



Possibility of the effect of the Internet on 'Public Sphere' in Jurgens Habermas's Thought?"

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Abstract: In recent decades, "Public Sphere" is one of the most important concepts in political science. Jurgens Habermas the famous thinker in this approach is the first to use this concept in critical thinking, where he demonstrates how networking is used for communicative actions. Habermas has not included the Internet as an important part of his thought process in the "public sphere", however, I think, the Internet could be used as a very powerful tool for public articulation in public affairs. The aim of this article is to determine and associate Jurgens Habermas's viewpoint of "public sphere" and locate the Internet's position in his public sphere. The method of this research was the use of many critical thinker's opinions and works regarding "public sphere". The result of this research is the significant changes from his earlier thought processes to his later thought processes. The answer to the question of "What about a possibility of the effect of the Internet on 'public sphere' in Jurgens Habermas's thought?" I think it is possible, and should be a very important inclusion in the "Public sphere". My opinion is that Habermas's works could be enhanced through the inclusion of the Internet in the "public sphere".

Keywords: Public sphere, the Internet, Communicative action, Electronic democracy

Introduction

Contemporary debates about the "Public Sphere" have been dominated by the discussion of Jurgens Habermas's seminal study, "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere." The contributors to this collection push forward Habermas's agenda by reflecting on current social processes and events, such as anti-corporate protests and the emergence of the Internet.

In Habermas's opinion "Public Sphere"

isn't a place or an organization, rather it is a network which communications in the course of events filter and combine opinions, and thereafter, according to their positions, they classify as a public opinion.

In this definition about "Public Sphere", there are many hidden concepts. In my opinion, when Habermas says "Public Sphere" is a network, with communication and exchanging of Ideas, we can then say that the Internet and the "metaphorical space" can play this role for us.

According to Bohman: "New technologies are often greeted with political optimism. The Internet was thought to herald new possibilities for political participation, if not direct democracy, even in large and complex societies, as "electronic democracy" might replace the mass media democracy of sound-bite television."(Bohman in Crossly & Roberts 2004: 131)

Globalization and other features such as critical thinking and participation in the government by contemporary societies make it possible to consider whether democracy is undergoing another great transformation. This transformation in representative democracy and its institutions of voting and parliamentary assemblies is possible in modern cities.

In spite of all this, it is not clear that Habermas is talking directly about using the Internet as a "public sphere." In this article I want to demonstrate that the Internet can be useful as a kind of "public sphere" in Jurgen Habermas's anticipations.

Before Habermas, Hannah Arendt another German thinker wrote clearly about "public space" for the first time. Undoubtedly Hannah Arendt is the central political thinker of the 20th century whose work reminds us with great poignancy of the, "lost treasures of our tradition of political thought", and more so of the "loss of public space, under conditions of modernity." (Calhoun 1993: 74)

Arendt in her philosophical writing "The human condition" tries to revive "Praxis" as an "interaction" which can happen in a "public space." Similar to Arendt's "interaction", Habermas calls it communicative action, which happens in the "public sphere."

Benhabib, one of the contemporary authors of critical thinking in the "public

sphere" has strong viewpoint about different kinds of public space. I concur with her approach, and have used it in my research in this subject.

She says that, there are three different conceptions of public space that correspond to three main currents of western political thought. In her opinion, the first one is Hannah Arendt's viewpoint about public space. "The second conception is provided by the liberal tradition and particularly by those liberals who, beginning with "Kant," makes the problem of a "just and stable public order" the centre of their political thinking."(Benhabib in Calhoun 1993: 73) According to Benhabib, she named this the 'legalistic' model of public space, and it will be exemplified by Bruce Ackerman's conception of "public dialogue."

"The final model of public space is the one implicit in Jurgen Habermas's work. This model, which envisages a democratic-socialist restructuring of late-capitalist societies, will be name[d] 'discursive public space'."(Benhabib 1993: 73)

I believe that, what is important here is not so much what public discourse is about but rather, as the way in which this discourse takes place: force and violence destroy the specificity of public discourse by introducing the dumb language of physical superiority and constraint by silencing the voice of persuasion and conviction. Only power is generated by public discourse and is sustained by it.

On the other hand Benhabib says: "The model of public dialogue based on conversational restraint is not neutral, in that it presupposes a moral and political epistemology; this in turn justifies of such a kind as leads to the silencing of the concerns of certain excluded groups."(Benhabib 1993: 82)

According to Benhabib the public sphere comes into existence whenever and wherever all affected by general social and political norms of action engage in a practical discourse, evaluating their validity.

I believe that, in effect, there may be as many public spaces as there are controversial general debates about the validity of norms, in which democratization in contemporary societies can be viewed as the increase and growth of autonomous government and public sphere.

On this subject James Bohman says: "Publicity at the level of social action is most basic, in the sense that all other forms of publicity presuppose it. Social acts are public only if they meet two basic requirements. First, they are not only directed to an indefinite audience but also offered with some expectation of a response, especially with regard to interpretability and justifiability. The description of the second general feature of publicity is dominated by spatial metaphors."(Bohman 2004: 135)

From my observation of critical thinkers, public actions constitute a common and open 'space' for interaction with indefinite others. Or, as Habermas puts it, publicity in this broadest sense is simply 'the social space generated by communicative action' (Habermas 1996: 360)

I believe that, electronic communication is dominated by such metaphors, now of 'virtual' 'cyberspace.' However, we may mention here the different concepts: "Public space", "Public sphere" or "Public dialogue". The importance here is not in the names, but rather in their applications.

I have argued that the Internet and other contemporary public spaces permit a form of publicity that result in various public spaces rather than a unified "public sphere" based in a common culture or identity. In order for it

to be an adequate extension of the dialogical "public sphere" for democratic purposes, various public spaces must still enable communication with an indefinite audience.

The purpose of this article is that, we want to know how Habermas thinks about "public sphere" and what the possibility of the effect of the Internet on "public sphere" is, in Jurgen Habermas's thoughts.

Further Reflections on the "Public Sphere" in Jurgen Habermas's Thought

During this contemporary climate of focus on the "public sphere", look at Habermas's life-long project of rescuing the modern "public sphere" should be looked at with urgency.

For the past five decades the "public sphere" has been at the top of Jurgen Habermas's theoretical agenda. He has explored the historical meaning of the concept, reconstructed its philosophical foundations in communications and repeatedly analysed its ongoing crises.

Habermas's activity of re-creating the significance of "public sphere" and rescuing the neglected potentials of "the Enlightenment legacies and heritages" has been strongly controversial.

In a general viewpoint, specialities of "public sphere" in Jurgen Habermas's thought consist of the following cases.

- In the "public sphere", public opinions and arguments are formed about public interests.
- The aim of the "public sphere" is to safeguard the public's benefits of participation in government decisions and public welfare.
- The "public sphere" is a mediator between commonwealth groups and public power.
- The basic foundation of the "public

sphere" is the public's participation which gives them democratic control.

- In this "sphere" every citizen has the right to actively participate and to offer difference of opinions, by using rational solutions and not customary and negative dogmatism.

- The "public sphere" is dominated by public wisdom, which means that public laws and co-operative opinions can make decisions for public solutions with deduction and public discourse.

From my observation of "public sphere" in Jurgen Habermas's thought it is clear that the position of "public sphere" has to change. A new kind of "public sphere" is necessary, because the old shapes obstruct new ideas.

In this subject James Bohman says: "Computer-mediated communication also extends the forum, by providing a new unbounded space for communicative interaction, but its innovative potential lies not just in its speed and scale but also within new form of address or interaction: as a many-to-many mode of communication, it has radically lowered the costs of interaction with an indefinite and potentially large audience, especially with regard to adopting the speaker role without the costs of the mass media."(Bohman 2004: 134)

According to him, moreover, "such many-to-many communication with newly increased interactivity holds out the promise of capturing the features of dialogue and communication more robustly than the print medium. At the very least, computer-mediated communication offers a potentially new solution to the problem of the extension of communicative interactions across space and time and thus, perhaps, signals the emergence of a public sphere that is not subject to the specif-

ic linguistic, cultural and spatial limitations of the bounded national public sphere that have up to now supported representative democratic institutions."(Bohman 2004: 135)

In my opinion this network-based extension of dialogue suggests the possibility of re-embedding the "public sphere" in a new and potentially larger set of institutions. At present, there is a lack of congruity between existing political institutions and the wider potential for public communicative interaction. Hence, the nature of "public sphere" is changing.

In the old shape of the "public sphere", the specific ideal forum was often taken to be a town meeting, or perhaps a discussion in a salon, coffee shop or union hall, in which participants were physically present in a face-to-face interaction.

In this century because of the increasing population it is not possible to have face-to-face interactions in this way. On the other hand, a democratic public sphere must commit to freedom and equality in the communicative interaction in the public sphere forum. Such interaction takes the specific form of a conversation or dialogue, in which speakers and listeners treat each other with equal respect and freely exchange their roles in their responses to each other.

According to Bohman "What makes dialogue so crucial is that it not only proceeds as a communicative exchange, in the form of turn-taking, but also that it is guided by the mutual expectation of uptake; that is speakers offer reasons to each other and expect that others will consider their reasons or concerns at least to the extent that their speech acts contribute to shaping the ongoing course of the interaction, without anyone exerting con-

control over it or having special status. What is potentially misleading is the assumption that dialogue must be modelled on one-to-one communication, perhaps counterfactually to the extent that each speaker addresses any other, demands a response, and so on. And he says; instead, the other's response can be understood in a quite expansive spatial and temporal sense, in that someone in the indefinite future could give a response, without the speaker even conceivably having intended to address that hearer [listener]. (Bohman 2004: 134)

In my opinion, this is a special kind of "public sphere", and with unprogressive thinking we cannot achieve progress.

The power of the Internet can be harvested as a very powerful public interactive medium, as no other medium (television and radio) has been able to accomplish, to date.

From my observation, currently only the Internet can provide us with the above process. Perhaps in the future we will have a variety of new "public sphere" which is possibly beyond our imagination at present.

In the Habermas thinking, my opinion is that the Internet can be used as a public sphere, which may be depended upon to open up a social space for a particular kind of repeated and open-ended interaction, and as such, requires technologies and institutions to secure its continued existence and regularize opportunities and access to it.

The Internet can be used as a network, as well as for a space of "public sphere" Nationally and Globally.

In my opinion Habermas is the most important critical thinker in our century; therefore his thought process shouldn't disregard the "Internet" as a communicative vehicle.

I believe his philosophy is unique, in comparison to many other thinkers that I have studied. He has written extensively

about communicative action and "public sphere", but he hasn't given any attention or consideration for the role of the Internet in the "public sphere".

Shapiro, one of the author's of critical thinking in the public sphere whose Idea regarding the Internet, I agree with, says: "Rethinking publicity allows us see that some critical diagnosis of the problems of electronic democracy are short-circuited by a failure to think beyond what is politically familiar, as when it is argued that communication over the internet leads to a general phenomena of 'disinter-mediation,' when [what is actually leads] to new intermediaries. (Shapiro 1999: 55)

In my opinion the same is true of various thinkers who see the Internet as essentially democratic and dialogical. Critical analyses of the potential of the Internet and the globalization of communication are better served neither by pessimism nor by optimism, but by examine potential transformations of our understanding of both democracy and "Public sphere".

In this situation Bohman also says: "If my argument is correct, that the Internet preserves and extends the dialogical character of the "public sphere" in a potentially cosmopolitan form, then a deliberative transnational democracy can be considered a "realistic utopia" in Rawls' senses; it extends the range of political possibilities for deliberative democracy. (Bohman 2004: 152)

I believe that, even as such communication does indeed threaten some of the best realizations of political ideas of democracy that have been achieved so far in the modern era, contrary to critics such as Kymlicka, it also opens to us new possibilities that are recognizably democratic and directly deliberative. "Deliberative publics can be strong publics distributively, capable of ex-

erting political influence in real decision-making processes under certain institutional conditions." (Kymlicka 1999: 38)

Bohman's comment about Kymlicka's opinion is that, "While he has rejected Kymlicka's criticism of transnational democracy as lacking [in] an egalitarian public sphere for mass participation, he [Kymlicka] is correct to press a further point that proponents of global or cosmopolitan democracy have not [been] taken seriously: the problem that the lack of a shared identity poses for cosmopolitan political form. (Bohman 2004: 152)

In a similar vein, Habermas has also argued that solidarity at this level cannot simply be based on a shared moral conception of human rights but only on a shared political culture; otherwise Europe may not become a public of publics [various public spaces] in the full democratic sense. (Habermas, 2001: 126)

In conclusion, I would like to suggest ways in which these innovative forms of publicity may, when institutionally secured, provide a solution to the problem of cosmopolitan identity and solidarity.

It does so in light of the specific qualities of the interaction those occur in an extended but mediated dialogical public sphere.

Conclusion

Comparisons between Habermas's different works, show that even though Habermas's early works insist, against the viewpoint of classical liberalism, that the modern "public sphere" described the mode of reasoning enacted between private, not merely political, actors he still imbibes the liberal conviction that the "public sphere" can only be rescued if it is relieved of responsibility for

the crushing weight of unmet needs for autonomy.

In the political climate of the 1950s and early 1960s it is not surprising that Habermas was not able to be hopeful about the radical potentials emerging out of civil society. Habermas says; "At the time, I could not imagine democratized interest associations and parties. Intra-party and intra-associational public spheres appeared to me as the potential centres of a public communication still capable of being regenerated." (Habermas 1993: p 440)

A coherent means of rescuing a critical public sphere would need, initially, to re-work Habermas's early sociological framework to bring into view, the wider importance of civic struggle aimed at achieving recognition for the legitimacy of particular needs and identity claims for the revitalization of a democratic culture. The normative under-pining of the bourgeois ideal of a critical public would also need to be subjected to a more searching interrogation and re-worked into a new understanding of communicative rationality, freed from the ideological assumptions of a liberal model.

Habermas's later writings have offered a more positive and systematically elaborated account of what involves a project committed to the re-appropriation of a critical public.

This progress does not specifically depend on a more moderate estimation of the obstacles that confront the task. As we see, Habermas's current sense of the likely prospects, for an emancipator self-reform of an era dominated by globalizing markets and politically gutted states of nations are not less gloomy than his earlier account which he had believed was bureaucratic capitalism that was a virtually insuperable threat.

My point is that Habermas has clarified his interpretation of the normatively of a modern public sphere and has, accordingly, a rather different analyses of the conditions required for its realization.

Because of this change I think we can include Internet as a new kind of "public sphere" in Jurgen Habermas's viewpoint. Perhaps he should re-think his ideas on the "public sphere" which should include the Internet.

From my observation Habermas has a great mental capacity for thinking and creating a new "public sphere" which can work, therefore I strongly recommend the inclusion of the Internet, as a "public sphere" in his works.

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