The Public and the Political – Concepts Reactivated by the Crisis

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The Public and the Political – Concepts Reactivated by the Crisis. The paper commences with a survey of classical concepts of public/ness. It pursues two intellectual traditions – the ones created by the political philosophy and legal sciences, as well as those created by sociology and psychology. Consequently, the paper provides a survey of inspirations present in the main contemporary concepts of the public (Arendt, Habermas). All this together forms a basis for an attempt to find terminological solutions suitable for contemporary research, both theoretical and empirical. The paper results in thoughts on the revitalisation of the public and the political. It concludes with a hypothesis about the penetration of the social into the political.

Key words: the public, public sphere, the publicness, publicity, the political, agonistic relations, de-politicization

Verejnosť a politickosť – krízou reaktivované koncepcie. Štúdiu otvára prehľad klasických konceptualizácií problému verejnosti. Sleduje dve intelektuálne tradície – vytvorené politickou filozofiou a právnymi náukami, ako aj v tvorbe sociológie a psychológie. Následne podáva prehľad o inšpiráciách obsiahnutých v hlavných súčasných konceptualizáciách verejnosti (Arendt, Habermas). Spolu to tvorí podklad pre pokus o terminologické riešenia vhodné pre súčasné bádanie teoretické i empirické. Štúdia ústí do úvahy o revitalizácii verejnosti a politickosti. V závere predkladá svoju hypotézu o prerastaní sociálneho v politické.

Kľúčové slová: Verejnosť, verejná sféra, verejné, publicita, politickosť, agonistické vzťahy, depolitizácia

Introduction

The life of society in the globalized capitalist times is hit by overall economization. The other spheres are one by one losing their autonomy, and therefore the natural versatility of society´s evolution is being deformed. A mainstream tendency can also be seen in the reality reflection in the area of social science: the conceptual equipment is being adapted to the schemes of economical thinking, they accept the suppressed assumption „homo economicus". The ongoing unilateralism in thinking is a sign of the gradual slipping into the system crisis, and the practical life after 2008 in different countries of the world provides symptomatic evidence of that. The public in the

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world seems to be waking up and along comes a new wave of interest in this classic topic. There is an ongoing parallel discussion, inspired by the return to Carl Schmitt, about the boundaries and nature of the political within the new historical context. The mutual interrelation of both topics has not been yet discussed in scientific discourses, although their interconnection is currently a significant practical and theoretical problem as well. The common work of Polish authors P. Dybel and Sz. Wróbel (2008) is one exception, however, they reduced „the publicness" only to one alternative – the public sphere. Therefore I will try to define the problem in a more plastic way and point out possible contributions of the sociological research.

The public as an object of theoretical analysis – two traditions

The topic of the "public" has been analysed in the social science with substantial time gaps – there were periods when the attention was directed towards vicarious topics. However, it would be deceitful to start the analysis of its current problems without having a look at the historical genesis of the issue and the evolution of concepts that theoretically reflect the issue of the public. Today there is a number of analytical works by renowned world authors available. The authors carried out exhaustive research at an admirably professional level, and today their work can be considered classical literature on the topic that we can utilize very well. There is no reason now to describe their conceptions completely, it will suffice to introduce just briefly the shifts in the content of the conceptions that gradually developed into a rich nest mapping the topic of the public. The content and meaning of the exerted conceptions within the conceptualization of the public – as stated by Habermas (2000: 55) – was diverse and often even conflicting. This is given also by the fact that the elaboration of the topic proceeded in two different traditions of thinking that were gradually bifurcated and therefore they enriched the knowledge about the public by different views.

In the first place, there is a tradition of conceptualization of this topic by the philosophy of politics, law science, and later political science. The second tradition is represented by sociology, psychology and research of media communication. The common germ of this conceptual nest can be found early in the Hellenic model of the public. In the second and fifth chapters of her most mature work *Vita active*, H. Arendt (2009) shows how *the privateness* and *the publicness* were divided in the life of the ancient *polis*. The publicness[2] was

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[2] Arendt uses word publicness to mark two phenomena, closely tied to each other, but not identical: "all that is shown in front of the audience, all that can be seen and heard by everybody" (2009: 66); „The second word "publicness" marks the world itself, because the world is that what we have in common and is different from what we have in private" (2009: 69)

constituted in the conversations and arguments of the free citizens (*oiko despot*) that took the form of meetings or tribunals, and as well as in the common actions such as wars or fighting games. The ancient Greeks understood „the publicness" as an empire of freedom and stability that was not available for everyone, of course – slaves, housewives, foreigners and people deprived of their houses (*oikos*) were excluded. The attention should be also paid to the fact that citizens were meeting as equal; however, everyone was trying to be exceptional, because glory and honour are only certified in the public. E. Rendlová (2002: 10) comments on this, that the concept of „the publicness" was not completely explicit even in the ancient Greek times. She refers to Hölscher[3] who distinguishes two meanings: a) *socio – political* – in relation towards the municipality, a group of citizens, and b) *visual and intellectual* – marking glory/shame or public performance. The socio-political notion ceased to exist with the disintegration of the ancient democracy and it appears again only in the modern period as inspiration of the liberal theory in the concept of a free public discussion. This study will reflect more on „the publicness" in the socio-political meaning.

● **Inspirations of classic normative conceptualizations of the public**
For the whole centuries, the Hellenic model of the public was preserved as an ideological model. During the medieval period, categories of publicness and privateness, the public as "*res publica*" were preserved in the definitions of the Roman law, but in the life of ordinary people in the feudal system, „discord among the public and private sphere according to ancient model did not exist" (Habermas, 2000: 59). In the modern period, the first of the listed traditions refers to the ancient model by the works of John Locke who enriched it. He was the first to assign the collective identity to the people and award them the attribute of sovereignty when in *„An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1689)"* together with God and the state law he advocates an equal „Law of opinion". According to Habermas, he expresses what man represents in the view of the others but, on the other hand, this „opinion" is cleansed from trivial verdicts (2000: 168). J. Locke comes out from the idea of the natural state of man – but being different from Hobbes (*belum omnium contra omnius* – the state of nature) – he understood it as a state of equality and „uncontrolled freedom, in which it is possible to decide about one´s activities and to treat one´s property in a way that people want within the natural law framework" (Locke, 1992: 31-32). People can free themselves from the uncertainty and self-will present in the natural law only by the „social contract". Independent individuals become members of political community on the basis of free will

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3 Hölscher, I. (1979). Öffentlichkeit und Geheimnis: Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Entstehung der Öffentlichkeit in der frühen Neuzeit. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

and voluntarily transfer legislative and executive powers to the representative of the political community – the state. Of course, they assume that the state would protect their natural rights and freedoms. Governments acquire their authority only with the agreement of those they are governing. The work *Two Treatises of Government* describes what such a government has to do and what it cannot do to preserve its legitimacy, otherwise people can start a revolution against the illegitimate government.

From the rich heritage of J.-J. Rousseau, the intellectual father of the French Revolution, we need to mention his emphasis on the citizen role (the highest ambition an individual can strive for), the equality of people and their need of being engaged in the public issues of their city/town as well as the idea of the state as a common good. In his work *The Social Contract*, he states that uncertainty of individuals before they agree on the social contract forces them to proceed with such a contract. By such act they give up their rights in favour of the community which will provide protection and security for them. A contractual act is a free act, individuals resign to pursue their own will, and therefore they accept submission to the will of the whole body (*la volonté générale*). It is not a summary of the individual free wills, but certain generalization of those. Everybody who accepted the social contract constitutes people. People create unity on the basis of common interest; they choose a governor who needs to act according to the laws approved by the people as the only sovereign of power. Noelle Neumann credits Rousseau for introducing the expression *public*, *public opinion* into routine use, since he was sensitive to this issue as being an individualist (Noelle-Neumann, 2004: 96-97).

A significant contribution to the conceptualization of "the public" is the one by Immanuel Kant. He was the first to transform the natural human right of freedom of speech into the civic right to publicly communicate one´s opinion and thus participate in the public activities. According to Splichal, much earlier than public and public sphere became routinely used terms, Kant had defined their key principle of publicity as "a transcendental notion of public justice" based on the natural base of dignity and moral sovereignty of a citizen (Splichal, 2012: 7). Kant advocated free public discussion as a tool of development and expression of autonomous rationality of human beings in contrary to the censorship that was controlling public life. The public was understood by him "as a principle of law order and especially as a method of enlightenment" (Habermas, 2000: 185).

The philosopher and law theoretician Jeremy Bentham connected publicity with rational discourse which enables the public to form an "enlightened" judgement. In his conception, the supervision over the selfishness of law-makers and executive power should be performed by the body being the most interested in the respect for freedom that he named "Public Opinion Tribunal"

(more on this Cutler: 1999). His committees would work in communities and would be composed of all citizens that were able to publicly discuss the activities of power bodies. In his reflections, the essential feature is preserved: the public is clearly separated from those who govern.

Unlike Bentham, A. de Tocqueville – supporter of aristocratic liberalism – warns against the strong pressure of public opinion that forces the individual to conformity. In his democracy analysis of the US democracy of that time, he expressed a warning against the tyranny of the majority and loss of the individual freedom. The public therefore has a very strong influence in the democratic nations (…) it does not persuade anybody about its opinion, it simply commands and pursues by penetrating into the souls through the very strong pressure that is given to the mind of the individual by the collective mind" (Tocqueville, 2006: 629). In the role of a control mechanism, he would rather see independent judicial power. However, he was the first to clearly distinguish the civil society and the "political world". Similarly, J. S. Mill warned against the dictatorship of the public opinion since it blocks the expression of different views. He drew the attention to the fact that such a process is taking place either in a political way (e.g. the superiority of the political party that monopolizes power), or economical (lobbing of the monopolies enables them to take over the real power in the country).

The repressive role of the public opinion that interferes with the personal freedom and self-expression has also been strongly criticized by political scientist W. Lippmann who in his work *Public Opinion* (1922) introduced the notion of stereotype and pointed out to the strong share of accidental experiences and prejudices in the thinking of people. Moreover, modern mass communication means lead towards to the concentration of all the information into brief slogans. Thus there is a barrier between the citizens and the problem life issues (Lippmann, 1921: 24). Lippmann had doubts about the ability of citizens to decide on complex issues. Governments should not listen to the public opinion and surrender to the majority dictate. These opinions can be heard as well among the current authors of the normative approach to the topic of the public. More information on this issue can be found in the cited work of S. Splichal.

● **Classic sociological approaches to the topic of the public and public opinion**
I will start the second issue from the listed traditions of research in this area by pointing out to the fact that the notion of the public is not any more primarily focused on its relation to the government but to the similar spontaneous collectives. G. Tarde, e.g., unlike Le Bon, suggested using the term "crowd" exclusively for situations when people feel physically close. He postulated the

psychology of the public, predicting big future to such a group, since it is much closer to modernity. It is characterized by the diffusion based on spiritual closeness that develops as a result of the improvement of the mass opinion exchange means (Szacki, 1981: 359).

The classic notion of the public can be also found in the work of R. E. Park who elaborated on the conception of group behaviour. He argues that the public as well as the crowd origin in their mutual interactions in informal settings, and the duration of both is limited. However, the public is different since it is a collective fixation towards a certain problem, and thus a rational reflection is needed. Its main characteristics are the criticalness and presence of different opinions. His conception emphasises the category of conflict (Szacki: 1981: 654) which is used to conceptualize the public. Similarly, according to H. Blumer, the public is a basic and spontaneous group differing from the mass in the fact that it reacts to a problem, engages in a discussion, and is usually divided on the basis of various opinions. A mass is composed of anonymous individuals, there is hardly ever some mutual interaction, and a mass is difficult to mobilize. The public pressure on the people´s behaviour is also the assumption of the social control concept by E. A. Ross.

The integral theory of public opinion by F. Tönnies significantly enriched the nest of concepts regarding the conceptualization of the public. He understood the public as a form of societal will. While in the *Gemeinschaft* control is provided by the habit and tradition (religious), in the *Gesselschaft* it is performed by public opinion (Kürwille – reflexive will). In his work *Kritik der öffentlichen Meinung (1922)* – as Rendlová reminds –, Tönnies defined three forms of public opinion that are not preserved in their exact meaning in the English translation[4]. Public opinion is a normative type ideal – the expression of societal will, while the first two forms of public opinion belong to the real empirical world. The public is different from a mass or crowd in that there is a spiritual bond among people and the ability to clearly express their common opinion based on critical thinking and knowledge more than on unverified impressions, beliefs or authority. We need to notice that Tönnies was the first not to tie these concepts to a given social space but to a group, the meaning of the subject in its interactions.

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[4] A) The first form is **published opinion** (*öffentliche Meinung*) when the published opinions of individuals addressed to the recipients while they do not necessarily need to match their personal beliefs. It is a summary of all the expressions of the mental life of the society and it is very heterogeneous. B) The second form is *eine öffentliche Meinung*, (**public opinion**) that emerges when it changes to the majority opinion, thus it expresses the merger of the various opinions and it is a transitional phase towards the third form. C) The third form is represented by **opinion of the public** (*die öffentliche Meinung*). It is only a theoretical concept, as an expression of the social will; the public is a subject of that will, social unit of the temporary duration similar as a mass or crowd (Rendlová, 2002: 15).

The classic period of the second tradition of the public research is concluded by John Dewey, the philosopher of pragmatism´s work *The public and its problems (1927).* As a starting point, he chose the analysis of the activities and their outcomes that can be twofold. The first category is formed by the outcomes directly influencing the life of persons engaged. The outcomes influencing other persons (not directly involved) belong to the second category. He considers this to be the core of division between "the privateness" and "the publicness" (Deway, 2001: 54). For example, if the consequences of the activities of two persons (whether they help or hurt each other) do not influence any other persons, they belong to the private sphere. If their interactions and the outcomes of these interactions have impact on the group of non-engaged persons – they become a public issue. The public is thus formed by people that feel the need to react. This conception of the public is interesting not only because Dewey thought also about the need to authorize publicly active persons to regulate such impacts. This leads to the building of a political state. Here Dewey differs from other theoreticians who always saw the public as the opposite of the state and the political power. The second reason of Dewey´s visions being original is the fact that his way of raising the issue implies the question when and how the political is developed in the everyday life of the society. This is the question raised in this study.

Understandably, the influence of the indirect outcomes of activities (that are much more complex) can be seen in the plurality and variability of publics. Moreover, their impact is diversely significant and the consequences are viewed differently. The means the public can use to defend itself against those consequences are different as well. This fact brings a lot of serious problems; Dewey therefore admitted "degeneration" of the public, given the influence of the commercial media or political parties. He wrote: "The public is so much confused and in such a degeneration that it even cannot use the bodies aimed to perform political activity and management of the state" (Dewey, 2001: 135).

Both traditions of the public and the public opinion conceptualization have almost broken down facing the pressure of the election industry (probing) and new field emergence – "public relations" that challenge the value of the traditional theories. As a consequence, the theoretical interest in the public as a subject vanished during the 1920s – 1930s, and public opinion is not any more understood as a social process taking place in the form of group interactions, but as a quantity that can be measured by research. The notion of public opinion has therefore shifted from the "substantive" understanding to the "adjective" one without the public being its heart and brain (Splichal, 2012: 73).

The Renaissance of the theoretical analyses in the post-war period

Only in the 1950s we can talk about the return of the social theory to the problem of the public. The most well –known is the reflection of W. Mills who in his work *Power Elite* again considers the public as a driving force of democratic power. He states that the main characteristics of the public – public discussion as a process of the creation of the people´s public power – is in the stage of decline because of the social change towards a mass society ruled by an elite through information media. He writes about the plurality of the public and says that in the conditions of the mass: 1. people significantly less express their opinions than they receive it, 2. the means of mass information are organized in a way that it is not possible for an individual to react effectively, 3. the realization of the public activities is under official control, 4. institutions do not provide autonomy to the mass, they even limit it to prevent the development of the essential discussion (Mills, 1966: 361).

In 1958, Hannah Arendt published a book entitled *The Human Condition*[5] *in the USA*. In this great study she was the first from the modern philosophers to dust off the neglected concept of the public in order to rehabilitate the politics as an authentic sphere of plurality, freedom and equality. Her conception of the public has become the most important source of inspiration for J. Habermas (see Gümplová, 2008), and such spring it is for our current considerations as well. The return to the sources of the ancient Greek philosophy which she stridently analysed made it possible for H. Arendt to point out the authentic experience of the political. The political was born in the public forum in a polis, then a new dimension of the human condition (conditionality). She underlines the specific nature of mutual interaction of different individuals in the plurality – that she distinguished from the work and manufacture as well – and thus the public sphere is created. During such activity, understanding and agreement about the things of mutual interest are sought, ergo political concern about the future. At the same time, the situation creates the potential for power that belongs to the whole and to all participants. Arendt postulated the request for autonomy in the public space, which we are not able to reach in the modern society, thus she criticized the issue. As Arendt claims, this dimension of human condition vanished in the practical history as well as in the human thinking, being in strong contrast to the modern situation.

The significant breakthrough in the modern study of "the publicness" issue came with the publishing of the Jürgen Habermas´ work *Strukturwandel der*

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[5]The Czech translation named "*Vita aktiva neboli o činném životě*" (Vita active or about active life) grew from the German version that was widened when compared with the English version from 2009

Öffentlichkeit (1962). The translated publication titles[6] show that the new (second in a row) wave of the decline of the public conception as a subject emerged, since this key issue had been long gone from the scientific journals pages. The problem does not lie only in the fact – as Splichal states – that the German conception of *Öffentlichkeit* has no exact equivalent in English. The traditional English term "the public" is much narrower than its German counterpart – *Öffentlichkeit*. Not only the two terms are not synonymous, since the public is only one of the meanings of the term *Öffentlichkeit*, but the German term represents a whole range of different conceptions for which English uses different terms (Splichal, 2012: 66). The problem can be as well assigned to the fact that the academic discourse was buttoned up to the controversial term "public sphere", when scientists quickly surrender to the noble fancy term understood as a space. This caused an innocent deception to the classic notion of the public as a collectivity, cultivated during two centuries[7]. Things got right only very recently, as S. Splichal states referring to B. Peters, who "*expressis verbis*" wrote that the classic democratic – theoretical conception of the (political) public (*Öffentlichkeit)* includes two meanings – social "sphere" as well as "collectivity" (Splichal, 2012: 66).

The credit certainly belongs to J. Habermas mainly for the detailed research of the evolution process of the public (the most detailed in the modern period) and its progressing changes. He provided evidence of the transition process from the "representative public" as a representative of feudal rule in front of the people (and not to the people), as the meaning of the word "the publicness" was shifted to the word "state" during the formation of the modern *state* law. He explained how the terms "public, the audience" entered the discourse at the end of the 18th century in accordance with the demands of the enlightened notion of intellect. The impact was given to the cognitive and critical attributes. That is when professional associations join town corporations and change into the sphere of *civil society.* As Habermas states, economic conditions of market growth and the development of capitalism has become an issue of public interest. The expansions of cities and towns, their inhabitants and the emergence of regular press created a new situation for the rulers. The well-

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[6] Published in English in 1989, it was named "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society". In the Polish translation, it was named "Strukturalne przeobrażenia sfery publicznej", in 2008, and in Czech „Strukturální přeměna veřejnosti. Zkoumání jedné kategorie občanské společnosti", in 2000.

[7] Habermas in his contribution published 30 years later - Further Reflections on the Public Sphere – in the year-book Habermas and the Public Sphere (1992): edited by C. Calhoun, Cambridge: MIT Press, 421-461 – next to the term public in the sense of social collectivity determines "public sphere" that he defines as "all such communication conditions which can be used to create opinion and will in the public that is composed of the citizens of the state" cited from Rendlová – Lebeda (2002: 11).

educated citizens from literary groups, salons and edification associations in the big cities formed discoursive spawn from private persons as the widening and as well complementation of their intimate family sphere (Habermas, 2000: 117). At first they discussed culture, literature or edification. When the discussion of the educated people became permanent, the public has become institutionalized as an autonomous audience at the growing influence of the press (editorial offices). Discussions soon became critique of the existing power relations, and emancipation ideals were formulated. These audiences started to be aware of their own political subjectivity. Everything that the audience was given to review, gained *publicity*. The idea of independent critical judgement led to the unified "public opinion". The ideas of the Enlightenment and the explosion of the French Revolution initiated the birth of the historically new type of the public, based on the conception of human rights, civil and political freedoms; a new counterpart for the official rule emerged – *civil public.* It dared to force the official power to legitimize itself in the face of public opinion which then acquired the character of *the political.* "Political public rises from the literary public; through public opinion it executes the function of mediator between the state and the needs of society." (Habermas, 2000: 91). The era of absolutism was thus over. Habermas assigns autonomy to its original liberal form in accordance with his opinion.

Therefore before the end of the 18th century the public and public opinion[8] formed a new authority system that newly required to be appealed to. Liberal notion of the public reaches its apogee in the liberal constitutional state of the 19th century. The following progress was fully influenced by the expansion of the mass communication means, commercial services and the development of the mass democracy involving less educated groups of people. The liberally predetermined public became diversified, and gradually the supervision of the public by the economic and political power was pursued in the life of the bourgeois society. Habermas evaluated it as *re-feudalization* of the society. The public lost its exclusivity after the arrival of the commercial mass media which in fact co-modify it (Habermas, 2000: 281 a n.).

Habermas reacts by new theoretical solutions stemming from the searching for the answer to the crisis of the society-power relations in the countries of liberal democracy. Their citizens are more and more an object of manipulation, we thus need to find a way to emancipate them from the societal pressure. He found the starting point in the idea of intact and uncontrolled communication which is the expression of the self-ability of human beings. There is no space to present his conceptions of communicative actions and two level model of

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[8] According to R. Noelle-Neumann, the term public opinion was firstly used in France in the 18th century in the work of J.-J. Rousseau and soon after in the fiction literature when in 1872 the novel of Ch. De Laclos *Dangerous Liaisons* was published (Noelle-Neumann, 2004: 83-84)

society (life area vs. system) that moulds Habermas' interpretation of the modern public. He postulated the need to turn the socially integrated power of solidarity of the autonomous public against the system integrating medium of power and money. Within this framework, *communicative rationality* can be applied. His theoretical contribution provoked many responses including controversial viewpoints[9]. Related to this, the critique (Mouffe, 2005a: 52) accuses Habermas of relying on something imaginarily universal, some referential value outside the impact of politics, hence the temptation to stabilize human affairs by engaging non-political order. In regard to this, P. Dybel (Dybel, Wróbel, 2008) profoundly analyses the viewpoints of Habermas as well as his critiques, while appreciating his work as an inspiration for the research of his followers.

An attempt at current terminological solutions

The review of all the viewpoints up till now suggests that in the long intellectual tradition of the research of the public many theoretical approaches having disparate terminology emerged. In the current phase of the civil public research we thus need to try to come up with a proposal for terminology solutions (not requiring definite validity) to prevent unnecessary misunderstandings. I will try to present a terminology solution for the nest of conceptions that reflect difficult nature of the public life with up till now accustomed meanings that were elaborated by the political philosophy, law science, and theory of mass communication or sociology. I do respect the last version drawn up by S. Splichal in his cited work, the difference lies in the fact that my proposal favours interpretations focused more on the usage in sociology analysis.

1. *The public* mainly expresses active **collectivity** composed of formally equal citizens. Such collectivity is created spontaneously while discussing important and conflicting questions and affairs of their mutual coexistence. On the basis of the situation it puts on the nature of the actor who pursues or enforces agreed solutions. It can well be a contradiction to the mass or crowd even though that there are signs of passion, desire, fantasy or intuitive thinking present in the

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[9] Tens of books and hundreds of studies in the scientific journals have been published until today that dispute his conception of the public sphere and with the philosophical theory of the communicative action as well. I mention at least significant books and almanacs such as: Hölscher, L. (1979) "Öffentlichkeit und Geheimnis. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Entstehung der Öffentlichkeit in der frühen Neuzeit". Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta; "Habermas and the Public Sphere" (1993), Edited by Craig Calhoun, The MIT Press Cambridge (with the contribution by J. Habermas); Peters, B. (2007) "Der Sinn von Öffentlichkeit". Edited By H. Wessler, with an introduction by J. Habermas. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp; "The idea of the public sphere. Aβreader." (2010) Ed. By Jostein Grisrud et. al. Lanham, MD: Lexington, and more.

activities of the public. Maffesoli as well speaks about such characteristics of today´s people, because it belongs to the subject (2006: 112). The defining feature is not only participation in the discussions and common actions, but what is needed is the feeling of belonging to some public. It can take a form of virtual or imaginary community (social networks on the internet). I did refer to the potency of the public (the pressure on the power structures or their de-legitimization) in more detail at the annual scientific conference of the Institute of Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Stena, 2011: 190-200).

2. **Public sphere** is a certain infrastructure, imaginary *space* that requires institutional framework, but as well background in the form of cultural traditions, social patterns, political culture and civil freedoms. It represents the counterbalance to the private world. While the public is an activated group, public sphere is neutral space. Many consider it to be a discursively created market of opinions, communication exchange and chance to gain some importance. There we have very important problems: who is an actor and to what extent is the public spontaneous. Public sphere is thanks to communication technologies freed from space dependence. Currently it globalizes.

3. **Public opinion** is a product of the public, a specific *response* of its self-expression. It is a phenomenon of the attitude; usually it has no action potential (Jungová, 2004: 258). Since the public is socially differentiated, public opinion necessarily acquires a manifold or even contradictory mix of opinions. It is necessary to distinguish between its two modalities: a) empirical, as an outcome of routine surveys of opinions and attitudes of the inhabitants to the chosen topics[10]; b) public opinion as a normative will, agreement or argument taking place among citizens regarding a certain problem. That is usually close to the action. A sociological description of the public discourse would probably bring much more valuable and consistent outcomes on the public mentality than routine surveys.

4. *Publicness* as an attribute indicates the **status** when something is common, whether it is an object, activity or a space, e.g. a public meeting, public funds, institutions, public speech. Public is what everybody can see or is available for all and what is going on in front of everybody. The opposite is what is private, hidden, confidential or secret.

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[10] In the course of history and in the present as well, the public opinion polls are highly criticized not only politically (the public opinion manipulation threatens democracy) but as well regarding the validity of the findings. For example, Rendlová writes: "Methodology of the surveys supposes the same value of all the opinions disregarding their intensity. A significant number of citizens express their opinion although they are not fully convinced of it. These people would never attend public discussions or any other actions initiated by the citizens" (Rendlová, 2002: 23).

5. *Publicity* is an activity that makes people visible or people make someone or something an object of perception, attention and interest. To secure transparency and draw attention is not purposeless; it is a tool to influence the behaviour of the recipient. The term *manipulative publicity* developed that moved the term "publicity" closer to public relations and promotion.

6. The abstract-normative concept of *publicness (Öffentlichkeit* in the broad sense)* is a principle that is usually embodied in the ethics or in a universally recognized norm of the communities. This notion has developed within the philosophy of politics and law science as a natural human right – to speak and to be heard.

Cited S. Splichal states three other terms but it is not necessary to mention them here. However, it is necessary to distinguish between the terms "the public" and "the public sphere". Those are the terms that express completely different ontological realities[11]. The public is a sociological category marking collectivity where the members are acting (discoursively). They express their opinions and share the feeling of belonging (similar as in the social groups based on the ethnic or political affiliation). On the other hand, public sphere is "only" the infrastructure of the public, not in the technical sense or as a formal availability of public communication channels that can be used to free and open communication. Public sphere is a "forum" that is needed (and created as well) by the public and reminds us of an ancient *agora* or *forum "Romanum"*.

The relationship between "civil society" and "the public" can be considered organic, since the public is a root element of what we consider civil society. Right out of "the body of the public" various organized forms of associations developed. We can indeed see – according to Ch. Mouffe – that the concept of civil society is not sufficient in the current conditions to uncover the new problems and connections.

The relation between the public and the political – an attempt to formulate a hypothesis

To fully understand current civil public and its potential, we need more than the above-mentioned conceptual determination and terminological differentiation. We need to consider transformation trends in the societies of the European civilizational circle as well as the movement of thought that follows these

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[11] Splichal refers to this: „Bentham's main concern was how to make sure that all dealings in the political assembly would be subject to surveillance by the public and its main organ, the newspaper" (...) „Arguing that „systematically and critically checking on government policies is the primary task for the public sphere (Verstraten, 1996: 348), rather than for *the public*, denies fundamental differences between 'the public' and 'the public sphere' (...) The conceptual replacement of 'the public' with 'the public sphere' implies the disappearance of the body public through a discursive process" (Splichal, 2012: 67-68).

changes. A new post-modern situation was created: we live under the pressure of invisible connections, we feel that someone anonymous is deciding on our behalf (what our life should look like, how and where we should live), and individuals hardly notice what their own influence to the real situations is. This has never been here before.[12]. Long-term perspectives have given way to "short-term" ones, the pace of changes is getting quicker, political situation lost its readability and it is getting more and more dramatic. Our mind is looking for new horizons and things that it knew until now are subject to examination from the viewpoint of ongoing changes. In the field of theory, we register an increase of the interest in the analysis of the political, while the sociological dimension of its determination remains unnoticed. That is why the question of uncovering the relations between the civil public and the political becomes the topic.

As already mentioned, Hannnah Arendt refered to the ancient Greek experience with the political in the life of a *polis*. The political emerged in the mutual influence inside the plurality of individuals – let me remark that it emphasized their unique diversity and individuality of each of them – when they *raised* issues of their common world in the presence of the others. Arendt explicitly writes about "talking and showing" and this "fact that can only be bestowed in the presence of the surrounding world of people, namely the circumstance that man is seen and heard, that he shows himself in front of the others" (Arendt, 2009: 258). It is a unique activity taking place directly and without any means among people, "it is such an activity that only creating the public space in the world" (Ibid.).

Let us get back to our reality: in everyday life, the public raise their own problems and move them to the threshold of visibility. The performance of the public – of the actor – includes certain expectations from the power structures and from the other members of the community as well. If the given problem is such a significant one that it needs engagement of the other citizens, new relationship quality is born – the political[13] as a "particularity of the public space … and its power potential ... only exists to the extent of its actual realization" (2009: 260). This power potential is understood by Arendt not as an expression of the state sovereignty, but as a possible agreement effect, the potential update of their mutual power that is born out of their cooperation and it is not delegated to anyone. Some current authors are not satisfied with the

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[12] This was pointed out by P. Dybel and Sz. Wróbel who are referring to Benjamin Constant. See: cited work, p. 18.
[13] The idea of the political is particularly elaborated by Carl Schmitt in his work *Begriff des Politischen* in 1932. The Czech translation "Pojem politična s předmluvou a se třemi korolárii." Praha – Brno: OIKOYMENH was published in 2007. Sharp discussions are still running about its intellectual heritage that is undoubtedly original.

logic of the agreement achieved in the open debate (based on the assumption that a consensus is always available).

Chantal Mouffe, the philosopher of politics, even though she does not address the issue of the public directly, in regard with the conflictualist notion of social reality (advocated by Max Weber or P. Bourdieu[14]), differs "the political" and "the politics". The differentiation is as follows: "by the 'political' I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by 'politics' I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing the human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political" (Mouffe, 2005a: 9). Such determination of the political has its opponents[15], I would say it misses a sociological ending (connection to the public, something is political to the extent of inducing coming change). The political as an attribute of the social life is in principle ineradicable. Not to understand "political" substantially, C. Schmitt preferred its naming by an adjective. What is the natural state for Thomas Hobbes, that is the issue of the political for C. Schmitt. He chose completely new categories to determine the political. Thus for the political he suggested bipolarity of each of the relationships within the limits of "friend/enemy". Those are the marginal positions of the relationship that people normally – influenced by the habit to use neutral words – do not even realize.

The line between what is social and what political is unstable by its nature; it needs constant movements and re-negotiations among social actors. Led by her differentiation, Ch. Mouffe thus states that collective identities created as some kind of "we" as an opposite to some "they" can, in some conditions, take an antagonistic character. She continues: " bipolarity friend/enemy is not the only form the antagonism can have – it can as well be manifested differently. I therefore do suggest the differentiation of its two forms: true antagonism – existing among enemies, ergo persons that do not share the common symbolic space – and such variety that I call "agonism" (Mouffe, 2005b: 33). In the second case, both sides of the relationship belong to the common symbolic space and they mutually accept their legitimacy. Ch. Mouffe uses the term

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[14] L. Wacquant writes: his vision of the society is equally as in Marks Weber´s work basically agonistic: social world is for him the place of never-ending and ruthless competition. Within this framework differences occur that are the basis of the social existence. Omnipresent feature of the collective life he is trying to enhance and explain in his research is competition, not stagnation." Wacquant, I. (2002): Pierre Bourdieu. In: Biograf 27. http://biograf.institut.cz/clanky/clanek.pp?clanek=v2707

[15] E.g. M. Karwat blames the author for "the political" being not only opposing interests, but the disharmony of interests and politics of such oriented subjects often leads to social devastation (Karwat, 2010: 68).

"rivals" here. The role of politics is to create conditions to prevent the appearance of antagonism.

She sharply disputes the authors that bypass the political and rely on the creation of the rational consensus by de-liberalization (Giddens, Beck). Ch. Mouffe vehemently advocates the model of liberal democracy that enables the conflict resolution in the form of real political rivalry. On the contrary, she postulates the need of its further deepening to the radical one, not in the Jacobean sense, but by refusal of the present practice "the discursive formation of a democratic consensus" (Mouffe, 2005a: 52) at the expense of the political. She argues that every consensus exists only as a temporary outcome of the transit hegemony (Mouffe, 1999: 756). The attempt to eliminate the political from the public life can be seen since the neo-liberal power administration was established in the last decades of the 20th century.

This manoeuvre is usually called de-politicization and it means "the process in which the forming and taking decisions having direct or indirect impact on the whole society is still more and more conducted only by the power elites. Equally as the majority of citizens do not have the chance to decide, they have still less possibilities to change this process by legal means." (Hauser, 2010: 105). The antagonistic feature of the liberal democracy is vanishing, the citizens feel the conflict between the democratic ideals and the sovereignty of people reduction – it is limited to the election act itself. In the accord of de-politicization, questions are raised why people should decide about important questions? They are no professionals, they have no responsibility and they only think about themselves and a material profit. Would it not be better to let experts, professional politics and influential spheres (media) decide? The aim of de-politicization is to lull the public and bring on only such topics that are out of their reach – their solution is dependent only from the power structures. The topics such as the threat of terrorism, the threat imposed by Islam on the Western civilization, etc. are thus popular because it is easier to reach a consensus. At the same time, this created conditions for the repeated (for the 3rd time in history) elimination of the public from the horizon of scientific reflection.

"The politics that is trying to close the space of argument and swears to God, expertise or undoubted morale, is depoliticized" (Barša, Slačálek, Stőckelová, 2010: 196). However, each de-politicization is only temporary and the reaction first comes in mind. Power solutions at the end always cause doubts among people (usually rising generations) and lead to the reassessment of the situation on the basis of their own experience. People then include wider context and unpremeditated consequences into their thinking. When a situation of a trigger pulse occurs, the political announces itself. The same happened in 2008 when the financial crisis emerged. The solutions adopted to overcome the

crisis created a situation where the impacts of the cutbacks in public budgets were enormously felt by large groups of citizens (mainly by the middle class). This mobilized the public in many countries of the world. An increase in mass dissatisfaction, explosion of unrest and protests as well as changes in the electoral behaviour of people start to attract the attention of the analysts mainly of alternative orientation. The return of the public into the decision-making process is being weighed (as an outcome of the current crisis of practice within the liberal democracy), opening space for re-activity of the political. Certainly, we need to try to renew the autonomy of politics by active entry of the public into the political life.

Conclusion

Such theoretical analysis of the current movements in the public sphere within our society needs to be expanded by the hypothetical model of mechanism of the overgrowth of the "social" into "political" in the course of our everyday life, or as Habermas says – in the life world. I would here link up to J. Dewey who defined the public by pointing out the dual consequences of human activities. The consequences having impact on the non-aligned people – their size is increasing in the times of globalization – sooner or later they enter their minds. Under such consequences, the image of WE (non-aligned) is formed among them as an opposite to those that came to our life by having consequences for their activities. Hence we create the image of certain THEY. WE – either we start to be suspicious, meet and debate with the like-minded people or we form a community on the internet and its social networks, eventually attend the public protest. Such "they" can as well be state authorities, developers or inadaptable citizens, it depends on the problem or situation that provoked the movement. "We" is the spontaneously and temporarily formed public. Both collective identities here gained new quality of the political; the relation between them is of an agonic[16] nature, the confrontation with all the attributes of the public (passions, desires, intuitive thinking) can cause various effects. The confrontation can rise in quantity and space, and the forms of competition can be sharpened. The public pressure has many times decided about the politically significant changes; let me remind, for example, the decisive role of the public in the fall of the communist regime in 1989. Today, the public has as well the decisive power over self-limitation of the official power structures. We can see that the power relations in the society are an open issue.

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[16] The term "agonic" rises from the ancient Greek word <agón> that has more meanings: competition, match, the scene of intense argument among actors in the Greek comedy.

The analysis of the empirical overgrowth of the "social" into the "political" and its various forms these processes acquire in the Slovak society is the research task of a sociologist. The given conceptual instrumentarium could help to characterize the state of the Slovak public and deeply analyse the nature of the changes we live through, or more respectively to assess the share the public has on these changes.

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