

# Sub-plenary 1: “New Directions in Institutional Innovation”

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## At the Interface of Innovation and Infrastructure

**Marc J. Ventresca**  
**University of Oxford**  
**marc.ventresca@sbs.ox.ac.uk**

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# Ideas for today

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- **Juxtaposing ‘institutional’, innovation, and infrastructure**
- **Activity and inhabited institutions**
- **Reports from the field**
- **WWSS and re-reading Selznick**
- **Why activity at various scale matters**
- **EGOS focus questions:**
  - **How ensure that how we generate value, profit today does not come at cost to other societies or future generations?**
  - **What implications of current econ, social crisis for how we live, design orgs, support society?**
- **How stimulate research reflexivity about orgs?**

# Juxtaposing inst, innov, infrastructure

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- **Institutional argument can break new ground at the interface of innovation and infrastructure. Focus on innovation re-activates inquiry into ‘inhabited institutions’, bringing back both activity and people. Focus on infrastructure extends attention to system of meaning with attention to material systems and large-scale activity.**
- **This 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Selznick’s classic, *TVA and the grassroots...* is a useful marker for rethinking how institutionalists can engage with organized activity, both small-scale and large-scale**
- **My argument today: turn our tools to issues at complex scales and to infrastructure policy**

# Org institutionalism: An idiosyncratic primer

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- Professional ‘success’ of institutional analysis may have been its downfall as a discrete analytic stance
- Humble origins: Efforts to account for organizational structures in innovative ways, that displaced then-current accounts (internal, functional, integrated) in favor of alternative claims (external, ‘cultural’, and loosely-coupled)
- Uneasy tensions between ‘institutions’ as phenomena in the world and ‘institutional’ as analytic accounts with diverse starting points
- Recent years evidence concern with institutional politics and contest, meaning and purpose, renewed interest in ideology and action, emotions, and ‘microfoundations’: all alternative and extending to

# Why 'activity' and inhabited institutions?

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- **Work on 'inhabited' foregrounds 1) focus on activity, 2) focus on 'going concerns' and people doing things together, and 3) focus on unrelenting conditions of ambiguity, 4) in the context of institutions**
- **Work on institutions points to patterns of repeated activities, focused by central purposes, that are over time durable, with strong form rules that reinforce, correct, and (may) adapt those activity patterns**
- **Anchor points for these central purposes are several, which introduces (situated) contingency.**
- **Underscores interaction and the social (heir to long traditions of non-contract social theory), rather than abstracting to hypothetical actors with presumed profiles and preferences**

# In search of an 'inst theory of innovation'?

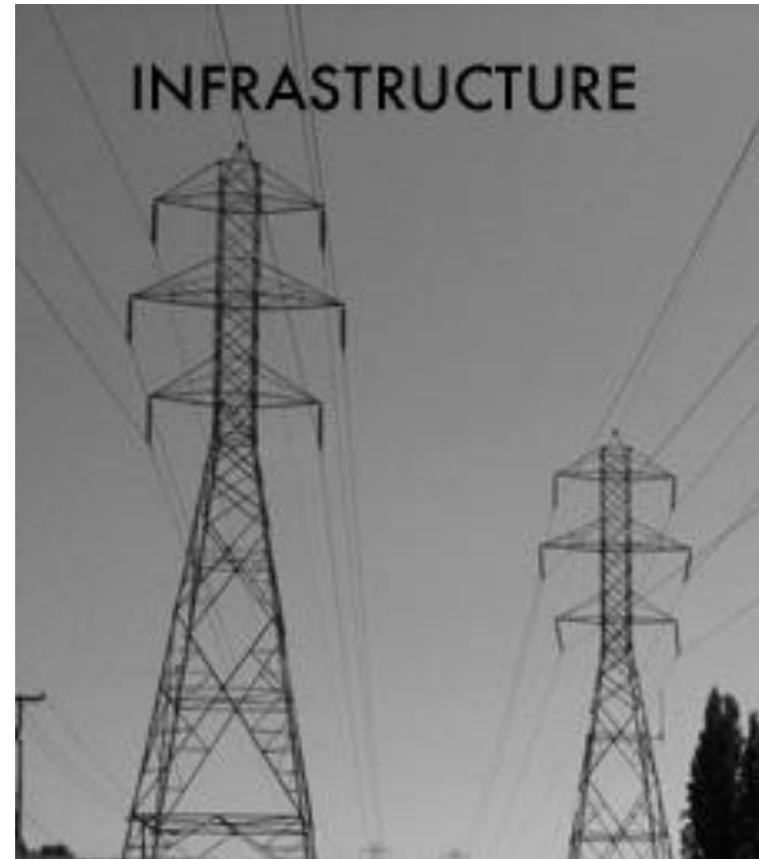
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- **Recent views of innovation emphasize**
  - **Broadly Schumpeterian, so not only technology per se, but new forms of organization, provision, value**
  - **Recombination, repurposing of existing elements**
  - **Transposition of elements to diverse context, and**
  - **Systembuilding work, pivoting incumbent value chains and inventing new ecosystems for action**
- **Suddaby gives us a focus on representation and collective memory, as critical resources and also processes by which inst innovation occurs**
- **Boxenbaum offer a model of innovation that starts from 'cognitive nano-processes of embedded agency' support innovation, how representations allow individuals to note novelty, and integrate into their repertoires, and how inst innovations, manifest in legal rules/categories, come to ind behavior and hence org practice.**

# Reports from the field: Illustrative examples of Infrastructure, old and new

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- **The basic structure of services, installations, and facilities needed to support industrial, agricultural, and other economic development; included are transport and communications, along with water, power, and other public utilities.**
- **‘Infrastructure’ is theorized in the idiom of them modern nation-state: Need alternative starting points for ‘national’ systems**



# Towards a New Infrastructure Asset Class by 2020" Lim (Min Trade&Industry) Summit 2014

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- **Building a strong pipeline of bankable projects**
  - First, this “new asset class” requires a strong pipeline of bankable assets.
  - Asia’s infrastructure requirements have been projected at US\$800bn annually until 2020. However, the proportion of projects that are bankable has been estimated to be as low as 10 per cent. This means that efforts must be made to enhance the bankability of Asian infrastructure projects, or we will lose the opportunity to bring in private sector capital, and the onus will fall on governments to provide the funding required.
- With Singapore being one of the few locations globally where we have the World Bank co-located with IFC and MIGA, the Bank Group here is uniquely placed to provide integrated services to governments and bring landmark deals to the market. A recent example is the work on Vietnam’s National Highway 20, in which the World Bank provided technical support and capacity building, while MIGA helped to mobilise commercial financing by providing a US\$500m guarantee for a 15-year loan.

# Building cultural infrastructure for the smart grid (Shapiro, HBR, 2010)

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- **Key issue in the smart grid debate is how we create an intelligent infrastructure for sustainable use of resources. [For] smart grid, buildings, vehicles, and computing, we can't just focus on whiz-bang widgets. Rather, we need to investigate the cultural infrastructure that will enable us to create, deploy, and scale up these innovations.... bigger than technology. We need the right tools in place, but we also need thoughtful allocation of capital, appropriate regulation, grants and incentives, and change in mindset.**
- **Cultural infrastructure includes the way we think, educate, engage, behave, and reward. It's in our mindsets, our biases, our relationships, which may vary by geography and social strata. It has an inarguable impact on our ability to create change. If we don't get our cultural infrastructure right, we'll have a very hard time transforming our actual infrastructure — technology alone won't fundamentally change our relationship with natural resources.**

# Cultural infrastructure (Turner NMS 2009)

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**Every August for more than a decade, thousands of information technologists and other knowledge workers have trekked out into a barren stretch of alkali desert and built a temporary city devoted to art, technology and communal living: Burning Man.... [Burning Man] ethos supports new forms of production emerging in Silicon Valley and especially at Google. It shows how elements of the Burning Man world – including the building of a sociotechnical commons, participation in project-based artistic labor and the fusion of social and professional interaction – help to shape and legitimate the collaborative manufacturing processes driving the growth of Google and other firms.**

# **‘Bridging Gowanus’ (Pratt Center, 2014)**

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- **Provision of essential public services**
  - Prioritize provision of public services, including increasing the number of public schools seats, enhancing existing community spaces, improving safety, and/or increasing bus service.
  - Investment in public infrastructure improvements
  - Prioritize investment in public infrastructure, including new green spaces, improved streetscaping, new transit connections, and/or new bridges across the canal.
- **Enhance connectivity**
  - Create design guidelines and/or use improvements to open space, streets, and transit to promote connectivity within Gowanus, and with nearby neighborhoods.
  - Adaptive reuse of historically significant buildings for community
  - Identify historically significant buildings and promote their reuse for community-oriented purposes.
- **Incentives to develop community facilities in future rezoning**
  - Provide incentivizes in return for building permanently affordable space for community facilities,

# **Cultural anthropology of infrastructure**

**(Lockrem and Lugo 2012)**

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- **Focus on infrastructure also creates a conceptual space to examine the shifting boundaries between material and immaterial structures, and the shifting networks between assemblages of human and nonhuman actors.**
  - **Furthermore, tracing infrastructure reveals power dynamics that transcend divides between public and private, state and NGO. Taking infrastructure as the object of analysis allows a different approach than that of neoliberalism, which has been criticized as a perspective that is too broad and can fail to consider everyday practices in local contexts, including how the broad brushstrokes of neoliberalism fail to account for the complex relationships people construct with states and other power structures.**
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# Rethink 'infrastructure'

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- **Not only physical capacity, but with strong material 'constraint'**
- **Empirical sites that test and discipline institutional arguments**
- **Different substantive basis for rethinking core imageries of 'institution'**
  - **Durable**
  - **Meaningful**
  - **Complex division of labor 'in the making'**
  - **Large-scale coordinated activity eventually disappears into 'concrete ideology' (Espeland 1995)**
  - **System shaping, impinging on society ever after**

# Reports from the field – WWSS\* what would Selznick say?

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- **Why TVA? 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary: Revisit with purpose**
- **Large-scale societal initiatives and experiments are current around the world, many of which dwarf the TVA in scale, stakeholders, and start from alt imaginations**
- **Conceptions of both moral action and politics have become narrow, un-moored from ‘commitment’, and presentist without regard for historical insight**
- **Conventional boundaries between states, markets, and civil society are in the midst of considerable reconstruction**
- **Organizations remain as central (if recalcitrant) units for action, governance, intervention, and accountability; and in most places, these still look a lot like uncurated Weberian bureaucracies**

# Words matter for worlds: Activity at scale

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- **Complex scale**
  - **Origins of ‘scale’ in context-free conceptions**
  - **Current fascination with scale: A footnote on current innovation ideology**
  - **Recalcitrant tools, cooptation, commitment: Yes, Selznick is a not an uncontroversial source**
  - **Keywords: Enrollment, action at a distance; alignment, scaffolding, ecologies of infrastructure, entrainment, collaboration**
- **Fine, ‘sociological miniaturism’; more generally ‘people doing things together’**
- **Zelizer on circuits’; Fligstein and McAdam on ‘strategic action fields’**

Although we understand institutions to be social structures that endure through time, history is often but an implicit and often invisible construct in organizational institutionalism. Yet history and, more particularly, the interpretive and symbolic process by which the past is converted to collective memory and myth, is a key but understudied element of the means by which institutions are created, maintained and changed. Indeed, the creative reconstruction of the past is presented as a critical component of institutional innovation.

This lecture aims to shed light on how embedded individuals, through their cognitive and sensory functions, contribute to crafting institutional innovations. I discuss how selected elements from cognitive science, psychology, and literary studies can help articulate the cognitive 'nano-processes' of embedded agency. Second, I explore how visual communication and linguistic expression, enables individuals to perceive novelty and integrate it into their existing repertoire. Third, I examine how institutional innovations, through their manifestations in legal categories, come to shape individual behaviour and hence organizational practice.

Institutional arguments are breaking new ground at the interface of innovation and infrastructure. The focus on innovation re-activates inquiry into 'inhabited institutions', bringing back both activity and people; the focus on infrastructure extends the focus on systems of meaning with attention to material systems and large-scale activity. This 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Selznick's classic, "The TVA and the grassroots: A study in the sociology of formal organization", is a useful marker for rethinking how institutionalists can engage with organized activity, both small-scale and large-scale.

# R Colignon, Power Plays

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- ***Power Plays* provides a conflict model of organizational behavior based on a historical reanalysis of the creation and early development of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) from its origins as a World War I munitions plant to its consolidation as the largest electric utility in the United States. It also examines Philip Selznick's classic work, *TVA and the Grass Roots*. The book shows how the interactions among the Depression, New Deal politics, the promise of electricity, and diverse ideologies with the strategic and tactical maneuvers of a policy network explain the institutionalization of the TVA.**