

Have you heard of ... SOUNDS?

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The following text has been machine translated from the German with no human editing.

An early warning system for society, built at Saarland University.

Where does a debate tip into hatred? When does distrust in institutions grow? Where does language radicalise? Democratic societies rarely change overnight; usually there are early signs. SOUNDS makes them visible.

The **Societal Observatory Using Novel Data Sources** reads traces that already emerge in everyday life: satellite images, social media posts, search queries, reviews, map services. Just as a weather service measures air pressure and temperature, SOUNDS measures societal pressure and turns it into something that lets politics and civil society act early. Prof. Dr. Daniela Braun (Political Science) and Prof. Dr. Ingmar Weber (Societal Computing) lead SOUNDS.



The SOUNDS team. Photo: Jörg Pütz.

What we observe

Social research has made little use of this data so far, because analysing it demands significant IT expertise and careful legal and ethical judgement. This is exactly where SOUNDS comes in.

Traces that society leaves behind anyway

Everyday data sources, and what they reveal about the way we live together

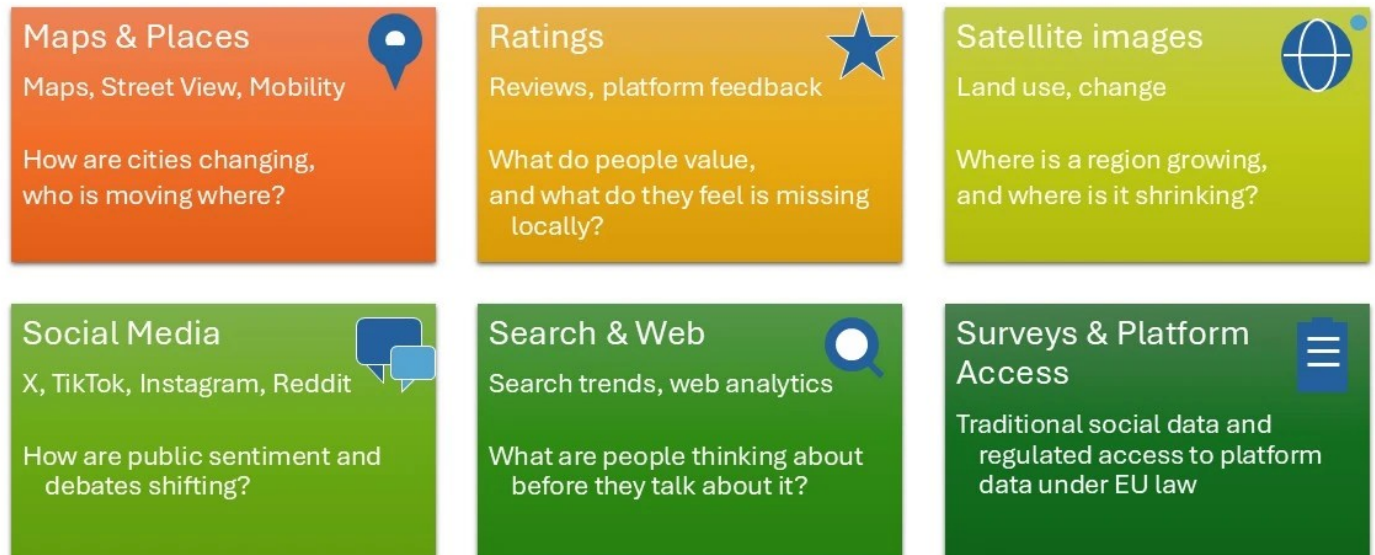


Chart 1: Six everyday data sources and the societal questions they make visible. Reference: SOUNDS.

On their own, each source tells us little. Connected and read over time, they reveal developments that classical methods struggle to capture, continuously and close to the events themselves. SOUNDS operates within existing data protection and research rules, and draws in part on the regulated access to platform data that new EU regulation has opened up for research.

How we work

SOUNDS does not start from a method. It starts from a societal question and the choice of matching data and tools. This sets the observatory apart from a classical research project and makes it a think-and-do tank, where computer science and social science sit at the same table from the outset.

The question comes first

SOUNDS starts with a social issue and then looks for what fits with it

Think-and-Do Tank



Chart 2: The question comes first: SOUNDS starts from a societal question, then finds the data source and the method that fit it.. Reference: SOUNDS.

Societal storms such as disinformation or polarisation cannot be predicted the way weather can. But bringing together insights from the social and computer sciences creates an early warning system that allows action before the storm breaks.

Why this matters for Saarland University

SOUNDS is funded with 29 million euros from the Saarland Transformation Fund for Research and Knowledge Transfer and runs until August 2032. Through it, the state links scientific findings with concrete economic impulses for the transformation of the Saarland economy.

For the university, the project connects **two of its strengths**: the computer science of the Saarland Informatics Campus and social science research. It sharpens the university's profile as a research institution that takes societal impact seriously. You may already be encountering SOUNDS in everyday life without the name being mentioned: at events on campus, in new professorships in computational social sciences, and in collaborations that cross disciplinary boundaries.

Get to know SOUNDS: Kick-off on 2 September 2026

SOUNDS invites you to a public kick-off at the Innovation Center on Saarbrücken campus. The event has two focus areas, so you can choose where to concentrate or attend both:

1. Morning, focus on science (from 10:00): understanding and contextualising findings. With welcome remarks, a keynote, a poster session and a speed-dating format for networking.
2. Afternoon, focus on societal impact (14:00 to 16:30): shaping and transferring impact. With a keynote, greetings from the ministry and joint working sessions.

A shared catered lunch break is included.

You are warmly invited, for one focus area or the whole day. Register at <https://www.uni-saarland.de/forschen/sounds/kick-off-veranstaltung.html>