

## Furthering critical institutionalism

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**Abstract:** This special issue furthers the study of natural resource management from a critical institutional perspective. Critical institutionalism (CI) is a contemporary body of thought that explores how institutions dynamically mediate relationships between people, natural resources and society. It focuses on the complexity of institutions entwined in everyday social life, their historical formation, the interplay between formal and informal, traditional and modern arrangements, and the power relations that animate them. In such perspectives a social justice lens is often used to scrutinise the outcomes of institutional processes. We argue here that critical institutional approaches have potentially much to offer commons scholarship, particularly through the explanatory power of the concept of bricolage for better understanding institutional change. Critical institutional approaches, gathering momentum over the past 15 years or so, have excited considerable interest but the insights generated from different disciplinary perspectives remain insufficiently synthesised. Analyses emphasising complexity can be relatively illegible to policy-makers, a fact which lessens their reach. This special issue therefore aims to synthesise critical institutional ideas and so to lay the foundation for moving beyond the emergent stage to make meaningful academic and policy impact. In bringing together papers here we define and synthesise key themes of critical institutionalism, outline the concept of institutional bricolage and identify some key challenges facing this school of thought.

**Keywords:** Agency, common-pool resources, critical institutionalism, institutional bricolage, institutions

## I. Introduction

### 1.1. Challenges to institutional scholarship

In their article reviewing scholarly trends in studying common property resources (CPR), Van Laerhoven and Ostrom wrote ‘Regarding the future, we think that scholars must embrace the challenge of finding ways to deal more explicitly with complexity, uncertainty and institutional dynamics’ (Van Laerhoven and Ostrom 2007, 5). They elaborated on the need for developing a keener eye for complexity at scale, for examining multi-use and multi commons and for the household use of private and public resources. This special issue furthers critical approaches to the study of institutions that address such challenges and explain both continuity and change in evolving institutions.

All analytical approaches face similar challenges in explaining the emergence, form and functioning of institutions. There is a need to place local institutional arrangements within the wider frames of governance (the political ecology and political economy) which shape the possibilities for resource allocation, adaptation and negotiated solutions. Institutional analysts must explain how institutions are animated by people, acting individually or collectively in particular spaces, in relation to others, and to the physical and material environment. Further, there is the challenge of showing how power works to sustain institutions and to shape participation, access and outcomes. In addressing such issues, institutionalists deal with complexity, uncertainty and institutional dynamics in relation to a multiplicity of factors. These include the interaction between ecological and social systems; the diversity of livelihoods, resources and uses; the variability of actors and their practices within heterogeneous communities; multiple and overlapping scales, domains and timescales of interaction; the often opaque ways in which institutions work and power operates; and the variability of outcomes produced. Faced with such multiple complexities, analysts need to combine the generation of rich, context specific accounts of institutional functioning with the identification of recurring patterns of governance and societal resource allocation.

Papers in this special issue address these and related challenges through a critical institutional lens, often deploying the concept of bricolage to further the study of institutional dynamics. Most of the papers included here are concerned with development, policy or project interventions to manage common pool resources or public goods and services. Saunders (2014) suggests that commons scholarship may well have inadvertently contributed to the unfulfilled expectations of many such interventions partly because concepts such as participation, social capital, social learning and empowerment have proved difficult to craft into workable arrangements. Further, CPR theory often struggles to effectively conceptualise socially embedded resource users and so to fully understand norms, values and interests; in focusing on efficiency and functionality CPR theory may overlook the ways in which local dynamics are shaped by interactions at multiple scales (see also Blaikie 2006). Similarly, mainstream commons scholarship has been critiqued for dealing inadequately with heterogeneity within communities, for

skating over the politics of policies, discourses and local power dynamics, and for lack of meaningful conceptualisation of the social relations and meanings associated with natural resource management (Hall et al. 2014). In the sections that follow we outline critical institutional approaches and to suggest how they begin to address such deficiencies.

## 2. Critical institutionalism: concepts and themes

Critical institutionalism as a school of thought has emerged partly in critique of mainstream institutionalism as epitomised by the work of Elinor Ostrom and her followers.<sup>1</sup> However, critical institutionalism is also partially indebted to such mainstream institutionalism, and several authors claim that there is considerable promise in attempts to find complementarities between the perspectives (Bruns 2009; Komakech and van der Zaag 2011; Ingram et al. 2015). However, we maintain that in key premises about complexity, the nature of human action, about the centrality of power dynamics, and the concern with social justice, critical institutionalism offers different and revealing insights.

Various authors have attempted to understand local resource management dynamics from different critical perspectives. These have emphasised the need to focus more on socio-historical or social-anthropological dimensions of interactions, their meanings beyond abstraction or use for economic purposes and their embeddedness in daily life and in historical trajectories (Mosse 1997; Roth 2009). Some critical scholars focus explicitly on the outcomes of resource management arrangements and the implications for social justice (Johnson 2004). Related to this are concerns for the power relations which imbue the spaces of collective action and way that this limits participation and access to benefits for some (Wong 2009). Perspectives that incorporate insights from political ecology and political economy emphasise the effects of broader societal governance arrangements of local institutions (Blaikie 2006). Critical institutional scholars often query the idea that institutions can be crafted to be efficient, a scepticism that is partly supported by evidence of the uneven functioning of decentralised forest and water governance arrangements (for example see Boelens 2009; De Koning 2011; Chowns 2014).<sup>2</sup>

Critical institutionalism draws on a wide pool of literature beyond the study of the commons. It incorporates insights from scholarship on hybrid economic and security arrangements in informal African economies and on the nature of the state, citizenship and the everyday politics of access to public goods and service

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<sup>1</sup> In our usage the term 'critical' is used to reflect a debt to critical realist thinking which recognises diversity in social phenomena, the potentially creative effects of individual agency and the influence of social structures in shaping individual behaviour and the patterning of outcomes. The term is also used in the tradition of critical social theories which suggest that knowledge should be used not just to explain the social world but to change it in progressive directions.

<sup>2</sup> We loosely combine such authors under the umbrella label of critical institutionalism, though they would not necessarily recognize or use that label themselves.

delivery (Olivier de Sardan 2008; Hagmann and Péclard 2010; Jones 2015); the efficacy of community based approaches to development (Dill 2010); and the nature of property and access (Sikor and Lund 2009). These intersecting literatures offer valuable insights into the formation of institutional norms through everyday practices (Arts et al. 2013), and through the authoritative allocation of resources in ‘twilight’ institutional zones (Lund 2006).

Synthesising insights from these varied approaches we propose the following as a thumbnail sketch of critical institutionalism. Critical institutionalists question the underlying rational choice assumptions of much institutional thinking. Instead they emphasize the multi-scalar complexity of institutions entwined in everyday social life; their historic formation dynamically shaped by creative human actions; and the interplay between the traditional and the modern, formal and informal arrangements. From this perspective rules, boundaries and processes are ‘fuzzy’; people’s complex social identities, unequal power relationships and wider political and geographical factors shape resource management arrangements and outcomes. Institutions are not necessarily designed for a particular purpose, but borrowed or adapted from other working arrangements. People’s motivations to cooperate in collective arrangements are a mix of economic, emotional, moral and social rationalities informed by differing logics and world-views. Institutions are dynamic in that they operationalised by human actions, and there is no simple relationship between institutional form and outcomes.

### **2.1. Institutional bricolage**

The concept of institutional bricolage (De Koning 2011, 2014; Cleaver 2012) has good explanatory power in showing how norms are articulated, explaining both institutional endurance and change, enriching understanding of human agency and relations of authority and in questioning assumptions about institutional effectiveness. Adapted from Levi-Strauss’ formulation of *intellectual* bricolage, this concept has also been developed by academics in the context of livelihood studies (Batterbury 2001) organizational studies (Freeman 2007), religious anthropology (Galvan 1997) and more. This article and the special issue mostly build on the work by Douglas (1987) on institutional bricolage.

Institutional bricolage is a process through which people, consciously and non-consciously, assemble or reshape institutional arrangements, drawing on whatever materials and resources are available, regardless of their original purpose. In this process, old arrangements are modified and new ones invented. Institutional components from different origins are continuously reused, reworked, or refashioned to perform new functions. Adapted configurations of rules, practices, norms and relationships are attributed meaning and authority. These refurbished arrangements are the necessary responses to everyday challenges, and are embedded in daily practice. Bricolage is a fundamentally dynamic process characterised by variable levels of institutional visibility and functioning. Let us briefly elaborate and illustrate these points.

In the reworking of the existing institutional arrangements, actors innovate, but they do so within the limits of their resources, social circumstances and what is perceived as legitimate. As De Koning (2011), adapting Levi-Strauss, suggests; the bricoleur might make a lampshade out of an umbrella stand but the same umbrella stand cannot be made into a space shuttle. The layering of these arrangements over time, changes in policy environments and in political and social discourses also ensure that the mechanisms that form institutions can be pieced together from a variety of sources (Sehring 2009; Marin and Bjorkland 2015). Institutions so formed are therefore a patchwork of the new and second hand and they include: habitual ways of doing things; well-worn practices adapted to new conditions; organisational arrangements invented or borrowed from elsewhere.

Such pieced together institutions often have multipurpose functions. They are rarely organised only according to single purposes, sectoral divisions or particular projects. Even if they begin that way, they often evolve to encompass other purposes and layers of meaning (Verzijl and Dominguez 2015). An example is the women's savings group that also collects the water tariff (Clever 2002), or a community forest management association that functions as a social security mechanism in case of illness (De Koning 2011). Pieced together or adapted, multifunctional arrangements must be made to seem familiar, to fit with accepted logics of practice and social relationships. It is this perceived fit that gives adapted institutions their legitimacy and so facilitates the exercise of authority through them. Institutions are 'naturalised' (Douglas 1987) through a number of processes ranging from calls on tradition (which may be invented or re-invented); on symbols, discourses and power relationships borrowed from other settings; and by analogy to accepted ways of doing things, to the social order and to ideas of rightness in relation to social, natural or spiritual worlds (Douglas 1987).

Elaborating on the processes of naturalizing institutions, De Koning (2011, 2014) categorises these and identifies three processes which happen when formalised institutions are introduced into local settings: aggregation, alteration and articulation. Aggregation relates to the re-creative re-combination of the introduced institutions with different types of institutional and socio-cultural elements. This process entails mixing the old with the new in order to create a more practical, useful institutional framework. Alteration refers to the tweaking of and tinkering with institutions to make them fit better with livelihood priorities or claims to identity. Articulation involves the asserting of traditional identities and culture in resistance to newly introduced institutional arrangements (De Koning 2011).

Bearing the features of critical institutional approaches and bricolage in mind we will now discuss some key themes, indicating the insights they offer and the questions they raise for the study of the commons.

### 3. Institutional dynamics: plurality, hybrity, and scale

Critical institutionalists embrace plurality and recognise that the governance of resources occurs through a variety of scales with no very clear boundary between

the domains of the local and the global. Indeed national and global processes can be seen as working out in local institutions and relationships (Sandström 2008). The concept of the ‘leakage of meaning’ is crucial here (Douglas 1987). Meaning in the form of legitimized discourses, arrangements, symbolic authority and values, leaks or is borrowed from one domain to another. Thus villagers in Zimbabwe debating whether the poorest person should be exempt from paying maintenance charges for the waterpump, draw variously on common experiences of hardship (to justify equal application of the rules) and on concepts of universal human rights, borrowed from international development discourses, to argue for exemptions for the most vulnerable (Cleaver 2012).

Critical institutionalists view historical trajectories as important because they shape contemporary institutions. The concept of path dependence has some traction here – not in a deterministic way, but in the sense that institutions are formed in sedimented layers of governance arrangements (Van der Heijden 2011; Peters et al. 2012). Governance configurations do not simply supersede one another in chronological order but contemporary institutional arrangements may draw patchily on the discourses, and sanctioned meanings of previous eras. The scope for invention, negotiation and resource allocation is also shaped by what went before (Sehring 2009; Upton 2009; De Koning 2011).

Commons scholarship has often focused on community based institutions but a promising direction for critical institutionalism is in explaining how change occurs at the messy middle – the meso level of institutions (Peters et al. 2012). An increasing concern of policy is how to operationalise decentralised resource management at scale – for example at district levels of government, and through nested institutions. We could argue that the messy middle comprises of a number of interfaces (Berkes 1989; Long 2001) between scales of organisations, between sets of values, between professional and lay knowledge, between individual, community and state action. It is at these interfaces that much bricolage work is done to navigate between different interests, to blend and smooth out some of the discrepancies between regulation and practice. Here we can see the blending of logics, the leakage of meaning, the exercise of authoritative power, as well as the creative exercise of agency, the generation of practical governance and the stubborn persistence of inequities (Funder and Marani 2015; Jones 2015; Marin and Bjorkland 2015).

We have argued that critical institutional approaches embrace the complexity of natural resource management arrangements (the pluralities of actors, scales, uses, values and meanings). However, this complexity remains challenging in a number of ways. These include challenges to analysis – if institutions encapsulate multiple scales, overlap, evolve over time and operate partially and intermittently then they are very tricky phenomena to study. So for example, Komakech (2013) notes that his attempts to map institutional arrangements across a whole river basin proved unworkably complex, and therefore he adopted a more partial approach of ‘following the water’ and observing institutional arrangements encountered along the way. It can be difficult to capture the dynamic nature of institutional evolution and functioning without in-depth longitudinal studies. Papers in this volume show

the need for understanding the varying logics and intensity of different strands of governance arrangements operating concurrently (Ingram et al. 2015; Marin and Bjorkland 2015) and the need to study different modes of governance using one framework (Jones 2015).

### **3.1. Can bricolage be facilitated? Can it be transformatory?**

The blending, layering and piecing together involved in bricolage can generate 'thickness' in institutions, and helps to explain their endurance through adaptation over time. However path dependence, power relations and national and global governance frameworks can also constrain attempts to innovate and negotiate. Questions arise here about the extent to which institutional complexity offers greater opportunities for actors to negotiate and innovate, to choose how to piece together their livelihoods. Some (Funder and Marani 2015; Ingram et al. 2015) see bricolage as a strategy for dealing with fragmented or weak governance arrangements. Such governance voids provide space for bricoleurs to improvise and to create arrangements tailored to fit local circumstances; but the effects of these on different actors may vary. Indeed, multiple social networks can dilute rather than strengthen institutions, shifting and dividing people's attention and ensuring only their only partial enrolment with any particular governance arrangement (Meagher 2005). Others see bricolage as the necessary rite of passage for any contemporary institution to become embedded in everyday life (De Koning and Benneker 2013).

Taking examples of different scholars working in the Usangu plains in Tanzania we find various perspectives on the possibilities offered by institutional pluralism. Els Lecoutere (2011), writing of irrigation management initially found less conflict than she expected in a multi-livelihood situation and claims that institutional pluralism can increase the potential for creativity and for pragmatic conflict resolution for some actors. Odgaard's (2002) study long term study of customary and state arrangements for land and water management in the same region, suggests rather that these work in tandem to ensure the double disadvantaging of already marginalised people (pastoralists, poor women, fisherfolk). Research by Cleaver and colleagues (2013) shows that politically marginalized pastoralists can indeed choose to selectively engage with institutions which align with their interests and to dynamically adapt others through bricolage. However this is insufficient to overcome the ways that state policies and economic trends work against them to restrict their pastoralist livelihoods.

So institutional plurality poses a challenge for critical scholars and for those practitioners concerned with facilitating bricolage to secure social, economic and environmental change (Nunan 2006; Merrey and Cook 2012). There is a growing concern in development related literature with identifying 'arrangements that work' – conceptualised as the practical hybrid mechanisms that people create to get a job done and ensure meaning and social fit (Booth 2012; De Herdt 2013; Jones 2015). In common with many 'wicked problems', resource management issues and the fairness of institutional arrangements depends on the viewpoint

of the person perceiving them (Venot 2011). It is highly unlikely that a single institutional solution will represent all users and livelihood interests. However practical and policy approaches often require simplification and standardisation of institutional form. Morris et al. (2013) describe how one NGO programme promoting community based natural resource management in Tanzania, moved *away* from supporting designed institutions (water user associations) towards a process of promoting facilitated stakeholder learning forums, bringing together actors who would be unlikely to interact in planned institutional structures.

#### 4. Agency, power, and governance

Critical institutional perspectives offer rich understandings of the ways in which individuals shape institutions and in turn are shaped by them. These perspectives depart from the bounded rationality model common to mainstream commons scholarship in which utility-based explanations predominate in accounting for people's choices. CI approaches enrich this rather thin model of human agency in a number of ways.

First, drawing on social theory, CI scholarship treads a middle ground between structural accounts of agency in which people's actions are defined by their place in the social system (the roles, norms and forms of cognition that this imposes), with post-structural emphases on diversity and creativity of identities and practices. From a CI perspective, actors do indeed strategize, innovate and negotiate in their engagement with institutions and management of natural resources. However, the particular ways they do so are shaped by their multi-layered social identities, changing contexts and the web of relationships within which they live their lives (Schneegg and Linke 2015). Second, the exercise of agency is shaped by power dynamics, including the power implicit in the societal allocation of resources (through governance arrangements), the power adhering to particular social and political roles, functions and regulations, and the power to challenge boundaries, or to resist and subvert institutional arrangements (Page 2005; De Koning 2014). Third, agency is also embedded in routinized practices, and may not be wholly conscious – practical action is often exercised in taken-for-granted ways, which people rarely consciously scrutinise. Contemporary practices are located in social, political and environmental histories and in the rich layering of resource arrangements, which may provide opportunity or constraint for innovation and adaptation. It is common for critical institutional accounts to consider how much room for manoeuvre different actors have to shape institutions and to promote change. Here we focus on some key ways in which critical institutional approaches develop thick models of human agency.

##### 4.1. Agency, rationalities and meaning

The logics of practices matter in understanding how people operate in relation to institutions (De Koning and Benneker 2013). Things (relationships, resources,



material goods, social order) matter to people beyond their mere instrumental functionality (Sayer 2011). Such meanings often have emotional, symbolic or moral dimensions as well as more pragmatic or strategic ones. In securing access to resources and services, people are also concerned with wider ends (related to order and meaning, identity and citizenship, wellbeing). This means that practical arrangements for managing resources are imbued with wider social significance and can be traced back to the generative principles of the social field (Bourdieu 1977). An example comes from an ecotourism project in Papua New Guinea accepted by a local community to render an additional income, but also used as a tool to re-establish traditional power relations among and between communities and to secure access to alluvial gold mining (De Koning and Benneker 2013).

In critical institutional approaches the model of the individual is highly relational. Action is only partly the result of conscious strategy and is shaped by the extent to which a person perceives themselves as autonomous, or inextricably entwined in a group (Burkitt 2012). Emotions matter when assessing life choices – they may shape actions of compliance in order to avoid the distress of conflict, or feelings of anger and indignation may lead to resistance (Page 2005). An Ecuadorian indigenous community opposed state interference as its historical relation with the state was characterised by feelings of distrust. Consequently, forest legislation was met with strong resistance (De Koning 2011).

Understanding people's actions and the ways these affect institutions goes further than merely tracking practices and social relationships – there is a need to uncover meanings, world views, forms of legitimisation and authority – all aspects which may or may not be visible in public decision making contexts. Rationality is shaped by belief as well as calculations and both shape social behaviour, political expectations and understanding of the social order. Crucially though, worldviews are not necessarily hegemonic and unchanging – they are perceived, interpreted and drawn on variably by people. Worldviews drawing on traditional understandings may permeate arrangements dominated by contemporary globalised economic factors as shown by Boelens (2009). In his studies of water control in the Andes elements of Andean cosmological beliefs persist even in the most marketised communities, emerging more strongly in times of crisis. Such myths and cosmologies can be used to legitimise the actions of particular interest groups and they are built into everyday behaviour, social relationships and institutions.

Worldviews or cosmologies provide a way of ordering the social and natural world, of accommodating unpredictability and of defining proper responses. For example, the traditional institutional unit for Sami reindeer herders in Norway, the *Siida*, incorporates such eco – cosmological perspectives (Sara 2009). These offer some orderliness in relation to the unpredictabilities of the weather and environment and shape local discussions and decisions within these units. Of course this knowledge may not completely align with professional or state representations of rights and resource management as embodied in legislation, regulation and bureaucratic institutions. Such moral-ecological understandings

are also the source of symbols and motifs which may be used to legitimise certain actions, and naturalise institutional and power relationships (Lund 2006).

#### **4.2. Differential capacities, variable practices: power and governance**

Agency is linked to power through the capacity to deploy material (allocative) and non-material (authoritative) resources (Giddens 1984). Such power is exercised in rule formation in public spaces of decision making but also in the power to control the agenda (what is discussed, who is represented) and the more invisible power to shape meaning and ideas about what is acceptable, which occurs in multiple social spaces (Lukes 2005). CI scholars are often concerned with the ways in which actors exercise or experience power beyond the public institutions of decision-making (Funder and Marani 2015). Additional concerns include the multiple ways in which power is distributed within local organizations; the lack of power in local institutions; the ways in which new institutions and rules may be captured by old elites, or new actors (Ribot 2009; Hall et al. 2014).

Poor and marginalized people often find it difficult to shape the formal rules and the rules in use, to negotiate norms, and experience the costs and benefits of institutional functioning differently to more powerful people. The costs of participation may be high and their room for manoeuvre restricted but poor people are often more dependent on fewer institutions for their resource access and livelihoods (Agrawal 2005). Cleaver's study of village water supply in Zimbabwe shows women related to the dominant village family able to negotiate flexibility in the rules for using the waterpoint whereas a poor woman resident quickly pays water fees she can't afford in order to maintain access and social reputation (Cleaver 2012).

The variability in the ways that people with different social identities and resources exercise agency in overlapping institutional spaces requires disentangling. In Ingram et al's study of the governance of non-timber forest products more powerful actors seek to amend statutory arrangements and create alliances with NGO's while those with little voice pursue access to land and water less formally (Ingram et al. 2015). For Verzijl and Dominguez (2015) multiple identities and overlapping institutional membership may allow actors to manipulate institutional spaces. Negotiations and struggles occur over natural resources as material access and rights, but also over meanings and discourses, representation and participation, as well as individual identities. In a study of the gendered negotiation of access to land and water in Peru, Delgado and Zwarteveen (2007) detail differing approaches by women to exercising agency and accessing resources. Some women work within the boundaries of 'traditional' gendered social water organisation and some challenge these and assert their rights to participate in more 'masculine' domains of official irrigation institutions at some cost to their own reputation. Delgado and Zwarteveen suggests that the variable ability to exercise agency through institutions and to challenge boundaries is highly dependent on the possession of resources (land, knowledge, family networks).

Significant attention has been paid in recent policy and academic literature to the ways in which actors make 'practical norms' of governance. These are the implicit rules, embedded in practice, which may divert or subvert official or explicit social rules. Some practical norms are formed strategically and through reflection, some enacted through a tacit 'feel for the game'. Recent analyses illustrate the dynamics between power and pragmatism, in the ways that bureaucrats work through processes of bricolage. Funder and Marani (2015) document how newly created district level Environment Officers in Kenya pragmatically piece together strategies for exercising their role which include cultivating personal networks and piggy backing on established authority, tailoring informal agreements and delegating public authority to civil society. Significantly, they need to claim or create legitimacy for such blended arrangements.

### **4.3. Physical embodiment, infrastructure and technology**

The strong focus in institutional theory and commons scholarship on rule formation and negotiation necessarily privileges voice as a way of exercising agency. A critical institutional approach however, might also focus on the ways in which agency is enacted through physical bodies, and in relation to material structures and physical phenomena (Arts et al. 2013). Status and power may be associated with particular forms of dress, demeanour and behaviour, all very evident in public spaces and the bodily enactment of resource access has symbolic and political significance (Page 2005). The ability to be negotiating in institutional spaces and to directly affect the rules- in- use of resource access also depends on physical presence. It could be argued that able bodiedness is key to the exercise of agency in participatory natural resource management with poor people in the Usangu plains in Tanzania often suffering multiple physical constraints on their ability to produce livelihoods, to travel and to engage socially and institutionally (Clever 2012).

Embodied agency is also exercised in relation to natural resources and technology. Different forms of technology (such as traditional earth banks or modern concrete gates in irrigation systems) imply different degrees of control, by different actors. The unlined field irrigation canals can be easily diverted by any farmer through the insertion of mud barriers, while 'improved' concrete lined structures require a gate, probably operated by a gatekeeper acting in some official capacity. Kooij et al. (2015) argue that such infrastructural mechanisms may be a practical way of dealing with complexities by replacing discussion in public forum. In this sense infrastructure, rather than institutional arrangements shapes people's actual practices and the exercise of agency.

## **5. Furthering critical institutionalism**

Critical institutional approaches address a number of challenges in institutional analysis, but in doing so raise more questions. Institutional plurality means that

arrangements for natural resource management are multi-stranded, overlapping and imbued with a variety of meanings and interests. This plurality raises questions as to how far processes of bricolage can be managed, and to what extent institutions elude design? A critical institutional analysis might highlight the fact that processes of bricolage produce both intended and unintended outcomes, so leading to questions as to how we judge the success or effectiveness of such arrangements.

Critical scholars suggest that institutions are formed in the interplay between the creative exercise of agency and the often constraining effects of social relationships, environments and the workings of power. This leaves us with the tricky task of tracking just how much room for manoeuvre specific institutions offer to different actors, and the extent to which institutions formed through bricolage can be transformatory. Critical institutional analysis is centrally concerned with tracking the effects of such arrangements on social justice as well as resource optimisation. This usefully situates institutional analysis within broader processes of governance but it also raises questions about where the boundaries of analysis for natural resource management can be drawn. In embracing plurality and complexity, how can we produce analyses of complex and dynamic institutional processes which are broadly legible to policy and public decision making? The papers in this special issue explore some of these questions and contribute to the development of critical institutionalism as a school of thought in different ways.<sup>3</sup>

Several papers in this special issue focus on the multiplicity of dynamic governance arrangements in the context of natural resources. Marin and Bjorkland's paper turns our attention to a commons setting in the global North (reindeer herding in Norway). Here they seek to address how the Norwegian state has contributed to the 'naturalisation' of the commons and the reinforcement of the 'tragedy of the commons' myth. The authors shed light on the ways in which customary localised reindeer commons are co-opted into a broad scale formally institutionalised commons, and the problems which ensue. They draw attention to complex relations rooted in customary institutions that enable or constrain herders from accessing resources. They examine how different scholarly institutional approaches (bargaining, layering and bricolage) can enrich our understanding the institutional trajectories of resource governance in Norway. This raises the interesting question as to how far concepts and frameworks from different disciplines and schools of thought can be effectively combined.

Ingram, Ros-Tonen and Dietz explain the governance arrangements for non-timber forest products (NTFPs) in Cameroon by exploring the increased role of NGOs, project-related and market-based organisations in managing and monitoring forests and creating new institutions such as producer and trade organizations. They characterise the different products, multiple uses, and plural governance arrangements of varying intensity as constituting 'a fine mess'.

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<sup>3</sup> Most of the papers are drawn from presentations made at a workshop held in London in April 2014 [www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/.../institutionalism18-190413.aspx](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/departments/.../institutionalism18-190413.aspx).

Administrative misfits within resource boundaries create room for manoeuvre through processes of bricolage. Overlaps, voids and coverage of only part of the value chain with governance arrangements create opportunities for bricolage by actors – who may for example piece together new arrangements where governance is of weak intensity and creates livelihood uncertainties. Within this context, hybrid configurations of customary and statutory regulations have been created. Such pieced together arrangements may well work by being exclusive and so the impacts of sustainable livelihoods are more difficult to capture. Rather than just describing the fine mess, the authors suggest a scoring method for measuring the strength and intensity of different configurations of plural governance arrangements. For this they draw on some of the mainstream institutional design principles, and incorporate additional indicators such as legitimacy. They conclude that arrangements pieced together through bricolage have the potential to create win-win situations in which both conservation and development aims are met. However, the intricate constellations and interactions in chains can make outcomes difficult to predict.

In his article on financing and delivery of water services in Mali, Jones also examines institutional and governance arrangements across scales. His paper is concerned with the governance of public goods (community water supplies) and his analysis draws on three areas of work which he sees as interlinked; political economy analysis, practical hybridity and institutional bricolage. Jones' paper responds to Cleaver's (2012) call to place detailed local-level analysis of institutional change within a broader framework which bridges different scales, considers the role of external actors and wider structural factors, and is "legible" to policymakers. Jones suggests that his analysis brings mainstream and critical institutionalism and analysis of the wider structures, institutions and actors shaping local governance arrangements, into engagement. Crucially, his paper addresses the question of whether the outcomes of hybrid and pieced together arrangements can be seen as merely palliative or more constructive and transformational.

A number of studies deploying the concept of institutional bricolage have focussed on community level arrangements and the ways in which local actors exercise agency. In their paper Funder and Marani shift this focus to the interface between state and community where frontline bureaucrats (in this case Kenyan district level Environment Officers) act as bricoleurs, deploying inventive practices to 'get the job done'. The authors set these actions in a constantly changing institutional environment (shaped by the growth of community based organisations and reorientation of national policies) and show how the Environment Officers must navigate their way through a complex and multi-layered institutional landscape. They do this through bricolage, but to be effective they must claim or create legitimacy and authority for the blended arrangements. Environment Officers see these as efforts to get the job done, and making the state function in the context of limited reach and authority, only partially fitting neopatrimonial analyses of how states operate in Africa. Funder and Marani's

paper highlights the patchiness and variability of bricolaged arrangements. Formal forest regulations for one area proved difficult to negotiate or blend because maintaining them were symbolically important for Forest Officers and of national political interest.

The case of the Water Users Association in the Peruvian Andes by Verzijl and Dominguez explains how a water association, despite not realizing its water management tasks and not being effective on paper, is still a durable and influential institution. By referring to the multiple identities and realities of the Peruvian communities, this institution is serving many locally relevant purposes and functions while at the same time operating under the flag of “good governance”. This creates a locally acceptable working of the association that ensures its survival. This paper problematizes the link between institutional effectiveness and durability.

A somewhat different angle on critical institutionalism is used in the paper written by Kooij, Zwarteveen and Kuper. They describe a farmer-managed irrigation system in Northwest Morocco and explore the social dimensions of technological innovations in irrigation systems. They suggest that technologies (in this case the mechanisms of gates in irrigation canals) are key players in the management of common pool resources and we should see such governance arrangements as socio-technical systems and not over-focus on the formation of rules made by human actors. In this case the members of water users associations have a strong desire to maintain social harmony and keep the irrigation system running. Instead of openly addressing conflicts and differences of interest, human actors propose new technologies. This allows them to enact changes in a manner which seem less conflictual, though technologies make certain human decisions and actions possible and others not, so are in fact, highly political.

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