Workshop Proposal Outline form
for prospective Workshop Directors for the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops

Title of proposed Workshop:	**Digital media and the spatial transformation of public contention**

Outline of topic and Relation to existing research::	Studies on the role of digital media in the communication and mobilization of the current wave of 'square' movements, which began in 2011 with the Arab Spring and became a global phenomenon in the form of the Occupy movement, suggest that a number of key shifts are taking place in current articulations of publicness and contention (Bennett & Segerberg 2013; Castells 2012; Margetts & John 2015). These shifts inspire us to critically reflect on the tradition of public sphere theory, which has been the main conceptual framework through which the relations between public contestation, mediated communication, and power have been examined. The proposed workshop on 'Digital media and the spatial transformation of public contention' aims to do exactly that. It explores and theorizes how the rapid development of online platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Tumblr, is affecting the *spatial* configuration of public contention.
	In this workshop, we will be focusing on three sets of changes in the spatial character and dynamics of public contention. First, in protest communication and mobilization, we see new connections emerging between the *local*, *national*, and *transnational*. As mobile technologies have become omnipresent in contemporary protest, street activity becomes inextricably entangled with national and transnational public communication (Couldry 2014; Lim 2012; Lotan 2011;). At the same time, as digital media communication increasingly involves masses of users, 'national' political issues and relations, more frequently than in the past, play a key role in online contention. Given the ways in which the topology and composition of relations of publicness are constantly redrawn across the local, national, and transnational, the notion of a 'sphere' as a 'natural' arena or container of these relations becomes problematic (Poell & Van Dijck 2016).
	Second, the 'spaces' of contentious politics are now located in a complex *hybrid media system* (Chadwick, 2013), which includes digital platforms, but also broadcast media and face-to-face communication. The interconnections and overlaps between communication technologies change the dynamics and spatial trajectories of public contention. This shift especially requires greater attention to the technological infrastructures of mediation (Kavada 2014; Langlois et al. 2009; Milan 2015; Poell 2014). While public sphere theorists have critically examined the political-economic and socio-cultural character of media systems, relatively little attention has been paid to how media technologies not only enable but also shape publicness. In the emerging hybrid media system, publicness is articulated in very different material settings, which are organized on the basis of different technological mechanisms. There are significant differences in this respect between national and transnational broadcast media, global digital platforms, and

local face-to-face interactions. Yet, in contemporary public contention they become deeply intertwined. Hence, the challenge is to explore and analyze how different technological mechanisms, socio-cultural norms, and political economic practices reinforce, undermine, or transform each other.

Third, the central role of digital media in contemporary activism means that protest communication increasingly occurs through *hyper-commercial platforms*, which shape how this communication unfolds. Deploying techniques such as data mining, user profiling, and targeted advertising, online platforms constitute spaces with specific characteristics that affect how people connect with each other (Fuchs 2011; Gillespie 2014; Kavada 2012 and 2015; Poell et al. 2015). Despite their fundamentally commercial character, these platforms are of vital importance for the rapid and widespread mobilization and communication of protest. This intense use of social media in public contestation, often in combination with alternative media, further confuses the traditional distinction between 'public' and 'commercial' space, which has been central to the different strands of public sphere theory (Couldry 2015; Papacharissi, 2010; Poell & Van Dijck 2016).

These three shifts in the spatiality of public contention challenge current systems of governance, in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. As trajectories of publicness fluidly traverse the 'local', 'national', 'regional' and 'global', the online and offline, as well as the public and private, political systems designed on the basis of the nation state find it more difficult to contain and to respond to such contentious activity. Thus, in the light of the rise of digital media, it becomes pertinent to simultaneously rethink the spatiality of public contention and of current systems of governance.

Taking up this challenge, this workshop aims to develop a more dynamic conception of the spatiality of public contention. It traces the processes and trajectories through which the relations between contentious actors and governing institutions are shaped and reshaped. Rather than simply situating public contention within a specific 'sphere' that serves as the container of contentious politics, we are interested in examining how it unfolds across different geographical, social, cultural, and material configurations. More specifically, the papers in this workshop will focus on the following questions:

- How do we need to conceptualize public contention in the new communication environment, centrally involving social platforms? Do we need to revise or even abandon dominant conceptualizations of publicness, like the public sphere model, which are very much predicated on the nation state? And if so, how?
- What are the spatial characteristics of current episodes of public contention? Does the communication on contentious politics move fluidly between different geographical settings, media contexts, private, public, and commercial divides, and online and offline relations? What are the new limitations and obstacles, as well as new opportunities, that digital platforms introduce in processes of contentious politics?
- What are the challenges posed by global, digitally mediated, processes of popular contention to existing political institutions, most of which are still grounded on national sovereignty? How can these challenges be addressed in a democratic fashion?
- How can the spatial reconfiguration of public contention and

	related processes of governance be studied? Can we capture and analyze the role of social platforms in these fluid processes? And what kinds of methods, such as digital methods and digital ethnography, are most appropriate for this?

Likely participants:	The workshop aims to bring together scholars from political science, sociology, media studies, anthropology, and communication science, working on digital media and public contention. The proposal has the endorsement of the ECPR Standing Group on 'Internet and Politics'. One of the proposed workshop co-directors, Dr Anastasia Kavada, is a co-convener of the group. The standing group will provide an excellent resource for recruiting participants and advertising the workshop. However, the Workshop Directors will also undertake a far wider search for papers, using other ECPR groups (e.g. the standing group on Forms of Participation) and related research networks and email lists. One of the workshop directors (Anastasia Kavada) is Associate Editor of the journal *Media, Culture and Society*, which could host a special issue with the best papers in the workshop. Other journals we could approach for a special issue include *Social Media & Society* and *Information, Communication & Society*.

Type of Papers required:	The workshop is open to three types of papers: 1) theoretical papers focusing on conceptualizing the spatial processes and trajectories of publicness, 2) methodological papers analysing how such trajectories of publicness can be studied, and 3) empirical papers discussing results of research on this theme.

Funding:	We anticipate attracting a diverse range of scholars who will be able to secure their own funding. Participation in Internet and Politics panels at the ECPR general conference is high, so we think that this workshop will attract a very good number of participants.

Biographical notes:	**Anastasia Kavada** is Senior Lecturer in the Westminster School of Media, Arts & Design at the University of Westminster where she is Deputy Director of the Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI). She is also Co-Convener of the ECPR Standing Group of 'Internet and Politics'. Her research focuses on the links between digital platforms and the practices of organizing and mobilization of social movements and non-governmental organizations. Her work has appeared in a variety of edited books and academic journals, including *Media, Culture & Society* and *Information, Communication & Society*. **Thomas Poell** is Assistant Professor of New Media & Digital Culture at the University of Amsterdam. His research is focused on social media and the transformation of public communication around the globe. He has among others published on social media and popular protest in Canada, Egypt, Tunisia, India, and China. These publications have appeared in a variety of edited books and academic journals, including

	Information, Communication & Society, *International Journal of Communication, Social Media & Society,* and *Journalism*.

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