

Think for a minute about soccer, by the way, the most popular sport in Morocco. How crucial are the rules for the game? Or are the players more important? Well, the game would not exist without the rules, but also could not exist without the players. But what happens if a penalty kick decides what team wins the game, who or what is responsible? Maybe the rule which punished the foul with a free goal kick, or the player who has the nerves to withstand the chanting crowds and scores? Or, was it a bad referee decision or just chance? Similar to soccer, processes of institutional change can be triggered by various factors, from which, selecting the decisive ones, is a puzzling task. What came first, the structure or the person? The answer fills libraries, with some studies concluding the structure determines everything, while others believe people can change everything—but only if it is in their interest.

In this chapter, I argue that processes of institutional change are triggered, adopted and implemented through the interplay of actors and institutions, with actors catalyzing change. Like soccer rules, institutional change is made and constantly developed through the interplay of player, referee and soccer association officials. The goal of this chapter is to lay out how the most pivotal factors for institutional change identified in social science research build the basis for actor-centered Europeanization as a new analytical framework to analyze the causal mechanisms underlying institutional change. This actor centered analysis is not reinventing the wheel; it rather originates from screening the field of institutional research for useful tools and bringing them together for the analysis of institutional change in Europe's neighborhood.

The chapter makes the case for actor-centered Europeanization as an analytical approach, analyzing causes of change. Combining knowledge from institutional and Europeanization analysis is fruitful to explain processes of institutional changes in Morocco and unravel the impact of the EU taking place. The chapter begins by explaining how institutions and actors are defined and used in new institutionalism

research and lays out their challenges of explaining institutional change. It then continues to examine how EU studies approached institutional change within and beyond EU member states, while singling out the EU as a causal explanatory factor. Finally, the chapter closes with laying out the main concepts and units of analysis of actor-centered Europeanization.

2.1 Theoretical foundations: explaining institutional change

The mechanisms behind processes of institutional change can be better understood by looking at the literature on institutional analysis⁸ in social science. Here, two traditions of prominent explanations can be singled out. The first is known as “old institutionalism” which is based on the analysis of institutions understood as formal-legal rules. The second, and more central to this study, is “new institutionalism” which is rooted in the modernist-empiricist tradition of political science⁹ and defines institutions as including all or a selection of “rules of the game” which can include constitutional rules, administrative structure as well as policy (Rhodes, 2009, 142; North, 1990, 3). These two pillars of institutional analysis not only differ in their approach to the relationship of actors and structure, but also, and more importantly for this chapter, their theoretical conceptions of change and what can trigger it.

The new institutionalisms are “indispensable for understanding how Europeanization is theorized,” (Bulmer, 2007). The new institutional analysis consists of three main schools of thought (Hall, Taylor, 1996, 940): rational choice, sociological and historical institutionalism. The fourth institutional, approach discussed here, is actor-centered Institutionalism. More of an analytical framework than its own institutional theory, actor-centered Institutionalism combines insights from the main institutionalism schools and brings the actor to the center of institutional analysis. These institutionalisms differ in their understanding of the nature of institutions,

8 Institutionalists are one of the six main viewpoints of political science research – political psychology, behavioralism, pluralism, structuralism, and developmentalism. Institutionalists focus on the study of government organizations, their interrelationships, norms, and governance patterns, but also on non-governmental organizations, networks and civil society (Rhodes, 2009, 141).

9 During the early twentieth century modern empiricism became the dominant tradition in political science. Instead of using history to explain data, modern empiricists used history as a source of data that is analyzed to inductively through categories and typologies (Bevir, 2009).

the scope of the ability of human behavior to alter institutions and how structure and behavior translate into political outcomes and change (March, Olsen, 2009). This first part of the chapter expands on these differences and proceeds to give an overview on how rational choice, sociological and historical institutionalism define and work with institutions, followed by a discussion of agency within conceptions of processes change in institutional research. The section ends with the discussion of Europeanization research and its contribution to unravelling the role of the EU in processes of institutional change within and outside Europe.

2.1.1 New Institutionalisms

The understanding of new institutionalism is deeply grounded in its reaction to old institutionalisms. With its focus on the analysis of the historical evolution of formal-legal institutions and the ideas embedded in them, “old institutionalism” was the first distinctive contribution of political science to the study of institutions (Rhodes, 2009).¹⁰ Until today, legal-formal analysis has been at the heart of political science research, complemented by a broad spectrum of various research approaches and perspectives. Two main turns left their marks on today’s institutional research as we know it: going beyond the prominent formal-legal analysis of the 1950s and 1960s, behaviorism focused on actual, observable beliefs and behaviors of groups and individuals instead of formal attributes of government institutions (see Allison, 1971; Ezrow, 1971; Rosenau, 1969). Behaviorists would argue that the referee or the players are bringing rules to life and are therefore central for their change (Brady, Collier & Box-Steffensmeier, 2009).¹¹ The slogan “bringing institutions back in” describes the second turn in institutional analysis (Hall, Taylor, 1996). In reaction to the behavioral movement, the new institutionalism school was born. New institutionalism changed and refocused the attention on the constraining and enabling nature of institutions as rules in political processes rather than solely on beliefs and behavior of actors. Following modernist-empiricist traditions, new institutionalists picked up insights from both legal-formal as well as behavior focused research in bringing political outcomes back to the center of analysis. Institutional

10 See also for a list of different traditions in the study of political institutions (Rhodes, 2009, 143).

11 Many theoretical works have contributed to behavioralism, with each representing different theoretical currents (Allison, 1971; Ezrow, 1971; Eulau, 1969; Rosenau, 1969; Dahl, 1961).

theory became an exciting intellectual playground for comparative, international, and American politics alike.

New institutionalism has become the label of the study of political institutions, as a set of theoretical ideas and hypotheses concerning the relations between institutional characteristics and political agency, performance, and change (March, Olsen, 2009). Protagonists turned away from behaviorists, arguing that institutions are not only driven by actors and highlight their partly autonomous role in political life. With a life of their own, rules turn to shape the players' behavior. Institutions in this perspective fashion, enable, and constrain political actors as they act within diverse logics of action. To what extent institutions perform and what logics actors follow, divides new institutionalism in three strands, building on different intellectual traditions in the social sciences, united only in the study of societal institutions and their commitment to modernist-empiricism (Rhodes, 2009, 144). Political science created historical institutionalism, economics developed rational choice institutionalism and sociology contributed sociological institutionalism (Goodin, 1996, 2-20; Hall, Taylor, 1996).¹² Actor-centered Institutionalism, as discussed here, is not a new institutionalism in its own right but rather a collection or fusion of their theoretical concepts.

Pivotal to understanding the dynamics of change is a clarification of the role of institutions in standard processes of change (March, Olsen, 2009). The various institutionalist schools of thought in social science use different definitions. Actor-centered institutionalism combines and expands on them, but as shown below, what institutions are, what they do, and especially what they do not do, shapes the understanding and explanations for institutional change. The following section looks at the three new institutionalisms and actor-centered institutionalism and their different understandings of institutions, actors and institutional change.

2.1.1.1 Institutions: from formal rules to cultural norms

While the phenomenon of institutional change has recently gained much attention in institutional analysis, there is not much common ground in regards to the definition of institutions (Campbell, 2010; Mahoney, Thelen, 2010; Streeck, Thelen, 2005b; Thelen, 2000). But the understanding of what an institution is has major implications for how researchers study institutional change and how much institutional change they find (Campbell, 2004). For old institutionalism and its formal-legal analysis,

12 The number of new institutionalisms differs in literature. Guy Peters (1999) for example identified no less than seven. This overview focuses on the three main strains that can be seen as the most influential, following the broadly accepted division by Hall and Taylor (1996). For a fourth institutionalism see (Schmidt, 2010).

institutions were “public laws that concern formal governmental organizations” (Eckstein, 1975, 2). The main research focus was on the evolution of these quite static rules, such as constitutions, and not on how they changed.¹³ Taking a 180 degree turn in institutional analysis, behavioralism swam against the current of formal-legal analysis and focused on explaining and predicting political behavior of individuals instead of formal institutions.

Turning away from structural functionalists such as Talcott Parsons (Parsons, Shils, 1951) and their belief that social structure and institutions generate individual actions, new institutionalism shifted towards the creation, development, and character of institutions and the role of actors. The view of institutions after the second turn in institutionalist research broke off from this bipolar approach between institutions and actors. The new institutionalisms saw both in a symbiotic relationship, with giving each of them different explanatory weight. In general, all institutionalisms rest on the assumption that “rules and systems in any historically given society not only organize and regulate social behavior but make it understandable – and in limited conditional sense – predictable for those sharing the rule knowledge” (Burns, Baumgarnter & Deville, 1985). New institutionalists agree that institutions are the “rules of the game” (North, 1990, 3). But these rules differ between the different institutional schools.

Sociological institutionalism has the thickest understanding of institutions as norms and culture. In sociological institutionalism¹⁴ institutions include formal rules but mainly consist of informal, common, and taken-for-granted cultural frameworks, scripts, and cognitive schemes (Jepperson, 1991). History and norms of a polity become embedded in institutions. In this notion Diez notes (1999, 10) that Europe has become a reference point embedded in all national identity constructions. Being a member of the European Union included Europe within the national decision making process even in areas where it has no legal role to play. From a sociological perspective, institutions as norms and culture unconsciously influence every step of one’s decision making and thus also have an impact on how institutions are shaped and changed. Some of these norms are solidified, can resist or trigger change, and are part of the agents’ identity the longer they persist (Aspinwall, Schneider, 2000, 14). The common criticism on sociological institutionalism and

13 See Rhodes (2009) for a more comprehensive discussion of this tradition of institutional analysis.

14 Sociological institutionalism is often referred to as organizational (Campbell, 2010, 16), constructivist or cultural institutionalism (Aspinwall, Schneider, 2000). Here I refer to all notions of institutional analysis that put emphasis on normative and cognitive ideas rather than on rational choice explanations.

its understanding of actors is that it is challenging to measure the effect of cultural institutions such as norms and beliefs in a reliable manner. Individuals always act within their cultural and societal roots and a distinction between the effects of culture and the effects of institutions is problematic (Schneider, Aspinwall, 2001, 10). This stickiness of norms to actors makes their behavior unpredictable *a priori* also in the process of institutional change, as discussed below.

In contrast to formal institutions, in old institutionalisms or complex institutions in the sociological tradition, rational choice institutionalism focuses on the individual and micro-level of analysis (Campbell, 2004, 14-15). In rational choice, institutions are “the rules of the game in a society or, more generally ... the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (North, 1990, 3). Interpreted as rules, designs, and structures, institutions become arenas of contestation between actors and their interest. Some rational choice scholars define institutions also as a strategic equilibrium, a situation where a person does not choose to change their current behavior given two alternatives and the reactions of others (Bates, Greif & Levi, *et al.*, 1998). For rational choice institutionalists, institutions are always efficient; otherwise actors would not set them up. Actors have a higher payoff with the institution in place than without it. The latter understanding of institutions even excludes an analytical focus on change, which explains the relative reluctant contribution of rational choice to research on institutional change. For rational choice scholars, institutions are important features of a strategic context, which constrains self-interested behavior of actors, but is also built by them (Knight, 1995; Knight, 1992). In this actor-centered notion, institutions are modified by actors according to their self-interest and represent an opportunity structure for them (Nee, 1998; Alt, Shepsle, 1990a).

Similar to rational choice scholars, historical institutionalists (Steinmo, Thelen & Longstreth, 1992), are interested in the relationship of agent and structure, but they reject the idea that institutions are always efficient (Pierson, 2004). In historical institutionalism, institutions are continuities: “formal and informal rules and procedures, routines, norms and conventions, embedded in the organizational structure of the polity or political economy” (Hall, Taylor, 1996, 938). The range of institutions in historical institutionalism includes constitutional orders, as well as standard procedures of a bureaucracy. In historical institutionalism, it is history, not just the actor’s interests, that creates the context which then shapes the choice of actors. With this “sticky” character, institutions are the context of actors, but are also – over time – changed by them. This symbiotic relationship is shaped by history. Like cement, institutions are harder to change the longer they exist. Not to be misunderstood: institutions in historical institutionalism can be produced by historical evolution or neutral bargaining between actors, but can

also have unintended consequences that the actors did not anticipate at the time (Skocpol, Pierson, 2002, 705; Skocpol, 1992). Institutions embrace formal rules, as well as ideas, which influence actors. Historical institutionalists are often accused of overemphasizing the role of institutions without paying sufficient attention to how the intentions of actors shape and change institutions and their outcomes (Aspinwall, Schneider, 2000, 10; Hall, Taylor, 1996, 21). While it sheds much light on the conditions of institutional change, it does not provide answers on how actors define their decision making agenda, what their goals are and what strategies they follow (Beland, 2009, 702-703).

Actor-centered Institutionalism (ACI) combines these different understanding of institutions. Instead of providing a new institutional school of thought, it combines the three new institutionalisms into an *analytical framework* that explains past and future policy choices (Scharpf, 1997, 1995; Mayntz, Scharpf, 1995). The ACI follows rational choice institutionalists in defining institutions as “systems of rules that structure the courses of action that a set of actors may choose” (Scharpf, 1997, 38). For ACI, the analysis of structure without the attention on actors is as deficient as the analysis of actors without structures (Mayntz, Scharpf, 1995, 46). It puts the actor at the center stage of the analysis surrounded by a set of institutions that can in turn confine their action. But, different to rational choice, institutions are not solely built and maintained because of the costs benefits calculation of actors. Social norms, identity, as well as self-interest lead actors.

ACI institutions also define how the outcomes of decisions are evaluated by an actor. Institutions lay the ground for decisions not only by distributing legal and material resources, but also by defining the purposes of and values attached to the actors’ doing. Drawing from sociological research, ACI acknowledges the influence of departmental affiliation on actors’ “selective perception” (Allison, 1971; Dearborn, Simon, 1958).¹⁵ Actors have different preferences, but they can also give variable importance to different indicators and apply different causal interpretations of the phenomena. Institutionalized expectations create a “common knowledge” on which actors take action. In this sense, institutions can be used to focus empirical research on “common knowledge” of actors in social interaction. It is important to note that even though institutions constitute a certain decision environment for actors, they are by no means able to determine the outcome of the decision. Institutions are rather prescribing a certain course of action. The more that is known about the institution, the more is known about the options, perceptions and preference of given actors (Scharpf, 1997, 40ff). ACI remains fairly vague when institutional

15 One prominent example is the Cuban Missile Crisis, where the reaction and action did depend on the departmental identities of the involved parties (Allison, 1971).

explanations are sufficient and when more idiosyncratic factors should be taken into consideration. Whether cognitive convergence or cognitive change has happened can be examined by using other analytical concepts such as policy learning (Radaelli, 2009; Sabatier, Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Hall, 1993; May, 1992; Haas, 1990).

Rather than following the debate on the supremacy of actors over structure or the other way around, ACI integrates both perspectives. The actor becomes the proximate cause and the institutional setting is the central remote cause (Mayntz, Scharpf, 1995, 46). Thus the knowledge of institutions tells much about the options and perceptions of given actors, but not everything, as discussed in more detail in the next section on actors in institutional analysis.

2.1.1.2 Actors: between gardeners and engineers

The second key piece to the understanding of institutional change is the role of actors and what they can and cannot do. While old institutionalism emphasized functional and technical factors as sources of change, the new institutionalisms pay more attention to how actors are involved in the process. Building on their different understanding of institutions explored above, actors can play different roles in processes of institutional change. Notions of struggle, conflict, and negotiations between actors over and within institutions can halt, alter or fast forward institutional change.

Proponents of the old institutionalism saw the ability of actors to change and form institutional processes as rather limited. For sociological institutionalists, actors are institutional “gardeners”, constantly engaging in actions related to the institutional setting in which they are embedded. For rational choice institutionalism, actors are institutional “engineers”, actively shaping and constructing their environment.

As gardeners, sociological institutionalism sees actors as being embedded in rules and routines that define their behavior (March, Olsen, 1989; 1995). Similar to the early behaviorism, sociological institutionalists see the actor or agent as the main subject of analysis and as being informed by a variety of cultural traditions and nationally-rooted common features that “establish a system of common reference” for actors’ decision making (Schneider, Aspinwall, 2001, 10-13). The main criticism of sociological institutionalism is that it leaves too much room for context and too little for agency (Hall, Taylor, 1996, 21). Due to its thick description of institutions and their role in influencing the perception of actors in processes of institutional change, the roles and interests of actors are minimally examined. But not only actors are important ingredients to explain institutional change. For sociologists, normative ideas are surrounding actors and determine behavior and change. But, to distinguish between the two analytically is quite difficult, and the identification of causal processes can get lost in thick and extensive descriptions.

In rational choice institutional analysis, human action is also the focal point of analysis. But distinguishing it from sociological and historical institutionalism, actors are perceived as being more independent from the structures surrounding them. They behave in a strategic manner and try to engineer their institutional environment depending on how they expect other actors within the decision making process to act (Scharpf, 1997, 51). Rules and routines are the carriers of accumulated knowledge of the engineers and generally reflect a broader and longer experience (March, Olsen, 2009; Scharpf, 1997, 51). Institutions are not only periodically contested, they are the object of ongoing skirmishing as actors try to achieve an advantage by interpreting or redirecting institutions in pursuit of their goals, or by subverting or circumventing rules that clash with their interests. Actors can either use existing knowledge, rules, and routines and redefine existing institutions, or make new discoveries that eventually lead to institutional change (March, 1991). At the same time, actors have to work around elements they cannot change, while attempting to harness and utilize others in novel ways to trigger change from within the context of existing opportunity and constraint structures (Deeg, 2005).

Institutional rational choice theory's precise explanation of human behavior and action is limited by assuming that actors are only rationally driven, and sacrificing additional explanandum such as norms, identity or historical context (Cook, Levi, 1990; Hall, 1986). This leads to an efficient but variable deficient analysis where potentially important explanatory factors are excluded. The main focus of analysis lays on situations of choice in a specific setting, in one point of time, with relatively well-defined alternative actions, where actors possess fair knowledge about costs and consequences according to previously established preference. Rational choice lacks a plausible account of how preferences of actors, available resources, choice situations, and knowledge of consequences form or change (Tilly, Goodin, 2009). It does also not include any unintended consequences of action, invisible, or indirect effects and environmental feedback. As explored above, actors' decision making can have other effects than those originally intended that can sometimes even lead to change of institutions.

Historical institutionalism differs from this understanding of actors. Evolving from its understanding of institutions as formal and informal rules that provide the context for action, actors are not the most important subject of analysis. Sometimes historical institutional studies just take the sociologist or the rational view on actors as a given, without further inquiry (Armstrong, Bulmer, 1998; Pierson, 1994; Immergut, 1992). This divide can be seen as strength of the analysis, with some studies emphasizing the role of institutions independent of culture and power struggles between actors, while others are closer to the sociological camp, highlighting culture and power as decisive explanations. Historical institutionalism

sees political actors as much institutional “gardeners” as institutional “engineers” (Mahoney, Thelen, 2010; Pierson, 1996; Immergut, 1992; Steinmo, Thelen & Longstreth, 1992). They can interpret rules and codes of behavior, impact causal and normative beliefs, foster civic and democratic identities and engagement, develop organized capabilities, and improve adaptability (March, Olsen, 1995). But there is little knowledge under what conditions actors are able to produce institutional change that generates intended and desired substantive effects. The institutions, rather than rational individuals or social forces, are the main units of analysis of most historical institutionalist studies on institutional change.

Similar to rational choice institutionalism, actor-centered institutionalism emphasizes the role of actors in institutional analysis. Comparable to its understanding of institutions, also the handling of actors, underlines ACI’s general aim to bridge different institutionalism schools. It does borrow the embeddedness of actors in their context from sociological institutionalism, but focusses on keeping the empirical data as parsimonious as possible through institutions. Individual as well as complex actors are defined by their capability for intentional action.¹⁶ Actor-centered institutionalism recognizes that different actors are central to the policy process as they negotiate to produce acceptable outcomes. It is re-directing the analytical attention back to actors by giving equal weight to the strategic actions and interactions of actors as well as to their ability to enable, constrain, and shape institutional structures and norms (Scharpf, 1997). While historical institutionalism has a similar goal, it gives more explanatory and constraining power to institutions. The focus on the role of actors shows similarities to rational choice as well as sociological institutionalism: while the actor has a certain motivation to follow their goals based on self-interest, the attainment of these goals is informed by social norms and values, which brings ACI again closer to the sociological approach. Furthermore, actors are not seen as fully informed as rational choice would suggest. Their level of information is rather dependent on the “specific knowledge and ignorance shared among actors in institutionalized interactions” (Scharpf, 1997, 62).

In Actor-centered institutionalism, the explanatory power of institutions and actor strategies informing and surrounding the institution formation process are combined instead of focusing on one or the other as in the other institutionalist approaches discussed above. In ACI, actors are characterized by their orientation

16 Scharpf differentiates between individual and complex actors. Complex actors are defined by the capability for intentional action for the participating individuals. This capability must be constituted externally through translating resources into action and internally through establishing sufficient institutional structures to produce action (Scharpf, 2000, 97). Here perceptions and capabilities of individual actors are at the center of attention.

The Will of Change

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