

Permanent enlightenment

About the change of knowledge distribution in modern society

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Modern society, that is over 200 years old, would not be thinkable without public sphere and the inherent knowledge distribution. The aim of this contribution is to describe knowledge distribution, its social figures and its structures of relevance. At first, a communication theoretical work frame for the problem of knowledge distribution on an individual and over-individual level is shown and secondly, the fundamental need of knowledge of modern knowledge-based society is substantiated also by means of communication theory. Building on that, thirdly, the most important social figures and the branch offices of (Swiss, German Austrian) news media are described. These social figures are the “expert”, the “economic editor”, the political editor, the art-, literature and music-critic, the “intellectual”, the “priest” and the “journalist”. In the new structural change of public sphere, the social figure of the journalist penetrates every branch office, the knowledge distribution of modern society ‘undifferentiated’ itself with all its branch offices and the rationality of public communication changes. But: social figures are not perpetrators, they are part of social fields that change. The social fields of these social figures are the structures of relevance of knowledge distribution of leading news organisations that have formed branch offices.

The knowledge we have of the world usually probes in our situations of activities. The world we are faced with in our actions behaves as we expect. If this is not the case, we experience disappointment in our expectations and if we can not eliminate this by comprehension of a misunderstanding, that means a wrong interpretation of the situation of activity, we are forced to a reflexive reference to our knowledge about the world. Then the everyday pragmatic, one-dimensional relation between us and the world erupts, because we focus on our knowledge brought up by the situation and the corresponding extract of the world at the same time and so the principal fallibility of our knowledge becomes clear. This reflexive and not daily triangular relation animates processes of understanding, to develop new interpretations with others or just to be open to conviction by others. This practice of understanding about problematic issues in this world that we experience now as a problem of our knowledge becomes in that way a problem in our communication about this world. The newly developed interpretations in this process or the gained lessons can again be proved in situations of action and by doing so, we can return to our daily one-dimensional relation of pragmatic action.

In this circular process of situation coping between pragmatism and reflexive attitude we *discover* the world (Habermas 1999: 7-64). Learning processes work in that way, knowledge is generated and passed on in that way. Knowledge, that is the point of the »linguistic turn« (Rorty 1969; 1981), is structured communicatively and therefore available intersubjective. In our language, passed on knowledge is included and by learning it, we are socialised into the world. Throughout our lives, the forms and places of this process of socialisation are changed. The »significant other« of our primary socialisation is replaced by the »generalized other«

(Mead 1968) in form of socialisation agencies, like the educational system and our networks in which we exchange in our private or professional roles (in our cultures of experts) and gain knowledge through the corresponding media. The most important »generalized other« of course is the public communication. In it and only in it becomes visible, what we call society. Only because we have this entrance we are able to put the systems of action (with its institutions, organisations and roles) in relation to society and also to recognise others as part of society. In public communication the particulate world of knowledge in which we move, is overframed: in it we continually learn the relevancies of those arenas whose audience we are. Here we also continually learn new interpretations of those situations that are cut out by these relevancies.

These interpretations can analytically be divided into the three world references that we are exposed to in every situation of action: faced with the facts of the objective world we react via cognitive interpretations; normative interpretations are the means of operating in a social world structured through norms and values and emotional interpretations we gain from our privileged enterable subjective world and so we judge the objective and normative parts of situations and most of all the emotional contributions of others (Habermas 1981, Bd. 1: 225-366). Correspondingly we validate (in a reflective, learning way) the in public communication cognitively learned interpretations in a cognitive way, the normative interpretations in a normative way and the contained subjective interpretations in an emotional way.

Because this is a fact, because we reproduce the over-individual, not particularistic contents of our knowledge via the public communication (mainly transported by media), it is worth the try to measure the relevancies of public communication and the therein flowing giant streams of knowledge.

Knowledge distribution is not by coincidence structured by cognitive, normative and emotional world references that we are faced with in every situation of action. The structure of this knowledge distribution can be observed on those structures of relevance of public communication that have evolved in editorial offices of leading media especially since the middle of 19th century: branch offices. Branch offices are the structures of relevance congealed into social fields in which not only specific social figures of knowledge distribution are reproduced, but also the “knowledge of the world” is reproduced in the form of streams of communication events, that again obey branch office specific as well as historically varying news values.

To reduce the burden of argumentation of this perspective, first I will show the neediness for knowledge in public communication after the »Austritt aus dem Zaubergarten« of religious thinking (Weber 1973 [1916]: 444) (1. The addiction to knowledge of modern age). On this base the modern world references of cognitive, normative and emotional type can be combined with a description of the most important social figures of knowledge distribution and of branch offices. Through the fate of these social figures important changes in the communication of leading media can be shown (3. World references, social figures and branch offices of the public knowledge distribution).