Transcultural Discursive Spaces. A Sociology of Knowledge's Perspective on Public Spheres in the Global Era

In the 21st century, people from all over the world realise, shape and perceive public spheres across cultural, linguistic, regional and national borders. The occupy movement, the World Social Forum, the World Economic Forum in Davos, and international art exhibitions all generate discursive spheres that are no longer consistent with the classic narrative of a public sphere linked to nation states and their people. However, an alternative narrative is yet missing: What is an adequate way to look at today's public? Within the framework of my habilitation, I introduce the concept of Transcultural Discursive Spaces as a new sociological narrative of public that opens the structure of the old narrative to phenomena of the global transfer of culture and knowledge that are not covered by previous theories. To develop this new concept, the traditional narrative is examplarily reconstructed using key literature. Furthermore, it is complemented by theories on the emergence of new transcultural spaces. Using the example of *Documenta14* (2017), that took place in exhibition venues in Athens and Kassel, the genesis of a Transcultural Discursive Space is reconstructed. Thereby, the plausibility of the concept is put to test.

This project is motivated by the observation that supposedly neutral or objective meta concepts of humanities are, as discussed here using the example of public, embedded in pre-scientific narratives. Thus, the idea of public as in wide use in the social sciences reveals a narrative structure that is intimately linked to the notion of a unity of nation, territory, people, and culture that arose in the 18th century. State, people and public are thought of as congruent and cohesive and the public is perceived as an Attic agora in which citizens negotiate public concerns. Despite frequently described processes of change in the course of transnationalization and globalization, the basic structure of the narrative remains the same. Its persistence and validity are barely being reflected
upon, which gives rise to analyses and judgements on social processes that are not appropriate to the global era. The comprehensive literature on the transfer of knowledge, ideas, objects, and people in the 21st century draws attention to the emergence of public spaces as results from new hybrid cultural forms, which arise through the exchange of knowledge and cultural encounters. These spaces allow people to interpret the world afresh, differently. Public spheres are no longer linked to the bounded spaces of nation states. Complementary, they construct themselves through diverse transcultural discourses that can change existing knowledge systems and attributions of meaning about the world we live in.

To enable a discussion on the concept of Transcultural Discursive Spaces we need to reconstruct the knowledge order of the narrative on the basis of narratives on public spheres. For this purpose, I use widely widely known theories on state and public that prima facie seem to contradict and convey the narrative of public as an Attic agora: Jürgen Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy, Hannah Arendt's elaborations on the political and public actions, John Dewey's concept of public local networks as the heart of a state, and Niklas Luhmann's Systems Theory. These theories are complemented by classic literature on public spheres by Georg Simmel, Pierre Bourdieu, and Anthony Giddens. Additionally, they are discussed with regard to their contribution to the narrative of public spheres as spaces linked to nation states and societies. Subsequently, the narrative structures of theories on public spheres beyond methodological nationalism are critically reconstructed (Saskia Sassen, Ulrich Beck, David Held, Daniele Archibugi, Martin Albrow). These approaches are then contrasted with and reflected on by means of theories on the transfer and exchange of cultural knowledge. To this end, I use theories on drifting terms and concepts (Edward Said, Mieke Bal), ones that explicitly address the development of spaces through cultural exchange and knowledge transfer (Arjun Appadurajj, Homi K. Bhabha, Paul Gilroy), and finally ones that problematize other (postcolonial, provincial) spaces (Dipesh Chakrabarty, Achille Mbembe, Mahmood Mamdani, Gayatri Ch. Spivak, Chandrak Talpade Mohanty). As a result the well-established narrative of public spheres can be reflected considering conceptions of space for the transfer of cultural knowledge about knowledge transfer and the development of Transcultural Discursive Spaces. This
reflection serves as the basis for the development of an alternative concept of public spheres in the global era – the concept of Transcultural Discursive Spaces.

The aim of the concept of Transcultural Discursive Spaces is to overcome the 'blindness' of the traditional narrative on public phenomena of transcultural knowledge transfer and the formation of discourses. The *documenta14* is relevant because of its transcultural character and its self-understanding as a political world exhibition. Its Slogan 'Learning from Athens' aims at starting a dialogue across both localities (Greece and Germany) between international artists and visitors from which a new discourse on the future of Europe shall arise. A methodological suggestion on reconstructing the discursive space as well as the complex discourse analysis of the space of the *documenta14* will help to condense the theoretical concept. Finally, an alternative narrative of public spheres can unfold.