

LEAVING PUBLIC PLACES: ANTIPOLITICAL AND ANTIPUBLIC FORCES OF THE TRANSNATIONAL ECONOMY

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Abstract

Over the last twenty years there has been a change of political regime from state controlled markets to market liberalisation. This article asks how are these changes affecting the role of the public sphere? The particular case is the economic crisis of Finland in the 1990s. The article looks at interviews of the country's most important political decision-makers: how do they perceive the role of politics and public in the new market regime? A new political culture favouring the market over the state, the private over the public and the experts over the politicians seem to appear. The elite interviews reveal an antipolitical and antipublic discourse, which tries to negate the relevance or to narrow the scope of public discussion. A formal transnational European democracy is not, however, a simple solution to these problems. The Finnish example shows how the antipublic forces of economic expertise and bureaucracy are emphasised also on the European level. Thus it is suggested that rather than choosing between national or transnational public sphere, we need to study how the public life is embedded in the structures of political power, how various political ideologies and powers aim at colonising or closing the public sphere.

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During the last twenty years a considerable shift has taken place in politics. It has been given various labels such as the end of the cold war, market economy, liberalism or neoliberalism. On the whole there has been a change of political regime from state controlled markets to market liberalisation, a shift of power from politics to economics (e.g. Amin 1997; Beck 1998; Colclough and Manor 1995; Giraud 1996; Hirst and Thompson 1996; Kantola 1999; McGrew 1997; Ryner 1997; Strange 1996).

The power of state bound politics seems to be weakening while the power of the economy and international markets is enhanced. As a result the scale of the political system is changing. At the same time the political system in the sense we know it from most western constitutions is threatened in several ways. The 1990s have testified to widespread suspicions about national politics. Politics have been infected by political scandals having to do with personal issues and corruption (Castells 1998, 333-342). At the same time the formal representative democracy is threatened by declining voting rates (IDEA 1997). The political systems face a crisis as "levels of political trust are decreasing in all systems for which there is available data" (Bouckaert, Ormond, Peters 2000, 3). As Jürgen Habermas (1999, 48) points out:

The "disenclavement" of society, culture and economy, which is proceeding apace, is impinging on the fundamental conditions of existence of the European state system, which was erected on a territorial basis beginning in the seventeenth century, and still positions the most important collective actors on the political stage.

Habermas sees that the whole political system based on national states is in jeopardy. The states can no longer protect their citizens from crossborder risks like crime, epidemics or pollution. He also points out arising deficits in democratic legitimisation as matters are settled through intra-state negotiation, and political decisions are withdrawn from the arenas of democratic decision-making and will-formation. In terms of the substance of politics, Habermas worries over the eroding power of the state over the economy. The range of national economic policies and steering mechanisms is narrowing, and national social security and insurance systems are feeling the strain of the market ideology. The European political scene has been characterised by discussions on the viability of welfare models and post-war welfare policies (e.g. Midgley 1997, 134-145).

While we hear this lament for the decline of politics, we hear voices and ideas pointing to new areas on which political action possibly still matters or might begin to matter again. For instance Nikolas Rose points out that talk about "the death of the social" is to some extent misleading, as social policies are increasingly being articulated at a supranational level using international bodies, such as the OECD, WHO, UN and, as well, EU (Rose 1996, 330).

My main concern in this article is to ask how these political and economic changes are affecting the role of the public sphere and the role of public discussion in particular in the process of Europeanisation. How are the ideals of modern politics, democracy and public life defined and how do these ideals survive in the European scale? By looking at these questions one can also start to look for answers to such questions as whether there is a need for a European public space and what role could it play in the changing political system?

Particularly I will look at the political shift in Finland. In the 1980s the country began to adopt a free market regime and in the 1990s, after the cold war period, it turned to the EU. The Finnish political system has been transformed to match the European political system and the Finnish case gives an excellent example of politics, democracy and public life at the time of Europeanisation.

I am looking at this question through 32 interviews with the highest-level political decision-makers in Finland: politicians and government officials. They were interviewed in 1995 by an important Finnish think-tank Sitra, the Finnish National Fund for Research and Development. In the interviews the decision-makers recall the period of financial deregulation which ended in severe financial crisis. The interviews were confidential and thus they give a very good picture of the thinking of the Finnish political elites at the time of market regulation and the shift of political regime.

Economic liberalisation was adopted in Finland in the 1980s. The state deregulated financial markets and the economy experienced a huge lending boom from abroad. As the financial bubble burst in the early 1990s, it led to a severe banking crisis and Finland became caught in a major recession. Public finances were brought to the brink of disaster due to huge public support for the banking sector and the rapidly rising costs of unemployment and other social problems (Honkapohja and Koskela 1999).

The Finnish case is a very good example of the larger shift in politics. The financial crisis was one of some twenty financial crises, experienced around the world in the context of a similar shift from regulated markets to the free flow of capital (Honkapohja and Koskela 1999; Kantola 1999, 55-59). The crisis was enhanced by the collapse of the Soviet Union as the considerable trade between the two countries ceased abruptly. At the same time Finland turned politically to the West and free market economies when applying for the membership in the EU. Since the crisis the whole post-war regime based on welfare thinking has been questioned in political discussions (Kosonen 1998).

Thus, the interviews from 1995 reveal a picture of politics at the time of a macropolitical regime shift to liberalisation and economic globalisation. In the interviews the decision-makers try to tell what really happened in Finland in the beginning of the 1990s and how the new economic thinking was adopted. The financial crisis forced the decision-makers to make sense of the world around them and to formulate their views on the various issues at stake. The contents of the interviews are confidential and not to be presented with the actual names of the interviewed. The interviews have thus an air of truthfulness around them, as people want to tell what they "really" think. At the same time they try to explain and justify their policies and their actions. Thus one can read the interviews in order to see how are politics, democracy and public sphere reformulated and defined in the new political doctrine.

The Brave New Words

The discursive world of the Finnish decision-makers, which has come about as a result of the financial liberalisation, is dominated by oppositional values that characterise the old and new regime. In this world the financial crisis of the 1990s has become a threshold to a brave new world very different from the old system of a controlled economy and a strong nation state.

Table 1: The Discursive World of the Finnish Decision Makers after the Economic Liberalisation

The wor(l)d		
	Before the crisis	After the crisis
	National	International
	Public Sector -	Private Enterprises
	Politics	Expertise
	Short-sighted -	Farsighted
	Irresponsibility	Responsibility
	Ineffective	Productive
	Loose	Effective
	Consensus	Competition
	Virtual	Real
	Greedy	Disciplined
	Sick	Healthy
	Predictability -	Change
	Familiar	Strange
	Loose public talk	Disciplined public talk
	Bad -	Good

The old regime is mainly seen in a negative light. The basic assumption in this discourse is not nostalgia for the “good old days” but rather a belief in the ideas of inevitable progress. Basically, things in the past, “before” the crisis, are labelled as bad and things “after” as good. Moreover, everyone seems to be compelled to take a stance in the new world and formulate one’s position in relation to these concepts. As one political decision-maker explains the new situation:

It was a virtual reality, when one imagines him/herself living in a healthy situation. A healthy situation will be reached, as we get rid of the national deals and all that. It is only painful for the people, to get them used to this real life after having such unhealthy subsidising politics.

It seems quite clear that a new political culture — favouring the market over the state, the private over the public and the experts over the politicians — has appeared. The scale of the political system has been transformed from national to international. The earlier “solely” Finnish economy is now characterised mainly by negative or disdainful terms such as a “sandbox” for the children.

Along with this shift, an interesting moral order has emerged: an order characterised an opposition between a greedy, irresponsible, consensual, sick political past and the healthy, effective and realistic economic expertise of today. A new world has appeared, a world much harder and demanding than the old one, but at the same time a fair and healthy one. In the new order of things, politics seems to represent something artificial and biased while the markets represent something that is characterised as normal and real life.

With regard to the possibilities of political action and alternatives the new order of authority institutes a sense of political powerlessness: politics becomes almost a dirty word. A high official describes discussions on currency policies in the early 1990s: “The political decision-makers were not involved in the discussions, and they did not know what had been done and what the question was all about after all.”

Double-Movement: From Solidarity to Markets

As one hears the elite voices it becomes clear that politics understood as *national* politics is in a state of crisis. Politics is defined as old fashioned, inflexible and politicians as unable to understand what is truly taking place. The values of the new policy emerge from the hard facts of economics, from savings and efficiency. The reasons for this development can to a large extent be traced to the ideas of the market economy. These ideas resemble a larger shift Norman Fairclough sees in the language of governance. A new language seems to be appearing on an international basis. It transcends the boundaries between governmental and other types of organisation (Fairclough 2000, 76-79).

Karl Polanyi offers an interesting interpretation, seeing the economy as an instituted man-made system. He sees that the three tenets of economic liberalism were established already in 1834 when abolishing provisions for the paupers by the ill-famed Poor Law reform and in 1846 when the Corn Laws created a world pool of grain. Firstly, it was suggested that labour should find its price on the market; secondly, money should be supplied by a self-adjusting mechanism and thirdly, commodities should be free to flow from country to country. Thus a system based on labour as a marketable commodity, fixed currency and free trade was established and labour and land were made into commodities (Polanyi 1968, 61-68).

Polanyi shows that this kind of arrangement of the economy carries strong pre-suppositions concerning social life, its meaning and value. He also points out that while previously man's economy was submerged in his social relations (1968, 65), the modern society tends to turn this relation upside down: man's social relations are submerged in his economy. The new markets are, however, not free in the sense that they would emerge naturally. The markets are, to follow the Polanyian line, politically made constellations kept alive by regulations and policies (see Polanyi 1957.)

Thus Polanyi's thinking is characterised by "a double-movement": the market forces are looking for economic improvement, while the counter forces tend to protect "habitation" and social solidarities and communities that are under a threat by the changing scale of markets (see Baum 1996, 6). The contemporary change from a state-regulated world to a world regulated by market forces can be seen as one move in the Polanyian sense: solidarities and communities are giving way to the economic impetus. Political system, representative democracy and public discussion can be seen as counter force to markets since they represent different logic than the economy. On modern liberal democracies political systems represent the range of values within the particular community. Especially after the Second World War solidarity has had a strong foothold in politics especially when thinking the rebuilding and the welfare state thinking after the Second World War. As this "movement" has become of age, it seems like the markets have come back and are now taking over diminishing the power of politics and solidarity- as well as community-based thinking.

This movement can be seen clearly in the Finnish political discourse along the same lines. The financial deregulation can be described as a movement by the market forces and economic efficiency. At the same time the regulating and redistributing forces of the states and politics are put in jeopardy. This movement can be seen clearly in the minds of the Finnish decision makers: the markets and their

logic of efficiency is taking over while the counter forces of the state, politics and welfare are doomed as old-fashioned and even harmful.

Linking the Politics and the Public

The public sphere has a vital part to play in modern liberal democracies. Public life and discussion are a part of the ideals of the modern liberal democracies. In modern mass democracies, political affairs are conducted by formulating political motivations through the language, above all through modern ideologies. Modern political communities exist on the level of the language, or on the level of the imaginary, as Benedict Anderson's (1991) national imagined communities or Michael Mann's (1993) class based imaginary realities. The structure of the society, identities, groupings and actions are conceptualised into ideologies such as liberalism, socialism, conservatism and nationalism (Schwartzmantel 1998). Thus, public sphere is a site of political contest where various political forces compete by formulating and defining ideologies and imaginary realities.

On the other hand public sphere and public discussion has also an important role in political system by being a source of political power. Politics can also be understood in the liberal democracies as "a common yet contradictory language of debate and action around the central issue of power" (Furet 1981, 26). As François Furet (1981, 48) points out, politics is a matter of establishing who represents the people: victory belongs to those capable of occupying and keeping that symbolic position. Political power thus resides in the word, in the competing discourses for the appropriation of legitimacy.

For these reasons public sphere has an important role to play when considering the practical survival of liberal democracies: public sphere is the site of political life and legitimisation in modern mass democracies. By keeping public sphere politically alive and kicking, one has done a great deal to keep the political system alive and kicking as well. And *vice versa*: if politics disappear from public places, politics takes place behind the curtains and thus the life and legitimacy of the political system is in jeopardy.

It is thus interesting to see, how the role of the public sphere and public discussion are defined at the time of market liberalisation. In the interviews of the Finnish decision-makers, statements on publicity and public discussion are characterised by negative overtones. Public discussion is perceived as almost dangerous because one has to stick to the common political line when living in the world of the markets. In the era of free international markets the role of the public is a very controversial thing. As one high-level politician states:

Well, it seems to me that living in the market era is much more difficult than living with a regulated economy. If markets are regulated, one can always correct a public statement and issue a new one, but under these circumstances it is not possible any more.

Public discussion is more and more seen as strategic action aimed at convincing the market. Public discussion is thus transformed into a facade or an image, and the message is directed at the markets, not to the citizens. The assumed power of the markets has apparently resulted in inability to discuss issues in public. Another experienced high-level political adviser describes the political culture with regard to public sphere:

The most important decision-makers have a certain cultural code of behaviour which newcomers are informed about when they arrive. It is nothing organised of course, but all governments agree on issues that are confidential or secret, and on issues that are or are not worth telling. People learn by trial and error. Unfortunately many of them have come to the conclusion that a public statement is damaging to their actual work and duties.

Another characteristic aspect of the elite interviews is the common distrust on the rationality of the public life and democracy. Many decision-makers view the public and the media as unable to understand the economy and the issues at stake. To their mind, public life is emotional, irrational and filled with insensible argumentation: It stand almost diametrically to the cool, sensible rationality of the decision-maker. The interviewees do not put great faith on democratic process and public discussion. As a leading politician describes the voters:

Hehheh, ridiculous. First they punch you and take your power away and then they say that you have to lead the country. Hehheh, ridiculous. Would the voters have some kind of responsibility on these issues? Hahahaha.

The “common men” are seen as not very intelligent. Many of the decision-makers openly admit that one cannot speak in public in the way one really thinks. Instead, one has to simplify issues even using “irrational” argumentation, as the public would not be able to understand the real arguments. Many decision-makers see that the “common men,” not the politicians or officials, are largely responsible for the crisis. As the financial markets were deregulated in the 1980s, the problem is not, as the studies have suggested (Honkapohja and Koskela 1998) with the failed monetary and financial policies. Instead there is a strong moral overtone in regard to the people, they have sinned and failed. “The people went mad,” became greedy and believed that they could become rich overnight.

On the whole it looks as though the economic crisis produces a vicious and narrowing circle of public discussion. The elite interviews reveal a discourse, which tries to negate the relevance of public discussion in politics or, alternatively, tries to narrow the scope of public discussion in political decision making. Although the interviews concern mainly the economic crisis, it is clear that as a result of the sobering effect of the crisis the markets have been accepted also as a more general force restricting public political discussion. The markets, especially the international financial markets, are allowed to restrict public discussion and the scope of things that can be discussed. The international economy is seen as an all-powerful force that national politics cannot compete with and which thus restricts the sphere of politically viable alternatives.

A Credo of No Alternative

The conflict between economics and public political life is not a new theme in the theories of public sphere. The usual criticism has been that economic concepts are infringing on free public sphere and restricting free argumentation. For instance Hannah Arendt points out that both Adam Smith and Karl Marx helped to create the concept of a national economy or a social economy in which everyone was seen working for the common good in an organic order. In modern societies, states tend to be transformed into collective economies and the economic sphere

fulfils the public and political spaces in societies. Politics is filled with Darwinist, nationalistic and organic notions of housekeeping (Arendt 1989, 28-49). The public space of *Homo Faber* is not based on free argumentation and discussion but rather on showmanship and sales promotion (Arendt 1989, 160, 210, 305-308).

According to Arendt, the economy creates a private realm that models all human relationships upon the example of the household, the *oikos*. Thus the idea of the economy has invaded the realm of the politics and the public by creating concepts that suggest an organic community to which everyone belongs and in which all have their well-defined place and task (Arendt 1989, 34-35). Habermas (1992, 19) agrees in this sense with Arendt. Economic thinking has created a society with a social nature: people living together because the continuance of their life is dependent on their common work. Thus Habermas (1992, 195, 234) states that the public sphere is becoming feudal again: discussion disappears and a demonstration becomes the central way of appearing in public.

Arendt wants a clear separation between the realm of the economy and public politics, and considers freedom as a central feature of the latter. (Arendt 1989, 34-37, 294-324.) In this sense one could say that her analysis is not quite getting the point. It might be somewhat misleading to try dismiss economy as a separate realm from politics. Her analysis is however useful when understanding the language of economy as part of politics and political public discussions: the power of economic logic when it enters politics. In our contemporary situation the analysis of Arendt and Habermas can be extended towards the internationalising scale of the economy. As the world economy has become more integrated into free capital markets, national public discussion easily becomes reactive and powerless. At least in the smaller countries one can only adjust to the international market forces that seem to restrict domestic politics and political discussions by giving limits to budgets and other economic indicators. In the elite interviews this development is a clear one. Political talk is characterised with notions of the international economy and the economic discipline of the markets reigns over the political and public sphere.

At the same time it seems like the power of politics diminishes hand in hand with the power of public discussion and public sphere. Both politics and public discussion are linked with the irrationality and ignorance of "the people" and thus regarded mainly as harmful and problematic for the rational decision making. Rather one has to rely on the hard facts of economics and adjust oneself to them. There is a widespread suspicion towards as well politics as public discussion, the media and citizens, which is contrasted with the superior, non-publicly practised rationality of the experts.

Interestingly, Andreas Schedler (1997) talks about a phenomenon of antipolitics, something which has emerged in several ways in contemporary societies. He distinguishes "two tribes of antipolitics." First, there are arguments which claim that politics cannot fulfil its function and at the same time aim at removing, abolishing or eliminating politics and closing the public sphere. Second, there are ideas imported from other spheres of action, aiming at conquering, occupying, dominating and distorting politics and colonising the public sphere (Schedler 1997, 14).

One can see this development taking place for instance in the Blair government in Britain, as Tony Blair declares: "I was never really in politics. I never grew up as a politician. I don't feel myself a politician even now. I don't think of myself

as a politician in the sense of being someone whose whole driving force in life is politics." These new forms of political talk could be called as consensual or partyless democracy and, as Peter Mair points out, its main aim is to take "politics" out of government (Mair 2000, 29). Or, as Slavoj Žižek notes, the consensual form of politics is based on a single economic stance of the "tight fiscal policy" of Clintonites or Blairian governance and political differences are reduced to "merely cultural attitudes" (Žižek 2000, 38).

It seems, however, that at least in the light of the Finnish example these antipolitical ideologies have also an *antipublic* character: consensual politics based on economic expertise seem to produce antipublic ideologies. On one hand, *closing* ideologies that aim at removing, abolishing and eliminating public political discussion by claiming that it is irrelevant, irrational or ignorant. On the other hand, *colonising* ideologies that tend to claim that there is no need for public discussion since we already know the "facts" and there is no alternative way of behaving or making decisions.

In the interviews of the Finnish political decision-makers, the market-oriented regime is producing political ideas with strong antipublic dimensions. Economic language colonises the public sphere by defining various political issues in economic terms. Economy is a source of facts, it defines the "real" world and the nature of "reality," and thus gives undeniable facts that are not a political issue but form a distinct realm conditioning politics. Thus the aim of politics is to ensure "a healthy and effective economy" and for example the sole criteria for assessing labour is to see that it is as "effective" as possible without considerations on the local or national historical and cultural structures sustained by local economic activities.

On the other hand economical thinking acts as a closing force in the political discussion and public sphere. In the interviews economic rationality and sensibility is contrasted with politics and public sphere by claiming that the public sphere is irrational, insensible and even dangerous for rational decision making.

Many Finnish decision-makers state that public discussion is not necessary and that it cannot function properly as a way to organise politics. The political force behind this scepticism has to do with the new doctrine of economic liberalism. In the process of "liberating" the market, economic expertise acts as a powerful political force, which seem to claim that the discussion on economy has to be left to the experts. Public discussion is seen as useful when it is helping the people to understand the facts of economics. Or alternatively, public political discussion may take place as long as it understands its economic limits. A credo of no alternative is strongly promoted by the economically knowledgeable: an idea that the current state of affairs cannot be changed or affected by politics or public discussion.

A European Solution?

The European Union is sometimes said to be an answer to the problems of a market gone wild: EU is supposed to govern the economy and help to create common social and employment policies. A central theme in the political discussions on Europe has been the tendency to "reunite" Europe in order to control expanding markets and to enhance political control. Following the argumentation of Polanyi, Arendt and Habermas, one needs to establish political control over the internationalised economy. Along the same line of argumentation, the public sphere

also needs to be internationalised and a new era of an internationalised public sphere should be taking shape.

In practise Europeanisation, as Philip Schlesinger puts it, has been a forceful tendency, which is linked with the emergence of a supranational legal framework, the transnationalisation of media ownership and control in Europe, the differential impact of deregulatory policies and the breaking down of East-West divisions in the post-Cold War era (Schlesinger 1996, 169). In the discussions on the "European" future a European public sphere has been presented as one solution to the disappearing power and legitimacy of political systems. For example Habermas (1999, 58) has suggested that we should start building up a European community by integrating educational systems and learning common languages. Political discussion must be "synchronised" throughout Europe, so that "same issues are discussed at the same time." In order to organise this he demands "a polyglot communicative context" so that the school systems should have a common grounding in foreign languages. Thus: "If that happens, the cultural legacies of a common European history will gradually be brought back together in a common political culture."

However, one needs to look carefully at the developments proposed under the title "European." So far the EU seems to be a mixed blessing in this sense, a story of dreams not quite coming true. Experiences of the formal democracy linked to the EU are not too encouraging. European political systems lean on experts rather than voters and the EU is characterised by a strong emphasis on expert knowledge and administration rather than democracy (Connolly 1995; Roberts and Hogwood 1997).

The main motive behind the European project has been an economic, not for instance a democratic one. Europe has been diagnosed as suffering from Eurosclerosis since the energy crisis of the 1970s and the structural unemployment of the 1980s. A vigorous political will has been developed in order to improve something called "European competitiveness." Illustrative of the political rhetoric linked to the EU is the discourse on international competitiveness (Kasvio and Nieminen 1998, 33-57; Krugman 1997, 69-103) which seeks to transform whole societies into rivalling business units using the same terms one uses when talking about single companies.

In the Finnish context the membership in the EU and EMU brings with it more international economic discipline. The EU aims to control economic policies and harmonise taxation. State budgets are also controlled by a special agreement limiting the amount of public deficit and loans, and the EMU eliminates the possibility to a national monetary policy, which has been a central tool of economic policy in Finland for the last three decades (Kantola and Härkönen 1999, 298). Thus, the impact of the European policies to politics seems to be considerable: the content, vocabulary and conditions of the national political discussion is changed fundamentally in many ways.

With regard to democracy and public discussion the impact of the EU has been felt in many ways. Finland joined the EU in 1995 after a close referendum. In the public discussion in and around the referendum, the Finnish political elite was more or less uniformly politically pro-European and the opponents had a hard time participating in the public discussion on equal terms (Åberg et al. 1996). In the first European elections in 1996, the Finnish voting rate was low compared to na-

tional elections but a reasonably high in the European context, namely 60 percent. In the following elections in 1999, however, the Finnish voting rate dropped alarmingly to 30 percent. Effective political action with notable and concrete results seems difficult to accomplish in the European scale. The EU has remained as remote for the Finnish politics and seems to be burdened by the heavy bureaucracy of the transnational institutions and procedures.

From the Finnish point of view, the restricted publicity of the EU has been a problem for the Finns (Hynninen 2000). Many Finnish journalists feel that the EU is a complex institution and hard to tackle journalistically; 68 percent felt that information is scattered and hard to obtain (Tiedotusvälineiden kokemuksia valtionhallinnon tiedotuksesta 1999, 37). Moreover, in the EU the importance of lobbying as a form of political action seems to be increasing. Political issues are often settled ideally by non-public lobbying, not by public discussion.

Luckily, however, the bad news is not the only news. Some Finnish NGOs note that the EU has improved their access to important information and sources, while others view the EU as a positive force, at least in the questions concerning human rights. Some NGOs see that the EU has encouraged public discussion in Finland, changing the attitudes of the officials toward opening up their information policies (Hynninen, Töyry and Heikkilä 1999). The internationalisation of various NGOs has brought up political issues linked to the environmental impact of the Finnish paper and pulp industries as well as concerns about the links between trade and human rights (Kantola and Härkönen 1999, 301-307). The trade unions have been activated internationally and are raising issues ranging from social security and the role of public sector in society to specific questions such as child labour (Artto 2000).

In the Finnish case the new market regime seems to produce ideas built around an antipolitical and antipublic core. Politics and public life are doomed as old-fashioned compared to economic expertise and effectiveness. Economy and politics seem to oppose each other and economy seems to invade the realms of politics and public. In the light of the Finnish developments market liberalism seems to create a political regime which does not favour political life. As Zygmunt Bauman (2001) has noted, the profound transformations in power relations and in the ability to act have produced a retreat from a public life to professional shelters:

As for the professionals of the ecclesia, there seems to be no reason for them either to visit the agora. After all, they can add little to the debate except further exhortations to take things as they come and bite them on their own, with private knives and dentures supplied by the shops (Bauman 2001, 204).

The Finnish example shows, however, also clearly the contradictory nature of the Europeanisation. On one hand the forces of economic ideology, expertise and bureaucracy are emphasised on the European level while the EU itself seems to be simply too large and complex political unit in order to make voting meaningful. On the other hand, it seems like the new forms of internationalised political action have been set in action and new political actors are finding ways to internationalised politics. Thus, the formally democratic EU seems to be to some extent failing to fulfil its democratic ideals while the "unofficial" civil society is bringing fresh and viable content to politics and to the public sphere.

Sites of Struggle

One solution to these problems of antipolitical and antipublic ideas is to give content to the transnational democracy by politicising issues on a transnational level. When economy and markets are introduced into national politics as an international force that cannot be competed with or questioned, one needs to politicise the workings of the internationalised economy. From this point of view, an important means of reinvigorating democracy is to politicise international issues and thus give democracy substance. In order to achieve this the concept of politics must be redefined in the new international system. Actions and actors that have an effect across national borders need to be politicised in the new system. One needs to politicise issues in areas such as:

- the workings of the transnational business and its social, environmental impact,
- the governance of the international economy, especially international organisations such as IMF, WTO, OECD and to the control of international capital flows such as Tobin tax,
- the international social and environmental policies,
- the decision making processes of the international governance, i.e. in the European Union.

Politics must be pictured as a multiplicity of linkages that operate across political and cultural boundaries including intergovernmental relations as well interconnections between NGOs, social movements and individuals. These tasks of politicising international issues have consequences with regard the public sphere as well: one needs political public spaces on an international level. From this follow various needs linked to the European and transnational public space.

In one hand one needs to have transnational public spheres which have political content. The most important new element of the new political regime seems to be the flourishing connections between non-governmental actors (e.g. Holton 1998, 128-134). This could mean, for instance, transnational political movements organising themselves with the new information technologies and forming new electronic public places to organise political discussions and actions (Downing 2000; Friedland 1996). The actual character of these public spaces could maybe be more issue-based than based on the idea of whole political sphere participating in the discussion. Public spaces could be developed and opened up in connection with political action and possibly connected to specific political questions.

This development, however, has limitations that need to be taken seriously. One needs to consider especially the role of the state in modern political systems. Modern politics, democracy and public discussion have been linked with the idea of the modern state. Nationalism has been a central constitutional ideology with regard to the formation of modern political communities as well as public spaces (Anderson 1991; Elias 1989; Gellner 1983; 1987).

One needs to keep this in mind when considering the Europeanisation project. As nation states loose their political power to the markets, the whole political system of liberal democracy is in jeopardy. While the ideal of democracy may have worked somehow in a small *polis* and maybe in national level, the prospect of a common European political space seems to be uncertain as the practise of democracy in a meaningful way becomes more and more difficult. An Andersonian im-

aged community as a working political community is difficult, if not impossible, to establish on an international level. It has to be noted that this community does not need to be only crudely nationalistic, but also the ideas of liberal democracy can be understood as an ideology of an imagined community. Liberal democracy can act as an ideology through which one belongs to a public democratic community and has an identity of a citizen who can participate on common affairs through political discussion and action.

In the light of the Finnish case, it is quite hard to see how the European level could create the requisite conditions for a global domestic politics (Habermas 1999, 48.) On the contrary, the hopes for international democracy seem to be weakening as the European system develops. The negative tones of the Finnish elites in the interviews could, as a matter of fact, be interpreted as a symptom of frustration in the face of internationalising political system. One could state that the internationalising scale of politics is probably one reason for their scepticism on the possibilities of politics and public discussion. Politics proper, to their mind, take place in far away places that cannot be understood by “normal” people.

Thus looking at the European developments so far, it seems unlikely that the vision Habermas (1999) put forth will work: that Europe will not — in the foreseeable future anyway — develop into a full-scale political community similar to national communities. The national media is likely serve as an important arena for public politics and national public spheres will still remain important sites of political contest.

Maybe the most important lesson at the moment is that a democratic political system is not something one can build up by creating seemingly democratic institutions. Democracy is born in anchored into identities and ideas in the minds of people. For a working democracy one needs real questions and struggles, one also needs ideologies that give an opportunity for relevant and meaningful choices, i.e. politics. Although economy has become transnational, a formal transnational democracy is not a simple solution and, as the Finnish case shows, can be a very problematic.

Michael Mann offers a mediating point of view. According to him, states have been central for the modern world since they have organised wars, created an infrastructure of communication for capitalism and militarism, created a place for political democracy as well as guaranteed social citizenship and invented macroeconomic planning. Mann sees that some of these activities can be taken over by international institutions. This does not mean, that the state has to disappear altogether. As Mann puts it, nation state is not the only institution of the political and at the same time it cannot be ruled out as an old-fashioned matter (Mann 1994, 123-125).

Thus, there is not only a need for a European public sphere, but also a need for European public spheres as sites of political contest in order to keep politics and democracy alive at the time of transnational economy. The international spaces of public action can help to formulate an internationalised political will but they also can act as channels of ideas and political contest for the national public which still will most probably stay the main level of political public discussion in Europe.

Instead of choosing either a national or a European public, we need to see the public sphere as more linked to politics: a public sphere linked to political strug-

gles. The public sphere is thus not a free floating space, but rather a site of struggle filled with structured ways of doing things in a specific social, cultural and historical context; a space structured by relations of power. It thus follows that if one wants to understand the role of the public sphere in a political system one needs to look at the political forces as well as the structures of political power in action. For instance Hannu Nieminen (2000, 173) suggests that we should analyse the forms of political *publicness*, things such as: who is entitled to public representation and how are they selected, how are issues selected and controlled, what are the procedural preconditions for valid public claims, and, finally, how are social relations displayed and how this process of public mediation is controlled.

At the moment it seems like the most popular ideas to characterise the public sphere in the new situation come at this point from the ideas of civil society which seem to gain popular acceptance (see Fairclough 2000, 79; Clarke, Newman 1997, 123-139). These ideas of the civil society are reflected in many theories of the public, which see it as an independent arena for public opinion building. The concept of civic as well as public journalism is very closely connected to the ideas of civil society. These notions, however valuable, can also be problematic. Often they fail to grasp the political structures of a particular society. The political system and formal decision making are somehow seen as not important or even non-existent. There is relatively little mention of the structures of power and governance, political systems and politics, struggle and conflict.

Thus the theory of the public sphere should be developed from an image of a loving community towards a site of political struggle. We need to examine specific political situation and consider the political forces and struggles at work in order to understand the developments of public spaces. The actual politics of public sphere need to be studied as a particular, historically, socially and culturally structured situation. We need to see how public life is linked to the structures of society, and how the public life is embedded in society, in this case in its structures of political power and in its political struggles: how various political powers aim at colonising or closing the public sphere.

This is a time for examining politics and democracy very carefully. How can they be maintained in connection with the public? How can politics survive in public spaces? In the context of the European public space, we need to ask, critically, once again: in what sense do we need a European public sphere, who needs it, to say what, to whom, and with what effect to our political systems?

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