JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT STUDIES

*Journal of Management Studies* 62:8 December 2025
doi:10.1111/joms.13209



POINT COUNTERPOINT

# The Mission (Im)possible of Climate Action through Quixotic Institutional Work

**Giuseppe Delmestri**[a] **and Elke S. Schuessler**[b]

[a]*Luiss Guido Carli University;* [b]*Leuphana Universität Lüneburg*

ABSTRACT The 'iron cage' of the (neo-) liberal-capitalist system prioritizes economic returns over climate protection. Formerly powerful nation-states are subordinated to the rule of markets, whereas business elites have been freed from substantial responsibility for social and environmental concerns. While we agree in principle with the Point that a reassertion of state power may facilitate more decided climate action, our Counterpoint adopts a cultural institutionalist perspective that highlights the embeddedness of actors in a broader cultural order. From this perspective, actors enact scripts while often lacking substantive agency towards protecting the natural environment. Cultural change in meanings, myths, practices, and rituals is needed to remodel the currently dominant scripts and templates of modern, liberal-capitalist 'world society', including the script of state actorhood. We suggest the notion of 'quixotic institutional work' as a way of envisioning and prefiguring alternative cultural templates when both the physical and the social reality start showing cracks due to the climate crisis. Quixotic institutional work follows the logic of appropriateness rather than consequential purposiveness, and thus constitutes a different, often overlooked and mocked, form of agency for systems change relevant in the light of powerful forces towards maintaining an unsustainable world order.

**Keywords:** climate change, cultural institutionalism, system change, institutional work, new institutionalism

## INTRODUCTION

The warnings by leading climate scientists that present scientific facts, inform policy makers and the public, and appeal to urgent action has, by now, developed a somewhat ritualistic character (Islam et al., 2019). The response is paralysing inaction, even as governments sign agreements and declare ambitious objectives for decarbonization

*Address for reprints:* Elke S. Schuessler, Leuphana Universität Lüneburg, Lueneburg, Niedersachsen, Germany (elke.schuessler@leuphana.de).

and biodiversity protection. What is the reason for such ineffective 'blah, blah, blah', to use the words of activist Greta Thunberg and, later, UN-secretary-general Antonio Guterrez?

The theoretical perspective of cultural institutionalism (also known as the world society/polity perspective[1]) can help us understand this frustrating and dangerous loop as the result of culturally constructed global models in which social actors, in particular states, organizations and individuals, are embedded and by which they are shaped. With the end of World War II, a particular form of modern liberal society strongly influenced by US-American cultural models has diffused via international treaties, norms, standards, and cultural products (Meyer and Jepperson, 2021; Schofer et al., 2012). A key part of this rationalizing cultural system is the construction of agency and actorhood. Agency originally located in transcendental authority (gods) and natural forces has become relocated into society and ascribed to nation-states, organizations, and individuals who are constructed as 'agentic actors', that is, actors who act on behalf of others and of higher principles such as progress, justice, or environmental protection (Meyer and Jepperson, 2000).

Regarding this *Point-Counterpoint*'s main question of how management studies can address the system-level challenges posed by climate change, Bodrožić and Adler (2025) emphasize in their *Point* that a proactive state in a democratized public policy regime is needed to confront climate change. This regime can result from mission-driven politics with a 'New Deal' character (Mazzucato, 2021), but its implementation competes with oligarchic, authoritarian or localist alternatives. Yet, while Bodrožić and Adler expect a lot from an interventionist state, they do not spell out how we can change existing policy regimes towards greater democratization, nor how we can make this policy regime a culturally dominant one. The fact that even authoritarian oil-dependent states such as Russia have an environmental ministry or have signed international agreements like the Kyoto protocol (Hadler, 2017) points to state actors ceremonially adopting cultural templates for environmental protection, while mostly lacking coherent interests or identities to forcefully act upon these commitments (Schofer et al., 2012).

In our *Counterpoint* we argue that modern capitalist societies cannot but exploit and commodify nature to maximize economic returns unless we change dominant cultural scripts and templates, including the cultural construction of state agency. Already Max Weber (1930, p. 181), central intellectual referent of neoinstitutional theory, wrote that today's capitalist market order constrains society 'with overwhelming force', possibly 'until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt'. The concern for material goods in modern, capitalist society has become an 'iron cage' that supersedes other values. While the other *Counterpoint* also emphasizes cultural hegemony, Nyberg and Wright (2025) see this hegemony at the agentic disposal of powerful (corporate) elites pursuing their interests. Instead, the image of the iron cage emphasizes that agency and interests, also of elites, are cultural products. In a nutshell, our *Counterpoint* criticizes the *über*-state assumed by the *Point* and the *über*-power of the dominant elites assumed by the other *Counterpoint*. Bodrožić and Adler view the state as a deus ex machina, while Nyberg and Wright see the nefarious capitalist elites as an almighty devil. Both pairs of authors thus attribute quasi-Olympic agency to these constructed actors.

To avert the alternatives of oligarchy, authoritarianism and the neoliberal status quo, which may neither serve the climate nor the population, we instead argue for the need to culturally 'reprogram' these actors. Staying within the ontological realm of cultural institutionalism, we suggest 'quixotic institutional work' to be an alternative form of agency to support systems change. In developing this notion, we lean on the generative interpretation of 'quixotic' offered by Jim March (2003, p. 206) as 'tied not to hopes for great outcomes but to a willingness to embrace the arbitrary and unconditional claims of a proper life' and Ulrich Beck's (2009, p. 5) discussion of 'quixoticness' as risk that 'unfolds its fateful and terrible, inscrutable ambiguity … into an unknown world involving ever more unpredictability'. Quixotic institutional work, thus, relies less on strategic and purposive notions of agency than the original conception of institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009) and, as in the literary original by Cervantes, unfolds against the breakdown of traditional representations and orders of knowledge (Foucault, 1975). It follows a logic of appropriateness rather than of consequences (March and Olsen, 1998), a shift which is facilitated by crisis events (Kornberger et al., 2019).

The 15-years hold Greta Thunberg, who in 2018 decided to sit in front of the Swedish parliament and start a School Strike for Climate that gave rise to a global movement, or the scientist Gianluca Grimalda who in 2023 decided not to fly back to Germany from a research trip to Papua New Guinea despite the threat of dismissal by his employer, offer prototypical examples of such quixotic institutional work driven by the personal urge to be consistent with one's own values. By engaging in seemingly foolish and irrational action, quixotic institutional workers can help to question and reconstruct some of the core cultural assumptions of world society, especially the fragmentation of societies into individual actors disembedded from the natural environment, the emphasis on individual entitlement and limited liability over collective responsibility, the prioritization of economic growth over the respect for social and environmental boundaries, and the currently dominant form of representative democracy that curtails citizen engagement. The notion of quixotic institutional work as a specific form of institutional work appropriate for times of radical unpredictability and instability helps to inform further research on prefigurative action and culture change, and addresses the role of management scholars in these processes.

## WHAT CULTURAL INSTITUTIONALISM CAN CONTRIBUTE TO UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE (IN)ACTION AND SYSTEMS CHANGE

Cultural institutionalism emerged as a long-term theoretical and empirical research project developed since the 1970s with the aim to understand the post-war 'liberal project' led by Western economies, particularly the USA, but spreading globally in parallel to the establishment of global trade relations (Drori et al., 2006; Thomas, 2009). As a theoretical movement, it sought to counter and complement the then dominant accounts of society in American sociology that glorified individuals and organizations as rational actors, pushing sociological arguments back in favour of economic and psychological ones (Meyer and Jepperson, 2021). Indeed, much modern social and economic science attributes choices to actors with agency, assuming that the motives 'emanate from the entity

itself, the actor, rather than from a cultural system that produced both the actor and the motive' (Suddaby, 2023, p. 516). Cultural institutionalism instead holds that actors may well have motivations, abilities, resources and peculiar interests, but their functions and powers to act are not a realist property of actors preexisting and exogenous to the culture in which they have been constructed.

Jepperson and Meyer go so far as to define actorhood itself as the core cultural script of contemporary society. This script produces 'inflated claims about the rights and powers of human persons, the obligations and competencies of formal organizations in every sector of social life, and the extraordinary powers and responsibilities of national states … far beyond any possible tightly coupled reality' (Jepperson and Meyer, 2021, p. 268). The tragedy is that the contemporary world polity constructs these actors in a way that makes them ineffective in changing the preconditions of their existence in a nature-destroying societal order. From the economic institutionalist perspective found in the *Point* by Bodrožić and Adler, institutions, following North (1990), are just the rules of the game within which enterprises, as ontologically independent actors, operate aiming at maximizing their interests. From a cultural perspective, institutions instead construct the social order, the actors embedded in it and even their interests and motives. Cultural institutionalism thus adds an additional, constructivist layer in explaining the difficulties of decided climate action despite public commitments to such action. In other words, both those acting to destroy human life on earth for profit (cf. the account of hegemony offered in the other *Counterpoint* by Nyberg and Wright) and those aiming to develop effective climate policies are shaped by the scripts and models constituting the world polity.

In addition to the study of the world polity as the institutional structure constituting the actors and influencing the network of their relationships in world society, Jepperson and Meyer (1991) have investigated national variations in the construction of the liberal world polity and offered an original theorization on the role of nation-states. From a cultural institutionalist perspective, nation-states are not ontologically independent actors that intervene in society but are informed by national polities. A national polity is 'a socially binding ideology', a model made up of 'the system of rules conferring social authority in pursuing of collective ends, establishing agents of collective regulation and intervention' (Jepperson and Meyer, 1991, p. 206). And while '… many features of the contemporary nation-state derive from worldwide models constructed and propagated through global cultural and associational processes' (Meyer et al., 1997), there are still important variations between liberal, corporatist, and statist polities that may offer different possibilities for climate action (Jepperson, 2002; Jepperson and Meyer, 1991; Nicolini et al., 2016) and are remindful of some of the distinctions advanced in the *Point*.

Liberal individualist polities are those in which individuals and organizations are authorized, the state has a limited role, and organizations are the only intermediate social entity because public functions are only weakly institutionalized. In these 'marketlike' polities (e.g., USA, UK, Australia), 'individuals are handed the loaded gun of legitimated actorhood and legitimated interests' (Jepperson and Meyer, 1991, pp. 220–1). In corporatist polities (e.g., Austria, Germany, Nordic Scandinavian countries), instead, people are not understood as actors but 'as members of occupations, classes, families, gender identities, regions, communities, estates, and the like' (Jepperson and Meyer, 1991, p. 223). State-corporate polities such as Germany traditionally give more weight to the

state than social-corporate polities such as Sweden that base collective action more on societal forces (Jepperson, 2002). Statist polities, on the other hand, present high degrees in both dimensions, or, in other words, both social actors and public functions are legitimated, but the state has a limiting role in directing a society that is conceived as too irrational and chaotic to be left alone. In these 'state-cum-society' polities (e.g., France and, to a lesser extent, Italy), power 'is more concentrated in an apparatus than in the societal systems' (Jepperson and Meyer, 1991, p. 224).

These differences can be illustrated using the *Point*'s case of local responses to the market entry of Uber, used there as an example of a corporation supporting a carbon-and-resource-intensive, anti-social urban transport system. The Helsinki Transport Authority's Kutsuplus ('Uber for buses') illustrates how corporatist polities may support a higher degree of climate action by moving from an individual to a collective, community-driven transport system. Similarly, in Vienna, Austria, and Berlin, Germany, two cities embedded in state-corporate polities (Jepperson, 2002), Uber has been obliged to act as either a taxi or a rental firm and Uber Pop is prohibited (Pernicka and Schüßler, 2022). In Italy, a statist polity, Uber, after having been prohibited for a while by court decisions, is regulated as a taxi, Uber Pop was soon prohibited, and the multinational agreed to come to terms with the existing taxi guild by integrating their cars into its smartphone app. In France, Uber managers have even been arrested in 2015 with the accusation of building a criminal organization in relation to Uber Pop. Thus, statist polities seem to be even more effective than state-corporate ones in holding Uber in check. But beyond this example, it is not fully clear which national polity offers the best conditions for mitigating climate pollution, though scholars have started to shed light on the effectiveness of different policy mixes in different countries (Stechemesser et al., 2024).

However, it must be noted that the cultural institutionalist framework has been developed at a time where rationalized (neo)liberalism, unfettered by preoccupations over the material 'fuels' sustaining its expansion, was at the height of its legitimacy – including in non-Western countries that sought integration into the liberal world trade regime. After the immediate post-war period of embedded liberalism, world society has embraced a neoliberal cultural frame and, between about 1980 and 2010, a particularly predatory form of capitalism (Djelic, 2007) characterized by marketization, dematerialization, commodification, private appropriation, transnational stratification, and an emphasis on radical economic and socio-cultural libertarianism. Since the 2008 financial crisis, this period is being replaced by a post-liberalist era (Bromley et al., 2020; Schofer et al., 2022) which maintains the economic and cultural libertarianism of the previous period, while mixing it with reactionary cultural models bound for reinstating national, religious, familial, or ethnic identities (Furuta et al., 2024; Jepperson and Meyer, 2021).

These periods fit well with the other two essays in this *Point-Counterpoint* debate: neoliberalism is marked by a retreat of the nation-state, the rise of social inequality and the establishment of transnational corporate and policy elites (Kaplan, 2024). Hence, it is only consequential that Bodrožić and Adler in their *Point* call for a reinstatement of state power, whereas Nyberg and Wright in their *Counterpoint* emphasize the need to challenge the hegemony of global (business) elites. Arguably, both dynamics are already on their way: authoritarian and right-wing movements in previously liberal democracies of the

West, often intermingled with the superrich digital and fossil fuel elites, aim to reassert state power and freeze the capitalist system on its actual route towards climate disaster (e.g., Trump's 2024 presidential campaign slogan 'drill, baby, drill'), and authoritarian states such as Russia or China veer for global cultural dominance (Schimank, 2024), often piggy bagging on the very institutional structures made available by the liberal world society (Velasco, 2023). Several cultural movements such as the religious Jihad or the anti-scientific COVID-19 protests also openly contest capitalist, cosmopolitan elites and the core pillars of world society such as science, education and democracy, aiming to reassert alternative, more communal, and 'tribal' identities. Yet, it is doubtful that these dynamics would support a path towards greater democratization (*Point*) and the establishment of a more climate-friendly counter-hegemony (*Counterpoint*) without some radical discontinuity in their evolution. In what follows, we argue that new global scripts and models are needed that provide an alternative to authoritarian, nationalist, or localist movements.

## MELTING THE IRON CAGE? CULTURAL CHANGE THROUGH QUIXOTIC INSTITUTIONAL WORK

In liberal-capitalist world polity, states have been entangled with and hence primarily prioritized the maintenance of the existing market-capitalist order, even though this entailed crossing planetary and social welfare boundaries. Timid 'repair-focused' (Crawford et al., 2024) institutional change has remained within system-maintaining guardrails including some policy adjustment and market shaping, such as seen in the US Inflation Reduction Act or the EU Green Deal. Technological solutions have emerged as the 'easy' compromise between popularity and business as usual. More radical changes in practices and beliefs come about not via regulation, but via a change in the wider global-institutional environment conferring authority and legitimacy (Schofer et al., 2012). Hence, central questions are, first, how alternative cultural models more aligned with planetary boundaries, that is, a safe operating space for humanity within the Earth's system endangered by climate change, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, and other processes (Richardson et al., 2023; Whiteman et al., 2013), could emerge and globally diffuse in a liberal world order and, second, what such templates could look like.

Regarding the second question, cultural institutionalism in its actual form has limited answers, because it is not (yet) a prescriptive design theory aimed at devising better institutions. Cultural institutionalists are like the Watchers in Marvel comics, ethically motivated extraterrestrial beings who observe and document the history and significant events of the universe without interfering. Hence, in line with this epistemically humble approach inherent in cultural institutionalism, any attempt to extend cultural institutionalism beyond description and explanation risks falling into the trap of a decontextualized and simplistic social engineering (Horner et al., 2024). The Watchers' intent not to interfere and influence the observed social reality, however, becomes futile when they publish and teach their theory, as new institutionalists (and all management scholars) do.

The performativity of theory in shaping social situations and action applies also to new institutionalists and requires reflection on its effects as a minimum

(Wickert, 2024). It would also be a blamable waste not to use the theoretical and methodological resources of cultural institutionalism in a situation where all of humanity's efforts must be directed towards avoiding ecological and societal collapse. Hoffman and Jennings (2021) hence advanced the need to politicize institutional theory to understand 'anthropocene society', as the new ecological reality not only implies 'shifts in the beliefs and social rules concerning our conceptions of humans, the natural environment and their interconnections', but also material consequences for various stakeholder groups ranging from corporations, scientists, or politicians to wider communities. A promising bet would be to radically repair the liberal world polity by reconstructing actors as both agents on behalf of the climate, *and* as actors whose agency depends on it, prioritizing collective responsibility over individual entitlement and corporate limited liability, redefining markets to value the common good and respect planetary and social boundaries, and reinvigorating democracy through different forms of participation (see e.g., Delbridge et al., 2024).

Regarding the first question, cultural institutionalism offers a solid understanding of mechanisms of social change and diffusion. Institutionalization happens via the learning of broad collective representations of society – pictures of what society is and how it works – and accepting these pictures as natural social facts (Meyer and Jepperson, 2021, p. 71). Berger and Luckmann (1966) referred to these pictures as 'recipe knowledge', whereas Meyer speaks of 'myths' that exert their influence not because reflexive people necessarily believe they are true, but also because everybody else adheres to them. Thus, people's beliefs about 'reality' are the basis for reproducing or questioning a social order, and belief traps, that is, misguided beliefs about the beliefs of others are common, especially regarding climate action (Andre et al., 2024). When established scripts and models are openly opposed and lose the feature of being considered inevitable, natural or normal, or when they become too decoupled from reality, they may break (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Cracks in the orderly self-activating repetition of cultural practices and accounts open avenues for change due to imperfect reproduction or improvised non-reproduction (Smets et al., 2012). These cracks may become larger and more frequent as the climate crisis increasingly progresses in a direction making environmental and societal collapse a real possibility. This understanding invites us to reflect about alternative, possibly less heroic forms of agency for protecting the climate than an interventionist state or powerful elites, who are themselves strongly embedded in the current institutional order.

From a cultural institutionalist perspective, a cultural movement legitimized by existing institutional materials and improvising on the same materials could help in redefining the roles of the state, the economy and the society to preserve us from ecological and societal collapse. But for not contradicting ourselves and positing social movements instead of states as a powerful deus ex machina, it should be clear that only a kind of *quixotic*, paradoxically non-agentic form of institutional work is available for challenging cultural scripts – if we exclude dangerous revolutionary processes (Turchin, 2023). Cultural institutionalists do not endorse the 'realist cast' and 'actor-and-micro-centric' descriptions and explanations of other variants of new institutionalism (Jepperson and Meyer, 2021, p. 290). Hence, for cultural institutionalists, institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009) can only be of a special kind both ontologically, with regard to descriptive/explanatory

studies, and epistemologically, when scholars venture in the prescriptive solution-oriented performative direction.

Quixotic institutional workers engage in efforts within organizations, fields, and societies driven by visionary and ambitious ideals that arise in response to their awareness of the incipient breakdown of taken-for-granted realities. Quixotic institutional work is not just idealistic or naïve but unfolds against such awareness of the potential breakdown of traditional representations and orders of knowledge and in the face of existential risks that become inscrutable and unpredictable (Beck, 2009; Foucault, 1975; Jonas, 1984). Quixotic institutional work hence not only entails imagining what others can't imagine but also supporting the development of new systems of knowledge and representation for making sense of a changed reality. These endeavours, though potentially challenging and unconventional, are rooted in a different intentionality than purposeful goal-directed transformation (March and Olsen, 1998).

Quixotic institutional work builds on the desire to be true to oneself in stepping aside existing practices considered unsustainable, unjust, and even ugly, regardless of meagre prospects of success, to achieve transformative and impactful change. It refers to the less strategic and more idealistic actions taken by individuals or collectives of actors characterized by a commitment to visionary and often impractical goals. In developing this notion, we draw inspiration from Jim March's (2003) reading of the literary figure Don Quixote, who embodies the pursuit of noble causes despite apparent futility or absurdity:

> Cervantes says, in effect, there is no hope, that the world is probably absurd, and there is not much one can do about it. But, as a matter of will, of humanity, we can charge windmills. (Jim March in Newark, 2021, p. 298)

> The Quixote message is about imagination that resists the limitations of reality. It's a vision of joy that rejects the corruption of cynicism. It is moral message in creating a life that ennobles the human spirit. A life of commitments that does not depend on consequences. (Jim March in March and Schechter, 2003)

In the next section, we reflect about several examples of unlikely change-makers in different core domains of world polity.

## EXAMPLES OF QUIXOTIC INSTITUTIONAL WORK IN DIFFERENT DOMAINS

### Quixotic Institutional Work in Civil Society: The Role of Social and Artistic Movements

In the introduction we have mentioned the example of Greta Thunberg, a 15-year-old teenager who decided to stop attending school because a formal education based on traditional curricula would be meaningless in a world where young generations have a future radically disrupted by climate collapse. Her personal school strike for climate

has started the 'Fridays for Future' social movement, with school children skipping classes on Fridays to protest for climate action. Despite these impactful consequences of her actions, Greta can be seen as a prototypical example of a quixotic institutional worker. She did not sit down in front of the Swedish Parliament with the purpose of founding a social movement, but rather because of a breakdown in meaning regarding the traditional motivation for kids' education: having a better future. Having understood and studied climate science, 'school as usual' no longer made sense to her. Hence, she acted out of a logic of appropriateness, seeking 'consistency with imperatives of the self more than with imperatives of the environment' (March, 2011, p. 356). In doing so, she had limited tools and resources at her disposal beyond her own body and a cardboard sign, akin to Quixote's thin, old horse Rosinante and makeshift armour.

The resulting climate movement has initially been more or less prone to accept the liberal-capitalist model of world society. The initial positions by Greta Thunberg of Fridays for Future aimed at petitioning the political system to engage in policies and actions that would avoid future climate breakdown by phasing out oil and gas. The requests were usually politically unspecific and did not aim at system change – apart from some fringe leftist climate movements like the Austrian 'System Change no Climate Change'. Also the cognate British-born international movement 'Extinction Rebellion' that engaged in more radical and disruptive actions positioned itself as non-political, trying to attract activists from all political orientations interested in safeguarding nature. Building on central institutions of world polity such as human rights, these movements try to reconstruct the position of humanity and fellow beings in nature in different, non-extractive ways. By striving to disentangle progress from economic growth, linking economy to climate justice, problematizing states' entanglements with capital, or demanding a reform of representative democracy by complementing it with more long-term oriented citizen assemblies or parliamentary chambers for future generations, these movements aim to repair rather than disrupt some of the central institutions of world polity.

Only recently has a minority of these movements become more politicized. Some attempts at directly defining a coherent alternative world order radically departing from the liberal-capitalist world polity draw on Marxism and leftist thought (Adler, 2019; Van der Velden and White, 2021). Others are presented as dampening the excesses of for-profit capitalism or as a step towards a post-capitalist system in which ownership of firms is held by cooperatives oriented towards the common good. In all versions, they emphasize small size, community, de- or post-growth, and localism as conducive to more sustainable behaviour.[2] However, localist solutions – here we agree with the *Point* – can only be a contribution to concretely address the climate crisis if they are conceived and organized as a prefigurative anticipation of system-level solutions, that is, if they contribute to culture change at word polity level. In this sense, quixotic institutional work by such movements is powerful, as it directly challenges unsustainable globalized practices by a more radical focus on institutional repair.

Symbolic elements are central to these actions, like children striking and skipping school, or the potent emotional impact of slow funeral marches for our species

organized by Extinction Rebellion. Here the boundary between activism and activist art tends to blur. One example is the climate-related GoBugsGo project (https://gobugsgo.org/) by Austrian artist Edgar Honetschaeger who founded an association to buy land in several countries and create 'non-human zones' for insects so as to preserve food security using artistic means to elevate the disgusting image bugs have in our society. One of the actions consisted in demolishing a building to rewild an acquired property. The artist, with the help of the other members of the association and motivated by both his concern for the preservation of biodiversity and beauty and by a dissatisfaction with the institutionalized art system, organizes actions within the boundaries of law showing how difficult it is to engage in effective climate/biodiversity actions – owning land without 'using' it for anthropocentric aims is often prohibited by laws or regulations.

## Quixotic Institutional Work by Experts and Professionals

Beyond social and artistic movements, culture change is often carried forward via experts and professionals (Schofer et al., 2012). An important group of professionals challenging core pillars of world society are lawyers, who in different places of the world are putting pressure on governments to act more in favour of the climate and less in favour of economic growth at all costs. For instance, the still undecided case of the Peruvian farmer Saúl Luciano Lliuya suing the German energy giant RWE for its contribution to climate change and demanding compensation for the risk of glacial flooding in his hometown has these characteristics (Burhans, 2022). Or the case of Polly Higgins, a British lawyer, who dedicated her life to advocating for 'ecocide' – the destruction of ecosystems – to be recognized as an international crime on par with genocide (https://www.stopecocide.earth). Hers was seen by most as an overly idealistic and improbable campaign. However, while not yet codified in international law, her work has sparked global discussions, and the International Criminal Court has shown increasing interest in addressing environmental destruction.

Again, these cases build on the core institutions of world polity, in particular the idea of a right of a life in freedom, and thereby improvise on and repurpose existing cultural materials to organize legal action against polluting corporations and countries. At the same time, they contribute to questioning and refining them. Because these cases often start as long shots, challenging entrenched systems of power and prioritizing ecological well-being over short-term economic gains, they have clear quixotic characteristics. For instance, lawyers representing Lliuya have faced significant financial and reputational risks and Higgins sold her house to finance her campaign, all the while being considered as harming the legal profession by many colleagues (Monbiot, 2019). However, these cases paved the way for cultural change through broader shifts in public opinion and legal frameworks (Branch and Minkova, 2023), not least because law and ideology are strictly connected (Sypnowich, 2019).

Scientists were the first to warn about climate change decades ago, and hence we can find many examples of quixotic institutional work among the scientific profession, originally mainly among climate scientists, but increasingly also among other disciplines.

A prototypical example of quixotic institutional work is offered by the social scientist Gianluca Grimalda's decision not to fly back to Kiel (Germany) from a research trip to Papua New Guinea despite the threat of dismissal by his employer. This decision was motivated by his commitment to actively living out his principles of climate protection, reducing his carbon dioxide emissions tenfold compared to flying. During his six-month research stay in Papua New Guinea, he conducted a study on the impacts of climate change on some of the world's poorest communities and their adaptive strategies. He wanted to keep a promise made to local indigenous residents not to further contribute to their climate suffering with his own carbon footprint.

Grimalda's quixotic action reflects a deep commitment to his values, prioritizing climate protection over convenience and institutional expectations – he was dismissed in October 2023 due to his refusal to fly but won monetary compensation in the lawsuit against his former employer in the labour court in January 2025 (of which he declared to donate Euro 60.000 to movements or associations working for climate protection and climate activism). His choice to travel by land and sea, despite the logistical challenges, underscores a non-consequentialist approach where the intrinsic value of his actions outweighed immediate practical benefits. Moreover, a group of seven academics from five countries started a petition to sustain him in the trial against his dismissal that was signed by more than 9500 other academics within a few days (https://innn.it/klimaforscher-entlassen). In the trial and throughout his journey he was also supported by Scientist Rebellion, an academic climate movement in which Grimalda participates and RAZ, an NGO offering support for an active civil society. Grimalda's action garnered attention from major international media outlets, including The New York Times, The Guardian, and CNN, particularly after his shocking dismissal for refusing to fly (see the documentary in four languages by Casalis, 2024).

The action is quixotic in that the five tons of GHGs saved in the land and sea trip are nothing compared to the daily emissions of academia but are everything if the guiding principle of action is appropriateness and being true to personal values and identity. The action is exemplary of this kind of institutional work also because of its wide symbolic resonance as well as prefigurative and collective character. Differently from similarly inspired actions of reaching a conference by train instead of flying (see, for instance, #EGOSbyTrain; Delmestri et al., 2021; Schuessler et al., 2021), this example is well beyond anything conceivable in academia and beyond. The disproportionately long distance and duration is an explicit symbolic expression of the need to radically repair our current institutionalized practices. Setting the time and efforts far beyond any latitude of acceptance disturbs the web of institutionalized meaning within which the practice of academic travelling is embedded. Moreover, the spike in attention by the academic community opens the possibility for this action to create the ground for more realistic changes like the ones scholarly societies are starting to implement (e.g., measuring the carbon footprint of conferences, as the European Group for Organizational Studies has started to do, or creating a multiyear plan of physical and online events, as the Society for the Advancement of Socio-Economics now does). This aligns with the essence of quixotic institutional work, where actors navigate their environments with prefigurational creativity and a strong sense of personal identity,

embedded in a web of supporters, thereby challenging established norms and practices and creating room for radical institutional repair beyond the purely rhetorical embellishments of business as usual.

## Quixotic Institutional Work in Politics

The above examples illustrate how civil society, artists, and expert actors follow a logic of appropriateness in line with climate science when breaking out of what would be considered 'normal' in the existing institutional order. In domains more closely dominated by the 'iron cage' of the liberal-capitalist world order, that is, in the economy and in politics, we also find examples of actors following a logic of appropriateness, though often mixed with a logic of consequence.

An example for a shift in the dominance of the liberal global market order in politics are the recent mandatory human rights due diligence legislations that provide for environmental protection under the banner of universal human rights – a core world society institution. These legislations directly challenge WTO obligations and widespread understandings of 'the market', raising legal as well as governance questions as to how human and environmental standards can be integrated into existing trade regimes (Bäumler, 2022). While their genesis is a complex, multi-layered process, the origins of the German Due Diligence law show traces of quixotic institutional work. In particular one Minister, Gerd Müller from the Bavarian conservative party CSU, pushed for the ratification of such a law, which creates a market-protected space in the global economy in which planetary and social boundaries can be respected (Schuessler et al., 2023). He hereby acted entirely against the party line, which strongly supports deregulation. In fact, in the campaign for the 2025 snap elections in Germany the party promises to abandon the recently introduced legislation entirely. Müller, when advocating for the need for such a law, strongly relied on a logic of appropriateness by stating that it is simply not right that so much labour and environmental exploitation goes into the products we consume.

We observed a similar quixotic action by the Austrian environmental minister Eleonore Gewessler from the green party (the junior party in the government coalition at the time) who leveraged the grey areas in Austrian law and enabled the approval of the EU Nature Restoration Law in June 2024,[3] against the will of the Chancellor, his conservative party and the pronouncements of the majority of ministers and state (*Land*) governors. She stated: 'I cannot reconcile it with my conscience to let this opportunity go away without doing everything we can' (Ministry for Environment, press release June 16th 2024; our transl.). The consequence of her decision was that the chancellor reported her for abuse of office and offence of the constitution (she has been later freed from all accusations) and that the relationships between the two parties were so strained that after the September 2024 general election the green party has been excluded from talks regarding the restatement of the coalition.

Such efforts to restrain unfettered marketization vary across national policies, or even regionally, as they typically depend on the existence of alternative logics of action and actors such as trade unions or religions that prioritize responsibility over profitability (Greenwood et al., 2010; Yan et al., 2019). Above we have presented

Jepperson and Meyer's (1991) classification of national polities. Looking at available data and studies, it seems that liberal polities, if we do not consider small oil-producing countries, tend to have the highest GHGs emissions per-capita in the world (e.g., Australia, USA, Canada; data.footprintnetwork.org) independent of the GDP per-capita (Ritchie et al., 2023). Özler and Obach (2009) found that the higher the Freedom House Index of economic freedoms (a measure of liberalism), the worse the ecological performance. Similarly, Scruggs (2003) discovered that between 1970 and 2000, corporatist countries outperformed others among the OECD nations. The fact that in liberal countries capitalism has its widest expansion and that unfettered individualism is more valued and inequality more accepted than in other countries is a possible explanation. Mann (2013) proposes an additional one: in corporatist systems, labour, and business groups, along with scientists and environmentalists, collaborate within government to negotiate on class, and environmental issues. This broad inclusion prevents lobbying from being dominated by industries most affected by environmental policies, because compromises between different industries are reached before presenting a unified plan to the government and labour. It may indeed then be the case that the above sketched pendulum-process spurred by quixotic action and followed by normalizing dynamics could find a more fertile ground in corporatist than in liberal polities.

## Quixotic Institutional Work in the Economy

In the economy, we can find many examples of entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs that challenge taken-for-granted beliefs and develop more sustainable business models. Often, again, these alternatives rest on quixotic institutional work. One example is the German company 'Rügenwalder Mühle', once one of the biggest producers of pork sausages in Germany. Christian Rauffus (then owner of the company) and Godo Röben (then Head of marketing) have turned the production to vegetarian/vegan sausages, raising media attention and widespread opposition by announcing that in 20 years the company would only produce no-meat sausages. Godo Röben was motivated by the parallels he saw between industrial animal farming and historical injustices like slavery.

Despite widespread scepticism, resistance from colleagues, and pushback from traditionalists in the industry, Röben championed the production of plant-based meats, framing the shift more as a pragmatic response to environmental, health, and market pressures than as a moral imperative (he indeed preferred to silence his commitments to climate action and animal rights after initial push-backs). His efforts have reshaped the company, with over 70 per cent of its products now being vegetarian or vegan. His work can be seen as quixotic, because, in his own words, 'among the 500 employees we had at the time, only myself and the owner thought we had to change; the remaining 499 said "what kind of non-sense are you talking about"' (interview conducted for this article on December 19th 2024). Culture change, in Röben's view, always takes at least a generation. In the process, it is important to offer alternatives – and these often develop in parallel in different places in the world. Here, a consequentialist logic comes to the fore: rather than moralizing, society needs to be convinced through a business case, and

good products. 'In liberal societies, people need to be convinced, and this takes time', he argues.

Another example is the Italian B-Corp Vaia (https://www.vaia.eu/en/) founded in 2019 following the Vaia Storm catastrophe that led to the destruction of tens of millions of trees and the collapse of the alpine ecosystem in the affected areas. Abandoning well-paid jobs at Coca Cola or NATO the three young social entrepreneurs developed products to be made by local artisans from the wood of the fallen trees to repair the physical scars left on the forests and heal the emotional wounds left in them and in the social fabric of the local communities. Close friends warned them of the move, considering it quite 'foolish'. One product is the Vaia Cube, a passive amplifier for smartphones whose design includes an intentional cut aligned with the wood's natural grain, representing harmony with its structure but also a citation of the storm and the healing work necessary to re-empower nature and the local community. Indeed, for each product sold, a tree is planted during ritual moments involving the local community and visitors. The entrepreneurs emphasize the combination of upscaling wood from the damaged forests, artistic design (already exposed at the Milanese Triennale), giving back by involving local carpenters and planting trees, and creating local community connections among forest authorities, schools, and citizens. They see the storm as a warning of the risks of climate-induced collapse for the need to both strengthen local communities and create global connections – interestingly the global sale of the wooden cubes is framed as 'amplifying' the values of sustainability, connection, and care carried by physical objects.

## RETHINKING AGENCY FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE – FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS FROM A CULTURAL INSTITUTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE

The notion of quixotic institutional work points to several interesting avenues for further research while giving due weight to cultural institutionalists' scepticism of normativity (Drori, 2019) that is inherent in any prescriptive approach.

First, by taking seriously the notion of crisis, collapse, and cracks in the dominant institutional order as well as the broader geo-political shifts currently underway, cultural institutionalists could direct their attention to the latent, emergent proto-institutions arising from dissatisfaction with the status quo, potentially offering prefigurative alternatives or 'real utopias' (Wright, 2013). Established institutional arrangements are not replaced in crisis situations by other arrangements coming from nowhere, but elaboration, theorization, and prefiguration are needed to prepare the ground for institutional change (Strang and Meyer, 1993). This can happen both at the margins of society within social movements, NGOs, or local communities (Bhatt et al., 2024), and more centrally in applied research institutes, universities, or parties, in courts or in associational structures such as trade unions. Cultural institutionalists could study these attempts at theorizing new institutions when they are in the making, embedding themselves in more ethnographic or action-oriented research designs and comparing such proto-institutions with established ones (e.g., Zilber, 2024).

Second, in doing so, cultural institutionalists could be inspired by the notion of quixotic institutional work, searching for further examples and engaging in a deeper theorization of this form of agency and the associated dynamics of change. For instance, as our examples have shown, while the logic of appropriateness ignites quixotic institutional work, it is then sometimes complemented or even superseded by a logic of consequence, particularly in the political and economic sphere. Such efforts can occasionally lead to groundbreaking advancements and inspire others for their ideals and their beauty (Boyd and Mitchell, 2013) but, while noble in intention, may be seen as impractical or unlikely to succeed. Alternatively, they may quickly be coopted into the 'mainstream', losing their radical potential. Radical forms of protest and ideas (e.g., gluing oneself to airport runways, throwing soup on paintings, demolishing buildings, requesting full decarbonization within 5 years) can also have a positive effect on moderate movements and the general acceptance of climate policies, the so-called radical-flank effect (Ostarek et al., 2024). This effect seems to point to a broader mechanism by which quixotic institutional workers – with typically more 'radical' ideas and approaches – shape culture change in different waves over time creating favourable conditions for others to act.

While we have mainly highlighted individual examples, the non-consequentialist vision of action characterizing quixotic institutional work can also become a property of the collective efforts of institutional workers acting according to the logic of appropriateness. Quixotic institutional workers are fundamentally engaged in deinstitutionalization practices that require 'not a powerful or culturally sophisticated actor, but one capable of working in highly original and potentially counter-cultural ways' (Lawrence et al., 2009, p. 238) following a *radical* repair-focused form of deinstitutionalization (Crawford et al., 2024) of those elements of the liberal world polity that stand in the way of actualizing the values it exposes. This process can likely be understood neither as a form of 'fixing' world society through technological innovation, nor as the quasi-revolutionary acts envisioned by the *Point* and the other *Counterpoint*. Rather, quixotic institutional workers often work in highly distributed and uncoordinated ways. Yet, these dispersed developments may nonetheless accumulate in changing people's culturally constructed values and beliefs, creating waves of change where quixotic action followed by normalizing dynamics spurs culture change in non-linear, two-steps-forward-one-step-backward, asynchronous ways (see also Djelic and Quack, 2007, 2008; Sewell, 1996).

Specific to quixotic institutional work and a promising avenue for future research is its syncretic character: modern art movements that integrate environmental and political activism, the logic of political advocacy blends with the expressive and symbolic modes of art, social enterprises mixing business strategies with artistic design and/or social movement goals. Such syncretic blending of artistic creativity, local artisanship, social activism, and/or business strategy create an effect akin to a synesthetic experience, where one 'sees' the harmony of diverse logics working together and is driven into a new envisioned cultural domain. These distributed and composite dynamics of change triggered by quixotic institutional work could be studied empirically in different contexts, both 'Western' and 'non-Western' (Wickert et al., 2024), and need to be traced across longer periods of time.

Third, the boundary conditions and limitations of quixotic institutional work deserve attention. We propose that quixotic institutional work, often ridiculed by the powers that be, may become more successful in leading to cultural change when ecological crisis events precipitate even further, producing a reality breakdown capable of spurring institutional reflexivity (Crace et al., 2023, p. 77). The combination of the material crisis of climate disruption with the symbolic challenge of alternative prefigurative arrangements and quixotic actions poses a threat to the stability of the existing order, possibly creating the conditions for change, because it 'demonstrates empirically that one's own universe is less than inevitable' (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, p. 126). Opposition and excessive material decoupling may then thwart the activation and completion of institutional reproduction, leading to cultural and institutional change, although it may also lead to 'environmental ideologies … comparable to revolutionary socialism, aggressive nationalism, and even fascism' in relatively less affected Global North countries (Mann, 2013, p. 397). The strength of institutional work performed by actors that complement themselves in their ideal and practical orientations (somehow as Don Quixote and Sancho Panza did in the novel; Jim March in Delmestri, 2019, p. 194), using different – albeit often weak – tools at hand could tilt the balance towards effective climate action.

Further research could examine how the cracks in our symbolic universe accompanying adverse climate events can facilitate the imagination of new cultural counternarratives and allow for prefigurative experiments (Reinecke, 2018; Schiller-Merkens, 2024), especially in the context of national polities that have not yet completely succumbed to the neoliberal cultural order (cf. Lerch et al., 2022). Further research also needs to pay attention to digital technology as a carrier and driver of culture change far across national boundaries (Hinings et al., 2018), increasingly fostering non-progressive developments. By engaging in these endeavours, cultural institutionalists could take on the role of solution-oriented scholars as one to craft 'alternative ideologies', that is, 'to theorize a desirable 'new normal' along with a path towards transition' (Zankl and Grimes, 2024), even if alternative social arrangements occur 'at the fringes of society' (Gümüsay and Reinecke, 2022, p. 238). As Schlesier et al. (2024) recently measured, a life within ecological and social boundaries is possible, but requires drastic societal changes. Quixotic institutional work is built on the vision that a better life for all is possible. In the words of Wright (2019), this means the construction of a just society in which all persons would have broadly equal access to the material and social means necessary to live a flourishing life. This society, as all alternatives to the liberal-capitalist order, must be assessed in terms of the ways in which they foster or obstruct the realization of the values of equality and fairness, democracy and freedom, and community and solidarity (Wright, 2019).

## CONCLUSIONS

While powerful parts of the world are moving towards a phase of post-liberalism that contests world society, the outcome of such contestation is currently unclear. Nationalist and right-wing movements have to date signalled little concern for the

climate, promoting instead a continuation of economic growth addiction by nation-states, blind profit-seeking by corporations, and an individual lifestyle of overconsumption (Mann, 2013). Given that the climate crisis is a global challenge, 'tribalist' countermovements may at best produce localist alternatives (in the language of the *Point*). And despite some positive signs of decarbonization in China's energy sector (Ritchie, 2023), the effectiveness of authoritarian states in addressing climate change often relies on providing material goods to maintain popular consensus, which can conflict with stringent climate policies. Given the global nature of the challenge confronting humanity, retrenchment into localism and technophobia is not an option anymore (Jonas, 1984; Page, 2021), nor is the shift to an authoritarian world order a desirable one from a societal perspective. Hence, we desperately need a world society that supports climate action and tries a different path than the one taken so far. While we agree with the *Point* and other political economists (e.g., Streeck, 2024) that a reassertion of state agency pushing back on globalized market forces is part of the solution, cultural institutionalism points out that such state agency cannot be decoupled from transnational developments.

Given that the climate crisis is a global challenge, and that templates for state agency are derived from world polity as a set of cultural and not just economic institutions, we argue that system change needs to entail a radical repair of world polity. Quixotic institutional workers in different contexts may eventually instigate a departure from the trajectory of perpetual growth in the utilization of planetary resources, push back on the dominance of market and 'winners-take-all' entrepreneurial templates for addressing social needs, and reinvigorate templates of collective action and participation, including in democratic state governance. As recently argued by climate scientists (Eriksen et al., 2024, p. 1214): 'Societal transformations involve changes in values, worldviews, ideologies, structures, and sociopolitical relationships that underlie choices and actions'. Here, a cultural institutionalist perspective – while developed in a different time period marked by the cultural and economic hegemony of the USA – offers several useful avenues for understanding the drivers and mechanisms of, but also barriers to such changes.

Since a particular form of neoliberal capitalism has become dominant in the world with the demise of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, more than half of all carbon pollution has been emitted. This puts capitalism (whether democratic or authoritarian) in the difficult position to carry the burden of proof of not being the primary cause of the impending ecological catastrophe. We agree with the *Point* that a more democratic state should be part of a solution and with the other *Counterpoint* that we need social-climate movements to effect change. However, climate movements and other actors that could drive such change do not have *über*-powers. Hence, for us, the central mechanism of systems change is not power but cultural change made possible by a combination of symbolic action and collective prefigurative practice. We have named this combination quixotic institutional work, a variant of institutional work based on individual and collective action driven more by appropriateness and ideals than by carefully calculated consequences of action. As academic 'knights-errant', we are also responsible for contributing to culture change, not least by embracing quixotic endeavours without fear of mockery or failure.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors wish to express their gratitude to the editors, Daniel Muzio and Christopher Wickert, for their expert guidance and thoughtful and encouraging comments throughout the review process. We wish to thank Gili Drori, Arno Kourula, Sigrid Quack, Jukka Rintamäki, Florian Ueberbacher, and the authors of the Point (Paul Adler, Zlatko Bodrožić) and the other Counterpoint (Daniel Nyberg, Christopher Wright) for their valuable feedback on earlier versions of this paper. We also thank the participants of the EGOS 2024 Sub-Theme 59 on 'Regulating Organizations' for comments and reflections. Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

## NOTES

[1] The two concepts have been used interchangeably in the literature (Cole, 2017) although world polity refers to the institutional structures and ideologies and world society to the dynamic network of relationships among the actors constituted by such institutions and ideologies (Jepperson and Meyer, 1991; Thomas, 2009).

[2] It is worth mentioning that some of these ideas have been attractive to far-right movements advocating for ethnonationalism and ethnopluralism (Mudde, 2019; Stern, 2019). Hence, in social movements we see a mix between incremental repair-focused institutional work and more disruptive forms (Crawford et al., 2024), which can range across the political spectrum or be interpreted, as in the Ecotopia vision once developed by Ernest Callenbach (1975), as 'a crude mixture of emancipatory and right-wing ideas' (Bierl and Lehmann, 1996; our transl.) combining ecofeminist, deep ecology, green capitalism, mysticism, and ethnopluralism.

[3] Austria accounts for only about 2 per cent of the EU population, a number however necessary to reach the required 65 per cent of EU-population to pass the law.

## REFERENCES

Adler, P. S. (2019). *The 99 Percent Economy: How Democratic Socialism Can Overcome the Crises of Capitalism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Andre, P., Boneva, T., Chopra, F. and Falk, A. (2024). 'Misperceived social norms and willingness to act against climate change'. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 1–46.

Bäumler, J. (2022). 'Germany's supply chain due diligence act: Is it compatible with WTO obligations?'. *ZEuS Zeitschrift für Europarechtliche Studien*, **25**, 265–86.

Beck, U. (2009). *World at risk*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Book.

Bhatt, B., Qureshi, I., Shukla, D. M. and Hota, P. K. (2024). 'Prefiguring alternative organizing: Confronting marginalization through projective cultural adjustment and tempered autonomy'. *Organization Studies*, **45**, 59–84.

Bierl, P. and Lehmann, A. (1996). *Und ewig rauschen die Wälder*. ÖkolinX Nr. 23/1996.

Bodrožić, Z. and Adler, P. S. (2025). 'System change, not climate change: Charting alternative responses to the climate crisis through international comparative research'. *Journal of Management Studies*.

Boyd, A. and Mitchell, D. O. (Eds) (2013). *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution*. New York: Or Books.

Branch, A. and Minkova, L. (2023). 'Ecocide, the anthropocene, and the international criminal court'. *Ethics & International Affairs*, **37**, 51–79.

Bromley, P., Schofer, E. and Longhofer, W. (2020). 'Contentions over world culture: The rise of legal restrictions on foreign funding to NGOs, 1994–2015'. *Social Forces*, **99**, 281–304.

Burhans, Z. (2022). 'Research report two: Lliuya v. RWE AG'. *Res Publica – Journal of Undergraduate Research*, **27**, 97–101.

Callenbach, E. (1975). *Ecotopia*. New York: Bantam Books.

Casalis, P. (2024). *The Researcher. Why I Lost My Job to Save 5 Tons of $CO_2$*. Produzioni Fuorifuoco. Available at: https://vimeo.com/ondemand/researcher (accessed 8 January 2025).

Cole, W. M. (2017). 'World polity or world society? Delineating the statist and societal dimensions of the global institutional system'. *International Sociology*, **32**, 86–104.

Crace, L., Gehman, J. and Lounsbury, M. (2023). 'An unsettling crisis of collegial governance: Reality breakdowns as antecedents of institutional awareness'. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, **87**, 77–109.

Crawford, B., Toubiana, M. and Coslor, E. (2024). 'From catch-and-harvest to catch-and-release: Trout unlimited and repair-focused deinstitutionalization'. *Organization Studies*, **45**, 109–36.
Delbridge, R., Helfen, M., Pekarek, A., Schuessler, E. and Zietsma, C. (2024). 'Organizing sustainably: Introduction to the special issue'. *Organization Studies*, **45**, 7–29.
Delmestri, G. (2019). 'La Vita: James March talks to Giuseppe Delmestri'. *Studi organizzativi*, **1**, 181–94.
Delmestri, G., Etchanchu, H., Bothello, J., Habersang, S. and Schüßler, E. (2021). 'OS4Future: An academic advocacy movement for our future'. In Starik M. and Kanashiro P. (Eds), *Personal Sustainability Practices*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 218–29.
Djelic, M. L. (2007). *Changing Forms of Capitalism, Globalization and the Marketization of (Nearly) Everything*. Uppsala: Uppsala Lectures in Business.
Djelic, M. L. and Quack, S. (2007). 'Overcoming path dependency: Path generation in open systems'. *Theory and Society*, **36**, 161–86.
Djelic, M. L. and Quack, S. (2008). 'Institutions and transnationalization'. In Greenwood, R., Oliver, C., Suddaby, R. and Sahlin, K. (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Institutionalism*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 299–324.
Drori, G. S. (2019). 'Hasn't institutional theory always been critical?!'. *Organization Theory*, **1**, 1–9.
Drori, G. S., Yong Jang, S. and Meyer, J. W. (2006). 'Sources of rationalized governance: Cross-national longitudinal analyses, 1985–2002'. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, **51**, 205–29.
Eriksen, S. H., Simpson, N. P., Glavovic, B., Ley, D., Carr, E. R., Fernández-Carril, L. and Degvold, F. (2024). 'Pathways for urgent action towards climate resilient development'. *Nature Climate Change*, **14**, 1212–5.
Foucault, M. (1975). *The Order of Things*. London: Routledge.
Furuta, J., Drori, G. and Meyer, J. W. (2024). 'The rise of the social state as a global model: A comparative and historical study, 1870–2000'. *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology*, **11**, 13–43.
Greenwood, R., Díaz, A. M., Li, S. X. and Lorente, J. C. (2010). 'The multiplicity of institutional logics and the heterogeneity of organizational responses'. *Organization science*, **21**(2), 521–39.
Gümüsay, A. A. and Reinecke, J. (2022). 'Researching for desirable futures: From real utopias to imagining alternatives'. *Journal of Management Studies*, **59**, 236–42.
Hadler, M. (2017). *The influence of global ideas on environmentalism and human rights*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
Hinings, B., Gegenhuber, T. and Greenwood, R. (2018). 'Digital innovation and transformation: An institutional perspective'. *Information and Organization*, **28**, 52–61.
Hoffman, A. J. and Jennings, P. D. (2021). 'Institutional-political scenarios for Anthropocene society'. *Business & Society*, **60**, 57–94.
Horner, S., Cornelissen, J. and Zundel, M. (2024). 'Panacea or dangerous practice: A counterpoint to Hanisch's argument for prescriptive theorizing'. *Journal of Management Studies*, **61**, 1717–30.
Islam, G., Rüling, C. C. and Schüßler, E. (2019). 'Rituals of critique and institutional maintenance at the United Nations Climate Change Summits'. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, **65**, 23–40.
Jepperson, R. L. (2002). 'Political modernities: Disentangling two underlying dimensions of institutional differentiation'. *Sociological Theory*, **20**, 61–85.
Jepperson, R. L. and Meyer, J. W. (1991). 'The public order and the construction of formal organizations'. In Powell, W. and DiMaggio, P. J. (Eds), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 204–31.
Jepperson, R. L. and Meyer, J. W. (Eds) (2021). *Institutional Theory: The Cultural Construction of Organizations, States and Identities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Jonas, H. (1984). *The Imperative of Responsibility. In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
Kaplan, R. (2024). '"Rather Than Follow Change, Business Must Lead this Transformation": Global business's institutional project to privatize global environmental governance, 1990–2010'. *Organization Studies*, **45**(1), 161–88.
Kornberger, M., Leixnering, S. and Meyer, R. E. (2019). 'The logic of tact: How decisions happen in situations of crisis'. *Organization Studies*, **40**, 239–66.
Lawrence, T. B., Suddaby, R. and Leca, B. (Eds) (2009). *Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organizations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Lerch, J. C., Bromley, P. and Meyer, J. W. (2022). 'Global neoliberalism as a cultural order and its expansive educational effects'. *International Journal of Sociology*, **52**, 97–127.
Mann, M. (2013). *The Sources of Social Power: Volume 4, Globalizations, 1945–2011*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

March, J. G. (2003). 'A scholar's quest'. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, **12**, 205–7.
March, J. G. (2011). 'A scholar's quest'. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, **20**(4), 355–7.
March, J. G. and Olsen, J. P. (1998). 'The institutional dynamics of international political orders'. *International organization*, **52**(4), 943–69.
March, J. G. and Schechter, S. C. (2003). *Passion and Discipline. Don Quixote's Lessons for Leadership*. DVD. Stanford, CA: Stanford University.
Meyer, J. W., Boli, J., Thomas, G. M. and Ramirez, F. O. (1997). 'World society and the nation-state'. *American Journal of Sociology*, **103**, 144–81.
Mazzucato, M. (2021). *Mission economy: A moonshot guide to changing capitalism*. Dublin: Penguin UK.
Meyer, J. W. and Jepperson, R. L. (2000). 'The 'actors' of modern society: The cultural construction of social agency'. *Sociological Theory*, **18**, 100–20.
Meyer, J. W. and Jepperson, R. L. (2021). 'Introduction: cultural institutionalism'. In Jepperson, R. L. and Meyer, J. W. (Eds), *Institutional Theory: The Cultural Construction of Organizations, States and Identities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3–23.
Monbiot, G. (2019). 'The destruction of the Earth is a crime. It should be prosecuted'. *The Guardian*, 28 March.
Mudde, C. (2019). *The Far Right Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Newark, D. A. (2021). 'Pictures at an exhibition'. In Beckman, C. M. (Ed), *Carnegie Goes to California: Advancing and Celebrating the Work of James G. March*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited, 261–302.
Nicolini, D., Delmestri, G., Goodrick, E., Reay, T., Lindberg, K. and Adolfsson, P. (2016). 'Look what's back! Institutional complexity, reversibility and the knotting of logics'. *British Journal of Management*, **27**, 228–48.
North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Nyberg, D. and Wright, C. (2025). 'Confronting the climate crisis: Fossil fuel hegemony and the need for decarbonization, degrowth and democracy'. *Journal of Management Studies*.
Ostarek, M., Simpson, B., Rogers, C. and Ozden, J. (2024). 'Radical climate protests linked to increases in public support for moderate organizations'. *Nature Sustainability*, **7**, 1626–32.
Özler, Ş. İ. and Obach, B. K. (2009). 'Capitalism, state economic policy and ecological footprint: An international comparative analysis'. *Global Environmental Politics*, **9**, 79–108.
Page, J. (2021). 'Art for a future planet: Beyond apocalypse'. *Environmental Humanities*, **13**, 159–80.
Pernicka, S. and Schüßler, E. (2022). 'Zwischen Disruption und Integration: Governance von digitalen Plattformen im Personentransportsektor aus feldtheoretischer Perspektive'. *KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, **74**(Suppl 1), 355–81.
Reinecke, J. (2018). 'Social movements and prefigurative organizing: Confronting entrenched inequalities in occupy London'. *Organization Studies*, **39**, 1299–321.
Richardson, K., Steffen, W., Lucht, W., Bendtsen, J., Cornell, S. E., Donges, J. F., Drüke, M., Fetzer, I., Bala, G., Von Bloh, W., Feulner, G. and Rockström, J. (2023). 'Earth beyond six of nine planetary boundaries'. *Science Advances*, **9**, eadh2458.
Ritchie, H., Roser, M. and Rosado, P. (2023). *$CO_2$ and Greenhouse Gas Emissions*. Available at https://ourworldindata.org/co2-and-greenhouse-gas-emissions (accessed 22 December 2024).
Schiller-Merkens, S. (2024). 'Prefiguring an alternative economy: Understanding prefigurative organizing and its struggles'. *Organization*, **31**, 458–76.
Schimank, U. (2024). 'What does John Meyer's "World Polity" perspective contribute to the understanding of Western modernity?' In *Keynote Speech, New Institutional Workshop*. Jena: Jena University.
Schlesier, H., Schäfer, M. and Desing, H. (2024). 'Measuring the doughnut: A good life for all is possible within planetary boundaries'. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, **448**, 141447.
Schofer, E., Hironaka, A., John, D. and Longhofer, W. (2012). 'Sociological institutionalism and world society'. In Amenta, E., Nash, K. and Scott, A. (Eds), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Political Sociology*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 57–68.
Schofer, E., Lerch, J. C. and Meyer, J. W. (2022). 'Illiberal reactions to higher education'. *Minerva*, **60**, 509–34.
Schuessler, E., Habersang, S., Gutierrez-Huerter O, G., Bothello, J., Etchanchu, H. and Delmestri, G. (2021). 'Sustainable conference organizing: practices and impact'. *ZDfm – Zeitschrift für Diversitätsforschung und-management*, **6**, 17–8.
Schuessler, E. S., Lohmeyer, N. and Ashwin, S. (2023). '"We can't compete on human rights": Creating market-protected spaces to institutionalize the emerging logic of responsible management'. *Academy of Management Journal*, **66**, 1071–101.
Scruggs, L. (2003). *Sustaining abundance: Environmental performance in industrial democracies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sewell, W. H. (1996). 'Historical events as transformations of structures: inventing revolution at the Bastille'. *Theory and Society*, **25**, 841–81.
Smets, M., Morris, T. I. M. and Greenwood, R. (2012). 'From practice to field: A multilevel model of practice-driven institutional change'. *Academy of Management Journal*, **55**, 877–904.
Stechemesser, A., Koch, N., Mark, E., Dilger, E., Klösel, P., Menicacci, L. and Wenzel, A. (2024). 'Climate policies that achieved major emission reductions: Global evidence from two decades'. *Science*, **385**, 884–92.
Stern, A. M. (2019). *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate: How the Alt-Right Is Warping the American Imagination*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
Strang, D. and Meyer, J. W. (1993). 'Institutional conditions for diffusion'. *Theory and Society*, **22**, 487–511.
Streeck, W. (2024). *Taking Back Control? States and State Systems After Globalism*. London: Verso Books.
Suddaby, R. (2023). 'Media review: Ronald L. Jepperson and John W. Meyer institutional theory: The cultural construction of organizations, states and identities'. *Organization Studies*, **44**, 515–8.
Sypnowich, C. 2019. 'Law and ideology'. In Zalta, E. N. (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2019 Edition)*. Available at https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/law-ideology/ (accessed 22 December 2024).
Thomas, G. M. (2009). 'World polity, world culture, world society'. *International Political Sociology*, **3**, 115–9.
Turchin, P. (2023). *End Times: Elites, Counter-Elites, and the Path of Political Disintegration*. Dublin: Penguin Press.
Van der Velden, J. and White, R. (2021). *The Extinction curve: growth and globalisation in the climate endgame*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited.
Velasco, K. (2023). 'Transnational backlash and the deinstitutionalization of liberal norms: LGBT1 rights in a contested world'. *American Journal of Sociology*, **128**, 1381–429.
Weber, M. (1930). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (translation by Parsons, Talcott)*. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
Whiteman, G., Walker, B. and Perego, P. (2013). 'Planetary boundaries: Ecological foundations for corporate sustainability'. *Journal of Management Studies*, **50**(2), 307–36.
Wickert, C. (2024). 'Prescriptive theorizing to tackle societal grand challenges: Promises and perils'. *Journal of Management Studies*, **61**, 1683–91.
Wickert, C., Potočnik, K., Prashantham, S., Shi, W. and Snihur, Y. (2024). 'Embracing non-Western contexts in management scholarship'. *Journal of Management Studies*, **61**, e1–24.
Wright, E. O. (2013). 'Transforming capitalism through real utopias'. *American Sociological Review*, **78**, 1–25.
Wright, E. O. (2019). *How to Be an Anticapitalist in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Verso Books.
Yan, S., Ferraro, F. and Almandoz, J. (2019). 'The rise of socially responsible investment funds: The paradoxical role of the financial logic'. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, **64**, 466–501.
Zankl, J. and Grimes, M. (2024). 'Taming unicorns: Toward a new normal of responsible entrepreneurship'. *Academy of Management Review*, **49**, 879–905.
Zilber, T. B. (2024). 'Narrating institutional logics into effect: Coherence across cognitive, political, and emotional elements'. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, **69**, 172–221.