Från norra ståplats till cyberspace
En beskrivning av en diskussion på internet om ishockey
uitrån ett offentlighetsperspektiv

From the north stands to cyberspace
A description of a discussion on the Internet about ice hockey
from a public sphere perspective

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Abstract
Internet involves possibilities for public debate and civic participation in democratic life. Space is
provided on the World Wide Web for new communities and public discussions, both with and
without explicit political intentions. The starting point of this study is that online discussions in
everyday life, political or not, contribute to the reproduction of democratic and civic culture.

The aim of the study is to analyze whether an un-political discussion forum in everyday
life can be described as a public sphere and the discussion on hockey as communicative,
democratic and deliberative.

The data consists of contributions to the discussion from three seasons, 1999–2002, of
the Swedish National Hockey League. The final sample, 3993 contributions posted during totally
149 days, have been undergone a content analysis.

The results show that the discussion is open to anyone but dominated by one group of
supporters and this status affect the discussion in several ways. The forum can be considered a
public sphere principally because new areas and perspectives are continuously discussed. The
participants cope well with language, truth and truthfulness but normative conflicts sometimes
strongly challenge understanding. Yet communicative action is frequent enough to guarantee the
survival of the discussion. The overarching character of the discussion is, due to its inequality,
ordered structure and media dependency, a problem-solving democratic dialogue. Furthermore it
is deliberative in several respects. Compared with political discussions on Usenet and America
Online, the hockey supporters seek information and use arguments to a lower degree. On the
other hand they interact much more frequent, incorporating and reflecting upon other
contributions, and are much less homogeneous in their opinions than political debaters are.

The conclusion is that an un-political discussion in the cultural public sphere shows
even more deliberative merits than discussions in the political public sphere. In addition, by
publishing new subject matters and perspectives and being a problem-solving dialogue with a
potential for communicative action, the discussion is a soil for reproduction of civic and
democratic culture for far more tangible reasons than just being an association of people in every
day life, supposed to produce the more indeterminable qualities solidarity and social capital.

Key words: internet, online discussion, forum, hockey, supporters, public sphere, cultural,
political, claims of validity, democracy, deliberation, civic culture.