ZONES OF MEANING, *LEITIDEEN*, INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS – AND PRACTICES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON SHARED MEANING STRUCTURES

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ABSTRACT

We review and discuss theoretical approaches from both within and outside of institutional organization theory with regard to their specific insights on what we call "regionalized zones of meaning" – that is, clusters of social meaning that can be distinguished from one another, but at the same time interact and, in specific configurations, form distinct societies. We suggest that bringing meaning structures back into focus is important and may counter-balance the increasing preoccupation of institutional scholars with micro-foundations and the related emphasis on micro-level activities. We bring together central ideas from research on institutional logics with some foundational insights by Max Weber, Alfred Schütz, and German sociologists Rainer Lepsius and Karl-Siegbert Rehberg. In doing so, we also take a cautious look at "practices" by discussing their potential place and role in an institutional framework as well as by exploring generative conversations with proponents of practice theory. We wish to

provide inspiration for institutional research interested in shared meaning structures, their relationships to one another, and how they translate into institutional orders.

Keywords: Leitideen; institutional logics; practices; meaning structures; institutional orders; phenomenological institutional theory

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, micro-perspectives and the micro-foundations of institutions, accompanied by a focus on actors and the perhaps somewhat overemphasized concept of agency, have been en vogue in institutional organization theory. Such focus has spurred much research and insights (but has also fueled a counter-movement to revisit and emphasize the macro-level aspects of social and organizational life; see, for instance, Haack, Sieweke, & Wessel, 2019; Hwang, Colyvas, & Drori, 2019; Powell & Rerup, 2017; Steele, Hannigan, Glaser, Toubiana, & Gehman, 2021). In a similar vein, some studies in the growing body of practice-driven research have entered the "danger zone" of overemphasizing the micro-level and the individual. Related concerns are commonly referred to as the "burger-flipping" problem (e.g., Burgelman et al., 2018; Smets, Aristidou, & Whittington, 2017). Our article differs from approaches that either foreground the micro or the macro in that it remains committed to the co-constitutive relationship of meaning structures and individual cognition and behavior (Lounsbury & Wang, 2020; Meyer & Vaara, 2020).

Modern societies are characterized by a plurality of potential meanings provided by a differentiated system of social institutions (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). In this article, we denote such institutionalized and internally structured sets of *Deutungsangebote* [interpretive options] by the generic term *regionalized zones of meaning*, although we are acutely aware that no single term can do justice to the numerous different theoretical approaches.[1] Berger and Luckmann (1967) alone evoke the concepts of provinces of meaning, sub-universes and partial universes, all of which represent slightly different variations on one central idea: That the social is differentiated into zones of meaning. These zones exert their effects "regionally." They can be distinguished from one another, but at the same time they interact and, in specific configurations, form distinct societies.

Our primary objective in writing this article is to present and discuss regionalized zones of meaning from the perspectives of various institutional approaches. One focus of our reflections is the concept of *institutional logics*. We distinguish between the initial formulation by Friedland and Alford (1991), which was developed further by Roger Friedland and colleagues (e.g., Friedland, 2009, 2013; Friedland, Mohr, Roose, & Gardinali, 2014), and the institutional logics perspective advocated primarily in the work of Patricia Thornton, William Ocasio, and Mike Lounsbury (see, in particular, Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). We supplement and contrast these two approaches to institutional logics with perspectives drawn from outside of institutional organization theory: insights

from central works by Alfred Schütz and Max Weber as well as the concepts of *Leitideen* [guiding ideas] by Rainer Lepsius (e.g., Lepsius, 1990, 1995, 1997) and symbolic orders by Karl-Siegbert Rehberg (e.g., Rehberg, 1994, 2002, 2003). We neither suggest that all these approaches are entirely compatible, nor shall we attempt to systematically compare them with one another or elaborate their many differences. Our aim is to shed light on the central idea that accounts for their "family resemblance": that meaning is structured in separate, distinct, yet inter-related clusters. Our own approach is a phenomenological institutional theory, inspired by Schütz, Berger, and Luckmann that we will briefly outline in the next section (see also Meyer, 2008, 2019).

In addition, throughout this article, we will also cautiously explore how region-alized zones of meaning may be related to notions of practices, that is, what the role and place of practices may be in such a conceptualization. According to Smets et al. (2017), "practice and institutional theorists have simply been look-ing at opposite sides of the same coin" (p. 366) and institutional logics are "a natural conceptual segue between institutional and practice theories" (p. 373), and, indeed, the term "practice" is frequently used in literature on institutional logics. On the other hand, neither Berger and Luckmann (1967) nor Lepsius, for instance, use the term in any systematic way, and most practice theorists shy away from the term "institution." For us, the place of practices in an institu-tional framework is not straightforward – not least due to the many different and often unclear definitions of practice (see, for instance, the different perspectives in Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001). However, it seems promising to reflect upon the concept's value with regard to institutions and zones of meaning. Conversely, (at least some) practice theorists are quite skeptical of such embrace (e.g., Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017).

We intend the main takeaway from this article to be a refocusing of institu-tional theory on zones of shared meaning, their spheres of validity, forms of rationality, types of actors and actions they endorse, and orders that exist within them. We argue that for institutional theory this is a necessary counterbalance to the alliance of agentic and strategic views with micro-perspectives that regard institutions as aggregations of individual choices (see Meyer, Kornberger, & Höllerer, 2021). We also explore opportunities for conversations with practice theory. We are quite skeptical that merely "implanting" practice theory, or its vocabulary, is a promising way forward. Instead, we reflect on potentially fruit-ful conceptualizations of practice in relation to institution. Our starting point for doing this is meaning – not subjective or intersubjective, but shared zones of meaning. We conclude that there are constructive ways forward, but some serious navigation through the thickets of both traditions is required.

We commence with a brief "prologue" that spells out our initial intuitions about practices from our own phenomenological institutional perspective. Then, in the remainder of this article, we elaborate on the family resemblance among different approaches to regionalized zones of meaning and attempt to locate practices within them. We will do so based on three central dimensions: a mean-ing zone's internal structure, its respective sphere of validity and effectiveness [*Wirkmacht*], and the interrelationships across multiple zones.

PROLOGUE: GAUGING PRACTICES WITH AN INSTITUTIONALIST "CONCEPT BOX"

Our point of departure are reciprocal typifications of habitualized actions by types of actors that become institutionalized as they transcend their context of origin, travel across time and space, and are passed on as social facts to actors who were not involved in the process of their typification (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). In such an action-based and type-based understanding, an institution is instantiated through a "package" of ideational, cognitive, behavioral, discursive, material/visual, emotional, and normative elements (Meyer, Jancsary, Höllerer, & Boxenbaum, 2018). Institutions and their appresentations have an indexical relationship, that is, they are co-constitutive of each other. A core danger for institutionalism lies in the reification of institutions: "The basic 'recipe' for the reification of institutions," Berger and Luckmann (1967, p. 107) warn, "is to bestow on them an ontological status independent of human activity and signification." Hence, it is important to stress that institutions are instantiated in their enactment (but ever only partially, as we will emphasize below); they persist beyond their immediate instantiation as internalized structures of expectation. Institutions have no ontological status beyond the activities and processes that enact them either in the social realm or the realm of individuals' consciousness:

> From a phenomenological perspective, institutions are not beds that embed persons, in which they lie however comfortably or uncomfortably. Institutions are not buildings or islands, where people dwell or which they inhabit. (Meyer, 2019, p. 40)

In order to initiate a conversation on how to locate practices within the conceptual space outlined above, we approach from two complementary directions. The first one explores where to locate practices in the process of institutionalization; the second addresses how institutions are instantiated.

The *process of institutionalization* runs from idiosyncratic, subjectively meaningful externalizations to typified, socially meaningful institutions. We assume that most scholars would agree that the conceptualization of practices needs to go beyond defining them as idiosyncratic or even recurrent activities that are only subjectively meaningful – such merely subjectively meaningful activities would be neither be practices nor institutions. From here on, consensus (also among practice theorists) wanes and the relationship between institutions and practices gets murky: Institutionalization requires typification and transcendence of temporal and spatial context of origin. If defined as socially meaningful activities, practices may or may not be institutionalized. If, however, practices are to be "scripted" – with scripts being composed of social roles and typifications – they come close to the type-based and action-based definition of institutions. Lounsbury and Crumley (2007), for instance, define practices as "sets of material activities that are fundamentally interpenetrated and shaped by broader cultural frameworks such as categories, classifications, frames, and other kinds of ordered belief systems." Not surprisingly, the authors conclude that "practice is best understood as a kind of institution" (pp. 995–996).

The second route we take to pin down practices within an institutional framework regards *how institutions are instantiated*. We will argue below that institutions as "packages" are symbolically indexed with various embodiments/instantiations, practices being one of them. To conceptualize practices as scripted *behavioral* manifestations (i.e., typified activities) would be a relatively easy way to incorporate (not to say: swallow) practices. However, using practice simply as a synonym for typified activities would add little conceptual value from an institutional theory perspective (besides the fact that we strongly doubt that many practice theorists would be willing to buy into this). A distinct conceptual space could be occupied by grasping a practice as a *typified set of multiple instantiations*, interwoven by shared understandings. We leave open for now to what extent practices would include symbolic instantiations aside from behavioral ones (such as, for instance, material objects, spaces, bodies, etc.) and also encompass values, purposes, emotions, etc. in addition to shared understandings – or whether these elements are linked to, but primarily external to practices. The more these are defined as internal to practices, the closer practices come to resemble full institutions as packages of ideational, cognitive, behavioral, discursive, material/visual, emotional, and normative elements.

Striding through institutional theory's conceptual thicket along these two routes, we tentatively conclude that a place for practices lies somewhere between sequences of socially meaningful activities and full institutions. With regard to the question of how this would resonate with practice theory, we can do no more than offer, humbly, our scattered interpretations of a vast and diverse literature in the hope that this is accepted as invitation for conversation. One of the three "prominent notion[s] of practice" that Theodore Schatzki (1996, p. 90) identifies in the literature focuses on "performing an action," that is, "the do-ing, the actual activity" (Schatzki, 1996 p. 90). Such a definition leans more toward the activity-end of the spectrum; the overlaps with the concept of institution are relatively small. Schatzki's (2002) notion of practices as "open, temporally unfolding nexuses of actions" (p. 72), "organized" through practical understandings, rules, a "teleoaffective" structure (i.e., purposes, ends, and emotions), and general understandings encompasses all kinds of instantiations (and, hence, moves far along the second route), but for us is indeterminate as to whether this "bundle" (Schatzki, 1996, p. 104) is institutionalized or not. Reckwitz (2002) also stresses that a practice is a "block" and

> consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. (p. 249)

In addition, he emphasizes that a practice "is a 'type' of behavior and understanding that appears at different locales and at different points in time and is carried out by different body/minds" (p. 250). From there, it does not seem to be far to get to our proposed understanding of institutions as "packages." When Schatzki (1996, p. 115) suggests that "practices thus 'constitute worlds' in the sense of articulating the intelligibility of nexuses of entities (objects, people, and events), specifying their normativized interrelated meanings," he paves the way back to our main theme: zones of meaning.

THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF ZONES OF MEANING

We here commence with the basic observation that modern societies are differentiated into internally structured and interrelated sets of meanings. Around this observation and especially concerning questions such as the range of validity of such zones of meaning, what holds them together, or in which way they structure the lives of people, a rich institutional literature has evolved. However, this literature utilizes an equally rich terminology with blurry overlaps and/or distinctions. For instance, institutional spheres, domains, logics, or orders are sometimes used interchangeably, and at other times denote concepts that differ from each other (and we confess to have fallen guilty of this as well). In this article, however, it is necessary to disentangle certain terminology.

   Although no single label has emerged as dominant, many conceptions of sets of shared meanings utilize spatial metaphors. Berger and Luckmann (1967), for instance, speak of socially segregated *sub-universes*; Schütz and Luckmann (1973) of *finite provinces of meaning*. Each such province can be conferred the "accent of reality" (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973, p. 22). In Schatzki's practice theory, too, complex integrative practices constitute *domains of social life* (Schatzki, 1996). In the remainder, we will use the term *zone of meaning* in the general sense of an institutionalized and internally structured cluster of meanings.[2] The terms "sphere" or "domain" are used to capture which areas of life (*Lebens- und Handlungszusammenhänge*) are governed by such zones. The number of specific areas that are differentiated, as well as the bases for such differentiation, vary historically and culturally. Most modern societies, for example, differentiate economic activity from the political sphere, religion, or the family (see our discussion of spheres of validity below). To answer the question what accounts for the clustering (i.e., what holds zones together), institutional literature refers to substances, *Leitideen*, rationality criteria, or logics. We will discuss these in more detail in the following two subsections. Specific substances, *Leitideen*, rationality criteria, logics, etc. structure life in spheres and domains in distinct ways – they translate into a particular order. For Schütz and Luckmann (1973), in each province, knowledge is distributed, and actors are positioned in a specific way. Berger and Luckmann's (1967) *sub-universes* are socially segregated and characterized by role specialization and role-specific knowledge. Weber's *value spheres* unfold their meanings by being translated into specific *Lebensordnungen* [orders of living] through institutionalization (Schwinn, 2005). Institutional orders encompass typified actors (including types of organizations) and activities, typical relationships between these actors (including power structures, hierarchies and "command posts," shared categories, and distributions of rights and responsibilities), as well as typical governance mechanisms. Together, they constitute the infrastructure of an institutional order. Within the economic sphere, planned economies guided by communism gave rise to a different institutional order than market economies guided by capitalism; but even within capitalist market economies, Anglo-American versus continental European orders differ (as in liberal versus coordinated market economies). A similar argument can be made for the diversity within, for instance, monotheist religions, or within the Judeo-Christian

tradition. And for the sphere of family, the traditional patriarchal order guided by the idea of the "pater familias" is challenged, for instance, by patchwork families. Multiple institutional orders within the same sphere point to what we called elsewhere *intra*-institutional pluralism resp. complexity (Meyer & Höllerer, 2016); multiple spheres within one society refer to *inter*-institutional pluralism, and society as *inter-institutional system* (e.g., Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012). All spheres of life governed by a single order refer to what Goffman (1961) calls "total institutions."

Identification and Demarcation of Zones of Meaning

The central assumption in the literature is that a zone of meaning represents some sort of *Eigenwelt* [a world of its own], possessing a certain *internal coherence and consistency* which make it perceptible as separate and distinct.

Friedland and Alford (1991) describe society an inter-institutional system. Each zone has a central *logic* that constitutes the specific organizing principle and translates into a particular institutional order. This coherent organizing principle is what lends actions within an institutional order specific meaning. Each concrete logic is "symbolically grounded, organizationally structured, politically defended, and technically and materially constrained, and hence ha[s] specific historical limits" (Friedland & Alford, 1991, pp. 248–249). This is why it is important to note that the institutional orders they describe – market, state, democracy, family, and religion – are the ones that characterize the "contemporary, capitalist West" (p. 233). With regard to practices, Friedland (2013) holds that "the notion of institutional logics [is] immanent in nested "symbolically defined" practices" (p. 432). According to Friedland et al. (2014), an institutional logic exists wherever "subjects, practices, and objects *cohere as cultural grammars*" (p. 334 [emphasis added]). Thornton et al. (2012) emphasize that every institutional order is marked by a *specific rationality* outlining and delimiting what is considered rational and is represented by "cultural symbols and material practices" (p. 54) particular to that order. Consequently, the institutional logics literature suggests that coherence and consistency require that practices (which remain mostly only vaguely defined) be infused with meanings associated with a particular logic. Such perspective locates practices within an institutional order, but situates subjects, objects, and cultural symbols "outside" of practices (or at least mentions them alongside and on the same conceptual level as practices) – which stands in some contrast to the work of Schatzki (e.g., 1996; 2002). For Schatzki, integrative practices that constitute social domains, such as legal practices or religious practices, are held together by the practice's "organization," that is, shared understandings, rules and principles, and teleoaffective structures under which he subsumes ends, beliefs, emotions, etc. According to Smets et al. (2017), Schatzki's "general understandings" that organize practices come close to institutional logics, as they "inject bundles of otherwise trivial activities with order and meaning" (p. 373). In contrast, Nicolini and Monteiro (2017) strongly reject the idea that practices become meaningful as instantiations of institutional logics, claiming that there is no need for "hidden forces" presiding over practices.

Coherence and consistency as central criteria for zones of meaning also exist in institutional approaches outside organization theory. For instance, Lepius' *Leitideen* are abstract ideas that guide action (e.g., Lepsius, 1989, 1990, 1997). A *Leitidee* is substantiated and made concrete through *rationality criteria* – "behavioral norms, adherence to which is considered 'rational' and which become independent of subjective motivations and interests as a model for orientation" (Lepsius, 1995, p. 395 [own translation]) – and instantiated through various forms of manifestations that symbolically give them presence, form, and stability. Drawing on Weber, Lepsius suggests that rationality criteria involve "the *formation and enforcement of standards, rules and procedures* that systematize behavior in certain contexts and render it foreseeable and intersubjectively controllable" (Lepsius, 1989, p. 216 [emphasis in original; own translation]). Thus, as in Weber's work, rationalization may occur to different degrees, progress in different directions, and follow different criteria. Weber (1988) emphasizes that the rationality specific to each value sphere has logical or teleological implications. Schwinn (2005) describes this characteristic of Weber's value spheres as an interpretive, cognitive, ethical, or aesthetic unity. Schütz and Luckmann (1973) emphasize that each finite province of meaning encompasses lived experiences that are consistent and compatible with regard to a certain "style."

(Relative) coherence and consistency within regionalized zones of meaning are a *conditio sine qua non* of such zones. Without them, no shared interpretations are identifiable. Put differently: Only a certain coherence and consistency in – depending on the author and research tradition – logic, cultural grammar, style, rationality criteria, etc. make experiences and actions within a zone of meaning compatible and socially meaningful. Conversely, the zone exists only in such experiences. Nonetheless, coherence and consistency within a zone of meaning are never absolute. Friedland and Alford (1991), for instance, point out that the logic of the capitalist market exhibits internal contradictions. A similar argument is made by Thornton et al. (2012) who emphasize that internal contradictions are always present because "institutional logics do not generate cultural hegemony" (p. 163).

Regardless of the reason, insufficient coherence and consistency within a zone of meaning represent a potential impetus for endogenous institutional change. The present discussion in institutional theory leaves open, however, at what point diminishing coherence may cause a zone of meaning to "dissolve" due to a lack of guiding, structuring, and ordering capacity.

Zones of Meaning and Their Ordering Capacity

What is it that generates coherence and consistency within a zone of meaning and gives rise to distinct clusters with specific internal order? Most institutional theorists postulate the existence of a *core element* that holds the zone of meaning together by acting as its "center of gravity."

In Lepsius' work, it is the *Leitidee* that forms the core of a zone of meaning. *Leitideen* represent basic orientations that are characterized by the mutual conditionality of ideas, interests and institutions. Interests are defined in relation to

values; ideas are substantiated with reference to interests; and institutions shape interests and assign validity to ideas in certain contexts: "Interests, ideas, and institutions give rise to social orders that shape people's living conditions, identities, and value orientations" (Lepsius, 1990, p. 7 [own translation]). Lepsius' *Leitideen* resemble Weber's *ultimate values*, which value spheres reference (e.g., Weber, 1968). In fact, Lepsius' writings (see especially Lepsius, 1990) all build on Weber's insights regarding interests, ideas, and the emergence of value spheres, each of which has a specific direction of rationalization.

In the approach of Thornton et al. (2012), the role of a core element is taken by *cornerstone institutions*:

> Each of the institutional orders of the inter-institutional system is defined as a different domain of institutions *built around a cornerstone institution* that represents the cultural symbols and material practices that govern a commonly recognized area of life. (p. 53 [emphasis added])

The authors do not go into detail as to the specific characteristics and modes of operation of these core institutions.

Friedland, in his more recent works, highlights *institutional substances* that found the coherence of institutional orders and their logics. Friedland follows Aristotelian tradition in defining substance as "the foundation, or essence, of a thing that cannot be reduced to its accidental properties" (Friedland, 2009, p. 56); "the highest, most general value in a field" (Friedland, 2009, p. 64); "not objects at all, but rather non-observable reasons that," as he continues, "can only be phenomenalized through practice" (Friedland et al., 2014, p. 335). An institutional substance is "an absent presence towards and around which material practice incessantly moves, known only through this movement" (Friedland et al., 2014). Friedland here understands logics metaphorically as production functions that bring forth certain subjects and objects which are linked through practices. Accordingly, for Friedland et al. (2014), "institutional logics are troikas – object-practice-subject – regionalized into meaningful categories of social relations" (p. 337) which are also "regionalized orders of practice" (Friedland, 2013). Institutional organization theory broadly agrees on the existence of institutional core elements that are invisible and in principle neither tangible nor clearly definable and manifest themselves in manifold instances (Friedland, 2009; Leixnering & Höllerer, 2019). Thornton et al. (2012) describe institutional orders as "governance systems" that offer actors frames of reference. In their approach, too, the degree of internal coherence and consistency manifests in identities, schemata, practices, and forms of expression.

Although the gravitational force of core elements furthers consistency within zones of meaning, internal inconsistencies continue to exist and can be ascribed to a number of factors. Rationality criteria substantiate, but also interpret and specify an abstract *Leitidee*. Lepsius (1997) emphasizes that, as a rule, the content of a *Leitidee* is not "brought to life" in its entirety but that all instantiations that index it are exemplars and partial manifestations. Taken further, this implies that, at each point in time, an entire "bundle" of different instantiations (with practices understood as scripted bundles or organized nexuses of behavioral and other manifestations being one of them) invokes the same *Leitidee*, and that

the composition of these bundles may change over time. Such multiplicity is an important source of ambiguity, heterogeneity, and variation within specific institutional orders: Since any instantiation of a *Leitidee* is necessarily imperfect and never exhaustive, ambiguities, contradictions, and conflict are built-in features of institutional orders. Both Friedland (e.g., 2009) and Thornton et al. (2012) agree, albeit in slightly different ways, that no institutional logic is ever exhaustively instantiated, and that not every instantiation can be assigned exclusively to a single logic. In practice theory, similar ideas of heterogeneity and resulting tensions exist: Reckwitz (2002) stresses that any given practice "can be filled out by a multitude of single and often unique actions" (p. 250); Nicolini and Monteiro (2017) hold that practices, too, are fraught with inconsistencies and tensions – "conflicts may arise from the misalignment of the elements of a practice, from the competition between old and new ways of doing things, or from the introduction of novelty" (p. 113). The resulting versatility in creating connections among practices and activities is a crucial "lever" for initiating change.

For institutional theory, the danger is that the indexical relationship and co-constitutive character of substance and instances moves to the background in favor of a more causalistic flow from substance to instance. Maybe practice theorists have such reified version of institutional theory in mind when they fiercely

> oppose the idea that ordinary actions are the instantiation of something else […] regardless of how such imagined elements are called (e.g., structural mechanisms, institutional logics, norms and value systems). (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017, p. 117)

We would actually agree with them that there are no forces that "preside over," "lie behind," or otherwise cause instantiations, and that "[n]o macro level of institutions and structures over and beyond interrelated bundles need be reified" (Schatzki, 2005, p. 479).

While both approaches to institutional logics suggest that coherence and consistency within a zone of meaning manifest in identities, schemata, and practices, they seem to contrast practices with these other forms of expression, hence, locating, as it seems, practices on the level of behavioral instantiations. Practice theory also suggests a strong link between practice and identities, but tends to subsume these elements into practice: The rules governing a practice assign duties to subject positions, while the teleoaffective structure of the practice imbues subject positions with purposes and emotions. Accordingly – and here we fully agree – "a person's identity consists in the collection of subject positions she assumes in participating in a range of practices" (Schatzki, 1996, p. 179).

Appresenting ("Giving Presence To") Core Elements

Friedland and Alford (1991) define institutional logics as "a set of material practices and symbolic constructions" (p. 248) and thus evoke a distinction of the symbolic and the material (including material practices) that is often repeated in the literature. While the materiality of institutions – be it as materiality of physical objects or as material practices – has meanwhile received considerable scholarly attention (see Jones, Boxenbaum, & Anthony, 2013; Smets et al., 2017),

the symbolic aspect is often alluded to in passing but has received no systematic treatment in institutional organization theory. This is astonishing considering that the purported "infatuation with cultural myths and symbols" attested by, for instance, Charles Perrow (1985, p. 154) was a major point of criticism against early neoinstitutional theory.

In contrast, the conceptualization of the symbolic character of institutions is elaborated by Rehberg (1994, 2002, 2003) and also central for Lepsius (he refers to Rehberg in this respect). For Rehberg, institutions are a specific form of stabilizing social order. Their specificity lies "in the symbolic representation of ordering principles (e.g., 'Leitideen')" (Rehberg, 2002, p. 47 [own translation]). Such "giving presence" to ordering principles (or, as Schütz puts it, "appresentation") is crucial: The requirement to make the absent present, or the invisible visible, ultimately renders all institutional orders symbolic orders. Consequently, Rehberg defines institutions as social regulations that symbolically express the principles and validity claims of a social order. Rehberg does not suggest that institutions are exclusively symbolic but rather that institutional orders require what he terms "embodiment." This embodiment can occur through spatial symbols (e.g., place), material and visual artifacts (e.g., architecture, material objects, or images), the structuring of time (e.g., specific processes, or the construction of history), text (e.g., vocabularies), or – literally as "incarnate signs" (Rehberg, 2003, p. 40) – through bodily symbols (e.g., significant gestures, rituals or other scripted acts, or through the placement of bodies/objects in space and time). Rehberg does not mention practices explicitly, but we believe that his ideas would resonate with our considerations in the prologue: A practice as a typified set of multiple embodiments/instantiations symbolically indexes an institution.

In current institutional organization research, systematic conceptual discussions deal almost exclusively with linguistic and textual instantiations of zones of meaning, such as, for example, *vocabularies* (e.g., Loewenstein, Ocasio, & Jones, Maoret, Massa, & Svejenova, 2012; Ocasio, Loewenstein, & Nigam, 2015) or *frames* (e.g., Cornelissen & Werner, 2014; Meyer & Höllerer, 2010). We know much less about symbolic representations that go beyond (verbal) language. Recent work in multimodal institutional research stresses that the invisible core elements of zones of meaning are appresented through numerous symbolic systems (e.g., Höllerer et al., 2019). Semiotics employs the term *register* to denote a collective set of resources used to construe meaning within a specific institutional context (e.g., Matthiessen, 2015). Institutions are, in this sense, multimodal accomplishments and instantiated not only through verbal and visual registers (Jancsary, Meyer, Höllerer, & Boxenbaum, 2018) but also through material (Jones et al., 2012), aesthetic (Jones, Meyer, Jancsary, & Höllerer, 2017), or emotional registers (e.g., Toubiana & Zietsma, 2017). Jancsary et al. (2018) suggest registers of institutional orders to be genuinely multimodal. Such a view takes into account that the symbolization of institutional orders involves numerous forms of expression (for instance, verbal, visual, material, bodily) which interact with one another in a complex manner. Consequently, only a multimodal perspective will do justice to the manifold forms of embodiment as discussed above.

SPHERE OF VALIDITY AND *DEUTUNGSMACHT*

Spheres of Validity of Zones of Meaning and Their Rationality Criteria

Lepsius (e.g., 1997) describes the characteristics of institutions along five dimensions: the formation of rationality criteria; the demarcation of validity contexts; the development of sanctions enforcing the validity claim; the externalization of consequences and contingencies; and the structuring of conflicts between institutions. The first three are necessary conditions of institutions, the latter two address effects of institutionalization and draw attention to the interrelatedness and interdependencies. Hence, the differentiation of a specific sphere of validity is central to any institutionalization of a *Leitidee*: "The process of institutionalization comprises not only the concretization of a Leitidee [through rationality criteria], but also the determination of the context within which it is valid" (Lepsius, 1997, p. 59 [own translation]). That is why each additional differentiation and institutionalization inevitably increases the fragmentation of the social world. The more precisely demarked the sphere of validity is, that is, the higher the extent to which action within this context is oriented toward a single *Leitidee*, the greater is the focal *Leitidee*'s degree of institutionalization: "In cases where a syncretism of Leitideen prevails within a typical action situation […] the degree of institutionalization is low" (Lepsius, 1997, p. 28 [own translation]).

The effectiveness of zones of meaning is confined to certain social spheres within which they claim validity and unfold their ability to shape meanings and interpretations [*Deutungsmacht*]. The most general and broadest social space mentioned in the literature is society: Berger and Luckmann (1967) speak of differentiated or plural societies; Weber's value spheres are anchored within society; and Friedland and Alford (1991), too, conceive society to be an inter-institutional system marked by a plurality of institutional orders. Although Thornton et al. (2012) describe the inter-institutional system as ideal-typical in the Weberian sense and emphasize that institutional orders and the elemental categories that characterize them may vary depending on time and culture, empirical research on institutional logics has been found to be almost exclusively limited to the logics of the Western capitalistic world (e.g., Johansen & Waldorff, 2017). In this respect, Lepsius' point that the configuration of *Leitideen* (including their number, core features, and degree of institutionalization) is characteristic of the respective society – and therefore always to be analyzed as a specific empiric-historical constellation – is an important admonition for institutional organizational research. Examples for this are the *oikos* in which economic activity and family were a unity – their differentiation into two separated spheres was, according to Weber, one of the bases for the development of the capitalist system; or the separation of state and religion that is still, or again, in flux in some areas of the world.

The overall society is not, however, the only social space within which different zones of meaning are analyzed. In this respect, Thornton and Ocasio (2008) state that

> [f]or Friedland and Alford (1991) the focus was on societal-level logics and their effects on individuals and organizations. But […] institutional logics may develop at a variety of different levels, for example organizations, markets, industries, inter-organizational networks, geographic communities, and organizational fields. (p. 106)

In fact, research on institutional logics has recently focused primarily on analytical levels below the societal level. Studies examined, for example, industries and sectors such as healthcare (e.g., Dunn & Jones, 2010; Reay & Hinings, 2009; Waldorff, 2013), the financial sector (e.g., Lounsbury, 2002), the public sector (e.g., Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006), or publishing (e.g., Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). The effects of various institutional logics on complex structures were also studied in areas such as cities (e.g., Jancsary, Meyer, Höllerer, & Barberio, 2017), courts (e.g., McPherson & Sauder, 2013), or professions (e.g., Reay, Goodrick, Waldorff, & Casebeer, 2017). Empirical research on *Leitideen* exists, for instance, with regard to the health sector (e.g., Wendt, 2008) or European integration (e.g., Lepsius, 2013).

The location of institutional logics at different analytical levels may be one of the reasons for the attractiveness and almost inflationary growth of this stream in institutional organizational research (e.g., Meyer & Höllerer, 2014). However, it is not unproblematic: Not only does it impede the comparison of reconstructed logics and, hence, accumulation of knowledge, it also complicates the delimitation of logics from similar concepts such as frames, interpretive schemas, or cognitive maps. According to Thornton et al. (2012), in addition to institutional logics emerging at different levels, there are also interactions between the logics of different levels. For instance, it is argued that "field-level logics are both embedded in societal-level logics and subject to field-level processes that generate distinct forms of instantiation, variation, and combination of societal logics" (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 148). Precisely how these *cross-level effects* work, which social mechanisms link levels, and how societal logics relate to logics at other levels, is at present still largely unresolved. Exceptions include, for example, the work of Greenwood, Díaz, Li, and Lorente (2010) which shows how regional logics filter the handling of societal logics by changing their interpretation, or the study by Winter (2017) which examines how prison managers evoke and adapt field logics at the organizational level through the use of metaphors.

While conceptions of fields vary (e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; Hinings, Logue, & Zietsma, 2017; Hoffman, 1999), the broad consensus in institutional theory is that *fields* are societal spaces in which zones of meaning exercise influence. More diverse, however, is the assessment of whether a field is constituted by *one* zone of meaning or may be influenced by *multiple* zones of meaning. According to Scott's influential definition, a field consists of organizations which partake of a common meaning system (Scott, 1994, p. 207). In Friedland's works, too, logics and their core elements seem to be closely tied to fields: "I call these institutional substances the central object of an institutional field and the principle of its unity" (Friedland, 2009, p. 56). The writings of Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, on the other hand, do not necessarily include such close link: "[T]he boundaries of an institutional field are observable within and across the borders of institutional orders and their categorical elements" (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 62).

Distinguishing conceptually between organizational and institutional fields (Meyer, 2008) – two terms that are mostly used interchangeably – may help clarify this. *Institutional* field refers to the structuration of one institutionalized zone

of meaning and therefore "maps" the respective institutional order. It includes all actor *types* that are institutionally co-constituted with the zone of meaning, as well as their relationships to other actor types within this zone (e.g., fathers, mothers, aunts, nieces, etc. in a family logic; ministers, believers, heretics, etc. in a [Christian] religious logic). Thus, institutional fields involve typical roles and role sets (Merton, 1957) and deal with questions related to the kinds of action contexts in which the specific *Leitidee* and the respective criteria of rationality claim to be valid, their *Deutungsmacht* in these contexts, and the symbolic instantiations – institutionalized practices being one of them – regarded as appropriate to index them. *Organizational* fields, on the other hand, denote empirically observable networks of individuals and/or organizations that are mutually aware of each other and regularly interact (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Thus, organizational fields often contain multiple overlapping institutional orders, which means that they are generally characterized by multiple zones of meaning. In contrast, overlaps of institutional fields with other institutional fields point to structural interfaces between zones of meaning at the level of meaning configurations (and not to the question of which of several zones of meaning has validity in a specific situation). We will come back to this later with the concept of *permeability*.

Practice theorists suggest yet another take on fields, focused not on actors but on "embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings" (Schatzki, 2001, p. 12), as "the social space that is defined by what practitioners *do* – and *do together* – on an everyday basis" (Smets et al., 2017, p. 369 [emphasis in original]). Schatzki explicitly contrasts his field of practices "with accounts that privilege individuals, (inter)actions, language, signifying systems, the life world, institutions/roles, structures, or systems in defining the social" (Schatzki, 2001, p. 12). We would argue that fields of practice and organizational fields are clearly quite different concepts. The difference between practice fields and institutional fields, on the other hand, is much less straightforward and brings us back to our prologue. As we see it, it is, first, a question of whether the *doing* is a *type* of doing and the degree to which it is institutionalized, and, second, a matter of focalizing either the type of actor or the type of action. In any case, we would see this as a worthwhile area for conversation.

Characteristics of a Zone of Meaning's Validity Claims

We will discuss the characteristics of the validity claim of a specific zone of meaning in terms of this zone's specificity, relevance, and degree of organization.

Specificity. Adopting a Weberian perspective, Schwinn (2005) considers the *specificity* of a value sphere to increase with the degree of institutionalization that links *Lebensordnungen* [orders of life] to ideas and values. Institutionalization specifies the symbolic content of values and substantiates it in concrete and intersubjectively valid criteria for action. Accordingly, Schwinn distinguishes value spheres having strong specificity (e.g., law) from those having weak specificity (e.g., art). Organizational research makes a similar argument regarding institutional logics (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011; Raynard, 2016). Here, the attribute of specificity is related to the degree of

discretion that actors have in interpreting and complying with the institutional prescriptions of a specific logic. A high degree of specificity implies exclusiveness and highly scripted actions and a strong link between the multiple instantiations of the respective institutions. From this perspective, fundamentalist religious interpretations, for instance, imply highly specific zones of meaning. Specificity is the "grip" with which a specific order regulates a particular sphere of life. With regard to practice theory and "integrative practices" (e.g., Schatzki, 1996), it could be argued that the more specific a zone of meaning is that claims validity in a "domain of social life," the more precisely and narrowly scripted the integrative practices organized according to this zone's rationality criteria should be, and the less leeway in their performance exists.

Relevance. According to Lepsius, the relevance of a zone of meaning increases in relation to the number of social situations for which the *Leitidee* and its rationality criteria claim validity. In this regard, Lepsius asks "how *extensive* the action context is, within which a certain rationality criterion is valid" (Lepsius, 1989, p. 216 [emphasis in original, own translation]). The more extensive this action context is, that is, the more areas of life are governed by a zone's rationality criteria, the more comprehensive is its range of validity. Along with the homogeneity of action situations, extensiveness defines the degree to which a *Leitidee* may influence people's lives. In this respect, Goffman's total institutions would be an example where one set of rationality criteria controls all spheres of life of a particular person. "Institutional imperialism," then, would denote the expansion of *Leitideen* and rationality criteria into life spheres that were previously governed by others (e.g., the spread of managerialism and market principles into the public sector under New Public Management).

Degree of organization. Lepsius (1995) also distinguishes between strongly and weakly organized institutions, providing the *Leitidee* of the rule of law (strongly organized) and that of academic freedom (weakly organized) as examples. The stronger the degree of organization, the more "infrastructure" is in place to safeguard the institution; the weaker the degree of organization, the greater is the institution's dependency on individuals who have internalized the *Leitidee* and rely on its rationality criteria for guidance. It follows that the stability of a *Leitidee* increases as its degrees of organization and internalization increase and reaches its maximum when both are high. In cases where only the degree of organization is high and that of internalization is low or vice versa, institutional volatility arises. To disentangle different forms of institutional volatility, their conditions and the windows of opportunity they open up, could raise exciting research questions for institutional organization research. It would be equally interesting to study how the degree of organization influences the bundles of instantiations of a *Leitidee*. Would a higher degree of organization of a *Leitdee*, for instance, lead to a larger number or different kinds of instantiations such as practices?

Wirkmacht (structuring and guiding effect). A central question is the structuring and guiding effect zones of meaning may exert. Rationality criteria influence understandings of the social world by providing legitimized cognitive categories and cultural meanings and guide action through institutionalized expectations and demands. In processes of institutionalization, certain sets of activities are

tied to socially shared meanings, reciprocally related to specific subject positions and role identities that are meant to perform them. They are structured temporally, placed in specific locales, equipped with specific "props" and an emotional fabric. These packages become fully institutionalized when they are transmitted to future generations as "social facts" and, if operating on deep levels of latency, unfold in a taken-for-granted manner. Schatzki (2002) also stresses the normativity of practices and locates such normativity within the practice. This seems to separate, at first sight, institutional and practice perspectives. However, since Schatzki (e.g., 1996) understands practices as spatio-temporal entities that embrace practice-as-doing, but also principles, understandings, and teleoaffective structures such as ends, beliefs, and emotions, his conception of practice seems to encompass our entire "package."

One of the fundamental debates in institutional theory relates to the extent to which zones of meaning have constitutive effect on actors – that is, constitute actors *as* actors (e.g., Hwang & Colyvas, 2020; Hwang et al., 2019; Lounsbury & Wang, 2020; Meyer & Vaara, 2020; see also the literature on the "paradox of embedded agency," e.g., Holm, 1995; Seo & Creed, 2002). Do institutionalized zones of meaning "guide" actors through expectations and prescriptions (which the actor can defy if willing to accept sanctions), do social actors as such only exist as a result of the constitutive effect of zones of meaning, or do such zones and social actors co-constitute each other? To start with, we believe it is important to stress that we are talking about social actors and not individual human beings or organizations. In addition, as we have pointed out above, the relationship between institutions and their manifestations is co-constitutive. When Friedland et al. (2014) emphasize that "[i]nstitutional logics point to socially regionalized orders of meaningful practice that are simultaneously orders of subjectification and objectification" (p. 334), they are close to the understanding of Berger and Luckmann (1967) for whom institutions emerge when actors and their acts are reciprocally typified. A similar notion is put forward by Meyer, Boli, and Thomas (1994) who, referring to Berger and Luckmann, state that "[i]nstitutionalized rules […] render the relation between actor and action more socially tautological than causal" (p. 18). In other words, regionalized zones of meaning make typified role identities available (e.g., Jancsary et al., 2017), which imbue types of actor with typical preferences and interests (see also Thornton et al., 2012) and subject them to expectations by other actors who are in an equally co-constitutive relationship with the same institutional order. In this sense, social actors literally "embody" the institution and appresent it through all sorts of bodily symbols including the performance of specific practices. To us, it seems that there are considerable overlaps with practice theory, for instance, when Schatzki (1996) states that actors "coexisting within" a certain practice become the object of one another's conditions. One of his examples are teachers and students "hanging together" through certain practices of teaching and learning – this would also be a fine example for the reciprocal typicality of actors and actions. Reckwitz (2002), too, implies an almost tautological relationship between agents and practices: "the social world," he notes, "is first and foremost populated by diverse social practices which are carried by agents. Agents, so to speak, 'consist in' the performance of practices" (p. 256).

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MULTIPLE ZONES OF MEANING

The Simultaneous Existence of Multiple Zones of Meaning

In differentiated societies, multiple zones of meaning exist and operate parallel to one another. Berger and Luckmann (1967), for example, emphasize that

> most modern societies are pluralistic. This means that they have a shared core universe, taken for granted as such, and different partial universes coexisting in a state of mutual accommodation. (p. 125)

A single institutional order conclusively regulating all life spheres – Goffman's (1961) "total institution" – is an exception which exists only to a very limited extent in modern societies (e.g., in sects or to some extent in psychiatric institutions). The idea of a pluralism of potential meanings can also be found in Weber's "polytheism of values" or in Giddens' (1990) concept of a second or late modernity, in which reflexivity is built into society's institutions. Luhmann (1984), too, speaks of a differentiation of society into functional subsystems; and for Lepsius (e.g., 1977), modern society is characterized by inter-institutional conflicts.

While early research on institutional logics often studied contexts in which one dominant logic was superseded by another one (e.g., Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999), more recent work (mostly building on the *inter-institutional system* in Thornton et al., 2012) assumes that multiple logics may exist in parallel in the same social space. Goodrick and Reay (2011) point out that multiple co-existing logics enter into distinct relationships with one another. They refer to such integrated systems of logics as *constellations*: "[A] constellation is composed of items that, when viewed from a particular perspective, can be identified as a pattern" (Goodrick & Reay, 2011, p. 399). Lepsius, too, takes the existence of a constellation of more or less rationalized areas of life as a starting point. He joins Weber in asking which spheres of life are affected by rationalization, and in what direction and to what degree these rationalizations are institutionalized (e.g., Lepsius, 1990). Lepsius speaks of a complex configuration of rationality criteria, whose direction and degree of institutionalization, on the one hand, is in flux. On the other hand, these criteria stand in relationships of tension to one another. The overall structure of this configuration of *Leitideen* and the way in which conflicts among them are regulated define the character of a particular society (e.g., Lepsius, 1999). This is why Lepsius (1995) demands institutional analysis to "also study the relationships between the institutionalized orders of a society and the overall order's character that is defined by them" (p. 399 [own translation]).

In practice theory, the idea of constellations is quite salient. According to Nicolini and Monteiro (2017), practice scholars frequently study how practices are interconnected to form constellations or larger assemblages. Hui, Schatzki, and Shove (2017) equally stress that most practice approaches share the idea that "practices link to form wider complexes and constellations – a nexus." For Schatzki (2017), practices connect to material arrangements to form practice-arrangement bundles, which, in turn, connect to other bundles to, then, form

wider constellations. Additionally, each practice itself is also "an organized constellation of actions" (Schatzki, 2002, p. 71). Constellations of practices, as Nicolini and Monteiro (2017) insist, are held together by relationships among different elements within and across practices. The network ontology that most practice approaches subscribe to is challenging when it comes to describing this interconnectedness – Schatzki's (2002) suggestion that "[t]he overall day trading firm industry is a confederation of nets of practice-order bundles" (p. 169) is only one of many examples that mirror such difficulty.

Types of Relationships Between Zones of Meaning

Within such constellations, zones of meaning exhibit different types of relationships to one another. Institutional organization theory distinguishes between institutional pluralism and institutional complexity (e.g., Greenwood et al., 2011): Institutional pluralism denotes the concurrent existence of multiple institutional logics without specifying their precise relationship(s), but this term often describes non-problematic relationships. The term institutional complexity, on the other hand, denotes competition between multiple contradictory logics. Lepsius and Rehberg consider institutions to be frequently in conflict with one another and to compete for spheres of validity and *Deutungsmacht* [interpretive authority]: *Leitideen* "prevail through fighting back other institutions' validity claims" (Lepsius, 1997, p. 62; [own translation]); in this sense, each established *Leitidee* is a "product of combat" (Rehberg, 1997). Friedland and Alford (1991) underscore that "major institutions of contemporary society are interdependent and yet also contradictory" (p. 256). Likewise, Thornton and Ocasio (2008) emphasize that contradictions are an inherent part of a system comprising multiple logics; orders therefore compete for attention and cultural prevalence in society (see also Thornton et al., 2012). For an overview of research exploring the role of practices in institutionally complex environments, see, for instance, Smets et al. (2017).

Apart from contradiction and conflict institutional logics may also complement one another or coexist for some time in a sort of "truce" (Meyer & Höllerer, 2010; for an overview of possible relationships, see Johansen & Waldorff, 2017). Berger and Luckmann (1967) already suggested that outright conflict could be replaced by "varying degrees of tolerance or even co-operation" (p. 142). Although Lepsius stresses the often tension-filled relationships between rationality criteria, he equally assumes that they may also coexist or be indifferent to one another (Lepsius, 1990). Lepsius further emphasizes a type of relationship that has hitherto received little or no attention in institutional organizational theory: Every institutionalized *Leitidee* endeavors to externalize the contingencies and negative consequences associated with its working as successfully as possible and thus to immunize itself against opposition (Lepsius, 1997). The contingencies externalized by a *Leitidee* can be transferred to other institutional spheres (for example, the state taking over the social consequences of capitalism through collectivizing social costs). If, however, no other institutional sphere adopts these consequences, people need to deal with them on an individual basis (Lepsius, 1997).

The more successful institutions are in externalizing their consequences, the more autonomous they become (Lepsius, 1999).

Lepsius' conceptualization can extend current knowledge in institutional organization theory in two important ways: First, he addresses a sort of "division of labor" among zones of meaning, each of which seeks to externalize its contingencies and transfer them to other zones. This division of labor can shed light on conflicts between institutional orders whose solutions may likewise be more or less strongly institutionalized (for example through the idea of a "social partnership" of workers and employers and collective bargaining efforts). Second, there are externalities which no zone of meaning directly addresses. This may allow for interesting ways to look at gaps in the institutional fabric.

Attributes of the Relationships Between Zones of Meaning

Recent research has devoted much energy to developing criteria and attributes to characterize constellations of zones of meaning and the degree of complexity within constellations. However, the literature is relatively vague regarding the analytical level of such considerations. In most cases, it remains unclear whether studies focus on relationships between zones of meaning at the level of the constellation and its structure (i.e., inconsistency, complementarity, or compatibility of rationality criteria) or consider contradictions and ambiguities at the level of the actor or concrete action situation (i.e., complexity resulting from simultaneous validity claims). Obviously, empirically, these two questions are necessarily interwoven. Nonetheless, for us it is important to distinguish analytically whether two zones of meaning claim validity of their respective rationality criteria in one and the same action situation, or whether two zones of meaning are structurally linked with one another, for example, though subject positions and practices that are meaningful in both zones. In contrast, Smets et al. (2017) argue that practice theories are less interested in whether certain logics are incompatible *per se* and focus instead on how incompatibilities "are constructed as such through practitioners' skillful praxis" (p. 397) – a contradistinction that is substantial if practitioners are meant to be people, yet may resolve if they are meant to denote a type of actor.

Compatibility. A central attribute of the relationship between zones of meaning is the degree of compatibility or commensurability. In Weber's work, the ultimate values at the center of his value spheres are fundamentally incommensurable "because the world's different value orders are in irresolvable battle with one another" (Weber, 1968, p. 603 [own translation]). Lepsius principally shares this view: "Value positions and Leitideen […] are incompatible because they would otherwise not be differentiated" (Lepsius, 1997, p. 30 [own translation]). Research on institutional logics is less categorical in this point and claims that different degrees of compatibility exist (e.g., Besharov & Smith, 2014; Raynard, 2016). The literature also suggests distinguishing whether logics are incompatible in relation to their constituted objectives or to their constituted practices, whereby it is assumed that the former type of incompatibility creates greater complexity (e.g., Pache & Santos, 2010; see also Greenwood et al., 2011).

Centrality and hierarchy. Besharov and Smith (2014) argue on the level of actors and introduce centrality of logics as a further attribute of their relationship. The greater the number of logics that are simultaneously relevant for an actor in an action situation is, the more complex this situation becomes for the actor. Goodrick and Reay (2011) also distinguish degrees and hierarchies of dominance among logics – albeit at the level of the constellation rather than the situation, where in each case one or more logics may be dominant at the same time. A similar attribute is the hierarchy of logics at the field level (e.g., Raynard, 2016): The more clearly logics in a field are hierarchized according to their relevance, the less complex the situation is for the actors in that field.

Overlap and permeability. Complexity is also influenced by whether or not multiple logics claim *Deutungsmacht* [interpretive authority] over the same types of situations. Raynard (2016) calls this jurisdictional overlap: If two or more logics are incompatible and at the same time highly relevant, but regulate different situations, their jurisdictional overlap and thus the degree of complexity is nonetheless low. Lepsius (1997) emphasizes the possibility of overlapping spheres of validity. For him, the validity of *Leitideen* and their rationality criteria are ever changing:

> At all times, different Leitideen are more or less institutionalized; at all times, there are tensions between them, are demarcation lines between their spheres of validity being shifted and externalization opportunities contested. (Lepsius, 1997, p. 62 [own translation])

Hence, policing and surveillance of their boundaries is essential. The validity of certain rationality criteria depends on how clearly they are able to demarcate the context in which they can offer the dominant orientation for meaning making and action (Lepsius, 1990). In this respect, Jancsary et al. (2017) suggest that from a structural perspective the boundaries between zones of meaning need not be clear-cut with regard to various typifications, such as social positions and practices. They propose *permeability* of zones of meaning as a relevant attribute and define it as the degree to which two or more zones of meaning share practices and subject positions. Such practices and subject positions that are legitimate in multiple zones of meaning reduce complexity. If the entire typified set of instantiations that constitutes a practice is legitimate in multiple institutional orders, this may, for instance, point to institutionalized conflict-resolution mechanisms as mentioned above. It may also manifest the incursion of one institution into the validity sphere of another:

> This is how, for example, the intrusion of military organizational forms and order-obedience thinking into companies, schools, athletic clubs, or political parties leads to the same sort of disciplining of behavior in different institutions. (Lepsius, 1999, p. 123 [own translation])

On the other hand, since any given practice "can be filled out by a multitude of single and often unique actions" (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 250), even if practices are not legitimate in multiple zones of meaning "wholesale," certain related activities may transcend zones of meaning and become linked to different meanings, rules, and/or purposes through typification in multiple zones. Such activities may then serve as "boundary objects" that link zones of meaning in a more temporary and fragile manner by connecting different and distinct practices on a purely behavioral level.

In summary, we see recent research in institutional organization theory pay more attention to relationships of zones of meaning beyond contradiction and conflict, such as coexistence and complementarity. However, the majority of work adopts the perspective of (individual and organizational) actors, while only very few analyze the structural components of constellations or configurations.

PRELIMINARY RÉSUMÉ

Our primary aim in this article has been to (re)establish *regionalized zones of meaning* as a core topic in institutional research and to reflect upon their internal structure, their spheres of validity, as well as the relationships between multiple zones of meaning from the perspective of various approaches.

Research on institutional logics is increasingly zooming in on individual and organizational actors, and on how they deal with institutional pluralism. Such actor-centric perspective ultimately turns zones of meaning (and the rationality criteria that organize them) into "tools" in cultural toolkits that actors can utilize strategically. In our view, this leads away from institutional theory's core strengths and main concerns. Instead, institutional analysis should be attentive to *collective patterns* of meaning and the relationships between multiple zones of meaning. Individuals or organizations may have more or less leeway; if collective patterns of meaning change, however, then a change in a society's institutional fabric is dawning.

Zones of meaning are translated in concrete institutional orders that exhibit different degrees of organization (e.g., Lepsius, 1999), give rise to specific organizational forms (such as courts or corporations) and governance modes. In our view, research should focus more on forms of organizing that are typical of specific orders or that are at work at the interfaces. Institutional organization theory has been challenged on its ability to account for innovative and alternative forms of organizing such as platforms, fluid organizations, network organizations, or social movement organizations. In this respect, a research agenda focused on collective meaning structures would investigate whether these new forms and practices result from changes in the respective order, or go hand in hand with shifts in societal zones of meaning and, if so, what exactly those shifts are.

In addition, we have attempted to explore how regionalized zones of meaning may be related to notions of practice. One option would be to understand "practice" as a synonym for a concept that already exists in the institutional conceptual tool box – there is indeed a number of candidates that may qualify for such re-labelling (and, as we suspect, this is already happening). However, although this seems relatively easy at first sight, apart from the questionable value added, it is complicated by the fact that each approach to practice theory "has its own definition of practice and therefore praxeologise their object of inquiry in different ways" (Nicolini & Monteiro, 2017, p. 111). Bringing together two often ill-defined and over-used concepts (i.e., "institution" and "practice"), both with a considerable number of disciples, will certainly enlarge the demand for the size of the tent, but the conversations between the two groups might not exceed small talk at a cocktail reception – a prospect that does not seem overly attractive to us.

In our prologue, we located a conceptual space for practices somewhere between socially meaningful activities and full institutions. Within this space, a variety of conceptualizations of practices is possible. Our initial intuition was to understand practice broadly as *typified set of multiple instantiations*, interwoven by shared understandings – and to leave open (for the moment) whether and to which degree such sets encompass symbolic instantiations aside from behavioral ones (such as, for instance, material objects, spaces, bodies, etc.) and values, purposes, emotions, etc. in addition to shared understandings. Therefore, we suggest a place for practices that lies somewhere between sequences of socially meaningful activities and full institutions. It is this understanding that we have brought into our discussion of zones of meaning – obviously not the most popular theme from a practice perspective – to explore how it could enrich our own institutional perspective, but also where we would require a more intensive engagement, or a deeper conceptual conversation. What has become clear is that we would need to see which space there is for institutions and zones of meaning in a practice framework. In any case, we find enough compatibility, and also difference, to incite an intensive debate. The devil is, as always, in the details.

NOTES

1.   In this article, we use generic terms to group together general ideas that have been assigned distinct labels in different streams of institutional literature. Whenever we refer to a specific theoretical tradition in our discussion, we adopt the terminology used by the respective author(s). This applies to our use of terminology related to both "zones of meaning" and "practices."

2. Although differentiation seems to imply fragmentation, all these "finite" zones nonetheless together form a "whole." Schütz (1970), for example, speaks of a universe of discourse; and for Berger and Luckmann (1967), too, the everyday life-world is ultimately a shared reality, even though social knowledge is unevenly distributed and parts of it are confined to designated experts.

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