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The meta-process of 'mediatization' as a conceptual frame

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In the rapidly changing global environment, there is a need for a conceptual frame that takes account of the wide range of theories and explanations for developments in media and communication, which also encompasses drivers like globalization, individualization and the growing importance of the market economy as a reference system. Academic research here does a lot of interesting work – but we lack a conceptual frame to order all these partial results and theories. Such a frame would make it easier to find a common language between different academic cultures in the world, such that we can learn better from their results and theoretical efforts. This is necessary because academic research is important for civic society, which needs objective information about what is happening in a changing world and how to influence it. Driven by their interests, money and power, economic and political systems already employ large networks to collect, exchange and use knowledge, but the exchange of information between civil societies, including academic researchers, is much less systematic and complete. Worldwide academic communication research needs a common conceptual framework within which to integrate and disseminate this knowledge. This article briefly sketches some general concepts which perhaps may be helpful here.

Metaprocesses as a way of explaining long-term developments

Traditionally, sociological and cultural thinking starts with the assumption that we live in a given culture and society. But if we look around, we may doubt whether such assumptions of stability still make sense and are valid. Stable states exist only for 'moments' in a constant flow of history and development. We can understand our changing world and its future shape only if we understand it as a product of long-term developments. But for that we lack adequate concepts. The concept of 'process' describes developments, but is usually defined as a temporal, linear sequence of different states, which are assumed to belong together; a process thus takes place in a well-defined dimension, has a clearly defined starting point and a direction. A good example is the

process of diffusion of innovations, as described by Everett Rogers (1995) in the frame of communication research.

But such a concept is not adequate for developments like enlightenment, industrialization, globalization, or individualization. Developments like these may last for centuries and are not necessarily confined to an area or a given culture. It is also not clear at which point in time they start or end, whether they have a defined direction and what belongs to them and what not. Such developments thus are not processes as it was defined above, but they nevertheless exist in the following sense: they are constructs which describe and explain theoretically specific economic, social and cultural dimensions and levels of the actual change. Thus here we call them '*metaprocesses*'.

Today, globalization, individualization, mediatization and the growing importance of the economy, which we here call commercialization, can be seen as the relevant metaprocesses that influence democracy and society, culture, politics and other conditions of life over the longer term. Obviously, these metaprocesses are crucial for the future forms of life and life chances, as they are important for people, their actions and their sense-making processes at a micro level; for the activities of institutions and organizations on the meso level; and for the nature of culture and society at a macro level. If we can analyse these metaprocesses, we can better understand social and cultural change.

- *Globalization* is a concept which originally started as a description of the development of financial markets and of market actors (Mattelart and Mattelart, 1998; Giddens, 2001; Hepp et al., in press) but since then has developed into a theory of financial, economic, political, social and cultural developments. There are many definitions and predictions of what globalized forms of social life will be in the future, e.g. Castells' (1996) concept of a network society or McLuhan's idea of a global village.
- *Individualization* describes a development that was famously studied by Emile Durkheim. According to Ulrich Beck (1994), a new form of this emerged after the Second World War, which may be described on three levels. We are increasingly free from being integrated and absorbed into social aggregates like neighbourhood, village life, relationships, fixed forms of working and institutionally guaranteed forms of living. We are increasingly free also of the influence of traditional conventions on how to live, act, think and feel, and free from traditional beliefs, values and norms. But there are also new forms of reintegration of individuals as each person becomes

increasingly dependent on market conditions and societal institutions like schools, universities, pension and health systems.

- *Commercialization* means that the economy becomes more important, not only for the way in which culture and society work, but also for strategies of organizations and institutions and as reasons and goals of the actions of the people. We here can refer to the work of Herbert Schiller (1989), Sennett (1999) and Krotz (2001).

Mediatization as a core process for media and communication research

The three metaprocesses cited above are of course relevant in analysing changes in media and communication, but perhaps the most relevant metaprocess for media researchers today is that of *mediatization*. By this we mean the historical developments that took and take place as a change of (communication) media and its consequences (cf. Krotz, 2006, 2007), not only with the rise of new forms of media but also with changes in the meaning of media in general.

This is because new media are not substitutes for the old ones, as has been recognized in communication research since the work of the Austrian researcher Riepel, more than a hundred years ago (cf. Krotz and Hasebrink, 2001), and thus the number of media grows and media environments become more differentiated. The last point is also true for the existing forms of communication: apart from face-to-face-communication, there exist today three different types of mediated communication:

- *Mediated interpersonal communication*, as in the case of writing or reading letters, emails or speaking by phone to another person.
- *Communication of a person with media* – both media production, where a person writes a book or makes a film, and media reception, where a person watches TV, reads a book or any other standardized media product addressed to everybody.
- *Interactive communication*, which takes place inside computer games, with robots like the AIBO, tamagotchis, speaking navigation systems and others. Here, one of the acting ‘alter egos’ is a computer system.

More generally, questions like these are studied by ‘medium theory’ (Innis, 1951; McLuhan, 1967; Meyrowitz, 1985), which is concerned with ‘the historical and intercultural analysis of different cultural environments produced by the communication media’, as Meyrowitz

(1995) put it. Of course, this should not be understood as a technologically determined process but as a man-made process, as mediatization changes human communication by offering new possibilities of communication, and in using them, people change the way they communicatively construct their world (Mead, 1967; Berger and Luckmann, 1969; Habermas, 1987).

Media have taken over more and more functions for people – they live in dense networks of mediated communication, the postal net, the telephone net, the mobile phone net, the internet and others. In addition, interactive media have become important in all areas of life and, as a consequence, the construction of knowledge about the world and its meaning is changing. The same is true for people's identities and social relations, as well as the way in which institutions and organizations conduct themselves, and for culture and society as a whole.

It is evident that there are complex relations between these four metaprocesses. In addition, each metaprocess has its own logic of how it develops, but in a capitalistic world all such metaprocesses depend on the economic dimension. Thus, commercialization is the basic process providing the stimulus to all action. This is not the place to discuss these issues in detail but the idea is that an understanding of the social and cultural changes of today as metaprocesses, and the specific analysis of mediatization can help to develop a general frame for much research in Media and Communication Studies and even some other disciplines. For example, it could be helpful in integrating specific theoretical ideas (like the domestication approach, with its diverging results in different cultures and subcultures) or interpreting and comparing the results of empirical research. With concepts like this, it is also possible to transfer results from the academic sphere into a language which may be understood by civic society. And if we understand 'critics' in the sense of Hegel and the Frankfurt School, as the gap between existing and possible realities, a critical discussion then becomes possible, which is not limited to a specific topic or culture.

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Cultural diversity and global media studies

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Media studies are under pressure to internationalize because the area of media itself is subject to massive transformations due to ICT changes, population fluxes and power struggles. Under the pressure of cultural studies and anthropology, the recent tendency has been to place culture,