

# Setting the political agenda

## How social network structure explains the political influence of associative interest groups

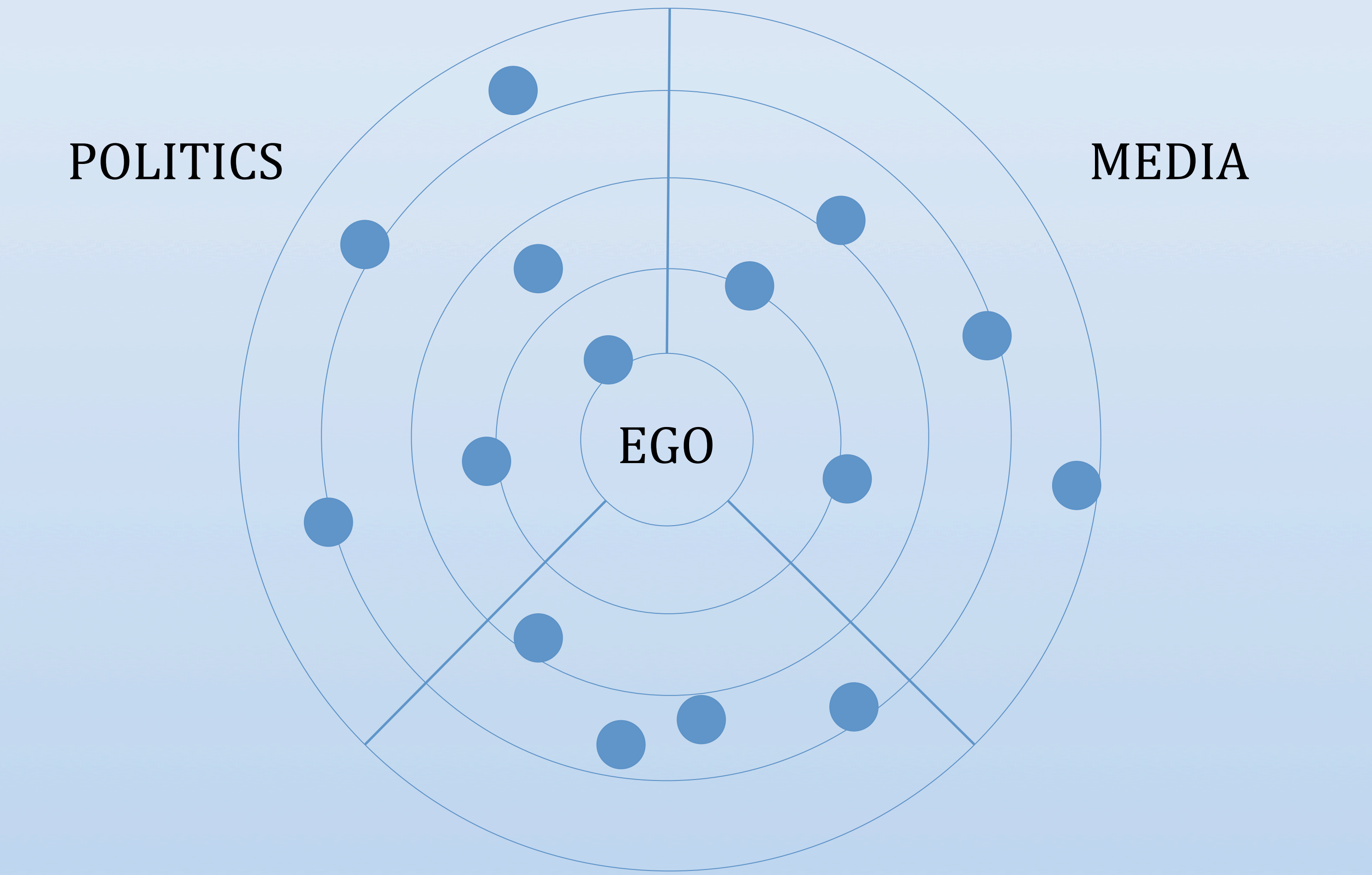
Stefan Aengenheyster

### RESEARCH OUTLINE

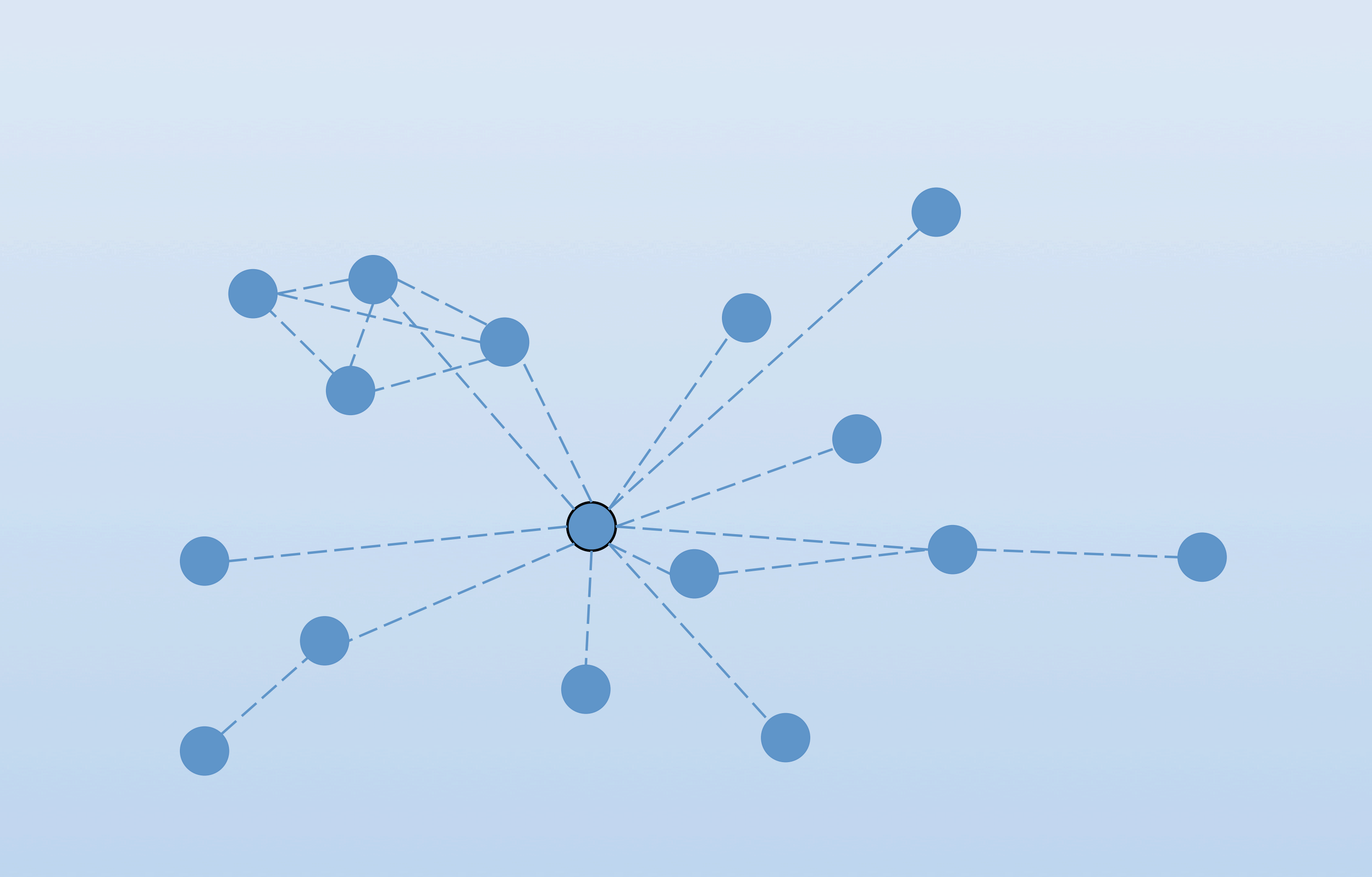
The primary question of this research asks why the public political discourse of Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) follows such different trajectories on both sides of the Atlantic. Although, the public debate in Germany has recently lost some of its original momentum it is still characterized by high public awareness and involvement while the discourse in the United States seems to have never picked up momentum within the wider public sphere. In order to explain such discrepancies the paper seeks to deploy a novel methodologically integrated approach by streamlining comparative politics methods with social network analysis in order to shed light on this social phenomenon.

### METHODOLOGY

In order to measure how influential certain interest groups are, information on their social networks and their embeddedness in society will be empirically gathered. Based on the gathered information egocentric network maps will be designed for each interest group. Mark Granovetter’s publications on network theory are used to explain systemic differences in social network structure of interest groups. I want to lay particular emphasis on the importance of weak ties and structural holes. The comparative part of the research will investigate similarities between the network maps. The hypothesis holds that the more weak ties within the network map, the more influence can be exercised.



img\_01 - Interview form



img\_02 – egocentric network map

### DISCUSSION

This methodologically integrated approach to analyzing the influence of the civil society on political issues contributes to the current academic debate in two ways. First, it addresses a research gap in the realm of comparative politics by providing a functioning tool to compare civil society. Second, it offers an explanation to why the public debate on both sides of the Atlantic has undertaken such different trajectories. This research has only laid down the foundations of combining comparative political science with social network analysis methodology. Future research should aim at investigating other EU-Member states for further evidence.

### LITERATURE

**Diamond , L.** (1994): Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation, in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 5, pp. 5-17 .

**Diaz-Bone, R.** (2006): Eine kurze Einführung in die sozialwissenschaftliche Netzwerkanalyse, in: *Mitteilungen aus dem Schwerpunktbereich Methodenlehre*, Heft Nr. 57.

**Dutton, W. H.** (2008): The Fifth Estate Emerging Through the Network of Networks, in: *Prometheus*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 1-15

**Ishiyama, J. T.** (2012): *Comparative Politics – Principles of Democracy and Democratization*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

**Kolleck, N. & Bormann, I.** (2014): Analyzing trust in innovation networks: combining quantitative and qualitative techniques of Social Network Analysis, in: *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft* 17(5), pp. 9-27.

**Lijphard, A.** (1999): *Patterns of Democracy – Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.