Discursive Media Institutionalism:
Assessing Vivien A. Schmidt's Framework
and Its Value for Media and Communication Studies

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Vivien A. Schmidt's discursive institutionalism (DI) framework has gained considerable popularity in media and communication studies, particularly among scholars studying media institutions. However, while scholars refer to DI to emphasize the importance of ideas and discourses in institutional processes, to date, a critical assessment of the framework is lacking. In this article, we discuss DI from the perspective of media and communication studies and suggest a modified DI framework in which we (1) rethink discourse from a discourse theoretical perspective and emphasize power as a constituting element of media institutions, (2) differentiate between public (mass media) communication and other nonpublic and semipublic forms of communication, and (3) integrate macro perspectives (market, political system, culture, technology, globalization) into Schmidt's micro–meso-focused framework. With these differentiations, our proposition is to be understood as a heuristic for a systematic analysis of media institutions as a field of power.

Keywords: discursive media institutionalism, media policy, neoinstitutionalism, media policy as discourse, communication and power

Self-reflective accounts and meta-analyses of media and communication policy research frequently criticize the field for being undertheorized and descriptive; thus, scholars have called for new approaches to improve the theoretical contributions. This article proposes a new theoretical framework that draws from Vivien A. Schmidt's (2008, 2010, 2012, 2016) discursive institutionalist approach, which combines institutionalism with an ideational, actor-oriented approach. With its institutionalist foundation, discursive institutionalism (DI) is suitable for the analysis of highly institutionalized social fields (Powell

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& DiMaggio, 1991). By focusing on ideas and discursive processes, DI allows us to consider how media institutions are constructed and reproduced by actors. The integration of DI into the field is valuable when emphasizing analytical dimensions with a focus on related discourses and power dynamics when studying change and continuity in the field of media institutions. With this contribution, we aim to theoretically connect complex dynamics between those in power and the public in the context of studying change and continuity in media and communication policy and their impact on the broader field of media institutions. We see this modification as an opportunity to put media and communication policy at the heart of media and communication studies.

We argue that work in our discipline has failed to date to connect our knowledge about communicative spaces and complex publics and their role within this particular institutional field to the perspectives DI offers. Contrary to media and communication policy work that adapts the DI framework (DIF; Ali & Puppis, 2018; Katzenbach, Herweg, & van Roessel, 2016; Padovani & Santaniello, 2018; Pohle, Hösl, & Kniep, 2016), we suggest going beyond the adaptation of DI, and instead discuss this framework from a media and communication studies perspective to enable a critical integration of DI into our field of study. Thus, we confront basic assumptions of DI with knowledge about communication and mass media and suggest modifications and complementary conceptual adaptations of Schmidt's framework to develop the potential that the DIF offers from a media and communication studies perspective. Particularly, we offer revised conceptualizations of (1) actors, (2) power, and (3) publics. We do this by suggesting a micro–meso–macro split by strengthening understandings of "discourse" and "public" in Schmidt's framework. For this purpose, we draw on communication studies literature and use characteristics of the media and communication policy field that discuss the basic dimensions of DI. Our article develops dimensions and research perspectives for the study of media and communication policy based on a discursive institutionalist framework. We first outline the original discursive institutionalist framework and point to the relevance it has gained in our field of study. Second, we discuss the applicability of the approach and add dimensions that are required for theorizing media policy. Third, we suggest how to apply DI as a framework to show its added value for studying the dynamics, change, and continuity of media institutions. Following a classic neoinstitutional definition, we understand institutions as "the formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions" (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 938), providing "'the frames of meaning' that guide human action" (p. 947) that are "embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy" (p. 938) and in sociocultural patterns.

Theoretical Challenges for Media and Communication Policy Studies

Political uncertainties and technological change have challenged media and communication policy research. This has led to a range of scholarly metareflections in the last decade. Many of these contributions have addressed the ideological and analytical barriers of research, have criticized the lack of context, and generally have made us aware of how specific philosophy of science traditions have shaped media and communication policy studies. Napoli and Friedland (2016), for instance, question the ideological, traditional distinction between the administrative and critical approaches that had debilitated research. Streeter (2013) emphasizes how, by adopting the analytical (and strategic) separation of "policy" from "politics" from political science, communication policy research had not only prescribed the myth of the neutral and objective "kind of government-by-expertise" (p. 490), but had excluded aspects

of media and communication policy such as issues of power and struggles over meaning. Mansell and Raboy (2011) argue that "many of the analytical models for the study of policy-making" overemphasized individual decision making and neglected normative issues (p. 5). Kimball (2012) makes us aware of the fact that positivist assumptions have led to a specific conceptualization of policy making as a "pure, factually defined, rational process" (p. 35). Along the same lines, Freedman (2008) argues that media policy research has neglected the importance of "underlying assumptions and ideas that define policy 'problems', shape policy debates and guide policy objectives" (p. 4).

What all of those reflections on the field share is not only an uneasiness about referring media and communication policy "simply to objectives and procedures for effectively addressing shared issues" (Streeter, 2013, p. 489), but they also share an uneasiness regarding unidimensional approaches, and instead suggest integration of administrative and critical research, interpretive approaches, and structural approaches, as well as overcoming the "false dichotomy of 'policy' and 'politics'" (Kimball, 2016, p. 5951). In all of that literature, we find calls are made to take the role of language and discourse in media policy into account, to put "policy developments in a larger sociocultural context" (Streeter, 2013, p. 493), to understand policy processes as being both structured and actor-driven (Freedman, 2008, p. 4), and to consider the increased entanglement between local and global contexts (Mansell & Raboy, 2011).

With the adaptation of the DIF, we aim to complement our field's contribution to theoretical discourses and the diversification of knowledge making. Our research interests are less about steering, efficient, or "good" instruments and regulation, but rather they originate from the social science concern regarding how media and communication structures emerge, are changed, and are abolished. We are interested in conceptualizing how media and communication policy as a discursive field "operates," today and in the past, and how media structures have been shaped by actors' interactions within particular social, economic, and political contexts. In emphasizing our communication studies standpoint, we do not take "policy science" (Streeter, 2013, p. 488) as a reference. Promoting the approach of the political scientist Schmidt is no contradiction in this regard. In our undertaking to adapt and convert DI for our discipline, the DI approach bridges structuralism and subjectivism. Media and communication policy processes can, therefore, be understood as interplay among structures, agency, and meaning. Our proposal incorporates power struggles and discursive formations and practices, as well as more complex understandings of the public into Schmidt's original proposal. This prevents the "objectification" of media policy change—a perspective focused on its outcome and efficiency and helps us understand how practices and institutions come into being (Streeter, 2013), and why media policy and structural change has or has not occurred over time. The DI perspective is therefore different from scholarly work such as approaches like the bottleneck, multiple streams, and strategic action field theories, which look at media and communication policy from a stance that is mainly driven by an emphasis on policy consequences and the urge to find solutions for current problems (e.g., Herzog & Karppinen, 2014; Steen-Johnsen, Schanke Sundet, & Enjolras, 2019).

If we consider that the current assessments made by media policy researchers are correct, and the field is weak in theoretical terms (Picard, 2016), and that the "discourse about . . . theoretical approaches" is "largely missing" (Just & Puppis, 2018, p. 330), then our article offers a way forward by strengthening theoretical discourses in our field. We relate particularly to efforts to link the micro, meso,

and macro levels when applying institutional theory in communication studies (Bannerman & Haggart, 2015). Our proposition is intended to serve as a heuristic and to help analyze media and communication policy as a field of power through the dimensions that we develop in this current work.

Discursive Institutionalism as a Theoretical Framework

        DI is a neoinstitutionalist framework that derives from political sciences and pays attention to traditional institutions, as well as emergent informal institutions and their role in defining policy issues and processes (Rosamond, 2000).[2] The DIF links the constructivist perspective that theorizes the role of ideas to the interpretative approach that tries to understand and explain how actors think and how they define and communicate a problem (Schmidt, 2008, 2010). At the core of the DIF is the aim of understanding transformation by asking "when and how ideas and discourses matter" (Schmidt, 2008, p. 305). Whereas other frameworks look at transformation by referring to changes in policy issues and objectives (e.g., Steen-Johnsen et al., 2019), DI emphasizes the dynamic role of actors in explaining institutional changes (Schmidt, 2008, p. 305). Schmidt displays a complex conceptual understanding of change and includes administrative settings, tools, underlying ideas, discourses, and agents (Schmidt, 2008), which can be studied as objects of change and as transformation per se. Consequently, the DIF studies institutions as socially constructed in a dynamic and never-ending micro-level process, determined by the actors' discursive ability to trigger change in institutions (Schmidt, 2008, 2010). In short, DI assumes that discursive action inside and outside organizations makes a difference in the shaping and maintaining of rules in a policy field and that organizations form part of a wider field in which they are interconnected to an institution (see Table 1). We offer an application of DI in our field that complements Schmidt's terminology and strengthens the knowledge about media institutions from an understanding that media and communication policy is shaped through interactions among a variety of actors with different power resources.

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[2] DI is founded in what Schmidt calls the "older" new institutionalisms, which are (1) historical institutionalism, (2) social constructivism, and (3) behavioral institutionalism (see Hall & Taylor, 1996; Puppis, 2016).

Table 1. Dimensions of Discursive Institutionalism.[3]

Dimension	Properties	Assumption	Specification
Institutions and institutional contexts	Meaning structures Processes	Socially constructed and interconnected, internalized Both constraining structures and enabling constructs (object of change and constraint)	Formal and informal rules, ideas with "authority"
Agents	Sentient agents	Create and maintain institutions	Think and speak foreground discursive abilities Background ideational abilities
Ideas and discourses	Ideas	"What is said" Fundament of discourses	Normative, cognitive ideas, worldviews, frames, and policy solutions
	Interactions	Exchange of ideas, shaped by institutional contexts Processes in coordinative policy sphere and communicative political sphere	Collective action, formation of discourse coalitions
Power	Ideas and power	Power is immanent to ideas	Power in ideas Power over ideas Power through ideas

Institutionalist perspectives traditionally enjoy popularity in media and communication studies, spanning fields such as journalism, political communication, communication policy, communication history, and global communication. Summarizing the use of DI in the literature, most works in our field use DI to broadly confirm that ideas and discourses matter in organizations and in related decision-making processes (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017; Katzenbach et al., 2016; Padovani & Santaniello, 2018; Pohle et al., 2016).

Others focus on the ways in which media organizations specifically take advantage of their particularly well-positioned resources to engage in and shape communicative acts that might influence policy making (Ali & Puppis, 2018). Another perspective is the analysis of the distribution of discourses through discourse coalitions across borders and on a global scale, and the establishment and defense of discourses across contexts over time (Ganter, 2018).

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[3] Own presentation based on Schmidt (2008, 2010, 2012, 2016) and Carstensen and Schmidt (2016).

If we consider how scholars from our field have used DI to date, we can conclude that the different dimensions outlined in Table 1 have not been explored in detail. As a consequence, the existing references to Schmidt's work reveal discrepancies between what DI proposes and what the field of media and communication makes of it. One aspect showing discrepancies is the complex conceptualization of actors, which is not entirely unfolded through Schmidt's (2008, 2010, 2012, 2016) work and is often reduced when her work is applied. She emphasizes the role of actors to understand institutional change and defines sentient agents as actors within institutional contexts who think and communicate ideas about institutions in discourses. Through their background ideational abilities, they create and reproduce institutions. Foreground discursive abilities enable actors "to think and speak outside the institutions in which they continue to act" (Schmidt, 2008, p. 315; see Table 1) and to communicate critically about them. This may lead to institutional change.

Looking at the sum of studies using the DIF, however, points to the fact that the field of actors that is relevant when studying media institutions includes and goes beyond media organizations; it includes political, economic, and citizens' organizations, which define the broader field of media institutions. Katzenbach et al. (2016) use DI to understand informal coordination in the games market operating under copyright laws by referring to industrial actors from within the gaming industry. Padovani and Santaniello (2018) refer to the abilities of social and policy actors when asking how and why informal policy documents can be influential or gain influence. Work from our field shows how actors' abilities are not created in a vacuum, but are shaped through access to resources, established power positions, and existing frameworks that enable them to enact their specific abilities (Breindl & Briatte, 2013; Herzog & Scerbinina, 2020; Löblich & Nietzke, 2020). In their studies, Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) and Ali and Puppis (2018) focus on journalism as a discursive institution and describe struggles over discursive authority (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2017) or power (Ali & Puppis, 2018) among journalists, news outlets, and media organizations and policy makers that are infused through ideas that can then be translated into media policy actions.

What these studies confirm is that actors in the field are "somehow" constructing, internalizing, and contesting meaning structures and processes as they work to turn existing ideas, rules, and structures to their own advantage and that this happens more through conveying power broadly through communication (which we conceptualize as "differentiated communicative spaces"). However, Carstensen and Schmidt (2016) suggest a conceptualization of power as immanent in ideas and define a triad of power that consists of (1) power in ideas, which refers to the authority of meaning structures that underline ideas; (2) power over ideas, which refers to the concept of being in control over the spread and transfer of ideas, for example, through the selection of fora, experts, and testimonies; and (3) power through ideas, which refers to reaching cognitive and normative validity through persuasion. We criticize this conceptualization of power by suggesting an approach in which power works through discourse as repressive, reproductive, unstable, material, and relational.

For the purpose of adaptability, we therefore suggest modifying the DIF toward (1) an understanding of actors as consisting of heterogeneous organizations and individuals that contribute to heterogeneous spheres; (2) an understanding of the public by complexifying the dimensions of discourse and publics in the DIF, which differentiates between public (mass media) communication and other nonpublic and semipublic forms of communication; and (3) a context-oriented, relational perspective that links

structural and interpretative factors. We suggest a micro–meso–macro split for the framework, which integrates macro perspectives (market, political system, culture, technology, globalization) into Schmidt's micro–meso-focused framework. With these differentiations, our proposition is to be understood as a heuristic for a systematic, process-oriented conceptualization of media institutions as a field of power.

Points of Critique as Points of Departure for Discursive Media Institutionalism

In the following, we depart from a constructive critique of the DIF offered to then amend it into a discursive media institutionalism framework (DMIF). We show how using the DMIF can help us study and understand the dynamics driving or hindering institutional change in the specific and highly complex field of media institutions, as we offer pathways for research perspectives and related questions to explore. For that purpose, we revisit Schmidt's conceptual undertakings based on theoretical and empirical questions from media and communication policy studies.

Schmidt (2010) defines the "institutional context" as the "context in which and through which ideas are communicated" (p. 2). The perspective on organizations as constructs created by diverse actors with diverse experiences, values, and interests is an important contribution that the DIF offers. It differs considerably from approaches such as the strategic action field framework (e.g., Fligstein & McAdam, 2011), the multiple streams approach (e.g., Kingdon, 2003), or the media policy field approach (Steen-Johnsen et al., 2019), which tend to view organizations as homogeneous and relatively stable constructs.

We use the conceptual separation of institutional contexts into micro, meso, and macro perspectives to clarify the mechanisms underlying them (Ganter & Maurer, 2015; Löblich, 2018; Talib & Fitzgerald, 2016). This allows us to take multilayered institutional contexts into account and to point toward their interconnections (see Figure 1). Whereas the micro and meso perspectives—the role and abilities of actors in organizations within institutional fields—are defined in Schmidt's DIF, little is said about the role that political, media, economic, and cultural systems play in defining discourses and the actor's positioning within both a single organization and in the institutional field. As DI is a midrange approach, the link among the policy level as a field of action, the related meaning structures, and the contextual factors that it encounters need to be integrated into the DIF when studying media institutions. One argument for this link can be derived from media history, and another is from comparative media studies: To understand a specific media institution in the past, it is necessary to know in which society and structural conditions it was embedded back then. To understand why countries develop similar or different institutional responses to media policy problems, it is important to consider their macro structures. We share this concern with proponents of historical institutionalism in our field (Bannerman & Haggart, 2015).

Consequently, we argue that institutional contexts have an impact on the discursive abilities of actors as they influence the ability to think and speak impactfully in the field of media policy. In the institutional contexts of a particular discourse, power dynamics work across these three analytical levels, where power is immanent in, over, and through discourses (see Figure 1) on each and between each level of analysis. Here, we recognize that media policy as discourse is shaped and sustained through complex processes across analytical levels and by heterogeneous actors (and not by homogeneously functioning organizations), an aspect that is mentioned but underdeveloped in Schmidt's framework. Having said that,

we understand DI as an opportunity to elaborate theoretically and empirically on joining structure-driven considerations that will enrich media policy analysis through considering not only discourses and the actors that represent them, but also the macro-level conditions and historical contexts (Löblich, 2018) that shape media policy as discourse. With that, we support Zittoun (2009) in asking why and how change in media policy happens rather than objectifying policy change through focusing merely on the question of success or failure. As a consequence, we conceptualize media institutions as a dynamic field that is negotiated through the exchange, survival, or silencing of discourses.
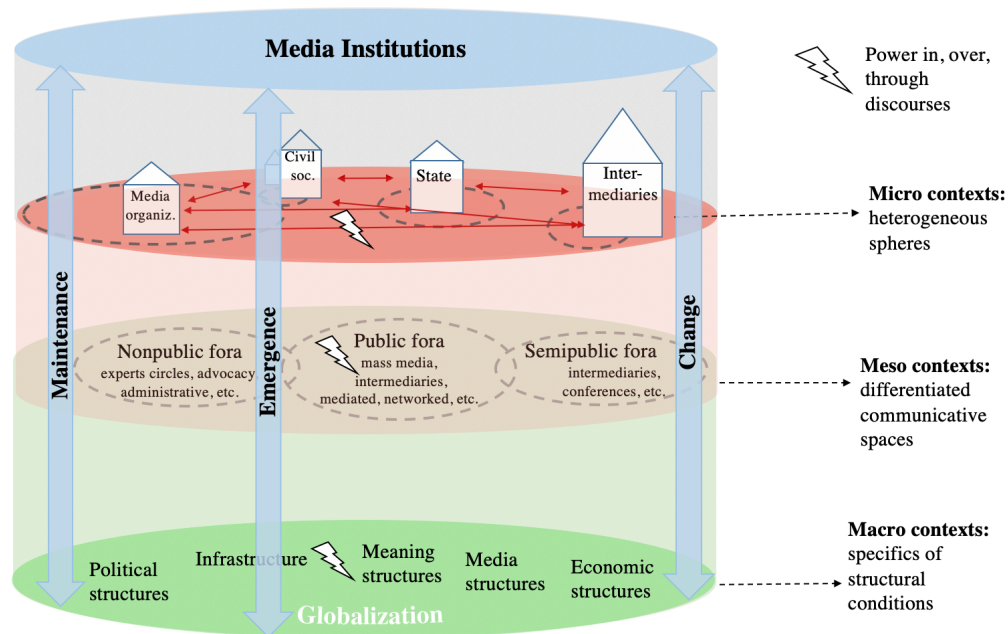

Figure 1. Discursive media institutionalism framework.

The Place of Power in Media Institutions: Power In, Over, and Through Discourses

By situating power in discourses instead of describing it as immanent in, through or over ideas, we offer the option of an analytical connection between the micro, meso, and macro levels through analyzing power with its characteristics, forms, and mechanisms in media policy as constituting elements of media institutions. We understand media policy as discourse itself, which means that meaning structures sustain their institutional contexts and vice versa (Bacchi, 2000). This conceptualization helps us better understand how media policy connects with power and the public and thus is helpful in studying the dynamics of media institutions. We agree that meaning structures constrain "which ideas are considered politically viable (or even mentionable)" (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016, p. 320) and that agents battle over meaning structures "to affect what ideas and discourses are deemed viable" (p. 322). However, we regard the theoretical links between power and ideas established in their framework as insufficient and argue that power is located and exerted in social discourse, and, as such, it is repressive, reproductive, unstable, material, and relational. Therefore, we put the question of

power, power repertoires, and different forms in which those power repertoires are being implemented and reflected in the sentient agents' discursive abilities at the center of this amended framework. We give two reasons for this: a theoretical and an empirical one.

Theoretically, linking power with ideas as a static concept negates the chance to theorize the battles over ideas—the social discourses, which are connected to the operation of power because they can be drivers of institutional change: actors' distinct capabilities to influence the conditions of thinking and speaking, the (re-)production of "powerful ideas" through discursive strategies, and the contentions in which a certain meaning of a problem comes to prevail. Schmidt's (2008) conceptualization of discourse—interactions in which ideas are exchanged—negates the chance to theorize the links between ideas, discourse, power, and institutional contexts. Schmidt (2008) merely hints at the disciplining inscribed into discourses, also emphasized in the past by scholars suggesting the use of critical discourse analysis (CDA; e.g., Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) by recognizing that within institutional contexts, "repertoires of more or less acceptable (and expectable) ideas and discursive interactions develop" (p. 314). However, looking at institutional contexts is necessary to understand the discipline inscribed into discourses. Depicting institutional contexts and the ways in which some resourceful actors are able to draw on prevalent meaning structures, whereas others are not in a position to do so, helps us understand how power is inscribed into and operates within media and communication policy. As media and communication scholars, we consider the ability or limitations of actors to establish discourses that convey the persuasiveness of their underlying ideas as the bases of their own legitimization (Breindl & Briatte, 2013).

Discourses, as Foucault (1977) understood them and as some media policy scholars interpret them (e.g., Ali, 2019), appear in a variety of arenas, which are formalized through policy documents, speeches, legal decision-making processes, and media reporting. They can also be informalized through daily professional or private conversations, for instance, among activists (see Figure 1). Discourses as creators of realities influence what can be thought about and said, when and where, and which discursive abilities actors can assume in the field of media policy. Media policy discourses relate to resources, existing political and lobbying structures, and by the level of transparency and accountability, or even corruption that is required at a particular point in time (Raboy & Taras, 2004). The ability to engage in, shape, and distribute discourses is bound to the ability to access resources and to participate in public fora; only in that way can the ideas immanent in discourses be represented and achieve legitimization (Talib & Fitzgerald, 2016). This lies also at the core of CDA (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), which can elucidate "how practices and institutions come into being, and perhaps, how, over time they might be constructed differently" (Streeter, 2013, p. 492) and reflects how patterns of social domination prevail because of repetitive legitimization through the established structural conditions. CDA also offers the chance to include an analysis of resistant discursive struggles as a manifestation of societal problems reflected through the dialectic dynamics among discourse, structure, and context.

Our empirical argument is derived from what we know about meaning battles in media and communication policy. In the last decades, the spectrum of actors in this battle has expanded. By contrast, DI is a strictly elite-oriented approach, focused on national arenas; however, working with a strict elite-oriented perspective poses problems. In increasingly networked (Castells, 2000) communication environments, not only policy elites are concerned with (or simply affected by) media and communication policies, but a broader range of nonstate and nonlegacy media actors gets involved (e.g., Bannerman & Haggart, 2015; Moe & Syvertsen, 2007). Activist groups have been the focus of media policy research for some time (Breindl & Briatte, 2013). At

the same time, corporate actors have launched public campaigns to steer public participation in policy developments (Ganter & Maurer, 2015). Particularly political economists have emphasized the importance of the powerful media industries in shaping media policy discourses (Becerra & Mastrini, 2011; Herzog & Scerbinina, 2020). In countries like Argentina, those powerful interests have repeatedly blocked media reform processes (Segura & Waisbord, 2016); however, at the same time, discourses stemming from civil organizations were consulted and an action plan communicated, which gained an important space in the discussions around a potential new media law (Segura, 2012; Segura & Waisbord, 2016). These examples point to the shift from elite-centered media and communication policy understandings toward amplified understandings (Frau-Meigs, 2011) that include nongovernmental and transnational actors and emphasize their role in shaping policy as discourse. Excluding nonelite actors delimits us in the early stages from considering the role of grassroots actors in shaping media policy implicitly or explicitly.

Only by considering their positions can we understand how ideas become dominant or suppressed and disappear or evolve into rules, regulations, habits, and conventions. The fact that the studies referring to the DIF encompass a variety of different industrial realms and different types of organizations shows that the field of actors that are relevant when studying media institutions includes and goes beyond media organizations; it includes political, economic, and citizens' organizations, which define the broader field of media institutions. Thus, operationalizing both the political and the communicative side of DI and adding economic and sociocultural perspectives into the framework offer new value in times when media and communication policy more often than not is discussed in fora that are external to parliaments and back rooms (Löblich, 2016) and in times when interconnections between complex publics and actors of an institutional field intensify (Castells, 2000).

Micro Level: Heterogeneous Spheres

Media and communication policy scholars have been using institutional theories and their mutations to describe and explain relations among market conditions, regulatory frameworks, and established norms, often emphasizing self-regulatory practices (e.g., Just & Latzer, 2016; Puppis, 2016). These elaborations see media organizations as objects of policy undertakings that define organizational practices that will ultimately shape the content produced, as well as the ways in which audiences can access and react to it. However, media organizations are not merely objects, but also self-interested subjects in media policy processes and are therefore actively involved in the shaping of the institutional context they are part of (Ali & Puppis, 2018; Löblich & Nietzke, 2020). Organizational perspectives in communication studies have frequently been associated with either media or sociocentric approaches. Whereas the former perspective understands media organizations as part of a broader socioeconomic context, the latter studies media organizations through their audiences and texts. Curran (1999) suggests integrating both perspectives into what he calls the widescreen approach. His enquiry into media institutions as a research field suggests recognizing ideas as part of discourses when studying organizational dynamics, structures, and practices. Media institutions in that sense represent both structural, hard characteristics, such as professions, formal procedures, and permanence (Vos & Ashley, 2014), as well as defining soft characteristics, such as discourses, ideas, norms, and their distinct meaning structures (Moe & Syvertsen, 2007).

Following this complex understanding, in the DMIF, we suggest an application of Schmidt's DI that regards media organizations as distinct, heterogeneous, and complex entities that take part in the institutional

field (Curran, 1999; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). We follow Schmidt in her concept of agents as having internalized structural constraints, and pursue, at the same time, subjective strategies—an approach inspired by Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992)—that consider individual socialization and interests and Foucault's (1977) understanding of discourses as constructing subjectivity in social relationships and knowledge systems, thus creating specific social norms, values, and belief systems. The reasons and self-understandings that agents bring into discourse (Schmidt, 2008, p. 315) are inseparable from institutional contexts. On the micro level, we recognize the need to consider subjective backgrounds that shape institutional contexts, such as biographies of media policy actors in the sense of Bourdieu's *opus operatum* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), or the particular features and history of an organization, its material resources, organizational goals, rules, and positions. We assume that those factors shape the ways in which individual actors think and speak, and, as a result, the organizations that are made of individual actors themselves are heterogeneous spheres in which power struggles are observable. The conceptualization of the micro level as heterogeneous spheres allows us to consider media policy as both a field of action, structure, and discourses, a conceptual approach that, on the level of society, enables the analyst to get a "fuller picture" and to question and investigate how institutional contexts, structural conditions, and meaning structures with their interpretations interact and shape each other.

Agents constantly (and not always intentionally) draw on meaning structures to give meaning to their circumstances, to legitimate their ideas, and to battle over ideas. Prevalent meaning structures influence what can be legitimately thought about and said in the field of media policy and may lend legitimacy to actors' ideas. Meaning structures may be used strategically to delegitimize the ideas of others. At the same time, meaning structures are changed through discourse. As a result, the heterogeneous character of organizations and the role of individual actors in decision-making processes, power negotiation processes inside and outside of the organization, their abilities to connect and interact with actors inside and outside their organization, and the resources available to them, such as reputation, access to mass media, and the broader public, are all aspects to be considered when applying DI in the field of media institutions.

Research dimensions arising from this perspective should address (1) the subjective strategies used to obtain power and defend power inside and outside an heterogeneous organization; (2) the role of coalition building within an organization or between organizations; (3) facilitating factors of these coalitions; (4) changes or lack of changes occurring in individual or strategic actions inside an organization and the related discourses; (5) determining factors that explain which agents are dominant/dominated and why, what their resources are, and why they have better/less access to certain resources than others do; and (6) the role of actors' biographies regarding their influence in an organization.

Meso Level: Differentiated Communicative Spaces

Schmidt puts discourses at the heart of institutional change; however, the conceptualization of discourse as a communicative and often mediated act (Becerra & Mastrini, 2011) reaches its limitations in the DIF. First, Schmidt usefully distinguishes between coordinative and communicative discourses. From a communication studies perspective, all discourses are, in principle, communicative. Schmidt's artificial separation of the interconnections between actors and spaces of speaking and thinking leads to a distinction of communicative spaces according to the place in the institutional field in which they take place: inside an organization, behind closed doors, and in unplugged digital devices, or in public. For Schmidt, the

coordinative policy sphere and the communicative political sphere are separated from ideas and discourses, which leads to the replication of administrative approaches to media and communication policy making that tend toward studying policy as a power vacuum (Kimball, 2012). As this is not a perspective that Schmidt defends herself, it is necessary to explore the interconnection of all communicative spaces (see Figure 1)—the closed and the open spaces—because discourses per se are political, regardless of where they take place (Freedman, 2008). Gangadharan (2009), for example, emphasizes the importance of mass involvement beyond mass communication by stating that the inclusion of different publics includes "public spirited decision making among agency officials" and "procedural safeguards for participation" (p. 337). This perspective includes deliberative models of participation (Gangadharan, 2013) and suggests studying translation as a critical discourse practice that links the discursive activities of publics inside and outside the rule-making system as setting the broader context in which publics evaluate agency decisions.

Having said that, Schmidt's conceptualization of public communication is problematic from the perspective of communication and media scholars. She writes that actors turn purposefully to the public and that they aim at "informing and orienting the public in the communicative political sphere" to convey "'good' policy ideas" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 16). This perspective on public communication fails to consider that mass communication is reciprocal and coined by power structures and interests. Braman (2006) speaks in this context about a battle over informational power, which refers to the maintaining or regaining of control over the informational bases of materials, rules, practices, and ideas within the communicative space. This is particularly true in a field like media and communication policy, as media organizations are both "providers of media publicity on issues that concern them and powerful stakeholders in the policy-making process" (Freedman, 2008, p. 87) and hence potentially influence the development of media institutions. There is plenty of empirical evidence for interest-steered coverage by legacy media organizations (Ali & Puppis, 2018; Gilens & Hertzman, 2000). In networked publics (Robinson, 2018), it might be increasingly difficult to steer such a self-interested agenda; however, the mass media have not lost their impact on politics (e.g., Garland, Tambini, & Couldry, 2018). Based on this complexity, we suggest that media policy discourses can be public, semipublic, or not public—as in constructed behind closed doors—when studying the meso-level contexts of media institutions (see Figure 1).

We suggest considering the following institutional features of differentiated communicative spaces in media policy:

- Mass media and journalism (media organizations);
- Networked publics (e.g., blogs, social media, digital platforms, messaging apps);
- Political arenas, structured by a political system (e.g., parliamentary committees, authorities' hearings, accessible policy documents, issued communications, parliamentary debates, political parties, expert circles); and
- Arenas of other actors (e.g., academia, civil society, foundations, professional and industry associations, conferences, intermediaries).

We argue that these different spaces shape media policy discourses and that they might at times overlap (see Figure 1). Public communication is constructed by the mass media or by actors that use social media, blogs, messaging apps, and interpersonal communication to gain public attention. This more

dispersed form of publicity is challenging to control, and power resources and discursive strategies can be found in all of those arenas. Media policy discourses are hence always strategic, including attempts to (de)legitimize and (re)produce power structures. Exploring the institutional contexts and logics of the mass media, networked publics, and nonpublic arenas, and the interconnections among them, allows us to consider discursive strategies and the potential impacts of ideas. These meso-level contexts have different logics and rules in terms of who, where, what, when, how, and why something can be said (Schmidt, 2008).

Analytically, each of those communicative spaces can be looked at separately or in their interconnectedness (see Figure 1). As a result, complex publics, the different rules and logics of public, nonpublic, and semipublic discourse fora, and especially the role of mass communication, and the ways in which control over communication is exercised in different discursive fora, are all aspects to be considered when working with DI in the field of media institutions. Research dimensions arising from this perspective should address (1) articulations of power within these different fora through discourses and the impact on media and communication policy agendas; (2) the framing of media policy issues by different actors; (3) the steering of media policy coverage by different media organizations; (4) the role of media organizations' self-interests in reporting on media policy issues; (5) struggles about (il)legitimate interpretations, media policies, norms, regulations, habits, and conventions; (6) attempts to dominate or empower through discursive strategies, such as references to widely accepted truths, shaming, and persuasion strategies; (7) the creation of discursive coalitions through effective use of different communicative spaces; and (8) mechanisms that foster inclusion/exclusion from/into discourses, related discourse coalitions, and the impact on the steering of processes and on the content of discourses.

Macro Level: Specifics of Structural Conditions in Society

Institutionalist approaches are midrange approaches and usually do not consider the macro level. However, this also applies to DI, which considers societal structures through linking actors and discourses to meaning structures that are generalized patterns of interpretation, norms, and values. In her framework, Schmidt is not referring to the particularities that the macro level can carry in different contexts and how that can matter in a discursive institutionalist analysis. Integrating the macro level in our approach, therefore, means at first including meaning structures regarding communication and media and relevant discourses beyond the field of media institutions. Streeter (2013) argues that media policy is a result of societal structures that shape discursive struggles around a policy issue. Other communication scholars have also repeatedly called for more consideration of broader, and not only discursive, contextual factors when studying institutional fields (e.g., Powers & Vera-Zambrano, 2018). The governmental frameworks, media and political systems, the market (Murdock & Golding, 2016), and journalism (Ali & Puppis, 2018), technology, and differences in infrastructures (Just & Latzer, 2016), particular time periods (van Cuilenberg & McQuail, 2003), or the impact of globalization and the related sociocultural particularities such as practices, habits, and conventions (Mansell & Raboy, 2011) are seen as important contextual components that shape media and communication policy discourse (see Figure 1). Studies can involve a variety of macro components from local to global and can aim at depicting particularities on each level and how they interact and shape responses on the micro and meso levels (see Figure 1).

Several theories provide opportunities to differentiate macro factors of media policy. We refer here exemplary to two theoretical traditions to start a longer conversation about the macro deficiency in institutional approaches and potential ways to address this issue. First, according to communication scholars following the tradition of Foucault (such as CDA), sociocultural elements appearing in discourses perpetuate institutional change, for instance, myths (cf. Ali, 2019, p. 41) and "general justificatory principles" (Edwards, Klein, Lee, Moss, & Philip, 2015, p. 62). Such elements at the sociocultural level can be linked to DI's assumption that power operates through ideas (Carstensen & Schmidt, 2016). Second, we suggest linking DMIF and political economy approaches that, in short, consider "the economy as being interrelated with politics, society and culture" (Herzog & Scerbinina, 2020, p. 2). It enables consideration of how media institutions "are integrated into general processes of accumulation, how they exercise power," (Murdock & Golding, 2016, p. 736) and how these dynamics shape the communications landscape. Even though Schmidt declares that the material world is not the decisive issue, and therefore remains unclear what nonideational structures are, she does not deny that material conditions exist (Schmidt, 2012, p. 96). Therefore, when linked with the DMIF, political economy can help differentiate the political and economic organizations of society and their influence on discourses shaping media institutions.

Research dimensions arising from this perspective should address (1) the rise, persistence, and change of discourse patterns and ideas related to media policy over time and across geographical contexts; (2) economic and social crises, war, sociocultural conflicts, and their influence on media policy discourses on the local, national, and global levels; (3) infrastructural conditions and how they shape media policy as discourse and vice versa; (4) the consequences of globalization processes on media policies and related discourses across different contexts and the role of power constellations across the micro–meso–macro levels in these processes; (5) political and economic structures that are linked with the allocation of power resources in media policy making; and (6) changes in established power constellations and the attached reasons.

Conclusion

Vivien A. Schmidt's DI has become a popular framework in our field, which is often referred to but never critically examined. Therefore, in this article, our contribution is to assess the value of Schmidt's framework and to showcase the ways in which the framework can be enriched through our media and communication studies-specific perspective. After outlining the value of the framework for studying dynamics and continuity in the field of media institutions, we issued three main points of critique, based on which we defined the dimensions of a modified framework: the discursive media institutionalism framework (DMIF). With this modification to DI, we propose to study ideas, discourses, and actors in institutional contexts by including vertical and horizontal reciprocal relationships, which contribute to emerging, changing, or continuing media institutions. The suggested analytical dimensions connect the micro, meso, and macro levels of media and communication policy discourses and, by doing so, emphasize the assumption that institutions are economically, politically, socioculturally, and globally embedded (see Figure 1). With the main interest being to understand and conceptually better grasp the dynamics of media institutions (formal or informal procedures, routines, norms, and conventions), we suggest turning away from merely accessing the effectiveness, normative relevance, and outcomes of policy processes toward an approach that overcomes the artificial dichotomy of "policy" and "politics" and is interested in media and communication policy as a socially embedded construct.

The suggested amendments to Schmidt's original DIF recognize the relevance of communication for the field of media institutions. We emphasize the role of power across different levels that shapes and maintains media policy as discourse in this institutional field. Studying the prevalent meaning structures and processes rather than merely the outcomes and related questions regarding effectiveness helps us understand how power is inscribed into and operates within media policy. Emphasizing power helps us depart from the "objectification" of policy change and allows us to ask questions to better understand why change has become an aim or is being hindered. Leaning on approaches from CDA and political economy, we have redefined the conceptualization of power by connecting the ways in which power is manifested, used, and restricted through discourses (rather than through or in ideas). With this reconceptualization, we help the understanding of why discourse in, between, and beyond the institutional field theoretically connects complex dynamics between those in power and the public. As such, power can be repressive, reproductive, unstable, material, and relational. It is important to study its mechanisms to understand the processes, structures, and power relations behind change and continuity in media policy and their (lack of) impact on the field of media institutions.

The DMIF functions as a heuristic that offers various opportunities for applications when studying media institutions as a dynamic field. Whether a change in media institutions happens gradually or suddenly and the exact mechanisms at work can be explored using this model and needs to be analyzed and discussed based on empirical data.

If one study attempts to address all aspects and levels, it will require a complex research design with different methods and sources. Depending on the particular research question, future studies can also focus on one of the levels and aspects outlined above. Elements may be "bracketed" if they are not relevant as a subject under study. Future studies can also seek to compare some elements of or help better understand the mechanisms that connect the different dimensions. The DMIF can be used for studying past and current cases to understand and explain national and transnational media and communication policy processes and the related interactions, discourses, and structural aspects. Studies working with the DMIF can explore further connections with theories concerning policy processes and activism, the political economy of communication, globalization, and media institutions, or mediatization. With this undertaking, we respond to calls for a self-confident positioning of media and communication policy research in the broader discipline with the aim of contributing to a media policy scholarship that locates itself at the core of media and communication studies.

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