

Abstract

Deliberative Politics.

The Public Sphere, Democracy and Political Participation

Author: Bettina Lösch

In present debate modern theories of democracy prevalently appear to define conceptions of democracy by stressing adjectives as for example elitist, participatory, economic or associative suggesting that this may also be the case for a conception of 'deliberative democracy'. This raises the question whether deliberative democracy can claim to be more than only a recent trend in political theory and whether a conception of deliberative democracy can rightly be described as substantial and contributing to an understanding of the political which focuses on emancipation and participation.

Considering that hegemonic neo-liberalism is dominating social conditions and political action in terms of efficiency and other management categories and in view of world politics under pressure it seems at first sight rather superfluous to reflect on deliberation or deliberative politics. Despite these challenges the thesis points out that deliberative politics offer an opportunity to focus on politics in a creative, foreseeing, and emancipative sense. Various conceptions of deliberative democracy encourage a conception of the political supporting a deliberative process of public opinion and participatory politics. It is therefore necessary to explore the relationship between 'deliberation' and 'politics' as well as the categories public, democracy and political participation.

The exposition of deliberative politics systematically contrasts the critical theory of deliberative democracy following the *Frankfurter Schule* and Habermas' theory of the transformation of the public with the more pragmatic approach offered by the US-American discourse.

The thesis provides for an interdisciplinary approach in linking a critical discussion of philosophical and political theories with sociological and socio-economic conceptions of democracy resulting in a novel synopsis of modern theories of democracy.

In chapter I I explore classical types of deliberation offered by traditional political philosophy as for example by Platon's *Philosopher King*, Sokrates' method of dialogue, or Kant's *öffentlicher Vernunftgebrauch* (public use of reason). In order to set the classical ideal types of deliberation in a modern context I discuss in chapter II modern theories of the public which form the basis of various corresponding theories of democracy. In chapter III – the central chapter on modern theories of democracy – I oppose the conventional distinction between classical, normative and realistic, and empirical theories of democracy by focussing the trias of decision, context, and deliberation. In order to conclude in chapter IV I take up on the critical objections against deliberative democracy to set the frame for my argument for a conception of deliberation supporting emancipation and participation.