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FROM MEMORY REGIMES TO DISCURSIVE MODES: A THEORY-DRIVEN FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING CULTURAL MEMORY IN HYBRID PUBLIC SPHERES

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ABSTRACT

This article develops a theory-driven framework for analysing cultural and communicative memory across traditional and digital public spheres. Building on political legitimacy theory, it shifts attention from substantive claims invoked by memory regimes to discursive modes through which memory is enacted in hybrid public spheres. The framework links narrative articulations of cultural memory with interactional modes of contestation (antagonism, agonism, and deliberation) and with discursive functions through which public remembrance gains political significance. Although technical components of the analytical architecture have been piloted elsewhere, this article provides the first full theoretical elaboration of the framework and illustrates it across national, cross-border, and transnational commemorative fields.

Keywords: cultural memory, politics of history, hybrid public spheres, antagonism–agonism–deliberation (AAD), democratic legitimacy, deliberative democracy

DAI REGIMI DELLA MEMORIA ALLE MODALITÀ DISCORSIVE: UN QUADRO TEORICAMENTE ORIENTATO PER L'ANALISI DELLA MEMORIA CULTURALE NELLE SFERE PUBBLICHE IBRIDE

SINTESI

Il presente articolo sviluppa un quadro teoricamente orientato per l'analisi della memoria culturale e comunicativa nelle sfere pubbliche tradizionali e digitali. A partire dalla teoria della legittimità politica, esso sposta l'attenzione dalle rivendicazioni sostantive evocate dai regimi della memoria alle modalità discorsive attraverso cui la memoria viene messa in atto nelle sfere pubbliche ibride. Il quadro collega le articolazioni narrative della memoria culturale con le modalità interazionali della contestazione — antagonismo, agonismo e deliberazione — e con le funzioni discorsive attraverso cui la memoria pubblica acquisisce rilevanza politica. Sebbene le componenti tecniche dell'architettura analitica siano già state sperimentate altrove, il presente articolo offre la prima elaborazione teorica complessiva del quadro e lo illustra attraverso campi commemorativi nazionali, transfrontalieri e transnazionali.

Parole chiave: memoria culturale, politica della storia, sfere pubbliche ibride, antagonismo–agonismo–deliberazione (AAD), legittimità democratica, democrazia deliberativa

INTRODUCTION

Cultural memory provides communities with shared reference points, *lieux de mémoire* (Nora, 1989), through which collective identities, values, and political orientations are articulated (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995).¹ These mnemonic markers, ranging from constitutive myths and national traumas to monuments and commemorations (Winter, 2008; Lampe, 2021; Detiček & Pušnik, 2025), can stabilise public discourse by generating common interpretive horizons, particularly within nation-building projects (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1983). However, competing interpretations of the past can also mobilise political conflict, deepen polarisation, and legitimate exclusionary agendas (Wodak & Richardson, 2013; Manucci, 2020).² Importantly, we argue that these divergent effects depend not only on what is remembered, but also on how mnemonic claims are publicly enacted and contested through different discursive modes of engagement.

In the digital age, these dynamics intensify and become more complex as social media turns into important arenas for memory practices. Individuals and groups commemorate historical events, invoke past traumas or triumphs, and challenge official narratives in real time. Digital media restructure practices of remembering (van Dijck, 2007), producing a “connective turn” in which private and public domains intertwine and memory becomes continuously reshaped through digital interaction (Hoskins, 2011). Platforms facilitate transcultural memory exchanges (Erl, 2011), transnational mnemonic flows (Rutten et al., 2013) and hashtag-driven memory activism (Yasseri et al., 2022). At the same time, the acceleration, visibility and affective intensity of digital communication magnify the political stakes of mnemonic contestation. Under platform conditions, the same mnemonic reference can travel faster and trigger sharper interactional

dynamics. These developments can reproduce and amplify ideological ruptures, promote selective historical framings (Richardson-Little et al., 2022; Pshenychnykh et al., 2024) or, conversely, facilitate new forms of accountability and efforts to redress historical injustice (Gutman & Wüstenberg, 2023).

Transformations in collective memory carry significant implications for democracy. They reshape historically embedded patterns of identity formation that once stabilised political orders (Calhoun, 2007; Habermas, 2001), while algorithmic recommender systems and platform logics amplify social and political ruptures previously moderated by the norms and practices of the classical public sphere (Habermas, 2023; Splichal, 2024). The consequences are double-edged: digital media broaden access and diversify mnemonic voices, but platform affordances also distort deliberation (Papacharissi, 2009) and facilitate toxic polarisation (Törnberg, 2018). New, digitally mediated forms of commemorating defining historical events have thus become sensitive indicators of broader transformations of the public sphere. They reveal shifts in identity formation, changes in communicative norms, and a growing instability of once sedimented narrative frameworks, all of which shape the conditions under which democratic reasoning can take place.

Despite extensive scholarship on memory politics (e.g., Bernhard & Kubik, 2014; Lebow, 2006; Olick, 2007), there is still a lack of an analytical framework capable of systematically linking cultural-memory theory, democratic theory and the empirical analysis of public discourse across both traditional and digital media systems in order to assess how these transformations affect democratic discourse. Scholarship has largely mapped memory regimes and their normative repertoires, including nation-centred, human-rights-based, and cosmopolitan forms (e.g., Olick et al., 2023; Levy & Sznaider, 2002; Assmann, 2014), and has also devoted attention to specific discursive modes, in

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2 The political instrumentalisation of memory is well documented across diverse contemporary contexts. For example, Maria Mälksoo (2023, 1) notes that Vladimir Putin justified the 2022 invasion of Ukraine through “twisted lessons of history,” denying Ukrainian statehood while framing the attack as “denazification” and “decommunisation.” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu invoked the Holocaust when justifying Israel’s decision to attack Iran in June 2025, framing the strikes in terms of preventing an existential threat (Reuters, 2025; cf. also van der Beek, 2020). Viktor Orbán has mobilised the memory of Trianon to legitimise an illiberal nationalist project (Toomey, 2018), while Brexit exposed deep symbolic divisions within the United Kingdom (Göhrmann & Henneböhl, 2024). Across the Western Balkans, entangled narratives of World War II and the 1990s wars remain powerful political instruments (Pavlaković & Pauković, 2019; Pavlaković, 2020).

particular agonistic ones, through which mnemonic contestation is enacted in public discourse (e.g., Bull & Hansen, 2016; Maddison, 2016; Nienass, 2023; Gutman & Wüstenberg, 2023). However, relatively few studies operationalise how regime-based mnemonic repertoires relate to observable discursive modes across traditional and digital media.

This article aims to address this gap by developing a theory-informed and empirically applicable framework to analyse how cultural memory operates, circulates and transforms within hybrid public spheres (Chadwick, 2017; Smrdelj, 2024). While technical components of our methodological apparatus were piloted elsewhere (Horvat et al., 2026; Lampe et al., 2026; Horvat & Koražija, 2026), this article offers its first full theoretical elaboration. We integrate insights from cultural-memory studies, deliberative democracy and agonistic democracy theory to connect three analytical dimensions: (a) the substantive content of memory, i.e. what is remembered and to what normative end; (b) the modes of contestation, i.e. how memory is debated and negotiated; and (c) the democratic consequences of memory discourse, which we analyse in connection with broader questions of deliberative legitimacy, public-sphere dynamics and political reasoning. Concretely, we operationalise these dimensions through (i) narrative inputs of cultural memory, (ii) discursive throughput captured through an antagonism–agonism–deliberation (AAD) framework, and (iii) outputs evaluated via deliberative functions (epistemic, ethical, democratic), complemented by an additional ideological function as an evaluative layer.

To illustrate the analytical potential of this approach, the article draws on three brief empirical illustrations: a) the nationally polarised Slovenian Day of Resistance Against the Occupier; b) the Italo-Slovenian contested memory surrounding *Giorno del Ricordo*, which commemorates the so-called *foibe* killings and the Istrian–Dalmatian exodus; and c) two transnational commemorations, the fall of the Berlin Wall and Europe Day, that function as symbolic pillars of European integration. These commemorations show how the integrated framework operates across different scales, capturing narrative structures, discursive modes of engagement and the deliberative functions of memory discourse in national, bilateral and transnational contexts.

The article proceeds in four steps. First, we conceptualise cultural and communicative memory as arenas in which embedded norms, values, identity patterns and forms of legitimacy are negotiated, thereby structuring political meaning-making in the public sphere. This also enables us to introduce the distinction between substantive memory regimes

and discursive modes of engagement in mnemonic contestation. We then translate this theoretical background into an operational framework for assessing deliberative legitimacy across hybrid public spheres. Next, we briefly illustrate the framework through selected commemorations. Finally, we consider its implications for memory studies, democratic theory and analyses of public-sphere transformation in digital environments.

WHY (AND HOW) CULTURAL MEMORY MATTERS FOR DEMOCRACY

Although commemorations refer to historical events, their primary referent is the present. Public debates over the past reflect existing configurations of socio-integrative consensus and reveal the embedded political-ideological narratives, cultural specificities and value systems that shape contemporary identity formations. In this sense, public commemorations repeatedly raise the explicitly political question “what is past and what is still present?” (Assmann, 2023, 3). Memory thus becomes operative not merely as a representation of what was, but as a symbolic lens through which communities articulate contemporary social and political dilemmas and orient toward collective futures. For this reason, as Mälksoo (2023, 1) notes: “What does ‘memory’ do, who ‘does’ memory – and what is being done by politically utilizing memory – are the central concerns for the study of memory politics.” However, Wüstenberg (2023) further sharpens this normative inquiry by asking “what kind of memory is good for democracy?” Namely, she stresses that “not only is remembering the past not always good for democracy, then, but not all forms of remembering are democratic” (Wüstenberg, 2023, 34). For instance, nostalgia for fascist symbols may flourish under democratic rule, and some mnemonic practices may erode rather than reinforce liberal-democratic norms.

In Europe, post-war and post-authoritarian contexts have provided fertile ground for examining how memory regimes shape democratic cultures. Verovšek (2021) argues that Western European political culture is anchored in the memory of the Nazi era and the trauma of 1945, which institutionalised strong commitments to minority rights, antifascism, and liberal civil society. By contrast, in Central and Eastern Europe memory centres on the legacy of communism and the upheavals of 1989, foregrounding national sovereignty, majoritarian democracy and scepticism toward supranational authority. These divergent “memory cultures” generate different democratic imaginaries. Similarly, Schmidtke (2023) asserts that German remembrance practices institutionalised liberal norms

grounded in negative lessons of authoritarianism, whereas Polish memory emphasised national martyrdom, thereby fuelling a more populist nationalism. A similar pattern appears in Southern Europe, evidenced by research on Spain's transition from Francoism and attempts to re-anchor democratic practices through forms of "constitutional patriotism" designed to diffuse divisive historical narratives (Aguilar & Humlebæk, 2002).

This body of research demonstrates how memory structures the normative horizons within which politics and public discussion unfold. It helps identify who is recognised, which grievances are heard, and which visions of the future appear legitimate. In this sense, cultural memory forms an underlying, often implicit dimension of democratic life that shapes both inclusion and contestation in the public sphere. The next section builds on these insights by revisiting Jan Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory, thereby establishing a theoretical groundwork from which to analyse how different memory regimes operate within political communities and how they enter (online) public discourse.

Communicative and Cultural Memory in the (Digital) Public Sphere

Jan Assmann (2008) defines cultural memory as the part of collective memory that is transmitted through symbolic forms: rituals, monuments, holidays, textbooks, and media. It preserves durable frameworks of meaning through which a community constructs a narrative about itself. Communicative memory is "living" memory, produced through everyday conversations, personal stories, and family narratives, and typically reaches back three to four generations (cf. also Širok, 2012). The rise of social media, however, profoundly alters this relationship and necessitates a reconsideration of Assmann's typology. Research shows that digitalisation has "democratised" memory production, though not necessarily in emancipatory, integrative or stabilising ways. Whereas cultural memory was once largely shaped by state institutions, archives, museums and traditional media, it now also emerges "from below," through dynamic, real-time exchanges among millions of users (Hoskins, 2018). Personal narratives, emotions and micro-stories circulate alongside institutional commemorations, collapsing boundaries between public and private, official and vernacular, ritualised and everyday communication. As Ben-David et al. (2024, 2) observe, "social media memory discourse lumps together multitudes of mnemonic agents in a continuous and often seemingly context-lacking conversation," thereby transforming long-standing patterns of collective memory formation.

Communicative memory, once tied to oral transmission and embodied interaction, now becomes externalised, archived and continuously recirculated through platform infrastructures. Cultural memory, formerly anchored in formalised institutions, is increasingly hybridised through hashtags, memes, viral reinterpretations and multimodal commemorative practices that fuse symbolic and affective registers (van Dijck, 2007). The result is a fluid mnemonic ecology in which the boundaries between the two memory types blur (Pentzold et al., 2023). The transition from communicative to cultural memory can occur rapidly, driven less by institutional canonisation than by algorithmic amplification and participatory virality.

Within online environments, epistemic processes of knowledge production and circulation undergo significant transformation: linear and non-linear narratives merge, giving rise to fluid "memoradic narratives" (Marles, 2015) shaped by shifting spatial, temporal and affective coordinates (Maurantonio, 2023). Platform algorithms, optimised for attention and driven by commercial imperatives, further undermine the public sphere's commitment to rational opinion-formation (Splichal, 2024; Habermas, 2023; Papacharissi, 2009). This also means that hybrid public spheres cannot be understood only as spaces of interaction between older and newer media logics, but must also be analysed in relation to the structural and material conditions that shape visibility, agency and power within contemporary media systems (Srnđelj & Pajnik, 2025). Consequently, social media researchers argue that meaningful analysis of digital discussion must attend to the materiality of platforms (Oswald, 2024), as these structures decisively shape how deliberation is conducted in hybrid public spheres.

These developments have profound implications for democratic culture. Communicative memory, which traditionally supported everyday trust, reciprocity and interpersonal civic interaction, and cultural memory, which anchored long-term identity and legitimacy, are both destabilised (cf. Table 1). On one hand, digitalisation enables unprecedented mnemonic participation and the visibility of marginalised voices, facilitating grassroots memory activism, as evidenced by campaigns ranging from #BlackLivesMatter and #ICantBreathe to #Srebrenica and #NakbaStories, which demonstrate how personal testimony can catalyse collective reflection and symbolic and spatial change (Dobrin, 2020; Robinson, 2022; Fridman, 2022; Jaugaitė, 2024). On the other, it intensifies contestation and polarisation. Far-right movements mobilise selective pasts to construct grievance-based identities (e.g., Birkner & Donk, 2018; Richardson-Little et al., 2022), misinformation proliferates (Zannettou

Table 1: Communicative and cultural memory in Assmann's (2008) typology. In grey: platform-driven transformations reshaping memory's core dimensions—content, forms, media environments, temporal structures and participation.

Dimension	Communicative Memory	Cultural Memory	Platform-driven transformations
Content	history in the frame of autobiographical memory; recent past	mythical history, events in absolute past (“in illo tempore”)	fluid, context-collapsed mnemonic micro-narratives, viral reinterpretations reshape significance
Forms	informal traditions and genres of everyday communication	high degree of formation, ceremonial communication	hashtags, memes, short-form commemorations, hybrid affective-symbolic practices
Media	living, embodied memory, communication in vernacular language	mediated in texts, icons, dances, rituals, and performances of various kinds; “classical” or otherwise formalized language(s)	multimodal, platform-mediated memory shaped by feeds, interfaces, metrics, and algorithmic curation (“in-scroll”)
Time Structure	80–100 years, a moving horizon of 3–4 interacting generations	absolute past, mythical primordial time, “3000 years”	compressed, non-linear temporality, resurfacing of the past via algorithmic recirculation
Participation	diffuse	specialized carriers of memory, hierarchically structured	expanded, hybrid personal–public participation, visibility structured by algorithmic ranking, moderation, and platform governance

et al., 2020), and revisionist or conspiratorial narratives circulate under the guise of ‘memory’ (Olson, 2023), transforming cultural memory into a vector of conflict rather than deliberation.

Although Jan Assmann’s distinction between communicative and cultural memory remains useful for analysing memory transformation, it is not sufficient on its own for analysing the political implications of mnemonic contestation. For this reason, the next section turns to Erik Meyer’s concept of the “politics of history,” which provides a bridge between cultural memory studies and political science.

From *Geschichtspolitik* to Research on (Online) Public Discourse

Meyer (2008) differentiates between “policy for the past” (*Vergangenheitspolitik*), the concrete politico-institutional handling of the past, such as reparations, lustration, trials, amnesties or official inquiries, and “politics of history” (*Geschichtspolitik*), which operates on a broader symbolic level. While the former concerns administrative or legal responses to historical wrongdoing, the latter treats the community’s past as a continuously renegotiated normative resource: the symbolic reference system through which the society’s coordinates linking past, present and future are articulated, affirmed

or transformed (Meyer, 2008). *Geschichtspolitik* thus captures how collective memory becomes politically operative, how it legitimises preferred policies, structures political identities and defines the moral parameters of public discourse.

Conflicts in the “politics of history” are thus not primarily disputes over historiographical accuracy but struggles over the normative frameworks that guide collective identity, moral judgement, and political legitimacy. They reveal, as Meyer emphasises by referring to the work of Edgar Wolfrum, the deeper value orientations, behavioural norms, and belief systems that structure political culture across generations (Meyer, 2008, 176). In this sense, cultural memory functions as a symbolic reference code: it provides the background grammar through which communities understand what constitutes justice, responsibility and collective belonging. The symbolic power of cultural memory becomes especially evident during periods of transition. According to Meyer, debates in post-Cold War Germany, for instance, were less about settling factual disagreements than about establishing a new normative identity shaped by lessons learned from Nazism and authoritarianism. Similarly, Slovenia’s transition of the late 1980s and early 1990s mobilised competing memories of World War II, post-war violence and socialist modernisation. Yet at the same time, public debate increasingly focused on the key sites of

memory that would serve as reference points for the post-transition Slovene community (Pušnik, 2017). Conducted also in the mass media, these debates revolved around which historical events were appropriate as shared reference points and could help establish new normative and value coordinates for its future. In this case, public disputes concerned not only the historical events themselves, understood through the lens of *Vergangenheitspolitik*, but also the question of which elements of the past could legitimately serve as anchors for future community-making and political legitimacy (Horvat, 2021).

Meyer underscores that the “politics of history,” operating in the symbolic sphere, is less a communicative frame for concrete policy than a long-term struggle for cultural hegemony over the values that should prevail in society. It can support the legitimacy of collective identity, a new political order or particular actors, either through negative differentiation from, or positive reference to, specific historical points. In commemorations, competing interpretations of the past are therefore publicly negotiated in terms of their claim to legitimacy, and such conflicts reveal underlying power structures, interests, norms and values (Herz & Schwab-Trapp, cited in Meyer, 2008, 175). As König notes, this is “politics without policy,” insofar as public debates do not merely describe or announce actions but already constitute political action themselves (König, cited in Meyer, 2008, 178). Defining cultural memory as a reference code within the “politics of history” highlights the role of communicative memory in affirming or inventing tradition, a process that is never conflict-free. Meyer stresses that the transformation from communicative into cultural memory increases the need for political decision-making and reflects ongoing struggles for hegemony.

For political science, however, these underlying normative configurations are difficult to operationalise and are usually inferred indirectly from their effects in the public or political sphere. They function like a kind of “dark matter” in political discourse—a political unconscious (Jameson, 2002) that steers and reorders collective experience and interpretations (Benjamin, 2019). Although commemorations often present themselves as integrative rituals, they invariably open a contested discursive field in which, on the surface, political parties and their supporters compete for primacy, while at a deeper level the struggle concerns cultural hegemony (Meyer, 2008). Each commemoration therefore reactivates basic value schemas that link past, present and future, legitimising present decisions and articulating visions of the community’s future.

From this perspective, commemorations exert a multilayered impact on public discourse in both offline and online environments. To grasp this dynamic, we draw on Willaert & Olbrich’s (2024) empirically grounded framework for analysing the relationship between social media and the public sphere through platform affordances. Building on Davis (2020), they identify four core public-sphere functions that can be measured with big-data techniques and linked to concrete platform affordances: information dissemination, deliberation, collective-identity formation and coordination of collective action. However, given the specificity of cultural memory, these functions require further conceptual clarification before they can be applied to commemorative discourse.

First, identity is marked by a “double bind”. Cultural memory simultaneously shapes cultural-political identities, yet it is also filtered through pre-existing orientations toward particular sites of

Table 2: Cultural-memory specificities of the four public-sphere functions – identity, deliberation, information and engagement – and the corresponding analytic focus adopted in our framework.

Function	Cultural memory specificity	Analytic focus
Identity	Cultural memory both shapes identities and is filtered through prior political orientations (double bind).	Mapping narrative positioning, legitimation claims, and boundary-drawing.
Deliberation	Disagreement unfolds through rational argument as well as antagonistic/agonistic contestation of symbolic codes.	Assessing how conflict is structured and whether opponents are treated as enemies, adversaries, or interlocutors open to reciprocal justification.
Information	Information functions less as “truth per se” than as a meaning-making resource anchoring interpretations of the past.	Evaluating claims along epistemic, ethical, democratic, and ideological dimensions.
Engagement	Utterances in memory debates are performative acts that already constitute political action.	Treating participation as an enactment of legitimacy and belonging.

memory. This double bind becomes sharper in digital environments, where political orientations influence how users appropriate commemorations. Analysing memory debates therefore requires mapping the narrative structures through which users position themselves, justify claims and contest legitimacy. Second, deliberation in the field of cultural memory unfolds not only through rational argument but also through antagonistic and agonistic contestation of symbolic codes, making it necessary to analyse how conflict is structured rather than merely whether dialogue occurs. Evaluating memory debates thus requires tracing their discursive modes of engagement, i.e. whether actors engage opponents as legitimate adversaries (agonism) or as enemies to be excluded (antagonism). Third, information in memory debates rarely functions as “truth per se”. It operates as a meaning-making resource whose epistemic quality must be assessed alongside its ethical, democratic and ideological implications. Finally, engagement cannot be reduced to simple participation, since in the “politics of history” utterances are performative acts, as public debates “do not refer to actions, nor do they announce actions or decisions, but in fact already constitute actions themselves” (König, cited in Meyer, 2008, 178). This performativity becomes more explicit online, where posting, sharing or hashtagging are political acts that enact visions of community, belonging and legitimacy.

Memory Regimes and Discursive Modes

To understand how cultural memory operates in contemporary public spheres, particularly within digitally mediated environments, it is necessary to distinguish between the substantive normative frameworks through which societies interpret the past (memory regimes) and the interactional ways in which these interpretations are articulated, contested and transformed in public discourse (discursive modes). This dual differentiation reflects the broader evolution of memory studies, in which analytical attention has been expanded beyond nation-centred commemorative traditions to encompass questions of justice, trauma and transnational responsibility (Zubrzycki & Woźny, 2020; Olick et al., 2023; Levy & Sznajder, 2002) and, increasingly, the discursive modes (antagonistic, agonistic, deliberative) through which mnemonic conflict unfolds (e.g., Bull & Hansen, 2016; Strömbom et al., 2022, Horvat, 2025b). What follows is a brief overview of the main memory regimes discussed in the literature and a clarification of how they relate to discursive modes of engagement in hybrid public spheres.

Nation-based memory was central to early scholarship on collective remembrance. Halbwachs

(1925/1992) conceptualised it as a mechanism of social integration that provides continuity and belonging while simultaneously drawing boundaries toward an “Other.” Renan’s (1882/1990) classic formulation likewise links national identity to shared remembrance and shared forgetting, while Smith (1991) and Anderson (1983) highlight its essentialist or constructivist dimensions as foundational to political community formation. Nation-based memory stabilises identity through selective remembering (Tratnik, 2021; Darovec, 2021), yet societies remain internally plural, while *lieux de mémoire* rarely integrate divergent ideological positions and often marginalise groups whose experiences fall outside dominant memory reference points. Furthermore, nation-based memory is only one among several mnemonic formations even within the same political community. As Berenskötter (2023, 18) notes, powerful collective memories also operate across and above states, meaning that the integrative force of national memory always coexists with other memory regimes. Depending on context, nation-based memory may manifest in antagonistic, agonistic or deliberative modes.

Human-rights-based memory emerged after 1945 and expanded significantly after 1989, grounding remembrance in universalistic norms of justice, accountability and victim recognition (Yasseri et al., 2022). This regime developed alongside political apologies (Misztal, 2005) and renewed debates on acknowledging harm (Margalit, 2022; Ricoeur, 2004). In post-socialist contexts, in particular, human-rights-based memory intersected with identity crises and attempts to “catch up” with the West (Krstev & Holmes, 2018), sometimes producing moralising binaries that pitted “victims” against “perpetrators.” In this sense, narratives of transition and modernisation merged with claims of national martyrdom and chosenness (Luthar, 2017), transforming remembrance into an ideological performative and fuelling “culture wars.” This type of memory carries a structural paradox. While human-rights-based memory broadens ethical reflexivity and supports victim recognition, it also creates new hierarchies of legitimacy and new forms of symbolic competition, as stressed by scholars of the culture of remembrance (Assmann & Shortt, 2012). Practices of coping with trauma, ranging from silence and forgetting (Berenskötter, 2023) to “deliberative ignorance” (Hertwig & Engel, 2020), show that this memory regime can democratise or polarise depending on whether it is integrated dialogically or instrumentalised for political ends.

Cosmopolitan memory gained prominence in the 1990s as the human-rights paradigm intertwined with cosmopolitan discourse (Yasseri et al., 2022). Levy & Sznajder (2002; 2006) conceptualise cos-

Table 3: Substantive memory regimes: core logics, normative functions and democratic implications.

Type of Memory	Core Logic	Normative Function	Democratic Implications
Nation-based memory	Constructs collective identity through selective remembering and forgetting.	Provides cohesion, continuity and shared belonging.	Can integrate or exclude; may support dialogue or fuel division depending on the context.
Human-rights-based memory	Addresses past wrongdoing through universal norms of justice and recognition.	Encourages ethical reflection and acknowledgement of harm.	Expands recognition but can polarise when moral hierarchies harden.
Cosmopolitan memory	Frames traumatic pasts within global rather than national reference points.	Promotes shared responsibility and transnational empathy.	Offers a normative horizon for solidarity; uneven resonance across local contexts.

mopolitan memory as remembrance that transcends national frameworks by establishing the Holocaust as a universal moral reference point. This theoretical framework corresponds with the theory of reflexive modernisation (Beck, 2006; Beck & Grande, 2007), which argues that cosmopolitanisation erodes national binaries and enables transnational solidarities. Similarly, Delanty & Rumford (2005) identify within this paradigm the public sphere and civil society as central to enacting cosmopolitan identities. Cosmopolitan memory emerged in a post-Cold War moment marked by EU enlargement, liberal optimism and confidence in global norms to restrain nationalist excesses. As geopolitical conditions shifted, the universalistic promise of cosmopolitan memory became harder to sustain, yet it continues to function as a normative horizon, an orientation for recalibrating how social and political change is imagined.

Agonistic memory, introduced by Bull & Hansen (2016), responds to the limitations of both nation-based and cosmopolitan memory regimes, which often reproduce binary moral schemas of “good versus evil.” They outline four features of agonistic remembering: (i) resisting reductive binaries by situating wrongdoing in specific historical circumstances and socio-political struggles; (ii) drawing on testimonies from both victims and perpetrators, alongside other implicated positions such as witnesses and bystanders; (iii) recognising the political significance of emotions by treating empathy as an initial step toward remembrance that fosters critical understanding, while also acknowledging the legitimacy of civic and political passions; and (iv) reconstructing historical context and struggle by tracing the socio-political dynamics and narrative formations through which mass crimes are perpetrated (Bull & Hansen, 2016, 10).

Deliberative memory, as we propose here, offers an alternative to both antagonistic closure and agonistic contestation. Although Bull & Hansen (2016) note that deliberative approaches, aimed at consensus, suppress

conflict, Habermas’ own intervention in memory debates, particularly concerning the Holocaust and perpetrator responsibility, aims not at consensus for its own sake but at preventing cultural nationalism from becoming the basis of community. His model of constitutional patriotism foregrounds belonging in procedures and communicative norms rather than shared ethno-cultural narratives. Understood in this way, deliberative memory does not seek closure but reframing, for example transforming ideological antagonisms into communicative, self-reflective dialogue. Rather than erasing trauma, deliberative memory aims to cultivate the conditions under which more reflexive engagement with contested pasts becomes possible, extending democratic repertoires beyond purely agonistic modes. This is in line with contemporary deliberative democracy theory, which shifts the focus from consensus to the creation of discursive spaces capable of altering political vocabularies (Hammond, 2019).

In this sense agonistic memory, developed by Bull & Hansen, refers to a normative orientation toward plural, conflict-aware remembrance that resists moral absolutism and closure. By contrast, the agonistic mode in our framework (cf. Table 4) captures how conflict is actually enacted in communicative practice. The two are related but not identical since agonistic interaction may occur within different substantive memory regimes. Accordingly, we treat antagonism, agonism, and deliberation here as discursive modes of engagement rather than as memory regimes. They do not define what kind of past is being remembered, i.e. the substantive content that constitutes a memory regime, but rather specify how competing mnemonic narratives are enacted in public interaction. Table 4 then illustrates that any regime can be enacted through different discursive modes of engagement (antagonistic, agonistic, or deliberative), depending on how actors position themselves and their opponents in public discourse.

Table 4: Mapping substantive memory regimes across discursive modes of engagement (AAD). The table illustrates plausible (non-exhaustive) enactments of each regime in public debate.

Regimes / Modes	Nation-based memory	Human-rights-based memory	Cosmopolitan memory
Antagonistic mode	Uses national past to draw sharp boundaries, exclude “others,” and legitimise conflictual identity politics.	Turns victimhood and justice claims into moral binaries, reinforcing blame, competition, and a symbolic hierarchy.	Frames global norms in oppositional terms, producing defensive reactions and identity backlash.
Agonistic mode	Allows plural interpretations of national history while recognising legitimate disagreement about identity.	Encourages contestation over responsibility, justice and recognition without collapsing into moral absolutism.	Enables critical, context-sensitive engagement with global solidarities while accepting persistent differences.
Deliberative mode	Reinterprets national narratives through inclusive dialogue and reflective debate; opens space for shared understanding.	Supports balanced discussions of harm, responsibility, and reconciliation beyond rigid victim-perpetrator roles.	Fosters transnational dialogue oriented toward mutual understanding rather than normative imposition.

The table also illustrates that memory regimes do not predetermine the democratic quality of public remembrance. Rather, their effects emerge through the discursive modes of engagement—antagonistic, agonistic or deliberative—through which they are articulated in the public sphere. Each memory regime can thus function as a source of exclusion and polarisation, as a platform for legitimate contestation, or as a resource for dialogue and democratic renewal. This matrix highlights that the key analytical task is not only to identify the content of a memory regime but also to examine the communicative mode through which it operates, since it is the interaction between the two that shapes democratic possibilities and constraints. What matters, therefore, is not only what is remembered but also how mnemonic narratives are mobilised and transformed within contemporary, digitally mediated communicative dynamics. This insight motivates the need for an analytical framework capable of capturing narrative patterns, discursive dynamics and deliberative functions—an operationalisation developed in next section.

OPERATIONALISING CULTURAL MEMORY RESEARCH: MEMORY REGIMES, DISCURSIVE MODES AND FUNCTIONS

If the previous sections established cultural memory as a field of negotiation that structures political meaning-making across public spheres (Meyer, 2008), the next step is to translate this conceptual apparatus into an analytical framework. The distinction developed earlier between the regimes of memory and the discursive modes in which memory is enacted provides the backbone of this operationalisation. Substantive regimes capture what communities remember and to

what normative end; discursive-mode configurations, by contrast, concern how these memories are performed in offline or online discourse: whether they polarise through antagonism, open plural spaces through agonism, or support more reflexive, transformative deliberative engagement.

To analyse memory in a way that speaks to both political theory and empirical research, we integrate these dimensions into a three-part analytical architecture. The unit of analysis is a discrete communicative act (e.g. a social-media post or a news article). In the first step, narrative analysis identifies the substantive memory regime by reconstructing narrative structures. In the second step, discursive modes of engagement are assessed through the Antagonism–Agonism–Deliberation (AAD) framework or operationalised through DQI-based deliberative quality indicators. In the third step, deliberative functions (epistemic, ethical, democratic) with added ideological function are evaluated discursively or using empirically observable indicators. This architecture ensures cross-media comparability while remaining sensitive to platform- and genre-specific communicative logics. Each component is theoretically elaborated in the subsections that follow, while the technical components of our methodological apparatus are presented elsewhere (Horvat et al., 2026; Lampe et al., 2026; Horvat & Koražija, 2026).

Narrative Analysis: Exploring the Substantive Level of Memory

To identify the embedded narratives attached to a commemoration, cultural memory cannot be treated as a self-contained phenomenon but must be situated within the broader discursive field of the “politics of history” (Meyer, 2008). Narrative analysis, in our framework, serves as this bridge, linking the symbolic

Table 5: Narrative and rational world paradigm (adapted from Fisher, 1989).

Narrative paradigm	Rational world paradigm
1. Humans are storytellers.	1. Humans are rational.
2. Decision making and communication are based on “good reasons”.	2. Decision making is based on arguments.
3. Good reasons are determined by matters of history, biography, culture and character.	3. Arguments adhere to specific criteria for soundness and logic.
4. Rationality is based on people’s awareness of internal consistency and resemblance to lived experience.	4. Rationality is based on the quality of evidence and formal reasoning processes.
5. We experience a world that is filled with stories, and we must choose among them.	5. The world can be understood as a series of logical relationships that are uncovered through reasoning.

sphere of memory with the public sphere in which political reasoning unfolds and providing an operational tool for making the symbolic work of memory analytically visible.

Narrative approaches are well established in memory studies. Much scholarship conceptualises memory narratively as structured accounts, mental images or symbolic representations of the past (Zerubavel, 2003). Berenskötter (2023, 23) notes that while images suggest stability, narratives allow change; they evolve as new experiences or shifting political contexts reshape their meaning. Narrative “maps” thus function as cognitive devices that organise temporal flow through plots, actors and moral framings. Examining their architecture reveals how political actors mobilise memory, justify action, define visions of order and delineate boundaries of legitimate interaction. This is particularly salient in digital environments where attempts to impose a unified “grand narrative” are readily countered by reframings and participatory appropriations (Silvestri, 2018; Maurantonio, 2023).

However, understanding how such narratives impact political reasoning requires recognising that they operate according to a logic distinct from the procedural norms of public discourse. Whereas the public sphere is normatively grounded in rational justification (Habermas, 1989; 1996), political narratives are first and foremost socio-historically embedded meaning-making devices (Boswell, 2013). They may transmit doctrines, serve as vehicles of ideology, or compress political complexity into narrative form. This produces a performative double bind: individuals align themselves with narratives, while narratives—in Luis Althusser’s terms—interpellate subjects who recognise themselves as their addressees.

This contrast is particularly evident at the micro level. Walter Fisher’s (1989) narrative paradigm suggests that individuals often reason through narratives rather than through reason-based argumentation. Good reasons,

Fisher argues, are grounded not in formal logical criteria but in narrative coherence and fidelity, that is, in consistency with one’s history, biography, culture and character. Following Meyer (2008), we can argue that cultural memory activates precisely this narrative rationality by linking past, present and future through inherited value templates. Conversely, the rational-world paradigm corresponds to communicative rationality, where claims are validated through evidence, mutual justification and procedural testing (Habermas, 1984; 1987). These two modes coexist in political life, yet commemorative discourse tends to foreground narrative reasoning, especially when the past functions as a source of identity and legitimacy. This tension is illustrated in Table 5.

At the mezzo level, public debates often appear as contests between competing narratives (Eliaz & Spiegler, 2020). However, political narratives are embedded in deeper socio-historical configurations, in particular value cleavages, institutional trajectories, implicit social contracts, and collective experiences that shape how stories resonate and how they structure public discourse (Horvat, 2025a; Schneiderhan & Khan, 2018). Under digital conditions, the public sphere becomes a dense intersection where narratives collide, reinforce or undermine each other. For this reason, narrative analysis must examine not only which stories circulate but how they function: how they frame and articulate moral boundaries, construct visions of political community and legitimise ideological positions, often echoing grand political narratives at the macro level.

Narrative analysis therefore forms the first component of our integrated theoretical framework. It identifies the substantive content of memory and reveals how commemorations provide legitimating resources for political reasoning. In line with the narrative layer developed here, we operationalise commemorative narratives through Greimas’s actantial schema, implemented in a scalable LLM-supported pipeline. This facilitates the

systematic identification of subjects, objects, helpers, opponents, senders and receivers across large datasets (X and online news), thus allowing us to map how memory discourse produces, circulates and legitimises political claims (Horvat et al., 2026).

**Antagonism–Agonism–Deliberation (AAD):
Discursive Modes of Discussions**

If narrative analysis clarifies the substantive content of memory, the next analytical step concerns how these narratives are enacted in public discourse. To capture these dynamics, we introduce the Antagonism–Agonism–Deliberation (AAD) framework, which identifies three distinct yet interrelated modes of interaction that structure contemporary commemorative discourse: antagonistic, agonistic and deliberative. Again, it is important to distinguish between substantive memory orientations (memory regimes) and interactional modes of engagement. Substantive orientations describe how the past is normatively interpreted and politically framed, whereas antagonism, agonism, and deliberation refer to discursive enactments, i.e. how mnemonic claims are performed, contested, and negotiated. The same substantive orientation can therefore be enacted antagonistically, agonistically, or deliberatively across different media environments and genres. To map these enactments more precisely, we describe the three AAD modes in turn, starting with antagonism as the most polarising baseline (cf. Table 6).

The antagonistic mode emerges when discourse is organised around an existential friend–enemy distinction. Digital media intensifies this logic since homophily (McPherson et al., 2001), filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011) and echo chambers (Cinelli et al., 2021) reward affectively charged and identity-signalling communication, contributing to what Törnberg (2018) terms “toxic polarisation.” In antagonistic commemorative debates,

rival groups assert mutually exclusive moral claims, often encapsulated in slogans such as “our truth versus their lies”, framings that cast the past as a battlefield of competitive victimhood, unbridgeable grievances and categorical delegitimation. Here, opponents are constructed not as participants in a shared public sphere but as enemies whose perspectives lack legitimacy.

The agonistic mode reframes conflict without dissolving it. Drawing on Mouffe (1999; 2013) and memory-studies scholarship such as Bull & Hansen (2016), agonism recognises that interpretations of the past may remain irreconcilable, yet insists that adversaries accept one another as legitimate opponents. Conflict is thus relocated from moral absolutism to democratic contestation. Agonistic commemorative discourse acknowledges plural perspectives, enables critical engagement and sustains political disagreement without collapsing into exclusion. Recognition of the opponent, reason-giving critique and explicit “agree to disagree” cues are central indicators of agonistic interaction.

The deliberative mode introduces a further normative shift by prioritising mutual justification, argumentation and openness to persuasion. Whereas antagonism turns disagreement into exclusion and agonism structures conflict as legitimate contestation, deliberation seeks to transform tensions through communicative practices that foster understanding and shared problem-solving. Deliberation can be conceptualised at both a systemic level (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012; Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019) and a micro level, where inclusive language, explicit justification and willingness to revise one’s position signal constructive engagement. In the context of cultural memory, deliberation becomes visible when participants introduce historical evidence, respond to counterarguments or re-evaluate claims in light of alternative interpretations. Although emotionally charged memories make such exchanges difficult, the deliberative mode is essential for moving beyond entrenched antagonisms.

Table 6: Antagonistic, agonistic and deliberative modes of engagement in commemorative discourse: core interactional traits and main empirical indicators.

Mode	Core interactional traits	Empirical indicators
Antagonistic mode	Binary “us vs. them” framing; affectively charged communication; mutual delegitimation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delegitimising or dehumanising language • Hostile labels and moral exclusion • Refusal of common ground or dialogic engagement
Agonistic mode	Adversaries rather than enemies; conflict conducted within shared democratic rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of the opponent as legitimate • Reason-giving critique • Explicit “agree to disagree” cues
Deliberative mode	Reason-giving and mutual justification; openness to persuasion; transformative potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliberative quality signals (e.g. justification, responsiveness) • Presence of structured argumentation • Openness to revising one’s position

This modal layer provides the essential analytic bridge between the reconstruction of narrative structures and the evaluation of deliberative functions. It shows how memory enters the public sphere as communicative action and how different modes of engagement shape the democratic possibilities of mnemonic contestation.

Deliberative Functions and Ideology in Memory Discourse

Public discourse on cultural memory is never a neutral recounting of past events. It is a site where identities, values and power relations are negotiated, stabilised or contested. From a deliberative perspective, assessing discourse quality requires attention not only to what is said but also to how, and with what consequences. This is particularly important for online commemorative discourse, where platform affordances shape visibility, emotional intensity and interpretive authority. Building on Mansbridge et al. (2012), we distinguish three deliberative functions—epistemic, ethical and democratic—and add a fourth, ideological, which captures systematic distortions that often structure memory debates in practice. Together, these functions provide a diagnostic vocabulary for evaluating the normative pressures and communicative tensions through which public engagement with the past unfolds.

The epistemic function concerns whether discourse supports shared standards for evaluating historical claims and whether it enables evidence-based contestation of

narratives. In cultural-memory debates, epistemic quality depends on responsible engagement with sources, interpretive transparency, and openness to correction. Ideally, commemoration functions as a form of collective inquiry. Participants can weigh claims, challenge distortions, and reduce misinformation and symbolic misrepresentation of the past. When epistemic safeguards fail, and claims are neither evidence-tested nor open to correction, deliberation becomes fragile or impossible. Yet the symbolic nature of memory (Meyer, 2008) complicates epistemic assessment, and digital infrastructures further intensify these vulnerabilities.

The ethical function concerns how participants are treated in interaction and how moral registers of memory are articulated. Ethical deliberation requires recognising others as legitimate interlocutors, acknowledging historical harm, and refraining from humiliation, mockery, or exclusion. Misztal (2005) argues that memory discourse should cultivate civic virtues such as empathy and respect rather than function as a space of symbolic retaliation. However, the ethical dimension also raises a normative paradox: should democracies respect all memories, even those glorifying authoritarianism or ethnic cleansing? As Wüstenberg (2023) notes, not all remembrance is democratically valid. Ethical deliberation, therefore, requires both normative boundaries around memory practices and communicative infrastructures that can sustain cross-group respect under conditions of heightened affect and visibility in different media systems.

Table 7: Deliberative functions, adapted from Mansbridge et al. (2012, 11–12), and applied to cultural-memory discourse; the ideological function is added as an analytical dimension.

Function	Mansbridge et al. (2012, 11–12)	Applied to Memory Field
Epistemic function	<i>“... is to produce preferences, opinions, and decisions that are appropriately informed by facts and logic and are the outcome of substantive and meaningful consideration of relevant reasons.”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates shared standards for evaluating historical claims • Opens space for evidence-based contestation of narratives • Reduces misinformation and symbolic distortions of the past
Ethical function	<i>“... is to promote mutual respect among citizens ... Mutual respect is also an ethical requirement among democratic citizens”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages recognition of suffering across memory communities • Weakens moral exclusion (“our victims vs. your victims”) • Allows disagreement without delegitimation
Democratic function	<i>“... to promote an inclusive political process on terms of equality ... For those excluded, no deliberative democratic legitimacy is generated”</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporates silenced memories • Expands participation • Strengthens the democratic legitimacy of how a society remembers
Ideological function (added)	<i>(Analytical dimension capturing systematic distortions rather than a normative deliberative goal)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces competing truth claims defining legitimate knowledge • Enhances ideological filtering and framing of archives, testimonies, and historical evidence • Facilitates victimhood narratives and moral labels used as identity boundaries

The *democratic (inclusive) function* addresses who can participate and whose memories become publicly visible. It asks whose voices are heard, whose experiences are marginalised and who is granted interpretive authority in the construction of collective pasts. Historically, many groups were excluded from authorised sites of remembrance, while digital platforms appear to widen participation by enabling minority groups and activists to circulate alternative narratives (Gutman & Wüstenberg, 2023). In divided memory debates, inclusion also requires that silenced memories can enter the public sphere and that participation is not reduced to polarised identity camps. Fulfilling the democratic function therefore depends on conditions that diversify visibility, protect vulnerable participants and enable reciprocal engagement across groups.

The *ideological function* captures how commemorative discourse is used to legitimise political positions, stabilise power relations or naturalise particular interpretive frames. While the epistemic, ethical and democratic functions articulate normative expectations of deliberation, the ideological function foregrounds a recurrent empirical pattern: memory debates are frequently structured by power and strategic mobilisation. We conceptualise the ideological function as an analytic dimension capturing how actors mobilise memory to justify positions, identities, and policy preferences within power-laden public arenas. This function is not “negative” per se since ideological articulation is an inevitable feature of democratic contestation. It becomes problematic when it overrides epistemic robustness, ethical recognition, and democratic reciprocity, thus shifting debate from contestation to discursive closure.

These four functions (Table 7) provide an analytic vocabulary for evaluating how commemorative discourse operates epistemically, ethically, democratically, and ideologically across media systems. Of course, no public debate fully satisfies these functions. Tensions among them are inevitable. However, diagnosing epistemic failures, ethical violations, democratic exclusions, and ideological instrumentalisation clarifies whether cultural-memory discourse contributes to democratic understanding or, conversely, deepens division and distortion. This functional framework has been fully operationalised in Horvat et al. (2026), where its dimensions are translated into empirically observable indicators for empirical analysis.

Integrating the Three Analytical Components

The integrated model presented below (Figure 1) synthesises the three analytical components developed in previous sections into a single legitimacy-oriented framework, corresponding to the input-throughput-output framework of political legitimacy (e.g. Schmidt & Wood, 2019). As demonstrated in Horvat et al. (2026), where this approach was first fully applied to the commemoration of Slovenia’s Day of Resistance Against the Occupier, the model provides a systematic way to trace how cultural memory moves from symbolic meaning-making to democratic consequences across hybrid media environments. Importantly, Figure 1 not only summarises analytic relations between components. It also makes explicit the methodological logic of our approach: each component is a potential leverage point for diagnosing—and, in applied settings,

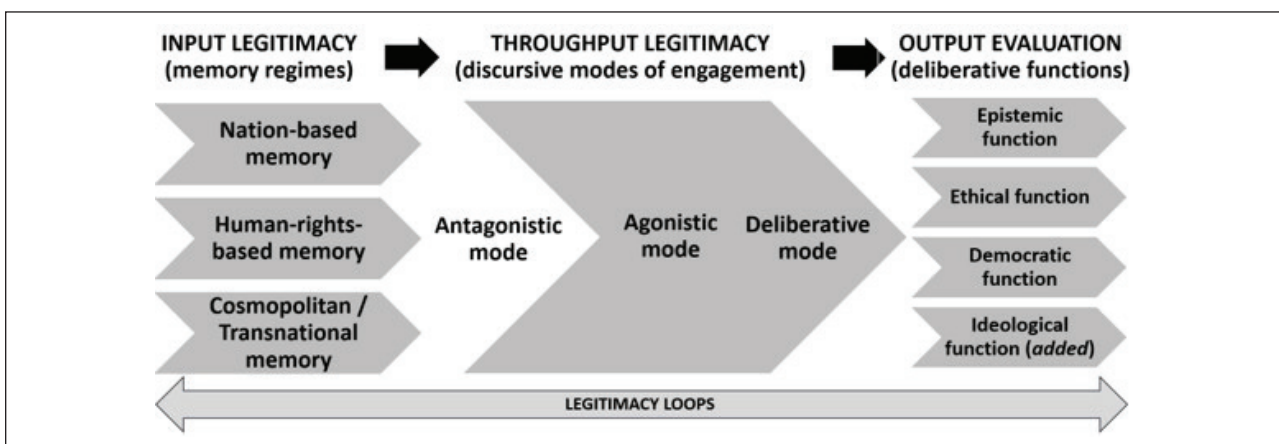


Figure 1: Legitimacy-oriented framework linking memory regimes (input legitimacy) to discursive modes of engagement (throughput legitimacy; AAD) and deliberative functions (output evaluation) across public spheres. The arrow at the bottom indicates legitimacy loops: improvements in any one component can feed back into and strengthen the others, reshaping how mnemonic narratives gain traction, how conflict is enacted (AAD), and how epistemic, ethical, democratic and ideological qualities of discourse are realised.

improving—the deliberative potential of contested memory debates.

Cultural memory enters public discourse primarily through narratives that articulate historically grounded claims about identity, responsibility, and political orientation. These narratives reflect the substantive memory regimes discussed earlier (nation-based, human-rights-based, and cosmopolitan/transnational) and encode memory regime-based legitimacy. In our model, they constitute the input dimension: a justificatory horizon through which actors (e.g. online users) across the political spectrum mobilise the past to authorise present preferences. To analyse these inputs systematically and at scale, we employ narrative analysis, adapted for computational extraction (Horvat et al., 2026). This approach enables us to reconstruct the deep-structural logic of commemoration. Throughput legitimacy concerns the communicative modes through which these narratives are enacted and contested in public interaction across hybrid media environments. Output evaluation refers to the epistemic, ethical, and democratic qualities that emerge from public debates. However, Figure 1 should not be read as implying a linear progression from antagonism to deliberation. Rather, it illustrates what we termed “legitimacy loops”: improvements in each component, especially at the level of discursive modes (AAD) and deliberative functions, can generate feedback effects between the input, throughput and output dimensions, thereby strengthening the overall quality of public discussion and reducing the traction of antagonistic framings.

EMPIRICAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE FRAMEWORK

To understand how digital memory operates across different political and symbolic contexts, we examine three commemorative fields situated at the national, cross-border, and transnational levels. Together, they span key substantive memory regimes discussed earlier in the paper, and allow us to observe how history, identity, and digital communication intersect in contemporary Europe. Although each case is shaped by a distinctive symbolic logic and political function, all are analysed through the same integrated framework, with operational choices adapted to the specifics and substantive content of each memory regime.

The first case, the Day of Resistance against the Occupier (April 27) is one of Slovenia’s most sensitive public holidays. It commemorates the founding of the Liberation Front (OF) and symbolises anti-fascist resistance, while also being marked by disputes over the role of the Communist Party, post-war violence, and the legacies of Socialist Slovenia. Since independence, it has remained a focal point where contemporary political divisions become especially visible. To examine how this nationally institutionalised memory is rearticulated across hybrid public spheres, we compare traditional

media coverage with social media discussion. We ask how social media reshapes the dominant narratives of the commemoration (inputs), whether they shift the interactional style of contestation toward antagonistic, agonistic, or deliberation-compatible modes (throughput), and how such shifts affect epistemic authority and claims to political legitimacy in debates about the past (outputs) (Horvat et al., 2026).

Case study 2 examines one of the most polarising commemorations in contemporary Italy—Giorno del ricordo—and its cross-border resonance in Slovenia. The main aim is to assess whether public discourse contains agonistic potential despite strong antagonistic framing of victimhood, responsibility, and national identity. Methodologically, the case study combines an LLM-assisted analysis of debates across Twitter/X and online news (2022–2024) with a survey of citizens’ normative orientations toward key agonistic principles. This triangulation enables a systematic comparison between mediated communicative practices and broader public dispositions, thereby providing a transferable template for diagnosing agonistic modes in contested memory conflicts. We ask: to what extent do debates on *Giorno del ricordo* / *foibe* exhibit agonistic potential; how does agonism vary across media arenas (X vs. online news) and across national contexts (Italy vs. Slovenia); and how do citizens’ normative orientations toward agonistic principles align with, or diverge from, observed mediated practices? (Lampe et al., 2026).

Case study 3 addresses transnational commemorations that function as European-level reference points and are frequently mobilised to interpret contemporary political conflict: Europe Day and the fall of the Berlin Wall. It tests a three-step LLM-assisted design on Twitter/X across France, Germany, Italy, and Slovenia: (A) conflict detection, (B) antagonistic versus non-antagonistic tone within conflict (as an incivility proxy), and (C) deliberative quality assessment using DQI-based indicators. In addition, topic modelling serves as a diagnostic layer to identify thematic hotspots where conflict, antagonistic tone, and lower deliberative quality concentrate, as well as clusters where deliberative signals persist even under confrontational tone. The results enable direct cross-country comparisons of whether commemorative talk is primarily ceremonial, confrontational, or conflictual yet deliberation-compatible. We ask whether Europe Day and the fall of the Berlin Wall systematically differ in conflict intensity and tone across countries; how the balance between antagonistic and non-antagonistic engagement varies across France, Germany, Italy, and Slovenia; and how deliberative quality (DQI-based indicators) varies across commemorations, countries, and topics—including whether specific thematic clusters sustain deliberative signals even under antagonistic tone (Horvat & Koražija, 2026).

To synthesise these observations, Table 8 presents a comparative overview of the three commemorative

Table 8: Comparative overview of three commemorative cases—Day of Resistance (Slovenia), Giorno del ricordo (Italy–Slovenia), and Europe Day & the Fall of the Berlin Wall (four countries)—mapping the memory field, dominant narrative inputs, and core research questions.

Dimension	Day of Resistance (Slovenia)	Giorno del Ricordo (Italy–Slovenia)	Europe Day & Fall of the Berlin Wall (EU)
Memory field	National	Bilateral / cross-border	Transnational (European)
Dominant narrative inputs	Nation-based (statehood/ antifascism; partisan resistance; revolution; post-war violence)	Human-rights-based + nation-based (victimhood/justice; responsibility attribution; borderland histories)	Cosmopolitan/transnational frames, filtered nationally (integration/legitimacy; democracy/authoritarianism; contemporary analogies)
Core research questions	How does X (vs. online news) reconfigure commemorative narratives (inputs), shift AAD and deliberative quality (throughput/ outputs), and reshape epistemic authority in a polarised national commemoration?	To what extent do debates exhibit agonistic potential (throughput) across arenas (X vs. online news) and countries (Italy vs. Slovenia), and how does this align with citizens’ agonistic orientations (survey; outputs)?	How do the two commemorations differ in conflict prevalence, antagonistic tone, and deliberative quality across France, Germany, Italy, and Slovenia, and which topic clusters concentrate antagonism vs. deliberation-compatible conflict?

fields. The reflections presented here indicate how the methodology elaborated in this article is customised and extended across commemorations. By covering a wider spectrum of memory discussions, the cases show how digital memory practices can reinforce entrenched cleavages but also open new spaces for interpretation, dialogue, and learning. The conclusion draws out these implications for cultural-memory studies, democratic theory, and computational social science.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that understanding cultural memory in contemporary public spheres requires moving beyond analyses centred on memory regimes toward an integrated framework that also captures the discursive modes through which memory is articulated, contested, and transformed. Digitalisation intensifies the need for such an approach. As communicative and cultural memory increasingly merge on hybrid media platforms, commemorations become dynamic arenas in which narratives circulate rapidly, discursive modes shift continuously, and epistemic, ethical, and democratic functions are enacted in ways that standard regime-centred approaches and classical public-sphere theory cannot fully explain.

By conceptualising memory simultaneously as a symbolic reference code, narrative resource, and communicative practice, the framework developed here provides a structured way to analyse how mnemonic claims enter public debate (input legitimacy), how they interact within platform-mediated environments (throughput legitimacy), and how they affect the epistemic, ethical, and democratic quality of discourse (output evaluation). Integrating three analytical layers

allows us to trace how mnemonic structures become politically operative in digital settings and how discursive modes shape the democratic possibilities embedded in memory conflicts, including through “legitimacy loops,” where improvements in one segment can feed back into the others. Methodologically, the framework has demonstrated its analytical value in our empirical studies (Horvat et al., 2026; Lampe et al., 2026; Horvat & Koražija, 2026).

The integrated framework proposed here contributes to ongoing debates in cultural memory studies, democratic theory, and computational social science by offering a scalable, theoretically grounded basis for analysing commemorative discourse across classical and digital media. As memory continues to serve as an important terrain for negotiating identity, legitimacy, and power, such analytical tools are essential for diagnosing democratic vulnerabilities and identifying opportunities for more inclusive, reflexive, and deliberative public engagement across media platforms.

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OD SPOMINSKIH REŽIMOV K DISKURZIVNIM MODUSOM: TEORETSKO-KONCEPTUALNI OKVIR ZA ANALIZO KULTURNEGA SPOMINA V HIBRIDNI JAVNI SFERI

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POVZETEK

Prispevek razvija teoretično-konceptualni okvir za analizo kulturnega in komunikativnega spomina v klasičnih in digitalnih javnih sferah. Izhaja iz predpostavke, da učinkov spomina v javni sferi ni mogoče pojasniti zgolj z analizo njegove vsebine, temveč tudi z analizo načinov njegove javne artikulacije. Na tej podlagi članek premakne težišče od analize spominskih režimov — nacionalnega, na človekovih pravicah utemeljenega, kozmopolitskega in transnacionalnega spomina — k analizi diskurzivnih modusov, skozi katere se ti režimi udejanjajo v hibridnih javnih sferah. Osrednji prispevek članka je tridelni analitični model. Prva raven obravnava narativne sestavine spomina in načine, kako akterji s sklicevanjem na preteklost oblikujejo identiteto, odgovornost, krivdo in politično pripadnost. Druga raven analizira načine razpravljanja skozi okvir antagonizem–agonizem–deliberacija (AAD), ki omogoča presojo, ali so nasprotniki v javni razpravi obravnavani kot sovražniki, legitimni nasprotniki ali sogovorniki, s katerimi je mogoča argumentirana razprava. Tretja raven presoja učinke spominskega diskurza skozi epistemsko, etično, demokratično in ideološko razsežnost. Izhajajoč iz razumevanja kulturnega spomina in komemoracij kot polja, v katerem se pogajajo norme, identitete, legitimnostne zahteve in razmerja kulturne hegemonije (Erik Meyer), predstavljeni okvir pokaže, kako akterji spomin artikulirajo, izpodbijajo in potencialno preoblikujejo v javni razpravi. Pristop je ponazorjen z delovanjem spomina na nacionalni, čezmejni in transnacionalni ravni. Predlagani model tako omogoča analizo, kdaj in pod kakšnimi pogoji digitalni spominski diskurzi poglobljajo politične razkole in polarizacijo ter kdaj lahko odpirajo možnosti za agonistično soočanje, pluralizacijo razlag in bolj reflektivno razpravo o preteklosti.

Ključne besede: kulturni spomin, politika zgodovine, hibridne javne sfere, antagonizem–agonizem–deliberacija (AAD), demokratična legitimnost, deliberativna demokracija

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