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## **Editorial: Russian and German Perspectives on Transcultural Communication**

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This special issue assembles articles of young scholars from Berlin and St. Petersburg that offer new transcultural perspectives on a fundamentally changing research field. The collection offers Russian and German points of view based on the national and academic roots of the different authors. This scholarly exchange is a first result of the developing institutional cooperation between the media and communication departments of Free University Berlin and St. Petersburg State University. As part of the German-Russian “Year of Education, Science and Innovation” a conference on “Transcultural Media Research in the Context of Digital Communication and Social Change” took place in St. Petersburg in 2012. The conference brought together more than 30 scholars discussing theoretical and empirical challenges for comparative media research along with the theoretical requirements for an adequate modeling of media and communication at a time when professional and structural boundaries are dissolving.

The selected papers published in this issue in various ways go beyond the mainstream of German-Russian media research of the last decades. So far, empirical research and ideologically based discussions on the representation of the (other) nation-state in the media have dominated the field (most recently Krumm/Medvedev/Schröder 2012; esp. Ahrens/Weiss 2012). Another relevant stream of research focused on analyzing the transformation processes of media systems in economic as well as political terms (Friedrichsen 2010). Both approaches tended to rely on a nation-based idea of media production—a systemic assumption that has become contested. The nation state as a framework of and starting point for the analysis of media production and reception has increasingly lost relevance under the conditions of digitalized hybrid media systems and global migration processes. Media production and reception do no longer happen in a

fixed spatial structure. Moreover, the media offer audiences opportunities to overcome spatial boundaries and to enable transcultural identities. As a case in point, the media use of migrants and media outlets addressing them are important areas for research on non-nation-state based media cultures and for explaining cultural belonging beyond the nation state.

In addition, not only media research as a discipline but also the researchers themselves have lost their clear national distinctions. Academic work based on specific cultural roots determined by national contexts have opened up due to transnational career developments and transculturally-formed biographies of young researchers. Some of the authors in this issue exemplify this trend as they do not work within separated Russian or German research communities. While educated in different national academic traditions and media systems, they now are embedded in an international research community as ‘transculturalized’ researchers themselves. This generation of young communication researchers offers innovative perspectives on transcultural communication beyond narrow ideological frames and national justifications. Recently Toepfl (2013) offered a comparable approach as a German researcher by analyzing the sense making practices of young Russian media users from a cultural studies perspective.

If the nation state as a political, cultural, academic, or physical space does no longer offer sufficient explanatory power to understand current media production, reception and discourses, comparative media research needs to clarify its frame of reference.

The collection of articles presented here meets this challenge in different ways. **Anna Litvinienko** (St. Petersburg) presents an approach to define the new role of journalism in a hybrid media system. As she juxtaposes recent discussions by Russian journalists and German journalism researchers her outcome is twofold: First, she illustrates the different cultural assumptions guiding the discussions in both countries; second, she reflects on the difficult transferability of concepts by advising against advocating a more audience oriented function of journalism in the Russian media context today.

**Kerstin Schulz** (Berlin) delivers a comprehensive concept for analyzing the role of media in foreign policy processes. At first sight, her analysis of German-Russian relations seems to adhere to a nation-state framework. However, her theoretical concepts reach far beyond by identifying media influence in foreign relations as contingent, dynamic and multi-directional.

**Svetlana Bodrunova** (St. Petersburg) deals with very recent activities of online/offline protest cultures. Her comparison of activities in Russia and Italy seems to stretch the focus of this special issue. But she takes the two cases to investigate the conditions of counter-public spheres in transition countries. She extends her two-nation comparison to offer more general arguments for understanding the new opportunities of online protest activities.

Media cultures of young migrants are in the focus of **Annett Heft and Sünje Paasch-Colberg** (Berlin). By comparing media use of Turkish migrants and ethnic German resettlers in Germany they offer empirical evidence of specific youth cultures that intensively rely on traditional as well as digital media. They show how digital media and its usage patterns can be a significant dimension of similarity between groups of distinct cultural backgrounds.

**Christin Schink** (Berlin) develops a theoretical concept for analyzing political media relations by integrating network analysis and game theory. Questioning the claim that political communication actors are always strategic, she presents a framework that takes seriously the metaphor of a ‘game’ between political actors and political journalists. While her ideas do not directly aim at comparative research, she highlights opportunities and restrictions of using the concepts to understand media relations in Russia.

Beyond the focus of this special issue, **Saskia Sell** (Berlin) deals with anonymity as a mode of public communication and its threats in digitalized contexts. Her plea for anonymity as a non-restricted right of freedom is based on historical as well as philosophical arguments. Anonymous public communication, she argues, shifts responsibility from sender to audience and offers – especially in non-democratic media cultures – opportunities for whistle-blowing, providing safety for those who dare to speak up.

**Angelina Davydova** (St. Petersburg) gives an overview “from the field” on types and formats of environmental journalism in Russia and Germany. Designed as a two country comparison she distinguishes three forms that – no surprise – end up transcending national contexts. While she perceives distinct relevance and legitimacy of environmental issues in the German and Russian public sphere, the ways journalists deal with topics like climate change and sustainability are structurally the same. She identifies different forms of struggling to gain and maintain relevance of environmental reporting whether covered by journalistic media outlets or as a type of organizational communication of NGOs.

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**Guest Editor**

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