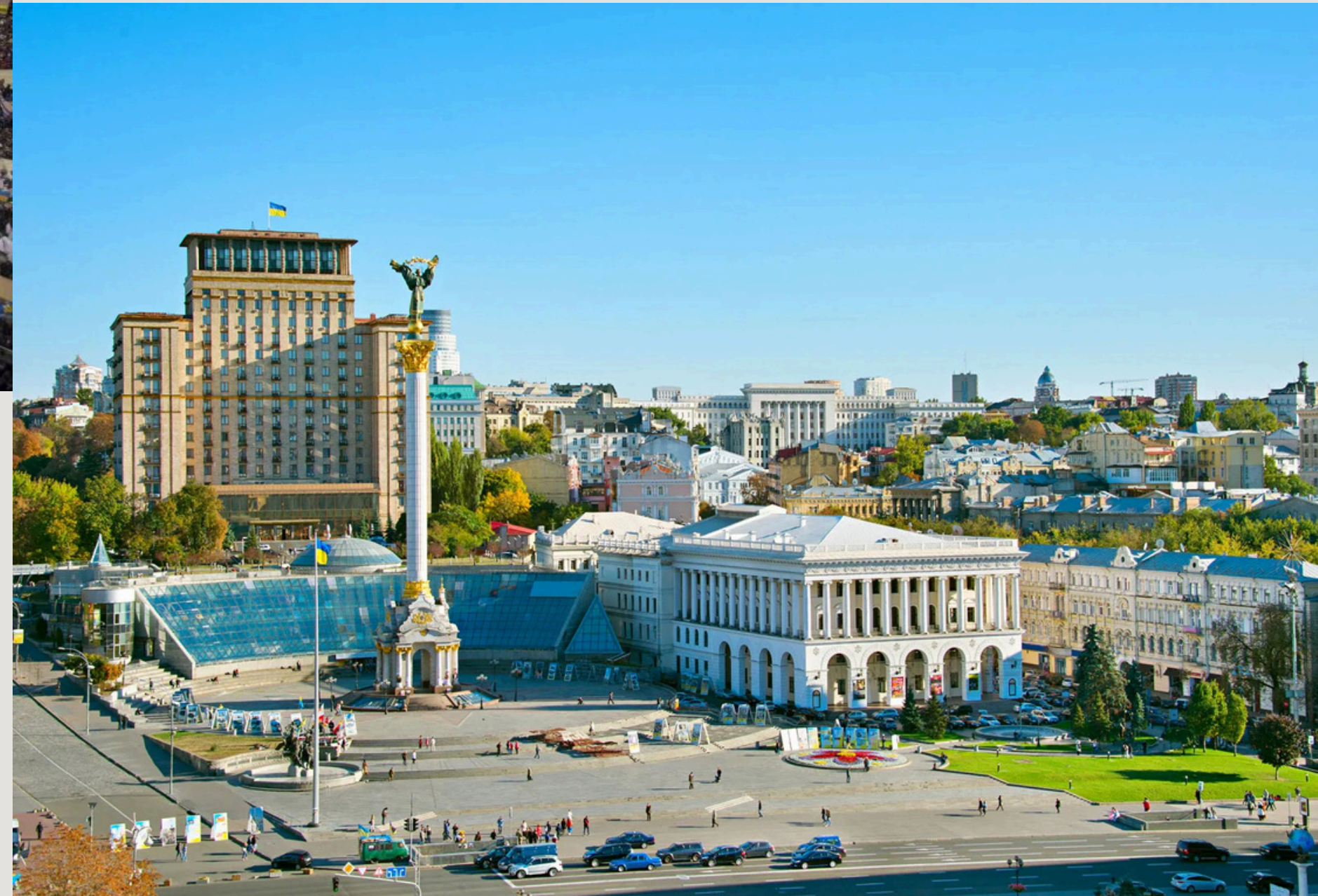


The Concept of Public Sphere

Ukraine's Euromaidan as Theory in Action



WHEN YOU THINK OF 'PUBLIC **SPACE**,' WHAT COMES TO MIND?



Public Sphere: Where private individuals become "the public"

- social space, could be physical or virtual,
 - where **private individuals come together as 'a public'** to discuss matters that affect everyone crucially,
 - these discussions **can influence political decisions**.
-

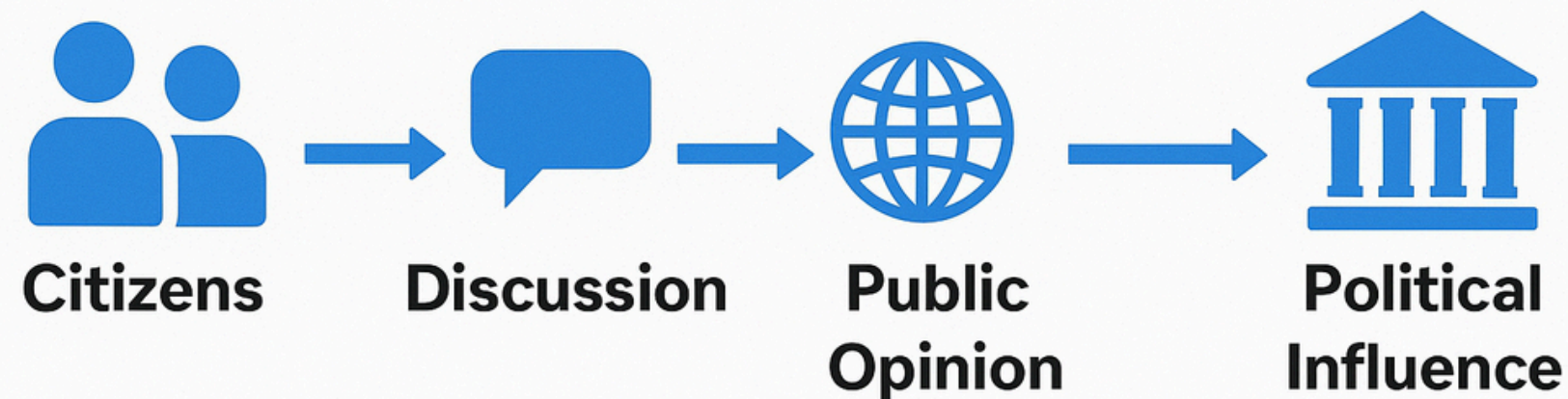
THE PUBLIC SPHERE (GERMAN: ÖFFENTLICHKEIT)

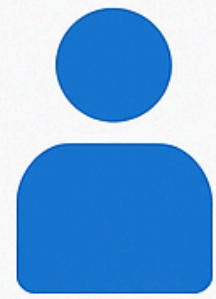
“made up of private people gathered together as a public articulating the needs of society with the state”

German philosopher Jürgen Habermas

KEY FEATURES:

- **Open discussion of common concerns**
- **Formation of public opinion**
- **Influence on political decisions**





Accessible

Open to all citizens
(in principle)



Rational

Based on reason
and argument



Public

Transparent, not secret



Autonomous

Independent from state



Common Concern

About collective issues

Five Characteristics of Public Sphere

**Can this exist
everywhere?**

**What happens
in authoritarian
states?**

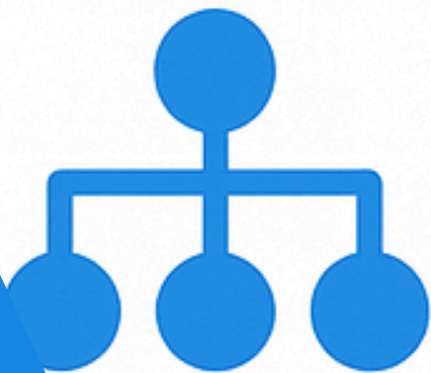
Ambicolonality



**Suppressed
voices**



**Ambiguous
identity**



**Colonial
domination**

Breaking the silence

06



**Finding
voice**



**Creating
public space**



**Claiming
agency**

November 2013 to February 2014

07

Nov 21, 2013

Gov't rejects EU
agreement →
Students protest

NOV 30, 2013

Police violently attack
protesters

DEC 1, 2013

500,000+
people flood
Kyiv

FEB 18-20, 2014

100+ KILLED

FEB 21, 2014

PRESIDENT FLEES

MAIDAN AS LIVING COMMUNITY:

NOT JUST PROTEST BUT ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY

SELF-ORGANIZED INFRASTRUCTURE:

- KITCHENS FEEDING THOUSANDS
- MEDICAL CLINICS
- EDUCATIONAL LECTURES
- ART & MUSIC STAGES
- DEMOCRATIC ASSEMBLIES

08



PROTESTERS DRINK FREE “HOT VOLYN TEA” AT INDEPENDENCE SQUARE. PHOTO
COURTESY ANASTASIA VLASOVA



MARKIYAN MATSEKH PLAYS THE PIANO IN KIEV. PHOTOGRAPH: ANDREW MEAKOVSKY, OLEG
MATSEKH AND MARIKIYAN MATSEKH

WHO WAS THERE? - DIVERSITY

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- **Different regions: East & West Ukraine, south, north**
- **Different languages: Ukrainian & Russian speakers**
- **Different politics: Liberals, socialists, some nationalists**
- **Different classes: Students, workers, business owners, pensioners**
- **Common values: Dignity, rule of law, anti-corruption**



YOU HAD UKRAINIAN SPEAKERS AND RUSSIAN SPEAKERS. IN FACT, MANY PROTESTERS WERE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING UKRAINIANS. AND THEY WERE THERE DEMANDING CHANGE JUST AS LOUDLY.



YOU HAD LIBERALS AND SOCIALISTS AND YES, SOME NATIONALISTS TOO. STUDENTS NEXT TO PENSIONERS. WORKERS NEXT TO BUSINESS OWNERS.



AND THEY DIDN'T ALL AGREE ON EVERYTHING! THERE WERE ARGUMENTS, TENSIONS. BUT THEY STAYED TOGETHER BECAUSE THEY SHARED CORE VALUES.



AND WHAT WERE THOSE VALUES? NOT ETHNIC IDENTITY. NOT 'WE'RE ALL UKRAINIAN BY BLOOD.' NO.



THEY WERE DEMANDING DIGNITY. THE RULE OF LAW. AN END TO CORRUPTION. THESE ARE POLITICAL VALUES.



BIEDARIEVA USES THIS WORD 'POLYPHONIC' = MANY VOICES. NOT ONE SINGLE MESSAGE, BUT MULTIPLE VOICES IN CONVERSATION, SOMETIMES IN TENSION, BUT UNITED BY COMMON CONCERN.

CREATING NEW KNOWLEDGE

NEW EPISTEMOLOGY =
NEW WAYS OF KNOWING

HOW IT HAPPENED: 10

FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTERS →
BROKE STEREOTYPES
COLLECTIVE WITNESSING →
SHARED TRAUMA
PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY →
PRACTICED TOGETHER
ALTERNATIVE MEDIA →
CHALLENGED STATE
NARRATIVES

TIMOTHY SNYDER: "*ULTIMATE
ENACTMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY*"

THE AMBICOLONIAL TRAP

UKRAINE'S SUPPRESSED PUBLIC SPHERE:

- ECONOMIC, CULTURAL, AND LANGUAGE TIES TO RUSSIA CREATED AMBIGUITY
- "NOT QUITE INDEPENDENT, NOT QUITE SUBORDINATE"
- AMBIGUITY PREVENTS MOBILIZATION — UNCLEAR IDENTITY = INEFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPHERE

BREAKING THE LOOP: EUROMAIDAN AS DECOLONIZATION

UKRAINE'S DECLARATION (2013-2014):

"WE'RE CLOSING THIS AMBICOLONIAL CHANNEL"

"WE'RE CHOOSING OUR OWN PATH"

"WE'RE NOT SUBORDINATE TO RUSSIA"

RUSSIA'S DOUBLE BIND TRAPPED IN CONTRADICTIONAL POSITION:

- Trying to colonize neighbors (domination) while experiencing self-colonization (mimicking the West, resenting it)
- This ambivalence → no genuine public sphere

KEY INSIGHTS: PREREQUISITES FOR HEALTHY PUBLIC SPHERE

A GENUINE PUBLIC SPHERE **CANNOT** EXIST WHEN:

- VOICES ARE STRUCTURALLY SUPPRESSED
- IDENTITY IS IMPOSED FROM OUTSIDE
- SOCIETY IS TRAPPED IN COLONIAL AMBIGUITY

→ DECOLONIZATION IS NECESSARY FOR GENUINE PUBLIC SPHERE TO EMERGE (?)

The Theoretical Problem

- **Standard postcolonial critique:**
Eurocentrism = bad
- Europe dominates and imposes its culture as the only legitimate model (?)
- **Ukraine's case:**
- Eurocentricity functioned differently
- It was emancipatory -- a way to break free from Russian domination

"WE WANT TO BE PART OF EUROPE"

**Not a new ambicolonial relationship,
but:**

- ✓ **Choosing diversity over centralization**
- ✓ **Choosing plurality over domination**
- ✓ **Choosing multiple voices over single authority**

Why This Matters for Public Sphere

European structure allows:

- Participation without losing your voice
- Multiple identities can coexist
 - Polish and European
 - Czech and European
 - Ukrainian and European
- Critical caveat: The EU is not perfect — power imbalances exist. But the fundamental structure differs from Russia's imperial model
- Result: You can maintain national identity while participating in broader European discourse

Structural Difference: Russia vs. Europe

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Russia

Centralized state

One government

One power center

Domination model

European Union

Collective of states

Multiple governments

Distributed power

Diversity & plurality

**Formal equality
between members**

PUBLIC SPHERE = SPACE WHERE CITIZENS DISCUSS AND INFLUENCE POLITICS

REQUIRES: ACCESSIBILITY, RATIONALITY, AUTONOMY, COMMON CONCERN

COLONIAL LEGACIES CAN SUPPRESS PUBLIC SPHERE

COLLECTIVE ACTION CREATES NEW KNOWLEDGE AND SOLIDARITY

EUROMAIDAN EXAMPLE: THEORY BECOMES REALITY

THE PUBLIC SPHERE IS NOT ABSTRACT THEORY BUT LIVED REALITY WITH HIGH STAKES