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Emerging Institutions: Pyramids or Anthills?[1]

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Abstract

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In the present text, an institution is understood to be an (observable) pattern of collective action, justified by a corresponding norm. By this definition, an institution emerges slowly, although it may be helped or hindered by various specific acts. From this perspective, an institutional entrepreneur is an oxymoron, at least in principle. In practice, however, there are and always have been people trying to create institutions. This article describes the emergence of the London School of Economics and Political Science as an institution and analyzes its founders and its supporters during crises as institutional entrepreneurs. A tentative theory of the phenomenon of institutional entrepreneurship is then constructed by combining elements of sociology of translation, actor-network theory and garbage can model. The article concludes with a suggestion that the way institutional enterprises are narrated may differ from the way they are built, and a genre analysis can be of further help in understanding this phenomenon.

Keywords: institution, translation, actor-network theory, garbage can model, narrative

Institutional Entrepreneur: An Oxymoron?

In view of the rich flora of definitions that the term *institution* attracts, it is necessary to define it at the outset. In the present text, an institution is understood to be an (observable) pattern of collective action (social practice), justified by a corresponding norm (Czarniawska 1997). This definition is based primarily on Berger and Luckmann's reasoning: 'institutions posit that actions of type X will be performed by actors of type X' (1966: 72). A constructive reciprocity is assumed; i.e. the performance of an X type of action leads to the perception that a given actor belongs to (or aspires to) type X, and vice versa. In narrative analysis, in which institution equals genre (Bruss 1976), the intelligibility of action X is achieved by referring it to a genre, where action X and actor X belong to the same type of narrative. Thus a manager cleaning the floors and a woman making strategic decisions in a corporation beg for explanation, as such happenings violate the institutionalized order of things.

Within such an order, the actors are often not people but 'legitimized social groupings': work units, profit centers, departments, corporations, public administration organizations, associations of organizations, and all those whose interactions 'constitute a recognized area of institutional life' — an organization field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 148). Actors leave or are pushed out of a field and

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new actors enter it (consider the powerful entry of environmentalists into political, industrial, and academic fields). Actions, in spite of the stability and repetitiveness that earn them the name of institutions, change in both form and meaning; the narrative changes in every narration. Finally, the process itself is recursive, as Meyer et al. (1987) point out: whereas actors perform actions, actions create actors (or rather, their identities) within the context of a narrative, which is created, in turn, by actions and actors.

Within this definition, an institution emerges slowly, although it may be helped or hindered by various specific acts. In narrative terms, one story does not a genre make. In terms of actor-network theory, which is itself of narratological origins (Czarniawska and Hernes 2005), an institution can be seen as a macro actor of long standing, which is strengthened not only by the norm or norms, but also by artifacts (Joerges and Czarniawska 1998). Furthermore, an institution depends for its survival on its ability to fit into the dominant institutional order (Warren et al. 1974; Meyer et al. 1987).

From this perspective, an institutional entrepreneur is an oxymoron, at least in principle. A person or a group can *institute*, but not *institutionalize*: the latter verb can only be used as past participle. In practice, however, there are, and always have been people or groups that try to create institutions. They could be divided into three categories:

1 those that, in their endeavors, ignore the institutional order dominant in their time and place: Galileo, Maria Curie Sklodowska, Mikhail M. Bakhtin;

2 those that institute a practice and hope it will be institutionalized: Freud and psychoanalysis, the Tavistock Institute and the ‘company doctors’ in the UK; Olof Palme and the ‘you-reform’ in Sweden;

3 those that construct a formal organization attempting (hoping) to turn it into an institution in its own right: TVA, Microsoft, the LSE.

In this article I focus on the emergence of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) as an institution and treat as institutional entrepreneurs both its founders and its supporters during crises, within a framework inspired by a combination of sociology of translation (Latour 1986; Czarniawska and Sevón 1996; 2005) and actor-network theory (Callon and Latour 1981; Callon 1986; Czarniawska and Hernes 2005).

Let me first briefly list the main concepts used here. *Translation*, as employed currently in social sciences, is a loan from the French philosopher Michel Serres (for an introduction to Serres’ philosophy, see Brown 2002). For Serres, translation is a generalized operation, not merely linguistic, and it takes many different forms. It may involve displacing something, or the act of substitution; it always involves transformation. Consequently, that which is involved in translation — be it knowledge, people, or things — has an uncertain identity. Each act of translation changes the translator and what is translated.

This notion has been adopted by Michel Callon and Bruno Latour. Callon has put it primarily to use in actor-network theory and emphasized its homologizing effect. Latour, on the other hand, is not so certain about the results of translation, although the desire to become similar might be at its origins. According to him:

> ‘the spread in time and space of anything — claims, orders, artefacts, goods — is in the hands of people; each of these people may act in many different ways, letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it’. (1986: 267)

This way of understanding translation was adopted in organization studies by Czarniawska and Sevón (1996, 2005) in an attempt to understand a continuous circulation of management ideas and practices. In this perspective, management ideas are translated into objects (models, books, transparencies), are sent to other places than those where they emerged, translated into new kind of objects, and then sometimes into actions, which, if repeated, might stabilize into institutions, which in turn could be described and summarized through abstract ideas, and so on and so forth (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996).

The concept of translation works exactly because it is polysemous: usually associated with language, it also means transformation and transference. It attracts attention to the fact that a thing moved from one place to another cannot emerge unchanged: to set something in a new place or another point in time is to construct it anew. Thus, translation is a concept that immediately evokes symbolic associations, while at the same time being stubbornly material: only a thing can be moved from one place to another and from one point in time to another. Ideas must materialize, at least in somebody’s head; symbols must be inscribed. A practice not stabilized by a technology, albeit a linguistic technology, cannot last; it is bound to be ephemeral. A practice or an institution cannot travel; it must be simplified and abstracted into an idea, or at least approximated in a narrative permitting a vicarious experience, therefore converted into words or images. Neither can words and images travel until they have materialized, until they are embodied or objectified.

The resulting notion of traveling ideas does not have room for prominent actors, and yet the very notion of institutional entrepreneurs posits at least an assumption of some actorhood, hence the necessity to turn to actor-network theory. Launched by scholars studying science and technology, it originated in narratology as a version of structuralist analysis introduced by the French semiologist of Lithuanian origin, Algirdas Greimas (see, e.g., Greimas and Courtés 1982). Greimas introduced the notion of *actants,* grammatical subjects, which may or may not reveal themselves as persons. An actant is ‘that which accomplishes or undergoes an act’ (Greimas and Courtés 1982: 5), and it includes human beings but also animals, objects, and concepts. This replacement of the word ‘actor’ has been done to show that actants change roles throughout a narrative: an actant may acquire a character and become an actor or may remain an object of some actor’s action.

Greimas’s ideas attracted scholars of science and technology, as they wanted to elevate machines and artifacts to a more significant position in their narratives and felt encumbered by the notions of ‘actor’ and ‘action’, which so clearly assumed a human character and an intentional conduct. ‘Actant’ and ‘narrative program’ (what an actant tries to do) could better describe the construction of macro-actors, such as corporations, societies, and institutions, they believed.

One could summarize the Latourian–Greimasian research procedure, which became known as actor-network theory (ANT), as follows. It begins with an identification of actants (those which act and are acted upon). Thereupon one follows the actants through a trajectory — a series of programs and anti-programs — until they become actors, acquiring a distinct and relatively stable character. Which actants have the opportunity to become actors? Those with programs that succeeded in combating anti-programs; or, alternatively, those with anti-programs that won, as in the stories of opposition and resistance. This success, suggests Latour (1986), is due to the power of associations: *the formation and stabilization of networks of actants, who can then present themselves as macro actors via their spokespersons*. Such common re-presentation, says Callon (1986), is possible because the diverse interests of various actants become translated into a common program.

In what follows, I apply this framework to the history of LSE.[2] Its analysis leads me to the conclusion that a popular theory of institutional entrepreneurship mistakes formal organization builders for institutional entrepreneurs, as the deeds of the former better fit an established narration pattern. In contrast, institutional entrepreneurs are not necessarily hero-like figures, and may contribute to the emergence of new institutions with loose connections to formal organizations.

An Idea Whose Time Has Come

The circumstances in which an idea arose in the local time/space or, even more important, how and when it decisively came to the attention of a given group of organizational actors, are often unknown (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). It was frequently a meaningless event at the time. But when the translation of ideas into actions is well advanced, the actors involved feel a need to mythologize by dramatizing origins. Such was the case with LSE.

Breakfast at the Webbs'

All formal and informal accounts point to the breakfast party on 4 August 1894, with four members of the Fabian Society present: the wards, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, and the guests, George Wallas and George Bernard Shaw. Of course, the idea was not born then and there: its origins extend back to the Fabian Society, an intellectual movement concerned with research, discussion, and publication of socialist ideas, founded in 1884, and to many other factors, such as Sidney Webb's close connection with the City of London and with London County Council (LCC).

The object around which an alliance needed to be forged was a bequest of £20,000[3] to the Fabian Society by Henry Hunt Hutchinson; the breakfast on 4 August 1894 brought the news of Hutchinson's suicide and of his bequest. This triggering event brings to mind Rorty's observation that 'poetic, artistic, philosophical, scientific or political progress results from the accidental coincidence of a private obsession with a public need' (1989: 37).

Most sources agree that at that breakfast party the existing alliances were geared in a new direction: toward laying the groundwork for the LSE. The alliances involved micro actors of various sizes: the Fabian Society was the biggest, but there were many others. As Sidney Webb wrote to another Fabian, Edward Pease, in 1886: 'Nothing is done in England without the consent of a small intellectual yet political class in London, not 2,000 in number. We alone could get at that class' (http://www.lse.ac.uk/lsehistory).

From the outset, there was disagreement over the LSE's political stance; for Shaw it ought to be manifestly collectivist, while for Sidney Webb it was to be neutral and unbiased. Webb's line won this argument.

But it was the Zeitgeist that Set the Table

How did the Webbs and their allies get 2,000 people in London — or at least some of them — to listen? There is a limit to the number of issues people notice and react to, regardless of their acuity. Downs (1972) showed how public reaction to problems is subject to 'issue–attention cycles', in which problems suddenly leap into prominence, remain the center of attention for a short time, and gradually fade away. A problem must be dramatic and exciting in order to maintain public interest, to survive in translocal time/space (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). As long as a problem is the focus of attention, all the ideas that can be related to it have a greater chance of being realized. All existing actions that can be represented as being coupled with it have a greater chance of being legitimized.

In the 1890s, the public discourse in Britain was tinged with a concern that Britain's international position in business and industry was at risk because of inadequate teaching and research. In August 1894, the British Association for the Advancement of Science spoke of the need to advance the systematic study of economics — thus the bequest and the idea of the LSE: the first university organization dedicated to the social sciences. Its original goal was to engage political science, history, and economics in the study of humanity's social relationships. Sociology, geography, statistics, and anthropology followed suit, with psychology as the latest addition. The goals and the methods of the LSE were to differ from those of a traditional university: it was to be a neutral and unbiased center of research, but with a pragmatic and practical bent. The advanced studies of social relationships were to be used in education for careers in administration and business.

Was the LSE an invention or an imitation? Both. The social sciences already occupied an influential position in France, and the French had their *écoles*, educating the ruling elites. In fact, the École Libre des Sciences Politiques in Paris was mentioned by Wallas as a model, as was the Faculty of Political Science at Columbia University by Webb, who was also impressed by the economics courses at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Unlike Oxford and Cambridge, however, the LSE opened its doors to everybody who desired education.

Dahrendorf says that the social sciences 'were not exactly invented at LSE but the School brought them together like no other university in Europe, led them to full bloom in all their variety, and then reflected the aches and pains of their maturity, in which professionalization often went hand in hand with an uncertain sense of direction' (Dahrendorf 1995: viii). Curiously, LSE was a British invention, but it was later granted money by the Rockefeller Memorial because it was 'outside British tradition' (Dahrendorf 1995: 167). The character of this invention was related to the fact that the Fabians' non-revolutionary version of socialism was in fashion. The Webbs and George Bernard Shaw were undoubtedly 'fashion leaders' of the era, and although individuals cannot create fashion, they can try to influence it, often successfully (Czarniawska 2005). What is more, they can use fashion for the purpose of creating new institutions. Fashion operates at institutional fringes.

On the one hand, its variety is limited by the 'iron cage' of existing institutions, which fashion actually reproduces; on the other hand, fashion is engaged in a constant subversion of the existing institutional order, gnawing ant-like at its bars.

Similarly, although fashion seems to sabotage and threaten established institutions, it is also an institutional playing field: new fashions can be tried and disposed of or they can be institutionalized, thus revitalizing the existing institutional order.

The final say in the selection of ideas, and of fashions, is often given to the zeitgeist, which, although no doubt a metaphor that catches the imagination, can hardly serve as an explanatory notion, as it is usually described retrospectively. But it is useful, at least in suggesting the direction of further explorations. Forty (1986) argued that, in a sense, an idea cannot catch on unless it has already existed for some time in the minds of many people, as a part of what is poetically called the spirit of the time. How does the spirit of the time change? Gradually and imperceptibly, says Rorty:

> 'Europe did not *decide* to accept the idiom of Romantic poetry, or of socialist politics, or of Galilean mechanics. That sort of shift was no more an act of will than it was a result of argument. Rather, Europe gradually lost the habit of using certain words and gradually acquired the habit of using others.' (1989: 6)

Thus, although the London School of Economics and Political Science was instituted by a decision, or rather by a series of decisions, it was made possible through an initiative of institutional entrepreneurs who correctly deciphered the shift in the idiom of the day.

One more element should be added to the picture: the turn-of-the-century atmosphere. The emerging institutions become connected to existing institutions that serve as sources of ideas, stimuli for action, or both. Anniversaries, birthdays, centennials, and millennia are institutionalized celebrations that permit certain unusual actions and invite certain unusual ways of sensemaking. The turn of the century was, and is, a huge event in Europe, one that provokes enormous amounts of sensemaking, which can lead to change (Joerges 1990). The time perspectives of people and organizations are turned around; courses of action are taken that break with expectations formed about what is normal, lawful, and repetitive. The unique, the unlikely, the unprecedented, or even the impossible happens — or is anticipated and begins to guide action. Epochs are closed (and thereby defined); other futures are opened (and thereby tentatively defined) by breaking with the past. Such a context is favorable for turning latent ideas into projects. It entails a vast redefinition of situations, an extraordinary mobilization of resources, and the unfreezing of institutionalized resource allocations. Thus, 1895 was a good year to start a new school.

An Idea is Enacted

An Idea is Objectified and Attracts Further Allies

Sidney Webb, with Beatrice's support, began slowly but surely to stabilize the idea of the LSE. Money first: on 8 February 1895, the Hutchinson Trustees agreed to spend most of the money on the School of Economics and Political Science. As Webb had never intended to become a director, first Wallas, who refused, and then Hewins, who accepted, were offered the job. As Dahrendorf notes, Webb was 35 at the time, and Hewins was 29 — which may explain the pace of what happened next:

> 'Within six months [Hewins] found rooms for the School, designed the syllabus of its courses, gathered support for the new venture *urbi et orbi*, and attracted over two hundred students so that the first academic year of the London School of Economics and Political Science could start on 10 October 1895.' (Dahrendforf 1995: 13)

Apart from the age of these entrepreneurs, and the fact that the 19th century is called 'the era of founders', it was the lack of bureaucracy, says Dahrendorf, that allowed these men to put the school into operation. As to Beatrice Potter Webb, although Dahrendorf gives her little credit, he admits that if 'the early history of LSE ... is as much recorded history as it is history in the making, this is owed to Beatrice Webb's gifts as an observer and a diarist' (1995: 27).

Sidney Webb continued to attract sponsors: private donations and support from LCC's Technical Education Board. Webb had, in fact, reorganized the board for that very purpose and had managed to have himself elected as chairman. Hewins wrote letters to economists and social scientists in Europe and enlisted either their moral support or their direct collaboration. He coaxed the Society of Arts and the Chamber of Commerce into helping with the provision of rooms for the School. He obtained these donations by promising a neutral perspective for the School, a pledge that first enraged Shaw and later caused him to lose interest. Webb's attempt to engage him in the LSE cause had not succeeded, and, having failed to prevent Hutchinson's money from being spent on the LSE, GBS withdrew from the emerging network. This was the first but by no means the last time a potentially central actor was reduced to the role of an actant (an object of the network's action).

Hewins also wrote (by hand) the academic program of the School. By July 1895, it had become a printed prospectus of 11 pages. All lectures and most of the classes were to be given between 18.00 and 21.00; men and women, British subjects and foreigners, were equally welcome. There were tuition fees, but also scholarships; a publication series to secure the visibility of research results was arranged.

Hewins also gave what Dahrendorf calls 'a string of upbeat newspaper interviews', in which the Webbs' names were seldom mentioned. One of the newspapers called the as yet non-existent LSE 'one of the great English institutions of the new age' (Dahrendorf 1995: 23).

Entrepreneurs, a name, rented rooms, a prospectus, money, staff, students, media testimony: a set of actants in place. It should be no surprise that 'words, printed and unprinted, were from the beginning the great weapons which LSE people used, weapons of attack and also weapons of self-defense, not least from the often unbearable tension of values and social science' (Dahrendorf 1995: viii).

An Idea is Put into Practice: 'A Great Romance' Begins

What did they do? They held lectures, a departure from the tutoring tradition of Oxford and Cambridge, demonstrating from the beginning the School's inbuilt paradox: 'Hewins in the front parlour lecturing to a dozen or so mostly *men* on economics; Wallas in the back parlour lecturing to twenty or thirty mostly *women* on Poor Law' (quoted in Dahrendorf 1995: 61). It seems that Dahrendorf does not approve of paradoxes and considers the tensions that arose to be counterproductive (on his reading, the LSE succeeded *in spite* of them, although they made the place attractive). Other studies suggest that that may be the very reason it succeeded (Czarniawska 1997). A school of commerce, and a high-brow university; a school for everyone, yet educating 'the captains of industry and commerce'; the Chairman to the left, the Director to the right; the Director and the Secretary aloof and disciplinarian, the Head Porter creating a domestic atmosphere; an 'imperialist' staff and 'social reformist' students.

What happened when it came to open conflict? In the case of the Boer War, the School divided into four factions (four being perhaps better for survival than two); and when the School was offered a Gladstone memorial endowment by the Liberal Party, its member and the main 'imperialist', Hewins, said that it could be accepted only on the condition that everyone would be eligible, for 'the School, like the rain, must fall equally on the just and the unjust' (quoted in Dahrendorf 1995: 68). The money went to Oxford.

Apart from formal lectures, the staff and the frequent guests conversed at the Webbs' 'at homes'. Staff and students gossiped over afternoon tea arranged by the Secretary, Miss Mactaggart, and, beginning in 1897, the students debated — and danced — at the Student Union meetings. The 'romance' of the title is not merely a metaphor: the School, says Dahrendorf, constituted practically a 'universe of life': with many women and many foreigners, the world was present in its diversity. Unsurprisingly, there were many marriages between alumni and between staff members, and whole families frequented the School for generations.

Dahrendorf notices all this, but his explanation of the School's success gives primary credit to the entrepreneurs:

> 'There are several reasons why the venture of building up a new institution ... succeeded. It benefited, in the apt phrase used in later Calendars ... from "the conjunction of need with an opportunity". Circumstances were favourable; a significant demand for social science education could be tapped; thanks to Henry Hunt Hutchinson and Charlotte Payne-Townshend and others the wherewithal was found; influential persons like R. B. Haldane were prepared to lend their support. But when all is said and done, no deconstruction of the history of LSE can detract from the fact that its foundation was the work of two unusual men, Sidney Webb and W. A. S. Hewins.' (Dahrendorf 1995: 64–65)

Why should the entrepreneurs be considered so much more important than any other actants? Elsewhere Dahrendorf says that the LSE was not 'merely the creature of a passing *Zeitgeist*' (1995: 47).[4] He was probably referring to similar attempts that had failed — a London School of Geography and a London School of Ethics and Social Philosophy — but it could just as well be that the window of opportunity had already closed (Kingdon 1984). Not to detract from Webb and Hewins, I believe that the School could have been built by two other people, and it certainly has survived both of them, or perhaps survived because it was able to rid itself of both of them. The School needed stabilization, not only in its early years, but especially then.

LSE Becomes a(n) (Arti)fact

With the exception of clandestine schools, a school is not a school without a building. Webb and Hewins understood it well, and in February 1896 a large house was rented at 10 Adelphi Terrace. Additional weight was to be added by a library, a separate but connected building. More funds were obtained from Hutchison's Trust; from Shaw's fiancée, Charlotte Payne-Townshend, who also rented the upper, unnecessary floors of the building; and from other donors. The British Library of Political Science opened on 9 November 1896.[5]

As a stabilizing artifact, a building of one's own is much better than a rented building. Webb first signed a permanent lease on 1,300 m^2 in Clare Market from London County Council, which, as Dahrendorf notes, he was renting as the Chairman of LSE from himself as the Chairman of the Technical Education Board at LCC. He next approached a well-known benefactor, John Passmore Edwards, for funds. Dahrendorf says that the correspondence between them constitutes painful reading, but 'quite typical of the relationship between a benefactor and an academic beggar for institutional money' (1995: 54).[6] The foundation stone for Passmore Edwards Hall was laid on 2 July 1900, and in May 1902 the School was moved to its new location. In the meantime the money proved, inevitably, to be short, and Lord Rothschild, among others, helped out. Rothschild then became President of the School.

The School also became a legal body, in a form that seems somewhat exotic to a non-British observer. The LSE became a college of the new University of London, and a Faculty of Economics and Political Science (including Commerce and Industry) was created, which meant that LSE lecturers became recognized teachers. The LSE was incorporated under the Companies Act as a company limited by guarantee, and registered on 13 June 1901 as the 'Incorporated London School of Economics'. Because the Board of Trade agreed that the School did not have to include 'Limited' in its name, on 2 August 1957 'Incorporated' was dropped. Another important artifact in this context was the text defining the goal of the Corporation: 'to provide *for all classes and denominations without any distinction whatsoever*, opportunities and encouragement for pursuing a regular and liberal course of education of the highest grade and quality in the various branches of knowledge dealt with by the institution' (quoted in Dahrendorf 1995: 58). A new institution became solidified by connections created to two other, older, institutions: the university and the corporation.

Four years after its opening, the School had 1,400 registered students from 16 countries, although it could not confer degrees until a year later. Most of the original teachers remained and new ones joined. The School was a fact.

Actions into Routines

As Martha Feldman and Brian Pentland (2005) pointed out, routines are important but underestimated stabilizers on a par with artifacts. What needed to be routinized in the LSE were administrative, pedagogical, and scientific activities. The person to begin this task was the next director, the geographer Halford Mackinder (Hewins left in 1903 for his next project). A three-year undergraduate degree day course was organized, special advisory committees were established to guarantee the continuity of research, a systematic program of visiting evening lecturers was put into operation, and the Library was turned into a research site with special emphasis on sociology and history. Postgraduate research was increasing in visibility — about

40 percent of all British postgraduates were at LSE. The Director had begun to write regular annual reports (Hewins wrote only one), and saw to it that he had somebody to report to. Various governmental and administrative bodies were established, apart from the Court of Governors (Professorial Committee, Council of Management, Finance and General Purpose Committee). The Secretary, Miss Mactaggart, was given clear responsibilities.

Beginning with Mackinder, large amounts of text were produced by the directors and many others, which seems to support the Phillips et al. (2004) thesis about the importance of texts in the process of institutionalization. At the same time, many projects in the later history of LSE show that texts are not enough.

During Mackinder's time, the railways and then the army sent students in great numbers to the LSE, and their fees, together with grants from public bodies and more fluctuating donations, constituted important financial input. Mackinder was quick, therefore, in responding to a cue from the Treasury Committee, which seemed to strongly appreciate the new School, and obtained a significant state grant. He was also keen on cultivating connections with the University and successful in attracting grants to support the development of the newfangled discipline of sociology.

Mackinder left the directorship in 1908, and the School was 'better organized and academically more solid than he had found it' (Dahrendorf 1995: 108). Yet Mackinder is not seen as an institutional entrepreneur. Without him, or without someone who fulfilled the stabilizing functions, the School might have failed, as others did. A question arises: Do we perceive people as institutional entrepreneurs because they have established institutions or because they reveal traits that we associate, in the mythology of entrepreneurship, as necessary for such an endeavor — vision and enthusiasm, as opposed to mere administrative skills? Can it be that, if Sidney Webb had not existed, he would have had to be invented, and that the romance of entrepreneurship dictates the plot of its documentation? That a spokesperson is mistaken for the force behind a macro actor?

An idea is Maintained and Institutionalized

It is my thesis that institutional entrepreneurs, although playing a role in the emergence of institutions, do not shape them according to their will. In support of this position, I briefly review the times of crisis that threatened the School and the ways in which it survived them, together with significant positive turns in the School's fate. The first crisis had, in fact, to do with its founder.

Webb Resigns

On 17 September 1910, with Beatrice present, Sidney Webb gave an inflammatory talk to the railway unionists. This talk was used by the Webbs' political opponents on the issue of the Poor Law to attack him as an inappropriate Chairman for the LSE, which, after all, educated railway executives. Although all three Directors defended him, he used the world tour that he and Beatrice had planned as a pretext to resign. As Dahrendorf points out, the Webbs' actions in the matter of the

Poor Law were unrealistic and harmful to most of their causes; thus one can deduce that even institutional entrepreneurs par excellence do not succeed with all the institutions they attempt to set up. One could claim that the law the Webbs were trying to promote was more important than the School and that Sidney Webb cared about it more than he cared about the LSE. The majority version of the law against which the Webbs rebelled was not implemented until some 20 years later.

Sidney Webb served the LSE once more, when the Director, William Pember Reeves, suffered a breakdown after the death of his son in 1917. Webb undertook the unpleasant duty of informing Reeves that his services were no longer required, assumed responsibility for the School between May and October 1919, and helped find Sir William Beveridge and convince him to become the next Director.

In 1932, the Webbs traveled to the Soviet Union and described Stalin's purges in a way that Dahrendorf, in general a supporter of the Webbs, calls 'sickening' (1995: 268). Ernest Gellner (1995) suggested later that, for that reason, the founders were best forgotten, for the good of the School.

The Second Foundation

Beatrice Webb coined the expression 'the second foundation' in describing the Beveridge era (1919–1937), during which several things happened. Beveridge introduced a commerce degree, which, he jokingly said, had to be right, as it was criticized by both theoreticians and practitioners. A new building complex (requiring new money) was constructed (a foundation stone was laid in 1920 by King George V). 'Staff now had rooms, there were even administrative quarters, students had classrooms as well as space for recreation, there were lecture theatres, there was a real library' (Dahrendorf 1995: 143). New faculty members were recruited and received full-time university posts, and the majority of students enrolled full time, a transformation that Beveridge called a 'decasualization'.

Dahrendorf expresses the opinion of other biographers that all this might have happened without Beveridge, but that it would probably have proceeded more slowly and without a 'Beveridge impress'. The latter, says Dahrendorf, was Beveridge's success with students, whom he saw as citizens of a modern state, to use his own metaphor (the faculty members, in contrast, weren't fond of him).

In order to solidify, to legitimize the idea-become-action, signals had to be sent to the wider community: dramatizing, justifying, marketing, selling, propagating. Although Webb understood all this, his choice of media was traditional: letters, articles, lectures. But an idea, locally translated into action, must be reified, for purposes of non-local communication, into a quasi-object that can travel and is recognizable as a translocal frame of reference (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996). During Beveridge's time, the logo of a beaver, and the motto *rerum cognoscere causas*, were produced. The School's own journal, *Economica*, began publication in 1921.

It appears that Beveridge was a workaholic and an autocrat, two characteristics that supposedly hold the key to the governance structure he formed, which survived for many decades. This structure's main trait was the delegation of governing duties from the Court of Governors (whose numbers were too high) to the

Director, justifying it with two arguments: that the collegiate system at Oxford and Cambridge was not innovative and that academics should teach and do research and not be bothered with administration.

Beveridge was not alone: as Webb had his Hewins, so Beveridge had his Jessy Mair — first as his secretary and later as his wife. She replaced Miss Mactaggart, who had actually run the School during the last years of Reeves' directorship, was promoted to the position of Dean, and then retired. Jessy Mair assumed both positions simultaneously.

Perhaps Beveridge's greatest scoop was the grant he obtained from the Rockefeller Memorial and Foundation, which, in the years 1923–1937, constituted one-quarter of the LSE's income. Rockefeller came looking for the LSE, and not the other way around, but once they had found each other, Beveridge took great care to preserve the connection. He established a committee that produced serious and regular reports, sailed across the Atlantic when necessary, and, with the help of the Secretary, maintained frequent informal contacts with the Foundations.

During the period 1928–1932, many of the original professors retired and were replaced by people trained at the School — a generational exchange that appears to have had a serious stabilizing effect on the School. Beveridge left in 1937.

Dahrendorf has emphasized Beveridge's single-minded pursuit of his goals, which verged on an obsession. In his view, Beveridge's undoing as Director, apart from his over-reliance on the Secretary, began with his obsession for developing 'the Natural Bases of Social Science'. He told the Rockefeller Foundation that that was the wish of his professors and told his professors that Rockefeller wanted it that way. Had the sociology of science and technology existed at the time, it might have fitted the bill; but it did not, and it had not. A zoologist by the name of Lancelot Hogben, who kept toads on the premises and disagreed with everyone, took the Chair in 1930 — and left it in 1937, when it was obvious that he lacked the support of Rockefeller and his fellow professors.

I am taking Dahrendorf at his word here — the description of the events does not show why the Director's obsession for the 'Natural Basis of Social Science' should have been his undoing; institutional entrepreneurs often have fixed ideas, some of them innocent. Dahrendorf goes on to describe other undermining events, three of which occurred in 1934. There were conflicts between Beveridge and the Student Union, and between Beveridge and Laski, in both cases over the freedom of speech; the Director was horrified that the School might be perceived as 'red'. On the other side of the political divide was a hasty promise to extract the library of the Frankfurt Institute from Germany. All these decisions were made autocratically, even if some were later accepted by his professors or his sponsors. In the same year, Beveridge was instrumental in creating the Academic Assistance Council for refugees: many refugee scientists from Germany and Austria came to the LSE in the 1930s.

Beveridge wanted to resign from his post as early as 1929, and, true to form, he concocted a secret plan that would gracefully retire him into a Chair of Economics. When the plan became known, however, the LSE professors opposed it and Rockefeller refused to finance it, withdrawing his support from the School. In the eyes of the Rockefeller Foundation's representatives, the LSE was in a mess by 1935, with no rescue plan in sight. In 1937, Beveridge left for Oxford and managed to negotiate a deal permitting Mrs Mair to remain until 1938, beyond her retirement age. Professor Alexander Carr-Saunders took over Beveridge's post.

Should Beveridge be seen as an institutional entrepreneur in his role as the School's first successful and, in his last years, unsuccessful administrator? Or should he be seen as the Chairman of the Committee that produced the Beveridge Report in 1942, making him, at least in Dahrendorf's eyes, 'the father of the modern welfare state' (Dahrendorf: 154)?[7] Observe that, in his second role, Beveridge did not even know that he was the founder of an institution; it took 20 years to implement the recommendations of the Report. Here again is a clash between the two meanings of the notion of 'institution': that of a formal grouping of people, an organization or an association, which can truly be seen as an enterprise; and that of a collective practice that becomes justified and taken for granted.

The 'Door-openers'

Dahrendorf mentions an interesting category of people who played an important role in solidifying the LSE in the first sense of the 'institution', without much visibility in this role. For some reason he calls them 'gatekeepers', clearly unaware of the sense in which Kurt Lewin (1947) has used the term (groups or individuals who make decisions about what is allowed in or kept out). The people Dahrendorf has in mind kept the doors open (he probably intended to say 'doorstoppers') between the inside and the outside, between political factions, between academic factions, and between the mighty Director and the Secretary on the one hand and the students on the other. Some of them were faculty, some were administrators, and, last but not least, there were the porters. Such people are worthy of attention because they were helping a group created by an institution to survive as a group and as an organization, while the institutional entrepreneurs were otherwise engaged (usually with the world outside). The metaphor of the doors — closed or open — became quite literal in 1968 when the students demolished the gates and then the doors were installed at various places in the School by the then-Director, Sydney Caine.

Going on in Style

'The job to be done at the School was not just one of style, much as style mattered', says Dahrendorf (1995: 337), introducing the era of Alexander Carr-Saunders, which lasted 20 years. In the recommendation sent to the Selection Committee, Carr-Saunders was described as 'admirable on Committees, practical, clear-headed and judicious, very even-tempered, and magnanimous. He doesn't inspire; but he encourages. People would like and trust him; and he would stay the course' (Dahrendorf 1995: 334). An ideal director, it seems, but not perceived as an entrepreneur, although he led the School through difficult times for 20 years. Why not? Because, says Dahrendorf, the School entered the period of 'normalization', aided by the 1944 Education Act and the 1963 Report on Higher Education. The LSE became a normal university; additionally, the unrest of 1968 and the hostile political attitude toward the social sciences that began in late 1970s did not help to maintain 'the style'. One interpretation would be that a bigger and sturdier institution — the university — annexed the smaller one — the practice-oriented school of social sciences. One can see an analogy with business entrepreneurship: a small company fights for survival and then grows; its success leads to its acquisition by a large company. Is this a sign of success or the end of the entrepreneurial dream? In other words, has the LSE survived as an institution? Gellner, for instance, claimed that the LSE of the post-war period became a victim of the cult of growth, and turned into 'a factory of degrees' (1980: 13). Yet, this may have been exactly the form it needed to take in order to survive in a changed institutional order. Questions about the present role of the LSE will be best answered by my UK colleagues; I shall now summarize insights into possible ways of describing and theorizing institutional entrepreneurship.

The Secrets of Institutional Entrepreneurship: Love, Contingency, and Control

Why was the LSE Loved So Much?

According to actor-network studies, love is a necessary requirement for an artifact in the center of a macro actor, and therefore for the macro actor, itself, to survive (Latour 1996). It certainly seems that the LSE, as an artifact, enjoyed love in abundance. In the Preface to his history, Ralf Dahrendorf claims that one of the alumni asked him to express 'in a word the charm of the place that so many lovingly call "the School", as if there was no other school in the world' (1995: v). He then proceeds, giving an explanation along the lines that Gabriel Tarde (1890/1962) would have called 'logical reasons', but soon moves on to 'extra-logical' reasons:

> 'One word? That may be asking too much, and a word would be too little for an answer. One theme perhaps. There is forever an explosive relationship between social science and public policy. Californians worry about the San Andreas Fault and what its violent eruption might do to the peace of their homes: LSE disturbs the peace of mind of those who are directly, or more often indirectly, affected by its doings through another fault line ... between wanting to know the causes of things and wanting to change things, dispassionate study and committed action, ascetic aspirations and worldly temptations. The very location of the School defines the fault line, at the heart of the polygon which includes the Law Courts and the City, Bloomsbury and Theatreland, Whitehall and Westminster ... This is where the architectural as well as the geological metaphor ends, for it was never just the common roof which united the School. The LSE may be permanently threatened by quakes of one kind or another, but it is also a place which engenders a special kind of loyalty among its members. The LSE matters to those who have come to it. It is not just a few lines in their curricula vitae, an educational experience, or even a first-rate university, but an institution which has laid claim to a part of the hearts and souls of many ... For the major part of its first century ... the School was a place to work and to play, to spend long days in earnest seminar and corridor talk as well as on frivolous pursuits like lunch-hour dances, to make friends, and for not a few to find their partners for life. LSE creates a common sense of belonging for people who recognize each other wherever they meet.' (Dahrendorf 1995: v–vi)

The first part of Dahrendorf's utterance is a correct description of specificity of the School as an idea; it is hardly an explanation of its success, however. A great many academic organizations that were trying to combine 'dispassionate study and committed action' have either vanished or have come down on the one side. The location of the School in the center of the city is already a clue, and far more than a metaphor. What is in the center of the city is in the center of public attention. To move out of the city, unless to a city of its own, as Microsoft did, is equal to moving out of that attention, as both the directors and the porters fully understood.

Even more explanatory power can be attributed to the 'extra-logical' reasons explored by Dahrendorf: the love and loyalty of the School's alumni. But why did they love it so much?

I think that Dahrendorf provides an answer, both in the quote and in the book, but does not label it. I would say that the School, unlike many other academic organizations, *constituted a complete world*. He mentions 'work and play', but only in another place does he mention an aspect that is central in my view: from the inception, women constituted a natural and integral part of the School, not only as students, but also as people in high positions, formally or informally. Additionally, because of the evening students, the age of the student population varied, unlike the situation in other universities. This complete world was also due to the high percentage of foreign faculty and students; again, they were not there as tokens of some alien group (Austrian émigrés, Indian exchange students), but as fully fledged members of the School who brought their alterity — their defining difference — with them and mixed it into the LSE. Granted, the code of conduct was very 'British', but it was, and is, a theatrical Britishness, at which the foreigners can actually beat the locals.

The LSE was thus a small world, and a world easy to love: *full of variety, based on irresolvable tensions* (between theory and practice, between political left and right), and *turning such tensions into sources of energy* rather than disruption (a 'tamed paradox', as it were).

Additionally, as Dahrendorf points out, it was never 'an ivory tower': 'on the contrary, truly academic pursuits always involved a battle to keep the noise of the outside world out' (1995: 301). No wonder that it felt like taking part in history just to be there. What role did the institutional entrepreneurs have in all of this?

Contingency or Control? An Anthill

Does the emergence of the LSE conform to the model of institutionalization as a contingent process, or to the idea of instituting — the result of effective control exerted by the entrepreneurs? Both.

Let me first review Dahrendorf's reasoning: I am, after all, piggy-backing on his historical work, and he is a great sociologist who has his own explanation. He starts with the fortunate complementarity of Webb's visions and Hewins' hard work: necessary but not sufficient. He also notes alliances, but these are also a work of entrepreneurs, and I would give them greater weight. Then he brings fashion into the equation: 'The "five Es" which made up the field of intellectual forces in which the LSE came into being — Education, Economics, Efficiency, Equality, Empire — were associated with the great or at least fashionable names of the time' (1995: 25). Dahrendorf hastens to add that they did not add up to a coherent philosophy — on the rationalist but unproven assumption that coherent philosophies are the key to success. A point that I find convincing, however, is that during its inception the LSE provided a forum for trying new ideas and objectives at the time when the old, Gladstonian ones were in disarray.

So what did the institutional entrepreneurs actually do? They *recruited, enrolled, translated the interests, and stabilized the connections*, just as actants and actors building a macro actor do. The interesting aspect of this case, however, is that the allies practically begged to be enrolled at those times. In other words, historical contingencies played an important role.

Although both translation and actor-network allow for the important role of historical contingencies in Rorty's (1989) sense, it is the garbage can model (March and Olsen 1976) that purposefully dramatized them. An inclusion of the elements of this model in my reading of the institutional entrepreneurship may significantly enrich it. In the case presented here, it means equating garbage can with zeitgeist, but I believe that this equation is sustainable and will work. The resulting reading of the case would then be as follows: in a given time and place, a zeitgeist positive to innovative higher education and research hosted institutional entrepreneurs who picked up/translated/invented an idea that fitted both the spirit of the times and sponsors who were willing to respond to the call.

The garbage can theory does not exploit its own metaphor on one point, however: what reaction is occurring to produce an effect (a decision or, better yet, an institution — after all, a decision seems to be momentary whereas an institution 'ferments' for a long time). One could ask: What is the role of the institutional entrepreneurs in this metaphorical picture? Are they enzymes? Or, if one remains faithful to the translation, were they the prophets of the zeitgeist, its foremost beneficiaries?

Torn between one spiritual and one chemical metaphor, I seek salvation in a third: institutions as anthills. The metaphor was previously used to describe open-source communities (Lefkowitz 2006) that are densely populated with entrepreneurs. An anthill is not a building erected according to a plan; it is a practice of long standing, taken for granted by the ants; and if the ants may not know what justifies the existence of the anthill, the biologists certainly do. The anthill is a part of an ecosystem, and can be built only in specific places where specific materials are available, and at specific times. It takes many ants to build it, and as individuals they are indispensable but not irreplaceable. The institutional entrepreneurs are the ants who start the building, the idea being the queen.[8]

Do Institutions Need Entrepreneurs?

Yet another conclusion that can be drawn from the history of the LSE may be that the quality distinguishing institutional entrepreneurs from other people is their entrepreneurial nature. It seems that such people are equipped with a great deal of energy, that they are very good at forging alliances, and that they have a special sense that allows them to feel 'what is in the air', a talent for pattern recognition.

Are these skills or traits learnable or teachable? Hardly. As with artists, one can improve the technique, but not learn a talent. But do institutions require entrepreneurs? This is not certain, as most of the reasoning about their role is post hoc, ergo propter hoc: when an institution has been established, people who were involved in establishing it are seen as decisive for its establishment (*cherchez l' entrepreneur!*). Most practices that have not been institutionalized probably also had their ardent proponents, but they have been forgotten. Other cases indicate that practices can become institutionalized, even when entrepreneurs fail (Czarniawska and Wolff 1998).

There can be no doubt that 'institutional entrepreneurs' are characters in a *narrative of the emergence of institutions*. They are attributes of the genre, and are required to achieve narrative coherence. If Sidney Webb had not existed, he would have had to be invented, as the romance of entrepreneurship requires such a figure. The question could then be asked: Why is this genre so stable? How is it stabilized and by whom? Although social scientists undoubtedly play a certain role in stabilizing it, it also seems that such a myth of entrepreneurship is enrolled in service by the very entrepreneurs themselves: people who, like the founders of the LSE, believe that society needs a change and that it is possible to change it.

My claim is that allowing the narrative of institutional entrepreneurship to be enriched with the image of an anthill may make it more realistic — not diminishing the heroism of ants, merely multiplying their number and character and stressing the connections. Also, a genre analysis of the histories of institutions might further help to make room for alternative narratives of the emergence of institutions.

Notes

1 The first version of this paper was presented at the Workshop on Institutional Entrepreneurship at the University of Melbourne, 15–18 December 2004. The paper as it appears here was revised 6 December 2007.

2 For the account of major events, I use Ralf Dahrendorf's history of the LSE, published on its 100th anniversary (Dahrendorf 1995), and LSE's own homepage, http://www.lse.ac.uk/lsehistory, which is consistent with Dahrendorf's version, as these are the recent official histories of LSE, based on the original documents. For interpretations, often opposing Dahrendorf's, I refer to many other sources.

3 Equivalent to approximately £1 million in 1994 (Dahrendorf 1995: 3).

4 At another point (Dahrendorf 1995: 129) he says that '[t]he spirit of the time is more than just the *Zeitgeist*', a peculiar statement for a native German speaker, as one is the literal translation of the other.

5 It became the British Library of Political Science and Economics in 1925.

6 Dahrendorf uses both the noun 'institution' and the adjective 'institutional' in a great many meanings, often on the same page.

7 Dahrendorf gets around the problem by saying different things about Beveridge in different places: he was the greatest Director; he was horrible; he was great in planning, bad in implementing; he built the School; he was awkward and asocial; he was loved by students and younger faculty ... and so on.

8 It is tempting to say that they are warriors — male ants with wings. This would be unfair, however, as warriors do not work and institutional entrepreneurs do. Every metaphor reaches the end of its usefulness at some point.

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