Constructivism and Media Socialization
Concepts and Perspectives in German-Speaking Countries

Theo Hug ◇ University of Innsbruck, Austria <theo.hug@uibk.ac.at>

► **Purpose:** The article deals with constructivism and media in two respects: on a general level with some aspects of the role of media in constructivism, and in particular with the role of constructivism in media socialization studies. ► **Context:** Media have been taken up as a topic in some parts of constructivist discourses. While some of the authors treat media as a subject of inquiry like other fields to which they are related – economics, society, or psychotherapy – others recognize constitutional aspects of media, too. ► **Approach:** The article focuses on various discourse threads in the German-language literature over the last decade. Various constructivist conceptions and assumptions are taken into consideration with a view to surveying their role in media socialization studies. The article will initially justify the need for reflecting on issues of modelling mediality and constructivity and their relation to each other. It points out several conceptual similarities and differences within constructivism and shows their relevance to media socialization studies. Furthermore, it provides an outline of the respective arguments and an introduction to interfaces of constructivism and media socialization. ► **Results:** In line with different constructivist concepts, the fields of investigation are rather scattered and authors only partly pay attention to each other. This article puts some characteristics and capabilities of constructivist discourses up for debate with regard to selected aspects of media socialization. We find that contemporary media socialization studies do not refer to a single definition of media socialization or constructivism. Since the concepts discussed are published in German, it may also be seen as a benefit that they are made accessible to a wider audience. ► **Key words:** Mediality, constructivity, constructivist discourses.

1. Introduction

In political, economic, scientific and everyday discourses it is widely agreed that media have become increasingly significant. Socialization research has also shown heightened interest in such problems in recent years (cf. Fritz, Sting & Vollbrecht 2003; Hoffmann & Mikos 2007; Ecarius, Fuchs & Wahl 2008: 111–114).[1] Not least, terms such as media-, information-, communication- and knowledge-society are of special importance in descriptions of society and analyses of present times. In this context, it is generally conceded that media play a considerable part in the processes of growing up, the development of identities, values and everyday aesthetics, or the shaping of references to the self and the world. In short, today it is beyond doubt that media are involved in the creation of realities and the formation of communicative processes, and that they have to be considered an agent of socialization. In this general sense they are granted quite constructive traits, also and especially when the influences and effects of media are judged as destructive. However, when it comes to *how* to shape and assess this role, *how* the aspects can be specified and *to what extent* a consideration of media as a socializing agent is adequate, opinions are divided. Perceptions differ tremendously, particularly with regard to the scopes and characteristics of constructivity and mediality.

The question of constructivity is especially important in constructivist discourses, which have increasingly attracted interest in recent media socialization studies (cf. Hurrelmann 1994; Großmann 1999; Gehrau 2002; Sutter 1999, 2007). Then again, skepticism and reticence about constructivist positions are also quite obvious. The spectrum of objections ranges from the problematization of (radical) subject-centeredness (Burkart 1999: 68) to allegations of arbitrariness or fashionable transitoriness, to general doubts about the viability of a subject-centered, (radical-)constructivist basis for theories of public communication, to the persiflage of a position that, following Arthur Schopenhauer, "ultimately only perceives the world as will and representation" (cf. Saxer 2000: 89, my translation).

The question of mediality is similar: *On the one hand*, knowledge about the world is often characterized as mediatized knowledge, as these two frequently-used quotations illustrate:

- "What we know about our society, indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media" (Luhmann 1996a: 9, my translation).
- "Everything we are able to say, perceive and know about the world is said, perceived and known with the help of the media" (Krämer 1998: 73, my translation).

On the other hand, there is caution against overemphasizing media and media-based communication. It is said that, today, issues of media socialization may be emphasized "in order to highlight the particular significance of media in the process of growing up and, in doing so, also point out that children and adolescents grow up in media worlds" (Mikos 2007: 28, my translation). The attempt to develop an independent theory of media socialization, however, is seen as a mistake "because the focus is too much on the media" (Mikos 2007: 28, my translation).

These succinct deliberations draw attention to opposing views and areas of conflict that are significant for the modeling of media- and construction processes. They point not only to pivotal issues within media socialization studies, but also to corresponding needs to reflect upon different modelings of mediality and constructivity. To that effect, some characteristics, implementations and capabilities of constructivist discourses will be put up for discussion below, with a view to selected aspects of media socialization studies.

2. Constructivist discourses and media

The field of constructivist approaches and orientations may be defined in a narrower or in a wider sense. Depending on internal or external attribution, distinct discourse lines are discernible, some of which overlap and complement one another, while others conflict or qualify one another. Currently we can distinguish, for example, radical constructivist and cybernetic, cognitive scientific and neurobiological, system-theoretical, socioculturalist, (social-)psychological and psychotherapeutic as well as (knowledge-)sociological and philosophical variants of constructivism (cf. Hug 2004; Riegler 2005). Each variant foregrounds different basic assumptions, discursive localizations and (meta-)theoretical connections. Moreover, the individual positions differ as to what extent they are guided by epistemological, methodological, methodical, (inter-)disciplinary, object-theoretical or thematic questions and considerations. Even though most of these viewpoints do not explicitly refer to media developments, many may be usefully applied and refined in the context of media socialization research. In particular cases, this requires the selection of certain aspects.

2.1 Constructivist conceptions and assumptions

The apparent lack of a conceptual, institutional or personal unity of "the" constructivism leads to the problem of how to accommodate the plural nature of constructivist discourses. I will highlight some examples of recent developments.

Since the 1970s, the term "constructivism" has been diversely used, for instance in the context of:

- The question of social conventionalizations, following Alfred Schütz (1971), Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966) and the constructionist approach of Kenneth J. Gergen (2002)
- Jean Piaget's (1973) genetic epistemology and his well-known formula that the mind organizes the world by organizing itself
- Ernst von Glasersfeld's radical constructivism (1995, 1998), which describes knowledge as conceptual formations in the experiential world

- An epistemology based on neurobiology (cf. Maturana 1970), in which cognition is perceived as a biological phenomenon in terms of a successful handling of "perturbing" influences, as well as its fusion with system-theoretical options with sociological intentions (cf. Luhmann 1990).

The list could be continued, for example by including to the critical psychology of Klaus Holzkamp (1972), constructivist laboratory studies ("Laborkonstruktivismus," cf. Knorr-Cetina 1981), Nelson Goodman's (1978) conceptualization of theories as delineations of the world, or Pierre Bourdieu's structuralist constructivism (1992: 135). While Goodman's position is commonly acknowledged as a philosophical version of constructivism, Bourdieu's position is received rather as neo-marxist than as constructivist, although the circular mode of foundation he uses can easily be recognized as constructivist. In this context, it seems noteworthy that even the "farewell to constructivism" in *Histories and Discourses* ("Geschichten & Diskurse," Schmidt 2003a) does not appear to signify a conclusion of the debate. It only designates a move away from the empirical foundations of constructivism towards arguments of plausibility.

Roughly speaking, constructivism is about the constructed nature of facts, knowledge, reality, history or social existence. The distinct variants of constructivism may be regarded as different interpretations of the connections between knowledge and the fabrication of reality. In each case, the focus is on how-questions and genetic, generative or procedural perspectives (cf. Rusch 2004: 174) that have corresponding conceptual postulates, thematic delineations and problem arrangements. For example, in the context of constructivist laboratory studies, scientific facts are considered as constructed through negotiations, accidental events, interpretations, and more or less opportunistic strategies of getting ahead in a certain social and political environment. Reality itself is also seen as constructed by selective and contextual scientific practices. In contrast to this type of studies, which are mostly regarded as micro-sociological studies, the how-questions and procedural perspectives focus on internal process of accommodation, assimilation, and equilibration in cognitive constructivism, whereas in

cultural constructivism, knowledge and reality are conceptualized as products of their cultural context and different observational methodologies.

In addition, the complex field of constructivist positions may be narrowed down even more by means of three characteristics: (1) the in-depth study of questions of self-reference and self-implementation (cf. Bardmann 1997, 1998; Bardmann & Groth 2001; Schmidt 2000: 61–63), (2) the assumption that all cognition or knowledge is ineluctably perspectival, and (3) the renouncement of statements about "reality as such." All three characteristics together are expressed in the "observation theorem" (cf. Hug 2004: 129): Observations are made by observing entities (people, individuals, agents, systems, etc.), which observations, in the process, cannot simultaneously observe the "blind spots" (starting points, perspectives, contextual requirements, etc.) of the observation (cf. Schmidt 2000: 15–21). Here, "observing" means the production and application of differentiations for the purpose of descriptions (the system-environment difference) as well as the analysis and characterization of the individual and collective fabrication of knowledge in socio-cultural and historical contexts.

## 2.2 Constructivist discourses and media

Media did not figure prominently in the constructivist discourses of the 1970s. The same is true for socialization studies, in which, to this day, references to "the media" mean the mass media (cf. Baacke 1973; Lukesch 2008). However, a multitude of media terms and theories has been available for a fairly long time.

We may differentiate between semiotic-culturalist concepts, on the one hand, and technical, apparatus-related ones, on the other. The former include *semiotic communication media* (image, language, writing, music); the latter *technical production, storage and dissemination media* (printing, radio, film, TV, computer, Internet, etc.). Furthermore, we can distinguish between *media offers,* which are the result of the use of communication media (e.g., texts, radio or TV shows, web pages), and *media institutions* (media organizations and intermedial institutions). Additionally, there are philosophical concepts of media as forms of apperception,

media of sense perception (space, time), general abstract concepts of the medium as middle, means and mediator, or the differentiation between medium and form (Luhmann 1997, vol. 1: 190–201, 2002: 82–101). In Luhmann's conception, symbolically generalized communication media (recognition, power, love, etc.) play an eminent role, next to the dissemination media, as binding agents for society and functional equivalents to morality (cf. Luhmann 1997: 316f). Luhmann frequently has dealt with questions of both education and socialization, in his earlier as well as in his later work (e.g., cf. Luhmann 1996b: 100, 205f, 2002: 48–81). But he did not develop a theory of media socialization although it would have suggested itself. This remaining challenge has been accepted by Tilmann Sutter (1999, 2006, 2007), whose take on the work of Luhmann will be presented below. However, the further differentiation of media as "multiplex systems" (Rusch 2002: 80–82; my translation) in terms of transdisciplinary media studies remains as one of the current challenges.

Constructivist figures of thought in the broader sense of the constructivity of reception processes (e.g., uses and gratifications approach) or the production of news (e.g., news value theory) have come into play in media and communication studies for several decades. Constructivist approaches in the narrower sense, which critique realistic epistemologies and problematize corresponding conceptions of reality, have attracted interest in this context only fairly recently (cf. Merten, Schmidt & Weischenberg 1994; Baecker 1994; Schmidt 1994; Merten 1995; Rusch & Schmidt 1999; Scholl 2002). Dirk Baecker, for example, adopts the medium-form distinction in order to describe "communication in the medium of information" (1994). And Scholl's (2002) collection includes epistemological and methodological issues in constructivism as well as a wide range of applications of constructivist concepts in communication and media studies.

The challenges associated with the constructivist objections and formulations of problems remain topical. This holds true, for example, for the criticism of Merten's effects research (1994: 296–308) with regard to assumptions of causality, implicit presuppositions of a proportional logic of increase according to the stimulus-response model,
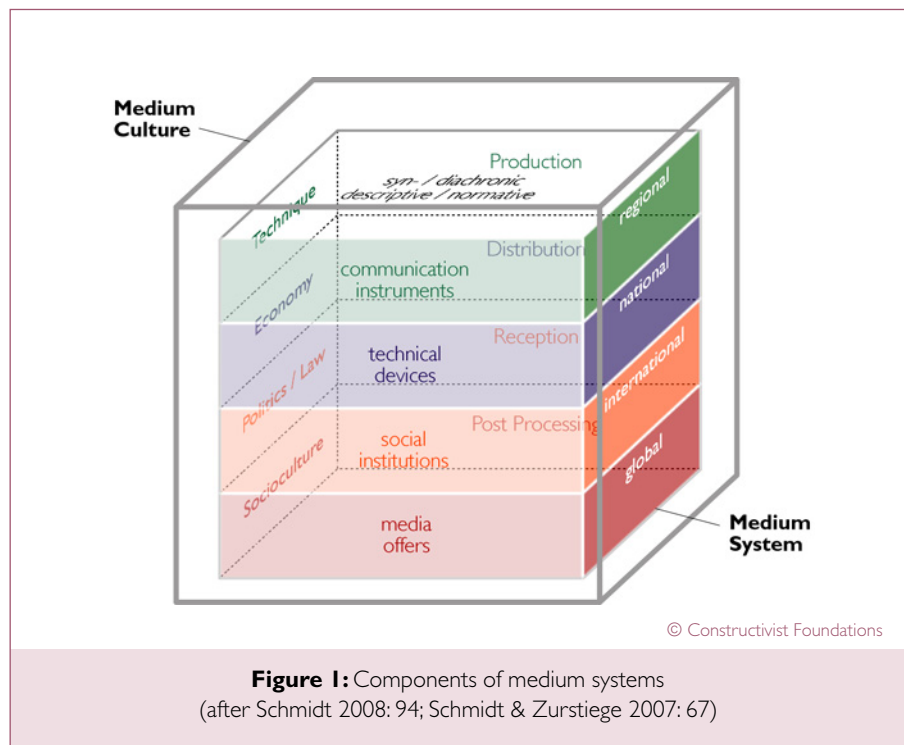
Figure 1: Components of medium systems
(after Schmidt 2008: 94; Schmidt & Zurstiege 2007: 67)

problems with the measuring and measurability of effects, as well as deficiencies in theory construction. Particularly, criticism of beliefs about the delivery of messages and news has gained importance beyond constructivist discourse, for the benefit of the guiding principle that modalities of supply and reception run parallel.

Some years ago, Siegfried J. Schmidt suggested viewing media as a "compact concept," aiming at systematizing and integrating available media terms, conceptions and theories (cf. Schmidt 2000: 93ff; Schmidt & Zurstiege 2007: 63ff; Schmidt 2008). Moreover, this concept is meant to facilitate unambiguous, preferably adequate differentiations within the respective area of observation that are system-oriented and empirically verifiable (cf. Schmidt 2008). The "compact concept" of media combines and synthesizes several notions and aspects:

- "*Communication instruments,* that is, material signs that are used for communication: above all, of course, languages, but also gestures and sounds
- *Media technologies* (or the technological devices called "technische Dispositive") that are employed to produce, disseminate

or receive media offers in the form of books, films or e-mail
- *Institutions* or organizations (such as publishing houses or broadcasting corporations) that are developed for, among others, the application, administration, financing, and political and legal representation of media technologies
- Finally, the *media offers* as such, which emerge from the coalescence of all the mentioned factors (e.g., books, newspapers, television shows, etc.), from which follows that they should not be treated as independent entities but as process results that always carry the preconditions of the particular medium system as their characteristics." (Schmidt & Zurstiege 2007: 63–64; my translation).

This compact concept is challenging in view of its complexity and demands for distinguishing, considering, and associating understandings of media that are often treated separately and not systematically in relation to each other. In my view, it is a powerful meta-model that has to be concretized in view of the manifoldness of its topics, aspects, and dynamics. Problems of concretion should not be underestimated here, particularly with

regard to the dynamic interplay of these factors, which is "conceived as a systemic, *self-organizing* cooperation in which none of the four components may remain unconsidered" (Schmidt & Zurstiege 2007: 64).

Concerning the description of media processes in medium systems, Schmidt (2008: 95) points to the following aspects:

- "The components of medium systems (communication instruments, technical devices, social organizations, media offers)
- Action roles (production, distribution, reception, post processing)
- Reference systems (technique, economy, politics, law, socioculture)
- Reaches (regional, national, international, global)
- Directions of observation (diachronical, synchronical)
- Kinds of observation (descriptive, normative)."

This idea of media as compact concepts is definitely very versatile. It can be applied to all medium systems and facilitates differentiated descriptions and internal and external observations in media socialization studies, as well. For example, the distinction of communication instruments (e.g., languages) from media allows for the observation and description of different kinds of use of these instruments in different media. But more important for the discussion here, is the fact that media do not have an optional status anymore in this concept. There is no primary focus on cognition or communication or culture or media – there are equally relevant agents that are conceptualized by reference to models of circular causality and auto-constitutive relations. In Schmidt's socio-cultural constructivism, media are important in terms of constructivity, mediality and socialization. He writes:

"*The evolution of the total media system of modern media-culture societies, from writing to the Internet, has fundamentally changed our relation to the world and our modes of communication. This change can be described as a transition from communicativity to mediality.*" (Schmidt 2008: 95, italics in original).

As a consequence, contemporary societies are labeled as media-culture societies, in which collective cultural knowledge acts as the basis of and outcome of socialization (Schmidt 2008: 101).

3. Constructivist discourses in media socialization studies

In media socialization studies, too, we can at best assume a constructivist discursive context and not a generally accepted theoretical edifice. Evidence for this may be found in Matthias Grundmann's (1999) overview of constructivist socialization studies. Grundmann characterizes processes of socialization in terms of, mutually, excitations and stabilizations of onto-, socio- and historiogenetic processes (Grundmann 1999: 28). His collection includes 14 elaborated contributions on various aspects of the topic such as social selection and individual development, formation of structures and interaction, cognitive socialization, collective problems and individual readiness for action, formations of identity and societal structures, or disease patterns as social constructions. However, the collection of articles does not examine media issues as part of constructivist socialization studies.

The current situation is characterized by a double connectivity: (1) two central motifs of media socialization studies – the interdependence of individual, societal and medial processes, and, in conjunction, the renunciation of modeling these processes as unilaterally deterministic – are primary for constructivist approaches, too; and (2) constructivist specialized discourses can frequently be connected with media socialization studies and vice versa. Differences are more likely to be found with regard to epistemological, ontological and methodological standards than in terms of themes and methods.

3.1 Connectable options
The wider field of media socialization studies includes several approaches and studies which, though not using the label "constructivist" in their self-description, occasionally subscribe to constructivist orientations in some sub-areas and are thus connectable. Two works will serve as examples.

At first glance, Siegfried Frey's *The Power of the Picture* ("Die Macht des Bildes," 2007) implies a unidirectional influence of nonverbal communication on culture and politics. Even though essentialist tendencies appear implicit in the title and subtitle, they cannot

simply be presumed. On the one hand, there is the question of the impact of images "in the eye of the beholder" against the background of a cultural-historical analysis of visual communication. On the other hand, by means of the notion of "inferential communication," (Frey 2007: 74–77; my translation) the attention turns to those denotations and the range of definitions that constructivism discussed under the concept of "cognitive autonomy." The thesis of the "non-seeing eye" (Frey 2007: 77–80; my translation) may informally be interpreted as a variation on the metaphor of the blind spot. Since it is visualized by referring to the question of how much a fish is able to know about the water in which he swims all his life (Frey 2007: 78), an interpretation of the thesis in terms of contemporary differentiations between medium and form seems obvious.

The notion of "reception modalities" (Suckfüll 2004, my translation), too, aims at transcending the media-and recipient-oriented one-sidedness in the study of media effects. It serves to examine different forms of processing in the reception of media offers and allows for a dynamic and process-oriented distinction of modalities, which are perceived in terms of cross-situational practical dispositions. In her approach, Monika Suckfüll regards interdependencies between features of media and of recipients and shows highly-integrative potentials. Although the author wants to retain principles of critical rationalism (Suckfüll 2004: 16), the construct of receptive modalities can also be formulated from constructivist perspectives and linked to ideas that are geared to the distinction of reference modalities (cf. Schmidt 1994: 179) and forms of modalizing reality experiences (Schmidt 1994: 281).

Media socialization studies following Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of culture are usually not designated as constructivist, in spite of his epistemological orientations (cf. Bourdieu 1992: 135) and motifs of self-implementation. Ralph Weiß (2000, 2001), for example, investigated generative principles and how they organize acting in everyday spheres. In his theory of the "practical sense" of watching TV in everyday life, he combines approaches from Jürgen Habermas, Pierre Bourdieu, and Agnes Heller without appreciating the constructivist epistemology in Bourdieu's thinking. The circular figures of thought in the modeling of the

habitus (Bourdieu 1993: 98–99), for instance, suggest the contrary, especially since he wanted to escape the forced alternative between subjectivism and objectivism (cf. Bourdieu 1992: 50–52). In my view, the work of Bourdieu could be further developed from within in terms of constructivity and mediality in order to create promising concepts for future media socialization research.

3.2 Explicit options

Constructivist discourses are present in media socialization studies in an explicit manner, too. They are included in introductory works (cf. Moser 2006: 30) and developed with different emphases. In addition to other aspects, relevant texts deal with the TV consumption of children of preschool age (Kubisch 2002), media use in the context of everyday action (Huysmans 2002) and German-speaking media effects studies (Gehrau 2002). In conceptual respects there exist more or less systematically elaborate contributions to constructivist media socialization studies, which will be illustrated in the following by a selection of examples.

Under the title *Media Reception* ("Medienrezeption"), Brit Großmann (1999) executed a systematic analysis of approaches to media reception studies (dynamic-transactional model, reference model of media use, comprehension of media discourses, socio-cognitive approach to media reception, etc.). She criticizes in particular a lack of definitions and references to theories of mass communication. In developing a constructivist alternative (Großmann 1999:111–212), she resorts to the "Siegener Überlegungen," a set of deliberations by Siegfried J. Schmidt, Wolfram K. Köck, Peter M. Hejl and Gebhard Rusch, and explores the possibilities for specifying the structural interconnection of cognition, communication and culture with regard to processes of the individual reception of communication offers in the mass media. The author's theoretical considerations consistently point out links to established approaches. Efforts to further differentiate her approach seem promising, and would be helped by the formulation of empirical specifications and illustrations to clarify the possibilities of this.

For several years, Tilmann Sutter (1999, 2006, 2007) has been developing a constructivist theory of media socialization with a pro-grammatic intention. He, too, is interested in profoundly connecting psychological and sociological subject and socialization theories, as well as notions of (inter-)action theory with system-theoretical concepts of media and communication (cf. Sutter 2004a, 2004b). Accordingly, he argues that the pivotal task is the "fusion between a developmental-psychological constructivism and a theory of socializing interaction" (Sutter 2007: 133; my translation). Sutter places his considerations on the foundation of interactionist constructivism and attempts to merge lines of argument of a theory of self-socialization and a theory of co-construction. Without doubt, his research represents one of the most elaborate systematic approaches toward a constructivist theory of media socialization at the present time. Here, too, exemplifications and empirical specifications would be helpful with a view to broader reception. However, for the time being it is difficult to understand why other approaches of interactionist constructivism (cf. Reich 1998, 2000) and particularly system-theoretical alternatives to Luhmann's conception (cf. Hejl 1982; Schmidt 2000) are not recognized in accordance with their conceptual virility.

Explicit options that are relevant for media socialization studies are also offered by Siegfried J. Schmidt, not only in terms of the compact theory of media I mentioned before, but also in terms of auto-constitutive relations in the processes of reality construction. In his expansive work, Siegfried J. Schmidt refers to aspects of (media) socialization studies in numerous instances (cf. Schmidt 1994: 172 & 266, 1999: 131, 2000, 2008), though without aiming for the systematic development of a theory of media socialization. In regard to the entire process of reality constructions, his analysis distinguishes three areas: *poiesis* (action and interaction), cognition and communication, and "in all three areas, systems specificity is dominant, and not 'reality specificity'" (Schmidt 2000: 42, my translation). The recourse to "the reality" is replaced by a pluralization of reality models that can be evaluated according to criteria such as viability, mode of operationalization and problem-solving relevance. Schmidt conceives of society as "unity of the difference between reality model and cultural program" (Schmidt 2003b: 144, my translation). Subjects are regarded as "agents in-between cognitive autonomy and social orientation" (Schmidt 2003b: 152, my translation). They acquire a "schematic knowledge of the production, mediation, reception and processing of categories of media offers" (Schmidt 1994: 172, my translation). In the process, corresponding cognitive schemata figure as media schemata. Overall, Schmidt's theoretical program offers a coherent frame for a constructivist theory of media socialization. The hope remains that there will be a summarizing account and empirical implementation of this. So far, only a few elements of the program have been considered by empirical media socialization studies. The project, "Media communicat-construction processes on the topic of death in male and female Gymnasium pupils" (cf. Drinck et al. 2001; Hackenberg 2004), for example, aims to analyze how young people reconstruct filmic treatments of the subject of death. In this project, a new method for the analysis of types of "personal film communicats" (Ehrenspeck, Hackenberg & Lenzen 2006: 424) was developed primarily on the basis of Siegfried Schmidt's work.

Constructivist discourses provide several other points of contact for media socialization studies and their refinement driven by theory and empiricism. Some may be found in, for instance:

- The theory of synreferential systems by Hejl (1982, 2007, 2008), in which society is modeled as a network of social systems with the individuals as "nodes" that are involved in the constitution of multiple social systems, as well as examples of applications (cf. Hejl 2003)
- The theory of comprehending as orienting action by Rusch (1992), his explorations on the theory of media change (Rusch 2007) and his model of the dynamics of communication-and reception episodes (Rusch 2008: 96–111)
- The theory of media interaction by Faßler (1996), his leitmotif of creative-constructive action and the deliberations on the media-based evolution of global cultures (Faßler 2005)
- Reich's (1998, 2000) interactionist constructivism, the constructivist critique of the illusion of a realistic view of media, and the idea of communication as a viable frame for simulation (Reich, Sehnbruch & Wild 2005: 195–214).

THE AUTHOR

Theo Hug is associate professor at the Institute of Educational Studies at the University of Innsbruck (Austria), spokesperson for Innsbruck Media Studies, an interfaculty research focus group. His research interests include media pedagogy and culture of communication, e-Education and microlearning, theory of knowing, methodology and the philosophy of science.

These points of contact for media socialization studies in constructivist discourses show that there is not one definition of "media socialization" – there are many versions to be defined from within the different conceptualizations (if any).

So, what difference does this make in view of commonly accepted notions on media socialization? Generally speaking, media socialization deals with the role of media in processes of personal and social developments in the context of societal, cultural, and technological developments. According to Daniel Süss (2004: 65) the two basic questions are (1) how humans learn the handling of media and which forms of dealing with media can be distinguished, and (2) how media change general socialization processes in beneficial and problematic ways and what is the impact of media on human development over the lifespan. In the theory of Süss, media are conceptualized as agents of socialization in similar ways as peer-groups, fan clubs, sports associations, political parties, etc. (Süss 2004: 26). Although he describes differentiated and useful views on pre-communicative aspects

(e.g., media access), communicative aspects (e.g., use and adoption of media), and post-communicative aspects (e.g., media competency, media effects) (Süss 2004: 274–298), the descriptions suggest that with the knowledge gained in media socialization research, we can approach reality. Furthermore, mediation of both media socialization research itself and the institutions of socialization (e.g., family, school, state, church, etc.) is not considered. In my view, the differences with more consistent and thorough constructivist perspectives lie in the suspension of the possibility of approaches to reality as such and a distinctive appreciation for circular modes of foundation and self-application of concepts. Needless to say, specifications of constructivity and mediality in constructivist concepts of media socialization must be clarified in relation to such concepts as mentioned above. In any case, processes of media socialization in constructivist perspectives are not just seen as different from those used by more traditional agents of socialization, because processes of the mediation and medialization of agents and institutions of socialization as well as the (self-)socializing actors have to be considered, too.

In view of the conceptual differentiation in current constructivist discourses, there is no substance to accusations of subjectivism, solipsism or ingratiation with neoliberalism. However, it should not be ignored that the sheer complexity of the mentioned approaches is linked to challenges that cannot be underestimated.

4. Conclusion

The assumption that socialization processes take place in concrete life-worlds meets with wide approval, while doubts about the naturalness of life-worlds are of long standing. To the culturalist and system-theoretical objections has been added the metaphor of life-worlds medial saturation. Although the latter is a commonplace by now, even differentiated and culturally informed accounts of mediatized daily life (Mikos 2005) frequently do not result in the consistent problematization of cognitive efforts on the basis of realistic epistemologies. However, not only questions about media in the context of socialization and socialization in the context of media are

addressed, but also questions about the scientific methods of producing and describing processes and results of media socialization studies under mediatized conditions. The strengths and, at the same time, biggest challenges of constructivist discourses consist in the connection between epistemological and theoretical motifs. This involves several modalities: of the multiple perspectivation of approaches; the recursive depiction of processes; the sober discourse on discursive fictions and concepts of virtualizations; as well as the relativization or overcoming of claims of truth that are sometimes perceived as confusing, unsettling or threatening.

It seems easier to problematize the separation of processes of media reception and the everyday structures that create meaning (Mikos 2005: 89) on the concrete level than on the metatheoretical level. However, future media socialization studies will not be able to avoid a consistent examination of questions of constructivity and mediality, too, in methodological and epistemological terms. This will not only mean, as in the past, the problematization of claims of realistic cognitive metaphysics and the relation "phantom reality" ("Phantom Wirklichkeit," Hug & Walter 2002); it will also be about the change in scientific literary culture in light of processes of mediatization. The significance of constructivist discourses in media socialization studies of the future depends in particular on whether the following efforts will be successful:

- to further and productively differentiate key concepts of the constructivist foundational discussion with regard to theoretical gains and results of practical use;
- to represent the discipline's innovative achievements and capacity for problem-solving;
- to explore similarities and differences with regards to contemporary competence theories, framing concepts and socio-ecologically oriented theories as well as with connectable conceptions from, among others, cultural studies, postcognitivist theory and the everyday-oriented analysis of patterns of acquisition and action in medial and cultural figurations (Bachmair 2007);
- to contribute to overcoming the media theoretical deficit in media socialization studies, which includes, in particular, the differentiated use of media terms and con-

cepts of mediality, medialization and mediatization,

- to present – parallel to the theoretical developments – viable methodical concepts and convincing empirical results.

Media socialization studies devoid of metatheoretical reflection of the areas of conflict that are associated with the key concepts "mediality" and "constructivity" are blind, and constructivist discourses without media-related concretions remain hollow. If we tentatively assume that media are "the historical grammar of our interpretive circumstances" (Krämer 1998: 90; my translation), media socialization cannot reasonably be reduced to a sub-area of socialization. In that case, it is also questionable to what extent the basic considerations of the *linguistic turn* (Rorty 1967) are still sustainable and subsequent

turn markers worth discussing: the arguments that have been presented, for instance, in connection with the *pictorial turn* (Mitchell 1994), the *cultural turn* (Bonnell & Hunt 1999; Musner, Wunberg & Lutter 2000), the *semantic turn* (Krippendorff 2006) and the *mediatic turn* (Margreiter 1999; Hug 2009). One may say that we have an acceleration of turnarounds being claimed, as well as an inflation of turns, since a decade or two. But these large-scale views of complex dynamics in highly-differentiated societies offer not only numerous links to trendsetting new orientations. They also enable and encourage meta-analysis of the various ways of foregrounding topics, problems, questions, and suggestions for solutions in heterogeneous theory landscapes. Their examination will show whether and to what extent media

socialization studies will prove to be the wrong way, the common way or the ideal way.

Note

Acknowledgment

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