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Andreas Hepp & “Communicative Figurations” research network

**Transforming Communications.  
Media-related Changes in Times of Deep Mediatization**



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# TRANSFORMING COMMUNICATIONS.

## Media-related Changes in Times of Deep Mediatization

*Andreas Hepp & “Communicative Figurations” research network*

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## 0. Preface

As part of its work over the last five years, the “Communicative Figurations” research network developed a research programme on investigating *Transforming Communications*; that is, how our present social world changes with deep mediatisation and the related transformation of communication. In 2016, this research programme was submitted as a proposal within the frame of the 12-year Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) funding scheme financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Our idea was to build up a centre comprising the two locations of the Universities of Bremen and Hamburg (a so-called *Transregio*). While an international on-site review committee supported our proposal and recommended it for funding, the responsible senate committee of the German Research Foundation decided not to go ahead in view of comparison with other initiatives across all disciplines. As we think the programme design we developed is of value in itself and might stimulate other research initiatives, we decided to publish our research idea in the form of this working paper. Our research network will continue its collaboration and is currently looking for alternative funding sources in order to realise the research programme.

## 1. Introduction

We are living in a time of profound media-related changes. Through our smart phones and other technical devices, we as *individuals* are connected with each other on a more or less continual basis. The way we use different media significantly shapes our public connections, socialisation, learning processes and life courses. The groups, communities and other *collectivities* we live in are constructed via the use of various kinds of media: older ones like newspapers and television (that become digital), but also more recent ones like social media platforms and other online services. *Organisations* - including the organisations of media production and journalism - more and more become dependent on and shaped by various media. In all, our media environment is changing fundamentally and subsequently the ways we act as individuals, collectivities and organisations. We are living in times of *deep* mediatization.

The **fundamental idea** of our research programme *Transforming Communications* is to study individuals, collectivities and organisations in this deeply mediatized environment of today. To do so, we take a cross-media perspective. Our starting point is the assumption that it is not one single new medium that makes a difference but people’s practices oriented towards an entanglement of various media that drives media-related changes of our present times. Emerging ‘new’ media technologies like social media platforms (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) are in close relationship with ‘old’ media such as newspapers or television, which in turn change as they become digitalised. In such a situation, the transformation we are confronted with is not a simple convergence of media into one single device (as expected at the beginning of digitalisation), but a differentiation of various media that are ever more connected with each other, omnipresent, and driven by a rapid pace of innovation and datafication (the representation of social life into computerised data).

To investigate these media-related changes we take an **actors’ point of view**. We have an inclusive understanding of actors, being interested in humans as actors (*individuals*), collective actors (*collectivities*), and corporate actors (*organisations*) as well as the dynamics between them. Taking such a threefold perspective on different social domains offers the possibility to investigate empirically the complexity of the transformations that result from our changing media environment. Analytically, we will investigate this by researching the various communicative figurations of individuals, collectivities and organisations, and compare the patterns of their transformation. We are interested in the consequences of the changing media environment for human actors and their practices, which is more and more entangled with numerous ensembles of media and specific for certain social domains. The argument for starting our research with an actors’ point of view is that a changing media environment is rooted in and unfolds its consequences through human practices - mainly: practices of communication. We are interested in all kinds of media-related practices, not only in practices of everyday media use, but also, for example, practices of media production in journalism and practices of media regulation in law and governance.

This leads us to pose our overall **research question**: How does the construction of social domains through communication transform with deep mediatization? The overall aim is to collaboratively develop a theory of transforming communication

in the sense of an empirically based generalising description of fundamental patterns of transformation that are driven by a changing media environment.

The **core innovation** of our research is that our whole research is structured as a ‘through time’ study: While transformation typically is explored by historical research looking backwards, we want to investigate media-related transformations in the making, while they are taking place, and compare these transformations over time. Starting from the present situation, we aim to capture emerging media formations as they ‘mould’ communicative practices on our three levels of actors: individuals, collectivities and organisations. To implement this kind of investigation, we structure our research in three periods (see Table 1): the first four years we focus on *constructions* in the present media environment as a ‘baseline measurement’. Then we move forward to capture *transformation*. Finally, we plan to research the *sustainability* of media-related transformation. Along this whole process, we will pay close attention to continuous changes in the media environment. This is the reason why the ongoing mapping of the media environment is a fundamental part of our research.

The main **geographical focus** of our research is Germany. Yet, taking into account that the change of the media environment is a transnational and transcultural process that differs in its consequences nationally, regionally and locally but also with respect to other categories, our research projects have a comparative design, which however does not necessarily mean national comparison. Accordingly, they compare the phenomena of interest with other, mainly European cities, regions and countries. Because of the transnational and transcultural character of media-related changes, all of our projects work in close cooperation with international experts and we position our whole undertaking as an international endeavour.

**Table 1: Work priorities of the three research periods**

Constructions (research period 1)	Transformations (research period 2)	Sustainability (research period 3)
Description of patterns of construction under the conditions of deep mediatization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- focusing on individuals, collectivities and organisations as different kinds of actors,</li> <li>- and analysing the communicative figurations of these individuals, collectivities, and organisations in a cross-media approach focused on practices of communication.</li> </ul>	Analysis of patterns of media-related transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in the perspectives of individuals, collectivities and organisations,</li> <li>- and with a special focus on the inertia of and dynamics in certain social domains.</li> </ul>	Investigation of the sustainability of media-related transformation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- with reference to their durability</li> <li>- and their contribution to a sustainable society for individuals, collectivities and organisations.</li> </ul>

## 2. Overview of the research programme

In the following section, we present the research programme. To start with, we will give an overview of our overall research programme to exemplify its core characteristics. Taking this brief overview as a point of departure, we will then explain the design of our research in more detail; this refers to our own preliminary work as well as to the research of numerous scholars from varying disciplinary fields.

The aim of our research on transforming communications is to investigate the transformation of social domains in times of deep mediatization. As we explained in the introduction, our fundamental idea is to do this as a ‘through time’ study. Altogether, deep mediatization refers to five trends of a changing media environment: an increasing differentiation of the media we use, the connectivity between and across these media, their omnipresence in various social situations, a rapid pace of innovation when it comes to media technologies, and an increasing datafication, which is the representation of social life into computerised data through media devices and their underlying software and infrastructure. However, many consequences of such changes differ strongly from one social domain to another because they are constructed by different practices of communication. The **main research question** we therefore want to ask is: How does the construction of social domains through communication transform with deep mediatization? To investigate this, we take an actors’ point of view, being interested in humans as actors (*individuals*), collective actors (*collectivities*), and corporate actors (*organisations*). Taking such a threefold perspective offers the possibility to investigate empirically the complexity of the transformations that result from our changing media environment as well as the various dynamics between individuals, collectivities and organisations in this process of change. This is the reason why we plan to structure our investigation in three research groups, on individuals, collectivities and organisations and cooperate closely in and between these groups.

In the case of **individuals** in the present media environment, the following questions are striking for the projects in **Research Group A**: In what way do individuals have a shared connection to mediated publics? How does the actual formation of the individual take place when the socialisation of children is more and more mediatized? In which way are processes of learning challenged by new ways of appropriating knowledge via social media platforms? To what extent do media support or challenge the coping of individuals with disturbances of their lives? And does our changing media environment support the inclusion of marginalised individuals like homeless people or migrants? Overall, how do individuals’ constructions take place in times of deep mediatization?

Putting the focus on **collectivities**, the pressing questions for the projects in **Research Group B** are: What are the pioneering groups that bring the ideas of new, media-related collectivities forward, and what influence do they have? How do more traditional communities like families and their memories keep together in a changing media environment? What kinds of networked collectivities emerge when it comes to so-called new media? What are the consequences of our media environment’s historical changes for the imagined communities we are involved in, locally, nationally and transnationally? And what new collectivities of discourse emerge in our cross-media debates on political issues like European crises? Altogether, we ask how are collectivities constructed in times of deep mediatization?

Moving to **organisations** in a changing media environment, the projects in **Research Group C** ask: In which ways do organisations of media - especially of journalism - come under pressure when complex media ensembles reconfigure journalists’ relationships to their audiences? How is the governance of the internet, as the main infrastructure of our present media environment, organised and how is this organising itself driven by media changes? What consequence does the changing media environment have for long-term established organisations such as churches?



What does it mean for schools as the main organisations of education when datafication becomes more and more important? And in which ways does scientific knowledge production change, for example with reference to climate issues when the organisational boundaries between science and journalism become blurred? All in all, we want to pose the question: How are organisations and how is organising constructed in times of deep mediatization?

The **core innovation** of our research is that our whole research is structured as a ‘through time’ study. While transformation typically is explored by historical research looking backwards, we plan to investigate media-related transformations while they are taking place. To implement this kind of investigation, we structure the research in three periods.

In the planned **first research period**, we focus on **constructions**. Starting from the present trends of a changing media environment, we investigate how individual, collective and organisational processes of social construction take place under the conditions of deep mediatization. We put a special emphasis on understanding media influences as being highly dependent on the social domain under consideration: the relevant kinds of groups, organisations etc.

The findings of the first research period act as a ‘baseline measurement’ from which we will progress with the **second research period transformations**. Across our three research groups, all projects will undertake a form of repeat studies, partly in combination with selected historical analysis to look backwards, partly in combination with a further cultural comparison to gain an understanding of certain particularities. Based on this approach, we believe we will deepen understandings of the transformations that result from a changing media environment that equates to structural social change.

On the basis of the first two periods, we finally plan to research the **sustainability** of media-related transformations in our **third research period**. The empirical core of this period is based on the combination of further repeat studies, comparisons and societal contextualisation. We ask here: how far does this transformation ‘sustain’; that is, to ask whether it is stable and, if so, to what degree? In addition, we also understand sustainability in a second sense as we want to research whether the media-related transformations support a sustainable society. Do the most recent media-related changes support a better life for individuals in the long run? Do they support more open-minded and more diverse collectivities? Does it help to make organisations more productive and inclusive? These are normative questions we want to investigate in-depth throughout the final stage of our collaborative research. By answering such questions referring to normative issues, we have the fundamental idea to transfer the knowledge we could acquire back to society.

Along this whole process, we will pay close attention to continuous changes in the media environment on the basis of a comprehensive **mapping**. Doing so is of great importance as we are researching a highly dynamic field in which single innovations can have far-reaching consequences. For example, the consequences of smart phones and mobile internet could hardly be predicted a few years before its dramatically fast spread. We expect the possibility of further, comparable drastic developments. Consequently, the ongoing mapping of the media environment is a fundamental part of our research.

Analytically, we will investigate the various communicative figurations of individuals, collectivities and organisations, and compare the patterns of their transformation. With this **conceptual approach**, we refer back to Norbert Elias’ process sociology, but transfer its basic figurational thinking to interdisciplinary media and communication research. From such a process point of view, individuals are necessarily embedded in communicative figurations of certain social domains; each individual is positioned at the crossing of various collectivities and organisations, which allows us to investigate the dynamics in-between. It is through individuals’ interweaving and interaction in such figurations that society is constructed. Taking this approach to its logical conclusion, sheds light on the constellation of actors that create society in a structured (and power-related) way. Such a dynamic process approach is of great importance as it puts emphasis on actors. Instead of understanding them as isolated entities, it perceives them as entities interacting with other actors and interwoven with social structures. In addition, a figurational approach puts emphasis on actor constellations and dynamics; this is of high importance when we discuss transformations in relation to recent changes in the media environment.

This conceptual approach makes it possible for us to compare the consequences of a changing media environment for a wide spectrum of social domains by asking: What is the constellation of actors involved? What are these actors’ frames of relevance? What are their practices of communication, how are they entangled with a media ensemble? And how does this ensemble transform in a changing media environment? By comparing the social domains of individuals, collectivities and organisations alongside these questions, we can work out patterns of construction, transformation and sustainability; and by doing so we can come to more generalised insights. This is what we understand as collaborative theory development.

To meet the challenges that researchers face with regard to the ongoing change of the media environment, one has to bring forward innovative research methods to deepen understandings of transforming communications. On a basic level, each of our research projects has to be innovative in the sense that it is planned to do cutting-edge research in its respective field. Beyond the individual projects, there are three **areas of methodological innovation** in which we want to distinguish ourselves. This is first of all the area of *cross-media* research. Doing cross-media research from an actors’ point of view is a particular challenge because we have to capture complex patterns of media-related practices. To meet this task, we want to develop special techniques for qualitative research (starting with interview techniques) and software tools (sorting applications and diary applications) to collect and analyse data on cross-media use. Second, there is the area of *digital traces*; that is, the traces we all leave online through our contemporary media practices. On a purely data-related level, these digital traces are also discussed as ‘big data’; but we are more interested in putting such digital traces in context. Here we want to be innovative by developing software tools and techniques (a meta-crawler and a special tracing software) that allow us to relate digital traces to qualitative data through which they become interpretable. Finally, the core innovation of undertaking a joint ‘through time’ study calls for *long-term research*, which we perceive as a further area of methodological innovation. Here, we focus on performing repeat studies, panel studies, and contextualising this with media-historical research. As this long-term research can only begin with our planned second research period it will become an area of innovation from then onwards.

Across the individual projects and research groups, our main **geographical focus** is Germany. Yet, taking into account that the change of the media environment is a transnational and transcultural process that differs in its consequences nationally, regionally, locally but also with respect to other categories, our research projects have a comparative design - but on different levels. We will compare different kinds of individuals, collectivities and organisations nationally or transnationally; we will compare different cities and regions; and we will compare different countries. While the initial focus of national comparison will be on France and the United Kingdom, the research projects will extend their investigations to Southern and Eastern European countries in the progression of our planned research. The reason for focusing on Europe is that many media-related dynamics and challenges within Germany are linked with European specificities. However, because of the complexity and manifold character of the phenomenon we are confronted with, it would not be helpful to define just *one* standardised comparative design. While *all* projects are based on comparison as a principle of empirical discovery, the unit of comparison differs with reference to the specific research question. Furthermore, driven by our interest in questions of segmentation, exclusion and divide, we will have a special focus on class, gender and race as further comparative dimensions.

Taken together, our research on transforming communications is necessarily an **interdisciplinary** approach rooted in the social sciences. The necessity to be interdisciplinary originates from the fact that we plan to investigate different social domains in a comparative way. Focusing on phenomena such as public connection, socialisation, learning, conduct of life and self-representation (Research Group A Individuals), pioneer communities, families, networked collectivities, imagined communities and collectivities of debate (Research Group A Collectivities), media organisations of journalism, internet governance, religious organisations, schools and science (Research Group C Organisations), we bring together eminent scholars from various disciplines. More precisely, the disciplines involved are: media and communication studies, sociology, pedagogy, cultural anthropology, history, law, study of religion and informatics. Across these disciplines, the participating research projects share a common figurational research approach that focuses upon actors' communicative practice and media-related transformations. This common approach enables us to cooperate in a highly productive way, which indeed we have been doing already over the past four years since we started to prepare the empirical setup of our *Transforming Communications* initiative, supported by a Creative Unit funded by the German Excellence Initiative. In a long-term perspective, our interdisciplinary cooperation will develop further areas of research. Media and communication studies are well-known as a so-called integrating discipline in the social sciences and humanities. But as media become more and more based on software technologies it is necessary to extend this scope of 'integration' even further to informatics. The team of scholars who push this idea of an interdisciplinary research forward form a very solid basis for such an extension. We have the long-term perspective of developing an interdisciplinary, empirical approach of media and communication research that is on the one hand rooted in the social sciences, but on the other hand open to informatics and therefore capable of carrying out critical investigation of most recent media-technological changes.

We hope that this preliminary overview gives an outline of the research programme of our *Transforming Communications* initiative. It is planned as an innova-

tive investigation that practices and promotes a new kind of empirical media and communication research in Germany capable of investigating the urgent issues of the fundamentally changing media environment and the resulting transformations in times of deep mediatization. We have the vision to develop this kind of research in a long-term perspective by doing a joint ‘through time’ study. And we have the fitting team of distinguished principal investigators - in all stages of their career and with a very good balance when it comes to academic background, gender and age - to bring our research project to life.

Following this brief overview, we now want to go into the **conceptual details of our research programme**. In order to support a proper understanding of our work, we will structure the coming sections by a set of **five questions** that have been critical for developing our research programme.

1. What is characteristic about the changing media environment in times of deep mediatization? We will answer this question in section 3 where we discuss the assumed main trends of a changing media environment.
2. How can we research and compare the possible consequences of a changing media environment across different social domains? Answering this question brings us to our analytical framework of communicative figurations in section 4.
3. How can we best operationalise our research from an actors’ point of view? This leads us to our three research groups presented in section 5.
4. What are the long-term objectives of our research initiative? This will be the focus of section 6.
5. In which areas do we have to strive for methodological innovation if we want to address these long-term objectives? The answer on that is given in section 7.

In our answers to all of these questions, we will repeatedly point out the **added value** of our research. This is first of all its core innovation, undertaking jointly an empirical ‘through time’ study in times when far-reaching changes in the media environment take place. Related to this, a further added value is our planned joint monitoring of the changing media environment, which we will present by appropriate visualisations and analyses on a mapping web site. This offers an important knowledge source for researchers but also for many other societal actors: civil society organisations, political actors, and other kinds of decision-makers. Again, we can only manage this through a long-term structural funding scheme. A third added value is the kind of comparative research we are able to do. A shared analytical framework offers the opportunity of undertaking comparisons on a common ground as well as the chance to compare media-related changes in different social domains. As a consequence, this will give us the ability to come to more generalised assessments of patterns of construction, transformation and sustainability. This is what we understand as collaborative theory development. Our methodological innovations comprise a fourth added value. Working over years together as a group will offer us the chance to refine our methods, and subsequently to develop software tools and analytical procedures as they are necessary for long-term research on media-related transformations. We plan to offer the software we will develop as open source to the scientific community and we will also make our analytical procedures accessible to all interested researchers. As questions of media-related transformations are so urgent and coping with them calls for the expertise of as many people as possible, we want to be as open and as inclusive as possible. Fifth,

with our collaboration we can be internationally much more visible than we ever could as single researchers or as single universities. As a joint research group, we aim to achieve international cooperation of the highest possible standard.

### 3. The changing media environment in times of deep mediatization

The first question we want to answer in this section is: **What is characteristic about the changing media environment in times of deep mediatization?**

As the brief overview of our research programme points out, answering this question is an essential point of departure for us. If we consider the changing media environment altogether as a driving force resulting in further transformations, we have to give a preliminary answer to the question of what is characteristic about its changes. At the same time, we cannot understand these changes as fixed or static, but have to make them an object of research in itself because we can expect further changes in the media environment over the next years. Therefore, we need a *dynamic* approach to investigate the media environment. Thereby, we define ‘media environment’ as the entire body of available media at any given time in society (Hasebrink/Hölig 2014: 16; Jensen/Helles 2015: 292; Livingstone 2001: 307). To answer our question relating to the changing media environment, we want to argue in two steps:

1. First, we outline on the basis of our own preliminary work what it means to live in times of **deep mediatization**. Deep mediatization is a stage of mediatization where our practices and sense-making in the very different domains of our social world are closely interrelated with mediated communicative practices. The specificity of deep mediatization is its cross-media, multifaceted and reflexive character.
2. Second, we isolate some of the most striking **present trends and possible consequences of a changing media environment** in times of deep mediatization. This is the differentiation of media, their connectivity, omnipresence, pace of innovation and datafication.

By putting emphasis on trends and possible consequences rather than a stable status quo, we take the dynamics of the present media environment as a point of departure and reflect that the trends we isolated can grow, decrease or even disappear, and that further trends can emerge.

#### 3.1 Characteristics of deep mediatization

The idea of mediatization is a particularly helpful starting point to describe how changes in the media environment are related to an overall ‘meta process’ (Krotz 2007: 256) of change.<sup>1</sup> Mediatization is a long-term and non-linear process traceable at least back to the beginning of various modernities (Esser/Strömbäck 2014; Hjarvard 2013; Lundby 2014; Meyen 2009; Thompson 1995). In essence, the term mediatization captures, on the one hand, the increasing spread of technologically based media in society; on the other hand, it captures how different social do-

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<sup>1</sup> See for a present overview: Adolf 2015; Eskjær et al. 2015; Kaun/Fast 2013; Krotz et al. 2014; Lundby 2014.

mains are becoming more and more shaped by these media. As we already emphasised, this process fundamentally intensified over the last decade. Up to now, there is no established term to refer to this stage of - in a certain sense radicalised - form of mediatization. To approach this, we want to use the term **deep mediatization**. By calling the contemporary mediatization *deep*, we want to indicate that with the recent wave of digitalisation mediatization has entered a new stage:<sup>2</sup> it is no longer expedient to grasp the social impact of ‘the media’ merely as the influence of a distinct domain (i.e. journalism) which is separate from other domains of the social world (Livingstone 2009b: 2-4). No matter which part of society we consider, its formation is in one way or another related to the technologically based media of communication, which are all becoming digital.

Deep mediatization is by no means homogeneous or linear. It is highly complicated, contradictory, and a conflict-driven process. Nevertheless, in the Western Hemisphere, deep mediatization takes place across societies as a whole. Yet, even when we strive to escape from this all-encompassing contemporary mediatization - for example, individuals who refuse to use certain (digital) media in an attempt of ‘coping’ (Schimank 2011: 459-462) with being reachable at all times of the day and night, or organisations that introduce email-free holidays etc. - such behaviour merely constitutes what we can call temporary ‘oases of de-mediatization’, in loose reference to Hartmut Rosa (2013: 87). In this sense, popular literature on ‘mindfulness’ - the practice of bringing one’s attention to occurring in the present moment, beyond any mediated communication - is less about any durable containment of mediatization: it is rather an expression that deep mediatization includes spaces of self-reflection and controlled escape in order to remain manageable for us as human beings.

From this point of view, there are three noticeable characteristics of deep mediatization:

- The **cross-media character** of deep mediatization means that not the emergence of any one single medium has brought about the media environment’s change, but the overall digitalisation and connectivity of various ‘old’ media and the emergence of ‘new’ digital ones. At this point we can refer to the various concepts used to describe cross-media - ‘re-mediation’ (Bolter/Grusin 2000), ‘media manifold’ (Couldry 2012), ‘polymedia’ (Madianou/Miller 2013), ‘media plenty’ (Ellis 2000) or ‘transmedia’ (Jansson/Lindell 2014). The main argument is always the progressively deepening cross-media *relatedness* with respect to everyday practices of communication (see Hasebrink et al. 2015; Schröder 2011). For example, when we seek information, maintain contact with others, build up networks, work in our organisations’ offices, and so on and so forth, we do so across different media, which are becoming ever more accessible and affordable. As a result, certain functionalities can move from one medium to another, or one medium can evolve various functionalities, depending on the ways it is used. Consequently, we can expect media-related transformations less attributable to the influence of a single dominating medium as was the case in former times.<sup>3</sup> It certainly remains fundamental to consider the

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<sup>2</sup> See on this: Couldry/Hepp 2016: 34-56; Finnemann 2014: 312-315.

<sup>3</sup> This is especially investigated in the tradition of ‘medium theory’ (Innis 1951; McLuhan/Lapham 1994; Meyrowitz 2009). Here, media-related influence on society is typically grasped as the influence of a dominant medium: the press, television etc. (Engell 2012: 28-44, 91-98; Friesen/Hug

‘materiality of media’ (Gumbrecht/Pfeiffer 1994), i.e. reflect their ‘affordances’ (Hutchby 2001: 444), ‘modus operandi’ (Hjarvard 2013: 17) and ‘moulding forces’ (Hepp 2013: 54). However, the challenge is that with deep mediatization this can no longer be grasped by focusing on any one single medium but only by understanding specific media in relation to others. This is one fundamental characteristic of contemporary ‘hybrid media systems,’ which are ‘based upon conflict and competition between older and newer media logics’ as well as the ‘interdependence among these logics’ (Chadwick 2013: 207).<sup>4</sup>

- Deep mediatization has a **multifaceted character**. By this we mean that it has various forms, all subject to disturbances and contradictory trends, and all depending on the specific context to a very high extent. We cannot assume *one* typical form of transformation but have to analyse its specificities in a contextualised way. This is not only the conclusion from our own preliminary work, but also of recent research by others. In the beginning, mediatization research was driven by the idea of *one* ‘media logic’ (Altheide/Snow 1979) that exerts influence on other domains of culture and society. This dynamic has been primarily investigated with respect to political communication (see Esser/Strömbäck 2014; Marcinkowski 2005; Sarcinelli 2009; Vowe 2006). But even there, research demonstrated that it is much more complicated. Jesper Strömbäck and Frank Esser (2014: 19) argued that in the field of political communication just the ‘news media logic’ already entails a combination of ‘three constituents’: it is the norms and criteria of journalistic news production, its economically motivated rationales, and the affordances of different media technologies that matter (see also Landerer 2013). In addition, research on digital media shows that ‘political communication in the online world’ (Vowe/Völker 2011; Vowe/Henn 2016) makes it difficult to identify strict boundaries between institutions. As a consequence, thereof, more far-reaching explanatory models are required. As Winfried Schulz (2014: 61) puts it, ‘new media call into question the idea of a universal media logic resulting in all-embracing media dependence of politics’, and ‘the theoretical idea of media logic is losing its explanatory potential and may at best be maintained in a specific sense referring to the conventional news media’. Other researchers underline the argument that it is not so much ‘media logic’ that matters, but the ‘anticipation’ of an *assumed* ‘journalistic logic’ by actors in other social domains (Scheu et al. 2014). Knut Lundby (2014: 19f.) emphasises that therefore it is the different ‘modes of mediatization’ which should be analysed. And in addition, cross-media changes may be fundamentally different if one considers everyday practices in formally less institutionalised (Hepp/Krotz 2014: 6-9) or formally more institutionalised contexts (Hjarvard 2014: 212-216; Hjarvard 2016).
- A third characteristic of deep mediatization is its **reflexivity**. Very generally speaking, reflexivity is not only a characteristic of deep mediatization but of modernity altogether (see U. Beck et al. 1994). However, with reference to

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2009; Gillespie/Robins 1989; Strate 2006), a perspective that is also characteristic for German ‘media archaeology’ (Kittler 2014; Parikka 2013; Winthrop-Young 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Put in the vocabulary of media and communications history (Averbeck-Lietz 2014; Briggs/Burke 2009; Marszolek/Robel 2014), it is not so much the sequence of the ‘revolutions’ (Behringer 2006) of individual media, but the cross-media diversification that matters in relation to communicative practices (Bösch 2015; Simonson et al. 2013; Wilke 2011).

*media-related* changes, reflexivity means something more specific. As contents and technologies, all media of communication are developed and introduced by some form of pre-planning and therefore involve reflection. This is also characteristic for everyday media use, in which people have a certain *practical* awareness of the specificities of the different media they use and make their cross-media selection accordingly (see also Jansson 2015; Madianou/Miller 2013). Additionally, present developments of media technology are characterised by reflexive ‘feedback loops’ (Castells 2000: 31; Lash 2003: 50) between the producers of media technologies, their users, and various ‘intermediaries’ (Bourdieu 2010: 360; Negus 2002: 502-509) like journalists, trend scouts etc. Media are developed, put on the market, and continuously re-developed and modified in complex processes of interaction between different groups of actors (Grenz 2015: 104-139). In addition, deep mediatization gives an additional push to the ‘self-monitoring’ which can be understood as a general characteristic of modernity. Deep mediatization here supports what we might call its ‘institutionalized reflexivity’ (Giddens 1994: 185; Grenz et al. 2014: 82). Datafication, for example, can become an expression of this as it offers the chances of forms of ‘reflexivity’ of the ‘quantified self’ (Lupton 2016) through the ongoing information individuals collect about themselves. Yet, in times of deep mediatization, reflexivity goes one step further, which is related to various ‘non-intended side effects’ (U. Beck 1994: 1-55). Two examples of our own preliminary research indicate this. In organisations like schools, for example, the introduction of software to support collaboration, time management and data exchange, has the side effect that an increased transparency of decision-making (e.g. for booking rooms or resource management) makes possible surveillance and control of the teachers by administrators. The effect of this is not transparent decision-making on resources but rather their possible reduction on the basis of the new information administrators subsequently receive (Schulz/Breiter 2013; Welling et al. 2015). Here, mediatization can become in such a sense ‘reflexive’ that a kind of ‘de-mediatization’ (Grenz et al. 2014) might take place, resulting in teachers avoiding the use of such platforms and preferring to negotiate decisions in direct communication. In contrast, media-related movements like the ‘quantified self’ don not react on side effects of deep mediatization like the misuse of data by a possible ‘downgrading’ or ‘renunciation’ of these technologies. Typically, anticipated solutions are further advancements of these technologies (Hepp 2016). The question at this point is how far deep mediatization can become reflexive in the sense that it begins to turn against itself by its non-intended side effects.

With respect to these characteristics, the concept of deep mediatization is neither an attempt at a closed theory, nor a limited theoretical approach. There are various traditions of mediatization research, and such a range is *needed* because of the complexity of the field.<sup>5</sup>

Across these different traditions, we can *on a first level* understand mediatization as a ‘sensitising concept’ (Jensen 2013: 213-217; Lunt/Livingstone 2016: 464; Strömbäck/Esser 2014: 4); that is, a concept that ‘gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances’ and that ‘merely sug-

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<sup>5</sup> For an overview see - among others - Couldry/Hepp 2013; Hjarvard 2013; Krotz 2009; Lundby 2014; Mazzoleni 2008b; Meyen et al. 2014; Schulz 2004; Strömbäck/Esser 2014.



gests directions along which to look’ (Blumer 1954: 7). This means to look at the overall spread of different media and the related changes in various social domains (Schulz 2014: 58-62). Using the term *deep* mediatization makes us ‘sensitive’ to how far mediatization nowadays progresses into what has been called ‘mediatized worlds’ (Hepp/Krotz 2014: 6) and ‘mediatized way of life’ (Vorderer 2015: 259).

*On a second level* and departing from this, we need further concepts and approaches to describe *in detail* how the transformation that we relate to the term mediatization actually takes place. While we have a rough estimate of the processes and practices that constitute deep mediatization, we still lack thorough empirical investigations.

This is the point where we want to position our planned research on transforming communications: we take deep mediatization seriously and therefore as a starting point, but want to reach in our joint empirical ‘through time’ study a more specific level of analysis to describe and explain how media-related transformations through communication take place. Therefore, we must move to a more specific conceptual level. A first step in this direction is to clarify in detail the trends of the changing media environment of deep mediatization. This is what we want to do in the next section.

### 3.2 Trends of a changing media environment

With reference to individuals, collectivities and organisations our research projects are confronted with very different phenomena of media-related changes: individuals’ public connection, socialisation and learning; community building, negotiating group memories and imagining collectivities; organisations that produce media, that regulate media, and that have other purposes for which media become more and more important. Reflecting this *specificity* of different phenomena and their *particularities*, it is nevertheless striking that they are all confronted with certain trends that characterise the change of the present media environment:

1. A *differentiation* of a vast amount of technologically based media of communication;
2. An increasing *connectivity* of and through these media, which offers the possibility to individually and collectively ‘link’ across space and time;
3. A rising *omnipresence* of media, that creates the possibility to connect permanently and everywhere;
4. A *rapid pace of innovation*, the emergence of ‘new’ media and services in ever-shorter periods of time;
5. A *datafication*, which is the representation of social life into computerised data through media devices and their underlying software and infrastructure.

None of these trends are to be seen as separate individual media phenomena; rather, they are all closely linked with each other, and *altogether* they are characteristic of the present change of our media environment (Bjur et al. 2014: 15). In addition, we have to be aware that these trends are not ‘linear’. It is also uncertain whether these trends will continue and whether other trends will emerge. In addition, these trends are highly contradictory in themselves. However, altogether they are manifestations of deep mediatization, and making the distinction of such

trends provides us with a first understanding of the media-related changes individuals, collectivities and organisations are involved in. In what follows we will therefore explicate the five aforementioned trends in more detail.

1. The trend of media’s **differentiation** means that the number and functionalities of media have increased over recent decades. While in the beginning there was a discussion concerning whether digitalisation might result in the dominance of the computer as the sole ‘meta-medium’ (Höflich 2003; Kay/Goldberg 1977),<sup>6</sup> it turned out that the result of digitalisation was rather the arrival of a variety of very different media, which at the present stage are becoming more and more digital and increasingly based on software (see Manovich 2013). The differentiation of media gives rise to a variety of contradictory impacts depending on their social domains and their practices of communication. While digital media might support self-paced learning for young people and adults (Wolf 2015), the same media can be used to build up authoritarian relationships in religious organisations (Radde-Antweiler 2015). Reflecting both, across the variety of possible consequences we can assume that differentiation might result in an *optionality* (Rusch 2006) of ways of use. These can be related to processes of individualisation (Hasebrink 1999), and following from this *contingency* within and across social domains and related questions of inequality and power. This can have various further influences on the *segmentations*, *exclusions* and *divides* articulated in a specific social domain (van Deursen/Helsper 2015; Nieminen 2016). For example, an increasing number of media as contents, technologies and organisations might weaken - as our preliminary research shows - the binding power of communicative practices within communities (Marszolek/Robel 2016), and the variability of possible contacts might increase (Friemel 2013). This is especially discussed with relation to internet-based contact platforms, which are understood as supporting a variability of ‘weak ties’ instead of ‘strong’ relations within the direct living environment (Rainie/Wellman 2012: 131-134; Wittel 2008).

2. The spread of media is related to their intensified **connectivity**. This is the case for ‘old’ media like television and the press, but increasingly and with reference to personal communication also for ‘new’ media like online platforms and mobile phone applications. As a consequence, there is a close relationship between more recent processes of globalisation and media changes (Krotz 2008). A characteristic of contemporary everyday life is our ability to socially connect globally, across various media, if we want to. However, “connectivity” does not necessarily mean “social connectedness” (van Dijck 2013: 4). Increasing media connectivity can result in a *spatial extension* of processes of construction (Hepp 2015: 13-18; Wessler/Brüggemann 2012: 119-136), and through that social domains can extend and their borders become *blurred*. This might ‘disembed’ (Giddens 1990: 20) social processes being then maintained across large distances. For example, it can become easier to build networks for learning across long distances (Ito et al. 2009: 213; Thomas/Brown 2011: 53), popular cultures can exist transnationally (Buckingham/Kehily 2014), and whole organisations or networks of organisations can be built up across various locations (Breiter 2003; Jarke 2015; Lam-

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<sup>6</sup> Typically, these changes are discussed with reference to what is called ‘media convergence’, being based on the spread of the computer as a ‘hybrid medium’ and ‘universal machine’ (K. Beck 2006; Schröter 2004). See for this discussion especially: Hohlfeld 2010; Jenkins 2006; Jensen 2010; Latzer 2009; Meyer 2014; Schorb et al. 2013; taking place across the levels of media production, media products and media use (Brüggemann 2002; Loosen/Schmidt 2012; Theunert/Wagner 2002).

mers/Jackson 2014: 33-47; Ribes et al. 2013) - all of this held together by technologically based communication. However, our own preliminary research shows that we must be careful in assuming any one single line of possible consequences of media’s connectivity. In other words, the further consequence of connectivity is very much context-dependent.

3. Besides the increasing connectivity, the social, temporal and spatial spread of media relates to their **omnipresence**. Face-to-face meetings, talks or walking and other social situations, which for a long time were not related to media, nowadays have become so in one way or another. These dynamics are especially propelled through the spread of mobile communication technologies (Goggin 2011; Katz/Aakhus 2002; Ling/Donner 2009; Vorderer 2015). It became possible to be ‘always on’ (Chen 2011: 63) and ‘constantly in touch’ (Agar 2003: 22); that is, being reachable at whatever moment of time. This omnipresence of various media can result in an increasing ‘acceleration’ (Rosa 2013: 41-43) of social processes. We might, for example, expect immediate answers, a quick delivery, and a fast response. With reference to this, social domains can be marked by new temporalities, especially with expectations of a new ‘*immediacy*’ (Tomlinson 2007: 72-93) of communicative reaction. Arguably, the result of this is a general *acceleration* of life (Wajcman 2015: 13-35). This can be the case for the sphere of work, but also for our private life. It is, again, worth noting that substantial differences do exist from one social domain to another.

4. A rapid **pace of innovation** has accompanied recent media developments. This means that the time sequence of more or less fundamental media innovations has - at least in the *perception* of many media users - shortened over the past few decades (Rosa 2013: 71-74).<sup>7</sup> The pace of innovation might result in a constantly perceived *adjustment pressure*, a perceived pressure to ‘conform’ to these changes with a possible breakdown of the ability to adapt. While various innovations surrounding the smart phone and its apps have become widespread by now, the most recent assumption is that the ‘internet of things’ and its ‘locations awareness’ might once again change ‘everything’ (Greengard 2015: 60). While we should generally be cautious about any ‘rhetoric of the technological sublime’ (Morley 2007: 235) related to the present pace of innovation, complex articulations of *segmentation* and *exclusion* are evident as they are reflected in such concepts as *divide* (Livingstone/Helsper 2007; Norris 2001; Tsatsou 2011; van Dijk/Hacker 2005; Zillien 2009). Being able to appropriate and adjust to certain media innovations means to be in a power position, no matter whether this is within the family, a group of friends, or certain organisations, especially when it comes to questions of regulation (Schulz et al. 2011). Even an attitude of openness towards innovations might privilege entire social groups like ‘pioneer communities’ (Hepp 2016) vis-à-vis other social groups like excluded homeless people (Koch/Warneken 2014).

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<sup>7</sup> While the assessment of a rapid pace of innovation corresponds with our everyday experience, we must be very careful not to over-emphasise this. Referring to social studies of technology, the challenge is to reflect what actually *constitutes* an innovation: a so-called ‘key innovation’ and ‘improvement innovation’. Moreover, there are ‘recursive innovations’ and other complex patterns of innovation processes (see Dosi 1982; Häußling 2014: 331-335; Rammert 2007: 28). So we have to be aware that ‘pace of innovation’ relates to experiencing an apparent acceleration of minor improvements that are *constructed*, among others for marketing reasons, as ‘ground-breaking’. Examples for this are smart phones or tablets where the latest software only works on the most recent generations.

An outcome of all this can be a segmentation between parts of the population (Drgomir/Thompson 2014; Friemel 2016).

5. The term **datafication** refers to digitalisation: a growing number of media are based on software. As a result, through the use of these media we leave ‘digital traces’ (Karanasios et al. 2013), data that can be aggregated and processed in automated ways on the basis of algorithms. This is the case across the variety of digital media platforms (van Dijck/Poell 2013), which are also understood as ‘social software’ (Stegbauer/Jäckel 2007: 7-10). In public discourse, this change of the media environment is mainly discussed with reference to the concept of ‘big data’ (Mayer-Schönberger/Cukier 2013; for a critique see boyd/Crawford 2012; Lohmeier 2014b). This means that the representation of social phenomena by quantified data plays an increasing role in societal self-understanding and self-conception, with the result that technical intermediaries (search engines, platforms, etc.) *disguise agency* by ‘quantification’ (Pasquale 2015: 32-38; Passoth et al. 2014: 281-283). On the other hand, there is the hope of new, technologically based forms of transparency that might support *participation* as it is discussed for example with reference to open data and smart cities (Koch 2015: 210, 218; Townsend 2013). Furthermore, such a datafication can result in a *stabilisation* of sociality, which is ‘society made durable’ (Latour 1991: 103). At the same time, as the public debate following Edward Snowden’s revelations has illustrated (Schulz 2013), new possibilities of *surveillance* emerge - for governmental agencies (Fuchs 2013; Lyon 2014) as well as for private actors (Andrejevic/Gates 2014; Christensen/Jansson 2014).

As we already put it, one must be cautious about the trends of deep mediatization we outlined above: these are preliminary interpretations on the basis of our own research, and at the same time they reflect the general state of media and communication research. Keeping the uncertainty about their directedness and future stability in mind, these trends together with our overall understanding of the characteristics of deep mediatization nevertheless offer us guidance in respect of how our media environment is changing at present and what possible consequences might be. We can summarise this in the table below (see Table 2).

Table 2: Trends and consequences of a changing media environment in times of deep mediatization

Trends	Possible consequences
1. Differentiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Optionality</i>, <i>social contingency</i>. and new chances for <i>participation</i></li> <li>- <i>Spatial extension</i> of communication, and by that shifting translocal interrelations</li> <li>- <i>Blurring</i> of social borders</li> <li>- <i>Acceleration</i> and <i>immediacy</i> of social processes</li> <li>- Perceived <i>pressures</i> to adjust with a possible divide and break-up</li> <li>- <i>Disguise agency</i> through technical intermediaries</li> <li>- <i>Stabilising</i> of sociality</li> <li>- New possibilities for <i>control</i></li> <li>- <i>Segmentation</i>, <i>exclusion</i>, and <i>divide</i></li> </ul>
2. Connectivity	
3. Omnipresence	
4. Pace of innovation	
5. Datafication	

We plan to take this preliminary systematisation as a starting point for our empirical research. By so doing we can pose questions like the following:

- How do these trends of a changing media environment bring about changes of communication?
- What are the possible related consequences?

Posing these questions, we have to be aware that we cannot consider these trends as fixed or necessarily stable. This said, it is worth mentioning again that the monitoring of these trends is itself a matter of investigation in our research. What trends might emerge over the coming years? Do current trends (partly) lose relevance? Do, in the wake of future developments, historical trends appear in a new light? Therefore, in our planned research on transforming communications we make the trends themselves an object of investigation. We do this in two ways. On the one hand, the individual projects reflect these trends from the point of view of their respective phenomena. On the other hand, we monitor and map the changing media environment continuously. By systematising and categorising data on media spread and media use, an ongoing description of these trends, their increase, decrease and the emergence of other trends becomes possible. In our attempt to undertake a joint 12-year ‘through time’ study on media-related transformation, we also have to critically question these trends along the progression of our research.

#### 4. Researching Transforming Communications

In the previous section, we have pointed to initial ways of answering our first question on deep mediatization and the trends of a changing media environment. Now we want to come to our second question, which is a logical succession of our first answer: **How can we research and compare the possible consequences of a changing media environment across very different social domains?**

It is of the utmost importance for us to answer this question in order to form a basis for our joint 12-year ‘through time’ study. Only if we have a shared framework that goes beyond the distinction of certain trends and offers in addition an analytical tool to compare the changes in different social domains does it become possible to reach more generalising statements on media-related changes. Therefore, any attempt to answer our joint research question - how does the construction of social domains through communication transform with deep mediatization? - assumes a shared conceptual framework at the level of empirical analysis. Such a conceptual framework has to be substantiated sufficiently enough to offer a stable design for collaborative empirical research, comparison, and theory development; and it has to be flexible enough to allow innovation in research within and across all individual projects and their research groups. The latter is especially necessary, as the media environment will continue to change dynamically with the progression of our research.

This is where our fundamental actors’ point of view is particularly important. From such a point of view, two aspects matter especially:

1. First, a changing media environment can unfold consequences only if practices change. When it comes to media, these are predominantly **practices of com-**

**munication.** Therefore, we need a shared understanding of communicative practices for our joint investigation.

2. Second, such changing practices are not just individual phenomena; they have to be analysed with respect to the social domains in which humans act. As a consequence, it is necessary to have a conceptual approach for analysing social domains. This is the point where we refer to the already mentioned concept of **communicative figuration.**

Departing from this, we have an analytical approach that enables us to empirically research the possible consequences of a changing media environment across very different social domains in comparative ways. Such an approach allows us to analyse **transforming communications:** the complexity of transformation processes as they relate to practices of communication and a changing media environment. In a fundamentally changing media environment, practices of communication are transforming, and as a result the ways in which we construct our social world and its society. This in turn becomes materialised in the media we use. It is this dialectical interplay that defines transforming communications.

Against this backdrop, we want to outline in the following our conceptual approach that answers the second question. We understand all the concepts we will outline as ‘bridging concepts’: they are deeply rooted in social sciences as we locate our research programme *Transforming Communications* there. At the same time, these concepts are cross-disciplinary with regard to our involved disciplines: media and communication studies, sociology, social studies of technology, informatics, study of religion, cultural anthropology, legal studies, pedagogy and cultural history.

#### *4.1 Communicative practices and their entanglement with media*

Our joint research is anchored in an actors’ point of view and, following from this, in action and practice approaches. We have a broad understanding of practice. In media and communication research - especially driven by media sociology - approaches that move agency and social practice into the foreground have a long tradition and can be traced back to the beginnings of sociology.<sup>8</sup> A first peak of this perspective could be observed in the 1970s across different areas like audience research (Blumler/Katz 1974; Renckstorf/Wester 2001; Teichert 1972) or cultural studies (Certeau 2002; Hall 1973; Morley 1980) that no longer considered media users as ‘dopes’ but as persons acting reflexively with media, being situated in a wider social and cultural surrounding. On such a basis, in media and communication research it became common to consider people as actors that ‘deal’ with media (Bonfadelli/Friemel 2015; Hasebrink 2003; Napoli 2010; Neumann-Braun 2005) - no matter whether they come from the side of media production, media use or various kinds of hybrids in between (Bruns/Schmidt 2011).

Based on this overall tradition, we can recently witness a more focused move in research towards media practice.<sup>9</sup> Such a move has to be seen in the wider context

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<sup>8</sup> See for this discussion - beside others - Averbek-Lietz 2015; Neumann-Braun 2000; Sutter 2013; Waisbord 2014 and Ziemann 2006.

<sup>9</sup> See for this discussion Couldry 2004; Genzel 2015; Raabe 2008; Pentzold 2015; Postill 2010; Schmidt 2012.

of a **practice turn** in the social sciences.<sup>10</sup> There are two aspects to be learned from this development that are particularly important for our research initiative: first, to consider every activity as ‘embodied’, and second, to consider the nexus of practices with ‘artefacts, hybrids, and natural objects’ (Schatzki 2001: 11).

When it comes to human acting, a practice approach is interested in the ‘embodied doing’ of an activity as such. This doing is based on ‘practical consciousness’ (Giddens 1984: xxiii), which is learned in highly contextualized ways. Based on this learning, practices can be realised in a meaningful way *without* being ‘discursively’ accessible to the actors; i.e. they personally cannot explain their doing, which is also the case for communication.<sup>11</sup> ‘Practical consciousness’ as embodied capacity is rather understood as know-how, skills, tacit knowledge and dispositions, related to the habitus of a person. Most practices are based on this ‘practical knowledge’, which has its own potential for situational creativity. Therefore, practices are anchored in the body and cannot be described as a mechanical obedience to rules. In this sense, practices of communication - with media but also without - are also embodied and have to be considered in their interrelation to other forms of practice (Bourdieu 1977: 16-22; Reichertz 2009: 118-120).

The argument to focus on the entanglement of practices with objects is of special interest for us, as with deep mediatization communicative practice increasingly turns into a media-entangled and therefore object-related practice. Here, practice theory itself puts emphasis on the media as a specific kind of object when it comes to the production of meaning: ‘writing, printing and electronic media mould social (here, above all, discursive) practices’ (Reckwitz 2002: 253). This is the reason why many communicative practices are ‘media practice[s]’ (Couldry 2004: 125); that is to say, they are undertaken in relation to media.

When practice theory was established, the main emphasis was to position itself within social science vis-à-vis ‘classical’ action theory (Reckwitz 2003). While we appreciate the achievements of this approach in putting an emphasis on the embodied doing and entanglements of practices with objects, we share the point of view that this must not necessarily contradict other approaches of action theory, in particular social constructivism (see Bongaerts 2007). Accordingly, we understand practice theory as a further development in the line of social constructivism: symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, and social phenomenology.

Following this line of reasoning, we can understand **practices of communication** as complex and highly contextualized patterns of action. Or to put it differently: certain forms of communicative action build up complex practices of communication as they are realised today in an increasingly complex media environment. Communication therefore involves the use of signs that humans learn during their socialisation and which, as symbols, are for the most part entirely arbitrary. This means that the meaning of communicative practices depends on social con-

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<sup>10</sup> Compare for this besides others Bourdieu 1992; Giddens 1984; Hörning/Reuter 2006; Nicolini 2012; Reckwitz 2002 and Schatzki et al. 2001; with regard to journalists as actors see Brüggemann 2013.

<sup>11</sup> However, methodologically we do not share the position that we could not get access to practices and their meaning via interviews. Depending on the interview strategy, we can in an indirect way get access to (media related) practices (of communication) for example by asking questions about specific habits and everyday experiences (Klein et al. 2016). For a general discussion of methods and practice theory see the chapters in Schäfer et al. 2015.

ventions. Practices of communication are fundamental to the human construction of reality: we ‘create’ the meaning of our social world in multiple processes of communication; we are born into a world in which communication already exists; we learn what is characteristic of this social world (and its society) through the (communicative) process of learning to speak; and when we proceed to act in this social world our practices are always communicative practices.<sup>12</sup>

This understanding of communication corresponds to our conception of **media of communication**. Thus, we do not focus on symbolic generalised media of influence like ‘love’ or ‘money’ (Luhmann 2012: 190-238) but on technologically based communication media of ‘second order’ (Kubicek 1997: 218-220): These are the means of communication, distinguished by specific technologies, a hereupon-based system of signs and various institutionalisations and organisations that furnish us with services for communicative practice (K. Beck 2006: 14). Media of communication ‘institutionalise’ and ‘objectify’, that is to say ‘materialise’ symbol systems and practices (Berger/Luckmann 1967: 49-61; Couldry/Hepp 2016: 15-33; Fornäs 2000; Knoblauch 2013: 300f.). This is how they ‘mould’ communication. With deep mediatization the challenging question is the ‘moulding influence’ of a medium in its respective typical constellation with other media. We have to address this constellation on at least three levels. These are, firstly, the level of the entire **media environment**. As we have already noted above, what we mean by media environment is the entire body of available media at any given time. Secondly, there is the level of the **media ensemble**. The media ensemble is the subset of the media of a media environment as it is used in a particular social domain (family, work office etc.) with respect to the available options (Bausinger 1984: 349). Thirdly, there is the level of **media repertoire**. This is the individuals’ selection of the media as they use and appropriate them as part of their everyday practices (Hasebrink/Popp 2006; Hasebrink/Domeyer 2012).

With deep mediatization, our practices of communication typically reach across media. When we inform ourselves with reference to a certain topic, we talk with people, we email with others, read online articles and possibly books, and we might ‘ask’ Apple’s software assistant Siri to search for information in the internet. Therefore, when it comes to the question how our social domains are moulded by media, we have to consider such cross-media influences with regard to various types of communication.

#### 4.2 *Social domains as communicative figurations*

The aim of our research on transforming communications is to investigate the transformations of social domains in times of a deep mediatization. Investigating communicative practices from a ‘non-media centric’ point of view entails defining the starting point of analysis otherwise:<sup>13</sup> via the social entity - the ‘social domain’

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<sup>12</sup> See beside others: Averbek-Lietz 2015; Couldry/Hepp 2016; Kepplinger 2011; Merten 2009; Kepler 2005; Knoblauch 2013; Münch 2002; Pörksen 2011; Rammert 2006; Scholl 2002; Schulz 1976; S.J. Schmidt 1994a; Winter 2010b. We cannot offer here a detailed discussion of the social constructivist approach we take on media and communication. See for this the special issue of *Medien & Kommunikationswissenschaft* on constructivism in communication research (at present: under review).

<sup>13</sup> There is a long discussion in media and communication research about the necessity of a ‘non-media centric’ perspective on media-related transformations that does not consider media always



- under consideration. Taking the perspective of media and communication research, our understanding of ‘social domains’ reflects a long tradition in social sciences on the idea of ‘social’ as well as ‘cultural differentiation’ (Hahn 2000: 14-24; Schimank 2013: 37-50; 131-149; Winter/Eckert 1990: 142-151). Max Weber, for example, used the term *Wertsphären* (Weber 1988 [1919]: 611) to reflect this differentiation. Pierre Bourdieu (1993) described processes of differentiation by analysing differences within and across ‘social fields’. Roger Friedland and Robert Alford (1991) preferred the idea of ‘institutional fields’. In system theory, we find the concept of ‘subsystem’ (Luhmann 2012 Vol 2: 4-27), a term which was also used by Jürgen Habermas (1992) to describe social differentiation. In a similar vein, phenomenology puts emphasis on different (small) ‘life-worlds’ (Luckmann 1970: 587; Schütz 1967: 139-144), with a certain relationship to the ‘social worlds’ of symbolic interactionism (Clarke 2011: 384-385; Shibutani 1955: 566; Strauss 1978). More recently, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (2006) proposed the idea of different ‘orders of justification’. In media and communication research, the concept of ‘institutional areas’ (Katz et al. 1973: 165) is used to describe social spheres.

While these concepts do have different detailed theoretical backgrounds as well as analytical potentials, they all share the fundamental idea of the social world’s differentiation on the basis of meaningful sub-orders. This is what we want to grasp with our concept of the **social domain**.<sup>14</sup> However, for our purposes we do not have to assume that this differentiation is necessarily a *functional* one which describes whole societies by such clear-cut models, as some of these approaches might suggest. Therefore, for us a social domain is a ‘meaningful subset’ of the social world - meaningful within the practices of individuals, collectivities and organisations. The actors involved in each social domain have a shared orientation of their practices. This means: they focus on something in common. Social domains can have a different range and reach, and they can be of different character. However, common to them is a delimited meaning and their rootedness in on-going processes of communication being more and more entangled with media. Our fundamental argument at this point is that changes in the media environment have consequences foremost at the level of social domains.

To investigate social domains, it is a fundamental help to consider them as reproduced in ongoing processes of interrelated practices. They are not just there but ‘made’ and ‘re-made’ in human practice. As a consequence, each social domain refers to a typical ‘constellation of actors’ (Schimank 2010: 202-206) interacting with each other.<sup>15</sup> With deep mediatization, this interaction is increasingly related to media as contents and technologies. The challenge is: How can we analyse such interrelations in a proper way?

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as the angle of change (see recently Couldry 2006; Moores 2012; Morley 2009; Krajina et al. 2014). Only research that takes into account non-media-related changes is able to assess when media as contents and technologies matter.

<sup>14</sup> With this meaning the term ‘domain’ or ‘social domain’ becomes more and more used in media and communication research. See for the field of research that matters for our CRC/TRR Hjarvard 2013: 4, Lunt/Livingstone 2016: 1 and Nieminen 2014: 64.

<sup>15</sup> For analysing phenomena of media and communication in the perspective of ‘actor constellations’ see also: Blöbaum et al. 2012; Neuberger 2014; Vowe/Völker 2011.

At this point, the process-sociological approach of Norbert Elias (1978) is of great help and importance.<sup>16</sup> Elias identified two problems for any social analysis: the relative autonomy but co-dependence of individuals and society, and the distinction between social change (the fact that each progression of life means variances) and structural transformation (fundamental changes in society). His solution was to argue that structural transformation could be explained in terms of the shifting relation between individuals and society through time. Elias referred to these dynamics as figurations - or as we would put it: as figurations of certain social domains. Figurations are ‘networks of individuals’ (Elias 1978: 15) or, more encompassing, of actors, including collectivities and organisations. These networks constitute, by their interaction, larger social entities. Therefore, figuration is a ‘simple conceptual tool’ to understand social domains in terms of ‘models of processes of interweaving’ (Elias 1978: 30, 130).

A development that Elias could hardly reflect - though he had some presentiment of it (Elias 1991: 163) - is that today many of the present figurations are made up by the use of media. The figurations of individuals, collectivities (families, peer groups, communities etc.) and organisations (media companies, churches, schools etc.) change with their media ensembles. In addition, deep mediatization makes new figurations possible, like online-gatherings in chats, on platforms or through apps. Nowadays, some figurations are entirely built up by media technologies. One example is the ‘collectivities of taste’ as they become represented by the calculation of groups of people with the same shopping interests in online stores like Amazon (Passoth et al. 2014: 282). Other examples we are interested in within our projects are ‘networked media collectivities’ as they are constituted around certain media events and media topics or ‘collectivities of debate’ as they emerge in cross-media discourses.

From a media and communication research point of view, we can consider each figuration as a *communicative* one: practices of communication are of high importance when it comes to a meaningful construction of the respective social domain. **Communicative figurations** are - typically cross-media - patterns of interweaving through practices of communication. Families as collectivities, for example, are possibly separated in space but connected through multimodal communication such as (mobile) phone calls, emailing, sharing on digital platforms and so on that keep family relationships alive (Hasebrink 2014) and allow to construct family memories (Lohmeier/Pentzold 2014). Another example of communicative figurations are organisations which are kept together with the help of databases, communication across the intranet, as well as printed flyers and other public relations (PR) media. Individuals are involved in such figurations by the role and position they have in the respective actor constellations. An approach of media and communication research that starts with figurations, therefore, is able to link the perspectives on individuals, collectivities and organisations as we approach them in our research groups in a productive way.

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<sup>16</sup> For such a further development of process sociology as a basis for media and communications analysis see Buschauer 2012; Couldry/Hepp 2016; Hepp/Hasebrink 2014a; Hepp et al. 2015; Krotz 2003; Ludes 1995; for a (con)figurational thinking more in general: Jarke 2014: 43-45; Schnell 2006: 10; Suchman 2012: 48; for general overviews of recent developments in this approach see Baur/Ernst 2011; Dunning/Hughes 2013; Treibel 2008a; Willems 2012.

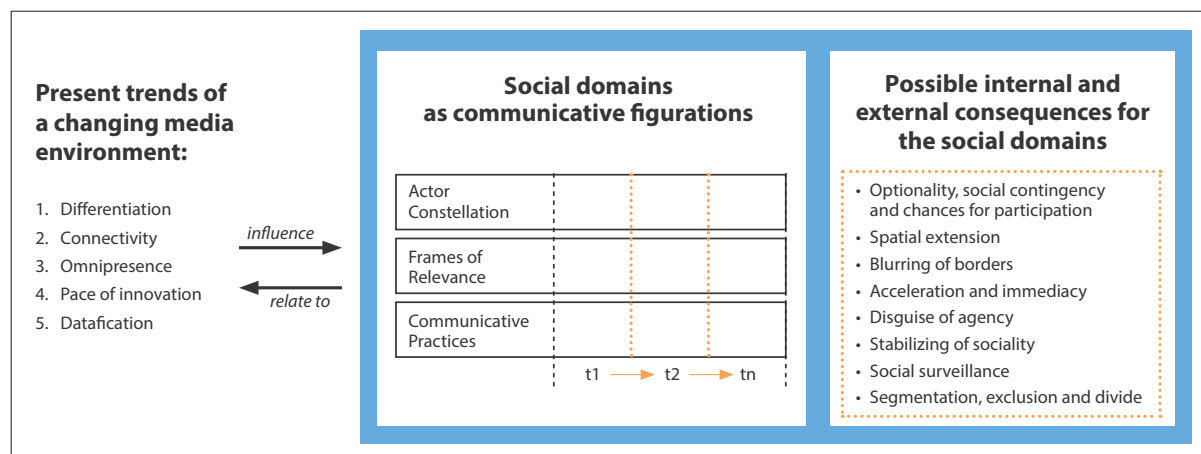
Taking such a perspective, there are at least three features characteristic for a communicative figuration (Couldry/Hepp 2016: 66f.):

- First, a communicative figuration has a certain *constellation of actors* that can be regarded as its structural basis: a network of individuals being interrelated and communicating with each other.
- Second, each communicative figuration has dominating *frames of relevance* that serve to guide its constituting practices. These frames define the ‘topic’ and therefore character of a communicative figuration as a social domain.
- Third, we are dealing with specific *communicative practices* that are interwoven with other social practices. In their composition, these practices typically draw on and are entangled with a *media ensemble*.

Investigating communicative figurations offers us a cross-media and processual approach to the construction of social domains and their transformation with deep mediatization. Today, we are confronted with various, dynamically changing media-related figurations. We gain access to them by researching their actor constellations, frames of relevance and communicative practices entangled with a media ensemble.

Summing up this understanding of communicative figurations and referring back to the main trends of a changing media environment, we can visualise the analytical approach of our research on transforming communications as follows:

Figure 1: Investigating transforming communications in times of a deep mediatization



The figure visualises the following: a changing media environment moulds the communicative figurations of social domains - their actor constellations, frames of relevance and communicative practices. As outlined above, with deep mediatization we expect at present five dominant trends of a changing media environment: a differentiation of media, an increasing connectivity through various media, their rising omnipresence, a rapid pace of innovation, and datafication of human interaction through media. It depends on the social domain under consideration how strongly these trends shape or mould the related figuration.

Investigating the transformations of such a domain, the following questions are striking: To what extent do the actor constellations transform with a changing media ensemble of this communicative figuration? How far do practices of communication shift? And what are the results of this for a figuration’s relevance frames? Based on our preliminary work on individuals, collectivities and organisations as well as the state of research discussed so far, we can assume a number of possible consequences: the optionality, contingency and chances of participation in social domains might increase; social domains might extend spatially; their borders might blur; there might be an acceleration and increasing immediacy within and across them; a disguise of agency might come about; media-technology might stabilize sociality in social domains; social surveillance might possibly take place; or all might result in segmentation, exclusion and divide.

While these assumed consequences are a starting point for our research, it remains an open question as to which of them is characteristic for what social domain, how these different consequences interfere with each other, and even if there might be further consequences we are not aware of at present. In addition, we have to consider the different ways social domains relate to these trends of deep mediatization’s changing media environment. They can be supportive for such changes, for example by appropriating always the latest media. Or by rejecting certain media they can hinder these trends.

For any empirical research, we need to have the dual character of possible consequences in mind. On the one hand, a changing media environment might have ‘internal’ consequences for a social domain - for example optionality, disguise of agency, or segmentation of its figuration might transform. This is for example the case when relations in organisation change partly due to the media that are used for communication, for instance, in news rooms (Loosen 2015). The same can be said about families in which the segmentation of knowledge transforms when digital media becomes part of the family’s memory construction (Lohmeier/Pentzold 2014). On the other hand, there might be ‘external’ consequences: figurations also change in their relation to each other. If organisations of journalism change, for example, their relation to audiences transforms: we are confronted with “blurring boundaries” of journalism’ (Loosen 2015: 68). These are the kinds of phenomenon our research is interested in. A detailed comparative empirical research on the communicative figurations of different social domains will offer the chance to make more general statements on transforming communications possible, focusing on individuals, collectivities and organisations.

By investigating communicative figurations, we therefore adopt an **open analytical approach** that gives us the chance to research the transformation of social domains with deep mediatization. This approach is open to various macro concepts such as ‘network society’ (Castells 2000), ‘media society’ (Imhof et al. 2004), ‘communication society’ (Münch 2002), ‘next society’ (Baecker 2007) or a new ‘re-assembling of the social’ (Latour 2007b). Such concepts offer more general considerations of how the social world might transform with the changing media environment and are therefore an important source for posing empirical questions on media-related changes. Yet, we do not want to decide in advance for any particular communication model of media-related transformations of society. Taking into account all of the above-said, we still need further detailed comparative research on different social domains before we can make such general claims.

For this kind of research, communicative figuration constitutes a highly productive ‘bridging concept’ due to its process perspective on practices and its emphasis on actor constellations.<sup>17</sup> The concept of figurations links a microanalysis of individual practices with a meso-analysis of certain social domains and thus offers us various possibilities to contextualise this with macro questions of society at the least (see Ryan 2005: 503). In so doing, it offers an important contribution to the discussion of the ‘micro-meso-macro link in communications’ (Quandt/Scheufele 2011: 9) that is open to various empirical and theoretical approaches.<sup>18</sup>

To link the detailed analysis of specific figurations with macro questions of transformation, it is important to be aware of the fact that figurations of social domains are interrelated in various ways: via their overlapping actor constellations, different figurations can be linked with each other. In addition, figurations of collectivities and organisations can become ‘supra-individual actors’ (Schimank 2010: 327-342) that are part of the actor-constellation of other figurations and thus build ‘figurations of figurations’ (Couldry/Hepp 2016: 71-78). One example here are figurations of various organisations acting together in a certain institutional field. In addition, we have to take into account that figurations do not simply co-exist side by side, but that they are arranged with each other in a meaningful way. For example, in the majority of Western societies, the family is given some special societal meaning because of recreation and bringing up children; organisations like the school or adult education centres are constructed as having certain responsibilities for educating people; media organisations of journalism deal with information and entertainment, while as companies they also have the role to generate income and jobs. One could continue at this point with various further examples.

On this basis, it is clear that communicative figurations are hardly ‘harmonious’ phenomena. In contrast, we have to be aware that certain power relations, inequalities and conflicts characterise many figurations. Therefore, all the criteria which are used to describe social disparities - class, race, gender and others (Klaus 2015; Maier 2015) - matter when it comes to the analysis of figurations. We even go as far as to argue that a figurational analysis has specific capabilities for analysing such disparities: the origin of the concept is rooted in analysing the ‘power balances’ of actor constellations (Elias/Scotson 1994 [orig. 1965]).<sup>19</sup> Describing communicative figurations with reference to their actor constellations, frames of relevance and communicative practices always implies that we have to be sensitive to all lines of inequalities and conflicts that are inherent in or characteristic for them. When analysing communicative figurations, we can expect to be confronted with the entirety of social disparities concerning media use and appropriation that have been researched so far (see Norris 2001; Pollock 2013; Stegbauer 2012; Zillien 2009), and possibly also new ones, too.

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<sup>17</sup> The suitability of ‘figurations’ as a ‘bridging concept’ between micro and macro question is emphasised by various social scientists: Baur/Ernst 2011; Emirbayer 1997; Esser 1984; Willems 2012.

<sup>18</sup> For a general discussion of ‘micro-macro links’ in social sciences see Alexander et al. 1987, Beamish 2011, Coleman 1990 and Schützeichel et al. 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Later, this was proved by various analyses in a figurational perspective, for example focusing on gender (Leach 1997; Liston 2007; Mandel 2009) or on migrant groups (Treibel 2008b); for a general discussion of a figurational approach in social sciences see Dunne 2009, Dunning/Hughes 2013, Krieken 2007 and Morrow 2009.

## 5. Research groups on individuals, collectivities and organisations

We started the detailed presentation of our *Transforming Communications*' research programme by first answering the question concerning the characteristics of the changing media environment in times of deep mediatization. Secondly, we explicated our communicative figurations approach to investigate the possible consequences of such a changing media environment across very different social domains. Now we want to move to our third question: **How can we best structure our research from an actors' point of view?**

Our answer to this question is to build three research groups in which we plan to structure our individual research projects. Up to this point we have introduced our research groups on individuals, collectivities and organisations mainly on a very general level. Yet, as indicated above, behind the distinction of these three groups there are further analytical considerations. Each group is situated on an analytical level we can empirically operationalise, that is on the level of actors: first, we consider individuals as human actors; second and third, collectivities and organisations are both what can be called 'supra-individual actors' (Schimank 2010: 327). Referring back to 'actor-centred institutionalism' we make here a distinction between 'collective actors' (in our terminology: collectivities) and 'corporate actors' (in our terminology: organisations) (Mayntz/Scharpf 1995: 50).<sup>20</sup> Both are 'supra-individual actors' in the sense that they have an agency that is more than that of the involved individuals. But both are based on different practices and procedures (Schimank 2010: 329): as they are shared by the involved individuals, collectivities are based on patterns of meaning-construction of belonging; organisations are based on binding agreements that are formally (re)produced. Empirically, of course, these phenomena can somehow shimmer in-between when, for example, a social movement ('collectivity') becomes more formalised and as result turns into a political association ('organisation'). However, the fundamental processes of building up collectivities and organisations remain different, and thus offer very helpful perspectives on transforming communications from an actors' point of view. This is the reason why we want to structure the individual empirical projects in three research groups: Research Group A Individuals, Research Group B Collectivities, and Research Group C Organisations.

Taken together, the perspectives of these three research groups complement each other. The perspective of the individual puts emphasis on human actors, their involvement in various communicative figurations - including collectivities and organisations - and the dynamics of change in relation to them. The perspective of collectivities brings the figurations of collectivity building to the fore. In the case of organisations, we put emphasis on formalised institutions as socially ordering forces. Our fundamental assumption is that media-related changes differ with respect to each perspective and within them with respect to the specific social domains we will investigate. And across our research groups we want to develop an analysis of this. In the following, we discuss in more detail our preliminary considerations for each research group on transforming communications.

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<sup>20</sup> This also reflects the discussion in organisational theory, where a distinction is made between organisations, on the one hand, and other institutions like families and social movements on the other, while the term collectivities is not used in the pointed way we do (see Scott 2001: 27).

### 5.1 Research Group A: Individuals

When we use the term **individuals** we refer to human beings as ‘plural actors’, being involved in a ‘plurality’ of figurations and having a ‘repertoire of habits’ (Lahire 2011: 26). Hence, we put emphasis on a perspective that takes human beings and their social embedding as the point of departure. In so doing, we do not have a ‘methodological individualism’ in mind (Esser 1984) but rather are interested in the social embedding of individuals within communicative figurations. Following Elias (1978: 16f.), the individual cannot be understood beyond society but only as part of it. With respect to this, we define an *individual as a human actor, being involved in various communicative figurations that mediate his or her agency as well as the ongoing construction of him- or herself.*

There are various general claims about how a changing media environment in times of deep mediatization relates to individuals. One argument is that digital media support a ‘networked individualism’ (Wellman et al. 2003: 3). It is proposed that the general support of individualization through the emergence of mass media (see Hasebrink 1999) receives an additional boost from the latest media innovations. Manuel Castells (2001: 131) argued that the internet is the ‘appropriate material support for the diffusion of a networked individualism as the dominant form of sociability’. Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman (2012) even went one step further, postulating that we moved from a group-centred society to a society of networked individualism in which ‘people function more as connected individuals and less as embedded group members’ (Rainie/Wellman 2012: 12). The internet is used to keep up ‘weak ties’ (Granovetter 1983) to members of various social domains, and local groups lose relevance. In parallel to this, but referring more to Riesman’s (1950) idea of the ‘lonely crowd’ and to Bourdieu’s (1985) concept of the ‘habitus’, Stig Hjarvard (Hjarvard 2013: 137; 151) argues that recent mediatization has supported a ‘soft individualism’: digital platforms and the mobile phone support an ‘other-directed character’ oriented to an on-going monitoring of the peers. Other scholars have called such a datafied monitoring ‘interveillance’ (Christensen/Jansson 2014: 8) and discussed this more critically. From such a critical point of view, these media-related transformations are so far-reaching that it becomes necessary to rethink the character of the ‘self’ (van Dijck 2013: 154-176; Lupton 2015: 164-187), and questions related to private property rights, privacy, and law (Cohen 2012: 128-148). We can conclude from this that recent changes in the media environment are much more contradictory for individuals than concepts like ‘networked individualism’ imply.

Putting forward this view, more fundamental questions come up: How does the social embedding of individuals transform with deep mediatization? What are the characteristics and particularities of these changes? And what does this mean for the self and his or her conduct of life? Such questions refer to three fields of research on individuals and mediated communications: First, research on the ‘*inclusion of individuals*’; second on the ‘*making of the individual*’ by socialisation and learning; and, third, research on media and ‘*individuals’ conduct of life*’.

The ‘**inclusion of individuals**’ by mediated communication is one of the classical topics of media and communication research. The investigation of ‘publics’ is to a large extent interested in achieving an understanding of how individuals gain

access to and can participate in society via media.<sup>21</sup> Typically, the term of reference is ‘integration’, a term that refers back to classics of social sciences focusing on the ‘integration in a national society’ by ‘mass communication’.<sup>22</sup> In media and communication research there is a discussion as to how far this means a ‘social integration’ of individuals (referring to ‘norms’ and ‘values’), whether it is rather about their ‘system integration’ (referring to an ‘inclusion in’ or a ‘structural coupling to systems’) or a combination of both (Imhof/Blum 2002: 9-10). However, empirical research already demonstrated for mass media the improbability of ‘integrating’ *each* individual: ‘mass media deliver knowledge for orientation, and offer various occasions for controversies’ (Jäckel 2005: 225; see also Keppler 2001 and the discussion in Klaus et al. 2010). And deep mediatization further complicates questions of individuals’ communicative inclusion (Hasebrink/Hölig 2014). With digitalisation, the idea that media offer a ‘centre’ to society becomes even more improbable as media’s differentiation increases the variety and openness of possible communicative relations (see Couldry 2014: 885-886; Jäckel 2005: 228).

Because of this, empirical media and communication research began to investigate the various levels of individuals’ ‘inclusion’ in a more open way. Important results indicate that individuals have different forms of ‘public connection’ that are built up across media and do not necessarily refer to ‘national publics’ but to a wide range of different publics.<sup>23</sup> This research finding corresponds to our own investigations, indicating that relations of communication nowadays are built up across a wide repertoire of media.<sup>24</sup> While this cross-media research was an important step forward, we need more detailed models and approaches with respect to how ‘cross-media inclusion’ of individuals takes place in times of deep mediatization. With reference to the multiplicity of present publics, we are witnessing a multiplicity of public connections. At this point, the concept of communicative figurations is a fundamental help as it offers an understanding of the individual at the crossing of different figurations of publics through which *various* ‘inclusions’ become possible - while we of course have to bear in mind that ‘social inclusion’ does not necessarily work only via publics. Our figurational perspective can inquire into the role of individuals in certain actor constellations, whether they rather act as ‘listeners’, ‘viewers’, ‘readers’ and ‘users’ or if they take opportunities for ‘participation’ and ‘self-representation’. Individual ‘disempowerment’ in one communicative figuration might be complemented with more ‘empowering roles’ in others. This is directly connected to social inequality, besides others with reference to age, race, class and gender. We will investigate such questions in two complementary research projects: **A01 (Hasebrink)** on the public connection of individuals with a particular focus on their inclusion into the national public sphere; and **A05 (Koch)** on the self-representation of marginalised individuals (Roma and homeless people) in the urban public of three European cities (Brussels, Hamburg, London).

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<sup>21</sup> The following publications offer an overview of this discussion: Eilders 2011; Geißler/Pöttker 2006; Hasebrink/Rössler 1999; Imhof et al. 2002; Klaus 2006; Jarren 2000; Lunt/Livingstone 2013; Peters/d’Haenens 2005; Splichal 2006.

<sup>22</sup> We can find this argument - besides others - in the writings of Parsons (1971), Habermas (1984) and Luhmann (2012).

<sup>23</sup> See for this research: Couldry et al. 2007; Kaun 2012; Schröder 2014.

<sup>24</sup> See Bjur et al. 2014; Carpentier et al. 2014; Hasebrink et al. 2015; Lepa et al. 2014.



A changing media environment also relates to the ‘making of the individual’. Here, our focus is not on how the individual is included in different communicative figurations but how these figurations mould the individual as a self. The ideas of ‘soft individualism’ or Elias’ original arguments on the shaping of habitus through the figurations in which the individual is embedded are in this line of argument. In media and communication research this is especially a matter of socialisation, learning and identity. Classical writings about socialisation largely ignored media.<sup>25</sup> However, more recent research puts emphasis on the role of media in socialisation (Kammerl 2011; Wagner/Lampert 2013).<sup>26</sup> With recent changes in the media environment, the character of socialisation changed insofar as children from a very early age onwards come in contact with media as content (books, films, audio stories etc.) *and* as technologies - offering a new and genuinely specific mediated access to the social world (Gardner/Davis 2013; Ito et al. 2009: 1-28; Schorb et al. 2013). Talking about media as well as doing things with media becomes a basic part of socialisation and shapes these processes. However, in the perspective of the individuals such a ‘mediatized childhood’ (Livingstone 2014) and youth is - partly because of the involvement in a variety of different communicative figurations - ‘complicated’ (boyd 2014). At this point we are interested in such media-related challenges for children’ socialisation (**A02, Kammerl and Lampert**). When it comes to learning of adults, the present media environment offers various new opportunities for individuals: through media, individuals can access figurations that offer chances for ‘participatory learning’ (Jenkins et al. 2016: 90-119) across long distances. Knowledge - at least this is a normative expectation - becomes accessible with fewer barriers and in a more self-determined way. However, the ‘media literacies’ developed by adults remain unequal (Livingstone/Helsper 2007). At the same time, new skill-sets must be acquired when more and more knowledge is produced on the basis of datafication. We will research such questions of learning with reference to informal learning in various learning domains (health, music, software) in which the dynamics of meta-related changes are evident (**A03, Wolf**).

This already refers to the close relation between communicative figurations and the ‘individual’s conduct of life’.<sup>27</sup> The term ‘conduct of life’ means an individual’s way of living that is socially mediated and increasingly marked by ‘coping’ and a ‘muddling through’ the challenges of life (Schimank 2015). We have to see each ‘conduct of life’ as an individual’s profile of life in relation to the ‘life course’, that is the typical sequence of life (and its path dependency) (Jurczyk et al. 2016). This sequence of life, and thereby its conduct, depends on the ‘domains in which individual action and development are embedded’, such as ‘family, education, work, leisure’ (Heinz et al. 2009a: 16). The communicative figurations of such domains have become deeply mediatized. But there are only rare links between research on conduct of life and research on media communications that put emphasis on the role of certain ‘status passages’ for changing patterns of media use (see

<sup>25</sup> Exemplary for other kinds of writing is Berger and Luckmann’s (1967: 149-165) analysis of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary socialization’. They reduce this mainly to situations of face-to-face interaction and do not discuss media as possible ‘agencies’ of socialisation.

<sup>26</sup> See for this discussion especially: Bachmair 2010; Charlton/Neumann 1988; Drotner 2001; Livingstone 2009a; Süß 2004; Paus-Hasebrink/Kulterer 2014; Rosengren 1994.

<sup>27</sup> For an overview of research on life course and the conduct of everyday life see Green 2010, Heinz et al. 2009b, Kudera/Voß 2000, Schraube/Højholt 2016; with the CRC 186 ‘Status Passages and Risks in the Life Course’ (1990-2002), there is a long-established research tradition on this topic at the University of Bremen <http://www.sfb186.uni-bremen.de/frames/main.htm>.

K. Beck et al. 2015; Bolin/Skoogerbo 2013; Claessens 2013; Rosenstock/Beck 2007; Westlund/Weibull 2013). More widespread is media and communication research on biography and generation, putting emphasis on the concepts of ‘media biography’ and ‘media generation’. A media biography is defined as a personal-historical experience of changing media as contents and technologies (and its typical patterns in relation to the life course).<sup>28</sup> Various approaches on media generations are interested in patterns of media use in relation to certain generational cohorts.<sup>29</sup> While there is much public discourse about the generation of ‘digital natives’ who approach digital media in a more ‘natural’ way than other generations (Prensky 2001; Herold 2012, Palfrey/Gasser 2008), empirical research shows that the idea of generations as characterised by uniform patterns of media use falls short.<sup>30</sup> While some individual differences of media use can be explained by a generational positioning, media generations cannot be understood as homogeneous (Jäckel 2010: 250-255; Lepa et al. 2014: 209-222). As a consequence, recent research puts more emphasis on process approaches to media generations and defines them by a characteristic experience of mediatization in relation to certain typical stages of a life course (K. Beck et al. 2015; Bolin 2015; Hepp et al. 2015a). In a more general sense, questions of conduct of life matter for all of the projects in Research Group A insofar as we consider individuals in a process perspective. However, as a special matter of research, project **A04 (Schimank and Volkmann)** will focus on the life course of middle-class individuals, taking different kinds of couples to investigate their conduct of life in relation to various typical figurations and social domains.

Through this structuring, we plan to take an individual perspective on transforming communications seriously. In so doing, we can gain an understanding of how deep mediatization relates to the self and the individual life on its various levels. The challenge is how to conceptualise such an individual perspective from a cross-media point of view. At this point, theoretical foundation has a particular strength as the concept of communicative figurations offers us the chance to understand individuals as positioned at the crossing of the various communicative figurations they are involved in. Through these figurations, they are related to very different social domains; to some of them by ‘strong ties’ like the family or the peer group; to others more by ‘weak ties’ like networks of like-minded people. Therefore, starting our analysis with individuals’ different communicative figurations allows us to be open to new kinds of connections as they become possible for individuals in a changing media environment. At the same time, we remain sensitive to the various individual relations to social domains that do not change so dramatically. To understand the present ‘plural actors’ and the transformation of their lives, appropriate starting points of analysis are the different communicative figurations these ‘actors’ are involved in. And these communicative figurations are influenced by a changing media environment: the *differentiation* of media is related to an increasing optionality and contingency of individuals’ inclusions in communicative figurations. The *connectivity* of media offers the chance for individuals to extend their figurative interrelations, but it might also blur the borders between them. An *omnipresence* of media involves individuals in accelerated pro-

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<sup>28</sup> See for a media biographical approach: Hartung 2013; Klaus/Röttger 1996; Paus-Hasebrink et al. 2009; Schoett 2009; Vollbrecht 2009.

<sup>29</sup> See for this: K. Beck et al. 2015; Jäckel 2010; Kübler 2012; Peiser 1996; Schäffer 2009.

<sup>30</sup> See for this Aroldi/Colombo 2013; Buckingham 2008; Hepp et al. 2014; Loos et al. 2012.

cesses of communication within various communicative figurations. The rapid *pace of innovation* offers new chances for creativity but also presents a challenge to an individual to cope with the perceived pressures to adjust to changing communicative figurations, and can result in various segmentations, exclusions, and divides (among others, in respect of class, race, and gender). And *datafication* refers to the individual insofar as it is mainly individual’s data that is collected and individuals who are surveyed.

With reference to this, in our **Research Group A Individuals**, all projects investigate individuals at the crossing of different communicative figurations, dealing with the following **orienting questions**:

- In which communicative figurations are individuals involved? How do these figurations transform with deep mediatization? What kinds of agency do they offer and what kinds of restrictions? What are the respective forms of inclusion and exclusion?
- How does the making of the self take place in the figurations? In which way do processes of socialisation and learning change? What kinds of inequalities are produced and reproduced as consequence?
- How far are our conducts of life and life courses shaped by the present, changing media environment? In which way does this media environment offer new possibilities for personal life, and in which way restrictions?
- What are the patterns of media-related transformation with respect to this? How stable are they? What are the subsequent long-term trajectories?

To research these questions, we must consider individual agency as embedded - and this means both constrained and empowered - in its social context, which the individual, though, can re-shape through time and within certain limits. This ‘blended view’ (Settersten/Gannon 2005: 35) is the common starting point of our Research Group A Individuals. Therefore, we ask both for the consequences of transforming communications for the individual, and, the other way round, for the involvement of the individuals in the production of these transformations.

## 5.2 Research Group B: Collectivities

Our second research group and therefore perspective on transforming communications refers to **collectivities**. A collectivity, in the sense we use the term, can for example be a group, a community, a situational gathering or an online crowd. In our understanding, a *collectivity is a figuration whose actors are characterised by a certain meaningful belonging that provides a basis for action- and orientation-in-common*. The form of such meaningful belonging can differ. It can be a feeling of a ‘common we’ as with traditional face-to-face communities (Knoblauch 2008). It can be based on a ‘shared situational action’ as in the case of smart mobs (Rheingold 2003). Or it can be based on processes of datafication like the collectivities of ‘numeric inclusion’ (Passoth et al. 2014). Across all these specific cases, the key characteristic of collectivities remains their *meaningful* character of belonging for the actors involved - with media being important means to support the construction of this meaning. Therefore, even if collectivities are vague and open-

ended, being part of a collectivity means more than just sharing a commonality perceived by an external observer.<sup>31</sup>

But how can we understand the ways in which collectivities are being transformed in times of deep mediatization? What are their characteristics and particular features? For the analysis of our projects in Research Group B we have at least four important kinds of collectivity in mind: First, *media-based collectivities* for which technologically based communication media are constitutive. Second, *mediatized collectivities* that can exist beyond media but which nevertheless become more and more interwoven with media ensembles. Third, collectivities that are rooted in processes of *imagining their belongings together* through shared media resources. And from a different angle, we have, fourth, to consider such *collectivities that try to influence further processes of media-related collectivity building*.

For **media-based collectivities** media are constitutive in the sense that they cannot exist without media. Maybe the most prominent examples for such a collectivity are various kinds of ‘fan communities’, for instance certain television series or film genres or more recently of computer games (Fiske 1987: 146-151; Jenkins 1992; Winter 2010a). Here, media are of importance in a double sense: first, their contents define the frames of relevance for such figurations; second, their technologies are important as means for keeping these collectivities together. With digital media the social visibility of such media-based collectivities increased as new ‘politics of participation’ became possible ‘not simply through the production and circulation of new ideas (the critical reading of favourite texts) but also through access to new social structures (collective intelligence) and new models of cultural production (participatory culture)’ (Jenkins 2006: 246).<sup>32</sup> With ‘second screens’ these processes already take place in parallel to other forms of media use (Han/Lee 2014; Shin 2013). Similarly, ‘online groups’ (Matzat 2009; Thiedeke 2003) only became possible through the emergence of the internet. Contemporary digital platforms offer possibilities for multiple online groups to jointly build up topics of interest. However, it still remains an open question as to when and how in detail these online groups become more stable figurations of communities<sup>33</sup> or remain ‘a group that got together because its members shared common interests’ (Turkle 2011: 238). Once we move to the field of online blogging it becomes even more complicated. What is often referred to as the ‘blogosphere’ (J.-H. Schmidt 2007: 1409) is an online space of bloggers who are interrelated with each other in une-

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<sup>31</sup> This understanding of collectivity is much more specific than the concept of ‘collectives’ as it is commonly used in writings about assemblages (see Falb 2015: pp. 273-342; Latour 2013: 296-325) that recently became adopted in media and communication research (Stäheli 2012). Referring back to Tarde (2000 [1899]: 35), we find there an emphasis on the ‘repetition’ that results in the emergence of ‘collectives’ (Latour 2007b: 14). Such collectives are assemblages of humans and non-humans that have a certain form of joint agency (Keller/Lau 2008: 319-320; Kneer 2008: 295-302). Such reflections are highly stimulating insofar as they allow us to think about the close media-relatedness of our collectivities (Schüttpeitz 2013: 3-18). However, terminologically, it is weak to confuse all linkages of human actors and media with collectivities. From a social scientific point of view - and this is the reason why we stay with this term - *collectivity* means more than just assembling: it also entails the construction of meaningful ‘boundaries’ that are defined in unfolding processes of communication.

<sup>32</sup> While we have to be careful not to romanticise these fan cultures (Carpentier 2011a; Cordeiro et al. 2013; Jenkins/Carpentier 2013), it is evident that digitalisation has expanded their social relevance; see also Ochsner et al. 2015.

<sup>33</sup> See Deterding 2008; Eisewicht/Grenz 2012; Yuan 2013.

ven ways (Bruns 2007; Reese et al. 2007; Tække 2005; Vicari 2015). The striking question here is which kinds of collectivities are built up across these bloggers. Partly, they are understood as a kind of ‘community of practice’ (Lave/Wenger 1991; Wenger 1999), being occupied with a certain topic, referring more or less to each other and, by doing so, building up as a constellation of actors an arena of discourse (Ekdale et al. 2010: 218-220; J.-H. Schmidt 2007: 1411-1418). Others have argued that in cases where such shared discourse becomes ‘characterised by intense affective unification’ (Stage 2013: 216) it might be more appropriate to understand this collectivity as a kind of online ‘crowd’.<sup>34</sup> At this point we are first interested in how new kinds of ‘networked media collectivities’ emerge like gatherings around media events that rely on cross-media contents and technologies (project **B03**, Friemel). Second, we are interested in how crowd-like, partly strongly moralising ‘collectivities of debate’ emerge with reference to the European crises in national and transnational publics in Germany and France (project **B05**, Averbek-Lietz).

Moreover, with deep mediatization such collectivities become related to media for which media are not necessarily constitutive: **mediatized collectivities**. Here, we can refer to families, peer groups or migrant groups. In these cases we can find what Nancy Baym calls ‘networked collectivism’; which means ‘that groups of people now network throughout the internet and related mobile media, and in-person communication, creating a shared but distributed group identity’ (Baym 2015: 101). Thus, these collectivities are typically articulated across a variety of different media. In the case of families, for example, the appropriation of media - especially of television - was and still is important for keeping them up as a collectivity.<sup>35</sup> But the crucial point here is that ‘doing family’ has become a cross-media endeavour (Hasebrink 2014). When family photos are shared on online platforms as a part of constituting a family memory (Pentzold et al. 2016: 2) or when family relationships are articulated by digital media use (Cardoso et al. 2012), it is a whole media ensemble we have to consider as relevant. Other collectivities become mediatized in comparable ways. An evident example are ‘peer groups’ (Neumann-Braun/Autenrieth 2011), which nowadays are often understood as part of ‘youth cultures’ and ‘scenes’ (Buckingham/Kehily 2014: 5-7). Again, characteristic for these collectivities is their close dependence on media that are used as a resource for community building (Friemel 2013; Hitzler/Niederbacher 2010: 30). Further evidence for the growing relevance of media in this context has been provided by research on migrant groups (Bailey et al. 2007; with a special focus on the city: Georgiou 2013: 92-116): Nowadays, already the act of migration is highly intertwined with media when the ‘image’ of the place to move to but also the possible migration network are built up via the internet before someone decides to actually migrate (see Braune 2013). The ‘connected migrant’ (Diminescu 2008: 568) organises the act of migration with the help of digital platforms and smart phones which allow for a detailed navigation, an ongoing flow of information as well as a documentation of the migration process (Leurs 2015; Wall et al. 2015). And contemporary migration does not necessarily mean to ‘assimilate’ to the new context of life but to be able to keep up dispersed collectivities by the use of various,

<sup>34</sup> See for this discussion Olofsson 2010 and Stage 2013: 216). It is an open question as to what kind of collectivity bloggers build, especially as the character of this figuration changes when bloggers become more professionalised in their ways of communication (Averbek-Lietz et al. 2015).

<sup>35</sup> See on this Hirsch 1992, Mikos 1994, Morley 1986 and Peil/Röser 2014.

mainly ‘smaller media’ (Dayan, 1999: 22; Lohmeier/Pentzold 2014; Madiannou/Miller 2013). At this point, we want to focus on locally situated families in Germany and migrant families from Poland and Syria and their memory constructions in times of deep mediatization (**B02, Lohmeier**).

A third kind of collectivity are **imagined collectivities**, whereby media are the main constitutive element. In his enlightening analysis, Benedict Anderson put emphasis on ‘the novel and the newspaper’ as ‘the technical means for “representing” the kind of imagined community that is the nation’ (Anderson 1983: 25). Electronic media later supplemented this process - mainly radio and television - which gave ‘print allies unavailable a century ago’ (Anderson 1983: 135). In this way, processes of communication that allowed for the construction of the nation were intensified. However, it would be a mistake to understand this mediated representation of the nation as an *explicit* discourse about matters of the nation as a political unit. Rather, it is a ‘banal nationalism’: a habitual representation of the nation as a point of identification in a ‘mundane way’ (Billig 1995: 6). Even today, this process of constructing the world as a world of nations continues, for example in online platforms that are not necessarily bound to a national territory (Skey 2014). However, with globalisation in general and increasing connectivity of media in particular such social imaginaries became less exclusive (Hepp 2015: 10-34; Taylor 2004). In addition to the ‘project’ of constructing the nation as a collectivity, other kinds of ‘projects’ of imagining collectivity became more widespread. One prominent example for this is the ‘community of Europeans’ that can be understood in parallel to the nation as a ‘community of communication’ (Risse 2010: 157): it is imagined through collective processes of communication. Here, the underlying communicative space is a *transnational* and *multilingual* public that emerges from the increasing discussion of European issues across borders as well as an increasing monitoring of European political affairs in Brussels, and it can result in collective processes of identity construction.<sup>36</sup> This said, any ‘doing’ of constructing the nation as an imagined community is deeply interwoven with the construction of other space-related imagined communities, at present as well as historically (Marszolek 2014; Marszolek/Robel 2016). Here, we plan to research the transformation of constructing imagined communities of various scopes (local, regional, national and transnational) on the example of two ‘media cities’ (Hamburg and Leipzig) (**B04, Marszolek and Wagner**).

From a different angle, we have to consider **collectivities that try to influence processes of media-related collectivity building**. On a more reflexive level, these are groupings which themselves ‘promote’ certain forms of (media-related) collectivity. Here, a special area of interest is ‘social movements’ and what we refer to as ‘pioneer communities’. With the support of media (Mattoni/Treré 2014), social movements mostly aim at transformations on a global scale, offering new imaginations of collectivity - collective ‘project identities’, as Castells (1997: 421) called them. In this perspective, such movements can become ‘networks of hope’ (Castells 2012). However, there is good reason to be more cautious about such assertions: the possibilities of social movements for new forms of collectivity building are certainly greater and better resourced today than prior to digitalisation. Yet, at the same time, the internet offers political elites many opportunities to

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<sup>36</sup> See for this Brüggemann/Kleinen-von Königslöw 2013; Kantner 2006; Koopmans/Statham 2010: 63-96; Lichtenstein/Eilders 2015; Risse 2015: 144-153; Wessler et al. 2008: 40-54.

intensify and diversify the ways in which they sustain themselves in positions of power (Chadwick 2006: 202). Therefore, the transformative potential of such collectivities might be far more limited than their own imaginaries suggest. But with deep mediatization, the ‘logic of collective action’ being originally characteristic for social movements (Porta 2013; Rucht/Neidhart 2002) becomes partly transformed into a ‘logic of connective action’ (Bennett/Seegerberg 2013: 27) because digital platforms offer possibilities of connecting people in more loose ways (Benkler 2006; Dolata/Schrage 2016). As a consequence, participants ‘engage with issues largely on individual terms by finding common ground in easy-to-personalise action frames that allow for diverse understandings of common problems to be shared broadly through digital media networks’ (Bennett et al. 2014: 233). Digital platforms support *both* hierarchically organised social movements *and* a highly individualised political engagement that is more ‘me-centric’ (Fenton/Barassi 2011: 180; Langlois et al. 2009: 418), but located in a wider and more varied imaginary of ‘protest collectivity’ (Kavada 2015: 883).

In times of deep mediatization, another kind of collectivity appears to be of growing importance: ‘media-related pioneer communities’. An example for this is the quantified self movement (Nafus/Sherman 2014). While having a tendency to use the term ‘movement’ in their self-description, such collectivities have a relatedness to ‘think tanks’ (Neubauer 2012; Pautz 2010), insofar as they understand themselves partly as political pressure groups and work closely together with media industries. The characteristic of such ‘pioneer communities’ is that they have an imagination of how to ‘socially implement’ media technologies. As these communities are closely related to media-related transformations in (the imagining of) collectivity building we want to make them an issue in our research by investigating the maker and quantified self movement in Germany and the UK (**B01, Hepp**).

These different angles of research illustrate the complexity of collectivity building in times of deep mediatization. Especially contradictions between the studies quoted so far indicate the context sensitivity of these processes, but also the overall missing integrative approach to describe the media-related transformation of collectivities. One-sided explanations do not seem to be particularly helpful. In addition, we have to be aware that any media and communication research on collectivities must also refer to sociological research in this area. In sociology, media-related transformations of collectivities are often contextualised quite closely with other meta-processes of change, mainly individualisation and globalisation.<sup>37</sup> Zygmunt Bauman (2001: 65f., 71), for example, argues that partly due to media, ‘aesthetic communities’ gained relevance in everyday life, i.e. communities that are more situational and based on aesthetic selection and interest, and less on ethical responsibilities and long-term commitments. This corresponds with other concepts of changing collectivities like ‘post-traditional communities’ (Hitzler et al. 2008: 15f.; see also Giddens 1990: 115 and Knorr-Cetina 1998). Others use the concept of ‘community of communication’ (Knoblauch 2008: 73-88; Risse 2010: 157-174) to put emphasis on the *communicative* construction of new forms of collectivity in a changing media environment.

We understand this variety of different concepts and discussions as an indication for the dynamics of transformation we are confronted with in this area. To

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<sup>37</sup> For a detailed discussion of this see Hepp/Hitzler 2014; Hjarvard 2013: 11-14; Krotz 2008.

investigate these dynamics, a comparative description of different kinds of collectivities as communicative figurations is of analytical help. By such an analysis, on the one hand, we remain open for the varying frames of relevance of different collectivities - the various forms of communities, groups and media-based collectivities etc. On the other hand, we receive an analytical tool for researching these different collectivities and their media-related transformations in a comparative way by focusing on their changing constellations of actors, communicative practices and their entanglement with a media ensemble, and frames of relevance. We have to take into account that these collectivities will possibly be marked by conflict, contradictions, and inequalities with respect to class, race, gender as well as other possible sources of inequality.

As the discussion above demonstrates, we can relate present trends of a changing media environment to the transforming construction of collectivities. The *differentiation* of various media offers options in relation to collectivities and a resulting social contingency: collectivities can be constructed across various media in different ways, and the numbers of collectivities and their differences increase with the changing media environment - which also results in a complexity and therefore contingency of social positioning, but also segregation and exclusion. Present media *connectivity* makes a spatial extension possible for collectivities as well as new translocal interrelations through which various collectivities can become intertwined and blurred. Through the *omnipresence* of media, collectivities can be marked by an immediacy of internal communication: that is, an involvement within the communicative processes that constructs a collectivity through platforms. For collectivities, the rapid *pace of innovation* means that the construction of these collectivities must adapt continuously to new media like for example the latest apps or smart phones that become a pre-condition for becoming or remaining part of a certain collectivity, something that can also result in *segmentation*, *exclusion*, and *divide*. Finally, *datafication* is of importance as it made possible fundamentally new forms of collectivity building like the quantified-self movement, but also surveillance in and across collectivities.

In light of this, our **Research Group B Collectivities** is occupied with the following **orienting questions**:

- What figurations of collectivity are characteristic for deep mediatization? What are their specificities beyond simplifying general statements like a media-related loss of ‘community’?
- How does collectivity building take place in these different figurations? How far are these processes related to power and exclusion or diversity and openness?
- In which way do these processes of construction transform with the changing media environment? What are the influences of the various related trends in this process? When are other influences like individualisation or globalisation of greater importance?
- What are the patterns of transformation with reference to these collectivities and across them? How stable and sustainable are they? What are the dominant lines of transformation in a long-term perspective?

We want to address these questions insofar that all projects in our Research Group B investigate collectivities from different angles. By so doing, the research group



avoids a one-sided perspective. Again, we adopt a dual perspective: on the one hand, we ask for the consequences of transforming communications for collectivity building; on the other hand, we ask how certain collectivities might either support or hinder these transformations. The reason for this is that the transformation of collectivities is not just an outcome of a changing media environment. Collectivities may also be important ‘supra-individual actors’ (Schimank 2010: 327) of media change.

### 5.3 Research Group C: Organisations

As a further perspective on transforming communications, we want to focus our third research group on **organisations**. An organisation is *defined by its orientation to a shared goal and practices, by a hierarchically coordinated division of work or responsibility, and by certain rules of membership* (Kühl 2011: 9-22; Meier/Schimank 2012: 26).<sup>38</sup> If we characterise organisations this way, they can be seen as distinctive institutions (Berger/Luckmann 1967: 102) offering particular roles in terms of membership and practice which are formalised (Jarren/Donges 2012: 48f.; Scott 2001: 27f.). However, it is important to understand organisations not as static phenomena but as being produced through an ongoing process of - as Karl Weick, Kathleen Sutcliffe and David Obstfeld (2005: 410) put it - ‘organising’ and ‘organised sensemaking’. Organisations as ‘discursive constructions’ (Fairhurst/Putnam 2004: 22) are made up through a kind of ‘metaconversation’ (Robichaud et al. 2004: 624) about their goals that evolves through sequences of practices (Weick 1979: 13). There are two sides to this organisational sense making: an internal side (how actors within the organisation develop a sense of what the organisation is, should be, and how it should relate to its environment), and an external side (how it is seen by an external environment like for example public discourses on this organisation). Building up this division between internal and external is part of the organisational practice. This division is constructed continually and refers to various resources (e.g. internal and external public relations). In this sense, organisations are not just individuals acting together (Jarren/Donges 2012: 49); they are a special kind of figuration (or figuration of figurations) in which actors are implicated in *formal* ways and which, through ongoing processes of construction and legal recognition, acquire a certain kind of agency as ‘corporate actors’ (Mayntz/Scharpf 1995: 49-51). Through this agency, organisations have an ability to ‘order’ wider institutional fields like journalism, politics and law, religion, education or science (see Cooper/Law 1995; Thornton et al. 2012: 133-147).

There is no question that organisations are important for understanding transforming communications: while mass media as organisations supported fundamentally the emergence of modern societies (Thompson 1995: 12-15), these mass media later increasingly put pressure on other modern organisations since media are important for them to communicate externally. However, the question is in which way transformation of organisations refers not only to external pressures in respect

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<sup>38</sup> With this definition, we appreciate the critique against any narrow definition of organisation on the basis of *predefined* goals (Cohen et al. 1972: 2f.). We share the argument that what we call ‘goal’ of an organisation is built up in a process of practice which is not necessarily defined when an organisation is founded at a certain moment of time and possibly changes during its existence (Weick 1979: 91-95). However, as we want to argue, each organisation has a meaningful purpose that defines - in our terminology - the relevance frames of its figuration.

of presenting themselves in the media (Altheide 2014: 19-39; Asp 2014; Donges 2008; Øyvind/Pallas 2014) but also to internal processes of communication with reference to a changing media ensemble (Hjarvard 2013: 23-27). For example, digital media being used internally for the work in newsrooms have stimulated organisational changes in journalism, which is again externally supported by new relationships between journalists and their audiences on the basis of digital platforms (Heise et al. 2014). This is a pattern we also know from other kinds of organisations: with the establishment of digital media, various organisations became related to or even reliant on technological communication media internally as well as with reference to their external relations.

At this point approaches are of importance that are more focused on the ‘communicative constitution’ or ‘discursive construction’ of organisations.<sup>39</sup> While operating with varying understandings of ‘organisation’ - organisation as an object (entity), organisation as a perpetual state of change or becoming (process), and organisation as grounded in action (entity from process) (Fairhurst/Putnam 2004: 10; Putnam/Maydan Nicotera 2010: 149) -, the work within these approaches is dedicated to the question of how organisations are constructed through processes of communication and therefore possibly changed by them (McPhee/Zaug 2009; Schoeneborn et al. 2014). Of importance are furthermore investigations of ‘socio-technical systems’ and how they relate to organisations (Emery 1959; Jarke 2014; Orlikowski/Scott 2008). In this tradition, there has been an intense discussion about the changes to organisations brought about through the use of (media) technologies. Maybe the most far-reaching argument is that through an increasing connectivity and datafication, organisations would transform to ‘networked forms of organisations’ that question their original hierarchical structures (Jarke 2015).<sup>40</sup> Moreover, such media-related changes do not only foster changes within existing organisations, they also support a ‘start-up culture’ that creates new organisations and models of organising (Carlson/Usher 2015).

With reference to such lines of discussion, there are at least three kinds of organisations that matter for the purpose of researching transforming communications at this point: *Media as organisations*, when we put emphasis on organisations that produce media and at the same time rely in this process on media. Extending our perspective to other kinds of organisations that are influenced by media especially *organisations of politics, governance and regulation* and *organisations of science and education* are of importance to understand organisational transformation in relation to a changing media environment. We exclude at this point the field of economics beyond media organisations as this is researched in other research groups with which we cooperate.<sup>41</sup>

On the basis of a long-term tradition (Curran 2000; Hesmondhalgh 2013; Jarren/Donges 2012: 47-53), media and communication research asks in a reflexive manner how the change of media transforms **media as organisations** themselves:

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<sup>39</sup> See beside others Cooren et al. 2011; Fairhurst/Putnam 2004; Kuhn 2008; MCPhee/Zaug 2009; Putnam/Maydan Nicotera 2010; Taylor/van Every 2011.

<sup>40</sup> See for this: Castells 2000: 163-215; Howard 2011: 58-62; Powell 1990: 295-336.

<sup>41</sup> The transformation of markets and economics due to the changing media environment is investigated in the DFG-funded research group ‘Marketing of Hedonic Media Products in the Age of Digital Social Media’ that is coordinated by the University of Hamburg (see <https://www.bwl.uni-hamburg.de/de/fg1452/ueber-uns/about-us>, 2.4.2016).

broadcasters, newspaper publishers, or other media production companies (Brock 2013; Lewis/Westlund 2014). Research in this field reflects that media organisations, which mostly stand for ‘the newsroom’ as organisational entity in the field of journalism research (Altmeyden 2008), operate within a changing and increasingly manifold media environment, and hence also have to transform their organisational structure.<sup>42</sup> For instance, a recurrent finding is that these organisations try to embrace more and more media channels for production as well as for disseminating goals (e.g., Blasingame 2011; Engesser/Humprecht 2015), and increasingly also for the purpose of (re-)connecting with declining audiences.<sup>43</sup> In journalism, for instance, these developments have turned many newspaper newsrooms into cross-media newsrooms incorporating a variety of (social) media channels (Brüggemann 2002; Neuberger et al. 2014). This development is accompanied by various organisational de-differentiations (e.g. ‘media-neutral’ content management systems) as well as differentiation processes (e.g. the emergence of new roles like the ‘social media editor’; Bakker 2014; Loosen 2005; Meier 2007; Reich 2015). Simultaneously, producing and distributing media content is increasingly also taking place outside established media organisations: within a vast diversity of blogs, social media platforms, photo communities, and the like (Shirky 2009; G. Turner 2016). This is often referred to as the end of the ‘gatekeeper monopoly’ of journalism and media organisations (Bruns 2005), while at the same time search engines and social media platforms came into the role of gatekeepers (Halavais 2008). As a consequence, the borders of *media* organisations are actually becoming blurred and more and more continue to become so. Moreover, due to lowered access-barriers to production technologies, produced media have become more open for individual and corporate actors beyond the traditional media organisations (Napoli 2016). Symptomatic for this development are platforms like YouTube via which non-media professionals can become ‘YouTube stars’ by publishing their user-generated content - and professionalise within such a process (Burgess/Green 2016; Kim 2012). These examples shed light on the fact that media organisations are very special cases when it comes to the investigation of the media-related transformations of organisations. This particular type of organisation is deeply concerned with the consequences of a changing media environment, and is at the same time a main driver of these changes. Many media organisations conduct reviews of media environment’s changes in order to assess whether upcoming media technologies are worth being incorporated in the organisation’s media ensemble. Consequently, media organisations contribute to an institutionalisation and potentially also to a ‘mainstreamisation’ of new media as technologies and contents. As in journalism we find the media organisations that on the one hand have the longest tradition but are on the other hand deeply affected by deep mediatization, in this research area we want to focus first on such organisations of journalism, their organising, and relation to audiences (project C01, Loosen).

In the field of political communication research, there is a special interest in **organisations of politics, governance and regulation**. One focus here is how far media as content, technologies and organisations shape or interact with these other kinds of organisations. A fundamental thesis of mediatization research has been

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<sup>42</sup> See especially: Boczkowski 2004; Domingo/Paterson 2011; Singer et al. 2011; Williams/Wahl-Jorgensen 2011

<sup>43</sup> See for this discussion: Allagui/Breslow 2016; Bloom et al. 2016; Cision/University 2015; Passoth et al. 2014; Schrage 2012; Tandoc/Vos 2015.

that political organisations (parties, political associations etc.) more and more have to adapt to a ‘media logic’, that is to media patterns of communication and representation which in turn influence the ways in which these organisations work:<sup>44</sup> the necessity to publish in certain time structures, to condense the messages in certain ways, to personalise communication etc. (perception) produces pressure on political organisations to organise themselves in certain ways (structure) as well as to communicate adequately (practice) if they want to reach audiences in times of deep mediatization (see Donges/Jarren 2014: 190; Scheu et al. 2014). More recent research demonstrates that the relations between changing media and organisations of politics are even more complicated:<sup>45</sup> various media-related influences are at work that cannot be operationalised as *one* single kind of ‘logic’. In addition, there are ‘path dependencies’<sup>46</sup> and ‘institutionalisations’ of existing organisations that counteract possible media influences and lead to inertia and persistence of certain forces (e.g. on the staff level of an organisation). Especially digital media platforms allow organisations, for instance, to communicate directly with their audiences and relevant stakeholders - without the detour via news media and journalism. In digital media platforms, very different kinds of ‘logics’ are at work (van Dijck/Poell 2013) and it becomes questionable whether we can consider their role for political organisations as ‘logic’ at all (Lundby 2009). We then have to consider in much more detail that digital media are not only part of the organisation’s environment. They are foremost ‘means of intra-organisational communication’ and ‘media for connecting with the environment’ (Schulz 2014: 64) - an area where datafied allocation of information is of growing relevance, for example in political campaigns (Nickerson/Rogers 2014).

A further perspective in research on regulation showed us that we probably still overestimate the capabilities of laws to govern social and especially organisational processes by means of prohibitions and mandatory requirements in a way that targeted regulative aims will be reached. Against this background, the concept of governance, originating from economics and political science, is increasingly adapted in regulation research (Haus 2010; Mayntz 2006; Willke 2007). That is especially the case when it comes to media regulation.<sup>47</sup> But processes of governance in practice and the role of organisations therein are not yet a focal point of these conceptual debates on media regulation. The rise of intermediary information services like social network sites or search engines as platforms for individual and collective communicative practices is the background of more phenomenon-driven research on functions of providers in coordinating behaviour and solving conflicts in the emerging communicative spaces (Gasser/Schulz 2015; Ziewitz/Pentzold 2014). Bearing in mind that these providers are in most cases business organisations, the question becomes urgent as to how we could and should look at these phenomena of ‘private ordering’ from a regulation or governance perspective. This

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<sup>44</sup> For an overview of these arguments see: Altheide 2004; Kepplinger 2002; Mazzoleni 2008a; Strömbäck 2008; Vowe 2006.

<sup>45</sup> See for this discussion (Donges/Jarren 2014: 183-187; Fredriksson/Pallas 2014; Landerer 2013; Strömbäck/Esser 2014: 13-22).

<sup>46</sup> See for the discussion on ‘path dependency’ especially Beyer 2005 and Garud/Karnoe 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Here we see a wide discussion on suitable concepts and regulative instruments to achieve normative goals in times of sustainable transformations of the media environment with deep mediatization - mostly on multi-level IP infrastructures and platforms (Donges/Puppis 2010; Katzenbach 2013; Lunt/Livingstone 2012: 4-21).

is something we want to investigate with reference to internet governance (C02, Schulz).

A very different kind of ‘governance’ and ‘regulation’ refers to religious organisations, if we understand ‘governance’ and ‘regulation’ in a wider sense and also include organisations that ‘govern’ and ‘regulate’ beliefs and life courses, what Stuart Hall (1997: 233) called ‘governing the conduct of our cultural life’. Accordingly, there is an on-going discussion on how far religious organisations transform due to a changing media environment and thus change in their possibilities to keep their authority as a *socially* ‘governing’ and ‘regulating’ institution (Hoover 2006; Lundby 2013). Most recent research indicates remarkable changes of religious organisations’ authority with reference to digital media, though our detailed knowledge of these processes is still weak.<sup>48</sup> This is of particular interest to understand media-related transformations of organisations as religious organisations are quite old and remarkably stable. Therefore, we plan to research this comparing different religious organisations and movements (Catholic church, Anglican church and charismatic movement) in Germany and UK (C03, Radde-Antweiler).

A further relevant area of research is **organisations of science and education**. A special interest of media and communication research is on the relation between science and journalism (see for an overview Rödder et al. 2011).<sup>49</sup> When it comes to organisations, the main question in this research field is: How far does an increasing interest of media in scientific topics change research institutions (Grande et al. 2013; Scheu et al. 2014)? And how important for science are new possibilities to reach audiences directly via digital platforms (Hoffjann/Arlt 2015: 83-127)? At this point, research results remain rather vague (Schäfer 2014: 575-579). There are some indications for an accommodation of science towards (perceived) media demands, driven by the wish to legitimate research. However, this typically refers to ‘non routine’ action (Bucchi 2008: 15) or ‘extreme cases’ like politicised research on climate change (Engesser/Brüggemann 2015; Ivanova et al. 2013). We will take this highly controversial example of climate change to investigate the blurring of borders between science and journalism on the organisational level and the level of these institutional fields (project C05, Brüggemann).

But media-related changes take also place *within* organisations of science and education, something that is less researched by media and communication studies but by social studies of science and technology.<sup>50</sup> For example, science and technology studies attended to the ways in which data infrastructures transform scientific practices in research fields such as biodiversity (Bowker 2000; Waterton et al. 2013), and further how these practices relate to political objectives and policy work (Waterton 2002). Others are interested in investigating how new media and communication technologies may help to address complex societal problems by supporting inter- and trans-disciplinary research (Fortun 2001). Media and communication technologies and in particular the increasingly data-driven decision-

<sup>48</sup> See here for example the 2016 special issue of *Media, Culture & Society* (38 (1)) on media and religion.

<sup>49</sup> The DFG funded the priority program 1409 ‘Science and the Public’ (2009-2015), which we cannot discuss in detail here. For further information see <http://wissenschaftundoeffentlichkeit.de> (30.1.2016). For a comparable programme by the German Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF) see Grande et al. 2013.

<sup>50</sup> E.g. Borgman 2015; Bowker 2000; Coopmans et al. 2014.

making in the management of research organisations transform scientific practice and science education profoundly (e.g. Felt et al. 2012; Sørensen et al. 2015), even in the direction of participatory science. Such changes also have their parallel in organisations of education, an area which is far less researched. A prominent example for investigating this are schools, which when it comes to education are the most relevant organisations in society. In schools, deep mediatization is exerting fundamental pressure on the core processes of teaching and learning (Livingstone/Sefton-Green 2016; Selwyn 2014) as well as on administrative support processes (Breiter 2014). At this point, we are interested in how schools in Germany and UK transform with deep mediatization (**C04, Breiter and Jarke**).

On such a basis, our third research group on organisations is concerned with media-related transformations of organisations, the related changes in organising, and the role of organisations in processes of public communication in their wider contexts and dynamics. All projects share a broad understanding of organisations, as outlined above. This offers us the possibility to investigate a variety of different organisations and processes of organising in various institutional fields: media organisations, organisations of politics, governance and religion as well as organisations of science and education. Again, an appropriate starting point of analysis is to describe these organisations as certain sets of communicative figurations characterised by constellations of actors, frames of relevance and communicative practices that are entangled with the organisations’ media ensembles. In addition, we have to consider the role of organisations in their respective institutional fields. We understand such institutional fields as made up by ‘figurations of figurations’, that is the figurations built up by various organisations as communicative figurations. With deep mediatization - so our expectation - borders of organisations in such institutional fields become blurred. And also internally a changing media environment puts pressure on organisations.

While a changing media environment in total has an influence on all these organisations, we expect that they differ considerably in their media ensemble and communicative practices. Organisational trajectories, patterns, and dynamics have to be reflected. For example, there can be organisational dynamics that make them ‘open’ to ‘new’ media and thus ‘promote’ media change. This might be driven by the call for more ‘transparency’ and ‘controllability’ in administrations, for greater ‘efficiency’ in companies, or for better ‘audience inclusion’ in media organisations. In such cases, media are understood as supportive means for organisational change. But organisations can also be ‘hesitant’ and ‘cautious’ vis-à-vis certain media when they are understood as ‘disturbing’ for the organisational goals like for example mobile phones in classrooms. Therefore, a perspective that is open for such ambivalences is also necessary in this case. On the one hand, we plan to investigate how a changing media environment is related to the transformation of organisations.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, we have to consider how far the demands and strategies of certain organisations themselves have an influence on the changing media environment or result in a certain kind of inertia.

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<sup>51</sup> Again, this has to be understood not as a unidirectional effect, but rather as a process that is broken by the trajectories, patterns and dynamics of the respective organisations in manifold ways. However, at this point, the question is in which way the (communicative) construction of organisations transforms with their media ensemble.

The trends of a changing media environment are not the same for the different organisations that characterise our present societies: We can assume that they are highly varied and contradictory. For organisations and their particular ways of organising, the *differentiation* of the media means an increasing optionality and social contingency. But the differentiation can also cause segmentation and divide within and across organisations. *Connectivity* is related to the possible spatial extension of organisations, which can also imply that absent actors are involved in organisational processes. Hence, the borders of organisations can blur, they can disembed from certain locations and develop a rather translocal network character or relax their rules for membership. The *omnipresence* of media is related in various ways to organisations as it makes possible - for example through mobile services - an immediate influence of organisations in various social situations (e.g. through instant feedback by audiences or other reference groups via social media channels). The rapid *pace of innovation* is insofar related as for organisations it also means that they perceive pressures to adjust to a changing media environment and are frightened of falling behind, as made noticeable by the various social media strategies developed by organisations. And finally, *datafication* offers new opportunities for managing organisations and stabilising organisational procedures; but also, new risks that are connected to the collection of data, including surveillance, and at the same time uncertainties of how to make sense of these data.

With reference to this, our third **Research Group C Organisations** is concerned with the following **orienting questions**:

- What are the communicative figurations of organisations in times of deep mediatization? What are their specificities in relation to the respective social domains of these organisations, the further contexts of institutional fields, and their role in processes of public communication?
- How does organising take place in and across these different figurations? How far are these processes related to power and exclusion or diversity and openness?
- In which way do processes of organisational construction transform with the changing media environment? What are the influences of the various related trends in this process? To what extent does inertia and persistence of organisations or their openness towards a changing media environment matter?
- What are the patterns of transformation with reference to these organisations, their processes of organising, and across them? How stable and sustainable are they? What are the dominant lines of transformation in a long-term perspective?

By posing these questions in the Research Group C Organisations, we want to investigate the interrelation of a changing media environment with organisational dynamics in our present social world.

Taken together, defining our three research groups on individuals, collectivities and organisations as our **perspectives on transforming communications** gives us the opportunity to focus in a productive way the research of our individual projects on where media-related changes specifically take place. Triangulating such a threefold actors' point of view, our research groups supplement each other and can offer a detailed picture of the major media-related communicative transfor-

mation processes we are confronted with: individuals are members of collectivities as well as organisations, collectivities can institutionalise in a more formalised way and build up organisations, while organisations might support certain forms of collectivity building or individuals’ socialisation. Therefore, the idea of our three research groups is not to put individuals, collectivities and organisations against each other. In contrast, we are interested in the various dynamics and interrelations between these three different kinds of actors. Via such an analysis, we obtain a sound empirical basis on which we can build the theory of transforming communications that we want to develop in the long run through our research.

## 6. Long-term research objectives

First, we illustrated our research question on the characteristics of the present media environment by describing the predominant trends of related changes in times of deep mediatization. Then we moved on to explain how we can comparatively research the possible consequences of a changing media environment across very different social domains. Our core approach towards doing this is to analyse patterns of communicative practices in and across communicative figurations. As we discussed in the previous section, we want to structure our research in three research groups focusing on individuals, collectivities, and organisations respectively. On this basis, we now move to our fourth question: **What are the long-term objectives of our research initiative?**

As we already said, the core idea and innovation of our approach is to undertake a joint ‘through time’ study: while transformation is typically researched by historical research looking backwards, we want to investigate media-related transformations in the process when they are actually taking place. Starting from the present situation, we aim to capture the changing media environment and its impact on communicative figurations on three levels of actors: individuals, collectivities, and organisations. By so doing, we plan to answer our research question: How does the construction of social domains through communication transform with deep mediatization?

Undertaking this ‘through time’ study is the overall long-term research objective of our research on transforming communications. However, it is evident that we need to structure our long-term research in sub-objectives. We have established five joint (sub-)objectives; three of them are structured as research periods, and another two across all research periods (see Table 3).



Table 3: Long-term research objectives and research questions

First research period	Second research period	Third research period
<b>Objective 1: Mapping</b> What are the (continuing) trends of a changing media environment? What software tools do we need for their ongoing analysis? How can we integrate into such a description our analysis of deep mediatization’s consequences?		
<b>Objective 2: Constructions</b> RG A: How do individuals’ constructions take place in times of deep mediatization? RG B: How are collectivities constructed in times of deep mediatization? RG C: How are organisations and organising constructed in times of deep mediatization?	<b>Objective 3: Transformations</b> RG A: How do individuals’ constructions transform? RG B: How do collectivities transform? RG C: How do organisations and organising transform?	<b>Objective 4: Sustainability</b> RG A: How far do individuals’ constructions and transformations contribute to a ‘good life’? RG B: How far do collectivities’ constructions and transformations support sustainability? RG C: How far do organisations’ constructions and transformations support sustainability?
<b>Objective 5: Theory development</b> How can we generalise and explain findings on the transformation of social domains with progressing deep mediatization?		

RG= Research Group

**Objective 1: Mapping of media environment.** First, our outline so far makes it evident that we have to continuously map the *trends* of our changing media environment for the kind of analyses we plan to implement. We will do this by an ongoing monitoring of general data on the changing media environment. In parallel, we will integrate our own research results on *consequences* of these trends. In addition, we will develop software *tools* to support such a kind of research.

**Objective 2: Analysis of constructions.** With regard to the first research period, our main objective across all our research projects is a comparative analysis of the processes of *construction* under the conditions of deep mediatization. Our idea is to undertake thereby a ‘baseline measurement’ to investigate future processes of media-related transformation on the basis of the questions in the table above.

**Objective 3: Analysis of transformations.** In the second research period, we want to focus on *transformation*. By extending our research with a comparison across time and by doing this jointly as a longitudinal research, we ask for the transformation of individuals, collectivities and organisations with reference to progressing deep mediatization.

**Objective 4: Analysis of sustainability.** In the third research period, our main objective is to research *sustainability* in a dual sense: on the one hand, the sustainability of the transformations; on the other hand, the opportunities of cross-media changes for a socially and culturally sustainable society. In order to achieve this, we want to pursue our research questions to sustainability. Taking up such normative questions and societal problems, we also want to focus on the transferring our research results to society.

**Objective 5: Theory development.** By mapping the changing media environment and processing the research-period related questions, we plan to gradually achieve a further central objective: *theory development*. Referring back to the fundamental research question - how does the construction of social domains through communication transform with deep mediatization? - the overall aim is through our joint empirical research to generalise patterns of *transforming communications*. The research periods build on one another and constitute important milestones in this overall process of theory formation.

In the following, we describe how we want to achieve these objectives.

### 6.1 Mapping

‘Mapping’ is an important task for media and communication research. Long-term mapping as a general descriptive tool is broadly used in media and communication research. There, the term is typically used for ‘charting’ media- and communications-related data. The subject matter of the charting can differ. Examples are the geo-cultural mapping of different kinds of journalism (Hanitzsch et al. 2011; Eberwein et al. 2011), the mapping of different types of media use (Bechmann/Lomborg 2013; Lev-On 2012; Reese et al. 2007; Rosenbaum et al. 2008), the mapping of media discourses (Lindgren 2011; Parameswaran 2004), the mapping of mediated and mediatized communities (Georgiou 2005; Jenkins 2004; Motta-Guarneros/Georgiou 2015), the mapping of media policies and ownerships (Price 2002; Raboy/Padovani 2010; Ward 2004; UNESCO 2009), the mapping of globalised media landscapes (Bozzini/Bee 2013; Drgomir/Thompson 2014; Matelart 1994; Nordenstreng/Thussu 2015) or even the mapping of media research and its approaches (Güdler 1996; Koivisto/Thomas 2007; Peng et al. 2013; Scolari 2009).

With regard to the overall objective of researching *transforming communications*, our mapping is dedicated to the following: first, a mapping of the changing media environment (*trends*); second, a development and provision of software tools for mapping (*services*); and, third, a mapping of our own research results (*consequences*).

An on-going mapping of *trends* of the changing media environment is necessary as we investigate a highly dynamic field in which we can expect new and incisive trends due to technological innovations that are not predictable at present. For example, the invention of the smart phone and its apps radically pushed the contemporary trends of media’s omnipresence and connectivity, something that was not conceivable before the iPhone and comparable devices arrived around 2007, just 9 years ago. Our research on transforming communications must be highly sensitive with regard to such potentially newly emerging trends and therefore continuously monitor the changing media environment and map the recent changes. This is important information for all projects in our investigation of transforming communications, but also for media and communication research and the public in general. For this kind of mapping, we closely cooperate with public institutions and companies that deliver this kind of data. In a first attempt, we plan to structure the data on a changing media environment with reference to the five trends outlined so far: media’s differentiation, increasing connectivity, omnipresence, pace of innovation, and datafication. With possible future developments, we may

have to expand this structure. This mapping of trends will be focused on Germany, but contextualised with reference to Europe and the world.

The second area of our mapping will be dedicated to *tools*. Our research programme has three areas of methodological innovation in which we also want to develop software tools for mapping media-based practices. These tools include apps for (mobile) data collection, and web-based tools for data triangulation and data analysis. This whole software development will be based on open software licenses, and the software tools as well as their source code will be made accessible to all interested researchers via the services area of our web portal.

In the third area of our mapping web portal - called *consequences* - we will present our own research results. With reference to the three research groups on individuals, collectivities, and organisations we plan to produce visual representations of our empirical analyses, text-based information on detailed research results and of the theory development based on these analyses. Again, the idea is to communicate our research results to the academic and general public close to their investigation.

## 6.2 Constructions

Our first research period will be dedicated to processes of construction in a particular way. The idea is to investigate the processes of media-related constructions of the respective social domains as they relate to deep mediatization. In this respect, in each of our projects we want to undertake a ‘baseline measurement’ that will serve as the basis for further investigations of transformative processes and the sustainability of change as part of our joint ‘through time’ study. This ‘baseline measurement’ acknowledges that all projects start with a particular knowledge about the transformation processes that have already taken place in their respective fields under investigation.

At this point we want to outline the objective of the first research period in the context of the overall conceptual arrangement of our research idea. This makes it necessary to come back to our original definition of the term ‘construction’. With reference to the criticism of postmodernist variants of constructivism that they partly have the tendency to confuse social construction with social arbitrariness (Hacking 1999: 3-5; Kneer 2009; Knorr-Cetina 1989), our understanding of ‘construction’ is related to social and communication theory. The main argument is that the social world and its society are not given, but rather ‘made’ by us as human beings on the basis of a daily, in main parts taken-for-granted ‘doing’. Such constructions are entangled with ‘materiality’, which makes society ‘durable’ (Latour 1991: 103); in our case the materiality of media. A more recent discussion in social sciences puts a special emphasis on the central role of *communication* for any process of social construction (cf. among others Couldry/Hepp 2016; Fairhurst/Putnam 2004; Keller et al. 2013; Knoblauch 2013; Luhmann 2012). The main point here is that when it comes to *meaning*, communication is crucial for any process of social construction. And as media mould and shape communication by their institutionalisations and through their materiality, the change of media is closely related to transforming communications, and therefore to changing processes of social construction.

Across all projects, our shared analytical tool of communicative figurations offers a common basis for a comparative research on these processes of construction. With reference to the research interest of each individual project and the research groups, we can investigate the actor constellation in its predominant relevance frames and the communicative practices of construction in their entanglement with media ensembles. By describing these fundamental features of communicative figurations, across all projects we gain an analytical foundation to compare different processes of construction using shared points of reference. At the same time, we are careful not to lose sight of the phenomenon at the core of our investigation, its specificities and differences: in our three research groups on individuals, collectivities and organisations we deal with *very different* kinds of actors (individual actors, collective actors, corporate actors), and they will be even more different for each project. This includes, for example, individuals in highly informal settings like self-organised learning, as in project A03 (Wolf), for example, or actors in highly formalised organisations like the organisations of media regulation or religion researched in projects C02 (Schulz) and C03 (Radde-Antweiler). The *social domains* we investigate are defined by the variety of the frames of relevance we research: the various figurations we as individuals are embedded in, the communities, groups and other collectivities which are constructed, and the organisations that produce order.

Due to our fundamental research question, the task is not just to *describe* these processes of construction: beyond this, we are interested in how these processes come under pressure from and are moulded by the media. That means we research the shaping force of the media ensemble as it is characteristic for each figuration. An important point here is to understand media not as external but as an integral part of these processes of social construction. In a social constructivist perspective, this is less about the ‘classical “effects” of media content but more about the social domains shaping the shared or negotiated meaning’ (Lievrouw 2014: 22) through media as content, technologies, and organisations. In view of this, media are of interest in this first research period in a dual sense: on the one hand, we will investigate how the trends of the changing media environment form certain ‘pressures’ on the communicative figurations of social domains. On the other hand, we will investigate how certain changes within social domains relate to present trends of a changing media environment. For each of the research groups, this means to move the following research questions into the foreground:

- How do individuals’ constructions take place in times of deep mediatization?
- How are collectivities constructed in times of deep mediatization?
- How are organisations and how is organising constructed in times of deep mediatization?

With such an overall arrangement, we compare processes of construction with respect to our changing media environment in very different social domains, thus triangulating the perspectives on individuals, collectivities, and organisations. This will give us an empirical fundament to typify patterns of construction that are characteristic for deep mediatization. With respect to our methodological innovations, we will focus on cross-media research and digital traces.

### 6.3 Transformations

The second research period focuses on transformation. As we put it: Investigating constructions is a kind of ‘baseline measurement’ for this. The reason for such an overall design is that transformations as we understand the term (that is: structural changes) occur in a rather long-term perspective and thus cannot be investigated solely within a four-year time frame. Therefore, in the second research period our projects will move to a more long-term research design which can most suitably be operationalised by means of repeat studies, panel studies or historicising studies. This is the reason why long-term research will become a special focus of our methodological innovations.

As we have seen, we can notice various trends of a changing media environment. However, in certain social domains, the transformative power of these trends can be very limited. To describe this, we use the concept of *inertia*. This concept does not mean that nothing is changing (Rosa 2013: 22-23, 92-93). Rather, in respect of the research interest ‘inertia’ means that the construction of a certain social domain - for example a group or an organisation - can remain relatively stable even within an overall changing media environment. There might be various reasons for such inertia: the established character as a ‘community of practice’ (Lave/Wenger 1991) or the ‘path dependency’ (Beyer 2015) of an organisation. We already investigated examples for this inertia in the context of preparing our research, referring to certain kinds of schools (Breiter 2014; Welling et al. 2015), to certain religious organisations (Radde-Antweiler 2016), and to particular communities (Lohmeier 2014a). Such inertia can take the form of appropriating ‘new’ and ‘changing’ media to reconstruct the ‘existing’.

In contrast to this, we use the term *transformation* to describe the performed structural change of social domains (Elias 1978: 65). While transformations can have diverse driving forces, our research is interested in *whether* and if so *how* a changing media environment moulds practices of communication and therefore the transformation of social domains. For certain social domains, a changing media environment might have (more or less) far-reaching consequences in the sense that these social domains transform with the help of or with regard to changing media. The ‘assumed consequences’ we outlined so far offer an orientating frame to grasp the transformations as they become manifest in specific social domains. Moreover, such transformations might themselves have influences on the changing media environment. This happens, for example, when user practices become reflected by actors of media production and development who build future versions of their media as technology- and content-based on this experience.<sup>52</sup> However, for certain other social domains, a changing media environment might have much fewer consequences. Consequently, these social domains can be marked by ‘inertia’ in a changing media environment. We also have to take this possibility into account.

Hence, the empirical task for the second research period is to investigate this dialectic connected with *progressing* deep mediatization. In so doing, we have to be aware of both change as well as possible inertia. This means that although trends of a changing media environment may well result in the structural trans-

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<sup>52</sup> This is an argument which was brought forward by the ‘domestication approach’ in media and communication research, see Berker et al. 2006; Grenz 2014; Hartmann 2013; Mansell/Silverstone 1998; Röser 2007.

formation of certain social domains, it may also be that other social domains remain more or less untouched.

Our concept of communicative figurations offers an appropriate approach for this kind of research as it focuses our attention on the different levels on which transformation or inertia might occur, i.e. the communicative practices entangled with (changing) media ensembles; those actor constellations which shift and those that might not; and the frames of relevance to which the overall practices in the respective social domain are oriented to. A *structural* transformation takes place when the practices, actor constellations, and frames of relevance change significantly. However, we have to be aware of the diverse further influences on these transformations beyond media that have to be included in our analysis, depending on the research questions of the individual projects: class, gender, race, legal and political contexts as well as cultural ones - to name some of the most important.

The research gap we are confronted with is a missing overall model of such media-related transformations (Calhoun 2011: 1488; Kinnebrock et al. 2015: 18): What patterns of media-related transformation are characteristic within and across various social domains? What driving forces support transformations? What factors are important for inertia? These are fundamental questions that we want to answer in the second research period.

We can refer at this point to a set of existing studies. Basically, most of the media and communication research discussed so far reflects on one level or the other on questions of change. But of interest are especially such studies that undertake empirical investigations in a way to designate *fundamental patterns* of transformation. From this point of view, two lines of discussion are characteristic for recent media and communication research. On the one hand, studies that are interested in patterns of media-related transformations as societal macro phenomena; and on the other hand, studies that are more concerned with micro processes of change. In the trajectory of mediatization research, we want to take a path in-between by investigating specific social domains, analysing patterns with relation to them, comparing these patterns, and in so doing building up a more general theory of media-related transformations.

When it comes to macro **approaches of societal transformation**, in systems theory - and here especially in the tradition of Niklas Luhmann - the idea of (media) evolution is widespread. Media evolution is understood as part of a societal process that increases the possibilities of communication that made ‘functional differentiation’ and finally ‘world society’ possible (Luhmann 2012: 113-190). Evolution is understood as a sequence of three stages: ‘variation’ (there are various possible ways of doing something), ‘selection’ (one solution asserts itself), and ‘stabilisation’ (it becomes dominant). In various models of media and communication research, this macro concept of societal evolution became adapted to describe patterns of media-related transformations.<sup>53</sup> (Media-technological) ‘innovations’ become ‘selected’ in such an evolutionary process (Latzer 2013: 236-238). Historical approaches of grasping such innovations refer back to Joseph Schumpeter’s (1934) idea of economic development focusing on certain ‘inventions’, which then diffuse (Stöber 2015: 61-67; Ziemann 2015: 74-79). In parallel to Weber’s un-

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<sup>53</sup> This is especially the case in German-speaking academia: Latzer 2009; Merten 1994; Neuman 2010; Rusch 2007; Schmidt 1994b; Scolari 2013; Stöber 2004; Ziemann 2011b.

derstanding of ‘coalitions of interest’ (Weber 1988: 425), such an approach focuses on analysing the historical ‘media innovations’<sup>54</sup> themselves by researching ‘inventors’ and ‘intermediaries’ who enforce them against other actors and societal forces. Typical examples for this are historical studies that contextualise media changes into processes of societal differentiation (see for example Stöber 2012), sometimes in combination with diffusion analysis (Rogers 2003). Other approaches on media evolution refer more to social studies of technology, and theorise this process less as an innovation driven by individual actors but more as a ‘co-evolution’ in the context of ‘complex systems’ to reflect the non-linearity of change (Latzer 2009: 603; Latzer 2013: 241f.). Transformation from such a point of view is the emergence of new structures of social systems that ‘arise’ unexpectedly. A good example for this is the internet as an infrastructure which works as a kind of ‘innovation machinery’ (Latzer 2013: 243) for many different kinds of media.

At this point there is a parallel to other ideas of describing societal changes with reference to a ‘network society’ (Castells 2000; Castells 2009; van Dijk 1999; Rainie/Wellman 2012).<sup>55</sup> Basically, the idea of network society is that the internet is a ‘material support’ (Castells 2001: 129) for restructuring the social texture on various levels. Because of this a new kind of society is supposed to emerge as a layering over existing forms of society. The patterns of transformation which are described here refer to building up certain kinds of networks in economics, work, and everyday life, which then would result in a new experience of space and time. This idea to move media and communications into the centre of societal changes can also be found in other conceptions of contemporary societies. Richard Münch (2002), for example, argues that our present societies are best understood as societies of communication. The patterns of transformation he sees at work are close to what we called ‘assumed consequences’ of a changing media environment: an overall communicative penetration of society, an increased density of communication, an acceleration of communication and a globalisation of communication. Scholars of media and communication research themselves put more emphasis on the term ‘media society’ (Imhof et al. 2004; Rössler/Krotz 2005; S.J. Schmidt 2000), reflecting on the fundamental role of media for building up national publics and creating interest in patterns of ‘structural transformation’ of the public sphere (Habermas 1989; Imhof 2011).

In contrast to this, major parts of media and communication research are more interested in **micro patterns of media-related transformations**. Most common here is the concept of *affordance*, which receives heightened interest due to the recent spread of various media technologies.<sup>56</sup> The core of the idea of affordance is that each medium as a ‘technology’ and ‘object’ has certain ‘characteristics’ that shape our everyday practice in relation to it. Returning to James J. Gibson (1967), affordance means in more general terms an object’s ‘offer’ to a person acting with it. Originally, this idea was introduced with reference to objects of the physical world. However, quite quickly it became transferred to technologies: like

<sup>54</sup> For the discussion about ‘media innovations’ in media and communication research see Drogruel 2013 and the chapters in Wolling et al. 2011.

<sup>55</sup> This parallelism becomes evident when comparing for example Castell’s arguments on the ‘network society’ with system theory’s arguments on a ‘next society’ (Baecker 2007).

<sup>56</sup> See for this increased interest for example boyd 2010; Nagy/Neff 2015; P. Turner 2005; Wellman et al. 2003; Zillien 2008.

‘natural objects’, technologies would be ‘suitable’ for a certain way of acting (see Hutchby 2001; Nagy/Neff 2015). From such a point of view, various patterns of media’s affordances have been researched. Examples are ‘basic affordances’ of online blogs (the affordance of the underlying software) and their ‘emergent affordances’ (the affordances of collective processes of using blogs) (Hopkins 2015). Another example is the mobile phone that can be described as ‘affording’ certain patterns of ‘portability’, ‘availability’, ‘locatability’ and ‘multimediality’ (Schrock 2015). Further examples are the affordances of social network sites such as ‘persistence’ (online expressions are automatically recorded and archived), ‘replicability’ (content made out of bits can be duplicated), ‘scalability’ (the potential visibility of content in networked publics is great), and ‘searchability’ (content in networked publics can be accessed through search), all cumulating in configuring ‘networked publics’ (boyd 2010). In general, the concept of affordances has become more and more extended, reflecting the context of media’s use as one important factor (Turner 2005) as well as the imagination of possible ways of using media (Nagy/Neff 2015). It is thus evident how the concept of affordance is theorised to describe the ‘characteristics’ of a medium: the material features of a medium’s technology together with institutionalised forms of acting with this technology are understood as the basis for describing more general patterns of affordance.

We consider both lines of researching media- and communication-related transformations as important, albeit somewhat limited. Macro approaches of societal transformations are in general very broad, and thereby offer an orientation of possible directions of transformation. But they are weak and somewhat speculative in relating this overall change to more detailed processes of change. Micro approaches like affordance theory are informative when it comes to detailed analysis of patterns of media-related transformation. However, they are mainly focused on a single-medium as opposed to a cross-media approach, and are weak in generalising patterns of transformation.

With our approach, we want to take an in-between path when investigating transformations in our second research period. Referring back to the mediatization research discussed so far, we consider patterns of inertia and change as something to be investigated on the level of social domains and their figurations. Therefore, it is unlikely we will find any one single overall cross-media pattern of transformation (Postill 2016; White 2014), but rather various more detailed patterns that relate to specific domains, their communicative figurations, and contexts. These considerations are in close parallel to social studies on institutional change (Streeck/Thelen 2005) as well as social studies of technology (Bijker/Law 1992; MacKenzie/Wajcman 2003; Rammert 2007). Here, we also find an emphasis on the **domain-specific character of transformations** as we bring forward. Such approaches theorise sociotechnical change as ‘gradual’, being the result of search and restructuring processes over a longer duration. Here, we find various suggestions for typical patterns of such transformations. For example, there is the idea of distinguishing six ‘modes of gradual transformation’ (Dolata 2013: 110): ‘exhaustion’ (established institutions disappear), ‘drift’ (established institutions lose relevance), ‘layering’ (new elements become added to existing institutions), ‘conversion’ (purposes of existing institutions change), ‘expansion’ (existing institutions expand), and ‘displacement’ (alternative institutional constellations become dominant). Other ideas are to analyse and typify patterns of ‘path dependencies’ in



certain organisations and institutional fields. We can understand them as ‘trajectories’ of transformation.<sup>57</sup> The idea of these approaches is to investigate such trajectories as a ‘stepwise reconfiguration’ (Dolata/Schrape 2013: 9), which is rather the ‘normal case’, in contrast to ‘upheavals’ (Schnell 2006) as the exceptional case of transformation. In parallel to this, we suggested elsewhere to distinguish three ‘ideal types’ of re(con)figuring as a starting point for an empirical research on transforming communications: ‘variation’, ‘emergence’, and ‘upheaval’ of communicative figurations (Hepp/Hasebrink 2014b: 356f.) ‘Variation’ is the maintenance of existing communicative figurations with a different media ensemble, their ongoing construction by communication in a changing media environment. ‘Emergence’ or ‘shift’ means a structural transformation of a communicative figuration by a stepwise change of communicative forms and actor constellations, which might result in a modulation of the frames of relevance. Finally, an ‘upheaval’ would be an abrupt alteration of existing communicative figurations.

In the second research period, typological distinctions like these are insofar very helpful for our investigations as they offer us an orientation to the possible different ‘trajectories’ media-related transformations can have. However, the fundamental idea of our second research period is to ask more openly for possible different patterns of transformation. With reference to our three research groups we want to orientate our investigations to the following questions:

- How do individuals’ constructions transform with progressing deep mediatization?
- How do collectivities transform with progressing deep mediatization?
- How do organisations and organising transform with progressing deep mediatization?

In each of our research groups’ perspectives, we plan to focus on the respective communicative figurations - their practices of communication, actor constellations, and frames of relevance - and how they change or persist and for what reasons. Comparing the results across the individual projects, we plan to typify more general patterns of transformation that will constitute the foundation for the next step of our theory development on transforming communications.

#### 6.4 Sustainability

In our third and last research period, our objective is to investigate sustainability. Referring at this point to the interdisciplinary field of sustainability studies (Caradonna 2014; Franklin/Blyton 2013; Godemann/Michelsen 2011; Heinrichs/Michelsen 2014; Jacques 2015; 2007), we operate with a definition of **sustainability** which becomes more specified by reference to our research groups. In the most general sense ‘sustainability’ means to ‘sustain something’, which means to ‘keep it going’ (Jacques 2015: 5, 19). Typically, sustainability studies distinguish four dimensions of sustainability: that is an economic, an environmental, a social, and a cultural dimension, sometimes combining the social and cultural into one

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<sup>57</sup> There is a huge research tradition on this that we cannot discuss here in detail. For an overview, see Beyer 2005; Garud/Karnoe 2012. The idea of analysing patterns of ‘trajectories’ is something we also find in mediatization research, for example Grenz 2013. The concept of trajectory was originally introduced by Anselm Strauss (1993: 47).

(Peatti 2013: 25). Being interested in transforming communications, we put emphasis on the social and cultural dimension when it comes to media and communications: justice, life chances, and participation as well as diversity, ways of life, and knowledge. Taking this general definition, we have a dual interest in sustainability. These are, first, an empirical interest and, second, a normative one. On the *empirical level*, we will inquire into the sustainability of the constructions and transformations being analysed in the first and second research period. How far are they sustainable in the sense that they ‘keep going’ and are therefore ‘durable’? Do some communicative figurations generate effects that ‘last longer’ than others? On the *normative level*, we investigate the contribution of transforming communications to a sustainable society. Do the different forms of transforming communications in a long-term perspective support justice, a balance of life interests, and participation? Do they enable diversity, a productive plurality of ways of life, and a responsible knowledge production?

This conceptual design reflects the state of international **media and communication research on sustainability**. Here, sustainability is understood as a phenomenon to which media and communications are not secondary but an integral part (Brand 2011: 56-58; Ziemann 2011a: 89f.). If we exclude research that investigates sustainability with regard to media coverage about environment concerns like pollution or climate change in which sustainability is of interest as a topic of media coverage, use and effects,<sup>58</sup> media and communication research on sustainability is far more limited. Especially four areas are striking here. This is, first, research on public relations and organisational communication to support the ‘sustainability’ of these institutions (Brugger 2010; da Fonseca Galleli/Marchiori 2013; Fieseler 2009; Mast/Fiedler 2007). A second area is research on sustainable forms of media appropriation and use, among others with regard to community building (Jansson 2010; Kannengießner 2016) and the support of democratic networks (Giraud 2014; Pickard 2006). A third area comprises media technologies as a source of waste and therefore of environmental risk (Bily 2009; Maxwell/Miller 2012; Maxwell et al. 2015). This must, however, be contrasted with the opportunities of media technologies to improve production and distribution (Hilty et al. 2006; Hilty et al. 2011) or ecological information management (Karasti/Baker 2004: 8). Here, sustainability issues are regarded as something that needs to be ‘managed’ in terms of technology (Schlosberg/Rinfret 2008), waste (M. Thompson 1998), and/or consumers (Shove 2014). Fourth, there is the area of researching the sustainability of the ‘information society’ in general (Servaes/Carpentier 2006), that is its chances as a diverse and inclusive ‘knowledge society’ (Mansell 2010; Mansell 2012: 43-45; Spangenberg 2005). In this context, normative questions of the ‘good’ information society are discussed (see for example Bradley 2010).

In respect of this discussion, the overall agenda in the third research period is dedicated to broadening the existing investigation of sustainability with regard to transforming communications. As postulated in interdisciplinary sustainability research, building up sustainability is not only a question of transitions in ‘sociocultural regimes’ - that is: the ‘deep structure’ that accounts for the stability of an existing ‘socio-technical system’ (Geels 2011: 27) - but a multilevel phenomenon

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<sup>58</sup> See for an overview: Allan et al. 2000; Ammer 2008; Bonfadelli 2007; Barkemeyer et al. 2013; Dernbach 2007; Schäfer 2015; Wolling/Arlt 2014).

for which the transformation of practices remains fundamental.<sup>59</sup> As a consequence, there is the need to broaden the research on sustainability by introducing a perspective on practices and their relation to structural transformations (Hargreaves et al. 2013; Shove/Walker 2010). This argument is in close parallel to the overall approach of transforming communications where we understand communicative figurations as a fundamental unit of analysis.

From an **empirical perspective on sustainability**, we plan to research sustainability with regard to specific communicative figurations. We can then consider their transformation as ‘sustainable’ (in the sense of long-lasting) when the *routines* of (communicative) practices have changed, intertwined with a structural stability of (transformed) actor constellations, and stable frames of relevance. As postulated in sustainability research, practices are stabilised (or changed) through their repeated performances (Hargreaves et al. 2011: 7; Pantzar/Shove 2010: 449-452), which continues throughout the ‘durability’ of the technologies these practices refer to, and which again has to be thought of as part of the structural figurations the actors are involved in (Hepp/Hasebrink 2013: 261f.). Hence, investigating communicative figurations in the perspectives of individuals, collectivities, and organisations is an appropriate starting point for making empirically based assessments of the sustained character of transforming communications.

In the light of ‘normativity’ (Karmasin et al. 2013; Werner et al. 2016), a move to communicative figurations is helpful. While it is hard to answer the very general question as to how far the trends of a changing media environment support a ‘sustainable’ (information or knowledge) ‘society’ as any assessment of the ‘information’ or ‘knowledge society’ is linked to a pre-defined ‘information society imagery’ (Mansell 2012: 38), referring to communicative practices, actor constellations, and frames of relevance offers a fundament for a normative reflection of present transforming communications. An anchor for investigating this **normative perspective on sustainability**, which is well-established in media and communications research, is the concept of human ‘needs’ based on general human ‘capabilities’ (see Sen 1992, 1999). According to the overall conception of our research, we see these needs as socially constructed and shaped by the common pressures of material and historical conditions as well as by anthropological givens of the human condition. A minimal anthropology sees human beings in need of physical well-being, on the one hand, and social appreciation, on the other (Esser 1999: 91-124). These two a-historical universal needs that can be derived from the *conditio humana* are shaped by the social and cultural structures of a society, including its technological potential. The result can be seen in lists such as Nick Couldry’s (2012: 163-179) seven categories of needs: ‘economic needs’ (related to economic security), ‘ethnic needs’ (the togetherness in ethnic communities), ‘political needs’ (political inclusion and participation), ‘recognition needs’ (reflecting social ‘acceptance’ within various contexts), ‘belief needs’ (concerning the field of religion), ‘social needs’ (those of social connection), and ‘leisure needs’ (recreation). Of course, this is only a first step of specification; what ‘leisure needs’, for instance, look like in a concrete historical society and for a particular group of members of this society – such as typical young middle-class women in contemporary Germany – can only be studied empirically as a result of social construction. Therefore, such lists can be seen as heuristic starting points that must be extended

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<sup>59</sup> See for this discussion: Genus/Coles 2008; Geels 2011; Hargreaves 2011; Shove 2012.

and sharpened, or focused, according to specific research topics and by empirical research. Having been identified in this way, it can then be asked whether and how particular communicative figurations might either enable or constrain the satisfaction of such needs (Hepp et al. 2015c: 186), and in so doing contribute to a sustainable society in the normative sense of the word.

In a very general sense, our point of departure in the third research period is that transforming communications then contribute to a sustainable society if its transformations are not only sustaining in the sense of having a certain ‘stability’ but also, and in addition, if they contribute to a form of society that is capable of supporting a high variety of different human needs while protecting its resources. In such a sense, we take ‘social responsibility seriously’ (Splichal 2008: 29), which is also and especially of importance for fundamental research. If we translate this to our three research groups, we end up with the following questions:

- How far do individuals’ constructions and transformations contribute to a ‘good life’?
- How far are collectivities’ constructions and transformations supportive for sustainability?
- How far are organisations’ constructions and transformations supportive for sustainability?

With regard to individuals (Research Group A), we want to investigate the media-related constructions and their transformations in respect of their long-term contribution to a ‘good life’ of various people in the sense of addressing a variety of individual needs. Investigating collectivities (Research Group B), the main interest is how far do the media-related constructions and their transformations support inclusive and at the same time diverse collectivities; i.e. collectivities that on the one hand are capable of addressing a variety of needs but on the other hand capable of building up sustainable social relations in this diversity over the long term. Finally, with regard to organisations (Research Group C), we ask how far do the media-related constructions and their transformations stimulate sustainable organisations, supporting different social needs in a resourceful and respectful way.

This conceptual frame offers the chance to empirically investigate and normatively assess the role of transforming communications for a ‘sustainable society’ in a much wider sense of the word than is typically employed in media and communication research. A ‘sustainable society’ - especially when it comes to the social and cultural dimensions - will only be realised through transformations in figurations of everyday practice. They have at the same time to be related to governance processes and the mechanisms through which individuals, collectivities, and organisations gain access to the social and political domains in which decision-making processes are negotiated and take place (Giddens 2011; Newton et al. 2011). Through the changing media environment and the resulting transformation processes that we research, our projects will be able to elicit important ‘shifts’ in these relations and the mechanisms through which various actors articulate themselves, and hence contribute to a better understanding of how ‘sustainable societies’ are performed.

By moving this objective into the foreground in the last research period, our aim is not only to finally assess the overall stability of the transformations investigated by us. In addition, and by investigating sustainability also in a normative

way, we want to contribute to a production and transfer of knowledge about transforming communications that is helpful for society. While our work is and remains rooted in fundamental research, we want to contribute through our research to solving challenging societal problems.

### 6.5 Theory development

Across all research periods, our ‘through time’ study refers to the idea of a collaborative theory development. In the sense we use the word, a theory is a connection of concepts, statements and ways of thinking, in our case in the field of media and communication research. In this respect, we do not understand a terminologically closed theoretical endeavour. This would not be appropriate for such a dynamic field as we want to research. Rather, we mean to *generalise* across all individual projects, research groups and research periods in a step-by-step process empirically based statements on how media-related transformations of communication and therefore social construction take place and can be *explained* in different social domains. This is what we have in mind when we use the term ‘theory development’.

In so doing we move into an empirical process of ‘theorising’ (Swedberg 2012: 5-9): the conceptual framework outlined so far and built around the ideas of social domains, communicative figurations, and trends of a changing media environment is the basis for this. Taking this as a starting point, our common theory development is planned as a stepwise process in which each research period defines a move forward, and thus an extension and improvement of the theory under development: from construction through transformation to sustainability.

This procedure is well-founded by the discussion surrounding **theory development in social sciences** in general.<sup>60</sup> If we refer back to the discussion of the 1960s, theory development is a task across quantitative and qualitative approaches. Arguing in the frame of quantitative methods (see also Blalock 1969), Robert Dubin (1969: 222-249) emphasised the necessity of descriptive research *as well as* hypothesis-testing research for theory development. For him, description without particular hypothesis is necessary as it is ‘providing the components of theory building’ (Dubin 1969: 227; see also Swedberg 2012: 9-14). Or put differently, especially for new or substantially changing phenomena, descriptive research offers an empirical starting point to develop theories that are based in the social world and not in a ‘belief system’ (Dubin 1969: 227). Hypothesis testing, then, is necessary; but not just to prove a theory, rather to *improve* it.

Published around the same time but starting from a qualitative point of view, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1999 [orig. 1967]) argue for what they call ‘grounded theories’. For them, the development of theories is based on ‘comparative analysis’ (Glaser/Strauss 1999: 21). Their idea is that a systematic comparison of cases offers the chance to develop step-by-step first ‘concepts’ and then more general ‘categories’ that then build the foundation of a theory. The core of this idea is to construct a theory as an ongoing process of abstraction that is controlled by the continuous comparison of empirical cases (Morse et al. 2009). This is a line of argument one can also find in case studies research and its contribution to theo-

<sup>60</sup> See Abbott 2004; Alvesson/Karreman 2011; Astleitner 2011; Shoemaker et al. 2004. For media and communication research in particular: Hagen et al. 2015; Jensen 2013; Krotz 2005.

ry development (George/Bennett 2005; Yin 1994). While these are approaches of a bottom-up process of theory building, we must still be aware that every grounded theory also starts from certain theoretical presuppositions that orientate the research (Charmaz 2006: 241-247). And reflecting this historical contextualisation, it is important to realise that theory development transgresses a strict distinction between ‘inductive’ and ‘deductive’ approaches as it can include ‘inductive elements’ (the new theories to be developed on the basis of empirically grounded research), and ‘deductive elements’ (existing theories that are to be improved on) as well as ‘abductive elements’ (the discovery of new connections by a comparative data analysis).

Against this background, we want to integrate two **frameworks of theory development**, depending on the overall orientation of the respective research projects: ‘causal models’ and ‘emergent theories’ (Jaccard/Jacoby 2010: 137-176; 256-294). In essence, ‘causal models’ are a kind of theory that is oriented to the description of causal relation (Scheufele 2008). In media and communication research, these models have been especially related to assumptions of media effects (Yanovitzky/Greene 2009). When it comes to theory development, the main process is then one of ‘constructing theories with causal relationship’ (Jaccard/Jacoby 2010: 145; see also Shoemaker et al. 2004: 42-46), which happens through a hypothesis-based process of ‘confirming’ or ‘not-confirming’ certain components of the theory under development. Practically and with regard to empirical research, this means to identify the outcome variables and then to specify the causes of these variables. The analytical procedure here is to build increasingly complex relationships, reaching from ‘direct causes’ (which are untypical in the field of media and communication) to complex chains of ‘indirect causes’, ‘side effects’, and ‘feedback loops’. The main point here is that this is understood as an open, empirical process in which not a pre-existing theory is verified or falsified but in which a detailed (standardised) analysis is used to build-up stepwise a complex model by researching focused hypotheses or relationships.

Approaches of ‘emergent theory development’ differ from this. A prominent example for this is the already mentioned grounded theory approach. But there are also other ‘emergent’ approaches that are, for example, more rooted in media anthropology and ethnography (Krotz 2005: 44-50). The difference to causal models is that in such approaches the theories ‘emerge’ in the process of data analysis (Jaccard/Jacoby 2010: 257-260). The main idea is that theory development starts with a certain problem definition. This problem definition is driven by the preliminary knowledge of the field under investigation. Such a knowledge is also based on literature and existing theory; however, this theory is not understood as something that has to be (im)proved, but rather as a helpful source for defining the research problem. Starting with such a problem definition, research is organised in sequences of description, understanding, and explanation. As part of this process, an increasingly abstract and more generalised set of categories and statements about their interrelations becomes developed, while these interrelations can be causal or of another kind. Such a process of emergent theory development is not necessarily a purely qualitative one; quantified data and statistical explorations can also be part of it.

All projects take one of these two frameworks of theory development for their particular research. Taken together, we understand our individual projects as

‘case examples’ in our joint ‘through time’ study, and therefore as part of a wider process of theory development on transforming communications: the generalising results of all projects are compared with each other as part of this joint task. At this point, the different research groups define the basic areas on which we want to start with our process of theory development. In Research Group A, the projects are concerned with generalisations regarding individuals and their involvement in the figurations of different social domains; in Research Group B they are dedicated to generalisations regarding the figurations of collectivities; and in Research Group C, we are dealing with generalisations with regard to the figurations of organisations.

Our concept of understanding social domains as communicative figurations - in the context of deep mediatization and its trends of a changing media environment - acts as a bridging concept across these areas of research. This enables us to deal with very different phenomena of transforming communications without losing a shared orientation of theory development.

In an overall comparative design, we will contrast the theoretical results of the different projects as specific case examples of transforming communications, and by so doing step-by-step build our more general theorising. This process of theory development is structured by the research periods of our initiative:

- In the first research period, we will mainly focus on processes of construction and the ‘pressures’ as well as ‘enabling possibilities’ linked to deep mediatization. The result will be a theory component on ‘construction under the conditions of a changing media environment’ (theory development, step 1).
- The second research period will be dedicated to patterns of transformation with progressing deep mediatization. Thus, we plan to extend our theorising to a theory of media-related transformation of social domains. The result will be a theory component of ‘media-related transformations’ (theory development, step 2).
- The third research period is dedicated to the sustainability of these transformation processes; in relation to this, the theory components of construction and media-related transformation become integrated in a more general communication theory of transforming communications. The result will be a theory of ‘transforming communications’ (theory development, step 3).

As this list demonstrates, the three research periods are structured in a sequence of increasing abstraction. We will move from research period to research period to a higher level of abstraction and corresponding generalisation.

Related to this is the afore already discussed challenge of what is called ‘micro-macro link’ in social research in general (Alexander et al. 1987) and in media and communication research in particular (Quandt/Scheufele 2011). In classical social research, the idea of linking micro and macro levels means to relate individual action (micro) with structural components of society (macro) (see Alexander/Giesen 1987: 14, who distinguish five ways of theorising this relationship). Typically, the relation is made by ‘bridging hypotheses’ and the ‘aggregation’ of individual data (Coleman 1990: 8). Or the micro-macro link is thought as a relation between different levels of sociality, i.e. between interaction (micro) and society (macro), theorising organisation (meso) in between. However, this way of building up links between micro and macro presuppose the existence of an already appro-

appropriate theory on a higher level, something which does not exist in our area of investigation. Up to now, media and communication research has not developed sufficient macro theories for understanding the media-related changes of the construction of society as would be appropriate for deep mediatization. As we are living in the midst of times of deep mediatization we also cannot expect the existence of such a theory. Our joint ‘through time’ study has the idea to develop the basis for such a theorising.

Starting at this point with the Elias-based concept of figurations is helpful as this offers a specific way of generalisation: individuals and their practices are not put against social structures but both are understood as integral parts of figurations. In addition, we can theoretically triangulate the perspective of the individual with the perspectives of collectivities and organisations, and thereby gain a more integrative view of the role of media and communication in society. In so doing, communicative figurations will act as a ‘bridging concept’ for discussing empirical research results that subsequently become able to be integrated in our theory development. We expect further mid-range concepts and approaches to become integrated into such a theorising of transforming communications.

## 7. Areas of methodological innovation

Up to now, we have explained why we framed our research on transforming communications with the overall question about the trends of a changing media environment in times of deep mediatization, how we plan to research its possible consequences across very different social domains, how we structure our investigation in research groups, and what objectives we have related to this kind of research. In this section we want to move to the fifth question we have to pose: **In which areas do we have to innovate methodologically if we want to address these long-term objectives?**

A first answer to this question is certainly: **plurality**. Any research on transforming communications that investigates various social domains in the perspectives of individuals, collectivities and organisations necessarily has to be pluralistic because researching different phenomena calls for different kinds of methods. With respect to the empirical approach, it entails something completely different whether we research individual socialisation of children (A02, Kammerl and Lampert), networked media collectivities and their dynamics around media events (B03, Friemel) or organisations of internet governance (C02, Schulz), to take some examples from our research projects. Therefore, with regard to its methods, our research is ‘pluralistic’. There are projects working with standardised methods, and others working with non-standardised methods. The selection of all methods in our projects is made with regard to their respective research questions and areas of research.

On the basis of such a methodological plurality, all projects are working with **multi-method designs** to avoid the construction of methodologically driven artefacts. This refers to the up-to-date standards of empirical media and communication research.<sup>61</sup> Our research will cover a variety of different methods of data col-

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<sup>61</sup> See among others: Averbek-Lietz/Meyen 2015; Ayaß/Bergmann 2005; Berger 2013; Brosius et al. 2012; Jensen 2011; Loosen/Scholl 2012; Schlütz/Möhrling 2013; Mikos/Wegener 2005.



lection as well as of analysis. This is necessary when one aims to investigate communicative figurations in times of deep mediatization with respect to their ambivalences and contradictions. The variety of different methods we use and the subsequently possible ‘methodological triangulation’ (Denzin 1989b: 237-241; Flick 2014: 183) of empirical positions in an overall process of collaborative theory development is itself already a highly innovative endeavour.

However, there is also a second answer to this question as to which areas we have to innovate methodologically. This answer refers more concretely to the topic of transforming communications and its core idea and innovation to undertake a joint ‘through time’ study of media-related changes in times of deep mediatization. There are at least three areas of **methodological innovation** that appear to us as emergent for such an undertaking. The first area is cross-media research; the second area is digital traces; the third is long-term research. All areas refer fundamentally to the core idea of our investigation. A first major issue is that innovations in cross-media research are of high importance as we understand transforming communications as a phenomenon which cannot be tracked back to changes of any one single medium. Second, deep mediatization is closely related to the digitalisation of various media that results in communicative practices increasingly producing digital traces. Third, beginning with the second research period we plan to investigate transformations. This makes long-term research necessary, a further area where we want to focus on methodological innovations.

With regard to this, we want to outline in the following sections our overall ideas for these three areas of methodological innovation as part of our research on transforming communications.

### 7.1 *Cross-media*

In a broad perspective, ‘cross-media’ (Bjur et al. 2014: 15) research is nothing new. In audience studies, we can find a prolonged discussion on the peoples’ use of a variety of different media. We can track this discussion back at least to the early days of uses-and-gratification research. Elihu Katz, Hadassah Haas and Michael Gurevitch, for example, discussed the “‘interchangeability’ of the media over a variety of functions’, which for them ‘orders television, radio, newspapers, books, and cinema in a circumplex’ (Katz et al. 1973: 164). More from the perspective of everyday media uses, Hermann Bausinger at a very early stage called for a ‘meaningful study of the use of the media’ that does not focus on single media use but investigates the ‘media ensemble which everyone deals with today’ (Bausinger 1984: 349). Another important precursor of the present methodological discussion surrounding cross-media research was the HICT project (Households Uses of Information and Communication Technologies, University of Brunel) (Morley/Silverstone 1990). A later argument was that the ‘multiplication of personally owned media’ (Livingstone 1999: 62) makes a cross-media perspective even more necessary. And also in applied media research there is a tradition of posing cross-media questions; for example when it comes to the daily succession of media use.<sup>62</sup> At this point we

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<sup>62</sup> See for example example Reitze/Ridder 2011, <https://www.agma-mmc.de/media-analyse/intermedia-plus.html> and [http://www.wemf.ch/d/medienstudien/total\\_audience.php](http://www.wemf.ch/d/medienstudien/total_audience.php) (2.2.2016).

can only agree with Kim Schrøder (2011: 5) that audiences have always been ‘inherently cross-media’.

However, along with deep mediatization and in the face of the present trends of a changing media environment - especially: media’s differentiation -, cross-media research again becomes a hot topic of methodological innovation.<sup>63</sup> There is a specific reason for the resurgence of this area of methodological innovation, which is also fundamentally related to transforming communications. Considering the present media environment, any claim concerning the consequences of media change fundamentally has to reflect the manifold character of our present media environment. However, to grasp this manifold involves highly sophisticated methods, irrespective of the specific research question one considers (see Bjur et al. 2014; Jensen/Helles 2011). From such a point of view, we can define **cross-media research** as a methodological area of investigating communicative practices, needs and appropriations across the variety of different media in a way that reflects the interrelations between these media. Therefore, cross-media methods are not just about the variety of media: they are about investigating their *interrelatedness*. This should not be misunderstood as referring only to media users. As Bjur et al. (2014: 15) put it very aptly in their discussion of ‘the increasing relevance of cross-media phenomena’: on the one hand, nowadays a ‘wide range of different services can be used on a single technical device; specific content can be distributed and used on many different platforms’. On the other hand, this has its parallels on the ‘production level’, too, where ‘multiple platforms are used for the publication of mediated products’ (see also Aarseth 2006; Loosen 2005; Westlund 2011). Investigating such *interrelatedness* in users’ as well as producers’ perspective (and the hybrids in between) is the present methodological challenge of any cross-media research. In such a perspective, there are especially three fields of cross-media research (see Bjur et al. 2014: 16-25): first, research on cross-media functional differentiation; second, research on situations of cross-media practice; and, third, research on patterns of cross-media practice.

Research on **cross-media functional differentiation** refers back to the original questions of uses-and-gratification research (Blumler/Katz, 1974; Katz et al. 2000; Rosengren et al. 1985). Here, the focus is on how far each medium specialises functionally in fulfilling certain types of needs for its users (Nossek et al. 2015). The methodological challenge is that with the recent trends of a changing media environment the original assignment of certain functions to a certain medium no longer works: people increasingly use the same device for different purposes, and ‘on’ the device the same ‘media’ (apps, interfaces etc.) to achieve different gratifications (Schrøder 2011: 7-11). Or put differently, with regard to an understanding of deep mediatization as a cross-media phenomenon, the fundamental challenge is that ‘the media’s functional propensities underpin their relational definitions and our understanding of them as an integrated structure’ (Madianou/Miller 2013:

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<sup>63</sup> An indicator for this are special issues of journals like for example the *International Journal of Communication* (9/2015), conferences that are held on cross-media research like the *Users Across Media* conference at the University of Copenhagen (5/2015) or calls for new special issues of journals on the topic like for example for the journal *Convergence* (to be published in 2016). Another indicator for the relevance of this research area is also the COST Action IS0906 ‘Transforming Audiences/Transforming Societies’ (2010-2014), in which members of the “Communicative Figurations” research network participated and cross-media research increasingly became an important agenda of methodological innovation (see the chapters in Carpentier et al. 2014; Patriarche et al. 2013).

183). For any method of data collection as well as data analysis, it is a challenge to grasp this *interrelated cross-media functionality*, especially as the functionality of each medium is not fixed but becomes defined only in the contexts of its use. This also refers to media organisations and organisations in general.

When it comes to **situations of cross-media practice**, the interest is in socio-spatial and temporal contexts. While long-term research tends to investigate situations of single media practice, nowadays such situations are typically cross-media. This refers to various situations, like so-called ‘second screen’ use while watching television at home (Groebel 2014: 109-161; Han/Lee 2014; Shin 2013), the use of different media in situations of remembering (Garde-Hansen 2011; Hoskins 2014; Hajek et al. 2016; van Dijck 2007) or the use of different media in situations of learning (Ito et al. 2009: 29-78; Wolf 2012). Such situations gain an additional cross-media complexity when we think of so-called ‘synthetic situations’, which are ‘a social “situation” that ‘invariably includes, and may in fact be entirely constituted by, on-screen projections’ (Knorr-Cetina 2014: 45). Examples for this are the situation of exchange trading, datafied decision-making in organisations via ‘dashboards’, or online computer gaming in groups. They are cross-media insofar as *various* media representations matter as well as mediated forms of communication (chat, telephone calls etc.) in parallel. Examples like these demonstrate the challenges for any method to analyse such situations of cross-media practice in their *interrelated cross-media situatedness*. The main point here is that any description of such situations necessarily needs to include data on the variety of media under use together with the interactions they bring into these situations.

Third, we have the field of **patterns of cross-media practice**. Here, the main focus is on how media-related practices (of use, work, production, networking etc.) spread across a variety of different media. This is what our two concepts of the media repertoire (when it comes to the individual) and media ensemble (when it comes to the figuration of a social domain) refer to (see 1.2.2.3). With regard to methods, the challenge at this point is how to reconstruct these repertoires and ensembles in their entirety, while the main focus is on the *interrelatedness of cross-media communicative practice*. This refers to methods of data collection as well as data analysis, both qualitative and quantitative. For data collection, we have already developed techniques on how to conduct interviews in a way that is capable of grasping the variety of media repertoires (Klein et al. 2016). Besides that, we triangulate interview techniques with additional methods of data collection like ‘sorting techniques’ where visual cards are used to represent the different media (Hasebrink/Domeyer 2012; see also Schröder/Kobbernagel 2010), or ‘visualisation techniques’ in qualitative and quantitative network analysis (Hepp et al. 2016a; Krempel 2009; Schönhuth et al. 2013). In respect of data analysis, one important discussion revolves around how to analyse the interrelatedness of media repertoires and media ensembles. At this point, our analysis moves beyond a pure aggregation and combines qualitative as well as quantitative data for a rich description of media repertoires and ensembles (Hasebrink et al. 2015; see also Lepa/Hoklas 2015; Schröder 2012) and forms of multi-level network analysis (Friemel 2015; see also Lazega/Snijders 2016).

In our first area of methodological innovation, we want to contribute to this overall discussion on cross-media methods. While all three fields of cross-media research are of importance for the individual projects on transforming communica-

tions, we want to start our innovations especially in the third field. The reason for this is that this field has a special importance for our joint research agenda as it is dedicated to the core of our overall interest: namely, to describe media repertoires and media ensembles with regard to different individuals, collectivities, and organisations. Therefore, a methodological innovation is needed especially in that area. Here, we want to put emphasis on methods for collecting as well as analysing cross-media data. What are the possibilities for a methodology of cross-media research that on the one hand reflects the variety of media under use in a social domain but on the other hand is also able to provide detailed information about the media-related characteristics of its use? The point here is how to handle methodologically the tension between the variety of different media and the necessity of detailed information on specific, media-related practices.

## 7.2 Digital traces

A prominent characteristic of deep mediatization are digital traces: Whatever we do, as soon as we live in this highly mediatized social world we leave ‘footprints’ of our digital media use that build ‘digital traces’. Partly we do this consciously, for example by uploading photographs or writing comments on the ‘time lines’ of digital platforms. But often we are not aware of it and it ‘happens’ as an (unintended) side effect of our media-related activities. This is for example the case when using a search engine, when reading newspapers online, when posting via Facebook or Twitter. But digital traces even go further: they are not just made by us but also by *others* when they interact online with reference to us: by synchronising their address books with our digital addresses, by tagging pictures, texts or other digital artefacts with our names etc. Digital traces nowadays even begin before the date of birth. As such, the ‘mediatization of parenthood’ (Damkjaer 2015) results in processes of constructing ‘parents’ *before birth* as pregnancy is accompanied with an ongoing flow of communication via apps and platforms that produces digital traces of a forthcoming child. Then the question ‘*who* is allowed to leave these traces of an even unborn?’ becomes an issue in a kind of family communication policy. In such a sense as individuals, collectivities or organisations ‘we cannot not leave digital traces’ (Merzeau 2009: 4) in times of deep mediatization.

Understanding digital traces in this way represents quite a new area of media and communication research that refers to the research interest of many projects in our research programme *Transforming Communications*. At the same time, we can refer this back to more prolonged discussions about whether ‘new’ media require ‘new’ methods of research (see for example Golding/Splichal 2013; Hutchinson 2016; Press/Livingstone 2006), and have to contextualise it in the much more far-reaching discussion surrounding ‘digital humanities’ and its methods (Baum/Stäcker 2015; Gardiner/Musto 2015). As a phenomenon, digital traces have evoked a sophisticated but also controversial methodological discussion. First of all, it is important to be aware that they are more than just (big) data. This is a kind of digital data which becomes meaningful *because* this sequence of ‘digital footprints’ is in a technical procedure of construction *related to* a certain actor or action, typically (of) an individual but in principle also a collectivity or an organisation. By such procedures of connecting data with entities of the social world they become meaningful information, and this is the reason why companies and other organisations of data processing are highly interested in this kind of data

aggregation.<sup>64</sup> For the purpose of our research, a good starting point is to define **digital traces** as numerically produced correlations of disparate kinds of data that are generated by our practices in a digitalised media environment.

Recently, digital traces became an issue of **fundamental critique of social science methods**; one that we do not share in detail but have to be aware of. The argument at this point is that with digitalisation methods of social sciences increasingly entered into a ‘crisis’ as digital traces seem to be a much more proper data source than the kinds of data typically used in social sciences (Savage/Burrows 2007). While the sample survey and the in-depth interview once represented innovative contributions to a methodologically informed description and understanding of the social world, nowadays they would produce a much more limited access to the procedures of how society is constructed. Its main governing organisations - companies, administrations, government institutions - get much of their information via an ongoing observation and analysis of the various digital traces left online. Against such sources, any proposition academic research can produce based on surveys and interviews seems to be flawed. Therefore, we would need to ‘reassemble social science methods’ (Ruppert et al. 2013: 22). Many established methods would come under pressure with recent digitalisation as they cannot deliver proper answers to the problems under question, something that is described as the ‘social life of methods’ (Savage 2013: 5). A conclusion from this is to think about new forms of data collection and analysis that are based on ‘digital methods’ (Rogers 2013: 1, 13). Methods like crawling, scraping or data mining take digital traces as sources for empirical research. They do not use special procedures for data collection to *produce* data that is *then* analysed; but rather they are methods of *using* digital traces as a source for analysis.

Some proponents even go one step further and argue that digital traces would allow for the first time a *direct* access to ongoing processes of social construction. Maybe the most prominent example is Bruno Latour’s integration of digital traces investigation into his overall approach to social analysis (see Latour 2007a). A ‘digital traceability’ (Venturini/Latour 2010: 6) then becomes a possibility for analysing processes of social construction *in situ*: ‘Being interested in the construction of social phenomena implies tracking each of the actors involved and each of the interactions between them’ (Venturini/Latour 2010: 5). With digital traces, so the argument, we might have such a direct access, as they would allow us to witness processes of assembling in the moment they take place (see Latour et al. 2012; Venturini 2012).

From our point of view, this move largely misunderstands the main points of digital traces. First of all, there remains the fundamental problem of misinterpreting the social world as ‘flat’ and therefore as reconstructable solely by an analysis of correlated ‘footprints’ in digital media. This is one point of access, but one that reduces the present complexity of the social world to the ontology of a flat society.<sup>65</sup> Second, and even more fundamentally, such an approach misunderstands digi-

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<sup>64</sup> The term ‘trace’ collects numerous meanings and appendices (to trace, track, traceable, traceability, tracing, etc.) and seems to connote an isolated object as well as an action or a process’ (Reigeluth 2014: 249; Serres 2002: 1). Because of this semantic richness of ‘trace’ in general, there is some ambiguity determining ‘digital traces’ in a proper way.

<sup>65</sup> Here the general problem of the idea of the social world as the sum of assemblages becomes replicated (see for a critique of such an approach Couldry/Hepp 2016: 57-78).

tal traces as something ‘neutral’, offering us a ‘direct access’ to society. However, digital traces are not ‘neutral phenomena’; rather, they rely on the technical procedures of *governing institutions* that produce this kind of information. With *governing* we mean that these institutions are organisations that are in a powerful position to define the character and structure of data and metadata as well as its possible purposes as companies or state institutions do. Therefore, as in any established method of social science, digital traces as indicators of social reality have to be critically reflected with regard to their particular perspective and underlying biases.

Concluding from this, our approach to digital traces refers back to a critique of any naïve understanding of ‘big data’ (Puschmann/Burgess 2014). Especially beyond academic research, there is high hope in the promises of new forms of analysis with reference to a so-called ‘revolution of big data’. The core argument of this hope is that more or less huge amounts of data-based information can be related and analysed with automatised procedures without pre-defining theoretical assumptions and at the same time lay the ground to predict future developments. This would make a new, purely data-oriented knowledge production possible that is partly positioned against theoretically informed forms of academic research. As prominent representatives of big data analysis put it, ‘no longer do we necessarily require a valid substantive hypothesis about a phenomenon to begin to understand our world’ (Mayer-Schönberger/Cukier 2013: 55). Or, as formulated in the sub-title of a best-selling practical guide (Marr 2015), it is about ‘using smart big data, analytics and metrics to make better decisions and improve performance’.

Such an approach reduces the phenomenon of digital traces to a ‘big data paradigm’ that is about ‘managing data and transforming it into usable and sellable knowledge’ (Langlois et al. 2015: 3). From the point of view of empirical research methods in social sciences, such hopes are partly based on what we can call a ‘mythology of big data’, that is ‘large data sets offer a higher form of intelligence and knowledge that can generate insights that were previously impossible, with the aura of truth, objectivity, and accuracy’ (boyd/Crawford 2012: 2). This kind of ‘social analytics’ (Couldry et al. 2015) refers back to the ‘gradual normalisation of datafication’ (van Dijck 2014: 198) as a new paradigm in science and society. Researchers of big data ‘tend to echo these claims concerning the nature of social media data as natural traces and of platforms as neutral facilitators’ (van Dijck 2014: 199). This involves a certain ‘fundamentalism’ of big data. The idea is that once the easy work of gathering data is completed, the ‘data will speak for itself’ (Mosco 2014: 180).

As we know in the meantime, (meta)data cannot be considered as ‘raw resources’ (Borgman 2015; Bowker 2014: 1797; Gitelman/Jackson 2013: 7; van Dijck 2014: 201) that offer any direct access to the social world. In contrast, the main methodological task for **empirical research on digital traces** is to make them *meaningful*, that is to explain the causalities and relations that go *beyond* pure aggregations and correlations as they are put up by automatised collections of data. As a consequence, the methodological challenge for researching transforming communications is less just an automatised analysis of ‘big data’ as often postulated: rather, the methodological challenge lies in how to relate digital traces to *further sources* of data by means of which such traces become validated as well as interpretable and can subsequently be referred to in more sophisticated explana-

tions and procedures of theory building (see Crampton et al. 2013; Lohmeier 2014b). We must be very careful to avoid possible misunderstandings at this point. We share the position that competences in new forms of ‘digital methods’ (Rogers 2013) and ‘automatized analysis’ (Sommer et al. 2014) are a necessity for media and communication research that endeavours to be up-to-date and we contribute to this discussion. This said, we are critical of any approaches that understand purely digital-based data as a source for describing the society. We need the combination with a further analysis referring to the social domains under investigation.

Hence, we plan a contribution to the methods of digital traces analysis that understands digital traces as aggregated and correlated ‘prints’ of individuals, collectivities, and organisations that we should analyse with reference to the respective social domains. Various forms of automatised data analysis can be helpful for this. But we have to enrich these data and validate it. From the outset, we plan to find sophisticated solutions to collecting digital traces in an enriched way and to make this information accessible in new forms of data analysis. In practical terms, in this area we will focus on the development of software tools that allow us to relate data of digital traces to qualitative forms of data and in so doing enable a contextualising analysis.

### 7.3 Long-term research

Beginning with the second research period, we plan to investigate transformations in a more long-term perspective and thereby build our joint ‘through time’ study: from analysing the construction under the conditions of deep mediatization, we will move to structural changes of communicative figurations. With the beginning of the second research period, long-term research will thus constitute a third area of our methodological innovation. Three approaches of long-term research will be applied across our individual projects: repeated measurement designs, panel designs, and historical designs. It is too early to describe *in detail* the methodological innovations we intend to introduce. All the same, these steps have to be at least partly prepared already in the first research period. Therefore, in the following we present an outline of the direction of methodological innovation we plan to take.

The most popular approach to researching long-term transformations entails **repeated measurements designs**. Data is collected at different points of time, and the differences between these points of measurement are interpreted as indicators for transformations. By taking ‘time’ into account it is possible to reconstruct the interplay between different factors - e.g. between certain trends of a changing media environment and the construction of certain social domains - or even to draw causal inferences between independent and dependent variables (Groves 2009; Lynn 2009; Menard 2008; Rindfleisch et al. 2008). In addition, longitudinal data enable us to analyse how certain cohorts change their communicative practices through time. This offers the possibility to distinguish between life-cycle effects and cohort effects (see Elliott et al. 2008; Fitzmaurice et al. 2011; Holland et al. 2006). Similar approaches also apply to units of aggregation other than cohorts (Rapley 2014).

In order to allow for comparisons over time, research instruments - qualitative or quantitative - must ensure a high stability. At the same time, they have to be flexible to a certain degree because they have to be adapted to new social and

technical requirements (Elliott et al. 2008: 235). Only a permanent adjustment to the latest developments can ensure a fruitful development of powerful research instruments without getting stuck on outdated assumptions, artefacts, and noise (Holland 2011). This is true for quantitative as well as for qualitative approaches. While quantitative studies put emphasis on producing long-term statistical trends and offer certain complex correlations between different variables, qualitative studies can explain these complexities and offer access to factors that might be hidden by statistical trends.<sup>66</sup>

Up to now, studies with repeated measurement designs in media and communication research are typically quantitative, for example the *Langzeitstudie Massenkommunikation* in Germany (van Eimeren/Ridder 2011) or on an international level the Reuters Institute Digital News Survey (Newman et al. 2015; Hölig/Hasebrink 2014). Qualitative studies in this field are much more seldom, and one of the very few explorative studies to test possible methods in this area was conducted by members of our research network “Communicative Figurations.”<sup>67</sup> On the basis of such preliminary work, we plan to develop multi-method designs for repeated measurement studies that combine the strengths of quantitative and qualitative designs. By means of quantitative data we are able to isolate correlations in long-term patterns of transformation (Hasebrink et al. 2015). Qualitative data offers us the chance for more detailed explanations. The methodological challenge for this kind of research is to relate both kinds of data and analysis in a proper way. We want to innovate here by developing structured sets of procedures on how to define sub-sets of individuals partaking in quantitative repeat studies to subsequently participate in qualitative studies (mainly deep interviews). Up to now, a typical procedure in this respect is to undertake a cluster analysis and then interview selected representatives of these clusters (see for example Lepa et al. 2014). The problem with adopting such a procedure is that ‘extreme cases’ are filtered out, although these often have a high explanatory power in qualitative research (see for example Glaser/Strauss 1999: 49-65). At this point, besides typical cluster analysis we want to develop ways of defining extreme and other relevant cases on the basis of statistical analysis for inclusion in such interviews later on. By so doing, our idea is to widen the explanatory power of multi-method designs in repeat studies. Another important innovation in this respect will be the link to the parallel mapping of changes in the media environment. By referring to the systematic description of these changes, the individual projects will be able to adapt their research instruments to relevant innovations and relate them to transformation in the construction of particular social domains.

A second approach to longitudinal studies is **panel designs**. In addition to applying the same variables or categories across time, a panel study investigates the same sample of individuals or groups over multiple time periods.<sup>68</sup> The most important benefit of panel data - beyond insights into aggregate changes through

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<sup>66</sup> See for this discussion Morrow/Crivello 2015; Thomson/McLeod 2015; Williams/Vogt 2011.

<sup>67</sup> This methodological experiment of a long-term study was undertaken as part of the DFG Priority Research Programme 1505 ‘Mediatized Worlds’ by Friedrich Krotz and Andreas Hepp to test possible designs and necessary resources for qualitative long-term research. See for this <http://www.mediatisiertewelten.de/en/projects/2nd-funding-period-2012-2014/a-qualitative-longitudinal-study-about-the-mediatization-of-social-relationships.html> (2.3.2016).

<sup>68</sup> See for this approach Engel et al. 2015; Kasprzyk et al. 1989; Sikkeli/Hoogendoorn 2009; Stafford 2010.



time - is the possibility to observe changes on the individual level, too. This kind of data allows for comparison ‘between groups’ as well as ‘within groups’. Whereas between-subject comparisons show differences between individuals or groups, within-subject effects represent the development of individuals through time (Frees 2004; Lynn 2009; Pforr/Schröder 2015). This opens up the possibility to follow communicative changes in the life course and to gain insights into the short- and long-term interplay between personal characteristics and ambitions, on the one hand, and any kind of external changes, e.g. changes in the media environment or social disruption, such as unemployment, job change, personal loss etc., on the other (Sikkel/Hoogendoorn 2009). With the help of panel data, we will be able to understand the interrelations between challenges in daily life and communicative practices. For that reason, longitudinal panel surveys are an indispensable tool for reconstructing long-term social processes (Lüders 2005).<sup>69</sup> A number of the projects we plan will complement our methodological approaches with panel studies.

Here, we want to be methodologically innovative particularly by developing qualitative approaches to panel designs. At first sight, the main principles of qualitative research - a certain degree of openness with regard to the definition of categories and to the process of interpretation - and of panel designs - building on constant instruments and measurements across time - seem to contradict each other. However, in recent years there have been examples for qualitative panel studies that illustrate the potential of such an approach for analysing the complex interplay between changes of social and media-related contexts, on the one hand, and individual development on the other (Paus-Hasebrink/Kulterer 2014; Peil/Röser 2014). We will build on that and contribute to the further elaboration of long-term designs in two directions. First, we will connect panel designs on communicative practices with the mapping of media developments. Second, we will particularly elaborate on the potential of panel designs to introduce a reflexive level: social construction in a certain time period will be investigated a) in the respective time period (what are your communicative practices right now?), b) in retrospect (what have been your communicative practices in the former time period?), and c) on a reflexive level (what did you change and why?). Following this procedure over several periods of data collection will allow for thick descriptions of changes in communicative practices and communicative figurations.

A third kind of approach to long-term research are **historical designs**. This is an area in media and communication research that recently received particular attention due to its additional explanatory power for contextualising more recent developments (Simonson et al. 2013). Exploring media-related transformations in a long-term perspective has already moved beyond the history of a single medium (Briggs/Burke 2009; Bösch 2015; Daniel/Schildt 2010). Especially studies on media-tization (Arnold et al. 2010), on media evolutionary developments (Stöber 2012), and on profound media changes (Gendolla et al. 2009) focus on a comparative history of mass media, i.e. of press, telegraphy, film, radio, television, and digital media. By dealing with a changing media environment in its entirety and analysing media ensembles, their concern is quite comparable to the research question of

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<sup>69</sup> For discussion on such methods see also the DFG-funded young scholars network ‘Temporal dynamics and process models in media effects research’, <https://mediennutzung.uni-hohenheim.de/projekte> (2.3.2016).

transforming communications. Of interest here are especially such strands in media and communication history that take a set of various forces into account, i.e. technological developments, political decisions, economic developments and laws, societal changes (e.g. Bösch 2012) that deal with transnational relationships and dependencies (Fickers/Johnson 2012; Hilmes 2011; Chapman 2005) and reveal that media can no longer be considered as something stable but as something permanently socially and individually shaped (e.g. Winston 1998).

From the perspective of long-term research, such historical designs offer on the one hand an important ‘depth dimension’ which is especially necessary to assess more recent processes of mediatization (Livingstone/Lunt 2014: 712-715; Hepp et al. 2015b: 318-319). Methodologically, the problem is that such historical studies work with fundamentally different sources and data (e.g. written sources, audio and visual material) as well as different ways of interpreting data (i.e. source criticism, historical contextualisation, historical discourse analysis). This results in different kinds of concepts and explanations than empirical media and communication research investigating contemporary phenomena. Because of this historical studies and empirical research often do not ‘speak’ to each other, while at the same time historical data is necessary to range recent phenomena of transformations.

At this point we want to be innovative insofar as we relate historical-oriented research designs and contemporary-oriented research designs in a much closer way than is usual. This works basically by adapting our concept of communicative figurations so that it also incorporates historical analysis: taking actor constellations, communicative practices entangled with media ensembles, and frames of relevance as key indicators, we will conduct qualitative meta-analyses of existing historical data in order to reconstruct transformations of construction. In so doing, we plan to develop new ways of interrelating historical and contemporary research.

As pointed out above, we will move to such methodological innovations in long-term research with the beginning of our second research period. As we are still in the process of preparing the first research period as our ‘baseline measurement’ for such long-term investigations, it is too early to outline the objectives for such innovations in more detail. However, the specifications made so far outline the directions we plan to take for our future innovations in the area of long-term research. We want to be innovative here by interlacing quantitative and qualitative repeat designs in a new way, by developing qualitative panel designs that integrate the mapping of media-related changes and the reflective potential of repeated data collection, and by interrelating historical research in a structured way with empirical investigations of the contemporary. This is an important point for our joint ‘through time’ study.

## 8. Planned Projects

PG	TP	PI	Title	Subject Area	Work area
A: Individuals	A01	Uwe Hasebrink	<i>Public Connection</i> : Individuals' Contributions to the Construction of Publics	Communication Sciences	Audience studies, media use
	A02	Rudolf Kammerl, Claudia Lampert	<i>Socialisation</i> : Growing Up in a Changing Media Environment	Research on Socialisation and Educational Institutions and Professions	Media education
	A03	Karsten D. Wolf	<i>Informal learning</i> : Media and Amateurs' Development of Expertise	Research on Teaching, Learning, and Training	Vocational training
	A04	Uwe Schimank, Ute Volkmann	<i>Conduct of Life</i> : Multiple Disturbances and Coping of the Middle Classes	Empirical Social Research	Social theory
	A05	Gertraud Koch	<i>(Re)presenting the Self</i> : Communicative Practices of Marginalised People in Urban Publics	Social and Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology/Folklore	Media anthropology
B: Collectivities	B01	Andreas Hepp	<i>Pioneer Communities</i> : Imagining the Media-Related Construction of Collectivities	Communication Sciences	Audience studies, media appropriation
	B02	Christine Lohmeier	<i>Locally Situated and Migrant Families</i> : Negotiating Group, Public, and Personal Memories	Communication Sciences	Media practices, family and communication
	B03	Thomas Friemel	<i>Networked Media Collectivities</i> : Network Dynamics and Social Capital in a Changing Media Environment	Communication Sciences	Media use, social network analysis
	B04	Inge Marszolek, Hans-Ulrich Wagner	<i>Imagined Communities</i> : Space-Related Constructions of Cities' Collectivity in Times of Analogue Media	Modern and Current History	Media and communication history, cultural history
	B05	Stefanie Auerbeck-Lietz	<i>Collectivities of Debate</i> : The Communicative Construction of Morality and Ethics in European Crises	Communication Sciences	Communication ethics
C: Organisations	C01	Wiebke Loosen	<i>Journalism</i> : New Organisational Models, Changing Audience Relationships, and their Effect on Journalistic Output	Communication Sciences	Journalism research
	C02	Wolfgang Schulz	<i>Internet governance</i> : Constructing Normative Structures Inside and Outside Intermediary Organisations	Legal and Political Philosophy, Legal History, Legal Theory	Governance research
	C03	Kerstin Radde-Antweiler	<i>Religious Authority</i> : Media and the Construction of Authority in Religious Organisations	Religious Studies and Jewish Studies	Study of Religion
	C04	Andreas Breiter, Juliane Jarke	<i>Organising Education</i> : How Data Practices are Constructing Schools	Empirical Social Research, Information Systems, Process and Knowledge Management	Organisational sociology, informatics
	C05	Michael Brüggemann	<i>Science Communication</i> : Redefining the Boundaries of Science and Journalism in the Debate on Climate Change	Communication Sciences	Science communication

## 8.1 Research Group A: Individuals

### A01: Uwe Hasebrink

#### Public Connection: Individuals’ Contributions to the Construction of Publics

In this project, we plan to investigate how people living in today’s changing media environment connect to different publics and, in doing so, contribute to the communicative construction of these publics. The design follows three main objectives: First, we will analyse individual repertoires of public connection and how they are related to biography and social contexts. Second, we will investigate how these repertoires of public connection contribute to the communicative figurations of particular publics. Third, we will examine how current trends of the media environment shape individuals’ repertoires of public connection and, through these repertoires, the communicative figurations of publics. The empirical approach combines complementing modules that examine the three research objectives from different perspectives. Through qualitative panel analysis of media diaries and semi-structured interviews we will reconstruct in detail, to what publics individuals connect themselves, for what reasons, and by what kind of communicative practices. Via secondary analyses of representative surveys on media use, we will draw the bigger picture of today’s practices and how they have developed over the past years. Building on these two modules, we will design a standardised survey that will provide a detailed description and analysis of today’s repertoires of public connection. Taken together, the project will help to better understand how individuals connect to publics and by doing so how they contribute to the communicative figurations of publics and to their structural transformation with deep mediatization.

### A02: Rudolf Kammerl, Claudia Lampert

#### Socialisation: Growing Up in a Changing Media Environment

Socialisation research focuses on the process by which individuals become members of a society. In this context, we look at the consequences of a changing media environment for the processes of growing up. By adopting the constructivist approach of communicative figurations, we want to advance the traditional perspective of socialisation in which different agents of socialisation are considered (e.g. family, peer groups, school). In the project, these agents are seen as communicatively constructed social domains. Within these social domains, media are increasingly important as communication channels and thematic hotspots. We will therefore investigate their function for interactions, and especially regarding processes of belonging and distinction in the communicative figurations of the family, peer group, and school class. Due to its particular role in regulating children’s media repertoires, we will place special emphasis on the family as the first and one of the most important social domains in which socialisation takes place. The project’s main research questions are: How do children use media to position themselves within the dimension of proximity and distance in their related social group? What is the role of children’s media repertoires and communicative practices for social embedding within different social contexts? By conducting a qualitative panel

study with two waves in the first research period, families with different media-related attitudes will be examined over a period of four years (the study is conceptualised perspectively as a longitudinal study with five waves in 12 years, Table 1). Thus, our study includes theoretical and empirical methods of integrating media developments by early-adopter families as well as possible tendencies of and reasons for ‘persistence’. In addition, the study comprises two parallel cohorts, thereby including important aspects of institutional transitions (e.g. kindergarten, school) associated with significant changes in media literacy and the use of media. To draw a consistent picture of the interactive socialisation process, we include the children’s perspectives as well as the view of their parents.

#### A03: Karsten D. Wolf

##### Informal Learning: Media and Amateurs’ Development of Expertise

The changing media environment has become an important resource for a selected group of amateur learners to informally develop expertise comparable to formally trained experts. Is this a blueprint of a ‘new learning culture’ for everyday learning? Or does it simply refer to a digital elite with a better fit to current transforming communications in a learning ecology? In our project, we plan to investigate the interrelation of a changing media environment, informal learning, dis/empowerment, and dimensions of difference in and across three central learning domains of everyday life: health, music, and programming. First, we want to study how people appropriate media and reconfigure their communicative repertoires to informally develop expertise. Second - based on individual learning processes - we analyse, how and why communicative figurations differ between learning domains and what they have in common. Third, we reconstruct the individuals’ processes of empowerment within selected communicative figurations: how learners decide what to learn (curriculum setting), how they choose persons and media to learn with and learn from, and how they get feedback for and validation of their learning outcomes. Fourth, with regard to dimensions of difference such as gender, age, and media literacy we will critically examine the amateurs’ participation (access, roles, sharing) or lack of it in the domains’ processes of expertise development. The research programme is split into three research modules. The unifying method of the project is situational analysis, an extension of grounded theory in a multi-site study. The first module reconstructs the individual ‘learnsapes’ using biographical interviews and learning-episode diaries. The second module aims to describe and compare the communicative figurations across the three different learning domains based upon the situational maps and an online survey. The third module analyses the communicative construction of dis/empowerment and segmentation/participation by combining a situational analysis with a network analysis.

#### A04: Uwe Schimank, Ute Volkmann

##### Conduct of Life: Multiple Disturbances and Coping of the Middle Classes

The middle classes’ conduct of life is characterised by a steady investment of economic and cultural capital to pursue the reproduction and, if possible, improvement of their status. For some time now, this mode of living is affected by often disturbing changes, which go along with deep mediatization. The project takes a

closer look at five spheres of middle-class life (work, intimate relations, parenthood, long-term asset building, and civil society engagement), which are studied by a two-step explanatory approach: First, we ask how middle-class individuals cope with disturbances in the context of routinised practices of their conduct of life. Here, disturbances are the explanans, and coping practices the explananda. In the second step, we take the communicative figurations and their changes as the explanans, and the patterns of disturbances and coping as the explananda. We expect transforming communications to exert ambivalent effects on the middle classes’ conduct of life. On the one hand, media changes can further escalate other disturbances, or become disturbances in their own right by producing disorientation and acceleration. On the other hand, media changes can bring about additional resources for coping, especially as devices that can be used for the self-empowerment of middle-class persons in their interactions with experts.

A05: Gertraud Koch

(Re)presenting the Self: Communicative Practices of Marginalised People in Urban Publics

The project seeks to understand, through the example of individuals from the groups of homeless and Roma people, the communicative figurations and cross-media practices of socio-economically marginalised individuals in European cities and the way in which such practices support their representation and partaking and thus their visibility in urban publics with a positive attention towards the needs, problems, and particular conditions of the people in question. Publicness is constituted on the crossroads of public spaces and media, fragmented due to transnational developments, and structured on local (urban), national, and international levels. In today’s societies, publicness is an essential precondition for partaking and being represented in urban publics, which is relevant to be considered in political processes and the social welfare system. At the same time, urban restructuring in the form of media cities and the re-figuration of public spheres due to social and mobile media constitutes new challenges for the representation and individual expressivity of marginalised people. The gain of some definitional power thus seems to be most improbable, considering the low social status and the deprivation of homeless and Roma people with regard to social and mobile media as well as media literacy. The project will study their diverse communicative figurations in respect of how they contribute and relate to publicity in mass and other media as well as in city areas. Based on a praxeographic research strategy and grounded theory, the study will investigate how marginalised people’s communicative practices across media contribute to their public attention and will theorise the role of communication and media in relation to wider expressions of marginality. It will apply a collaborative research design by including para-ethnographic knowledge of social workers and local knowledge of young researchers.

## 8.2 Research Group B: Collectivities

### B01: Andreas Hepp

#### Pioneer Communities: Imagining the Media-related Construction of Collectivities

As communicative figurations, the ‘maker’ and ‘quantified self’ pioneer communities build complex transnational and transcultural networks that support the technology-based imagined concepts of collectivity they want to establish: collectivities related to digital practices of manufacturing and digital practices of the self. Pioneer communities are characterised by a remarkable tension. While they are - at least in their core - closely interwoven communities with strong concepts of belonging, they unfold their social influence on collectivity building via a much more open public discourse. Therefore, it is less a unidirectional diffusion of their media-related imagined concepts of collectivity but rather a complicated process of spreading technologies and journalistic coverage that builds the basis of collectivity transformation. The project will investigate this on three levels. First, we aim to reconstruct the communicative figurations of the two pioneer communities. Second, we will investigate their imagined concepts of media-related collectivity. In their very own perspective, the pioneer communities’ conceptions in this respect are ‘blueprints’ of possible collectivities within everyday life. Third, we investigate the public discourse surrounding these pioneer communities and their imagined concepts of collectivity, and compare the findings with their own structures and conceptions. Methodologically, our analysis is based on a media ethnography of the pioneer communities (including sorting and drawing methods, as well as crawler and qualitative network analysis), a qualitative content analysis of their imagined concepts of collectivity, and a longitudinal qualitative content analysis of the print, television and online media coverage they receive. The research will be conducted in Germany and UK with a focus on Berlin and London as two main European hubs for pioneer communities.

### B02: Christine Lohmeier

#### Locally Situated and Migrant Families: Negotiating Group, Public, and Personal Memories

Family’s communicative practices and rituals relating to the construction of group, public and personal memory are changing with deep mediatization. Developments such as high divorce rates, an increased mobility and the changing media environment are altering the circumstances in which and how memories are created. The aim of this project is to understand the communicative construction of group, public, and personal memories and memory work for different kinds of families, both migrant and non-migrant: traditional families (consisting of mother, father and children), blended families (consisting of parents and children of whom at least one stems from a previous marriage or partnership) and alternative families (such as families that consist of a gay or lesbian couple with children, families with only one parent). We will distinguish between locally situated German families and migrant families from Poland and Syria. Given this diversity, we investigate the communicative figurations of these different families to understand how group, public, and personal memories are constructed in these collectivities. First, we investigate the families’ communicative figurations. In a second step, we research

the communicative construction of family and public memory with reference to the family’s media ensembles as well as further material memory objects to understand by means of which contents and technologies memory work is carried out. Finally, we compare similarities and differences between the families and thereby develop a typology of communicative processes of constructing memory within them.

B03: Thomas Friemel

Networked Media Collectivities: Network Dynamics and Social Capital in a Changing Media Environment

People use media to communicate and thereby construct collectivity in two ways. First, media provide technological means to bypass time and space and enable otherwise unconnected individuals to establish or maintain social relations. Second, media provide topics for communication. Our goal is to empirically assess the relevance of media for the communicative construction of collectivities of different kinds. Media collectivities are not bound to predefined sets of persons, but rather resemble interwoven and overlapping networks. Therefore, our subjects are *networked media collectivities* that are defined as a networked set of actors with shared communicative practices. The shared communicative practices can be a common interest for a specific media content (e.g., a TV programme) or the joint use of communication technologies (e.g., a messenger service). For the empirical analysis of these hard-to-grasp collectivities, we investigate the process of building up such networked media collectivities in two respects: First, in peer groups of adolescents analysed by panel surveys and the collection of digital traces in schools. Second, in ego-networks that emerge around media events (i.e., major sport events and politics): these are investigated by means of a representative survey. Our research project will provide new insights into the media-related construction of collectivities, their relevance for social capital, and the transformation of both in times of deep mediatization.

B04: Inge Marszolek, Hans-Ulrich Wagner

Imagined Communities: Space-related Constructions of Cities’ Collectivity in Times of Analogue Media

The ways in which collectivities are constructed are crucial for our understanding of the constitution of modern societies. The main goal of this project is to contribute to a cross-media history *prior to* deep mediatization, focussing mainly on differentiation and connectivity as trends of a changing media environment. The investigation of imagined communities as communicative figurations in two cities will clarify: first, the role of the changing media environment in relation to urban media ensembles; second, the impact of political and societal forces, and third, the importance of space-related constructions (imaginings) of collectivity in Germany. To pursue these overall goals in the long historical perspective of the 20<sup>th</sup> century we necessarily have to be selective. We will research the imagined communities of two important German ‘media cities’: Hamburg and Leipzig. They are examples of locations of particularly dense mediated communication. As such they are exceptional cases: in cities like these, print as well as audio-visual media played an important role in the processes of constructing imagined communities



early on. Investigating their construction by means of discourse analysis, we determined four time slots, in each case referring to changes in the media environment as well as to political, societal, and cultural changes. Our slots of in-depth analyses are: 1919-1924, 1937-1946, 1952-1961, and 1967-1975. The selection of these time slots enables us to focus on decisive changes in the media environment and to contextualize these with the transformations in different political systems as well with categories of intersectionality.

#### B05: Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz

#### Collectivities of Debate: The Communicative Construction of Morality and Ethics in European Crises

Collectivities of debate share certain frames of relevance. In our study, such frames relate to different European crises (like the financial crisis or the so called refugee crisis) as multi-layered topics to moralise and to deliberate on. We understand collectivities of debate as communicatively interacting cross-media crowds that involve professional journalists, bloggers, and lay-persons. Our main research questions are: How do such collectivities construct, reconstruct and institutionalise norms and values with regard to European crises? What are their related sets of communicative practices in terms of moralising and deliberating? A follow-up question is whether such collectivities of debate morally clash, exclude and divide, and with which consequences for the public debate, not least the development of a European identity and belonging. To know more about the construction of public debates and the involved actor constellations, we inductively analyse the practices of communication of such collectivities in different national and transnational media ensembles. With deep mediatization and the emerging trends of a changing media environment like media's differentiation, connectivity and omnipresence, collectivities of debate rely to a digitalised and personalised media ensemble in which media content is produced to an increasing amount in a *non-professional* manner and complementary or even contrary to classical journalism. Bloggers' communicative practices might be characterised by advocacy. Lay-persons using social media platforms and web forums of mainstream media are easily and anonymously able to cross borders between moralisation and hate speech. Notwithstanding, collectivities of debate are potentially able to reflect (self-critically) about their own communicative practices on an ethical level. How do they do this under crisis scenarios and enduring media change? Are debates surrounding European issues - such as financial disruptions or escape from war - eroding when they are increasingly marked by moralisation and indignation? What does this mean for the future of public debates in respect of their potential for *deliberating moral problems* and related norms and values (in the sense of Habermas' 'practical discourse')? Empirically, we investigate three European crises on the basis of three case studies: 1. the financial crisis, 2. the refugee crisis and 3. one further crisis we will sample on the basis of the political situation and debates during our first research period. Methodologically, we rely on a) longitudinal qualitative and quantitative content analysis (to investigate communicative practices of deliberation and moralisation), b) interaction and conversational analysis in the tradition of social constructivism (to analyse the actors constellation and dynamics of the debates), c) qualitative interviews with involved actors (to gain insight into their ethical reflections on their own communicative practices) and d) an issue crawler

analysis (to observe the connectivity and continuity of certain collectivities of debates).

### *8.3 Research Group C: Organisations*

#### C01: Wiebke Loosen

#### Journalism: New Organisational Models, Changing Audience Relationships, and their Effect on Journalistic Output

Journalistic organisations as well as individual journalists are profoundly affected by the changing media environment of deep mediatization that has contributed to an ever-increasing pace of innovation and a differentiation of media channels and platforms that simultaneously follows and fosters individualised media use. Today, journalistic content is produced, used, and distributed via multiple platforms, and social media increasingly complement traditional mass media while expanding the communicative options between journalists and their audiences. These developments stimulate increased connectivity between journalists and their audiences as well as an omnipresence of recipients’ feedback and other audience contributions. At the same time, the changing media environment motivates the formation of new media organisations with newsroom(-like) structures as well as novel organisational models for the journalistic production process in the shape of networks, collaboratives etc. - often with a new understanding of the journalism-audience relationship at the very heart of the idea of thinking about and organising journalism. These developments are, in our view, interrelated: changes in the organisation of journalism usually allow for, or even require, different ways of engaging, relating to, and communicating with the audience. At the same time, new understandings of the journalism-audience relationship often call for innovative organisational structures and processes. However, these developments neither follow a linear process nor do they take place simultaneously within all journalistic organisations or for all individual journalists: rather, they are more likely to differ across the field. How and to what extent they do so is the object of this project in which we reconstruct the communicative figurations of journalists’ relationships to the audience within different organisational models and investigate how the interplay of both affects journalistic output. To these ends, our methodology is split across three different processes. First, we will carry out an on-going ‘monitoring of innovations’ to map the emergence of new organisational models in the field of journalism. Second, we will investigate how journalists embedded in different organisational models construct relationships to their audience(s). Third, we will analyse how the interplay of different organisational models and audience-relationships affects journalists’ work and their resulting output. We will do so by combining reconstruction-interviews with journalists, a diary app in which they log their contacts with audience members, and content analyses of examples of the journalists’ work as well as the corresponding audience feedback.

C02: Wolfgang SchulzInternet Governance: Constructing Normative Structures Inside and Outside Intermediary Organisations

Research on regulation broadened its perspective from central governmental regulation to governance as a complex network of normative structures formed by different normative factors like law, contracts, technological code or the social norms set by multiple corporate and individual actors performing coordinated coordination. Driven by such a re-orientation, fundamental new research questions arose: How are normative structures of internet governance constructed in times of deep mediatization? How do they interplay with the changing media environment? The importance of these questions is underlined particularly by new phenomena of ‘private ordering’ on the part of business organisations that provide intermediary services in the highly complex institutional field of internet governance. These corporate actors seem to gain more importance in the figuration of internet governance as the production of norms with relevance for public communication shifts at least partially from the outside to the inside of these organisations. By analysing two recent cases of fundamental structural changes in internet governance - first, search engine entries with reference to natural persons and second, the automated valuation of entries on rating platforms - we will answer the question as to how the construction of norms as the basis of internet governance is performed under the conditions of a changing media environment and, vice versa, how such normative structures influence the media environment. These cases will shed light on the actor constellation and communicative practices not just of the figuration of internet governance as such but also of the intraorganisational communicative figurations as we observe the processes of norm construction inside as well as outside the intermediary organisations.

C03: Kerstin Radde-AntweilerReligious Authority: Media and the Construction of Authority in Religious Organisations

Critical voices in the press argue that in times of deep mediatization religious authority is weakened or endangered. The way the construction of religious authority is changing is crucial because the structures and the function of religious organisations are based on this. We assume that traditional religious authority does not disappear because of deep mediatization, but that there are different changes taking place inside the religious organisations. The project’s aim is to investigate the religious organisations’ communicative figurations as far as they relate to authority construction. With regard to different areas in which authority is applied, namely ‘transcendence’ (e.g. postmortality), ‘conduct of life’ (e.g. abortion, contraception, remarriage), and ‘self-authorisation’ (e.g. women’s ordination), we ask how religious authority is constructed towards a greater plurality. In a changing media environment, different actors are more and more involved in the structural negotiation in the respective organisations. Further consequences may be possibilities of extended participation and, related to that, changing roles within religious organisations. To show how these constructions take place in different contexts and how they are related to the trends of media change, we will research three different religious organisations, namely the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, and the Charismatic Movement. Because religious organisations are con-

servative and more resistant to technological change, we also expect to find tendencies of inertia and stagnancy vis-à-vis changes in the media environment. Methodologically, our analysis is based on a triangulation of qualitative, ethnographic methods and media discourse analysis.

C04: Andreas Breiter, Juliane Jarke

Organising Education: How Data Practices Are Constructing Schools

Decision-making processes in organisations are increasingly linked to the collection, processing, and visualisation of data. Datafication as a major trend of the changing media environment reaches educational organisations as well. The ways in which schools are organised, how ‘good schooling’ is understood, constructed, and subsequently enacted is changing profoundly with deep mediatization. Data-related communicative practices shape a school’s performance and students’ achievements, which are compared on a national and international scale. They can affect the salaries of teachers and school managers, which are adjusted according to test scores as well as parents’ decision making regarding school choice, and communication and control of teachers. In relation to other trends of a changing media environment, this raises expectations concerning transparency, engagement, and accountability, but also associated fears with respect to surveillance, privacy issues, data literacy, divide and control. The direction and extent of these processes vary between and within countries, as well as between stakeholders. Datafication is strongly connected to a changing media environment that features computer-based information systems, data structures, and algorithms. Based on ‘good schooling’ as an important component of school’s frames of relevance, we will research how data-related communicative practices contribute to the construction of schools as organisations. The main actors within this communicative figuration are teachers, pupils, parents, administrators, policy makers, and more recently software providers, each with differing media repertoires and data-related communicative practices. The research will be conducted in Germany and England to account for variances in the communicative construction of ‘good schooling’ in ‘data-poor’ (Germany) and ‘data-rich’ (England) environments. We will focus on the pupil lifecycle (from school choice, teaching and learning, to certification and transition) to identify different data practices for the construction of ‘good schooling’ involving different actors and their respective media repertoires. In so doing, we will contribute to theory development, in particular with respect to how organisations are constructed in times of deep mediatization. We will use a mixed-method approach with qualitative interviews, focus groups, ‘data diaries’, and software studies for analysing educational data structures and algorithms. In so doing, we will contribute to methodological innovations, in particular innovation on digital traces.

C05: Michael Brüggemann

Science Communication: Re-defining the Boundaries of Science and Journalism in the Debate on Climate Change

The debate on climate change is challenged by two contexts: first, a post-normal situation of science coping with uncertainties, value questions, urgency to take action, and second, a changing media environment. We argue that this leads to an

emerging *post-normal figuration of science communication*, characterised by a blurring and renegotiation of the boundaries of organised science and journalism. Digital communication networks enable scientists and journalists to bypass their respective organisational gatekeepers and reinterpret the communicative norms enshrined in their organisations such as objectivity and professional autonomy. The project will explore whether discourse coalitions across organisational boundaries have evolved, and whether this is accompanied by a redefinition of communicative practices. We will explain differences in communicative figurations through systematic comparison of: (1) the impact of different organisational contexts of journalists and scientists, (2) the impact of traditional and new digital media environments, (3) the impact of different national contexts in Germany, India, South Africa, the UK and the US. We combine an analysis of social media networks and the online content they link to with a content analysis of traditional print media and interviews with key actors. After the recent summit in Paris, researching the climate debate has become even more relevant as global climate policies will now depend on whether national publics hold their governments accountable to act on their pledges. The project will thus enhance our understanding of science communication and of one of the most important debates of our time.

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