

Communication within the Transport Policy. Media and informal political communication – a case study

*Klaus Kamps, Christin Baumert, Christoph Borschel,
David Höltgen & Anna-Maria Thein*
University of Erfurt (Germany)

Abstract

Interest groups and other intermediate actors play a significant role in modern democracies when it comes to the definition of political problems and political decision-making. Within policy-analysis approaches dominate that reduce communication onto its mass medial and public side. This article presents results of a case study about the German ‚Luftverkehrsteuergesetz‘ (Air Traffic Tax Law). We link the political negotiation system and the medial mediation system by means of a multi-method research design. Results show that a strategic, media-based influence on political decision-makers occurs on a low level and cannot be tracked further. Possible reasons are discussed considering the background of informal communication in policy fields.

Keywords: Political communication, policy-analysis, transport policy, Luftverkehrsteuergesetz, framing-analysis, informal political communication

Zusammenfassung

Verbände, Interessengruppen und andere intermediäre Akteure spielen in modernen Demokratien eine zentrale Rolle bei der Definition politischer Probleme und der Herstellung politischer Entscheidungen. Dabei überwiegen in der Politikfeldforschung solche Ansätze, die Kommunikation auf ihre massenmedial-öffentliche Seite konzentrieren. Der vorliegende Beitrag berichtet Befunde einer Fallanalyse zum Luftverkehrssteuergesetz, die mittels eines Mehrmethodendesigns einen Konnex knüpft zwischen politischem Verhandlungs- und medialem Vermittlungssystem. Es zeigt sich, dass ein strategischer, medial platzierter Einfluss auf die politischen Entscheidungsträger nur in geringem Umfang nachgezeichnet werden kann. Gründe dafür werden vor dem Hintergrund informeller Kommunikation in Politikfeldern diskutiert.

Schlagwörter: Politische Kommunikation, Politikfeldforschung, Verkehrspolitik, Luftverkehrssteuergesetz, Framing-Analyse, informelle politische Kommunikation

1 Introduction

Within policy-analysis most political science approaches concentrate on the political system and associations as well as the influence of institutionalized decisions (Blum and Schubert 2009; Bandelow 1998; Noweski 2008; Sebaldt and Straßner 2004). Communication, in particular, is being examined only marginally (Sarcinelli and Tenscher 2008: 8), it functions as a basic frame of reference at most (cf. Kamps, Horn and Wicke 2013: 276). This is rather astounding as internal and external communications serve as the main tasks (cf. Jentges et al. 2012: 384.) of such organizations. If one takes the dictum seriously that political communication is not only a tool for politics but politics itself (cf. Jarren and Donges 2002: 22), the question occurs to what extent studies based on communication sciences provide a complementary insight into political negotiation and decision-making systems.

The relation between politics or political public relations and journalism has been present on the agenda of political communication research for quite some time (e.g. Baerns 1985). A focus on communicative and medial influences on decision-making processes in policy fields and decisions themselves, on the other hand, is rather new (Koch-Baumgarten and Mez 2007a; Jarren, Lachenmeister and Steiner 2007; Vowe 2007; Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009, 2010). One result of these works is the high dependency on contextual information concerning the question if and to what extent media have an analytically traceable impact on decisions. This means whether the ‘media logic’ affects the process of a concrete political decision-making or not and, furthermore, under which – institutional, structural and situational – circumstances this might be the case. In short, the state of affairs and its political and economical reach, the special network configurations within the policy field and formal guidelines within the multi-level system matter.

These findings somewhat contradict those analysis which may be found under the key words ‘medialization’ or ‘mediatization’ and state a broad orientation of political actors or organizations on a media logic (for further discussion cf. Reinemann 2010). Against this background, the present exploratory analysis examines the ‚Luftverkehrsteuergesetz‘ (hereafter: LuftVStG) in order to answer the question to what extent formal and informal communication, systematic processes and institutions influence political decision-making processes within the political negotiation system. The LuftVStG has been passed as a ‘junktim’ deal in the context of a fiscal consolidation package and did not require approval by the German ‚Bundesrat‘.

2 Media, politics, policy fields: an outline of the theoretical background

Within the German policy-analysis such concepts and approaches dominate that concentrate on a „democracy by negotiation“ (e.g. Lehmbruch 2003). Nonetheless, these approaches neglect processes of political communication and, therefore, most of the time the medias’ impact on political decision-making processes (Koch-Baumgarten and Mez 2007b: 8-9). Still, (neo)institutional, control-theoretical or systematical approaches do dominate at this point (ibid.: 9).

In comparison, communication science – using catchphrases like ‘mediatization’ or ‘medialization’ – broadly discusses to what extent political actors orientate themselves on the media and even adjust their own activities (Meyen 2009; Reinemann 2010). Communication studies investigate the consequences on the manufacturing, presentation and legitimization of politics: for example on the interaction- and information-behavior of parliamentarians (Puhe and Würzberg 1989), on experts in policy transfer (Tenscher 2003), on specialized journalists (Rinke et al. 2006), on parliaments as organizations (Marschall 1999), parties (Alemann and Marschall 2002) or on communication of associations (Hoffjann and Stahl 2010; Steiner and Jarren 2009). Other surveys investigate ‘relationship games’ (cf. Donsbach et al.

1993) between two groups of actors, e.g. journalists and political spokespersons (Pfetsch 2003; Pfetsch and Mayerhöffer 2011) or PR-employees (Gottwald 2006). All these studies are united by the fact that they are frequently adjusted to the relationship of interaction of politics and journalism (Kamps, Horn and Wicke 2013). Anyhow, it has to be mentioned that both political and communication science look at the subject matter of association communication and communication of interest groups through their particular disciplinary lenses (Jentges et al. 2012: 385).

Specifically concerning policy fields there exists just a relatively small number of case studies (cf. e.g. Koch-Baumgarten and Mez 2007; Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2010; Hoffjann and Stahl 2010; Kamps, Horn and Wicke 2013), which all in all provide us with a multi-faceted picture: Political decision in policy fields may be made without traceable media influence over long periods of time so that politics follows its own inner logic. However, this can change under specific structural and situational circumstances. Especially fragmented actor-constellations, a missing or bursting fundamental consensus, the exclusion of public actors in the field and the compatibility of concrete policy issues and media logic have to be taken into account (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009: 313). Based on these findings it is not feasible to globally answer the questions if, when and in which manner *the media* do influence specific decisions within the political negotiation system.

Apart from this ambivalence of empirically verifiable factors of influence, actors may assume that the media actually have an impact in specific situations or, at least, they cannot completely deny the idea that this impact might exist. In this way, classic association-research distinguishes between an influence and support-logic (cf. Steiner and Jarren 2009; Jentges et al. 2012: 386-388; Roose 2009): Political communication in form of direct or indirect, media-transmitted communication of interests towards political decision-makers (influence logic) as well as in form of direct or media-orientated communication towards members or other circles of supporters (support logic) (cf. Roose 2009). One of the few broader quantitative studies concerning the communication of interest groups in Germany (Jentges et al. 2012) com-

plements this perspective with a so-called reputation logic and a reciprocity logic: Regarding the acceptance of their concern or request associations do orientate themselves on the mass media and journalism (reputation logic). Following the logic of reciprocity they also orientate themselves on relevant segments of the public, e.g. on other associations or intermediate organizations (ibid.: 25-26.). This way, a simple association-policy-dyad may be further differentiated: Interest groups do not only accommodate to their members or political counterparts, they also keep an eye on other actors and organizations within their field as well as on specialized media, online-strategies and more.

Following this line of argumentation, a concern of this study, on the one hand, was to answer the general research question about the communication in the negotiation system of the transport policy. On the other hand, it was also about clarifying whether – and if so – how public or non-public communicative strategies (and their effectiveness) could be explained by the procedure context of the LuftVStG: a) the fact that the law didn't require any approval by the German Bundesrat, b) the fact that the law was part of a fiscal consolidation package and therefore subjected to a 'junktum'.

3 Method

3.1 Background information: The Luftverkehrssteuergesetz

As mentioned, this study concentrates on the LuftVStG as its examination background. This specific law was one component of a consolidation package that was accepted as governmental initiative in June 2010. Being spread over four year, the fiscal package (cf. Borschel et al. 2012: 4-5) embraced an amount of 80 billion Euros. Thereby, about one billion Euros have been allocated to the LuftVStG. Precisely, the law provides that when taking off from a German airport (starting from January 1st, 2011) all airlines have to pay a fee for every passenger. This graduated 'tax' differs depending on the destination. On January 1st, 2012 the fee declined. Being a part of a consolidation package, the respon-

sibility for elaborating this act fell within the scope of the Federal Minister of Finance. Moreover, this law did not require any approval by the German Bundesrat.

Three official objectives have been pursued through implementing the law: Firstly, the air transport should be included within the mobility taxation. Secondly, it should offer an incentive to behave in a more environment-friendly manner. Thirdly, probably as its main objective, this law depicts a contribution to the volume of savings.¹

Some characteristics made the law quite useful for this study: a) the act was adopted as a federal law which is why the federal states had no influence on the law and the political responsibilities were clearly given. Also, b) the law was part of a reform package and a variance in topics could be expected – exceeding the general field logic. Besides that, c) the law could be discussed in different contextual dimensions: socially (consumer), economically (passenger numbers, enterprises' losses) and ecologically (mobility taxation). Furthermore, there was a possibility of reducing the tax after the time period of one year and an evaluation report was about to be published by the government in the summer of 2012. All this led to the assumption that within an acceptable timeframe, a discussion about the tax within the political field might be expected and that it would bring along a sufficient variance for the planned framing analysis. The study chose different methods in order to pursue its objectives: identification of policy actors, content (frame) analysis and qualitative interviews.

3.2 Identification of policy actors and selection of interviewees

Firstly an analysis of relevant and important policy actors of the LuftVStG was conducted. This had to be done in order to identify the central persons of this political field for the following qualitative interviews. The period of time and the material of the examination corresponded with those of the subsequent content analysis. Articles of three national daily newspapers (*taz*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*), two

¹ Cf. Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache 17/3542; Bericht des Haushaltsausschusses zum Gesetz der Bundesregierung: 1.

business newspapers (*Handelsblatt*, *Financial Times*) as well as the political magazines *Focus* and *Der Spiegel* and the local newspapers *Bonner Generalanzeiger* and *Berliner Zeitung* were examined in the interval from June 8, 2010 until January 15, 2012. Additionally, parliamentary documents such as protocols were included.

In the end, 619 printed articles contained the word „Luftverkehrssteuergesetz“ (or one of 13 other synonyms) in its caption, subtitle or text. These articles and documents were the basis to find out which persons were involved. Ultimately, a number of 288 individual and corporative players of politics, economy and associations could be identified². In addition to that, 183 journalists were found. Nevertheless, interviewees for the subsequent surveys were not exclusively selected on basis of this counting. Actually, people who did not play an essential role in the print media but were mentioned throughout the political documents were also depicted persons of interests for the interviews, and a list was created in which all participants were grouped. 101 persons received a letter of inquiry. Eventually, 39 interviews³ could be realized. The interviewees were structured as follows: four economy experts, nine political players, five journalists, twelve representatives of airports or airlines and nine people from touristic, transport or environmental associations.

3.3 Media Content Analysis

On the basis of the same printed material – same period of time, sources and criteria (619 articles) – a content analysis was conducted and frames were identified: argumentation patterns, subdivided into the frame elements problem definition, causal attribution, (moral) judgments and remedies for further actions (cf. Entman 1993).

² Therefore, the analysis did not only capture persons but also collective and corporate players like associations, enterprises, and political parties.

³ This low return rate of about 39 per cent cannot be seen as an excellent value, but it is good and sufficient.

The codebook mainly was created inductively⁴: Previously, no frames per se were defined. Nonetheless, all frame elements were verified by structure and combination and put together as frames right after data collection (cf. Matthes and Kohring 2004: 62). All in all, the first evaluation differentiated 60 single arguments, which were aggregated in 16 superior frames. Those represented the most crucial frames within the discussion about the LuftVStG (see later the presentation of results).

3.4 *Qualitative Interviews*

It was the key objective of the structured guideline interviews to find out: a) which arguments had been mentioned by the discussion participants themselves, b) which arguments they considered as central, c) which communicative strategies had been followed up by the players and d) how useful and effective they estimated each single argument. With regard to the variety of players, four different guidelines were developed. These four guidelines were either used for the political actors, representatives of associations and companies or independent third party experts and journalists. One special feature should be pointed out: Following a multi-staged approach, all interviewees were confronted with the results of the previous framing analysis, including their own medial presence (alternatively the medial presence of their branch, company, etc.) in the context of the discussion.

Finally, all interviews had been transcribed and captured categorically by means of a codebook. Besides, statements relating to the assessment of discourse, coalitions of interests or the general relationship between politics and media were interpreted according to separate schemes.

4 Results

The following presentation of results focuses three aspects: 1) public communication by means of arguments, *frames*, which

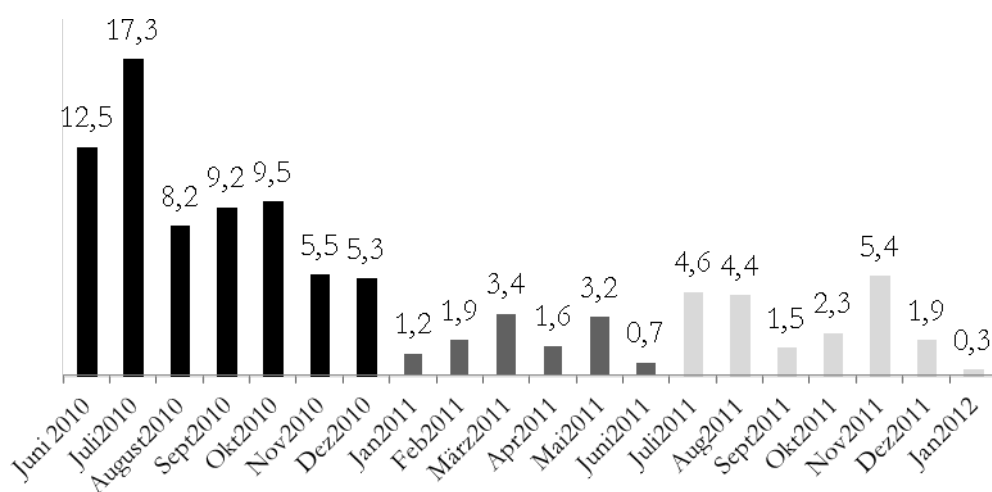
⁴ The intercoder reliability by Holsti (cf. Rössler 2005: 190) was in case of concerning the content variables $r=.79$.

have been published by the media (sample); 2) *speakers* of these frames; 3) informal communication in the context of the LuftVStG. These aspects are analyzed through interviews and the content analysis of the political and medial discourse.

4.1 Frames within the media coverage

First of all, a simple count of all articles reveals that the media coverage about the tax may be divided into three separate *phases* (Figure 1): an initial phase with an intense coverage which starts immediately after the decision of the cabinet (June 2010 until December 2010), a second phase from January 2011 until June 2011 with lower intensity and fewer peaks, and a third phase from July 2011 until January 2012 with more peaks at the beginning which then, however, vanish gradually with the change of the fee-structure in January 2012. Thus, the quality of the public communication resembles the process of the legislation itself: an intense phase immediately after the decision of the cabinet, which flattens after the parliamentary passage, followed by a phase with less coverage, and eventually another intense phase referring to the intended change until the end of 2011.

Figure 1: Phases within the media coverage / articles addressing the tax



Note: Share of articles per month in relation to the entire media coverage in percent, $N = 619$

All three phases can be explained more detailed with regard to their patterns of argument.

The *first phase* refers to consumers and passengers. With 17.4 percent (in this phase) the problem ‘the tax has influence on the behavior of the consumers’ is most frequently mentioned. The argument ‘influence on passenger figures’ is the second most important with 15.8 percent. Interestingly, the argument ‘fiscal revenues for the national budget’ plays a minor part from the start (10 percent) even though this was the essential reason for the law. This can be ascribed to the dominance of the airlines and airports within the media. In almost 40 percent of all cases the speakers of an argument belong to one of these two aviation groups. In contrast, political speakers emphasize the positive effects of the tax for the national budget (see 5.2).

The important argument for companies that a decline in passenger figures would affect their financial situation is only discussed marginally in the initial phase, though. The same is true for arguments concerning international competition, economic aspects or ecological issues (4 to 5% each). In contrast to the other phases, the first phase is the most heterogenic one with regard to content and patterns of argument.

The *second phase* (January 2011 until June 2011) is obviously less intense: It is even the least intense one within the entire investigation period. A potential reason for this may be the fact that nearly all decisions concerning the law had already been made prior to this phase. Hence, there is not much talked of. This phase is slightly dominated by the argument that ‘the law has influence on passenger figures’ (19.8% in this phase) as well as the argument that ‘the law has influence on the sales of a company’ (18.3%). This argument comes to the fore in the second phase because the companies start to publish tangible sales figures in this phase to proof the (economic) consequences of the law.

In the *third phase* (July 2011 until January 2012) the argument addressing the financial situation of a company reaches its peak: With approximately 20 percent it becomes the most frequently mentioned argument. It is easily comprehensible that this argument is often linked to the statement that the tax will result in a decline of passenger figures. The governmental ‘power argument’ that the tax will contribute to the national budget vanishes completely from the medial stage. Interestingly, two-thirds of all

explicitly mentioned demands or recommendations for actions (69%) in this phase are geared towards abolition or at least reduction of the tax. That means prior to a potential change of the tax companies and industries and their problem definitions dominate the coverage.

Table 1 shows the occurrence of the eight most important frames over the course of time. Especially five central patterns of argument evolve in the media coverage: ‘passenger figures’, ‘flight figures’, ‘financial situation of a company’, ‘consumers’, and with a little gap the ‘contribution of the law to the consolidation of the national budget’.⁵ Especially the argument addressing ecological policy issues (by means of a mobility tax) is only discussed in the initial stage of the coverage (which is characterized by textual heterogeneity). In all other phases this argument is nearly immaterial. This is interesting since a mobility tax on the one hand and ecological policy issues on the other hand represent two essential arguments for the initiation of the law in the German Bundestag (see footnote 1).

⁵ Concerning the differentiation of these central frames: ‘Passenger figures’ predominantly refers to a potential decline of passengers due to the tax, which might result in an emigration of air passengers to airports abroad. The intertwined frame ‘flight figures’ relates to the cancellation of flights or their relocation abroad. The ‘financial situation of a company’ involves declining sales as well as aspects concerning the location of a company. The frame ‘consumer’ includes increasing prices for flight tickets and issues of social justice. The fifth top-frame ‘national budget’ addresses the German package of consolidation and how the tax positively contributes to the national budget.

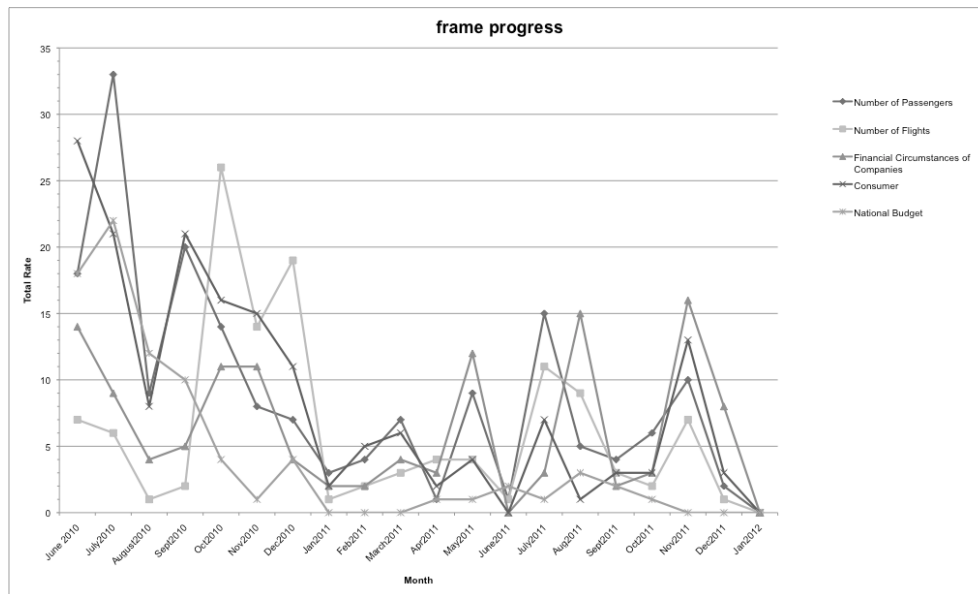
Table 1: Frames over the course of time

Valid	Number of Passengers		Number of Flights		Financial Circumstances of Companies		Consumer		National Competition		National Budget		Jobs		Environment		Month Total (100%)
	Rate	%	Rate	%	Rate	%	Rate	%	Rate	%	Rate	%	Rate	%	Rate	%	Rate
June 2010	18	17,14	7	6,67	14	13,33	28	26,67	4	3,81	18	17,14	8	7,62	8	7,62	105
July 2010	33	24,09	6	4,38	9	6,57	21	15,33	21	15,33	22	16,06	15	10,95	10	7,30	137
August 2010	9	16,98	1	1,89	4	7,55	8	15,09	5	9,43	12	22,64	10	18,87	4	7,55	53
Sept 2010	20	27,4	2	2,74	5	6,85	21	28,77	3	4,11	10	13,70	8	10,96	4	5,48	73
Oct 2010	14	16,67	26	31,00	11	13,10	16	19,05	8	9,52	4	4,76	3	3,57	2	2,38	84
Nov 2010	8	14,55	14	25,45	11	20,00	15	27,27	3	5,45	1	1,82	1	1,82	2	3,64	55
Dec 2010	7	13,72	19	37,25	4	7,84	11	21,57	1	1,96	4	7,84	5	9,80	0	0,00	51
Jan 2011	3	30,00	1	10,00	2	20,00	2	20,00	1	10,00	0	0,00	1	10,00	0	0,00	10
Feb 2011	4	26,67	2	13,33	2	13,33	5	33,33	1	6,67	0	0,00	1	6,67	0	0,00	15
March 2011	7	25,93	3	11,11	4	14,81	6	22,22	1	3,70	0	0,00	5	18,52	1	3,70	27
Apr 2011	1	7,69	4	30,77	3	23,1	2	15,38	0	0,00	1	7,69	1	7,69	1	7,69	13
May 2011	9	28,13	4	12,5	12	37,5	4	12,5	0	0,00	1	3,13	2	6,25	0	0,00	32
June 2011	1	25,00	1	25,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	2	50,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	4
July 2011	15	31,91	11	23,40	3	6,38	7	1,49	2	4,55	1	2,13	5	10,64	3	6,38	47
Aug 2011	5	12,82	9	23,08	15	38,46	1	2,56	1	2,56	3	7,69	2	5,13	3	7,69	39
Sept 2011	4	30,77	3	23,08	2	15,38	3	23,08	0	0,00	2	15,38	1	7,69	0	0,00	13
Oct 2011	6	40,00	2	13,33	3	20,00	3	20,00	0	0,00	1	6,67	0	0,00	0	0,00	15
Nov 2011	10	16,95	7	11,9	16	27,12	13	22,03	2	3,39	0	0,00	10	16,95	1	1,69	59
Dec 2011	2	11,76	1	5,88	8	47,06	3	17,65	0	0,00	0	0,00	3	17,65	0	0,00	17
Jan 2012	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	0	0,00	1	100,00	1
Total	176		123		128		169		53		82		81		40		850

Note: *n* and the share of frames within the particular month: the ‘top-frame’ of every month is highlighted.

The five mentioned frames which are central to the coverage are also graphed over the course of time (Figure 2):

Figure 2: Central frames over the course of time



The core objective of the law – fiscal revenues – is only discussed subsequent to the cabinet decision. That does not mean that the tax policy context gets lost. This context is, however, only marginally understood as *a problem*. It rather accompanies government actions self-evidently.

The process of the ‘consumer’ frame is similar. At the beginning, the frame is a subject of discussion, but then it becomes

less important. Interestingly, the social category ‘consumer’ constitutes only ten percent of all affected people who were mentioned in the articles – even whilst taking into the account the category ‘employees’. In contrast, airlines and airports are labeled as the affected people in three-quarters of all cases. The small number of consumers may be ascribed to the fact that their concernment is obvious and does not need further explanation. Thus, only the consequences for airlines and airports are discussed more explicitly.

‘Passenger figures’, the ‘financial situation of a company’, and somewhat weaker the ‘flight figures’ are the most constant arguments. In the first phase of the coverage these three frames are tantamount to other frames. But during the second phase, when the change of the tax is discussed, those three frames marginalize others in the public media communication. That means they are not discussed more intensely themselves but the other frames vanish increasingly. Hence, the coverage becomes more homogeneously in the final phase even though this involves a lower level of diversity.

4.2 Speakers in the media coverage

Apart from the actual arguments surely the speakers of those are of immense importance in order to make a proper description and analysis of this political discourse. At this point 15 groups of speakers have to be distinguished. The group’s way of argumentation will at first be illustrated in a chart. A more detailed examination will follow later on.

Table 2: Speakers and arguments

Table 1: Contingency Table of Speakers and Arguments

Speaker of Argument	Political Administrative System	Argument (grouped)														Total	
		Number of Passengers	Number of Flights	Financial Circumstances of Companies	Jobs	National Competition	Inter-German Usage of Transport	International Competition	Economic Situation	Environment	Communication of Industry	Consumer	Research and Development	Parliamentary Action/Regulation	Size of Company		National Budget
		13	0	1	4	6	5	4	9	3	0	10	0	0	2	19	76
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	17,1	0	1,3	5,3	7,9	6,6	5,3	11,8	3,9	0	13,2	0	0	2,6	25,0	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	6,6	0	0,7	6,8	7,0	10,9	8,2	24,3	6,4	0	5,1	0	0	0	22,4	6,6
	Opposition	3	0	0	3	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	27,3	0	0	27,3	9,1	9,1	9,1	9,1	9,1	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	1,5	0	0	5,1	1,2	2,2	2,0	2,7	2,1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,0
	Government Coalition	1	1	1	0	2	0	1	0	5	0	5	0	0	0	2	18
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	5,6	5,6	5,6	0	11,1	0	5,6	0	27,8	0	27,8	0	0	0	11,1	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	0,5	0,8	0,7	0	2,3	0	2,0	0	10,6	0	2,6	0	0	0	2,4	1,6
	Foreign Countries	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	0	0	50,0	0	0	0	50,0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	0,0	0	1,4	0	0	0	4,1	0	0	0	0	0	14,3	8,6	0	0,3
	Journalists	10	7	9	3	3	6	2	5	8	0	9	0	1	5	4	72
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	13,9	9,7	12,5	4,2	4,2	8,3	2,8	6,9	11,1	0	12,5	0	1,4	6,9	5,6	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	5,1	5,3	6,5	5,1	3,5	13,0	4,1	13,5	17,0	0	4,6	0	0	0	4,7	6,3
	Socioenvironment	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	2	0	4	0	0	0	1	11
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	9,1	0	0	18,2	0	0	0	9,1	18,2	0	5,6	0	0	0	9,1	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	0,5	0	0	3,4	0	0	0	2,7	4,3	0	2,0	0	0	0	1,2	1,0
	Inter-German Transport	0	1	1	1	0	3	2	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	0	13
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	7,7	7,7	7,7	7,7	0	23,1	15,4	0	30,8	0	7,7	0	0	0	0	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	0,0	0,8	0,7	2,6	0	6,5	4,1	0	8,5	0	50,0	0	0	0	0	1,1
	Travel and Touristic Business	15	3	8	1	8	0	2	0	4	0	28	0	0	0	2	71
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	21,1	4,2	19,7	1,4	19,7	0	2,8	0	5,6	0	39,4	0	0	0	2,8	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	7,7	2,3	5,8	2,6	9,3	0	4,1	0	8,5	0	14,3	0	0	0	2,4	6,2
	Environmental Union	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	0	0	14,3	0	0	28,6	0	14,3	42,9	0	0	0	0	0	0	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	0,0	0	0,7	0	0	4,3	0	2,7	6,4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,6
	Airline Industry	30	2	10	13	11	4	6	3	4	1	7	0	2	3	0	96
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	31,3	2,1	10,4	13,5	11,5	4,2	6,25	3,1	4,2	1,0	7,3	0	2,1	3,1	0	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	15,2	1,5	7,2	33,3	12,8	8,7	12,2	8,1	8,5	14,3	3,6	0	28,6	5,2	0	8,4
	External Experts	5	3	6	6	4	4	1	4	2	0	4	1	2	2	1	45
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	11,1	6,7	13,3	13,3	8	8,9	2,2	8,9	4,4	0	8,9	2,2	4,4	4,4	2,2	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	2,6	2,3	4,3	15,4	4,7	8,7	2,0	10,8	4,3	0	2,0	50,0	28,6	3,4	1,2	3,9
	Airlines	33	80	55	10	20	2	13	2	5	1	67	0	0	18	3	309
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	10,7	25,9	17,8	3,2	6,5	0,6	4,2	0,6	1,6	0,3	21,7	0	0	5,8	1,0	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	16,8	60,6	39,6	25,6	23,3	4,3	26,5	5,4	10,6	14,3	32,7	0	0	31,0	3,5	27,0
	Airports	55	16	19	12	12	4	7	5	1	2	7	0	1	9	0	150
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	36,7	10,7	12,7	8,0	8,0	2,7	4,7	3,3	0,7	1,3	4,6	0	0	6,0	0	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	28,1	12,1	6,5	30,8	14,0	8,7	11,9	13,5	2,1	28,6	3,6	0	14,3	15,5	0	13,1
	Federal States	3	1	4	0	1	6	6	4	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	30
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	10,0	3,3	13,3	0	3,3	20,0	20,0	13,3	0	0	10,0	0	0	6,7	0	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	1,5	0,8	2,9	0	1,2	13,0	12,2	10,8	0	0	1,5	0	0	3,4	0	2,6
	not existing	27	18	22	4	18	9	2	2	5	3	52	0	1	17	53	233
	% Amount within Group of Speakers	11,6	7,7	9,4	1,7	7,7	3,9	0,9	0,9	2,1	1,3	22,3	0	0,4	7,3	22,7	100
	% Amount within Group of Arguments	13,8	13,8	15,8	6,8	20,9	19,6	4,1	5,4	10,6	42,9	26,5	0	14,3	29,3	62,4	20,3
	Entire Amount of Argument in all Arguments	196	132	139	59	86	46	49	37	47	7	196	2	7	58	85	1146

N = 1146

In the examined articles the airlines have their say – by far – at most; 27% of all arguments (n=309). Their argumentation is also the richest in variety (13 of 15 arguments) and their ‘biggest argument’ is the ‘influence on the number of flights’ (25.9% of their frames). Of all actors the airlines also most clearly uttered the argument that the LuftVStG affects consumers (21.7%). Furthermore, they argued in respect of the attributions of responsibility (the political-administrative system) and prompt to action (abolition or reduction of the tax) most strongly compared to other groups of speakers.

The airports have been represented strongly as well: They mentioned 13 of all 15 frames. Their percentage of arguments in the media was 14.3 percent. ‘Passenger numbers’ has been their most common argument (36.7%). For them, the frames ‘financial

situation' (12.7%) and 'flight numbers' (10.7%), on the other hand, have been a little less relevant within the discussion. The airports mostly occurred as the 'affected ones' within the debate – next to the airlines they form the second most affected group.

The aviation industry in the form of delegates of associations does, at least, occur as a speaker in 96 cases within the articles. This corresponds to a share of 8.4 percent. This group of actors actually should be assigned to those two groups that have just been mentioned: the airlines and airports, however, they differ in their organizational character. About one third of their arguments (31.3%) included the argument of 'passenger numbers'. With a bigger distance the arguments 'influence on jobs' (13.5%), the 'influence on the international competition' and the 'financial situation of the companies' (10.4%) followed.

Likewise, the political-administrative system appeared within the articles as a rather strong speaker. As expected, its actors mostly emphasized the question of the contribution to the consolidation (25% of their arguments). With some distance this argument was followed by 'passenger numbers' (17.1%), 'Consumers' (13.2%) and the 'economic situation' (11.8%). Following the logic, political actors have been blamed for the law the most. Consequently, almost all calls to action were addressed to them as well.

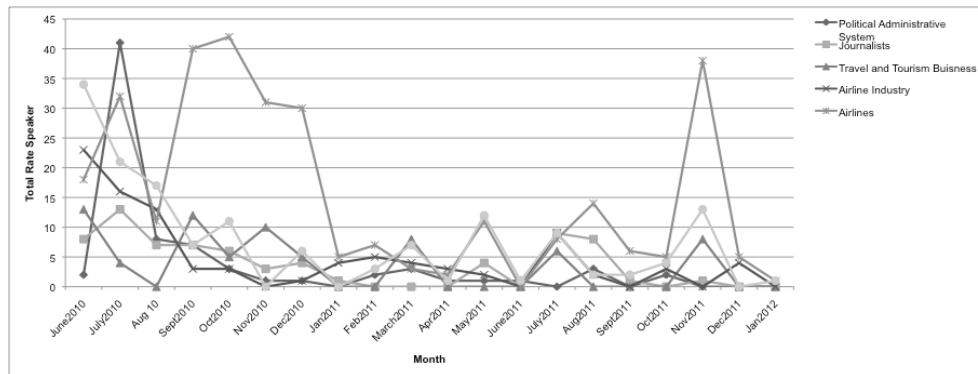
Journalists used interpretive comments as expression of opinion; they account for 6.3 percent of all speakers. This number refers to the *explicitly* marked statements by journalists. In the journalists' reasoning (as a group) it is noticeable that no argument is specifically highlighted, expressions of opinion are distributed rather heterogeneously. They also most commonly used the 'number of passengers' frame (13.9% of their arguments), yet immediately followed by the argument 'financial situation of the company', 'influence on the consumers', 'influence on the environment', 'influence on the number of flights'. In addition, the coding shows an extremely high proportion of arguments, which cannot concretely be assigned to *any* of the speakers. Altogether, this is true for 233 cases, which equates to a proportion of 20.3 percent of the whole discussion. This is due to the journalistic routine; an assignment to a speaker was only done if it was clear-

ly identifiable. These cases of non-specific reasoning in print articles also show the pronounced heterogeneity in the breadth of frames used. In other words: from a journalistic perspective the discussion in the opinion forming as well as in the information reporting was presented rather heterogeneously.

A last important group of players, which had their say in the articles, were representatives of the travel and tourism industry with 6.2 percent of the arguments. For these representatives the 'consumers' frame had priority (39.4% of their arguments); besides they focused on the 'number of passengers' argument (21.1%). Seven further thematic aspects were mentioned, yet only marginally. In the detailed analysis of this group of players it is recognizable that opposed to expectations they did not predominantly argue *negatively*, this was done by about 38%, however a good half of the arguments were neutral, a few times statements were positive, among other things with reference to the environmental problem.

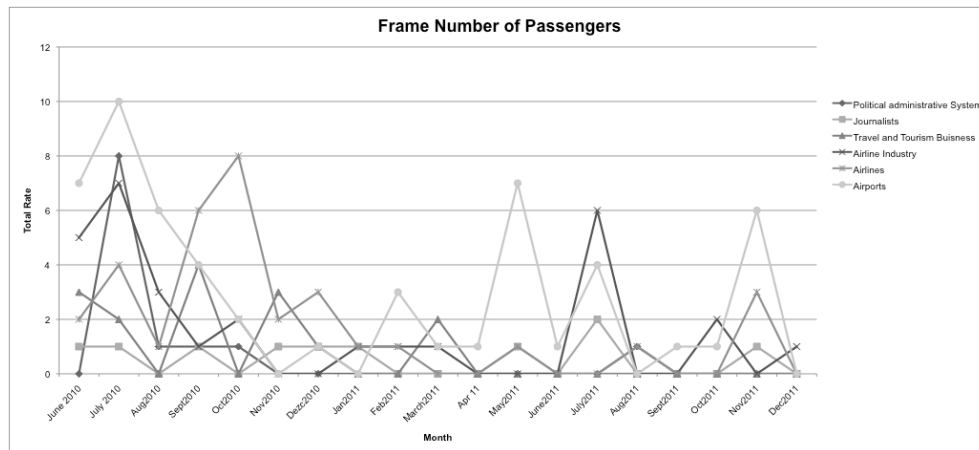
These six groups of players were thus central to the discussion around the LuftVStG. Additionally, other speakers appeared in the examined media, such as those from environmental organizations, players of international or national politics. In sum, one may therefore say, that representatives of airlines, airports, industry organizations including travel and tourism associations as well as journalists and players of the political-administrative system (i.e. ministerial spokesmen) dominated the public discussion. These six groups are in the focus of interest in the following analysis of their behavior over time and in view of the five central frames.

At first the print-media appearance of players during the period of investigation will be addressed (Figure 3).

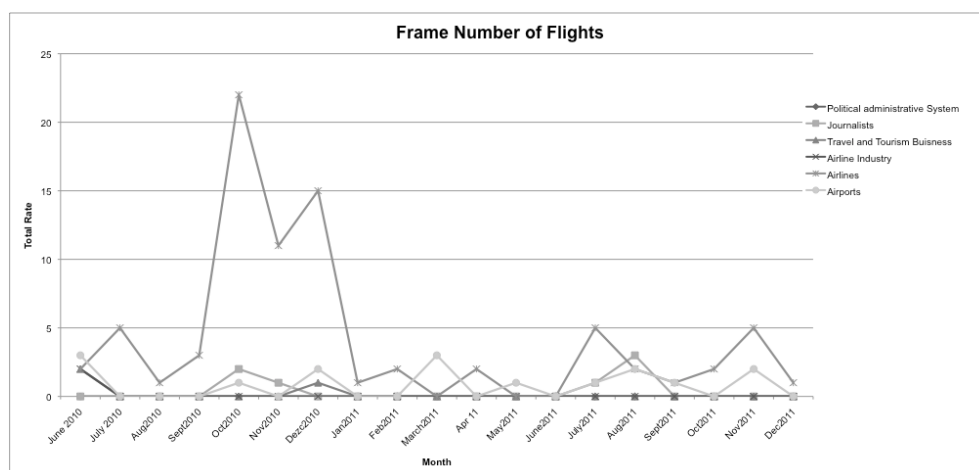
Figure 3: Central players over time

This figure shows that the representatives of *airlines*, which on the whole dominate the discourse or present the largest proportion of speakers. That is especially true for the first phase after the cabinet decision and immediately ahead of the parliamentary decision or during the debate about a reduction in autumn and winter 2011 respectively. The representatives of the *political-administrative* system show a clear peak in July 2010 – immediately after the reaction of companies and industries before. Apart from that they stay at a rather low level over time. *Journalists* as speakers (in interpretive or opinion-forming articles) appear slightly increased after the cabinet decision, as to the rest they remain at a constant, rather low level. Immediately after the decision of the German Government airports, too, display the highest attention in the articles and decrease a little afterwards, yet constantly remain a topic for discussion. The same is true (in total at a lower level) for representatives of the aviation, travel, and tourism industry. Hence it becomes clear that in particular airlines and also by far airports as *companies* lead the debate. Representatives of associations accompany the process, but are not visible at the same extend as speakers.

The following five figures (Figures 4-8) of the quantitative part reveal in which ways players over time with which arguments were placed in the print-media reporting. Doing so, the above mentioned central frames will be used: ‘Number of passengers’, ‘number of flights’, ‘financial situation of the company’, ‘consumers’ and ‘national budget’.

Figure 4: Frames over time – number of passengers

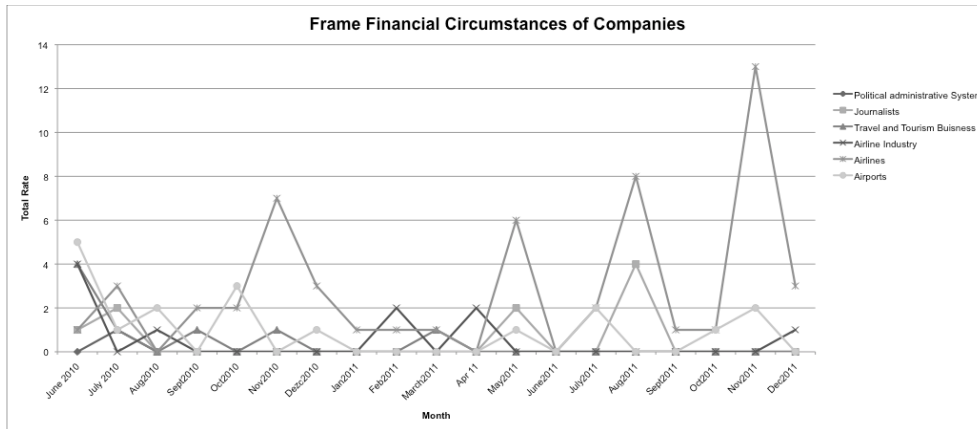
The frame ‘number of passengers’ is important in the discussion of the LuftVStG and predominantly used by airports, followed by airlines – although one could have expected that in reverse order. The airlines argue in return (relatively viewed) rather by using the closely related argument of the number of flights. Before the law was passed and before the fees were introduced the numbers of passengers also became an issue for the associations of the aviation industry, yet for long periods this is not the case. Otherwise, there are barely any conspicuities or peaks noticeable; this topic (like the others) by and large follows the division into three phases made above.

Figure 5: Frames over time – number of flights

As mentioned above and evident from this figure, the argument ‘number of flights’ is heavily determined by speakers of airlines. Even the airports, for which this aspect is likewise of some im-

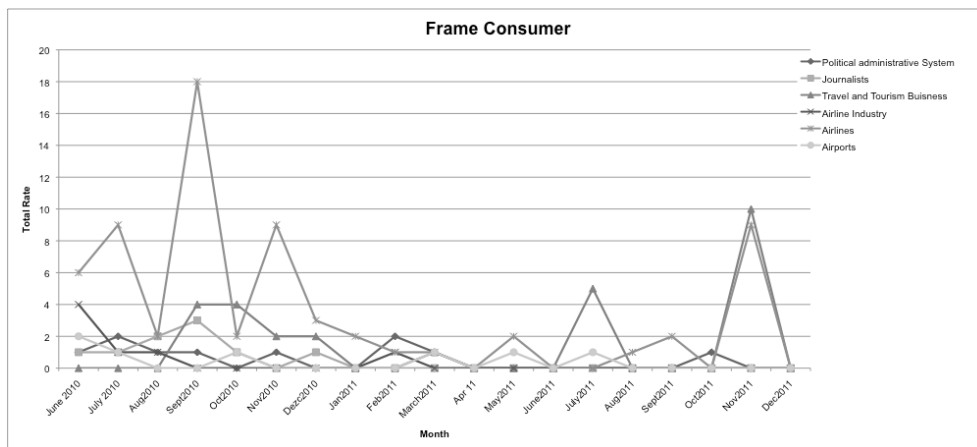
portance, come back to this frame – during the whole time period just 16 times. The political-administrative system in its generally given restraint places this frame only once. Also the representatives of industries and associations as well as journalists marginalize this question.

Figure 6: Frames over time – financial circumstances of the company



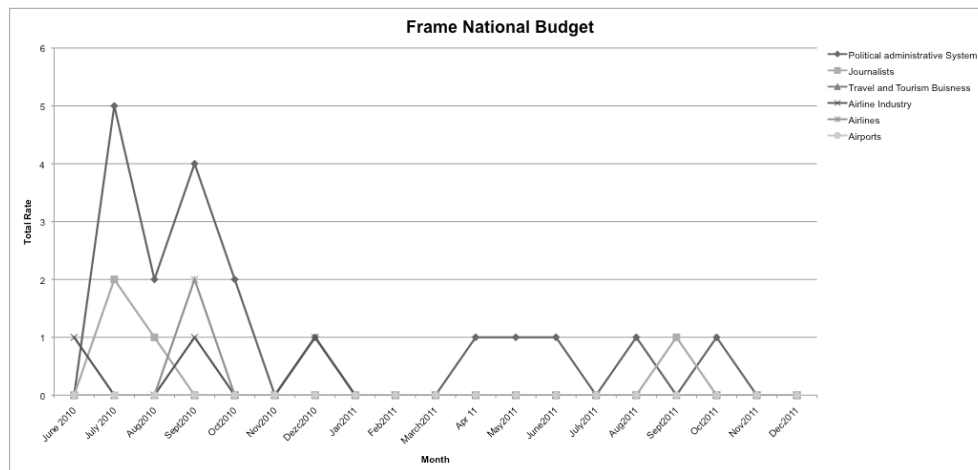
The ‘financial situation’ of the companies is a constant issue of the reporting at a low level, yet it is actually only addressed mainly by the affected airlines – and this with peaks, roughly distributed like the reasoning with the number of passengers by the airports. Contrary to the steady processes of other groups of players these peaks hint at a strategic agenda-building. The two central players of the print-media discussion thus set priorities or – what cannot be excluded – are integrated in the reporting by journalists in a standardized way.

Figure 7: Frames over time – consumers



The assumption of a timed framing-strategy by speakers of the airlines is supported by the presentation of groups of players over time of the ‘consumers’ frame. Airlines place some reasoning peaks during the parliamentary procedure and in this respect almost at the same time with their reasoning regarding the number of flights. The arguments to the financial situation of the companies are temporally following, probably because at first only prospectively and then, in the course of the year 2011, being able to back it up with hard facts. Otherwise the ‘consumers’ frame is also a focus of the travel and tourism industry, especially in winter 2011. For the rest of the groups of players this frame remains marginal.

Figure 8: *Players over time – national budget*



As mentioned before, the question regarding the consolidation contribution of the LuftVStG is in the focus of interest for political motives. The last diagram of this section shows once again that the corresponding frame is placed only rarely – and if so then by players of the political-administrative system. Airports and airlines or their speakers, respectively, did not use it at all – not even in a negative sense. As has become apparent in the last figures these players clearly set other priorities. However, this does not mean that the nexus between the legislation and the national budget is not part of the journalistic reporting (this is similarly true for the ‘consumers’ frame): the connection is set, actually rather extensively and over the investigation period, yet there has not been a linkage to a representative of a strategic group of

players. In this vein, the consumer argument was additionally mentioned 52 times and the budget argument 53 times in the articles, which in turn taken as a whole equates in each case to almost a quarter of the mention of these arguments. In other words: As already touched upon several times, the journalistic coverage was more heterogeneous than the addressing attempts of single players.

However, this description of the debate around the 'LuftVStG' does show some thematic priorities and that specific arguments – like those concerning the taxing of mobility – are only marginally addressed. Since this is not an input-output study (which would for instance compare press releases to the reporting), it can only indirectly be indicative of communication strategies and their consequences. Therefore this study, as mentioned in the methodological part, also included guideline-based interviews with those players, who accompanied or lead the discussion with a different organizational background.

4.3 Qualitative results

Several steps are required in order to analyze the qualitative interviews. In particular, all communicative actions named by the interviewees have been classified in a category system and analyzed with the help of qualitative data software (MAXQDA). It has to be mentioned that these interviews were conducted *after* a first examination of material and framing-analysis. The results were incorporated into the interviews. Therefore, the interviewers were able to precisely ask interviewees about their specific communicative actions, arguments, and strategies of communication. In the following, the results will be outlined according to a) the political and b) the media debate. The political debate mainly deals with the informal interference of actors as well as the assessment of their decisions. Regarding the media debate we question the interference on journalists and the assessment of their journalistic reporting in the context of the LuftVStG.

4.3.1 *The political debate*

By analyzing and assessing the political debate five major argument categories have been identified: ‘surprise’, ‘solo effort’, ‘responsibility’, ‘lack of readiness to talk’ as well as ‘industry coalition’.

Approximately 50 percent of all political actors emphasized that the law-making procedure happened to be surprising and rapid: an assessment, which has been confirmed by most groups of actors, and therefore, is not considered as an exclusive perspective. For instance, one journalist mentioned that according to his information inside the governing coalition the taxation of air traffic was never at issue before (J03: 1f.). Also actors of aviation and tourism industry referred to this process as atypically fast: „If this law had been passed regardless of the national budget, it would have taken at least one or two year to pass it in an orderly way involving all stakeholders“ (B14: 10). Another industry representative called the taxation an „instrument of desperation of the coalition“ (B20: 3) as there is no broad agreement about alternative opportunities of cost-saving or revenue. According to another journalist, the lobbying came to nothing as the process happened to be what he called a „knee-jerk action“ (J01: 3): „The industry has been that overrun so that the whole effort of lobbying did not work anymore; neither towards journalists nor towards the policy“ (J01: 3). In contrast, the political actors described the procedure as surprising, but not as intense as non-political actors did.

Again approximately half of the interviewees emphasized that the law can rather be considered as a solo effort of the government with minor or no room for negotiation. Four out of nine politicians interviewed and three out of five journalists share this opinion. However, actors of aviation and tourism industry are again by far the group with the most interviewees approving this statement. An airline’s delegate remarked it had been clear from early stages on that it all is about how to elaborate the taxation and not how to prohibit: „What happens afterwards is basically lobbying within an already made decision“ (B03: 3). Even an interviewed member of an environmental association who actually

supports the introduction of the taxation, points out the lack of alternatives: „Within the CDU apart from Schäuble, I would say 80 percent of their members had a rather skeptical opinion about this fee, this tax. Within the FDP, actually all members were against the taxation but probably could not present an alternative“ (B06: 15).

Twelve interviewees criticized the poor influence of the responsible Federal Ministry of Transport in elaborating the LuftVStG. Numerous actors felt left out by the Federal Ministry of Finance (FMF) who played the leading role in the law-making procedure. Also, those actors saw the ministry as rather monolithic and with a lack of readiness for discussion. „Everyone we had talked with and tent to be on our side, said: sorry, but the FMF had spoken and there is nothing we can to“ (B09 & B10: 3). Despite concerns from specialists‘ point of views the minister of transport was not able to prevail against the Federal Ministry of Finance – a view, which has been expressed by several political actors (e.g. P02: .2). This appraisal confirms and emphasizes the atypical procedure of law-making. The usual division of competences and responsibilities among the ministries has possibly been skipped for the benefit of a fast adoption of the cost-cutting package. In case of the taxation of air traffic the affected industries had place their interests in a ministry, which was – speaking in ‘lobby’ terms – uncharted territory for them.

All interviewees belonging to the aviation and tourism industry talked about a poor readiness to talk and discuss – therefore, the interviewees were rather dissatisfied with the exchange of information between policy and the industry itself. Another journalist confirmed the rather strong request of making contact with politics: „It is absolutely clear that the industry has been very active – communicative – (...) and this shows the higher the concern the higher is the request of communication“ (J03: 8). In contrast, according to his observation the communication between policy and media actors have been much more intense. However, opposition politicians shared the opinion that although companies and industry associations try to get in contact with the policy, the communication has been rather „weak or completely missing“ (P02: 6) on the ministerial base.

Seven interviewees criticized a lack of cohesion within the aviation industry in the first instance. However, only two out of 18 interviewed industry representative shared this opinion. Also, only three interviewees of this group talked about a failure of communication within their industry. Just a few interviewees reflected the effort of their own industry critically. One tourism industry's representative referred to a „personal sensitivities“ (B12: 13) of companies and associations which made it more complicated to enforce common interests: „In this case, the industry has been unprofessional. We have to change it, and we do know [that]“ (B12: 13). Another representative of an environmental association rated the communication of the aviation industry as less professional and in some way even arrogant (vgl. B06: 6). In the end, they seemed to had „overrated their influence and underrated the capabilities and abilities on the other side“ (cf. B06: 6). Furthermore, the assessment of journalists appears to be rather interesting: four out of five interviewed journalists rated the cohesion within the industry as poor or even not existing. One of those journalists spoke about a communicative failure of the aviation industry and referred not just only to the dialogue between the industry and politicians but also to the communication in direction of media. One had made the mistake of communicatively not pulling together (cf. J01: 2). This dissension has been recognized by the policy-makers and was – according to his opinion – a crucial factor to the failure of the aviation industry in remaining steady against the policy. „And at this point politicians had the impression: they brawl among themselves, so we don't see a point in abolishing the tax“ (J01: 2). This assessment of effort in lobbying of the aviation industry is particularly interesting as it shows the clear difference between self-awareness and awareness of others.

In the context of communication research it was also interesting to see how all actors assessed the significance of informal and formal communication – a level of assessment that lies lateral to the five identified categories of arguments. The interviewees were asked to rank which way of communication within the debate about the LuftVStG has taken over which significance. In this context, „informal communication“ is defined as the ex-

change and transfer of information beyond official paths such as parliamentary debates, consultations, protocols, press conferences or press releases.

22 out of 39 actors (56%) stated that in the context of this law informal communication has been more effective and important, respectively. In nine cases informal communication has been rated as relevant. This opinion has been shared even within policy. A member of the parliament said relating to the significance of informal communication: „If I really want to change something, I don't start a major conversation, I would go off the side with a parliamentary undersecretary. (...) Every lobbyist is doing that. Every politician is doing that if he wants to achieve something“ (P06: 13). Basically, the entire aviation industry showed distinctly an increased usage of informal communication. Eleven out of 18 interviewees stated that this way of communication is of essential importance to them and the basis to make significant decisions. Independent experts agree with this opinion as well. Additionally, one journalist emphasized the importance of informal communication for his background information: „Sometimes it is more important to have an informant with who you can talk about things you won't necessarily write about“ (J04: 7). Thus, within the groups of different actors there is no clear opinion on which way of communication has which significance. However, more than half of the interviewees and also most industry's actors described informal communication as more relevant and target-aimed while political actors restrained a decision which of those two ways of communication is more important.

4.3.2 Media debate

After assessing the political discourse, the different actors have been asked about the usage and relevance of media relating to the LuftVStG.

A relatively homogenous outcome resulted out of the plain question how important the media coverage and reporting has been to the interviewees: five interviewees of the aviation and tourism industry stated that they did not received further information; four stated the opposite. Also four out of nine inter-

viewed politicians gathered additional information from the media. Although journalistic articles seemed to be basically suitable to communicate new aspects and ideas or current developments, they were not seen as the major opportunity.

The quality of the reporting has been appraised as constantly well by six out of 39 interviewees. Ten actors saw quality variation. Within the aviation and tourism industry the quality has been judged differently. Among politicians the quality has not been valued as well at all. For one politician the reason for the – as he observed it – unbalanced negative assessment of the tax within the media coverage can be seen in the proximity of industry to media: „In the end, [this] confirms our impression that the critical journalism has not really been involved. (...) In this case, one has rather responded to the quite powerful industry’s arguments. (...) It is much easier to talk down a politician rather than an industry“ (P08: 11). The assessment of an unbalanced media reporting of the issue is supported by the media content analysis, indeed: In 14.4% of all cases, the LuftVStG and its implementation has been valued positively. According to a representative of an aviation association this is caused by the tendency of journalists to take over the position of readers and therefore potential passengers.

Concerning the quantity of media coverage there is only little agreement among the interviewees, as well. Seven out of 39 estimated a high amount of articles, six a rather low amount. This phenomenon can possibly be caused by the (quantitatively seen) phased media discussion of the law. Another representative of a travel business perceived this as rather typical: „The first stage occurs to be, let’s say, a presentation of facts, the government is planning. After this, usually a parliamentary undersecretary has to go in public (...) and then the industry will awake and counteract harshly. And then, it’ll increase also quantitatively.“ (B17: 5)

Representatives of aviation and tourism industry thought that communicating the issue of the air traffic taxation via media is rather difficult as even politicians are not able to explain the impact of the taxation. „This makes the process of lobbying much more complicated. One cannot taper [this issue] with a few, (...) in two or three sentences“ (B20: 9). Additionally, all room in

newspapers for reporting about the air traffic taxation have been taken by other problems of the industry such as air traffic controller strikes or protests against aircraft noise (cf. B15: 12). One journalist pointed out: „Fee on air traffic, if you read that, you won't continue. What is a fee on air traffic actually? (...) 'Ticket tax' clearly means I have to pay additional money on top of the ticket. That makes it simply bold“ (J01: 12).

Moreover, one actor of an environmental association added that the issue has not principally been „driven by media“ but rather „driven by policy“ (B06: 14). The intention has not been to integrate the media but rather create a broad agreement among the politics – some journalists were of the same opinion. „It was not (...) a specifically public (...) press relations in this point“ (J01: 8). A speaker of the tourism industry submitted that basically the relevance of media presence in the context of LuftVStG should not be overrated: „But that is not the horse we are betting on. (...). We try to argue and place [our concern] in direct contact with politicians“ (B09 & B10: 4). This concurs with the major assessment of industries' representatives. However, in terms of media potential, it contradicts with the evaluation of some journalists who do not see the potential of this issue being fully used: „I think one could have done much more [with this issue] if one had work target-aimed and commonly asked the question: How could we get this topic back in the media once again?“ (J01: 16)

Only three interviewed actors spoke of a failure of the media position. Two of those interviewees work in the field of politics. Members of the parliamentary opposition made these critical assessments. In reverse concern of the media coverage's influence on the discourse on LuftVStG, approximately half of the interviewees stated that the coverage did not influence the political discourse and the procedure of law making. At least nine interviewees spoke about a rather low influence, only two as high.

This tendency can also be found in particular groups of actors. Seven out of nine politicians, more than half of the industry (eleven out of 18) and also the independent experts (three out of four) termed the influence of media coverage on the political discourse as not existing. And in the given situation this is certainly not surprising: „The issue is not necessarily a topic which is con-

trolled by the media due to time, due to framework conditions and due to the complexity“ (B14: 22). Apparently, one did not manage a sufficient media presentation of the taxation’s consequences so that after all politicians would have been able to recognize other arguments (cf. B15: 12). Even three out of five journalists spoke about a low or even no influence of the media reporting which could indicate that journalist reflect their own work in a self-critical way (concerning the actual influence on politicians). However, it is more likely that journalists who have been well informed about the issue recognized from early stages on that the law couldn’t be avoided. The politicians’ approach shows that media coverage can be a relevant factor in order to assess what is politically enforceable – and what is not. However, journalists also pointed out that the media could only draw attention to one certain situation, which exists anyway. Also, it is less likely that one can automatically put new issues on the media’s agenda by oneself (cf. J04: 21).

The interviewees have also been asked about the media’s influence separately from this certain case. The aviation and tourism industry’s interviewees have rated this influence as high (six times) or depending on the issue (seven times). „I know that a single article in any newspaper will not change the stable opinion of a politician“ (B11: 18). It is more likely to mobilize people to a certain issue if it is presented in „classic quality media as well as yellow press“ (B11: 18). In contrast, lobbyism has been playing an important function – not just only personal contact with journalists but also with politicians: „the actual influence is created in personal conversation, hearings and consultations and not in the press“ (B18: 16). A representative of a tourism industry limited the media’s influence even further. The media is having rather no influence on the law-making procedure. The only thing they can do is to achieve an amendment subsequently (cf. B07 & B08: 17). Another representative: „None of my colleagues is talking with the press. The press cannot induce anything. We need to achieve it with information and communication. (...) Certainly towards those people who set up decisions or those who take decisions“ (B18: 16).

According to these statements, for economic actors media plays a rather subsidiary function in the law-making procedure – if at all the media could have achieved change in the aftermath. However, lobbying prior to political decisions is seen as relevant and crucial to influence – whereby the dilemma in the present case can be explained retrospectively: The surprising political decision has basically blocked the usual path of political influence. The influence via media did not work out – this occurs to be much more difficult anyway, especially if it is about a sheer specialized issue (cf. B05: 20).

In context of this study, the (reported) groups of actors' communicative actions cannot be explained in detail. There was a certain attempt to include the media. Nevertheless, it was not possible to influence the government initiative due to the packet solution of the LuftVStG's passage. The actions were described as process and system focused. In other words: following the theoretical assumptions of medialization of politics, a clear alignment towards the media has been observed but only partly for example in sense of agenda building. Especially industry representatives with a deep relation to lobbyism had a stronger focus on a contact with politicians and even refused to work with media. Hence, for industry representatives there was more emphasis on a subsequently fiscal limitation of possible loss than on a strong public awareness. Therefore, the industry had to respond to the LuftVStG with press releases, press conferences and such-like. But they particularly sought for informal contact the ministry (as the industry also had to make new contact with the Federal Ministry of Finance in this context of policy). However, after finalizing a decision the executive branch apparently had no major concern in including stakeholders or companies' representatives in further configuration of laws - especially in case of the Federal Ministry of Finance. Nevertheless, most of the economic actors tried to find an agreement with the government and – according to their statements – did not play via the media. From the aviation industry's point of view it had rather unfavorable consequences that there was a broad agreement („abolishing the taxation“) but one was not able to bunch individual interests concerning a fiscally fundamental decision. The foundation of the „Bun-

desverband der Deutschen Luftverkehrswirtschaft“ (BDL – Federal Association of German Aviation Industry) may be counted as an immediate consequence. According to the statements of the major part of actors and observing journalists, this way of institutionalization was not able to influence the LuftVStG’s configuration.

5 Discussion and conclusion

With the passing of a finance-political consolidation package in June 2010 the German Government via the LuftVStG confronted the aviation industry with an annual license fee resource – the ‘ticket tax’ – of about one billion Euros per year. In this study the discussion around this tax in form of frames – recurring patterns of reasoning – in the media discussion was analyzed. Players and lobbyists initially only succeeded marginally to place their reasoning *influentially* in the political system or to put it on the media agenda.

With regard to the *political process* it is evident that a government-concept prevailed. Neither was the tax discussed further in its basic justification nor in its form by the government with affected industries – be it associations or companies. In fact, the impression of an *ad-hoc* decision succeeded in the public discussion which made it difficult if not impossible for representatives of the industries to wield influence with known procedures of lobbying – procedures *prior* to governmental decisions. The reduction of ticket fees alone one year after the introduction was achieved in consultation with representatives of the industries without a clear strength of impact (particularly since the facultative reduction in the legal text has already been agreed upon). Moreover, the law *per se* was *not* subject to approval so that possible coalitions of the industry with representatives of the federal states did not come into question. Since in addition the responsibilities of the procedure were with the Federal Minister of Finance, who presented the law in a package, representatives of companies and associations apparently had difficulties to accompany their objections against the tax also within the ministerial

bureaucracy by informal communication. In this respect, one certainly has to speak of a governmental and *policy-* and *polity-* driven process in the present case, also regarding the eventually implemented reduction of the ticket fee.

This characteristic by the decision-political constellation of the LuftVStG also mirrors the question of the media discourse. Admittedly, the interviewed players of this study expressed a clear media orientation (persons strongly focused on political lobbying were only a rare exception); nonetheless the influence of *the* media and *the* media debate was perceived almost in unison as marginally.

Content wise and quantitatively the media reporting followed the political process as well. The first phase immediately after the cabinets' decision is the strongest and most differentiated phase of the coverage – with regard to frames and speakers, which are mentioned in the investigated context. Above all, the fact that the players affected by the law followed different lines of argumentation and (partly) initially were not represented by an established association, might have contributed to the heterogeneous public discussion of the 'ticket tax' and journalism reporting about it in a gauging way. In this phase one can still find the latent '*power argument*' of the government: the contribution to the consolidation – who can at all be against the budget consolidation? Striking is the relatively low proportion of speakers of the political-administrative system in the media discourse including at first the officially presented arguments against to the taxing of mobility with its environmental aspect. This corresponds to the restraint of the political-administrative system to become communicatively active *at all*. Furthermore it is noticeable that it is above all speakers from the central *companies* affected by the law – airlines and airports – who succeed in the preliminary phase of a possible reduction of the tax with their – although differently focused – arguments to dominate the media coverage and not the associations. For one thing this can be due to journalism *actively* addressing the affected – and these are exactly mainly the airports and airlines as organizational players – and for another thing a reversed proactive media activity on the part of the industry associations.

The characteristics of the frame elements revealed in this study are limited. In this regard the decisive power of the law being passed is with the political-administrative system alone. This is the reason why in the media there was only little direct attribution of responsibilities – it was simply not necessary to express them. Since an economic topic such as the LuftVStG is additionally not that emotionally loaded, as is for instance often the case in family- and/or social-policy the moral evaluations, seen quantitatively, are minor.

Finally, the case of the communication in the context of the LuftVStG can be treated as a case of ‘conditional medialization’ of the political process. The basic question of the legislative initiative by the federal cabinet coined the media as well as the political discussion in the negotiation process. Yet, informal communication in the negotiation process as well as the media debate – at least according to the assessments of the interviewed players – remained largely without influence. A form of ‘adjustment’ of actors to media logics is at most given in the form of communicative activities such as press releases or press conferences: as routine activities. Explicitly *strategic* communication via and with the media, say through ‘experimental moves’ could not be observed here. This may be due to the special character of *ad-hoc*-decisions, too. Hence – in the overall picture – the influence of communicative variables and on the political and decision-making process as well as in the implementation phase *in this case* is rather little.

Therefore, this study affirms other works in the context of informal political communication within policy fields (Koch-Baumgarten and Mez 2007a; Jarren, Lachenmeister and Steiner 2007; Vowe 2007; Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009, 2010): the medias’ influence on political decisions seems to be widely affected by the specific circumstances of the political question in hand. This holds true for the question, whether (and how) journalist (and journalism in general) may be used for strategic purposes of public affairs or public relation as an *additional* component of informal political communication. Our findings somewhat contradict analysis which may be found under catchphrases like ‘medialization’ or ‘mediatization’ and state a broad orienta-

tion of political actors or organizations on a media logic (for an overview Reinemann 2010).

Referring to this case study – to be more concrete –, several dimensions should be distinguished: Firstly, obviously the specific *institutional* question that the law was initiated within a package of laws and – in addition – within the responsibilities of the Federal Minister of Finance and not within that of the Federal Minister of Traffic left the network configuration of the policy field communicatively speaking – relatively – helpless. In other words: the political *structure*, the political *intention* and the political *option* somewhat ‘overruled’ the informal communication routines thus far established.

Secondly, in this case the governments’ rather surprising decision shows that the question of strategic communication via public or non-public communication, formal or informal communication seems to depend upon a *timely* dimension: a) whether (or not) the policy field was able to discuss the issue in hand in detail *before* an official political intention was claimed, b) whether (or not) the law itself announces an evaluation of its effects and possible changes later on and c) which situational factors affect classical agenda-building strategies.

Thirdly, the *issue itself* respectively (and more concrete) a missing or bursting fundamental consensus within the field (Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2009: 313) should be taken into account when analyzing the effects (or non-effects) of political communication – be it formal or informal. In addition, our study confirms other analyses with regard to the correspondence between formal and informal communication (e.g. Koch-Baumgarten and Mez 2007; Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2010; Kamps, Horn and Wicke 2013): the fields’ actors mostly agreed upon the notion that the influence of informal communication by far outreaches the influence of formal and/or public communication.

Generally speaking, based on our findings it is not feasible to globally answer the questions if, when and in which manner *the media* do influence specific decisions within the political negotiation system.

For future research designs it is obviously reasonable to switch over to a comparative perspective (fields, issues, actors, institutions and organizations, newsworthiness of the issue), to evaluate the nexus of political logic, formal and informal political communication and respective effects on political decisions.

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