Path dependence and gradual change
– Exploring the relationship between formal and informal institutional change in the European Parliament

Author: Michaela Lööf
Supervisor: Prof. Karl Magnus Johansson
Abstract

Path dependence and gradual change

Exploring the relationship between formal and informal institutional change in the European Parliament

Author: Michaela Lööf

This thesis addresses the relationship between formal and informal institutions in the European Parliament from a new institutionalist perspective. This is done in order to fulfill the aims of the thesis, which are: (1) to broaden our understanding of informal institutions and institutional change in the EP as well as (2) develop our understanding of the new institutionalist approaches: rational choice institutionalism, sociological institutionalism and historical institutionalism. The method of analysis is qualitative and the main material consists of 14 interviews with Swedish members and former members of the 4th to the 7th EP. The empirical investigation shows that the EP should be interpreted as institutionalized, but some informal institutional changes have, however, occurred due to changes in formal institutions. The enlargements and treaty changes have changed not only how the parliamentarians work in informal network, but they have also affected the internal selection procedures of the rapporteur and the internal view on the EP versus the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. The two central claims of this thesis are: (1) new institutionalist approaches go well together and should be used parallel in order to get a comprehensive understanding of political phenomena and, (2) the EP is characterized both by institutionalization and informal institutional changes and that these interplay with each other.

Key words: institution, formal, informal, change, institutionalization, new institutionalism, European Parliament
Table of contents

1. Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 1
   1.1 Research problem of the study – institutional change in the EP ........................................... 1
   1.2 Aim and research question ................................................................................................. 3
   1.3 Outline of the study ........................................................................................................... 3

2. Previous research - Identifying research agendas and research frontiers ..................... 5
   2.1 Institutional change in the EU .......................................................................................... 5
   2.2 European Union integration and socialization ................................................................... 7
   2.3 Decision-making and the study of formal institutions in the EP ....................................... 8
   2.4 Summing up and identifying paths for future research ..................................................... 9

3. Theoretical framework of analysis: the three new institutionalist approaches 10
   3.1 Mapping different institutionalist approaches .................................................................. 11
      3.1.1 Rational choice institutionalism .................................................................................. 11
      3.1.2 Sociological institutionalism ..................................................................................... 13
      3.1.3 Historical institutionalism ......................................................................................... 15
   3.2 New institutionalism and party research ......................................................................... 17
   3.3 Combining new institutionalist approaches ...................................................................... 18
   3.4 The theoretical aims of the thesis ..................................................................................... 19
   3.5 Conceptual framework ...................................................................................................... 21
      3.5.1 Understanding informal and formal institutions ......................................................... 21
      3.5.2 How to understand institutional change of formal and informal institutions ........... 21

   4.1 Methodology and research design: an interpretive case study ......................................... 23
   4.2 Operationalizing informal and formal institutions ............................................................. 25
   4.3 Data .................................................................................................................................... 26
      4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews ....................................................................................... 26
      4.3.2 The interview questions ............................................................................................ 28
   4.4 Other sources .................................................................................................................... 29
   4.5 Interpreting the material .................................................................................................... 29
   4.6 Delimitation of the study and questions of validity and reliability ................................... 31
   4.7 Demarcations of the study .................................................................................................. 33

5. Analysis ................................................................................................................................... 35
   5.1 The institutional triangle: the EP’s relationship to the Council and the Commission .... 35
      5.1.1 Unification: The EP versus the Council and the Commission ................................. 35
      5.1.2 The EP’s increased confidence .................................................................................... 37
5.1.3 The EP inferiority complex ................................................................. 40
5.1.4 Summing up: institutionalized unification and a changed self-confidence .... 42
5.2 The good parliamentarian - norms and appropriate behavior ....................... 42
  5.2.1 The most valued characteristics ......................................................... 42
  5.2.2 Summing up: the successful and appropriate parliamentarian ................. 47
5.3 The distribution of reports and the selection of rapporteurs .......................... 48
  5.3.1 The successful rapporteur and the view on the rapporteurship .................. 48
  5.3.2 Post-Lisbon: Standing rapporteurs and harmonized selection procedures ... 50
  5.3.3 Summing up: the EP rapporteurship .................................................. 54
5.4 The EP party cohesion ............................................................................ 55
  5.4.1 An EP party whip? ............................................................................... 55
  5.4.2 Summing up: a veiled party whip ........................................................ 59
5.5 Informal cooperation ................................................................................ 60
  5.5.1 Pre-enlargement: stable and secluded regional oriented groups ............... 60
  5.5.2 Post-enlargement and post-Lisbon: big and inviting target-oriented groups... 62
  5.5.3 Summing up: from regional to issue oriented networks .......................... 64
6. Conclusions - Institutionalization and institutional change in the EP ............ 66
  6.1 Empirical findings ................................................................................... 66
  6.2 Creating a synthesis between new institutionalist approaches .................... 67
  6.3 The EP - Institutionalization and institutional changes .............................. 70
References ........................................................................................................ 73
  List of references ............................................................................................ 73
  List of interviews ............................................................................................ 77
Appendices ........................................................................................................ 79
  Appendix 1 .................................................................................................... 79
    The MEPs, their terms of office in the EP and their party groups ................... 79
  Appendix 2 .................................................................................................... 80
    Questions to the MEPs ................................................................................ 80
Abbreviations

ALDE  The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
COREPER  The Committee of Permanent Representatives
Commission  The European Commission
Council  The European Council of Ministers
DCI  Discursive and Constructivist Institutionalism
EC  European Community
EI  Empirical Institutionalism
ELDR  The European Liberal Democrat and Reform Party
EU  European Union
EP  European Parliament
EPP  The European People’s Party
EPP-ED  European People’s Party-European Democrats
G  The Greens
G/EFA  The Greens-European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL  The European United Left – Nordic Green Left
HI  Historical Institutionalism
MEP  Member of the European Parliament
NI  Normative Institutionalism
PES  The Party of European Socialists
RCI  Rational Choice Institutionalism
S&D  The Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats
SEA  Single European Act
SI  Sociological Institutionalism
1. Introduction

1.1 Research problem of the study – institutional change in the EP

The European Parliament (EP) is the only institution elected by the European Union (EU) citizens and over time its legislative powers have increased with the ratification of successive EU treaties. The EP has gone from being only a consultative body to having some decisive powers to become an equal legislative body together with the Council. The EU as such is often described as institutionalized and difficult to change (Akman & Kassim 2009, Farrell & Héritier 2002, Morillas 2011 et al.). Concerning the EP it is, however, likely to think that formal institutional changes such as extending legislative powers have affected also informal institutions such as norms and practices. This is the starting point in this thesis, which applies to a new institutionalist approach and centers on the institutionalization and institutional changes that the EP has undergone since the Maastricht treaty entry into force in 1993.

With a widening of both the legislative competences of the EP and the increasing number of member states, the EP is perhaps more important than ever before to study. As the EU’s only direct elected body, the EP’s internal structure and ways of making decision is of importance since it relates to the health of the EU democracy. Much research can be found on the EU integration and socialization (Beyers 2010, Lewis 2005, Scully 2005 et al.) as well as on the formal structures and party groups in the EP (Hix 2003, Kaeding 2005, Lindberg 2008, Raunio 1996 et al.). There is, however, a lack of research on informal regularities within the EP. More specific the norms, practices and things taken for granted by the members of the EP (MEPs) are rather unexplored in the academic literature. These informal institutions affect the MEPs’ possibilities of action and windows of opportunities and if the MEPs do not follow these informal rules and practices they risk being marginalized, which would have consequences not only for the MEPs themselves but also for the national delegations and the cohesion of the party group. In a wider perspective, this affects the EP positioning against the Council and the Commission and, thus, the whole political
system of the EU. It is, therefore, both interesting and necessary to study EP institutionalization and institutional change on these matters.

In order to get a broad image of the EP a wide perspective is needed and this relies on three parts in this thesis. It, firstly, means that it is not enough only looking at one term of office. Instead, a longer time perspective is needed in order to be able to grasp both institutional changes and institutionalization. Secondly, it is essential not only to pay attention to the macro level and theorize what is going on in the EP, but the actual practices and day-to-day work as well as the parliamentarians’ attitudes need to be analyzed. Relating to both the time perspective and the level of analysis, this thesis, thirdly, has its starting point in the three main new institutionalist approaches: historical institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism, which all are fruitful approaches for institutionalist studies.

The new institutionalist approaches are not completely new in the study of the EU and the EP. On the one hand, much of the previous research on the EP rapporteurship as well as previous research on party cohesion are based on a rational choice institutionalist perspective (Benedetto 2005, McElroy 2008, Yordanova 2011 et al.). On the other hand, historical institutionalists such as Patterson (1997) and Kay (2003) explored on harmonization and development of the EU legislation and pointed at the very institutionalization of the Common Agricultural Policy in the EU. It is, however, not enough only looking at the rationality of the parliamentarians or only at political culture or history as such. Together, it is likely to think that the three new institutionalist approaches portray the EP in a more comprehensive way and make it possible to distinguish more general trends and patterns of the EP institutionalization and informal institutional change.

By combining a new institutionalist approach with more traditional party research, this study aims filling the research gap on the EP internal institutionalization as well as institutional changes. Consequently, it sheds new light on the academic debate about the norms and practices that are to be found within the EP as well as it increases our understanding of power relations and possibilities for the MEP to influence the EU legislation.
1.2 Aim and research question
The overall aim of this study is to contribute to the understanding and growth of knowledge of the EP. More specifically, the study seeks to combine empirical and theoretical aims. The empirical aim is to increase the knowledge of the norms, practices and ways of behavior in the EP. The theoretical aim is to develop the understanding of new institutionalism as an approach to understand social phenomena, which in this case is how changes in formal institutions affect the pattern of behavior in the EP (i.e. the informal institutions). This study, consequently, concerns the interplay between informal and formal institutions, in which informal institutions are the units of analysis and, thus, seen as the dependent variables affected by the formal institutions, which are the independent variables.

The study has an explorative character since the relationships between the informal and formal institutions are to be identified in the EP as well as explained by new institutionalism. A consequence of this is that the focus is on finding more general patterns of institutional change or absence of change that are valid for the EP as a whole and not for a specific party group or a single parliamentarian. In this thesis traditional party research, thus, meets new institutionalism and the core is how the MEPs act in order to gain power and how they adapt and are affected by norms and symbols within the EP. Since the EU as a whole often is described as being institutionalized I expect to find patterns of institutionalization in which formal institutions have not affected informal institutions in a specific way. I do, however, also expect to find some informal institutional changes since the EP has undergone many changes over the past 20 years. The research question is:

*How do formal institutional changes affect informal institutional change in the European Parliament?*

1.3 Outline of the study
Part one of the thesis is the introduction in which the research problem, the aim of the study and the research question are discussed. In order to put the research problem in
a bigger context and to throw some light on the necessity of studying institutional changes in the EP part two of the thesis summarizes the research frontiers on this issue as well as emphasizing which research gap this thesis aims to fill. Part two works as a guideline for the following part of the thesis (part three), which is the theoretical framework. In this part the three new institutionalist approaches are presented and discussed separately as well as in relation to each other and to party research. Part three also includes a discussion of the theoretical aims of the study and ends with a theoretical operationalization of the central concepts: institutions and institutional changes. This operationalization constitutes the base for the empirical operationalization of the concepts, which is presented in the fourth part of the thesis. The fourth part also includes a general discussion of the method and methodology of the study. Here the actual research case is described and discussed and since the thesis is more or less based on interviews with parliamentarians this is also discussed. Part four ends with a critical discussion of validity and reliability in order to stress how these problems are handled. The first four parts of the thesis, consequently, lay the foundation for the fifth part, which is the analysis. The analysis includes five subparts that are based on the units of analysis, i.e. the informal institutions. The sixth part of the thesis include the empirical findings of the study as well as a theoretical discussion of which theoretical conclusions that can be drawn. Part six ends with a general discussion of what the main contributions of the thesis are.
2. Previous research - Identifying research agendas and research frontiers

The research field of the EU and the EP is certainly not a new one. Much empirical and theoretical research has been conducted on this topic. The minority of comprehensive studies on the EP institutional change and institutionalization has been concentrated on the changing legislative powers of the EP and its consequences. It is, therefore, essential to analyze an issue that more or less has been unexplored: the development of informal and formal institutions in the EP. As is to be argued below, previous political scientist research states that formal institutional change has an effect on informal institutions in the EP. There are, however, still answers to be found concerning what these connections look like and how institutionalized the EP really is. Below I identify some central pieces of previous research and discuss the avenue for future research like in this study.

2.1 Institutional change in the EU

There are a myriad of relationships between informal and formal institutions in the EU. Farrell and Héritier (2002) argue that there is a relationship between informal and formal institutions. By focusing on the Council and the EP they claim that formal institutional change at a particular moment in time can encourage the creation of informal institutions. These informal institutions can, in turn, affect the negotiation of future formal institutions. Building on assumptions and claims from primarily game theory – but also with elements from constructivism and historical institutionalism – Farrell and Héritier conclude that formal rules and informal institutions seen in the co-decision process in the EU cannot properly be understood through a focus on one-shot interactions, but that it is necessary to turn to ‘folk theorem’ results and mechanisms of equilibrium selection in order to explain how the formal rules governing the co-decision process have led to the creation of informal institutions (Farrell & Héritier 2002:578). Importantly here is the identification of formal and informal institutions in the EU, and especially that informal institutions can be created due to special formal institutional changes.
Héritier (2007) further explores the relationship between informal and formal institutions by raising the question of how to explain permanent institutional changes in the EU. One of her cases is the EP and its role in legislation during the different treaties and time of periods in the EU, starting with the EP consultation right under the European Economic Community and ending with the Constitutional Treaty (Héritier 2007:70). With her soft rational choice institutionalist approach she ends up arguing that actors in the EP push for informal reinterpretation of existing formal rules, leading to conflict, which is arbitrated in favor of a rule-upgrading interpretation, leading to formal change in the rule.

According to Héritier, the EP has constantly been pushing for expansive interpretations of its policy role (Héritier 2007:230ff). Even though Héritier opens up for new interpretations and ways of interpreting about what is going on in the power struggle between the EU institutions, her study does not anticipate the important relationship between two or more institutional rules that affect each other (Héritier 2007:244). This can be seen as one of her theoretical findings: the limitation of rational choice institutionalism. Héritier clearly rejects sociological institutionalism as giving any valuable explanation of the complex EU system (Héritier 2007:245), but by treating sociological institutionalism as the antithesis to rational choice institutionalism, Héritier misses what lies in between. Héritier’s dichotomous way of seeing the two institutionalist approaches may be one of the main weaknesses of her study, since it leaves out potential explanations and views on the relations in and between the EU institutions.

In a study by Rittberger (2005) a new institutionalist perspective is applied on explaining the empowerment of the European Parliament beginning with the Maastricht Treaty. Rittberger uses rational choice institutionalists and sociological institutionalist explanations and conclude that both approaches fail in explaining EP empowerment (Rittberger 2005:26-27). Even though his study can be seen as giving us new insights in the two new institutionalist approaches his study clearly has a weakness since he treats both approaches as independent and does not use them as complementary. Rittberger uses the approaches in a wide sense, putting up hypotheses that are too broad and without going into detail on what is needed in order to test them properly. Therefore, Rittberger’s conclusions can, unsurprisingly, be seen as rather
empty. Rittberger’s ambition is, however, valuable and it can be seen as a good starting point for future research that uses a new institutionalist perspective on the European Parliament. In that sense, Rittberger provides us a worthy contribution in the EP research debate.

2.2 European Union integration and socialization

European integration and socialization has been studied since the very establishment of the European Community (EC) in the 1950s. Both Haas (1958) and Hoffmann (1965) have provided us with valuable explanations and understandings of the integration and socialization in the EU. In recent years a more constructivist understanding of integration and socialization in the EU has, however, been developed. For example, Beyers argues that socialization should be understood as an internalization of norms that are spread through a process of conscious deliberation (Beyers 2010:916).

What the previous theoretical research on socialization and European integration, however, miss out on is that they overlook the role and influence of institutions. A weakness that can be found in previous research on EU socialization is the lack of focus on institutions. As is brought up by Beyers, that previous research focuses too much on the outcome of socialization rather than the process and those mechanisms that actually socializes individuals (Beyers 2010:911). There is, thus, a need for a stronger emphasis on the socialization process instead of outcomes. Such empirical studies can, however, be found. For example, Jeffrey Lewis (2005) examines whether and how national officials become socialized into a Brussels-based collective culture by looking at the COREPERs. Lewis’ study does not indicate that COREPER socialization occurs, but it shows a pattern of national identities being replaced and this whole socialization process is based on the officials acting from a ‘logic of appropriateness’. Hooghe (2005) finds a similar result in her study about socialization and the Commission. Her study shows that there is a high support for international norms in the Commission, but that does not depend on socialization in the Commission. According to Hooghe, top officials sustain Commission norms when national experiences motivate them to do so. Moving in the direction of the EP, Scully (2005) investigates the going native thesis in the EP, but finds no overall
support for the going native thesis in the EP as a whole. Rather, it seems that there are national and partisan ties guiding the MEPs’ behavior (Scully 2005:130).

2.3 Decision-making and the study of formal institutions in the EP
The EP has got extended legislative powers by the introduction of every new treaty in the EU. With new legislative powers, new ways of bargaining between and within the EU institutions have emerged and the rapporteurship can be seen as one example of a formal institution that has been examined during time (Benedetto 2005, Costello & Thomson 2010, Finke 2012, Kaeding 2005, Lindberg 2008, Yoshinaka et al 2010). Yoshinaka, Bowler and McElroy claim that parliamentarians with certain expertise on the particular issue is rewarded and become rapporteur more often, which also is the case for MEPs that are successful in building coalitions between the party groups (Yoshinaka et al 2010:477-478).

Both Kaeding (2005) and Benedetto (2005) find similar patterns. Their respective studies show that there is some disproportionality within the party groups and among the member states concerning the distribution of reports in the EP. Also Lindberg (2008) analyses the selection of rapporteurs, by analyzing the rapporteur selection process concerning the service-directive. Lindberg concludes that party group voting loyalty and preference proximity to the party might have been a decisive factor in the nomination of the rapporteur for the services directive.

Some other formal institutions that have been studied by political science scholars are the party groups. Some of the political party groups in the European Parliament are old. For example the forerunner of the S&D group as well as the forerunner of ALDE was established already with the establishment of the Common Assembly in the 1950s whereas the Christian democratic group, the EPP, was established in the 1970s. In a study by Raunio (1996), the relationship between the legislature’s structural properties and the behavior of the transnational party groups is analyzed. Raunio’s analysis shows that the cohesion in the EP party groups varies, but that the party groups can be considered cohesive actors facilitated by ideological homogeneity, providing the key for their cohesion (Raunio 1996:232ff). Exploring on the same theme, Hix et al (2003) study the development of the organization of the EP party
groups and the nature of competition between PES and EPP. They argue that the party system in the EP has become more consolidated and more competitive as the powers of the EP has increased. Relating to this, McElroy (2008) examines if the party groups in the EP try to enforce 'party discipline' and if those MEPs that go against the party discipline are punished. The results indicate that there is a significant relationship between voting behavior and transfer patterns among committees. The committee system is used, especially, by the two largest party groups (EPP and S&D) in order to enforce party discipline.

2.4 Summing up and identifying paths for future research

Reflecting on the overall situation regarding research on the EU, there is definitely no shortage of works on the EU political system. Previous research shows that there is a relationship between informal and formal institutions as for example the study by Farrell and Héritrier (2004) shows. We also know already that officials as well as parliamentarians that enter the EU system do not get fully socialized. Instead, they seem to keep their national identity (Checkel 2003, Scully 2005 et al). Following on this, there is a trend that some member states get hold of important positions in the EP. The rapporteurship is one example when some MEPs are favored on national basis (Kaeding 2005, Benedetto 2005 et al). Even though the party groups are rather heterogeneous they often act quite homogenous. An explanation can be, as argued by McElroy (2008), that the party groups can be punished by not getting the role as rapporteur et cetera if not following the party line.

There is, consequently, much research on the EU and especially on the EP. Consequently, the internal structure of the formal institutions in the EP is well covered and much of the research has a rational choice inspired approach. There is, however, a gap in the literature concerning the relationship between the formal and informal institutions and the institutionalization of the internal structure and patterns of behavior is not fully examined. The literature leaves also much to be done on the MEPs’ behavior and norms of how to act in the daily work in the EP. In order to fill this research gap it is not enough using only a rational choice view, but we must turn towards other new institutionalist approaches. This is, consequently, a starting point in this thesis, which will be more explored upon in the next part of the thesis.
3. Theoretical framework of analysis: the three new institutionalist approaches

The theoretical starting point of the study is new institutionalist theories. Utilizing these theoretical perspectives is an attempt to digress from other traditional perspectives on European integration such as neofunctionalism, intergovernmentalism and Europeanization.

Today a flora of new institutionalist approaches can be found. The most familiar ones may be rational choice institutionalism (RCI), sociological institutionalism (SI) and historical institutionalism (HI). In addition, Peters (2012) has identified four more: normative institutionalism (NI), empirical institutionalism (EI), and discursive and constructivist institutionalism (DCI) (Peters 2012). Above these, feminist institutionalism, and international institutionalism (II) can be added (Marsh & Stoker 2010:65). The concept ‘new institutionalism’ does, however, signify that there was an ‘old institutionalism’ as well. Studying institutions have been done already since the Ancient Greece. The old institutionalism consisted mainly of detailed configurative studies of different administrative, legal and policy structures (Powell & DiMaggio 1991:12, Peters 2012:3). The state was predominantly in these old institutional studies since the state was seen as having a central role compared to the new institutionalist idea that politics depends on society and not on the state for its existence (Katzenstein 1978, March & Olsen 1984, Peters 2012, Skocpol 1979). Many other differences concerning structuralism, institutional goals, organizational dynamics et cetera can also be found by comparing the old and the new institutionalism. The latter and all of its sub-categories did, however, emerge in reaction to the behavioral perspectives that were influential during the 1960s and 1970s in order to elucidate the role that institutions play in the determination of social and political outcomes (Hall & Taylor 1996, Peters 2012, Powell & DiMaggio 1991).
3.1 Mapping different institutionalist approaches

3.1.1 Rational choice institutionalism

Initially, RCI arose from the study of American congressional behavior (Shepsle 1989:134). It explored the paradox that if conventional rational choice postulates were correct, it would be difficult to secure majorities for legislation in the US Congress. As is stressed by Hall and Taylor (1996), Congressional outcomes actually showed considerable stability. As a consequence, late 1970s rational choice scholars started to ask how that discrepancy could be explained, and in order to find an answer they turned towards institutions.

Rational choice institutionalists understand individuals as actors that act in order to maximize their utility. The actors are, thus, driven by strategic calculus and this calculus is affected by the actor’s expectations about how others are likely to behave. Rational choice institutionalists also posit that actors have a fixed set of preferences and that they behave entirely instrumentally as to maximize the attainment of these preferences, which they do in a strategic manner (Hall & Taylor 1996:945, Immergut 1998:13). Actors, consequently, act in accordance to a logic of consequences. The role of institutions within this is to structure these interactions. As is pointed out by Hall and Taylor, this is done by affecting the range and sequence of alternatives or by providing information and enforcement mechanisms that reduce uncertainty about the behavior of other actors (Hall & Taylor 1996:945). The rationality of individuals is, however, bounded meaning that it is limited by the information they have, the cognitive limitations of their minds et cetera (Shepsle 2009:33). Since institutions are seen as collections of rules and incentives, they establish conditions for bounded rationality. Institutions, consequently, play the role as mechanisms for channeling and constraining individual behavior (Peters 2012:50, Simon 1972:163).

There is, however, no single definition within RCI of what an institution is. As in many theoretical approaches, also RCI contains a number of different traditions (Shepsle 2009). Institutions can be both formal and informal and they constitute the framework in which individuals act. Institutions are, however, taken as given or as can be easily created by actors (Hall & Taylor 1996, Peters 2012, Shepsle 1989). Institutions are being formed on a tabula rasa: i.e. the outcome of the design process is
determined by the nature of incentives and constraints being built into the institutions (Peters 2012:51).

Since actors are understood as rational they can use institutions as means for eluding collective action problems, which can be done by providing a set of agree-upon rules, which map preferences into decisions (Peters 2012:53). When individuals act to maximize their utility they are likely to produce an outcome that is collectively suboptimal (Hall & Taylor 1996:945). Some classical examples of this is the ‘prisoner’s dilemma’ and the ‘tragedy of the commons’. Institutions can, thus, reduce transaction costs. Under ideal conditions there is a Nash equilibrium, meaning, firstly, that all actors benefit from the institution. Shepsle describes this as a structure-induced equilibrium: i.e. it is an alternative that is invulnerable in the sense that no other alternative, allowed by the rules of procedure, is preferred by the actors that possess veto power (Shepsle 1989:137). Secondly, some actors can benefit more than others, but every actor must benefit more overall. Consequently, this leads to, thirdly, that no actor benefit on changing its strategy alone. This explains, firstly, why individuals join political parties and, secondly, why individuals organize in party groups in the EP.

Institutional change is from a RCI perspective not a primary question when analyzing the impacts and structure on behavior and policy (Peters 2012:61-62). There is, however, a debate concerning institutional change: whether it is simply exogenous or if it can be endogenous as well. Institutional change can be seen as exogenously when it occurs as a result of an existing institution’s failure in meeting the requirements for which it was formed (ibid.). Change is, thus, seen as a conscious process, that occur when an equilibrium is punctuated and a factor affecting this is the number of veto players. The more veto players and veto points, the harder it is to change an institution. Some do, however, argue that change also can occur endogenously (Peters 2012, Thelen 1999 et al). From this perspective, institutional change occurs by the reshaping and adaption of actors’ preferences.
3.1.2 Sociological institutionalism

Sociological institutionalism has primarily been developed in sociology and not political science. It can be traced back to Max Weber’s (1922) ideas concerning institutions and the development of ‘rational’ institutions. The roots of SI, consequently, lie in the 1970s critique of the view on organizations as acting merely rational (Hall & Taylor 1996:946). A starting point within SI is that there is not always a clear distinction between institutions as entities and the process of institutionalization by which they are created (Peters 2012:107). Institutions and organizations are overlapping each other just as institutions and culture are interrelating.

Sociological institutionalists see individuals as fundamentally social beings. These are neither as self-interested, nor as rational as RCI would argue, but they are satisfiers who act habitually. Individuals act according to the logic of appropriateness and, consequently, they act depending on what is appropriate in relation to rules, identity, custom and so on (March & Olsen 1996:254). What is appropriate depends on the particular situation and is defined by political and social institutions. Sociological institutionalists see individuals as socialized beings and individuals, thus, are a part of a bigger context. The individuals preferences are based on their visions and view on identity and which group they belong to (March & Olsen 1989:22). The idea that individuals may act rational is not completely rejected by sociological institutionalists, but from a SI perspective rational actions occur in a broader construction of subjective views on what is rational and which consequences the actions may have. Consequently, what an actor sees as a rational action is itself socially constituted (Peters 2012, March & Olsen 1984).

Sociological institutionalism has a broad view on institutions. They can be everything from formal rules and procedures, to norms and symbol systems, cognitive scripts and moral templates (Lecours 2005:7). Institutions provide guidance for human actions and they affect individuals’ strategies, preferences and identities. As stressed by Hall & Taylor, institutions and culture, consequently, shade into each other. This has at least two implications. Firstly, it challenges the distinction between ‘institutional’ explanations (based on organizational structures) and ‘cultural’ explanations (when
culture is understood as shared attitudes or values) (Hall & Taylor 1996:947). Secondly, SI views culture as an institution itself meaning that culture may be a network of routines, symbols or scripts that provides templates for behavior (Hall & Taylor 1996:948). Institutions can also specify what an actor can imagine doing in a given context (and not only what it actually does) (ibid.). Central in this is, thus, the notion that actions are tightly bound up with interpenetrations. Consequently, when an individual face a particular situation he/she must find a way of recognizing it as well as responding to it. The institutions provide means for accomplishing these tasks.

There are many possibilities for change to occur from a SI perspective. A concept that captures the view of institutional change within SI is sedimentation, which states that current practices are built on the past and beneath current practices in a system there may be layers of values left from earlier times. Even though the structure of institutions may change and transform over time, they may also retain much of their past history. This understanding of institutions affects the view on institutional change, which can occur gradually as new understanding and symbols are developed. These new understandings and symbols are not necessarily incompatible with those that were in place before. An implication is, however, that change is a slow process. The process of sedimentation is similar to the process of layering within historical institutionalism (Peters 2012:135).

Following on the concept of sedimentation, organizations often adopt new institutionalist practices in order to enhance social legitimacy (Hall & Taylor 1996:949). What confers legitimacy or social appropriateness depends on what occupies institutional authority. Change can also be seen as occurring in a more functional way: institutions must, and will, find means of adapting to changes in their environment. This form of change involves recognizing challenges in the environment and then finding ways to make the institution conform to those external forces (Peters 2012:119). Isomorphism is another way of understanding institutional change and it points at the process of homogenization in which organizations try to imitate other organizations (Lecours 2005:12, Powell & DiMaggio 1991:66). Following on Powell and DiMaggio’s definition of isomorphism three types can be found: (1) coercive isomorphism concerns the formal and informal pressures exerted in organizations by
other organizations. (2) **Mimetic isomorphism** occurs when organizations model themselves on other organizations due to the symbolic uncertainty in the environment. (3) **Normative isomorphism** deals with socialization when organizations get socialized from or with other organizations so that they look rather similar (Powell & DiMaggio 1991:67-74).

### 3.1.3 Historical institutionalism

Traditionally, historical institutionalists have focused on explaining institutional continuity and a key is that all political events happen within a historical context. Consequently, the time when an event takes place gets direct consequences for its continuation and possibilities to happen. History is not seen as a chain of independent events, but as something that affects the future and future choices, behavior and happenings (Hall & Taylor 1996, Steinmo 2008, Thelen 1999 et al).

HI can be seen as lying in the borderline between RCI and SI since it can apply to both the calculated and the cultural approaches. Individuals can, consequently, be seen both as norm binding rule followers and as self-interested rational actors (Hall & Taylor 1996:939, Immergut 1998:28 Steinmo 2008:163). More important is perhaps that individuals can and are acting on what happened in the past (Steinmo 2008:164-165). Historical institutionalists have a broad view on the relationship between individuals and institutions. Institutions can be both informal and formal procedures, routines, norms and conventions (Hall & Taylor 1996:938). A key premise in HI is that institutions provide the context in which political actors define their strategies and pursue their interests (Steinmo et al. 2002:7). Differencing from pure RCI, HI means that institutions can create clear winners and losers. Those actors that are creating or are affect by an institution are not, automatically, better of then what they would have been if the institution were not there. Institutions are, thus, bounded to the creation of asymmetries between individuals or groups and institutions both affect the individuals’ behavior by providing information, but it also affect the individuals’ self-image, preferences (Hall & Taylor 1996:940-941). Institutions can, consequently, be created both endogenously and exogenously.
A key in HI is that policy choices made when an institution was formed, or when a policy was initiated, will have a continuing and largely determinate influence over the policy far into the future (Peters 2012:71). This path dependency makes it difficult to change institutions, and the time and sequencing is of importance for institutional arrangements (Hall & Taylor 1996:941). A path dependency is maintained through different reinforcing mechanisms (Pierson 2004:77). From a calculated approach perspective an example of this can be that if the actors put much focus on bargaining a new policy it creates incentives among the actors for holding on to the decisions made by them. It can also be argued that each further step along the same path increases with each move down that path. This is because the relative benefits of the current activity increase over time. Consequently, the costs of exit rise. Pierson conceptualizes this process as increasing returns (Pierson 2000:252). Path dependencies can, however, also occur when individuals adapt to already existing institutional arrangements, which makes it possible to act outside the framework of the institution and, consequently, the individuals get trapped on a specific path (Pierson 2004:210-211).

Even though historical institutionalists traditionally have focused on explaining institutional continuity, the HI as an approach does not ignore institutional change. Institutional change occurs with formative moments or so called critical junctures. These critical junctures appear when different factors cooperate in order to create necessary circumstances for the junctures to occur (Hall & Taylor 1996:942). A critical juncture does not necessarily need to be the point of time when the effects of the juncture can be distinguished afterwards. Instead, as is argued by Steinmo, the critical juncture more commonly occur earlier in the process long before the effects of it can be seen (Steinmo 1995.). There are at least three ways of understanding institutional change within HI. Firstly, new institutional procedures can be put on already existing structures. Consequently, the institutions are layered. A second possibility is to give already existing institutions new tasks or changing their goal description. This is more commonly known as functional conversion. Thirdly, an institution can change through displacement: i.e. when a new institution pushes the old institution in a certain direction (Pierson 2004, Streeck & Thelen 2005).
Important to remember is that depending on if the calculated or the cultural approach is governing within HI, the way of understanding institutional change varies. As is pointed out by both Steinmo and Rothstein, institutional change may occur when the actors’ ideas changes and this is due to the possibility of solving collective action problems (Rothstein 1996:159, Steinmo 2008:170). Other scholars, including Peters, argue that an institution changes when an equilibria is punctuated. These punctuations are assumed to occur when there are rapid bursts of institutional change, which are followed by long periods of stasis (Peters 2012:77). HI is, consequently, not a narrow approach and its understanding of institutions and individuals are dependent on if the calculated or the cultural approach is in focus.

3.2 New institutionalism and party research

The pioneers of institutional research were interested in political parties. Already in the early 20th century Robert Michels formulated the ‘iron law of oligarchy’, which stresses that political parties are not democratically governed, but ruled by the few and that party organizations suffer from an ‘oligarchische Krankheit’ (oligarchic illness) that sooner or later hits every political organization (Michels 1911:350). Since then, institutionalists and new institutionalist have extended the research field to other types of organizations and other research areas. This study does, however, focus on what the initial institutional scholars were interested in.

Previous new institutional research that has its starting point on political organization on an EP-level is relatively absent. This does, however, not imply that new institutionalism is incompatible with political party research - quite the reverse. As is pointed out by Peters, the potential for combining these two: “[...] are important for explaining their performances within the political system” (Peters 1999:112). Here, Panebianco’s (1988) work on the organizational development within political parties can be seen as one example of building a bridge between new institutionalism (and more specific: historical institutionalism) and party research. Svåsand argues in the same way and means that when studying change, the institutional perspective provides valuable concepts such as windows of opportunity and actor capacity that can be used to understand party change as well (Svåsand 2006:23-24). Elaborating on the same issue, Johansson claims that different social contexts are more or less
surrounded by informal rules that guides appropriate behavior (Johansson 1994:12-13). As all political systems and environments, also the EP can be seen as a social context and we can clearly find an interchange between party research and new institutionalism. Institutional theory can provide an additional perspective to party research and this idea is, consequently, one of the starting points in this thesis.

3.3 Combining new institutionalist approaches

As previous sections have shown, the research containing some sort of new institutionalism is often leaning towards one of the new institutionalist approaches. Some scholars do, however, argue that the approaches can be used as complements for each other. Even though the approaches differ on several points they have much in common. As pointed out by Lecours, all approaches focus on institutional reproduction rather than transformation (Lecours 2005:11). Hall and Taylor also point at the similarities between the approaches and they argue that even though the approaches have developed rather isolated from each other they are combinable and, therefore, we should favor a more open and extensive interchange among them (Hall & Taylor 1996:957). Immergut also shares this view and emphasizes that a combination of elements of all three approaches can be fruitful and has much potential in order to explain and understand different phenomena (Immergut 1998:28).

A theoretical starting point is, consequently, that the new institutionalist approaches have much more similarities than differences. These approaches can, therefore, be used parallel in order to explain social phenomena. Consequently, a pragmatic view on institutions, institutional change and institutionalization in the European parliament is used in this thesis. This relates to the ontological and epistemological basis of the thesis. Individuals are seen both as rational actors that aim to maximize their utility and as social beings acting in order with what is seen as appropriate and due to the historical context. If only focusing on the rationality of individuals, as is done in RCI, we run the risk of catching informal practices and things that are only taken for granted by the parliamentarians. SI, thus, play an important role since it fills the gap of rational choice institutionalism’s weaknesses concerning both the importance of norms and socialization. Political behavior is something more than just
preference aggregation and rational behavior. Historical institutionalism mainly adds a third important point needed in the study of the European Parliament and that is: institutionalization in form of path dependency. The EP is a rather old institution that to a great extent looks the same as the Common Assembly did when it was introduced with the European Coal and Steel Community in the early 1950s. The role of history is, consequently, not to be rejected. There are clearly benefits with using all three new institutionalist approaches parallel to each other when analyzing institutional change and institutionalization in the EP, and the main one is that the new institutionalist approaches provide complementary perspectives of the same object.

An obvious problem with applying to all new institutionalist approaches is, however, the risk of eclecticism. As is stressed by Sanderson (1987:315) there is always a risk of contradictions and a danger of generating more confusion than insight when combining and integrating approaches. It is, therefore, important to be careful in putting elements from different theoretical traditions together. The solution can be to create a synthesis, meaning that new theories are produced out of reworking and recombing old ones. As is pointed out by Sanderson: ‘If synthesis is a chocolate layer cake, then eclecticism is certain unmixed quantities of flour, eggs, water, sugar, and cocoa. The taste in each case is obviously very different’ (Sanderson 1987:335). Consequently, the key in the case of creating a synthesis between the new institutionalist approaches lies not in picking the raisins from the cake, but to take all three approaches as they are and combine them. This is, thus, how the new institutionalist approaches are treated in this thesis.

3.4 The theoretical aims of the thesis
Having introduced the theoretical approaches and discussed their relation to each other, a final task is to bring together the dimensions central to this work. This thesis has both theory consuming and theory developing aims. On the one hand, it is theory consuming in the sense that it uses the three new institutionalist approaches in order to catch the institutional change and institutionalization in the EP. Relating to this, the new institutionalist approaches have guided the research question as well as the understanding of the research problem and the conceptualization of institutions, institutional change and institutionalization (see below).
The theory developing part relates to the aim of combining the three new institutionalist approaches and use these approaches parallel in order to catch the institutional change and institutionalization in the EP. Consequently, the view on theory development is not seen as testing a theory in the sense that primarily new hypotheses are generated. Instead, I firstly wish to contribute to the understanding of the new institutionalist approaches and show empirically how these can be used parallel in a synthetic way. This, secondly, makes the new institutionalist theories move from the more abstract down to a concrete level since the thesis is not a general theoretical discussion, but clear empirical aims. Consequently, this thesis goes beyond the broad theoretical discussion that many other new institutional scholars end up in when trying to integrate different new institutionalist approaches. Many previous attempts of combining new institutionalist approaches end up in only a general discussion about the theories (see Thelen 1999) rather than by let the approaches integrate through an empirical analysis.

In order to avoid operating on a macro level both theoretically and empirically, the thesis operates on a meso level of analysis meaning that the attention is on the EP as an institution as well as on the party groups and committees. This dimension of analysis constitutes the framework from which the operationalizations of informal and formal institutions are made, which can be found in the methods part of the thesis. Together with the new institutionalist approaches it also serves as an overall framework for the interview questions (see part 3.3.2) in the sense that these are centered on the meso level. The main theoretical benefit with the study is, consequently, the idea of bringing the abstract to the concrete and using rational choice institutionalism, sociological intuitionism and historical institutionalism in order to explain different aspects of the same phenomena. The general theoretical expectation is that the different new institutionalist approaches will point at different aspects of the informal institutions in the EP and, consequently, the relationship between formal and informal institution will be identified and explained in a comprehensive way.
3.5 Conceptual framework

3.5.1 Understanding informal and formal institutions

As all new institutionalist approaches point out, there is not a clear agreement in the literature on what an institution really is and how institutions should be understood. For example, March and Olsen argue that political institutions are: “[…] collections of interrelated rules and routines that define appropriate actions in terms of relations between roles and situations” (March & Olsen 1989:160) whereas Shepsle (in Powell & DiMaggio 1991:5) sees a political institution as: “ex ante agreements about a structure of cooperation that economize on transaction costs, reduce opportunism and other forms of agency ‘slippage’ and thereby enhance the prospects of gains through cooperation”. The understanding of institutions in this thesis is built on Douglass North’s definition of institutions as being “the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction” (North 1990:3).

Institutions can be both informal and formal. How do distinguish between formal and informal institutions is, however, less clear. Helmke and Levitsky’s have a valuable understanding of informal and formal institutions, which is also used in this thesis. Whereas formal institutions are seen as rules and procedures that are created, communicated and enforced through channels widely accepted as official, informal institutions are seen as socially shared rules that are usually unwritten and that are created, communicated and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels (Helmke & Levitsky 2004:727). Worth emphasizing is that not all patterned behavior is rule-bound. To be considered an informal institution, a behavioral regularity must respond to an established rule or guideline. If an individual does not follow this behavior he or she will in one or another way be exposed for some kind of external sanction.

3.5.2 How to understand institutional change of formal and informal institutions

As is already emphasized, institutional change can occur in different ways depending on the new institutionalist approach. Noticed by several scholars, formal institutional change is one important source for informal institutional change (Farrell & Hérétier
2002, Helmke & Levitsky 2004 et al). At least two types of institutional change can be emphasized. *Firstly*, changes in formal institutional design can affect informal institutional changes. The changes may affect the costs and benefits of adhering to related informal rules. As is argued by Helmke and Levitsy when formal rules are modified they may change the nature of the gaps that the informal institutions address, which in turn can create incentives for actors to modify or abandon the informal rule. If the informal and formal institutions are competing with each other and if the strength and effectiveness in the formal institutions changes to the better it is, *secondly*, possible that the informal institution change as well since it will cost too much to maintain the informal institution as it was when it was initiated.

The Helmke and Levitsky’s understanding and definitions of formal and informal institutions as well as of formal and informal institutional change can be seen as complements to the definitions of formal and informal institutions and institutionalization of the specific new institutionalist approaches. These definitions constitute the categorization of concepts that can be found in the methods part of this thesis. They are also used in order to catch the institutional change in the EP.

4.1 Methodology and research design: an interpretive case study

The study requires a research strategy that grasps the process of institutional changes in the EP. The research question, posed in the introduction, which asks how formal institutional change affect informal institutional change in the EP, is formulated in the terms of a logics approach, which aims to explore on the conditions of possibility. That refers to an ontological level of existence (Glynos and Howarth 2007:108f). In this thesis, social relations are seen as contingent and changeable and the analysis construct notions of logics based on actors’ self-interpretations as well as the researcher’s understanding of these interpretations and contexts.

I, consequently, adopt an interpretive research strategy based on the case of institutionalization and more specific: institutionalization in the EP. An implication of that is the study’s Weltanschauung, that what is going on within the EP is seen as a complex. As is described in the theoretical part of the thesis, the parliamentarians do not only act rational in order to maximize their utility, instead they are also seen as being framed by the organization of the EP meaning that they adapt to certain symbols and norms. This methodological statement is mirrored in not only the theoretical framework with its pragmatic view on institutions, but also in the selection of method.

Some would argue, as does Diamond, that qualitative case-study research maintains a bias toward verification (Diamond 1996). Consequently, the research has a tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions, which makes the study doubtful concerning scientific value. Like Flyvbjerg (2006:234), I argue that this is a misunderstanding or at least, that the question of subjectivism applies to all methods and not just case studies and qualitative methods. All studies that seek casual explanation can be seen as having some elements of subjectivism since the pre-understandings and interpretations of the researcher are mirrored in the study in one or another way. It is, therefore, arguable making a qualitative study on the EP. Interpretive research, as this study, is often centered on the verstehen or erklären type of social science. This study applies to an explanatory approach and focuses on different dimensions of the EP in order to grasp the changes in informal institutions,
which the formal institutions cause. The units of analysis are, consequently, the informal institutions, and the thesis has clear ambitions not only in identifying them, but also in explaining how they are affected by formal institutional changes. The casual relationship that is to be identified and explained is, thus, as Figure 1 shows: how formal institutions (x) affect informal institutions (y).

![Figure 1. The casual relationship between the variables](image)

The view on causality does, however, not stay at the X and Y relationship as is stressed in Figure 1. Since the world and in this case the EP is seen as complicated the relationship between the variables is also seen as complex. The independent variables, which are further discussed in part 3.2, are not necessarily seen as separated from one another. Instead they may interplay and reinforce each other and together affect the dependent variables as is described in Figure 2.

![Figure 2. The view on causal relationship between the variables](image)

Consequently, the case selection and the Weltanschauung of the thesis are mirrored in the view on causality. Following on this and seeing the world as complex it is crucial not to circulate at a single point of time in the EP history in order to fulfill the aim of the study. Instead a longer time perspective is needed and therefore the thesis covers about 20 years of the EP history. The thesis includes the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th EP and it, consequently, starts from the introduction of the Maastricht treaty in 1993 when the EC became the EU and finishes at the end of the 7th EP in 2014. The length of the time period as well as the aim of grasping institutional change from new institutionalism give the thesis elements of process tracing, which is further discussed in part 3.5.
4.2 Operationalizing informal and formal institutions

The theoretical definitions of informal and formal institutions are presented in the theoretical part of the thesis and they serve as a base for the whole analysis. It is, however, necessary to take these definitions down some steps on the ladder of abstraction in order to show how these concepts more specifically are understood and used in this thesis. Together with the previous research on this topic two aspects of formal institutions that can affect informal institutional change in the EP can be distinguished. These aspects/formal institutions work as analytical tools since they are used as sorting instruments in order to get closer to institutional change in the EP in the interviews as well as in the empirical analysis. The aspects were deductively identified in the beginning of the process with help from previous research on the EU political system and they have more or less stimulated the empirical work and all together the aspects constitute what formal institutions can be seen as.

These formal institutions are: (1) the EU enlargements of 1995, 2004, 2007, and 2013 (2) the EP’s legislative powers, which changed with the treaty of Maastricht, the treaty of Amsterdam, the treaty of Nice, and the treaty of Lisbon. They can be seen as formal institutions basically because they are affecting the very formal structure of the EP. For example, when there are new member states entering the EU their MEPs cannot be rejected to be MEPs. Instead, they become part of the EP formal political system. The same can be said for treaty changes and when the EP gets more legislative powers. These are formal changes that cannot be overlooked or not used. Both the enlargements and the EP extended legislative powers can, consequently, be seen as formal institutions because they are aspects of mandatory regulations that cannot be ignored.

Formal institutions are usually written down and officially communicated in some sense. Identifying informal institutions and institutional change is, however, much more difficult. A country’s constitution can tell us whether it has a presidential or parliamentary political system, but it cannot tell anything about the clientelism in the system. Even though the aspects of informal institutions were distinguished inductively in the interviews, they are in some way derived from which questions were asked, which is discussed in part 3.3.2 of the thesis. The aspects constitute the
core themes of the analysis by circulating on norms, hierarchies and patterns of behavior in the EP: (1) the EP relationship to the Commission and the Council in the institutional triangle, (2) norms and appropriate behavior of the MEPs, (3) the view on the rapporteurship and the selection of rapporteur, (4) the view on party cohesion, and (5) informal cooperation. These informal institutions correspond to the theoretical definitions that are stressed in the theoretical part of the thesis. All the informal institutions can be seen as socially shared unwritten rules or view on how to behave and act.

4.3 Data

4.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

In statistical analyses it is necessary to isolate and define categories before the start of the collection of data (Esaiasson et al. 2012:253). The starting point in a qualitative and abductive study such as this one, a key is that we cannot on beforehand know, which all of these categories are. As is emphasized by Alvesson and Sköldberg, an event can be thought of in the perspectives of earlier theories or hypotheses, but a theory or hypotheses should not be put on the empirical material as such. Instead, they should work as a source of inspiration in the disclosure of general patterns. The theoretical assumptions and the empirics are, consequently, put in layers in the research process (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2008:55-56). Following on this, the interviews in this study have a semi-structured character and they cover a wide range of matters including: the MEPs first memories of entering the EP and their attitudes toward various aspects of EP’s institutional structures. 14 interviews with MEPs from the 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th EP has been made. Seven of them were conducted face to face whereas the other seven were telephone interviews (see Appendix 1). The face-to-face interviews were made in environments chose by the interviewees.

The selection of present and former parliamentarians were made out of six over-all criteria: (1) number of terms of office in the EP, (2) which and how many terms of office the parliamentarian was in the EP, (3) gender, (4) if the MEP has had any prominent role in their party group or committee, (5) political party and (6) political party group. These criteria made it possible to get a wide set of parliamentarians. All
parliamentarians are from Sweden and they represent Socialdemokraterna (the Swedish Social Democratic Party), Moderaterna (the Moderate Party), Miljöpartiet (the Green Party), Vänsterpartiet (the Left Party), Folkpartiet (the Liberal People’s Party), Kristdemokraterna (the Christian Democrats) and Centerpartiet (the Centre Party). The reason for having only Swedish parliamentarians is primarily because it corresponds to the time perspective of the thesis. Sweden entered the EP some years after the introduction of the Maastricht treaty and therefore none of the parliamentarians also had a seat before the Maastricht. It is possible to think that if interviewing parliamentarians who also were parliamentarians before the introduction of the Maastricht treaty they are not able to separate their experience pre and post Maastricht since the memory often fade and since it was such a long time ago. Interviewing Swedish parliamentarians facilitate this problem. There are, of course, some validity problems concerning the selection of parliamentarians and this is further discussed in part 3.6.

The interviews were carried out in the parliamentarians’ native language, which is Swedish. The MEPs could, consequently, express themselves more clearly than what would be the case if the interviews were made in English. In that way, the parliamentarians were able to grasp and describe things and issues that otherwise would not have been caught the same. The quotes taken from the interviews that are included in the analysis are, thus, translated from Swedish to English. A risk with this is, of course, that the meaning of the words and the context are not fully correct. This does, however, relate to a bigger discussion of the role of texts and language, and not at least: the reader. If we apply to Barthes’ (1977) idea that texts and language are complex matters and that, firstly, it is through reading that texts comes alive and that, secondly, a text that is only tied to its author is either unfinished or not to be read by the public, we can imagine that not only translations determine what the text is saying, but this is made by the reader him-/herself. A general problem that perhaps is more important to take into consideration than the problem of translations is the one of understanding and overstanding, raised by Jonathan Culler (1992). Whereas understanding is to ask questions and find answers that the text insist on, overstanding consists of pursuing questions does not pose to its model reader (Culler 1992:114).
The point here is that even though translations are done properly or less properly, the text is still in the hand of the reader to be interpreted.

All face-to-face interviews were recorded and transcribed whereas the telephone interviews were written down during the interviews. The interviews lasted for about 45 minutes. All interviewees were keen on talking and had a positive attitude towards the study. Most of the MEPs did not care about being recorded, but some of them were more anxious about it. This should not have affected the material as such since most MEPs had an open approach towards being recorded. It might, however, have made some MEPs more careful in what they said throughout the interviews, which might have made the interview material less comprehensive.

4.3.2 The interview questions

Before all interviews the parliamentarians got information about the theme of the thesis: the relationship between informal and formal institutions in the EP. They also got to know that the study is not explicitly comparative in the sense that it concerns differences and similarities between the party groups in the EP even though comparative elements can be dispersed. All parliamentarians had the possibility of getting the interview questions beforehand. Some wanted to have them beforehand in order to prepare themselves whereas others did not want to have a look at the questions before the interview. A consequence of this is that some of the parliamentarians had more or less prepared answers on the questions that can be interpreted as rehearsed. This can be compared to the unprepared MEPs, who more or less answered on intuition. Even though the distribution of the interview questions in some way may have affected the material it is not possible to distinguish different answers between those MEPs who read the questions beforehand and those who did not.

The questions (see appendix 2) asked in the interviews were guided primarily by the operationalization of informal and formal institutions in the EP. They all included inductive elements since they had open answers. An implication of this is that the MEPs – to some extent – navigate the interviews and tell their stories. Even though the benefits of semi-structured interviews are many, there are still some negative
implications that should be raised. If the interview questions would had been closed, each answer would have got a measured value, which had made it easier to compare the answers. This type of closed questions could have been motivated to have since it quite easily makes it possible to identify similar patterns among the interviewees.

Closed questions can, however, give an incomprehensive material since it reduces the possibilities for MEPs to explore on themes they find important. The semi-structured character used in this study made it possible to follow up on emerging themes during the interviews. Thus, themes and topics that were not though of beforehand could be covered. It also made it possible to explore on themes that were specific for the respective MEP as for example committee positions, rapporteurship and the treaties.

4.4 Other sources

The interview material is the main material of this thesis since it exclusively centers on the MEPs day-to-day work in the EP and, thus, catches the relationship between informal and formal institutions as well as institutionalization. The thesis does, however, also include some secondary sources that are used in order to get a broader view on the institutional changes and institutionalization. This material basically consists of academic articles that touch upon the same topics as the themes in the analysis and, consequently, the supplement the analysis and make it more valid.

4.5 Interpreting the material

As is discussed in part 3.3.2, this study has an abductive approach meaning that it balances between induction and deduction. It comes close to the deduction since the theoretical framework has guided the selection of formal institutions, which were discovered on beforehand. The thesis is, however, not centered on testing hypotheses. Instead, it includes some clear inductive elements especially since the informal institutions, i.e. the units of analysis, were only theoretically identified on beforehand, but they were empirically identified in the interview material. This relates to the research questions, which were not closed but, instead, rather open. The intention has, consequently, been to find empirical regularities by focusing on the empirical material itself. In this study, this is reflected in the initial work of reading all interviews a couple of times and on each theme in the interview questions the answers of the
parliamentarians have been put together in tables, in which empirical regularities have appeared.

Since the analysis is centered on a longer time perspective and since time is seen as important for determining if changes have occurred or not the analysis includes elements of process tracing, which have guided the interpretation of the material. As argued by George and Bennett process tracing is suitable when uncovering intervening casual mechanisms and exploring reciprocal causation and endogenous effects (George & Bennett 2005:206-207). Process tracing can apply both to constructivism, rational choice or having a more pure historical perspective similar to historical institutionalism. Consequently, process tracing fits very well to the pragmatic theoretical approach of this thesis in which the three main new institutionalist approaches are used. The elements of process tracing relate to how the themes of the analysis have been distinguished, which has not focused on observing change or sequence from the very beginning of the process, but taking good snapshots at a series of specific moments. More concrete, this means that I have, firstly, identified moments that could be a part of a process of institutional change or institutionalization. Secondly, the snapshots or specific moments have been put in relation to each other in order to find and explain patterns and regularities with help from indicators from the theoretical framework.

In order for something to be characterized as an informal institutional change in the EP it is necessary that MEPs from different EP’s tell different stories about the same event or object and that most MEPs from the same EP have similar stories. This is, consequently, a core condition. On the other hand, an institutionalized process or view requires that MEPs from different EPs and different party groups show the same patterns and describe events in a similar way. Since the thesis has an explanatory approach as well, it is necessary to clarify the indicators that are used in order to explain the different patterns and regularities in the EP that characterize the five themes of the analysis. These indicators (see Table 1) have worked as sorting instruments in order to find explanations of the institutional changes. These are based on general understandings of institutional change within the three new institutionalist approaches (see Hall & Taylor 1996, Lecours 2005, Peters 2012, Thelen 1999 et al.).
Firstly, RCI explanations point at the individuals’ or political groups’ self-interests. They emphasize the goal fulfillment and search for the greatest good and efficiency of the institution. Secondly, explanations from an SI perspective focus more on the MEPs habits and how they aim at being a part of the group. They are group and identity oriented as well as pointing at routines and doing what is custom. Finally, HI explanations are more general and can apply to both RCI and SI explanations. They do, however, stress the importance of gradual change and equilibrium getting punctuated and the change of initial conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New institutionalist approach</th>
<th>Rational choice institutionalism</th>
<th>Sociological institutionalism</th>
<th>Historical institutionalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional change</td>
<td>Private interests, goal-directed, goal fulfillment, seek the greatest good, working effectively, veto players</td>
<td>Acting habitually, norms, identity, custom, routines, gain legitimacy, gradual adaption, socialization</td>
<td>Gradual change, layering, veto players, punctuated equilibrium, changed initial conditions, establishment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fictitious examples indicating that there is some sort of institutional change going on</td>
<td>“We do that in order to gain influence.” or “When I did that, it improved my possibility of becoming rapporteur”</td>
<td>“We have always done like that. It is just the way it is.” or “You do not challenge someone from a high status committee”</td>
<td>“They always did as they wanted, but then they started to listen to us and after some time we decided it all together”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Indicators of institutional change

4.6 Delimitation of the study and questions of validity and reliability
Validity problems might be the most central and difficult problems for this thesis. In order to prevent problems with construct validity I have, firstly, clearly defined theoretically how institutions and institutional change is be understood. This is done in the theoretical part of the thesis using previous theoretical research. Secondly, the theoretical operationalization of informal and formal institutions and institutional changed have paved the way for the empirical operationalization of those concepts. The empirical definitions are also guided by previous research on the EP.

The main validity problems can be found by turning towards what Esaiasson et al. (2012) have identified as results validity. Good results validity presupposes validity but also good reliability. The main reliability problem in this thesis relates to the interviews with the MEPs and whether the interviewees tell the truth or if they withhold some information or strengthens and intensifies the information about a
particular issue. In the case of the interviewees in this study, it is possible to think that they want to portray their terms of office in the EP in a particular way. The authenticity of the MEPs’ individual statements is judged by their capacity of arguing for their statements as well as their ability of elucidate them with concrete examples. The authenticity is, however, also valued in relation to the material as a whole. Following on this, it may be easier for the present parliamentarians to relate to the interview question and to give answers that correspond to what actually happens in the EP. Some former MEPs reiterated that it was difficult to remember what actually happened when they were parliamentarians. The interview questions were, however, in most of the cases handed out beforehand. This might have had a good effect on the interviews, since it gave the MEPs the possibility of revoke their memory.

Since the interviews constitute the main material in this thesis and since only Swedish MEPs have been interviewed it should be stressed that the result and the conclusions that are drawn to some extent may be biased, which is a validity problem. Especially the MEPs’ ideas and views on the EP can be affected of their political experience from their national party as well as their activities in the Swedish parliament. Following on this they may have an approach towards the EP that, for example, makes them understand the Commission in a special way differing from the MEPs in general, which, consequently, have consequences for the result. In order to improve the results validity the material consist of interviews with MEPs from different terms of office, different political parties et cetera. Consequently, many more factors than just the member state affect the answers given by the interviewees. This is one argument for why the conclusions should be seen as adequate. Following on this it is important for the reader to be able to follow the decisions in the analysis made by me as a researcher. This relates to questions of internal validity and, consequently, the transparency of the thesis. In order to make the study transparent the units of analysis are both theoretically and empirically described and a framework with indicators of how to identify changes and institutionalization has been made.

A final problem that relates both to the reliability and the validity is the neo institutionalist approach of the thesis and its impact on the result. This thesis has a new institutionalist approach, which affects the operationalization of informal and
formal institutional change as well as guiding the whole analysis. If analyzing institutional change and using only one new institutionalist approach or perhaps another theoretical framework the result might be completely different. The starting point in this thesis is, however, firstly that new institutionalist theory grasps institutionalization and institutional change in a suitable way. Secondly, as many other researchers (Thelen 1999, Peters 2012 et al.) have stressed, the three new institutionalist approaches have more similarities than differences. The three new institutionalist approaches can therefore be seen as going well with each other by pointing both at similar and different aspects of institutionalization and institutional changes.

4.7 Demarcations of the study

Three overall demarcations have been made that affect the thesis in a number of ways. These demarcations concerns the time perspective, the theoretical framework that lies as a base for the operationalization of the variables, and the interview material. As already touched upon, the thesis includes a time perspective that begins with the 1993 Maastricht treaty and that extends to the end of the 7th EP in 2014, which, consequently, is about 20 years of the EP history. The main reason for starting at the Maastricht treaty is because it gave the parliament legislative powers with the co-decision procedure, which is often described as a milestone concerning the EP’s development (Crombez 1999:2, Benedetto & Hix 2007:116). Another reason for beginning at the Maastricht treaty is that co-decision has, according to Farrell & Héritier (2002), led to modes of decision-making, which have affected the treaty negotiations. Consequently, it made the EP more successful in advancing its interest. In order to identify and explain institutional changes it is necessary to have rather long time perspective. This motivates the 20 years of the EP history that the thesis includes.

A second demarcation concerns the selection of the independent variables, i.e. the formal institutions. The two formal institutions represent events that affect the political and organizational structure of the EP and it is already known that they cause changes (Farrell & Héritier 2002). For example, more member states in the EP makes the political groups larger and the internal structure of them changes. It is, however,
unexplored on the relationship between this type of formal institutions and the informal ones. This, consequently, motivates having these two formal institutions. The study is, however, also demarcated concerning the informal institutions. The informal institutions that are crystallized in the interviews and they are, consequently, distinguished with help from the questions that the MEPs answered and the themes of the interviews. The questions can, thus, be seen as demarcating the study. It should also be noticed that the study relies on a new institutionalist approach, which has consequences for the analysis and the conclusions that are drawn. The analysis and the conclusions are guided by new institutionalist perspectives on formal and informal institutions, institutional changes and institutionalization.

The thesis is also demarcated only to include interviews with MEPs from Sweden. As is already explained in part 3.3.1, the reason for this relates to the time perspective of the study, but it does, as is emphasized in part 3.6, affect the result. The benefits with making this demarcation are not only those stressed in part 3.3.1, but also the possibility for the MEPs to talk their native language in the interviews is an advantage since it enables the MEPs to express themselves in another way than what they could have done in for example English.
5. Analysis

5.1 The institutional triangle: the EP’s relationship to the Council and the Commission

5.1.1 Unification: The EP versus the Council and the Commission

The EP is not only seen as a unified actor by a big part of the electorate, but over the years it has been characterized as being a stable and rather cohesive actor versus the Commission and the Council (Crombez 1999, Hix et al. 2003). The EP has got more and more legislative powers with the entry into force of every new treaty in the EU and it has never had as much legislative powers as it has got after the introduction of the 2009 Lisbon treaty. Before the 1993 introduction of the Maastricht treaty the cooperation procedure was more common than co-decision, which was introduced with the Maastricht treaty. An implication of the EP’s (especially pre-Lisbon) lack of legislative powers is that the EP had to act relatively unified and agrees on a common standpoint in order to affect the legislation et cetera in the EU. In that way, the EP can be seen as the opposite pole versus the Commission and the Council. This guided the 4th EP as much as it guided the 7th EP. Consequently, building and retaining rather stable coalitions between the party group is rather institutionalized in the EP and the Council and Commission are seen more or less as bigger opponents compared to how the party groups’ view each other (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld, Lennart Sacrédeus, Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund).

When the EP negotiates with the Commission and the Council the 4th EP parliamentarians argue that the EP was put aside (Interviews: Lennart Sacrédeus & Charlotte Cederschiöld). The EP, therefore, had to act as one player in order to get any influence at all. It is widely agreed that the EP often lacked means of reaching the Council and the Commission. A valuable tool in the 4th EP in order to influence was speaking with one voice (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld & Marianne Eriksson). Consequently, the EP could counterbalance the Council and the Commission. This is, however, not as straightforward as it might look like at first sight. The EP consists of different party groups and it is, according to the parliamentarians’, problematic that the EP had to (and still has) to act united since it makes it difficult to show the political differences to the electorate. Getting influence and playing by the rules of the
Commission and the Council do, however, seem to be most important for the MEPs (Interviews: Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund). Åsa Westlund, a member of the 6th and 7th EP, stresses that when everything is said and done the EP do, however, need a common strategy against the two other big players (Interview: Åsa Westlund). This visualizes the view of the importance of acting together between the party groups vis-à-vis the Commission and the Council. This view on the EP’s role of being a unified actor can be interpreted in lines of RCI since the MEPs want to gain as much influence as possible and they are, thus, forced to cooperate. It can, however, also be understood from a more sociological institutionalist perspective since it indicates that the process is more or less taken for granted. The legislative process, consequently, can be seen as a network of routines that guides the EP’s as well as the individual MEPs’ behavior.

The parliamentarians’ view on the importance of having a common strategy against the Commission and the Council does, however, also signify the understanding of the EU legislative process. What can be noticed is that it has become more and more common for the legislation to be finished in the first reading. As is pointed out by many researchers the decision-making have in that way become more efficient than before (Burns 2013, Hägen & Kaeding 2006, Yordanova 2011 et al). Co-decision has become significantly shorter: taking on average 17 months between 2009-2011 and 22 months in the 1993-1999 (Kardasheva 2012:3) and as noticed by Yordanova, during the 6th EP more than 60 percent of all co-decision legislation was finalized in the first reading of the co-decision procedure. (Yordanova 2011:611). It seems to be an agreement that this is the way of working when making decisions even though the parliamentarians (especially the post-Lisbon ones) argue that there are several problems with this since much has to be negotiated outside the official meetings (Interviews: Mikael Gustafsson, Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund). This, consequently, point at the complexity of the EU legislative process in which not only the EP is seen as one actor versus the Commission and the Council, but also the more or less demand on making the legislative process more efficient has implications that are not seen as good even though they are accepted.
5.1.2 The EP’s increased confidence

Already in the 1979 the concept ‘institutional triangle’ was coined in order to emphasize the interdependent and balanced nature of the relationship between the Commission, the Council and the EP (Gozi 2008, Jaque 2004, Pech 2011 et al). The EP has clearly changed from being a body in which the MEPs felt rather powerless and less important than the Commission and the Council to becoming more self-confident. The EP’s increased legislative powers is one explanation for this (Interviews: Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund). Especially the parliamentarians that were members of the parliament for more than one term of office and who, consequently, experienced more than one treaty emphasize that the sense of self-importance increased with every new treaty. Jan Andersson was a parliamentarian in both the 4th, 5th and 6th EP and he stresses this pattern: “During my time in the parliament I think everyone thought that the Council was not progressive enough. It has been a perception in the parliament saying that we should outdo the Council and the more legislative powers the EP has got the more self-confident the EP has become. It clearly differs between when I entered and when I left the EP.” Many other parliamentarians share this view and especially the pre-Lisbon parliamentarians saw both the Council and the Commission as major actors (Interviews: Jan Andersson, Lennart Sacrédeus & Marianne Eriksson). This should not be seen as surprising since the Commission and the Council has been portrayed at the dominant actors of the EU in general. The pre-Lisbon parliamentarians’ view on the EU actors can, consequently, be interpreted in terms of historical institutionalism stressing that the view on the EU actors has been rather path dependent and built on previous powers of the Commission and the Council. The Commission has always had the power of the initiation of the legislation and the Council has continuously viewed itself as the main decision-making body of the EU (Gozi 2008:40, Pech 2011:10).

The EP’s extended legislative powers and view on itself as a major actor tells that its position in the institutional triangle has become strengthened. In the Community pillar, the EP did not only largely came to share legislative power with the Council, but it also gained a part in the appointment of the Commission (Jaque 2004:389). Even though the EP already with the Maastricht treaty and Amsterdam treaty got lots of powers and possibilities of influencing the EU not all of them were used when they
emerged. One example that shows this, as well as portraying the changed self-confidence of the EP, is the possibility of approving or rejecting the Commission. In 2004 the president of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso, proposed one commissioner that the EP did not want as a commissioner. The result was that Barroso had to change him. This happening is something that almost every parliamentarian from the 6th EP mentions as an important event for the EP’s internal view on itself, but it also represents a point of time when they felt that the Commission and the Council took the EP more seriously (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld, Inger Segelström & Åsa Westlund). Åsa Westlund who entered the 6th EP tells: “When I got elected in 2004 the EP clearly said no to Buttiglione who wanted to become commissioner and that had not been done by the EP before. From the start, no one took EP’s point of view seriously, but later on they did and they were forced to change a commissioner. With the Lisbon treaty later on, it felt like the Parliament started to use the competences it has had for a longer time.” (Interview: Åsa Westlund). The EP, consequently, had won some sort of struggle versus the Commission and the Council concerning how the EP was to be understood from the other two actors. After Barroso had to change one Commissioner there was an increased will within the EP to use its powers more offensively against the Commission and the Council. The EP started to challenge the Commission and the Council more during the negotiations than what it had done before (Interviews: Inger Segelström & Jan Andersson). The path dependence of the EP as a subordinated actor was, consequently, to some extent broken. This can from a HI perspective be understood in terms of layering, meaning in this case that when the EP got new tasks in form of more legislative powers, its view and space of acting changed. This view can be seen as reinforced by bringing in a RCI perspective, which stresses that the MEPs acted rational and started to use the powers of the EP. In this way, the MEPs’ changed view on the role of the EP follows a rational path meaning that the more influence the more self-confidence.

The Buttiglione event did not only affect the parliamentarians’ interpretation of how the Commission and the Council viewed the EP, but it did also strengthen the EP as an institution and it reinforced the EP to act unified (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld & Åsa Westlund). Concerning the view of the EP as a unified actor
versus the Commission and the Council this can be explained both with rational, sociological and historical aspects. It is rational in the sense that the EP has to act unified in order to bring in their amendments et cetera in the proposals, but it is also sociological and applies to the feeling of being a part of the group since the parliamentarians stresses aspects of the importance of being a team (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld & Inger Segelström). The historical aspects follow the path of the other two. The EP has always been the weaker player in the institutional triangle and it has never alone got any own influence (besides the Council) over the legislation. The EP has, thus, always been needed to take the Council into consideration, which has functioned as a reinforcing mechanism for the EP to stick together.

The EP’s own view on itself concerning that the EP is just as important as the Commission and the Council was strengthened even more with the introduction of the Lisbon treaty in 2009. From a new institutionalist perspective, the extending powers that the EP got with the Lisbon treaty can be seen as reinforcing the path of much self-confidence that the EP was already on. The parliamentarians mention that the extended EP legislative powers made the EP not only formally an equal legislative body with the Council, but it also informally changed the EP role since its status increased (Interviews: Eva-Britt Svensson & Åsa Westlund). A quote from Eva-Britt Svensson explains the importance of getting more influence as a MEP in the EP: “The EP straightened itself up much when the legislative powers were extended, and the EP keeps up much more towards the Commission. The more power, the more one talks about one’s strengths.” The Lisbon treaty may not be seen as pioneering and as a treaty the very foundation of EU political system, but rather as a new chapter in the book as argued by Pech (2011), it both reinforced and strengthened the path dependency concerning the EP’s view rather new view of itself as a valid actor. This view of the EP as a more serious player in the 6th and 7th EP becomes even more obvious with Göran Färm’s interpretation of the EP. He was a parliamentarians in the 5th respectively the 7th EP and he means that the EP is not any longer about only making standpoints and discussing different political issue on the basis of the views of the Commission and the Council, but the EP can actually make serious decisions and be an agenda setter. It seems that the parliamentarians identify themselves as more
important players and they take for granted that other actors such as the Commission should listen to them as well as to the whole EP. The increased self-confidence of the EP, consequently, enables the parliamentarians to set the tones in the negotiations with the Commission and the Council and from a sociological institutionalist perspective it specifies the view of what the parliamentarians as well as the EP can imagine doing in the EU political system.

5.1.3 The EP inferiority complex

Even though the post-Lisbon parliamentarians show a more self-confident image of the EP and describe it as a strong institution the old inferiority complex still seems to be a part of the EP. The EP legislative powers have increased with both the 1993 Maastricht treaty, the 1999 Amsterdam treaty, the 2003 Nice treaty and the 2009 Lisbon treaty, but the interviews with the post-Lisbon parliamentarians underline that there are still moments when the EP verifies its earlier weaker position of the three core players in the EU. Sometimes the Council used powers they do not have and that confirm the image of the EP as the weaker actor in the institutional triangle (Interviews: Göran Färm & Åsa Westlund).

As the EP got more legislative powers the clash between the EP and the Council has become intensified. A huge problem concerns the delegated and implementing acts in the EU legislation process. The decision of having delegated or implementing acts has many times locked the whole legislation process (Interview: Åsa Westlund). When there are implementing acts, the member states have the possibility of having a national expert and if that is the case the EP can only give their opinion, but the Commission is not forced to change anything. If there are delegated acts the member states are not guaranteed of having a national expert. Instead, the Commission puts up a committee and the EP has the possibility of saying no or giving their view on the matter. The result is that in all cases that someone has to hand anything to the Commission that they are going to implement, the member states want implementing acts whereas the EP wants delegated acts. Most often, according to the treaty, it should be delegated acts, but the Council refuses to agree on that because they think they get too little influence. Sometimes the EP, however, agrees on having
implementing acts even though that should not be the case (Interviews: Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund).

This clearly portrays the ambivalence in the EP’s view on itself and the domination of the two other players. It may be surprising that the EP sometimes agree on being dominated by the Council. The Commission has lost lot of influence and powers since the 1987 SEA whereas the Council has strengthened its position vis-á-vis the Commission (Jaque 2004:390-391). Differing from the EP the Council has been the primary decision-maker in the EU for a long time and as its position gets stronger and stronger compared to the other traditional major player, i.e. the Commission, it is not unexpected that the Council tries to protect its position (Gozi 2008:42-43). Both rational, sociological and historical explanations can be found for explaining the EP inferiority complex. The decision making in the EU primarily involves the three major actors, which all have to interact with each other. All institutions have to reach a point of agreement and, therefore, it can be rational for the EP to sometimes let the Council be the big brother since the EP, thus, preserves good relations to the Council and, consequently, gets a better chance of influence in the long run. In order to understand this more clearly it is possible to turn to historical institutionalism. If viewing the actions of the EP with historical glasses on, it is possible to argue that since the Council has been a dominant player and EP has not, it still has a view on itself as subordinated. This, in turn, goes hand in hand with sociological institutionalist aspects, which in this case emphasize both the historical and cultural context that the EP acts within.

A consequence of the fact that the EP sometimes agrees on having implementing acts and follow the rules of the Council, the EP’s view on itself as a unitary actor becomes stronger and the MEPs feel that they are a part of the same team (Interviews: Mikael Gustafsson & Olle Schmidt). Consequently, this reinforces the parliamentarians’ view seeing the EP as a unitary actor and it also increases the reasons for building stable majorities when negotiating with the Commission and the Council. The parliamentarians argue rather rational by stressing that there has to be a big coalition between the main party groups the Commission and the Council view the EP as a strong actor.
5.1.4 Summing up: institutionalized unification and a changed self-confidence

Some important changes as well as features of institutionalization can be found when analyzing the EP’s view on itself vis-à-vis the Commission and the Council. Primarily two general trends can be distinguished. Firstly, the EP is characterized by being a unified body that both aims at building stable coalitions for rational and historical reasons in order to gain influence. Neither the enlargements nor extending EP legislative powers seem to have broken this pattern. Instead, it has reinforced the EP to be unified. No change in this informal institution can be found.

A second trend is the one of the EP’s increased self-confidence. The extending EP powers and especially co-decision and the Lisbon treaty are fruitful explanations for the trend that the EP sees itself as a bigger and more important player in the 7th EP compared to especially the 4th EP. Consequently, there is a relationship between increased legislation and increased self-confidence. Even though the parliamentarians are keen on emphasizing the importance of the EP the EP still seems to be characterized by an inferiority complex. This is especially visualized when it is to be decided whether to have implementing or delegated acts and as is emphasized in the previous section the reasons for this should be seen in terms of RCI, HI and SI.

5.2 The good parliamentarian - norms and appropriate behavior

5.2.1 The most valued characteristics

In all societies there are norms that stress how it is appropriate to be and act. As is emphasized by Abélès, the institutional features of the EP with its party groups, committees and rapporteur system remind of any national parliament, but with one difference: the political culture, which has been developed ever since the establishment of the EP (Abélès 1992:365ff). Some of the parliamentarians have been in the EP since 1979 and the first direct election to it. These MEPs are seen as having more influence than the newer parliamentarians (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld & Olle Schmidt). Experience is certainly beneficial to have in order to get influence in the EP. For example, the German Christian Democrat Elmar Brok entered the EP in
1979 and has remained a member of the EP ever since. In the EPP party group he is a well known name and his time in the parliament as well as his political experiences has given him an important position. Brok always gets the reports on foreign and security policy since he always wants them (Interview: Gunilla Carlsson). This is, however, something that is not very questioned. It seems to be a general and informal agreement in the EPP party group that experienced parliamentarians such as Brok should be in hold of an exceptional position. The reasons for this can be divided into at least two parts. Firstly, it can be interpreted in lines with RCI. The party groups want to have much influence and experienced parliamentarians have established networks within the EP as well as to the Commission and the Council and their officials, which is beneficial for the rapporteur to have. Secondly, it is a general trend in the EP that the MEPs listen to more experienced MEPs independent of party group (Interviews: Gunilla Carlsson & Inger Schörling). This relates to sociological institutionalist aspects of having an experienced rapporteur. Experience is in some way linked to status and that can make parliamentarians from other party groups listening and willing to negotiate. This, consequently, points at the political culture and what is seen as valued and not. Consequently, due to his experiences of the EP, Brok has high status is, therefore, seen as a key player. ‘Knowing the system’ is highly valued and the more experienced MEPs have advantages in this. Experience is, consequently, something to strive for and for the MEPs’ to emphasize that they have (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld, Gunilla Carlsson, Jan Andersson & Lennart Sacrédeus). It is, thus, not only of rational reasons that experience matters in the EP, but also sociological aspects should be taken into consideration.

The longer a MEP has been in the parliament the easier it is to get influence and power, but MEPs that are newer can also get much influence if they have other valuable characteristics than just EP experiences. The former French prime minister, Michel Rocard, and the present prime minister of Italy, Giorgio Napolitano, are two examples of parliamentarians that are described as have been influential and had high status in the EP. They are seen as established political actors and well-known names and, thus, they have got a fast track into the party group and into the daily work (Interview: Jan Andersson). Being a well-known person on the international level is, certainly, beneficial and another example of that is the Danish MEP Jens Peter Bonde.
Bonde was a personality and someone parliamentarians were talking about long before he became a MEP (Interviews: Hans Lindqvist & Inger Schörling).

If a MEP both has much experience of the EP and is well known he or she has advantages. It is, however, also beneficial having being a minister or having another title such as Doctor or Professor. The MEPs who have been ministers or who has any academic titles are taken more seriously and are more listened to than others. Hadar Cars, a member of the 4th EP, tells: “The title does not matter so much in the sense that it makes you a complete other person than you would have been without it, but it has an impact of course. I have it written on my business card, which indicates that I have seen the world from another perspective. […] The experience of have being a minister is important and especially when discussing with people from the Council who were ministers. It gives some extra respect.” (Interview: Hadar Cars).

Parliamentarians with titles do not start from zero when entering the EP and they are much more prioritized by the group concerning getting assignments and so on. It is, thus, an order of precedence among the parliamentarians within the party group, which to a large extent depends on titles (Interviews: Inger Schörling & Åsa Westlund).

Having an outgoing personality is also helpful in order to get assignments in the EP. An example can be found by looking at the Irish MEP Pat Cox. Even though he was an independent MEP in the ELDR party group, he had a winning personality in the EP. He could argue, he spoke both English and French and he knew how to behave in different situations. Cox managed to become the speaker in the EP even though he had not a big national delegation in his party group that supported him (Interviews: Hadar Cars & Lennart Sacrédeus). The MEPs often get advantages and assignments from the party group if they are outgoing and if they stand up for their ideas and views. It is a matter of course that a MEP openly announces that he or she wants a specific assignment (Interviews: Göran Färm & Åsa Westlund). Characteristics such as ‘being outgoing’, ‘having something to say’, ‘not being afraid of taking up a great deal of space’, ‘contribute to the discussions’ and ‘speak out one’s opinions’ are appreciated and prized (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld, Eva-Britt Svensson, Göran Färm & Marianne Eriksson). Many parliamentarians share similar stories.
concerning how they realized that an outgoing and extrovert personality pays off. At the same time, there are also moments when it is appropriate for the MEPs to show the otherwise so appreciated characteristics. The MEP chairpersons should, for example, not question chairpersons on their expertise and also not question chairpersons from committees that have higher status. Those committees are: the foreign committee, the Budget committee, the committee for Economic and Monetary affairs, the committee for Constitutional affairs or the Internal Market and Consumer Protector committee (Interviews: Hadar Cars, Hans Lindqvist, Inger Segelström, Jan Andersson, Åsa Westlund).

Eva-Britt Svensson, who was the chairperson of the committee on women’s rights and gender equality during the 6th and 7th EP, experienced this ranking during many of her meetings with the other committee chairpersons: “The Internal market committee was always called upon to speak and so one and once I questioned something their chairperson said, which is not common to do especially not since my committee does not have that much status. People get surprised when such things happen. One does not challenge the chairperson of the Internal market committee on one of their questions.” (Interview: Eva-Britt Svensson). On the one hand, it is not appropriate to question too much and to be too much of a rebel because that can make the MEP loose influence in the party group. As is emphasized by Hix (2001) the party groups control the allocation of office benefits and there are, consequently, powerful incentives for individual MEPs to follow they party group’s agenda. This applies to a RCI view on parliamentary behavior and of rational reasons the MEPs should, consequently, do as is decided by the party groups. It should, however, be noticed that the national parties control the process of selecting candidates in the election for the EP and, thus, parliamentarians who do not aim to stay in the EP may, therefore, not care to act in accordance with the party group since he or she is going to leave the EP (Hix 2001:666). On the other hand, standing up for one’s points of view is valuable. The MEPs have to pick their battles in order to remain a strong actor in the party groups and challenging MEPs from committees with higher status is something the MEPs simply not should do in order to satisfy both the other actors but also in order to maintain the reputation of the party group (Interview: Charlotte Cederschiöld). The
MEPs’ behavior is, consequently, not only driven by rationality in the sense of utility maximization, but they MEPs are also guided by the norms of appropriate behavior.

Having a common party group position in the committee is essential in order for the party group to be successful in the negotiations with the other party groups (Yordanova 2011:609). Since the EP needs a common position in the negotiations with the Commission and Council in the decision making process, it is necessary for the party groups to negotiate and compromise. Therefore, it is important that the MEPs are able to listen to others and to build networks across the party groups. Being ‘open’, ‘flexible’, ‘pragmatic’ and ‘ready to negotiate’ are valuable characteristics that can be helpful for the MEPs in order to get the assignments they want (Interviews: Hans Lindqvist, Inger Schörling, Mikael Gustafsson & Åsa Westlund).

Compromising is a common element in the EP and much of the parliamentary work is focused on building coalitions and finding parliamentarians to cooperate with. This is not only the case between the party groups, but also within the party groups the MEPs have to compromise. The outcome of different proposals are not as predictable in the EP as in many national parliaments and sometimes MEPs from a certain national delegation share the same view not as the other MEPs within the party group, but with MEPs from the same national delegation in another party group (Interviews: Mikael Gustafsson & Åsa Westlund).

As is noticed by McElroy and Benoit, within the party groups a number of different policy positions can be found due to the number of national political parties within them (McElroy & Benoit 2010:377). An example of this is the 2004 Laval conflict, which caused a big clash, which went across the party groups in the EP. The Polish MEPs in the PES group opposed to the position taken by the Swedish rapporteur on the issue and the rapporteur did not try to convince the Polish MEPs to change attitude, but he met the German MEPs from the EPP group in order to get support. The strategy was successful and not only the German EPP MEPs joined the Swedish PES rapporteur’s position, but also the French, Dutch and Austrian MEPs joined. Negotiating with the EPP group gave the Swedish MEP and rapporteur a higher status than what he had before. This paved the way for future assignments in the EP (Interview: Jan Andersson).
5.2.2 Summing up: the successful and appropriate parliamentarian

There are many characteristics that are beneficial for a MEP to have not only in order to gain influence, but also to apply to the party group. These characteristics valued in all party groups and they have not changed over time from the 4th to the 7th EP. Neither any of the enlargements nor the changed legislative role of the EP has affected the MEPS’ view of the ideal parliamentarian. Instead, the norms of how to be seem to be rather institutionalized. This can be related to the very institutionalization of the party groups. The party groups and especially the S&D and EPP are often described as institutionalized and difficult to change (McElroy & Benoit 2007:6).

The EP seems to be rather path dependent concerning the features that the ideal MEP should have. MEPS who have a long experience of the EP, that are well-known in the international political sphere, that has some kind of title and that has an outgoing personality and who is pragmatic and open for compromising should have much influence and be seen as strong actors.

From a RCI point of view these valuable characteristics can be explained by stressing that they give the MEPS as well as the party groups possibilities of influencing the legislation. It is, therefore, valued to have experienced MEPS that are outgoing and well known. This view may be reinforced when looking at the political system of the EU in general, which is more or less based on the idea that the EP has to have strong coalitions in order to get any influence at all and in that way characteristics such as ‘being open minded’ and ‘willing to compromise’ are valuable. In order to get a more comprehensive image it is, however, necessary to turn to more sociological institutionalist understandings of the valued characteristics. The valued characteristics can be seen as portraying the EP specific political culture in which certain hierarchies and norms are prevailing. It is in that way desirable for the MEPS to try to emphasize that they have those characteristics. The valuable characteristics do, however, not only enabling MEPS that have the valued characteristics, but they do also constrain the ones who do not have them. Consequently, two dimensions of the valued characteristics can be stressed: they affect appointments in the EP and they affect which ideals the MEPS are striving for.
5.3 The distribution of reports and the selection of rapporteurs

5.3.1 The successful rapporteur and the view on the rapporteurship

Differing from many other national parliaments the EP is characterized by a rapporteur system, which more or less gives one parliamentarian some extra influence over the legislation. This rapporteur is responsible for the report from the initiative phase until the actual decision-making (Benedetto 2005:67). Most scholars agree that the production of legislative reports is one of the most important elements of the parliamentary committee work (Corbett et al 2003, Kaeding 2005, Mamadouh & Raunio 2001). The rapporteur has an important role to fill not only because he or she is responsible for writing a good report, but also because this person negotiate with representatives (primarily shadow rapporteurs) from the other party groups in order to get a majority of MEPs supporting the report (Interviews Inger Schörling, Marianne Eriksson & Åsa Westlund). As is widely known the distribution of reports among the party groups is based on a bidding system in which each party group has a number of points that they can ‘buy’ a report with (Corbett et al. 2003:117, Hauser 2006:510).

When a report has been distributed the party group that won the report in the committee selects who is to be rapporteur. Some parliamentarians have a better chance of becoming rapporteur than others (Kaeding 2005) and some characteristics are more valuable and requested to have as a rapporteur. The EP is guided by a norm saying that everyone should get something and the MEPs more or less know when it is his or her turn to get a report. The party groups in the committee are usually acting decent to parliamentarians from new member states giving them reports even though they do not have much experience of parliamentary work (Interview: Inger Schörling). Everyone should become rapporteur or shadow rapporteur sometimes even though some MEPs have more experiences and competences than others. This view is valid for all party groups because all parliamentarians should feel included in the party group and the rapporteurship do to some extent play an important role for this (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld, Marianne Eriksson & Olle Schmidt). This view on the rapporteurship can be interpreted in lines of sociological institutionalism stressing that group identity and being a part of something bigger is important. This concerns not at least a political environment such as the party groups in the EP.
Having particular experiences and competences of the issue, as well as the ability of negotiating with other party groups is strengthening the MEPs position in the selection process (Interviews: Hadar Cars, Inger Schörling & Marianne Eriksson). The selection procedure and the assignment of rapporteur is surely a give-and-take system between not only the party groups, but also among the parliamentarians within the political party in the committees. The requested characteristics have, however, been rather stable over time and are neither affected by any of the enlargements of the EU nor of the new treaties, which have given the EP more legislative powers. Having knowledge and experience of the theme of the report is crucial. Charlotte Cederschiöld tells: “People that have much competence and experience within a specific area gets those reports. One has to be relevant for the specific political issue. I was involved much in drug politics and I got many of those reports and since I speak many languages and integrated much with people that not shared the same views as I do I was a safe card for being a rapporteur. It changed a bit from my first term of office compared to my third one. I got more specialized and did not get any other reports.” This quote by Charlotte Cederschiöld firstly tells that experiences matters. This corresponds to Hausermer’s (2006) view, which stresses that the rapporteurs tend to be experts in the policy area that the report addresses. It also emphasizes the importance of having networks, or at least being good in building them. This view is shared by Costello and Thomson (2010) who argue that it is the policy position of the median MEP that determines who becomes rapporteur. The policy position relates to the ability of building networks, since the rapporteur has to do that in order to get a majority of the MEPs supporting the report. This can be understood mainly from a RCI point of view. If the party group is to build a majority around the report as well as having as much of its own stand points within it, it is necessary to have a rapporteur that is well-informed and that is relevant for the policy area. In that way the party group as such can maximize its utility and the EP, consequently, gets a suitable negotiator in the trilogues with the Commission and the Council.

In the academic literature it is an agreement that some party groups and some member states get the rapporteurship more often than others (Benedetto 2005, Yoshinaka et al 2010, Costello and Thomson 2010). This is mirrored in the view presented by the parliamentarians. The image of old member states that get all reports is, however,
more complicated than it actually might look like at the first glance. It seems to be easier becoming a rapporteur if the member state is in the front edge of a specific political matter (Interviews: Hadar Cars, Inger Schörling & Marianne Eriksson). Inger Segelström tells that Sweden was seen as being in the front line concerning questions of women’s rights and, therefore, she became rapporteur for some reports concerning prostitution in the 6th EP. Within the party group it was, consequently, natural giving such reports to a Swedish parliamentarian (Interview: Inger Segelström). Mamadouh and Raunio (2001, 2003) as well as by Kreppel (2002) share the similar view and emphasize that some national delegations within the party groups are key gatekeepers of some policy areas. A consequence of this is that predominantly the old western member states have progressive national legislation or competences that are requested in the EP whereas many of the newer and smaller member states such as the Baltic or Balkan ones do not. There are RCI, HI and SI aspects to take into consideration in order to understand this. Just as in the case of being experienced as a MEP, it is rational to have a rapporteur from a member state that is in the front line of the policy area since it maximizes the possibilities of getting a good report. To this a HI perspective should, however, be added. The old and big member states have been the agenda setters already since the establishment of the EU and the EU is more or less built from western political system, at least concerning the rapporteursystem, which is somewhat a copy from the American congress and the German Bundestag (Benedetto 2005:70, Høyland 2006:47). The competences and experiences that are requested in order for a member state to get the rapporteurship can, therefore, be seen as framed by the older member states. To this, a SI perspective can be added. Just as some characteristics are more valuable for the MEPs to have as is stressed in part 5.2 of the analysis, giving the rapporteurship to a MEP from a member state that is in the front line of the specific political issue is what is seen as appropriate and natural within the party group. Consequently, the selection process of the rapporteur includes not only rational aspects, but it also shows some sort of hierarchy concerning what is seen as right or not.

5.3.2 Post-Lisbon: Standing rapporteurs and harmonized selection procedures

As the EP has got more legislative powers and more member states the party group have harmonized the selection procedures and appointments of rapporteur. It has also
become more common to have standing rapporteurs in the committees (Interviews: Göran Färm & Åsa Westlund). These standing rapporteurs are more or less seen as experts on one or several political issues. The pre-Lisbon and also pre-2004 enlargement parliamentarians stress the importance of the committee chairperson’s influence over the appointment of rapporteur much more than the post-Lisbon and post-2004 enlargement parliamentarians do (Interviews: Hadar Cars, Göran Färm, Marianne Eriksson, Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund). Two parallel processes seem to have emerged concerning the appointment of the rapporteur: (1) standing rapporteurs have become more common and (2) the selection process has become more harmonized between the party groups.

Yoshinaka et al. argue that member states that are seen as experts in a particular issue in a committee are allocated more reports than others (Yoshinaka et al 2010:459). Even though the group leader of the committee party group is important in official terms, the selection process is much more complicated. The parliamentarians often tell their group leader in the committee beforehand that they want a specific report within his or her expertise. Usually there are experts within the party groups in the different committees and they look after their own interests and the MEPs do not, generally, challenge each other on important reports if they know that the party group has an expert on the political issue. Sometimes there is, however, a voting within the party groups concerning the appointment of rapporteur (Interviews: Eva-Britt Svensson & Olle Schmidt). This can, on the one hand, be understood in rationalist terms. From a RCI perspective it can be stressed both that the party group might get more influence with an expert as a rapporteur and also that MEPs generally should be careful by challenge expert rapporteurs since that may impair the MEP’s position within the party group. Being a troublemaker is neither appropriate nor tactical. On the other hand, it can also be understood from a SI perspective. It is not valuable nor appropriate to challenge parliamentarians with higher status and having expertise and status are things that seem to be important in the political culture of the EP. Since the work in the EP is much about building networks and securing one’s own position within the group it is not appropriate to question too much (Interview: Hans Lindqvist)
If a parliamentarian is an expert, he or she has a better chance of becoming rapporteur as well as interacting with MEPs from other party groups in policy area of the report, the Commission, the Council and lobby organizations. This is something that is valued within all party groups since it maximizes the possibilities of influencing the legislation. It seems that even though the national delegations are somewhat dominating concerning with whom the parliamentarians identify themselves with, it is, nonetheless, the party groups as such that negotiate with each other in order to approve the reports. Thus, there is an understanding among the MEPs that even though one parliamentarian actually wants a specific report he or she can abstain having it if there is another parliamentarian that usually gets such reports (Interviews: Eva-Britt Svensson, Göran Färm & Åsa Westlund). Consequently, the parliamentarians do not only value the party group as such, but they do also think and act rational so that the group maximizes its utility. As is stressed by Benedetto, the rapporteur is the one writing the report and incorporating amendments in the text as well as being the main EP negotiator in the trilogues (Benedetto 2005:70). It is, thus, important that the rapporteur is someone who has experiences of the political issue and therefore it is not unexpected that political experience mattes in the selection process of the rapporteur.

Göran Färm who was a MEP during both the 5th and 7th EP means that there is a shift from having a more unstructured selection process towards more strict and well thought-out process: “When I entered the EP I cannot remember that it was this structure of how to appoint the rapporteur. Then I left the EP and when I came back in 2009 I noticed that not only in my own committee, but also in others, it was obvious that some particular parliamentarians got some specific reports. […] I like the standing rapporteur system because it makes it easier for the EP to gain influence since the Commission and the Council know who handles certain political issues and then they can establish stable relations to them.” This quote by Göran Färm points at the shift in the selection process of the rapporteurship and it can be understood by looking at the extensions of legislative powers that the EP has got with every new treaty, as well as by stressing the increased amount of early agreements. The Lisbon treaty had made the EP an equal legislator together with the Council and the co-decision procedure with its three rounds of readings has created a system in which
much is decided already in informal agreements before and between the official meetings and negotiations (Yoshinaka et al 2010:462). The demands on the rapporteur have, consequently, increased and having a standing rapporteur on a particular political issue makes it possible to establish good relations to the Commission and the Council, which make the legislation process easier and more efficient (Interviews: Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund). This corresponds to the overall view in the academic literature emphasizing the increased influence of the EP and the increased numbers of trilogue meetings (Burns 2013, Costello & Thomson 2010, Huber & Shackleton 2013, Judge & Earnshaw 2011). Having standing rapporteurs can be interpreted in the lights of RCI, HI and SI. From a RCI point of view having a standing rapporteur maximizes the possibility not only for the party group, but also for the EP as a whole to get as much influence as possible over the legislation. The shift from not having standing rapporteurs to having standing rapporteurs can further on be seen as a conscious process in which the changing conditions in the EU political system required standing rapporteurs in order for the party groups as well as the EP to reach their goals. From a HI and SI point of view the standing rapporteur system can be seen as a part of the political culture institutionalization process concerning the skills and characteristics that are seen as valuable. The EP seems to be rather path dependent regarding these issues and since the skills that are required for a rapporteur to have correspond to the valuable characteristic of the MEP in general (as is discussed in part 5.2) it is possible to interpret the standing rapporteur system as an example of something that reinforces this path dependence of the EP in general.

Even though the parliamentarians from the 7th EP emphasize that it has become more common with standing rapporteurs the EPP party group distinguishes a bit and it seems that the other party groups have adapted the EPP system of having standing rapporteurs. EPP parliamentarians already from the 4th EP touch upon stress that having standing rapporteurs was common already back in the early 1990’s (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld, Gunilla Carlsson & Lennart Sacrédeus). The EPP view on the rapporteurship seems to have rubbed off on the other party groups, which have harmonized with the EPP group. The explanations for this can from a rational point of view be seen as a matter of course. If the EP gets more influence over the legislation and more decisions are made with early agreements the demands
on the rapporteurship increase. It is, therefore, logical to change the way of thinking about the rapporteurship and also change the selection process. It can, however, also be seen as an interplay with other aspects. It is, clearly, rational to change the view on the rapporteurship, but the reason for changing view is relatable to normative isomorphism stressing that the party groups get socialized with or from each other and they, consequently, adapt to each other. This latter idea corresponds to a SI understanding of the harmonization of the rapporteurship.

5.3.3 Summing up: the EP rapporteurship

The rapporteurship is a characteristic for the legislation process in the EU political system. Both the rapporteur and the shadow rapporteurs have important roles since they influence what is included in the reports. At least two general patterns concerning the rapporteurship in the EP can be found from the 4th EP until the 7th one. Firstly, the distribution of reports within the party group is clearly a complicated system. The view on decent rapporteur characteristics seems to be rather institutionalized. Not surprisingly, characteristics such as expert knowledge and experience within the specific policy makes it easier for a MEP to become rapporteur. The parliamentarians argue rather rational meaning that it is good for the group to have someone experienced as a rapporteur since it becomes easier for that person to write a good and substantial report and, thus, give the group as much influence as possible. The distribution system is, however, also characterized by a thought of including all political parties within the group. As many parliamentarians emphasize ‘everyone should get something’. This can be understood rationally as the MEPs want to keep the group unified in order to gain influence, but it can also be understood from a SI perspective. In the latter case, the main reason for letting most MEPs becoming rapporteur is that it is seen as appropriate and it characterizes the political culture of the EP.

Secondly, the post-Lisbon parliamentarians view emphasizes that it is common to have standing rapporteurs after the introduction of the Lisbon treaty compared to before. The pre-Lisbon parliamentarians are much more divided concerning their view of how to select rapporteur within the party group. The selection process of rapporteur has become more harmonized as all party groups are having standing
rapporteurs. The idea of having standing rapporteurs can be from a rational point of view be understood as natural since it makes it easier to build relations to the Commission, the Council and the lobby organizations and, consequently, party groups as well as the EP as a whole gain more influence, but as noticed in part 5.3.2 the reasons can also be of SI aspects stressing that the political party groups get socialized over time and, therefore, apply to the same system concerning the rapporteurship.

5.4 The EP party cohesion

5.4.1 An EP party whip?

Usually, parliamentarians from the same party stick together and vote the same in parliamentary votings. This norm or unwritten rule is often labeled ‘party whip’. In the EP, the national political parties cooperate with similar parties in party groups. This means that there are a bigger amount of political parties in the EP compared to other multiparty political systems. As a consequence, the party cohesion is not always as strong as it is in national parliaments (Votewatch 2014). This is valid also for party groups that often are described as institutionalized. As is pointed out by McElroy and Benoit, the EPP and the S&D party groups have existed for over 50 years and they have got increasingly cohesive and powerful over time (McElroy & Benoit 2007:6). Although that may be true, the EPP and S&D still have some party loyalty problems (Votewatch 2014).

Differencing from, for example, the Swedish parliament it is much more legitimate not to vote as the party group does in the EP (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld, Hadar Cars & Hans Lindqvist). This is something that has not changed with the enlargements of the EU or with the introduction of new treaties. Instead, the parliamentarians emphasize the same pattern independent of party group or which term of office they have served as a MEP. Since the executive (i.e. the Commission) does not rest on the support of a majority party or a coalition in the EP, the EU political system differs from other multi party systems. Usually the parliamentarians of the governing party/parties support the government in a national political system. In the EU there are, however, no such incentives for the parliamentarians and this affect the view of the voting (Interviews: Hadar Cars, Mikael Gustafsson & Åsa
An idea would, however, be that it would be rational for the MEPs to vote as the party group in order to keep their position within the party group and in order to get assignments, but it is not that easy. Even though some parliamentarians reason in that way some others do not view assignments as means of influencing the legislation. Hans Lindqvist from the 4th EP tells: “It was no party whip for me since I belonged to the EU-critical faction in my party group. We voted as we wanted and won reliance because of that.” Lindqvist’s role within the party group was to oppose all supranational decision-making and he was fine with having a decreased chance of getting assignments and at the end of the day is standpoints was accepted even though the majority of the parliamentarians in his party group did not agree with him. Lindqvist’s experiences point at a general pattern and emphasize the dualism that characterizes the EP (Interview: Hans Lindqvist). On the one hand, the MEPs should follow the party line in order to negotiate with other party groups to be a part of the EP’s common position against the Commission and the Council. When doing so the possibilities of becoming rapporteur or getting other important assignments increase or at least remain stable. On the other hand, it is accepted not to vote as the party group does as long as the party group is informed. Although getting an assignment is only one example of how to increase the possibility of influencing legislation, being too rebel decreases the chances of becoming for example committee chairperson or rapporteur (Interviews: Hadar Cars, Inger Segelström & Åsa Westlund). This corresponds to McElroy’s (2008) study on party loyalty that stresses that showing loyalty to the party group and the party leadership has its rewards.

Even though it is legitimate to differ from the party group in the voting, it still seems to be both appropriate and logical to vote as the party group does. The party groups cannot sanction rebel members through the electoral nomination process as can be done in the nomination process of national parties (McElroy 2008:358). The party groups in the EP have no direct control over the access to the ballots of the member states, but they do, however, have other means of enforcing party discipline and one is committee assignment. As is stressed by McElroy there is a relationship between the MEPs’ voting behavior and transfer patterns among committees (McElroy 2008:372). This corresponds to the MEPs’ own view on party loyalty. The parliamentarians cannot be rebels and oppose too much to the party group in order to get good
positions within the committees or within the party groups (Interviews: Charlotte Cederschiöld & Hans Lindqvist). It should, however, be emphasized that it is not only the assignments as such that make a MEP influential. The parliamentarians emphasize that not voting the same as the party group in many votings can imply inferior assignments (Interviews: Hans Lindqvist & Åsa Westlund). According to Yordanova, this is a way of how the party group leadership can control the group members and it is, consequently, a means of forcing party discipline (Yordanova 2011:606). This is, however, only half of the truth, because even though MEPs can be, and are, punished when they differ too much from the party group, they can still influence the legislation (Interviews: Hans Lindqvist & Mikael Gustafsson). This is related to the importance of informal networks and working groups as well as being able to influence other parliamentarians and lobby organizations. Especially lobby organizations and other important external actors can be used in order to affect the party groups’ position. For example, individual MEPs can inform lobby organizations that there is some legislation in preparation from the Commission and, consequently, encourage the lobby organizations to lobby on this issue. Lobby organizations and other actors can also be invited to informal and formal meetings within and between the groups. This is done in order to make parliamentarians change or strengthen their positions. (Interviews: Inger Segelström & Olle Schmidt). Getting assignments within the group or in a committee is, consequently, only one part of influencing the legislation.

Independent of party group, the parliamentarians are individually elected and elected as a member of a national party, but at the same time it is not appropriate voting ferociously (Interview: Gunilla Carlsson). The MEPs are elected to a multinational institution and the task of being a representative and knowing who primarily is to be represented may be challenging (Scully & Farrell 2003:271). According to the parliamentarians, it is correct trying to stick to the group as much as possible when voting, but sometimes this is not possible and in those cases it is important to inform the group (Interviews: Inger Schörling, Jan Andersson, Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund). Åsa Westlund explains: “It is best to prepare the responsible persons that one are not to follow the party line, because sometimes there is a voting with small margins and the responsible person or persons and the group do not want to stand
with the pants at their knees.” (Interview: Åsa Westlund). Other MEPs reason in the same way as Westlund and it seems to be important to inform the party group when voting different. The party group needs cohesion in order to get any influence and since there are many party groups negotiating with each other in order to reach a common position against the Commission and the Council it is necessary that the negotiator, from respective party group, know how many MEPs from the party groups share the same position (Interviews: Hadar Cars, Inger Segelström, Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund). This reasoning goes hand in hand with RCI. Taking a long view, it is rational for the MEPs that are going to vote different than their party group to inform the party group about their position. If national delegations from for example the Nordic member states are going to vote different, they tell the party group so that the party group knows how many votes it has when the negotiator negotiates with the other party groups. This is rational because in future voting it might be the Nordic member states that are a part of the party group’s position and MEPs from these member states might be those that negotiate with the other party groups. Consequently, in this latter case the Nordic MEPs surely want to know how many votes they have when they negotiate with the other party groups. This reasoning corresponds to the RCI theoretical examples of ‘the prisoners dilemma’ or ‘the tragedy of the commons’ (Peters 2012, Shepsle 1989).

It is desirable to inform the group when not voting the same as it. The party groups are still rather open concerning internal discussions and debates of how to vote. Even though disputes of how to vote not always lead to an agreement between the national delegations it is not seen as being a problem (Interviews: Inger Schörling & Lennart Sacrédeus). It is more problematic if the party group and the negotiator are uninformed about how much support he/she has when negotiating because that can result in difficulties getting influence in future negotiations. Göran Färm tells: “In my party group there is a party whip and that is good. If the group does not stick together we get less influence. If the representatives from the group negotiate with the other groups and if no one believes that the group votes the same we loose trust and is not taken serious. If some national delegations want to vote different it is accepted, but they have to say that beforehand. The ambition is, however, to stick to the group line.” (Interview: Göran Färm). It is, consequently, rational to either stick to the group
line or if not: inform the group about one’s position and how to vote. Building stable majorities within and between the party groups is necessary in order to get any influence at all. Having party cohesion does not seem to be an end in itself, but it is necessary in order to get influence and, therefore, sticking together and have a unified group is a common goal in every party group in the EP.

The party groups in the EP do, however, not look the same and even though there are many similarities between them concerning structure, they do not have a common view on different political issues. As is noticed by Benoit and McElroy (2007), the party groups have differentiated positions on the classic left-right social and economic dimension as well on their view on the EU integration. In the EP there are some party groups that are expressively confederal and the leftist GUE/NGL group is perhaps the most well known. One aspect of being a confederation is according to the GUE/NGL parliamentarians themselves that there is no party-whip and demand on the parliamentarians to stick to the group line (Interview: Marianne Eriksson). At the same time it seems to be natural also for these parliamentarians to inform the party group if they are going to vote different. Just as in other party groups the GUE/NGL group also has a voting list on the group’s positions in all the EP votings. Consequently, it seems that the leftist group has the same informal rules and view on party cohesion as the others. Mikael Gustafsson emphasizes: “My group is a confederation and does not make any decisions on beforehand concerning how to vote at the plenary meetings. All political parties within the group decide how to vote, but there is always a voting list, which we use as a starting point. I always vote as my political party wants me to vote.” (Interview: Mikael Gustafsson). Just as in most other political groups, also the GUE/NGL party group is rather coherent when voting, not at least in the 7th EP (Votewatch 2014²), which Gustafsson was a member of. The party groups, consequently, follow the same pattern concerning party cohesion and the view of trying to stick to the group line seems to be rather institutionalized.

5.4.2 Summing up: a veiled party whip

The view on party cohesion in the EP does not seem to have changed in any particular way between the 4th and the 7th EP. On the one hand, the MEPs are seen as being more free actors than national parliamentarians and the MEPs are, consequently, seen as representing the electorate from their member state and their national political party.
On the other hand, it is a shared view that the parliamentarians should try to stick to the group line and vote as the group because it gives the negotiator a bigger mandate to negotiate upon with the other party groups. Following on this, it gives the party group and the EP as such more influence. Even though the EP has got more new member states since the beginning of the 4th EP, the post-enlargement parliamentarians argue the same as the pre-enlargement parliamentarians and even though the EP has got more legislative powers it has not changed the view on party cohesion. Most striking is perhaps the view on party cohesion in the confederal GUE/NGL group, which just as the other party groups have some sort of party whip.

The explanations for this institutionalization and path dependency can be found by turning to RCI and HI. Firstly, it is rational for the parliamentarians to stick to the group in order to not get punished in the sense that they do not get as many or good assignments as before. Being too rebellious is challenging for the group in order to remain stable and a consequence is also that it becomes difficult to build a stable majority on the political issue for the negotiations with the Commission and the Council. The party cohesion can, consequently, be related to the very political system of the EU. The EP needs to have a common standpoint when they negotiate with the Commission and the Council. Secondly, this relates to the HI explanations of party cohesion stressing that the EP always had needed to be unified towards the Commission and the Council. As is stressed in previous section of the analysis the EP has not always had legislative powers, but most of the time the EP has only been a consultative institution. Not having any actual legislative powers increases the pressure on the EP acting unified. It is, therefore, not unexpected that the parliamentarians aim to stick together in the party groups and, consequently, are very keen on emphasizing the importance of telling the group when they are not going to vote as the group.

5.5 Informal cooperation

5.5.1 Pre-enlargement: stable and secluded regional oriented groups

The decision-making in the EU is complex and includes many different actors and processes. Within the EP, not only official meetings in the party groups, in the
committees or between the rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs are important, but also informal activities are central for the MEPs. Building networks, working in informal groups and trying to influence others in the informal arena are commonalities for the EU officials and not at least the parliamentarians (Richardson 2005). Ever since the establishment of the EP in the late 1970s this has more or less been the daily life of the MEPs. Working in informal networks is certainly not new. Instead it is rather institutionalized and something that is taken for granted by the parliamentarians (Interviews: Gunilla Carlsson, Hadar Cars, Inger Schörling, Jan Andersson, Marianne Eriksson, Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund). Working in informal networks is done at all levels in the EP and between different party groups and national delegations.

Before the 2004 enlargement, the Nordic member states in the PES had a rather institutionalized collaboration. This collaboration is one example of member states from the same region in the EU working together informally. This network was established when Sweden and Finland became EU member states in 1995 and it started with the Finnish and Swedish treasures in their respective party group who started to build a system for handling the money of their delegations. The cooperation was extended as the Danes invited the Swedish and Finnish MEPs to social meetings in order to become more influential in the PES. They started to meet every once a month in Strasbourg and discussed different political issues and proposals as well as hanging out and becoming friends with each other. This was also something that, according to Jan Andersson, happened between other member states as well (Interview: Jan Andersson). The Nordic collaboration can be interpreted in lines of RCI. By cooperating and building a Nordic alliance within the party group it became easier for the national delegations to hold their positions within the group and maximize their influence. The social democratic parliamentarians emphasize that it was natural building stable relations to the other Nordic member states because they had more or less the same regional interests. Many of the MEPs from those member states also knew each other on beforehand because it already was a strong bond between their parties on the national level and the MEPs could identify themselves with them (Interviews: Jan Andersson & Inger Segelström). The identification does not primarily point at the rationality of the MEPs. Instead, it can be understood more in lines of SI. The MEPs are social beings that act rather habitually. When already
knowing some MEPs from other national delegations it becomes easier and especially more natural building networks with them.

Lennart Sacrédeus who was a parliamentarian in the 5th EP, presents a similar view that corresponds to the SI perspective: “In my party group we had some meetings with the Nordic parliamentarians, especially the Swedish ones. But we were not that many and did not have so much influence in the whole party group since it consisted of more than 200 parliamentarians, but we did it anyway. Even though our influence was not so big we had fun and I think it helped us in some way” (Interview: Lennart Sacrédeus). Other parliamentarians from the same term of office and from the same party group share this view and the informal network made it possible for the MEPs to discuss different political issues. Gunilla Carlsson, who was a member of the 4th and 5th EP, started a social network and invited MEPs that she liked and as the group expanded to include also other non-Nordic parliamentarians it changed character. The group started to work on a long-term trying to decide whom to become group chairperson et cetera. Being social and meet other parliamentarians is common whether or not one wants influence (Interviews: Gunilla Carlsson, Hadar Cars, Hans Lindqvist & Lennart Sacrédeus). The networks do not only work in a rational manner providing means for the parliamentarians to gain influence, but they also relates to the social dimension of the EP.

5.5.2 Post-enlargement and post-Lisbon: big and inviting target-oriented groups

The 2004 enlargement changed the view on the informal networks and working groups in the sense that they became less regional and more target-oriented. In the 6th and 7th EP the parliamentarians and the national delegations still organized themselves in regional collaborations, but the MEPs did not meet on a regular basis as the pre-enlargement parliamentarians. This new way of informal working is less focused on which member state a parliamentarian or national delegation belongs to. Instead, it is more concerned with what position the parliamentarian or national delegation has in the policy area that is treated by the EP. These changes can be visualized by looking at the Nordic social democratic cooperation, created by Sweden, Denmark and Finland as is described in the previous part of the thesis. In 2004 the EU got ten new member states and the Nordic social democratic group was keen on including
especially the new Baltic member states in order to make them feel welcome in the party group and in order to strengthen the Nordic delegations’ position within the party group (Interview: Jan Andersson). There was, consequently, an interplay between the Nordic delegations’ wish for more influence in the party group and their duty of do their share in order to build a strong social democratic party group overall, in which every new delegation should feel included (Interviews: Jan Andersson & Inger Segelström). It was, therefore, not only rational, but also appropriate inviting the Baltic delegations to the network.

The inclusiveness of the Baltic delegations in the Nordic collaboration does only indicate that the group became bigger and extended its regional borders. The very basis of the group did; however, change since there were more parties included in the party group and, consequently, more wills to be heard. There was somewhat a clash within the group, as the Nordic and Baltic delegations did not agree as much as the Nordic states had done before (Interview: Jan Andersson). Later on, with the introduction of the Lisbon treaty the EP got more legislative powers and it, thus, became even more important to find coalitions within and between party groups on different political issues.

Göran Färm was a parliamentarian in the 5th EP as well as in the 7th EP and he points at the very change of the view on informal networks and working groups: “Well, there is still this Nordic and Baltic cooperation, but it is not as stable as before. We meet now and then, but not regularly. It depends on what happens. For example when there was a big discussion concerning the CAP we had an intense cooperation, but we extended the group to include also other member states with the same interests as we have. I think the informal working groups are more target-oriented nowadays.” (Interview: Göran Färm). This highlights a general trend in the EP. When there are to be important votings in the EP, the national delegations in a party group that have specific interests invite other delegations to discuss and negotiate in order to affect the whole party group. Fishery policy and agricultural policy are two examples from the 7th EP in which the national delegations have mobilized within and between party groups (Interview: Åsa Westlund). The informal networks are open for everyone who wants to join and who shares the same view and has the same agenda. They are seen
as an efficient way of sharing thoughts and idea and showing once position (Interviews: Mikael Gustafsson, Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund). With new member states and a bigger EP, these informal networks are described as solving the problem of unification and it can be interpreted in lines of RCI.

In the 7th EP, networks and coalitions are not only built within the party groups, but also between the party groups’ national delegations. They try to cooperate with each other in order to affect their respective party groups and, thus, gain influence over the EU legislation. This is, consequently, a second aspect of the 2004 enlargement and the EP extended legislative powers. For example, there are both religious and trade union oriented networks that are built between the party groups in order to discuss the party groups’ different positions and try to find solutions and possibilities for cooperation. This relates to the rather notion of working with a long-run perspective in mind and the parliamentarians emphasize that it is necessary trying to finds other parliamentarians with the same view even though they are not from the same party group. (Interviews: Eva-Britt Svensson, Göran Färm, Lennart Sacrédeus, Olle Schmidt & Åsa Westlund). Eva-Britt Svensson’s work with the Estrela report is one example of this: “We were a number of parliamentarians working together informally on the Estrela report and that was good in the long run to find these small groups that could increase. It made it possible to know whom to trust in the EP.” (Interview: Eva-Britt Svensson). This quote indicates that issue oriented networks are common in the EP and it also stresses the importance of having a long run perspective in mind in the day-to-day work in the EP. This can be understood in terms of RCI, stressing the importance of calculating the future steps of other actors.

5.5.3 Summing up: from regional to issue oriented networks
As more countries joined the EU and became member states in the union, the political groups changed and the number of actors in the EP increased. With the introduction of the Lisbon treaty 2009, the EP got more legislative powers and, consequently, became a more serious player in the EU. In order to meet these changed conditions and in order for the pre-enlargement actors to hold their positions, they changed their way of organizing themselves. The informal way of working and building networks in the EP has gone from having regional collaborations within the party groups towards
open informal working groups that are more target oriented and that include parliamentarians from a number of different member states. These new working groups come and go depending on which political issues are to be discussed in the EP. They are, consequently, looser than before. An explanation of these changed networks and working groups is that the informal institution of organizing informally in working groups did not meet the requirements for which it was formed and therefore the institutions changed. This view is corresponding to RCI and emphasizes that it was logical and rational to change the informal way of working and cooperating. It should, however, be noticed that the structure from the pre-enlargement working groups/networks remained as a base. For example, the Nordic social democratic collaboration still remains even though it is not as important as it was in the 4th EP. This could, on the one hand, be seen as unexpected since there are many more member states in the 7th EP and since the groups have become more target-oriented. Collaborations such as the Nordic social democratic one would, therefore, perhaps not be seen as valuable by the MEPs. The explanations for this can be found explained by sedimentation; i.e. that the current practice is built on old practices. The features of today’s EP are affected by the past since everything happens within a context framed by the past. This is also an explanation for why informal working groups still exist in general. That the Nordic social democratic collaboration remains can, however, also be understood from rational reasons meaning that the Nordic delegations benefit from sticking together. This is, consequently, an argument for keeping the group even though it is weaker and not as visible in the 7th EP as in the 4th EP.
6. Conclusions - Institutionalization and institutional change in the EP

Having traced the connections between informal and formal institutions in the EP I shall now bring together the pieces of evidence into a pattern and present the final empirical results of the analysis as well as presenting the theoretical conclusions concerning new institutionalism that can be identified as a result thanks to the analysis. Firstly, I introduce the empirical findings of the analysis. Secondly, the theoretical conclusions are discussed. Thirdly, the empirical findings and the theoretical conclusions are brought together in order to draw some general conclusions about the EP.

6.1 Empirical findings

There are some specific empirical conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis. The analysis shows that the EP is a rather institutionalized body and many of the informal institutions have not changed throughout the years. The treaty changes that have given the EP more legislative powers and the enlargements have affected the EP in a number of ways, but features of institutionalization can also be found. The EP still aims at unification between the party groups versus the Commission and the Council. The MEPs seem to be loyal to the party groups in order to keep a strong position within the party group. The characteristics that are most valued to have in order to be a popular and successful MEP have neither changed much. Having an outgoing personality, compromising skills and being experienced increase the parliamentarians’ possibilities to be popular and have high status. The same trend can be seen when looking at the rapporteurship. It has been a trend that every parliamentarian should get the possibility of becoming rapporteur, but in order to get many reports the MEPs should have much knowledge and experience of the theme of the report.

The EP has, however, undergone some changed in informal institutions during the last 20 years. Three patterns can be distinguished. Firstly, increased EP legislative powers especially with the Lisbon treaty have made the EP and the MEPs more self-confident in the negotiations with the Commission and the Council. The parliamentarians of the 6th and 7th EP emphasized that they felt that the Commission and the Council treat
them much more serious compared to the parliamentarians of the 4\textsuperscript{th} and 5\textsuperscript{th} EP.

Secondly, the rapporteurship has to some extent faced changes. Before the Lisbon treaty it was much more common to have different rapporteurs within the same theme of the reports. An exception is, however, the EPP party group, in which it was common to have standing rapporteurs already in the 4\textsuperscript{th} EP. The other party groups seem to have become harmonized with the EPP party group, since the former ones (in the 7\textsuperscript{th} EP) presents a similar pattern as the EPP party group. This relates to the rapporteur’s increased importance and influence. When the EP gets more power over the legislation the job of the rapporteur becomes more important, but this development also puts much more more pressure on the MEPs who need to be specialized in certain policy areas in order to increase their possibility of becoming rapporteur. A third change in informal institutions that can be found in the EP is the one of networks and informal working groups. When the EU got ten new member states with the 2004 enlargement it changed the informal ways of working in the EP. Before the enlargement it was common to meet in informal networks that were based on which region the MEPs came from. After the 2004 enlargement this changed and it became more common to work more issue oriented depending on which political issues that were discussed in the EP. It also seems that the extending EP legislative powers have affected these informal ways of working because when the EP became an equal legislator together with the Council, with the entry into force of the Lisbon treaty, these issue oriented networks have become more common and a natural element in the day-to-day work of the MEPs. Differing from the regional based networks, these issue oriented ones are including all MEPs and national delegations that share a common position regarding the issues discussed in the EP that the MEPs are going to vote about.

6.2 Creating a synthesis between new institutionalist approaches

The three new institutionalist approaches have much more in common and can be used much more parallel than usually is done. They do not only point at different aspects of the same object, but to a large extent they are rather similar. This latter point opens up for a theoretical synthesis between the three approaches. The main differences between the approaches can also be interpreted as what unites them. This can be shown by at least three examples.
Firstly, the view on individuals may be more similar than different. Whereas RCI views individuals as rational utility maximizers that act in accordance to a logic of consequences, SI understands individuals as acting on a logic of appropriateness meaning that individuals act in order to gain legitimacy. As is argued by Peters, individuals must, however, – also from an RCI perspective – learn norms and accept institutional values if they want to be successful in an institutional arrangement (Peters 2012:49). It is, consequently, rational to behave appropriate and the MEPs in the EP seem to apply to this. An example is the EP inferiority complex, which the EP has in relation to the Council. It is appropriate sometimes to have implementing acts in the decision-making process (as the Council) wants, even though the EP can demand delegated acts as would be most beneficial for the EP. What is rational and what is appropriate, consequently, goes hand in hand.

A second example is the one of institutional change. From a RCI point of view, institutional changes are seen as occurring when an institution does not meet the requirements of the actors whereas changes from a SI perspective are seen as proceeding in order for the institution to gain legitimacy. These two views do, at first sight, not clearly correspond well. Since actors are seen as having a bounded rationality according to the RCI approach, it should, however, not be unfamiliar for RCI scholars to view institutional change as a consequence of gaining more legitimacy. On the one hand, actors do not act fully rational and, on the other hand, gaining more legitimacy can be seen the most logic or rational to do. The ‘reshaping and adaption of actors preferences’ that often is stressed as being the core of RCI institutional change is similar not only to the SI’s concept of sedimentation, but also to layering, which exemplifies institutional change within HI. In the case of the EP many examples of MEPs are rational and at the same time trying to gain legitimacy can be found. An example is the importance of having party cohesion within the party groups. As is told by a number of parliamentarians, the party groups need to remain cohesive in order to get influence but they also have to cooperate in order to find a common position against the Commission and the Council. If a MEP does not want to vote as party group X, he or she must tell the party group leadership because otherwise they do not know, which mandate they have to negotiate with party group
Y. If party group X promise party group Y to vote as they decide, but if half of party group X vote different, party group Y might not want to negotiate with party group X in the future since it is not seen as an legitimate actor because its lack of party cohesions et cetera. It, consequently, seems to be an interplay between acting rational and gaining legitimacy.

Thirdly, the role of history may not be more important for historical institutionalists than for RCI or SI scholars. From a HI approach, the decisions made early in a process guide the decisions that can be made later on. The role of history can be seen as similar within SI. SI sees changes as complicated and they occur depending on the surrounding context, which is more or less depending on history. History can also be seen as important from and RCI point of view and it can be exemplified by looking at the case of ‘QWERTY’. The design of a computer keyboard can be seen as being institutionalized since the keyboards having the same language look the same concerning how the keys are placed. If historical institutionalists would describe this as a typical path dependency, rational choice institutionalists could similarly explain this by arguing that the transaction costs are too high to change the order of the keys on a keyboard. Consequently, RCI also takes history into consideration and what happened early in the process can make individuals used to it and, therefore, it seems most logical and rational for them to act in that way. The idea of high transaction costs is, thus, similar to the HI idea of path dependency. In the case of the EP, this can be shown by once again looking at the decision of having implementing or delegated acts, in which the EP sometimes agree on having implemented acts even though the treaty says that it should be delegated acts. This relates to the history of the EP. The EP has always had a subordinated role compared to the Council and even when these two bodies should be equal in the post-Lisbon legislative process, the EP sometimes agrees on having implementing acts –of rational reasons– in order to have a stable and good relationship to the Council.

These four examples visualize the possibilities of using the new institutionalist approaches more or less unified in a synthesis. Drawing together insights from all three approaches is the key to understand institutional evolution and change empirically as in the case of the EP. There are more similarities than differences.
between the new institutionalist approaches and all three approaches are needed in order to understand political phenomena in a correct way.

6.3 The EP - Institutionalization and institutional changes

Moving beyond the concrete empirical and theoretical findings it is possible to draw some general conclusions about the EP. The overall aim with this study was to contribute to the understanding and growth of knowledge of the EP. What clearly can be said, regarding the aim of the thesis, is that the EP can be seen as a rather institutionalized political body. Formal institutions such as an increasing number of member states and more EP legislative powers do, however, affect the institutionalization of the EP not only separately, but they do also work together and change the EP internal system, rules, norms and regularities, i.e. the informal institutions. Following on this, the informal institutions that are analyzed in this study works both as constraining and enabling the MEPs actions and behavior. They work both as windows of opportunities and affect the actors’ capacity and even though they are difficult to change they are not set in stone. The informal institutions can also be seen as interplaying with one another. For example, the EP inferiority complex is imbuing the view on informal networks as well as the notion of having standing rapporteurs. This points at the very complexity and dynamics of the EP.

A general trend that can be found within the EP is the interplay between acting rational in order to gain influence and acting on a logic of appropriateness. The MEPs clearly want to have as much influence as possible, but in order fulfill that aim there are lots of norms that they have to follow otherwise they risk to be marginalized. This does, firstly, relate to a general theoretical conclusion: namely that the border between appropriate and logical behavior in the EP is rather fluent. What is seen as rational is often relatable to what can be seen as appropriate. Secondly, it can also be related to the general discussion of the possibilities for the party groups to position themselves against each other. The EP is still characterized by being unified against the Commission and the Council. This makes it difficult for the party groups to point at the very differences between them since they have to cooperate, which especially is done between the bigger party groups. As a consequence, it can be difficult for the electorate to distinguish the bigger party groups from one another. This can ultimately
be seen as a democratic problem of the whole EU political system and it points at an important problem that usually is neglected in favor for the more general discussion of EU legitimacy and the separate roles of the three main political bodies of the EU.

Both rationalist, historical and sociological explanations can be used when explaining institutionalization and institutional change in the EP. A theoretical conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis is that even though the MEPs often argue in a rationalist manner, it is possible to understand their arguments and stories in the lights of historical regularities and cultural patterns. Although the rationalist explanations in this thesis are more salient than the historical and sociological ones, they cannot stand on their own. Instead, what could generally be said is that the rationalist explanations are supported by the historical context as well as norms of appropriate behavior. In order to get a comprehensive overview and understanding of the EP it is necessary to take all of the new institutionalist approaches into consideration.

In this thesis I have, consequently, grasped a bit on the surface of the institutional nature of the EP and tried to fill the research gap in the existing literature concerning not only more empirical substance of the MEPs’ environment, but also institutional changes and institutionalization. The theoretical conclusion stressing the importance of using the new institutionalist approaches parallel in a synthesis in order to get a comprehensive understanding of the EP can not only be fruitful in the study of parliaments, but it can also be the start of using not only SI but also RCI and HI in the research of organizations and organization theory. A central claim of the thesis is, consequently, that new institutionalist approaches go well together with one another and when only using one of the approaches it is likely that we miss out on valuable aspects and understandings of political phenomena. My research contribution does also include a new dimension of how to study the EP. Previous research of the EP is in general more quantitative or includes a rational choice perspective, which has contributed to our knowledge of which party group get most of the reports or how the principal agent hierarchy look like. By having a more qualitative and explanatory approach and by looking more specific on the relationship between formal and informal institutions, this thesis has filled one of the research gaps concerning what is going on in the EP, which norms are guiding the MEP behavior and how the
parliamentary work functions. The EP can be seen as a rather stable institution with features of institutionalization and path dependence, but it can also be seen as an actor open for and exposed to gradual changes. Following on this, this thesis opens up for more research on the institutionalization and institutional changes in the EP as well as more research on research in other political bodies or organizations combining the three new institutionalist approaches.
References

List of references


Votewatch (2014)1) “National Party Loyalty”


List of interviews
Mikael Gustafsson, MEP 2011-2014, telephone interview, April 2014
Appendices

Appendix 1

The MEPs, their terms of office in the EP and their party groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name in the Analysis</th>
<th>Terms of office in the EP</th>
<th>Party group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hadar Cars</td>
<td>1, 1995-1999</td>
<td>ELDR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hans Lindqvist</td>
<td>1, 1995-1999</td>
<td>ELDR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inger Segelström</td>
<td>1, 2004-2009</td>
<td>PES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lennart Sacrédeus</td>
<td>1, 1999-2004</td>
<td>EPP-ED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mikael Gustafsson</td>
<td>1, 2011-2014</td>
<td>GUE/NGL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olle Schmidt</td>
<td>2, 1999-2004, 2009-2014</td>
<td>ELDR, ALDE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

Questions to the MEPs

1. Which expectations did you have when you ran for the EP? How did your expectations correspond to your time as a MEP?
2. What characterize the day-to-day work in the EP?
3. How should a MEP act in order to gain influence? Are there any specific characteristics a MEP should have that are required?
4. Are there any member states or national delegations that dominate the day-to-day work as well as the EP legislative process?
5. Which are the most important positions in the EP, in the committees and in the party groups? What characterizes these positions?
6. What is the role of the group leader in the party group as well as within the committee?
7. Are there any committees that are dominating concerning their role and status within the EP? If so, which ones and can you give some examples of this?
8. How would you describe the EP’s attitude and relationship towards the Commission and the Council?
9. How is it decided, which MEP should become rapporteur within your party group? When is this decided? Can you, please, describe the selection process?
10. Is there a ‘party whip’ within your party group? How is the view on party loyalty within your party group?
11. What does the relationship between you as a MEP and your political party on a national level look like?