Call for Papers:

Social Web – Towards Networked Protest Politics?

7-8 November 2008
University of Siegen, Artur-Woll-Haus, Am Eichenhang 50, D-57076 Siegen.

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Theorists drawing on different concepts of *democracy* such as associative, deliberative or participatory democracy perceive the internet as providing new opportunities to revitalise classical notions of democracy through widening the scope for active public debates. Civil society actors are attributed a crucial role in new notions of web based public spheres. Social movements, it is argued, benefit more than established political actors from online media since their social network structure corresponds well with the technological structure of the internet. The internet provides new opportunities to intensify as well as territorially expand social networks and enables the formation of public sphere(s) beyond the borders of the nation states. Connected to the communicative dimension of democracy some authors even see the possibility of a global "community of communication" (Delanty).

The conference addresses issues of online communication of political protest actors by particularly focussing on the so-called social web, 'Web 2.0' as it is called after Tim O'Reilly, and its impact on political campaigning, community formation, transnationalising politics, and overall on the contribution of virtualised protest politics on the formation of a transnational 'public of publics' (Bohman).

The analysis of the interrelation between *campaigning* and networking deals with new forms of political mobilisation and highlights options and problems of online-offline-connectivities by giving particular relevance to mass media resonance. Apart from that questions of internal organisation and communication among protest actors and groups come into foreground. As protest networks and campaigns play important functions within new governance structures questions of democratic legitimacy of political protest actors in general as well as aspects of internal democratic decision making in particular have to be discussed.

Looking inside virtualised networks of social movements also raises questions of *community* building and collective identity. While some studies question the potential of internet technologies to provide a platform for the emergence of (online) collective identities and put emphasis on common experiences in physical social space, the proliferation of social techniques and their use on the net raises questions of an appropriation of these techniques by civil society actors for identity-building practices.

In early stages of internet research many scholars assumed that the new network technology would be able to decrease social inequalities but current studies of network research show that well-established social structures continue to exist on the net. For instance, the centre-periphery paradigm seems to persist within *transnational online networks* with regard to the gap between North and South. Furthermore, transnational protest actors tend to use the net rather for framing processes than for public interaction and exchange between individual protest actors and other relevant groups.

Overall, the conference aims at shedding some light on the interrelations of social movements and digital networks. It will address such questions as:

Panel #1: Virtualised Networks & Campaigns

- Which aspects of internal communication, decision making, organisation, and coordination of protest actions are facilitated within virtualised networks?

- With regard to external communication how do campaigns organised by virtualised networks and coalitions manage to speak with 'one voice'?

- Are network technologies changing campaign strategies of establishing public spheres?

Panel #2: Virtualised Networks & Community

- To what extent do civil society actors use technologies of Web 2.0 in order to build up social relationships and to foster or anticipate processes of community building and collective identity?

- Do Web 2.0 technologies form another milestone on the way towards a 'networked individualism' (Wellman)?

- How are cognitive and affective elements connected within virtualized communities?

- May we characterise them as social networks, as issue networks, or as 'epistemic communities'?

Panel #3: Virtualised Networks & Transnationalism

- How are claims of virtualised networks asserted across boarders?

- To what extent and how does virtualised protest bridge the North-South gap?

- Do social network techniques generally enable mobilisation of spatially separated supporters and thus contribute to the development of a 'global civil society'?

Panel #4: Virtualised Networks & Democracy

- How can we conceptualise public sphere(s) in the age of network communication on the internet beyond the nation state?

- May Web 2.0 be regarded as 'magic formula' for online deliberation, participation and direct democracy?

- What conclusions may be drawn for conceptions like 'transnational democracy' or 'global governance'?

Keynote speakers include:

Panel #1:Dieter Rucht, Social Science Research Center Berlin, D

Panel #2: Richard Rogers, University of Amsterdam, NL

Panel #3: Peter J. Smith/Elizabeth Smythe, Athabasca University /University College of
Alberta, CDN

Panel #4: James Bohman, Saint Louis University, USA

Theoretical and empirical works focusing on political and sociological aspects of online communication of political protest networks actors such as participation, mobilisation, organisation, identity, transnationalism, public sphere(s), global governance, and democracy are welcome. *The deadline for receipt of the abstracts is 14 April 2008.* Abstracts, between 500-1000 words, together with an author biography, must be sent electronically to Johanna Niesyto (johanna.niesyto@uni-siegen.de).