

https://dspace.org/

Civil society, the public sphere and policy-making in a democracy: the case of the South African Human Sciences Research Council

Shepherd, David K.

2009-02-25T12:35:11Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/6452

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Abstract

The central argument in this MA research report is that arguing for a compromised or depleted political culture or space is extremely difficult if we consider the complexity of the public sphere. This involves firstly arguing that by re-interrogating the concept of the public sphere underpinning orthodox critical perspectives on democratic functioning from deliberative democratic theorists, we find notions of the critical public sphere have been corrupted by the idealism that accompanies this nonetheless important concept.

By illuminating this flaw in the orthodox critical democratic perspective and applying it to critiques of South African democracy, I argue that critiquing South African politics and policy making should in general be done with more care, since what is under-contemplated in these critiques by way of the actual nature of the public sphere, is not negligible. Critics, who often start by characterising the political space as dominated by one party which allegedly renders the political space unfit for its critical purpose, ought to be fairer in their accounts. The end result of this increasingly consensual critical position is that we inhabit only a relatively meaningless formal democracy.

The *exploratory* case study of the Human Sciences Research Council which I go on to consider was chosen on the basis of the considered guess that it was likely to throw up evidence of interesting illustrative tendencies in what I argue may constitute a 'new' public sphere. The theoretical possibilities I aim to highlight are arguably deserving of more focused appraisal in themselves, but the aim of this dissertation is to introduce the theoretical possibility of an under-theorised public sphere through highlighting how that situation came about, and less so, what would constitute evidence of the nascent theory's correctness.