

Call for papers

International Workshop

Transformations in the digital age #1: Transformation of the public sphere

Hildesheim University, 25/26 April 2019

Conveners:

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One of the main assumptions about the impact of Internet and social media points to a (more or less significant) transformation of the public sphere. The literature however provides us with competing views on the direction and the quality of this transformation: Against the backdrop of decreasing trust in the institutions and processes of modern democracies, digital technologies have repeatedly been loaded with hopes for increasing citizen engagement and participation through a broad range of democratic innovations. In this vein, social media would have a mobilizing and empowering impact enabling citizens to interact with each other or with politicians circumventing other institutionalized channels of communication including journalists as gate-keepers. In the best form, this could lead to broad and inclusive deliberation. On the other hand, such optimistic scenarios have been countered by more pessimistic outlooks like the fragmentation and atomization of the public sphere and the creation of filter bubbles and echo chambers. This perspective would include the discourse hegemony of some few as well as the potential of manipulation. Besides this normatively loaded debate, other open questions refer to aspects like the possibility of a transnational public sphere based on online-connectivity, the quality of public deliberation and new forms of networked publics.

Authors are invited to present theoretical and conceptual papers as well as empirical studies (a comparative perspective is welcome). Exemplary questions that could be addressed are the following:

- Is there an increase of deliberation through digital media? What are the findings on quantity and quality of online political deliberation?
- Public sphere is a concept related to rational argumentation. What does the increasing emotionalization of communication in social media mean for this approach?
- Which consequences will the increasing blurring of public sphere and privacy have for politics and society? To which new forms of interaction and communication does this lead?
- Which transformative effects can be observed on media systems, political news provision and consumption?
- Is there an increased fragmentation of the public sphere observable (filter bubbles, echo chambers)? And what are the mechanisms of these filter bubbles and echo chambers?
- Which role has the demand of a high degree of transparency for the transformation of the public sphere?

- Is there increasing transnational communication activity which might lead to the emergence of transnational (mini-)publics?
- Which effect do surveillance, security risks and manipulation do have on democratic publics in Europe?

The workshop shall be the start of a series of events on “transformations in the digital age”, organized by an international network of academic institutions, including LUISS University in Rome, Sciences Po in Paris, Hildesheim University, University of Perugia, USI in Lugano, the University of Urbino and the University of Prague. The first workshop will take place at the Center for Digital Change at Hildesheim University on 25 and 26 April 2019. The workshop is supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) within the program framework “University dialogue with Southern Europe”. Due to this support, all travel and accommodation expenses of active participants from the following five countries will be covered: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. For all other participants, accommodation expenses will be covered as well.

The deadline for proposals (including name, affiliation, email address and an abstract of max. 300 words) is 31 January 2019. Please send your proposals by email to the local organizers (see below).

The conveners plan to organize a publication (special issue). Therefore, we ask for full papers (no more than 50,000 characters), submitted by 12 April 2019. The papers for the publication will be selected by the conveners.

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