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THE APPLICATION OF NEW INSTITUTIONALISM AND THE RESOURCE DEPENDENCE THEORY FOR STUDYING CHANGES IN UNIVERSITIES WITHIN EUROPE

A b s t r a c t. This article offers the application of new institutionalism and the Resource Dependence Theory in order to study the transformation of higher education in Europe in accordance with the principles of the Bologna Process. At the start of this article, the most important assumptions of both theories are presented. In the next section, the similarities and differences between both theories are discussed. In the concluding part, some observations are made regarding the application of these theories for the study of changes in universities. Universities are understood here as organizations that respond differently to changes in the institutional environment. The combination of these theories allows us to focus on many different factors that determine the responses to change. It is shown that external factors (for instance, government policy and the economic situation) as well as internal factors (for the same university) may have an effect on the processes of change in universities.

Key words: neo-institutionalism, Resource Dependence Theory, universities, Bologna Process, changes, institutional environment.

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Higher education is closely linked with society. It depends on the social context and is associated with the culture and history of each specific country. During the last two decades, higher education in Europe has changed due to the globalization process and the growing integration of the European Union. Important changes have also resulted from the Bologna Process[1]. These changes affect universities and other higher education institutions and can cause tensions in relatively stable institutions.

In organizational theory, three important theories that are associated with problems of stability and change may be discerned[2]: the population ecology perspective, the source dependency perspective, and the institutional perspective[3]. These are theories that focus on organizations and their environment, and which emphasize the importance of an environment[4]. In this article, two theories are presented: new institutionalism, alternatively known as neo-institutionalism, (NI) and the Resource Dependence Theory (RDT). Both theories focus on the relationships between an organization and its environment, and the interaction with the global environment[5]. At the end of the article, some principles are presented that may guide the application of these two theories to studying changes in universities that emerged under the influence of the Bologna Process.

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[1] The Bologna Process is named after the Bologna Declaration, a multi governmental agreement, which was signed on 19 June 1999 by ministers in charge of higher education from 29 European countries (now 46 countries). The main aim of the Bologna Process was the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The objectives were as follows:

− adopt a system of easily readable and comparable degrees and a system with two main cycles (undergraduate/graduate), and an establish a system of credits (ECTS);

− promote European co-operation in quality assurance;

− promote mobility and internationalization;

− promote a social dimension in higher education and lifelong learning strategies;

− underlines the importance of the stakeholders: students, universities, business;

− promotion of the attractiveness of the European Higher Education Area.

[2] In this article, we consider a university to be an organization.

[3] F. VAN VUGHT, *Diversity and Differentiation in Higher Education Systems*, CHET anniversary conference, Cape Town: 2007. Online: http://www.universityworldnews.com/filemgmt_data/files/Frans-van-Vucht.pdf.

[4] J. PFEFFER, G.R. SALANCIK, *The external control of organizations. A resource dependence perspective*, Stanford: Stanford Business Books 2003, p. XIII.

[5] J.C. VERHOEVEN, G. DEVOS, C. SMOLDERS, W. COOLS, J. VELGHE, *Hogescholen. Enkele jaren na de fusie*, Antwerpen/Appeldoorn: Garant-Uitgevers n.v. 2002.

1. THE THEORY OF NEW INSTITUTIONALISM

New institutionalism is a theoretical perspective that borrows many ideas from other methods of organizational analysis. It creates an exciting interdisciplinary perspective, interconnecting levels of micro/meso/macro structures and the subjective and objective aspects of social life. Neo-institutionalism is not only applied in sociology, but also in political science and economics. Several variants of this theory can be found in literature. Hall and Taylor[6] describe three types of new institutionalism: historical institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism, and sociological institutionalism[7]. This categorization more or less mirrors the division of neo-institutionalism between economics, political science, and sociology.

New institutionalism in economics is interesting for the analysis of markets, companies, economic behavior, and economic development. A large variety of literature contributes to a mixture of ideas forming the new institutional theory of economics. Three themes link all the contributions. First, neo-institutionalists apply a broad concept of the economic agent. Second, they focus on the study of economic processes and the evolution of economic systems over time. Third, the coordination of economic activity depends also on non-economic types of institutional structures. It is not only a matter of market-mediated transactions[8].

The institutional approach in political science usually focused on historical processes. Historical institutionalism began to explore how social and political institutions could generate distinctive national trajectories. Institutions are seen as "relatively persistent features of the historical development along a set of 'paths'"[9]. In the path dependence concept, 'history matters', paths can be understood as selected directions of development. Decisions made in the early stages of the time span of an institution or policy, constrain activity after that point. In other words, possible decisions are limited by the deci-

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[6] P.A. HALL, R.C.R. TAYLOR, *Political science and the three new institutionalisms*, "Political Studies" 6/1996, p. 936.

[7] Some scholars have also distinguished a fourth type of new institutionalism on the basis of the perception of changes. They emphasize the role of discourse and ideas to explain endogenous institutional change, whereas other "neo-institutionalist scholars in all three neo-institutionalisms have mainly explained change as coming from the outside, as the result of exogenous shocks" (V.A. SCHMIDT, *Taking ideas and discourse seriously: explaining change through discursive institutionalism as the fourth 'new institutionalism*, "European Political Science Review" 2/2010, s. 2).

[8] R.W. SCOTT, *Institutions and organizations*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications 2001, p. 28-29.

[9] HALL, TAYLOR, *Political*, p. 941.

sions that have been made in the past[10]. The concept of path dependence seems particularly suited to explore tensions between 'national inertia' and 'international push factors'. Factors of 'national inertia' stress persistence (and explain why institutions are so hard to change). They preserve stability and are also the reasons for persistence. However, in spite of this, change is always possible. For instance, change might emerge from new technologies as the diffusion of ideas, or from socioeconomic developments that can lead to political outcomes[11]. These are the 'international push factors' which focus on the dynamics.

In sociology, new institutionalism is part of organizational studies. The roots of the assumptions of new institutionalism in sociology are wide and interdisciplinary, and combine more classical organizational studies (based on M. Weber and T. Parsons) with influences of cognitive theory, phenomenology, cultural studies, and ethnomethodology[12]. These influences are also a reason for the differences in this theory and the existence of many faces[13] of institutional theory in sociology[14].

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[10] I. GREENER, *The Potential of Path Dependence in Political Studies*, "Politics" 1/2005, p. 62-72.

[11] HALL, TAYLOR, *Political*, p. 942.

[12] SCOTT, *Institutions.*

[13] Here, an important distinction between the old and the new approach should be mentioned. F. Selznick, whose works are cited as an example of the 'old' institutionalism, argued that "The 'new institutionalism' in the study of organizations has generated fresh insights as well as interesting shifts of focus" (P. SELZNICK, *Institutionalism "old" and "new"*, "Administrative Science Quarterly" 2/1996, p. 273). Nee and Ingram point out that new and old institutionalism share skepticism toward the rational actor model, emphasize the relationship between organizations and their environment, and stress the role of culture (V. NEE, P. INGRAM, *Embeddedness and Beyond: Institutions, Exchange, and Social Structure*, in: *The new institutionalism in sociology*, M.C. BRINTON, V. NEE (eds.), Stanford: Stanford University Press 2001, p. 12). However, there are more differences between new and old institutionalism. Hall and Taylor (HALL, TAYLOR, *Political*, p. 948) suggest that old and new institutionalism discern different relations between institutions and individual actions. The old institutionalism supports a more 'normative dimension' of the institutional impact in which individuals, who have been socialized into particular institutional roles, internalize the norms associated with these roles. By contrast the new institutionalism represents a more 'cognitive dimension' of the institutional impact in which institutions influence behavior not simply by specifying what one should do, but also by specifying what one can imagine oneself doing in a given context. Thereby institutions affect also the most basic preferences of individuals and their very identity. This change can be described as a shift from Parson's action theory to a theory of practical action based on ethnomethodology and 'cognitive revolution'. In particular, three theoretical approaches influenced the thinking about human action in new institutionalism: the Carnegie school (J. March and H. Simon), ethnomethodology (H. Garfinkel), and phenomenology (T. Luckmann and P. Berger) (P. DIMAGGIO, W.W. POWELL, *The new institutionalism in organizational analysis*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1991, pp. 15-19). The differences between old and new institutionalism reflect changes in social theory.

[14] W.R. SCOTT, *The Adolescence of Institutional Theory*, "Administrative Science Quarterly" 4/1987, pp. 493-511.

Organizations are seen as deeply embedded in social and political environments, and organizational practices and structures are reflections of the rules, beliefs, and conventions established in the wider environment. The definition of an institution varies among authors, but they agree that an institution is not necessarily a formal structure[15]. It is instead a collection of rules and routines. March and Olsen defined an institution as a "relatively stable collection of rules and practices, embedded in structures of resources that make action possible – organizational, financial and staff capabilities, and structures of meaning that explain and justify behavior – roles, identities and belongings, common purposes, and causal and normative beliefs"[16]. Scott defined institutions as "multifaceted, durable social structures, made up of symbolic elements, social activities and material resources"[17]. In sociological institutionalism, the definition contains symbols, cognitive scripts, and moral templates[18]. In effect, a distinction can be made between institution and culture. Institutions can affect the most basic preferences and identity of individuals. They do not simply specify what one should do, but they specify the context in which one acts and can imagine oneself. This feature is a result of the influence of social constructivism (P. Berger and T. Luckmann) on new institutionalism[19].

Problems with the origin and change of institutions are associated with the problem of legitimacy. An organization functions in a specific institutional environment and it adopts institutional rules because of their social legitimacy, rather than their efficiency. The relationship between an organization and the institutional environment is one of the central problems for new institutionalism in sociology. This relationship is viewed as the problem of the similarity of organizations to their environment and thereby to each other. Hughes and Lander noted: "The central question of neo-institutional theory is straightforward: 'What makes organizations so similar?'"[20]. New institutionalism

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[15] B.G. Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science*, Bloomsbury 2005, p. 29. Online: http://books.google.de/books?id=HXV2esV-PUkC.

[16] J.G. March, J.P. Olsen, *The Logic of Appropriateness*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*, R.E. Goodin, M. Moran, M. Rein (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009, pp. 689-708.

[17] Scott, *Institutions*.

[18] Hall, Taylor, *Political*.

[19] Scott, *The Adolescence*, pp. 495-496.

[20] P. Heugens, M. Lander, *Testing the Strength of the Iron Cage: A Meta-Analysis of Neo-Institutional Theory*, 2007, p. 6, online: http://ssrn.com/abstract=962252.

sees organizations as embedded "in a variety of social-institutional influences stemming from different spheres of society; political influences […] cultural influences […] and economic influences […] are all considered"[21]. In other words, culture and society matter and they have an influence on organizations, but also vice versa.

The problem of the relationship between organizations and their environment was also a theme in the article by Meyer and Rowan "Institutionalized organizations. Formal structure as myth and ceremony" (1977)[22]. Meyer and Rowan emphasized the fact that organizations in modern society arise in a highly institutionalized context. Thereby new organizations incorporate new practice, policies, and a concept of organizational work as a powerful myth. The conformity to institutionalized rules (viewed as classifications built into society as reciprocated typifications or interpretations) can conflict sharply with actual work activities: "To maintain ceremonial conformity, organizations that reflect institutional rules tend to buffer their formal structures from the uncertainties of technical activities by becoming loosely coupled[23], building gaps between their formal structures and actual work activities"[24]. For example, organizations in a specific field of industry tend to be similar in their formal appearance, but they may show a great deal of diversity in actual practice. Because of their conformity to institutionalized rules, organizations tend to become isomorphic with the shared institutional environment. Meyer

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[21] K. SENGE, *The 'New Institutionalism' in Organization Theory: Bringing Society and Culture Back*, "The American Sociologist" 1/2013, pp. 76-95.

[22] J.W. MEYER, B. ROWAN, *Institutionalized organizations. Formal structure as myth and ceremony*, "American Journal of Sociology" 2/1977.

[23] The concept of the loosely coupled systems was coined by K. Weick. In his essay "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems" (1976), he used the educational system of the US to show how loosely coupled systems are both prevalent and important for organizational functions. In his opinion, the coupling mechanisms are the technical core of the organization and the authority of office. A loosely coupled system has advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, these organizations are more resistant to change, but on the other hand, they could benefit from it. For example, loosely coupled systems may allow parts of the organization to persist; a loosely coupled system may better detect changes in the environment; local groups can adapt to their part of the environment without changing the entire system; loosely coupled systems provide more diversity to adapt to changing environmental situations; they are less affected by a breakdown of a part of a system; there is more room available for self-determination by actors and it should be less expensive to run because it takes time and money to coordinate people. (K.E. WEICK, *Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems*, "Administrative Science Quarterly" 1/1976, pp. 1-19).

[24] MEYER, ROWAN, *Institutionalized*, p. 341.

and Rowan described four 'levels' of isomorphism. First, changing formal structures: an organization designs and changes its formal structure to show it wants to act toward collectively valued purposes and wants to do this in a proper and adequate manner to become legitimate. Second, adopting external assessment criteria: organizations become sensitive to external criteria of worth (certification, accreditation, praise, etc.). Moreover, this legitimizes organizations, not only for non-members of the organization but also for internal participants. Third, stabilization of external and internal organizational relationships. Centralized states, unions, professional associations, and coalitions among organizations standardize and stabilize them. The final level is organizational success and survival. In effect, the success of an organization depends on factors other than just efficiency and the control of productive activities[25].

A significant addition to the approach of Meyer and Rowan is the concept of institutional isomorphism that Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell presented in the article "The Iron Cage Revisited; Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields" (1983). According to the authors, isomorphism is the most common source of institutional change. Homogeneity especially concerns organizational fields (organizations that provide similar products or services)[26]. Following on from Hawley, DiMaggio and Powell defined isomorphism as a "constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions". They identified two forms of isomorphism: competitive isomorphism (for fields with free and open competition) and institutional isomorphism. Three mechanisms of institutional isomorphism are discerned: coercive, mimetic, and normative. Coercive isomorphism occurs when there is formal and informal pressure to change, from other organizations or the state (for instance bylaw), a particular field of action. Mimetic isomorphism is a response to uncertainty. In order to be more successful and legitimate, organizations follow other, successful organizations. Normative isomorphism is associated with professionalization. Similar formal education and professional networks (through the diffusion of ideas and practices) create a common cognitive base in organizations.

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[25] Ibidem, pp. 348-352.

[26] P. DiMaggio, W.W. Powell, *The iron cage revisited: institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organization fields*, "American Sociological Review" 2/1983, p. 147.

The new developments in new institutionalism are closer to the concept of institutions as products of human action than as a limit of human agency. More attention is paid to individuals. Victor Nee developed an analysis of the relationship between individuals and institutions. Referring directly to the concept of institutional isomorphism of Powell and DiMaggio and the concept of embeddedness[27], he tried to combine sociological institutionalism with economic concepts. He saw individuals as embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relationships. He defined the institutional environment as "the formal regulatory rules monitored and enforced by the state that govern property rights, markets and firms"[28]. The institutional framework encompasses formal rules of the institutional environment and informal rules embedded in social relationships. Changes in social organization depend on changes in the institutional environment (as a result of path dependence). Indeed, the institutional environment imposes constraints on organizations through market mechanisms and state regulation. Organizations can monitor and force social groups and individuals and they can, through collective action, lobby for changes in the formal rules to be more in accord with their interests. Social groups and individuals can influence organizations by compliance with formal norms or by decoupling arising from opposition norms. Actors can also change formal norms by collective action[29]. Nee[30] illustrated these relationships in a multi-level causal model for new institutionalism in economic sociology.

Former ideas concerning neo-institutionalism inspired R. Scott to some new approaches to social organization. He used DiMaggio and Powell's distinction between three basic modes of institutionalization in the reconstruction

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[27] The concept of embeddedness is described by Mark Granovetter in his essay "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness" (1985). He noted that in sociology and economics two false concepts of human action are used: oversocialized and undersocialized human action. Both of these isolated actors. He thought that "Actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside a social context, nor do they adhere slavishly to a script written for them" (M. GRANOVETTER, *Economic Embeddedness*, in: *Contemporary sociological theory*, C.J. CALHOUN (ed.), 2nd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub. 2007, pp. 162-170.). In his opinion, most behavior is closely embedded in a network of relationships, and that avoids both extreme concepts (M. GRANOVETTER, *Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness*, "American Journal of Sociology" 1/1985, pp. 481-510).

[28] V. NEE, *The New Institutionalism in Economics and Sociology*, 2003, p. 25. Online http://www.economyandsociety.org/publications/wp4_nee_03.pdf.

[29] NEE, INGRAM, *Embeddedness*.

[30] NEE, *The New*, p. 2.

of the entire tradition of institutional organization theory. It turns out that the analysis of the historical heritage of economics, political science, and sociological trends in organization theory can be combined into one approach based on three different elements of institutions: cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative. These three elements are the building blocks of institutional structures, which Scott called the three pillars of institutions. The regulative pillar is associated with a system of rules, the normative with norms, values, and roles – but also with social relationships – and the cultural-cognitive stresses cognitive dimensions of people and a common framework of meaning. Scott characterized the pillars as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Pillars of institutions in the theory of Scott

	Regulative	**Normative**	**Cultural-cognitive**
Basis of compliance	Expedience	Social obligation	Taken-for-granted Shared understanding
Basis of order	Regulative rules	Binding expectations	Constitutive schema
Mechanisms	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
Logic	Instrumentality	Appropriateness	Orthodoxy
Indicators	Rules Laws Sanctions	Certification Accreditation	Common beliefs Shared logics of action
Basis of legitimacy	Legally sanctioned	Morally governed	Comprehensible Recognizable Culturally supported

Source: SCOTT, *Institutions*, p. 52.

These pillars expose three related but distinguishable areas of legitimacy: legally sanctioned, morally governed, and culturally supported (which is the deepest form of legitimacy), however, they also can be in conflict. These three pillars can also distinguish the different types of diffusion of an institutional form (a set of rules or structural forms) across space and time, which are adopted by and incorporated into organizations. In the regulative pillar, diffusion is supported by regular authority. In the normative pillar, the most important elements are network ties and the relational structure. The cultural-cognitive pillar refers to the diffusion of ideologies, beliefs, and archetypes.

Scott also developed a multi-level model of institutional forms and flows to show the different structural levels.

Figure 2. Model of the new institutionalism by R. Scott
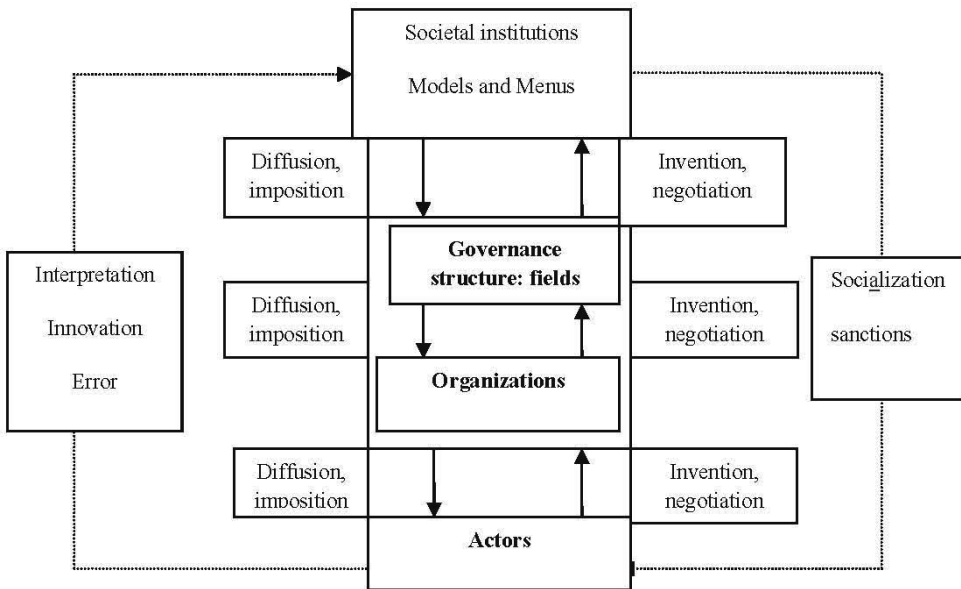
Source: Scott, *Institutions*, p. 195.

The context is provided by the world system, and trans-societal and societal institutions. In this context, an institutional field is in operation, which grants a context for particular organizations and other forms of collective actions. The top-down processes are: constitutive activities, diffusion, socialization, imposition, authorization, inducement, and imprinting. They allow constraint or empower the structure and actions of lower-level actors. The bottom-up processes include: various and selective attention, interpretation and sense making, identity construction, error, invention, conformity and

reproduction of patterns, compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation[31].

Scott and other authors show that institutions and institutional dynamics can be studied in different ways and that we can take into account the different elements of institutions. New institutionalism offers an interesting theoretical framework for analysis, but has also some limitations. For example, little attention is paid to "the 'inside' of organizations, i.e. issues of power and interests of actors within organizations"[32]. The Resource Dependence Theory is an important addition in this regard.

2. RESOURCE DEPENDENCE THEORY

The Resource Dependence Theory (as does new institutionalism) focuses on the social context and the environment of organizations. However, the Resource Dependence Theory provides "different insights in why and how organizations react to changes"[33]. The main assumptions of this theory can be described in three steps: 1) every organization needs resources to survive and this leads to interdependence; 2) this interdependence leads to uncertainty; and 3) in order to reduce uncertainty, organizations change their strategy to survive. The interdependence is the actors' mutual dependence on each other[34] and leads to the problem of power. Power, which is associated with the control of resources, is one of the important elements to understand the Resource Dependence Theory[35].

In general, three main principles guide the theory: 1) the social context matters; 2) organizations have strategies to enhance their autonomy and pur-

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[31] SCOTT, *Institutions*, p. 196.

[32] J.C. VERHOEVEN, K. DE WIT, *Stakeholders in Universities and Colleges in Flanders*, "European Journal of Education" 4/2000, p. 422.

[33] P. FISSER, *Using Information and Communication Technology*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Twente, 2001, p. 26.

[34] T. CASCIARO, J.M. PISKORSKI, *Power imbalance and interorganizational relations: Resource Dependence Theory revisited*, p. 6. Online: http://web.mit.edu/sloan/osg-seminar/f03_docs/RDRevisited.pdf.

[35] F.G. DAVIS, A.J. COBB, *Chapter 2 Resource dependence theory: Past and future*, in: *Stanford's Organization Theory Renaissance 1970–2000*, p. 28, Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing 2010, p. 5.

sue interests; and 3) power is important for understanding the internal and external actions of organizations.

First, the social context matters and is important for understanding the decision-making process in organizations. Organizations are seen as open systems, which are embedded in social relationships and networks of interdependencies. In order to survive and exist, organizations need resources. Resources may be financial or material, as well as symbolic. No organization is independent and self-contained. Organizations must cooperate and transact with each other and with the other elements of the environment in order to acquire resources. Therefore, organizations are dependent on their environment and on the sources of valuable resources. In a stable environment, gathering resources is not problematic. The problem is more complex in a non-stable environment[36]. Second, organizations are constrained by their position in society and their environment, but there is also an opportunity to gain more autonomy. An organization can negotiate its position using different tactics and making strategic choices to minimize uncertainty and dependence, and maximize its autonomy. For example, an organization can find alternative suppliers to increase its independence. It can also join associations or business groups, invite a representative of its sources onto its governing board, or incorporate them within the organization's boundary through mergers and acquisitions[37]. Generally, we can describe relationships between organizations, environments, and inter-organizational relationships as a dynamic interaction and evolution over time. Third, Pfeffer and Salancik emphasize the role and the importance of power[38]. Some organizations have more power than others. The extent of the power depends on the resources.

An organization wants to have more independence and tries to respond to changes in its environment in order to have more power. How an organization responds to changes is influenced by the organization itself; its structure, information systems, and management. The external environment and the internal management of an organization are both important for its functioning. However, individuals would have less effect on organizational outcomes than the organizational context. There are many possibilities for managers and administrative personnel in organizations. The management guides and controls the process of manipulating of the environment, as well as recognizing

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[36] PFEFFER, SALANCIK, *The external*, p. 3.

[37] DAVIS, COBB, *Chapter 2 Resource*.

[38] PFEFFER, SALANCIK, *The external*, p. XIII.

the social context and the constraints within an organization[39]. Organizations have information systems and based on this, they select and interpret the information that comes from the environment. This information depends on the fact that "the individuals who attend to the information occupy certain positions in the organizations and tend to define the information as a function of their position"[40]. Moreover, the organizational response is often built on past environmental contingencies. The creation of a new information structure takes time. Decisions and action are determined by this "enacted environment" (based on knowledge of the set of definitions). Planning in an organization is retrospective[41].

Figure 3. Relationship among the dimensions
of an organizational environment in the Resource Dependence Theory
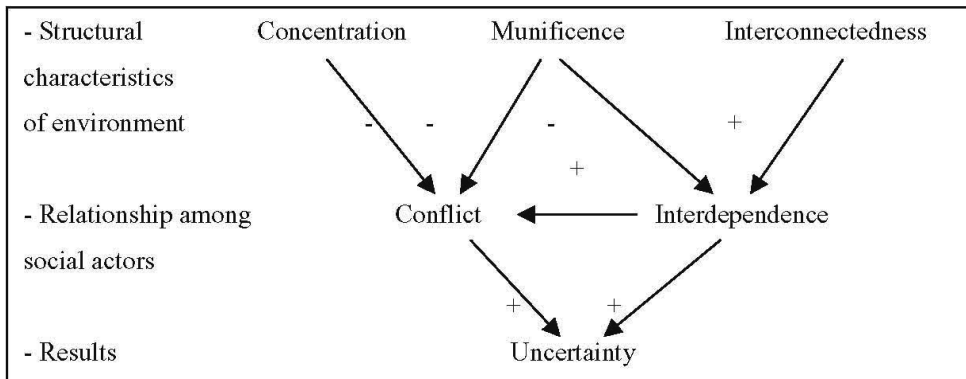
Source: PFEFFER, SALANCIK, *The external*, p. 68.

An organization may also have an influence on other organizations. Organizations are interdependent. The interdependence might become visible in outcomes and behavior. This interdependence can be symbiotic (in the case of different resources for different organizations) or competitive (when they compete with each other for resources). This interdependence is usually a-symmetric. The more important the external organization is, the greater the

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[39] Ibidem, p. 18.
[40] Ibidem, p. 13.
[41] Ibidem, p. 78.

dependence on this organization[42]. The other organizations are part of the environment of the organization. However, the environment of an organization includes, according to Pfeffer and Salancik, "every event in the world which has any effect on the activities or outcomes of the organization"[43]. The most elementary structural characteristics of the environment are the concentration of power (the extent to which power and authority in the environment are widely dispersed), the munificence (the availability or scarcity of critical resources), and the interconnectedness (the number of patterns of linkages and connections between organizations). These three characteristics determine the relationship among social actors. Conflict and interdependence determine the uncertainty met by an organization.

The most interesting problem concerns interconnectedness. The interconnectedness of organizations results in their interdependence on each other. Moreover, the more levels of connectedness, the more unstable the environment for organizations is. The adaptation of an organization to the environment can be easier in more loosely coupled systems. Pfeffer and Salancik mentioned: "when everything is connected to everything else, it is difficult to change anything because there are more constraints deriving from the large number of interrelationships"[44]. As a consequence, the loose coupling of a system makes the system more stable and harder to change than the connectedness. Organizations seek stability and certainty in their own resource exchanges, but on the other hand, future adaptation requires the ability to change. This creates a dilemma. To gain stable resources, organizations must abandon some of their autonomy. Drees and Heugens noted that: "The main question addressed by RDT is, why do organizations enter into interorganizational arrangements?"[45]. They also emphasized that the RDT tries to explain why formally independent organizations engage in different kinds of inter-organizational arrangements, such as board interlocks, alliances, joint ventures, insourcing, mergers, and acquisitions. The agreements in this theory are seen as instruments "for reducing power imbalances and for managing mutual dependencies"[46].

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[42] Ibidem, p. 60.

[43] Ibidem, p. 12.

[44] Ibidem, p. 69.

[45] J.M. DREES, P. HEUGENS, *Synthesizing and Extending Resource Dependence Theory: A Meta-Analysis*, "Journal of Management" 6/2013, pp. 1666-1698.

[46] Ibidem.

3. COMPARING NEW INSTITUTIONAL THEORY
AND RESOURCE DEPENDENCY THEORY

To combine the new institutional theory and the Resource Dependence Theory, first, we have to point out the similarities and differences between them. These two theories share some assumptions about organizations as open systems. In both theories, the role of the environment is important and it is considered to have an influence on organizations. Both perspectives also emphasize the subjective character of the environment and the role of the interpretation and social construction of meanings[47]. Fisser[48] noted that the RDT and new institutionalism share two main assumptions: 1) organizational choice and action are influenced by various external pressures and demands; and 2) organizations must be responsive in order to survive. However, there are also two main differences: the capability and the way of reacting to changes in the environment of the organization. The RDT focuses on active adaptation and (strategic) choice to increase the independence of an organization and the control of the environment to obtain critical resources. New institutionalism emphasizes the external pressure from the institutional environment and maintains that organizations are dependent on their legitimacy[49].

Oliver noted that the RDT and new institutionalism are convergent. Both theories describe different types of responses, depending on the nature and the context of external pressure. She pointed out that: "organizational responses will vary from conforming to resistant, from passive to active, from preconscious to controlling, from impotent to influential, and from habitual to opportunistic, depending on the institutional pressures toward conformity that are exerted on organizations"[50].

Oliver compared the similarities and differences between both theories using two perspectives: the context of organizational behavior and the motives of organizational behavior (see Figure 4).

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[47] VERHOEVEN, DEVOS, SMOLDERS, COOLS, VELGHE, *Hogescholen*, p. 7.

[48] FISSER, *Using*, p. 30.

[49] VERHOEVEN, DE WIT, *Stakeholders*, p. 422.

[50] C. OLIVER, *Strategic responses to institutional processes,* "The Academy of Management Review" 1/1991, p. 151.

Figure 4. Oliver's comparison of New Institutional and Resource Dependence Perspectives

	Convergent assumptions	Divergent foci	
		New Institutional Theory	Resource Dependence Theory
Context of organizational behavior	Organizational choice is constrained by multiple external pressures	- Institutional environment - Non-choice behavior	- Task environment - Active choice behavior
	Organizational environments are collective and interconnected	- Conforming to collective norms and beliefs - Invisible pressures	- Coping with interdependencies - Visible pressures
	Organizational survival depends on responsiveness to external demands and expectations	- Isomorphism - Adherence to rules and norms	- Adaptation - Management of scarce resources
Motives of organizational behavior	Organizations seek stability and predictability	- Organizational persistence - Habit and convention	- Reduction of uncertainty - Power and influence
	Organizations seek legitimacy	- Social worthiness - Conformity to external criteria	- Resource mobilization - Control of external criteria
	Organizations are interest driven	- Interests institutionally defined - Compliance self-serving	- Interests political and calculative - Non-compliance self-serving

Source: OLIVER, *Strategic*, p. 147.

According to Oliver, the RDT is focused on a more active choice and exchange with the environment. By contrast, new institutionalism emphasizes different types of institutional conformity and norms that are taken for granted. The RDT asks who controls the resources, while new institutionalism is interested in the question who shapes and enforces institutional rules. In the RDT as well as in new institutionalism, organizations seek stability. In the RDT, organizations exercise some degree of control or influence to achieve stability, while in new institutionalism, organizations reproduce and imitate organizational structures and activities. In the RDT, legitimacy is viewed more instrumentally (as one of the resources), whereas in new institutionalism it is seen as the main goal of an organization. However, it should be mentioned that the comparison is for some parts too strict. For example, according to Oliver, the new institutional theory sees organizations' behavior as non-choice behavior. This is not always true. Meyer and Rowan noted: "organiza-

tions do often adapt to their institutional contexts, but they often play active roles in shaping those contexts"[51].

Despite differences, the Resource Dependence Theory and new institutionalism are compatible, not just in the sense indicated by Oliver (in the organizational response to changes) but also in a broader sense. The RDT complements new institutionalism with a number of important issues that may have an impact on organizations, and changes and relationships between an organization and the environment. For example, the RDT focuses more on the role of actors and the resource dependency of the organization.

4. USING NI AND RDT FOR RESEARCH ON CHANGES IN UNIVERSITIES – THE BOLOGNA PROCESS AS AN EXAMPLE

New institutionalism and the Resource Dependence Theory offer an interesting basis for research on changes in universities. In Europe, the Bologna Process has been an important orchestrator of change in universities. This has made the Bologna Process a very popular research topic in educational research. The most frequently studied associated topic concerns the problems of implementing the expectations of the Bologna Process in concrete national higher education(HE) systems, taking into account their specific cultural and historical context[52]. The majority of relevant literature refers to the policy

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[51] MEYER, ROWAN, *Institutionalized*, p. 348.

[52] P. LUČIN, S.P. SAMARŽIJA, *The Bologna Process as a Reform Initiative in Higher Education in Croatia*, "European Education" 3/2001, pp. 26-42; M. DESPOTOVIC, *The Interpretation and Implementation of the Bologna Process in Serbia*, "European Education" 3/2001), pp. 43-55; B. ALESI, Ch. ROSZNYAI, T. SZANTO, *The Implementation of Bachelor and Master Programmes in Hungary*, "European Journal of Education" 3/2007, pp. 395-409; J.M. GONZÁLEZ, J.L.A. MONTAÑO, T. HASSALL, *Bologna and Beyond: A Comparative Study Focused on UK and Spanish Accounting Education*, "Higher Education in Europe" 1/2009, pp. 113-125; A. GORGA, *Where Are We with the Harmonization of European Higher Education?: The Case of Central and East European Countries*, "European Education" 4/2007, pp. 58-68; M. KWIEK, *Emergent European Educational Policies Under Scrutiny*, in: *Creating the European Area of Higher Education*, P. MAASSEN, V. TOMUSK (eds.), p. 12. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands 2007, pp. 87-115; G. PUSZTAI, P. SZABÓ, *The Bologna Process as a Trojan Horse: Restructuring Higher Education in Hungary*, "European Education" 2/2008, pp. 85-103; V. TOMUSK, *The Bologna Process and the Enlightenment Project: A Bird's Eye View from the Bottom of the Slope, "European Education" 2008, pp. 9-28; A. VEIGA, A. AMARAL, Survey on the implementation of the Bologna process in Portugal, "Higher Education" 1/2009, pp. 57-69. Y. YAĞCI, *A Different View of the Bologna Process: the case of Turkey*, "European Journal of Education" 4/2010, pp. 588-600.

problems of national HE systems. Previous research has elaborated many interesting aspects of this evolution. First, the Bologna Process had different influences in different national HE systems: the culture and history of the different states had different impacts on the outcomes. Second, the Bologna Process can be analyzed at different levels and from different perspectives.

Here we will focus on the university level. New institutionalism and the RDT offer interesting theoretical perspectives for the study of this level. In the following pages, we show that these theories are useful for research concerning the Bologna Process, more precisely, for the study of changes in the universities under the influence of the process. Our aim is not to present results, but to offer a research design for studying changes in universities.

Neo-institutionalism does not offer one approach, but many, depending on the perspectives developed by different authors. However, some ideas are common among these authors. First, the idea of path dependence. In this context, tensions between 'national inertia' and 'international push factors' should be mentioned. The first stresses persistence (and questions why institutions are so difficult to change),while the second focuses on dynamics.

Second, the concept of organizational fields is also useful for the study of change in universities. Applying this concept in research on HE, the HE system can be approached as a field in which colleges and universities act as organizations. This field is sensitive to a process of isomorphism. For example, due to the new agreements for HE within the Bologna Process, which 'forces' an organization to adapt to changes, coercive isomorphism may play a role or mimetic isomorphism may emerge due to following the example of successful universities, etc.

Third, Scott has shown that HE can be analyzed by focusing on different pillars. This allows us to observe relationships between different levels of a social system (system – field – organization) and detect whether the changes are realized bottom-up or/andt op-down. For example, changes may be a result of pressure from the state (top-down) or may arise in the universities (bottom-up).

The use of new institutionalism will have some consequences for further analysis. First, this theory helps to focus on relationships between organizations, the organizational field, and the institutional framework. The institutio-

nal framework can be understood as the inherited national institutional framework of a particular country, and as an international institutional framework (e.g. the level of Europe), which influences the national institutional framework that is stable and hard to change. The changes in the institutional framework (which combines the tension between the international framework and the inherited institutional framework) concern the three dimensions (pillars) as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Three pillars of an institution according to R. Scott used to show the institutional context of the Bologna process

Regulative	Normative	Cultural-cognitive	
The European and Bologna agreements	External network ties (complexity of the	The European tradition[53] of higher	**'international push factors' (level of**
The nation-state rules (law on HE, inherited	Internal network ties (complexity of the	The nation-state tradition of the hig-	**'national inertia' (national level)**

This brings us to six hypotheses:

1) The more consistent the national HE system is with the rules of the Bologna Process agreements,…

2) The more external network ties a HE system has,…

3) The more connections a HE system has with the European tradition of higher education,…

…the more quickly changes will occur.

4) The more complex the national law concerning the HE system is,…

5) The more complex the HE system (internal networks of actors)is,…

6) The more connections a HE system has with the nation-state tradition of higher education,…

…the more slowly changes will occur.

These hypotheses need some explanation. The regulative pillar refers to a system of rules for the HE system. The most important element here is the law and its similarity with the rules of the Bologna agreements and the law.

[53] The European tradition can be understood as influences of the European models of the university, especially the Humboldt university, the Napoleonic university, and the Anglo-Saxon model.

of other European countries (similarities between systems). For example, we can expect that there will be more connections between the HE systems of countries in Western Europe than between them and countries in Eastern Europe (which were isolated for many decades due to the communist regime). This is also associated with the network of international relations and the tradition of higher education. However, some of these hypotheses will be hard to test. For example, examining the connections with the European tradition of higher education will require historical studies. Nevertheless, this can be reduced to a description of the inherited systems of HE at the moment of joining the Bologna Process. These aspects can influence a university and its adaptation to changes. For example, the system of higher education in Flanders before the Bologna Process was closer to the Bologna model than the Polish system was.

In addition, the RDT has some new implications. First, universities depend on resources, in terms of matters such as financial resources, students, and staff. The state can put pressure on universities, because the state provides the financial resources. This leads us to the following further hypotheses: The more a university is dependent on the state, the more pressure can be applied by the state to realize changes; the less dependent a university is on the state, the more active this university will be in answering the suggested innovations provided by the Bologna Process. In this regard, dependence on the state should be understood in the context of the resources which are provided by the state (not only funding, but also legitimacy, etc.), and these can vary from state to state.

Second, the external perspective should be complemented by the internal perspective and the role of the response of organizations to change. Individuals who manage an organization can, in a limited sense, influence the outcomes. This aspect brings us to the importance of key actors in the implementation of the Bologna Process and leads to the research question: What was the governance structure of a university during the realization of the Bologna Process and who made the decisions in this organization? This requires the identification of the key actors and their perception of the changes. This perception could affect the decisions within the organization and therefore the actions of the organization.

The research design is directly related to the theoretical outline presented above. The Bologna Process is an intergovernmental procedure, implemented at two levels: first at the state level and then at the level of higher education institutions in a country. Based on NI and RDT, we cannot neglect changes to the institutional context or the importance of the resources at the state

level. They can modify the way universities respond to changes. Each country might respond differently and create a legislative basis in a different way. The system in each country is specific.

For this reason, it is important to describe, first, the inherited institutional context of the higher education system. This description should be based on NI and RDT. Using the pillars of institutions and RDT we show suggest that:

− the cultural pillar is connected with the history of higher education in a particular country;

− the regulative pillar refers to the formal system of higher education (as determined by law and practice);

− the normative pillar is related to the quality of the system, which creates a pattern of standards and is connected with the networks of cooperation;

− the important resources are: funding, students, and staff.

In order to collect additional data concerning the political structure and the government policy in relation to the Bologna Process, ministerial archives should be included in this research. political and economic environment differ between countries, observations should be made in more than one country, and in each country, minimum two universities should be investigated.

After the description of the institutional context, it is important to focus on the internal characteristics of the universities. Important features are the governance structure and the perception of changes by 'key actors' responsible for the implementation of changes. This requires the identification of the actors who had or have an impact on the introduction of the Bologna Process. In-depth interviewing of these key actors will provide answers to questions such as: how did they experience and understand the changes, what was their priority, how do they evaluate the changes, etc.

CONCLUSION

In the framework of new institutionalism and the Resource Dependence Theory, universities are seen as organizations rooted in an institutional environment, dependent on different resources, and characterized by different internal dynamics. These organizations may respond in different ways to the changes that occur in their institutional environment. In this short article, we have summarized the most important theoretical concepts of new institutionalism and the Resource Dependence Theory. We have also analyzed the conse-

quences of the use of these theories for studying organizations, and more specifically universities. This led us to the development of several possible hypotheses that could be helpful in the study of the changes in universities (for example, for research about the Bologna Process).

Concluding we mention once more the factors that may have an impact on universities in a process of change:

– the inherited institutional context in which the organization operates, i.e. the institutional framework and its changes according to the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars;

– dependence on resources: who provides resources, what kind of resources are provided, and who can put pressure on the organization?;

– the internal dynamics and response to change: the functioning of the management(internal governance model of the organizations) and the perception of changes by key actors in the organization (the perception of the environment is subjective, but may have a real impact on decisions and on the reactions to the changes) and outside the organization (if the organization depends on other actors) at the national level.

Research will show whether and to what extent these factors contribute to different patterns of educational change in universities.

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ZASTOSOWANIE NEOINSTYTUCJONALIZMU
I RESOURCE DEPENDENCE THEORY [TEORII UZALEŻNIENIA ZASOBOWEGO]
DO BADANIA ZMIAN NA UNIWERSYTETACH W EUROPIE

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł dotyczy aplikacji teorii nowego instytucjonalizmu oraz teorii zależności od zasobów do badań przemian szkolnictwa wyższego, na przykładzie Procesu Bolońskiego. Na początku zaprezentowane są najważniejsze założenia obu teorii. Następnie pokazane są podobieństwa i różnice między nimi, a na koniec zaprezentowanych jest kilka uwag odnośnie do zastosowania tych teorii do badań przemian uniwersytetów. Uniwersytety rozumiane są tutaj jako organizacje, które w różny sposób odpowiadają na zmiany środowiska instytucjonalnego. Połączenie teorii neoinstytucjonalnej oraz teorii zależności od zasobów pozwala na rozważenie wielu różnych czynników, od których zależy ta odpowiedź na zmiany. W artykule pokazane jest, że zarówno czynniki zewnętrzne (np. zarządzanie, sytuacja ekonomiczna), jak i wewnętrzne (dotyczące samego uniwersytetu) mogą mieć wpływ na proces przemian uniwersytetów.

Słowa kluczowe: nowy instytucjonalizm, Resource Dependence Theory, uniwersytety, Proces Boloński, zmiany, środowisko instytucjonalne.