

Från norra ståplats till cyberspace

En beskrivning av en diskussion på internet om ishockey
utifrån ett offentlighetsperspektiv

From the north stands to cyberspace

A description of a discussion on the Internet about ice hockey
from a public sphere perspective

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Abstract

Internet involves possibilities for public debate and civic participation in democratic life. Space is provided on the World Wide Web for new communities and public discussions, both with and without explicit political intentions. The starting point of this study is that online discussions in everyday life, political or not, contribute to the reproduction of democratic and civic culture.

The aim of the study is to analyze whether an un-political discussion forum in everyday life can be described as a public sphere and the discussion on hockey as communicative, democratic and deliberative.

The data consists of contributions to the discussion from three seasons, 1999–2002, of the Swedish National Hockey League. The final sample, 3993 contributions posted during totally 149 days, have been undergone a content analysis.

The results show that the discussion is open to anyone but dominated by one group of supporters and this status affect the discussion in several ways. The forum can be considered a public sphere principally because new areas and perspectives are continuously discussed. The participants cope well with language, truth and truthfulness but normative conflicts sometimes strongly challenge understanding. Yet communicative action is frequent enough to guarantee the survival of the discussion. The overarching character of the discussion is, due to its inequality, ordered structure and media dependency, a problem-solving democratic dialogue. Furthermore it is deliberative in several respects. Compared with political discussions on Usenet and America Online, the hockey supporters seek information and use arguments to a lower degree. On the other hand they interact much more frequent, incorporating and reflecting upon other contributions, and are much less homogeneous in their opinions than political debaters are.

The conclusion is that an un-political discussion in the cultural public sphere shows even more deliberative merits than discussions in the political public sphere. In addition, by publishing new subject matters and perspectives and being a problem-solving dialogue with a potential for communicative action, the discussion is a soil for reproduction of civic and democratic culture for far more tangible reasons than just being an association of people in every day life, supposed to produce the more indeterminable qualities solidarity and social capital.

Key words: internet, online discussion, forum, hockey, supporters, public sphere, cultural, political, claims of validity, democracy, deliberation, civic culture.
