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Public Spheres within Movements Challenging the (Re)search for a European Public Sphere

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Abstract

The emergence of a transnational public sphere in Europe is expected to facilitate democratic control and public debate about European issues as well as enable the formation of a European collective identity. Taking this claim seriously, though, reveals that empirical research has so far taken a rather restricted view on the European public sphere by assuming that the mass media constitute the core framework in the transnationalisation of the public sphere. This paper argues that such an approach reinforces the dominant 'top-down' perspective of EU institutions and should thus be complemented by including 'lower' levels of the public sphere in the analysis. Transnational social movements, for example, have often contributed to the diffusion of vital information across borders, thus creating public spheres 'from below'. However, because of their capacity to mobilise public opinion across borders, social movements have mainly been seen as actors who are engaged in contentious debates within the given frameworks of communication, even though numerous public arenas are created also within social movements themselves. The paper suggest to link both fields of research by looking at the public spheres created within social movements, such as the European Social Forum. To facilitate such an approach the arena model of the public sphere is presented as a conceptual framework providing some clarity about the public sphere as a structured space of communication which comprises interlinked public arenas as well as private networks. As a result, Based on this distinction between two modes of communication, 'publicness' and 'density' can be distinguished as two parameters of a public sphere

Keywords

Civil Society - Deliberative Democracy - Discourse - European Public Space - Europeanisation - Media - Networks - Participation - Protest

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to research on the transnationalisation of public spheres. Triggered by a growing awareness of a democratic deficit of the European Union and the inert formation of a widely recognized European identity, numerous studies have been conducted to search for an evolving European public sphere which might help to tackle these problems. However, these studies focus very much on the mass mediated public sphere, especially quality newspapers, thus risking limiting their scope to elite discourses and implicitly assuming a 'top-down' perspective on the creation of a European public sphere.

On the other side, social movement research has been very interested in the notion of the public sphere as an arena where movements and other political actors engage in public discourse trying to influence and mobilize public opinion. While this research perspective sees social movements as actors putting forward their claims to a wider audience (outside of these movements), little attention has been directed to the various public arenas, which emerge at the micro level *within* social movements. The empirical analysis of such public spheres within movements, however, could give important insights into processes of transnational identity formation and practices of participatory and deliberative democracy 'from below' in the context of transnationalisation of politics.

As has been previously argued by Doerr and Haug (2006), this paper suggests a research perspective that links the two above mentioned research traditions through the concept of public sphere.¹ In order to facilitate a 'bottom-up' perspective to Europeanization and to help investigating public discourse both within social movements and the general public, I suggest the arena-model of the public sphere as conceptual framework, capable of linking both research fields.

I will thus take two points of departure: The first section explores the limitations of a media-centred approach to the transnationalisation of public spheres and suggests complementing this research by looking at public arenas at 'lower' levels of the public sphere which are emerging across Europe, such as the European Social Forums. Section 2 then takes social movement research as a second point of departure and introduces the idea of looking *at public spheres within movements* in order to grasp internal movement dynamics and to understand how discursive decision-making and identity formation is structured. Finally, in the third section, I develop a concept of the public sphere which can facilitate the cross-fertilisation of the two research fields and which might serve as a starting point for a more comprehensive analytic theory of the public sphere.

Complementing the EU and media-content centred approach to the European public sphere.

In the early 1990s, EU institutions became increasingly concerned about the lack of support by citizens (Brüggemann 2005: 65) which has been steadily declining throughout the nineties (Sifft et al. 2007: 128). This triggered not only an (internal) political debate about changing the "arcane policy" of the EU (Brüggemann 2005: 65)

¹ An updated version of this paper will be published in Teune (in press). It draws on a conference paper written with Nicole Doerr (Doerr & Haug 2006), whose contribution to the same volume takes an empirical perspective on the issue while this chapter addresses conceptual questions. The starting point for the original co-authored paper was our common criticism of the widespread media-centred approach to the European public sphere. Please note also the previous publications on the issue by Nicole Doerr. Any comments, criticism and questions to the author are welcome at haug@wzb.eu.

towards a more transparent information policy but also an academic debate about the 'public sphere deficit' (or the communication deficit) in Europe. This debate revolves around the question whether and under what conditions a public sphere might possibly emerge at the European level as a democratic counterweight to the institutions and policy-making of the EU and hence could strengthen the "legitimacy of European governance" by "narrowing 'the widening gap between the EU and the people'" (Sifft et al. 2007: 128).²

Besides this *monitoring function* vis-à-vis European institutions, a second commonly mentioned function of a (would-be) European public sphere is to create a sense of a *European identity* amongst the citizens of the EU, or – more generally – to form a common European public opinion (see e.g. Risse & van de Steeg 2007: 2; Sifft et al.: 130–132).

A process of Europeanisation of the mass media is perceived as the key dimension for the emergence of a European public sphere. And since a system of European wide mass media is not in view (Gerhards 1993), research has focused on the processes of Europeanisation within the *national* media in Europe (or rather: in the EU). As Neidhardt (2006: 52) summarises, the diagnosis of the extent to which a European public sphere already exists varies in a wide range depending on different theoretical assumptions and operationalisations of the public sphere. The purpose of this section is, however, not to discuss the various operationalisations but to assess more broadly the stance which the research on the European public sphere (henceforth: EPS-research) has taken, i.e. which is common to basically all of these approaches: it's preoccupation with mass media content and the EU polity.

There seems to be agreement that the aim of EPS-research is to identify and analyse a possibly emerging space of transnational communication in Europe with regard to its democratic functions in relation to powerful institutions. But in the realisation of this goal, EPS-research has – if with best intentions – often adopted the top down perspective on the European public sphere which still persists in EU institutions (Brüggemann 2005) and which is a characteristic of a specific normative model of the public sphere related to representative liberal theories of democracy (Ferree et al. 2002a). According to this model the public sphere is the domain of elites who divide the public space amongst themselves according to their relative strength, though giving some space to experts as their advisors (ibid: 291–292). From this point of view, it seems sufficient to limit the analysis of the public sphere media content, determining the relative space occupied by various actors and perhaps evaluating whether the occupied space is in line with their 'real' importance in the policy-making process. In this perspective, it does not matter so much whether or not the actors engage in public dialogue or if certain groups are empowered or disempowered through public discourse. Accordingly, EPS-research treats the arenas of the mass media as the given basis of a transnational public sphere, which is to be created through cross-references between these arenas or by increasing the salience of EU issues in these existing arenas. Their internal democratic (or non-democratic) forms of organisation or the question of ownership seem to be beyond the horizon of EPS-research, despite the fact that it is highly contested in EU policy research whether mass media should be considered as commercial goods (subject to deregulation and

² The debate referred to here is – amongst many others – reflected in Eder and Kantner (2000, 2002); Erbe (2006); Eriksen and Fossum (2002); Gerhards (1993, 2000, 2002); Grimm (1995); Kantner (2004); Koopmans and Erbe (2004); Risse (2002); Risse and van de Steeg (2007); Trenz (2004); van de Steeg (2002).

marketisation) or as cultural goods (and thus subject to democratic control) (Brüggemann 2005: 62).

The creation of new transnational arenas of communication and their interrelation with existing arenas has been considered of little importance simply because the mass media provide few examples for such arenas. The foremost concern has been the representation of policy makers in the mass media arena in order to inform citizens about relevant policy decisions by the EU. But while it is correct that information about policies is the prerequisite for citizens to evaluate them critically, this should not lead to seeing citizen only as a passive recipient of information for two reasons.

The first reason is that a review of democratic theory reveals at least four different democratic models of the public sphere (Ferree et al. 2002a) and all but the representative one put strong emphasis on the inclusion of active citizens in public debate. Participatory liberal theories of democracy, for example, emphasize the empowerment of citizens (ibid: 297) and would thus see them not merely as recipients of media content. Discursive theories of democracy emphasise also the notion of dialogue amongst citizens (ibid: 303). Even if the EU commission uses 'dialogue' as a "prominent catch-word" (Brüggemann 2005: 68) rather than engaging in serious dialogue with citizens or facilitating dialogue amongst citizens, this should not lead to research adapting the same stance and interpret dialogue mainly as a dialogue amongst elites within the media.

By not taking serious other normative models of a democratic public sphere besides the representative liberal one, EPS-research has burdened itself with an elite bias which prevents the serious reconsideration of the democratic role of the public sphere at a transnational level (cf. Fraser 2005). It has so far failed to provide knowledge about "transnational 'spaces' where citizens from different countries can discuss what they perceive as being the important challenges for the Union" (Commission of the European Communities 2001: 12), let alone the proliferation of such spaces could be advanced in order to democratize the EU.

The second reason is: In order to grasp processes of the Europeanisation of the public sphere in their full capacity and assess their potential role within a "multilevel structure of sovereignty" (Fraser 2005: 6) in "the current postnational constellation" (ibid: 7) EPS-research needs to - first of all - approach the 'public sphere deficit' from the perspective of the governed (rather than that of the governing seeking legitimacy for their established institutions) because the question of democratic legitimacy today arises not only with regard to national and transnational polities but more than ever with regard to transnational private powers such as multi-national corporations. As Fraser (2005: 6) points out, the problem of conceptualising the public sphere at the transnational level is the mismatch between "at least four kinds of community, which do not map onto one another today: 1) the imagined community, or nation; 2) the political (or civic) community, or citizenry; 3) the communications community, or public; 4) the community of fate, or the set of stakeholders affected by various developments (included here is 'community of risk')".

For the realignment of these communities in the public sphere neither a pan-European media system nor the Europeanisation of national mass media (alone) seem to be of much help, at least at this stage. Within the framework of the nation state (with an established liberal representative systems of government), an approach which sees the mass media as the "master forum" (Ferree et al. 2002b: 10) seems adequate as long as it at least acknowledges the existence of other public arenas and

their relevance as a “backstage” of the mass media where agendas are set, important issues are pre-discussed before entering the mass media and parallel (counter-) debates to those in the media are hosted. But in the context of the transnational polity of the EU, with its lack of legitimacy becoming increasingly evident, the study of the public sphere cannot be limited to media content analysis without risking – politically – to merely reproduce established power structures³ and – scientifically – losing out on processes of Europeanisation ‘from below’ as they are taking place in civil society across Europe. With numerous interconnected “deliberative arenas” (Bobbio 2003) being created at the transnational level in Europe and the persistence of *national* media systems, there is no reason to assume *prima facie* that the mass media actually constitute the ‘master forum’ of a public sphere at the European level (and should thus be studied with special regard) – apart from a *normative* presumption that the European public sphere should be modelled along the lines of “elite dominance” (Ferree et al. 2002a: 291).

What hence needs to be included in EPS-research is the study of public arenas at different levels. Gerhards and Neidhardt (1991) – in their widely recognized (but never translated) article – have provided an assessment of the basic structures and functions of three levels of the public sphere: Simple *encounters* amongst people in their daily life, organised *assembly publics*, and the professionalised *mass media*. Although Gerhards & Neidhardt argue clearly within the nation state framework when assigning various democratic functions to each of these levels, their typology of public arenas still seems also applicable in a postnational context. The different characteristics of encounters, assembly publics and the mass-media (see table 1) can reveal different aspects of the transnationalisation of the public sphere because they constitute different types of public situations, each with their specific ‘contribution’ to an emerging European public sphere.

Table 1: Characteristics of the three levels of the public sphere

	Examples	Audience	Permeability of audience and speaker roles	Degree of organization	Continuity of the framework	Rationality of communication	Legal protection
Mass media	TV, radio, newspapers, magazines	<i>Recipients</i>	<i>Very low</i>	<i>high (technical)</i>	<i>stable</i>	<i>lay-orientation</i>	<i>freedom of press</i>
Assembly publics	conferences, mailinglists, group-meetings	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Medium-high</i>	<i>medium (thematic)</i>	<i>temporary / recurring</i>	<i>thematic / expert orientation</i>	<i>freedom of assembly</i>
Encounters	meetings in pub, supermarket, street, etc.	<i>Bystanders</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>low (spontaneous)</i>	<i>episodic</i>	<i>situational</i>	<i>freedom of speech</i>

Public encounters

Public encounters happen rather randomly when people meet in public places: in the street, at the hairdresser, in a waiting queue, at the scene of an accident, etc. They are not organised in any way regarding themes of communication, speaker roles etc. The focus of communication in encounters evolves in the situation itself. This does not

³ As Gerhards (2002: 154) rightly argued, the public sphere deficit on the European level is a result – not a cause – of the institutional democratic deficit at the European level.

mean however, that public communication in encounters is not prestructured at all: in encounter situations where specific agendas, rules of talk and normative assumptions are not available, speakers have to relate to a more general 'default situation' of how to behave and what to (not) talk about. For Goffman (1963), who analysed the ordinary American middle-class milieu in the 1950s and 60s, the default situation was generally given and quite clear to all (middle-class citizens) involved in a public encounter: "In any *given* society, different situations will be the scene of many of the *same* normative assumptions regarding conduct and of the *same* situational rulings" (ibid: 216, emphasis added). Unlike assembly publics which often exhibit their own (subcultural) rules of conduct, encounters have to rely on shared cultural habits established *outside* of the situation of a specific encounter. Very often, the media (or the weather) provide a source of common reference. But also other communities of shared experience can be a reference point, coordinated, for example, by the appearance or the habitus (clothing, manners, language etc.) of those involved in the encounter.

What is interesting about encounters in the context of the Europeanisation of the public sphere is to observe what happens in transnational encounters with different cultural traditions and with no common media as reference is available, i.e. when Goffman's assumption of a given society does not apply anymore: 'which frame of reference is nevertheless established in such a situation, and how?' And if communication fails, 'why did it fail?'

At first glance it might seem impossible to study such transnational encounter-publics because they occur rather randomly. But in times of high mobility, cheap travel, and open borders within Europe transnational encounters in border-region supermarkets or pubs, on the street, in airports, at the hotel-pool or on the camping site, and in the context of international conferences are common. Observing (and possibly recording) such encounters between people of different nationalities⁴ can provide further insight into the specificities of transnational and intercultural public communication in everyday life.

Assembly publics

Assembly publics are organised around specific topics and thus provide a shared frame of reference which can be taken for granted when communicating in this specific arena. Though Gerhards and Neidhardt (1991) tend to limit assembly publics to face-to-face meetings, it can be argued that the crucial characteristic of assembly publics is that- in principle - they allow for *active participation of any member of the audience* (though usually not everyone actually does speak up). This means, that email-lists, online-forums, chat rooms or telephone conferences can also be considered as assembly publics.

Very often, in such publics we find a rather specific public opinion which is different to that of the mass-media or 'mainstream' public opinion in general. Besides, they are usually not oriented towards a lay-audience like the mass media but rather at experts or special-interest groups. Eder and Trenz (2003) have already shown that such specialised public arenas can be not only strongly Europeanised but also relevant for policy building at the European level. According to Gerhards (2002: 149), Trenz (2000) also acknowledges the relevance of the interrelations of these publics with the other

⁴ The dominant assumption that it is nationality (and not race, class or gender) which constitutes the biggest obstacle remains to be verified.

levels of the public sphere but does not explicate the social conditions under which a “structural coupling” (Gerhards 2002: 149) of the different levels could be achieved in a democratic way. But if we consider theories of democracies beyond the representative model implied by Gerhards, we can see that non-established public actors involved in the creation and maintenance of deliberative arenas within civil society are generally regarded as crucial for the democratic process because of their capacity to formulate innovative claims (Commission of the European Communities 2001: 14–15; Ferree et al. 2002a: 301; Fung & Wright 2001; Habermas 1989: 474; Neidhardt 1994: 10). Indeed, the recent popular politicization of European politics through protests related to the referendums on the Constitutional Treaty and the ‘no’ votes in several member states reveal that the long observed “public silence” of these actors can no longer be interpreted as a sign of agreement (Fossum & Trenz 2006: 73). In fact, this ‘silence’ turns out to be no silence at all but rather a silence *observed* by those limiting their view to the mass media.

Including all levels of the public sphere in the analysis

Although the diffusion of ideas from the level of assembly publics to the mass media is highly selective and biased in many ways (Gitlin 1980), there have been significant instances where transnationally coordinated social movements have managed to mobilise global public opinion to major problems of injustice by ‘lifting’ their concerns into the mass media in various countries (Olesen 2006; Thörn 2007). In Europe, social movements are increasingly adapting to the high relevance of the EU institutions (Della Porta 2005) and creating their own public spaces through interlinked assembly publics, most prominently in the European Social Forum process (Doerr 2005, 2006, forthcoming; Haug et al. forthcoming). One can say that the movements are reacting not only to the democratic and the communication deficit of the EU by creating their own public spaces but also to the democratic deficit of the media, which give even less space to non-institutionalised actors on the European than on the national level (Della Porta & Caiani 2006). The public spaces created by the movements are spaces where rights-based European integration is debated as an alternative to current market based integration and where even EU foreign policy. The creation of such transnational spaces can be seen as reflecting the characteristic of civil society to pursue universal values rather than merely national (or even European) interests (Rucht 2005).

Looking at the *creation* of transnational assembly publics (as opposed to looking at the content of *established* media) immediately raises the question of who creates and maintains these arenas, and what are the structural conditions which facilitate or constrain a Europeanization of the communication within and these spaces. Table 2 lists some dimensions which seem relevant here and tries to identify some of the important roles on each level of the public sphere: Obviously, the *hosts* and/or *organisers* have a high importance in pre-structuring the communication that takes place in these assemblies, e.g. by inviting certain speakers, setting the agenda but also by inviting a certain (multi-national) audience. And on the level of the mass media the general policy of the *publisher* (i.e. owner) or the editorial bylaws guiding the *editors* become comparable to the policy of the *organising committee* of an assembly or a conference.

Furthermore, the role of a meeting *facilitator* becomes comparable to that of a *journalist*: Just like the journalist is arranging the statements of various actors in an newspaper article, (foregrounding some as opposed to others, raising certain questions etc.) also the facilitator of a meeting give speakers the floor, asks questions

and juxtaposes their answers in a certain way. On the level of encounters, spontaneous ‘*natural*’ leadership roles might emerge in the situation, taking a similar functional role of structuring public communication.

Finally, we can also identify similar linking roles on each level. As Erbe (2005) has pointed out, the European public sphere (but also the national public spheres) consist of multiple arenas so that the fragmentation of the public sphere is an obstacle in the formation of a European (and national) public sphere as long as these arenas are not interlinked. She identifies various “mechanisms” (ibid: 77) which account for the linking of the arenas within national media systems, allowing us to speak of a ‘public sphere’ instead of “public sphericules”, as Gitlin (1998) suggests. The most institutionalised of these mechanisms are the *news agencies* which make the same information available to the various media arenas. But also the journalists of a specific media outlet observe and cite other media (e.g. in press reviews), thus also interlinking the arenas. Such linking roles can also be found on the level of assembly publics. Drawing on Diani (2003), we can call these people, that take core positions in connecting previously unconnected arenas, “brokers”. On the encounter level linking roles are less pronounced, but we can nevertheless say that people who move about between places (*travellers*) are most likely to be between various encounters.

Table 2: Functional roles on the three levels of the public sphere

	Pre-structuring roles	Structuring roles	Linking roles
Mass media	<i>Publisher/Editors</i>	<i>Journalists</i>	<i>News agencies</i>
Assembly publics	<i>Hosts/Organisers</i>	<i>Facilitators</i>	<i>‘Brokers’</i>
Public Encounters	<i>None</i>	<i>‘Natural’ leaders</i>	<i>Travellers</i>

For the sake of the argument, the roles described here remain somewhat simplistic. But the focus on the *roles* of actors in table 2 should however not trick us into believing that public communication is structured *only* by actors. The important question when assessing the contribution of various public arenas to the creation of a democratic (European) public sphere is ‘What are the guiding norms and principles (pre-)structuring the communication in this arena, how are they realised and in what way do they constitute a counter power to established institutions?’ but also ‘Which loci of power can be identified in these arenas and their organisational framework that might thwart the free flow of communication?’ This pertains not only the norms and principles guiding the (pre-)structuring roles, but also the speakers and – in many cases the most important form of pre-structuration – the public opinion established in a certain arena by previous communications.⁵

⁵ Tönnies (1922: 137-138, own translation) has aptly described different “states of aggregation” of public opinion – gaseous, liquid and solid – where the “degree of cohesiveness is the degree of its uniformity” (Tönnies 1922: 137). In this sense, the crystallised parts of public opinion are part of the structural conditions of public communication. More recently, Hallin (1984: 21) has distinguished the “sphere of consensus” and the “sphere of legitimate controversy”. The first denotes opinions which are not regarded as controversial by journalists so that they feel no urge to present opposing views and the

As we have seen, the media-content centred approach concerned mainly with a EU-related top-down approach to the European public sphere should be complemented by integrating organisationally less demanding levels of the public sphere into a wider research agenda. Including the level of assembly publics in EPS-research makes it possible to trace the processes of alignment of the different communities mentioned above (nation, citizenry, audience and stake- or 'risk-holders') and thus identity formation at the European level (which might not (only) be directed at the EU but also at other powerful actors). As Doerr (2007) has shown, the creation of transnational arenas within social movements is not free from exclusionary processes though the quality of deliberation at this level is often better than on the national level. Mattoni (2006a) traces the diffusion of the precarity discourse from assembly publics through alternative media into the mass media and how a transnational identity was formed around the concept of precarity in various transnational assembly publics (Mattoni 2006b).

This perspective of looking at civil society and social movements not only as a set of actors (articulating certain interests and demands) but also see the communicative *spaces* created by them, points to a neglected area of social movement research which I will be dealing with in the next section.

The limitations in seeing social movements as actors

Since social movements are considered important agents of social change most research on movements has been interested in explaining the emergence of movements and their behaviour as well as their impacts on society. While *new social movement* scholars reflected on social conflict and fundamental change in a larger context, regarding movements both as an expression and as a protagonist of these changes, research on *resource mobilization* and *political processes* focus on the conditions under which specific forms of collective action become effective or not. And even approaches of *collective behaviour*, focusing more on individual emotions causing eruptions of collective protest and regarding movements as rather reactive, simply combine individual behaviour to form a more or less unified entity of collective action. Also the *framing* literature tends to look at the achievements of movements in changing the way certain issues are discussed in the general public but pays little attention to processes *within* the movements which lead to the establishment of new frames.

Scholars like Melucci (1995: 42) have been trying to overcome "the dualistic legacy of structural analysis as a precondition for collective action and the analysis of individual motivations" by tracing the very processes of collective identity construction and acknowledging the plurality of levels on which meaning is produced within the social space of movements (ibid: 52-55). But the focus seems to remain on an *actors* identity, albeit a multitudinal and continuously socially "identitized" (ibid: 51) actor.

Focusing on Movements as being political actors amongst others within a larger context (such as civil society, national societies, policy fields, social history etc.) the

second refers to issues where different opinions seem legitimate so that norms of neutral and balanced journalism become vital when reporting on these. Since these spheres are constructed based on the journalists' observation of the public sphere, this is an example how public communication can have a structuring effect on public communication.

perspective of these approaches is comparable to that of human psychology which looks at the behaviour of individuals, considering both factors from outside and inside the individual.⁶ In other words, due to this tendency of regarding movements mainly as *actors*, their interior processes have only been analysed as far as it was considered relevant for the explanation of movement phenomena on the outside. It can be argued, however, that since the emergence of the global justice movements in recent years, the model of the actor is not sufficient any more because these movement – perhaps for the first time in history – consider unity not as a primary goal in order to be successful but instead see the processes of communicative exchange and plurality as one of its highest values (Andretta et al. 2002: 85–87; Della Porta & Mosca 2007). The most obvious expression of this tendency is the Social Forums, which have emerged all over the globe since the first World Social Forum in 2001 in Porto Alegre. In fact, the idea of creating open spaces of discussion within movements and its possible incongruence with the idea of a unified, strong and effective movement is increasingly being debated with the movements themselves (e.g. Aguiton & Cardon 2005; Reyes et al. 2004; see also: Haug et al. 2005: chap. 4; Patomäki & Teivainen 2004; Wallerstein 2004). Furthermore, it seems that the clashes of different organizational cultures that took place during the preparations for the third European Social Forum in London (see Harrison 2006; Reyes et al. 2004: 7–10; Papadimitrou et al. 2006; also Doerr 2005) are probably only carried out to such an extent *within* social movements, revealing interesting dynamics of conflictual communication (and non-communication) in a setting that is largely dependent on voluntary cooperation.

Reflecting on communicative processes within movements is not only adequate because of these recent developments, but it also means taking seriously the “[p]hases of self-reflection” (Rucht 1988: 313) within movements which are characterized by extensive internal discussions. Moreover there are whole movements which follow a rather “expressive logic” (ibid: 317), i.e. they are “concerned with the process of cultural rationalization” (ibid: 319) within the life-world as opposed to those “fighting for the control of the systemic steering process [which] will be called ‘instrumental’ (or power-oriented)” (ibid.). Internal communication can be seen as vital for these, too. Rucht mentions the women’s movement as an example for such a movement, which “concentrates its energies on methods of qualitative mobilization: 1. On the one hand, the creation of autonomous cultural practices and the establishment of a specific feminist infrastructure; 2. On the other hand, the abolition of sexist institutions and modes of behaviour through techniques of provocation and ironic exaggeration and inversion of connotations (critique of ‘male’ language, symbolic castration, positive evaluation of witches, etc.)” (ibid: 321). It is not by chance that Freeman’s (1970) classic text about internal structures of communication originated from the feminist movement. The political scope of such movements emphasizing everyday practices as practices of subversion and resistance cannot be grasped by merely looking at their external behaviour, i.e. as actors in a larger context.

Why have these “‘internal’ fields of action [where] organizations and groups within a social movement establish a daily routine that is not at all, or only indirectly, related to external conflicts” (Rucht 1988: 322) rarely been systematically studied in the past? It might have been due to – as Snow and Benford (1988: 214) noted – movement scholars preferably using archived material to conduct their studies, but it might also

⁶ In their history, it appears, social movement research and psychology have gone through a number of similar debates and conflicts regarding especially the question of rationality underlying (collective or individual) behaviour or the question of deterministic impact of the external world on action.

have been due to a simple lack of access to such internal meetings. This situation however has changed in recent years, perhaps due to the spreading culture of openness, plurality and self reflection in the global justice movements. Accordingly, recent studies and research projects such as the DEMOS-project⁷ have shown increased interest in examining contemporary movement's internal practices of democracy, seeing them as 'laboratories' in which new forms of (transnational) democracy (or collective decision-making) might emerge.⁸

So if, for all the above mentioned reasons, we want to turn towards internal communicative processes and regard social movements as microcosms of interaction to be studied in their own right, then we need an adequate concept to be able to analyse the diverse forms of communication taking place in various "internal fields of action" (Rucht 1988: 322). In other words, we are looking for ways to study movements not *in context*, but regarding them *as context*, similarly to organisational sociology, which looks at social interactions within a given (formal) organisation as well as procedures of change within the organisation. But since it is – for good reasons – widely rejected⁹ to conceptualise movements as organisations (Della Porta & Diani 2006: 25–29; Endruweit 2004: 29–30) we will need to look for other theoretical fields to find an adequate conceptual framework for such an approach.

Another option would be the field of (small) group research which seems promising at first sight because it looks at the internal dynamics of groups. But since social movements are constituted of many different groups, we rather want to look at dynamics *between* groups or rather between individual activists from these groups. Although these groups share – to some degree – a common identity, seeing them as one group would *a priori* overemphasise the aspect of unity rather than studying how it comes about through communicative processes.

Gerhards and Rucht (1992) introduced the concept of "mesomobilization" building on the concept of "micro-mobilization context" (McAdam et al. 1988: 709) which was designed to bridge the gap between the micro-level of movement groups mobilization and the macro-level of whole movement campaigns. Their level of analysis is thus exactly the same as the inter-group level mentioned above. Gerhards & Rucht are interested in how micromobilization groups establish connections and coordinate their mobilization activities (which is the prerequisite for a campaign to evolve). They use their concept of mesomobilization for the structural (or formal) aspects of these mobilization processes. In order to describe their contents, they use the concept of "framing" (see e.g. Snow & Benford 1988), describing how the mesomobilization actors do not simply organize contacts between movement groups but create masterframes that bridge the various frames of the participating movement groups (Gerhards & Rucht 1992: 572ff.). Using the final result of such meetings (two leaflets signed by all groups) Gerhards & Rucht analyse these masterframes of the movement and how these comprise the frames of all participating groups. However, they do not analyse the communicative processes leading to these final results so that we will yet

⁷ DEMOS stands for "Democracy in Europe and the Mobilization of Society"; for details see: <http://demos.iue.it>

⁸ In his PhD-project, the author of this paper studies processes of discursive decision-making in social movement assemblies following numerous movement meetings and mailinglists on the local (Berlin), the national (German) and transnational (European) level during the last 2-3 years.

⁹ Nevertheless, just recently, there has been a first joint publication of organisational theorists and social movement researchers in the U.S. (Davis et al. 2005); for an interesting use of organisational theory on movements see Leach (2005) but also Rucht (1999).

again have to resort to other fields of study, although the concept of mesomobilisation does help to identify the level of analysis.

It will come to no surprise that our search for an adequate concept which can help us study the inside of social movements leads to the concept of the public sphere, more precisely to assembly publics. Although social movements have mainly been seen as actors within the public sphere, influencing public opinion, the notion of public sphere has also been used to refer to the communicative arenas created within social movements: Stamm (1988) speaks of “alternative public spheres”, Wischermann (2003: 15) looks at ‘movement public spheres’ (“*Bewegungsöffentlichkeit*”) or ‘internal public spheres’ (“*Binnenöffentlichkeit*”) and – probably most prominently – (Fraser 1992: 123) coined the term “subaltern counterpublics” (see also Rucht 2002).

In the following section, I will introduce a model which I consider suitable for the analysis of both public spheres within movements as well as emerging European public spheres of various types.

Linking transnational movement research to the European public sphere

So far, I argued – in accord with the similar approach of Doerr (2005; 2006) – that research on the European public sphere needs to be relieved of its media-content centred blinkers and that social movement research might well look at communicative processes within movements using the concept of public sphere. With this in mind, the next step seems apparent: Linking both fields of research by studying the Europeanization of public spheres within social movements. In order to facilitate this link, I will now set forth a model (or a set of concepts) which makes it possible to translate findings between both fields and make them relevant for each other.

Introducing the arena model of the public sphere

A public arena is constituted by an audience following the same communications at (roughly) the same time. Examples of such arenas are the *Financial Times* (in relation to its readers), a plenary session during a meeting preparing the European Social Forum, or an encounter in a bar between fans during the *FIFA World Cup*. Depending on the level of the public sphere, an arena can be a rather fixed framework of communication (such as *Financial Times* as a mass medium), a regular meeting (such as the European Preparatory Assembly) or a random encounter of football fans which is unlikely to reoccur in the same way.

Eder et al. (2002: 106) argue that “[t]he distinction between public and private should not be confused with the presence or absence of the *addressed* audience” (emphasis added). A public situation is therefore made up of a speaker (*Ego*) addressing *Alter* and an “uncommitted third actor” (*Other*) (ibid: 104). But while this distinction between ‘Alter’ (those addressed by ‘Ego’) and ‘Other’ (the bystanders) is important for their analysis of ethnic conflict, it seems that for the more general task of studying the public sphere as a space of shared communication of a collectivity, it seems more viable to consider as public any situation involving more than two actors, i.e. not to distinguish between those addressed by the speaker and those not addressed.

But one arena usually does not make a public sphere because all members of a collectivity are rarely identical with the audience of one single arena. EPS-research

has come to see the European public sphere as a network of interconnected public arenas, linked through flows of communication. Similarly Olesen (2005: 427) describes the infrastructure of transnational publics as a “polycephalous network”. But the notion of network is equally fuzzy as that of the public sphere and does not clarify much. What exactly is connected through the network? And how?

If we look at how a collectivity (e.g. a transnational social movement or the citizens of Europe) shares its communications (or how information is diffused within it) we find two basic modes how information can be passed exchanged: private and public. The distinction between public and private communication allows us to conceptualise networks of (private) communication and arenas of (public) communication as two idealtypically opposed structures of communication, both capable of diffusing and exchanging information.

In network-communication, information is passed on bilaterally from one actor to the next and so on. In public communication information is shared directly amongst several actors within an arena. If at least one actor from arena A is also in arena B, then these arenas are communicatively linked. If the link is only through one actor it is a private link. If there is more than one connecting actor then the link is public. This opposition between public and private communication is represented on the vertical axis in *figure 1*. Both private and public channels contribute to the sharing of communication within a collectivity so that they must be considered in our concept of the public sphere. The concept of *publicness* allows us to grasp this dimension of a public sphere: the more communication takes place publicly, the higher the publicness of that space of shared communication.

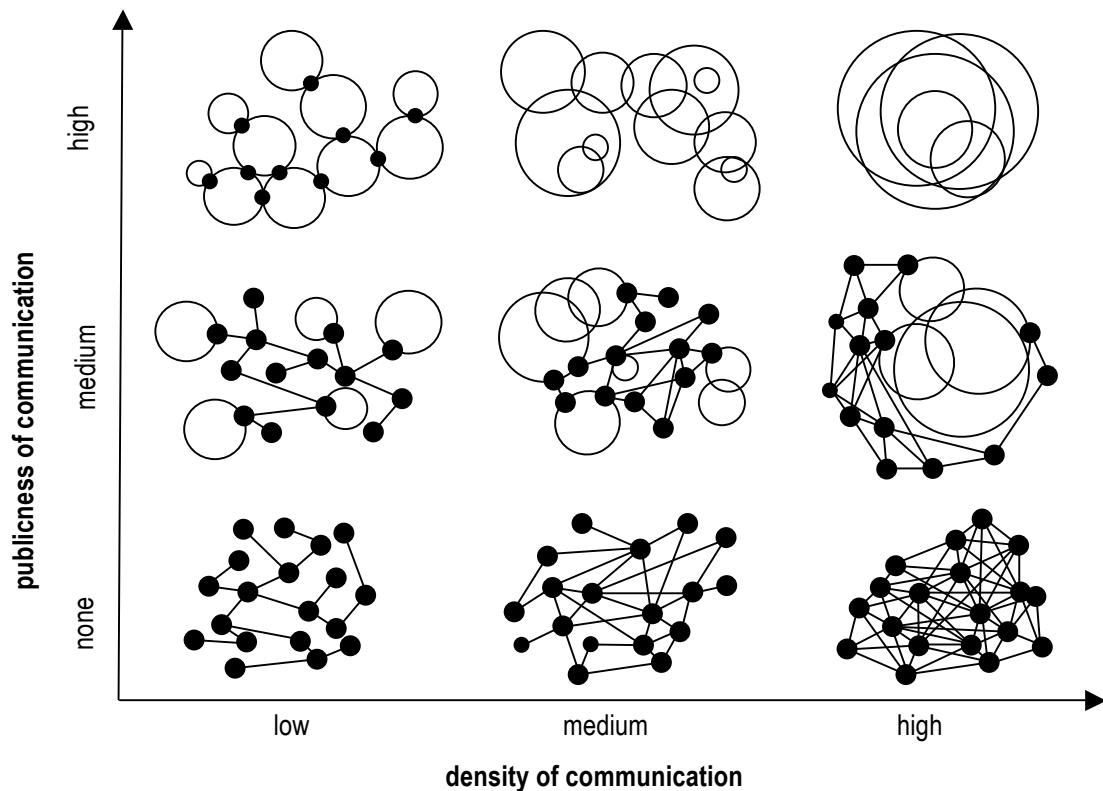


Figure 1: Two parameters of the public sphere

As illustrated in *figure 1*, there is another relevant dimension of the public sphere: its *density*. The density refers to the intensity in which communication is shared amongst the actors of that collectivity. In private networks, communication can be shared more intensely when more communicative links exist. This corresponds with the density concept in network-theory, but enriched with the dimension of arenas. In the public realm, the highest density is reached, when all actors assemble in the same arena because then everything that is said directly reaches everyone else.

Combining both dimensions of publicness and density, we can describe and compare public spheres: Publicness is high, when communication takes place in arenas, i.e. before an audience. The circles in *figure 1* represent the audience of public arenas: the density of the public sphere is high when there is a big overlap between the audiences of different arenas and it is low when the connections between the arenas are only through small segments of the audience. The 'base line' in *figure 1* with no publicness represents the ideal type of purely private networks, i.e. the absence of a public sphere.¹⁰ The nodes (black dots) of the network are individual actors¹¹. The density of communication within a collectivity is higher when more actors are interlinked through communication. It is here that the various linking roles mentioned in table 2 become relevant.

Discussing the arena model

Conceptualizing the public sphere from below by starting from the evident plurality of arenas and building on the core characteristic of public communication – the audience – we can analyse the public sphere of any collective social entity and specify its density, rather than theoretically assuming the existence of one arena. The density tells us to what degree it is appropriate to talk about *a* public sphere (rather than numerous public sphericules) and the publicness tells us to what degree we can actually speak of a *public* sphere (as opposed to the private sphere of personal networks).

If it turns out that the density of a public sphere is very low, it makes more sense to speak about the concrete arenas or clusters of arenas (which could be labelled 'public sphericules') within that public sphere, where arenas are more densely connected with each other than average. This approach connects the idea of Koopmans and Erbe (2004) of measuring the "*degree* to which we can speak of a nationally [or 'Europeanly'; CH] confined public sphere" (ibid: 103, emphasis added) emphasizing the "spatial reach and boundaries of public communication" (ibid: 102), but while they limit this space to the speakers (i.e the communicative linkages between speakers in different countries) the model presented here suggests to include the whole audience when determining the reach and the boundaries of a specific public sphere.

If on the other hand the publicness is low, we should consider a network-analytic approach but nevertheless acknowledge the relevance of public arenas wherever we find them and point out their specific function as a node within the analysed network. (Olesen 2005: 425) points in that direction when he says that "transnational publics are networks". However, his concept remains somewhat unsatisfactory since the

¹⁰ Perhaps the communicative structures of the Mafia are as close as you can get to purely private networks. In that case, the only way the collectivity remains capable of acting is through its hierarchical structure, i.e. centralised network.

¹¹ The figure only shows those actors which are relevant for passing on information. As described above, every arena (circle) represents at least three actors but the number remains indefinite in the graph, i.e. the total number of actors in each 'scenario' is not visually represented but should be imagined as constant.

nodes of these networks “are usually social movements” (ibid: 425) but then “nodes of special influence may [also] be personalities” (ibid: 427). If we really want to know what the “infrastructure of transnational publics” (ibid: 427) look like, and trace the flows of communication across national borders, we should be very clear about such basic conceptual definitions. Though Olesen senses the close interrelation between transnational social movements and transnational public spheres (and the necessity for research in this field) he limits himself to the conception of “social movements as agents” (ibid: 425) so that he does not conceptualise the arenas *within* those transnational movements as part of that transnational public sphere.

By coherently conceptualizing the public sphere as a *space* of shared communication, the model proposed here focuses our attention on how this space is structuring the communication that takes place within it. Distinguishing between private and public modes of communication helps us to map the structures of the transnational public sphere not simply as a “polycephalous network” (ibid: 427) with both movements and individuals as nodes but more as a network of (partly overlapping) arenas and networks of individuals (both of which might be part of a social movement or not).

There is much to commend that such arenas can be laboratories of democracy relevant for the construction of democratic transnationalised polities and public spheres. The principal arguments put forward here were thus:

- Public spheres and networks must be distinguished as different communicative structures and their respective capacities for democratic debate should be assessed. Social movements which are – on the one side – commonly conceptualised as ‘networks’ but do also – on the other side – create and maintain deliberative arenas which makes them an ideal site to explore both dimensions of the public sphere and their role in democratic transnationalisation of communication.
- The public sphere should be seen as a structured *space* and not be confused with the content of communication taking place within it (though a dynamic relationship is evident between both (see fn. 5). It seems, that much of what has been measured as a Europeanisation of the public sphere would be more adequately described as a Europeanisation of various discourses.
- Whether or not the space of shared communication of a collectivity is really *one* space or whether it might not be more appropriately described as a set of arenas depends on how densely connected the various arenas are.
- If the public sphere is supposed to contribute to the democratisation of Europe, then the framework of the public sphere itself needs to be democratised. This is not only a matter of democratising the mass media. It also raises questions regarding the creation of new arenas and their maintenance, how the various arenas on different levels should be interconnected (also to the so called ‘strong publics’, i.e. those with decision-making power), and how debate within such arenas should be organised.

It was the aim of this paper chapter to suggest the agenda model of the public sphere a basic tool or developable conceptual framework to raise new questions and to approach these questions empirically and also normatively in the light of the democratic experiments within transnational social movements – who themselves are challenging dominant notions of the public sphere.

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