

CHAPTER 7

National versus Global Public Discourse in the Era of Multi-channelism: The Introduction of Commercial and Cable Television in Israel as an Empirical Test of Habermas' Theory

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The “public sphere,” as defined by Habermas (1989), constitutes a public stage for discourse regarding critical joint problems and topics of collective concern that are found in the public realm—especially as enunciated in the mass media, universities, and voluntary organizations. The “sphere of public discourse” is the intermediate area between the state and civic society, a space in which differences in power and social status are put aside, where in theory at least, each person has equal weight (Werman, 1997). Such rational public debate on political issues first occurred (in the modern age) within the “private” group discussions of the emerging bourgeoisie.

Habermas asks a critical question regarding our understanding of democracy: What are the social conditions for a substantive, rational discussion of public issues, carried out by private people who are willing to allow *argument* and not *status* to carry the day (Calhoun, 1992)? One of the conditions for enabling citizens to act as a “public” and become part of public activity is their being freed from force or other environmental pressures when dealing with public issues—thus enabling them to feel responsibility to the social collective and to give free expression to their ideas (Mukerji & Schudson, 1991). The capacity to do so is traced to the dissemination of literacy and enlightenment.

The second part of Habermas' major study describes the transformation—indeed, the decline—of the public sphere in advanced capitalist society. This is a structural transformation built into the developmental processes of Western society over the past few generations. He finds here a blurring of the lines between the private and public realms, the adoption of public tasks by private organizations, and the penetration of the state into private life. Simultaneously, the ideal of the general public interest has

been supplanted by a picture of necessary compromise between opposing interests, and thus critical and rational discourse in the public sphere has been overtaken by negotiation. Moreover, active critical debate of cultural products has changed into passive consumption of mass culture, determined by forces outside the public sphere (Werman, 1997).

In opposition to Habermas, we believe that public discourse as a tool for engendering a “democratic dialogue” remains essential and continues to exist—this through creation of conditions for collective (not collectivist) thought and enlightened activation of democratic decision making (Dayan-Urbach, 1996). The political realm has an important job of “creation” in this regard; its job is to discover societal values and provide opportunities for deciding priorities. Such a public discourse must allow a free flow of information and criticism regarding governmental leaders and decision makers, in order to guarantee open channels of communication and to spark public debate on the burning issues of the day.

THE NEED FOR A MODEL

In the last few years, the academic communications community has adopted the idea of the “public sphere” and has dealt with different questions regarding the place and role of the mass media in this public sphere. Most of the scientific literature in this area, taking Habermas' lead, has focused on analyzing the historical process of its appearance and has further expanded upon philosophical and theoretical aspects of the subject. However, this preoccupation with the earlier stages of the phenomenon has steered the discussion away from Habermas' other argument that the public sphere is in decline.

The present chapter, therefore, represents an initial attempt to use empirical tools to determine whether, and to what extent, the public sphere has been weakened, using Israel as our case study: a country planning in conscious fashion a significant expansion of its electronic media. We have no doubt that the conditions for “pure” public discourse no longer exist in the contemporary world. On the other hand, we do believe that the intermediate public sphere between the individual and the polity does continue to work, to create, to listen, and to influence. Moreover, in moving from a theoretical discussion of the existence and function of the “public sphere” to a development of an applied, real-world examination, we continue to hold Habermas' opinion that the state—the “public authority”—is one of the prime factors determining the priorities in advancing the citizenry's welfare.

To that end, we have developed the “Funnel Model,” a practical model that offers a mechanism for exhibiting the actual development of an open and true dialogue in the public space. This is an applied tool designed to aid in describing the dynamics of any one of the many possible public topics

for discussion. It combines quantitative and qualitative analysis of the phenomenon. Use of the Funnel Model involves setting up a methodology for comparing the promised public discourse with the actual empirical consequences of the process.

THE MODEL

The proposed model creates a "funnel" through which the local various social, cultural, economic, and technological subjects pass. In the Habermasian version of the public discourse process, one would expect that local, particularistic topics take preference over regional/international ones, but this need not be true. In any case, our model is value-free, that is, it is based on the priorities of the specific country under discussion and does not determine a priori for any country what those priorities must be.

The central characteristic of our model is that it is dynamic; the following are the four major elements:

Determining the Parameters of the Main Subjects

The first order of business is defining the priority public discourse topics that are the focus for future nurturing.

Hierarchical Dynamism

The several public discourse subjects of importance need to be prioritized, giving the more important ones greater emphasis in the future public discourse. In that way, we can determine the hierarchy of priority.

Filling and Emptying the Funnel

"Filling the Ideational Funnel"

In this first stage the actors attempt to determine future public discourse. The funnel "fills up" with different public topics, based on the pronouncements of all those publicly involved in the expansion of the public sphere.

"Emptying the Funnel"

In the second stage, the funnel "empties out," as evidenced by the actual subjects that form the core of the public discourse. If the most prioritized subjects in the first (pre-expansion) phase emerge as the core subjects constituting the post-expansion discourse, then we have a case of FIFO—first in, first out. Conversely, if the actual public discourse revolves around the (pre-expansion) lower-priority subjects, then the process can be called LIFO—last in, first out.

Feedback

The proposed model is an open one, in constant interaction with the social, cultural, economic, political, and technological environment. Therefore, every change in expectation and aspiration in any of the listed subject areas over time may lead to internal changes in the "public sphere" and concomitant public discourse.

CASE STUDY: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO ISRAEL'S MEDIA EXPANSION

The decision to open up Israel's television broadcast system to competition received legislative expression in Amendment 4 of the Bezek (Telecommunications) Law in 1986, as well as in the law establishing the Second Channel Authority for Television and Radio in 1990. It is in the early and final stages of legislation that we find our Ideational Funnel being filled regarding the expectations for the country's future public discourse—through the hoped-for development of a "public sphere" that would nurture certain topics for public discourse. On the other hand, the actualization of the public discourse ("emptying the funnel") occurred after Channel 2 began broadcasting (late 1993), and it is this latter period that forms the basis of our analysis of the actual public discourse that emanated from this new multi-channel broadcast system.

METHODOLOGY

Our proposed model emphasizes the dynamic process of change and immediate interaction with the social environment as the core factor of change.

Stage 1: Filling the Ideational Funnel

We first identified the major subject areas raised by the various participants in the legislative and accompanying public debate process. This was done through an in-depth analysis of the following: the arguments and recommendations of the sundry "Commissions of Inquiry" (e.g., Kubersky in 1979; Bar-Sela in 1982; Karniel in 1993) set up by several Israeli governments for the purpose of receiving input as to suggested models; the applicable laws establishing the various broadcast agencies and the way they were supposed to work (Am. 4 to the Bezek Law, 1986; Second Channel Law, 1990); collections of relevant regulations related to the auction of broadcast licenses, such as the programming obligations of the licensees, (for example, as listed in the official *Reshumot*, November 12, 1987: 110–148) and speeches on the part of members of the Knesset (MKs), across

the political spectrum, involved in legislating the new communications map of Israel.

The next task was prioritizing the “public discourse” subjects to be nurtured. We broke these down into four categories of hierarchical importance, in a systematic fashion in line with several (occasionally inchoate) attempts on the part of the actors themselves (Ericson, 1996). In order to ensure a systematically empirical analysis, this prioritizing task was based on the obligatory demands placed on the Channel 2 and CATV licensees as found in the respective *legislation* and *ordinances* exclusively—and not on the more amorphous speeches and commission recommendations expressed to the legislative/bureaucratic outcome.

Stage 2: Emptying the Ideational Funnel

After the establishment of the expanded broadcast system, we arrive at the point where we can analyze the public discourse *de facto*. Our method was to return to the same actors involved in stage 1, for their feelings of success or failure regarding the desired public discourse (as expressed in the earlier hierarchy of subjects). Such a research typology, then, is based on a double research focus (Lin, 1976): the first stage’s intentions constituted the intended *means*, while the second stage’s results are the *ends* whereby the latter are evaluated in light of the former. To do this, we turned to the following sources: speeches by several Ministers of Communications who dealt with the process over the years; once again, speeches on the part of MKs; interviews conducted by one of the authors with “key informants” (Tremblay, 1982)—ministers, MKs, members of parliamentary committees, and experts deeply involved in the process; and the State Comptroller’s annual reports.

The State Comptroller’s Report is an important adjunct to this type of research because it is the only source among all those mentioned with a relatively “neutral” stance. While the office is beholden to the legislative branch (the State Comptroller is elected by the Knesset), historically these annual and special reports are almost universally accepted in Israel as being objective (the present and previous comptrollers formerly were Supreme Court justices). Indeed, the scope of this office in Israel and elsewhere (usually called State Ombudsman) has transformed it into a central institution guaranteeing the stability and proper functioning of the nation’s democratic system (Friedberg, 1990). In the Israeli case, the main purpose of the State Comptroller’s office is to gather data and information on public institutions and to compare their functioning with the legislative mandate (including ordinances, etc.) underlying their existence and work. Thus, these reports were designed from the outset to do in general what we have chosen to do in the particular subject area under discussion, and provide significant as-

sistance—not to mention corroboration—of our findings with regard to the gap between original intent and subsequent fruition.

We chose to divide all the subject areas into three classifications from the standpoint of such a “gap”: (1) lack of fit, (2) minimal to partial fit, and (3) large to complete fit. It should be noted that the “fit” refers only to the degree in which each “promise” was fulfilled and not to the amount of “fit” relative to the other subject areas. In other words, a category could score 100 percent total fit, which might indicate that it received *too much* attention, given its low ranking among the prioritized “promised” subject areas.

For illustrative purposes, we offer an example here of the second classification (“minimal to partial fit”). One of the desired intentions of the new television legislation was to enable local community expression. However, the State Comptroller’s Report of 1994 found that “the regional advisory committees [mandated by law] were *hardly active* from their establishment; from 1992 only two such committees were active. Due to their inactivity, the subject of community broadcasts was not advanced. . . . In November 1993 the [Second Channel] Council turned to a professional consultant in the area of programming and he will work on developing a policy in the area of local community broadcasts.”

Most of the original intended “promises” were carried out in one degree or another, with very few not showing any results at all. One rare example of the latter was the intent to enable broadcasting to linguistic and religious minorities. Although the new cable television system did provide satellite broadcasts from Russia and Morocco, the intent could be said to have been *completely unfulfilled* insofar as these local groups having any control of such broadcast programming was concerned. Overall, however, virtually all the “promised” subject areas did find some expression in the second, post-expansion stage, enabling us to clearly show which had greater expression and which had less.

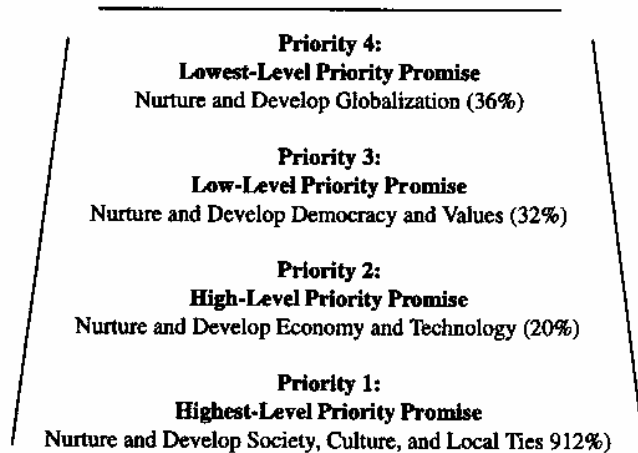
Findings

Filling the Ideational Funnel

After studying all the sources of the pre-expansion, legislative stage, we were able to reduce all the announced “promises and intents” of future multi-channel broadcasting to four basic categories, each of which had several specific policies and intended outcomes. The following four categories are presented in descending order of prioritized importance (i.e., from the most important priority, as declared by the sources, to the least important): (1) social, cultural, and local public discourse; (2) economics and technology; (3) democracy and values; and (4) global/international trends (see Figure 7.1). The following MK citations are representative of the political debate on the related subjects.

Figure 7.1
Filling the Funnel

Mapping the "Promises" of the Future Public Sphere



Social and Cultural Promotion and Development

Encouraging original Israeli and Hebrew works: Many shared the view that increasing the number of television broadcasting channels would encourage thought and creativity. As early as the 1980s, MK A. Rubinstein, Minister of Communications, made provisions for "the promotion of original Israeli and Hebrew works" (DK, 18.5.87). At the beginning of the 1990s, various MKs pursued the same course. MK N. Arad thought that "competition would help the creative network in Israel" (DK, 18.2.91). MK R. Rivlin worried that "local creative works are nonexistent today; only a second channel can enhance and enrich the nation with true and original Israeli creative works" (DK, 18.2.91).

Encouraging cultural rapprochement: Minister of Communications, MK G. Yaakobi, viewed communications as a medium that "brings nations closer together, and also brings remote areas of Israel closer, and gives them some leeway for accelerated development" (DK, 23.5.88). He saw many advantages to the adoption of satellite broadcasting: "The advantages of satellites are bringing other cultures closer, receipt of information, and the opportunity to develop a better understanding of occurrences beyond Israel's borders" (DK, 20.7.88).

Permitting the public to influence the content of broadcasts: Minister of Communications MK A. Rubinstein believed that "it is essential that the news agency be separate, and that the public will have an independent representative therein, and that it not be composed of representatives of

the broadcasting authority—representatives of the parties" (DK, 18.5.87). His successor, MK G. Yaakobi, promised that "we will soon set up regional advisory committees in order to allow the public to influence the content of broadcasts" (DK, 19.6.89).

Providing a platform for residents of the geographical periphery: MK Y. Bibi believed that "a second channel could serve more communities in the country (speakers of other languages). . . . The North need not be deprived" (DK, 19.6.89). MK A. Dayan inveighed against the existing discrimination "in channel two, whose broadcasts do not get to our areas because of the limited scope of the budget, and because of opposition on the part of the Broadcasting Authority management" (DK, 19.6.89). The Minister of Communications, MK M. Shahal, also "recognized the particular needs of residents of the periphery in the North and the South, who don't enjoy an excess of other information, culture and entertainment resources, and therefore are especially in need of these broadcasts."

Providing a platform for peripheral ethnic or national groups of the periphery: MK M. Nefa'a denounced the failure to adopt the idea of providing a platform for national or ethnic groups by way of multi-channel television broadcasts. In his view, "there is no justification for the limited time devoted to Arabic language broadcasts on Israel television. . . . The Arab population has the right to that!" (DK, 28.5.91). MK R. Cohen also requested "that some of the cable television programs be in Arabic. It is important for the society and for economic diversity" (DK, 9.11.92).

Providing a platform for linguistic minorities: MK A. Burg hoped "that the second channel would be fair and egalitarian minority groups in Israel—not necessarily ethnic minorities, but minorities in terms of language. . . . The second channel should be available for other languages as well" (DK, 22.7.92). Minister of Communications MK M. Shahal also wanted "a channel that is fair and equal toward the entire population, including speakers of other languages and new immigrants" (DK, 22.7.92).

Creating a platform for the religious periphery: MK S. Yahalom, a member of one of the religious parties in Israel, wondered whether "there would also be interesting programs for minorities" (DK, 2.7.92). MK C. Biton also viewed as important the expansion "of tools of mass communications primarily for the protection of minority groups like women, religious minorities and other groups that are vulnerable and deprived" (DK, 18.2.91).

Giving expression to community life: MK M. Goldman was satisfied with the thought that increasing the number of broadcasting channels gives expression to community life: "The time has come for Israel, after 42 years, to have more than one channel. . . . The second channel broadcast from Kfar Tavor, and caused quite a stir" (DK, 18.2.91). There was no doubt among various members of Knesset that "a community channel is important also for local authorities and for residents of the smaller cities" (S. Buhbut, DK, 25.1.93).

Fostering and Development of Globalization Trends

Strengthening the process whereby Israel is becoming part of the global village: MKs from various factions lent their support to the words of MK D. Tichon, that “the world is becoming smaller and smaller” (DK, 20.7.88). MK R. Pinhasi also saw how “modern communications are turning the world into a small global village” (DK, 28.5.91). Thus, as noted by MK R. Cohen, “electronic communications are turning the world into a global village” (DK, 11.2.92).

Diversifying the airwaves: MK A. Rubinstein’s conception has become more and more true: “The sky above Israel is opening up more and more and the country’s communications network is becoming more and more diversified. . . . We are a free country. The sky is the limit” (DK, 20.7.88). And in truth, “the sky cannot be closed down by laws and fines” (DK, 20.7.88). It is clear, as stated by MK D. Tichon, that “the airwaves must be diversified, they must be opened for every citizen of Israel” (DK, 19.6.89).

Helping to make Israel part of the new age: MK Y. Tsidon saw “great importance in the field of communications, in terms of national infrastructure. . . . The post-industrial age we have entered is an age in which the smooth and rapid flow of information has replaced highways, railroad lines and ports” (DK, 19.6.89). “The field of communications,” according to MK A. Solodar, “is perhaps one of the most important fields in the modern era” (DK, 28.5.91). MK R. Cohen also acknowledged that communications is the “key to the next century” (DK, 22.7.92).

Building block in the creation of an advanced mass communications network: Minister of Communications MK G. Yaakobi declared that “one of the primary goals of our communications policy is the creation of an advanced mass communications network, with well-developed, advanced and free foundations, to be accomplished primarily via private and public—but not government—investment” (DK, 19.6.89). His replacement, MK R. Pinhasi, also saw in the promotion of the Israeli communications satellite project, Amos, “a catalyst for further improvement in communications and broadcasting. . . . Promotion of the option of broadcasting by satellite to the Soviet Union and thence to Israel . . . [offers] a flexible means of communication that changes to meet the needs of the current generation and to be in sync with advanced technology . . . the combined system—satellite broadcasts for direct reception and for transmission purposes, as is employed in the most advanced countries in the world” (DK, 28.5.91).

Fostering and Developing of Democratic Values

Expectations regarding enhanced democratization: According to the views of Minister of Communications MK G. Yaakobi, “The principal goals of our communications policy are the creation of an advanced mass communications network, built upon well developed, advanced and unres-

tricted foundations, to be accomplished primarily via private and public—but not government—investment. . . . Free choice of sources of information, diversified radio and television, will strengthen our democracy, increase the competitive strength of the Israeli economy, and render the society more stable” (DK, 19.6.89).

Preventing centralization: The issue of centralization of all the television broadcasting channels in Israel has a number of aspects. MK Y. Goldberg attached great importance to the fact that there should be a number of channels, in light of the security situation. “Cable television in Kiryat Shmonah and Metulla is part of the organization of these communities in a fluctuating security situation. . . . It is very important that there be two television channels, particularly at such times, so that people will not be stuck on one channel” (DK, 28.5.91). MK H. Corfu (Chairman of the Special Committee on the Second Television and Radio Authority Law) tried to increase the number of broadcasting competitors, in order to avoid the problem of centralization. “The number of participants in each franchise will be far greater, and will tend to prevent the concentration of ownership of commercial communications media in a limited number of persons” (DK, 11.2.92).

Reducing attempts to obtain political influence over the media: MK Y. Levy saw how “the second channel has turned into a focus of controversy between Likud and Labor. . . . Among the public, the opinion is broadly held that if a second channel is created, the Minister of Communications will control it, and thereby serve as an alternative to Mekel [Director-General of the Broadcasting Authority]” (DK, 19.6.89). MK O. Namir believed that the proposed law fell apart on the point they cannot get away from—“who will oversee the news department. . . . Neither of the large parties comes to this with clean hands. . . . If the politicians don’t manage to overcome the desire for personal publicity, and the struggle to control the news, then the second channel won’t be created as a serious channel” (DK, 19.6.89).

Breaking up the Broadcasting Authority’s monopoly: MK A. Rubinstein wanted to see an end to the monopoly of the Broadcasting Authority and requested the Israeli public’s support: “The Israeli public desires to bring an end to the destructive monopoly of the Broadcasting Authority” (DK, 20.7.88). Moreover, according to Rubinstein, “the opening of a news agency will bring an end to the destructive monopoly that has existed with regard to everything having to do with television and radio broadcasting” (DK, 11.2.92).

Economic and Technological Support and Development

Encouraging economic growth: Minister of Communications MK G. Yaakobi welcomed the economic initiative he saw in the changes in television broadcasting. “Communications brings countries together, and also

brings the distant corners of Israel together, giving them space for breathing and accelerated development. . . . The investment required for laying down the infrastructure, building studios, and acquiring broadcasting equipment will total \$400 million over the next five years, supplied by private and public sources (DK, 23.5.88). "The proposed law is designed to ensure that the system has the capacity to function financially," explained MK D. Ben Meir (DK, 20.7.88).

Increasing competition: The accelerated processes in the field of communications were understood by the Minister of Communications, MK G. Yaakobi, as processes with "broad-ranging ramifications for society, culture and the economy. . . . The free choice of sources of information, a range of television and radio programs, etc. . . . will strengthen democracy, increase the ability of the Israeli economy to compete" (DK, 19.6.89). MK M. Wirshovsky agreed with this view and emphasized the notion that "people need to have a choice between Channel One and Channel Two" (DK, 19.6.89).

A communications revolution: "Throughout the world, and in Israel as well, a communications revolution is taking place, as part of the computer and information revolution. . . . The age of the communications revolution is upon us, and with it an increase in new organizations and new media: cable television, direct satellite reception," as MK G. Yaakobi proclaimed (DK, 23.5.88). MK D. Tichon protested that "the Knesset does not understand the communications revolution that is taking place around the world; and it is setting down impediments to all the laws regarding the creation of a second, a third, and a fourth channel" (DK, 19.6.89).

These are but a few of many sundry quotations from the Knesset debates on the subject of Israeli TV programming, and they are presented here to offer a taste of the spirit of those debates. At the end of the legislative process several laws and ordinances were passed and issued, and it is on the basis of these more concrete and measurable expressions that we turn to an analysis of the relative success or failure in shaping the public discourse.

Emptying the Ideational Funnel

After the introduction of cable and commercial television, the intentions and promises of the pre-expansion sources could be measured through what we call "emptying the funnel": an examination of which prioritized categories were actually carried out in the new multi-channel situation. As noted earlier ("Methodology" section), we scored each of the categories on a tripartite basis: (a) "lack of fit," (b) "minimal to partial fit," and (c) "large to complete fit." The major—and quite unexpected—finding of this study: the fit of the four major categories was in inverse (!) proportion to the priority each received in the first (pre-expansion) stage. The actual per-

centages of "fit" (a, b, and c), as felt and described by the post-expansion sources we studied are offered in the following description of our findings.

Priority 1: Society, Culture, and Local Ties (a = 33%; b = 67%)

The high hopes for a social, cultural, and local community-based public discourse were strongly dashed in the ensuing multi-channel reality. As the peripheral sectors—national, linguistic, and (ultra-) religious—were not given significant expression, collective public discussion could not take place because these groups did not become partners in any "joint collective public discourse." In complete contradistinction to the hopes that a rich cultural discourse would take place, few tools or venues were developed for an open dialogue based on mutual recognition and respect among Israel's sundry population groups.

Priority 2: Economic and Technological (a = 13%; b = 13%; c = 74%)

The link between intention and execution turned out to be far stronger regarding the second priority category. Overall, one can see that in large measure a public atmosphere of economic and technological growth was created, and even more pronounced was the emphasis on the importance of encouraging economic expansion in Israel of the communications realm. On the other hand, the development of a public discourse on the parameters and nature of such growth did not meet expectations. As a result, ongoing standard and clear rules of public discussion and control did not evolve for these new communications industries.

Priority 3: Democratic Values (b = 20%; c = 80%)

The relatively low priority originally given to this category was not reflected in its actual expression in the multi-channel environment. Quite the reverse. All the "promises" were kept in large measure: establishing the foundation for, as well as inculcating the relative concepts of, a democratic public discourse.

Priority 4: Globalization and Internationalization (c = 100%)

This last category was given very low priority, and yet in the new multi-channel environment it gained a very large amount of public attention. Thus, the public dialogue was turned on its head: instead of a serious *intra*-Israeli discussion of internal matters, the dialogue instead had a clear *inter*-national perspective!

In short, the post-expansion period, that is, after the introduction of multi-channel television in Israel, presents a mirror image of the hopes and aspirations of those who set the priorities in the course of its establishment. The higher the priority given a category, the lower its actual expression in the new media environment—and vice versa. In Habermasian terms, a sphere of public discourse did emerge, but not necessarily the one that he

Table 7.1
Success and Failure in Developing the Sphere of Public Discourse

Category	Stage 1: Designing the Future Public Sphere of Discourse	Stage 2: Fulfilling the Actual Public Sphere of Discourse
1—Society, Culture, and Local Ties	Step 1—Joint, collective sphere of discourse	Step 1—Failure
	Step 2—Pluralistic, collective cultural sphere	Step 2—Failure
	Step 3—Particularistic, community cultural sphere	Step 3—Failure
2—Economics and Technology	Step 4—Public atmosphere for economic and technological growth	Step 4—Success
	Step 5—Public discussion as to the parameters and nature of economic and technological growth	Step 5—Minimal success
3—Democratic Values	Step 6—Creation of a joint democratic public sphere of discourse	Step 6—Success
	Step 7—Inculcating its concepts and ideals	Step 7—Success
4—Globalization and Internationalization	Step 8—Inculcating the idea of an external transnational public dialogue	Step 8—High level of success

would have preferred. Table 7.1 summarizes the success and failure in developing the sphere of public discourse.

DISCUSSION

In the following discussion we shall offer four possible reasons for this anomalous outcome. First, the politicians attempted to determine not merely the agenda for “political debate” but rather the much wider “sphere of public debate,” leading to the public’s attempt to free itself from the long arms of political influence in order to create an “independent public sphere.” Second, in the civic society the “marketplace of social reality” and the “marketplace of ideas” tend to be synchronous and influence one another. In other words, the public sphere is an active and *real* one, and not

merely verbal and divorced from reality. Third, the growing “individualization” and “privatization” of Israeli society might have led the average Israeli citizen to leave the “political sphere” and withdraw into a “private sphere.” Finally, the role of Israel’s print press may have also influenced the nature of the electronic media’s public discourse prioritized agenda.

Creation of an “Independent Public Sphere”

Until recently, Israel did not nurture a Habermasian environment in which all citizens had access to the public sphere. Even the public authorities (including the state bureaucracy) were not obligated to divulge information, a requisite for the proper functioning of public discourse in a democracy. It is only when the public authorities are obligated to “full disclosure” that the public sphere gains a measure of influence over the government through the judiciary (Mukerji & Schudson, 1991). Moreover, public opinion is created through informational transparency and journalistic publication, and without trustworthy and independent reporting the public is unaware of how public resources are being (ab)used (Friedberg, 1990). To this we can add the fact that the State of Israel has demanded of its citizenry intensive participation and involvement in the creation of Israeli society. The overall result: a virtually identical “political sphere” and “public sphere”—almost universal agreement on the important subject areas or, in other words, the political and the civic are one and the same.

During the 1980s, however, a privatization process commenced in which government-owned companies moved into private hands, or at least began to be run on a profit basis. This occurred simultaneously with the development of a “public sphere” in which attention was diverted to wider issues of greater public interest.

This trend received its greatest push in the changeover to a multi-channel system, as these media are truly “mass” and highly influential. However, many times the developing relationship between the new media and the government leaves the former integrally tied to the latter (Garnham, 1992). In the Israeli case, the legislation setting up multi-channelism attempted to ensure that the political establishment would continue to determine the public agenda. But the by-now “mature” Israeli public demanded an “authentic” discourse, that is, a debate relevant to its needs and desires. Thus, Israelis did not take upon themselves the “ideal role” which the authorities tried to foist upon them—and which Habermas called for. Instead, many Israelis decided not to use the new media as a tool for creating (or strengthening) their, or the country’s, self-identity. This is line with Meyrowitz’s argument (1985) that the electronic media, and especially television, lead to the reconstruction of social reality through the diminution of the value of social situations.

Perhaps Habermas is correct in arguing that the public sphere in its pure

state has been sacrificed; however, we think that we can identify an attempt by the public to escape the constricting atmosphere of the nation-state into a wider, more "global" public sphere.

Mutual Influence between the Marketplaces of Reality and Ideas

The law reflects and represents the public discourse on the basis of society's fundamental cultural values (Broekman, 1996). However, already at the early legislative stage towards multi-channelism we can discern that the legislative process was operationally "realistic" in that it tried to resolve disagreements by taking account of divergent views (Ericson, 1996). As a result, even in the early stages of the development of a "sphere of public discourse" one can see the gradual blurring of lines between the "public sphere," the "state," and the "marketplace" (used here not only in the economic sense of the term). As opposed to Habermas' "ideal" prescription of a "pure" (i.e., conceptual, ideational) public sphere, the public was unwilling to divorce the marketplace of reality from the marketplace of ideas. Quite the reverse: the internal "dialogue" between these two spheres intensified.

In Israel, internal and external conflicts have not been resolved over the years. This complex marketplace of national reality exists through an array of political and social checks and balances that many times necessitate *avoiding* coming to grips with questions of national Israeli-Jewish identity (including the internal Arab-Israeli conundrum) as well as not trying to resolve totally the sundry social cleavages. Among other things, this is expressed in the unwillingness to use public channels of communication as a means of opening up these questions to serious public debate. The fear of the heavy social (and perhaps national-existential!) price to pay prevents any real internal coming to grips with Israel's almost unique problems. This may explain in part the "over" emphasis that we found on an external, trans-national public dialogue—a way of avoiding social "root canal" work. Put simply, in Israel's "sphere of public discourse" we find ongoing give-and-take around different *weltanschauungen*, but always taking into account the heavy "price" if matters cut too close to the bone. The marketplaces of reality and of ideas operate in an open system—one with feedback and equilibrium—but the main goal is ensuring the continued survival of the system as a whole.

Decreasing Civic Participation in the Political Sphere and Withdrawal into the Private Sphere

The existence of the State of Israel and Israeli society is without a doubt to the credit of the Zionist revolution (Dror, 1997). Its *raison d'être* was

the physical salvation of the Jewish people qua nation and not of individual Jews per se (Rotenstreich, 1991). This is the central reason for our study's legitimate expectation that we would find trends nurturing a "joint (unified) sphere of collective discourse". Moreover, in Israel the "nation" is perceived as a natural ethnic community, a sort of highly extended family—one that not every individual can join and that a person cannot completely leave (once joined) because of an organic connection to the group. Thus, the interests of the individual and of the general community are considered identical (Liebman, 1990).

Unfortunately, the collective success of establishing the state and defending its existence (literally) in the conflict-ridden region of the Middle East proved to be a heavy burden for the individual citizen (Gorny, 1986). In addition, the breakdown of ideology as a unifying mechanism in Israel and the general decrease of attractiveness of ideological movements around the world only intensify this tendency (Almog, 1993). This is an indication of withdrawal from collective politics and a turn to individualistic self-expression.

Another reason for civic "withdrawal" into the private sphere can be found in Israel's evolution into an "Information Society." First, when television gradually becomes society's main means for news and information, then in the very use of this "home" medium the user strengthens privacy at the expense of collectivity (Garnham, 1992). The paradox here is not only Israeli, but rather universal: Worldwide media systems "push" the individual viewer back into hearth and home (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1991). Israeli research has found that in subscribing to cable television (it had a very high "penetration" rate from the start), the new media environment encouraged a reorientation to individualistic values as well as global ones (Adoni and Nossek, 1997). In sum, through television the individual removes himself from the "political sphere" and attempts to create an "independent public sphere" while simultaneously withdrawing into a "private sphere."

Israel's Print Journalism as the Last Bastion of the Public Sphere

Habermas' characterization of the public sphere's evolution involved the rapid development of social communication networks, print media, lending libraries, publishing houses and the like, but mostly the rapid growth of the print media. The rise of a reading public and their gathering together for discourse in social settings (e.g., salons) was what gave the "publicness" to the "public sphere." Simultaneously, the role of the private reader emerged as well. While bookstores, cafes, and reading rooms offered space for different forms of "public assembly," subscribers' lists and pen pal associations were a form of non-personal communication, not to mention the

fact that receiving printed material usually meant solitary consumption. The idea that one can view society as a series of private individuals, or that the individual takes priority over the social collective, draws more from a *reading* public than a listening one (Eisenstein, 1991). One way or the other, the field of modern intellectual criticism in the contemporary world regarding democratic discourse and political dialogue is to be found mainly in the medium of writing within newspapers, journals, and books (Kellner, 1995).

Therefore, it is possible that the real main forum for the sphere of public discourse is to be found in print and not the electronic medium of television. In Israel one can find a rough division of labor between print journalism and the broadcasting media, the latter specializing in collecting and reporting news while the former emphasize commentary and opinion formation to a much greater extent. Despite the expansion of television and radio in Israel over the last few years (the multi-channel revolution), the country's print media has maintained its important position in Israeli society (Caspi & Limor, 1992). Given the very high level of newspaper readership (about 85% of the adult population read a paper on an almost daily basis), there was very little need for any expansion of the public sphere.

As a result, despite the politicians' (and other interested parties') aspirations to have the multi-channel revolution expand the public sphere, the Israeli public saw little need for this. What the average Israeli *did* want was to expand the country's entertainment menu as a means for escaping (if only for a few hours each day) from the pressurized reality of daily life, and certainly not to have deal with it in yet another (expanded) medium! We find support for this hypothesis in the explosive growth of pirate cable television in the 1980s, which offered video movies almost exclusively to an entertainment-starved public. Further research into the "public discourse" as found in Israel's newspapers should be able to disprove or corroborate this last explanation for the lack of serious and open public discussion on the burning issues of the day in Israel's expanded, multi-channel television environment.

CONCLUSION

To a great extent, technology determines the dialogue between the citizenry and their elected representatives (Jacobson, 1993). The question of whether to adopt a new technology, therefore, is a very significant one in the evolution of a sphere of public discourse. Given the similarities of media development among the nations of the developed world and the omnipresence of the global market, it is our belief that the "funnel model" outlined in this article is applicable to most nations and cultures in which a "communication sphere" has evolved. Moreover, the accelerated trend toward a (somewhat) unified international lifestyle, the cross-cultural exchange be-

tween different cultures, and growing structural similarities among the advanced nation-states that were quite different in the recent past—all these trends tend to submerge traditional values and particularistic beliefs which gave each culture its particular coloration. This is especially the case among those countries with a high level of immigration and with those nations characterized by a high level of persecuted or repressed cultural and religious minorities. For these countries, our funnel model serves a useful purpose and constitutes an efficient tool for analyzing the gap between legitimate expectations from technological communications innovation and the actual success/failure of these media in the creation of a direct and authentic public discourse. If our central finding is replicated elsewhere, it would indicate that Habermas' argument of decline in the "sphere of public discourse" in the contemporary world is right and wrong—correct in that such discourse may no longer primarily revolve around national, societal matters as in the past; incorrect in that a new paradigm of discourse is taking its place—internationalist and global in perspective.

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