

## RETHINKING PUBLIC SPHERE TO SAVE AMERICAN DEMOCRACY<sup>1</sup>

*The article reveals the influence of the Donald Trump presidential campaign on openness functioning in the United States. The narratives produced by a new president discourse adversely affect the exercise of democracy through the network free from the coercion openness. The concept of openness is discussed as the key concept in sense of understanding the theory of deliberative democracy by J. Habermas and his critics. A set of regulatory standards that characterize deliberation role in the process of democracy development and preconditions for its implementation has been analyzed. The authors stressed that networking as a key characteristic of openness offers new prospects for its implementation in the era of information society.*

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**Keywords:** *openness, communication, deliberation, deliberative democracy.*

### Переосмислення сфери відкритості заради збереження американської демократії

*Проаналізовано вплив президентської кампанії Дональда Трампа на функціонування сфери відкритості в США. Доведено, що наративи, які продукує дискурс нового президента, негативно впливають на здійснення демократії через мережу вільних від примусу сфер відкритості. Розглянуто поняття «сфера відкритості» як ключове у розумінні Ю. Габермасом та його критиками теорії деліберативної демократії. Проаналізовано набір нормативних стандартів, які характеризують роль деліберації у процесі становлення демократії, а також передумови її здійснення. Визначено, що мережевість як ключова характеристика сфери відкритості відкриває нові перспективи її реалізації в епоху інформаційного суспільства.*

**Ключові слова:** *сфера відкритості, комунікація, деліберація, деліберативна демократія.*

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## Переосмысление публичной сферы для сохранения американской демократии

*Проанализировано влияние президентской кампании Дональда Трампа на функционирование публичной сферы в США. Доказано, что нарративы, которые производит дискурс нового президента, негативно влияют на осуществление демократии через сеть свободных от принуждения публичных сфер. Рассмотрено понятие «публичная сфера» как ключевое в понимании Ю. Хабермасом и его критиками теории делиберативной демократии. Проанализирован набор нормативных стандартов, характеризующих роль делиберации в процессе становления демократии, а также предпосылки ее осуществления. Определено, что сетевая структура как ключевая характеристика публичной сферы открывает новые перспективы реализации в эпоху информационного общества.*

**Ключевые слова:** публичная сфера, коммуникация, делиберация, делиберативная демократия.

In the days of loud, tense and polarized public discourse in social networks returning to the concept of 'openness' is twofold: an outdated character because of conservative rationalist approach and the relevant one due to the need of strengthening foundations of modern democracies.

However, the area where everyone has the right to sell his own freedom of expression and to influence policy processes is unlikely to be able to compete with 2016 presidential campaign in the USA. Donald Trump criticized politicians and their staffs who were intended to organize a public debate in the form of implementation of the main principles of openness [1]. While the main theoretician of openness J. Habermas defined the emergence of media corporations as a threat to openness [2], Donald Trump's actions, namely, the prohibition of certain media participation in his election campaign and withdrawal some certain population from discourse, destroying the principles of openness and deliberative democracy [3]. However, it should be noted that these actions made him even more popular among the followers, and drew special attention of conservative Americans on him who had forgotten the main principle of deliberative-ness: the convictions must be true to be selected.

According to the theory of Juan J. Linz, D. Trump is an anti-democratic politician: he cannot renounce violent methods; he limits civil liberties and opposition and denies legitimacy of elected governments. By his statement

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that he had lost a lot of votes because “millions of people voted illegally,” D. Trump called into question the entire American electoral process and democracy. Although the US intelligence repeatedly stated that Russian hackers interfered with the vote counting in favor of the elected president. Of course, D. Trump is not the first American politician having autocratic inclinations (e.g., Louisiana Governor Huey Long and Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy). But he is the first politician with such inclinations who was elected the President of the United States.

According to Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, Americans have always been characterized by authoritarian trait and therefore it should not be identified as a crucial one. The reason for this is Americans’ distrust in government and public institutions that should protect them from such extremism, the media that should defend freedom of expression and offer an alternative vision. According to the Gallup polling company, 91 percent of Americans do not trust the government; 80 percent feel the same way about the media and 73 percent about the courts [4]. D. Trump actively communicated with voters through Twitter, which took away the equation variable of critical thinking and narrowed it down to mass populism. The discourse of one public person managed to neutralize the basic principles of American democracy. Therefore, in our opinion, the theory of openness needs rethinking for leveling negative effects of propaganda and populism and the rise of modern democracies.

During three decades of its existence, the J. Habermas theory was criticized for its hegemonies and prevalence of white men from Western Europe in the discourse, for exclusion of ethnic minorities, gay communities, and the middle-class from communications practices and policy development process. It was considered unnecessary at a time when the media belonging to big media corporations performed critical functions. Throughout the election campaign, D. Trump significantly worsened the relationship between the media and American politics. Today the democratic openness, the foundation of any democracy, is under two threats: the US President devastating attacks and loss of the media and the public critical function.

Openness is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It gets extra dimension and becomes a matter of interdisciplinary character in the information society. Many researchers from different areas are turning their attention to the issue of openness, and the most renowned are J. Habermas, L. Hölscher, H. Kleinstüber, C. Calhoun, A. Gutman, D. Thompson,

J. Bohman, it is worth mentioning Ukrainian research works by O. Shchurko, A. Yermolenko and A. Karas.

The objective of our work is to analyze the concept of openness, the functions that it has to perform in modern democracies.

The concept of openness was first used in 1964 in the Fischer Lexikon dictionary in the meaning of public sphere (the issue on mass communication and journalism, E. Noelle-Neumann and W. Shultz were among the authors). The next time the phrase was used in one of the articles in the New German Critique Journal in 1974, and in 1979, this concept was repeatedly used in one of the volumes of the Communication and Class Struggle series [5]. The authors of works in English, Russian and Ukrainian often noted that this concept was introduced into the scientific discourse by J. Habermas.

According to another version, the term public sphere (openness) appeared in the early translations of J. Habermas' articles and that translation somewhat bent the author's understanding of the concept. Thus, in 1974 J. Habermas wrote an encyclopedic article that presented the first definition of the German word, which is close in meaning to the Ukrainian public/open: Öffentlichkeit means a sphere of social life, where the notion close to public opinion is formed. Access [to it] is guaranteed to all citizens. The Öffentlichkeit concept partially recognizes itself in every conversation when participants gather to form associations. Universal access, reliable sources of information, voluntary participation, rational debate and argumentation, freedom of expression, freedom to discuss public affairs, freedom of participation (in the discussion) outside institutional roles are recognized as the key elements of Öffentlichkeit in the early Habermas' works (translated into English in 1989).

J. Habermas interprets formation and development of the civil society through the prism of his own theory of communicative action. Availability of openness is necessary to form capabilities of the open communication of citizens in social institutions to monitor state authorities at different levels. The German thinker agrees that routine political problems should be resolved in the political centers – governmental agencies, parliaments, courts and at the level of political parties. It is necessary to optimize the system. However, when it comes to issues affecting the life of society as a whole, it is extremely important the discussion is not limited only to actors from the political system center. To solve these issues the properly arranged openness should also include civil society representatives.

In this regard J. Habermas distinguishes autonomous (autochthone) actors who are interconnected through shared life worlds, and actors whose actions are regulated by the authorities (vermachtete), namely the formal relations of the power hierarchy [6]. To autonomous actors the philosopher attributes primary non-bureaucratic organizations and associations of citizens with little or no significant division of labor, which have a minimum number of intermediaries and are as close as possible to everyday personal experience. J. Habermas believes that such associations will have a specific organizational form. He notes that taking into account their informal multiple and differentiated communication processes they form a real periphery (structural changes). His classification standards of primary organizations are much narrower than the participatory vision of liberalism, which also highly evaluates the groups actively promoting their members in politics, regardless of their organizational form.

104 — The organizational form is important for J. Habermas because of its contribution to the deliberation process: the less bureaucratic, centralized form serves to shift political debate to the life worlds of the participants. Independent groups have a specific role in transparency and their inclusion is crucial. J. Habermas notes that these associations are communication hubs between the autonomous audiences. These associations best match for creation and dissemination of practical convictions. They focus on the issues that meet concerns of the community life, contributing to the search for possible solutions to problems of the values interpretation, providing a good motivation and discrediting others [7, p. 474].

Critics of the representative liberalism doubt that independent actors, such as social movements, deliberate better than actors who are under the influence of power, or that their communication processes are much better, as J. Habermas noted. Eventually, this is an empirical problem, when a thorough and systematic study of differences rather than relying on the authority of apriority judgments will be its best solution.

The criteria that characterize the style and content of communication in openness are the foundations of discursive tradition. Its ultimate goal is to develop such openness where the best ideas prevail over the worst thanks to their semantic content, rather than the power of supporters. The normative ideal of the vision embodied in the concept of J. Habermas philosophy is an “ideal communicative situation”. He insists that it is more than just an abstract ideal, which should be guided by the practice of communication. This concept is implemented, at least in part, when someone

enters discourse to convince others with own arguments, not just make them do something; to carry out negotiations, put forward compromise, or make other efforts to ensure that the idea affirmed in discourse.

The theory of deliberative democracy by E. Gutman and D. Thompson offers a similar set of regulatory standards. Citizens should be able to go beyond the narrow sphere of personal interests to reflect on the arguments of people who disagree with them. Deliberation can explain the nature of a moral conflict helping to distinguish between moral and immoral judgments and compatible and incompatible values. Citizens are better able to solve the issue, which was the subject of discussion if they use ethics in an effort to overcome differences. Deliberation helps to separate judgments, caused by self-interest, the judgments, which have been formed under the influence of others. To provide the critical argument it should not be important who owns this judgment. Differences in the external status or possession of power among speakers should be postponed to the background and ignored. There should be mutual recognition of all autonomous and rational actors whose opinions will be taken into account if they are supported by valid arguments in such environment.

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If the economic or political power affect this process, or it is subject to social engineering or some arguments are prohibited, the participants do not take seriously the opinions of others and the ideal communicative situation conditions are not met. Thus, inclusion, which is known as discursive tradition, has one important advantage: it facilitates the process of deliberation. Courtesy and respect are necessary.

Openness serves as the arena of political communication where the viewpoint of the public and impact on political decisions are defined, develop and as a result go through the political system. This process J. Habermas defines as “communication power” [8]. The power of communication, where open points of view are competing cannot govern alone but may influence the way of administrative power use. J. Bomen and J. Habermas believe that the deliberative discourse is possible within the real decision-making by actors with political influence inside the “powerful” openness [9, p.87]. However, as the example of D. Trump shows the power of communication may hinder the democratic process.

J. Habermas divides public areas into strong and weak ones. The strong areas are legitimate and have the discourse where decisions are made. This area is narrower than the broad public one, where the weak areas appear and communicate. According to scholar’s vision, they have only indirect

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influence. Communication in the public area should be rational, inclusive and self-reflective.

As John Dryzek remarks that J. Habermas communicative rationality understands only one authority – “powerless force is a better argument” [10, p.172].

106 — There are several important prerequisites of deliberation: 1) the participants take reasonable positions taking into consideration the importance of those aspects of social life that were problematized, 2) claims to the discourse participants’ significance are subject to verification by other participants of the debate [11]. Moreover, as J. Cohen notes, the discourse participants are required to express their speculations regarding further judgment problematization, supporting or criticizing it [12]. The aim of deliberation is acceptance (or rejection) of judgments based on the best (worst) arguments. Therefore, a better strength of the argument and not the power of government or any other external coercion should have a managing role in deliberation. The arguments must be addressed not only to those who participate in discussions but to all those for whom these judgments are potentially important. The arguments should be universal – that is, those accepted by the universal audience – not particularistic, formed for “virtual public” present only in the specific debates [11].

Talking about J. Habermas, L. Dahlberg defined criteria to be met by deliberative communication [13]. It should be: ideally inclusive (formally); free (non-coercive, including autonomy from state and corporate interests); equal (communicatively); sincere (as far as this is possible), respectful (putting oneself in the position of the other); reasoned (framing arguments in terms of why particular claims ought to be accepted) and reflexive (identity re-constituting) [11].

The public sector is reproduced through the communicative action. Thus, public opinion in the Habermas theory is the product of collective communication activities efficiently and ethically aimed at reaching agreement or consensus. Understanding of deliberative democracy as the democracy of choice by way of rational discussion and consensus is formed in his theory and similar approaches of the mid-1990s [14]. A fundamental condition for this deliberation is “the public use of reason by free and equal citizens and provides a norm for rational and critical deliberation, which is inclusive, reflexive, and aimed at understanding and agreement” [15].

A new definition of openness that J. Habermas proposed in 2006 redefined its role and function in a dualistic model of the deliberative democ-

racy: openness as the intermediary communication system between formal and informal discourses coming face to face in the arena and located at the highest and lowest levels of the political system [16]. J. Habermas creates a spiral scheme of democratic communication that differs from the scheme “communicator – channel – audience” that is commonly used in communication theory. The spiral of deliberation consists of the close local acts of political power circulation, and the spiral starts from the bottom, with public opinion formation, rather than the top, with decision making (see Fig. 1).

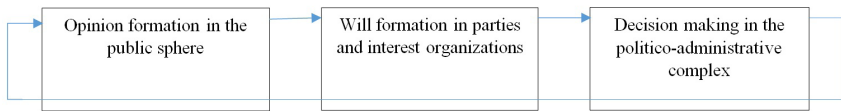


Fig.1. The circulation of political power [17]

Exaggeration of the role of any aspect prevents understanding of the deliberation actors' behavior or openness is transferred from the objectively existing reality into the psychological plane. So, C. Taylor suggested that openness was one of the key social imaginary realities, a collective form of social reality understanding, which is embedded in everyday human consciousness. These imaginary realities have a major impact because they represent a large group of people; they define social practices and are socially legitimate. C. Taylor defines openness as extra political, secular, and meta-utopian space that serves, however, as a social and political institution [18].

The approach to searching complete interpretation of the openness concept is considered idealistic by many critics of the theory of communicative action. Many J. Habermas' followers changed the vector of their research from the issue of openness to the issue of its functions. Thus, the Finnish critics of J. Habermas H. Heikkilä and R. Kunelius note that there is a constant tension between structural pre-specified condition areas that we call open and pragmatic questions about the quality of action in these areas. These two aspects are mutually determined; the concept of an open space creates a regulatory perspective of communication, including political one [19].

As part of the structural (structural-functional) approach the following functions of openness are determined: firstly, it is necessary to set patterns



of political publicity forms. For example, H. Niyeminen believes that we should analyze the forms of political publicity: who of the actors are endowed with representative status and how these people are elected, what procedural conditions exist for reasonable civic applications and, finally, what are the social relations that occur and how the process of social mediation is controlled [20].

Secondly, the function of ensuring democracy implementation. Openness has regulatory status and is considered the space where the public can always verify the state affairs (public scrutiny) [5]. If the politics is removed from public places, it will be done behind closed doors and that could damage the legitimacy and viability of the political system.

There is also an opposite view: in particular, G. Almond and S. Verba, dividing political cultures into 'subordinate' and 'participatory' (culture of participation) [21] concluded that the degree of (public areas) openness generally depends on traditional political culture and not vice versa. We believe that the interaction of these forms of political life is synergic.

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Thirdly, the function within a democratic regime: to form mechanisms of acquiring political capital and determine who will be in power, in other words, to be a source of power: openness and public discussion play an important role in the political system as a source of political power. In liberal democracies, politics is defined as a total but controversial language of debate and a set of actions carried out around the central concept of power.

Having examined the theory of openness and its main functions, we can make a conclusion that their implementation in the American society is under threat. D. Trump actively used "the power of communication" during the election campaign and continues to produce manipulative judgments as US President. His discourse is irrational and is focused on weakening democratic conservative narratives that are much weaker after social and economic crises of previous years. We believe that at the moment openness in the United States is losing its ability to influence political decision-making procedure and violates the circulation of political power. Today the network structures of openness is widely used for spreading ideas that destroy democratic ideals in the USA that have always been considered the cradle of liberal values and produced narratives of openness to the world, during D. Trump's presidency may be the primary source for democracy destruction instead of its rethinking.

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