Discourse and Institution in LIS and policy analysis

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Abstract
This article explores the possibilities of integrating elements from institutional theory with discourse theory in the context of Library and Information Science (LIS), specifically in relation to an ongoing study of the Swedish national policies for adult education and film. It is maintained that both discourse theory and some approaches within institutional theory share a social constructionist epistemology. As the work by Talja and Fairclough demonstrates, ideas of social institutions are inherent in discourse theory. However, this article suggests that some approaches to institutional theory, especially those represented by March and Olsen, could enrich and improve the analytical value of the concept of institution in discourse analysis. Further, the view on social interest and power relations proposed by Powell and DiMaggio (institutional theory), and Fairclough (discourse theory), represent an approach to social analysis that reintroduces a critical perspective to social analysis that is lost in some conceptions of social constructionism. This article suggests that this approach is justified in LIS and cultural policy analysis.

Keywords: Social constructionism; institution; discourse; interests; critical realism

Introduction
The interdisciplinary character of Library and Information Science (LIS) and the application of theoretical and methodological elements from other disciplines are well known today (e.g. Ingwersen, 1994, 140 f.). Two examples are the application of discourse theory and institutional theory within LIS (Audunson, 1996; Talja, 2001). Discourse theory and intuitional theory are unique theories with distinct characteristics, and at the same time each presents an internal heterogeneity concerning theoretical and methodological details (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Discourse analysis, as the term indicates, studies social phenomena focused on language and discursive relations. One pivotal premise is the social constructionist conviction that our statements and assertions do not represent the world in any simple, straightforward way but rather ”conduce the creation of it” (Bergström & Boréus, 2000, 221). Institutional analysis concerns ”the cognitive, normative, and regulative
structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behaviour” (Scott & Christensen, 1995, xiii). One central assumption of institutional analysis is that social action implies the production of meaning, and therefore institutional analysis very much concerns the role of ideational phenomena (such as knowledge, beliefs and rules) in social behaviour.

The purpose of this article is to discuss if and how discourse theory and institutional theory can be drawn on to form an analytical framework for cultural policy studies within LIS. I am currently working on a doctoral thesis which is a comparative analysis of the policy domains of public film policy and adult education policy (including public libraries) on the national level in Sweden in the 1940’s and early 1950’s. The analysis concerns the characteristics of the discursive structures of the policy processes in these policy domains and how these discursive structures were related to different agents and institutions at this particular time.

I have experienced analytical shortcomings in discourse theory with regard to the conceptualisation of the communicative (institutional) context of discourses. Based on the idea that there are some theoretical overlaps between (some approaches to) discourse theory and institutional theory I have decided to investigate the possibility of supplementing discourse theory with elements of new institutional theory.1 The theoretical kinship between discourse theory and new institutionalism has been treated recently within policy studies by Fischer, basically from the perspective of the possible contribution of discourse theory to policy analysis (Fischer, 2003).

In this article, I propose that some approaches to discourse theory and institutional theory share common views on social analysis – including a basic interest in the relation between institutions and the way aspects of reality is constructed in language (March & Olsen, 1995, 29; Talja, 2001, 10). My interest will mainly be focused on concepts of institution and how they may be applied to develop discourse theory. I will go into the details of discourse theory and institutional theory as it is applied and presented in LIS literature and that I have found interesting and illustrative to the concerns of the article. However, some of the literature used in this article is affiliated with disciplines other than LIS. I do not claim to have identified all the relevant literature for the purpose of the article. Indeed, it could be questioned if I have identified the most relevant literature. However, my main objective concerning this issue has been that the literature referred to below is relevant and has the potential to ”put me on the track” in the exercise of forwarding the institutional elements of discourse theory in the context of LIS, especially cultural policy analysis.

According to Brenda Dervin in a discussion of information seeking research; ”we lack a vocabulary for talking about methodology”, by which she refers to the function of methodology to ”build a bridge between metatheory and method” (Dervin, 1999). I think that Dervin in this article points at an important but difficult element of research,
and I take it as a challenge to reflect on the implications of Dervin’s ideas for the work on my doctoral thesis. One dimension of methodology is to reflect on the epistemological presumptions implied by the theories applied. For this reason, it seems reasonable to commence with some epistemological considerations of discourse theory and institutional theory. If elements of institutional theory are to be integrated with discourse theory we need to consider if the theories are derived from the same epistemological presumptions, or not.

Social constructionism in theories of discourse and institution

The demand that any consideration of theory in research should be grounded in epistemological presumptions is not least relevant with an intention to merge theoretical elements from different theories. It is commonly acknowledged that discourse theory is anchored in a social constructionist (sometimes also termed “social constructivist”) view of social reality and knowledge (Tuominen & Savolainen, 1997; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Because social constructionism has many faces, the meaning of the term is not easy to pin down. However, according to Burr, all variants of social constructivism share the belief that reality is only accessible to us through our linguistic categories – implying that our knowledge and worldviews are not mirrors of the external world but products of those very categories – and that our knowledge and worldviews are always marked by culture and history (Burr, 1995, 2ff). Because the way we understand the world, our selves and our relations to other people is at the core of our identity, it follows not only that our knowledge about the social world is socially constructed, but that discursive acts contribute to the construction of the social world (including knowledge, identities and social relations). Social constructionism thus carries an anti-essentialist view on the social world and identities: The social world is constructed socially and discursively, implying that its characteristics are not determined by external circumstances or in advance; and that people do not own a set of authentic and stable characteristics, or essences. A social constructionist would also hold that people’s way of understanding the world is constructed, fought about and maintained in social interaction, and that worldviews have consequences for which social actions are deemed both natural and inconceivable. (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, 11f).

It is possible to identify examples of these principles of social constructionism in works by scholars who have advocated the appropriateness of discourse theory for the knowledge interests of the LIS community. Budd and Raber, discussing the relevance of discourse analysis for the study of information, maintain that meaning is “the coincidence of intent and interpretation that results from messages exchanged in discourse”, and that meaning thus “has formative aspects that include the linguistic, the social, the political, and others” (Budd & Raber, 1996, 217f). In Talja’s view (1997, 71) language constitutes the individual through the subject positions inherited in different discourses, and further, language contains specific sociohistorical traces which structure the experiences of individuals through the concepts and categories
applied. Talja adopts another social constructionist principle when asserting that meaning, values and ethical principles are created in social interaction, rather than being constructed by the individual:

The discourse analytic viewpoint locates the socio-cultural context of information processes in discourses, which provide different perspectives and subject positions for knowledge construction and systematization. (Talja, 1997, 71f)

While these examples definitely place discourse theory within a social constructionist understanding of language, knowledge and social institutions, we now have to consider institutional theory from this perspective: does institutional theory rely on a social constructionist viewpoint?

According to Scott, there are different approaches within institutional theory which entail different answers to this question (Scott & Christensen, 1995), and following DiMaggio and Powell, the distinction between old and new institutional theory bear some relevance to this issue (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). Both old and new institutionalism share a critical view of behaviourist and rational-actor explanations of social agency. Such explanations are based on methodological individualism which places the self-interested individual at the core of social analysis and understands collective political and economic behaviour "as the aggregate consequence of individual choice" (Audunson, 1999; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, 2). As Fischer discusses, the application of rational choice theory in social analysis bears the marks of methodological individualism and an empiricism that neglects the significance of language and values to knowledge (Fischer, 2003, 41, 119ff.). In the view of institutional theory, social behaviour is governed by a different logic of rationality than is suggested by rational choice theory. Audunson proposes the following framing of the rationality inherited in the institutional view on social agency:

Institutionalism stresses the weight and meaning of existing structures, rules, norms and roles./…/To a large extent, we receive, as human beings, norms and prescriptions through membership in institutions. These norms, rules and structures represent a socially constructed reality that is taken for granted and within which social actors act. Instead of asking which actions will maximize goal realisation, courses of action are often selected or rejected based on considerations of appropriateness. (Audunson, 1999, 526)

At the same time as this quotation illustrates assumptions common to both old and new institutionalism (the institutional placement of individuals), it is also an illustration of a social constructionist perspective: norms, rules and structures represent a socially constructed reality which is the most important point of reference to social actors when courses of action are decided. Scott juxtaposes the social constructionist belief within institutional theory with the cognitive view of institutions (Scott & Christensen, 1995, p. xvii), also identified as one of the main characteristic of the new institutionalism (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). However, Audunson is hardly an ardent
proponent of the cognitive view in institutional theory, referring as he does on several occasions to path-breaking work by Selznick (see, for example, Selznick, 1949). I consider this to be a fine demonstration of the kind of variety of typologies and meaning March and Olsen believe is typically associated with institutionalism (March and Olsen 1995, 27).

According to DiMaggio and Powell, it is the ”cognitive revolution”, basically driven by theory development in psychology and ethnomethodology, which is at heart of this issue (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, 15). In this picture, if the theory of action inherent in old institutionalism was based on Parsonsian action theory and Freudian socialisation theory (newcomers were socialised into institutions by internalising organisational values to which they then became committed), the action theory of the new institutionalism is associated with attribution theory and cognitive psychology (implying that normative obligations enter into social life primarily as facts actors must take into account) (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, 13ff). According to Scott, in the cognitive view it is categories, rather than values or rules, identities rather than regimes or power systems, and scripts rather than the pursuance of conformity or compliance, which constitute the basic elements of institutions (Scott & Christensen, 1995, xiv). Yet if there are some ambiguities concerning the meaning of the concerned terms, the shift in action theory involves a turn from values, norms and attitudes to classifications, routines, scripts and schemas (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, 13ff). The shift in action theory within institutional theory goes hand in hand with the cognitive turn and the turn to social constructionism. In this perspective, the core of the new institutionalism consists of shared cultural rules, structures of meaning and cognitive orders that define or construct agents and actions (Scott & Christensen, 1995, xvii).

**Constructed interests and social constructivism**

Any distinction between the old and the new institutionalism is bound to impose a simplified characterisation on a more messy research reality. The boundary between the new and old institutionalism is in reality blurred by a more selective use and understanding of the core concepts in a wealth of institutional approaches affiliated with different disciplines. Therefore, within institutional theory, a social constructionist view of knowledge and social life need not be expressed through a ”pure” cognitive framing of institutions. As Powell and DiMaggio contend, the cognitive turn in new institutionalism has in some approaches entailed too much of a retreat from issues of conflict of interests, contested values and power relations. They propose that questions of interests and power are highly relevant to the institutional agenda (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, 27). In their view, when investigating institutional change, it is important to work from a conflict perspective:

> But institutions are not only constrains on human agency; they are first and foremost products of human actions. Indeed, rules are typically constructed by a
process of conflict and contestation. Thus, although we stress that rules and routines bring order and minimize uncertainty, we must add that the creation and implementation of institutional arrangements are rife with conflict, contradiction and ambiguity. (Powell & DiMaggio, 1991, 28)

The turn away from, in some social constructionist approaches, conflicts of interests in social relations may very well be associated with some implications of the social constructionist theory itself. In some approaches of social constructionism the relations between subject positions and social interests are impossible to fix, which implies that it is also impossible to pin down the power relations between social agents (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, e.g. 84). Within political theory this new and more complex view on social power relations is also reflected in the turn from the theory of ideology to discourse analysis (Hall, 1997). Some approaches of constructionism in social analysis have had consequences for the concept of social power: Instead of picturing social power as a constant to be fought for and distributed among social agents, groups and individuals (the essence of political struggle), power, as Foucault would have it, is pictured as an inescapable generative force intimately bound up with the production of knowledge (Lukes, 2005, 89).

However, there are differences between various social constructionist approaches, differences that in some cases have bearings on the issue concerning the degree to which the social world is "constituted" by language. According to Winther-Jørgensen and Phillips, some approaches of discourse theory understand all social practice to be discursive; discourse is both material and all encompassing and there is no dialectic interplay between discourse and other elements of the social. Elements of the social world usually conceived of as materially evident, such as economic transactions, infrastructure and social institutions organised in human routines and buildings etc., are in this view always discursively constructed (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 25f.). Other discourse analytic approaches, for instance critical discourse analysis, allow for dialectic interplay between discourse and other elements of social practice (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, 21). Correspondingly, I think this kind of diversity and tension concerning the conceptualisation of social constructivism and its implications to social analysis has also surfaced in institutional theory; I understand the critical view of the cognitive turn delivered by Powell and DiMaggio to be an instance of this. I propose that this kind of diversity in social constructionism could be explored within a critical realist conception of social research (Sayer, 2000).

The exploration of this issue will have to be suspended at this point. The main point made in this section of the paper is that there need be no epistemological impediments to the combination of elements from institutional theory and discourse theory. On the contrary, provided that one is aware of the problem and implications concerning the analysis of power relations involved in the social constructionist view of knowledge, discourse theory and institutional theory is well suited in combination in developing
a theoretical framing of social analysis. As a matter of fact and as will be demonstrated in what follows, there are ample examples of the combination of concepts of discourse and institution in both discourse theory and institutional theory.

Institution in discourse theory, discourse in institutional theory

Reading through literature on discourse theory and applied discourse analysis it is obvious that concepts of discourse are often more or less clearly worked out in relation to concepts of institution. I will to a great extent rely on Talja for examples of how variants of these concepts have been coupled:

In discourse analysis the idea is to study ordinary ways of talking in concrete contexts and institutions. The aim is to tackle the philosophies present in the institution in a particular historical moment by analyzing talk and writing. (2001, 10).

It is not obvious from this quotation or from the text surrounding this excerpt from Talja’s book, what is meant by ”institution”. However, it is clear that Talja in using the term in this work refers to libraries, more specifically music libraries, and other ”art institutions” (Talja, 2001, 4). Certainly, the idea of institution is important to Talja’s analysis, because it points at the structuring context of discourses. Yet the term is not worked out and explained in more detail in the text. If I am right in this interpretation, and I believe I am, Talja is in good company, because this situation seems to be the regular case when discourse theorists try to work out the relation between institutions and discourse: much of the meaning of the term is taken for granted or is implied (e.g. Fairclough, 1995, 63).

My impression is that Talja in using the term in this work employs a concept of institution which is close to that which March and Olsen understand as ”(social) systems that are organised formally” (1995, 27). This idea, that institutions are formally organised social systems, is recurrent in literature on institutional theory. When Østerberg expounds on the concept as one of the key concepts of sociology, he makes a distinction between social relations formed by implicit norms, relations which he denominates structure or system, and social relations formed by explicit norms and rules that prescribe specific behaviours by the individuals, that is, institutions (Østerberg & Forsén, 1978, 103f). In contrast to a social structure or system, a social institution always owns a socio-material structure: usually written rules, premises and employed specialists. When social practices come to take on this kind of ”more solid forms” they become objectified, and they are thus institutionalised (Østerberg & Forsén, 1978, 104).

In applying this kind of distinction it is interesting to ask which social practice represents an institution and which does not – what are the necessary conditions?
According to Østerberg, not all human behaviour becomes objectified, yet the major part of social life in our society is institutionalised. And further, according to Østerberg’s definition, an institution need not have written rules, premises and employed specialists, even if that is generally the case. This indicates that besides the explicit guiding norms there are no clear-cut and evident dividing lines between institutions and other social relations governed by implicit norms. I understand explicit norms to be communicated, shared and disputed within a social institution; there need or can be no absolute consensus about the guiding norms of appropriate institutional behaviour.

March and Olsen employ “institution” in a more general sense to refer not only to formally organised systems (such as national legislature, courts or libraries), ”but also to systems of law, social organisation (such as the media, markets, or the family), and identities and roles (such as ”citizen,” ”official,” or ”individual”) (March & Olsen, 1995, 27). I guess that all of these do share some aspect of institutionalisation according to Østerberg, i.e. to take on a more solid form in a system of social relations, at some level ruled by explicit norms. It is reasonable to call a system of law an institution if the system of law has been institutionalised, that is, has been implemented and has influenced social organisation (such as the media), and identities (such as the official or other citizens socially positioned to be influenced by that law). By the same logic, but from another perspective, it is reasonable to see social roles and identities as social institutions when they are identified by the tasks, purposes and expectations that are imposed on them by the implications of the social positions where they exist. Social organisations such as the media or the market are also social institutions if we look at them from the perspective of the (ideological, legal and economic) logic and rules that govern them and the relational structure between the involved social agents. However, they could also be understood to be institutional complexes; social fields or social domains. The reason for this would be, for instance, that the media is a compound of different but interacting media institutions, such as the newspaper industry and the publishers, television, radio, the music industry and the film industry, partly following a media specific logic and regulation but at the same time sharing some common traits in these respects.

I will return to March and Olsen later on in this text because I think they propose an interesting institutional approach, an approach which presents a mix of elements from old and new institutionalism. But first, after this excursion into some basics of the concept of institution, we shall look a little closer at Talja’s text referred to above.

Context and change

Institutions, according to Talja, are the home of institutional practices and discourses or cultural narratives. The terms ”discourse” and ”narrative” seem to be used
interchangeably in this work by Talja (Talja, 2001, 6f). The latter term is introduced with reference to Silverman (1985) to illustrate the formative dimension of culture expressed by the term ”moral narratives”, but exchanged by ”music ethics” in the work by Talja to comply with the context of the music library. The relation between institutions and discourses are framed in the following way by Talja:

Discourses do not only express, for instance, the library’s meanings, they in fact make it possible to produce meanings about the library. Therefore they also construct the phenomenon, the library, in practice. It is not possible to produce meanings that are ultimately realized as practices otherwise than by the tools provided by discourses, because discourses create with their rules and conceptualisations the space in which things can be talked about. (Talja, 2001, 10)

Let us set out from the term ”discourse” to try to pin down the relation between discourses and institutions. According to the quotation discourses own rules and conceptualisations which people use to produce meanings, for instance about the library. Discourses are the linguistic resources people use to talk about a topic, to present knowledge and viewpoints on a subject. The individual is posited by Talja as a meeting place of historically and contextually developed discourses, which owns distinct characteristics and therefore may contradict each other. Historically ”strong discourses” or ”grand narratives” present interpretative resources for the speaker so that ”established conceptualizations of culture ‘speak’ the speaking subjects” in discursive practice (Talja, 2001, 7). In this work, drawing on Wetherell and Potter (1988) Talja also employs the term ”interpretative repertoire” as a near synonym to ”discourse”. According to Talja, the aim of discourse analysis is to ”identify and name the interpretative repertoires existing in a particular field”, and such an identified repertoire is named discourse (Talja, 2001, 11).

The meaning of field-concept applied in this quotation it is not clearly worked out in the text. Both discourse theory and institutional theory demonstrate the importance that is placed on the context of the mediation of information and culture in some strands of LIS research (Dervin, 1997). A phrasing further on in the text indicates that Talja thinks of the context of discourses as organised in the form of fields or institutions: ”(T)here are simultaneously several more or less conflicting discourses in a particular field or institution at a certain point” (2001, 12). The way I understand Talja on this point is that the field-concept is interchangeably used both as a complement and synonym to institution as a formally organised social system; the professional music library. As a complement to institution ”field” may point at an institutional complex that is organised around the same kind of activities, in this case music production and distribution. Other institutions in this field would be concert halls and orchestras, music producers and record companies, opera houses, and educational institutions in the music area.
It is important to understand that the context, understood as institutions or institutional complexes, in the discourse analytical approach pursued by Talja influences social agents through the meanings they carry (e.g. Schreiber 2004, 51). In other words, the contexts of discourses are other discourses. Yet if the necessary social function of language is at the heart of discourse analysis, I think this view places too much weight on the linguistic element of social interaction. The routines of institutionalised social behaviours have a force that is not exclusively expressed through discourse: Social power has meaning, but it moves more than words. This is a social condition that reasonably influences discourses, and I think we need to take this into account in discourse analysis.

If a discourse ”speaks” through the subjects, as Talja implies, this seems to suggest a rather rigid and fixed view of language and language use: How are changes possible, how do discourses change and new discourses arise? What is really the role of the individual using language in social interaction? Obviously, changes do occur in institutional practices and in the discourses associated with them even if social practices and institutions are tough and resistant to change. Certainly, discourses belong to traditions, social organisation, established social practices and institutions. But the social life of individuals is formed by social experience and the relationship between historically formed discourses and individual cultural experience provide a complex interaction which always presents some openness and allows for cultural renewal. Historically formed narratives, which constitute interpretative repertoires, may very well contradict an individual’s identification with cultural experience in everyday life, and yet exist together in the discursive acts of that person (Talja, 2001, 6f). And Talja continues:

The ways in which we describe and categorize music, and how we actually hear and experience music, are two different worlds. Terms and categorizations belong to the world of ideology, and they tell us about the society’s history and traditions./—/These aspects naturally influence each other: ideology affects listening, and affect gradually changes ideology. Changes in cultural experiences and practices gradually change the moral in moral narratives. This metamorphosis is not comprehensive, however, because novel and alternative interpretations arise alongside historically strong discourses without displacing them. (Talja, 2001, 7f)

Concerning the aspect of change described in this quotation, Talja does not touch on the possibility of combining discursive elements, or semiotic elements to use the term preferred by Chouliaraki and Fairclough, (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999) from different discourses associated with different social institutions and fields. That would be one possible way where institutional and discursive change may occur. I think the detailed workings of such changes have to be studied in specific cases.
where the discourses drawn on and combined by social agents in processes of institutional change are in focus.

**Ideology and power**

I also want to comment on a term introduced by Talja in this quotation, a term which is interchangeably used together with discourse in this work—“ideology”. Ideology often implies an aspect of social power and domination and the use Talja makes of the term indicates that this is the case in this work. However, power, according to Talja, does not belong to any particular group or social position, but is something that “operates through widely accepted, legitimate cultural narratives and practices” (Talja, 2001, 5). From the perspective represented in this work by Talja; i.e. views of the library institution and cultural policy, this understanding of power has specific implications:

> When looking at the relationship between practices and ideology/…/historically strong interpretations may form an obstacle to a perceived need to adapt institutional practices to the changes that have taken place in cultural practices and experiences./…/The coexistence of conflicting historical and practical forms of cultural knowledge may/…/ impede the reforming of institutional practices and patterns of decision making. (Talja, 2001, 8)

According to this view, discourses are ideological because they are selective; they provide a way of looking at a particular phenomenon from a specific angle or perspective, which by default is restricted and limited. This entails that other interpretations are not voiced or do not contribute to the credibility of the established discourse (Talja, 2001). Still, it is an important precondition in Talja’s approach of discourse analysis that dominance, power and contested knowledge is not associated with particular social positions etc. As I pointed out earlier, there are other conceptions of power in other discourse analytical approaches and I think it is worthwhile to consider them in working out a fruitful conception of social interests and power relations. The concept of ideology also recurs in institutional theory (e.g. Cohen & Orbuch 1990, 87), and as I related to earlier, Powell and DiMaggio point at the importance of applying perspectives of clashing worldviews and interests in institutional analysis.

**Identities and contexts**

If the quotations from Talja’s doctoral thesis exemplify how concepts of institution and discourse can be expressly coupled (expressly because the terms “discourse” and ”institution” indicate the presence of the concepts), in other instances concepts of institution are implied by the framing of discourse. Reading through another text by Talja we have to work harder to identify the implied concept of institution, but at the same time we are presented with ideas that are also current in institutional theory:
Discourse theory emphasizes that the user has different identities and subject positions in different social contexts /…/. In different situations an individual may, for instance, be parent, child, teacher, student, professional, customer, buyer, seller. The person’s rights and duties, positions and resources, competencies and knowledge states, vary according to context. (1997, 75)

What we are presented with here are ideas about how identities and subject positions vary between different social contexts. I have proposed that ”context” in Talja’s discourse theory points at social fields or institutions, which of course, do not exclude other possible interpretations of ”context”. However, the enumeration of different identities in this quotation, and the connection that is made between such different identities and different duties, resources, competencies, knowledge states etc., present us with more possible intersections between discourse theory and institutional theory.

Identity is one central concept of the institutional theory of March and Olsen:

The core notion is that life is organised by sets of shared meanings and practices that come to be taken as given./…/Actions of individuals and collectivises occur within these shared meanings and practices, which can be called identities and institutions /…/. Institutions and identities constitute and legitimize political actors and provide them with consistent behavioural rules, conceptions of reality, standards of assessment, affective ties, and endowments, and thereby with a capacity for purposeful action. (1995, 30)

I believe that this quotation includes several theoretical elements which may be related to discourse theoretical concepts. Obviously, March and Olsen share Talja’s interest in identities and their formation through shared meanings, conceptions of reality, etc. I think there is a common view in the theories that different contexts provide the individual with different positions and resources, though the ways in which the relations between language, norms, values and social practices are conceptualised differ on a detailed level. One important reason for the difference is quite obvious; the research focus.

Discourse analysis, in this article represented by Talja, is focused on discourse, on identifying discourses, naming them and describing their relative meaning to the institutional practises studied. Discourse analysis is interested in how social agents use or draw on different discourses in social interaction. Institutional analysis concerns first and foremost the shared (and contested) meanings and social practices that provide the agents with rules, worldviews (discourse), endowments and thus ”a capacity for purposeful action”, to quote March and Olsen again. Because institutional analysis starts off from the shared social practice that is associated with the discursive part of social interaction, the shared meanings and worldviews, it presents a more complex and richer picture of social institutions than discourse analysis does.

The interest in social practice has also been demonstrated by discourse analysts who, like Norman Fairclough, try to pursue social analysis without reducing everything to
discourse. Yet, as pointed at earlier in this article, the concept of institution is not particularly well integrated into this critical realist conception of discourse analysis (see, for example, Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1995, 63). I propose that the concept of social institutions presented by March and Olsen could prove fruitful to such an end.

Conclusion

In this article I have outlined some considerations that must be taken into account when trying to supplement discourse analysis with the concept of institution developed in the new institutionalism. I have demonstrated that some approaches in institutionalism share the social constructionist view that is a precondition for discourse analysis. On condition that one is aware of the epistemological implications of social constructionism for social analysis there are good chances that some approaches and elements of the new institutionalism can be drawn on to expand the concept of institution in discourse analysis.

From this perspective, the concept of institution offered by March and Olsen seems promising. I believe it could be integrated into a historical discourse analysis of the national policy for film and adult education in Sweden; it is complex and integrates components of both social practice and discourse. Further, March and Olsen, like myself, deal with political institutions, which presents me with a suitable institutional framework for the analysis. However, I believe it may also prove productive to involve the institutional theory of Powell and DiMaggio, because my doctoral thesis is concerned not only with political institutions and their role in policy processes, but with non-governmental organisations and agents representing different interests in the social domains affected by policy processes.

Literature


Lennartsson, C. (Forthcoming). "Discourse and Institution”. Ed. S. Sörlin, *[Part of a series of publications from the research project Kulturen i kunskapssamhället]*.


Note

1. I have made some tentative effort to combine discourse theory and new institutionalism in the analysis of the film policy domain, and have found the result promising: Lennartsson, C. (Forthcoming). Discourse and Institution. In S. Sörlin (Ed.), [Part of a series of publications from the research project Kulturen i kunskapssamhället]. However, what I have accomplished so far is more of two parallel analyses from two theoretical perspectives than an integration of the two perspectives.