



INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the symposium on ‘crisis and persistence: dynamics of institutional changes at the interface between formal and informal institutions’

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Abstract

Crises constitute a fascinating context in which to investigate the resilience of institutional arrangements, or their breakdown and change, and to shed light on the interplay between formal and informal institutions in this process. The papers in this symposium focus on crises from political power grab to economic shock and natural disasters. They focus on the differing impact of different crises or investigate the specific impact of one form of crises on formal and informal institutions or the negotiation process that allow them to coexist. Bringing them under one roof emphasises the diversity of lenses through which institutions can be conceptualised and operationalised. It also highlights some of the issues preventing meaningful comparisons across frameworks. Importantly, it also allows us to trace an agenda for research towards improving our understanding of when and how crises lead to change. We argue that an often understudied aspect that could help to move towards a clearer taxonomy is to articulate more explicitly the agency of actors and the distribution of power within society and social groups.

Keywords: crises; disasters and conflicts; formal institutions; informal institutions; institutional change/persistence; resilience; shocks; social capital

Background

We live in a polycrisis world (Tooze, 2022), where crises have become more frequent and widespread across geographies and spheres of our life/world. The complexity of the interlinked ecological, political, and societal crises – from climate change and biodiversity loss, to terrorism, wars and the failure of states, or to the influence of internet trolls and fake news on democratic elections – has led to much anxiety. Yet, crises can lead to positive as well as negative change in an institutional system. With this symposium¹, we offer an opportunity to pause and reflect on crises as a force for change or resilience.

¹This symposium emerged from a two-day workshop on the theme “Crisis and Persistence: Dynamics of Institutional Changes at the Interface between Formal and Informal Institutions” which took place in September 2021 in London. The workshop was organised by the Friday Association for Institutional Studies – a collective including members of the Birkbeck Centre for Political Economy and Institutional Studies (CPEIS), the Centre for New Economic Transitions (CNET, previously known as the Centre for Comparative Studies of Emerging Economies) at the University College London School of Slavonic and East European Studies (UCL SSEES), and the Institute for International Management (IIM) at Loughborough University London – which was established to stimulate pluridisciplinary discussions around institutions and their impact on social and economic outcomes. With that objective in mind, we have organised at least a yearly international event since 2018, focusing on various aspects of institutional studies.

Many see crises as windows of opportunity for change, moments of critical junctures, and structural breaks in the development of economic and political institutions (Collier & Collier, 1991). For academics working with an institutionalist approach, crises – defined as events that challenge the survival of an institutional arrangement – constitute an opportunity in a very specific sense. Namely, they are particularly useful phenomena to investigate the conditions under which institutional arrangements are disrupted and under which these arrangements persist despite pressure. Indeed, surprisingly, some – even major – crises do not seem to have the expected disruptive effect on institutional arrangements, with institutional features showing remarkable resilience in the face of major upheaval (Crouch, 2011).

One factor explaining institutional continuity or change during crises is the interplay between formal and informal institutions. Some argue that, in times of crisis, the role of informal institutions in stabilising existing institutional arrangements or, conversely, precipitating change is particularly important (Bentkowska, 2021; Ledeneva, 2013). Indeed, some authors emphasise that informal institutions are slow moving and thus fundamental to our understanding of persistence (e.g. Roland, 2004). Others consider their role in shaping the implementation of formal institutions, making them a more fundamental driver of change (Boettke *et al.*, 2008). Additionally, whether a crisis will provide an opportunity for meaningful formal institutional change may also depend on whether informal institutions supporting the status quo remain unchallenged or are equally shaken by the crisis.

Yet, we still lack conceptual clarity on the distinction between formal and informal institutions. Definitions and conceptualisations of both formal and especially informal institutions vary widely from one discipline to another, and even within a discipline from one approach to another. Even less agreement exists in terms of the relationship between formal and informal institutions.

Without attempting to be exhaustive, we can mention a few of the ways in which the relationship between formal and informal institutions is presented in the literature. Many economics and management approaches simply consider informal institutions to be second best structures, on which actors rely when formal institutions are absent or somehow ‘faulty’ (Peng, 2003; Rodrik, 2008; Khanna & Palepu, 1997). Within this frame, informal institutions are often used to explain deviance or shadowy (and thus shady?) behaviours.

Other approaches – some drawing on legal scholarship – acknowledge a much more complex relationship between formal and informal institutions (see Schnyder *et al.*, 2021). Informal institutions may be what turns written, codified rules into actual practices (North, 1990). As such, informal institutions may not be detached from formal ones. Rather, they are the social norms, conventions, and values that explain why people routinely adhere to formal institutions – even in the absence or with low likelihood of enforcement. Informal institutions themselves may be more than just unwritten ‘rules of the game’. Recent interdisciplinary research of management scholars and anthropologists conceives of informal institutions as embedded in various types of social networks, which determine their resilience or vulnerability to change (Minbaeva *et al.*, 2023). In short: a great deal more remains to be researched to fully understand how formal and informal institutions interact, but investigations, to date, have varied in their conceptualisation of institutions.

With all of this in mind, the call for contributions to this symposium remained purposely open in terms of the conceptualisation of formal and informal institutions. Our aim was to recognise the complexity of defining and measuring formal and informal institutions and the large number of theoretical lenses that could be taken in the absence of a unifying framework. Now, over two years after this initial call, it is time for us to look at the papers that made it into this symposium, take stock of their findings, and reflect on what we can learn from them.

Summaries of the papers

Four papers are included in this symposium. We briefly summarise them here.

Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis (2024) explore the implication of centralised reforms on local governance of water resources, discussing the interplay between the local community and municipality representatives as a process through which adaptation to a formal change is negotiated. In this paper,

the crisis can be understood as being in the background, given the focus on Greece, at a time of economic instability, but the frictions between actors with differing views on how water resources should be governed constitute another crisis of sorts. Specifically, the paper focuses on a case study, where a group of citizens are trying to maintain collective governance rights over local water resources (as commons), in a context where top-down reforms imply a contradictory move towards greater formalisation and state involvement. In doing so, the paper explores local resistance to, and attempts to adapt to, changing formal rules, which work against customary practices. Resistance and adaptation are thus endogenous to the institutional structure and reflect antagonistic formal and informal institutions, with the paper exploring the negotiation required between actors with differing objectives, to bring them back together.

Buchen (2024) presents a much more formal take on the question at hand and illustrates through a coordination game that formal institutions, such as a functioning legal system, can promote resilience in the presence of an external shock that could otherwise lead to a breakdown in cooperation. Here formal institutions are understood through a rule-frame as reflecting the legal context (i.e. the contract laws and the court supporting them) in which actors must operate. Informal institutions are conceptualised as observed practice: through the act of cooperating or defecting, and linked to the concept of social capital, in the form of universalistic trust which supports cooperation between strangers. Formal and informal institutions are presented as promoting cooperation, until a disruptive shock changes the pay-offs and increases the attraction of defecting, reinforcing the need for formal institutions to ensure continued cooperation.

Choutagunta *et al.* (2024) consider constitutional compliance (CC), which is higher when the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* rules is smaller. They explain that it is generally seen as desirable: it indicates a lower propensity from the government (or the elite) to apply discretion in the way constitutional rules are implemented. 'It creates a predictable environment and makes government promises credible, both of which is economically favourable' (Guttman *et al.*, 2024). This third paper thus investigates the resilience of constitutional compliance to external shocks, arguing that these shocks can open an opportunity for decreased compliance. The authors conclude that civil conflicts, the onset of international sanctions, and *coups d'État* increase the likelihood that CC will decline, while banking crises and natural disasters have no impact on average. While the paper focuses on the gap between *de jure* and *de facto* rules, it does so focusing specifically on rules that are meant to place a constraint on the state.

Rayamajhee *et al.* (2024) take another perspective again. Using measures of economic freedom, the paper investigates the impact of Hurricane Katrina (2005) on the state of Louisiana, using the Synthetic Control Method. The findings suggest that experiencing the hurricane led to a reduction of the relative size of the state and thus lower involvement of the state in economic affairs, than what might have been the case had the hurricane not ravaged the state. In a separate analysis, the authors also investigate how Katrina impacted on local social capital (measured through an index building on Putnam (2000)'s focus on associational membership, public engagement, and volunteering – thus social capital as structure, rather than social capital as values, as in Buchen, 2024). They conclude that social capital was unaffected by the hurricane (but in a context of generally rising social capital). The authors conclude that this relative withdrawal of the state and stability of less formal institutions (as measured through social capital) is compatible with natural disasters opening a window for formal institutional change, while informal institutions may be more resilient to these types of shocks.

In sum then, the four papers focus on a variety of empirical contexts, but also on a variety of institutional concepts, ranging from institutional change (Rayamajhee *et al.* 2024), to institutional resilience (Buchen 2024), and constitutional compliance (Choutagunta *et al.* 2024). The next section seeks to bring together the four papers and draw lessons for institutional research.

Ways of bringing them together

Comparing the papers in this symposium, we find four different types of formal-informal institution interactions (see Table 1): An antagonistic relationship between formal and informal institutions that

Table 1. Summing up

Paper	Formal informal institution interaction	Type of crisis and reaction	Process of change/resilience	Actors of change or resilience	Questions for future research
Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis (2024)	Antagonism and substitution: Two incompatible logics competing	Exogenous economic shock triggering a policy change and an endogenous contestation	Crowding out/superseding if formal institutions are strong enough Resilience if informal institutions strong enough	Political actors as rule makers – community actors as rule takers	What makes communal rules resilient? When does it crumble? How can top-down state-made institutions be designed and implemented by building on rather than crowding out communal rules?
Buchen (2024)	Complementing: Formal institution reinforcing informal institution	Exogenous economic shock incentivising endogenous defection	Formal institutions reinforcing informal ones by creating certainty	Economic actors as rule takers	How do different types of crises affect the propensity to cooperate? What features of formal institutions are needed to support the norm of cooperation? When are shocks too large for resilience?
Choutagunta <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Complementing: Informal institution enforcing formal institution	Exogenous economic, political, and natural shocks relaxing constraints on endogenous compliance	Formal institution may break down due to non-compliance with informal norm depending on strength of shock	Political actors as rule takers	What features need to be in place to make constitutions resilient to crises and limit the decline in the norm of constitutional compliance?
Rayamajhee <i>et al.</i> (2024)	Competition and co-existence: Two alternative logics performing equivalent function	Exogenous natural disaster triggering competition	Change in the <i>extent</i> of formal and informal institutional domains Informal institutions <i>indirectly</i> challenging formal institutions	Community actors as rule takers	How can different institutional domains be made to reinforce each other in times of crisis rather than compete?

rely on incompatible logics; a complementary relationship whereby the formal institution reinforces the informal one, which in turn is the one producing the outcome in question; a different type of complementarity where the informal norm (constitutional compliance) reduces practices of non-compliance with the formal institutional rules while a defection from the informal institutional norm would lead to a breakdown of the formal institution; and a relationship of competition and substitution where formal and informal institutions rely on alternative logics, but perform an equivalent function. The range of interactions between formal and informal institutions covered in the papers included in this symposium is in line with previous studies (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004) and hints at the complexity of institutional phenomena. A key question for future institutional research is whether such different types of interactions are systematically related to a certain type of antecedents.

Given the topic of this symposium, a first factor that may explain different types of interactions is the type of crisis that the studies investigate (see Table 1, column 3): Buchen (2024) and Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis (2024) both look at external economic shocks as a form of crisis, but in both cases these shocks are followed by changes in actors' behaviours that then entail an endogenous, system-threatening political crisis. Choutagunta *et al.* (2024) investigate a broader range of exogenous crises, including natural disasters but also wars, military coups, and financial crises, but like Buchen (2024) they are interested in how this external shock incentivises actors' compliance or defection behaviour relative to an informal institutional norm – here the norm of constitutional compliance. Finally, Rayamahjee *et al.* (2024) focus on a different type of exogenous shocks, namely a natural disaster (a hurricane), which also leads to changed behaviours that – in this case – lead community-based informal institutions to compete with the formal state-made institutions.

The papers thus hint at different ways in which shocks that are exogenous to the system (these are often described as critical junctures – Collier & Collier, 1991) trigger processes that lead to a systemic instability. In the first case, the instability results from a direct contestation of existing (informal) institutions. In the second and third cases, the instability consists of the (threat of) defection from the behaviour expected under the informal institution (norms of cooperation) or a deviation from constitutional compliance, respectively. In the fourth case, the exogenous shock leads to the switching from the formal to the informal institutional domain to address societal needs.

The different types of interactions and different types of crises and knock-on effects may in turn partly be explained by different conceptualisations of formal and informal institutions, which imply that different types of actors are at the centre of the analysis.

The papers in this symposium almost always operationalised formal institutions as legal rules, in a variety of forms: from policy directives, to laws, to the text of the constitution. While these definitions differ in scale, they all imply a focus on the legal framework. One important distinction however is between the constitution, which is partly meant to guard against arbitrary or self-seeking decisions by the government (and is the focus of Choutagunta *et al.*, 2024 only), and policy directives or laws that – contrastingly – seek to enable and constrain the actions of 'ordinary' citizens and organisations as rule takers (as seen in Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis, 2024 and Buchen, 2024). The distinction between the two is reminiscent of Glaeser *et al.*'s (2004) call to differentiate between 'true' formal rules (as rules constraining the ruler, and incentivising good policies) and *de facto* formal rules that are mediated through policies, as one may find good policies or laws, even in contexts where checks and balances on the state are missing. Rayamahjee *et al.* (2024) adopt a different definition of formal institutions, captured through the size of the state and thus focusing on the reach of the government, rather than its quality².

These differences in the conceptualisation of formal institutions, while not necessarily minor, are dwarfed by the different conceptualisations of *informal* institutions. This is not surprising. Many have emphasised that the conceptualisation of informal institutions is more complex but also more varied (Hodgson, 2024). This is well illustrated by the contributions to this symposium, as the differences are

²See Hodgson (2024) for a more exhaustive discussion of the ways in which formal institutions can be conceptualised, and a more nuanced discussion of operationalisation.

striking. Buchen (2024) defines informal institutions as a norm to cooperate, which he links to social capital as shared values. In contrast, Rayamajhee *et al.* (2024) also define informal institutions as social capital but as embodied in non-state actors or organisations that make up what is sometimes labelled the civil society. In other words, this definition of social capital focuses on the visible structure and membership of civil society, rather than its cognitive dimension embodied in norms. Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis (2024) define informal institutions as the systems of rules communities have developed through time to manage common resources. In these three cases, the focus is thus on a relevant social group and their social capital, with this group being either inclusive (if the focus is on overall norms of cooperation, implying universalism and generalised trust for example) or exclusive (if the focus is on the in-group managing a specific resource) and with the institutions being measured through its structure and/or through a cognitive dimension (i.e. shared norms). Finally, Choutagunta *et al.*'s (2024) key concept of 'constitutional compliance' constitutes an informal institutional norm, which gives rise to practices of compliance or non-compliance that evolve under this institutional system. This comes close to Ostrom's (2005) distinction between rules-in-form and rules-in-use, but here with a focus on government and elite groups and their compliance to rules aiming specifically at placing checks and balances on their actions.

It would therefore seem that the definitions and frameworks adopted in the contributions to this symposium are incommensurable and cannot speak to each other. Hodgson (2024) is right in pointing out the possible confusion that can arise from grouping such different conceptualisations under one umbrella term. Indeed, the concern that '[t]here is no consensus on how to conceptualise either institutions themselves or the process of institutional change' (Kingston & Caballero, 2009: 151) has been voiced many times. Yet, due to disciplinary specialisations and silos, it is unlikely we will see a convergence on a set definition of formal or informal institutions any time soon.

At the same time, taken together these conceptualisations hint at the complexity of institutional arrangements, that are constituted by state-made formal rules (laws, policies, constitutions), the informal rules they rely on for functioning properly (compliance) or that they – in turn – support (societal cooperation), and the extent and quality of these formal and informal rules (constitutional quality; reach of state-made institutions). Given the complexity of institutional arrangements and their interactions, it is little wonder that the contributions to this symposium place the focus on different aspects.

Institutional theory has for a long time attributed much importance to external shocks as drivers of institutional change by 'puncturing equilibria' (Baumgartner *et al.*, 2009; Collier & Collier, 1991). Historical institutionalists have challenged this view arguing that much change may hide behind seeming continuity and resilience (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). This has led to an interest in processes of incremental institutional change, which is not radical but transformative in the long run (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Our focus on crises as moments of institutional change or persistence contributes to this debate. In particular, the contributions to this symposium clearly show that the distinction between incremental and abrupt change may be too simplistic. Even major crises – such as Hurricane Katrina in the Southern USA or the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 – do not lead to a straightforward process of rupture/unfreezing of institutional arrangements, change, and stabilisation. Instead, the papers show both empirically and conceptually, that abrupt change leads to complex processes that mix resilience, resistance, and radical change in which formal and informal institutions interact in various ways. Antagonism, two-way complementarity (informal institutions reinforcing formal ones; formal institutions stabilising informal ones), and competition are just three types of interactions which an exogenous shock may trigger. Whether or not the process that ensues from each one of these interactions will systematically lead to (radical) change or resilience is a question for future research. Importantly the papers presented here often focus on describing adjustments that allow for a relative persistence, in the sense of maintaining specific functions of the institutional structure (e.g. cooperation, social service provision or persistence of a mode of management). However, this persistence may hide changes to the nature and role of the underlying institutions, potentially creating areas of fragilities. For instance, how much policy and economic pressure can communities who

manage water resources in traditional ways sustain before they crumble? Will a stronger or renewed shock prevent formal rules from compensating for lower incentive to cooperate?

Future studies thus could investigate which ones of these interactions are more likely to see a crisis give rise to transformative change and which ones are more likely to result in resilience or only incremental change. Processes of complementarity may be the most likely candidates for generating resilience, since formal and informal institutions ‘pull’ in the same direction. In the case of antagonism, whether or not radical change will result may depend on the strength of the challenge and the strength of the pre-crisis institutional arrangement. In Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis’s (2024) paper, the informal arrangement does resist the change from formal institutions, but for how long? In the case of competition and substitution, the type of institutional arrangement may change radically – from formal to informal in the case analysed by Rayamajhee *et al.* (2024) – but the outcome or societal function of the new system may be functionally equivalent to that of the pre-crisis formal arrangement (or not). This hints at the need to additionally distinguish between the means and the outcomes of a given institutional arrangement to fully appreciate the nature of institutional change after crises. Future research could build on these insights to investigate more systematically what type of interactions make radical change or resilience more likely.

Taken together, one important lesson from the symposium is that institutional phenomena are more complex than the simple distinction between formal and informal institutions allows for. Therefore, our conceptual toolbox to capture institutional phenomena (formal or informal) may need to be clarified and the tools sharpened.

We also need to ask the question what is the ‘missing link’ between the contributions to this symposium? Is there a missing concept that would help us shed light on their joint contribution or would facilitate drawing comparisons in their findings? Is there a dimension, that if made explicit, would support clarifying the typology of cases encountered or would lead to a more effective taxonomy (as argued in Hodgson, 2019)? In the next section, we suggest that looking at the actors of change/resilience may provide some element of response.

Levels of institutional change and agency

Existing institutionalist work tends to distinguish different levels of institutional arrangements with varying propensities to change. Thus, Ostrom (2005) – based on the definition of institutions as the ‘rules of the game’ – distinguishes operational rules that govern daily interactions, from collective choice rules that determine how operational rules are chosen, and from constitutional rules that determine how the collective choice rules are decided on. Similarly, the well-known typology suggested by Williamson (2000) distinguishes between four levels of institutions (from informal institutions at ‘level 1’ to day-to-day interactions between actors at ‘level 4’). Williamson’s (2000) typology only recognises actors as constrained by rules in their daily interactions (what the author refers to as ‘level 4’). Moving up from ‘level 4’, the institutional structure is described as the frame within which these actors evolve, but in this typology, they are essentially absent from the way rules are conceptualised and measured. However, informal institutions (level 1) can only shape formal institutions (levels 2 and 3) through the mediation of actors: it is these actors who carry within them the values and norms that will shape their behaviour, it is also these actors who create and maintain the networks that perpetuate these rules (e.g. Douarin, 2024). Recognising this can facilitate distinguishing between approaches that focus on formal institutions that constrain the state versus formal institutions that are a universal legal framework. For the former, the elite or the state is the most relevant actor in shaping implementation, while the latter are impacted by a much broader range of actors, from the judge and lawyers, or law-enforcement officers, who act to implement them, to the citizens who support or not legal changes, and tolerate deviations, depending on their alignment with local *mores* (Amini *et al.*, 2022).

The contributions to this symposium focus on phenomena situated at different levels of such hierarchies and suggest different roles that informal institutions and actors subject to them play in these settings.

Two of the papers focus on communal rules and norms governing local commodities and markets (Arvanitidis & Papagiannitsis, 2024; Rayamajhee *et al.* 2024) – which correspond with Williamson’s level 1 – and (explicitly or implicitly) explore the interaction of this level with formal institutional factors generated by the state. In other words, these two papers investigate the interaction between lower-level operational rules and higher-level formal rules emanating from the state. Both papers suggest that informal institutions present alternatives to formal institutions by way of governing a given economic or societal space. The co-existence of formal and informal institutions can be either one of competition but co-existence – as Rayamajhee *et al.*, 2024 imply – or antagonism – as Arvanitidis & Papagiannitsis’s (2024) account suggests. In both cases, however, the key factor explaining what type of interaction emerges – antagonism or competition – depends on the actors involved. In one case, local community actors oppose change imposed by political actors as rule makers in the formal institutional sphere; in the other community actors provide an alternative to the formal institutional arrangement, challenging the formal institutions indirectly on the ground, but not directly.

The paper by Choutagunta *et al.*, (2024) on constitutional compliance focuses on constitutional rules. In addition to the formal-informal institutions distinction, it brings in a Ostromian-Northian distinction between the ‘rules on the books’ versus the ‘rules in practice’. It investigates how different types of crises affect the link between constitutional rules and constitutional practice. In other words, here the focus is on how institutions translate into actors’ behaviours in situations of crises. Informal institutions are key to understand that translation. Indeed, the paper can be read as investigating how an informal institution – the social norm of constitutional compliance – affects the governing elite’s behaviours towards the formal constitution. In other words, the focus in this paper is on a different type of actors than the previously mentioned ones, namely political elite actors who are themselves subject to formal institutions and as such rule takers.

Finally, Buchen’s paper focuses on the impact of crises on informal institutions defined as high-level norms of cooperation and defection – and the role that formal institutions – defined as a functioning legal system – play in maintaining the informal norm through a crisis. The focus is on how economic actors as rule takers change or maintain their practices following an external shock. As such, there is a link between Buchen’s paper and Choutagunta *et als.’* in terms of the link between (cooperative/compliant) practices and formal institutional rules. Both hint at the importance of a Veblenian notion of ‘habits’ or Bowles’ concept of ‘internalised norms’ that link preferences and behaviours. ‘Preferences are endogenous when one’s experiences result in durable changes in one’s behavior in a given situation’ (Bowles, 2004: 378; cited in Kingston & Caballero, 2009: 174).

Based on this, one way of tying these papers together, and of understanding the essential ways in which they differ, is thus by focussing on the actors who are ‘caught’ between formal and informal institutional spheres. In the wider institutional literature in management studies, recent contributions have suggested to revive the age-old debate about structure *versus* agency by conceiving not so much of institutions as inhabited by actors (the traditional embeddedness perspective – Granovetter, 1985), but rather actors as inhabited by institutions (Bitetkine *et al.*, 2020). This formulation of inhabited actors recalls the importance of processes of internalisation of institutional rules and pressures by social actors and chimes with both a Veblenian idea of habit or Bowles’ notion of internalisation. Inhabited actors are where formal institutions meet informal institutions. Thus, Buchen’s study shows that economic actors may internalise the (informal) social norm of cooperation when formal institutions support this process. (Political) actors can also explain why and when a crisis leads to increasing deviations from *de jure* constitutional rules (Choutagunta *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, members of local communities who have *interiorised* collective governance rights of water as customary, explain in which context formal and informal institutions may clash and lead to an antagonistic relationship. In the same vein, it is the adherence to community relationships amongst community actors in Louisiana that generated the social capital (informal institution), which made possible the reliance on informal economic organisations, rather than state provided support, after Hurricane Katrina.

This focus on actors and internalised norms is also in line with recent interdisciplinary research that has explicitly theorised the role of social networks – and hence actors and their relationships – in

making informal institutions more or less resilient when faced with formal institutional change (Minbaeva *et al.*, 2023). Actors and relationships between them thus constitute a distinct level of social reality that links informal to formal institutional spheres. Moving actors back to the centre, as actor-centred institutionalism has advocated for a long time (Scharpf, 1997; Jackson, 2010), will allow researchers not only to fill in the gap between the formal and the informal, but also to bridge concepts as diverse as norms, conventions, laws, and regulations.

Overall to understand institutional resilience *versus* change after a crisis, it seems that several factors can be highlighted based on this symposium: (i) what type of formal-informal institution interaction results from the crisis (ii) which in turn may be determined by the type of crises (exogenous economic shock, political crisis, natural disaster); (iii) and what internal process of resilience or change it triggers. This will, in turn, depend on (iv) the type of actors that are involved and how they react to the crises based on their internalised norms and habits. Table 1 attempts to summarise these aspects and provides possible questions that future research still needs to answer to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of crises on formal and informal institutional change and resilience.

Conclusions

The contributions to this symposium illustrate the richness of institutional phenomena in the social world. They reflect the diversity of institutional concepts that require further research in the context of crises and informality: institutional change, institutional resilience, constitutional compliance.

However, this richness also poses certain challenges to researchers. There may be more diversity of institutional phenomena out there than our conceptual tool kit currently allows for, creating a temptation to stretch the meaning of the concept beyond usefulness (see Bothello *et al.*, 2019). Clarity is key here in order to further our understanding of the interaction between formal and informal institutional phenomena and concepts in times of crises.

We suggest that emphasising actors, as an often-overlooked aspect of institutions in the literature, calls for a nuancing of some of the most established frameworks used to conceptualise both formal and informal institutions. This is in line with recent research on ‘inhabited actors’ (Bitetkine *et al.*, 2020) who conceive of actor-institution relationship in terms not dissimilar to classical Veblenian notions of habits or internalisation of social norms. This seems a promising way to bridge the formal-informal divide by developing more nuanced and complex understandings of how the formal and informal interact via their impact on actors’ attitudes and practices. Such an approach could be used to nuance established ways of thinking about informal institutions, such as Voigt’s (2018) widely used framework. Voigt (2018) argued for the importance of measuring informal institutions as true reflection of societal norms shaping behaviour rather than personal attitudes. But especially models interested in change and resilience may need to put greater emphasis on how views are distributed throughout the population and the social structure of relevance that can impact on social enforcement, because changing views may for example only propagate if they have emerged among what some have called cultural entrepreneurs (e.g. Mokyr, 2017). In the paper by Choutagunta *et al.* (2024), the elite is presented as a key actor driving constitutional compliance, and non-compliance is explained through a political economy argument, recognising the relative balance of power. Then, when considering rules constraining the population overall, should we not also recognise the balance of power shaping societal norms? Some specific social groups, as leaders or role models, can dominate social views making average assessment of values and beliefs irrelevant in time of change or at the very least unreliable (as in Kuran’s 1997 preference falsification model).

With this in mind, a key lesson for us from editing this symposium is that it might be unrealistic to strive for a unifying framework to the myriads of approaches to investigate institutional resilience and change in the face of crises. It may also be undesirable: the strands of literature embodied in the multiple conceptual frameworks that can be applied are individually too rich to subside. But that diversity makes clarity even more crucial. Some clarity could be gained from looking at evidence accumulated from all these traditions, if more space was given to the actors who navigate the

institutional context being investigated. Without emphasising the groups that are constrained by the formal rules investigated (the state or the population at large?), and the actors that have the agency to follow, bend or change these rules, important conceptual nuances can be overlooked, comparisons across frameworks are made more difficult, and wrong inference can ensue. Interestingly, giving a more important role to actors, understanding their motivations and the distribution of power is in line with what academics focusing on progressive institutional change have been arguing for decades (see for example Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). That this call has not been answered yet probably reflects the complexity and ambition of such a project. It is still a necessary project.

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