

Power, politics, and environmental change

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Class 3

Communicative rationality and environmental governance

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Introduction

- Main point
 - Communicative rationality (a rationality different from HE) can be the basis for a more inclusive and legitimate way of making environmental (public) decisions
 - But it has some limitations
- Why should you know this?
 - Because this type of decision-making has a potential to be more inclusive, fair (environmental justice) and democratic

Class outline

- **Difference:** HE vs. communicative rationality
- Why communicative rationality is **important** for good environmental governance
- **Limitations** of communicative rationality and deliberative decision-making

How (in what aspects) is communicative action different to homo economicus? Why is this important for deliberative decision-making?

ASSIGNMENT QUESTION

Question

- What does the article say is “a central aspect of the homo economicus view of human behaviour”?

HE as **instrumental** rational action

Instrumental action

- Action = a **means** for achieving given/**predetermined** goals
 - Material outcomes
 - Satisfaction of values
- Central aspect of HE view of human behaviour: understanding of human action as **instrumental**

Example

- The 'rational' herder



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Question

- What does the article say is “the essence of rational action” for communicative rationality?

Reaching understanding

- Communicative action:
 - the essence of rational action is not always instrumental (achieve individual goals) but it can also be to **reach understanding** between oneself and other actors, or society in general (Dryzek, 2000)
 - Type of action involved with communicative rationality may thus reflect **logics** that go **beyond instrumental seeking of pre-defined ends**

Question

- How do we make decisions when people's rationality is oriented towards "reaching understanding"?
 - i.e. when people participate in a group that seeks solutions and they are motivated by the urge to "reach understanding"?
 - On what basis?
 - What *principle* do we use?

Consensus

- Communicative action:
 - on basis of **shared understanding** that goals are **reasonable** or merit-worthy
- Communicative action succeeds: when actors freely agree that their goals are **reasonable**/ they merit cooperative behaviour
 - Strategic action succeeds: when actors achieve their individual goals
- Communicative action: a **consensual** form of social interaction
 - Consensus: consent over a favourite option of those participating
 - Not always or absolute agreement
 - Not through voting, but through discussion

Deliberative democracy

- **Democratic life** emerges in situations where institutions enable citizens reach such understanding
 - By **rationaly** debating matters of public importance: deliberation
- **Deliberation**: decide on an issue by:
 - Discussing it, bringing in all arguments
 - Listening to others (incl. but not limited to 'expert'-knowledge) opinions
 - **Reflecting** on what others have said: give space for
 - Change initial views on topic on the basis of what you've heard
 - Reach agreement, **consensus**, on merit-worthy course of collective action

Question

- What are the benefits of making decisions on the basis of deliberation, i.e. after:
 - Discussing, bringing in all arguments
 - Listening to others (incl. but not limited to ‘expert’-knowledge) opinions
 - Reflecting on what others have said: give space for
 - Change initial views on topic on the basis of what you’ve heard
 - Reach agreement, consensus, on merit-worthy course of collective action

Benefits

- Deliberation of matters of public importance: most **legitimate** and **useful** guide to public decision-making
- **Legitimate**: because
 - All possible views are taken into account during decision-making
 - Agreement over course of collective action is result of voluntary agreement/ change of opinions
- **Useful**: because effective
 - When your views have been considered you are more likely to not obstruct implementation of policies as you have already been part of process and have been convinced about usefulness of action taken

Implementing deliberative democracy

Deliberative public spheres: forums

- Public forums to discuss questions of neighbourhood life where people with different customs and moral principles (e.g. religion, entertainment) is at stake
- Public forums to discuss wind farm siting decisions: people change their opinions/ preferences in response to what they hear been said

Example: Nat'l Issues Forums (USA)

- “non partisan, nationwide network of organizations and individuals who sponsor public forums and training institutions for public deliberation.”
- Everyday citizens get to deliberate on the various issue through NIF forums, e.g. civil rights, education, energy, government, etc.
- “Think, Deliberate, Act.” is the slogan on the NIF website

Environmental governance

- **Legitimate and effective** environmental governance (way of making public decisions re: environmental change) should involve creating such deliberation public spheres
 - E.g. in form of forums
- **Also: procedural environmental justice** potential
 - Fairness in the process of making environmental decisions
 - Representativeness of views in decision-making processes
 - DD: includes and so legitimises multiple views, priorities, values, languages of valuation, etc.

CRITICISMS AND LIMITATIONS

Genuine deliberation

- Genuine deliberation to take place: requires
 - Absence: of power and direct/ indirect coercion
 - Absence: strategic (e.g. manipulative) behaviour
 - Presence: rational argumentation and critical discussion
 - To: foster reflection and to enable shift in preferences

Question

- Read from: “Beyond the scope of debate” (p.2129) – until: “(participant, female, business interest)” (p.2131)
- Question: identify at least three main issues with deliberative fora

Injustice

- “Cooke and Kothari (2001) point to the tyranny of the group—where group dynamics lead to participatory decisions that reinforce the interests of the already powerful” (pp. 2129- 2130)
- Use deliberative fora to legitimise injustice (“interests of the powerful”)

Strategic action

- “In a number of cases, we found that representatives of a range of interest-groups, who shared similar goals or values, chose to work together, to agree objectives and priorities. In this way, they were able to pool power in deliberative fora to ensure a particular instrumental purpose was met” (p.2131)
- Note: they felt this was done by others, but also that they should do it next time!

Instrumental use of DD

- Dramaturgical behaviour
 - Hide an image of themselves, acceptable representation to ‘consensus audience’
 - Business reps: openness about organisational goals and values could create conflict and damage image, so they hide these
 - Rather: use alternative communication channels (‘backstage performance’) to achieve their goals...

What happens?

- Fora spaces where:
 - Instrumental (e.g. strategic action) instead of behaviours trying to “reach understanding”
 - Communicative rationality: not realised
 - Injustice is legitimised (“interests of powerful”)
 - De-legitimising deliberative democracy
- Instead of spaces of legitimate decision production and “reaching understanding”
 - DD response: but is this genuine deliberation?

Bickerstaff & Walker, 2005

- “efforts which emphasise the fairness and competence of decision-making processes are important
- “but more basic questions regarding the **distribution of political power (inside and outside deliberative forums)**
- “and the **institutional capacity for democratic change** need be addressed
- “to fully consider the importance of deliberative institutions”

A final point

- Read: “Panama president cancels Colon land sale after clashes”
- Question: What has been the result of that conflict?
- Consensus (the objective of DD) vs. **conflict**: conflict is not always a bad thing
 - Notwithstanding the severity and undesirability of people dying
 - It can some times help address existing injustice and power imbalances

Next class

- We will see a case study of environmental conflict (over wind energy)
- And consider some basic power dimensions of the conflict