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Agency, structure, institutions, discourse (ASID) in urban and regional development

Frank Moulaert^a, Bob Jessop^b  and Abid Mehmood^c 

^aPlanning & Development, ASRO, University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium; ^bDepartment of Sociology, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK; ^cSustainable Places Research Institute, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, Cardiff, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the relations among agency (A), structure (S), institutions (I), and discourse (D) and their analytical relevance for socio-economic development. It argues that an adequate account of these relations must recognize their inherent spatio-temporality and, hence, their space–time dynamics. This is not an optional extra but a definite descriptive and explanatory requirement. Moreover, while structure is recognized as a product of path-dependent institutionalization and path-shaping (collective) agency, agency is seen in turn as discursively and materially reproduced and transformed. This approach treats structure in terms of a differential spatio-temporal configuration of constraints and opportunities, reference to which informs the empirical analysis of strategic agency within the overall agency, structure, institutions, discourse (ASID) heuristic. The paper concludes with an eightfold typology of particular combinations of ASID features to guide analyses of socio-economic development in all its (dis-)junctural complexity.

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Urban and regional development analysis; structure; agency; institutions discourse

1. Introduction and background to the ASID model

The agency, structure, institutions, discourse (ASID) model has been developed as one of the main theoretical pillars of the DEMOLOGOS¹ research. The DEMOLOGOS project strove to substantially improve the methodology for analysing socio-economic development at different spatial scales, with a particular focus on the industrialized world. Five operational objectives were formulated to fulfil the project ambitions. First, provide a survey of theories of socio-economic development trajectories of industrialized economies – going back to the nineteenth century or earlier where relevant. Second, critically evaluate the explanatory power of these theories regarding socio-economic development trajectories and systems. Third, build a comprehensive (meta)theoretical framework for analysing socio-economic development in its institutional, historical, and territorial dynamics, using contemporary institutional debates as a synthesizing framework. Fourth, develop a

CONTACT Frank Moulaert  frank.moulaert@icloud.com

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methodology capable of validating the (meta)theoretical framework for diverse multi-scalar case studies from around the world. And, fifth, validate the meta-theoretical framework and the methodology through selected case studies of socio-economic development at different scales, taking account of their articulation from the local to the global. This approach also helped address the discontent among various academic, research, and policy circles with several assumptions and practices in recent socio-economic theory, methodology, and policy analysis (Novy, Mehmood, & Moulaert, 2013a). These concerns included the disconnection from the history of thought and practice in spatial development; dissatisfaction with the ideological pervasiveness of neoliberal approaches in scientific theory; neglect of important theoretical and methodological legacies in spatial development analysis; and misinterpretations of the meanings and nature of development, role of institutions and significant agents, culture, and power relations. In this respect, several theories were integrated within an overarching ontological and epistemological conceptual framework that included different themes in socio-economic development in accordance with specific trajectories (Moulaert & Jessop, 2013). A meta-framework was developed as a meta-theory (beyond 'theory of theories' or 'ontologically coherent' ensemble of theories and methodologies) in the sense of connecting methodology to theory. This meta-framework is based on a number of 'Synthesis papers', each of which theorises a thematic:

CULTURE, DISCOURSE, IDEOLOGY AND HEGEMONY – Analysis of social production of discourse and discursive chains

CAPITAL, CLASS and FORM – Form analysis: which forms do the generic processes of capital and class take? Space-time Dynamics?

REGULATION, REPRODUCTION and GOVERNANCE – Analysis of institutional dynamics etc.

DEVELOPMENT PAST – PRESENT – FUTURE – Analysis of collective action – Action research

AGENCY, STRUCTURE, INSTITUTIONS and DISCOURSE (ASID) – Strategic relational approach – Spatialized regulation analysis – Strategic Analysis

The meta-framework also examines various connections among these five thematics and how these connections explain the dynamics of spatial development. This paper elaborates the ASID thematic.

Discussions about the interaction between (individual) behaviour and (social) structures date back to pre-disciplinary times and occur in many disciplines and attempts at inter- or post-disciplinary synthesis. Indeed, the frequency of surveys over decades of debates on structure–agency interaction with or without institutional mediation or materialization illustrates the durability of this problem. This contribution offers a different take by adopting a fourfold model that serves to reveal the limitations of conventional approaches that focus exclusively on structure and agency.

The four tightly linked concepts in the ASID model are all crucial for the DEMOLOGOS project and its ambition to provide a robust methodology to analyse socio-economic development in space. For an adequate account of socio-economic development, one must refer to the *actions* that steer or interfere with the development processes, the *structures* that both constrain and enable action, the *institutions* that guide or hamper action and mediate the relation between structures and action, and the *discourses* and discursive practices that

are part of these interactions.² Yet, although most social scientists accept the analytical value of such concepts, there is little consensus on how to define them individually, let alone on how to investigate their connections and interaction. Thus we first present our own provisional definitions. In Section 2 we integrate them in the dynamic ASID model.

- Agency is *meaningful human behaviour*, individual or collective, that makes a significant difference in the natural and/or social worlds, either by direct, unmediated action or through the mediation of tools, machines, *dispositifs*, institutions, or other affordances. The differences made by agency include the appropriation and transformation of nature; the creation or variation of identities, subjectivities, or social standing; the design, building, re-arrangement, creative destruction, or dismantling of institutions; and the re-articulation of discourses. These and other effects occur in many and varied combinations.
- Structure comprises those moments of natural and/or social realities that, in the short- to medium-run and in a definite spatial context (typically wider than the ‘localissimo’), cannot be changed by a given individual or collective agency. The necessarily relative, relational, and temporary nature of structure in this sense means that the emergent properties of interaction among social agents vary with the potentially constrained agents’ spatio-temporal location and relative control over resources, affordances, and capacities that are relevant to modifying a given structure. Thus, for our purposes, the structure of natural and/or social realities must always be defined relative to the differential transformative power of social forces that are potentially subject to their constraining or facilitating powers.
- Institution: depending on the theory, this category can complement or rival that of ‘structure’. The ASID model views institutions as ‘socialized structure’, that is, a relatively enduring ensemble of structural constraints and opportunities. Institutions comprise a more or less coherent, interconnected set of routines, organizational practices, conventions, rules, sanctioning mechanisms, and practices that govern more or less specific domains of action. Some have global significance (e.g. the balance of power principle in international relations), others are more local (e.g. family rules about domestic turn-taking).
- Discourse is the production of intersubjective sense- and meaning-making. It is an essential moment of action (as meaningful behaviour), of structural constraints and conjunctural opportunities (which typically vary with agents’ identities, values, interests, spatio-temporal horizons, strategies, and tactics) and, a fortiori, of institutions (understood as ‘socialized structure’).

We now elaborate the conceptual dynamics of the ASID model in Section 2. We then explain the relationship of the model in terms of socio-economic development within the DEMOLOGOS methodological framework in Section 3. Finally, we look at the epistemology and ontology of ASID model to illustrate how it can support the analysis of socio-economic development at interconnected spatial scales within different theoretical perspectives.

2. The dynamics of the ASID model

In the ASID model, institutions mediate structure–agency dialectics by selectively shaping actors’ opportunities for individual or collective action in space and time. Such action may include conservation, transformation, or dissolution of institutions themselves. Thus testing our overall approach will benefit from identifying and operationalizing key

concepts for institutional analysis from a broad spectrum of middle-range theories (Appendix 1 compares and contrasts some of these and suggests how to combine them in analysing socio-economic development).

In particular, using the ASID model, we address the following questions:

- *How are agency, structure, institutions, and discourses interrelated?* How significant are the logics (or illogics) of individual conduct or interpersonal interaction for the micro-foundations of institutions and structures? How far do emergent macro-structural phenomena determine the operation of institutions and the effectiveness of collective and individual behaviour? How do institutions mediate structure–agency? What determines the spatio-temporal reach of emergent structural effects on social action? How do changes in cognitive and normative expectations or other discursive features change identities, subjectivities, and propensities to act individually or collectively and thereby modify institutional effects and the durability of structures? In short, how are ASID dynamics to be analysed and explained?
- Given our provisional definitions, we should focus on how institutions mediate structure–agency interactions in specific spatio-temporal contexts and relative to specific spatio-temporal horizons of action. Capacities for, and the extent of, time–space distanciation and compression are also important for socio-economic development – as are variable horizons (primacy of orientations to past, present, or future, short-termism vs long-termism, parochialism or globalism, glocalization, and so on). *Thus considered, how are the always relative, relational facilitating-constraining effects of structures related to the spatio-temporal dimensions of institutions? And how do they reflect social forces’ capacities to engage in space–time distanciation and compression and develop new spatio-temporal horizons of individual and/or collective action?* Such questions have rarely been explicitly addressed theoretically outside the regulation approach, some evolutionary and institutional economics and network theories (especially those analysing spatialized dynamics) and the strategic-relational approach.
- What is the role of semiosis, reflexivity and learning in mediating agency–institutions–structure dynamics? Relevant issues include: developing new imaginaries that see the world differently, that provide different narratives about past and present, that envision new futures, and so on; the exercise of ‘political, intellectual, and moral leadership’ as a basis for overcoming social fragmentation and immobilism or, conversely, for disorganizing forces committed to social transformation; the role of new imaginaries, identities, and subjectivities in strategic action, organizational and/or institutional design, institution building, and social revolution. New forms and contents of intersubjective meaning and new semiotic practices may stem from deliberate strategic action, the effects of new communication and discursive technologies and/or new ways of utilizing them, or the accumulation of small-scale changes. This is another area where issues of rescaling, space–time distanciation and compression, and shifts in spatial and temporal horizons of action may be significant.³
- The role of spatiality. Spatiality is a complex phenomenon and different theories privilege different dimensions (e.g. territory, place, scale, and network), composite spatial features (e.g. positionality, mobility) (see Jessop, 2016; Jessop, Brenner, & Jones, 2008; Leitner, Sheppard, & Sziarto, 2008), or its impact in different social fields (Coraggio, 1983; Markusen, 1983; Moulaert & Mehmood, 2010). For

example, some theories are scale-specific (focusing, for example, on local institutions in local development; others are explicitly multi-scalar (e.g. geographical historical materialism, with its emphasis on changing spatial and temporal fixes (Moulaert & Swyngedouw, 1989; Moulaert, Swyngedouw, & Wilson, 1988), and yet others claim, rightly or wrongly, to be *conceptually* scale-neutral (e.g. neo-classical economics). Likewise, theories may be territorially delimited (especially where methodological nationalism prevails) or global in scope; place-specific or generic; or oriented to networks or hierarchical command. Given these complexities, we should avoid one-dimensional spatial analysis in favour of the interaction and relative weight of territoriality, locality, scale, and networks. We also reject treating the macro-, meso-, or micro- labels as self-evident, pre-given, mutually exclusive properties of behaviour, whether individual or collective, and use them instead to describe emergent properties of specific sets of social relations and/or strategies concerned to re-articulate social relations at different sites (whether territorial, local, scalar, or networked) and across different temporalities and temporal horizons. This is obvious in the varieties of capitalism literature (Jessop, 2006, 2011b; Theodore, Peck and Brenner, 2005) and theories of local endogenous development (Moulaert, Mehmood, & Nussbaumer, 2005). This approach does not entail fetishizing space and time as if they exist outside of social relations and merely provide external parameters of social action. Instead we view spatiality and temporality as emergent properties and generating factors of structure–institution–agency–discourse relations with specific strategic-relational potential. For example, the time–space compression and time–space distantiation that allegedly typify contemporary globalization (notably superfast, hypermobile financial capital) alter the relative balance of material and spatio-temporal constraints and opportunities facing actors in national and local spaces, but their impact can be constrained in turn by measures that slow down speculative capital flows and/or require local resources and local reinvestment of profits.

- How should agency be analysed? There is now broad agreement that the capacity of action to make a difference is (re-)produced and mediated through subjects who are at least ‘practically conscious’. Although this requires attention to the phenomenological nature and implications of practical consciousness, many theories ignore this. The drivers of individual agency include motivation, psychological reactions to context, situational logic, personal creativity and innovation, defence of given identities and interests, or efforts to promote new identities, values, and interests. Besides such individual drivers, we should examine organizational agency, that is, organizational capacities and goals, and the role of inter-organizational collaboration (cf. Clegg, 1989).
- Adopting this approach to structure (as emergent constraint-opportunity) and agency reveals a paradox. For, if we focus on the *institutional* robustness of structural features and the *conjunctural* dynamics of institutional transformation, it is evident that agency has a central role in the reproduction and transformation of structures and institutions.

2.1. *The institutional robustness of structural features*

In opposition to diverse reductionisms that one-sidedly emphasize the role of one particular institutional order in determining socio-economic development, the DEMOLOGOS project and its ASID model insist on the relative (or, better, operational) autonomy of different social fields and institutional orders. The latter are defined by their relative concern with specific (discursively-materially) determined social problems (e.g. the economic appropriation and transformation of nature, the territorialization of political power, humankind's concern with the meaning of life, the nature and place of art).⁴ These are linked in turn to alternative societalization principles (*Vergesellschaftungsprinzipien*), that is, to competing visions-cum-projects to organize social relations on a societal (or more comprehensive) scale primarily in line with the logic of one institutional order. Where successful, this logic begins to colonize and reorganize other institutional orders and starts to totalize everyday life. However, such totalizing attempts generally fail because there are competing interpretations, efforts to reorganize society in line with other institutional logics, material problems caused by the interdependence among operationally autonomous institutional orders (which block complete subsumption), and resistance from social forces committed to other projects, identities, and interests (for an initial presentation and further development of this argument, see respectively Jessop, 2002, 2007; and Sum, 2009).

Reproduction of individual institutions or institutional orders is nonetheless far from automatic but always mediated through their interaction with other institutions and/or orders and by (transformative) social agency. In this context, DEMOLOGOS examines the emergent properties of the interaction, structural coupling and co-evolution of different fields and orders to produce patterns of institutionally mediated, agentially reproduced 'structured coherence'. Such coherence often hinges on the extent of time-robust institutional flexibility and the time-and-place dependent (in)capacity to secure structural change through institutional transformation. Regulatory reform of wage relations in post-Fordism illustrates both features.⁵

2.2. *Conjunctural dynamics and institutional transformation.*

The analysis of 'con-junctions' and 'dis-junctions' in and across institutional orders (especially the profit-oriented, market-mediated economy and the territorial state-centred political system), social movements, cultural processes, and social relations with nature, is integral to the study of institutional transformation and 'social agency'.

Conjuncture is defined here as the reciprocal of structure – and therefore equally part of structural dynamics (Jessop, 1982, 2007). It refers to a specific configuration of structural constraints and conjunctural opportunities formed through time-space-specific intersections across different social fields and institutional orders that thereby create definite opportunities (or constraints) for agency to produce (or block) institutional change. A conjuncture is a specific, over-determined condensation of intersecting processes that presents a path-dependent set of path-shaping opportunities for strategic agency. As such, it is a relative, relational, spatio-temporally specific notion that is analysed at the same time and in the same manner as structure. Crises are especially important conjuncturally because, as Debray notes, they are 'objectively over-determined, while subjectively

indeterminate' (1973, p. 113). But opportunities for institutional transformation also arise in many other contexts, especially when seen from a medium- to long-term perspective in which 'wars of position' may have a crucial strategic role.

The centrality of 'agency' to the ASID model is implicit in the structure–conjuncture distinction. If structure refers to the aspects of social interaction and institutional articulation that cannot be changed by given agents within a given period or spatial context, it follows that agents' capacities vary with these structural aspects. Institutions matter here because the structurally inscribed strategic selectivities of institutions shape actors' capacities to make a difference within a given conjuncture and, indeed, to transform sooner or later constraints and opportunities and their materialization in institutions. Significant issues here include the articulation of individual and collective agency; the socialization/institutionalization of agents; institutional resources and constraints; networking and institution building; mental maps, motivations and psychological processes – some of which are ideal reflections of structural relations (e.g. exploitative or domineering attitudes, tensions between competition and cooperation). Such relations can only be changed by transforming the relevant path-dependent materializing institutions and this depends in turn on the path-shaping power of (collective) agency. So we must analyse the links between the relative autonomy and selectivity of 'institutionalized agency' and purposeful action to change institutions, their selectivities, structural inertia, and path-dependent consequences.

Conjunctures are central to studies of socio-economic development, its institutional dynamics, and transformative agency. They are not isolated points in time–space but the complex product of interwoven discursive-material processes, each of which has its own spatio-temporalities and horizons of action. Such analyses are anticipated in business strategy analyses (Gadrey, 1992; Porter, 1988; Quinn, Mintzberg, & James, 1988) and, in more complex terms, in the regulation approach, especially regarding types of crisis and their differential scope for changing accumulation regimes and modes of regulation (e.g. Aglietta, 1976; Hirsch & Roth, 1987; Overbeek, 2003). Several analysts of the nineteenth-century social economy show how it became institutionalized through the favourable conjunction of a socio-economic vacuum due to unregulated industrial capitalism and colonial expansion and well-orchestrated, pluralistic, and multi-scalar social action (Bouchard, Borque, & Lévesque, 2000; Lipietz, 2001; Moulaert & Ailenei, 2005). DEMOLOGOS scholars have also studied relatively short periods of social change at the regional and local level without, however, disregarding links to (supra)national scales and/or longer time-horizons (Giunta & Martinelli, 1995; Moulaert & Willekens, 1987; Novy, 2001; Peck & Tickell, 1992; Sum, 1995). They have also studied the rise of social movements, their institutionalization and incorporation into structural complexes, and tactics of resistance to such integration and, in so doing, have closely examined their intertemporal as well as interscalar dimensions (Moulaert, Martinelli, Gonzalez, & Swyngedouw, 2007; Moulaert, Martinelli, Swyngedouw, & Gonzalez, 2010).

3. Which dimensions of the socio-economic system are explained?

The DEMOLOGOS methodology adopts a wide range of explanatory approaches to socio-economic development but seeks to avoid eclecticism through careful synthesis. Central to the integration of these approaches is the ASID model (Moulaert & Jessop, 2013). Indeed

the continuous movement among agency-, institution-, structure-, and discourse-based explanations in this model tends to blur the explananda-explanans distinction and cross-cuts the distinction *between types of explanation* (economic, social, political, ecological, etc.). Indeed, following the DEMOLOGOS rejection of analytical one-sidedness and/or theoretical *idées fixes*, ASID provides a generic toolkit applicable to all social engagement with the natural and social worlds. Synthesis is possible because the phenomena conventionally identified as economic, social, political, ecological, etc., tend to have their own more or less distinctive forms of agency, structure, institutions, and discourse. Reproduction and regulation (Swyngedouw & Jessop, 2009) can also be analysed in ASID terms insofar as these processes depend on agency, occur in specific structural-conjunctural contexts, are mediated in and through specific institutional complexes, and involve the reproduction of particular forms of subjectivity, identity, interests, and dispositions to act. This holds for *social formations* and their regional/local armatures, for *specific functional subsystems*, and for *historically specific institutional orders*.⁶ These three distinctions are important because of their significance for case-study analysis, which will often identify mixed functionalities and rationalities in particular institutional orders compared to the purity of functional systems. The resulting complexity requires detailed empirical analysis of the agential, institutional, technological,⁷ structural-conjunctural, and discursive mediations involved in regularizing-reproducing the relatively durable properties of a given social formation.

Agency-based explanations focus on: (a) the capacity of specific social forces to shape socio-economic development by catalysing (or failing to catalyse) individual and collective action in particular ways in specific conjunctures and broader structural contexts; and (b) agents' capacities to join forces to promote beneficial trends and tendencies and/or to exploit particular conjunctural opportunities to change organizations, institutions, and structures. To understand the articulation between agency and institutional change, a strategic-context analysis must refer to actors' scope to make a difference in a given conjuncture. Such analyses need spatio-temporal depth, that is, must examine action over different spaces, places, and scales and over different time-horizons, in order to identify the relative and relational character of structures and conjunctures and, a fortiori, to consider the feasibility of alternative strategies for socio-economic change (Novy, Swiatek, & Lengauer, 2013b). For what cannot be changed in the short-run at the 'localissimo' scale by actors located at (or oriented to) this specific site could well be altered through a concerted sequence of actions involving networked cooperation that connects different places, crosses frontiers, and combines scales of action. The latter kind of strategic action will often require the (re)combination of existing agents, confrontation, and transformation of their identities and their associated values, norms, and interests, development of new strategic alliances and orientations, tightening of social interaction among agents (studies of organizational learning and network theory can help here), and progress in the more radical analyses of the institutional changes needed to challenge prevailing forms of exploitation, domination, hegemony, or ecological regime.

Institution-based explanations focus on the forms and processes of mediation as various institutions act as relays or obstacles in linking actions within and across different social fields. The key terms for such analyses are presented above, but there are significant differences among theoretical models in how, if at all, they define institutions and/or explore institutional mediation and the scope for institutional transformation.

Structurally-based explanations focus on the emergent properties of action undertaken in specific structural–institutional circumstances (conjunctures) in broader strategic contexts and how these properties, not themselves reducible to the properties of individual or collective action, enable and constrain other social forces and, perhaps, the actors who themselves reproduce/transform these emergent properties. There is a risk that structural explanations reify emergent structural properties as natural, taken-for-granted, inevitable, etc. But this would entail a structuralist rather than structural explanation, which we reject. Analysis of contingent structural properties is legitimate, of course, provided that their constraining and empowering effects are denaturalized by showing how they emerge from social action and institutionalization.

Discourse-based explanations focus on the discursive construction of social entities and relations and, a fortiori, the ways in which discourses orient social action in a complex world. The ASID discourse-analytical approach adopts an evolutionary perspective to examine the *variation, selection, and retention* of specific discourses and therefore highlights the semiotic factors that make some discourses more resonant than others, more likely to be selected as the basis for strategic action and policy-making, and more likely to become institutionalized. This approach would prove one-sided and reductionist if it failed to consider the role of material factors (such as the natural world, emergent structural constraints, and available technologies) in privileging and, even more significantly, retaining some economic, political, and socio-cultural imaginaries (and other types of discourse). But the proposed synthesis makes it relatively easy, at least in theoretical principle, to undertake such a combined discursive-material analysis (Jessop, 2004; Sum, 2009, 2010; Sum & Jessop, 2013).

Table 1 shows how ASID integrates different DEMOLOGOS themes and indicates how to connect its four moments in a single analytical framework. It also suggests how the ASID framework might be operationalized in empirical analysis. Turning to the actual interaction of ASID features in specific conjunctures provides a more concrete, empirically grounded meaning to agency and identity, structural dynamics, institutional transformation, and the role of discourses and discursive practices. Section 4 suggests how to do this, but we first address some key meta-theoretical features of the ASID model.

4. Ontological and epistemological reflections on ASID

The ASID model rests on general ontological and epistemological assumptions that take particular forms in different versions of the overall approach. Ontologically, ASID rejects idealism, that is, it regards the ‘real’ world as ontologically prior to scientific inquiry into that world; but it also presupposes interaction between these ‘worlds’ insofar as the ‘external’ world operates as a regulative principle and constraint on scientific investigation, insofar as scientific study intervenes in and transforms the external world as a vital element in the process of scientific investigation, and insofar the results of scientific study may lead to changes in understanding and practice in the external world. Epistemologically, the ASID model assumes that, to paraphrase Marx, if the real world were immediately accessible to observation and experience, there would be no need for science (cf. Marx, 1976[1894]: 817). Thus a key part of developing the ASID model is to produce a set of epistemological and methodological protocols for studying the real world.

Table 1. DEMOLOGOS themes addressed in ASID meta-framework.

| Themes | ASID synthesis paper |
|---|--|
| Scale/Place | Very important for agency, structure, institution, and discourse. <i>Spatial</i> 'models' differentiated at various scales are relevant here, witness the Variegated Capitalism (Theodore, Peck & Brenner, 2005) and Services papers (Martinelli, 2005). Institutions and discourses are scale- and place-specific and -sensitive. Structural dynamics involve articulated spatial scales and can only be changed through institutional transformation and collective action. |
| Democracy and authoritarianism | Collective behaviour and reproduction of social forces are politically significant for the State as an institutional ensemble as well as for various institutions (firms, schools, household, peer communities, etc.) that are regarded as 'private'. Critical here is the link with institutional transformation and empowerment (human capability development) in development (Novy, Lengauer & Trippel, 2009). |
| Crisis and crisis mechanisms | Crisis is an over-determined moment for decisive intervention, a necessarily contingent moment when life cannot go on as before and choices must be made. Its origins and the scope for intensification are many and varied and explained quite differently in different theories. The ASID heuristic offers no particular substantive theory of crisis mechanisms, crisis-tendencies, or crisis resolution |
| Development & development views | The ASID model is especially appropriate here because it shows the importance of economic imaginaries, identities, and subjectivities in shaping development views as well as the path-dependent, multi-scalar constraints on realizing such views. It problematizes the meaning of development in structural, institutional, and strategic terms. |
| Competition. Competitiveness versus equality. Inclusion versus exclusion | Competition relates mostly to the profit-oriented, market-mediated capitalist economy but takes other forms in other institutional orders. It reinforces structural contradictions and crisis-tendencies in capitalist societies as competitive pressures influence economic conduct and the stability of institutions. The two oppositions concern extra-economic as well as economic aspects of socio-economic development. They are sometimes depicted in dilemmatic terms (competition policy OR cohesion policy) or as sources of disequilibrium (where one-sided treatment can provoke crisis). But 'progressive competitiveness' strategies could secure both competitiveness and social welfare – either because one delivers taxes for the other and/or because welfare facilitates trust and cooperation. |
| Articulation of subsystems (complexity) | Complexity requires choosing a suitable analytical entry-point for one's research. Empirically ASID focuses on key agents and institutions from functional subsystems, institutional orders, and social fields that are central to socio-economic development in a given case. One aim of the research is to identify the spatio-temporal fixes and institutionalized compromises that help to stabilize a complex formation. Periodization and sensitivity to the complexity of socio-spatial relations are required. |

4.1. Ontology

The ASID model works with a multi-level critical realist ontology. Starting from complexity and the need for complexity reduction, it explores how actors simplify a complex natural and social world by distinguishing what is important *for them* from what otherwise appears as an unstructured, 'messy', and 'noisy' complexity. Thus agency and discourse (semiosis) are already implicit in the ASID ontology (cf. Jessop, 2005a, 2005b). The next ontological step is the recognition that social interaction tends to produce relatively stable configurations of social action with more or less complex emergent properties: these comprise stable patterns of interpersonal interaction, organizations and inter-organizational relations, and institutions and inter-institutional relations. Each level of interaction has structural and conjunctural aspects that have more or less evident strategic-relational

implications for specific actors located in particular spatio-temporal, discursive-material contexts. Thus, structure/conjuncture and institutions are also already implicit in the ASID model – as long as one notes that, while the ‘I’ refers for our purposes primarily to institutions, it can also be reinterpreted to include interaction and (inter-)organizational relations. Among the structural aspects, the social relations of capital and class occupy a predominant place to the extent that the logic of profit-oriented, market-mediated accumulation is the dominant principle of societalization. To what extent this is the case cannot be taken for granted but is always mediated through agency, structure–conjuncture, institutional selectivities, and hegemonic projects.

Evidently, institutions can only be fully explored from an ASID perspective by considering their articulation with social interaction, organizations, inter-organizational relations, and inter-institutional relations. Although being able to ‘go on’ in the world requires actors to reduce complexity, the very act of complexity reduction entails that a wide range of factors relevant to the success of all kinds of social projects are neglected. This is one of the general (as opposed to specific) sources of failed actions and also requires that actors are capable of reflexivity and learning. This also has general implications for social reproduction and, in particular, for social networks, organizations, and institutions capable of reflection and learning and/or for developing these capacities elsewhere in a social formation.

Given the complexity of nature-society relations and the conflictual and often contradictory nature of social relations (including conflicts and contradictions arising from the unequal access to nature and its consequences, as studied in political ecology (Bavington, 2002; Renfrew, 2011), the DEMOLOGOS project is especially interested in how a certain degree of macro-social coherence is secured and reproduced over different spatio-temporal horizons. The DEMOLOGOS project has identified several key themes that merit special attention here: capitalist relations of production, relations of authority and subjugation, patriarchy, and modes of use of nature (see again Table 1). The ASID model would analyse these macro-social ordering principles – inherent in the ontology of society and its potential transformation – by examining their contribution to the ‘strategic codification’ of micro-, meso- and macro-social relations across time–space. This occurs by shaping typical modes of conduct (*agency*) through institutional selectivities (*structure–conjuncture*) that produce a hierarchy of structuring principles that operate in part ‘behind the backs’ of agents, by linking *institutions* that mediate conduct, and by providing hegemonic or dominant modes of calculation (*discourse*). The resulting structuration (or, better, structurally inscribed strategic selectivities) facilitates the institutional integration of social formations, channels conflicts, and provides a matrix for attempts to secure social cohesion through hegemony building, force-fraud-corruption, institutionalized coercion, or open war on forces that resist exploitation and domination. In any case, for reasons rehearsed above, social reproduction is unstable and requires continuing efforts to (re) institutionalize ‘its terms of transaction’ and rules of conduct.⁸ The same factors also prompt wider social struggles to resist prevailing patterns of exploitation, domination, and oppression (however defined) and lead to counter-movements based on alternative principles of societalization and quite different visions and logics (Novy, Swiatek, et al., 2013b). Counter movements and agency are socially (re)produced. They step into (or produce) the cracks of the system, ally with or foster social forces and change strategies that emerge from the dynamics of reproduction of society itself.

Institutions are reproduced and transformed through the dialectic of path-dependency and path-shaping. They result from actions in previous periods and constrain current action but, given their strategic nature, there is always variable scope for agents to engage in institutional innovation, reinforcing, weakening, or overthrowing the dominant logic(s) of contemporary social formations. The relation between institutional formation and reproduction and path-shaping agency is best explored through comparative conjunctural analysis of critical turning points in and across different places, spaces, and scales as well as different time periods (Moulaert & Jessop, 2013; Novy, Mehmood, et al., 2013). But even if everyday life in the cases studied in the DEMOLOGOS project proceeds relatively routine with the result that variations from the established rules and norms of conduct are often random and self-cancelling or else produce cumulative changes through ‘structural drift’ relayed through interdependent structures and institutions and the associated interaction of belief systems, instinctive and reflexive reactions. From a strategic-relational perspective, routinization is also mediated through ‘habitus’, hexis, and established vocabularies of motives. Where such drift is recognized and reflected in identity-formation, it may become an object of strategic action, whether to dampen or reinforce it (see the six discursive-strategic moments identified in Sum (2009); and in Sum and Jessop (2013)). It should also be noted that changing relations with the environment also have a major role in shaping social transformation and vice versa (Norgaard, 1994).

4.2. Epistemological and methodological reflections

The complex ontology of the ASID model requires careful consideration of the appropriate entry-point(s) for social analysis whilst recognizing that the relatively abstract-simple entry-point adopted for an empirical analysis will differ from its more complex-concrete provisional outcome as further dimensions and concepts are introduced and the empirical analysis becomes wider and/or digs deeper. This claim also has *three important methodological implications*.

First, substantive empirical categories are not pre-given in the ASID heuristic – it is a meta-theoretical framework for thinking about the interrelations among agency, structure, institutions, and discourse, not a theoretical system that prejudges the outcome of specific inquiries. Indeed, as a meta-theoretical approach, it is necessarily theoretically underdetermined. Its application requires its connection to more specific theoretical inputs, especially middle-range theories, selected in terms of their compatibility with the overall principles of the ASID model and its emphasis on interaction among all four of its dimensions.

The *second* implication of the ASID heuristic is that among relevant structures we should focus on the nature and dynamics of those that are relatively robust, that is, those that can be overturned or significantly modified only in quite specific conjunctures and only by a limited range of social forces operating by themselves or interactively. Thus institutional robustness is a strategic-relational property that is time-space specific and also linked to specific spatio-temporal horizons of action.

And, *third*, the ASID meta-frame is compatible with any explanations proposed in dual, interactive, strategic-relational, or morphogenetic models of ASID interactions as long as they have commensurable ontological and epistemological assumptions about the stratified ontology of structure, institution and agency. *Particular case studies will necessarily privilege particular combinations of partial theories within the overall meta-framework*

depending on their specific explanandum and its broader context but they will still prove commensurable with the ASID approach as long as the necessary meta-theoretical work has been undertaken (Martinelli, Moulaert, & Novy, 2013; Moulaert, 1987). Indeed, this is the prerequisite for realizing the full heuristic potential of the model.

5. Building the methodological bridge between ASID and DEMOLOGOS empirical research

We now calibrate the ASID meta-theoretical framework with appropriate middle-range theoretical frameworks for the DEMOLOGOS case studies (for the key theories deployed in this research, see [Appendix 1](#); see also Moulaert & Jessop, 2013). This will show the role of the ASID model in identifying and analysing specific conjunctural and disjunctural features of agency, structural–conjunctural moments, institutions, and discursive dynamics in socio-economic development in particular localities and regions. This requires concern with the variable spatio-temporal (e.g. de- and re-territorialization, relocation, scale jumping, networking, acceleration or deceleration, and changing temporal horizons of action) as well as discursive-material features of case studies (e.g. the politics of memory, identity politics, institutional legacies, and material contradictions) and their role in shaping strategic action. It also requires concern with the changing vocabulary of motives, situational logics, and personal motivations of agents in specific contexts. Overall, this requires a reflexive spiral movement, which is typical of critical realist analysis, between meta-theoretical, theoretical, and empirical analysis, *refining conceptual entry points in the light of substantive findings and deepening, widening, and modifying the empirical analysis in the light of the developing heuristic model in its articulation to specific middle-range theories*. This concerns not only the basic theoretical concepts but also requires resort to periodization, identification of critical conjunctures, and specification of key actors, strategies, and spatio-temporal horizons of action (Moulaert, Christaens, & Bosman, 2007; Moulaert, Martinelli, et al., 2007).

For example, Martinelli et al. (2013) in their Mezzogiorno case-study explore the reproduction of the economic and extra-economic institutional orders central to socio-economic development in this region as well as the embedding of regional development in national and transnational space (e.g. the Italian state, the EU, the Church, the mafia, tourism, European and US security and defence policy). The case study focuses on con-/disjunctures in the interconnected ASID dimensions of different development paths. This methodology involves judgements about the appropriate degree of spatio-temporal specificity of the case studies. The relevant periodization will depend on the temporalities of various local(ized) subsystems: economic (e.g. life expectancy of a major investment project), political (e.g. duration of a local government, the local lifespan of a grand political narrative, etc.), and so forth. But these local(ized) temporalities are clearly connected to those of the region, nation, etc. to which a locality belongs. The same holds for spatiality: for example, the referents of local, regional, or other scales will vary with particular social relations (e.g. the spatiality of a major production system such as an industrial district) or their combination (e.g. urban areas based on trade relations and their emerging governance structures; or regionalization as the outcome of complex spatial articulation among diverse social relations as in Coraggio, 1983; Holgersen, 2015; Markusen, 1983; Pike, Rodríguez Pose, & Tomaney, 2011).

To elaborate these methodological claims, we have selected eight interrelated research foci for an ‘ASID’ analysis of the discursive, material, and socio-spatial dimensions of socio-economic development at the local level, which is the specific object of the DEMOLOGOS project. These foci connect intermediate concepts reflecting types of agency, particular structures, institutions, organizations, and institutional mediations as well as discursive moments and practices to place and scale. The foci connect ASID concepts to spatialized and institutionally embedded concepts used in actual practice and experience-based research on socio-economic development. While the selection of foci hinges on the research questions examined in specific locality studies, the analytical relevance of those listed below will be recognized by most local development researchers.

Each focus is linked to several medium-range theories that should help to materialize its analysis from an ASID perspective. These theories are not chosen to substitute for ASID but to enable us to give a more fine-grained substance to it (see again [Appendix 1](#)). We now present the eight foci and show *in some cases* how their ‘asidification’ can enrich the analysis of socio-economic development.

(1) Strategic economic agency in ‘local’ development

Which are the key economic actors/forces in a given locality and how do they relate to external forces? In many localities a few key firms set the economic scene and significantly affect local socio-economic conduct and performance. Of course, such firms are not structurally or institutionally isolated from each other or from wider economic, political, and social relations, which must be explored in the first three foci in order to explain the discursive-material, spatio-temporal dynamic of the economy in its connections to extra-economic factors and ‘second nature’. The drivers of individual agency, typical behaviour patterns, and identity-formation are all relevant here.

(2) Local–regional socio-economic organization and strategic agency

Moving from individual agents to organizations and other forms of collective agency and institutional as well as discursive processes and mediations, we should explore the multiple logics that shape agendas, socio-economic associations and networks, institutional arrangements, ongoing transformations, and organizational discourse. These logics are likely to operate on many levels – from the conventions of personal interaction through organizational routines and strategies as well as institutional codes and programmes to competing Vergesellschaftungsprinzipien and, from a more discursive viewpoint, from personal narratives through organizational narratives and various accumulation strategies, state projects, and hegemonic visions up to grand narratives. Network agents, local economic development strategy and policy, territorial identity building, and alternative development coalitions (often organized around cultural identities) are analysed under this rubric.

(3) National–regional juridico-administrative-political regulation

This focus highlights institutions that operate at and across the national and/or regional scales and requires close attention to periodization and emblematic events that disrupt

prevailing governance regimes. Relevant institutions should be considered in structural–conjunctural terms (see Section 1.1), noting their potential transformation in and through specific forms and strategies of agential intervention, and discursive technologies and emerging discourses. It is here that grand discourses about market efficiency, new public management, etc. are circulated and, perhaps, get translated into territorially defined neoliberal policy frameworks, knowledging technologies and bureaucratic control systems.

(4) Reproduction systems: service providers

This feature focuses on substantive reproduction systems – housing, social protection, education, health, and environmental services as the concrete expression of reproduction within particular regional and local regulation and governance systems (Kelly, 2006). It addresses the institutional and multi-agency factors especially the anatomo- and bio-political disciplining and sanctioning of clients, the expression of the new public management style seeking effectiveness in the (semi)public service providers. These clients are often the excluded subjects and citizens of urban societies and may play key roles in resistance and counter-hegemonic movements (Karriem, 2009).

(5) Global (corporate) market-economy agents and institutions

Simplifying: these are the global private market players and include not only leading global or transnational corporations but also associated think tanks, lobbies, interest groups, and professional bodies. They are supposedly the most global strategic players in ‘modern’ capitalism, as investors, global competitors (seeking to establish monopolies), catalysts of deregulation and an entrepreneurial state, market favouring institution builders, grand discourse producers and disseminators, and so on. The ASID model should note this assumption and test it in relation to the whole scheme.

(6) International cum national juridico-political-administrative regulation

This focus highlights links among national and international political developments and established and/or emerging socio-political regimes. It is central to interpreting and explaining socio-economic development in multi-scalar terms, especially given the interdependencies among global economic and financial governance institutions (IMF, World Bank, European Central Bank and the Federal Reserve) and their impact on the pseudo-monetarist macro-economic policy of the past quarter century. From a DEMOLOGOS perspective, the dominance of the international or global scale must be established rather than presupposed because scalar hierarchies are often tangled and there are selective opportunities for scale jumping. Hegemony-building organizations such as the G8 and ‘e-type’ organizations and institutions significantly affect the reproduction of national and sub-national regulatory institutions and practices as well as the scope for local socio-economic development strategies to make a difference.

(7) Sub- and counter-hegemonic and/or socially innovative agencies and movements

This feature concerns agencies and movements that act as subaltern relays of the hegemonic strategies and imaginaries by recontextualizing them to other sites and scales of action (sub-hegemonic) and/or as sources of tactical resistance and alternative imaginaries and strategies intended to establish new alternatives (counter-hegemonic). The motives, material bases, and principal sites of political and ideological impact of these forces clearly differ from those of the agents and forces considered in the first and second features. Indeed a common driving force of counter-hegemonic forces is social progress and human emancipation and, hence, to contest factors and forces that reproduce exploitation, oppression, and alienation. Counter-hegemonic imaginaries and their role in mobilizing alienated and exploited agents are significant here; their appeal must be related in turn to shifting conjunctures within multi-scalar accumulation dynamics and socio-political regimes.

(8) 'Eccentric' and 'leadership' individual agency and conjunctural dynamics

This focus is often neglected in spatial development analysis but idiosyncratic agency is often powerful in certain conjunctures, shaping collective action, institutional mediation and transformation. (captains of industry, charismatic leaders, ...). ASID is useful here because it focuses on periodization and conjunctures, but also because it reveals the institutional dynamics fostering or hampering particular agencies and leadership. This should improve the historical dialectics and institutional dynamics of integrated locality studies.

Distinguishing eight ASID foci for empirical locality studies is not meant to suggest that specific topics can be studied in isolation or to fragment the analysis. Rather, it aims to provide the detail that cannot be provided by exclusive reliance on abstract concepts derived from a meta-theoretical framework. This holds for individual and collective behaviour, particular institutionalization and institutional mediation processes, discursive practices and institution construction or destruction. 'Empirical', practice-oriented researchers find that such medium-range concepts and theories can contribute to a scientific language and problematic that is easily recognized 'in the field' and in diverse communities of practice (not only business communities but also local authorities, grassroots movements, regulatory agencies, NGOs, ...) (Martinelli et al., 2013). At the same time, these foci offer another opportunity to operationalize the ASID framework in local development studies because of their contingent interconnections. Thus, case studies can reveal multi-scalar mediations, links among types of agencies and organizations, place-bound features of structural consolidation and transformations, etc.

'Strategic economic agency in "local" development' (focus 1), for example, must be related to 'national-regional juridico-administrative-political regulation' (focus 3). Do major business players live by the rules, do they seek to corrupt the regulatory system or lobby instead to change regulations? Can they do so because they belong to 'global (corporate) market-economy agents and institutions' (focus 5)? Or does the corporate social responsibility rhetoric or practice of a MNC exercise ethical discipline over associated local players?

Similarly, focus 3 (national-regional government and governance arrangements) affects to a greater or lesser extent the nature and operation of all other foci. This does not mean that the national (or national-regional) level is always dominant in the scalar division of juridico-political-administrative labour but is certainly nodal and also plays a key role in meta-governance (Jessop, 2011a).

A final example involves focus 6 (international-cum-national juridico-political-administrative regulation) and focus 7 (sub – and counter-hegemonic and/or socially innovative agencies). Connecting them not only opens up the arena of discursive and strategic struggles between business regulation organizations and NGOs defending fair trade and development strategies but also connects them to more local agendas, such as those of local development agencies, urban citizens associations demanding equity in urban development, etc.

Notes

1. DEMOLOGOS was a four-year project (2004-07) funded by the European Commission's Framework 6 Programme.
2. See the DEMOLOGOS survey papers (called ABC papers) at <http://demologos.ncl.ac.uk>
3. Integrating discourse into the ASID framework shows how intellectuals, movements, organizations, diverse institutions, and strategically selective structures shape the prospects for new discourses and discursive practices. We can also better understand the modalities and significance of struggles over hegemony, sub-hegemony, and counter-hegemony and of inclusive forms of social interaction (passive revolution, force-fraud-corruption, repression, and resistance tactics). Examples include the globalization of finance and trade, transnational promotion of neo-liberalism, differences between varieties of capitalism, rise of environmental movements and governance, etc.
4. There is no pre-given set of functional requirements that requires a corresponding number of institutional orders. Institutional codes and programmes are shaped by the interaction of semiosis and material adequacy and these vary widely across social formations and regional/local armatures (for an introduction to this problem, see Luhmann 1996).
5. See *Le Monde Diplomatique* June 2008 on the ongoing re-institutionalization of the flexible wage labour relationship and how it reinforces the robustness of the capitalist wage relation.
6. Regarding *rationalities*, especially firms' behaviour, the ASID model reveals a fruitful link between the Varieties of Capitalism paper (Theodore, Peck, & Brenner, 2005) – with its account of big firm behaviour – and the Endogenous Development paper on the DEMOLOGOS website, (Moulaert, Mehmood, & Nussbaumer, 2005) which focuses on small firms and networks.
7. Technological selectivities refer here not only to different technical relations of production but also to governmental technologies of the kind analysed by Michel Foucault (Foucault 2008; for further discussion, Sum & Jessop, 2013).
8. Cf. Commons's (1934) triple way of looking at institutions and transactions.

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ORCID

Bob Jessop  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8134-3926>

Abid Mehmood  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3719-6388>

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Appendix 1. ASID features and relevant theoretical inputs.

| Theoretical inputs ASID foci | Agency | Structure | Institutions | Discourse |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| a. Strategic economic agency in ‘local’ development | Structure and agency (Mintzberg) INST: multi-rationality agency | GHS: Society as an organism ... power structures in economy | INST: Institutionalization Network theory | CPE: Disciplining codes (accountability, efficiency, effectiveness). |
| b. Local–regional socio-economic organization and strategic agency | DEV, ERD: Entrepreneurs as innovators – Diversity of agents and inter-agent cooperation | SRA: Structures are strategically selective in form, content, operation Archer (2000) morphogenetic cycle | GHS: Articulation between institutional dynamics at various spatial scales INST: Institutionalization Network theory | ERD: Innovation and modernization discourse ↔ Local and regional identity |
| c. National–regional administrative-political regulation | GHS: State behaviour – Strategic approaches to State behaviour State theory | RA: State as key site of institutionalization | HGM: Regionalization GHS: Articulation between institutional dynamics at various spatial scales RA: Regulatory role of State and State institutions | Gramsci: Role of representation and discourse in institutionalization |

(Continued)

Continued.

| Theoretical inputs ASID foci | Agency | Structure | Institutions | Discourse |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| d. Reproduction systems: Service providers | SERV: Typical agencies functionally oriented – service relation ST: Structure and agent as a duality – strong self-reproducing dynamics of providers | PEE: All structures are environment SRA: Morphogenetic cycle: from structure to social interaction, back to modified structure and servicing agency SERV: Service relation as control relation? | | |
| e. Global (corporate) market-economy agents and institutions | Marx: Relations of production, world market IMP: Integration of economics and politics | WS: Structure as systems – historical emergence and structure of the capitalist world economy | INST: Global governance, link with hegemonic discourse, Washington consensus and NPM doctrine | D/CPE: Discourse and discursive technologies |
| f. International cum national politico-administrative regulation | VC: Leading theory to calibrate this focus SRA: Actions are treated as structurally-gearred, context building and structuring | SRA: ASID table | | CPE: economic imaginaries, roles of genres and genre chains |
| g. Counter-hegemonic and socially innovative agencies and movements | HGM: Class struggle PEE: New alliances around environmental questions | Marx: Class struggle WS: Agency as anti-systemic movement | D: Empowerment, alternative organization | D/CPE: Counter-hegemonic and alternative development discourse |
| h. 'Eccentric' and 'leadership' individual agency interfering with conjunctural dynamics | Social innovation literature Veblen: Non-behaviourist psychology Instinct-habit psychology Analysis of personal motivations | - | INST: Voluntarist institution building, using personal power networks | Personal identity, image etc. building ... |

Legend of references to survey papers on DEMOLOGOS website: INST, Institutionalism; GHS, German Historical School; D/CPE, Discourse; Cultural Political Economy; SRA, Strategic-Relational Approach; DEV, Development theories; ERD, Endogenous Regional Development; RA, Regulationist Approach; HGM, Historical Geographical Materialism; SERV, Services; IMP, Theories of Imperialism; PEE, Political Economy of the Environment; VC, Varieties of Capitalism. A comprehensive list of all survey papers along with the respective annexures is available at <http://demologos.ncl.ac.uk/wp/wp1/disc.php>