

Babeş-Bolyai University
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PhD Thesis

Public Space and Private Space.
A Romanian Perspective

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Table of Contents

Introduction: Public Space and Private Space. Notes upon the constitution of a delayed Romanian discursivity

Part I

Chapter I. Mutations in the XXth century Political Philosophy

The pragmatic reconstruction of philosophy

The role of the public and private categories in the passage from political philosophy to political science

Chapter II. Public Space vs. Public Sphere

Chapter III. Methods in constituting a genealogy of the public and private categories

The historical approach of the public and private categories

The systematic approach of the public and private categories

The “archeological” approach of the public and private categories

Part II

Meanings of the public space

Chapter I. The ontological meaning of the public space

Public and private in ancient Greece

Public and private in classical Rome and in the medieval period

Chapter II. The modern withdrawal from the ontological and political meaning of the public space

The meaning of the modern eclipse of the public sphere. Dewey and Arendt

The social meaning. Karl Marx

The normative meaning. The public-private relation in Jürgen Habermas

The aesthetic meaning. Arendt and Sennett

The representative meaning. Kant, Mill and Rawls

Part III

The Western versus the east-european (Romanian) meaning of the public space

Chapter I. The Romanian public space from tradition to modernity

Towards a reconstitution of the “traditional” meaning of the public space

Proverbs between popular philosophy and public action

“Traditional ritualizing” of the public behaviour

Symbolic constitutions of the public space

Chapter II. The explosion vs. the implosion of the public space

Limitations of the private space

Chapter III. Eclipses of the public space in the early Romanian postcommunism

Part IV

Private identities: “subsistence” of the body and “resistance” through culture

Chapter I. The institutionalization of corporality

Gender, body, politics in communism

The political body and the working class

The ideal physical model

Reproduction, multiplication, substitution

Chapter II. Knowledge, mental production and communication in communism

Mental production and fabrication of discourses in Romanian communism

Resistance through culture versus resistance within culture

Institutionalized practices of philosophy

Conclusions

Bibliography

Abstract

The introductory chapter of the thesis reconstitutes, in a condensed and critical-reflexive manner, the itinerary of the theoretical researches within the Romanian postcommunist field, the destiny of the debates around the public-private categories and records the sinuous road, but also the essential steps which the public and private concepts have endured till they succeeded in taking part in the contemporary Romanian theoretical framework discursivity.

We showed how the public and private categories were in the position of constituting the object of a theoretical analysis belonging to the field of socio-humanistic studies, as these are practiced in post communist Romania. Moreover, we observed the manner in which only after eighteen-twenty years from the „Romanian revolution”, the concept of public space begins to be effectively discussed in the socio-humanist sciences and in the Romanian culture, caught in between local and global, „post communism” and „democratization”.

The first part of the thesis is divided into three chapters, which could appear at a first glance like a heteroclite structure, but which, by reiterating and explaining several aspects which open up new perspectives, enounced in the introductory chapter, and asserting others, essentially build up bridges between the chapters and ensure the coherence of the approach as a whole. The main purpose of this first part is to elucidate the concepts according to their (late) modern philosophical-political meanings, to investigate and question the fundamental aspects and the normative dimensions of modern rationality within the construction of the social sphere.

The first chapter of the first part is dedicated to the mutations that occurred in the XXth century political philosophy, through the progressive orientation of the discourse towards the political and social sphere, through openness toward other disciplines, till the apparition of a new and distinct domain of investigation: that of political science. We intended to crystallize here the main directions of this pragmatic philosophical turn: to synthetically rediscuss from the American pragmatist perspective the historical distinction between social theory and practice and to highlight the role of the public and

private concepts in the passage from political philosophy to the political science and then to political theory.

The second chapter of the first part also brings forth the justification for the terminological option, that is, for the notion of space (public or private) against the notion of sphere (public or private).

If till this point in our work we often used indistinctly the public and private terms in the expressions public space/sphere and private space/sphere, and although the debated problems mainly regard only the public space and private space categories, in this chapter we considered useful the explanation of the necessity of the indistinct usage in the scholarly literature of the terms space and sphere, and also our preference for the concepts of public space and public sphere in our thematic analysis. All these detailed explanations are part of the scientific discourse with the precise purpose of demonstrating the real existence of differences in meaning and nuance between the two groups: (public or private) *space* and (public or private) *sphere*.

The third chapter of the first part focuses on the explanation of several methods used in constituting a genealogy of the public and private categories. The elaboration of a genealogy always presupposes a complex knowledge process, based on the intertwining of at least three strategies. The first would consist in following the historical process of their „ripening”, with the purpose of recuperating their origin. The second one coincides with an „epistemic schematization” of their development, in order to identify their ideatic filiations, of integrating the discussed concepts in the corresponding and related „thematic seating”. If the first two strategies converge in the „architectonical” foundation, which „analyses the internal structure of a theory” and of its adjunct concepts, the third accomplishes the genealogical process, through an „archeological” analysis, meant to offcut singular and regional configurations, limited to the unique trait of an époque. The final intention of the approach which we take up consists in describing and analyzing the way in which public space and private space are configured in Romanian communism and imply the assumption of the mentioned strategies.

The second part of the thesis concerns the revealing of the ancient and modern meanings of the public space and correspondingly of the public sphere, and on the way in which these meaning appeared over time, the way in which they are reflected and in establishing

the *public-private* relation. This conceptual map is constituted around the theoretical aspects which effectively marked the history of the envisaged concepts, seizing them not only in their genuine state, but especially in their turning points. Implicitly, the „geography” of the public-private relation is meant to be followed and „mapped” with the own means of the philosophical discursivity. Obviously, these conceptual clarifications and crystallizations, materialized in an entire chapter, generically entitled *The meanings of the public space*, beside the „popularization” role which they assume, take up the function of a conceptual and theoretical guide not only for subsequent studies and researches belonging to the social sciences dedicated to the public space/sphere and to the private space/sphere, but, concurrently, to further investigations that have a social, political, juridical or architectural normative content.

The first two chapters of this part reveal the passage from the ancient paradigm, more political, of the public space, to the modern one, in which public space, through the apparition of means of mass communication and through the acquirement of certain „public qualities” of the social sphere, gradually transform in what the modern political theories designate as *public sphere*.

The third part of our thesis was conceived as a natural development of the analysis of the meanings of the public space. Here, we tried to apply the same paradigmatic scheme ancient-modern, also used in the analysis of the historical evolution of the „Western” meanings of the public space, through operations of discerning the „Romanian” meanings of the real public space, presenting the „local” tentatives of adapting and/or of adopting the mentioned paradigm in their analysis. Its „Romanian” (east-European) correspondent would be the *archaic (traditional)-modern* one. Therefore, the third part of our thesis begins with a chapter concerning the Romanian tradition of the public space.

This chapter part searches to answer to a suite of questions: to what degree a tradition of practicing the public space existed, and if it existed, which were the conditions of its constitution, which was the state of the Romanian public/private space before the instauration of communism and which was the way in which the public space was „lived”, assumed, experimented, in its relation with the private one. The answers would bring details on the „traditional” constitution of the public space/sphere and of the private space/sphere. By giving the title *The Romanian public space from tradition to modernity*,

we tried to exemplify and to complete the Romanian genealogical structure of the public and private concepts, knowing that Romanian history is so precarious regarding the above mentioned categories.

The fourth and last part in the structure of this thesis is dedicated to the analysis and „re-enactment of rights” of the second element of the public-private relation: the private space/sphere. Its title is *Private identities: “subsistence” of the body and “resistance” through culture*.

Being less affected by the sphere of political action, the private space seems to be more sheltered from transformations compared to the public space. It does not remain constant, unchanged, but, as a second element of the public-private relation, it could be influenced by many factors, but also by the metamorphoses of the public space. Therefore, the most significant affection of the nature of private space appears, we believe, following an ideological distortion of the public space/sphere. If for the public space the communist ideology brought an undeniable “eclipse”, the private sphere has also suffered a loss of autonomy in its relation with the State. The case of the instauration of communist regimes certainly represent the most clear examples of modification of the coordinates of private space/sphere. Simultaneously with the gradual destruction of the public space in communism, the access of the State to/in the private space became more and more unconfined.

When defining the concepts “public” and “private” analytically, one may use them either as barometers in order to determine the modernization and the democratization degrees of a certain society, or as standards for proving the modernization and the openness degrees of a discourse regarding the political domain and politics in general. The Western modern society understands this concept of “a public space” as a progressive and a meaningful one: both strong and weak, both central and mediating the power of the state and the private interests. It also adjusts these two last structures.

As a matter of fact, because of the late usage of these concepts by the Romanians, there was an extremely slow evolution of the public space.

A late usage also determines extreme political forms, with different types of ideology. This is what has happened with the Romanian twentieth century. It is a fact that there was a vague presence of this public area. This led to extreme forms of ideology,

such as: the Nationalism, the Fascism, the Military and the Communist Dictatorships. Communism represented the turning point, one which had changed both the traditional experimental structures and the pre-Communist ones, belonging to the public and the private spaces.

From a political point of view and taking the analysis of the public-private relation into account, neither the Communism, nor the post-Communism were up to the mark when speaking about modernizing. It is a fact that post-Communism developed very slowly.

Consequently, the Romanian democracy does not act as a solid one, though two decades have already passed. This is due to the lack of a real foundation of the public space and an institutionalized and acknowledged practice, understood in a form of a civil society. The political element has been identified with the traditional forms and standardizations of the public space, leading to an obvious avoidance of the true political sense.

Thus, when the Romanian cultural context is being analyzed, one may observe that Communism has not radically changed the vague political aspect of the public space, even though it had had this aim. On the other hand, while broadening both the force of the totalitarian state and its controlling way of being, it has managed to strongly influence the usage of the public space/sphere and of the private space/sphere. When ideology broke into one's private space, one could hardly take his/her own initiative.

It is, then, no wonder why the state grew a rapid political control over this private space.

Some of the Communist idiosyncrasies regarding public space, its passing-by when democracy tried to be created, seem to be kept along the Romanian transition period from communism to what followed.

A vivid knowledge about these western categories, the private sphere/space and the public sphere/space, is a must, first of all from a cultural point of view. The immediate result resides in a better understanding of our social and political democracy and in creating a balance when introducing terms like "private" and "public" into discussion.

Nevertheless, this analytical step does not stand just for creating some new concepts. It intends to urge some true modern consequences come to a better practice of the public space. And this is a true hard work.

Here are some desiderata of this analytical work. The first desideratum aims at describing the historical becoming of these categories: from the ancient political view regarding the public space to the modern view which understands the public space as a public sphere, due to some more efficient means of communication and to the new public quality of the social sphere.

The second desideratum deals with the tradition of political philosophy, in general, and with “the private” and “the public”, in particular. There was a true turn: the first with Walter Lippmann and John Dewey, in the direction of political science, on one hand, and with Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas or John Rawls, in the direction of political theory, on the other hand.

The third desideratum aims at discovering the intermediary step between the political philosophy and the political theory: the pragmatism of the political science. Though even the western discourse forgot about this kind of invention, reliable definitions of the public space/sphere and of the private space/sphere have to be given.

Some other desideratum was that of stating the differences between: the private/public space and the private/public sphere. When the public space became a public sphere, the process involved was a true modern one and the public spaces were integrated into a larger and impersonal public sphere.

One last desideratum was a research of the missing elements in the western humanist discourse, one about the relation between „the private” and „the public”.

The conclusion may suggest the fact that this procedure of diachronic retrieval and discourse synchronization between Romania and the west seem to direct us to the idea that the already mentioned categories must decrease the lack of interest found in the Romanian theoretical and political context. It also aims to plead for the regeneration of a modern workable public space, one with multiple connections: the juridical, the political, the administrative, the cultural or the artistic, the architectural and the town-planning domains.

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