ВОПРОСЫ ИСТОРИИ, ТЕОРИИ И МЕТОДОЛОГИИ

Institutions: a promising topic insufficiently clarified*

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Abstract. The basic question of sociology is what sets of rules and order are used in society and how they are maintained. One possible answer is based on the concept of institutions, which still provokes theoretical discussions due to, among other things, a certain ambiguity, since the term 'institution' is, figuratively speaking, shrouded in a kind of fog that prevents it from being captured in any direct, clear way. Today, ambitions of philosophy, political science, anthropology or mathematical game theory, which try to solve this problem outside the sociological framework, contribute to the deepening of the ambiguities surrounding the concept of institutions. Some approaches tend to define institutions as a cyber black box with inputs and outputs, whose working remains largely hidden (especially philosophical and mathematical approaches strive to find some common universal principle or even mathematical formula). From the perspective of general sociological theory, the article considers the topic of institutions. The author identifies this topic as a central issue that needs to be reconsidered in sociology. The starting point of the article is the analysis of concepts related to the topic, their definitions and paradigmatic integration. In the following part, the author considers the theoretical interpretations in the works of Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, John Searle, and the concepts inspired by game theories and rational behaviour theories. After that, ten basic issues of the current approaches are identified. The author pays particular attention to the fact that methodological individualism tends to dominate, which explains the ignorance of certain issues, especially of a holistic and macro-social nature, thus, leading to some problematic simplifications. The article shows what needs to be changed in the current social-scientific thinking on institutions in order to develop a more appropriate starting point for the further development of sociological theory.

Key words: sociological theory; social order; institutions; institutionalization; organization; social role; methodological individualism; functionalism; behaviour; rules; norms; sanctions

Institutions in a multi-paradigmatic perspective

The term institution is derived from Latin *instituere* (establish, institute) and *institutio* (institution in general legal provisions, and later also the legal code or collection of legal norms) as a matter of the legal regulation of social relations

among. It was from the legal science that the concept of institutions was adopted and incorporated into sociology [6. P. 2–3]. In sociology, this term was first used for interpersonal relationships by Herbert Spencer [21. P. 603 ff] — to link the diversity of social institutions to social differentiation. In the contemporary society, we encounter not only legal, but also political, power, economic, scientific, educational, religious, artistic, sport, relational and many other institutions. In addition, a distinction is sometimes made between formal and informal institutions.

In common language, the terms 'institution' and 'organization' are used as synonyms. However, in social sciences, institutions usually (though not always) differ from social groups or organizations. Institution as a set of provisions or rules can be defined as a "how to do guide" [11], while specific activities carried out in accordance with these instructions do not take place in institutions, but in social groups, organizations, or higher social units. Thus, the family and university are both institutions, but the Smith family is a small social group, and the University of Oxford is an organization (although in its own official description it is referred to as 'a unique and historic institution'). Some authors believe that institutions, beyond individual human actors, are social actors, which is a certain misunderstanding, because social groups and organizations can be considered as real collective actors, but hardly institutions that represent sets of rules.

In contemporary sociology, the concept of institutions is associated with several meanings and characteristics, which can usually be considered interconnected; nevertheless, paradigmatically different directions of the sociological thought tend to approach the choice of key concepts to capture them from different perspectives. In general, institutions are defined as the building blocks of social order, whose opposite is chaos, anomie and powerlessness.

The anthropological perspective finds in institutions a specifically human alternative to the instinctive equipment and orientation of other animals [7]. As such, institutions are a kind of 'lightening' means (or mechanism) that frees us from the need to think again and again about our reactions to situations that repeat; therefore, human actions are subject to certain customs and automatisms (in economics, reducing its 'costs'). Institutions can be understood as sets of rules for a particular area of behavior formed during the cultural evolution [2]. Anthropologically oriented authors consider these rules as analogous to genes. Just as the gene is a basic unit of the biological evolution, and a combination of genes leads to the emergence of organisms, rules are the basic units of the social evolution, and their combination forms institutions.

For sociology of culture, institutions are cultural inventions which, in the constructivism perspective, are social constructions created by typification, canonization and enforcing best practices. The existence of institutions makes it possible to reveal in the seemingly unrepeatable manifestations of human action regularities that can be translated into generalizing statements. Structuralism associates these regularities with the rules that make up structures [12. P. 353]. Such rules are

analogous to the grammar rules of speech, and they are accepted as binding and (in the classical structuralism) invariant (i.e., unchanging). Functionalism connects institutions with mechanisms whose mission is to provide for society the functions (or needs) necessary for its survival and reproduction, and to protect it from extinction.

In the perspective of structuralism, structural functionalism and systems theory, we can consider institutions as certain structural units (institutional structure/structures of society), which makes us associate the institution with certain normative expectations (structures in sociology are sometimes referred to as structures of expectation [13. P. 397 ff]) and consider it a basis of social order. Rueschemeyer defines institutions as "clusters of norms with strong but variable mechanisms of support and enforcement that regulate and sustain an important area of social life" [17. P. 210]. To ensure that institutional obligations and standards are respected, observed and enforced, social control mechanisms are complemented to one degree or another (forming control institutions).

In the interpretative sociology, institutions are understood as generally practised, approved, passed on and repeated ways, patterns, actions and interpersonal relationships often associated with the concept of social role. Social roles are the building blocks of institutions and vice versa: institutions consist of roles [23].

In the structuring theory, Giddens [9] distinguished four basic institutional orders in the structure of society: symbolic, political, economic, and legal. Institutions ensure the distribution of individuals in space and are associated with Braudel's category of *longue durée* representing a long duration of the institutional time [8. P. 93].

Institutionalization is generally the process of establishing institutions through the creation of rules. The representative of structural functionalism Parsons associated institutionalization to a large extent with social roles rather than with institutions [16. P. 188 ff]. Behaviour or action is institutionalized when it is in accordance with (institutional) norms: by contrast, behaviour that differs from these norms is called 'deviant', i.e., deviating. In sociology, contrary to the everyday notions of deviations, deviating behaviour — to one degree or another — can be observed wherever (institutional) norms exist. However, these norms often alter in time, so what was once deviant may be accepted later, become institutionalized or, on the contrary, the deviant may become the norm (for instance, the changing relationship between men and women, e.g., the gender division of labour).

Three theoretical explanations
of the establishment of institutions

When social sciences try to analyse and clarify the establishment of institutions, it is mainly approaches with an individualistic starting point (theory of action, interpretative sociology, constructivism, theory of rational choice), whose origins are associated with sociology of Max Weber. Certainly, we encounter the concept of institutions in theories of a holistic nature too, which refer back to sociology of Émile Durkheim (structuralism, functionalism, systems theory) [22]. While the

functioning of institutions is captured and theoretically described, the attention to this issue is significantly lower and less elaborate. Therefore, we will take a closer look at three different conceptions of an individualistic nature.

Under the influence of the philosophical anthropology of Arnold Gehlen, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann portrayed man as poor in instincts. This lack of equipment was compensated by institutions. Thus, the origination and maintenance of social order were linked to the processes of institutionalization, and for Berger and Luckmann [1. P. 56–93] this raised the crucial question of how they developed. They noted that every repeated activity encouraged individuals to habitualization, i.e., repeated activities stabilized in the form of patterns. If such habitualized behaviour became reciprocal and mutually recognized, it might have become an institution [1. P. 58]. For the individual, institutions asserted themselves through social roles, through which the individual participated in the reproduction of social order.

During their development, institutions detached themselves from their originators and became independent, capable of exerting pressure on members of society. Institutionalization culminated in institutions created by the language passed from one generation to the next. For institutions to be successful, they had to be equipped with 'credentials'. Berger and Luckmann [1. P. 95–96] distinguished four stages of legitimation: 1) incorporation of new concepts into the vocabulary; 2) explanatory schemes created from these concepts; 3) the compilation of specialized legitimation theories; 4) symbolic universes (for example, religion or philosophy). The order that a person takes on (or internalizes) during socialization as a player of social roles is not determined biologically — it is a result of human activities.

The approach of John Searle was based on the works of his teacher, Oxford philosopher John Austin, the founder of the speech act theory. Oxford analytical philosophy considers language a basis of philosophy. For Searle too, language was a central theme; however, he sought to transcend the boundaries of philosophy and to address the issues of social sciences, especially psychology, sociology, political science and economics. According to Searle, the significance of speech acts lies in the fact that we use it to create a substantial part of social reality. Searle connected the concept of language with the concept of action. To make communication meaningful, it must be operated by human beings who have a certain interest (intention). Intentionality expressed in speech acts was derived from intentionality of mental states; thus, the study of language must be associated with the study of the mind [18]: philosophy of language as a part of a broader theory of mind (a unified theory of mind, language, and society).

Searle distinguishes individual intentionality (common in philosophy) and collective intentionality (his conceptual innovation) [19]. However, both types of intentionality exist in the minds of individuals. According to Searle, collective intentionality is a social phenomenon which determines the development of collectives as a basis of sociality, social action and communication, and leads not only to joint action and cooperation but also to sharing common wishes, intentions and attitudes.

Searle argues that social reality was largely made up of nature used for our lives and adapted for our purposes, and institutional reality shaped by institutional facts. In *The Construction of Social Reality* [20], he explains how institutional facts were created and maintained: events and facts of our world became what they are because a community of people believed in their existence and recognized their meaning (for example, whether a particular piece of paper could be used as a banknote or a cinema ticket). Institutional reality was the creation of human beings, arising from speech acts and performances of consciousness. The specificity of institutional reality became apparent when we compared it with natural entities (clouds, mountains, deserts, etc.) existing regardless of whether one trusted or understood them. Institutional facts had a hierarchical structure and became what they were not because of the material properties of objects, but because people trusted them and understood them. Understanding essentially concerned actions within the institutional framework: people assigned to these acts certain functions which, according to these assumptions, they fulfil. These facts are linked with a certain paradox: independent of us and not subject to our choice, but, on the other hand, created and maintained by our trust and recognition (though we may not be aware of it). Exploring what people believed and recognized was the examination of intentionality.

Searle understood speech acts as linguistic expressions of intentions, which follow certain rules. He distinguished constitutive and regulative rules: the latter govern already existing actions, while the former (the key to understanding speech acts) created the very possibility of the given action. Searle explained how this was done in *The Construction of Social Reality* [20], the ambition of which was to formulate the ontological foundations of social sciences. Searle observed that highly complex social phenomena are based on certain constitutive rules and principles of a speech and symbolic nature. Social reality had its origin in our consciousness, intentionality, speech acts, and their connection with physical objects (for example, with the tools we use). Collective intention was essential for the constitution of institutional reality. Language as a symbolic system co-participated in this constitution. At the same time, it was especially important that the institutions thus formed be collectively accepted by people to whom they applied through trust in them (for instance, the acceptance of means of payment of a particular currency within the country makes money an institutional fact). According to Searle, institutional facts were associated with certain meanings and symbols, and also with normative principles, rights, obligations and commitments; they assumed a certain duration; finally, they were associated with certain principles of a procedural and performative nature.

Many authors who think and write about institutions are influenced by the rational choice theory and mathematical game theory. The foundations of the game theory were laid by the mathematician John von Neumann: in 1944, together with the economist Oskar Morgenstern, he published an extensive work *The Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour* [15], in which elaborated the rational decision-making. The

game theory cannot predict how a particular situation will turn out, but it shows how people should act to achieve optimal results. In sociology, James Coleman [3. P. 2 ff] used these approaches which represented and promoted the so-called methodological individualism. Coleman combined the behaviour/actions of individuals with rationality and used economic and mathematical methods to explain this rationality. As in other economizing approaches (for example, the theory of exchange), the rational actor treats everything as if he were an entrepreneur — whether where to buy or who to fall in love with. The highest principle is to minimize costs and maximize profits. The interests or goals of the actors may meet in different relationships, which leads to the formation of certain processes and institutions. Through the repeated interactions of actors, commitments, norms and expectations of their future behaviour develop, which may be accompanied by a system of sanctions.

Francesco Guala [10] tries to combine two concepts: first, Searle's understanding of institutions as rules that govern the actions of individuals, and, second, a concept of equilibrium in the game theory (the so-called Nash equilibrium [14], in which no game player can improve its situation by unilaterally changing the chosen strategy). In this perspective, institutions appear to be patterns of behaviour that are maintained because individuals are not motivated to deviate from them. Guala believes that these two approaches are complementary and can be combined into a unified theory — a 'balanced approach to institutions'. In this theory, institutions are defined as a form of regulative rules that coordinate the behaviour of individuals according to the principle of balance [10]. This regulatory rule can be outside the individual (for example, the traffic light and its signals).

Critique of the contemporary theories of institutions

All approaches to institutions based on the theoretical-methodological individualism have common weaknesses and shortcomings:
1. The above-mentioned approaches are ahistorical, especially when try to explain everything as if actors, who form and shape institutions according to their wishes and ideas, start from scratch, from some point zero. They forget that there is always something in the past, a certain determinant in the conditions that individuals enter, which influences how they act.
2. Thinking about institutions in this way (typical for the theory of action) is based on the fact that the ways of action analysed are taken out of the context and considered as if in a kind of vacuum, outside other phenomena and ways of action. This neglects the fact that new institutions usually have to be compatible with those that already exist and not to come into major conflict with them (in the pre-modern society, the family institution had to be compatible with ecclesiastical institutions).
3. These approaches can interpret the formation of institutions at the micro-social (interpersonal) and meso-social (organizational) levels, but usually ignore the fact that there is also a macro-social level (culture, civilization, society, stratification,

international relations, globalization, etc.), in which there are also institutions, but different from those that have their basis in the relatively easy-to-capture actions of individuals.

4. Many sociologists consider institutions with a certain idealism which tends to reduce everything to events in human consciousness and rationality. It overlooks that social order is created and maintained not only by cooperation and faith, but by conflicts, often bloody in nature (in history, there are countless examples of people forced to maintain a certain order by brute force). Moreover, institutional theories usually do not consider how the human impact on nature and material world is associated with institutional rules based on technological and production processes, where cooperation arises not from the interests of participants, but from what is technologically possible and necessary for a certain goal (e.g. institutions of slavery). At the same time, the logic of conquest, defensive or destructive goals is also based on processes limited in their scope (for example, disarmament agreements).

5. The prevailing approaches tend to explain all possible cases in a uniform way, seeking some universal mechanism by which all institutions are formed. For instance, Guala's explanation based on the game theory ignores the fact that there may be many equilibriums and diverse reasons for establishing institutions. Many but not all human institutions are a certain continuation of something in nature (e.g. the animals' concern and care — parenthood and families). Another reason may be states and phenomena of a transcendent nature that lead to the formation of religious institutions with their rituals. Representatives of the rational choice theory would probably explain these cases with the principles of the game theory, but the question is whether such an explanation is the best. In addition, the establishment of certain institutions can be of a poly-causal nature, and institutions of a multi-functional character may emerge (for example, the family).

6. Some institutions, especially at the macro-social level, are often the result of not one single decision but long-term development processes. In addition, complex institutions can gradually differentiate internally to form institutional clusters (for example, the modern state, whose genesis was studied by Norbert Elias [5]). There are types of institutions that require supplementation by other institutions (the modern state needs an army, police, official administration, legal system, education, institutions of symbolic representation).

7. Contemporary approaches often proceed from the assumption that actions and institutions which control them possess rationality of an economic nature based on the logic of efficiency that can be measured by profits and losses. However, besides the 'market' logic, there are other types of rationality, which Max Weber once showed in his work on world religions. Another example was provided by Norbert Elias [4], who argued that the behaviour patterns of members of the absolutist court were substantially different from those of the bourgeoisie, but

one could not call them irrational; therefore, the rationality of the sovereign court was based on other principles than that of the capitalist market.

8. Not all institutions can be established through a relatively easily limited range of individual actions. At the macro-social level, we encounter mechanisms of a different nature, caused not by the actions of individuals but by the changes of a macro-social dimension (economic booms and crises, war conditions, revolutions, military victories and defeats, computerization, electronic media, etc.). Although the contemporary sociological literature sometimes suggests that all macro-social phenomena can be understood as large units composed of micro-social events, this idea implies a danger of reductionism and simplification.

9. Contemporary theories often try to explain why institutions are formed (in Comte's terminology) by 'social statics' rather than 'social dynamics'. A significant exception is the work of Jonathan Turner [24; 25; 26], which was inspired by earlier sociologists such as Spencer and Durkheim and focuses on the meso- and macro-levels of social reality, emphasizing the long-term development in which the main social institutions have developed in the field of kinship, religion, polity, law and education. As for Guala's approach, we can add that the equilibrium can take the form of not only a point but a trajectory. Many institutions change — either step by step and gradually or in developmental breaks or leaps. Due to historic 'turning points', we can see that some institutions are not universal and nationwide: while some people or groups remain with old institutions (e.g. religions), others follow new institutional patterns (corresponding to the modern secularized society).

10. If we are to use the concept of institutions for sociological explanation today, we have to work with it as with Weber's ideal type, because the concept represents a certain theoretical idealization which is hard to encounter in social reality (few real families fully correspond to the theoretical model of the family in terms of the institutional approach). I suggest the concept 'duplex' (inspired to some extent by Durkheim's concept 'homo duplex') [22] to underline that in additions to social groups and organizations and their institutional structures, there is another layer of structures resulting from the characteristics of individuals acting within their framework. In organizations, institutional structures can be referred to as formal structures (set by organizational rules), and there are informal structures based on personal acquaintances, family relationships, kinship or sympathies, which, for instance, can circumvent formal hierarchical structures in communication between different parts and levels of the organization in an informal way.

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The issue of institutions, especially their connection to social order, represents one of the fundamental sociological questions. One could even say that to develop sociological theory must focus on this issue. In recent decades,

social sciences have focused on 'new institutionalism' which is significantly linked to contemporary economics [17], political science and other social sciences. However, it is the influence of economics in sociology, with methodological individualism prevalent, that determines some problematic tendencies in the research of institutions. Methodological individualism prevails in contemporary social sciences primarily for two reasons: first, it has certain ideological (non-scientific) connotations related to economic and political liberalism, which is critical of everything that resembles 'collectivism'; second, for the research based on quantitative methodology, it provides relatively easy-to-grasp, operationalizable and measurable concepts for the relatively easy acquisition of quantitative data that can be used for both analysis and prediction. However, the price of these possibilities is too high — the ignorance of macro-social factors and contexts of a holistic nature, which leads to a disturbing simplification of the above-examined set of issues.

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Институты: многообещающая недостаточно раскрытая тема*

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Аннотация. Один из главных вопросов социологии звучит так: какой набор правил и какой тип порядка создают общество и как именно они сохраняются. Один из возможных ответов на этот вопрос основан на понятии института, которое до сих порождает теоретические дискуссии, в том числе вследствие неоднозначности данного термина: образно говоря, научное понятие «институт» все еще окутано туманом, который не позволяет дать ему однозначное и четкое определение. Сегодня многие дисциплины претендуют на решение этой проблемы вне социологического контекста — философия, политология, антропология и даже математическая теория игр, однако лишь усугубляют противоречия, связанные с концепцией институтов. Некоторые теоретические подходы склоняются к определению института как своего рода кибернетического черного ящика с системой входов и выходов, чье функционирование носит преимущественно скрытый характер (философские и математические модели стремятся обнаружить в деятельности институтов некий общий универсальный принцип или даже математическую формулу). Статья рассматривает понятие института с точки зрения общей социологической теории. Автор считает, что концепция институтов — главная социологическая теория, требующая сегодня принципиального переосмысления. Отправной точкой рассуждений автора выступает анализ концептуальных подходов к трактовке института, предлагающих его разные определения и допускающих парадигматическую интеграцию. Затем автор кратко характеризует теоретические подходы Питера Бергера, Томаса Лукмана и Джона Серля, а также понятия, пришедшие в социологию из теорий игр и теорий рационального поведения. Далее в статье обозначены десять вопросов, вытекающих из существующих социологических теорий институтов. Автор подчеркивает, что среди них очевидно доминирование методологического индивидуализма, что объясняет принципиальное игнорирование целого ряда вопросов холистического и макросоциального характера и неизбежно порождает упрощения. В статье намечены направления дальнейшей работы — что следует изменить в сложившейся трактовке института в социальных науках, чтобы выработать адекватные основания для его осмысления в рамках социологической теории.

Ключевые слова: социологическая теория; социальный порядок; институты; институционализация; организация; социальная роль; методологический индивидуализм; функционализм; поведение; правила; нормы; санкции