

TECH1502 Introduction to Community Media

Lecture Six – Civic Representation

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1 Introduction – Civic Participation

“Citizenship is not a spectator sport” (Putnam, 2000, p. 341).

“The old, in other words, is bending the Net to protect itself against the new. The concern now is that if ‘the future’ is here, then it is beginning to look a lot like the recent past” (Rennie, 2006, p. 163).

1.1 Globalised Communities

“What exactly is community within the vast, decentred, and global terrain of Internet content? Does the Internet’s potential for participation at the edges (with no central control) mean that it is the perfect domain for community expression?” (Rennie, 2006, p. 164).

“Its facilitation of communication in real time, the formal and informal congregation of users according to their interests, the end-to-end technical design – all of this makes it the technological platform with a seemingly natural affinity for the spaces, groups, and networks of civil society. Early impressions of the Internet led to expressions of this sentiment” (Rennie, 2006, p. 164).

2 The Public Sphere

“The public’s capacity to participate in decision-making processes in an informed and deliberative fashion is severely compromised. Herein lies the great threat to democratic societies by corporate-controlled and commercially sponsored media” (Howley, 2005, p. 18). (Howley, 2005, p. 18).

“To be effective, however, democratic communication demands active and engaged civic participation” (Howley, 2005, p. 19).

2.1 Emerging Public Space

“The public sphere that emerges in the eighteenth century is a metaphorical common space” (Etzioni, 1995, p. 190).

“Habermas defines the public sphere as a space open to all comers where participants relate as equals engaging in rational debate apart from the instrumental demands of business and economic survival and free from interference by state authority” (Burrell, 2012, p. 107).

2.2 Jürgen Habermas

“The concept of the public sphere, as described by Jürgen Habermas, provides a robust theoretical framework to examine the crucial link between democratic self-governance and communication. Habermas (1993) argues that the public sphere is the foundation for civil society; it is a forum for the citizenry to reach consensus on the issues and policy decisions that affect public life. In Habermas’ formulation, the public sphere is a realm, insulated from the deleterious influence of state and commercial interests, in which citizens openly and rationally discuss, debate, and deliberate upon matters of mutual and general concern to a self-governing community. Isolated or ‘bracketed’ from both state and market forces, this public sphere is the space in which a public comes to understand and define itself, articulate its needs and common concerns, and act in the collective self-interest. In short, it is a space in which a social aggregate become a public” (Howley, 2005, p. 19).

2.3 Robust Public Sphere

“According to Habermas, an effective and robust public sphere depends on two conditions: the quality of discursive practices and the quantity of participation within this discourse. The first requirement calls for rational-critical debate based not on the speaker’s identity or social standing, but upon the reasoned and logical merits of an argument. The second requirement entails opening

up the debate to the widest public possible and encouraging the inclusion of competing opinions and perspectives” (Howley, 2005, p. 19).

“The threat to the public sphere, as Habermas sees it, is the encroachments of the state and commercial interests into this realm. Habermas observes that as the public sphere shrinks, there is a marked increase in political apathy, a relentless pursuit of economic and material self-interests, and a rising tide of cynicism and social alienation” (Howley, 2005, p. 19).

2.4 Democratic Media Cultures

“The concept of the public sphere has enormous relevance for the ongoing project of building and sustaining a more democratic media culture... As the nature of citizenship changes in an increasingly integrated world, the question of who deliberates has enormous implications... There is relatively scant popular participation in this deliberative process” (Howley, 2005, p. 20).

“Habermas (1992) reworked his concept of the public sphere, recognising not only the existence of multiple public spheres, but also their capacity for challenging hegemonic views” (Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpenter, 2008, p. 85).

“The public sphere – the realm of newspapers, businesses, voluntary institutions, and the arts (not to mention individuals) – is one realm that lies to a large degree outside the direct control of the state” (Etzioni, 1995, p. 10).

“The public sphere is a central feature of modern society. So much so, that even where it is in fact suppressed or manipulated, it has to be faked” (Charles Taylor in Etzioni, 1995, p. 186).

2.5 Active Citizenship

“The democratisation of media allows citizens to be active in one of many (micro-) spheres relevant to daily life, to organise different forms of deliberation, and to exert their rights to communicate” (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 24).

“Jo Freeman (1972-73) presents seven ‘principles of democratic structuring’: (1) the delegation of authority; (2) taking responsibility for the authority; (3) the distribution of authority; (4) the rotation of tasks; (5) the allocation of tasks along rational criteria; (6) the diffusion of information; and (7) equal access to resources (pp. 163-164)” (Atton, 2002, p. 101).

2.6 Sustainable Communication

“Good communication is particularly relevant in order to sustain and practice effective forms of participatory democracy based on the transformation of preferences... Communicative practices are essential in the achievement of satisfactory instances of participatory and deliberative democracy within social movement networks” (Porta & Mattoni, 2013, p. 175).

“Marginal actors in representative democracy, social movements acquire instead more and more relevance in (participatory) conceptions of counter-democracy, as they contribute to the creation of critical public spheres” (Porta & Mattoni, 2013, p. 178)

2.7 Cultivating Values

“The best way to keep the public sphere functioning is to encourage what might best be described as principled decentralisation. That is, communities, institutions, and individuals have a responsibility to cultivate a variety of different venues so that alternative voices are expressed. At the same time these venues must maintain open frontiers with one another and with the larger public sphere. In this way pragmatic coalitions can be built around common goals where an overlapping consensus has been established. Without such as commitment decentralisation can only lead to Babel and,

ultimately, Balkanisation” (Etzioni, 1995, p. 11).

“What do I mean by a public sphere? I want to describe it as a common space in which the members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and also face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these” (Charles Taylor in Etzioni, 1995, p. 185).

3 Third Sector

“Elsewhere I have argued that the democratic structures and participatory ethos associated with community media enable local communities to articulate relations of solidarity and significance through a variety of communicative forms and practices (Howley, 2005)” (Howley, 2010, p. 9).

“These early descriptions of the Internet saw it as a realm immune from control, as if the Internet were the perfect public sphere where people could organise into communities without the restrictions of time and space that have encumbered traditional communities” (Rennie, 2006, p. 164).

“The Internet was not the product of uncorrupted ‘hippy artisanship,’ but of a combined effort from private industry, government and civil society groups and individual pioneers. Those that warn of ‘certain economic, political, and legislative trends that threaten to convert the Internet into yet another commercial medium, stripped of its unique potential for facilitating progressive political debate and transformation, often ignore its history” (Rennie, 2006, p. 165).

3.1 Third Sector Governance

“Without the mechanisms of governance – licencing, regulation, incorporation – that clearly define community broadcasting as belonging within the third sector, it is difficult to identify exactly what on the Internet can be considered community media” (Rennie, 2006, p. 166).

“Communities that utilise the Internet negotiate their own terms and boundaries more often than not. Resources and enthusiasm determine their presence on the Net but their activity is not enshrined by application to bureaucratic authority. The internet involves a different idea of access than that discussed so far” (Rennie, 2006, p. 166).

3.2 Enactment of Citizenship

“Accordingly, Rodriguez evaluates citizen’s media as significant sites for the enactment of citizenship, where the social subjects negotiate and renegotiate social definitions, their identities, cultures, and lifestyles, on the personal as well as on the collective level. ‘Citizens have to enact their citizenship on a day-to-day basis, through their participation in everyday political practice” (Howley, 2010, p. 37).

4 Access Media

“Community media is created out of the belief that civil society requires communication platforms – the two are, in this respect, mutually dependent” (Rennie, 2006, p. 35).

“Access cannot help but sound like a challenge or a demand – it is the opposite of exclusion and alienation, and yet it is also a recognition that these dynamics exist” (Rennie, 2006, p. 167).

“The difficulty of community broadcasting comes not from its ambitions to change wider patterns of ownership and control, but that it is made to exist within overall policy arrangements that are antithetical to its design” (Rennie, 2006, p. 167).

4.1 Citizens Access

“What in the past has been a politically ambiguous word (more of a political process and a tool than a system of governance), ‘access’ has come to describe a new type of politics” (Rennie, 2006, p. 167).

“This policy approach argues that open and accessible communications platforms are the most guaranteed pathway to the development of new ideas – and for the reinvigoration of political life” (Rennie, 2006, p. 168).

“A number of changes in the public initiatives that are deemed necessary for enhancing take-up and citizens participation. In particular, five main conditions have been identified:

- Access
- Awareness
- Skills
- Motivation
- Representation” (Ferro & Molinari, 2010, p. 12).

4.2 Digital Divide

“In terms of Access, the main changes should be towards a more extended concept of digital divide.. . Regarding Awareness, traditional dissemination actions... should be integrated with specific initiatives on Web 2.0, making use of innovative techniques like viral marketing or tools like mash-ups and other online gadgets to be integrated with social network platforms... As far as Skills are concerned, though it may seem odd in a 2.0 logic, we think appropriate to remind of the value that education and training may play with respect to social inclusion for certain categories of individuals (Unplugged)... Concerning Motivation,... ‘co-creation’ between government and citizens emerges together with tailoring of existing solutions as a powerful driver of attraction for take-up and participation... As far as Representation is concerned... representation becomes the main and only condition for enabling uptake, also for those social categories – like the Connected and particularly the Unplugged – where this has to be made possible by a combination of awareness and education efforts” (Ferro & Molinari, 2010, p. 12).

5 Centralisation

“The nightmare scenario is a hypercentralised government, existing in a space of powerful elite-run lobbies and national television networks, each as impervious as the others to input from local sources. But this drift can be offset by a double decentralisation, toward regional societies and nested public spheres, which can mediate the input from masses of ordinary citizens, who otherwise feel excluded from everything but the periodic national elections” (Charles Taylor in Etzioni, 1995, p. 208).

5.1 Heterogeneity

“It requires the development of significantly new policy intelligence skills as well as the implementation of articulated public programmes that are capable to deal with the complexity and the heterogeneity present among actors involved in this process (citizens, businesses, government agencies, etc....)” (Ferro & Molinari, 2010, p. 13).

“Enter into public discourse, thereby supporting popular participation in decision-making processes and promoting a greater sense of individual and collective agency in directing the community’s growth and development” (Howley, 2010, p. 16).

6 The Open Source Commons

“The technical initiatives of open source and end-to-end design can be credited with having the Internet the unusually accessible and participatory communications platform that it is” (Rennie, 2006, p. 168).

“For Lessig, the Internet is a commons in which no one has ‘the exclusive right to choose whether the resource is made available to others.’ It is akin to a public park or beach that anyone can access or a language that anyone can learn without having to seek permission. The commons is a resource that is held ‘in common,’ and the Internet, due to its technical architecture, is seen as the ultimate example of this” (Rennie, 2006, p. 170).

6.1 Unfinished & Open Processes

“For Meikle, conversational forms of interactivity are ‘unfinished.’ The unfinished nature of this interactivity means that it allows others to add to existing works and so continue the creative process” (Rennie, 2006, p. 171).

“As with Lessig, Meikle sees the possibility of a future with new ideas and democratic potential as residing in the existence of open (rather than closed) systems, in the particular end-to-end technology, and in open source software” (Rennie, 2006, p. 171).

“When partnered with a commons-style notion of access, the communitarian ideal is transformed into a more dispersed, random, and inclusive idea of the good life” (Rennie, 2006, p. 173).

6.2 Information Access

“‘What a democratic society requires above all is access to information and knowledge, but also corresponding open forums and spaces in which this knowledge can be produced, distributed, discussed and published’ (Tremetzberger, 2003, p.53)” (Howley, 2010, p. 54).

6.3 Group Joining

“Digital tools have the capability of lowering the costs of group-formation, group-joining, and information-sharing to nearly nothing. Social media networks also make it easier for members of such groups to agree upon ideas and courses of action, and dividing the labour accordingly. By lowering the cost of contribution, they make it more likely that individuals will participate in one of the many ways afforded by the technologies themselves” (Faris & Meier, 2013, p. 199).

7 Multiple Publics

“Policy approaches that see to uphold the new public interest are important for community broadcasting as they admit the existence of multiple publics – something that has always been a feature of the community media rationale” (Rennie, 2006, p. 173).

“Community activity is but one part of a wider innovation system, but it is a necessary part. Amateur activity, as well as the activity of groups such as Catalyst (based upon stimulating greater social good), provide spaces from which new ideas can emerge. Economic outcomes may flow from some of this activity. The commons argument requires that we look more closely at the relationship of community to the market and to recognise that they are interconnected” (Rennie, 2006, p. 175).

7.1 Open Publics

“The public has no formal structure, no leaders, no rites or rules of membership, no objectives, no charter, no dues, but it is undeniably real. And facelessness is a requirement for admission; we think of ourselves as being part of the public precisely when we’re appealing to that which we have in

common with others” (Weinberger, 2002, p. 98).

7.2 Common Resources

“In a commons, the resource is shared according to established use and customs. Therefore, the commons need not be seen as a radically new concept or one that is free from rule” (Rennie, 2006, p. 175).

“The commons argument places the Internet firmly within a framework of rights and social guarantees, long established in Western democracies, using property arrangements to achieve that” (Rennie, 2006, p. 175).

7.3 Threat of Multiple Public Spheres

“On the political role of minority media, we argue that multiple public spheres are indeed vital to plural societies, but the proliferation of ‘subaltern counter-spheres’ does not lead to multiplication of political forces, nor do they in themselves provide the conditions for social inclusion” (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 95).

“The threat to the corporate world is not that the Internet commons seeks to eliminate property and ownership, but that it provides a basis for a revision of how the system of property is managed. It asserts that society has changed and therefore the fundamentals of economic exchange and law must follow suit” (Rennie, 2006, p. 176).

7.4 Applied Expertise

“Community media’s attempts to influence policy makers can be considered as part of the current mobilisation for communications justice. Specifically, community media activists ground their advocacy interventions in their daily practices of grassroots communication and derive legitimacy as social actors in policy arenas from their ‘applied’ expertise” (Milan, 2010, p. 308).

“There are too many publics and too much of public concern for our existing resources to cope with. The problem of a democratically organised public is primarily and essentially an intellectual problem, in a degree to which the political affairs of prior ages offer no parallel” (Dewey, 2016, p. 157).

7.5 Determined Consequences

“Roughly speaking, tools and implements determine occupations, and occupations determine the consequences of associated activity. In determining consequences they institute publics with different interests, which exact different types of political behaviour to care for them” (Dewey, 2016, p. 92).

“The ramification of the issues before the public is so wide and intricate, the technical matters involved are so specialised, the details are so many and so shifting, that the public cannot for any length of time identify and hold itself. It is not that there is no public, no large body of persons having a common interest in the consequences of social transactions. There is too much public, a public too diffused and scattered and too intricate in composition. And there are too many publics, for conjoint actions which have indirect, serious and enduring consequences are multitudinous beyond comparison, and each one of them crosses the others and generates its own group of persons especially affected with little to hold these different publics together in an integrated whole” (Dewey, 2016, p. 166).

8 Community Benefits

“The commons is a useful construct for understanding and implementing community media. It is a

means to achieve access to a resource with a system of management that benefits the community rather than carves up the resource into allotments for private gain. And it allows for experimentation, sharing, and collaboration without the hindrance of restrictive, profit motivated rules and technologies” (Rennie, 2006, p. 176).

“Conceptually, it asks us to see community media as a legitimate system that can be used to stimulate innovation. It defines community media positively, for what it can achieve, rather than negatively by what it opposes” (Rennie, 2006, p. 176).

“Community-based media still fits better with commons theory than notions of the public interest being met only through monopoly or oligopoly public service broadcasters” (Rennie, 2006, p. 177).

8.1 Emerging Worlds

“In the emerging world of Internet-enabled communication, obfuscations and lies will work even less well than before. Activists and informed customers will catch the cheaters and hold them accountable” (Gillmor, 2006, p. 68).

“Participation, frames in contrast to the mass media, has always been used as a justification for community media, but this has been overlooked in the commons argument. Community media proves that innovation arising out of open networks is not restricted to the Internet, but possible on any platform where a commons can be established” (Rennie, 2006, p. 177).

“Blogs can be acts of civic engagement” (Gillmor, 2006, p. 68).

“Community media is a multi-platform phenomenon that often finds innovative ways to reach its audience” (Rennie, 2006, p. 179).

8.2 Sympathetic Involvement

“We’re sharing the new world of the Web because that’s the type of creature we are. We are sympathetic, thus moral. We are caring, thus social. These are sympathetic, thus moral. We are caring, thus social. These facts are easy to miss in the real world where we can blame space and geography for our involvement with others. On the Web we have no one to blame but ourselves” (Weinberger, 2002, p. 195).

“When it comes down to it, citizens’ media facilitate issues of access, self-representation, participation, and the democratisation of mediated communication at the same time as they advance the principles of societal diversity, discursive multiplicity, and pluralistic democracy in significant ways” (Howley, 2010, p. 38).

9 Changing Technologies

“Although the way in which we view community media may change as technologies become more participative, the notion of community itself becomes more relevant” (Rennie, 2006, p. 180).

“Though some of these platforms have already crumbled or mutated beyond recognition, each represented a significant step forward in the ability of citizens to share, annotate, publish, and remix digital information” (Delwiche & Henderson, 2013, p. 6).

“How new sites of communication, such as social change Web sites, blogs, online art, or video upload sites, connect to existing democratic communication flows?” (Barker-Plummer & Dorothy Kidd Howley, 2010, p. 325).

9.1 Fruitful Relationships

“Community is both a means to the development of fruitful relationships that may extend and

enhance networks and information flows, and that which contributes value to this new social configuration” (Rennie, 2006, p. 180).

“Television at its civic best can be a gathering place, a powerful force for bridging social differences, nurturing solidarity, and communicating essential civic information” (Putnam, 2000, p. 243).

“Community plays a vital role in the maintenance of networks and social relations within the network society, but, more importantly, it makes it worthwhile. However, as people’s participation in the media increases, community media as a concept may change or fade” (Rennie, 2006, p. 181).

10 Future Definitions

“The words ‘community media’ could be substituted for that of ‘activism’ and the point would still be the same – that participation may become so commonplace that people will not be aware that they are changing the traditional structures of the media” (Rennie, 2006, p. 181).

“How will community media be defined when participation is as much a characteristic of the mainstream media? The line between community media and other media may cease to exist” (Rennie, 2006, p. 181).

10.1 More Tools

“As a society, we cannot simply design more civic tools, without offering participants more meaningful choices” (Stokes, 2013, p. 144).

“As long as the media is not an open resource, community media is an important category by which to ensure that participation exists” (Rennie, 2006, p. 182).

10.2 Differences & Values

“Not every difference has the same value, and some lifestyles and forms of community are ethically more praiseworthy than others; we won’t find out which, however, if both sides are not given equal rights to present their arguments and prove their points” (Bauman, 2011, p. 93).

“Without social rights for all, a large number of people – and a number likely to grow – will find their political rights useless and unworthy of their attention. If political rights are necessary to set social rights in place, social rights are indispensable to keep political rights in operation. The two rights need each other for their survival; that survival can only be their joint achievement” (Bauman, 2007, p. 66).

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