



ØRECOMM –

CENTRE FOR COMMUNICATION AND GLOBAL CHANGE

invites researchers, students and practitioners to the upcoming

ØRECOMM FESTIVAL 14–17 September 2012

IN ROSKILDE, MALMÖ AND COPENHAGEN

## Reclaiming the Public Sphere

*Communication, Power and Social Change*

### Call for abstracts – and a concept note

The ØRECOMM FESTIVAL aims at identifying and analysing the roles of different stake-holders and actors in the changing public spheres at global and local level; the media professional (journalist/editor), the communication for development practitioner, the activist, the artist, the intellectual, the media mogul.

The modalities in the festival combine keynote presentations, invited speakers, papers by researchers and students, artist presentations, cultural and social events.

Deadline for submission of abstracts: **10 August 2012**.

Deadline for registration without paper: **30 August 2012**.

Abstracts by researchers and students should be kept between 200 and 300 words.

We welcome your participation – see website <http://orecomm.net> for more information about the Festival and how to register.

Mail address for submitting abstracts and for any other communication with the organisers: [orecomm@gmail.com](mailto:orecomm@gmail.com)

### Concept note

Social media activism, clicktivism, media revolutions ... Since the advent of the Arab Spring began to unfold late 2010, there has been a dramatic rise in attention to the role of information and communication technologies in social change. Now, looking back, a deeper momentum of critical reflection has arisen. This year's Ørecomm Festival therefore wishes to provide a space for this critical reflection, focusing upon how the notion of public sphere is being reinterpreted in these years, and how new spaces and new agents in the public sphere are influencing the relation between communicative practices, power and social relations amongst all stakeholders.



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If we take a brief look back in history, the notion of the public sphere has its origins in the *salon* or *coffee-house* culture of 19th century Europe, when this arena for civic debate evolved in response to the needs of the rising merchant and political class. Whereas formerly the ruler's power had been merely represented before the people, the new bourgeois public sphere, as defined by Jürgen Habermas, monitored state authority "through informed and critical discourse by the people". It was distinct from the state, but also from the economic sphere: Not primarily an area of market relations but rather one of *discursive* relations, "a theatre for debating and deliberating", to quote another prominent public sphere theorist, Nancy Fraser.

The public sphere has hence been intrinsically connected to the idea of *participatory democracy*, and the conversion of public opinion into political action. It has also been fundamental for nation-building and other forms of community and identity politics.

In fact, the theory about the public sphere has, from its inception, explicitly or implicitly assumed a national (nationalist) frame. And that has also been true of most of the various critiques of the theory, from feminist, postcolonial, and other perspectives.

The twin phenomena of Globalisation and Mediatisation are today posing interesting challenges to our understanding of public sphere(s) and political action. On the one hand, the national frame is largely being replaced or supplemented by transnational communications and cultural flows; on the other hand the mass media, which have formed the backbone of the public sphere, are now losing ground to new social media and other forms of opinion-making and political mobilisation – what Manuel Castells has defined as "mass self-communication". An often-quoted article in *The Economist* even suggested that the era of mass media was coming to an end, bringing us back to the coffeehouses (*The Economist*, editorial, 7 July 2011).

*The public sphere* is hence the over-arching theme of this second Örecomm Festival. We consider it a natural follow-up on last year's focus on *agency in the mediatised world*.

"Reclaiming the public sphere" should perhaps have a question mark. Rather than retrieving *the* public sphere in a Habermasian sense, are the new means of communication and political action shaping and constituting new public spheres in the plural? But what are the implications of this on-going shift? Who are the new players in the public arenas of the present? What processes of power brokering are taking place? How do the communicative practices, the negotiation of power and the formation and negotiation of social relations all come together in and around the public spheres? And how do public spheres relate to public *space* – be it physical cityscapes or virtual environments?

The negotiation of power is not only connected to formal institutional processes of elections and the formation of representative democracies, but is just as much about the processes of governmentality in everyday life: we negotiate power in our everyday social and cultural practices - and thus also in our participation in the public sphere, be they mediated or not. And these processes of power brokering have implications for who influences processes of social change.