Digitalization and Political Science in Germany

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1 Introduction: digitalization in Germany

Digitalization is one of the major disruptions and trends globally. Nevertheless, it appears different within different cultural contexts. The analysis of teaching and learning as well as academic research strongly depends on the level of digitalization within the society. On the one hand, one must consider path dependency factors such as the history of a society and on the other hand the national structure of the university system. These two factors define the role of digital revolution in teaching, learning and research, in Germany.

The following overview can only present a brief sketch of the different initiatives in the past and in recent times. It is obvious that especially in the last decade, digitalization became one of the leading societal trends, which changed social life tremendously. An analysis and even a rough overview of digitalization in teaching and research in political science seems to be problematic for two reasons. Germany is a relatively big country with a large number of universities, which makes it difficult to get a comprehensive overview. Compared to other OECD countries, Germany is a latecomer to a certain extent and some important developments started only recently and therefore lack documentation. The reason for this backward position will be described and analyzed in the following article. The status of a latecomer includes and implies problems when it comes to very recent changes and developments. Since the number of political science institutes and scholars working on this hot topic is growing, numerous scholars and academics are (re-)focusing on this topic. Here it is obvious that some scholars seem to have a longer research and teaching track, others are reinventing and mirroring the international debate of the last two decades while other colleagues are contributing new fresh ideas to the international academic community. This brand-new development makes it difficult to get a proper overview.

Despite the phenomenon that the comparatively affluent country of Germany was always relatively late when it came to digital innovation, globalization enforced most of the trends, which Germany in time also implemented. This becomes obvious when considering the government structure and the stage of the policy field digitalization in Germany. Digital media were not accepted or were accepted late. In 2016, there were around 40 million smartphones users. In 2015 almost 24 million persons had Facebook accounts. Other social media such as Twitter are used by 4 million users. In recent years, other instruments such as WhatsApp have reached around 33 million users. In the same year, it can be shown that Germany lagged behind some smaller countries with better public infrastructure such as Estonia, but also behind larger countries, such as France or the UK (ARD/ZDF 2017).
1.1 Digital infrastructure

In Germany, digitalization has not advanced as much as other infrastructure (roads, electricity grid etc.). Only a few projects were implemented at the national level and coordinated and planned by national ministries, such as national roads or autobahn. Public infrastructure in traffic as well as energy, water, sewerage, etc. is predominantly employed at the local level by strong, efficient and effective local administrations. German administration has a very good reputation in delivering infrastructure for its citizens. This can be seen as one reason that the strong new public management approaches affected German municipalities relatively late and predominately after Telekom and the railway were privatized. Meanwhile most other public services are still local and have become local again.

The development of digitalization and digital infrastructure fell into a period of strong privatization in the 1980s and 90s. After the privatization of the telecommunication sector and the dissolution of the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication, digital infrastructure was predominantly in the hands of a very small number of private companies (Telekom). This can be regarded as being one reason for the very low coverage of broadband infrastructure. But, compared to other countries, Germany, with its approx. 80 million people living in a context of high population density, performed badly and Germany was way behind in broadband infrastructure. A decade ago, the government promised to have a 25 Mbit broadband in each household in most areas by 2018 (BMVI 2017). This goal was not achieved at the household level. Besides the relatively good “old” infrastructure as well as deficits in public choice, people were very hesitant and reacted with negative sentiments against digitalization highlighting all its problems regarding safety and security (see below).

This was also obvious in the educational sector. The German educational system is regarded as one of the driving forces behind the economic development in the 1960s (German Wirtschaftswunder). Most school infrastructure derived from the educational reforms in the late 1960s and 70s. In this educational system, digitalization could only sporadically be regarded as a success story. In most of the schools there was (and still is) a long debate as to whether pupils should be allowed to bring their cellphones into the classroom or even on to the school premises. Modern educational instruments such as whiteboards or tablets are rare or barely exist. The same verdict applied to higher education in universities and the technical colleges, which will be described in detail later on.

1.2 The development of a policy field and digital executive and legislative

In Germany, digitalization is a relatively old trend but not adequately implemented in the governmental, political structure. At all government levels, the institutions always seemed to have a reactive attitude against crisis phenomena, but did not deliver a long-term master plan. At the national level in Berlin, the government did not create a leading coherent ministry focusing on digitalization. Digitalization is considered an important task in all ministries. Thus, it plays a highly important role in the Ministry of Transport and Digitalization, the Ministry of Labor, the Ministry of Economy, and the Ministry of the Interior. To coordinate regional initiatives at the national level, consultative institutions were developed (IT Planungsrat). In 2017, additionally a Minister of State for Digitalization at the Federal Chancellery was installed, and in 2018 an expert group (Digitalrat) was set up to advise the national government. Until 2018, most Laender did not create a sole Ministry for Digitalization. The government responsibility was and is divided within the different ministries and governmental institutions. In the following years Hesse, Bavaria and other Laender implemented state ministers on digitalization.
With the development of the Internet (in the 1990s) as well as new instruments such as social media (in the 2000s), it could be observed that the government did not react timely and adequately towards this new trend. In the early 2000s, the Ministry of Economy was highly interested in becoming the leading actor internationally, regarding new developments in this policy field. Here, especially the German emphasis was on security and safety topics. After the privatization of the German Post and Telecommunication, it was the Ministry of the Interior (Home affairs) in Germany which was highly interested in being a part of the process of new government structures as well as constructing symbolically important instruments for national branding, such as online voting. Besides the temporary Parliamentary Enquete-Commissions, until 2014, there still was no Commission for Digitalization in the German Bundestag. The responsibilities were split up and the digital infrastructure was allocated to the Ministry of Transport as well as to the Ministry of Economics. This happened in a period when in the field of the civil society, new organizations were established (e.g. Netzpolitik.org). Nevertheless, in the following years, the German debate paid more attention to safety and security issues as well as copyrights (against child pornography, length of data retention). In 2014, a commission on digital agenda was implemented. Here, national and European scandals played an important role as well as the strong emphasis of the German constitution (Grundgesetz) in protecting individual rights against any interference from private or state actors. This slow implementation applies also to the development of digital infrastructure.

This hesitant development of a policy field influenced also the development of digitalization within schools and universities. Safety first was the main principle and impeded many private and individual initiatives, and hindered digital experiences within the universities.

2 Political science and digital professorships: the structure of German universities

Traditionally, Germany displays an urban structure with only some six metropolitan cities or areas, such as Berlin, Munich, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Frankfurt as well as the region of Ruhr and its neighboring city Cologne, while there is a large number of municipalities in smaller cities. Remarkably, most of the 79 cities with more than one hundred thousand inhabitants have universities. However, historically universities exist in smaller, older cities and towns (e.g. Marburg 80,000 inhabitants including 25,000 students). In the German federal system, the responsibility for universities is at the provincial level (Laender). In the 1970s, some Laender created new universities because of regional strategies in order to develop more remote areas and to strengthen certain regions. In the following years, some new universities were established in remoter areas. Some new universities were built in Hessen (e.g. Kassel) and in North Rhine Westphalia (NRW), for example in Bielefeld or Bochum. In the 1960s and 1970s, most teacher training colleges (pädagogische Hochschulen, PH) were also restructured and either changed into universities of applied sciences or incorporated into bigger university structures. The trend for new universities continued in the 1990s, where universities of applied sciences in schools for administration were built even in smaller cities. Altogether there are now 108 universities (with PhD programs) plus another 320 universities of applied sciences as well as schools for administration (no PhD programs). These include 16 newly founded private universities (with PhD programs).

Political science departments were created after the Second World War as institutions to assist “re-education” programs after the Nazi dictatorship. From the 1960s until now, there was a growing demand to study social science and political science in particular. The
number of students in these departments are very high. Most of the 100 larger German universities have a department of political science. In view of the growing studentship, most departments struggled with very poor professor-student ratios and the academic austerity programs. The very large departments in the 1970s and 80s – such as Berlin with more than 30 full professors – had to reduce staff to a third after unification. Also, other departments experienced severe budget cuts. Only a few could stabilize their number of full professors. The position of assistant professors (the German title is ‘Juniorprofessor’) did not exist until the new millennium, and was only introduced in the year 2002.

Political science, in some universities, is – together with sociology – part of the faculty of social sciences. At some universities, it is totally separated from institutes of political communication, which is often allocated in other departments and part of other faculties. This split is also reflected in the overarching structures of German academia and funding institutions like the German Research Fund (DFG), where communication, sociology and political science are strictly separated. This separation is even stronger when it comes to other competing faculties such as in geography, law and economics or informatics and computer sciences.

In Germany, there are around 350 professorships in political science. They follow the traditional differentiation in political theory, political system of Germany, comparative politics, and international relations, often also didactics (always when the training of school teachers is involved).

2.1 “Digital professors”

Digitalization and the Internet are a recent phenomenon and the study of Internet and politics has not been included in the curricula. Only in recent years has digitalization been included in the curricula of digital humanities and in social science faculties and departments. Digitalization was not reflected in professorships in political science until 2012. There is only one exception in Germany, namely the University of Hildesheim, where an assistant professorship for Internet and Politics (Juniorprofessur) was installed in 2012 at the Department of Political Science. Another newly established professorship is Political Data Science at the Technical University Munich. It can be shown that in recent years some professorships in the field of informatics started analyzing social phenomena, but still have a strong emphasis on computer science. In political science, the number of colleagues working on digitalization is rather limited. In Germany’s political science, digital politics has been regarded in recent decades as a kind of playing field for early career scholars.

The professors, who are working in the field of Internet are based at eight universities and in addition to the Internet have other main focuses: thus, Sigrid Baringhorst (Siegen) and Stefan Marschall (Düsseldorf) have their expertise in comparative politics, Andreas Busch (Göttingen) in comparative politics and political economy; Marianne Kneuer (Hildesheim) besides comparative politics also covers aspects of international politics; Norbert Kersting has been concentrating on comparative politics and local and regional politics. Christoph Bieber (Duisburg-Essen) holds a professorship on ethics, and Gary Schaal (University of Hamburg) on political theory. Even if other colleagues are publishing increasingly more on related topics, they do not have a long research track or a strong concentration on digitalization and its impact on politics. Their digital research will be described in the following chapter in detail.
2.2 Teaching and learning

Due to strong austerity measures in recent decades, most political science departments have tried to implement the core curriculum centering on the most important political institutions and processes. In general, it can be observed that some international academic trends could strengthen certain groups within the departments. For example, because of globalization, the field of international relations has become more important and it has slowly refocused as well on comparative politics. A strong emphasis on regional integration has influenced research concentrating on European studies. New incoming professors also highlighted most of these trends. Nevertheless, due to the financial restrictions, megatrends, such as sustainability, are only recently being mirrored in the curriculum of some departments of political science.

In 2010 as part of the Bologna process, Germany introduced three-year Bachelor and two-year Master programs (BA, MA). Around 50 German universities have fully fledged Bachelor and Master programs in political science. All in all, there are no programs on digitalization or Internet politics. In some political science departments, however, BA and MA programs cooperate with programs on political communication and thus give importance to digital media.

Generally speaking, the digital revolution has not been covered appropriately in the curricula of German political science departments. Similar to primary and secondary education, blended learning through a combination of online and offline instruments is relatively rare. Digital support for the lecturers and students mostly reflects older self-made software. Digital learning tools such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are seldom offered in most faculties at university level. Digitalization in teaching has been taken up very reluctantly at the departments of political science.

Nevertheless, under the broader labelling of political science, some of the modules/courses refer to digitalization. Often led by an individual interest in this field, some scholars pushed to introduce modules on digitalization, for example, in Marburg, Münster, Hildesheim, or courses in Munich, Humboldt University Berlin, Mainz, Konstanz etc. Covered topics are e-democracy, e-participation, e-voting, big data and the role of social bots, Internet governance, online campaigning, social movements and online interaction, data security.

It has already been mentioned that the role of digital media in teaching and in learning is very basic. Mostly, there are only a few digital tools included in the communication and interaction within the classroom. Here, the students as well as professors predominantly use online publications, where the formerly highly ranked German university libraries are losing ground. One important aspect in this regard is the very high costs of political science books in Germany. Here political science publishers have gone through the process of amalgamation and merger. In the last years, publishing houses have changed ownership and become more international. Nevertheless, some of these publishing houses have contracts with the university libraries and offer free access to political science books and journals for students and staff.

3 Research

Research in the field of digitalization in Germany, followed existing political developments and trends and international, national and German discussions. Meanwhile, in the 1990s an administrative and democratic innovation became popular (Kersting 2017, Lucke 2017).
At this time, online voting as an instrument to enhance declining voter turnout, was discussed. Later in the 2000s the deliberative turn brought more instruments, which tried to transfer the political arena into the digital sphere. In the following years, open government and open data as well as smart city approaches became much more important. Since the Obama election in 2008 the German discussion on political online campaigning was important during the national as well as the regional and European Union elections. The stronger emphasis was continuously oriented towards safety and security, the problems of social media and analysis of social bots. The new trend towards populism affected Germany, during the election in 2017 when the new political right wing populist party AfD entered the Bundestag. This triggered an analysis of Internet discussions on populism and research about the way in which right-wing parties use the Internet. These different trends in political science can also be seen in the number of publications deriving from different research projects.

3.1 Publications on digitalization

With very few exceptions, publications on digitalization and the use of the Internet started in the early 2000s. Here Siedschlag (2003) produced one important edited volume. Others concentrated on the change of the public sphere (Leggewie 1998) or concentrated on public administration and participation (“Orwell in Athens” van de Donk 1995).

E-administration and Internet governance

In the late 90s and in the early 2000s a couple of articles were published in the field of public e-administration and e-government (Kubicek et al 1997). Here, the focus was predominantly put on the local level (Klaus Lenk, Hermann Hill). In the following years, different reforms, such as the freedom of information, influenced research and articles on open government data were published. It can be seen that in 2010s, issues like government and Internet politics became more important (Schünemann/Weiler 2012), as well as open government and smart cities (Baldersheim/Kersting 2012; Kersting 2016; Wewer/Wewer 2019). Other aspects referred to the net neutrality debate (Schünemann/Steiger/Stier 2015). The discussion on Internet and privacy (Schwanholz/Graham/Stoll 2018, Busch 2012) concentrated more on traditional and regulative aspects. Due to the often unregulated policies in the field of digitalization, which were lacking proper institutions in the 2010s, the new literature was dedicated to regulation and information (Reiberg 2018; Busch et al 2019; Klenk/Nullmeier/Wewer 2019).

Digital divide and representativeness

The digital divide has been important in international studies with the development of the Internet. Because of the backwardness of Germany regarding some of these indicators (broadband, social media usage), a stronger attention was on the use of online participation in certain social groups, such as seniors (silver surfer etc.), youth (digital natives etc.) (Ritzi/Wagner 2016). Other studies evaluated online participation by politicians, local administration as well as citizens (Kersting 2016).

E-discourse

Early approaches trying to analyze the discourse quality of such forums were using Habermas’ criteria for deliberation (Kersting 2005). In the following years, online participation
in comparison to offline participation as well as participation in the invited and the invented space were analyzed (Kersting 2014). With the deliberative turn, new deliberative as well as direct democratic participatory instruments started to be analyzed (Sossdorf 2016; Escher 2013; Voss 2014). Some international comparative data analyzed the use of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in democratic and autocratic systems. Some scholars explicitly dedicated to the implications of online discourse and deliberation for the enrichment (or not) of democratic processes and the question of democratic quality (Kersting 2012; Kneuer 2016). This was examined against the background of the longstanding and open question, whether digitalization would be able to revitalize democracy.

E-campaigning and inner party democracy parties
A major thread in scholarly research referred to the use of ICT within the political parties as well as between political actors and the citizen in online campaigning through political communication (Zittel 2010; Jungherr 2017). The role of the Internet and the trust in social media had already been analyzed in the late 1990s (Marshall 1998, 1999). Other scholars in political communication studied Internet campaigning and the use of the Internet by political parties (Römmel 2001, 2003). In the following year, these scholars additional-ly concentrated on the role of the new ICT within the political parties (for party 2.0 see Gibson, Römmel, Ward 2003, Marschall 2012, Reichard/Boroucki 2015, Bieber 2014a; Fitzpatrick 2018). With the development of the Pirates party, there was often a focus on the mobilization of citizens within representative democracy (Römmel, Gibson, Lusoli, Ward 2004). Some colleagues analyzed the influence of the new digital instruments of direct democratic participation, offering “liquid democracy” tools for inner party democracy (Bieber 2014a).

Early comparative studies analyzed political parties using the Internet at local and national level, others on individual political actors using the new ICT. Here, not only candidates for the regional parliaments were analyzed, but also the national online and offline campaigns in Germany (Boroucki 2016, 2018, Faas 2003, 2006, Partheymuller & Faas 2015 on the elections of 2005 and 2009). Likewise, the usage of social media by heads of government and the German chancellor became research subjects (Boroucki 2014).

E-voting and electoral monitoring
In the early 2000s, there emerged an intense discussion on online voting with the front-runners USA, UK, Switzerland, and Estonia. Online voting was regarded as one form of online political participation, which enhanced the role of the new ICT as an instrument of political information, political communication and political participation (Kersting & Baldersheim 2003). On the basis of online and offline surveys, Schoen and Faas (2005) criticized the low substance and lack in methodology of online campaigning and e-voting. Due to the critical discussion of online voting in Germany, there was a refocusing on the use of digitalization within the administration of elections, as well as the use of new technologies in monitoring election and election observation (Shayo/Kersting 2016).

Voting advice applications
Since 2002 the Federal Agency for Civic Education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, BpB) sponsored and supported a Voting Advice Application VAA (Wahlomat), which was highly successful and had a huge number of users. It was predominately organized by Stefan Marschall (Düsseldorf) who is involved in an international group of VAA research-
ers. In 2010s it included regional and sporadically even local elections, and it was confronted with smaller local competitors (Wahlkompass etc.). The possibilities to analyze the enormous set of data produced was strictly regulated due to data security issues.

Ethical questions of digitalization

In recent years, data security has become an important issue in the public debate and also in the scholarly attention (Bieber 2012). In Germany, there also prevailed a strong emphasis on ethical questions (Jacob/Thiel 2017; Bieber 2014b). From a more journalistic perspective, first analysis on the blogosphere and on social media were presented (Maier/Faas 2006; Holler, Vollhals & Faas 2008). At Mannheim University, Faas and Schoen (2006) additionally analyzed the role of online surveys and criticized the misuse of these instruments.

Data safety, manipulation

One aspect of data safety and data security pointed to privacy in the public space. Here, political theory became an important contributor (Schaal 2004, 2014; Ritzi 2018). In addition, practical aspects of cyber security predominated here (Schünemann/Baumann 2017). The misuse of the Internet and social media brought other ethical aspects such as cyber justice and human rights and good governance on the agenda. Furthermore, some colleagues studied manipulation of social media using social bots on Twitter (Hegelich/Janetzko 2016, Thielges/Hegelich 2017).

Social movements and digitalization

The so called Arab Spring and the then emerging new social movements like Occupy and other indignation movements inspired a considerable work on these phenomena (Baringhorst 2009, 2014, Kneuer/Richter 2015). Another thread of scholarly attention was on net activism of NGOs and on especially on net protest based on political consumerism (Baringhorst 2009b, 2012, Yang/Baringhorst 2016). Here also the new possibilities for depicted petition and the aspects of personalization of political protest were analyzed (Baringhorst 2015).

3.2 New book series and new journals

Digitalization is not just underrepresented in the policy arena but it also lacks organizational structures in the academic research in political science. Until now no new journals have been established, which would cover this topic. Nevertheless, it can be seen that some of the well-known journals in political science published special issues on this topic edited by scholars from political communication and journalism (Pfetsch/Marcinkowski 2009). In 2013 the chair of IPSA Research Committee 10 on e-democracy, Norbert Kersting published a book on “Electronic democracy” in the IPSA series “State of the discipline”. This brought together political scientists of the Research Committee 10 focusing on the main topics in this field digitalization (Kersting 2013). Furthermore, a couple of edited books deriving from national and international conferences were published (such as Leggewie/Maar 1998; Kersting/Baldersheim 2002; Kneuer 2013).

However there are other structural reasons for the under-representation and the absence of journals. Most of the German journals in political science are published in German and are also for this reason, not represented in important social science citation indices (ISI,
Scopus etc.). Nevertheless, due to the relatively high number of journals on the German market, academic scholars seem to be hesitant to introduce new journals on digitalization.

Under the economic pressure of the big German publishing houses over decades, a strong process of monopolization has become obvious. Alongside only a few, smaller, older publishing houses, a number of publishers finally became a part of the major Springer Nature group. Although some academic scholars have been planning book series on digitalisation and politics in Germany, there was no book series until 2018 (the series “Politics in the digital society” edited by Jeanette Hofmann, Norbert Kersting, Claudia Ritzi und Wolf Schünemann was established in 2019). But it is quite obvious that there is a strong cooperation with departments of communication, developing interdisciplinary research.

In the public arena and in national media coverage of digitalization, political scientists do not seem to be relevant, when it comes to experts from the media, such as TV or radio. Here, predominantly representatives from civil society and NGOs in the field of digitalization are presented on television. One reason for this may lie in the lack of contacts to journalists. But this is also the case in Germany, on the typical split between the field of journalism on the one hand and the field of science on the other, where public intellectuals are viewed skeptically and are often criticized by their academic peers.

3.3 Research institutions and new research initiatives

In the area of digitalization, a couple of research institutions, which are predominantly sponsored by the Ministry of Higher Education (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung), already existed or exist. These research institutions are mainly working together with scholars from informatics working on more practical political issues but they have incorporated a few political scientists. Here, for example the Karlsruher Institut für Technologie (KIT), Institut für Technikfolgenabschätzung und Systemanalyse (ITAS) in Karlsruhe, Fraunhofer-Institut für Kommunikation, Informationsverarbeitung und Ergonomie (FKIE), Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB) have branches on digitalization.

At university level, organizations outside of political science are relevant in the field of digitalization, such as Leibniz University Hannover, the Institut for Law and Informatics (IRI); Technical University Dortmund (TU Dortmund), the Faculty of Economics and Social Science (WiSo); at Munich University (LMU), IOM (Research Institute Information, Organization and Management) at the University of Bonn; the Informatics Department at the University of Bochum; the Psychology Department (Kognition) of the University Duisburg/Essen; Muenster University, the Economy European Research Center for Information System (ERCIS), the Institute for Telecommunication und Media Law. Most of their staff do not have a political science background.

Within the German Political Science Association’s (DVPW) section on Politics and Communication, some scholars worked more on media in general and communication and later on digitalization. But this DVPW working group organized and supported important publications in 2009 (Pfetsch/Marcinkowski 2009, Emmer/Strippel 2015). There are strong ties and sometimes an overlapping between political science scholars and scholars of the German Communication Association (DGPsK) and the other German speaking Swiss Association of Communication (SGKM). Here political scientists were sporadically part of important research networks (Schwerpunktprogramme, Forschergruppen) which had an emphasis on digitalization and Internet research such as “Mediatisierte Welten (Mediatised worlds)” and “Politische Kommunikation” (Political Communication).
The German Internet Institute and the selection process

Different national and provincial regions tried to foster research on digitalization. Here, some were highly influential and triggered broader engagement in all Laender (provinces). In 2014, the grand coalition government between the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD) incorporated in their coalition treaty a new research institute for their digital agenda 2014–2017. A publicly financed research institute was planned, which was to have an interdisciplinary science approach to analyze ethical, legal, economic and participative aspects of the Internet and digitalization. The idea was that the German Internet Institute should become a think tank institute analogue to the Oxford Internet Institute, Berkmann Institute and others. This Institute concentrates on aspects of social media, its effects on young and older users, the role of big data and privacy, and lastly on possibilities to participate politically. During the process, the approaches also included more researchers working on legal and economic issues.

In September 2015, the German Federal Ministry for Higher Education presented its call and promised 50 million Euro for five years. In the following month, the new German Internet Institute was supposed to be detected in a two-step process. In most of the German Laender, academic scholars working on digitalization in the field of social sciences built up strong networks for presenting their applications in the selection process. Finally, nearly all German Laender (11 of 15 Laender) presented a proposal. During a following selection process, a shortlist was developed. This included Berlin with different universities from the metropolitan area, Bavaria with the Bavarian Academy of Science, (Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften), Lower Saxony with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz University in Hannover, Baden Württemberg with Karlsruhe Institute for Technology and finally North-Rhine Westphalia (NRW) with the consortium of Heinrich-Heine University Düsseldorf (HHU), University of Münster (WWU), University of Bonn (Uni Bonn), Grimme Institute as well as Bochum University (RUB) and GESIS (Open Science Center). All networks had to present future research areas as well as national and international partners. The winner was the Berlin consortium, which included the Free University Berlin, Humboldt University Berlin, Technical University of Berlin, the Berlin University of Arts and Design, University of Potsdam, Fraunhofer FOKUS and Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin (WZB). These partners founded the new Weizenbaum Institute for the Networked Society – the name that was given to the Berlin consortium – was incorporating other initiatives in the capital city. Nevertheless, this completion produced positive effects in the other Laender. In NRW for example, the Center for Advanced Internet Studies (CAIS) was founded in 2016 by the consortium of participating NRW universities.

Lack of political science organization

German political science scholars and academics are organized in the German Political Science Association (DVPW), as well as in the smaller German Society for Politics. In the early 2000s, the Ph. D. student Alexander Siedschlag developed the idea to build up a thematic group (research committee) within the German Political Science Association. His book on Digital Democracy is regarded as an attempt to bring the various colleagues together, who worked on digitalization (Siedschlag 2003). Nevertheless, most of these colleagues did not have their own chairs or even a permanent position at their department. Therefore, the attempt to build up a thematic group, which could have become a working group within the German Political Science Association, failed and most of the scholars involved in the book did not get an academic position at a German university or changed their thematic orientation over the years.

One reason for this failure was the ignorance of most faculties and departments, when it came to the development of a new policy field in the area of digitalization. Due to the
fact, that there was no new professorship and no new positions for other relevant areas in the field of Political Science, it was obvious that it could be hard for a new research field to be implemented. Most universities experienced regulation of the kind that introduced academic austerity and had to reduce staff. Many struggled to save the old relevant professorships and none were willing to give up their new professorships. The same happened in the field of new research institutions. Meanwhile, in communication, the trends towards digital and online communication have been reflected by some new research groups and networks in political science. There was hardly any development of research organization.

One attempt to start more institutionalization and organize research, happened in the late 1990s and early 2000s at the University of Giessen. Here, Claus Leggewie and his assistant, Christoph Bieber were part of the new interdisciplinary Centre for Media and Interactivity at Giessen University. Together with other faculties, they started research on digital rights and Internet politics. This was very closely related to a growing field of NGOs (politik.digital) and organizations in the field of digitalization. Most of the debates focused on political communication, but also on the development of the policy field. In the meanwhile, more such initiatives came up and installed centers in the field of digital topics (such as the Institute for Information-, Telecommunication- and Media Law (ITM), Ferdinand-Steinbeis-Institut (FSTI); Bavarian Research Institute for Digital Transformations (BIDT) to name but a few).

At the German Political Science Association’s conference in 2015 a new thematic group was founded, which worked on Internet and politics/electronic governance. This has expanded by more than 80 scholars, who are now contributing to this network. In the following years, two workshops on Internet and politics in online campaigning were organized. The new thematic group has strong links to the European Consortium for Political Research, as well as to the International Political Science Association and its Research Committee 10 on Electronic Democracy. At the IPSA conference in Poznan in 2016, it could be seen that the number of German scholars contributing to the RC 10 panels rose substantially compared to older IPSA conferences. At the European Political Science Association (ECPR) scholars such as Isabelle Borucki (University Duisburg- Essen), Jasmin Fitzpatrick (Mainz University) are involved in its Standing Group Internet and Politics

4 Positive developments and future risks

It can be shown that there is a direct correlation between the policy field of digitalization and research in this field. Digitalization has often been neglected at the policy level and there is a lack of organizational structures, such as ministries, etc. at the national as well as the sub-national levels. This situation mirrors the development of digitalization as a research field of political science. Due to the lack of financial resources, most political science departments could not adequately integrate a professorship on digitalization. It is also obvious that most departments of political science did not include digitalization in their curricula. Most of the scholars in political science working on digitalization are also teaching in related fields, such as online participation, etc. In this regard, digitalization is less represented than other research fields, as for example, sustainability or European Studies. The lack of these new subjects in the curriculum comes together with a higher specialization on new methodologies. In recent years, most universities changed from qualitative approaches towards more quantitative or mixed methods curricula. Traditionally, classical statistical software as in SPSS was used. To analyze big data, new software programs
of methodologies and linguistic software programs such as “R” facilitate analysis. This program has become much more popular in most German universities.

In the field of publication, a very small number of political scientists actually have a long research track on digitalization in political science. This number slightly increased from 2010, when another half a dozen political scientists published more in this research field. With the national call for German Internet Institute in 2015 in all Laender, most of the universities gathered colleagues working in this area, but most of them came from neighboring fields, such as political communication, geography, law and economics. Nevertheless, these initiatives brought a strong push towards more publication of research projects in all faculties especially in the faculty of political science.

Digitalization means a stronger co-operation, not only with the departments of communication, but also with other faculties, which are closely related to informatics. In contrast to some disciplines, this kind of informatics has already been incorporated in the curriculum of departments such as geo-informatics, economic-informatics. In political science, a cooperation with the department of informatics has yet to be developed. This is a much more cumbersome process because of different cultures within these disciplines.

In 2018 national government as well as Laender government changed legislation on digitalization (Onlinezugangsgesetz). New research projects evaluated the pilot projects and model regions and cities tested new research methodologies. The semantic net strengthened new methodologies in the field of computational social science. Political science departments developed new interdisciplinary research projects and planned new interdisciplinary curricula.

At university level, the number of MOOCs in political science is very small. Nevertheless, the Internet is used – in its old way – as a memory for institutions. Here, programs such as “learnweb” and others, are also assisting lecturers and professors in distributing academic articles, PowerPoint slides of the lectures and video streaming, even though it has not been used to a large extent. In this regard, European and German copyrights often can be regarded as an obstacle for these platforms.

For publications in this field there exists only a small number of – mostly not appropriately indexed and accredited – journals. Nonetheless, the number of publications in Anglo-Saxon journals written by German authors is growing. In Germany, there are no journals aiming predominantly at digitalization and politics, but books, as well as edited books, still have not lost their value and are used by authors and PhD students to publish their papers. In Germany, a new book open access book series on Politics in the digital society was established in 2019 by transcript publisher.

The field of digitalization is in some respect predominated by strong NGOs and civil society. Academic colleagues often cooperate with a small number of these older think tanks but also with younger NGOs (Bertelsmann Foundation, Open Knowledge Foundation etc.). The new networks cooperate with civil society groups, who are working on open knowledge, the open government data etc. Here, a stronger, more practical cooperation is strengthening ties between political scientists and practitioners.

Due to German history and the experience of the Nazi regime as well as the GDR, skepticism about the misuse of information technologies is very high and the protection of privacy is of utmost importance for the public as well as for politics. Therefore, regulations in the area of data safety and data security are strict and have been developed in the wake of certain European and German scandals in recent history. It is predictable that German Political Science research will put its emphasis on the area of blended democracy and the combination of online and offline institutes, as well as on the area of regulations for digitalization. The new organizational structures within the German Political Science Association gives some hope that a stronger co-operation between the scholars of digitalization can be realized and that this can elicit more engagement in teaching, as well as in research.
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