



LISTEN CAREFULLY – DEMOCRACY BROKERS AT THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUMS

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Abstract

Interested in activists' practices of translation as a potentially innovatory method of participatory democracy in a multilingual polity like the EU, my Dissertation explores the European Social Forum (ESF) process, a transnational platform created by global justice activists, civil society groups and social movement organisations. I studied the small-scale European preparatory meetings in which hundreds of activists have met six times a year since 2002 to organise the European Social Forums, and form campaigns on global justice, peace, social policies, anti-privatisation, climate change, migration, health, education and other issues.

Comparing activists' deliberative practices in these European meetings with social forum meetings at the national level in Germany, Italy and the UK, I arrived at a surprising result: European meetings reflect a higher degree of inclusivity and transparency within deliberation and decision-making compared to the national level. The puzzle to understand is this: European meetings bring together the same groups and individuals as national meetings, but they work by a novel practice of translation in multilingual deliberations implemented by activists who do a work of cultural and political translation: principled brokers. Principled brokers intervene on the listening side of deliberative processes and may change those culturally specific "hearing habits" and informal norms of discussion that work against traditionally marginalised groups.

My findings show that the inclusion of currently absent groups in debates on the EU depends less on a lack of *voice* than on efficient translation. Members of marginalised groups felt to be included in settings where elites actively listened. Careful listening, as a condition for public dialogue, occurred in European meetings that worked with practices of translation and allowed for alliances to form between geographically and socially distant groups. In the national meetings though, a lack of care for listening and translation reproduced exclusionary decision-making among informal elites. This comparison of participatory democracy arenas at the national and European level shows that linguistic and cultural homogeneity may impede rather than facilitate an effectively inclusive public dialogue.



Jury: Donatella della Porta (Supervisor), Peter Wagner (Università di Trento/ EUI), Klaus Eder (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Co-Supervisor)

After having defended my Dissertation at the EUI, I went to Berlin to work as a Postdoctoral researcher at the French-German Centre Marc Bloch Social Science Research Center (Humboldt Universität). At Humboldt, I co-directed the junior research group Gender and Politics. Eventually, I initiated a second Postdoctoral project at the Freie Universität new created international research center “Transformative Power of Europe” funded by German Research Foundation. My Postdoctoral project refines the work on practices of translation in the Dissertation. I now focus on the role of culturally embedded emotions and visual practices of translation and diffusion of political discourses in Europe’s multilingual public sphere. I study how Western and Central Eastern European activists use online media to spread their critical visions on the issue of social justice and the problem of precarity transnationally, to network around visions of political citizenship and social rights beyond official representations of EU policy makers. Methodologically, this new project links discourse analysis with a methodology of visual analysis taken from cultural studies and ethnography. The findings of my Dissertation have been published in the journals *Mobilization*, the *European Journal of Foreign Affairs*, *Feminist Review*, *Social Movement Studies* and the *International Journal of Women’s Studies*.