Adequate Information Management in Europe

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D 6: Theory Building
"European Identity Building/ European Public Sphere"

Erich-Brost-Institute
Centre of Advanced Study in International Journalism

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Introduction

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One of the overall objectives of the research project *Adequate Information Management in Europe* (AIM) is to investigate the media's impact on the emergence of (a) European public sphere or spheres in empirical, theoretical, and practical dimensions.

To give consideration to the complexity of this objective, researchers from different countries, different disciplines and schools of thought participate in the AIM project. In total, researchers from eleven countries (Belgium, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, and the United Kingdom) take part, from the fields of journalism and communication studies, and political and social sciences. Among the schools of thought involved, there is a range from pragmatic empiricism, from holistic social theories to those of structural analysis based on a wide and varying spectrum of traditions and cultures of theoretical analysis concerning journalism cultures in the participating countries.

After a number of most energetic brain-storming exercises and discussions designed to arrive at a coherent concept for a theory of (a) European public sphere(s) based on the projects achievements, so far, it emerges that such cohesiveness is, at this stage, out of reach for the international project team. However, this is considered as a challenge in itself. The discovery, hence, has been that instead of trying to arrive at a kind of 'heads on' single theory, it might, indeed, be fruitful to discover insights on a meta-theoretical level. This could imply an analysis of the essential ingredients of existing theoretical approaches of (a) European public sphere(s) – including those being developed out of the project itself. It is with this prospect in mind that the consortium agreed to publish its first theoretical insights step by step, and on a singular basis. This procedure also aims at providing the research community with a solid basis for further discussions. In this way, the theoretical debate within the overall project has the opportunity to link to the existing general debates emanating from other projects and research groups, while, nevertheless, following the idea of critical analysis on a meta-theoretical level.

The consortium, thus, regards the diversity of approaches within the project, as well as outside, as an adequate basis for long-term future work on mutually complementing theories of such a complex topic,[1] Thus, this paper presents, after a short and non-exhaustive introduction to the existing research on European public sphere(s), a first set of articles, derived from the debate on theoretical approaches within the consortium.

These articles are written by the AIM researchers, Gerd G. Kopper (Professor at the Journalism Institute at Dortmund University and Founding Director of the Erich-Brost-Institute), Peter Golding (Professor of Sociology and Head of the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University), as well as Heikki Heikkilä (Research Fellow at the Journalism Research Development Centre at the University of Tampere) and Risto Kunelius (Professor in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Tampere), and illustrate the variety of different approaches within the project. Within the context of the project's aims and results to date, Golding examines the existence of certain factors necessary for the development of a European public sphere, while Heikkilä & Kunelius examine the discourses of journalists concerning the EU and their work, in order to further inform the theoretical debates and thoughts on the public sphere.

1. The term *public sphere* and the scientific debate about (a) European public sphere(s)

The term *public sphere* is often related to Jürgen Habermas' main work "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere", which was published in Germany in 1962, but was not available in English until 1989. Kleinsteuber (2001, 2004) describes the problems of translating the German term *Öffentlichkeit* into English and the relationship between the terms *Öffentlichkeit* and *public sphere*. According to him (2001: 96), the terms *openness* or *openicity* would have been more ac-

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[1] The diversity of approaches is illustrated, for example, by the state-of-the-art-reports of the participating countries. These reports are published on the website of the AIM project. ULR: http://www.aim-project.net/index.php?id=85 Additionally, all reports are listed in the bibliography at the end of this paper.

curate translations. Nevertheless, the English translation of Habermas' work (1989 [1962]) inspired lively theoretical discussions about the concept of the public sphere in the international academic world (Kleinsteuber 2004: 32-35).[2]

Today, a wide range of different approaches to the concept of European public sphere(s) have developed,[3] and several research projects analyse various aspects related to the concept of European public sphere(s): Some researchers deal with the constitutional process of the EU, with the question of legitimacy of European governance, and with questions of citizenship[4] (Fossum/Trenz 2005, 2006; Liebert/Falke/Maurer 2006) and citizens' involvement and political participation at the European level.[5] Others investigate the Europeanisation of political mobilisation and communication[6] (Diez Medrano 2003; Klein et al. 2003; Koopmans/Erbe 2004; Koopmans et al. 2005; Della Porta/Caiani 2006; Statham 2006; Statham/Gray 2005); or the transnationalization of public spheres in Europe[7] (Brüggemann 2005; Brüggemann et al. 2006; Peters et al. 2005; Sifft et al. 2006; Wimmel 2004, 2005). Other researchers focus on circumstances under which responsibility for political action is publicly attributed to the EU by mass media[8] (Gerhards/Offerhaus/Roose 2005); on the role of the media in the emergence of a

European public sphere and the connections between the media, public sphere, and ethics[9] (Schulz-Forberg 2005, 2006); or on questions of European and national identities[10] (Spohn 2005; Stråth 2002).

2. The function of a public sphere in democratic states

In the discussion about the concept of European public sphere(s), two theories of democracy have become prominent:[11] a liberal-representative theory of democracy, and a deliberative-discursive one. As these theories have different normative concepts of the functions a public sphere should fulfil in a democracy, there are at least two normative concepts of an ideal public sphere: a liberal-representative model and a deliberative-discursive model of public sphere.

The liberal-representative model of public sphere

According to the liberal-representative model, a public sphere should function in creating transparency, ensure the mutual observation of government and governed citizens, and also enable the citizens to control the government (Latzer/Saurwein 2006: 12-13): In a democratic system, political decisions are to be related to the interest and will of the citizens. As this usually happens through elections, it is important to keep the citizens informed about political actors, their actions and their programmes. In mass democracies, these functions of the public sphere – spreading information, enabling the formation of opinion, and control of the government – are mainly undertaken by mass media (Gerhards 2002: 137-138).

An ideal public sphere from this perspective involves elected representatives – who compete with each other for the citizens' affirmation – communicating their opinions, and also where political processes and decisions are reflected as precisely as possible (Gerhards 2002: 139). Empirical studies of European public sphere(s) in the tradition of this theory of democracy thus often analyse the degree of EU coverage of mass

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[2] There are, for example, several English books on Habermas' work (e.g. Outhwaite 1994, 1996; Calhoun 1992), and several media scholars have contributed significantly to the thinking on the public sphere and the media in Great Britain (e.g. Curran 1991; Garnham 1990, 1992; Keane 1991, 1998; Scannell 1989; Sparks 1998; Schlesinger 1999) – even though the debate there has not been very intense according to Golding (2005).

[3] As it is thus not feasible to give a comprehensive account of the current state of European research on European public sphere in this short introduction, a few anthologies, books, and articles are listed instead to illustrate the variety of European approaches: See for example the German anthologies by Franzius/Preuß (2004); Hagen (2004); Kopper (1997); and Langenbucher/Latzer (2006); the French works of Abélès (1994); Dacheux (2003); Mercier (2003); and also the works of Marchetti (2004); and Le Torrec/Garcia (2003). For Norwegian research related to European public sphere, Allern (2005) mentioned three authors he regarded as especially relevant: Skogerbø (1996); Slaatta (1999); and Eriksen (2004). An overview of existing empirical studies of EU coverage of media is provided by Machill/Beiler/Fischer (2006).

[4] *Building the EU's Social Constituency: Exploring the Dynamics of Public Claims-Making and Collective Representation in Europe* (http://www2.hu-berlin.de/struktur/constituency/Inhalt/kurzbeschreibung.htm) and *ConstEPS: Citizenship and Constitution: Transformations of the Public Sphere in East- and West-European Integration* (http://www.monnet-centre.uni-bremen.de/projects/consteps/index.html).

[5] *Diversity and the European Public Sphere: Towards a Citizens' Europe* (http://www.svf.uib.no/sfu/imer/research/eurosphere.htm).

[6] *EUROPUB.COM: The Transformation of Political Mobilisation and Communication in European Public Spheres* (http://europub.wz-berlin.de/Default.htm).

[7] *The Transnationalization of Public Spheres in Europe* (http://www.sfb597.uni-bremen.de/publicsphere/).

[8] *The European Union and the Attribution of Responsibility in Mass Media* (http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/%7Egerhards/proj_eu_verantwortung.html).

[9] *EMEDIATE: Media and Ethics of a European Public Sphere from the Treaty of Rome to the "War on Terror"* (http://www.iue.it/RSCAS/Research/EMEDIATE/).

[10] *EURONAT: Representations of Europe and the Nation in Current and Prospective Member-States: Media, Élites and Civil Society* (http://www.iue.it/RSCAS/Research/EURONAT).

[11] For further details see for example Fischer (2004: 10); Gerhards (2002); or Latzer/Saurwein (2006).

media and the structures that hamper or promote this coverage (Latzer/Saurwein 2006: 13).

The deliberative-discursive model of public sphere

The deliberative-discursive model is, according to Gerhards (2002: 138), related to Habermas' (1992) notion of *autochthoner* and *vermachteter Öffentlichkeit*[12] and can be differentiated from the liberal-representative model with regard to the following three aspects: the participants of the public sphere, the form of the communication process, and the results of this process. According to the deliberative-discursive model, the public sphere should not serve only to create transparency, but also to include actors of civil society and citizens, and to initiate common learning processes. The form of the communication process is regarded to be very important: the process should be discursive, deliberative; a dialogue based on mutual respect, the exchange of rational arguments, aimed at forming a common opinion or even a consensus (Latzer/Saurwein 2006: 14).
An ideal public sphere in this regard includes actors of civil society, is based on a mutual exchange of arguments, and enables deliberation processes that bring communication partners to approximate their opinions or find a consensus (Gerhards 2002: 139).

With regard to the development of (a) European public sphere(s), research following this model mainly focuses on structural conditions for, and practical experiences with, transnational communication and discourses about European topics, and on the quality of these communication processes (Latzer/Saurwein 2006: 14).

Due to the diverse functions that are attributed to a public sphere in a democracy by the various theories of democracy, there is not, and cannot be, a single normative model of an ideal European public sphere at present (Latzer/Saurwein 2006: 15).

3. Three models of (a) European public sphere(s)

When applied to the European level, not only are there different normative expectations with regard to the functions of a public sphere, but also various concepts about the ways European public sphere(s) might possibly develop, about the factors that indicate the existence, the degree and also the form of such (a) European public sphere(s) (Latzer/Sauerwein 2006: 16).

Mainly two models of European public sphere(s) are discussed: the development of a common European-wide public sphere and the Europeanisation of national public spheres. (See for example Fischer 2004: 18; Gerhards 1993: 100, 2002: 142; Latzer/Sauerwein 2006: 16).

A *common European-wide public sphere* is said to presuppose a common media system, a common language, and the reception of European media by people in all member states of the EU. Thus, this model is regarded as rather unlikely (Eilders/Voltmer 2003: 251-252; Fischer 2004: 21; Gerhards 2000: 288-292, 2002: 142). Evidence for a limited public sphere at the European level tends to relate to those media outlets targeting and serving business and political elites (Schlesinger/ Kevin 2000).

The *Europeanisation of national public spheres* is defined as the coverage of European topics and EU actors in national public spheres and the evaluation of these topics and actors from a European and not from a national perspective (Gerhards 2000: 293-296; see also Eilders/Voltmer 2003: 253-254).

Another model for (a) European public sphere(s) is seen in the rise of transnational political communication and the resulting development of *segmented transnational and issue-specific spheres of European publics*. For further details see for example Eilders/Voltmer (2003: 252-253), or Schlesinger's (1999: 270) model of "overlapping public spheres".

Latzer/Sauerwein (2006: 16) point out that at an early point in the debate, requirements for media structures (European-wide media system), media attention (coverage), and media contents (European perspective) were formulated. With the growing attention being paid to the public sphere in scientific discourse, new criteria were developed, like the requirement of a transnational synchronisation of topics, transnational interaction and transnational discourses.

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12 Habermas (1992) differentiates between *autochtoner* and *vermachteter Öffentlichkeit*. The term *vermachtete Öffentlichkeit* refers to a public sphere that is dominated by the state and political actors. The term *autochthone Öffentlichkeit* refers to a public sphere in which actors of civil society and citizens participate as well.

4. The alleged public sphere deficit of the EU

According to Gerhards (2002: 140-141), the Europeanisation of politics could result in a democratic or a public sphere deficit of the EU: The EU has a democratic deficit, because the 450 million citizens that are affected by European decisions are not or only partially identical to the *demos* that elected and thus legitimised the decision-makers.[13] With regard to an alleged public sphere deficit of the EU, one can again differentiate between a liberal-representative and a deliberative-discursive perspective (Gerhards 2002: 140).

The perspective of the liberal-representative model of public sphere

In the liberal-representative perspective, the EU has a public sphere deficit, when the coverage of European decisions and EU actors remains limited, while the decision-making competences are increasingly transferred to the EU level, leaving citizens not sufficiently informed about decisions and discussions that are directly relevant to them.

The alleged European public sphere deficit is regarded in this view as a consequence of the alleged democratic deficit: Many EU actors – such as Commissioners, but also national ministers participating in Council meetings and being thus part of the legislative body at the European level – are not elected at all or are only elected by their own national citizens. Therefore, it is not really necessary for them to canvass for European voters or engage in press and public relations. Improvements would thus require a democratisation of the EU (Gerhards 2002: 154).

The perspective of the deliberative-discursive model of public sphere

The representatives of the deliberative-discursive model[14] oppose the pessimistic understanding of the European public sphere deficit, which they regard as theoretically fruitless (Eder/Kantner 2000: 307). They rather stress the emergence of trans-national communication in Europe. For example Eder/Kantner (2000: 328) define European public sphere(s) as transnational political communication processes: parallel debates about the same topics in various national public spheres with the same "relevance-frame". According to these authors, the criteria for such (a) European public sphere(s) are present to a large extent (Eder/Kantner 2000; Gerhards 2002: 147).

This implies that the different models of European public sphere(s) provide different and sometimes contradictory conclusions regarding the question whether (a) European public sphere(s) already exist(s).

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[13] For a concise account of the lively debate in political studies on the democratic deficit of the EU, see Kohler-Koch/Conzelmann/Knodt (2004).

[14] Gerhards (2002: 146) refers to Eder, Hellmann, Trenz, and Kantner and their deliberative ideas about European public sphere(s).

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A note on the AIM project and the theoretical debate on the European public sphere

Prof. Gerd G. Kopper

One of the central aims of the AIM project is to enable an advanced understanding of the structural elements of the communication processes that underlie daily European news production, which is generated and influenced by actual mass media and European institutional news outlets. This aspect has been so far under-researched within the theoretical debate concerning the European public sphere(s). In some countries there has not been any research at all on this basis and in this analytical direction. The main approach on a meta-theoretical level will, hence, attempt to establish links between the insights into the structures and processes of information existing within this particular sphere – and conceptual patterns of European public sphere(s). There are, evidently, three very general links that have already become visible through the AIM research, up to now:

(1) The structure of the working patterns of journalists engaged in covering European affairs, on the spot at Brussels, or from their home offices, differs quite considerably from comparable working patterns when covering national news related to governments or general matters of national politics. Central elements of such structural differences refer to a comparatively much higher degree of insecurity regarding the importance and value of daily information material that they have to work with. This results in an extraordinary reliance on second and third hand reference and collegiate consultation which would be never required to this extent in a national environment. The structural result of this impediment is an inbuilt, but invisible focus within the selection and reception process on the part of the work force of journalists to favour topics, items, and questions that tend to reduce this structural measure of dependency on external reference, consultation and corroboration.

In view of a link to a meta-theoretical pattern concerning the European public sphere(s) it is this element within the daily news processes that renders a structural distancing from measures and efforts related to "control", or "investigation", or "contextual background". This would mean that the quality of journalistic work within the context of European politics due to such structural implications differs remarkably from that of national journalism. Additionally is has to be emphasised that this is not a matter of individual energy and vision, but a matter of structure. In this respect, then, considerations concerning the European public sphere(s), on a proper meta-theoretical level, have to take account of a specific momentum of an essential structural difference of work of journalism on the national and on the European level. This has to lead, of course, toward much more erudite measures in terms of future possible comparisons.

(2) Another element of insight, so far visible, is the dynamics of demand, also prevalent within the world of information. Mass media operate within environments that are either one hundred per cent demand driven (operating in markets) or have to take care of demand at least at the minimum verge of institutional legitimating (operating under public service proviso). On the national level there exists a permanent process by which a daily consensus among information professionals generates an agenda of importance concerning national items of interest. The major effect of this agenda building process is its dynamics to override popular, or mass demand (with the exception of some media that favour a business model especially following mass demand, as e. g. mass market tabloids).

One essential function of mass media resides exactly in this element of constituting general essentials in the public discourse, notwithstanding the divergences of interests or disinterests, or the vast differences in information demands within a given society. Every day there are some three to five items prioritising the daily agenda of the majority of media within a national context despite an existing entropy of information demands. Concerning European items a coherent dynamic among news professionals in Europe that might override mass demand, so far, is absent. Furthermore, the inherent quasi constitutional social agreement concerning one central agenda building function of the media with regard to Euro-

pean politics is not a matter of all actual mass media in Europe, but only of a small group of very few. It is this small group of selected media that, therefore, serve in a particular rank and constitute a particular quality, i. e. they are mass media, but rather elitist ones.

It is here that another link from the AIM project toward a meta-theoretical pattern concerning the European public sphere(s) becomes visible. There is an apparent vertical structure operating within the sphere of political discourse, information, and also options for controlling through information within the European polity, which has a clearly designed top and a much less clearly configured down side. This is an element of information practice as well as policy making that has, up to now, mostly escaped the critical debate concerning European public sphere(s); at least, this is the case concerning this point of entry.

(3) One of the constituting elements of the AIM research has been its emphasis and explicitness concerning the differences among the national news and journalism systems among the participating countries. One of the paradigms serving as an indicator is the term "Journalism Culture", used within this project, which clearly points at the kind of tight amalgam of a particular type of national journalism in a given country with its unique national history, the elements of cultural development, and the specifics and norms of social understanding.

A central insight derived from this theoretical basis of the common research projects has to be made more explicit after a major part of the empirical findings has been presented. It becomes very clear by observing the ways and forms of European information management, especially from the side of journalism that a historical antidote is to be observed. The history of the development of the political processes in each of the countries and of the history of journalism, as it is attached to the specific political system has been that of a mutually triggered, tight, and cohesive environment. The model cases of this kind of development have been the French revolution and its aftermath and the process of US-American in-

dependence; all through the history of the Western and European world this development has been re-enacted. The last phase being that of the post 1989 years in Middle and Eastern Europe. The building of a supranational executive, that of the European Commission, however, bears no resemblance to this historical model.

Journalism – in its role model concerning European news and information - therefore will be miscalculated if it is judged and analysed within the historical perspectives of the generic development and value model of political journalism of the West. It has to be judged and analysed within its proper, i. e. unique, and even extra-historic context. It is from here that another link rises to the meta-theoretical implications of European public sphere(s): it might well be that the inherent historical context of European journalism as it has become visible through the AIM project does not at all fall in line with the inherent historical implications that constitute the fundamental theoretical ingredients of the concepts of European public sphere(s).

In order to further debate and clarify these and other questions of meta-theoretical importance, induced by insights derived from the AIM project, at this stage, we introduce two concise views for further discussion by Peter Golding (Professor of Sociology and Head of the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University), and by Heikki Heikkilä (Research Fellow at the Journalism Research Development Centre at the University of Tampere) and Risto Kunelius (Professor in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Tampere).

Theoretical Issues Arising from the Research Project

Peter Golding

This paper addresses some of the theoretical issues that inform this collaborative research programme. It arises from continuing discussions among the contributing partners, and reflects both the theoretical input into the design of the research programme, as well as modifications and developments that have emerged from consideration of the research findings and the data generated in the different phases of the research. The paper has been discussed at the workshop of the Programme in Tartu, Estonia, in June 2006, as well as during other meetings of Programme participants.

The role of theory in the Programme

It is important to note that the programme was designed both to inform and be informed by theory. The most prevalent and pervasive concept underpinning debate in the field in which this research operates has been that of the 'public sphere', or more specifically the 'European public sphere'. This concept, rooted in the influential writing of the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (Habermas 1989 [orig. 1962]; Habermas 2001a; Habermas 2001b), has been central in many debates about the reconstruction of the spaces in which citizens can express themselves and learn about their common experience. More especially this has become a question of importance to the European Union as it seeks to understand the engagement or lack of it among European citizens with the political institutions and processes of the EU.

The programme, however, it must be noted immediately, was not designed nor funded to be a study of public consciousness, attitudes, or values. Its empirical work was focussed on the matter of information management, especially in the flow of information and ideas from the EU to the public via the news media. Thus an interest in the European public sphere provides a context and aspiration for the research, but is not directly involved in its design or conclusions. In addition, as Splichal has recognised in a recent essay (Splichal 2006), there remains an unacceptable gulf between the theoretical development of the concept and its empirical exploitation. He prefers to purse the concept of publicity and, like many other writers, is not persuaded that the operationalisation of concepts of the public sphere will help us to understand shifts in European civic consciousness.

For these reasons we need to be clear about the role and limits of theory in this programme. It is not able significantly to address the broad debates about the European public sphere, though it is influenced and informed by them. Two fundamental reasons for insisting on the theoretical dimension to the programme, however, remain. First, it is essential that the research avoids the temptations and pitfalls of abstracted empiricism. Generating and collating data without a clear purpose and without a means to evaluate, compile, and make sense of the data, would be pointless, and an anathema to the scientific principles at the heart of the programme. Secondly, the generation of data uninformed by theory would risk being prey to an undue utilitarianism, in which the data was seen simply to relate to very current concerns and application. While the research will clearly have ready application to practice and to the management of information, it cannot be solely wedded to these requirements, as this would circumscribe the data collected and the analysis to which that data is subjected.

The purpose of theory in our work is twofold. First we are attempting to understand a process. Our project is entitled adequate information management in Europe. This signals that we are interested in the process by which European institutions (meaning the European Parliament and European Commission) provide and distribute information to citizens primarily via the news media. To understand this we need to theorise how such processes occur, and with what possible consequences. Secondly, we seek to evaluate the impact of these processes, and in this we have focussed on the creation of (or failure to create) a European public sphere (EPS). Our thinking on this issue has largely accommodated to the increasingly prevalent view that a EPS exists and is constructed primarily at national level, and that major barriers both organisational and structural (ideological, political, cultural) exist in the evolution of a genuinely trans-national EPS.

Contested ideologies

Underlying the way information is managed, pro-

duced, and disseminated are two competing sets of ideologies within which this information is constructed and construed. One is universalist, rights-based, a post-nationalist cosmopolitanism. This set of ideological premises promotes and distils ideas that transcend the national, and are rooted in ideals and ambitions that have long historical ancestry, but which form part of the 'grand project' which has been a continuing aspect of the ideals and politics of many who are most committed to the evolution of 'Europe' or the EU. Alternatively there is a particularist, nationalist localism. Such ideas, on the contrary, are often articulated as opposed to increasing transnationalism, and as sceptical of developments of any kind of supra-national authority or regulation, never mind citizenship.

Within national contexts this dichotomy is not neatly located in party or even traditional partisan divides. For example, we can characterise and exemplify these two as follows:

	Localist	Cosmopolitan
Right	**Trad nationalism**	**Free trade**
Left	**Anti-globalisation**	**Universalist internationalism**

As this schema suggests an affinity with, or enthusiasm for, things international or cosmopolitan will not neatly coincide with traditional left or right politics, nor will its opposite. This complexity is easily identified in the party political fissures in many European countries. For this reason it is crucial that we understand how information about the supra-national, including Europe, is formulated and disseminated to a European population.

News Media and a European Public Sphere

The expectation, or indeed aspiration, that Europe may be the home to an embryonic political culture transcending the national is a necessary dimension to the 'European project'. Schlesinger has argued as much in hope as expectation that we may be witnessing the birth of an „emergent supranational political culture" (Schlesinger 1997), but recognizes that this requires the further development of a number of pre-

conditions. If we are to see the gradual construction of "a range of European publics, typically these would be composed of transnational citizens who have (a) an equal and widespread level of communicative competence, (b) relatively easy access to the full range of the means of communication, and, (c) a generalised communicative competence that embodies sufficient background knowledge, interest, and interpretative skills to make sense of the EU and its policy options and debates". If there were indeed such a set of European publics, for it would as yet be a plural entity, it would "(a) involve the dissemination of a European news agenda, (b) need to become a significant part of the everyday news-consuming habits of European audiences, and (c) entail that those living within the EU have begun to think of their citizenship, in part at least, as transcending the level of the member nation-states" (Schlesinger 1999: 387).

These are serous tests, and we need carefully to assess how far they are being met. Four questions need to be addressed in this regard. First is there any indication of the growth of a European public, for without a European public plainly there can be no European public sphere? Secondly, are there European media whose audience, rationale, and production logic is geared to a European scale? Thirdly is there a common discourse, linguistically or thematically, for a European public? Finally, are there vehicles for citizen interaction that are located and rooted in the European dimension of people's experience?

Following the traumatic rejection of the new EU constitution in the 2005 referendums in France and the Netherlands, it was salutary to read Eurobarometer findings that more than one third of European citizens were in fact unaware of the existence of the constitution. At the end of 2004 people who saw themselves as both European and as a citizen of their country were seven per cent of those interviewed, while 41 per cent saw themselves only as national citizens. Only four per cent foresaw a future as primarily European citizens (European Commission 2005). The percentage of persons interviewed who consider that they know nothing or almost nothing about the European Union (scoring one and two out of 10) is relatively stable (19%). The majority of respondents (51%) rate their level of knowledge as being between three and five, considering therefore that their knowledge about the European Union is fairly limited.

The qualitative study *EB Special*: The Future of Europe (May 2006) also adds to these rather negative findings. Among many other findings it suggests that:

- There is near-zero knowledge and understanding of the functioning of the EU, its institutions and their role
- The institutional workings of the Union and how decisions are taken are a matter of nearly complete ignorance.
- Ignorance of the EU's institutional system appears great, often very great, and sometimes even unfathomable. The institutions are poorly or very poorly identified
- Visions of what the Commission does and its responsibilities are very mediocre or nearly nonexistent
- Nothing more is known besides a few bits and pieces evoked above regarding the respective roles of some institutions

Of course, it is important to evaluate these findings – active hostility is not ignorance – it is a real awareness, and we should not extrapolate too much from this. Widespread citizen disengagement from political institutions has come to be a common phenomenon in many countries, i.e. attitudes to, and conceptions of , the EU are no different from general political attitudes. Such findings would doubtless be replicated similarly at national level, the widespread indifference to or knowledge of mainstream politics being a constant object of distress for more informed, educated, or involved elites. It is also important not to confuse ignorance of the EU with disenchantment with, or distance from, the broader sense of a European common culture or inheritance that lies behind the 'European project', though this too has its problems as we will see. The evidence as it is, however, does not speak convincingly of a European political public.

Occasional and persistent attempts to develop European media have rarely been successful. Robert Maxwell's *European* newspaper was one of many high profile honourable failures. Pan-European television has not evolved into any position of prominence or persistence. Indeed in the last decade such channels as do exist have increasingly localised their pan-European material (Chalaby 2002). Chalaby further shows how much pan-European television provision is addressed to other forms of trans-national collectivities,

especially ethnic and diasporic ones (Chalaby 2005). Euronews survives, although with small audiences (Machill 1998). There are of course specialist targeted media: the *European Voice* produced by the Economist Group has a circulation of about 16,000; it is distributed free to MEPs and EU officials. The *Economist* itself has some claim to a globalised status if not European standing, but rather more the former than the latter. Of its circulation of just above a million, four out of five readers are outside Europe.

Other transnational magazines, constructing as much as addressing cosmopolitan financial elites, find much of their market in one country. While increasingly international, this intercontinental clientele is both a highly selective and an up-market one, and also significantly based in a few countries. The *Financial Times* has 68 per cent of its readership outside the UK, but magazines like *Newsweek* and *Time* continue to be largely read in the USA (87 per cent and 82 per cent of their circulations respectively). The *International Herald Tribune* describes itself as the paper for "the global class", those "people who move across continents, who bridge sectors and industries, and who are at home in several cultures". Published in Europe in partnership with the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Publishing Group it is plainly addressing a niche and cosmopolitan elite.

If we move to television we find ample evidence of the preference of European audiences for domestic and local products, with little traffic between European countries in programmes (except programme formats like *Big Brother*), and the essentially facilitating apparatus of Eurovision, the operational service of the European Broadcasting Union. Eurovision manages the exchange of more than 30,000 news items every year while distributing over 15,000 hours of live sport and cultural events each year. Nonetheless, as Ruß-Mohl concludes, „Looking at the readership or audience, all European publications and programmes are simply irrelevant. The field of political information is dominated by national newspapers and magazines, networks and talk-shows" (Ruß-Mohl 2003: 205).

Even where notable examples of 'European' cultural events can be discovered we should be wary of making hasty deductions. The growth or attractiveness of European media events does not, in itself, of course, speak to a transnational cultural formation. Many

would indeed argue that such events as the Eurovision Song Contest or European football competitions celebrate the national. What engages the emotions more – the singing of the largely unheard 'European song' (officially the 'UEFA Champions League Music' composed by Tony Britten) prior to European cup football matches, or the team-specific support rolling in frenetic waves from the terraces, albeit for 'local' teams increasingly composed of multi-national squads of sporting mercenaries? In an optimistic reading of what is plainly a contradictory and mixed picture, Martin suggests that "football may [be] bringing Europeans together… more than any number of EU initiatives to breathe life into the notion of a sense of belonging to Europe" (Martin 2005: 363). It would be generous, at the very least, to suggest this embryonic supra-nationalistic identification would be found among the crowds at the average UEFA encounter. On the one hand one could argue that a more complex understanding of a European consciousness would see it constituted of a multiple of national consciousnesses, entangled with and articulated to a wider trans-national complex of understanding and awareness. On the other hand, it could be argued that such opportunities for intensified and exaggerated national symbols of identity inhibit, rather than advance, the potential of a European consciousness. This remains as much a political as a theoretical conundrum.

Our third question concerned the existence or otherwise of a common discourse through which experiences and images could be described and shared? The growing installation of English as the common language of international finance, computing, business, research, and tertiary education is a matter of great convenience for the native speaker and great irritation for some, not least the French, for whom this development has cultural as well as linguistic consequences. But Europe remains a polyglot arena, with English (and primarily its trans-Atlantic form at that) far from universally spoken, and certainly not a vehicle for common experience or utterance.

But language is not the only vehicle for which the claim of an emerging common symbolic terrain is made. As Hall has noted, „supra-national communities...cannot simply be political, economic, or geographical entities; they also depend on how they are represented and imagined: they exist within, not out-

side, representation, the imaginary" (Hall 2003: 61). In part this demands a common historical sense. But it may well be that the ideas and mythologies being deployed to advance this sense of common origin and future is itself gendered, national, and indeed even racist. Hall (op. cit.) argues that the myths that make and made Europe have their origins in some very specific and increasingly (in the wake of enlargement) contentious, and philosophically partial foundations. As Dunkerly et. al. point out, Europe "as a term has been inseparable from political developments…To speak of certain *core* aspects of a European identity, such as Christianity or the Greco-Roman heritage, is to miss the fact that these do not reflect the experiences of *all* Europeans" (Dunkerley, et al. 2002: 123). Cronin, examining one such attempt by the Council of Europe notes that it "has produced a series of policy documents that aim to define Europe through a common ‚European culture'." He argues that the ideas of Europe, culture and consumerism that are used in the report… "redefine the terms of European belonging and rights.''[and he explores] "the gendered and racial interconnections in these definitions and the rhetorical use of cultural heritage"(Cronin 2002: 307).

A European consciousness of terrorism as a threat can be construed as just the kind of common threat and commonly defined problem that fosters unity, shared consciousness, and cross-border integration. But it just as easily translates into the simpler and yet more destructive forces of xenophobia, racism, and animus, which are the very antithesis of a common sense of people and place, and practice seems to exemplify this fear. Thus topic or action provide a foundation for the expression of difference as much as of common identity. Where there may be common ground for identity it is likely to be in residual definition against 'the other' with all the regressive and divisive tendencies such values can mobilise.

Fourthly came the question of a vehicle for interaction, in other words an effective and dynamic set of practices and institutions through which citizens could interact with and be sensitised to a world of action and decision beyond the nation state. Turnouts in EU elections are of course notoriously low – in 2004 the average across the EU was 45.6 per cent, and while just four per cent lower than in 1999 this was 15 per cent lower than in 1984, falling to under one in four people voting in Poland and Slovakia. The so-called

democratic deficit in the EU can readily and easily be called in evidence for a wholesale rejection of, or at least indifference to, the EU as a project, and by extension the European programme as a whole. This is too facile, however. Antipathy, or even outright hostility, to the institutions or practices of the EU may be an expression of awareness and political belief as vital and significant as outright enthusiasm and engagement. This case must remain, to date, unproven.

Journalism: Theme and European Variations

Journalism as a public means of societal surveillance, informing citizens about the remote, the intriguing, the important, and the merely diverting, through regular and anonymous report, has emerged as a key feature of the cultural landscape in every European society. From origins in the direct and *ad hominam* reports of commissioned observers reporting directly to patrons in the early years of mercantile capitalism, through to the vast media empires and publishing conglomerates of recent times, there is much in common to observe. Not surprisingly these common features loom large in comparative accounts. Hoyer and Pöttker (2005) describe what they term the 'news paradigm', which over the last century or so has diffused universally. It comprises five elements: an event, criteria for reporting it called news values, the news interview, the inverted pyramid, that classic formulation of accounts which start with essentials and moves on to further detail, and most problematically, journalistic objectivity, and overarching professional commitment to detachment and balance (ibid, 11).

One of the great fascinations of a historical approach to the analysis of news media is to trace the variation in experience and adoption of these differing elements. The news interview is probably a trans-Atlantic import, while the key commitment to objectivity is seen by many as peculiarly Anglo-American, far removed from either practice or indeed aspiration in many other parts of the globe, whether the 'development journalism' so critical to anti-imperialism movements in mid twentieth century Africa and Asia, the party-loyal journalism of Leninist theory and practise, or simply differing traditions even within Europe. Mancini reminds us that we would do well to keep a clear picture of these variations (Mancini 2005). He describes the Anglo-American tradition, with its separation of the press from other power centres, as a

claim to professional standards, including objectivity, and the separation of reporting from comment. This tradition (in which he finds the UK closer to European than Anglo-American norms) is distinct from the European model, which is very often and in origin much more partisan, and certainly much closer to and entangled with the political party system. Nonetheless he draws attention to variation within Europe, not least between north and south, with the latter more likely to have links to literature and thus to comment and interpretation.

British journalism emancipated itself more early than most from a close embrace with political parties, and through the 'retail revolution' of the late nineteenth century rapidly turned itself into a low price daily adjunct of consumer commerce, with a mass popular press expanding rapidly between 1920 and 1940 (Murdock and Golding 1978). The entertainment core of popular provision, enhanced by the emerging mid-nineteenth century Sunday press, and not least by the circumvention of taxes on newspapers through producing newspapers with no news, found its expanding echoes in the mass entertainment press of a century later, presenting an apparent disregard for the mainstream of politics evident also in the 'Boulevardzeitungen' of central Europe. Italian journalism has been typically highly partisan while less committed, at least traditionally, to a professional autonomy and independence. For some observers from a rather different tradition (ostensibly) this becomes even a matter of some distaste. One American analyst investigating Italian journalism in the 1980s concluded that: "Perhaps the most important thing Italian journalism could learn from the vocation in the United States is a deeper sense of professionalism and a larger reputation for it"(Porter 1983: 95-96).

French journalism has equally shown a slow and halting emergence from the yoke of politics. Indeed, political activity is often seen as the goal and target of a journalistic career. For much of its history French journalism has been a creature of the state, with media that remain closely entwined with the political apparatus. As Neveu (2005) and his collaborators explain, in an economy dominated until relatively recently by small entrepreneurs, the conglomeration common elsewhere was late to develop, as was a dependence on advertising, and for press magnates political ambition was the primary purpose of newspaper own-

ership. Here the prevalence of advocacy journalism endures, and the literary ambitions and style of journalism result in what Neveu and his colleagues describe as "something like fencing with a pen".

By contrast, in northern Europe things were often different. In Norway, for example, local news and politics have taken prime position in the press, and journalistic norms have borrowed from the long tradition of public broadcasting, with a commitment, despite close party connections, to impartiality and balance enshrined in statute, and of such severity that in 1997 the national journalists' union decided to exclude public relations and information officers from membership, so different was their task and practice.

Yet we can go only so far in tracing these fascinating variations and traditions before recognising a common core. The daily and routine reporting of public events, and the finite range of locales, both geographic and institutional, which lend themselves to journalistic observation and report, are sufficiently circumscribed to make comparative analysis possible, and to allow us to speak meaningfully of journalistic norms, conventions, and ideologies. The disavowal of 'objectivity' and the refusal to dispense with a journalism of opinion, so tenaciously sustained in some countries, are nonetheless expressed in explicit debate with the more austere and 'professional' norms of the Anglo-Saxon world. The twin evolution of democratic representative political structures and late capitalism necessarily lends a common frame to the mass media systems of all these countries, and in turn to the quasi-professional occupations such as journalism which have grown within them.

Journalism: New Times and Perspectives

If there is indeed a recognisable universal core to journalism, above and beyond national and local variation, is it now undergoing radical change? Three trends detectable in many journalistic cultures would suggest such change is indeed in process. First is the growing importance of holding and attracting audiences. Though never wholly absent from journalism, it is now often argued that news has become so embedded in the entertainment industries that it has become imbued with the same values and styles as other forms of media provision. The term 'infotainment' has been coined to describe this shift, and its worst

effects in diluting the information provided by news to citizens, and thus the value of journalism to democracy, have been dubbed 'tabloidisation' (McLachlan and Golding 2000).

The second change we can observe is the globalisation of journalism's embrace. While reporting from the far flung corners of empire or the distant horizons of overseas adventure was always part of journalism, modern communications put most of the world within the reach of news media in various ways. The growth of the nineteenth century news agencies created a structure which has largely survived, if technologically and organisationally far grander and more sophisticated than before. However, news audiences remain stubbornly parochial, and in many countries the increased availability of global news is met by diminishing interest in it.

The third change is technological, with an explosive expansion of communicative possibilities arising from digital media and new forms and systems of telecommunications. Resources for journalism to be found on the Internet as well as the use of digital communications for both reporting and indeed production and distribution of news may well be revolutionising journalism itself. It must be said, however, that such claims seem premature at present, and, as I have suggested above, the romantic elevation of such practices as 'blogging', as though they presaged a wholesale replacement of existing forms and structures of the news market, are almost certainly exaggerated if not wholly misguided.

Journalism in Europe: The Brussels Beat

For many 'Europe' means the EU. Our collaborative research into the success of the European journalists corps has thrown doubt on the impact of this work in many countries. The outcome of the 2005 referendums in France and the Netherlands, suggests further evidence of the failure of the European *grand projet* to secure the affection of European hearts and minds.

Our programme of interviewing with journalists suggested a recurrent number of views that are far from enthusiastic about the European ideal, or indeed the EU specifically. For example among UK journalists specific tendencies include: relief at the opportunity to report on other news from various European

capitals; the sense that the EU as a news story has gone „off the boil" since the French and Dutch referendums, the ending of the UK presidency etc.; the feeling that the Commission is not very interesting, the EU as a set of institutions is not newsworthy and they rarely generate 'real' news stories; the journalists are not very impressed with the news sense of Commission spokespersons and communications people or with the proposals in the Wahlstrom initiatives; that the focus should be on pragmatic practical issues rather than the ideological focus on a grand project and European identity; the UK will remain very uninterested in or hostile to the EU, and it is not the job of journalists to change this, but to recognise it as a limit on what they can do.

Not all of the journalists corps were as negative, of course. But many of these views were shared across the British journalists interviewed.

Eurocrats and Technocrats

The emergence of the Internet is sometimes proposed as meeting the need for a transnational medium of communication and interchange. At best such interaction may, even allowing for frequent and sometimes romanticised exaggeration, speak to the genesis of emergent interest groups or proto-communities. However these are seldom more than rudimentary in cultural or social structure, and still founder on the obstinate evidence of a 'digital divide', which is as prevalent in Europe as elsewhere. The most recent EU report on this issue focuses, like many more recent overviews, on the divides opening up with the widening availability of broadband. The major division assessed is that between availability in rural and urban areas; indeed income inequality and poverty do not feature in the report at all (Commission of the European Communities 2005). The report nonetheless notes the limited take-up of broadband compared to its availability – on average, by January 2005, only 10% of the EU-15 population had a broadband subscription, when broadband was available to about 88% of them. This figure falls to 8.6 per cent if the enlarged EU is included. Despite the rural-urban split which gives this report its focus, recurrent analyses identify income as the major obstacle to entry into the new communications market place for most consumers. The still high and, more importantly, recurring costs of maintaining information technology currency

in the home, mean that lower income households either manage without or, as the emerging picture of broadband demonstrates, manage with lower level technologies than higher income groups. It is for this reason that simple survey investigations of Internet use or experience often mask major inequities of real availability and advantage. Thus in seeking a vehicle for trans-border community formation, and discovering its potential in the Internet, we need to pay close regard to the continuing and resilient inequities in access to new communication technologies.

These stark facts pose a problem for the recurrent enthusiasm for an 'e-Europe' which is endemic among many in Brussels. There is a problem to be solved. That European citizens are largely ill-informed about the mechanisms and institutions of Europe's embryonic supra-national organisation is manifest and familiar. Before the 2005 referendums one third of European citizens were unaware completely of the existence of an EU constitution, and well over half told the Eurobarometer survey that they had 'little knowledge' of its contents (European Commission, 2005). Just a few months after the European elections in June 2004 two thirds of respondents were unaware that the elections had taken place. It would not be difficult to document at length the evidence of widespread ignorance, or more fundamentally, indifference, about the doings and structures of the European Union as a political and institutional edifice. The 2005 referendums, of course, were analysed as a more explicit and aware rejection of much that the Union seemed to be promising or offering people, and I do not here propose to interrogate this analysis. The point is to identify readily a problem as perceived by advocates of the European project, namely their inability to enthuse or even inform much of the putative population of the emerging Europe.

If the Eurocratic imperative is to force-feed the growth of a digital Europe and to drag an unwilling, unskilled, and uninformed population into it, the technocratic imperative is the corporate driver, voraciously encouraging whatever is technologically possible to become socially desirable.

Journalistic Imperatives

In assessing the development of styles of journalism in the countries in which we have been researching

we have found four distinct styles or approaches. First is what we might describe as an *empirical* orientation, in which journalism seeks to describe but not evaluate, to observe but not participate. This is the core of the value system that has evolved around values such as objectivity and impartiality in western journalism, though with varied application across Europe, (described more extravagantly as 'Apollonian' by Merrill in contrast to the 'Dionysian' excesses of the committed journalist) (Merrill 1974). The second orientation is *political*, in which journalism is explicitly and designedly a vehicle for the objectives of party or state. The journalist is participant, or at least partisan, and avowedly presenting a position rather than a detached explication. The third orientation is *rhetorical*, in which the journalist is writer and author, aligned with literary traditions and writing in a form which is personalised, expressive and essayistic. This form, always present even in the most austere organs under the by-lines of named star writers, but inherent in many traditions, has recurrently re-appeared, for example as the 'new journalism' in the United States a generation ago, one of many such reappearances of this term (Weber 1974). It has had a particular prevalence in some cultures such as in Italy or in France. Finally comes the *commercial* orientation, in which seeking, attracting and retaining audiences is the primary goal. It is this that is assumed to have overturned more traditional values in the turn towards more entertainment oriented forms, to the extent that the primary social purposes of journalism become diluted, distorted, or even displaced.

In truth all four orientations may be found in most forms of journalism, though in differing mixes at different times and in different places. The shift from the first to the last that many observe in recent times arises from stark and evident shifts in the political economy of the organs within which journalists work, probably more than a shift in the core values and ideologies of journalism itself (Murdock and Golding 2001). Indeed, in the world of the media if we wish to seek the emergence of pan-European activity and integration, it is to the corporate worlds of Berlusconi, Murdoch, Kirch, Bertelsmann, and the like that we must turn. This is especially significant in Europe, where the entrenched public service tradition in broadcasting has been essentially national in character and status, but increasingly finds itself under threat from shifts towards a more commercial, privatised, and corporate underpinning to media policy and regulation at both national and European level.

Journalism is a variety of practices and beliefs, and the extent to which it is focused on one of these four orientations – empirical, political, rhetorical, commercial – will shape the particular ideology and standards prevailing in any given place or at any given time. The variation in practice across Europe reflects differences in the contingencies of history and structure, which inevitably obtain. The close relation between political formation and newspaper, for example, still prevalent in so much of Europe, is largely absent in much of the north. Yet we could not understand journalism as an occupation or practice without some common threads and ideas. Where literary pretensions or political commitment are more common than in those journalistic cultures where "facts are sacred", there is nonetheless a profound recognition of the idealised sense of journalism as witness, and of news as the raw material of democratic deliberation.

It is against that backdrop that seeking the emergence of a 'eurojournalism', or a journalism, which can contribute to the grand ambitions of a pan-European community of interest, is so demanding. It is one of the many contradictions in which international journalism finds itself that the intense and entangled relationships with organised politics has loosened its hold on journalism in recent decades in both the United States and in much of northern, certainly Anglo-Europe, while at the same time the political character of news, as a vehicle for the inherent expression of a partial view of the world, and thus one that is in its very essence political, has become increasingly apparent from both research and critique. As journalism embraces the world of entertainment and audience satisfaction, so too it looms larger in the construction of a cultural environment of profound importance for people's understanding and engagement with political change, including the evolution of trans-national identities.

In describing these four we would want to stress how far they co-exist and are frequently in contention at national level. At the same time there are clearly differences in national traditions and practices – in journalistic culture, and one feature of our project is to bring these differences to light and to explore how far they continue to be salient.

Conclusion

Our theoretical discussions are continuing, but to date confirm how far theoretical debates vary across Europe but also how far local and national experience also varies. Our primary concern must be whether and how the theoretical ambitions and concerns we set ourselves need modifying by or are modified by our empirical work. One possible conclusion is that the debate about the EPS is not (for us as it plainly is not for the journalists) an especially primary focus. The complex and contradictory formation of a common consciousness or amplified understanding of an identification with the activities of a supra-national entity requires research into public behaviours, beliefs, attitudes and values, that we have not undertaken.

The more direct focus of our concerns lies in the flow of information from primary producers (the EU institutions) through intermediaries (the EU itself, and most especially the national news media). For these concerns we have much rich conceptualisation in media theory (from two step flow to digital divides) that is relevant to our questions.

To complete our picture it is essential that the research extends to embrace that key stage in the communication process, namely reception and consumption, in order to obtain a broad and adequate picture of information management in the round.

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Journalists Imagining the European public sphere

Professional discourses about the news practices in reporting the EU in ten countries

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