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Citizen journalism for, with and by the citizens - City wikis in Germany

Prof. Dr. Peter Mambrey
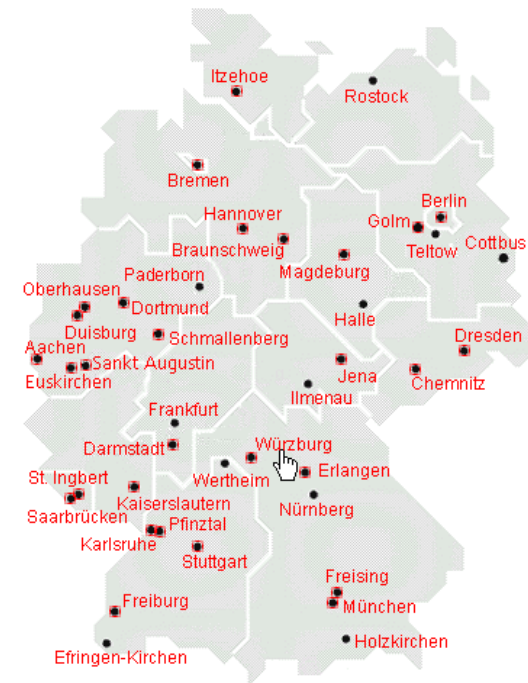Bologna - 8 aprile 2009

Background

Fraunhofer - FIT Institute for Applied Information Technology

Current research:

• Web 2.0 socio-technical infrastructures and communication & collaboration
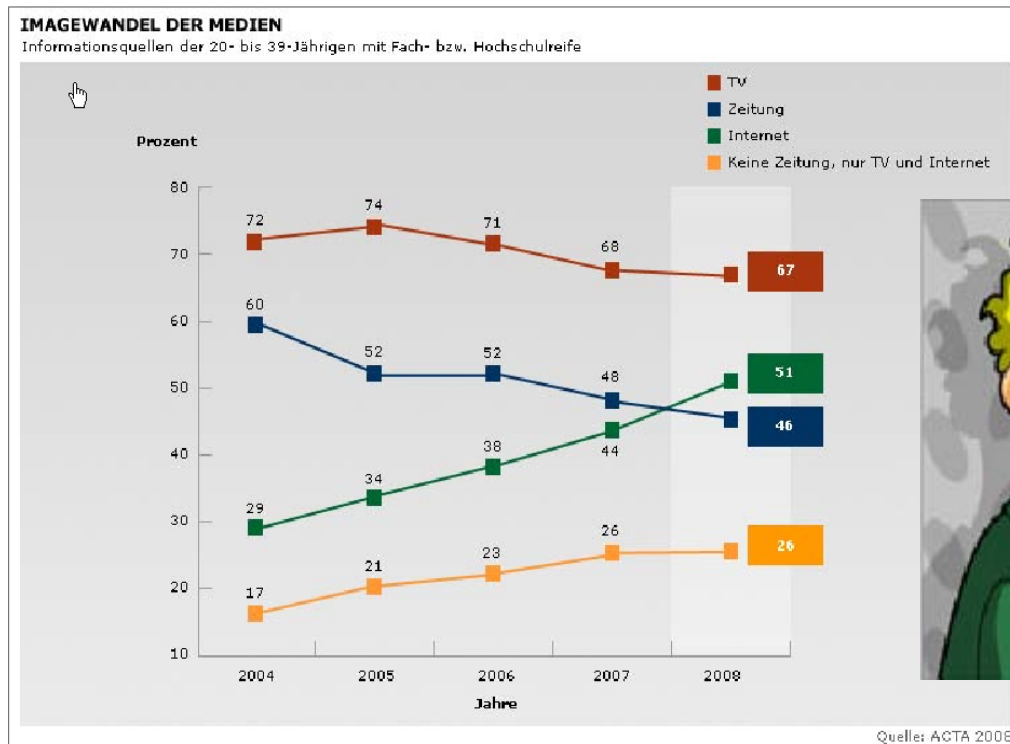
• Autonomous use of IT by citizens

DEMO-net: EC financed Network of Excellence

University of Duisburg-Essen

Current trends

Vanishing news papers & changing media use

New socio-technical formats allow new communicative actions : web 2.0

Online-petitions, econsultation, epolling, online-dialogue, web campaigning, blogs, social platforms, city wikis, flash mobs, cyber budgets, forums, news groups, emails, mailing lists, twitter, podcasts etc.
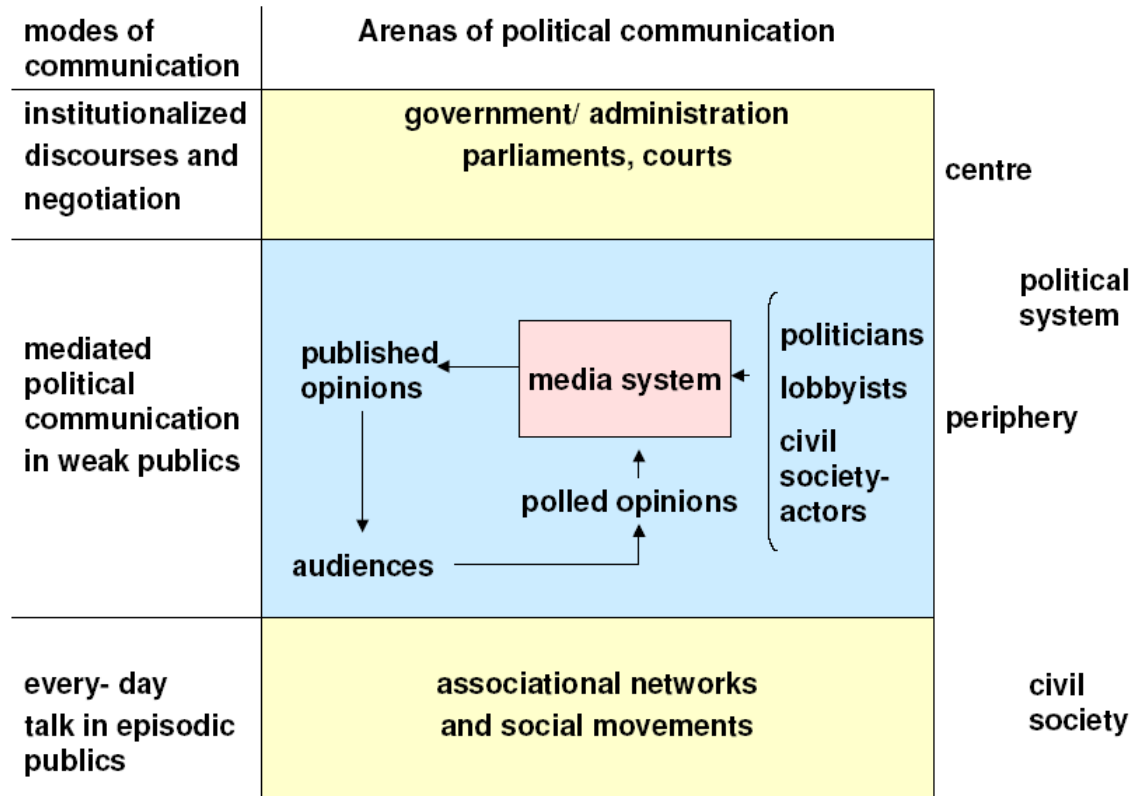
Hybrid formats emerging

Communication has impact on

- the construction of reality

- social and political action

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How can the current trends be theorized?
Habermas: communicative actions in public spheres

Perspectives on media use in the three arenas of political communication

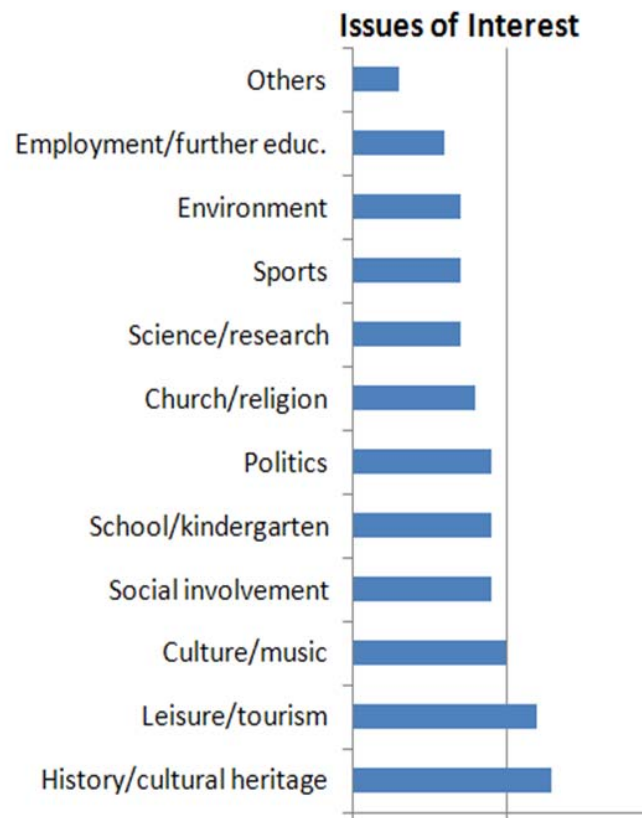*Arena 1: Institutionalized discourses in the center of the political system*

Arena 2: The mediated political communication by the mass media system

Arena 3: Every-day talks in episodic publics: the civil society and city wikis in Germany

Methods:

- Analysis of a semi-structured online survey
- Investigation of the web presence of city wikis

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Findings: German city wikis emerge since 2003

Findings 2

Sites, articles, registered users and software

Place 1: Karlsruhe: 16.961 articles, 2645 reg. users (Nov. 2008)

Place 20: Münster: 1.736 articles, 1001 reg. users

Mediawiki under GNU General Public License (GPL) hosted by Wikimedia Foundation

Conditions of collaborative citizen journalism

vision: anyone who accesses can contribute and modify content

copyleft: Creative Common License or GNU Free Documentation License

Self-description and topics of city wikis

„prosumer" producer and consumer at the same time

a digital virtual representation of local artifacts and mentefacts

broad scope not single issue, a local digital encyclopedia

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Findings 3

Competitors at the awareness market place

traditional mass media: print media and municipal web sites

vision: free accessible virtual market place of information and not a market place for selling goods or services (Open Source)

Mutual awareness and interrelationsship

Other related web sites, municipal web sites

no reciprocal awareness -> information campaign

Bias of city wikis

multi-perspective reporting and not partisan political journalism

information, encyclopedia no advertisement

Communication style

journalism, pluralistic perspectives

Findings 4

Public sphere

    counter public / counter culture?: Creation of collective thoughts

    alternative to traditional mass media

Who really produces content

    < 25 % of the registered users; all formats < 4%

Business model

    low cost basis dependent on voluntary work

    in search for a sustainable basis

Quality control and quality assurance

    power users; control of the many, discussion sites, watch lists

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Findings 5

Influence on others

    city wikis do play a minor role in the attention market

    they can create awareness about aspects not mentioned

    currently: a niche phenomenon

Satisfaction level

    high satisfaction, no division of labor, participation,

    immediate response

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From hierarchically governed to heterarchically self-governed media on local level

Creativity: You are free to publish your personal thoughts and impressions without attracting a target group. You do not have to sell your content but simply present it to the public;

Immediacy: You can publish your information as quick as you want independent from opening hours or publishing dates;

Interactivity: You can receive immediate reactions of readers;

Responsiveness: The easy possibility to react to existent publications encourages responses or the creation of new content;

Scope: Independent of the geographical place of your target group the publication can be read everywhere;

Cost-effectiveness: You can publish content with limited resources in time, money and technical equipment. This encourages volunteers or non-professional journalists to raise their voices;

Independence: In print media journalists were controlled by their editorial board. There always is subjugation under the rules and conventions of the group you are within. In city wikis you find different peer groups on horizontal level coexisting;

Subjectivity: People can express what they personally want to contribute without the harness of a group which usually edits a publication.

Challenges for citizen participation

Challenges:

- Citizens autonomously (re)present their interests
- New forms of gate-keeping
- New forms of agenda-setting
- Multi-perspectivity
- Unfiltered immediacy

Risks:

- Eroding the representative system and mass media
- Fragmentation
- Lost in eparticipation?

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Thank you for your attention!

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Italian City Wikis

TrentoWiki

Venicewiki