A SHORT HISTORY OF THE EPISTEMIC COMMONS

CRITICAL INTELLECTUALS, EUROPE AND THE SMALL NATIONS

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Abstract

The quest for more openness and publicity is seen as a continuation of the long historical development of the epistemic commons, which began in the Middle Ages and culminated in the legacy of the Enlightenment. The argument is that European modernity is fundamentally based on the assumption that knowledge and culture belong to the common domain and that the process of democratisation necessarily means removing restrictions on the epistemic commons. Over the last 30 years, this optimism has suffered from two kinds of backlashes. Firstly, from the 1970s onwards, a policy of weakening and privatising public institutions has practically halted the expansion of the epistemic commons. Secondly, the other half of Europe, the CEE countries, did not benefit from the same kind of democratic development after the Second World War as their Western counterparts did. Because there was no tradition of democratic public institutions, the critical intellectuals in the CEE countries were rather helpless in promoting the ideas of publicity and democratic citizenship. The difficult questions are as follows: What can the role of critical scholars in promoting the epistemic commons be today? How should we understand the legacy of the Enlightenment – without falling for nostalgia for the 1960s and 1970s?

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In this article, I will discuss the development of epistemic institutions from the 1960s to today. By epistemic institutions, I mean such established fields of social activities as education, science, culture and the media, as well as the organisational forms representing them. The relationships between these institutions have changed throughout history, and they have fulfilled different functions at different times. Together, they form the epistemic order of society. It is vital for democracy that epistemic institutions are open and inclusive. This forms a part of our basic understanding of the constitution of a modern society.

It must be emphasised, however, that there is no interminable, historically constant relationship between epistemic institutions and democracy. In certain phases of history, these institutions have developed hand-in-hand with democracy, but we have the opposite experience as well in that epistemic institutions have also been used against democracy. It is equally important to recognise that in relation to democracy, these institutions have different functions. We can say that, for example, the function of academic education is to equip us with an epistemic and mental map of the world, cultural institutions offer us aesthetic and identity-forming experiences, the role of the media is to update our daily relationship with the world and so on.

Epistemic institutions have played a central role in the historical development of European democracy. The recent symptoms of the crisis of democracy are closely linked to the status of these institutions. Many institutions have been compelled to adopt responsibilities and functions that are external to their original social and cultural functions and their operational logics. This is the case, for example, in science and higher education, which have been compelled to finance their activities by applying commercial logics in many countries, creating a dependency on external economic conditions. Obviously, this has a direct effect on their democratic function.

Epistemic Commons

My starting point is the notion that our conception of democracy includes something that we can call the epistemic commons as one of its basic ideas. By the epistemic commons, I mean areas of shared knowledge and information that are open to all, although what we mean by "all" is always negotiable.[1] We can think of the epistemic commons as the reservoir of our shared social imaginaries, which, following Craig Calhoun (2003, 25; also Taylor 2007) are

> *more or less coherent sociocultural processes that shape actors' understandings of what is possible, what is real, and how to understand each. The influence of both interests and identity is refracted through such imaginaries – thus, not simply through culture generally but through specific formations that naturalize and give primacy to such ideas as individual, national, and market.*

The origin of the metaphoric term "commons" derives from the medieval use of the concept, referring to the collective right to use the village land, which was understood to be an open field in communal usage; no one could claim exclusive right or private ownership over it. The eventual fate of the commons is well known: through the gradual privatisation of land ownership, they were transformed into the private property of large landowners, leading to the enclosures of the commons.

Open fields and woods were divided and fenced to prevent free trespassing, which had been a common right for centuries (see Polanyi 2001). In different parts of Europe, the policy of enclosure took place at different times. In England, it started as early as the 13th century, while in Finland, it began as late as the mid-18th century.

In the realm of symbolic production, the allegory of the commons can be used to refer to the idea of the universality of knowledge and culture. Our modern liberal democracy, with its European social welfare state model, is based on an assumption that epistemic institutions are open and accessible to all and exposed to critical public evaluation as well. The idea of the epistemic commons has its historical roots in the form of social institutions, which include academic education, the sciences, culture and arts, religion, the media and so on. Institutions have their organisational appearances, for example, in the forms of the education system (schools and universities), the media (in all of its manifestations – print, electronic and recorded), cultural institutions (theatres, museums and orchestras) and religious organisations. Social institutions and their mutual relations bring about the epistemic order, which concerns such fundamentals as the understanding of the distinction between the real and the unreal, the just and the unjust, and the beautiful and the tasteless. This order is peculiar to each age and each culture (see Foucault's *Epistemé*, Regime of Truth).[2]

The concept of the epistemic order can be illustrated by comparing the West European societies of the 1910s, 1960s and 2010s.[3] What was conceived of as being real and true in the 1910s was changed fundamentally over the next 50 years. With the coming of the 1960s, Europe had survived two major wars and was now divided in two, the East and the West; societies were secularised; class relations were pacified; political systems were pluralised; the role of the state was strengthened; etc. Fifty years later, in 2010, the political order was again fundamentally changed. Europe's division had, at least officially and formally, ended; societies had become multicultural; social and political polarisation had returned; the role of the state had diminished and that of the market had been reinforced.

The term "epistemic" can be problematic because it can be understood as narrowly referring to the cognitive and rationalistic dimensions of knowledge. Here, however, it is used in a wider sense, also including non-cognitive and non-rational ways of experiencing and signifying the world, as in the forms of aesthetic experiences and creative processes. A more accurate expression might be "the commons of knowledge and shared experiences"; for convenience's sake, the shorter term "the epistemic commons" will be applied here.

The Development of the European Epistemic Commons

In what follows, a brief introduction to the development of the epistemic commons in Europe will be presented. We can say that the first (pre-)modern epistemic institutions were the early universities, which were established in various parts of Europe from the 12th century onward, first in Italy (Bologne), France (Paris) and England (Oxford). Although universities were under the tight control of the Church, new and non-conformist ideas about the nature and origin of knowledge, as well as the methods for approaching and testing it, began to develop over time. (Bartlett 1994, 288–291; Rossi 2001) The next major movement towards the epistemic

commons took place with the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century in Central and Northern Europe. The reformation movement, spreading confidence in the individual's own personal judgment and a non-mediated spiritual relationship with God, also laid the groundwork for the secularisation of knowledge and for the eventual coming of a scientific worldview (see more in Taylor 2007).

The Protestant Reformation laid the groundwork for the expansion of the epistemic commons in other ways as well. It can be claimed that the Reformation acted as the first pan-European counter-public movement (Warner 2002) that effectively used a new medium, the printing press, to promote its aims. Printed pamphlets were spread around Europe, and extensive censorship by both Church and state authorities was avoided by using small printing machines that were easily transferable from country to country (Briggs and Burke 2002). The literary publicity of those days, which was still predominantly religious, was complemented by the publicity of the pulpit, which the reformers used to spread their reformist, anti-Papal message. The effectiveness of the reformist message was seen in the expanding practice of conducting religious sacraments in the vernacular, instead of using Latin, as traditionally required by the Church. This meant making the direct spiritual relationship with God an idea that was seminal to the Reformation, a living practice. The vernacular translations of the Bible began to be spread among the lay people. Religious literature came in various forms – from the Bible to prayer books – and was the most widespread literary genre for several centuries. Thus, it is only natural that religious language and symbols have had a major influence on the development of national public cultures, including those of the countries of the Protestant Reformation (see Febvre and Martin 2010, 287–332).

The transition from the Middle Ages to early European modernity witnessed the birth of another central epistemic novelty, the newspaper press, which was the predecessor of the all-embracing media of today. With the emergence of newspapers, the critical idea of publicity was formulated for the first time, eventually leading to the claim that public opinion was the origin of political will (see Keane 1991). As is generally pointed out, newspapers were born out of the correspondence between the agents of the largest European merchants, who were located in major commercial centres around Europe, and their company headquarters. In addition to purely commercial information, their letters also included stories from various trading centres. Because their correspondence contained material of public interest – news, descriptions of foreign countries and cultures, gossip – they were copied and distributed for wider audiences. In this way, the first regularly issued newspapers were born in Central Europe as early as the 16th century (Briggs and Burke 2002).

Jürgen Habermas's seminal treatise on the origins of the bourgeois public sphere (1989) offers a useful introduction to the development of epistemic institutions. Most discussions of Habermas's presentation emphasise its political dimension. According to this reading, the main issue in the formation of this new type of publicity was the political emancipation of the emerging middle classes, or the bourgeoisie. Although the wealthiest sections of the middle classes were excluded from political power in most European countries, their increasing wealth served their governments well as a source of taxation and war loans. The recently established newspaper press, as well as other publications (magazines, journals and chapbooks) offered an arena for critical political debate. Political argumentation, mediated by the newspapers, accelerated the debates in meetings, as well as in

coffee houses and pubs, eventually leading to the political organisation of the bourgeoisie in the 18th and 19th centuries (Habermas 1989; Keane 1991; Thompson 1992; Van Horn Melton 2001). The bourgeois revolutions took different forms in different European countries. What they had in common, however, was that the press (newspapers, pamphlets, leaflets, chapbooks, journals and books) performed a central role in organising political action and promoting critical debate. This was the case in France (1789–1799), as well as in Britain (1832).

Less attention has been paid to Habermas's account of the significance of cultural publicity (or the "literary public sphere," as Habermas calls it).[4] Because political publicity did not evolve from a historical void, it must have been preceded and complemented by the development of structures of publicness in the cultural sphere. The political debate and the claims it generates are predicated upon a process in which the new social subject becomes conscious of itself and thus precognitive of its collective interests. (Habermas 1989; Taylor 2007). The common forms of life – based on birth, education, occupation, language, place of residence, cultural or ethnic origin and kinship – create connecting bonds. A bourgeois subjectivity develops first within the traditional forms of publicness of the old society (a society of estates), initially benefiting from these forms but eventually turning them upside-down, using them against the old society and its institutions. According to Habermas, the birth of the modern novel and the expansion of the reading culture are crucially important culturally subversive practices. New aesthetic forms and conventions, reflecting wholly novel individual experiences, came to reign not only in literature but also in the realms of fine art, music and theatre (Habermas 1989).

Universities as Epistemic Commons

In the early decades of the 18th century, the Industrial Revolution brought a fundamental change to the entire traditional structure of social production, from agriculture and forestry to international trade and commerce. All parts of Europe felt a growing need for useful knowledge, creating increasing pressure for the expansion and reform of European epistemic institutions. Traditionally prestigious universities, such as Oxford, Cambridge, the Sorbonne, Bologna, etc., were still conservative and anti-Enlightenment; they were following the forms and rituals derived from the Middle Ages. New knowledge was first established outside of these universities, in separate institutions and research centres (Rossi 2001). A model for a new university, promoting Enlightenment-based ideas of the human and social sciences, was finally offered by Humboldt University in Berlin, established in 1810. It became known as the first modern multidisciplinary and liberally minded European institution of science and higher education.

It was not only universities but the entire academic educational system that, from the 18th century onward, was forced to face the challenges of industrialisation and social modernisation. Simultaneous to the expansion and diversification of modern industries, the need for specialists and experts increased. The rapid increase in production brought about growing expectations regarding the public regulation of the conditions of economic production by nation states. The state administration and public legal apparatus grew stronger. New occupations and professions were born that required education. This new industrial society required basic education and elementary civic virtues – literacy and industrial discipline – from all its members.

The development of compulsory mass education started in the early decades of the 19th century (Freeman Butts 1955; Houston 1988; Vincent 2000).

This new industrial society was based on the idea of an ever-expanding economy. Its basic unit was the nation state. The territory and the soil, including the natural resources, were part of its national treasures, the utilisation of which was to be decided within the framework of national legislation. A central responsibility of the nation state was the creation of national wealth, which required the input of all members of society. The relationship between the Industrial Revolution and the consolidation of the nation state was organised differently in different countries. Thus, in England, on the one hand, the role of Parliament was strengthened, and on the other, the freedom of the market was enhanced; in France, the role of the central state administration, both in the government and in the economy, was fortified (Rietbergen 1998; Le Goff 2005).

Nationalisation of the Public Spheres

It should be noted that the introduction of a new social force, the middle classes, took place at about the same time in various parts of Europe. This occurred from the 13th to the 15th centuries, depending on the speed of capitalist development in a given region. The advent of commercial and, later, industrial capitalism was an all-European phenomenon. This was the case with the development of European epistemic commons as well: the emerging middle classes created their shared frames of reference not only during their many struggles against the feudal powers but also through expanding their trade relations and commercial networks throughout Europe and eventually the globe (McNeill and McNeill 2003).

However, despite the fact that on the most general level, the formative epistemic commons were pan-European and common to the middle classes in all parts of Europe, their emergence and consolidation took place simultaneously with the new spatio-political organisation of Europe, especially as a result of the Westphalia peace treaty in the 17th century (see Fraser 2007). The epistemic order not only followed but was an elemental part of the shaping of the new Europe, which was now divided by national borders. This created a controversy that has shaped how we think of Europe: although the modern epistemic order is in many fundamental respects shared by all European societies, in their institutional forms, the epistemic commons came to be defined by nation states, including all the mythical elements regarding the historical "origins" of these nation states. The tragedy of this controversy is shown, for example, in the politics of writing national histories. Although one of the first conditions for a European epistemic order was a shared understanding of European history and shared values – we Europeans as the inheritors of classical humanism – today, there are a multiplicity of national histories tailored for the purposes of promoting national sentiments and identities, thus dividing Europe.[5]

The tragedy of Europe is that despite the common history of our epistemic institutions, our modern social imaginaries were formed in the process of nation creation. In this way, the epistemic institutions became shaped within nationalist frameworks and developed into components of the power structures and hegemonic constellations of the increasingly powerful nation states. (Taylor 2007). As a result, something like a two-level European epistemic order developed. One level was formed by the general idea of the epistemic commons, which was shared by

European societies (references to Christianity, classical humanism, the interpretation of European and world history, scientific epistemology, etc.); on the other level, these epistemic commons were always adopted and modified within national frameworks and shaped to fit the needs of the social and political power structures of a given nation. This process created the basis for the formation of national public spheres (Rietbergen 1998; Fraser 2007).

The process of the nationalisation of culture can perhaps be observed most clearly in small European states, which in many ways, paved the way for the modernisation of the larger and more powerful states. What took several hundred years in large European countries – England, France and Germany – was completed in many smaller countries in less than a century. For example, in the case of Finland, after the annexation of Finland from Sweden by Russia in 1809, the government announced a competition to write the "best" history of Finland, which was also to be the first, in 1818. This was followed by the founding of the national newspaper press (in stages from the 1830s onwards) and the establishment of a system of public education (from the 1880s onwards). The birth of modern national cultural life was completed with the establishment of the Finnish school of fine art, literature and theatre (1870–1890) and the organisation of national associational life (from the 1870s onward). As a result, something like a national public sphere, uniting the most of the nation, was in place by 1905–1906, just before the first parliamentary elections (Klinge 1997; Nieminen 2006).

The Role of Intellectuals

Above, I made the point that our concept of democracy, in all its different forms, presumes the existence of sources of shared knowledge and experiences – something like what I have called the epistemic commons above. Although this requirement must concern all branches of democratic theory (see e.g. Held 1987; Habermas 1998; Cunningham 2002; Dryzek and Donleavy 2009), this seems to especially concern theories of deliberative democracy. They assume that in order to practice genuine deliberation, the members of the public must not only have equal access to all relevant information and knowledge but also possess an equal competence in order to comprehend and use this information for their interests and needs. Additionally, a communication system must facilitate a non-restrained dialogical relationship both horizontally, between citizens, and vertically, connecting citizens to decision makers.

Even if these conditions are taken as counterfactual – that is, something that can be used as a normative measure in assessing the empirical state of matters – within the present mediatised political condition,[6] they remain utopian. We cannot assume that every citizen can master all the myriad areas of modern politics or that they will ever be able to assess all the available knowledge and information before being able to form an opinion on the issue in question. (Dryzek and Dunleavy 2009, 215–225). What is needed are trusted intermediaries who act as interpreters between three poles: the issue and the actors under discussion; the epistemic commons, that is, all accumulated knowledge and information relevant to the issue and citizens.

Here, what I call intermediaries is a generic name for institutions and institutionalised practices, examples of which include the media, the church, the school and the university, as well as the professions of journalists, priests, educators, scientists and the like, which are characterised by their epistemic status. Their

roles are justified by their special expertise and knowledge; they are supposed to "know better" than normal citizens or to know on behalf of others (Bauman 1987, 4). Essential to the successful performance of these epistemic institutions is their dependence on trust relations. Although they are not formally accountable, their status is constantly being tested. They must publicly convince the rest of society of their relevance, that is, that they fulfil the tasks and duties for which they were originally mandated.

There are various ways of categorising these intermediaries. Habermas (2006, 415–16) distinguishes between five roles for intermediaries in the area of mediated political communication:

> *(a) lobbyists who represent special interest groups; (b) advocates who either represent general interest groups or substitute for a lack of representation of marginalized groups that are unable to voice their interests effectively; (c) experts who are credited with professional or scientific knowledge in some specialized area and are invited to give advice; (d) moral entrepreneurs who generate public attention for supposedly neglected issues; and, last but not least, (e) intellectuals who have gained, unlike advocates or moral entrepreneurs, a perceived personal reputation in some field (e.g., as writers or academics) and who engage, unlike experts and lobbyists, spontaneously in public discourse with the declared intention of promoting general interests.*

It is the last category to which Habermas (2009, 55–56) attributes the ability to articulate common interests, thus placing it above of particular or private interests:

> *They are supposed to speak out only when current events are threatening to spin out of control – but then promptly, as an early warning system. With this we come to the sole ability which could still set intellectuals apart today, namely an avantgardistic instinct for relevances. They have to be able to get worked up about critical developments while others are still absorbed in business as usual.*

For his part, Zygmunt Bauman (1987, 4) includes scientists, moral philosophers and aesthetes among the intellectual professions. He makes a distinction between two sorts of intellectuals, the modern ones, whom he calls "legislators," and the post-modern intellectuals, whom he calls "interpreters." The strategy of the legislators

> *consists of making authoritative statements which arbitrate in controversies of opinion and which select those opinions which, having been selected, become correct and binding. The authority to arbitrate is in this case legitimized by superior (objective) knowledge to which intellectuals have a better access than the non-intellectual part of society.*

The post-modern strategy of the interpreters consists of

> *translating statements, made within one communally based tradition, so that they can be understood within the system of knowledge based on another tradition. Instead of being oriented towards selecting the best social order, this strategy is aimed at facilitating communications between autonomous (sovereign) participants* (Ibid, 5).

Compared to Bauman's conception of intellectuals, that of Habermas appears rather prescriptive in character. In contrast to other actors in public life, intellectuals are assumedly impartial – their declared intention it is to promote general interests to which, it seems, only they can have access. In a way, intellectuals are seen as guardians of the epistemic community. On the other hand, Bauman's approach seems more functionalistic. According to him, intellectuals are needed in all modern societies to mediate and regulate social relations between epistemic communities. His claim is that this function can be seen as historically relative. Societal mediation needs are different in the modern phase of development than they are in the post-modern phase.

When assessing the state of the epistemic commons and the present role of intellectuals in this regard, Bauman's historical-functionalist approach appears more helpful. Habermas provides a list of heroic attributes characterising intellectuals: "a mistrustful sensitivity to damage to the normative infrastructure of the polity; the anxious anticipation of threats to the mental resources of the shared political form of life; the sense for what is lacking and 'could be otherwise'; a spark of imagination in conceiving of alternatives; and a modicum of the courage required for polarizing, provoking, and pamphleteering" (Habermas 2009, 55–56). Following from Bauman's way of thinking, these attributes can be taken as qualities that are essential for promoting the functional stability of societies, and from this point of view, intellectuals are seen as guardians of the epistemic order, diagnosing potential dysfunctions, providing or proposing corrective measures, etc.

From this perspective, intellectuals form one group of public actors with a very specific role: they possess, for one reason or another, the competence to formulate interpretations that give public articulation to something like collective experience. One of their main forums is the daily media, especially the newspaper press. Other forums of equal importance, but with less immediate visibility, are the epistemic institutions of the "second order": educational and scientific institutions, book and magazine publishers, cultural organisations and all other institutions that make authoritative decisions and value judgments on what is presented as true, just and of good taste. It is also assumed that these definitions and interpretations vary over time. In this sense, they are always "situational," being temporally and spatially marked. This does not, however, prevent some interpretations from becoming institutionalised (in one form or another) in such a way that a social institution is formed that embodies the historical conditions under which the "original" interpretation occurred. In other words, these conditions imply path dependence.

From this historical-functionalist approach, it naturally follows that the role of intellectuals is historical as well. In different times, different people or groups of people with different qualities and abilities can – or can be invited to – occupy this role. Just for the sake of illustration, it can be argued that in the case of Finland, in the early years of the 20th century, public intellectuals came from the sphere of arts and culture ("men and women of letters"). In the 1950s, lawyers were included; in the 1960s, sociologists and engineers entered; in the 1980s, economists and market analysts entered and from the 1990s onwards, "men and women of letters" and sociologists have exited, and corporate and financial managers and their proponents have entered (Nieminen 2014).

It would be misleading, however, to speak of public intellectuals as one homogeneous group. Continuing Bauman's functionalist method of analysis, we

are reminded that not all intellectuals follow the same strategy at any given time. Thus, speaking about the situation in the Central and East European socialist countries before the democratic transition, Rudi Rizman (2011, 96–97) has made a distinction between three intellectual positions: the co-opted intellectuals, who served the Communist Parties as "intellectual workers," sacrificing their "autonomous critical thinking for certain material and non-material rewards, including privileges, high positions, awards and medals"; the silent majority, who defended their professional autonomy "against the paternalistic attempts of a party-state" and the non-conformists, who formed "a relatively small minority" and who were "rather easily monitored by the regime's security apparatus."

Although Rizman makes this threefold division on the basis of the European ex-socialist countries, we can easily find similar intellectual strategies at work in West European liberal democracies. There are intellectuals who have assumed the role of active advocate in relation to politics ("party-intellectuals," as Habermas (2009, 51) calls them); another group is formed by the silent majority, those who accept the status quo and have adopted an expert professional position ("practical intellectuals," Bennett (2006, 187)) and lastly, there are critical or non-conformist intellectuals, who according to Habermas's definition, are intellectuals proper, being socially responsible and fulfilling their historical moral duty.

From the viewpoint of the epistemic commons, the issue becomes how these different intellectual strategies currently relate to the openness and publicity of epistemic institutions. Historically, modern epistemic institutions and intermediaries were constructed within and around nation states. The Habermasian public sphere is certainly based on an idealised depiction of political and cultural development in the nation state; the ideal of deliberative democracy was originally constructed based on the re-shaping of a national polity. Accordingly, the critical debates and struggles between particular interests were conceived as taking place within the national articulations of those interests, that is, within a national constellation of organised interests.

On the Crisis of the Epistemic Commons

We can say today that in hindsight, the first two to three decades after the Second World War (from the 1950s to the 1970s) were pinnacles for the development of the epistemic commons in Europe. Through the processes of material, social and political reconstruction, a shared understanding developed among Europeans that epistemic institutions – in the domains of education, culture, social care, etc. – should be open to all. This was an integral part of the more general European approach to the social welfare state, recognising the universality of civic values and citizenship. A unique epistemic order began to take shape, perhaps epitomised by what has been called the Nordic welfare model (Kananen 2014).

One of the corner stones of the model was the concept of citizenship, which was based on the Marshallian ideal of allocating to the state the responsibility of guaranteeing political, social, cultural and economic rights equally to all citizens (Marshall 1951). Often, when assessing the Nordic model, the importance of the neo-corporatist system of organising socio-political relations based on a three-partite system of social contracts between the state, the employers and the trade unions is highlighted. Its historical role in pacifying industrial relations and promoting a

culture of consensual policy making is emphasised (Rainio-Niemi 2008). Recently, however, the cultural dimension of Nordic "welfarism" has also received increasing attention. Its common elements include free universal basic education for all; free higher education; the geographic expansion of universities outside of metropolitan areas; an increasing investment in science in general; a strong emphasis on the human and social sciences; the expansion of public cultural institutions: public libraries, concert halls, museums and theatres, as well as musical and artistic education; the continued improvement of public service broadcasting; public subsidies to newspaper presses; etc. (Hilson 2008). Although not perhaps on the same scale, these ideas were adopted by other Western European countries as well. The expansion of public institutions in the late 1940s and 1950s was made possible by the rapid economic growth resulting from the "big boom" of reconstruction.

An integral part of this more general process of European recovery was the cumulative need for academic expertise in solving the mounting problems in all the areas of social, economic and cultural development. There was a huge demand for social scientists from all disciplines – sociologists, political scientists, social policy scholars, social psychologists and social statisticians – who were needed as public experts and policy advisers. New universities and new faculties were established, and new disciplines emerged. The number of governmental departments and other public agencies exploded. This opened a new window for critical academic intellectuals as well: because the social problems at hand were unforeseen in terms of their scale and their solutions invited new approaches, critical scholarship was not only allowed but in demand in order to help break down the old conservative and hierarchical disciplines.

However, this conjuncture, which was favourable to critical intellectuals, began to change in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. On the one hand, economic growth began to slow down, first in the USA and then in Western Europe (see Aldcroft 2001). On the other hand, as people's concern for the future and their fear for their standard incited them to challenge the traditional power structures, popular discontent began to expand, both in the USA and in Europe. This had already been analysed in the early 1970s by Habermas; he termed it "the crisis of legitimation in late capitalism" (1973; 1975).

A New Metanarrative for Europe?

Fundamentally, the predicament of most critical social scientists educated in Western Europe before the 1990s is that our whole concept of Europe – as well as our identity as social scientists – has been based on the Western historical narrative after WWII, which was essentially the experience of a divided Europe: the West against the East. As all people who were born before the mid-1970s remember, the Cold War experience was deeply embedded in our everyday lives. We were constantly reminded of the difference between "us" here in the free West and "them" behind the well-guarded borders.

This experience was naturally part of our academic practices as well. There are at least three elements at play here. The first is related to the tasks of reconstruction, as discussed above. After the war, in most if not all Western European countries, the social sciences were assigned two major tasks: firstly, to assist in the processes of overall national reconstruction – in re-starting the national economy, establish-

ing social services, restoring the political system, renewing education, etc., and secondly, because most governments were faced with mounting internal social and political problems with very fragile (or, in most cases, antagonistic) industrial relations and mounting social and political discontent, social scientists were also invited to assist in the task of promoting socio-cultural integration and unity under the national banner.

In each country, these tasks gave social science a firmly national mission and, because the mission was common to all Western European countries, a common European cause, which was much assisted by the USA in the form of scholarship schemes, academic exchange programmes (the most famous being the generous Fulbright Program, which is still in existence), etc. The large narrative of European social sciences began to take shape. It seems necessary to emphasise that the "nonconformist" social sciences, as represented by, for example, the neo-Frankfurtian critical scholars, were formed within the same Cold War European social framework, with all its ontological and epistemic challenges.

The European socialist countries, with their Central and Eastern European social scientists, were obviously missing from this picture. The socialist East was a black hole; it was not thought of as being a part of the expanding epistemic community of European social scientists. The major task facing Western scholars concerned the reconstruction and modernisation of the West European countries, and because the East was both less-developed than the West and closed to Western scientists, there was little active scientific interest in the East among scholars. There were four potential ways of dealing with Central and Eastern Europe: to ignore them because socialist societies were not interesting from the viewpoint of the challenges of Western modernisation; to define the socialist countries as objects of sociological and political research, as with the research traditions of the Western "Sovjetology" and "Kremlology"; to adopt an official policy in attempting to build bridges between Western and Eastern scientific institutions, such as science academies, universities, faculties and university departments and to develop personal contacts with colleagues in the socialist countries and offer them both scholarly help and, in many cases, assistance regarding their dissident politics as well. In many cases, the latter three approaches were applied, with differing emphases.

As the "big boom" of European reconstruction began to wane in the late 1960s and early 1970s, both the social status of and the socio-political demand for the social sciences began to decline. Along with this, the grand narrative that had offered the academic community a feeling of commonality was losing ground. Although institutionalised academic practices continued – new faculties of the social sciences were established, scholars published increasing numbers of books and articles, research agencies continued to finance scholarly projects and research programmes, international and national associations and their conferences expanded, etc. – simultaneously, ontological and epistemic differences that had long been controlled by the common grand narrative re-emerged and began to divide scholarly communities. The enthusiasm within macro-level social theory that had been characteristic of the 1960s and 1970s gave way to an increasing interest in micro-level social and cultural phenomena. However, despite the growing disciplinary divergence, the one thing still common to Western social sciences was the "structural imaginary" in relation to the East. This imaginary, deeply embedded in the self-identity of West

European scholars, concerned both the status of the academic intellectual – how to be a European social scientist – and the substance of our critical endeavour – how to perform European social science. Nothing prepared Western social scientists for the fall of the Berlin Wall and the breakdown of the Soviet Union. The Western structural imaginary suffered an abrupt collapse from 1989 to 1991, from which it has not yet recovered.

In the 1950s and 1960s, many critical scholars belonging to the last category in terms of their attitude towards the East had already adopted an activist stand in relation to the Central and Eastern European countries. Some of them were actively supporting the oppositional forces, or the "dissidents," in these countries. The developments in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and the attempts to create "socialism with a human face" were studied especially closely. There was a belief that if liberated from the Stalinist grip of the Soviet Union, the Central and Eastern European countries could offer a model for a "third way" between capitalism and socialism, bringing the ideals of democracy and socialism together (see Havel et al 1985). This scholarly activism received new momentum in the 1980s with the rise of the Solidarnosc movement in Poland and the publishing of Charta 77 in Czechoslovakia.[7]

This development took place just as new social activism was gaining ground in Western Europe, especially regarding the protection of the environment, gender equality and European nuclear disarmament. The traditional sociological concept of a "civil society," which had long been dormant, received a new lease on life. The optimism arising from the activism in the West was now projected to the East. Many critical scholars saw that what was taking place in both Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe was a historical strengthening of civil society, clearing the way for major societal changes. Now, the civic movements in the East – "them" – presented the utopian potential for a new society based on democratic principles, and the standard bearers of this change were the leaders of these movements: Lech Walesa and other Solidarnosc leaders in Poland, Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia and others (see Havel et al 1985).

What has happened since 1989–1991 continues to create a dilemma for critical social scientists. On the one hand, the demise of the post-war "European grand narrative," which had been based on the constant modernisation and socio-economic progress of the 1950s and 1960s, had left European social scientists scattered into different camps in the 1980s and 1990s. The public responsibilities and direct assignments that had been addressed to the human and social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s were now re-directed to academic fields such as technology and economics – disciplines that promised more immediate solutions to the problems characteristic to the era: the challenges of global competition, declining economic efficiency, falling profits, etc. If the traditional social sciences wanted to avoid being sidelined, they had to compete against the "hard" sciences and prove their usefulness by providing policy recommendations, which some prominent scholars attempted. In the late 1990s, a group of European sociologists, among them Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, pioneered a "third way," a social democratic alternative for Europe. This was captured by the then-leading European social democratic politicians, most famously Tony Blair of the United Kingdom and Gerhard Schröder of Germany (see Giddens 1998; Beck 2000).

On the other hand, as discussed above, the events of 1989–1991 brought about a major identity crisis for critical scholars. The second dimension of the post-war

European grand narrative, the Cold War and the fact of a divided Europe, had abruptly discontinued. With this, the identity-creating narrative had lost its plot. There was no longer an externally imposed distinction between "us" and "them"; there was no longer such a distance between the modernised West and the underdeveloped East. Suddenly "we" were all supposedly on the same level. This posed a totally new normative challenge to Western critical scholars. Previously, they had possessed two registers of criticism: one used in critically measuring the performance of "our" Western capitalist democracies and another that was applied when criticising the Central and Eastern European socialist non-democracies. As discussed above, for a number of scholars, the civil society movements in the East promised to lead the way to a peaceful transformation and the unification of Europe under the banner of democracy and social solidarity. The hope was that with the collapse of socialism and the end of Party rule, now that the people in the Central and Easter European countries would finally be free to choose their futures, they would give power to their intellectual leaders. In so doing, it was hoped that the new European democracies and the political ideals they represented would provide us critical Western intellectuals with new models and empirical measurements for criticising our own societies.

It turned out that this was not to be the case. The transition proved to be much different than the Western intellectuals had predicted or hoped for. According to the critics, the intellectual leaders of the pre-1989–1991 years proved incompetent in governing the transition from socialism to capitalist democracy. They lacked experience with practical political and economic leadership. Soon, the responsibility of running these countries was taken on by the new ruling elite, which consisted of a mixture of members of the old guard and young business managers (Ost 2005; Rizman 2011, 101–103; Tomka 2013, 308–310). The phenomenon of elite continuity was verified in the practices of the transition societies (see Sparks 2008).

The European ex-socialist countries were soon re-named CEE countries by the international community (OECD, EU and IMF) and described as transition societies. It soon became clear then the concept of "transition" signified the process of the full integration of the CEE countries into the Western global order.[8] The essence of this transition followed the model of modernisation defined in the infamous Washington Consensus, originally designed by the US Government and international organisations representing the less developed countries in Asia and Africa, which indicated that they were ultimately expected to adopt the same developmental path as "old" Europe.[9]

For social scientists, this meant that suddenly, in the mid-1990s, the demand for social scientists increased once more. They were now invited to assist their Eastern colleagues in common efforts to modernise the CEE countries and bring them to the "right" transitional path towards a fully developed free market economy and Western liberal democracy. This was backed up by a number of European and American research programmes that were funded by the EU and other international and private sources, including the seminal Open Society Foundations (Guilhot 2007). In a rather short time, a kind of academic Marshall plan was set up to help with academic research and its application to the transition processes, bringing with it all the consequences of dependence, both in the financial and academic-scientific senses.

However, there was a problem. In many instances, the funding was for a fixed term and on the condition that after the funding period, the CEE countries would find their own funding resources in a manner similar to that of their Western European neighbours. When the external funds began to dry up in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the social sciences were in trouble. The latest statistics from the European Research Council (ERC) show that in the field of human and social sciences, between 2007 and 2013, most grants under the Advanced Grant Funding Scheme (AdG) were given to projects hosted by UK institutions (358 projects), Germany received the second largest number of grants (219) and France received the third largest number of grants (191). On the other end of the scale were Slovakia, Hungary, Lithuania and Czech Republic with no projects; Slovenia, Latvia, Croatia, and Estonia with one project each and Bulgaria with two and Poland with three.[10] The imbalance between the large Western European countries and the CEE countries is clear. At the same time, amplifying this effect, the neo-liberal grip began to seriously affect social science departments in the Western European universities, restricting resources for their international contacts.

For critical scholars, all this led to a dilemma. After having lost the critical register that had been reserved for the socialist system, it became evident that their critical register, adjusted to the conditions in the Western liberal democracies, now had to be "recalibrated" for the new Eastern democracies, where against the expectations before 1989–1991, the problems concerning democracy and social justice soon turned out to be even greater than in the Western democracies (see Bezemer 2006). Simultaneously, Western social scientists were expected to fully collaborate and share their entire theoretical and methodological competences with their colleagues from the CEE countries.

The difficult issue now is the normative basis of collaboration. On the one hand, the Western funders – the EU, the Open Society Foundations and others – expect this new research cooperation to promote the model of Western modernisation, with the values of economic competitiveness and administrative efficiency as guiding principles.[11] On the other hand, the tradition of critical European scholarship has emphasised other values – solidarity, democracy, equality and culture. In the academic research that concerns their own Western societies (the countries of "old" West Europe), critical researchers have, by necessity, learned how to cope with this conflict between external pressures and critical scholarship (or so they think). This is not, however, necessarily the case in the collaboration with researchers of the "new" European democracies, in which external conditions concerning funding criteria and project management are much stricter.

Nostalgia, History and Memory

Here, we must address the problem of nostalgia, which I claim is embedded in the "structural imaginary" of the critical scholarship of Western social scientists (see Robertson 1990; Turner 1990). Because nostalgia, by definition, is a generational phenomenon, my claim is that the dominant scholarship and thus the problem of nostalgia are defined by the generation that entered academia between the 1960s and the 1980s. In relation to their lived experience, its members form a distinct epistemic community from the generation of the 1990s and 2000s. What makes nostalgia a specific problem is that among an epistemic community, it is usually

taken for granted that its members all share the same (or about the same) normative commitments, and because of this, it is not necessary to spell out these commitments explicitly – they function as background or silent knowledge.

A further complication is that this "taken-for-grantedness" is often combined with a lack of self-reflexivity, which means that the individuals in question have not made their normative commitments or their adopted criteria for criticism and judgment clear, even to themselves. In academia, this has led to a situation in which the different generations, although they share the same departments, do not necessarily share the same structural imaginary but belong to different epistemic communities in a practical sense, guided by different normative engagements. By the problem of nostalgia, in reference to critical Western scholars, I mean a complex phenomenon characterised by the fact that most of them have as their critical vantage point the ideal of the European welfare state as it was developing in the 1970s. At that time, however, Europe was divided along Cold War lines. These were structural conditions for the European welfare policies of the 1970s. In this way, academic nostalgia cannot escape the division between "us" here and "them" there.

The scholars in the CEE countries cannot enjoy a similar nostalgia. There is no lived experience of the welfare state based on a neo-corporatist social contract; their experience of welfare under socialism is different. For most of them, the period between the late-1940s and 1989–1991 were "lost" years, an era of societal discontinuation that has had little bearing on the situation in their countries after 1991. I strongly feel that if we want to learn from each other – both within the Western academy and with our partners in the CEE countries – this fundamental and structural unevenness must be thoroughly discussed within our community of critical scholars.

In what follows, I will return to the ideal of the epistemic commons and the responsibility of critical academic intellectuals to protect its tradition. From this viewpoint, it is somewhat disturbing to study the contradictory conceptions of what makes Europe today, as articulated by some of the major intellectual figures of our day.

One of the central elements in the ideal of the epistemic commons is the existence of the public sphere as its core component. In the last couple of decades, a wide body of literature has been published debating the potentiality of a European public sphere. In 2004, Habermas and Jacques Derrida made a bold proclamation that the massive demonstrations against the 2003 US military intervention in Iraq "in London and Rome, Madrid and Barcelona, Berlin and Paris," which were "the largest since the end of the Second World War – may well, in hindsight, go down in history as a sign of the birth of a European public sphere" (Habermas and Derrida 2005, 4).

After this, they differentiate between three European orientations, which seems to be at odds with their claim of an emerging, unifying European public sphere. In their account, there are differences between European countries in three main areas: the global role of the USA, the future world order and the relevance of international law and the United Nations. One side is represented by the Anglo-American countries, in the middle are the countries of "Old Europe" and on the other side are "the Central and Eastern European" countries, who were still candidates for entry into the European Union at that time. In his later interview, Habermas further clarifies his way of thinking when he is asked, "Who belongs to core Europe?"

The 'ongoing' project of conducting a symbolically effective and mentality-forming common foreign policy [in relation to the USA – HN] must be undertaken by France, Germany, and the Benelux states. Then Italy and Spain would have to be won over. The Greek government may well be open to a joint initiative (Ibid., 5).

To the questions "What role will Eastern Europe play in the future? Does the dividing line run between Europe and 'the Rest' due to the lack of shared experiences over the past 50 years?," Habermas answers as follows:

we must keep three facts in mind. First, the changing tempo of European unification has always been determined by the agreement between France and Germany. … Second, as the Eurozone demonstrates, there is already a Europe of different speeds (Habermas 2006, 52).

For Habermas, the historical responsibility of the "avant-gardist core of Europe" – Germany and France foremost – was to function as a "locomotive" for European integration (Habermas and Derrida 2005, 6).

Habermas and Derrida's appeal was not limited to European intellectuals. One of the controversies concerned Europe's relationship to the USA. Among many commentators taking part in the debate, Ralf Dahrendof and Timothy Garton Ash offered a clear stand that was shared by many others. They agreed with Habermas and Derrida that the "renewal of Europe [was] necessary" but emphasised that "this [would] never be accomplished by an endeavoured self-determination of Europe as un- or even anti-American. Each attempt to define Europe vis-à-vis the United States will not unify Europe but divide it" (Garton Ash and Dahrendorf 2005, 143).

Commentators from the CEE countries remarked that firstly, the list of demonstrations that Habermas and Derrida presented did not include any Central and Eastern European cities, which denoted two things: first, that their European public sphere was not really pan-European but reflected only the capitals of what had been called Western Europe, and second, that there was not such strong popular sentiment against the US invasion in the Central and Eastern European capitals as in their Western counterparts. This leads to the second remark by the commentators: the list of differences distancing the USA and Europe offered by Habermas and Derrida did not necessarily resonate with the experience and feelings of the people in Eastern Europe (Biebricher 2011, 709–734). There are major contradictions is assessing what constitutes Europe and European experience, as shown, for example, by Stefano Bianchini (2011, 114) according to whom,

Consistently, in their relations to Central and Eastern Europe, Western European countries have nurtured feelings and ideas of superiority – the belief that the other part of the old continent was backward … This behavior clearly explains why Western Europe has been and continues to be unable to recognize the other parts of Europe (and Central Europe specifically) as 'part of its own self.'

In his infamous essay published in 1984, Milan Kundera claimed that West Europe had abandoned Central Europe and thinks and behaves as if Central Europe was part of the Russian-dominated homogeneous East: "Europe has not noticed the disappearance of its cultural home because Europe no longer perceives its

unity as a cultural unity" (Kundera 1984, 134). From this perspective, it is now the Central European critical intelligentsia who are fighting to preserve the memory of Europe as a distinctive, cosmopolitan and multicultural entity. As Auksene Balcytiene (2011, 134–135) puts it,

> *In general terms, Central European culture emerged from the dichotomy of the cultures of Rome and Byzantium … that cultural dichotomy survives to this day. For the most part, it survives not so much in the geographies and territorial transformations of Europe, but rather in people's minds and imaginations. The Western World has supported this separation through the ages. For many centuries, it saw Central Europe as an incomplete and unfinished project – as an unrecognizable entity that is best associated with the unknowable East.*

The main target – or villain – of this criticism is France: "Once, Western Europe, or the West, was an area of centralised, homogeneous, and powerful states. It appeared to Central Europe as a Single France … Western Europe was permeated by a belief in science and rationality, whereas Central Europe was not" (Donskis 2012a, 46). In contrast to this French-dominated image of Europe, the ideal of Mittel Europe is projected onto the "German cultural circle," which "traditionally included all (historic) German lands as well as Switzerland and Liechtenstein" (Žagar 2011, 78).

In stark contrast to the nostalgia of the critical scholars in the West, which had its genesis in the European welfare statism of the 1960s and 1970s, Central European nostalgia seems to go farther back in history, to the period between the First and Second World Wars (the 1920s and 1930s). The dissidents of the 1980s saw that both the rule of Nazi Germany and Soviet-dominated socialism were "alien to the Central European societies" and "interrupted their 'natural' evolution and development," which would otherwise "have been democratic, even if the experience and practices of those countries in the first decades of the twentieth century might have been rather undemocratic"(Žagar 2011, 79).

Conclusion

The main argument of this article concerns the future of democracy as we have seen it develop in Europe over the last 60 years, after the Second World War. Our – here denoting academically educated middle class Europeans – way of conceiving democracy is based on an assumed continuous expansion of publicity and openness in all areas of social activities, in politics, economics and cultural life. This increasing publicness is seen as a requirement for truly democratic and well-informed citizenship. The guardians and forerunners of the expansion of publicity are critical intellectuals, who are supposed to represent universal values and interests on behalf of other social groups.

In this article, the quest for more openness and publicity is seen as a continuation of the long historical development of the epistemic commons, which began in the Middle Ages and culminated in the legacy of the Enlightenment. The argument is that European modernity is fundamentally based on the assumption that knowledge and culture belong to the common domain and that the process of democratisation necessarily means removing restrictions on the epistemic commons.

Over the last 20 to 30 years, this optimism has suffered from two kinds of backlashes. Firstly, from the 1970s onwards, a policy of weakening and privatising

public institutions has practically halted the expansion of the epistemic commons. Instead, we can say that the process of enclosure has taken ground, exemplified by adopting the market-based principles of the New Public Management for educational, scientific and cultural institutions. However, in Europe, there is a tradition of critical scholarship and activism to defend and safeguard the democratic tradition.

The second backlash concerns the fact that the other half of Europe, the CEE countries, did not benefit from the same kind of democratic development after the Second World War as their Western counterparts did. Thus, their expectations of and socio-political requirements for democracy were not based on practical experience but on promises and hopes, which were in turn based on the political and ideological realities of the Cold War period. Because there was no tradition of democratic public institutions, the critical intellectuals in the CEE countries were rather helpless in promoting the ideas of publicity and democratic citizenship.

The difficult questions are as follows: What can the role of critical scholars in promoting the epistemic commons be today? How should we understand the legacy of the Enlightenment and avoid falling for nostalgia for the 1960s and 1970s? Perhaps, the first step should be an open dialogue regarding our perception of Europe and an acceptance of the fact that because of our different historical and cultural experiences, there are multiple Europes that we must simply learn to share.

Notes:

1. The term has been used, for example, by Stephen Wright (2005). It is close to Elinor Ostrom's concept of "knowledge commons" (see Hess and Ostrom 2011; also IASC 2012) and James Boyle's "commons of the mind" (2008) as well.

2. "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse that it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (Foucault 1980).

3. The concept of epistemic order comes close to Taylor's concept of moral order. See Taylor (2007).

4. This has been noted by Gripsrud (2002) and Splichal (2012), among others.

5. On the problem of methodological nationalism, see Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002).

6. For a discussion of mediatisation, see Couldry and Hepp (2013).

7. For reflections, see Keane 1995, Garton Ash 1999 and Kaldor 2003.

8. Most of the CEE countries joined NATO (between 1999 and 2009) and the EU (between 2004 and 2007).

9. For an account of the prehistory and birth of the Washington Consensus by one of its fathers, see Williamson 2004.

10. See European Research Council, http://erc.europa.eu/projects-and-results/erc-funded-projects (read 6 March, 2014).

11. As defined, among others, by the OECD; see OECD 2014.

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