IN SEARCH OF A TELOS:
A CRITIQUE OF THE PERFORMATIVE GREEN PUBLIC SPHERE

Carme Melo Escrihuela*
carme.melo@uv.es

This paper addresses the relationship between environmental politics and the public sphere. The focus is placed on the concept of the "green public sphere", developed by Douglas Torgerson and very influential in green political theory. I argue that we should rethink Torgerson's twin conceptions of environmental politics and the green public sphere. First, I review Torgerson's Arendtian notion of the public sphere and explain why this view is limited as far as a transformative environmental politics is concerned. Drawing on the functions of public spheres in democratic theory, I stress that the merits of the green public sphere are to be evaluated not only in relation to the type of interaction they facilitate (rational-discursive), but especially to the extent that it is critical with power and influential on society and democracy. Then, I delineate an alternative account of the green public sphere better suited, in my opinion, to unfold its democratizing aspirations. To this end, I take into consideration Habermas' notion and the further intellectual reactions it provoked.

Keywords: green public sphere, environmental politics, Torgerson, Arendt, public sphere theory.

Neste artigo trato da relação entre políticas do ambiente e esfera pública, colocando a ênfase na concepção de "esfera pública verde" de Douglas Torgerson - preponderante na teoria política verde. Argumento que devemos repensar as concepções congénitas de Torgerson de políticas ambientais e de esfera pública verde. Primeiramente, reviso a noção arendtiana de Torgerson de esfera pública e explico

* University of Valencia, Inter-University Institute for Local Development, 46010 Valencia, Spain; Radboud University Nijmegen, Scholl of Management, Political Science Department, 6500 HK Nijmegen, Netherlands.

os seus limites quando está em causa uma transformação das políticas ambientais. Com base nas funções das esferas públicas na teoria democrática, gostaria de salientar que o mérito do espaço público verde deve ser avaliado não apenas em relação ao tipo de interacção que propicia (racional-discursiva), mas especialmente na crítica, poder e influência que exerce sobre a sociedade e a democracia. Seguidamente, esboço uma compreensão alternativa e mais adequada, na minha opinião, de esfera pública verde, dado desdobrar as suas aspirações democratizantes. Para este fim, levo em consideração a noção de Habermas e as reacções intelectuais dela decorrentes.

Palavras-chave: esfera pública verde, políticas ambientais, Torgerson, Arendt, teoria da esfera pública

1. Introduction

Since the birth of contemporary ecologism, environmental thought and practice have triggered changes in discourses, societies and in the political culture outside the state. These transformations have crystallized in the consolidation of a green public sphere. The notion of the green public sphere has many nuances and can be associated with different values and ideas. Yet it is often deployed to stress debate across difference and plurality. Sustainability is a matter of disagreement and conflict. Competing visions of the ecological society coexist; different paths could lead to it. The evolution of the green movement and environmental political thought provides evidence. A relatively homogeneous early ecologism - based on ecocentrism, limits to growth and decentralization - has given way to a collection of visions and values, from human-centred perspectives and environmental justice, to ecological modernization and the green state. Talk about a green ideology has become less common because basically all ideologies have embraced sustainability discourses to various extents (Saward et al., 2009). In the face of this, current environmental political theory is highly concerned with expanding democracy. Given uncertainty about environmental issues and the diversity of ecologisms, the safest position seems to be working towards a democratic system that encourages debate and allows all points of view to be equally considered. From this angle, achieving sustainability means deepening democracy and consolidating green public spheres where active citizens engage in political discussion about socionatural relations. Those who praise the notion of the public sphere from a green politico-theoretical perspective stress the essential role it plays in accommodating disparate values and discourses (Yang & Calhoun, 2007;

Doyle & Doherty, 2006; Eckersley, 2004, 2005; Smith, 2003; Dryzek et al., 2003; Brulle, 2000).

Research on the public sphere and the environment unavoidably leads to *The promise of green politics. Environmentalism and the public sphere* (1999), where Douglas Torgerson develops the notion of the "green public sphere".[1] This account has been very influential in green political theory, and that is why it constitutes the focus of this paper. In what follows, the importance of the idea of a public sphere for green political thought is examined. I argue that we should rethink Torgerson's conception of environmental politics and the green public sphere. First, I review Torgerson's notion of the green public sphere and explain why this view is limited as far as a transformative environmental politics is concerned. Then, I delineate an alternative account of the green public sphere better suited, in my opinion, to unfold the democratizing aspirations of the public sphere. In order to redefine the green public sphere, I focus on the functions of public spheres in democratic theory, and I take into consideration Habermas' notion and the further intellectual reactions and developments it provoked.

2. Environmental politics and the green public sphere

Douglas Torgerson explains that the ecological critique of modernity includes a rejection of instrumental rationality, for the way it has led to the instrumentalization and domination of nature. But given the high levels of environmental destruction and the urgency of pro-environmental action, Torgerson contends that, paradoxically, an instrumental approach has come to dominate ecological politics: "The point of political action is success in achieving green goals", he laments (Idem, x). This is Torgerson's departing realization. His work is an attempt to go beyond what he defines as green strategic thinking, to transcend ends-oriented environmentalism. And he finds a solution in Hannah Arendt's conception of politics.[2]

The German philosopher elaborates a non-strategic redefinition of political action as debate with intrinsic value, as a performing art which has value in its performance, like music or drama. So the merits of politics are not to be found in its outcomes but in political action itself. Following

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1   See also Torgerson (2000, 2006, 2008, 2010).

2   Torgerson does not undertake a reading of the political thought of Hannah Arendt from an environmental perspective. For such analysis, which also falls outside the scope of this article, see Whiteside (1994; 1998), Macauley (1996), Szerszynski (2003) and MacGregor and Szerszynski (2004).

Arendt's account of politics as demanding the creation of a space for debate and the constitution of a "we" by the citizenry, Torgerson defines the green public sphere as a "space of appearance" (Idem, 17), a site to carry on political action formulated in terms of debate aimed at sustaining itself. Hence the green public sphere is not a physical location - like a gathering or assembly - or an institution, but a network of spaces for discourse. It is not restricted to a given country or territory.[3] A variety of interrelated places where people join together for the sole purpose of speaking and listening, to practise a green discourse, forms a green public sphere – understood as a cluster of public spheres.[4] From this perspective, the green public sphere is not a space for rational debate oriented towards agreement, but a cultural interplay of different voices. The aim is to sustain a communicative process in which participants are committed to play indefinitely, as debate is valued for its own sake.[5] This makes disagreement possible.

A green politics perceived as the project of building and maintaining a green public sphere is presented as an alternative to discussions about the "we", that is, about the identity of the green movement, the definition of its ends and strategies. If the green public sphere is understood as a common place, then the unity derives, not from a set of shared values, goals and tactics, but from dwelling in a collective space. In this account, an "idealized *we*" - understood as a collective subject or Marxian historical agent - is replaced by a "partially existing *we*, capable of shared meaning" (Idem, 49, emphases in the original). So the metaphor of the green movement is mixed with the metaphor of the green public sphere.

Torgerson argues that when goals are introduced in debate, the theatrical and performative vanishes. The background of crisis in which environmental thought and politics emerged denotes a sense of tragedy that is accentuated by the moralism and desperation of some forms of green discourse – he regrets. Torgerson wants to stress the importance of irony and comedy for a politics that refuses to end discourse and lacks of purpose of action. In his view, there is a comic, carnivalesque element to green politics,

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3   See Torgerson (2006) for a discussion on the global dimension of the green public sphere.

4   As a correction of Habermas' seminal formulation, feminist and postmodern theorists have envisaged a plurality of public spheres that allows difference. Therefore a proliferation of public spheres is not seen as a sign of decline – as Habermas argued – but of democratic vitality. Following this standpoint, Torgerson claims that there is not a unitary and uniform green public sphere but a multiplicity of green public spheres.

5   Torgerson employs several metaphors to exemplify the never-ending nature of debate. For instance, he evokes a dance in which the goal is to learn how to dance properly in order to keep on dancing, or an infinite game which players cannot stop playing (1999: 156-157).

deployed with different languages and diverse contexts to expose its own tragic dimension and to caricature the arrogant decisions of the administrative mind. He brings our attention to citizens representing the funeral of a river and to the activities of groups like Greenpeace. Thus the notion of rational discourse is expanded so as to include a mixture of voices: laughter, the comic, the fun, tragedy. Situationist performances, carnivals, the absurd, the spiritual, meditation, play, passion, dancing and music, all are privileged forms of communication in the green public sphere.

Let me spend a little time now contextualizing the green public sphere within Torgerson's conception of environmental politics before going on to reflect on the limitations and merits of his account. To do so, it is appropriate to discuss Arendt's political thought, which informs Torgerson's narrative. In *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt draws a contrast between "labor", "work" and "action". Labor is the economic activity resulting from humans necessary exchange with nature. Work refers to the making of artefacts and civilization, the non-natural aspects of human life. And action is human conduct, in the form of speech, through which individuals manifest themselves, perceive each other, and represent their different identities and shared humanity. While labor and work have extrinsic ends, action is non-strategic and self-contained. Arendt regards action conceived as debate to be the key aspect of politics.

Using Arendt's tripartite scheme of the active life, Torgerson distinguishes three dimensions of politics: "functional politics" (related to labor), devoted to the creation and preservation of the social and economic system; "constitutive politics" (corresponding to work), aimed at building "the cultural artifice of a civilization", including its institutions, the identities of its inhabitants and the features of their discourse; and "performative politics" (action), theatrical and oriented to itself, to the value inherent to politics. Drawing on these categories, green functional politics would include reformist tendencies that seek to influence policy processes to make them more ecologically rational, while green constitutive politics would be related to radical social change. In Torgerson's view, radical and reformist approaches – unlike green performative politics - are instrumental and often neglect debate. When focusing on green performative politics, the labels radicalism and reformism no longer apply, since there is no instrumental action, Torgerson argues.[6]

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6   Note that Torgerson's conception of performative politics goes beyond that of Arendt. For Torgerson, the performative character of politics is not reduced to reason but includes dancing,

Torgerson believes that both environmental reformism and radicalism tend towards totalizing postures, since they are bound to either accepting or rejecting the existing order. He instead advocates an in-between position: incremental radicalism. This is a decentred account that allows difference, including an array of groups, networks and orientations – accommodating reform and radicalism. It is not a strategy since it does not indicate what it is to be done or the aims to be pursued. There is room for building alliances but nothing points at unity and coherence. Torgerson states that more than any other type of environmental politics, incremental radicalism highlights the limitations of instrumental action and of rigid standpoints, enhancing the prospects for a green public sphere characterized by debate, diversity and disagreement. An example of this type of dispersed strategy would be the environmental justice movement, which does not have a centralized organization and covers a wide range of issues.

Although Torgerson's theory is a celebration of the performative conception of politics, he acknowledges the functional and constitutive dimensions of green politics. This becomes clear when he argues that the green public sphere "cannot be an arena of pure performativity – just a theatre appreciated for its own sake – but must also be concerned with *outcomes relevant to its own construction and protection*: to the project of building and shaping a green public sphere" (Torgerson, 1999: 20, emphasis added). So for these two types of politics – functional and constitutive - to be taken into account in Torgerson's proposal, they have to include debate for its own sake – and so have intrinsic rather than extrinsic aims – or be seen as an instrument for the creation of the space of appearance that forms the green public sphere.

3. A critique of the performative green public sphere

After having explained Torgerson's twin notions of environmental politics and the green public sphere, it is my intention to point at the limitations of his perspective. I shall develop a critique structured around two main aspects: the neglect of social issues and the lack of practical-political orientation.

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comedy and the carnivalesque. This gives a postmodern thread to his notion of the green public sphere.

Overcoming dualisms: the social and the political, the public and the private, instrumental and communicative reason

The first corollary of Torgerson's stress on the intrinsic value of politics is the peripheral role that he concedes to social issues. Torgerson asks us to accept that the *end* of environmental political theory should be the creation of a space for debate, and that other principles like pursuing social equality should be oriented to the creation of a *we*. This approach is influenced by Arendt's theory, on which Torgerson draws. Therefore it is relevant to refer to the Arendtian conception of social issues before proceeding to unveil the problems inherent to Torgerson's work.

For Arendt, political action conceived as an art with intrinsic value demands a public domain constituted for this purpose. Arendt believed that modern politics - unlike the Greek *polis* - lacks such a public space. She was concerned with the modern emancipation of economic affairs from the private realm occurred as a result of market relations and capitalism. With this transformation, economic issues became public matters, putting into question the distinction between the public and the private domains. This process marked the erosion of public discourse, the decline of the political and "the rise of the social" (Arendt, 1958: 38). It triggered the transformation of the public field of politics into an arena where citizens become consumers and producers, disconnected from political life and unconcerned with the common good. Subsequently the public space declined due to the rise of private interests (Benhabib, 1992; Calhoun, 2001). Arendt makes a clear distinction between the political or the world of free speech about issues of principle like freedom, participation and institutional organization, and the social, that is the arena for collective problems, inequality, poverty and environmental degradation (Dryzek, 1990a: 19). Therefore, in her account, the social is excluded from what is truly political, in as much as technocracy and policy-making (functional politics) are left outside (Torgerson, 1999: 132-135).

Arendt would regard functional politics as management and administration seeking the provision of basic needs. On the one hand, Arendt conceives administration as an evil responsible for the lack of meaningful, true politics. On the other hand, she welcomes the capacity of the state to provide for the satisfaction of everyone's needs and create opportunities for political action. In Arendt's view, basic needs and issues of social policy concern governments. They are not a matter of public debate, of opinion, but have to be dealt with by experts and bureaucrats, because there is nothing to argue or disagree about: they must be guaranteed. In placing

socio-economic decisions within the administrative sphere (and not within the public sphere), Arendt confines them to the arena of what Torgerson defines as functional politics (Torgerson, 1999: 131-135). For her, social and collective problems can only be solved through instrumental rationality. Accordingly, if the public sphere of politics is to be preserved as a sphere for communicative rationality, then there is no room in it for social problem solving. As Dryzek observes, it seems that for Arendt "there should be no more to politics than talk" (1990a: 53).

Following Benhabib (1992) and Dryzek (1990a), it can be objected that Arendt's account of politics and the public space is based on three related misconceptions, to which I now turn to: (i) the social-political dichotomy in modern democratic life, (ii) the consideration of issues of justice as private matters, and (iii) the opposition between communicative and instrumental forms of rationality. I suggest that these three issues influence Torgerson's model of the green public sphere, as I shall show.

(i) Under conditions of modernity, the distinction between the social and the political no longer applies. This is not because the administrative sphere pervades the public sphere, replacing politics with economic relations - as Arendt would claim - but because as formerly excluded subjects (like women, workers and racial minorities) gain access to the public space, their concerns are politicized and incorporated into the public arena. The Ancient model of the public space and politics that Arendt praises was based on the exclusion of large groups (including women, children, non-Greeks and slaves) whose labour made it possible for privileged citizens to devote to the "leisure for politics". Since the emancipation of these groups from the private domain led to the rise of the social, in Arendtian terms, her exclusion of the social may be taken as a neglect of political universalism. So the project of building a public space under conditions of modernity appears as an "elitist and antidemocratic project that can hardly be reconciled with the demand for political emancipation and the universal extension of citizenship rights…" (Benhabib, 1992: 75). Dryzek reaches the same conclusion when he argues that Arendt's account of politics is discursive but "hardly democratic", since, like in ancient Athens, politics is left for "a self-selected elite" (Dryzek, 1990a: 19-20).

(ii) Arendt fails to acknowledge that "the struggle to make something public is a struggle for justice" (Benhabib, 1992: 79). The emancipation of workers that brought issues of property onto the public agenda, and the emancipation of women that made household relations enter the political

arena, were struggles to bring those previously considered social and private issues into the public domain of politics. Insofar as they are mediated by power relations, these issues are not private preferences but questions of public justice. According to Benhabib, "[t]o make issues of common concern public...means making them accessible to discursive will formation, it means to democratize them" (Idem, 94).

Due to these two misconstructions, Benhabib argues that Arendt holds an "essentialist" conception of the public space, defined as a site for one particular form of activity (action) and only one distinct content of debate (politics understood in narrow terms). This view of the public sphere excludes the worlds of labor and work (to which economic relations and technology belong to, and where most environmental problems originate) and confines them either to the private domain of preferences or to the instrumental administrative sphere. Yet labor and work can and should become issues of public discussion in the political public sphere, and be "reflexively challenged and placed into question from the standpoint of the asymmetrical power relations governing them" (Idem, 80).

(iii) Finally, Arendt assumes a clear separation between instrumental and communicative forms of rationality. But these two types of reason are not necessarily divided and do not always stand in opposition to each other; indeed they can coexist. Communicative rationality and discursive democracy can be found within the domain of what Arendt would define as instrumental rationality, like problem solving and certain forms of policy-making. Although communicative rationality deals with interpersonal discourse and can be used to arrive at normative principles beyond a strict focus on means, it also refers to coordination of actions. In fact, communicative rationality can be applied to social problem solving, as social problems involve values. In Dryzek's words, "[i]f problems can only be solved through purely instrumental action, then clearly problem solving has no place in the critical theory program" (1990a: 53).

I wish to go back to Torgerson to disclose how these three misconceptions shape and limit his work. Torgerson accepts that communicative rationality can develop in the domain of instrumental rationality. He identifies situations in which debate and politics with intrinsic value can be found in functional and constitutive political action. However, he does not reject Arendt's social-political dualism, which underpins her distinction between instrumental and communicative rationality, since he is concerned with affirming the intrinsic value of politics as debate about itself.

The use of an Arendtian framework limits Torgerson's green theory of the public sphere in different ways. First and foremost, Torgerson's account is characterized by a general exclusion of social and economic aspects on the grounds that they belong to the terrain of strategic politics. And when exceptionally included, a functional conception defines them as means to the ends of communicative rationality and the expansion of the green public sphere. The role Torgerson assigns to social and economic concerns is to create the conditions needed for rational discourse to flourish and "to make the community-communication something more than a vague hope" (1999: 124). On the one hand, he would argue, basic needs ought to be met as a precondition for one's engagement in the *vita activa*. On the other hand, those suffering basic shortages are more likely to violate the postulates of the communication process. As part of the incremental radicalism he endorses, Torgerson contemplates the design of economic and social policies, like the basic income, aimed at reducing citizens' vulnerabilities and fears that prevent them to focus on environmental issues (2000: 15). These types of measures would, in his view, contribute to the enhancement of the green public sphere, since they could encourage citizens' engagement in public spirited talk about environmental issues.

Yet this approach suggests that social and economic wellbeing do not have intrinsic value as social objectives, and that they can be accepted as valid topics of debate only insofar as they are means to realize the performative value of politics. Consequently, Torgerson fails to acknowledge that what he regards as instrumental are, in fact, issues of public justice, issues of power. Therefore, they have to be democratized and made subject of collective debate in the green public sphere, not so much because they contribute to the expansion of the green public sphere, as Torgerson may accept, but because they are collective, social aims. So achieving social equality has to be included and addressed in the green public sphere as a way of confronting authority and opposing those institutions that perpetuate relations of domination and injustice.

Like the Arendtian public space, the green public sphere envisaged by Torgerson is based on an essentialist conception. It is a site for only one type of political activity, debate; and only one type of debate, one that is self-referential. Nancy Fraser makes a distinction between a proceduralist notion of the public sphere that conceives it as a locus for "certain types of discourse interaction", and a substantive definition focusing on the public sphere as a space for discussion about particular problems (1992: 142). Following this distinction, it could be argued that Torgerson understands

the green public sphere in procedural terms, in the sense that what matters for him is that debate be conducted in a particular fashion, that is, focused on itself, following the rules of communicative ethics, regardless of outcomes. The lack of concern for extrinsic, valuable goals (like social equality and justice, reduced in Torgerson's theory to means to achieve communicative rationality or to celebrate the value of politics) restricts the scope of debate in the green public sphere to political issues defined in a narrow sense. This, in turn, leads to a neglect of the potential of the green public sphere for bringing about social and environmental change. If issues of power and ends-oriented action are not brought into the public realm, then the green public sphere risks becoming a club for a selected elite, like the ancient Greek polis and the Arendtian public space.

Despite the above assertions, the position of socio-economic issues in Torgerson's theory can be read along different lines. He contends that we would recognize that a green public sphere has emerged, amongst other possible signs, when the media were promoting sustainability rather than consumption. Another indicator of the generation of a green public sphere would be the displacement of privileged industrialism by discourses such as the unequal distribution of environmental costs according to race, class and gender, and the real environmental impact of every product. This shows an interest in discourses with a social and environmental justice dimension. However, even if one accepts that social, economic, and justice related issues are taken into account as aims of debate in the green public sphere, for Torgerson these are simply discourses. And, unfortunately, he does not seek to encourage ways to make these discourses lead to transformative action, because this would result in the end of the green public sphere, according to his Arendtian understanding of political space.

Beyond communication: the critical and democratizing functions of public spheres

In effect, this is the second aspect of this paper's critique of Torgerson's theory: the lack of practical and political orientation (the first is the neglect of social issues, with all its implications discussed so far). Two points have to be stressed. First, Torgerson does not entertain the idea that discourse and debate may lead to practice and to socio-environmental action. And, second, his rejection of strategic politics leads him to ignore the reverse possibility: that certain ends-oriented practices create new forms of knowledge and green discourses that will then enter the green public sphere,

prompting more green public spheres. In Torgerson's view, maintaining a green public sphere should be prioritized over the green movement's activity. But if a green public sphere is rooted on different flows of green discourses that emerged as a result of ecological activism, then the importance of pro-environmental citizen, community and social movement activity cannot be underestimated. Let me explain in more detail the second limitation in Torgerson's account: the neglect of a practical focus. To do so, it is useful to introduce in the argumentation the issue of the public sphere functions in relation to democracy.

As Nancy Fraser asserts, "[t]he concept of the public sphere was developed not simply to understand communication flows but also to contribute to a critical theory of democracy" (2008: 76). Other democratic theorists like Craig Calhoun (1993) and Iris Young (2000) have argued too that the merits of the public sphere are to be assessed in the light of the extent to which it is critical-oppositional and influential. If this is accepted, it is not sufficient, then, that the green public sphere follows the rules of communicative rationality. Beyond the value of discursive processes and the quality of debate, the degree to which a green public sphere shall contribute to the promotion of democracy and justice depends, also, on the results achieved.

Through its critical and oppositional functions, the public sphere challenges all forms of power and domination. Earlier I noted that attempts to broaden the range of issues included in the public sphere are struggles for justice and freedom. Torgerson's overemphasis on the value of debate for its own sake makes him blind to the fact that the inclusion of social and economic issues in the green public sphere is not just a matter of broadening the terms of discourse; it is a question of justice. And, as such, through this inclusion, the green public sphere becomes an arena for demands for justice, democracy and equality, that is, an arena for action aimed at achieving certain aims.

Torgerson explicates how environmentalism has shifted the terms of mainstream (industrialist) discourses. Yet he does not go far enough as he neglects that transformations in discourses have external aims - and by external I mean aims which are not self-referential or do not relate to the communication conditions. One of my main arguments is that a politics of the green public sphere should pursue those extrinsic aims, if the green public sphere is to be part of a normative theory that seeks to democratize society. Green public spheres could be thought of as vehicles for emancipation, inclusion, empowerment, and as means to challenge relations of

domination in late-capitalist democracies. A green public sphere which does not target state and corporate actors, and those institutions that generate environmental injustice, loses its emancipatory potential to bring about social change. The neglect of strategic action not only means the end of the metaphor of the movement advocated by Torgerson, but also the end of all social struggle aimed at challenging privileges by democratic means.

Besides being critical, the green public sphere should be influential and avoid "too much thought at the expense of action" (Connelly, 2006: 66). The concept of the public sphere can inspire an account of politics based on free and open discourse amongst citizens, mainly concerned with mutual understanding and reflexive learning. But the idea of the public sphere can also motivate a view of politics rooted in collective action and the (discursive) resolution of social problems (Dryzek, 1990a: 38-39). With a focus on the first aspect, the accounts of both Torgerson and Arendt omit the second one. Torgerson offers a double foundation of deliberation: the intrinsic value of the communicative process and respect for difference. This proceduralist approach contrasts with the so-called "epistemic argument for deliberation" (Dryzek, 2000: 174) that looks at the increased rationality of outcomes as the justification of discursive politics. If deliberation is to be related to collective problem solving it needs to incorporate this epistemic justification. According to Przeworski, an orientation towards the making of decisions that are "binding on a community" and deal with "how to act collectively" is what makes deliberation political (1998: 140). From this point of view, Torgerson's characterization of the green public sphere and the types of deliberation that take place in it would be nonpolitical.

But for discourse to be influential (as well as critical) it is not enough that it aims at collective decision-making and social problem solving – or that it is political, in Przeworski's terms. Deliberations have to be given practical form. To put it with Craig Calhoun,

> A public sphere, where it exists and works successfully as a democratic institution, represents the potential for the people organized in civil society to alter their own conditions of existence by means of rational-critical discourse (of course the public sphere represents only *potential*, because its agreements must be brought to fruition, or at least brought into struggle, in a world of practical affairs where power still matters (1993: 279, emphasis in the original).

In this respect, Nancy Fraser notes that a public sphere should generate legitimate and efficacious public opinion (2005, 2008). Public opinion is legitimate when all those potentially affected are able to participate, when participation is accomplished under conditions of equality and freedom, and when public opinion represents the general interest. Public opinion is efficacious when it is able to constrain political power, when it is deployed as a political force to empower citizens versus private interests and to exercise influence over the state. Fraser argues that if these two elements – legitimacy or validity and political efficacy - are missing, "the concept loses its critical force and its political point" (2005: 37; 2008: 77).

In light of these arguments, one should ask whether Torgerson's concept of the green public sphere is legitimate and effective. The answer seems to be negative if the focus remains on speech that is an end in itself. For Torgerson, the green public sphere depends on the quality and form of discourse and on openness to citizens' participation. The idea that there is purposive debate in the public sphere aimed at generating communicative power that rationalizes state authority and represses private power is neglected. His green public sphere observes the condition of legitimacy (yet only to a certain extent, since for him deliberation is not always about issues of common concern, rather it is mostly about its own conditions) but does not perform the function of effectiveness, and thus becomes a depoliticized, uncritical public sphere.

4. The green public sphere: a reconstruction

Green public spheres are crucial for environmental politics. Yet green political theory loses its ability to democratize social and economic relations if the focus is placed on a narrow conception of politics and the intrinsic value of debate. It is dangerous to emphasize debate that has no purpose, that seeks no conclusions and that is kept going for fun, as Torgerson does. To suggest that because there is no objective environmental knowledge but rather ignorance, uncertainty and complexity, we should abandon purposive action, is a type of argument that can be appropriated by eco-sceptics. This attitude, in turn, is very welcome by political and economic elites that continue to benefit from environmental and social injustice.

Although endorsing the intrinsic value of politics and accepting that it necessitates the making of a space for debate where people can speak as citizens, I seek to stress the purposive dimension of political action that leads to progressive, emancipatory aims. This position is encouraged by the

view that a conception of politics as having intrinsic value is not inconsistent with a notion of politics as being aimed at social change. Value-driven purposive action is necessary because existing conditions are very different from the deliberative ideal. Precisely because there is injustice and social inequality, political activity should aim at redressing these situations so that democratic participation and citizenship, both intrinsically valuable, can somehow be realized.

Torgerson offers an idealized notion of the green public sphere that ignores power and downgrades socio-economic relations. An alternative definition is required. It is my contention that the green public sphere could better serve democratic green politics if it involves social change to put an end to those relationships and practices that are cause and consequence of environmental problems. This understanding is inspired by the classic Habermasian account, which views the public sphere as a normative ideal of a space where citizens get together to discuss issues of common concern (Calhoun, 1992). For Habermas, a political public sphere refers to those "conditions of communication under which there can come into being a discursive formation of opinion and will on the part of a public composed of the citizens of the state" (1992: 446). Hence public spheres are a form of social interaction and action coordination. This conception of the public space is appropriate to overcome the limitations of Torgerson's theory insofar as deliberation is not restricted to its own conditions, but aimed at making collective decisions. Yet the green public sphere should go beyond Habermas' formulation to avoid its shortcomings, like the exclusion of certain groups – mainly women, propertyless workers and racial minorities – and the lack of attention to economic and family relations.[7] A postbourgeois public sphere theory needs to respond to egalitarian critiques and focus on the politicization of the concerns of traditionally excluded subjects, showing that confining their interests to the private realm was part of

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7   See Calhoun (1992), Benhabib (1992) and Fraser (1992) for an overview of such criticisms, and Habermas (1992) for a reply to them. The bourgeois model of the public sphere is also problematized in the light of contemporary transnational processes which challenge its Westphalian character (Fraser, 2005, 2008). In addition, the Habermasian picture is vulnerable to green objections. The main dilemma is that his communicative ethics excludes nature. As a result, Whitebook (1996) maintains that the human superiority over the non-human world is accepted and domination justified. Although some environmental writers, like Brulle (2000), have argued that Habermas' account allows the incorporation of ecological concerns, there have been attempts to correct his antiecological bias by developing an environmental communicative ethics that includes human relations with non-humans, particularly by Eckersley (1990, 1992a, 1992b, 2004) and Dryzek (1990b, 1996).

a strategy of domination and oppression. Furthermore, it should highlight the limits and contradictions of actually existing democracies (Benhabib, 1992; Fraser, 1992).

At this point, I would like to suggest that Torgerson's account could be turned around. Discourse in the green public sphere may be oriented to protecting the natural world and building egalitarian, just societies. From this perspective, debate is not self-referential but instrumental to democratically discussing and accomplishing particular ways of achieving social equality, justice and sustainability, while equality and justice are valued for their own sake and not simply because they enhance communicative rationality. Yet whatever just, egalitarian and ecologically sustainable may imply, shall be a matter of collective debate. By engaging in different ends-oriented discourses, a myriad of meanings can arise and diverse paths can be tried.

What would be the main elements of the re-conceptualization of the green public sphere sketched out in this paper? First, the green public sphere could be thought of as a vehicle for democratization of all spheres of life. As Nancy Fraser contends, stress on deliberation among politically equal citizens drifts attention from social inequalities that do actually exist. The transformation of the "I" into a "we" that takes place with deliberation in the public sphere can hide forms of domination and control, and favor one particular worldview at the expense of others. Therefore, it is necessary to "*unbracket*" inequalities and be suspicious about the possibilities of conceiving a space for debate under alleged conditions of equality. Discursive spheres are always situated in a broader social frame "pervaded by structural relations of dominance and subordination" (Fraser, 1992: 120). A green public sphere should make evident that social inequalities pervade communicative practices and constrain democracy, since they cause relations of exclusion and subordination. In addition, the green public sphere has to deal with questions traditionally relegated to the private realm, to the economy, to the sphere of labour and in general to the social and cultural domains of life – and thus excluded in accounts of the public sphere like those of Arendt and Torgerson for being non-political or prepolitical. These are the spheres were most environmental problems originate so they have to be politicized. And these domains, especially the world of labour, relate to the socio-natural metabolism. So if labour is excluded from the public sphere, then nature is excluded from politics. And the result is, as in Torgerson's picture, a green public sphere without nature.

Second, the public sphere is not just a means for the rationalization of domination; it is also a form of social interaction. So the green public

sphere has to involve collective decisions. Dryzek notes that critics of discursive politics have argued that deliberative democracy does not allow for collective choice: "we deliberate and then what?", they ask (2000: 78). Similarly, we could ask Torgerson: we play, dance, laugh and then what? Without a doubt, environmental political thought requires a communicative ethos and a variety of green public spheres for debate and disagreement. But green political theory should not forget that "democratic life is not just the endless interplay of discourses. There have to be moments of decisive collective action…" (Idem, 78-79). So the green public sphere would be better thought of as an arena for instrumental as well as communicative action.

It is useful to recall Fraser's distinction between "weak publics", whose deliberation is concerned with opinion formation, and "strong publics", devoted not only to opinion formation but also to decision-making (1992: 134). Torgerson's green public sphere only deals with opinion formation. Indeed he argues that debate about objectives would bring the green public sphere to an end. However, as Fraser indicates, a weak conception of the public sphere that focuses on discourse and opinion, neglecting issues of collective decision-making "denudes 'public opinion' of practical force" (Idem, 137). The type of self-referential debate that Torgerson favours has to be complemented with what Habermas defined as a "pragmatic discourse about what should be done in terms of translating consensus into binding decisions capable of implementation, and negotiations concerning what to do when values and interests irreducibly conflict" (Dryzek, 2000: 24-25). The green public sphere could be expanded in this direction and in this way challenge the social-political dualism earlier mentioned.

What issues should be the subject of collective decisions in the green public sphere? For Habermas, private concerns are excluded. Torgerson and Arendt envisage the public sphere as a site where there is no space for either ends-oriented action or social maters (although for Torgerson perhaps to a lesser extent than for Arendt). Just as Habermas thought that the inclusion of private interests led to the collapse of the bourgeois public sphere, Arendt and Torgerson believe that the rise of the social and discussions about objectives would mean the end of the public sphere. However this paper has presented arguments to explain why none of these issues should be ruled out in principle from debate. Only those engaged in public discourse can determine, in the course of deliberation, what questions of common interest and collective problems are.

It is important to note that the fact that deliberation should encompass collective decisions does not mean that it has to be restricted to the

common good. As it stems from the discussion illustrated in this article, deliberation should also refer to individual needs. Taking distance from Habermas, Fraser (1992) and Benhabib (1992) maintain that dealing with collective matters does not mean that consensus need to be the necessary outcome of deliberation. Following Dryzek, consensus can be defined as a "unanimous agreement not just on a course of action, but also on the reasons for it" (2000: 170). Consensus is not a prerequisite for purposive action of the kind advocated here; what is more, consensus can overshadow spontaneity and difference. As Dryzek observes, "[in] a pluralistic world, consensus in unattainable, unnecessary, and undesirable. More feasible and attractive are workable agreements in which participants agree on a course of action, but for different reasons", as long as these reasons can be justified in public (Ibidem).

Now, for the green public sphere to be effective, it is not enough that it be oppositional and pursue social and environmental change; collective decisions have to be brought to fruition and somehow implemented. The implementation stage is as important as the deliberative process, since it is what confers on the green public sphere its political and critical character. There are different ways in which a green public sphere could be effective and influential. Public opinion can have an impact on state policy – or, in other words, communicative power may affect administrative power. From this point of view, public spheres serve as a nexus between society and the state. For Habermas the most important tools for transmission of public opinion from the public sphere to the state are elections.[8] Yet, as Dryzek (Idem) observes, public opinion can be transmitted to the state using different vehicles. Through rhetoric, for instance, given discourses are made more visible and successful than others and thus have a greater impact on public policy. This is a discursive mechanism for the transmission of public opinion.

Fraser (2005) retains that if the public sphere does not seek to influence state power and authority, it loses its political force and effectiveness. But in her view, this requires institutional renovation. In this sense, she refers to transnational institutions to regulate (already transnationalized) private power - which can be confronted, held accountable and influenced by public opinion - and to global citizenship rights to guarantee participation beyond the nation state borders. Without this institutional renovation,

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8   Habermas accepts the liberal state channels, like elections, law-making and policy processes. This approach has been criticized for being "old-fashioned" and not facing the empirical realities that suggest extra-constitutional forms of influence, like boycotts, demonstrations, or media and information campaigns (Dryzek, 2000: 25-27).

transnational public spheres and social movements will not succeed. They need an institution they can aim at, direct their counterpower at, and seek to influence, otherwise they cannot "assume the emancipatory democratizing functions that are the whole point of public sphere theory" (Idem, 46).

Yet the state is not the only institution capable of organizing collective action and the implementation of decisions. Communication in the public sphere may produce changes in society and even in private life directly without seeking to influence the state or the economy (Young, 2000; Calhoun, 2001). A focus on civil society as a site for collective self-organization would be an alternative way of encouraging strong publics oriented to decision-making outside the state. Fraser points to "self-managing institutions" like "self-managed workplaces, child-care centres, or residential communities" as strong publics whose "internal institutional public spheres could be arenas both of opinion formation and decision making" (1992: 135). This would bring about the articulation of spaces of direct democracy or quasi-direct democracy (combined with some form of representation), "wherein all those engaged in a collective undertaking would participate in deliberations to determine its design and operation" (Ibidem). These arguments reveal the significance of self-determination, "the primary aspect of social justice that associative activity outside state and economy promotes" (Young, 2000: 180). They also underscore that decision-making can be institutionalized in ways that are not constitutionally determined but internally and autonomously established by members of the public sphere itself.

5. Concluding remarks

Green politics cannot dismiss deliberation and discussion, especially if we think about shifts in people's preferences and attitudes, the desirability of forms of action agreed rather than imposed, giving voice to the excluded, and collective decision-making. Environmental political theory should be concerned about both means and ends, and do not lose track of what may be one of its distinctive features: to put into question those aspects of contemporary institutions that hold the sustainable society back. To this end, the notion of the green public sphere is useful and important. Yet a redefinition seems appropriate. This paper has sought to make a contribution to this task. Drawing predominantly on the insights of contemporary critical theory, a more transformative, practical and politicized account has been advanced. This alternative concept is based on the idea that the green public sphere needs to encompass value-driven purposive debate aimed

at discussing and reaching decisions about matters of common concern, including issues related to ecological sustainability but also questions of self-organization, equality and democratization. If we exclude the categories of labor and work, and privilege action (in Arendt's terms), or if we exclude functional and constitutive politics, and privilege performative politics (in Torgerson's terms), we end up with the exclusion of nature.

Acknowledgments

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