

Looking for and producing 'public engagement'

Citizens' connections with public issue campaigning

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Campaigns as invitations to public engagement?



- Campaigns frame citizens as (co)-responsible for societal problems
- Contestation of everyday habits by linking with public issues
- Public engagement?

Campaigns as invitations to civic engagement?

- Campaigns frame citizens as (co)-responsible for societal problems
- Support to (already existing) citizen engagement
- Civic engagement?



The public connection argument



- *Existing literature:* Seems to either over- or underestimate everyday life as context for public/civic engagement
- Public connection rather than publics
- Public connection as something citizens do, and do in various degrees and types

Civic/public engagement in mundane embedding

- *Practice theoretical assumptions:*
- Unit of analysis: practices and ways of practicing
- Social organisation: different overlapping routinized and shared practices
- *My understanding:*
- Potential civic/public engagement consists in how citizens in their practices handle the issues framed by the campaign – and thus is blended into a multitude of overlapping practices and issues



Potentials and limitations of a practice theoretical approach

Potentials

- Avoiding methodological individualism
- Able to describe how relevant things are done in mundane contexts
- Including the embodied and intersected character
- Able to analyse reproduction, change and conflict
- Open to empirical variation

Limitations

- Not yet so well developed methodologically
- Difficulties in conceptualising habitual action
- Difficulties in including macro-structures and institutionalisations

Practice theoretical approach and different kinds of campaigns



- Top-down campaigns
- Bottom-up campaigns
- The online component

The research project on campaigns

- A qualitative dataset with 8 focus groups with citizens
- Sampling: Age-group and locality segmented, but mixed gender and education
- Campaigns from across 12 different policy areas
- Analysed bwo coding, categorising and focusing on negotiations about citizen responsibility
- Part of a larger project with 3 other datasets



Empirical patterns 1:

Responsibility rationalisations

- “I am already doing the right thing”
- “Begin with yourself”
- “It supports us all in solving the problems”
- “Use your common sense – information is abundant and shifting”
- “I will do it when I see others do it”
- “I do something because it touches my life”
- “People must decide for themselves”
- “We need legislation instead of participation”

Responsibility rationalisations examples

- Oskar: *“You had this waste-bin divided in two and they were thrown in exactly the same hole, and you thought, ‘Okay, why is it that I have to sort this first?’ But it’s become much better now. So I can relate to it.”*
- Didde: *“Yes, but I also do it at home. Nicely in each their bag and then off to “big waste”.”*
- Bo: *“This has an enormous feel-good effect for me. These piles that you drive off with every second week to the recycling place. Then you’re a good citizen!”*

Responsibility rationalisations examples

- Sune: *"That thing about me as a consumer going actively in and thinking about a whole lot of things, which really, there ought to be legislation about. That is not okay."*
- Jes: *"You can't. It's way to wide-ranging."*
- Grete: *"No."*
- Leif: *"It's much too..."*
- Grete: [interrupts] *"Just to look at a declaration of contents at some bag of something. It's science!"*
- Jes: *"Not only do you have to see what's in the food, but also the packaging. Are there phthalates in and what the lid is made of and..."*
- Grete: *"And every time you think, I've got it, then they've changed it [laughs around the table]. You thought you had found out that some of it was not poisonous, and then they change it the following week."*
- Henning: *"Yep, that's not even kidding us!"*
- Karina: *"It is very opaque."*
- Jes: *"Then you have to take like one day a week where you use the whole day on shopping." [laughs around the table]*
- Karina: *"No Thanks!"*
- Sune: *"And remember the reading glasses."*
- Jes: *"No, that..."*
- Karina: [interrupts] *"It's right, there ought to be legislation about this, so we as consumers completely..."*
- Leif: [interrupts] *"Others are taking charge of this. There ought to be."*

Empirical patterns 2:

Traces of everyday agency



- The empowering way of enacting everyday agency
- The resisting disciplining way of enacting everyday agency
- The pragmatic way of enacting everyday agency

Traces of everyday agency examples

- Empowering agency:
- Camilla: *“There are also many people who might think that it’s some kind of limitation when you hear, that now you have to eat this and this. So when you look and see that it’s actually so many things – there are no limitations. There are all these good, healthy, delicious kinds of food that you’re allowed to eat.”*
- Ahmed: *“And also, it doesn’t say specifically ‘eat mackerel five times a week’ or such. It says ‘eat more fish’, so people can sort of choose themselves.”*
- Camilla: *“Yep, sort of work it into their own daily life.”*

Traces of everyday agency examples

- Resisting disciplining agency:

Mikael: *“I think alcohol, of course it depends on how much you drink, but maybe this one is more targeted towards people who party a lot. But I remember that I was a member of one of these anti-Health Agency groups. Or read about it at least, because I thought it was too much.”*

Traces of everyday agency examples

- Pragmatic agency:
- Britta: *“I am mainly the driver [laughs] but I won’t say that I am afraid of saying it. I can’t. I hate to sit next to people like that, so if they are not completely focused I tell them.”*
- Ralf: *“Yes, you a duty to say so. Like you have a duty to say so if you see someone who is going to drunk-drive.”*
- Britta: *“Yes, but it’s probably very few of us who do it.”*
- Ralf: *“Yeah, it’s that thing about...people have to dare doing it because it’s provoking...”*
- Dennis: *“Yes, I also think that it’s difficult, but you have to do it.”*
- Ralf: *“Yeah, then you have to take the conflict afterwards. There probably will be one.”*

Are some practices more important to public connection?

- The most routinized ones?
- The ones with most explicit discursive interaction?
- The ones embedded most in social networks?



Potential consequences of instrumentalization of campaigns



- Reactions to what is seen as commercialization
- Reactions to what is seen as professionalization
- Reactions to what is seen as responsabilization

Handling differentiated targeting

- Even in narrow target groups, practices are compound and public connectivity varies
- Dialogue is not necessarily the answer
- Trying to make engagement as “do-able” as possible

