



# Actors and Institutions

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## Courses

JSM518 "Public Policy"

JSD009 „Public Policy“

JSM699 „Theory of Public Policy“

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# What is the lecture about



- Actors
- Institutions
- The relationship between actors and institutions
  - Government as an institution and an actor

➤ Theory of actor-centred institutionalism

- Arenas
- Agendas

➤ Theory of actors generating agendas in arenas (A-A-A Model)

# Actors



= **Individual** or **composite actors** **involved** in the **policy process**:

- they may initiate it or influence its course or outcome.
- they are characterized by their:
  - **preferences** (which may change through persuasion),
  - **perceptions of the problem** to be addressed (which may change through learning),
  - **capabilities** – the resources at their disposal.
- their **action** is **motivated by their interests**.

(Scharpf 1997, p. 43)



## Actors – overview

- **Global level** (WB, WTO, IMF)
- **European Union** (Green and White Papers, Open Method of Coordination...)
- **National-level government and public administration** (central government, Parliament, President, courts, regions, municipalities)
- Media
- Businesses
- NGOs, churches, political parties
- Mafias
- Epistemic communities, think-tanks
- Interest groups
- Personalities: politicians, celebrities, leading intellectuals...





# Institutions

= **Regulators** (rules, norms) of **actors'** behaviours

➤ **Implicit (unwritten)**

- ethical and social norms,
- expectations and customs



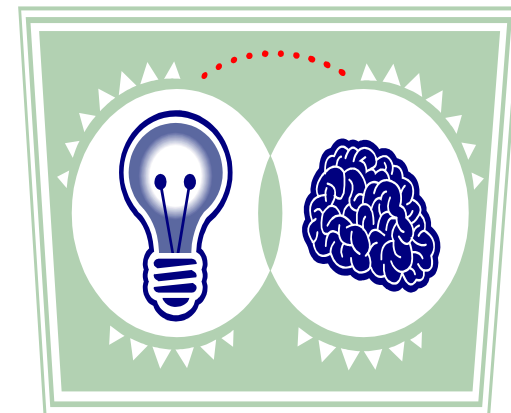
➤ **Explicit (formalized)**

- the constitutional-legal system
- organizational structures



# Critical Thinking Question

- Can ***unwritten institutions*** play a ***more important*** role in policy implementation ***than formalized ones?***
- Give examples supporting or refuting this proposition.





# The relationship between actors and institutions

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- **Change** depends on **actors'** agency,
  - yet actors exist in an environment, facing different external constraints and **institutional contexts** they have to respect.
- Some **institutional environments** are more advantageous for effective policymaking than others (Stoker 1989, May 1993).

# Formalized & non-formalized policy actors & institutions

Level of formalization	Actors		Institutions
	Individual	Composite	
<b>Formalized</b>	Political leaders  Policy analysts	Political parties Government, public administration bodies Firms Civic sector organizations Policy analysis organizations Media	Constitutional-legal system  Organizational structures (e.g., administrative areas of a state, the Tripartite)
<b>Non-formalized (unwritten)</b>	Opinion leaders  Policy entrepreneurs	Interest groups  Epistemic communities  Policy communities	Ethical norms, social norms, expectations, customs



# Exercise

- *For each cell of the preceding **table**, give examples for the **global level of governance**.*



# Government as an institution & an actor

- Government executes **key functions**:
  - develops the **constitutional-legal framework** of social life and enforces it among other actors;
  - guarantees internal and external **security**;
  - sets the **institutional framework of economic activity**;
  - ensures the provision of public social services;
  - protects the environment.
- **Changing government authority** in recent decades
  - gradual shift from positive to **regulatory** state (Majone 1997).





# Theory of actor-centred institutionalism

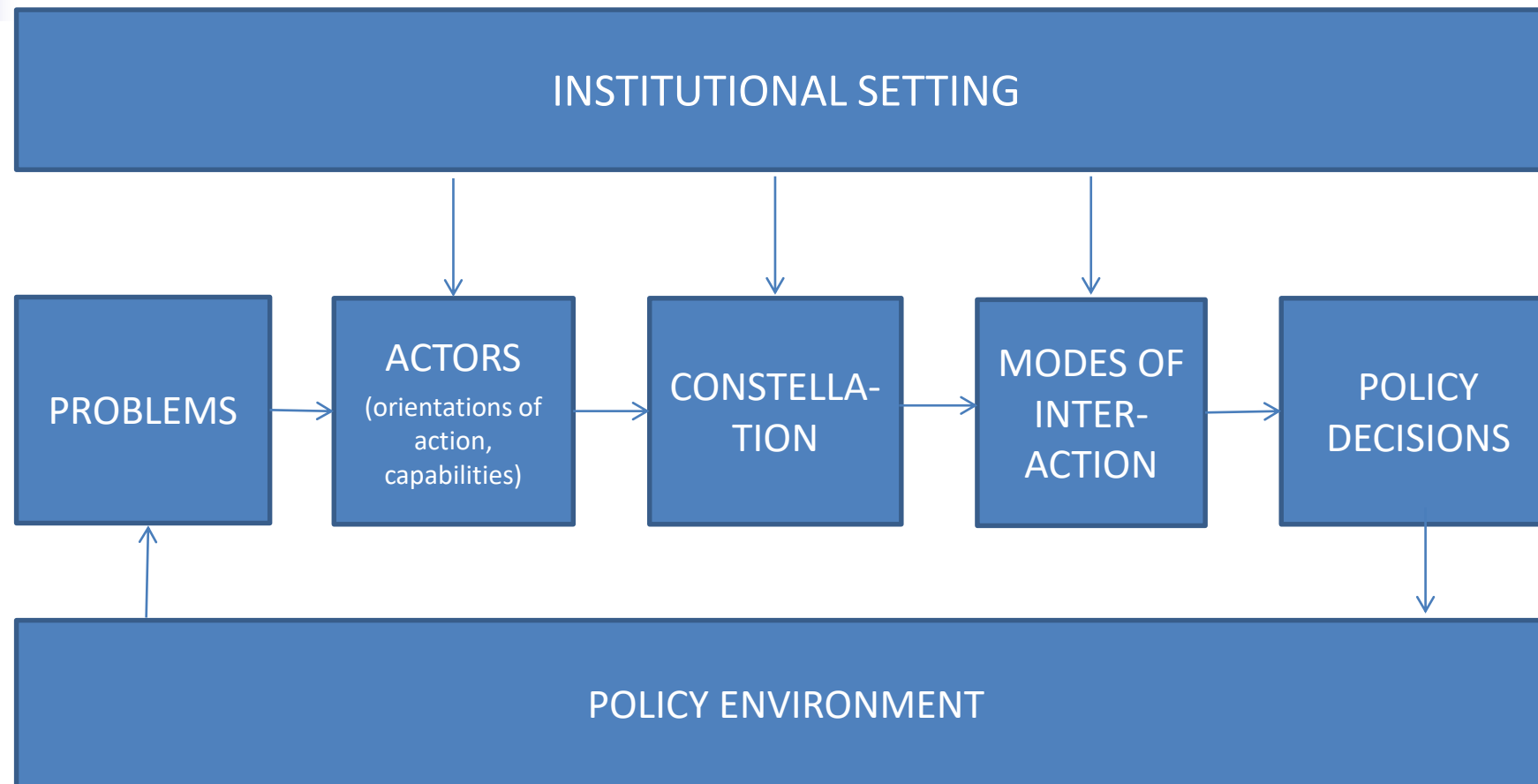
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- **Actors formulate and implement policies by way of politically feasible measures and/or institutional change.**
- Basic assumptions:
  - **actors' actions** are strongly (but never fully) **determined by** the ways **existing institutions** (both formalized and unwritten ones) influence their perceptions, preferences and capabilities;
  - even individuals working in formalized institutions follow their internal rules.

*"Rules and systems of rules in any historically given society not only organize and regulate social behavior but make it understandable – and in a limited conditional sense – predictable for those sharing in rule knowledge."*

(Burns, Baumgartner, Deville 1985, p. 256 in Scharpf 1997, p. 40)

# Theory of actor-centred institutionalism



CONSTELLATION – structure of actors in their mutual policy interactions with alternative goals and ways of attaining them.

MODES OF INTERACTION – ways actors accomplish policy action: unilateral action, negotiated agreement, majority voting, and hierarchical direction.

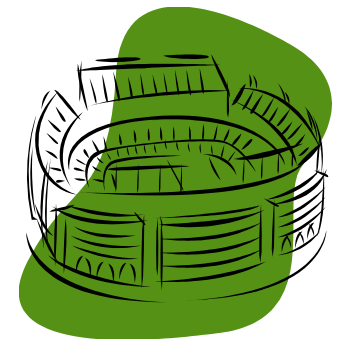
Source: Scharpf (1997, adapted).



# Arenas, policy venues

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= **specifically delimited spaces** in which different **policy actors** **interact** in **cooperative/consensual** or **competitive/conflictive** ways.

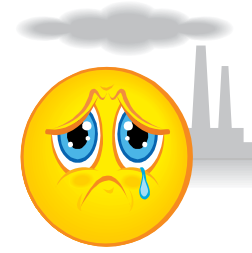


## ■ **Typology:**

- Traditional: legislature, executive, political parties
  - + general public, bureaucracy, interest groups (Jordan & Richardson 1987)
  - + media
- distributive, redistributive and regulative; constitutive, auto-regulative and persuasive.

(Lowi 1972 and Salisbury 1968, in Fiala & Schubert 2000, pp. 67–75).

# Agendas



= **formulated**, solved, or postponed social (public) **problems** + the ways they are **perceived** and **communicated** by actors in given **institutional environments**

- They are constantly shaped, modified and complemented by various specific **issues**.
- **Current** (e.g., the Euro crisis) vs **prospective** (strategic – e.g., global warming)

# Exercise

- ***Give examples of a **policy agenda** and issues on the agenda.***





# Theory of actors generating agendas in arenas (**A-A-A** Model)

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- Studies the links between and dynamics of policy **Arenas** + policy **Actors** + policy **Agendas**.
- Actors (through mutual interaction in arenas) establish and maintain relations with actors from other arenas  
different **flows of communication**
- **Actors** articulate and initiate **issues on the agenda**, but also suggest the ways to address them
- An articulated issue gets onto the policy agenda when actors with a threshold potential of influence are mobilized





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