

European Public Sphere(s)

Uniting and Dividing

TOM MORING

The subject of the project is *European Public Sphere and its different forms of existence*. The main research question is whether there is a common European public sphere, and if there is, what are the empirical forms of its existence. The project aims at producing new empirical knowledge on the means and forms of European public debate. It wants to increase our understanding of European cultural and political dynamics and promote openness and democracy in European public life (policy proposals). The project is working parallel in five sub-projects. The project is financed by the Academy of Finland (2005-2007).

1) The concept of the European Public Sphere from the comparative historical-sociological perspective (Dr. Hannu Nieminen).

In this sub-project an attempt will be made to study and compare different ways to define the individual-society relations. How are the elements of public life defined and controlled which in the European thought are approached with the notion of the public sphere? How are such issues of inclusion and exclusion regulated in non-European cultures which in Europe are regulated through the mechanisms and procedures of the public sphere?

Two levels of analysis are applied. On the basis of earlier research, a general theoretical-comparative framework will be constructed on both global and European levels. On empirical level, several case studies will be conducted, both in Europe (such as Finland, Britain, Germany, France, Spain) and in other part of the world (for example in India, Tanzania/Namibia, Brazil, USA).

2) The national, regional and global challenges to the construction of the European Public Sphere (Dr. Anu Kantola, Dr. Inka Salovaara-Moring).

Dr. Anu Kantola is interested in the development of political public sphere as national political public spheres face the challenges of internationalisation, i.e. globalisation as well as the Europeanisation of politics. The project aims thus to analyse the role of public sphere in contemporary politics and understand how internationalisation of politics if changing the practises and role of the national public sphere. The basic questions are: i) What is the role of public sphere in the contemporary politics? ii) What are the forces that aim to restrict or narrow down the role of public sphere in contemporary politics? iii) How could the role of public sphere be enhanced and developed?

Dr. Inka Salovaara-Moring will work on Geographies of Power, Politics and Memory: A Spatio-Cultural Approach to a European Public Sphere. Her point of departure is the enlargement of the EU, which brought together very diverse nation-states with major divergences between economic, political, and cultural development. The overall aim of this sub-project is to draw conclusions of the role and relevance of the public sphere in the contemporary Finnish and European politics. The project tries also to find out how the public life could be enhanced in relation to political process. By tracking the problems of public processes the study tries to give also some recommendations on how the processes of public action could be enhanced and developed as a part of working democracy.

3) The role of the media in constructing the European Public Sphere (Dr. Tuomo Mörä, MSocSci Kari Karppinen, MA Hanna Raijas).

This sub-theme is approached by three researchers:

The topic of M.Soc.Sci. Kari Karppinen's doctoral thesis is The normative grounds of European media policy, in which he focuses on the ideological and normative roots of European media policies, especially concerning media pluralism, public service media, and related choices in structural regulation of the media. Normative theories of the public sphere and democracy are used as a framework for studying the conceptual foundations used to legitimize media policies.

M.A. Hanna Raijas, in her doctoral thesis, deals with the digital television and its developments in Europe, influencing European broadcasting policy and regulation. The time frame for her research is from the late 1990s until the expected analogue switch off around 2007-2010. She will look at regulation of broadcasting and audiovisual sector at the EU level, use some decisions already made as examples and assess to what extent these policies have been successful in achieving their aims and where the possible failures and weaknesses of the EU's audiovisual policy are. As a case study, comparing Britain and Finland brings into the picture the national level of audiovisual policy-making.

The topic of Dr. Tuomo Mörä is Journalists and the European Public Sphere. Studies of public sphere are typically normative macro level analyses of society in which present problems of citizen participation are compared with ideal situation (in the past). He takes a different angle and analyses the public sphere from grass-root level, bottom-up, approaching it by studying one key group of modern, mediated public sphere, journalists. His interest is to find out how journalists conceive the "public sphere" and journalism's role in constructing it. In other words, what are journalists' predispositions about democracy, citizenship, society and journalism's role as part of those. His special focus group will be journalists working in and reporting from the core of "Europe", i.e. institutions and centres of European Union (Brussels, Strassburg; EC meetings, etc.)

4) The role of the internet and virtual communities in the development of the European Public Sphere (Professor Sinikka Sassi, MA Juha Sjöblom).

This sub-theme will be covered by two researchers. In the background of the research is the emergence of computer networks, the internet in particular,

which have changed the concept and formation of communities. Virtual communities can be defined as symbolic communities because they are created by symbolic exchange and computer-mediated communication. The aim of the study is, first, to examine the social uses of new media environments and, second, to understand the role of the technologically mediated conversations as part of public debate.

In her project Professor Sinikka Sassi will concentrate on the theme Locality and digital public sphere, in which she studies the theories of democracy and public sphere form the broader context of the above study. When new digital forms of democracy and especially those of citizen participation are concerned, not only the formal procedures but also the underlying structures of communities and the actual codes of communication are essential. In order to be able to develop situated and meaningful democratic practices it is necessary to know how people communicate and organize themselves in the virtual space. Without actual social ties and intercourse no viable local democracy can exist.

The theme of M.Soc.Sc. Juha Sjöblom's doctoral dissertation is Representation of Self and Space in Virtual Communities. This study is especially interested in the ways members of virtual communities represent both themselves and virtual spaces, and in the ways these representations evidently vary between different European cultures and regions. The communities, which are often multicultural by nature, collectively create and maintain their norms, hierarchies and social order. Also individuals represent textually their bodies or virtual identities: gender, race, age and social status. The aim of the study is to understand the characteristic conventions of the internet communication both crossing the cultural and linguistic barriers and differentiating between European cultures.

5) European minorities and the prospects of constructing the European Public Sphere (Professor Tom Moring, Professor Charles Husband, MA Yonca Ermutlu, MPolSci Camilla Haavisto).

This sub-project is carried out by two senior researchers, Professors Tom Moring and Charles Husband, and two doctoral students, supported by an international network of experts. The project Public sphere and sphericules: ethnic and linguistic minorities in an integrating (?) Europe, explores the interface between the political economy of minority and majority media, as they emerge according to language and ethnicity divides. One point of departure will be based on normative instruments for policy formation in the field of media and minoritised

groups (UN, UNESCO, OSCE, and Council of Europe etc). Another point of departure will be actual policies (EU policies, and policies in specific states). The research questions are designed to address different aspects of European public life from the point of view of the proliferation of spicules fragmenting the public sphere.

This comparative project seeks to interrelate four aspects relating to minoritised communities within a fragmented public sphere: 1) strategies for cohesion (how minorities communicate within themselves) 2) strategies for presence in the society at large (how do minorities get their voice heard), 3) societal practices of addressing minority communities, and 4) societal practices of acceptance of minority presence.

The particular states to be studied are Finland, the UK, Estonia and Turkey.

The theme of the doctoral research of M.Soc.Sc. Yonca Ermutlu is participation of ethnic minorities in public sphere. She aims to explore the participation of ethnic minorities in public sphere in Finland, Turkey and United Kingdom from the agency point of view. The main research questions are: how and where and in which language do the ethnic minority members get the information related to their lives; how do the ethnic minority members make themselves heard; how do the ethnic minority members interact with the main public sphere; how do they participate in discussions of common concern; and what are the principles of being a citizen in a multi-ethnic and democratic society? Theoretically, this study focuses on the principles of becoming a citizen in a multi-ethnic society especially concentrating on the principle of “right to express opinion” as a central theme, and thus exploring the possibilities towards a multi-ethnic public sphere.

The theme of the doctoral research of M.Soc.Sc. Camilla Haavisto is the construction of otherness in the public sphere. She analyses the appearance and the construction of otherness, mainly ethnic otherness, in the public sphere. This is done by studying presentations of otherness in popular media, which is mainly managed by majority representatives. The main question is how the construction process of different mediated group identities works. On the bases of a wide empirical material

concerning different types of presentations of ethnic minority representatives, the thesis will enlighten the issue of the representation of non-majority representatives in one corner of the public sphere; the popular media.

Research group

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