CONCEPTS OF DELIBERATION

Dr Marjan Horvat (Institute IRRIS, Slovenia)

Historicity of The Public Sphere And Deliberative Democracy: The Missing Research Field

In my presentation, I will compare the different theories of deliberative democracy and the public sphere, focusing on their treatment of historical aspects. Deliberative democracy appears distinctly ahistorical, while the concept of the public sphere, based on Habermas’s analysis, is rooted in the socio-historical emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in 16th and 17th century Europe. Habermas described the public sphere in normative terms and intended to provide an in-depth historical account, but ultimately did not undertake this project. Consequently, subsequent literature has focused mainly on normative understandings of the theory of the public sphere, leaving the relationship between theory and history in public deliberation underexplored.

I argue that the lack of a historical dimension in deliberative democracy is a significant problem. Deliberative democracy, particularly in its Anglo-American form, is pragmatic and presented as a progressive intervention in decision-making practices, thus neglecting the historical decision-making practices of individual societies. Recent research emphasizes the importance of historical, cultural, and cognitive settings in opinion making, as highlighted by the Enlightenment 2.0 initiative, which aims to center reason in political decision-making.

First, I present works that emphasize the inclusion of historical aspects in analyzing public spheres and deliberation practices in order to better understand societal decision-making processes. Second, I reference my previous research on the formation of historical forms of deliberation, particularly the transition from proto-political to political during national awakenings, which shaped contemporary social contracts. Lastly, I offer a transhistorical perspective on historical processes in relation to tradition and progress, drawing on thinkers like E. Hobsbawm, F. Jameson, and W. Benjamin. In conclusion, I suggest paths for further analysis.

This presentation highlights the importance of integrating historical dimensions into the study of public deliberation and proposes a more historically-informed approach to understanding and improving democratic practices.