

The institutional framework of the project state

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Abstract

The project state refers to a mode of governance that has arisen alongside a policy discourse marked by terms such as sustainable development, participation and bottom-up development. Within the literature on rural development, this sustainability discourse is marked by the term 'neo-endogenous' or integrated development, and link has been made between the devolution required for bottom-up development and the rise of the institutions that give shape to the project state.

In this 'projectified world', the relationships between citizens and representative of the state, and amongst citizens, are shaped by a series of practices and expectations formed by the need to plan, deliver and monitor development through the medium of projects. In this paper, we propose a framework for the analysis of the institutions that sustain the project state in rural development. This is intended to facilitate the understanding of the way that rural governance operates and changes or fails to change.

Introduction

In this paper, we work towards a framework for the analysis of the institutions that sustain the project state in rural development. This is intended to facilitate the understanding of the way that governance operates and how it changes or fails to change. The reason for doing so, is that under the emerging style of governance in rural Europe characterised by the rise and rise of projects and programmes as a mode of planning and delivering rural development, there is a growing tension between the rhetoric of public participation that justifies the reform of governance arrangements, and the managerialist practices that are introduced to enact that rhetoric.

We premise our discussion on the idea that that gaining an understanding of the organisations and institutional practices that inform and influence rural development will help to analyse the success or otherwise of public policy on rural development. The framework draws on a review of institutional theory and on a simple conceptual tool from metaphor theory to highlight key aspects of an important institution in rural development: evaluation. We conclude by indicating a range of other institutions that could be analysed under this framework, and consider how this analysis might inform practice.

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Integrated rural development

Our understanding of rural development is rooted in the debate on endogenously driven rural development (Bassand et al, 1986; Van der Ploeg et al, 2000; Nemes, 2004), where the term ‘endogenous’ refers to a process that arises from within. The notion of endogenous development has been promoted in contrast to more a modernist idea of development: exogenous development, which is driven from without. In European research and policy discourse, the concept of endogenous development is closely aligned with a developmental ethic that shifts attention from sectoral to territorial logics of change (Ray, 1999) and that focuses on the role of multi-functional agriculture within the wider rural economy and landscape (OECD, 2001; Wilson, 2001)

While endogenous and exogenous development can be considered as a simple dualism, Nemes and others have pointed out the challenge is to find a synthesis (Lowe et al, 1995; Ray, 2000a; Nemes, 2004), a hybrid view that goes beyond both endogenous and exogenous views of development and keeps in sight the dynamic interplay between such processes. Ray’s (2000a) synthesis is what he calls neo-endogenous development, ‘*endogenous-based development in which extra-local factors are recognised and regarded as essential but which retains a belief in the potential of local areas to shape their future*’.

Nemes analyses the synthesis in terms of integrated rural development, by which he means a situation where the exogenous and endogenous institutions of rural development operate so as to reinforce one another, rather than in opposition (Nemes 2005; Nemes et al. 2006). An example of this is the hybrid evaluation called for by in High & Nemes (2007), calling on evidence that endogenous and exogenous forms of evaluation can reinforce one another.

In Europe the emergence of a ‘rural sector’ (indicated for example by the second pillar of CAP, Lowe et al, 2002) is the result of a long reform of the public policy that has increasingly relied on the rhetoric of integrated rural development, whilst simultaneously drawing in a range of key European issues, for example expansion, convergence, and subsidy vs free-trade in agricultural commodities. In the UK, the shift in emphasis from agriculture to the rural more generally is best typified by the creation of DEFRA (Department of Food, Agriculture and Rural Affairs) from the ashes of MAFF (Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs) in 2001, though subsequent experience has shown that this is a process that continues and cannot yet be taken for granted.

More generally, integrated rural development can be seen as part of a broad social and political discourse around the term sustainable development. Given the well-established multiplicity of definitions of sustainable development and sustainability (eg Blackmore & Ison, 1995; Pretty, 1995; Reid, 1995), this becomes more apparent if rather than engage in an attempt to define sustainable development in terms of a global “*problematique*” (see Reid, 1995, for example), one notes that sustainable development can be treated as a social and political discourse (High, 2002).

That is sustainable development is the subject of a continuous series of debates about current trends in wealth and welfare, ecological sustainability

and so on, and where the term sustainable development is central (O’Riordan & Voisey, 1998, chapter 1). These debates in turn interact with an ongoing process of collective and individual action that is oriented towards the solution of many common difficulties faced by humanity and the connections between them. This non-normative definition highlights a locus in which the various normative ideas of what sustainable development is operate, hence the phenomenon that the attempt to define sustainable development normatively is itself a substantial part of the discourse that under this definition makes up sustainable development.

The link between integrated rural development and sustainable development is then clear when one observes integrated development displays the same characteristic of simultaneously referring to a social and political discourse oriented on improving social, economic and environmental trajectories, and carrying a number of normative references within that debate. Indeed it is arguable, given the timing of the emergence of the two discourses, the academic and policy actors involved, and the issues the two discourses seek to address that integrated rural development is a subset of sustainable development as we define it, as well as within the normative sense.

In both cases, there is a focus on synthesis between different value systems, and they also share a strong focus on a rhetoric of participation. Thus, in many countries, there is a new emphasis on partnerships, networks, civil society and participation, and this often translates into interventions that support associational activity. Various forms of partnership promoted as key mechanisms to secure a central role for civil society and, thereby, to promote social inclusion. In the UK, for example, partnership is central to New Labour’s politics, at least in rhetoric. Through a partnership approach to governing, the government seeks to overcome problems of inefficiency associated with bureaucratic hierarchies and the problems of inequity and exclusion arising from market-based solutions (Giddens, 2000).

Participatory processes are often presented very positively in the literature on sustainable development. The cited advantages include a more comprehensive picture of local realities (Giddens, 2000), enthusiasm and commitment due to a feeling of ownership, (Gibson, 1994; Bunch, 1995), sustainability of results (Warburton, 1997), heightened accountability to local people (Gibson, 1994; 1996), and enhancement of social, psychic, physical and economic well-being (Bunch, 1995). Essentially, the benefits can be seen in the light of efficiency or ethics (Pretty, 1995; Warburton, 1997): as instrumental or transformative, although the ideal is to achieve both efficiency and ethicality.

Notwithstanding the high volume of literature predicated on participation as a good thing, there are a number of critiques which either seek to improve it (Blackburn & Holland, 1998; Guijt & Kaul Shah, 1998) or question it as a ‘*new form of tyranny*’ (Cooke & Kothari, 2002). Bad practice arises out of a failure to appreciate that a shift is expected from ‘*experts on top to experts on tap*’, as Gibson (1996) puts it, resulting in use of the brand of participation, without the substance. Thus participation can be severely constrained by the realities of a situation and the social and political context in which participatory methodologies are used can be crucial. As a result, participatory approaches can be merely nominal, fail to include all stakeholders or be participation on

other people's terms (White, 1996). It could even be said that participation is usually asserted rather than demonstrated, and that in much of rural development it has degenerated into a kind of propaganda.

In the case of neo-endogenous or integrated rural development, participation is important, because it requires finding ways that participatory governance can work – with positive interactions between the institutional forms of the state and those of voluntary association. This generates a requirement for both appropriate institutional capacity within local territories, and governance relations that are supportive of subsidiarity and devolution (Nemes et al, 2006). The contradiction is that in practice the institutions that shape governance, mediate centre-periphery relations and attempt to regulate how non-state actors participate in state-funded initiatives are often extremely non-participatory while at the same time sidestepping the safeguards of representative government. Concern about this has begun to focus on the emergence of the so-called project state.

The project state

In Nemes' (2004) depiction of the tensions between centralisation and devolution in rural development, two primary systems of governance are described, each with its own values and institutions. These are the central administrative system, which is characterised in terms of formal institutions: written rules, established procedures and formally derived and explicitly stated aims with an underlying logic that is modernist and technocratic and is expressed through bureaucratic control. Under the logic of this system, the development of peripheral regions serves the interest of the political and economic centre by building access to local economies and through creating a stable environment for overall economic development. The local heuristic system, on the other hand, is based on bottom-up processes. Its elements comprise local economic, political and social actors, social networks and kinship relations. The institutions of co-ordination are often tacit and based in personal and cultural values as much as externally visible mechanisms. Local heuristic systems are therefore socially embedded and highly specific to context, oriented towards keeping the processes and benefits of development under local control.

This analysis can be rewritten or extended by the observation that just as there is texture and different institutional forms within informal institutional frameworks (High et al, 2005) such as those predominant with the local heuristic system, the central bureaucratic system is itself the locus of alternative institutional logics – in this case the sociological staples of hierarchy and market (see Thompson, 2003). This is indicated in Ray's (2000b) description of the phenomenon in that while the delivery of much rural policy has shifted outside direct state control, there has been a compensating increase in managerialist institutions of control, such as formal targets, contracts and indicators of performance. Ray links these explicitly, arguing that devolution gives rise to managerialism as a result of the need of the centre to ensure quality in public service. This can be seen as a specific case of du Gay's (2000) more general argument that a longstanding critique of bureaucratic government in Western democracies has led to the introduction of private sector social technologies to the management and

delivery of public goods and services. It is also related to Robson's (1993) association of an agenda of accountability in public policy with a growth in the need for audit trails and evaluation, as public bodies seek to demonstrate that the projects they fund are well managed and deliver satisfactory results.

A particular manifestation of this general trend is the rise of what Marsden & Sonnino (2005) call the project state. This is the observation that more and more, the delivery of state services and public goods is being organised through competitively tendered projects and programmes, together with an uncritical acceptance that this is the only way to do things. As a result, limited resources become both justified and concentrated. These themes are echoed in Bell & Morse's (2005) description of the 'projectified world order', which also notes the increasing tendency within governance to run initiatives as projects, perhaps building on an increase in the project form with the private sector.

Marsden and Sonnino build on an analysis by Marsden (2004) that argues that the difficulty with this is that the implementation of government policies through projects is inevitably going to be unsuccessful. The key problems are a lack of stakeholder engagement and need to '*visualise and articulate how actions and cases at one level can build up more broadly into significant and autonomous projects of change.*' For Marsden and Sonnino, the onset of the 'project-state' has, rather ironically, led social science researchers into an implicit belief that the State can be conducive and empowering with regard to rural development. Yet within their work on producer networks they argue that that these are developing despite, rather than because of, state policy (Sonnino and Marsden, 2005).

The project state, at it's worst represents an unholy marriage between bureaucratic and managerialist rationalities, while pretending to privilege citizen engagement and direct participation in governance. The ultimate irony is that to operate the project state needs to co-opt private and social effort in the service of what the state defines as the public good, and ultimately in the forms specified by the state. It is with this in mind that we turn to institutional analysis as a way of understanding what it is that shapes the individual actions that collectively give rise to the an emergent system we can call the project state.

Institutional analysis

The study of institutions, of the social factors that shape individual and collective behaviour, has enjoyed resurgence across the social sciences in recent decades. From sociology (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991), to political science (Hay, 2002), to economics (Williamson, 2000), 'new institutionalisms' have appeared which focus on non-atomistic accounts of social processes (Lowndes, 1996). They are new in the sense that they have arisen in reaction to individualist and materialist forms of social science and hark back to "old" institutionalisms in their respective fields.

What institutions are and how they operate remain a source of contention after decades of thought and study (Commons, 1931; Ostrom, 1999). In part, this is because of the number of disciplinary and epistemological perspectives that have brought to bear on the subject; meaning that even where people have started off interested in the same things, their attention has been directed in

different ways, eventually resulting in quite different definitions and working assumptions. To further muddy the waters, the everyday usage of institution, institutional and so on is quite loose.

For North, institutions are the “*humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction*” (North, 1990: 3). They are socially constructed rules, conventions and codes of behaviour, and their existence can be highlighted as much in their breach as in compliant individual behaviour. They have also been characterised as the regularities in human behaviour across individuals and over time (Shaffer, 1995), which emerge from the subjective process of generation of knowledge within a social context (Rizzello & Turvani, 2002). They are said to control access to and distribution of resources, and decrease uncertainty and compensate for bounded rationality. Thus they cut down transaction costs, and enable modelling of other actor’s decision strategies (Kiser & Ostrom, 1982).

For North institutions cover not only the expectation of how individuals and groups should behave, but also how they will be penalised if they fail to fulfil expectations. It might be easy to read North’s concept of institutions as external and coercive in the way that Hulsen (1998: 298) defines them. But we explicitly retain the idea of institutions as enablers of action as well as constraints – the social technologies of Nelson & Nelson (2002).

One of the key distinctions recognised in the literature (Aoki, 1998; Ostrom, 1999, pg 37) is between those who construct institutions as a type of (formal or informal) organisation (eg Uphoff, 1986), and those who view them as the rules, norms and strategies which shape individual and organisational behaviour (North, 1990; Ostrom, 1999). We follow North (1990) in making a clear distinction between institutions and organisations. Institutions, in this reading, are the rules of the game which provide common ground for the negotiation and performance of power and influence in relationships between individuals and groups. Organisations are the players of the game, social collectives with agency.

Institutional analysis highlights both the formal and informal aspects of social and organisational life. Formal institutions, including legislation or work-guidelines are overtly formulated. Brown & Duguid (1991) describe formal institutional systems as canonical. They are visible and subject to rational control and management through public institutional frameworks. Informal institutions are embedded and tacit, and include intangibles such as cultural norms, values, and accepted ways of doing things. They lack a constitutional basis, and the dialectical relationship with agency comes to the fore; informal institutions give shape to, whilst being reproduced by, repeated rounds of customary behaviour. This shadow view draws attention to the hidden, implicit patterns of behaviour and organisational forms that are hard even to delineate and thus hard to rationally control.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that institutions do not operate in isolation. They have different relevancy to given decisions by given actors, and can act to modify one another in particular situations (cf Mershon, 1994 on the development of informal institutions which modify the operation of formal institutions in coalition politics). In other words, institutions operate in an environment consisting of other institutions, and the way they are modified over time is itself institutionalised. For example, the institutions of family and

marriage encompass formal and informal, objective and subjective aspects. Both legal and religious institutions make and enforce rules and laws regarding marriage and family, create and regulate various concepts of how people relate to one another, and what their rights, obligations and duties may be as a consequence, but culture and custom also permeate marriage and family, and can give rise in time to new legal forms. In the United States and western Europe, a transition from a conception of marriage, as license for sexual intercourse granted by Church and State, to a conception of marriage as a form of contract, freely entered into, has occasioned momentous social and political controversies regarding laws and customs governing the freedom of women, divorce, cohabitation outside marriage, contraception, and homosexuality. Thus it makes sense to speak in terms of institutional frameworks or institutional architectures (High et al, 2004)

Therefore it makes sense to speak of institutional frameworks, constellations systems or architectures (according to preference), in order to recognise that different types and levels of institutions may be active in any given situation. A focus on collectives of institutions in this manner is implicit in several frameworks for institutional analysis (Ostrom, 1999; Turner et al, 2003), and is vital for understanding and working with multi-level, iterated structures such as rural governance in Europe.

Institutional dimensions

Given the diversity of the new institutional literature, one can derive a number of dimensions from which we derive our analytical framework. This should not be understood as a comprehensive bounding of institutions, but rather a device to widen attention along particular axes, so as to encompass a broad 'space' covering a wide range of possibilities. The axes are drawn from the literature on institutions, and have been chosen in order to reveal as much as possible about different kinds of institutions. They are summarised in the table below, along with some relevant references, and have been chosen on the basis that they are independent although not necessarily orthogonal.

Axis	Explanation	References
Formal/informal	Institutions can be formally constituted or informally constructed through the interaction of some social group.	(Kiser & Ostrom, 1982; North, 1990; Williamson, 2000; North, 2001)
Conscious/unconscious	Subjects of an institution may or may not be aware of the influence of a particular institution on their decision making	(Argyris & Schön, 1996; Goleman, 1998; Hulsen, 1998)
Action/Collective choice/Constitutional Choice	Institutions operate at different levels. Constitutional choices configure a space within which collective choices are made, which in turn shape how individual (or group) actions are decided upon.	(Kiser & Ostrom, 1982)

Designed/Emergent	Institutions can be considered the products of design, or the emergent, contingent result of ongoing social interaction.	(Jordan & O'Riordan, 1997; Ostrom, 1999; Nelson & Sampat, 2001)
Internalised/Enforced	An actor may perceive an institution as an internal value, arising from their identity, or an external force	(Hulsen, 1998; Nelson & Nelson, 2002)
Stable/dynamic	At a given point in time, institutions can be perceived of as stable and unchanging, or fluid and evolving.	(North, 1990; Aoki, 1998)
Continuous/1-10 yrs/10-100 yrs/100-1000 years	Institutions can persist and operate over different time scales.	(Williamson, 2000; Shaw, 2002)
Interorganisational/ Intraorganisational/ Interpersonal	Institutions can mediate different kinds of relationships.	(Vandenberg, 2002)

Table 1 – Axes of difference amongst institutions.

Formal/informal

The existence of both formal and informal institutions are recognised by most of the literature, and are usually seen to work in tandem (eg Fernandez-Gimenez, 1999). What is not clear is the relationship between them. North, for example, clearly recognises the importance of informal institutions (North, 1990; 2001), but according to Williamson (2000) has no real explanation for how they have such a pervasive effect on social and economic destinies over the long term. Indeed for North (2001), the main arena in which intentional action is possible is in the case of formal institutions (a point echoed by Wenger, 1999), and he sees these as shaping and perhaps informal ones. However, the fact that informal institutions are ubiquitous and that informal institutional frameworks can exist in the absence of formally constituted ones, suggests the reverse is true. The interesting question here is why are informal institutions so slippery for mainstream institutional thinkers, a question addressed to some extent in High et al (2005) and High et al (2006).

Conscious/unconscious

Conscious institutions can be defined as those whose influence are apparent to an actor. Hulsen (1998) argues that all institutions are conscious in this sense, although he is willing to recognise that institutions vary across different identities because of their intersubjective nature. However, when working through a calculus of observers, it is quite possible (and even common) for social facts such as an institution to be invisible to the actor they affect and visible to another (and vice-versa, though this is less important for this point).

The existence of unconscious institutions is supported by the work of Goleman (1998), who explores processes of unconsciousness and repression at all levels from the individual to the society, and suggests some ways in

which unconsciousness may operate. Equally, Argyris & Schön (1996) are concerned with way that organisational forces (which are easy to read as institutions in our terms) become undiscussable, and the fact of their undiscussability is itself undiscussable. Their practice (and that of many other organisational practitioners) suggests the work of surfacing unconscious institutions opens possibilities for sometimes radical change and learning.

Action/Collective choice/Constitutional choice

These three types are proposed by Kiser & Ostrom (1982), and refer to the operation and evolution of institutions at different levels - essentially, these three categories are nested arenas of institutional action and development. The world of action is where individuals are empowered to make their own decisions and choices, eg which diet to follow. For Kiser & Ostrom, the world of action is subject to institutions which develop in the world of collective choice, where officials (formal and informal) set and enforce collective constraints on behaviour. The constitutional level concerns the rules about which rules are able to be set. The three levels here correspond roughly to those used for analysis of the policy environment of sustainable agriculture in Vorley (2002). Although the categories do not seem central to the institutional literature, they have been included here because they direct attention to the multi-level nature of institutions, something which is important in several analytical frameworks designed to understand institutions (Mehta et al, 1999; Ostrom, 1999; Turner et al, 2003).

Designed/Emergent

Nelson & Sampet (2001, pg 36) review some of the different ideas within the literature about how institutions arise. For some, institutions come about in a way which is not planned – individuals do not have control over the institutional forms that emerge. For others, they are the result of rational collective action – designed to achieve particular ends. In New Institutional Economics, the tendency is to recognise both, but concentrate on designed institutions as North (2001) & Ostrom (1999). The idea of emergent institutions has been more important in the sociological literature on institutions (Jordan & O'Riordan, 1997) and emphasise path dependence in the evolution of new institutional forms. This is not the same as the formal/informal split, because part of the discussion is whether formal institutions are in fact designed, or whether they emerge and are then formally recognised.

Internalised/Enforced institutions

The literature varies in the emphasis placed on external enforcement in the operation of institutions. For Hulsén, for example, institutions are external and coercive (Hulsén, 1998, pg 298), although perhaps this betrays Hulsén's position in the philosophy of law literature. Others posit that institutions can be internalised, and/or recognised as positive guides to behaviour. Strictly speaking, internalised and externally enforced institutions are not exclusive categories, although they are comprehensive in the case of conscious institutions. Note that this category in particular raises issues of power.

Stable/Dynamic

Institutions at any time can be perceived as stable or dynamic. Cash (2000), for example say that long-term institutionalised relationships allow trust and credibility to accrue over time, and certainly within the literature there seems to be an emphasis on the long-term stability of some institutional forms. However, several authors recognise that stability and dynamism occur at different times in relation to the same institutions, and that punctuated equilibrium in institutions seems a reasonable model for the growth and change of institutions (Aoki, 1998; Hay, 2002), especially given the interdependence of institutions. For an analyst, this category draws attention towards the stability of given institutions over the relevant time period. What makes particular organisations dynamic and how this dynamism operates is of particular interest to North (1990), who suggests power relationships are of particular interest. What isn't explored much in the literature is how institutions configure the space for change (apart from in the sense suggest by Kiser & Ostrom, covered above).

Inter-organisation/Intra-organisation/Interpersonal

This category derives from Vandenberg(2002), who says that organisations mediate relationships within and between organisations, as well as between individuals. In NIE, intra-organisational are interesting because they explain the existence of organisational forms such as the firm (Williamson, 2000). This axis becomes much more closely aligned to the internalised/externalised if the distinction between individual and organisational actors is ignored. This can be justified because there are valid viewpoints from which organisations act purposefully – the government is raising taxes, my family wants to see me go to university etc.

Continuous/1-10years/10-100 years/100-1000 years

These four temporal scale have been suggested by Williamson (2000), who matches them to different kinds of institutions.

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