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The aspects of human action

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Abstract: Anthropological differences assumed by neoclassical economics and macro-sociology and contrasted in the dichotomy of ‘homo economicus’ and ‘homo sociologicus’ are essentially generalisations of the ultimate distinction in the concepts of human action. A corresponding divide also pervades the conceptualisation of institutions. Maximising behaviour and a fixed and independent preference function on the one hand, and adaptive behaviour, and flexible but socially influenced preferences on the other, signify not only characterisations of possible courses of interpretation and action, but also the ‘ideal types’ assumed by the mainstream of the respective disciplines. This work aims to challenge this divide by linking the concepts of rational and interpretive action in the context of the ‘agency and structure’ or ‘participant – social whole’ debates. That is done through providing several new or recontextualised answers at the basic level of individual understanding and interpretation of purposes of action in general, and the action taking place within institutional and organisational contexts in particular. The underlying intention is to present an analytically separable ‘interface’ that links individuals and institutions. This interface is subsequently analysed in terms of four interrelated aspects of human action – habituation, deliberation, participation and reification, and constitution of norms. The paper attempts to offer insights into their internal dynamics of these processes, and to explore the links between them, including their simultaneity, partial overlapping and inherent tensions.

Keywords: Human Action; Communities of Practice; Institutions; Habits; Norms

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1. Introduction

Dealing with the fact of society must not succumb either to overarching determinism of individual behaviour, or to neglect of the effects of societal forms on individuals. The relationship between agency and structure is a fundamental issue of various disciplines of social science, including anthropology, sociology and economics. Attempting to present the range of existing positions – varieties

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of methodological individualism, methodological collectivism and mediating approaches – would be outside the scope of this work¹. This complex debate also reflects a fundamental condition of social science, as interpretive practice in which self-reflecting researchers study actions of self-reflecting actors. The centrality of context and judgment in understanding human action implies there is no viable escape from the social and reflexive nature of social science (Flyvbjerg 2001). Its explanatory and predictive weaknesses can be compensated by reflexive analysis and discussion of values and interests. Social science is linked with common sense (Fevre 2000), public debate within particular social contexts (Walzer 1983, 1987) and ideology (Fukuyama 1999). Realistic acceptance of the pervasiveness of social context and setting more modest aims of social theorising may open up opportunities to challenge views that social science is becoming a postmodernist ‘language game’ pursued for its own sake or for the advancement of particular ideological frameworks. By seeking dialogical engagement with the plurality of approaches, disciplines and sources of inspiration we might devote our attention to careful crafting of more encompassing conceptualisations that are both theoretically sound and dialogically engaged with the social world. As an example of such an approach, this paper primarily builds upon insights from philosophy (e.g. MacIntyre 1985; Searle 1995, 2005), social anthropology (Wenger 1998), sociology (e.g. Giddens 1984; Archer 1995) and institutional economics (e.g. Hodgson 2006).

We start with the proposition that actors and systems are analytically distinct but interdependent categories that partially influence each other (Sorge 1995). Agency is viewed as ability to act otherwise, which can be discerned in particular situations, whereas action implies a continuous flow of conduct of actors embedded in social systems (Giddens 1984). Systemic properties of social structures, which are viewed as emergent or aggregate effects of past actions (Archer 1995), are partially reflected in the minds of actors, and are consequently reproduced or transformed in accordance with their actions. Therefore, human action is viewed as a mediating process that links actors and systems, playing the crucial role in the constitution of agency and structure. Its central role pervades the conflict between individualist and collectivist theories in social science. For instance, the anthropological differences assumed by neoclassical economics and macro-sociology and contrasted in the dichotomy of ‘homo economicus’ and ‘homo sociologicus’ are essentially generalisations of the ultimate distinction in the concepts of human action and in the corresponding definitions of institutions. Maximising behaviour and fixed and independent preference function on the one hand, and adaptive behaviour, with flexible but socially influenced preferences on the other, signify not only characterisations of possible courses of interpretation and action, but also ‘ideal types’ assumed by the mainstream of the respective disciplines.

1 Ritzer (2000) gives a comprehensive basic overview of mediating theoretical positions, whereas Archer (1995), Mouzelis (1995) and Hodgson (1999) provide useful additional insights.

This work aims to challenge this divide by linking the concepts of rational and interpretive action in the context of the ‘agency and structure’ or ‘participant – social whole’ (Mouzelis 1995) debates. That will lead to several new or recontextualised answers related to individual and collective action. It deals with certain ontological prerequisites of emergence and development of institutions, which are heavily interlinked, but, nevertheless, can be discerned for analytical purposes. In other words, the underlying intention is to present an analytically separable ‘interface’ that links individuals and institutions. This interface will be later on analysed in terms of four interrelated aspects of human action – deliberation, habituation, participation and reification, and constitution of norms.

2. Human action

Human beings are inherently disposed to be sociable and mutually intelligible, and to mediate their experience and engagement in the world through various social groups (Barnes 2001a; Wilson 1993). The social nature of the human experience enables collective intentionality² – sharing of intentional states such as beliefs, desires and intentions (cf. Searle 1995). Shared representations among humans are prerequisites for the creation of institutional facts and construction of social reality. Practical intentions and activities of human agents give rise to assignment of functions to objects through collective imposition of the status not intrinsically related to the physical characteristics of the objects. Representations and interpretations are not uniform. Openness of the social world makes complete fixation of meaning impossible. What occurs is ‘the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 113). Individual and shared understandings develop and change. Shared understandings actually serve as focal points of ongoing interpretation that enables learning and social change. Moreover, activities that include perceptions of or actions upon non-verbal configurations (images, sounds, bodily movements etc.) cannot be completely verbalised. Actors’ knowledge is therefore largely tacit and expressed as practical competence (practical consciousness), rather than as reporting of intentions and reasons for action (discursive consciousness). Therefore, human action occurs as a continuous flow of experience and conduct, rather than a sequence of separable acts; acts are constituted through discursive moments of attention to the flow of experience. Actors also reflexively monitor their own activities, the activities of others, and the context of action, and rationalise action by maintaining an understanding of the grounds of their activity (Giddens 1984).

2 Intentionality initially denotes ‘the capacity of the mind to represent objects and states of affairs in the world other than itself (Searle 1995: 6-7). Intentionality is aboutness; hence the concept can be extended to linguistic items (like sentences) and other forms of representation (pictures, charts, films, etc.) (cf. Gregory 1998).

Construction, elaboration and recontextualisation of meanings occur through dialogical interaction in the context of discourses. Discourses can be viewed as interconnections of mental / linguistic phenomena, social practices, and systems constituted through them. Although external reality, including practices and systems, exists outside discourses, it acquires meaning only through them. Social practices are various socially established modes of interpretation and action that revolve around specific areas and situations. They are (re)constituted through learning within relevant communities. Although practices reproduce and transform discourses, they also have a discursive dimension, which is especially reflected in their justification, communication and transformation. Since action and communication within practices are interconnected, there is no ontological difference between linguistic and behavioural aspects of social practices (Laclau and Mouffe 1985); both of them involve intentionality and can only be interpreted in discursive terms. Social practices encompass various instrumental and non-instrumental facets of human action; they address the spontaneous flow of action, its reflexively constituted orientation towards specific goal structures, and its interplay with the social context that embeds and is constituted by action. Practices include resources and frameworks that sustain mutual engagement in action. Hereby learning becomes an underlying process that constitutes social practices and communities that reproduce them. Practice thus becomes a shared history of learning (Wenger 1998). The centrality of learning enables us to comprehend the duality of individual participation in practices. Extrinsic motives and rewards behind practices are intertwined with the intrinsic ones – those derived from the participation itself and one's development stemming from it. Reaching for the excellence standards appropriate to an activity results in systematic extension of human powers and conceptions of ends and means (MacIntyre 1985). Intrinsic rewards and individual transformation through 'practising' are linked to the social dimension of the practice, defined through accompanying relationships, excellence standards, norms and institutions. Practising and learning-by-doing which stems from it occur through communities – "social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence" (Wenger 1998: 5). Communities are discursively constituted systems usually based on practices; belonging to a community includes sharing of sensibilities and intuitions (Walzer 1983), and inter-subjective meanings as a basis for actions and feelings that accompany them (Taylor 1985). However, this sphere of commonality that defines and binds a community of practice is the very object whose meaning is contested and negotiated in discursive and political processes. The configuration of common meanings, actions and artefacts is the object of the negotiation that occurs through the politics of participation (cultivation or avoidance of specific relationships with specific people) and reification (production of specific artefacts that focus future negotiation of meanings) (Wenger 1998).

Actors develop practical consciousness, proceeding from recognition of a situation to practical action that revolves around it, without totally conscious knowledge of the appropriate concepts or rules. Action is not reducible to rules;

causes should not be conflated with effects. Rules create dispositions and inclinations, which can be complex and overlapping. Moreover, at higher levels of performance, action is increasingly based on interpretation and judgment (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1988). The primacy of practical consciousness in human action leads to the importance of 'difference' in the perceived aspects of a situation as the basic impulse that induces the invocation of discourses, the formation of new understandings and the corresponding learning. When an aspect of experience apparently contradicts expectations, it becomes a focus of interpretation that may lead to new knowledge and a deeper elaboration of individual and collective identities. Due to its logic of difference and transformation of understandings, learning also enables the experience of the moral dimensions of action. The transformation of participants in a practice, which occurs through realisation of appropriate internal goods, may lead to a comprehensive form of learning which reaches beyond functional capabilities towards moral understandings of the practice and its social context. Excellence standards that are appropriate to and partially constitute a practice have a teleological moral aspect. Since learning typically occurs within communities, it is closely linked with exploring the moral adequacy of the new and old understandings developed by participants in the community. "Our moral nature grows directly out of our social nature" (Wilson 1993: 121). Shared participation in social practices not only enables the constitution and revision of one's mental models, but also involves relating to the paradigms of the 'good'.

Practices are produced by an interaction of agency and structure. The way of approaching the constitution of practices influences one's view of institutions. Giddens (1976, 1984) proposes a duality whereby both human subjects and social structures are recursively constituted through social practice. In his view, structures, which enable and constrain social practices, consist of rules (which relate to the constitution of meaning and to the sanctioning of modes of social conduct) and of material and symbolic resources. Structure is both the medium and outcome of the practices it recursively organises. It is a 'virtual order' of 'transformative relations' and cannot be viewed independently from knowledgeable human agents. "Structure exists only as memory traces, the organic basis of human knowledgeability, and as instantiated in action" (1984: 377). Consequently, institutions are nothing but 'practices which have the greatest time-space extension within such (societal) totalities' (1984: 17). By conflating institutions with practices and treating them as mental phenomena (Hodgson 1999), Giddens assumes that recursive constitution of agency and structure is purely symmetrical and that it operates at the single level. However, as Archer (1995) points out, structure and agency, although linked, work on different time intervals. Structure, including institutions, has temporal priority over agency. Individuals are socialised into pre-existing social practices and systems, which already encompass past experiences and interactions of others and which are then reproduced or transformed. As Bhaskar (1989: 36) puts it, "Society does not exist independently of human activity (the error of reification). But is not the product of it (the error of voluntarism)." Consequently,

analytical separability between agency and structure and between practices and institutions should be maintained, accompanied by a focus on relations and the forms of interaction between the analysed phenomena.

By reaffirming the temporal priority of structure over agency we can recognize the tension between two classes of social phenomena – practices and institutions. Although practices display certain regularities and structural properties, they remain configurations that reproduce human action, which is reflected in their embeddedness in practical consciousness and in their role in the constitution of meaning. In order to survive and evolve, practices must be sustained by institutions (MacIntyre 1985) – systems of rules that provide the context for the (re)production of practices. The approaches to and the challenges of defining institutions are well documented (e.g. Gräbner and Ghorbani 2019) and the discussion on the nature of institutions is ongoing (cf. Searle 2005, 2010; Hodgson 2006, 2015, 2019; Aoki 2011; Hindriks and Guala 2015). On the one hand, there are many similarities among theories, as outlined by Gräbner and Ghorbani (2019). Institutions are mostly viewed as human-made (social) structures which are codifiable and which provide behavioural guidelines and/or motivations. The rules upon which institutions are based include norms of behaviour, social conventions and legal rules (cf. Hodgson 2019). Many theorists also acknowledge that institutions have cognitive, normative and regulative aspects (cf. Scott 2014). However, there are also notable differences. Searle's (2005, 2010) views on collective intentionality (as a specific philosophical concept) and institutions as constitutive rules (as opposed to mere regulative rules) are not shared universally³. When it comes to the effect of institutions on actual behaviour, most authors emphasise that institutions engender dispositions and inclinations, rather than actual behavioural patterns. As opposed to prevalent view of institutions as rules, some institutional economists view them as equilibria, i.e. outcomes of strategic games (cf. Hodgson 2015); Hindriks and Guala (2015) introduced the concept of rules-in-equilibria.

Institutions provide frameworks that facilitate the production of meaning, but they do not produce it themselves. Meaning stems from intersubjective experience and interpretation, rather than from the structures in which it develops. As Habermas (1975: 70) succinctly puts it, "There is no administrative production of meaning". Institutions also provide a social context for the exercise of practices, since they facilitate co-operation and often entail norms and sanctions. Well-functioning institutions unburden actors from many strategic considerations, because institutionally prescribed courses of action are expected to yield beneficial or at least tolerable outcomes (Offe 1996).

3 In Searle's view, constitutive rules are contrasted to regulative rules. The former make institutional actions possible, whereas the latter simply channel actions that can be performed independently of them. Hindricks (2009) eventually supports the opposite view that the difference between two types of rules is a linguistic one, but also argues that there is an underlying reality that constitutive rules make apparent.

Primary concerns of practices and institutions differ fundamentally. Despite their ambivalence⁴, practices are linked to internal goods, which can be specified and recognised only in terms of the specific practice. Therefore, they can be rewarding in themselves and co-operative in nature. That reveals their potential ethical dimension – the fact that they can be bearers of ‘virtues’. A virtue is “an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods”⁵ (MacIntyre, 1985: 191). Institutions put relatively more emphasis on external goods (including money, power and status), explicit procedural mechanisms and defined norms of behaviour, which all influence the regulative, cognitive and normative aspects of the relationships between actors and institutions. External goods are contingently attached to specific practices. They can always be obtained in alternative ways. Unlike internal goods, external goods are scarce and are distributed through competition. Moreover, the boundaries of institutions and communities of practice rarely coincide. Institutions often comprise of multiple (sometimes overlapping, sometimes opposing) communities of practice. Institutional context of a practice influences its reproduction, including the scope of co-operation and the opportunities to achieve internal goods. MacIntyre (1985: 194) concludes that “institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the cooperative care for common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution”.

Institutions embody normative intuitions or principles of actors who live in or under the institutions in question (Offe 1996), but also exist to fulfil a clearly specified purpose that justifies their existence. Effectiveness of institutions simultaneously depends upon socialising actors into specific modes of thought and behaviour, wide social acceptance of institutional purposes, goals and means, as well as upon institutional performance in the achievement of the purposes. Institutions involve struggles for meaning and other symbolic and cultural resources, which links them to the referring practices, and struggles for economic and political resources, which enables them to exert a wider influence on society. The economies of meaning and economies of economic and political power usually mutually constitute and reinforce each other (cf. Laclau and Mouffe 1985). All institutions reflect a normative tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces – between homogeneity of meanings, rules, and co-operative expectations, and autonomy of actors to pursue their goals (while usually assuming others’ rule obedience and co-operative behaviour for granted). Too much homogeneity due to strong norms

4 MacIntyre (1985) views practices as co-operative activities that facilitate virtues, whereas Wenger (1998) considers them morally and functionally ambivalent. The view adopted here accepts the ambivalence of practices but argues that mutuality and learning-orientation of ‘practising’ contain a potential for development of moral understandings and actions.

5 Virtues are different from a more general concept of values, which signify any attribute of usefulness or desirability accepted and reinforced by a community. Ethical concern about the ‘good’ can thus also be viewed as distinguishing virtues from mere values.

may engender rigidity that hinders innovation and increases risks when changes, crises and acute conflicts occur. Actors then usually face a choice between loyalty and exit, without sufficient opportunities to exercise voice and facilitate change (cf. Hirschman 1970). However, too much behavioural diversity may lead to internal fragmentation and eventual loss of institutional legitimacy. When the actors' ability and willingness to bracket strategic considerations is weakened, an institution can easily fail to provide credible answers, habits and patterns for individual actors, and to facilitate the generation of tolerable outcomes through co-operative behaviour. When we realise the need for internal and external rewards, identities and narratives expected by participating actors, we can overcome the instrumental/non-instrumental divide through 'thicker' conceptualisations of socio-economic reality that will redefine the boundaries between goal-oriented behaviour, habits and internalised social norms. Since every end is never just a goal, but a 'structure of ordered complexity' that includes means for its achievement (Fried, 1970), even seemingly instrumental activities (such as profit maximisation in business) incorporate a political and ethical debate about the appropriate means and ends.

3. The aspects of human action

We now turn to the aspects of human action, as an 'interface' that links individuals and institutions, which is analysed under the categories of deliberation, habituation, participation and reification and constitution of norms. These four interrelated phenomena are not viewed as components, but rather as aspects of human action whose separability is primarily analytical. All of them include the mutual constitution of agency and structure, but that meta-process occurs in different ways, which depend upon a variety of forms of learning, as the underlying process that constitutes social practices. Habituation and deliberation primarily involve development of individual understandings and capabilities, whereas constitution of norms and participation and reification represent learning processes that affect the whole community of practice. We can also distinguish between the processes that occur continuously, as a flow of action primarily engendered by practical consciousness (habituation; constitution of norms) and those that require a more discernible use of discursive consciousness in their constitution and are hence relatively more focused (deliberation; participation and reification). We can summarise them as follows:

	Aspects of human action	
	<i>Individual level</i>	<i>Collective level</i>
<i>Practical consciousness</i>	Habituation	Constitution of norms
<i>Discursive consciousness</i>	Deliberation	Participation and reification

4. Habituation

Habituation is the aspect of human action that integrates the multiplicity of influences and processes that constitute action. It takes place through interaction of all available stimuli, representations, intentional states and social influences that affect social actors. Moreover, it is temporally and ontologically prior to intention and reason; all action and deliberation depend upon previously adopted habits acquired through individual development, including the habits of language, classification and association of meanings (Hodgson 2003). Habituation is a cognitive and behavioural process of developing dispositions and patterns of responding to challenges in the context of intuitive understanding of situations. A similar definition is offered by Fleetwood (2019a), who argues that habit is a cognitive representation of a cue-action response⁶. Habits are results of past learning, enacted and contextualised within the present that enable formulation of ‘appropriate’ responses through interpretation and judgement, rather than through adherence to explicit rules. Habits should primarily be viewed as dispositions (Hodgson 2003) and points of reference reinforced by repetition, rather than as programmed courses of action. They involve a skill that reduces the psychological burden of making too many decisions (many of which are routine), enabling the actor to focus her attention to more complex aspects of the action. A habit is a basic, flexible response derived in accordance with the definition of the situation, which displays certain quasi-automatic⁷ qualities stemming from the intuitive understanding of the dynamics that frames a situation. As Searle (1995: 144) puts it,

in learning to cope with social reality, we acquire a set of cognitive abilities that are everywhere sensitive to an intentional structure, and in particular to the rule structures of complex institutions, without necessarily everywhere containing representations of the rules of those institutions.

Habituation therefore stems from a certain set of implicit assumptions about the context, which over time generate appropriate ways of framing and mastering situations⁸ (cf. Bourdieu 1990). Because of its gradual nature, it easily accom-

6 Fleetwood (2019a) analyses and rejects several definitions of habits, some of which are consistent with the notion of ‘homo economicus’ (‘rational economic man’), whereas others are inspired by ‘homo sociologicus’ (‘socially embedded individual’). The first group of rejected definitions views habit as behaviour, regular conjunction of actions or preference (stock of past actions). The second group comprises the concepts of automaticity, propensity or disposition, mechanism and process. The second group of definitions is also criticised and ultimately rejected despite automatic, tendential and process-based acquisition and activation of habits.

7 This quasi-automatism, which stems from learning, enables fast response to the particularities of the situation, and is a sign of mastering the practice in question (cf. Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1988).

8 Despite instrumental benefits brought about by these ‘appropriate’ actions, it does not follow that these actions were undertaken solely to capture those benefits. Such a claim would be an ex-post rationalisation.

modates small-scale, flexible responses, but requires a paradigm shift to deal with fundamental changes in the environment or in the actor's perception of herself. In practice, habits complement the cognitive categories within which we perceive reality. They are often prone to inertia and resistant to radical innovation. Since habits are not enacted well or badly, they cannot secure the proficiency of performance of a practice (cf. Barnes 2001b). Learning through habituation takes time and forgetting (or significantly modifying) what has been learned can also be difficult. Interaction between individuals and their social contexts is not pre-determined: any blend of 'rational' and 'normative' aspects of action can develop as a result of habituation. The concept of habituation encompasses a variety of dispositions and patterns towards which actors may lean – slow or fast, flexible or rigid, goal-oriented or normatively bound⁹ alike. The difficulties of unlearning and relearning of habitual knowledge (cf. Bourdieu 1990) are similar in all cases and are only reinforced because of the need to rationalise the grounds of action (cf. Giddens 1984).

The process of habituation occurs within the societal context, but it primarily involves individual actors' interpretation and engagement in the social world as they perceive it. When it comes to collective behaviour, a similar role is played by conventions (cf. Brown 1995) and organisational routines (cf. Hodgson 1998). Since conventions are rule-like regularities that actors tacitly agree to impose on each other (Brown 1995), they also display spontaneity of development (just like habits), tend to be self-enforcing and bring about instrumental benefits of coordination. However, they are different from habits because of some normative content associated with rule following. When conventions become established, they easily assume the status of norms (cf. Ullmann-Margalit 1977). Organisational routines are the patterns and dispositions to address situations in specific ways, which are shared by of groups of actors within an organisation; they are dynamic, spontaneous, learning-oriented and disposition-based, which makes them analogous to habits, but also involve participation as an additional aspect of human action (please see below). Such routines provide foundations for specific competences of an organisation, and hence influence its identity and purpose (cf. Nelson and Winter 1982).

5. Deliberation

Whereas objectivist thought has ignored practical consciousness (Giddens 1984), many practice-oriented theorists (including Giddens and Bourdieu) downplay the role of deliberation in human action (Mouzelis 1995). The limits of approaches that assume given actors and strategies, without offering insights into

⁹ The 'ideal types' identified here serve illustrative purposes. The reality of observed dispositions is more similar to a continuum between the poles mentioned here.

their constitution, should not lead into inattention or reductionism regarding the strategic dimensions of human action. In order to be more realistic and effective, social science should overcome extremes – the objectification of given and context-independent actors and strategies and the deconstruction of emergent and inextricably context-bound actors and strategies¹⁰. Therefore, despite the importance of practical consciousness and continuous flow, human action is in part constituted in more structured forms, as acts and projects that are addressed strategically. Moreover, even when activities are performed without too much conscious deliberation, the actor's enactment of a practice is a knowledgeable and goal-directed exercise of power and competence (cf. Barnes 2001b). Finally, organisational settings imply the use of hierarchy and division of labour, which means that the actors within organisations often face structured tasks. In such cases human action is steered towards discernible acts and projects that are to be accomplished, whose execution will nevertheless also depend upon practical consciousness.

Deliberation involves a conscious consideration of broader goals and projects enacted and contextualised within the current situation. It therefore entails development of attitudes, dispositions and behaviours that enable actors to orient their action towards desired goals. In accordance with the logic of difference, deliberation comes into focus in situations perceived by actors as sufficiently unfamiliar, whereby acquired habits and norms provide limited guidance, and incremental learning may be insufficient. This knowledge gap is sometimes compensated by conscious rule following, e.g. in primary stages of learning of new skills, when rule-based knowledge is available. However, when actors achieve proficiency in, for instance, driving a car, rule-based deliberation become much less important than habitual practical evaluation of circumstances (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1988). Although achieving proficiency in such cases is rather difficult, its realisation strongly depends upon the actors' ability to accumulate experiential knowledge and contextualise strategies within evolving social contexts¹¹. Deliberation is also often a defensive strategy of coping with complexities and uncertainties of social, economic or political reality or a response to the demands and objectives set by others, usually more powerful actors in social hierarchies (such as managers or legislators) (cf. Mouzelis 1995).

Deliberation is typically concerned with rationality, instrumental reasoning and goal-oriented behaviour. Standard economic theory defines rationality of behaviour either as internal consistency of choice or as maximisation of self-interest (Sen

10 Such an approach, based on Aristotelian notion of *phronesis*, requires pragmatism, orientation on action, values and interests, and interaction between the general and the particular (cf. Flyvbjerg 2001).

11 Cognitivism, which identifies individual behaviour with problem-solving defined by initial and goal states, operators that can transform one state into another, and constraints that must be met (cf. Holland *et al.* 1986; Mantzavinos 2001) can at best address competent performance of actors. It thus cannot accommodate higher levels of human knowledge (Flyvbjerg 2001).

1987). The first definition is tautological: it can always be argued ex-post that any course of action represents some preference function. When 'maximisation of self-interest' is replaced by 'deliberation regarding chosen ends', we approach Weber's notion of purposive rationality, which denotes deliberate choice of means in the pursuit of desired ends. If not qualified differently, this is the meaning of rationality adopted throughout the text. Normative and affective factors also deeply influence the process of deliberation, by shaping to a significant extent which information is gathered, the ways it is processed, the drawing of inferences, the options that are considered, and the final choice of options (Etzioni 1997). Bounded rationality entails the lack of capability of actors to sharply separate their values from their knowledge (Nelson and Winter 1982). Strategising is thus an orientation that is mediated by other influences; it is predominantly discernible in the conceptual dimensions and prerequisites of action, whereas practical elaboration and implementation of any explicit strategy will be interwoven with habits, norms and other aspects of one's actual patterns of relating towards the environment. Deliberation is reflexive, because it involves awareness of the actions undertaken, and redefinition of the actor and his actions in accordance with the changes of circumstances that affect goal attainment. Evaluation of the context and one's actions is primarily oriented towards goals, rather than processes and experiences. Consequently, deliberation tends to be oriented towards some criteria of effectiveness and/or efficiency, which links it with rationalisation (understood as the reproduction of the discourse of instrumental rationality¹²). Deliberation involves structuring of experiential complexity through an emergent imposition of order, which involves mobilisation of attention, envisaging the possible futures, and focusing efforts on the desired objects.

In terms of form, deliberation follows two basic paths. The more common one is adjustment of one's means (i.e. cognitive and material resources) in order to be better attuned with the perceived goals. That adjustment is often a reaction to the perceived changes in the environment. The second type of deliberation involves more fundamental changes in both means and ends, a deeper reconstitution of the way a person views herself, a situation or a broader environment. This type includes much stronger possibilities of a radical break with the past through deliberate change. Here we encounter a creative process that affects and transforms one's relationships with other people, social facts and objects, through insight learning, which involves sudden restructuring of a problem (Eysenck 2000). That results in a new strategy – a redefined way of relating towards the environment in the pursuit of desired goals. To illustrate the outlined types of deliberation, one may use the two influential theories of entrepreneurship – Schumpeter's view of entrepreneurship as venturing into the unknown (which corresponds to the second type mentioned above), and Kirzner's view of entrepreneurship as arbitrage (which is reflected in the first type).

12 Rationalisation as a form of deliberation is distinguished from 'rationalisation of action', which denotes actors' maintenance of understanding of the grounds of their activity (see above).

In terms of content, deliberation is often expressed as rationalisation. The discourse of instrumental rationality has demonstrated a significant power to spread and enhance its influence over the constitution of social life (cf. Habermas 1975). For instance, rationalisation reduces morality to norms, and then questions those norms by treating them as expressions of self-interest. Effective norms involve an affective component (Etzioni 1988). By depleting their affective content, rationalisation transforms norms into rules that can be addressed strategically. Consequently, a quintessential root of morality, the Durkheimian sense of the sacred, which belongs to the emotional realm (cf. Meštrović 1997), is easily undermined. Since it is concerned with prioritising, rationalisation may also lead to reduction of the experiential totality to ‘essential’ elements that facilitate the attainment of ‘pressing’ goals, with the accompanying neglect of the aspects of valued relationships and phenomena that are not directly related to the goals. The effects of the predominance of economic rationality on persons and their relationships provide a case in point (Fevre 2000).

6. Participation and reification

Although habituation and deliberation are constituted in the social context, they denote the aspects of experience of individual actors. However, these actors also participate in groups, communities and organisations. Interpretive paradigm has gained a footing in organisation theory (cf. Hatch and Janow 2005), which opened up opportunities for recognition and analysis of intersubjective processes within human collectives. By sharing not only explicit but also tacit knowledge and making sense of their experiences and artefacts, the participants intersubjectively co-create these collectives. Hatch and Janow (2005: 70) observe: “Participants make sense of situations, events, interactions, and so on by relying on tacit knowledge that is nonetheless shared among members of an interpretive community...” Wenger’s (1998) theory of communities of practice embodies these intuitions. Communities of practice are formed by people who participate in the process of collective learning in a shared domain of human action. Given the centrality of knowledge sharing and accumulation for the viability of all other collective entities (including organisations), the key insights of this theory a section are applicable more widely. In this paper, the duality of participation and reification is analysed in the following sections.

Participation is a social experience of “membership in social communities and active involvement in social enterprises” (Wenger 1998: 55). It entails a flow of encounters and activities of actors that reflexively monitor themselves and others whilst engaged in social practices that constitute communities. Joint engagement of actors in the pursuit of communally negotiated enterprises creates communities of practice. Mutuality does not nullify social hierarchies by implying equality or even respect among participants (Wenger 1998); it refers to the shared history of relating and learning. That leads to accumulation of ‘mutual knowledge’ in-

corporated in encounters and not directly accessible to the consciousness of actors (Giddens 1984). Participation denotes internal dynamics of the community of practice, which can be co-operative or competitive, harmonious or conflictual. Participation is linked to the phenomena such as sustained mutual relationships, shared patterns and styles of action, rapid flow of information, assessment standards, relatively clear boundaries of community, mutually defining identities, shared artefacts and communication tools etc. (Wenger 1998). Participation entails negotiation of meanings of actions among actors and articulation of relations of power and accountability. The multiplicity of discourses employed in the struggle for meaning within a community of practice, and the variety of practices within institutional and societal contexts provide a multiplicity of discursive resources that influence the constitution of actors' identities. The actors relate to discourses, practices and institutions through the interconnected processes of action and communication; by acting they also communicate positions, intentions and attitudes, whereas by communicating through speech acts (cf. Searle 1995) they perform actions.

The process of participation is complemented and reinforced by reification – the process of giving form to particular experiences through production of traces and objects around which the negotiation of meaning is focused (cf. Wenger 1998). The term does not only cover the formal and purposively created objects produced, for instance, within an organisation, but also a variety of spontaneously generated communication that may result in something tangible or memorable and hence serve as a point of reference. The objects produced through reification do not just have an inherent communicative role, but they also influence the shaping of actors' patterns of thought and behaviour. Moreover, as focuses of meaning they tend to develop lives of their own, often obscuring the initial context of the creation, as well as the intentions and attitudes of the communicators who created the object. A paradigmatic example is the law, where there is a continuous struggle between the spirit and the letter of the enacted laws, which gave rise to a multitude of professions engaged in interpretation and application of the law.

According to Wenger (1998), participation and reification mutually constitute a mutually supporting duality interwoven in the negotiation of meaning, whereby the action-communication processes of participation clarify, elaborate and transform the objects of reification, whereas reified objects enable coordination and communication of the participatory processes. This duality is the key element in constitution and evolution of communities of practice, identities of participants and relations among them, and of organisations that embed them. The artefacts produced through reification constrain the actors – especially if they have been created through hierarchy. However, in order to become meaningful and effective, even such reifications are not simply taken for granted by actors at lower hierarchical levels; they must subsequently be re-appropriated by them. This is especially important for reifications with significant normative content. Therefore, we turn to the constitution of norms as specific objects of reification.

7. Constitution of norms

Norms are rules about permissible or desirable patterns of action, supported by sanctions and deduced from views about group identity¹³. Being informed by values, they provide models of correct behaviour (Brown 1995) imposed on or shared by a particular group. By their enabling and constraining functions, norms tend to engender instrumental benefits of co-ordination and identity maintenance, but often fail to do so¹⁴. By introducing prescriptive, evaluative and obligatory aspects into social life, norms provide guidance about appropriate goals and ways to pursue them (Scott 1995). The normative dimension is interwoven with functional and hierarchical differences within communities and institutions; many norms, defined as roles, apply only to members of a social collective that occupy particular social positions; roles are essential in the constitution of institutions (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

Although norms have a history and can change over time, their temporal and contingent aspect is not invoked as long as they are honoured. They are adapted and rationalised only when necessary, which gives them potentially a long duration, but also burdens the attempts of normative change. Actors rarely assume that the norms will vary in the immediate future. But that does not entail, as Elster (1989) claims, that the norms are not future-oriented. Norms convey an implication that the future will not be dramatically different from the past or the present; even if it becomes different, normative obligations are expected not to lose their binding nature automatically or without resistance. Consequently, norms are essentially based on the recognition of the intrinsic value of specific (re)actions and the corresponding duties and rights. Due to their deontological dimension, norms are not oriented towards outcomes, but towards intentions and procedures. They thus represent the Kantian aspect of social life. Norms are among the crucial products and by-effects of reification, which often gives them a life of their own and reinforces their deontological nature. They are often observed even when that does not 'make sense' (cf. Elster 1989). Even the failure to observe a norm often does not imply that a person can completely disentangle herself from the moral binds the norm implies. This concern for obligation is complemented with the affective dimension, which stems from identification with communities associated with normative systems (Etzioni 1988). Since norms are developed and enforced by

13 Fleetwood (2019b) offers an alternative view, which clearly distinguishes formal rules from norms and rejects the existence of informal rules altogether. According to him, rules are injunctions, constituted by social phenomena, which are learned, mutually understood, located in artefacts and govern agents' actions. On the other hand, norms are viewed as injunctions constituted by socio-cognitive phenomena. They are also learned and mutually understood, but they are located as memories of past actions, in agents' cognitive systems. However, placing norms solely in actors' memories seems to conflate them with habits.

14 Elster (1989) examined various forms of the argument that norms exist to promote self-interest, common interests or even genetic fitness, but found them all insufficient.

social groups, through which humans develop a sense of identity and the capacity to distinguish the acceptable from the unacceptable views and actions, they can engender strong emotions – particularly when they are questioned or broken by others. In their constitution, norms rely both on internalised understandings and sanctions imposed by the group. That gives them a crucial role in the definition of social groups and in the definition of the Other. Allegiance to specific norms distinguishes members of communities from non-members; communities thus often use norms as barriers against external influences.

Like other institutional facts, many norms are enacted spontaneously through collective intentionality (cf. Searle 1995) and infusion of values into habituated conventions (Ullmann-Margalit 1977), which become reflections of ideals internalised within the community. However, norms can also be created through an exercise of power and through diffusion from the higher-level of the social system. Every act of norm creation is an affirmation of power relations. When such exercise of power reflects shared understandings of the community, it is legitimate, implying that such a norm will probably be accepted and re-appropriated by actors subjected to it. Norm creation often stems from and affirms existing power differentials or creates new ones. Unilateral (rather than discursive) norm creation implies particular capabilities of certain actors to reproduce the relations of power. Economic, cultural and social capital of such actors is transformed into symbolic capital¹⁵ that enables them to influence the normative background of certain social practices. Asymmetries in relationships are reinforced through hierarchies and discursive practices (such as economic rationality and scientific objectivity) that justify imposition of normative expectations on others. This imposition can be formal (defining the roles and responsibilities of subordinates within an organisation) or informal (backing up normative expectations towards others by sanctions). Although norms can be imposed from the above, their reproduction requires others, which engenders a permanent struggle for the definition of norms and their implications for everyday behaviour.

Norms serve as reference points that can be reinforced, developed, transformed or opposed. The dynamics of negotiation, interpretation, imposition, and acceptance or opposition to the norms is a ubiquitous feature of institutional and organisational reality. Normative dimension of human action is extensively interwoven with the (re)production of institutions. Within institutional reality, the normative dimension complements the cognitive and regulative dimensions in steering actors towards perceptual and behavioural consistency. As guides for ethical behaviour, norms serve an important but limited role – reduction of available and acceptable courses of action that can be approached instrumentally. They define minimal and conventional moral standards of a community through institutionalisation of expectations regarding the behavioural consistency of members. That is the rationale

15 This terminology, of course, belongs to Bourdieu (cf. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

behind the formalisation of legal and ethical standards, which is necessary, but not sufficient prerequisite of morality, because nothing can replace human interpretation and judgement. Norms and values define the patterns of social reinforcement that prevail in a given community. Communities and organisations can reinforce all kinds of attitudes and behaviours, including the ethically questionable ones. The reliance on conventional or codified understandings can only facilitate conventional morality concerned with developing similar understandings and avoiding sanctions, but it fails to provide opportunities for questioning the moral validity of the prevailing cultures, structures and habits.

8. Concluding remarks

The dynamic and evolving nature of human dispositions is (re)produced through participation in social practices, which are in turn sustained, enacted and developed by the activities of practitioners characterised by mutual intelligibility and mutual susceptibility (cf. Barnes 2001b). This paper has aimed to link the concepts of rational and interpretive action and to present an ‘interface’ that links ‘practising’ individuals and institutions. That interface was analysed in terms of aspects of human action – habituation, deliberation, participation and reification, and constitution of norms, which are interlinked, analytically separable and mutually irreducible. These aspects should be viewed as processes that evolve and interact over time. The shift of focus from entities to processes is analogous to Weick’s (1969/1979) shift from ‘organization’ to ‘organizing.’ This paper followed the approach advocated by Tsoukas (2017: 132) to complexify, rather than simplify theorising, as such an approach is better suited to grasping the logic of practice. As he puts it: “Complex theorizing is conjunctive: it seeks to make connections between diverse elements of human experience through making those analytical distinctions that will enable the joining up of concepts normally used in a compartmentalized manner”. Moreover, linking the concepts also implies paradigm interplay’ (Schulz and Hatch 1996) in which the researcher recognizes and confronts multiple paradigms (e.g. rational and interpretive action), while recognising both contrasts and connections between them.

Further research could expand insights into each of the identified aspects of human action, as well as into their interrelationships. However, an even greater challenge would be exploring the insights of this paper in the context of complementary theories of practice (e.g. Bourdieu 1990) and sensemaking (e.g. Weick 1995). As Board (2011: 1) observed, both Bourdieu and Weick realised that human action takes place “... under multiple pressures of limited time, patchy understanding and pre-existing commitments to important stakes” and attempted to understand better how intelligent individual action and social order emerge in these conditions. Despite their common focus on action in practice, their approaches are largely complementary, as they focus on different aspects of human action. Bourdieu is concerned with habitual complexity that enables the flow of action and anticipa-

tion among participants of social games played within specific communities and fields. On the other hand, through the sensemaking process individuals work to understand novel, unexpected, or confusing events, and co-develop frameworks for understanding (Maitlis and Christianson 2014). An initial exploration of the similarities and differences between Bourdieu's and Weick's theories was provided by Board (2011). However, both the richness of insights of these authors and subsequent developments of the theories of practice and sensemaking needs to be taken into account in future research. The perspective outlined here, which focuses on habituation, deliberation, participation and reification, and constitution of norms, could provide a valuable contribution to these endeavours.

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