The impact of challengers’ online communication on media agenda-building — a comparison across countries and issues

**Project members:** Silke Adam, Barbara Pfetsch (project leaders); Thomas Häussler, Peter Miltner, Hannah Schmid-Petri, Annie Waldherr (research assistants in the project). **Cooperation partners:** W. Lance Bennett and FAS.research.

**Approach & Research goal**

**Central problems:**
- Civil society actors (‘challengers’) have difficulties in accessing traditional media / politics; they are marginalized in media agenda building and issue framing.
- Does online communication have the potential to democratise access for challengers to traditional media / politics?

**Goal:** Answer the following research question:
*Under which conditions does the online communication of „challengers“ have an impact on traditional media / the political agenda?*

**Research model**

**Comparison across countries / language regions:**
- Germany, German-speaking Switzerland
- UK, USA

**Comparison across issues:**
- Established issue climate change and latent issue food safety (first project period)

**Observation of possible spill-overs:**
- Tracking of online actor hyperlink networks through a period of 18 months
- Content analysis of print media and webpages: which actors and frames can be observed in the discourse?

**Hypotheses**

**Hypotheses concerning networks:**
- Strongly connected coalitions with a common master frame and prominent frame sponsors are more successful.

**Hypotheses concerning media outlets:**
- Political leaning of the newspaper affects the portrayal of media-challenger coalitions.

**Hypotheses concerning country characteristics:**
- Spill-overs are more likely to be found in pluralist countries than in corporatist countries.

**Hypotheses concerning issue characteristics:**
- We expect more framing spill-overs for established issues, for latent issues in turn more agenda-setting effects.

**Methods**

**Online**
- Webpage selection: Google, Literature review
- Network identification: Web Crawler software, issue-specific networks; Web Scraper Software
- Challenges’ issue networks
  - Issues and frames on the agenda
  - Regression & time series analysis
  - Spill-over of issues and frames
  - Content analysis

**Offline**
- Text selection: Sample of national newspapers in the four countries
- Issues and frames on the agenda
  - Content analysis