The communicative construction of collectivities: an interdisciplinary approach to media history

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The Communicative Construction of Collectivities: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Media History

Inge Marszolek & Yvonne Robel [*]

Abstract: *»Die kommunikative Konstruktion von Kollektivitäten. Ein interdisziplinärer Zugang zur Mediengeschichte«.* The paper discusses some concepts, trends, and deficits in recent media history, and it makes a plea for a history of communication to implement media into a broader conception of social history. Therefore, we employ a wider notion of mediatization which is used in media and communication studies, and re-formulate it for historical research. On the basis of that notion, we introduce the theoretical concept of 'communicative figurations' which an interdisciplinary research group in Bremen and Hamburg developed to ask how changing media environments and ensembles interrelate with societal and political transformations. In transferring it in research on imagined communities in times of analogue media, the paper presents some early insights into an on-going project and pursues questions about the communicative construction of collectivities.

Keywords: Media history, mediatization, communication studies, imagined communities, space.

1. Preliminary Remarks

In recent years, historians have increasingly focused on the impact of media on the constitution of societies and the processes through which social order is negotiated. Our observation is that the research of scholars of communication and media, and especially the more theoretical approaches, are widely ignored in historical research. For example, though historians use the concept of mediatization, they have not sufficiently considered the long history of mediatization processes, and did not include media ensembles in their research. Likewise, communication studies of, for example, mediatization, are mostly restricted to the period of digital media (Krotz et al. 2012) and rarely consider the history of their subject. In our paper, we argue that an interdisciplinary perspective can be fruitful for researchers in both disciplines.

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After a short survey of the state of research in Germany, we will consider historical research into mediatization. This will lead us to discuss some concepts in more recent historical research on communication. We will propose employing communication studies' wide notion of mediatization in media history and introduce the concept of 'communicative figurations,' which the interdisciplinary research group *Transforming Communications: the Construction of Social Domains in a Changing Media Environment* in Bremen and Hamburg has developed. We will argue that this concept is useful in research on transformation processes in the past and on the mutual effects that society and media have on one another. Next, we will give some examples of our empirical research on imagined communities in Hamburg and Leipzig between 1919 and 1975[1] in order to show the fruitfulness of our interdisciplinary approach. Finally, we will reflect on the potential of a comparative and entangled perspective for historical media research.

2.   Media and History

Until quite recently, historians have largely ignored the important role of mass media in the societies of the 19th and 20th centuries.[2] The few exceptions were either marginalized by the mainstream in historiography or were not historians (Schildt 1996). This began to change in the last years of the 20th century. In 2001, the historians Führer and Schildt, and Hickethier, a scholar of media, published the programmatic article *Public Sphere – Media – and History* in which they characterized media history as an "especially flourishing field of research" (Führer et al. 2001, 1).[3] The field continues to flourish as is evidenced by the fact that the renowned Institute for Contemporary Historical Studies (ZZF) in Potsdam has a strong focus on media history. Furthermore, the German Research Foundation (DFG) had funded (until 2013) the graduate

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[1]   The project entitled *Imagined Communities: Space-related Constructions of Cities' Collectivity in Times of Analogue Media* (Inge Marszolek and Hans-Ulrich Wagner) is part of the work of the Bremen/Hamburg research group mentioned above. We thank Hans-Ulrich Wagner for inspiring discussions. The authors have begun preliminary work on the 1950s at the Creative Unit, *Communicative Figurations*, of the Center for Media, Communication and Information Research at the University of Bremen (Inge Marszolek, Yvonne Robel, 2013-2015).

[2]   Bösch (2015b) reminds that mass-media sources were classified by historians as "non-serious" and non-objective.

[3]   The article is the introduction to a special issue, *History of Mass Media and Mass Communication in Germany*, of the well-known journal *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte (Archive of Social History)*, which is itself evidence of the change in German history. For newer surveys, see Bösch (2015b); Daniel and Schildt (2010).

program *Transnational Media Events from the Early Modern Period to Today* at the University of Giessen.[4]

The New Cultural History inspired some German media historians to recognize the significance of mass media for the history of the 19th and 20th centuries.[5] The ideas of Stuart Hall (e.g. 1996, 1997), John Fiske (1989, 1994), and other scholars of the so-called 'Birmingham School' of cultural studies were particularly influential, as was Roger Chartier's (1994) concept of representation. These developments led to a change of paradigm, and with it a differentiation, in media history. As Bösch noticed (Bösch 2015b, 7 et seq.; see also Bobrowsky et al. 1987), the main interests that historians and scholars of communication shared turned from media organization, the history of journalism, and the organization of propaganda, especially in the Nazi-period, to the manifold role of media in society.[6] In recent years, scholars in both disciplines have focused on how media generate and negotiate meaning and how they impact on the construction of the social order. Both perspectives on media – as an important part of everyday life and as important in economics, politics, and society – are now established disciplines, or sub-disciplines, of historiography. The digitalization underlying enormous transformations stimulated research in communication and media studies and also influenced media historians. But, up to the present, the fragmentation of media and historians' concentration on single media, as well as their methodological approaches, have prevented them from examining some of the ideas of communication studies from a longer historical perspective.

Furthermore, the more sociologically orientated communication studies and media studies, which are based on cultural studies, – both dealing with media history – have staked their claims (Bösch 2015b, 3 et seq.). Whereas communication studies focus on societal aspects of media, media studies often deal with aesthetical and philosophical issues in media history. Media-studies scholars restricted their research mostly to visual media, like photography, film, and television (Schildt 1996, 2000), whereas scholars of communication focus on print media. This division was a consequence (especially in Germany) of the history of the two disciplines. The appearance of digital media has transformed

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[4] The graduate program *Media Changes* (*Medienumbrüche*) at the University of Siegen (finished in 2010) included cultural-historical research questions, but it was mostly concerned with media studies.

[5] In the following, we focus on the technology-based mass media, which are typical for modernity. Though scholars of the medieval and early-modern periods have produced numerous methodologically advanced studies, they necessarily have a very broad understanding of media, which makes it difficult to transfer these results on research phenomena such as transformation, continuity, and persistence, which are characteristic for the time of mass media.

[6] The media archives in Germany, such as the German Archive of Broadcasting (*Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv*), the German Press Archive (*Zeitungsarchiv Deutschland*), and the Institute for German Press Research (*Institut Deutsche Presseforschung*) at the University of Bremen, did some important early research on communication history.

both media and communication studies and enlarged their fields of research, but historians have not yet really started to investigate them. The Center for Contemporary History (ZZF) in Potsdam has taken some first steps in this direction in its investigation of the mediatized construction of visions of the future of computerized labor in East and West Germany. Also the interdisciplinary, collaborative research group *Appropriation of History in the Media Society*, which includes historians, has been established at Jena, Magdeburg, and other universities. Only recently has the border between the disciplines become more permeable. Both historians and scholars of communication benefit from media studies' concepts of the materiality of images (Lethen 2015; Mitchell 2003; Müller 2003). The same is true for the new field of sound studies (Morat 2011). It has helped that some early theories, e.g., theories of media that focus exclusively on media and rarely considered political or societal influences on them (McLuhan, Innis, and Meyrowitz to name only a few), have updated and developed further. Communication studies have become more open to qualitative methods, especially the *grounded theory* (Glaser et al. 1967), and have focused on the *dispositive* in analyzing media settings (Hickethier 1998). Furthermore, the idea that mediatization is a meta-process (Krotz 2007) takes the processes of media transformation to be non-linear, and it underlines the interrelations between media and societal change in general. Thus, connections to the historical perspective become clear. In addition, historical approaches within communication studies, e.g., the Leipziger Schule around Arnulf Kutsch (Averbeck-Lietz et al. 2009), Jürgen Wilke in Mainz (2011), and Rudolf Stöber in Bamberg (2013), offer a wide range of research subjects in the history of journalism, the press and the history of knowledge (Averbeck-Lietz 2014), all of which are fundamental for a social-historically orientated history of media. More recently, reflections on *communicative constructivism* (Keller et al. 2013), referring to Berger and Luckmann (Berger et al. 1977), have led to a more cultural-historical media history. The conference *From the Politicization of the Media to the Medialization of Politics: The Relations among Media, Public Spheres, and Politics in the 20th Century*, organized by the Communication History section of the German Society for Journalism and Communication Science (DGPuK), the Center for Contemporary History (ZZF) in Potsdam, and the Broadcasting and History Study Group, and its associated publication (Arnold et al. 2010) were milestones in interdisciplinary collaboration. One indication of this slowly improving cooperation was the German Society of Journalism and Communication Science's (DGPuK) invitation to Adelheid von Saldern to give the keynote address, *Urban Communication in Historical Change*, at their annual meeting in 2012 (Saldern 2013).

Historians who work across disciplinary borders agree that a technology-based mass-media environment was established in most Western and Central European countries around 1900. This environment underwent constant change in the last third of the 20th century due to processes of digitalization. The dif-

ferentiation of audio-visual media, like broadcasting and television, triggered the transformation, but only with the merging of the old and new communication media can we observe both a quantitative and a qualitative change (see Daniel et al. 2010, 9). Media address a fragmented and dispersed audience, and, thereby, they affect the everyday routines and perceptions of people of all social classes and milieus (see Lindenberger 2004) though their possibilities of access differ. Media construct ever changing public spheres and concepts of privacy. They are central places for negotiations about social norms, social order, and the construction of identities. Historians call this quantitative and qualitative process 'medialization' whereas various scholars of communication speak of 'mediatization.'

Nevertheless, both disciplines overlap. They share a common understanding of the transformation processes brought about by digital media. They investigate a wide range of issues in common, like institutions and organizations, reception and appropriation, possibilities of access, the transfer and popularization of knowledge, and the negotiation of norms. They also share interests in media technology, the design of media devices (Fickers 1998; Lenk 1997), and media economics and law, and both pursue themes like media and war and media in dictatorial regimes. And new research areas of shared interest continue to emerge, like the media's construction of space and time, their materiality, and their production of meaning. Thus, a special methodological challenge for both is to conduct the sort of intertwined research on text, image, and sound that leads to an understanding of the economy of the senses and its gradual changes.

3.   Deficits in Media History

Though both the media and their audience emphasized the (new) media's potential to reach across national borders, scholars have researched media as more or less embedded in national histories. Comparative or transnational media history is still the exception. One of the exceptions is Frank Bösch, who, although he focuses mainly on Germany, includes transnational references in his *Introduction to Media History* (2015b). Already in his doctoral dissertation (Bösch 2009), he compared scandals in the German Kaiserreich to those in England. Another is Andreas Fickers, who published a compelling book on the transnational history of European television. He analyzed "television cultures" that crossed national borders and described the interrelations between television and the building of the European Community (Bignell et al. 2008; Fickers 2009).

The work of Katz and Dayan (1992) on media events has inspired transnational historical research. Empirical investigations of transnational media events, like the visit of Pope Benedict to World Youth Day in Cologne (Hepp et al. 2009), have also stimulated historical research. The graduate program in Giessen mentioned above was dedicated to research of those transnational

media events that are considered to be "nodal points of communicative condensations."[7] A recent publication in that area (Nanz et al. 2015) asks how the media strategies that create a transnational media event can be considered as political strategies which incorporate a dimension of 'doing future.' The anthology *Atlantic Communications* (Finzsch et al. 2004) contains articles about the history of the media in the US and Germany from the 17th to the 20th century. Its editors intend to portray the increasing differentiation of media ensembles from the printing press to telegraph, radio, and television. They understand media history as a history of continued transatlantic transfer or, in other words, an entangled history. At the same time, most of its contributors are experts about some single medium at a specific time, and they neglect the cross-media relations in those ensembles. Though scholars agree that media refer both to themselves and to other contemporary media and that new media in many ways copy older media that still exist, most research up to now has been limited to single media, even when the main task is to analyze transformation processes in the public spheres.

But just identifying the media ensembles in a media city takes time and effort. In Germany, the historian Christian Führer (2008) has undertaken this effort for Hamburg from 1930 to 1960. The result is a profound social-historical study, but he does not investigate the interactions within Hamburg's media ensemble, e.g., the connectivity of different media. An anthology on mass media in Germany, edited by Führer and Ross (2006), includes contributions on film, television, sound, and print media, but, again, the authors do not examine the interrelations.

A problem inherent to the history of media in Germany is that some scholars still cling to an understanding of propaganda according to which the media are tools for manipulating the masses. This concept of propaganda is especially inapt for making sense of the research on both German dictatorships in the 20th century. It goes back to the 19th century but was revitalized in Germany by the Frankfurt School and has remained influential until today (e.g. Sösemann 2011a, 2011b). Recently, some historians have enhanced their understanding of continuities and entanglements underlying the change from dictatorial to democratic systems (Betscher 2013), and they advocate a wider understanding of propaganda. They argue that the appropriation of media production is much more complex than the restricted view of propaganda suggests. Even in dictatorial regimes, audiences read propaganda subversively (Diesener et al. 1996; Gries et al. 2005; Bussemer 2005; for the radio: Marszolek et al. 1998). Clemens Zimmermann shows how fruitful such an approach can be. In his inspiring comparative study of the media in Germany, Spain, and Italy from 1933 to

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[7] See the research objectives of the graduate program at <https://www.uni–giessen.de/cms/ fbz/dfgk/tme/bilder-gkm/Ziele_und_Programm_GKM.pdf> (Accessed August 27, 2015).

1945 (Zimmermann 2007), he emphasizes the dynamic interactions between propaganda and communicative practices.

At the core of many studies of mass media is the notion of a public sphere. We cannot summarize the enormous number of studies dealing with the public sphere and its differentiations, but we do claim, with Führer, Hickethier, and Schildt (2001), that as yet no investigation provides an empirical historical basis for Habermas' conclusions in his renowned book *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit.* Instead, studies have discussed differentiations of the public sphere: its asymmetry (Hall 1982), its informal (Saldern et al. 2003, 21 et seq.) or internal character (Meyen 2011), and the counter-public spheres (Wimmer 2007), to name only a few. But all of these differentiations have been influential in studies of dictatorships in Germany and Eastern Europe (Behrends 2006). The Swiss communications scholar Kurt Imhof insists that there is a normative dimension, in Habermas' sense of an added value, to the public sphere (Imhof 2014). Adelheid von Saldern advocates an integration of research into interpersonal communication with investigations of the public space and defends the relevance of such integration for a comparison of different regimes (Saldern et al. 2003; Föllmer 2004). Führer, Hickethier, and Schildt propose employing the notion of the public sphere as a "central point of reference for media and communication history to register the complexity of the development of the mass media and to make their contribution to the constitution and change of modern societies visible" (Führer et al. 2001, 1). Though we agree with them that a focus on cities as media places and as public spaces is fruitful, we challenge their claim that research should emphasize the public sphere. The notion of a public sphere is still closely linked to normative and universal claims, it implies that social domains are clearly separated, and it has specific implications for the theory of democracy which are contested by, e.g., feminist theory (see Benhabib 1999; Fraser 1996). Instead, we employ the more neutral notion of communication.

Recent communication studies (Arnold et al. 2008; Stöber 2013; Wilke 2009) and historiography (Sösemann 2011a) have followed up on this change of paradigm to communication (Bobrowsky et al. 1987). Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz argues that communication should be the starting point for a new theory-guided history of communication (Averbeck-Lietz 2015). Rudolf Stöber claims: "The supremacy of communication lies in the understanding of it as a social practice. Both media history and the history of public communication would then be subcases of a general history of communication" (Stöber 2013, 25). In his programmatic article, the historian Volker Depkat argues that "communication history should be understood as the history of social communication, including communicative practices, through which societies have constituted, stabilized and reproduced their order over centuries" (Depkat 2003, 10). An interdisciplinary history of communication (see also Simonson et al. 2012) would be a first step toward phenomena to be targeted by a new social and cultural

history, which is more than mere media history. Nevertheless, a history of communication has to include phenomena like mediatization/medialisation. The special contributions of historians to the understanding of such phenomena are showing that social theories are always self-descriptions of modernity that have to be historicized. The advantages of theoretically orientated historical studies are always the result of the critical examination of their sources. Empirical historical research is both continual process of rethinking theory and empirical findings. We historians can contribute to analyze the complex dynamics of communicative processes and of the transformation of media environments. To give an example, Olaf Stieglitz (2013) shows in his compelling study of informers and denunciation in the US in the 20th century that there was a dynamic interplay among regulatory institutions (police, law), the press and movies, informers, and the targets of denunciation. Through this dynamic process, these agents negotiate some normative outcome within the wide range from whistleblowing to informing to denunciation. Of course, the major force driving the process is power. The range of outcomes, as Stieglitz has shown, change in different spaces of communication and different periods of American history. One can understand denunciation as a communicative figuration that includes mediatized and interpersonal communication (Marszolek 2013). With this understanding, we are able to offer a better explanation of these complex processes of communication. (See below for details.)

In historical research, the notion of communication (and the genesis of the notion of the public sphere) is, and always was, closely linked to the concept of urban space. The differentiation of communication was part of the urbanization, which has shaped European societies since the middle of the 19th century. Electrification, especially, made possible the development of the infrastructure of cities, e.g., the traffic system, the illumination of streets, and the technological improvements in printing that made the press a mass media, and densified communication. In light of this, it is astonishing that the complex relationship between cities and media has not been investigated in depth until now. In his profound study of the metropolises of modernity, Friedrich Lenger (2013) described their social and cultural history in Europe since 1850, but he largely neglected the role of the media. One reason for this is that Lenger focused on high culture and neglected mass media. Urban historians like Clemens Zimmermann contest this sort of scope in communication and media studies. In contrast to the thesis of increasing blurring of borders and trans-locality, he argues that people and media have historically insisted on belonging to their local community, even as the spheres of communication expanded. Already in the past, citizens invented the traditions of their *Heimat* by using images and symbols that the media provided, and they mixed local and trans-local meaning. Even before the advent of digital media, cities were not separated from the world beyond the city limits. Zimmermann concludes that medialization has to be both historicized and localized (Zimmermann 2012). Meanwhile, communication

studies of, e.g. migrants' use of digital media, highlight, as did Zimmerman, the blurring of spatial borders and the parallel blurring of forms of locality (Hepp et al. 2011; Morley et al. 1995; Robins 2003).

In our project, we will take up these discussions and rethink the present understanding of communication and space. Space serves as a discursive nodal point (Glasze 2013, 84) for the communicative construction of identities and imagined communities. Though the important role of the concept of space has been widely recognized (e.g. Glasze et al. 2009; Drost et al. 2013; Löw et al. 2008; Schroer 2006; Warf et al. 2009), scholars have failed to investigate from a longitudinal perspective, how the profound changes in the media environment of the 20th century shaped negotiations over and differentiation in space-related constructions of identities.

Systematic research on the so-called 'media cities' is still missing from social history (Schildt 2012, 249 et seq.). The sole exception is the study of Hamburg mentioned above. Adelheid von Saldern and her research team have investigated urban communication and the cross-media construction of images of cities in the 20th century (Saldern et al. 2005, 2006). Their comparison of such images taken from three political systems in Germany is innovative. At the same time, Saldern considers space to be relational and, thus, her work has strengthened the link between historical research and recent sociology of urban spaces (Christmann et al. 2013; Löw et al. 2008; Löw 2008).

Allow us to summarize this rough and eclectic *tour d'horizon* of the present state of historical research into mass media.

1) Media historiography is challenged in many ways to re-enforce comparative views. Meeting these challenges means avoiding the over-emphasis on the dichotomy between dictatorial and democratic political systems. This was based on normative assumptions and can be seen in continuity to the former understandings of propaganda and the solely propagandistic role of media in dictatorial systems.

2) Historians should keep in mind how changing media environments and ensembles interrelate with societal and political forces. By doing so, they can overcome their notion and focus on a 'leading medium.' Furthermore, the implicit assumption of linearity becomes evident. Consequently, the close connection drawn between progressive modernization and technological media development as articulated in discourses from the time of radio to television will become obsolete.

3) Shifting from media history to the history of communication means situating the media within social history conceived more widely. This will help to make the complex dynamics among medial, social, political, and cultural changes clear.

4) Research on media cities offers an important approach both to historicizing and localizing these processes of change. But a detailed integration of this

research into new approaches to a more comprehensive history of communication is still missing.

Our overview of current research also shows the necessity of analyzing those transformation processes characterized by increasing differentiation of the media, their increasing depth of penetration into social domains (*Lebenswelten*), and changes in communicative practices from a historical perspective. We argue, with Führer, that only if the development of the media is studied as a decisive factor in social history in general (Führer et al. 2001, 1) will we be able to describe these dynamics in depth and detail. To do so, historians need theory to guide their use of their analytical tools (Daniel et al. 2010). Only then will they overcome the limitations that have existed until now.

In the following, we will argue that both the understanding of mediatization as a meta-process and the concept of 'communicative figurations' will help to overcome some up to now existing problems in media research.

4.   From Mediatization to Communicative Figurations

The sociologist Ernst Manheim developed the notion of mediatization in the 1920s. He spoke of the "mediatization of human relations of immediacy" (see Averbeck-Lietz 2015). After him, researchers like Jean Baudrillard, Jürgen Habermas, and John B. Thompson put the notion to different uses. Thompson (1995) speaks of a "mediatization of culture" by which he means the role of mass media in culture. According to Hepp and Hasebrink (2013), these early uses already show that research on mediatization should focus not on the effects of a single medium but on the interplay between technologically based mass media, on the one hand, and culture and society, on the other. Hepp and Hasebrink differentiate between a narrow and a broad concept of mediatization. Proponents of the first assume a media logic, as media affect societal fields like politics, religion, and sports (see Hjarvard 2013). Michael Meyen, who takes up this perspective, claims to investigate "reactions" to and "effects" of a media system's historical "change of structures" (Meyen 2009, 31). The historians Bösch and Frei reflect the interactions between politics and medialisation emphasizing that "societal subsystems adapt to medial logics" (Bösch et al. 2006, 9). However, proponents of the broad concept see mediatization as a number of long, interacting processes. According to Berger and Luckmann (1977), the development of technology-based media does affect the "communicative constructions of reality." These mutually interacting processes are constitutive of social transformation processes in general. Accordingly, studies which employ the broad understanding of mediatization assume that different media, not different "media logics," are molding forces in complex and increasingly differentiated social constellations (Couldry et al. 2013). As Krotz summarizes,

mediatization indicates a comprehensive change "which is not limited in space, time and in its social and cultural consequences" (Krotz 2007, 12, see also 37 et seq.). "[It] consists of a changing everyday life, of changing identity constructions and social relations, of a changing economy, democracy and leisure, of a changing culture and society as a whole" (Krotz et al. 2011, 139). It is important to observe in these processes not only adaptations to radical change but also persistence and even resistance to change.

Historians reject the term 'mediatization' because a homonymous term refers to the suspension of the imperial immediacy under Napoleon at the beginning of the 19th century. Therefore, historians prefer 'medialization.' Nevertheless, we will use 'mediatization' for two reasons. First, the two terms overlap; they refer to the same phenomena.[8] Second, unlike the historical term, 'mediatization' is used in media theory and in its broader sense is relevant to historical media research.

We want to stress three aspects of mediatization.

1) As a meta-process, mediatization requires describes analyses of long-term transformation processes. Only then can historians employ the concept to analyze radical changes, continuities, simultaneities, and non-simultaneities.

2) We do not assume that mediatization involves any particular media logic or a linear development of media. Still understanding it sheds light on the complexity of change. The challenge for media historians consists, on the one hand, in identifying its long-term dynamics and, on the other, in describing them in precise detail, even when the sources are asymmetric and diverse.

3) A focus on mediatization can be fruitful when historians question certain implicit or explicit narratives which are hegemonic in a certain period. Examples are narratives of modernization and modernity, the relevance of changes of political regimes and systems, the shaping of the public sphere, and specific to media, discourses on the flood of images, the digital revolution, the blurring of borders, and the permanent acceleration triggered by digital media.

Though we understand mediatization as a complex process that is manifested in increasingly cross-media-negotiated constructions of reality, we still need an analytical approach. To this end, the Bremen/Hamburg collaborative research group has developed the concept of *communicative figurations* (Hepp et al. 2014). It goes back to Norbert Elias, who conceived the notion of a figuration in order to describe social phenomena as entangled, interrelated practices. He understood figurations as social entities shaped by fluid collectives and their changing power relations (Elias 1970, 141 et seq.). Elias was skeptical about teleological progress. Instead, he looked for the potential for change, which is embedded in figurations themselves (Elias 1970, 159 et seq.). Although he did

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8 For the parallel and sometimes different understandings of both terms, see Meyen (2009, 26-8), Lundby (2009, 1-18).

not focus on the constructivity of social domains, his terms 'figuration' and 'power' are easily applied to poststructuralist (media) history.

Making use of Elias' concept, the Bremen/Hamburg group sees communicative figurations as entangled interdependencies of communication. As figurations are fluid, in flux, and connected to different social domains and collectives, they are basic to a dense description of these interdependencies. The research group has identified three characteristics, which have proved to be helpful in the analysis of communicative figurations. They are distinguished by different constellations of actors (or speaker positions). They are characterized by changing communicative practices. And they are orientated towards specific common thematic framings. We argue that by adapting this approach to a historical perspective one can overcome some of the problems, described above, inherent of making sense of the public sphere.[9] Because we have for our project supplemented Elias' approach with communicative figurations, we see the added value of the enhanced approach to be its strong connection with the analysis of the role of communication in negotiations over meanings and community building.

In order to realize this approach, we need one more distinction: The research group uses the term 'media environment' in a sense that it includes all of the media existing at a time. The term 'media ensemble' describes a subset of the media environment, which characterizes media use in a social domain (Hasebrink et al. 2015). These terms enable us to focus on the on-going processes of mediatization rather than on the disappearances of the so-called 'old media' or their replacement by new media. As Führer (2008) has already shown in his empirical study of Hamburg from 1930 to 1960, neither the assumption that the importance of printed media decreased with the appearance of the radio nor assumptions about radical media change as the result of changing political systems in 1933 and 1945 can be verified. One result of Führer's research is that Hamburg's media ensemble in the Nazi period was affected by the disappearance of a great number of newspapers and journals. Not only had the journals that associations put out for their members but also daily newspapers vanished. This finding shows that the much deplored decline of print media has not been a continual development. But the empirical finding does not tell us much about the molding forces of the media in social, cultural, and political fields; the construction of meanings and identities; the imaginings of communities; or processes of normalization and homogenization. Therefore, we employ communicative figurations to uncover the dynamic interplay of media and society.

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[9] Of course, we do not deny the heuristic value of the notion of the public sphere. In the research group, some projects consider the notion of the public sphere in, for example, Habermas' sense.

5. How to Research Transformations of Communicative Figurations

As part of the Bremen/Hamburg research group in the next years, the project will explore how widely the concept 'communicative figuration' applies in historical research. As we said above, it will examine the interaction between communication and the construction of space-related imagined communities in Hamburg and Leipzig. The decision to investigate these two cities has manifold reasons.

Both cities are loci of particularly dense communication and varied media ensembles. In such cities both print and audio-visual media were important early on in the process of constructing imagined communities. The history of both cities has been thoroughly investigated and this research suggests some similarities in their social structures. For a long time, in both cities social-democratic traditions were very strong (for Hamburg: Eiber 2000; Weinhauer 1994; for Leipzig: Adam 1999; Häberlen 2013). Both urban societies imagined themselves to be cosmopolitan metropolises open to the world, though they used very different images to express this and stressed different traditions of interacting with the world (Amenda et al. 2008; Rembold 2003a, 2003b). Investigating these and similar imaginings through discourse analysis, we will focus on four time periods: 1919-1924, 1937-1946, 1952-1961, and 1967-1975. By selecting these periods, which are not characterized by the big historical ruptures still dominant in German historiography, we take into account considerations in media history and the history of everyday life. Whereas the older media history concerned itself with the so-called 'leading medium,' we focus on the specific periods of dense interplay between media and society. Finally, the selection of these cities and time periods enables us to compare transformations in the media ensembles and the societies and their effects on one another in different political systems, including the two parallel systems of postwar Germany.

By focusing on imagined communities, our project takes up Anderson's influential suggestions, especially those about the role of media and time in the imagining of communities. In brief, we are convinced that all communities larger than face-to-face village communities are imagined, continually newly formed, and inherently limited. Consequently, we argue, with Anderson, that "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson 2006, 6). Redefining the concept in the context of communicative constructivism (Keller et al. 2013), we assume that imagined communities are constructed primarily through communication. As imagined communities formulate (consistent) ideas of collectivity and offer feelings of commonality, they can, but do not necessarily, imply a "really existing" individual sense of belonging (Sarasin 2003).

Since the 1990s, discussions of collective identities, especially, have been tangential to Anderson's general argument and were reinforced by the political

transformation in 1990/91. Research in social and cultural studies has stressed that collective identities are not essential and homogenous entities and we are not born with them (Niethammer 2000), rather they are constructed and transformed continually by our socio-cultural surroundings (Hall 1992; Hall et al. 1996). Accordingly, researchers emphasize the variability, fragmentedness and plurality of identity constructions in general (see also Keupp et al. 2006). In the light of this emphasis, scholars more and more often discuss approaches to so-called doing identity (Amann et al. 2011; Kontopodis et al. 2010; Marxhausen 2010; Wille et al. 2015), according to which identities are constructed in an on-going *process*. Our project on space-related, imagined communities will focus on the dynamic dimensions in the processes of doing identities in two ways. First, we will investigate the transformations of the imagined communities of Hamburg and Leipzig from a historical perspective of more than 50 years and how those transformations were interlinked with a changing media environment and with historical changes in general. Second, we will emphasize the cities' representations of communicative practices and their ways of doing imagined communities that accorded with them. In these ways, our project connects with on-going discussions of media metropolises and media cities, which, under the label of 'doing cities,' have been quite influential in history as well as communication studies (Greyer et al. 2013; Saldern 2013; Zimmermann 2012).

Imagined communities, which are intertwined with ideas of collectivity and of collective identities, are based on discursive points of references; shared norms, values, and collective memories; and different forms of exclusion. These points of reference are mutable, as can be seen with *spatial* points of reference. The on-going discussions of both the concept of imagined communities and the spread of nationalism across the world (e.g. Balakrishnan 2012) have shown that such spatial references serve as prospective discursive nodal points (Glasze 2013, 84) within processes of imagining communities. Consequently, we must pay attention to how imagined communities are infused with and by space, an issue that Anderson raised, but did not analyze deeply, in the last revised edition of his book (Anderson 2006, 226 et seq.).

As further studies of the invention of national traditions (e.g. Hobsbawm et al. 1992) and transnational communities (Alonso et al. 2010; Hipfl et al. 2006) have shown, a nation's imagined communities have always been in flux and in dialogue with local, regional, and transnational formations. But, how are different space-related, imagined communities interlinked with each other? How do they correspond with other imagined social structures like gender, generation, and milieu? And, how does their intertwining with these other imagined structures change over time? Which aspects of imagined communities, besides their framing by different political systems, are crucial for their change or persistence? By focusing on these questions, we will highlight the facts that "many other objects [beside the nation, I. M. / Y. R.] have constituted imagined communities helping to shape contemporary societies" and that "it is in the interaction be-

tween these various social imaginaries that the specificity of our time is to be found" (Laclau 2003, 25).

At the core of these questions is the analysis of the production of meanings for the building of space-related collectives in mass-media communication. For this purpose, we will employ concepts pertaining to the tensions between relational constructed spaces and territories. The construction of spaces is not only the result of continual social negotiations (Lefebvre 2006), but they are important to us because they shape communicative practices are drawing borders and thereby defining inclusion and exclusion (Schroer 2006, 175 et seq.). In contrast to Martina Löw (2001, 2008; Berking et al. 2008), we claim, with Schroer (2006), that actors construct spaces as territorial containers, which are perceived as such. He pointed out there is an increasing "diversification of spatial references" (Schroer 2008, 131). Ulrike Jureit has shown the same and she emphasizes the tension between territory and space (Jureit 2012). These dimensions are especially relevant for urban studies. According to Susanne Rau, metropolises are characterized by inter-spatiality, i.e., as a relational collocation of social commodities, of both material elements and human beings" (Rau 2013, 155). Our analysis of space-related imagined communities aims at clarifying how exclusion and inclusion are negotiated within these spaces and how this negotiation is responsive to power structures. Though we will investigate how communities are imagined in media discourses, and not explicitly ask how they are constituted in urban societies, we will be able to draw conclusions about how these discourses, e.g., about the stability of discourses on *Heimat* become parts of social structures.

Media within this field not only mirror power structures; they are also part of the power play (Marszolek 2004). In order to investigate the constructiveness of collectivity and imagined communities, we employ discourse theory as both a research perspective and a methodology (e.g. Dreesen et al. 2012; Keller 2011; Landwehr 2008). Historical discourse analysis aims at revealing structures of knowledge, reality, and rationality in societies of the past (Bublitz et al. 1999; Landwehr 2008, 161-71; Martschukat 2002; Sarasin 2003), and in our view it is also fruitful for media analysis. Inherent to discourse analysis is the understanding of power as a decentralized, sectional, and anonymous structure which itself generates its objects (Foucault 1983, 184 et seq.). Because of the institutionalized position of their speaker, (mass) media are decisive in the construction of space-related communities and, thus, in hegemonic knowledge (Stauff 2005).

The project will combine the discourse-theoretical perspective with the heuristic of communicative figurations. Thus, we will be able to define the thematic framing of the communicative figurations. These framings contain spatial borders and define exclusion as well as inclusion. This is not identical with an intended and self-reflexive, existing social community. Furthermore, the construction of communities within their figurations depends on the fluidity of their borders. Unlike communication studies' focus on a specific concept of

dispositive, our approach acknowledges the dynamics of communication processes and of the "communicative construction of reality." It enables us to grasp the complexity of the changes triggered not only by media innovations but also by different components. Communicative figurations can be stable even as the media environment or media ensemble changes (e.g., the appearance of new media, the conversion of existing media, fragmentation, and homogenization). This stability can be the result of stable thematic framings or the set of discursive rules. Even persistent resistance to intended change may be observed.

The complex design of our study will enable us to target constructions of collectivities and identities beyond those, which are inherent of political systems, e.g., in the Cold War. The reasons why constructed communities change cannot be understood within the restrictions of the confrontation between dictatorial and democratic systems. As some scholars have emphasized, a public sphere exists even in dictatorships, like the GDR, though it is structured asymmetrically (Marszolek et al. 2010). Nevertheless, we have to make clear what the issues about censorship, control of the press, and its centralization are. We will do this with historical discourse analysis (Landwehr 2008), which includes identification of the position of the speaker in the set of communication. In this context, our central assumption is that, on the one hand, in times of political change imagined communities are negotiated in a special way, but, on the other, they often maintain their stability throughout these transformation processes.

Having turned away from the structural history of the 1980s' dominant paradigm of modernity, historians still have some difficulties in using the terminology of transformation, which often aims at linearity (Speich Chassé 2012), especially since the term 'transformation' itself connotes a fundamental change of political systems and reflections on historical turning points (Sabrow 2013).[10] We understand 'transformation' as expressing an open notion that implies patterns and components of change. Transformations can be minor variations (e.g., in the media ensemble), gradual new formations, or radical changes. Inherent to these processes is persistence, even relapse, e.g., when a technical innovation could not be implemented in everyday live (Hepp et al. 2014, 254 et seq.).

The following example of a space-related community illustrates the approach that our research takes. In 1937, the magazine of Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk (*Funk alle Tage*, No. 25, June 20-26, 1937) included an article about a broadcast of the program "*Deutschlandsender*" on new settlements in the eastern border region of the German Reich. On the one hand, we can read the article as about the building of a new *Heimat* in the east and, on the other, as propaganda for the Nazi ideology of "*Volk ohne Raum*" and mental preparation for

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[10] Recently, the term 'transformation' has been used in the humanities, e.g., in the history of knowledge, as well.

war. At the same time, the radio program enlarged the space of the nation. The article includes a series of photographs of small, nicely decorated houses with flower gardens. The accompanying description of the people living in these newly built villages aims to encourage readers and the audience of "*Deutschlandsender*" to settle in the east. It embeds the idea of *Heimat* in National-Socialist ideology.

In our next step, we will examine whether the regional radio programs in Leipzig and Hamburg included similar broadcasts and whether similar articles and photographs were printed in local newspapers. We will then identify the speaker positions in these discourses and investigate links to other constructions of *Heimat* and locality. Finally, we will examine if, and how, the blurring of the borders of the "*Volksraum*" was part of the ideological medial propagation of the war and how that blurring changed after 1939.

If we can identify the "Heimat in the east" as a thematic frame within an imagined community, we will describe how this construction changed after 1945. For example, a series of audio programs that Radio Bremen broadcast from 1953 to 1958 (some more than once) shows some continuities. The series was entitled "Unforgotten Landscapes." Its episodes dealt with the "lost landscapes" that were a result of the war, e.g., East Prussia and Silesia. The programs aimed to re-inscribing Germany's re-constitution and re-location in the cultural memory of post-war Germany and paving the way for former National-Socialist narratives. They did this through a revitalization of the "German mission" which, for example, the Teutonic Knights had pursued since medieval times. The audio series aimed at prolonging such old constructions of belonging forever. Thus, the authors of the series intended not only to blur the borders of *Heimat* and nation but also to offer identification to the expellees from the east. They appealed to a repertoire of cultural memory that was not only alive to them and to expellees and refugees but was shared by members of the German educated middle class. So, the series was a part of an attempt to revitalize the conservative idea of the Occident and to codify West Germany's special role in the Cold War. The genre itself (*Hörfolge*) suggested continuity from the emergence of the radio in the 1920s, through Nazi broadcasting, and into the Federal Republic (Marszolek 2014).

In our vocabulary for describing transformations, we classify the changes in the thematic frame "Heimat in the east" as a gradual new formation. The political transformation of 1945 does not imply a radical change in the imagined community. The transformations in actor constellations and communicative practices have to be investigated from a diachronic perspective. Do these constructions recur in different periods, spaces, or territories? When do they refer to the nation and when to regions or localities? When do they incorporate forms of belonging which are not categorizable in terms of 'urban space,' 'region,' 'nation,' or 'world' but involve hidden ideas of spatiality, like the idea of

a socialist brother nation. Most spatial constructions are connected and overlap. Thence the notion of interspatiality (Rau 2013) comes into our design.

Our starting point in investigating such multiple spatial references is the two cities and how they are embedded in spatial discourses. This includes, for example, the highlighting of explicitly local features, like *Hamburger Schnack* (the Hamburg dialect), and discourses on belonging to urban neighborhoods. Furthermore, media construct imagined regional communities, e.g., the Hanse and the Hanseatic in Hamburg (Seegers 2015). Other examples of how media construct spatialities are the inscriptions of urban societies into the *NS-Volksgemeinschaft* (the Nazis' folk community), the ethically socialist community, and the Cold War. We will also investigate the competitive self-images of cities like Hamburg's description of itself as the "gateway to the world," which refers to its harbor, and Leipzig's as the "showcase of the world" because of its annual trade fair. Additionally, we can find space-related constructions of the past and the future that are integrated into discourses on *Heimat*, tradition, modernity, and mobility.

As the example of "Heimat in the east" shows, interspatiality and competitive constructions are crucial for the project. At the same time, imagined communities have to be embedded in hegemonic interpretations. Therefore, the comparative dimension is at the core of our research.

6.   Comparison and Entanglement

As the relation between change and continuity is crucial for historical research in general, the question how to clarify its parameters has been discussed frequently. For a long time, the synchronic and diachronic comparison of different political systems, areas, or events in certain time periods seemed to be the methodological silver bullet. However, in the last years and especially with the shift to global or transnational history and its methodology of entanglement or *histoire croisée* (Middell 2000; Werner et al. 2006), historians have begun to look beyond relatively simple comparisons and aim at understanding mutual influences and entanglement. Interrelations with space are important in these studies as scholars enrich their understanding of the entanglement of nation and region and of transnational relations (ibid.). This understanding of entanglement is also useful for our investigation of imagined communities in Hamburg and Leipzig. Recently, Frank Bösch and Dorothea Wierling have controversially discussed the problems of comparison for the German case. Whereas Bösch advocates a transnational perspective on the two German states, Wierling returns to the model of the reversed Y on the grounds that the GDR and the Federal Republic share a common past (Bösch 2015a; Wierling 2015). Wierling argues that this model enhances one's perspective on the experience of everyday life

and allows for a bottom-up history of society that includes, perhaps, common visions of the future and of belonging, which may be projections of a (lost) past.

Another example from our research demonstrates the added value of such a differentiated approach of entanglement. Looking at Leipzig in the early 1950s, we can describe a cross-medial construction of an imagined community that is characterized by the local and collective uses of media and by the participation of the citizens in the media. Leipzig has celebrated the annual *Leipziger Volkszeitung* festival and, since 1949, the annual Days of the Radio festival. These celebrations staged the idea of a special form of participation and became very popular events, especially because of their carnival (*Volksfest*) atmosphere (see also: Schmidt 1998b, 288 et seq.). So-called 'listener communities' (*Abhörgemeinschaften*), often organized at places of work, were invited to secure the participation of Leipzig's citizens in the radio programs. They were asked to discuss radio programs collectively and write reports on them (Fischer 2012). The citizens of Leipzig were one of the first urban populations after 1945 that could watch television collectively, in *Fernsehstuben* (see also Hickethier 1998, 108; Meyen 1999, 120). Its traditions and its international fair made Leipzig a pioneer in the media landscape of the German Democratic Republic. The cross-medial dissemination of letters from the audience and readers intensified the perception of the comprehensive involvement of different actors in local media productions.

Events like media festivals and other opportunities for collective media use constructed permanent relations among readers, listeners, viewers, and local media producers. Ideas of collective media use and participation were positively associated with local spaces, like factories and urban neighborhoods. In the magazine of *Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk*, the radio presented itself as either a helping or an interfering medium, and it appealed to the citizens to take over responsibility for urban space. Furthermore, the blurring of borders between the local and the regional were negotiated together with the border between private and public. We have to ask how these constructions of communities corresponded to other space-relations, especially after the administrative reorganization of the German Democratic Republic into new districts in 1952, which brought with it the cancellation of regional radio programs and the enforcement of a socialist notion of *Heimat* (Kretzschmar 2003, 96 et seq.).

With this in mind, we understand the offer of local participation in Leipzig as corresponding to a specific self-image of the German Democratic Republic and its ideas about socialist democracy and the involvement of the masses. In the 1950s, the term 'democratic broadcast' was coined and propagated. This indicates how these ideas allocated meaning to the media themselves. At the same time, the voluntary *Volkskorrespondentenbewegung* was created by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), which gained increasing influence over local coverage during the 1950s (Richter 1993; for the Leipziger Stadtfunk see: Rohr 2011, 22 et seq.). The celebration and praise of this "dem-

ocratic participation" played a big role in the repulsion of criticism of the newly founded Federal Republic of Germany. An entangled history will shed light on the interrelations among such national, regional, and local constructions of identity. We have to take into account, of course, that the relevant sources represent a state-controlled communication and construction of belonging. The voices of the listeners, readers, and viewers, as well as the correspondents, do not represent "authentic tradition" (Schmidt 1998b, 303) but are, rather, an intentional selection. Only rarely can we provide verified, every-day statements or stubborn ("*eigensinnig*," as Alf Lüdke puts it), subversive appropriations of the media (see Zahlmann 2010), but we assume that socialization by media production did take place in the German Democratic Republic. With our focus on imagined communities, we insist on a difference between imagination or suggestion and a group's real sense of community. As a consequence, we also must investigate the elements involved in presenting these local communities in Leipzig in relation to state-controlled national constructions of identities.

The next step is to look, synchronically, for East German-West German entanglements. Similar elements, which are inherent to the construction of a local media-user community, can be assumed to exist for Hamburg as well. At the moment, we know about the *Fernsehstuben*, which were established by the *Hamburger Abendblatt* and the *Hamburger Freie Presse* in the 1950s; the film clubs organized by the British Military Government since 1948; and the public viewing of soccer's World Cup in local bars in 1954 (Hilgert 2008, 317).

We will contextualize these assumed analogies from a diachronic perspective. One must investigate collective media use (and, maybe, production, too) in relation to locality from a long historical perspective. Already in the Weimar Republic, the workers' radio movement stimulated the collective use of the media and the collective discussion of transmitted content, especially in the workplace (Dahl 1978; for Hamburg: Handwerk 1982). The Nazi regime followed a policy of providing a radio for every household, as well as for factories and public places (e.g.: Marszolek 2013; Schmidt 1998a, 259 et seq.). The first *Fernsehstuben* were established in a number of German cities in the 1930s, especially in Berlin during the 1936 Olympic Games. The aim of the regime was to popularize collective viewing in public and semi-public places, small salesrooms, and the private homes of party officials (Hickethier 1998, 39 et seq.). The regime intended to organize collective viewing on big screens as "steering instrument of the public participation" (Winker 1994, 134).

In the 1950s, officials in the public media returned to these schemes. At the same time, practices of collective media consumption were contested because of the shared media use during the era of National Socialism (Meyen 1999, 118). Entanglements can be observed not only in diachronic comparison but also in the overlapping of media history and politics in the past.

From this perspective, strategies of power, which are shaped not only by governments and individual actors but also by the dynamic of discourses, be-

come visible. According to the Foucaultian concept of power, a discourse continually generates its objects (Foucault 1983, 184 et seq.; Karis 2012). In addition to being constructions of space, community, and identity, these objects also define borders between genders, generations, classes, and ethnicities. Questions of inclusion and exclusion are therefore closely connected to these issues. Clarifying their *croisement* across political systems is the aim of our research.

7.   Conclusion

Research on processes of mediatization and on the concept communicative figurations requires a long-term historical investigation. In our project *Imagined Communities: Space-Related Constructions of Cities' Collectivity in Times of Analogue Media*, we take up this challenge. At the same time, we contribute to filling in some of the gaps existing in media history.

1) Our research on imagined communities aims at a twofold localization of mediatization processes. First, it focuses on two media cities. Second, it considers discursively generated space relations which are overlapping and entangled, as in, for example, the notion of *Heimat* as an "umbrella notion" (Confino 2000). This implies that discourses on belonging are multilayered, even competitive, and multi-optional.

2) The identification of relevant media ensembles related to urban space in both cities overcomes the fixation on single media, which has been typical for most media history until now. At the same time, the investigation will shed light on implicit teleological ideas of progress inherent to reflections on media. In contrast, our focus is on the constructed character of social reality that makes continuities, change, and persistence visible.

3) We investigate the transformations of media-based communicative figurations in the analogue media environment from a long perspective. We assume that one of the consequences of an already increasing differentiation of the media is a parallel differentiation of negotiations over social realities. Understanding whether these transformations in the construction of social reality are largely triggered and shaped by changes in media environments or whether these changes are molded by other forces is at the core of our research. As a result, we hope to conclude with the similarities or differences of transformations in the time of digital media.

4) With our twofold comparative approach, we want to provide a broader understanding of a history of entanglement, which enables us to avoid the overly narrow focus that one sometimes still finds on differences due to opposed political systems.

Finally, we are convinced that the concept of communicative figurations and the introduction of the term 'communication' will provide deeper insights into social history, which should include research on mediatization processes.

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