

Institutional History Rediscovered: Observing Organizations' Behavior in Times of Change

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RESÜMEE

Die Einleitung versteht sich als ein Annäherungsversuch an eine kontextsensible und theoretisch informierte Institutionengeschichte. Ausgangspunkt ist die Überlegung, wie es gelingen kann, Organisationen auch in Phasen rapiden Wandels sowohl als eigenständige Einheiten zu analysieren als auch in Relation zu ihren komplexen Umwelten zu begreifen. In einem ersten Schritt werden zentrale institutionen- und organisationstheoretische Konzepte verschiedener Fachdisziplinen aufgegriffen und auf ihren Nutzen und ihre Anwendungsmöglichkeiten für die empirische historische Forschung hin betrachtet. Diese werden mit bestehenden historiographischen Debatten verbunden. In einem zweiten Schritt ordnet der Beitrag die hier präsentierten Fallstudien in diese Diskussion ein und formuliert einige übergreifende Befunde für die zukünftige institutionengeschichtliche Forschung.

This theme issue has its roots in a panel entitled “Institutions and Actors: Perspectives on Structuration in History”, which took place at the European Social Science History Conference in Glasgow in April 2012. The panelists were working on a range of different kinds of organizations in different regions of the world at different periods in time. What they shared was the belief that it was important to discuss methods of thinking and writing about organizations and their institutional relevance. While institutions are omnipresent in historical research and writing, refined methods and approaches to analyze them are relatively rare in historiography. Sociology and political theory offer much more

in this regard,¹ but the dialogue between the disciplines has yet to develop more fully. Therefore it seemed promising to take a more systematic look at the theoretical concepts available. Building on some of the work done in the 1990s, we consider Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration, especially his concept of the duality of structure, as one of the still most interesting approaches in this context. Considering institutions as products and producers of social structures makes them promising fields of empirical research on social and political change over time. We take Giddens serious in his attempt to deliver not an all-embracing theoretical model but an abstract framework "to be used in a selective way in thinking about research questions or interpreting findings".² Against this background, this theme issue suggests using his theory as a starting point to consider the problem of structure and agency to analyze organizations. To provide readers with a better sense of the conceptual background of our approach, we will sketch some of the main developments in history and in the social sciences with regard to the scholarly analysis of institutions before providing an overview of the individual contributions.

Since the 1960s institutions have not played a major role in debates on historical methodology. In trying to distance themselves from more traditional political history dealing with institutions (mainly administrative organizations), proponents of the newly arising fields of historical sociology and social history largely disregarded institutionalized forms of historical reality. Only in the 1980s new interest in this topic developed. The scholars involved agreed that institutions matter with regard to political as well as economic processes, and that they should therefore be re-integrated into scholarly analysis. These reflections were influenced by the historical experiences of the time that depicted the limitations of technocratic optimism and feasibility in periods of crisis. Structural contexts and institutional constraints thus reappeared on the intellectual agenda, alluding to the intrinsic logics of institutional arrangements in social contexts.³ Historians were not very prominent in these discussions, though, leaving the field mainly to political and social scientists and to economists.

In trying to summarize the theoretical developments since the 1980s, two strands can be identified. They are closely related to one another but originate in different disciplinary settings: Neo-institutionalist theories stemming from the political and social sciences, and assumptions proposed by new institutional economics. Both approaches define institutions as formal and informal sets of norms, values and beliefs mainly, not as organized entities and microcosms of action. Nevertheless, some scholars have tried to conceptualize *organizations as institutions*. How to distinguish precisely between organizations and institutions is an unresolved issue, not the least due to the fact that the two terms are often used synonymously even in academic discourse. The contributions in this issue

1 For an overview see: A. Kieser and M. Ebers (ed.), *Organisationstheorien*, 6. ext. ed. Stuttgart 2006.

2 A. Giddens, *Structuration theory: Past, present and future*, in: C. G. A. Bryant and D. Jary (ed.), *Giddens Theory of Structuration - A Critical Appreciation*, London 1990, pp. 201-222.

3 See: G. Göhler, *Einleitung*, in: idem. (ed.), *Die Eigenart der Institutionen. Zum Profil politischer Institutionentheorie*, Baden-Baden 1994, pp. 7-8.

cannot provide a solution, but they are aware of the problem and hope to contribute greater sensitivity of the issue.

In general, new institutionalism does not form a clear-cut program but combines a variety of methods of institutional analysis. Peter Hall and Rosemary Taylor have distinguished three analytical approaches relevant for this field: Historical institutionalism, rational-choice institutionalism, and sociological institutionalism. The three types differ with respect to the emphasis each places on rationalist or culturalist assumptions about human behavior. Rational-choice theorists draw attention to strategic interactions and to the functionalist fundaments of institutions. Sociologists focus on culturally specific repertoires that influence the institutional setting as well as individual decision-making within this setting. Historical institutionalists, in turn, stress a conception of path dependency. They study the importance of existing institutional templates for the creation and transformation of institutions, and they pay attention to the meaning contemporary actors attribute to their decisions. According to Hall and Taylor, historical institutionalists are occupied with “one of the most important dimensions of the structure-agency problem, namely, the problem of explaining how an institution can be said to structure human action, in some determinative sense, so as to produce a regularized pattern of behavior, even though the existence of the institution itself usually depends on the presence of these patterns of behavior and thus on the willingness of the actors to behave in certain ways. The problem *is* to capture simultaneously the voluntary and determinative character of institutions.”⁴

The presence of institutionalized patterns structuring human behavior and the impact of individual agency has thus been at the center of discussions on institutions in history. Reflecting on the specificity of institutions, Gerhard Göhler has emphasized the commonality of assumptions and modes of behavior that connect organizations and actors. “Social institutions,” Göhler argues, “are relatively permanent patterns of behavior and social meaning with a regulating and orienting function which are solidified through internalization.”⁵ Within this institutional setting, organizations are considered as actor-related systems of rules. Their institutional meaning lies in their ability to enable binding decisions and to symbolically represent what is considered meaningful action. The organizations’ internal constitution is based on rationality and efficiency, yet they act as institutions only if they are not confined to instrumental logics and organizational aims but are based on a certain ‘ethos’. What distinguishes organizations from institu-

4 P. A. Hall and R. C. R. Taylor, Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms, in: Political Studies, 44 (1996) 5, pp. 936-957, at p. 939, online: http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/hall/files/political_studies_1996.pdf. See also: W. W. Powell and P. J. Di Maggio (ed.), The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis, Chicago 1991; L. G. Zucker (ed.), Institutional Patterns and Organizations, Cambridge 1988. More recently: V. Lowndes and M. Roberts, Why Institutions Matter. The New Institutionalism in Political Science, Basingstoke 2013.

5 G. Göhler, Politische Institutionen und ihr Kontext. Begriffliche und konzeptionelle Überlegungen zur Theorie politischer Institutionen, in: idem. (ed.), Eigenart, pp. 19-46, at p. 22 (footnote 3). Translation by the authors. See also: Idem. (ed.), Institutionenwandel, Opladen 1997; B. Nedelmann (ed.), Politische Institutionen im Wandel, Opladen 1995.

tions is a 'guiding idea' that performs a symbolic integration inside and outside of an organizational apparatus.⁶

These discussions related institutions to historical contexts in a general way. The genuine "historicity of the institutional" (Gert Melville)⁷, however, has played only a minor role in neo-institutional approaches. In trying to bring institutional theory and history closer together, Reinhard Blänkner alludes to the fact that institutions do not follow the same institutional 'logic' over time and can therefore not be defined in a universal way. The transformation of the institutional as such has to be taken into account in order to understand institutions as an object of historical research. In 1993, Blänkner stated that the most fruitful approaches were to be expected from anthropology and ethnology, which look not only at the outer structures but also at the inner mechanisms of institutionalized systems.⁸

Historical institutionalism nevertheless managed to relate organizations closer to their temporal and cultural contexts. In doing so, it also made an effort at 'bringing society back in' by defining organizations as parts of their social surroundings.⁹ This approach was refined by proponents of an actor-centered institutionalism¹⁰ that tried to overcome simplistic notions of structural path-dependency and called for a rediscovery of individual or corporate agency in the process of the constitution of social systems. The argument that organizations do not simply employ given norms but have a character of their own was also put forward by the so-called New Institutional Economics (NIE) and Douglass C. North as one of its most prominent representatives.¹¹ NIE relies on four constitutional elements for the analysis of institutions: Property rights, contracts, markets, and social hierarchies (although the latter relate to a different level of analysis). Correspondingly, there are at least three theoretical concepts that form more of a research

6 G. Göhler, *Institutionen*, p. 41f (footnote 4). See also: K.-S. Rehberg, *Institutionen als symbolische Ordnungen. Leitfragen und Grundkategorien zur Theorie und Analyse institutioneller Mechanismen*, in: G. Göhler (ed.), *Eigenart*, pp. 47-84 (footnote 3); idem., *Die stabilisierende „Fiktionalität“ von Präsenz und Dauer. Institutionelle Analyse und historische Forschung*, in: B. Jussen and R. Blänkner (ed.), *Ereignis und Institutionen*, Göttingen 1998, pp. 381-407.

7 G. Melville, *Institutionen als geschichtswissenschaftliches Thema*, in: idem. (ed.), *Institutionen und Geschichte. Theoretische Aspekte und mittelalterliche Befunde*, Köln/Weimar/Wien 1992, pp. 1-24, at p. 18.

8 R. Blänkner, *Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Geschichtswissenschaft und Theorie politischer Institutionen*, in: G. Göhler (ed.), *Eigenart*, pp. 85-122, at p. 89f (footnote 3). For empirical reflections on the historicity of constitutional institutions see also: idem., *Der Vorrang der Verfassung. Formierung, Legitimations- und Wissensformen und Transformation des Konstitutionalismus in Deutschland im ausgehenden 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert*, in: idem. and B. Jussen (ed.), *Institutionen und Ereignis. Über historische Praktiken und Vorstellungen gesellschaftlichen Ordners*, Göttingen 1998, pp. 296-325.

9 See: R. Friedland and R. R. Alford, *Bringing Society Back In. Symbols, Practices and Institutional Contradictions*, in: W. W. Powell and P. J. Di Maggio (ed.), *New Institutionalism*, pp. 232-266 (footnote 4); K. Türk, *Organisation und moderne Gesellschaft. Einige theoretische Bausteine*, in: T. Edeling, W. Jann and D. Wagner (ed.), *Institutionenökonomie und Neuer Institutionalismus. Überlegungen zur Organisationstheorie*, Opladen 1999, pp. 43-80.

10 R. Mayntz and F. W. Scharpf, *Der Ansatz des akteurzentrierten Institutionalismus*, in: idem. (ed.), *Gesellschaftliche Selbstregelung und politische Steuerung*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 1995, pp. 39-72.

11 D. C. North and R. P. Thomas, *The rise of the western world: A new economic history*, Cambridge 1973, in: idem. (ed.), *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*, Cambridge 1994.

agenda than a coherent theoretical body: Property Rights Theory, Agency Theory, and Transaction Cost Economics.¹² Institutions matter, as Douglass C. North famously put it, because they make a difference in explaining economic exchange and economic performance. This is also the reason why each of the three theoretical concepts works with its own understanding of what an institution could be. Yet none focuses on institutions in their own right. North, for example, describes institutions as a “system of rules, the proceeding of granting rules and morally and ethically based norms”.¹³ But he is neither very interested in the constitution of the system of rules through organizational behavior, nor in the mechanisms of how these components work together, nor how one should validate those norms.

Generally speaking, one can reduce New Institutional Economics and its three core concepts to a very basic set of research questions centered on four variables: Institutions, exchange, costs, and efficiency. “Institutions dispose the exchange of goods, efforts and property rights; the exchange causes costs; the costs affect the efficiency of factor allocation; that decides on the advantages and the choice of the following set of institutions etc.”¹⁴ Despite its evident limitations in explaining the functioning of organizations and the evolution of institutions, NIE has had a remarkable influence on historical research. It has led to programmatic attempts to redefine institutional history in economic spheres under cultural auspices, with an effort to integrate the analysis of concrete social organizations.¹⁵ Furthermore, historical studies of the political sphere have taken up some of these approaches. Parliaments, for example, are conceived of as communicative organizations and as spaces of discursive interaction. Rituals and symbolic practices of parliamentary everyday life have been scrutinized in order to understand the representative relevance of these practices within a given culture and to re-evaluate the meaning of institutional agency.¹⁶ These studies link with theoretical suggestions put forward by constructivist or discursive institutionalists. They stress the ability of agents to change

- 12 R. Richter and E. Furubotn, *Neue Institutionenökonomik: Eine Einführung und kritische Würdigung*, Tübingen 2003; K. Jongwook and J. T. Mahoney, *Property Rights Theory, Transaction Costs Theory and Agency Theory: An Organizational Economics Approach to Strategic Management*, in: *Managerial and Decision Economics*, 26 (2005), pp. 223-242; E. Colombatto (ed.), *Economics of Property Rights*, Cheltenham 2004; M. Casson, *Entrepreneurship: theory, institutions and history*, in: *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 2 (2010), pp. 139-170.
- 13 D. C. North, *Theorie des institutionellen Wandels. Eine neue Sicht der Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, Tübingen 1988, pp. 207-209.
- 14 M. Ebers and W. Gotsch, *Institutionenökonomische Theorien der Organisation*, in: A. Kieser/M. Ebers, *Organisationstheorien* p. 247f (footnote 1).
- 15 See: B. Löffler, *Moderne Institutionengeschichte in kulturhistorischer Erweiterung*, in: H.-C. Kraus and T. Nicklas (ed.), *Geschichte der Politik. Alte und Neue Wege*, München 2007, pp. 155-180; idem., *Soziale Marktwirtschaft und administrative Praxis. Das Bundeswirtschaftsministerium unter Ludwig Erhard*, Wiesbaden 2002, pp. 11-21; U. Schulz, *Economic Perspectives on the Historiography of Law: Property Rights in Business History*, in: *Interdisciplines. Journal of History and Sociology*, 4 (2012) 2, pp. 166-193.
- 16 See the contributions in: A. Schulz and A. Wirsching (ed.), *Parlamentarische Kulturen in Europa. Das Parlament als Kommunikationsraum*, Düsseldorf 2012; J. Feuchter and J. Helmrath, *Parlamentarische Kulturen vom Mittelalter bis zur Moderne. Reden – Räume – Bilder*, Düsseldorf 2013; T. Mergel, *Parlamentarische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik. Politische Kommunikation, symbolische Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Reichstag*, Düsseldorf 2012; idem., *Kulturgeschichte der Politik*, Version: 2.0, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 22.10.2012, http://docupedia.de/zg/Kulturgeschichte_der_Politik_Version_2.0_Thomas_Mergel?oldid=84783.

institutions by discursive action, and they highlight the fact that organizational stability depends on its repeated enactment.¹⁷

What becomes obvious by looking at the current situation in institutional history is that the internal conditions of organized entities have received growing attention over the last years. In addition, the power of cultural and communicative representations has been emphasized, leading to a more constructivist perception of organizational agency. In this vein, Niklas Luhmann's systems theory and his earlier works on formalized organizations have been taken up again.¹⁸ Yet most of these models continue to work with the idea of a dualism of structure and agency, stressing either the pre-dominance of overarching structures or the impact of individual agency. Moreover, the assumption of a stable and to some extent teleological relation between organizational practices (be they instrumental or symbolic) and the surrounding system (be it defined structurally or culturally) has largely prevailed. The institutional effects of organizations are mainly described as a form of stabilization or representation of a given order. Therefore, the focus is on the consensus embodied by organizations, not on conflicts or phenomena of disintegration and dysfunction. Change, however, is a historical normality, whereas the rule of fixed arrangements should be considered an exception.

What, then, is the role of organizations in different historical processes of institutionalization and de-institutionalization? How do they confront conflicting cultures or rival powers? Is institutional agency an active part of social change or only its outcome? And in what ways can organized practices of given institutions contribute to a re-structuration or re-stabilization of social systems? How can such organizations be thought of as fluid entities permanently occupied with reproducing themselves *and* the institutional setting?¹⁹ These questions arise if one looks, as the contributions to this issue do, at transitional periods in history that were marked more by rapid transformation of social norms and practices than by their routinized and normalized functioning; at moments of intensified social (re-)ordering less so than of 'social order'.²⁰ Such a perspective calls for an analysis of the interrelation of structure and agency.

17 V. A. Schmidt, Discursive Institutionalism. The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse, in: *The Annual Review of Political Science*, 11 (2008), pp. 303-326; S. Bell, Do we Really Need a New "Constructivist Institutionalism" to Explain Institutional Change?, in: *British Journal of Political Science*, 41 (2011) 4, pp. 883-906; K. E. Weick, Sensemaking in Organizations, *Foundations for Organizational Science*, London 1995; J. Mahoney and K. Thelen, *Explaining Institutional Change. Ambiguity, Agency, and Power*, Cambridge 2010.

18 See, for example: S. Jüngerkes, *Deutsche Besatzungsverwaltung in Lettland, 1941-1945. Eine Kommunikations- und Kulturgeschichte nationalsozialistischer Organisationen*, Konstanz 2010. For an overview see: T. Drepper, *Organisationen der Gesellschaft. Gesellschaft und Organisation in der Systemtheorie Niklas Luhmanns*, Opladen 2003.

19 See: E. Flaig, War die römische Volksversammlung ein Entscheidungsorgan? Institutionen und soziale Praxis, in: G. Melville (ed.), *Institutionen*, pp. 49-73 (footnote 7). For a more critical perspective see: A. Lüdtkke, Die Fiktion der Institution. Herrschaftspraxis und Vernichtung der europäischen Juden im 20. Jahrhundert, in: R. Blänkner and B. Jussen (ed.), *Institutionen*, pp. 355-379, esp. 376-379 (footnote 6); J. Revel, L'institution et le social, in: B. Lepetit (ed.), *Les formes de l'expérience. Une autre histoire sociale*, Paris 1995, pp. 63-84.

20 See: P. Joyce, What is the Social in Social History?, in: *Past and Present*, 206 (2010) 1, pp. 213-248.

One of the most inspiring theoretical frameworks dealing with the structure/agency problem *and* the role of institutions is Anthony Giddens's theory of structuration.²¹ Giddens strongly criticizes the epistemological distinction between structure and agency. He also stresses the dynamics of social systems, putting forward a process-oriented approach to the analysis of institutions that favours a historical perspective. Yet although structuration theory has been suggested to historians as a theoretical approach years ago,²² empirical studies relating to the interpretative agenda suggested by Giddens remain rare. With regard to German historiography, this lack of engagement with structuration theory might be explained by the fact that, in earlier years, the discussion on Giddens took place under the influence of the heated conflict between the seemingly opposed fields of cultural history and social history. In this context, Giddens's agency-oriented approach was considered a useful tool to overcome blind spots within the Weberian assumptions of *Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, taking into account dynamic moments of dysfunction within organizations as well as the relevance of actors' knowledge.²³ However, most of the cultural historians concerned with finding new ways of analyzing individual and collective action within organized (symbolic) settings favored praxeological or discursive studies, inspired by French theory as developed by Pierre Bourdieu, Bruno Latour or Michel Foucault.²⁴ Consequently, the number of historical studies using structuration theory remained very small.²⁵

Additionally, recent theoretical discussions have focused on agency in de-institutionalized settings (e.g., networks) more than on action in or by organizations. Even the fields of state theory and history that were at the forefront of the re-discovery of institutions in the 1980s²⁶ are currently dominated by approaches that stress ambiguous practices, hybrid languages of power, transformative processes, and individual contestation of norms rather than organized entities.²⁷ Yet, in this context concepts like 'meaning in action'

21 Especially: A. Giddens, *Constitution of Society: Outline of a Theory of Structuration*, Berkeley 1984; idem., *Central Problems in Social Theory*, London 1978.

22 See: W. H. Sewell, *A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation*, in: idem. (ed.), *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*, Chicago 2005, pp. 124-151.

23 A similar interest can be found in actor-centered institutionalism. See: R. Mayntz and F. W. Scharpf, *Der Ansatz des akteurzentrierten Institutionalismus*, in: idem. (ed.), *Gesellschaftliche Selbstregulierung und politische Steuerung*, Frankfurt a.M./New York 1995, pp. 39-72.

24 See also: G. Göhler and R. Speth, *Symbolische Macht. Zur institutionentheoretischen Bedeutung von Pierre Bourdieu*, in: R. Blänkner and B. Jussen (ed.), *Institutionen*, pp. 17-48 (footnote 6). For possible relations between Giddens and Bourdieu see: T. Welskopp, *Die Dualität von Struktur und Handeln. Anthony Giddens' Strukturierungstheorie als „praxeologischer“ Ansatz in der Geschichtswissenschaft*, in: A. Suter and M. Hettling (ed.), *Struktur und Ereignis*, Göttingen 2001, pp. 99-119.

25 See for an example: J. Yates, *Using Giddens' Structuration Theory to Inform Business History*, in: *Business and Economic History*, 26 (1997), pp. 159-183.

26 See: D. Rueschemeyer, P. B. Evans and T. Skocpol (ed.), *Bringing the State Back In*, New York 1985; T. Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, New York 1979; P. A. Hall, *Governing the Economy. The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France*, Cambridge 1986.

27 See, among others: M. Bevir and R.A.W. Rhodes, *The State as Cultural Practice*, Oxford 2010; G. Steinmetz (ed.), *State/Culture. State-Formation after the Cultural Turn*, Ithaca/London 1999; P. Becker (ed.), *Sprachvollzug im Amt. Kommunikation und Verwaltung im Europa des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Bielefeld 2001; P. Collin and K.-G. Lutterbeck (ed.), *Eine intelligente Maschine? Handlungsorientierungen moderner Verwaltung (19./20. Jh.)*,

or 'situated agency'²⁸ have been introduced that overcome a rigid idea of institutional structures without entirely rejecting their importance. They serve the effort to study institutions through a more decentralized image of institutional action. Against this background, our issue tries to bring Giddens's theory of structuration into dialogue with more recent approaches to dealing with the problem of agency in structured settings.²⁹ Giddens's theory conceives of structuration as an ongoing process. It functions on the basis not of a 'dualism' but a 'duality of structure' that becomes present only in moments of instantiation through interaction but cannot be reduced to individual agency. It therefore offers a process-oriented perspective that systematically relates actor decisions to structural dimensions. Structuration theory has been criticized for lack of clarity and methodological rigidity.³⁰ However, from the perspective of historiography, the concept of structuration seems valuable precisely because of its seeming eclecticism: It offers space for different narratives based on case studies and their empirical material. Structuration theory helps to understand the inner functioning of organizations as "formalized contexts of interaction".³¹

The case studies presented in this issue take up structuration theory as a model informing a hermeneutic approach, not as a clear-cut guideline to empirical practice. They focus on organizational behavior in times of structural change in very different social systems on national, transnational and global levels, and they analyze strategic conduct by actors and institutional settings as interrelated and dependent on each other. In his contribution on advisory bodies in inter-war Western Europe (especially in the Netherlands), Stefan Couperus makes a case for a decentered approach to organizational practice and institutional change. He studies individual agents in extra-parliamentary councils like the *Commissie voor den Economischen Politiek* and their interpretations of their intermediate position between state and society. By doing so, he shows that institutional agency on the micro-level was informed by traditions while being constantly contested by contrasting sets of beliefs embodied by different actors. With regard to the advisory structures concerned, this led to a primacy of expert advice and changed a horizontally organized collection of advisory councils into a single hierarchical structure, the *Economische*

Baden-Baden 2009; B. Latour, *La fabrique du droit. Une ethnographie du Conseil d'État*, Paris 2004. See also the broad discussions on governance and gouvernementalité: T. Risse (ed.), *Governance without a State? Policies and Politics in Areas of Limited Statehood*, New York 2011; F. Heidenreich (ed.), *Technologien der Macht. Zu Michel Foucaults Staatsverständnis*, Baden-Baden 2011.

- 28 See: M. Bevir and R.A. W. Rhodes, Introduction: Meaning in Action, in idem. (ed.), *Governance Stories*, London/ New York 2006, pp. 1-14.
- 29 See also: A. Peczar, Innovation des Strukturbegriffs, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 27 (2001), pp. 350-362; A. Reckwitz, *Struktur: Zur sozialwissenschaftlichen Analyse von Regeln und Regelmäßigkeiten*, Opladen 1997.
- 30 See: D. Held and J. B. Thompson, *Social Theory of Modern Societies. Anthony Giddens and his critics*, Cambridge 1994. Also see: W. B. Sewell, *Logics of History. Social Theory and Social Transformation*, Chicago 2005.
- 31 T. Welskopp, Kontingenz als Prognose. Die Modellierung von Zukunft in der Strukturierungstheorie à la Giddens, in: V. Tiberius (ed.), *Zukunftsgenese. Theorien des zukünftigen Wandels*, Berlin 2012, pp. 286-287, at p. 288; T. Welskopp, Dualität (footnote 24); idem., Der Mensch und die Verhältnisse „Handeln“ und „Struktur“ bei Max Weber und Anthony Giddens, in: T. Mergel and idem. (ed.), *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft. Beiträge zur Theoriedebatte*, München 1997, pp. 39-70.

Raad. In contrast to historical institutionalism, this article, which is informed by recent constructivist and structurationist concepts of changing institutional practice, stresses contingency and situates agency in specific social contexts.

In her comparison of the transitional period of the 1940s in Romania and the Soviet zone of Germany, Liesbeth van de Grift questions popular assumptions about the process of ‘Sovietization’ after World War Two. Drawing on the concept of structuration, she avoids a teleological perspective on the institutionalization of power. Instead, she situates pragmatic decisions and unexpected results in an ongoing process of recursive enactment of institutional structures by party representatives and military personnel. What is often portrayed as a radical regime change turns out to have been a gradual process. Furthermore, important differences between the two examples become visible: While the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (later the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*) was reluctant to compromise in matters of personnel continuity and practiced a rigid policy (though with ambiguous results), its Romanian counterpart acted more flexibly, not the least due to a lack of bureaucratic routines and cadres. In sum, van de Grift argues that applying the concept of structuration together with constructivist methods enables us to better understand how the establishment of communist regimes was made possible by a plurality of actions that helped reproduce institutional practices and consolidate dictatorship.

The international level of economic and technical politics is scrutinized by Vincent Lagendijk in his contribution on the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), founded in 1947. Criticizing international relations theory for its prevailing disinterest in the role of international organizations, Lagendijk takes structuration theory as a starting point. He moves a step further by emphasizing that these organizations cannot simply be considered as instruments of nation-states. Instead, he argues, organizations like the UNECE possessed genuine international agency. They created networks of mutual interest that went beyond nation-state preferences and institutionalized an attitude of ‘technical rationality’ embodied by their personnel. Lagendijk stresses the relative autonomy of international organizations with regard to the political and economic structures they are part of. As he shows, international organizations do not simply act as conveyor belts of technical expertise but form clearing houses for ideas and individuals that need to be analyzed with a view toward their structural surroundings.

The fourth contribution, by Corinna R. Unger, while also concerned with the international level, focuses on non-governmental actors, namely the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation. In trying to understand how the foundations managed to become highly valued players in development matters, Unger analyzes their political and strategic behavior with regard to the domestic and the international situation they found themselves in and helped to shape. By drawing on specific organizing capacities, they managed to secure an institutional position of lasting influence. What the article shows, then, is that a perspective on the evolution of a professional or political field can benefit from an actor-driven perspective that pays attention to the structuration process.

Thomas Welskopp, a specialist on theory and history and one of the few scholars to have taken up the analytical implications of Giddens's ideas in his own writing,³² provides a comment on how to write the history of institutions in a theoretically informed way. Drawing on the empirical studies, he also reflects on the opportunities and limits of research informed by structuration theory.

On a more general level, we would like to summarize the findings of the individual contributions in order to present a possible agenda for future discussions on institutions in periods of transition. First, the articles emphasize the openness of historical developments. This is even true of moments when actors are forced to do what they are doing, and also when organizations are supposed to be representing strategic interests. Unexpected outcomes and modes of improvising in situations of conflicts can be observed in all of the case studies. Path dependency in the sense of institutional traditions or modes of thinking interferes with situational behavior and the procedural construction of meaning in ways characteristic of the social setting – be it in the transformation of small advisory councils on a national level, in the fluid constitution of European party regimes, in the construction of international economic networks, or in the institutionalization of the global field of development politics.

All of these examples also show, secondly, the complexity of the attempt to differentiate between conscious agency in the sense of strategic interests and the recursive, subconscious enactment of structural dimensions of society in organizations. Empirical research of this kind requires a close view at internal conflicts and different habits of interaction, instead of focusing on organizations as a whole or on programmatic utterings of individual representatives solely. With regard to this issue, Giddens's ideas are valuable and inspiring.

Finally, the question of institutional power or autonomous agency in periods of change has to be combined with an analysis of organizational structures and specific forms of self-representation. The ways in which organizations construct meaning, implement norms or execute power become visible not only by looking at the social or political structures they are part of but also by scrutinizing the interpretative efforts of knowledgeable actors in the organizations and the structured situations they find themselves in.

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32 See: T. Welskopp, *Arbeit und Macht im Hüttenwerk. Arbeits- und industrielle Beziehungen in der deutschen und amerikanischen Eisen- und Stahlindustrie von den 1860er bis zu den 1930er Jahren*, Bonn 1994; idem. and K. Lauschke (ed.), *Mikropolitik im Unternehmen. Arbeitsbeziehungen und Machtstrukturen in industriellen Großbetrieben des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Essen 1994.