

EUROSPHERE

International Project Conference



Towards a Diverse European Public Sphere? Theoretical Puzzles and Empirical Evidences

Date: 13 – 14 November 2009

Host: Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies (IMIS), University of Osnabrück

Location: University of Osnabrück, Germany

Organiser: Prof. Dr. Michael Bommers (IMIS, University of Osnabrück)

Aim of the conference

The main objective of the Eurosphere project is to create innovative perspectives on the European public spheres and to identify the conditions that enable or undermine the articulation of inclusive European Public Spheres. The first international conference in November 2009 aims to face up Eurosphere's theoretical and empirical approaches to criticism of external experts. The central research topics of Eurosphere will be addressed here contrasting Eurosphere research and its first results with critical views in theoretical and empirical terms.

For this purpose, the conference will focus on two major thematic issues:

Does a European Public Sphere (EPS) exist and how can it be approached?

The tension between diversity and unity in the EU as a challenge for a EPS – which are the structural consequences of diversity for EPS (and vice versa)?

The conference will be divided in two parts, each part addressing one guiding question.

First day of the conference:

Does a European Public Sphere (EPS) exist and how can it be approached?

The research project Eurosphere starts from the assumption that there exists a European Public Sphere (EPS). Based on this assumption it is interested in the effects of 'diversity' on the outlook and future perspective of European Public Sphere(s). On the first day of this two days conference we want to address this central assumption of Eurosphere from theoretical, methodological and empirical perspectives. We ask to what extent has a EPS emerged and what does EPS refer to? How can we conceptualize a EPS in a theoretically adequate and precise manner that allows



methodologically sound and meaningful empirical research on public spheres including a potential EPS.

Guiding questions of presentations of this first day should be:

- What does EPS refer to?
- How significant is a EPS (singular/ plural?) for actors (and the polity) – can they do without EPS? Does it refer to a relevant frame of reference for actors compared to potential alternatives (regional, national, international PS) in which they may place their activities and communications.
- The central question will be less if a EPS exists but the mode of its social existence: How can we empirically observe public spheres? What makes communications and social practices public? How can we differentiate between regional, national, European or international public spheres?
- The relationship between political and other public spheres: What is specific about political vs. non-political public spheres?
- What are the communicative infrastructures of EPS concerning media and languages? Can we empirically determine and theoretically account for levels of scope / dynamics/ continuity and discontinuity? Who are the cultural entrepreneurs of EPS and who is mobilized by EPS (groups, regions, nations, classes, minorities etc).
- Does the EPS have a democratic potential? What are the structural grounds of such a potential and how can we analyze it? What are the political implications of varying normative concepts of the relation between EPS and democracy?

Second day of the conference:

The tension between diversity and unity in the EU as a challenge for a EPS – which are the structural consequences of diversity for EPS (and vice versa)?

Most studies on the EPS start from the normative assumption that a public sphere has to be based on a certain level of homogeneity (of interests, of identities, of language or of political cultures). Diversity is thus typically seen as an obstacle to the formation of an integrated public sphere. Our aim is to formulate a different approach, whose point of departure is the empirical observation that both the EU and the public spheres linked to its political development are characterized by multiple manifestations of diversity – of cultural backgrounds, of political orientations or of institutional arrangements, to give just a few examples. For this reason, it is of crucial importance to thoroughly rethink the potential of the EPS in the context of diversity: What would be the appropriate 'mix' of differentiating and integrating elements in such a public sphere? Or should we rather conceive of social and political spaces which connect a multiplicity of public spheres in Europe?

To tackle these questions we have to (1) refine our notions of diversity, (2) have a closer look on different forms of institutionalizing diversity and (3) discuss the relations and tensions between diversity and the EPS. This implies to raise the following issues:



(1) Concepts of Diversity

- How should one map the political semantic of diversity? How does diversity relate to concepts such as difference, heterogeneity and inequality?
- On which empirical and normative grounds do collectivities claim to be 'different' or 'diverse'?

(2) The Institutionalisation of Diversity

- Which types of 'diversity' have a visible impact on policy-making?
- Which institutional mechanisms are used for dealing with diversity? Who are the 'legitimate' subjects of such an institutionalization, be it on a territorial or on a personal basis?

(3) Diversity and the EPS

- To what extent is diversity a constitutive element of the EPS?
- What does diversity imply for the development of EPS infrastructures (in terms of language, media and political communication)?

For further information please visit

<http://www.imis.uni-osnabrueck.de/EurosphereConference.htm> or contact

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