



MEDIATIZED WORLDS
CULTURE AND SOCIETY IN A MEDIA AGE
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The Meaning of Home in the Context
of Digitization, Mobilization
and Mediatization

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1. Introduction

Arguing for the lasting relevance of the home as meaning-giving sphere of media communications does not seem very popular these days. With the emergence, pervasion and increased centrality of online media and mobile technologies, the research focus of many communication scholars has been aimed at mobility rather than locality, and on networks rather than places. This is mainly due to the liberation of media from their physical restrictions that has characterized the better part of media innovations in the last two decades. As a consequence, the use of media technologies is no longer bound to well-defined settings, as was common for most of the last century when the television had its permanent place in the centre of the living room, and the telephone was considered perfectly placed in the entrance hall. Nowadays, media communications of all different kinds have shifted into the public sphere, permeating a plethora of places and cultural spaces. By using devices such as smartphones and tablet PCs, people can connect to their friends and families and have access to media content and online services from anywhere in the world. This has brought about several changes for the perception and understanding of the outside world which have increasingly become subject to negotiations and customizations by the media users. It is often overlooked, however, that significant changes are also taking effect *within* the home. Media such as the internet and mobile technologies have given rise to a special dynamic that has been unfolding within the domestic realm. Not only have they contributed to a rearrangement of the domestic media ensemble and to a realignment of family interactions, routines and activities within the social fabric of the household: they have also taken part in the further erosion of the already porous boundaries between public and private life, since online media, in particular, are

regularly being used to bring into the home what had previously belonged to the outside world. These changes are, without doubt, worth examining in more detail, especially as they are closely connected to the transformation of various socio-cultural fields and are not isolated from larger trends within society.

In light of these developments, it will be argued that the home is today more than ever an important signifier of media technologies and their implications for society. Although developments such as digitization, mobilization and mediatization are currently widely discussed among scholars and have promoted a perspective on instable geographies such as in-between-spaces or virtual and augmented realities, the home has not lost its relevance within media and communication discourse. On the one hand, this is because the processes that are taking place at the macro level are reflected at the micro level of the household. On the other hand, the home is still the place where questions of participation and inclusion are negotiated and where meaning is allocated to the media as part of a broader media ensemble which is deeply rooted in everyday life. Starting out from these assumptions, what follows is the reasoning for upholding the significance of the home as a meaning-giving sphere of media communications. A theoretical approach in media and communication research that has traditionally put emphasis on the home is the concept of domestication, which will be discussed and critically reflected in the context of digitization, mobilization and mediatization. In this sense, the home is considered a field of action which constitutes one out of several overlapping 'mediatized worlds' (Krotz and Hepp, 2012) of changing communication cultures (Section 2). Based on empirical data drawn from an ethnographically oriented panel study with 25 households, we will then elaborate on the crucial role of everyday domestic life in the ongoing process of adoption, appropriation and alteration of media technologies (Section 3). It will be argued that the relevance of the home is expressed in the following processes, as will be illustrated based on our empirical studies: (a) Participation in new media technologies is fostered due to their integration into everyday domestic life; at the same time, inequalities are being reproduced (e.g., regarding gender relations); (b) the coexistence of old and new media is managed at home; it is where their functions and roles within the media menu are negotiated; and (c) the process of mobilization becomes effective within the household; it takes form as something that we call 'the domestic mobilization of media practices'. The chapter concludes with an outlook on the communicative connections between the household and the outside world, which have increased in number, range and complexity. The mediatized home is, thus, to be seen as an ongoing process coined by the gradual transformation of communication cultures both within the domestic sphere and in connection to the world beyond (Section 4).

2. Domestication in the light of digitization, mobilization and mediatization

When it comes to a theoretical understanding of the complex relationship between media and the home, the domestication concept is the theory of choice. Rooted in British and European cultural media studies, the domestication approach describes and analyzes the process in which new media technologies move into the household and become part of everyday life (for example, Berker, Hartmann, Punie and Ward, 2006; Peil and Röser, 2012; Röser, 2007c; Silverstone and Haddon, 1996; Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, 1992). Essentially, it is about allocating technologies a physical and symbolic place within the domestic sphere by integrating them into the daily routines, social interactions and spatio-temporal structures of the household. The approach has emerged from ethnographic research traditions that sought to analyze media use within the mundane surroundings of everyday life. Instead of creating artificial research settings, domestication theory calls for the consideration of the situations, places and social constellations of media appropriation. In this respect, one of its merits is the 'discovery' of the home as a meaning-giving sphere of media use. Within domestication theory, everyday domestic life represents an important context of media appropriation. On this basis, the approach sheds light on the entanglement of different domestic practices, mediated and non-mediated, and links them back to discourses and changes in society.

The domestication concept was initially developed by Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley (1992) and Livingstone (1992) as an outcome of their *Household uses of information and communication technologies* (HICT) project. Not only did the authors intend to elaborate a conceptual framework for examining the role of information and communication technologies in the home, but they also challenged the idea of a technological determinism by emphasizing the active role of users in the process of media adoption. In their original concept, the authors conceptualized four phases of domestication that account for the dynamics that are stimulated when integrating new media technologies into the domestic sphere: appropriation, objectification, incorporation and conversion. However, rather than succeeding in the order described, these phases mutually shape and interact with one another. In this sense, domestication has to be seen as an ongoing process that is never entirely successful or completed, as Haddon (2001) points out. Unlike mainstream research at that time, which mainly focused on the impact of television and its content, the project shifted analytical attention towards the whole range of information and communication technologies inside the home. It aimed at understanding media use with regard to the household and to family, generation and gender constellations. By considering the 'double articulation' of media technologies (Silverstone and

Haddon, 1996) the researchers introduced another novelty, in that they differentiated between media as material artefacts and media as providers of content-related symbolic meaning. Accordingly, the domestication concept, in theory, claims to take into account both of these dimensions (Livingstone, 2007; Silverstone and Haddon, 1996). However, empirical domestication studies seem to concentrate on the level of the artefact and its integration into everyday life (Hartmann, 2006) rather than on the user's interpretation of the contents.

The focus on the household in ethnographically oriented studies of the 1980s is not surprising, given their interest in the everyday contextualization of media use and, in particular, television use, which was, back then, considered a truly domestic practice. In the understanding of Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley (1992, pp. 16 ff.), the household is a 'moral economy' of shared values and identity. It is seen as an economic, social and cultural unit that is linked to the public sphere in several ways, especially as 'part of a transactional system, dynamically involved in the public world of the production and exchange of commodities and meanings' (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, 1992, p. 19). Building on this idea, domestication theory has always been interested in the household's transformative relationship with the external sphere. It thus regards media use and everyday domestic life not as detached from the surrounding world, but as closely related to society at large.

The domestication approach, with its original focus on the domestic sphere as a pivotal context of media use, has been challenged in more recent domestication studies in which the home seems to have become less relevant (e.g., Vuojärvi, Isomäki and Hynes, 2010). By hinting at the importance of social relationships in media use, Haddon (2001), for example, makes some instructive suggestions on how to extend domestication theory outside the home. Morley (2003) follows a different perspective when he argues for a reconsideration of the home as a dynamic space of close social relations that can be experienced anywhere in the world through the use of ubiquitous media (compare Peil, 2011; Peil and Röser, 2012; Röser, 2007a). A shift away from the household as signifying context of media use has become apparent, especially with the emergence of mobile phone research drawing on domestication theory. While some of the respective studies are concerned with mobile phone use in the specific context of the household (e.g., Dobashi, 2005), others underpin the need for a reconceptualization of the domestication concept. Most commonly, however, they just refer to its more general ideas of the social character of media technologies that do not develop to an inner logic, but are related to negotiations, social interactions and changing discourse (e.g., Hjorth, 2009; Ling, 2004).

From our perspective, the home's perceived loss of significance can be associated with the processes of digitization, mobilization and mediatization, which are profoundly interconnected with each other and have been

important promoters of social change. The concept of mediatization (Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby, 2010; Hjarvard, 2008; Krotz, 2007; Lundby, 2009) is concerned with media-related changes in communication that implicate new ways of making sense of the world. The underlying assumption is that social action is increasingly moulded by media communication (Hepp, 2009). Mediatization, hence, refers to the cultural and social change related to the emergence and saturation of different forms of media communications in all spheres of everyday life. Mediatization is not a new phenomenon; for example, the emergence and spread of the television set in the 1950s could already be linked to a mediatization of the home which was, among other ways, expressed in the realignment of domestic family rituals, the mobilization of lifestyles and a transformation of the relationship between the public and the private sphere. Mediatization, therefore, has an history, but no defined endpoint, and it is to be understood as an ongoing, highly heterogeneous meta-process shaping modernity.

Characteristic of the present mediatization of culture and society is its intensification by the digitization and mobilization of media. The term 'digitization' basically indicates a new media standard that helps to store, modify and distribute information, and, thus, describes a form of technical change. It represents the technical side of the current mediatization process and stands for far-ranging implications concerning the activities of media users and society as a whole (Hüsig, 2012). These include the emergence of a variety of new communication facilities, the technological convergence of media and media contents, and the enhancement of existing media devices that are becoming increasingly connected and networked. As a consequence, media uses overlap, and the media's scopes of action and signification have become less distinctive (Krotz, 2007, p. 94). However, even though digitization has resulted in a proliferation of convergent technologies and all-purpose media, this does not mean that older media are being replaced or substituted. Rather, a dynamic coexistence can be noticed, as Jenkins (2006) puts it:

Each old medium was forced to coexist with the emerging media. That's why convergence seems more plausible as a way of understanding the past several decades of media change than the old digital revolution paradigm had. Old media are not being displaced. Rather, their functions and status are shifted by the introduction of new technologies.

(Jenkins, 2006, p. 14; see also Morley, 2003)

The process of mobilization points in a similar direction, in that it is not only about technological advancements but also about the accompanying change of culture, society and everyday life. Mobile media, such as the smartphone or tablet PC, play a key role within this process. They are highly personalized and portable technologies that allow the users to access a broad spectrum

of communication tools while, at the same time, leaving the well-known contexts of media consumption, such as the home or the office. Instead of referring to an immobile, localized context of media reception, mobile technologies are available on the go, wherever and whenever they are needed. Their liberation from geographical constraints and, in particular, their ability to overcome distances have fed the debate about the sense of place, which is either believed to have become irrelevant or regarded as an ever more crucial condition of everyday life (Morley, 2007, p. 223).

With regard to the growing impact of these ongoing processes, as well as the increasing blurring of boundaries that comes with it, the upkeep of the home as a significant context of media use seems like a difficult undertaking that still deserves greater support. For the social construction of home media have played a major role since the early 20th century. Through the use of media, domestic routines and communicative patterns are established, social interactions are structured and differences within the family are negotiated (Silverstone, 2007, p. 172). At the same time, the home has been and still is an important context of media use, even in times of a growing significance of mobile media that often come into operation within the home. While the boundaries of the home have become more porous and subject to modifications, the home is still crucial for the acquisition of media and their position and function within the media ensemble. Regardless of the consequences one draws from the changes depicted above for the reconceptualization of the domestication approach, it can be concluded that the home is still a special place. It is not just one out of many spheres of everyday life where media are appropriated. Featuring some specific structures and qualifications that provide a unique ground where 'the molding force of the media' (Hepp, 2012) and the communicative actions of the people intersect, the home is a microcosm of mediatization that is closely connected to the macrocosm of society. Even today, with the ongoing processes of mobilization, digitization and mediatization, the relevance of the home has not diminished, as we will demonstrate in the following chapter, based on the findings of our empirical study on the mediatized home and the changes of domestic communication cultures.

3. The mediatized home

The empirical data of the mediatized home project is drawn from a qualitative panel study with examination periods in 2008 and 2011.¹ The underlying concept was the assumption that the domestic use of the internet had contributed to significant changes within the mediatized home which are articulated in the reconfiguration of the media ensemble and in the realignment of domestic interactions and relations. The core interest of the study was, therefore, directed to the domestication and appropriation of the internet (= main focus of the first examination period) as well

as to the alteration of domestic communication cultures (= main focus of the second examination period), from a process-oriented perspective. Overall questions addressed the emergence and negotiation of participation, the interplay of media usage patterns and gender constellations, and the media-related construction of fragmentation and community within the home. Another emphasis of the study was the changing relationship between the household and the outside world.

In order to gain insights into the designated research areas, we completed 25 ethnographically oriented household studies with cohabiting heterosexual couples in Germany. In total, 50 men and women were interviewed. We first conducted a written survey with 135 individuals, who were recruited through snowball sampling, to build up the sample. Of these, 25 people and their respective partners were selected with respect to three different age groups (25–35, 36–50, 51–63)² and two different educational groups (general/intermediate secondary school, high school graduation or vocational diploma) for the household studies. Certain attributes were also considered, such as the date of internet acquisition, professional affinity and non-affinity to the internet, as well as children, housewives and retirees within the household.

The qualitative household studies included two visits to each couple's household (in 2008 and 2011) with a guided interview, a home site inspection and photographs of the media settings. We interviewed husband and wife together, since our primary interest was not in the individuals but in the social situations, communication practices and gender-related arrangements that shape the daily lives of the couples. According to the shifting emphasis of the study – from the reconstruction of the internet acquisition and domestication process in the first examination period, to the analysis of changing communication cultures in the second examination period – additional instruments were applied. In 2008, the household studies were part of a broader methodological design that additionally comprised the secondary analysis of representative data about the development of online use in Germany.³ When conducting the qualitative interviews, we made use of a timeline to help the respondents recollect the early days of computer and internet adoption and appropriation. They also had to fill in lists to provide information about the use of online applications and the functions allocated to different media. A new element in 2011 was a drawing, whereby the respondents had to sketch in the media and their position within the household (Morley, 2007, p. 83). On the one hand, these drawings were used to encourage talk about the meanings that were assigned to the media in everyday life. On the other hand, they supported a comparative analysis of the households, since the media setting of each household was comprehensively documented and visualized.

We developed the genre of *ethnographic household portraits* for the data analysis and created a detailed portrait of each household by drawing

on interview transcripts and memos (with impressions from the interviews), as well as other empirical material such as questionnaires, lists and photographs, and supported it with interview quotes. After the second examination period, these portraits were complemented by structured summary reports centring on selected interview themes and topics. In this way, we were able to perform a context-oriented analysis of all domestic media activities and preferences. Instead of interpreting the data in an individual-based way, as it is done in most other studies, we put a special focus on social constellations and interrelations of various factors within the household. Based on these portraits and reports, a comparative analysis was carried out, followed by a grouping and typifying of the households according to selected questions.

Media domesticity, participation and persisting inequalities

The idea of the home's ongoing significance is supported by the findings of the household studies in multiple ways. One key aspect is the involvement in new media technologies that is moderated and negotiated within the household. The 2008 study, with its focus on the process of domestication and appropriation of the internet, has already shown that the integration of the new technology into everyday life and its connection to domestic duties, routines and interactions have given a major boost to online participation in Germany (Peil and Röser, 2012; Röser and Peil, 2010a). This was mirrored in the quantitative data by the ARD/ZDF online studies (cf. endnote 3). It became obvious with regard to internet diffusion in the first ten years of the survey (1997–2007) that the expansion of the user community and especially the broadening of user groups – from tech-savvy young men to users of different age, educational background and gender – had largely taken place via the domestic context. Whereas places such as the office or school were the preferred localities of internet use in 1997, the share of home internet users increased from 42 to 91 per cent in the following decade. After 2000, the number of people using the internet exclusively at home rose significantly, totalling some 20 million people in 2007, which accounted for half of all the internet users in Germany at that time. In large parts, this rise was a result of the internet adoption by population groups for whom professional inputs were likely to be lacking, for example, due to maternity leave, retirement or 'deskless' professions. Even though some well-known socio-demographic differences in the composition of internet users were still visible in 2007, these trends clearly indicate that the internet had diffused into different social groups and towards a broadening of the user community. Internet use was considerably fostered through the domestication of the technology, contrary to what was predicted by digital divide theorists at the beginning of online connectivity in Germany. The data speaks for the interplay of various factors, such as the implementation of the internet into the domestic sphere, the broadening of the

user community and the integration of the technology into everyday life at home.

Our qualitative household studies point in the same direction, and they shed light on the domestication process from the perspective of the users and their initial motivation to access the internet from their private homes. Based on these findings, we identified two different adoption stages that were linked to specific sets of motives. The early stage of internet adoption refers to the households with online access from the mid-1990s onwards. Their interest in the internet was strongly influenced by work or education. A general interest in technology was also often mentioned as a motive for the adoption. The second adoption stage, which was characterized by households without any professional reference to the internet, began in 2000, with peaks in 2002 and 2003. At that time, the user's motivations to access the internet from home were significantly connected to the domestic sphere and the politics of everyday life. In most cases, either there was a specific private concern that initiated internet adoption (e.g., a hobby) or services that supported daily life attracted people's interest, such as travel planning, online banking or eBay. Some of the later adopters had already experienced some pressure from friends or family members to use the internet, and the fear of being left behind motivated their adoption. Another relevant factor was the availability of friends or relatives with some technical expertise who could help to get the internet started and solve problems. These supporters – who in our sample were all male – had, and still have, an outstanding role in the domestication of the internet.⁴

Both the findings based on quantitative data and those based on qualitative data hint at the importance of the domestication process for the diffusion of the internet. They are theoretically rooted in a second perspective of the domestication approach that has been rather neglected so far, even though it was already part of the original concept. Besides emphasizing the role of everyday-life-related contexts for the appropriation of media, the domestication approach represents an analytical framework for describing and theorizing the diffusion process of new media. By asking to what extent the diffusion of new media technologies is fostered through their integration into the domestic sphere, it provides an appropriation-oriented perspective of analysis which primarily centres on the increase of participation as an implication of domestication (Peil and Röser, 2012). This further perspective of the domestication concept can be underpinned by historical studies about early radio (Moores, 1988; 1993; Morley, 1992; 2000) and the telephone (Fischer, 1994; Rakow, 1988). The alteration of these media from technical artefacts to integral parts of everyday life bears some interesting analogies with the diffusion of computers and the internet in the 1990s. All have in common that they attracted wider audiences in the course of their domestication; social inequalities that usually characterize the introduction phase of a new medium were levelled during this process (Peil and Röser,

2012). Additional insights into the quality of this process were gained in the 2011 interviews that revealed how different forms of digital participation were repeatedly negotiated in the further domestication (and re- and de-domestication; see Peil and Röser, 2007) of the internet. The increase of participation is, thus, not to be understood as a linear process, but as being subject to domestic communication cultures: eventually, it is the activities and relationships in the home that decide over the proliferation of competences, the promotion of interest and the use of social resources that constitute the basis of the involvement with digital technologies.

The domestication-driven dynamics unfolding within the home should, however, not be mistaken for an equal use of domestic media technologies. Some inequalities became evident, especially with regard to gender relations and online uses, that exemplarily shed light on the internal processes of inclusion and exclusion and their potential changes over time. Today, the internet still remains a medium framed by its technical character, despite its increased contextualization and integration into everyday life. As a networked technology with multiple interfaces, it still cannot be as easily handled as media such as the radio or television. This technical dimension of the internet (and computer!) is a major reason for its male coding at the hardware level. Correspondingly, in most households in our sample the male partner was responsible for technical issues around the domestic use of online devices. Even in those households where the women were quite confident about their own technical skills and competently used the internet, they usually delegated the technical responsibility to their partners. Nevertheless, there were some differences pertaining to the two adoption stages: while in the majority of households belonging to the first adoption stage (with the exception of the student couples) the male partner was the dominant or even sole user of the internet, the gender constellations within the second adoption stage were more diverse and the partners lagging behind were more likely to start using the internet shortly after domestic implementation. In a few of these households, the woman initiated the internet purchase and remained in charge of the technology. However, the man held this responsibility in most of the households, whatever his factual expert status. Even men with limited internet knowledge were often constituted as the expert within the male–female relationship. This kind of relative difference points to persisting inequalities that are reflected in the representative data: while a lot of women now have access to the internet, there is still a gap between male and female users in terms of range, intensity and diversity of use. This difference is repeatedly constructed by both partners as part of a doing gender process taking effect within the home.

In summary, everyday life at home plays an ambivalent role in the domestication of media. On the one hand, it fosters participation in new media technologies; on the other hand, it represents a cultural field where inequalities are being reproduced. This is especially true for gender relations, because

gender-related divisions of labour and the reproduction and alteration of gender discourse within society are inscribed in the domestic media practices (see Morley, 2000; 2001; Peil and Röser, 2012; Röser, 2007a; 2007b; Röser and Peil, 2010a; 2012).

Coexistence of old and new media

The home is still the place where the coexistence of old and new media is managed. It is the place where their functions and roles are negotiated and where each single medium is allocated its specific position within the media ensemble. The decision over which medium to use at a given moment is made at home, where the whole range of media are set in relation to each other (see Morley, 2003, p. 445). This can be illustrated by assuming people's information needs in times of crisis and their corresponding media usage. When, for example, Japan was devastated by the triple catastrophe in March 2011, media users selectively chose from their set of media in order to meet different interests. Watching television might have helped them to feel part of a national community that simultaneously shared the immediacy and shock of the events; social media, such as Facebook, potentially enhanced this mediatized experience in that they delivered tailored and customized information and allowed direct communicative exchange over what had happened; the radio, with its perpetual flow of news that is deeply embedded in everyday life, possibly served as an additional source of information; again, the connected smartphone might have been used to expand the factual knowledge about the backdrops of the disaster. Envisaging this overall setting, it becomes clear that no medium works completely independently, nor does it establish its own separate space of cultural meaning (Bolter and Grusin, 2000). On the contrary, the interplay of media is crucial to understand what each part stands for and how it is used. The significance and impact of media are, thus, to be assessed against the background of domesticity.

The role of media as part of the domestic media ensemble was critically analyzed in our ongoing household studies. The results provide instructive information about the digital mediatization process currently affecting the home. Rather than a predominance of online media, the findings suggest a dynamic coexistence of old and new media that is deliberately managed by the household members. In most households, the internet was integrated into the existing media repertoire as a discrete element with specific concerns and gratifications. Its use was related to tasks that were not at all or only partially covered by the other media in the home – mainly the management of needs and wants that emerged in the context of everyday life. Hence, instead of substituting the purpose of older media, such as radio, television and newspapers, the internet began occupying a cultural sphere that was previously unoccupied by media communications. This insight is reflected in our typology of domestic media usage patterns,

which distinguishes three types of households with regard to the internet's role within the media repertoire: internet as integrated medium, internet as convergent medium and internet as marginal medium. While the latter – referring to households with a strong affinity to a classical media repertoire dominated by radio, newspapers and television – has lost relevance in the last few years, the convergent use of the internet still applies to only a minority of the households, but is likely to gain importance in the future. The large majority, about two-thirds of the households we interviewed, were characterized by the integral nature of the internet, whereby the other media had retained their specific role and meaning. At this level, the data hints at a persistence of everyday life contexts within the home that are not easily overturned by new media, but take a significant part in the shaping of domestic technology.

Domestic mobilization of media practices

One process by which the significance of home is particularly challenged is the mobilization of media. In our view, mobilization should not be considered as the opposite of domesticity, because it becomes effective not only beyond but also within, the domestic sphere. Our empirical data provides evidence of the increased importance and various uses of mobile media within the home. This trend will be referred to as the *domestic mobilization of media practices*. Between 2008 and 2011, quite a few of the couples in our panel had purchased smartphones for their private use, which have now come to infiltrate nearly all rooms of the household. However, domestic mobilization is not founded in the mere availability of mobile technologies that were already present in a fair share of households in 2008. Above all, it is expressed in the more flexible use of laptops and other related media, since in most of the households that owned such a device in 2008 it had expanded into a greater variety of rooms three years later. In fact, mobile uses of the internet with a smartphone or a laptop computer were common in every second household in 2011. The household members connect different rooms and places temporarily to the online world via mobile media technologies; they generate provisional internet spaces, and thus create new media spheres within the home that are subject to a complex management of family relationships, as well as media preferences. In this way, the domestic mobilization of media practices comes with new communicative settings that are actively constructed by the media users. Couples, for example, mostly relied on mobile media when they wanted to share a physical space in the home with their partners without having to share involvement in the same media content. Some form of community was enabled even with diverging media preferences, in that one partner, for instance, watched television, while the other was surfing on the internet. As proved by the household studies, these social situations were clearly connected to the content and kind of online activity that was performed. Some of the

respondents reported that they would answer e-mails or administer their social networking profiles in the living room in order to be in the company of their partner or other household members. For work-related internet uses, however, they would rather retreat to a separate room. This is a good example of how domestic media are used to adjust community and individuation within the home.

The domestic mobilization of media practices can be linked to new socio-spatial routines and new ways of negotiating interactions at home (Röser and Peil, 2010b). This tendency has been intensified by the increased use of smartphones within the domestic sphere. Permeating more and more domestic localities, mobile media have given rise to a variety of new situations and contexts of mediatized communication in which media uses overlap and interfere in a complex way with daily life. Given the intention to buy a smartphone or laptop in the near future, which was articulated by several of the couples, it is expected that this trend will continue over the next few years. This not only applies to interpersonal mediatized communication, which looks back at a longer tradition of domestic mobilization thanks to the popularity of cordless telephones since the 1990s, but also gradually affects all different kinds of media communications within the home. In the course of this development, face-to-face communication between the household members, as well as other domestic activities, such as cooking, studying or watching television, are augmented – to name but one of the consequences. Most notably, the domestic mobilization of media practices has led, and still leads, to a further dissemination of the internet within the mediatized home that is closely associated with the configuration of community.

4. Conclusion: Grasping the mediatized home in the ongoing decade

Supported by the empirical findings of our qualitative panel study with 25 couples in Germany, we have given evidence of the home's lasting relevance as a meaning-giving sphere of media communications. Current developments, such as mediatization, digitization and mobilization, seem to have promoted a perspective on contemporary societies that is centred on flows and networks rather than on locality and domesticity. However, these processes cannot hide the fact that the home still represents a significant terrain for people to negotiate the impact and meaning of media technologies. This was proven by the household studies, with their insights into the dynamics of digital inclusion and exclusion, as well as the coexistence of old and new media and the mobilization of media practices within the home. As one out of many 'mediatized worlds' (Krotz and Hepp, 2012) within society that overlap and influence each other, the home is currently undergoing significant changes. These changes cannot be solely linked back to the increased pervasion of the domestic sphere with different forms of media

communications, but also relate to the alteration of domestic communication cultures which are expressed, among other ways, in new media settings and sites of social interaction, reworked patterns of work and family organization, and innovative socio-spatial arrangements. As these fields of action, in turn, constitute 'small life-worlds' (Krotz and Hepp, 2012, p. 13) of shared belief, knowledge and practice, the mediatized home further represents a local reference for multiple concretions of an encompassing mediatization process.

The domestication approach, with its process and context orientation, helps to analyze the manifestations of cultural change within the mediatized world of the home, as it turns its focus to the media-related routines, interactions and disputes inside the house. Beyond that, the concept has always been interested in the household's transformative relationship with the public sphere. Since the communicative connections between the home and the outside world have considerably increased in number, range and complexity, this field is expected to bring about the most significant changes in the near future. To a great extent, this is a result of different forms of mediatized interpersonal communications that have gained relevance in the last few years, especially e-mailing and participation in online communities. In addition, the management of daily tasks and activities has become more and more mediatized and is regularly performed within the domestic sphere. The constant presence of work inside the home and the virtual proximity of distant friends and peers are likely to have some kind of influence on interpersonal communication between the household members. These processes, in particular, call for a re-evaluation of the mediatized home and its ever more complex relationship with the outside world.

Notes

1. The German Research Foundation-funded project 'The mediatized home: A qualitative panel study on changes of domestic communication cultures' is situated at the University of Münster and is run under the leadership of Jutta Röser. It is part of the German priority programme 'Mediatized World' (Krotz and Hepp, 2012) and will be continued with a third examination period in 2013/2014.
 2. The age of the respondents refers to the date of the first examination period in 2008. The minimum age was set at 25 years because of our interest in the domestication process of the internet that commenced in the mid-1990s and was supposed to be recounted from the perspective of adult users.
 3. The quantitative data was originally collected for the ARD/ZDF online studies that annually survey the internet usage of the German population over the age of 14. The studies have been commissioned by the media board of the two main public service broadcasters in Germany, ARD (Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten der Bundesrepublik Deutschland) and ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen) since 1997, which made the data available to us for secondary analysis. Some, but not all, of the data is regularly published in the journal *Media Perspektiven* (e.g., van Eimeren and Frees, 2010).
4. Bakardjieva (2005, p. 98) also found such helpers in her study and described them as 'warm experts'.

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