

## “Radio Activity” – The Role of Technological Affordances and Agency for Participatory Practices of Radio Communication

*Nele Heise*

*n.heise@hans-bredow-institut.de*

In the last decade, scholarly and public discourses on developments in media communication often refer to a “participatory turn” in contemporary media landscapes. The advent of social media is said to promote new types of, and possibilities for, audience activity and practices of “produsage”. These new options for media participation and productive practices also raise the question of the production means as a prerequisite of active media production. Lüders (2008), for instance, points to the emergence of “personal media” (e.g. weblogs) at the intersection of techniques, technologies, media forms and genres, and the role of creative user agency and appropriation within that process. At the same time, previous research suggests that the (active) use of participatory features and content creation, as well as the appropriation of media technologies, has manifold preconditions, e.g. motivations, skills and competence and also access to media technologies. Moreover, media use is to some extent shaped by the material structure, i.e. the characteristics of a media artefact might to some extent have a structuring effect on our actions. Altogether, this underlines the relevance of the technological aspects for practices of media participation. Hence, the project seeks to examine this intersection of technological affordances, agency (skills, knowledge, and competences) and participatory practices. The overarching research question is: what is the role of (arrangements of) technical objects and their affordances as well as technical skills and competence in participatory practices of radio communication? The focus of the present project lies in the phenomenon podcasting as a form of “radio-like” communication. Podcasts are understood as a hybrid format at the intersection of “personal” (niche formats, special interest) and mass media (providing content as podcast), as well as activities of amateur/hobby and professional actors, which afford different participatory practices and interactional roles between producers and users. The empirical research within the project follows a qualitative approach that comprises small scale case studies of different podcasts. It is planned to conduct in-depth interviews with both producers and recipients to reveal their motivations to produce or use the format (and whether they perceive podcasting as a “radio activity”), the role of technological aspects, e.g. devices they use, their technical skills or attitudes towards technology. These interviews will be combined with “home” or “studio” visits e.g. to examine the specific technological setup. Moreover, it is planned to attend regular group meetings (e.g. podcasting workshops) to observe whether and how the actors discuss technological aspects of podcasting.