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RESEARCH OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS WITHIN NEOINSTITUTIONAL THEORIES

The article discovers basic interpretations of the concept “political institutions”, its narrow and broad understanding within the frames of political and sociological sciences since the 70's years of the last century. Paper analyzed typical features and basic approaches of the known researchers of the world, mainly the Ukrainian. It also analyzed the concepts of “institutionalism” and “neoinstitutionalism” in the given context. It is grounded, that historical institutionalists overestimate the role of institutions and underestimate the breadth of alternatives actors' relative behavior choice. The good point is that this trend highlights the importance of the institutional legacy of the past for the present context.

Key words: institution, political institution, institutionalism, neoinstitutionalism, political behavior, political science, behavioral approach, functional changes.

Till the end of 1970s political institution as a researchable topic was outside political science mainstream. For it there were characteristic such things as the contextualism (the impact of the classes, geography, climate, ethnicity, culture, economics, demography and so on policy), reductionism (politics is the aggregation of the individual actions), utilitarianism (political events are determined by the rational decisions), functionalism (every political decision serves a function of achieving equilibrium in a particular situation), instrumentalism (the political actions are just a tool for the political actors selfish interests)¹.

In political science an institution is understood as: 1) installation, norm, generally accepted rule of conduct; 2) organization, association, people union.

Today understanding of an institution as a norm prevails. According to the definition of D. North, “the institutions are the rules for playing in society or, to put it more formally, they are the limits made by people which organize the relationships between people”. Similar to that is the understanding of an institution in the interpretation of T. Parsons: “institutions are the universal models of norms, which outline the behavior categories in the social relations and in the interaction with each other”².

The famous explorer of democratic transits O. Motyl briefly describes the meaning of an institution, using the definition of “valued patterns of behavior”³.

The vast majority of scientists distinguish such traits of institution as repeatability and resistance patterns of behavior. In particular, G. O'Donnell defines institutions as “regularly recurring patterns of interactions, those are known, acceptable (though not necessarily endorse) and practice by the actors who hope to continue the cooperation under the rules sanctioned and supported by these samples, in the future”⁴.

Thus, the process of institutionalization, which is extremely important in the context of democratic transit, can be understood as transformation of certain norms, practices, structures into the known and acceptable. The political actors are developing their own strategies and behavior models based on the fact that a particular norm, practice, structure will legitimately exist in the foreseeable future. Thus, in the process of institutionalization may appear stable expectations of some actors about the behavior of the other, their interaction becomes predictable. According to E. Ostroma, institutions act as a “set of acting rules which are used to determine who can make decisions, which actors are allowed or limited, which

¹ March, J., Olsen, J. (1984). The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political life. *American Political Science Review*, vol. 78, 3, 735-742.

² Норт, Д. (1997). *Институты, институциональные изменения и функционирование экономики*. Москва: Фонд экономической книги «Начала».

³ Motyl, A. (2006). Ukraine and Russia : divergent political paths / analysis & commentary. *Open Democracy Online, London*. <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/home/index.jsp>>.

⁴ Moser, Robert G. (1999). Electoral Systems and the Number of Parties in Postcommunist States. *World Politics*, vol. 51, 349-361.

procedures are should be followed”¹. Thus, a characteristic feature of the institution is exactly the typical nature, repeatability, and even daily routine norms of behavior.

In science, a narrow and a broad interpretations of an institution are used. The first says institutions are the rules which exist in the form of normes, mostly of a legal nature. The second interpretation of the concept of “institution” contains not only the legal, but also the moral norms and procedures, strategies, beliefs, customs and so on. D. North says: “I am interested as in the formal constraints: such as rules fictioned by people, as in the informal restrictions: such as the generally accepted conventions. The institutions can be the product of deliberate human design, such as the US Constitution, for example, or be just established in a process of historical development”². A. Leyphart defines institutions as “formal and informal rules of practices which are used to turn the people intentions into the social policy”³.

The new institutionalism begins to assert conceptually in the West political science in the 1980s. The researchers J. March and J. Olson were among those who were involved to the rethink of the institutional approach, and their article “The New Institutionalism: The Organizational Factors InThe Political Life” has become a kind of manifesto of the reduced research approach⁴. The importance of the institutions were justified by B. Rotstajn, P. Evans, D. Rushem'yer and T. Skokpol

The recycled interest to the institutions has been accompanied by the rethinking of this content, mentioned above, as well as by the involving of the various scientific disciplines achievements, in the result of what neoinstitutionalism acquired distinct interdisciplinary features.

For the new approach was not typical neither the simplified attention exclusively to the constitutionally enshrined power structures, nor the ignoring of the contextual features, typical for the behavioral approach. In the relation to the “old” institutionalism, the behavioral approach, the theory of rational choice and the other popular concepts of Western political science neoinstitutionalism held a clearly critical stance, along with those not rejecting their achievements and tenets, but trying to find a rational seed in them and incorporate it into its own thesaurus. This happened with several key ideas, particularly, with the perception of the individual not only as that which had been pinched by the institutional constraints, but also as one that is able to make a significant impact on the institutions itself, their proper or improper functioning, creation, destruction and so on. Neoinstitutionalists believe that the institutions can be improved for better functioning by accepting relevant decisions within existing institutions. At the same time the exaggeration of the rational choice about the existence supposedly fully informed and fully rational individual is rejected. From the neoinstitutionalism point of view, the individual tries to be rational, but at the same time he never has the complete information, and sometimes he can act altruistically or has certain restrictions on selfish or opportunistic behavior. But, in any case, the individual does not predict, but only tries to predict the consequences of his actions; the link between his actions and the expected results sometimes exists only in his imagination. It's fully applies not only the individual but also the collective political behavior.

Other words, there are rejected behavioral ideas about that the individual behavior is focused on the obtaining of real and the objective benefits and advantages which summarize on the political market, and at the same time, the institutions function only as a kind of equilibrium generator without affecting the summation of results themselves and choice, and the political process is reduced to simplified mechanical evaluation of prospects of individual preferences and the selection of appropriate behavior. In contrast to it, within the neoinstitutionalism's frames the benefits are not actually on the outside of the political process factor, but included in it, change directly in its course under the different institutional and procedural influences. In its turn, political institutions are not neutral mechanisms of interests aggregation, they influence on political process, depending on the method of their creation, the relative strength or other.

The theoretical assumptions make neoinstitutionalism approach suitable to rethink the post-Soviet transformations, because in fact they coincide with a dedicated in the previous section area of the classic tenets transitology revision or, namely with a finding of a balance between structural and procedural

¹ Цит. за: Макеев, С. (2009). Соціальні інститути: класичні тлумачення й сучасні підходи до вивчення. Соціологія: теорія, методи, маркетинг, 4, 5-20.

² Норт, Д. (1997). *Институты, институциональные изменения и функционирование экономики*. Москва: Фонд экономической книги «Начала».

³ Макеев, С. (2009). Соціальні інститути: класичні тлумачення й сучасні підходи до вивчення. *Соціологія: теорія, методи, маркетинг*, 4, 6.

⁴ March, J., Olsen, J. (1984). The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political life. *American Political Science Review*, vol. 78, № 3, 735-742.

factors.

Since in the neoinstitutional theory the institutions are treated as rules of behavior and ways to support such rules, the essential feature of the institution becomes the usage of sanctions for violations. For sustainable existence of the institutions their securing in the formal or informal norms is not enough. It is important that in the real life, the compliance of these standards would result to the rewards for individuals and its violation would result appropriate sanctions¹.

Denying understanding of an institution as an organization, D. North makes an analogy with a sport game that goes between players according to the rules: “as institutions, organizations structure the relationship between people, but it is important to separate the rules from the players”². In this sense, the organizations are the teams of players, their goal is to win the game using fair (and if possible and deceptive tactics). Institutions are the game rules.

Thus, within neoinstitutional approach and its varieties, an institution is interpreted solely in the sense, which was mentioned higher as “broad” and the formal-law “narrow” understanding, typical for the old institutionalism, is dismissed as simplistic. At the same time the new institutionalism became a connection of the elements of the old institutionalism and the non-institutional style of modern political theories³.

To the special features of the neo institutionalism belongs the emphasis on the importance of not only institutions themselves, but also on the phenomenon of formal and informal institutionalization, correlations, interconnection and the opportunity of mutual substitutability of formal and informal institutions.

Talking about key scientific issues, specific for neoinstitutionalism, they can be divided into two groups. The first one embraces the full range of the issues related to the methods, degree, influence factor of the institutions on the political behavior of actors and the course of the political process in general. The second one relates to the matters pertaining to the variability of the most institutions, their ability to emerge, evolve, faint and so on. Given this division, D. Dermeyer and K. Krebel offered to divide the neoinstitutional approach into two distinct areas, namely the “theories of the institutions” and “the institutional theories”⁴.

In terms of institutionalism, political behavior of actors and the ways of achievements of collective decisions largely depend on used institutions. Hence the problem of meaningful assessment of political processes and their results, a critical attitude to aggregation of interests and the elimination out of the moral evaluations related to the question of justice satisfaction of various social interests. Neoinstitutionalists tend to view sustainable balance of interests as a fair by definition, rejecting the very concept of the objective public interest.

Different theoretical areas united under a common “roof” of the neoinstitutionalism, do not try to be comprehensive, but focus on specific subject areas: institutions that structure interaction between a state and a group of interest, influence of formal institutions on political structure, the constitutional design, the electoral and parliamentary systems, etc.

At the same time, the designing of political institutions, their focus on achievement of certain results depends on the will of political actors. Thus regulatory standards are not something external to political process, but they are put it by different ways.

How J. March and J. Olson summarize, “the human actions, the social context and institutions interact with each other by a very complex way and this complex of interactions affects on the political life”⁵.

Neoinstitutionalism explains why the inefficient “rules of game” can exist for a long time. Summing, there can be defined several reasons for the “survival” of the inefficient political institutions.

¹ Іваненко, О. (2003). Новий інституціоналізм в економічній соціології : теоретичні підвалини дослідницьких можливостей. *Соціологія: теорія, методи, маркетинг*, 1, 60-70.

² Норт, Д. (1997). *Институты, институциональные изменения и функционирование экономики*. Москва: Фонд экономической книги «Начала».

³ Steinmo, S., Thelen, K., Longstreth, F. (1992). *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*. Cambridge Univ. Press.

⁴ Diermeier, D., Krehbiel, K. (2003). Institutionalism as a Methodology. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, vol. 15, № 2, 123-127.

⁵ March, J., Olsen, J. (1984). The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political life. *American Political Science Review*, vol. 78, 3, 735-742.

1. The authoritarian leader can be interested in them, if it contributes to the maintaining of his dominant position.
2. They can be supported by the powerful elite groups.
3. The society develops in the direction once chosen institutional trajectory.
4. The new, more efficient “rules of game” may remain idle since their introduction requires significant initial investment, from which free institutions have been entrenched for a long time.
5. The introduction of the new rules of the game can prevent the institutional frictions with the informal institutions, deeply rooted in the society.

As a result, the society develops within the defined institutions those represent a mix of effective and ineffective rules¹. The old informal institutions can sterilize and replace the new effective political institutions. Therefore, even the deep transformations of the political system cannot displace the political practices and norms which existed in the past. Thus, some positive changes can turn instead demodernization of political life.

This way, neoinstitutionalism tries to restore the connection between the theoretical propositions and the reality, which they are trying to represent; recognizes the crucial and intermediary role of institutions in the design of political behavior; recognizes the severity and unpredictability of political systems research.

In summary, it should be noted that assumptions of neoinstitutional approach can be represented by the following statements:

- 1) political institutions cannot be separated from political actors, political institutions are the part of politics as such;
- 2) the institutions determine in affective way on the actors' behavior, establishing for them frameworks of choice through formation and expression of interest;
- 3) the institutions involved in determining of policy outcomes; the ability of the actors to realize their goals is determined (at least partially) as the institutional context in which they operate.

Within neoinstitutionalism we may distinguish its directions:

Normative institutionalism cares norms role in the formation and functioning of the institutions and in the determining of individual behavior when the institutions determine the frameworks of an individual choice through formation and expression of the interest.

The focus of social institutionalism is the system of relations between society and the state, including neocorporatism institutions. The institutions within this area are seen as a reference framework that helps actors to determine what variants of behavior are the best or the relevant to the situation, and to understand better and predict the behavior of others. Therefore, the institutions are the key intermediaries between the individuals and their environment in general, and between individuals themselves. With their help the individuals understand the meaning and consequences of their actions. The social institutionalism lets reveal the overall picture of the impact of institutions on behavior and identity.

Institutionalism, from the perspective of rational choice, treats political behavior as a function of the rules and incentives rather than norms and values. Institutes are understood as systems of rules and incentives, following which, a persons try to maximize their own benefit. Accordingly, institutions themselves are considered as formal educations, and the angle of their consideration has an instrumental nature, other words institutions are the actors' tools to achieve their own goals, which they determine for themselves under the influence of external factors. The actors can create the new institutions or use existing ones. It assumes the existence of restrictions of goal-setting options on the actors from the institutions, but the actors agree with such restrictions as to determine the rules for them is more productive and profitable than the unilateral actions. Thus, institutions exist as long as the actors perceive them as such, that providing them an advantage rather than create obstacles.

Historical institutionalism is trying to understand the logic of the policy development through the initial decisions that affect the future political course. Institutions are defined as formal and informal procedures, routines, norms and consents those exist in the organizational structure of the political system. The key provision of the historical institutionalism: primary choice affects on all the subsequent political decisions, determining the future path of institutions' development. Institutions become important factors those form the behavior of the actors, when the actor is in a situation of choice of alternative behavior he chooses through the usage of available funds and accepted notions of legitimate behavior. “The trajectory

¹ Норт, Д. (1997). *Институты, институциональные изменения и функционирование экономики*. Москва: Фонд экономической книги «Начала».

of the future development” of the institutions does not mean that the actors do not have freedom of maneuver. Maybe they deliberately refuse from the trajectory path chosen by their predecessors.

Historical neoinstitutionalism explains the problem of balance continuity and change well: why, for example, it is that the introduction of a certain type of official institutions in some cases gives a good result, while others it fails; why do the institutional constraints in some countries (regions) have a decisive influence on the behavior of political actors, and others or a minimum or do not make any at all; why, despite their introduction, life often turns to the old lowed track.

Robert Putnam, an author of meaningful empirical study of the problem, explained, using this concept, the differences in outcomes of the politico-administrative reform in the North and the South of Italy, outlining the “path of dependence” in societal, economical and political development of these regions. The cliental type of relationship over a long period in the South history led here to a poor healing of the new democratic institutions. Instead the civic tradition of the North provided their rapid approval and positive impact on the values of the people¹.

About the limited impact of official institutions on the processes of democratization and the need to consider the impact of cultural factors (which in the works of neoinstitutionalists often treated as informal institutions) Francis Fukuyama writes also. Zigzags and pathology of this process, according to his words, “it seems, are outside the influence of institutional decisions, and therefore outside of the state policy”. But on the other hand, he notes that culture “is rather malleable and can be affected by developments in the three higher levels” the civil society, political institutions and ideology².

However, historical institutionalists overestimate the role of institutions and underestimate the breadth of alternatives actors’ relative behavior choice. The good point is that this trend highlights the importance of the institutional legacy of the past for the present context.

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