

Sociology of Institutional Changes (Published in Georgian in 2002)

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SUMMARY:

I. Definition of the Social Institutions and Forms of Social Institutions:

It is possible to find three polar different definitions in literature about social changes and indications on social institutions:

1. Institution as general, before-existing (“vorgegebene”) structure. Concrete institutional forms are its reification/realization – Malinowski, Gehlen, Durkheim, Douglas.
2. Institution as conceptual concretization from frequently repeated human activities – Randal Collins, Berger, Luckmann.
3. Institution, as process in the organization (i.e. organizations and associations create in themselves institutions as rules/norms for action) – Maciver, Page.

All these definitions are true: This relativity is the outcome of the concrete approaches/positions of definition-makers:

Capacity of these three definitions to be applicable to the concrete institutional Forms:

“Family”

The first social system/institution perceived by the human being is the family, or its substitute. During growth he/she sees a number of concrete families, mostly acting in the similar way. This is the basis for formation/formulation of the definitions of the family, as a general structure existing (“somewhere”) before concrete behaviors, and definition of the concrete family, as concrete example of that one.

This “natural” approach creates the basis of the tradition and thus, legitimates the ground for family actors to make demands and evaluate actions/behaviors.

Beside this, for the “passive” member of the family (in some cases: children, adults, servants, relatives, etc.) the family is an organization with strict boundaries, where

the agents (active, main members) establish/control the rules and orders for action and conduct them.

For an observer, who observes family as social institution, family is an abstraction from concrete acts and behaviors frequently repeated by the members of concrete families. Under “observer” here I mean not only scientists and those who write laws about the family ¹, but in general, the people, who are not satisfied with the existing institution of the family and separate themselves from it.

“State”

If we consider a concrete State as the example of social institution, or how it is used to call “Power/Politics”, we’ll see that for the main actors², state is an organization, which creates institutions, i.e. rules and orders for action. This means, that for agents there do not exist general institutions of power/politics. For main actors the concrete institutions are always concrete outcomes of the concrete organizational frame of the state (organizational frames here are state constitution and laws). In this case, by the view of main actors, institution is the rule of existence of the organization: organization, as concrete process is an institution.

At the same time, for passive members of the state/power-politics, who, e.g. tied with this concrete institutional work, are influenced by the work of these institutions, but who cannot be influenced by his/her side, state/power/politics is general, traditional phenomenon, existing before and behind any action and concrete process, and its concrete reifications are concrete institutional forms (police, army, parliament, government, health care, insurance systems).

Besides, for an observer a state is an abstraction from those actions, taking place in and by policy/power organizations.

¹ These two positions under this label are mostly contingent and are definite cultural roles

² I mean politicians, high-level civic servants, government members, etc.

“Civic Society”

If we choose as an example of social institution ‘civic society’, economic system, or church in developing countries³, we’ll see, that in several cases, for main actors this institutions (their values and rules of actions) are constructed by the frequent repetition of some actions by their members. It is evident, that state creates frame laws for these institutions, but their concrete face, the problems they are focused on, the values they carried, the behavior expected from their members from the side of others, i.e. the concrete face of the concrete institution, depends on and springs out mainly from the concrete activities held by the members of these institutions. It means, that here, in this realm, by the agents view, institutions are mostly self-defined entities. So, in this case institutions are abstractions from the frequently repeating actions.

As in the above examples, for a passive receiver⁴ of goods and messages these institutions are organizations, systematically provided others with some services and messages. For an observer, as there exist huge number of concrete churches, economical systems and civic societies, every concrete form of these institutions are reifications of the general, before existing (vorgegebene) structure(s).

So, we have three approaches to institutions, three understandings of institutions and three forms of institutions. Also, we have three participants in the institutional process: **agents** (active members, rulers, conductors of the institutions), **passive receivers of goods and messages**, and **observers**.

These three layers of the definitions/descriptions of the institutions can be named in the traditional way - *idealistic* (institution as a before-existing structure), *realistic*

³ For the most European States religion or the church is posed in the same column, as State. This above-mentioned case is possible to be ascribed to the some of NIS countries (including Georgia).

⁴ As one of the examples of passive receivers we can consider here volunteer workers in civic society organizations

(institution as an organization in process) and *conceptual* (institution as an abstraction from concrete behaviors, i.e. construct of consciousness)⁵.

On the scheme it becomes clear, that there is a possibility of threeface definition/description of the institutions according to the condition of the existence of all three participants:

Concrete Social Institution Participant's Approaches/Positions	“Family”	“Civic Society”, “Economical System”, “Church”	“State”
Agent	Idealistic	Conceptual	Realistic
Observer	Conceptual	Idealistic	Conceptual
Passive receiver	Realistic	Realistic	Idealistic

This kind of representation of participants, separately and as independent ones is optional and formal. Mostly all three approaches can be understood as unified in one “person”–system. For example, one “person” can be an agent/actor regarding to the family, an observer regarding to the church and a passive receiver regarding to the state.

The above given arrangement of the names of concrete institutions are not obligatory and can vary from culture to culture, from state to state, from region to region. The above arrangement is that specific distribution of institutions, characteristic of Georgia, and may be, of some of the former Soviet Republics (the European part) ⁶.

⁵ Here I want to clarify this “labeling” of approaches and forms of institution: In the medieval ages there took place the discussion about the nature of the ideas: the “idealists” were saying, that ideas exists before concrete things, in the God’s mind, and god creates the things according to those ideas. “Realists” were used to say that ideas of the things are themselves in the things. By “Conceptualists” theory ideas are in our mind, i.e. we are construct them by finding similarities in the diversity.

⁶ The flexibility of this approach gives possibility to use it in radically different societies: from some still existing “primordial” societies, where power/politics can be characterized as the above

This description of institutions is useful for the description of the institutional changes, but is not capable to elaborate an adequate topology of the institutions. For the latter case we must work out the types of social institutions.

Types of social institutions:

In some cases, institutions can be defined by the level and quality of values and rules, carrying demands, expectations and frames for action of a concrete institution, and also, an apparatus for control and repression facilities (in the case of deviancies and deviants).

By this approach institutions are divided to the following groups:

- **Micro institutions** – institutions, which create the minimal level of the frames for control, stabilization and activity (a maximum level of value/restrictions stratification, a minimum level for controlling this stratification)
- **Macro institutions** – Institutions, which create the maximum frames for control, stabilization and activity (a minimum⁷ level of value/restrictions stratification, a maximum level of controlling of this stratification)
- **Meso institutions** – Institutions, which create balance and equilibrium between sanctions and values; i.e. the restrictions and apparatus for these restrictions are potentially equal and depend on the solidarity in actions of agents of these institutions. Consequently, these institutions are meso form of restrictive values and restriction apparatuses.

The concrete forms of these institutions cannot be the same in any society or community. They can vary from one state and system to another; e.g. if we imagine the community of traditional-agrarian society, where the education of adults is only possible in the family, (i.e. it transfers from father/mother to son/daughter), the institution of education in this

given scheme's "Family", to e.g. Beck's "Risk Society" where power/politics can have the description, identical to the scheme's "civic society" and "economical systems".

⁷ In the case of totalitarian State the values and demands of restriction are maximal, but here can be argued the question: The totalitarian state is a macro institution, or it is symbiotic existence of micro and macro ones?

community can be classified as a micro institution. In the countries, where higher education is the issue of the politics and government, the higher education institution can be scoped in the macro group. In the USA, where higher education agencies are mostly private and conjunct directly to the market, the H.E. institution would be placed on meso level.

These institutions of different types create institutional complexes. According to the analysis of institutional complexes it is possible to define the type of a society/state.

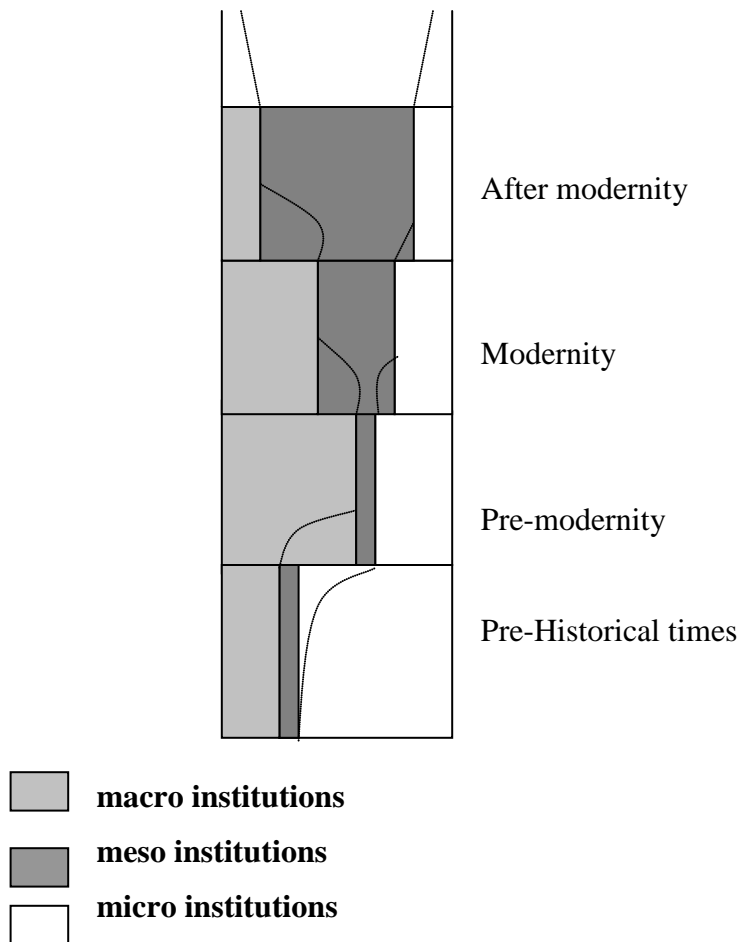
Institutional Complexes:

Institutional complex is the social event, when number of institutions of different types is unified either by the power of law, or by tradition (unwritten case): When in the concrete system/society/community the existence of one of them implicitly means existence of another (i.e. in some cases: power/politics – economical system, power/politics – church - family, education-family etc.)

- Institutional complexes: Different institutional complexes can be described by the combinations of the institutions with same labels. In different societies they can behave and arrange themselves differently. For our culture and civilization, institutions, which till nowadays still do not change the type through history, are the **Family (micro)** and the **Power/politics (macro)**. Other institutions can be moved up or down on the three-point-scale (micro, meso, macro) of the classification. The concrete type of institutional complex defines, in the end, the type of the society, community and state.

Changing of Institutional Complexes as Social History

Social history can be described as movement from macro-dominant systems to meso-dominant systems. In the pre-pre-modern (pre-historical) period most institutions were micro (probably including religion). Then, in the pre-modern period situation changed to the side of macro-dominance. Modern and after-modern period can be characterized as direction towards meso-domination.



It is evident, that the transition from one condition to another should not be marked so strictly. The dot lines indicate the possible wave-forms of concrete transitions.

On the other side, this scheme is mostly formal, and does not reflect all the nuances of the concrete institutional trends: for example, in the Soviet Union there existed a social order to transform all institutions to the macro type (including family).

But, even in the case of the SU, the state imitates the existence of the meso-institutions (Union of writers, workers, trade unions, etc.).

Nowadays concrete processes in the developing countries do not strictly coincide with this pattern: there are several attempts to transform the church [back] into the macro institution, and to keep civic society institutions (including economic systems) in the boundaries of state organizational processes, i.e. create from them state (macro) bodies.

The dotted lines on the top of the scheme indicate the trend of the meso-dominance, which seems to be everlasting (never coincides with the whole social universe).

But despite of these movements, institutional changes themselves, as a process indicates that the process of meso-dominance is irreversible⁸.

Sociology of Institutional Changes

Here we have two-dimensional description of institutions. As I have mentioned above, the type-oriented model is adequate for fixing of existing situation, but it is not adequate for explaining institutional changes. This model is based on the pure system approach, and cannot give any explanation, except common phrases like “inherent character of the social universe”.

It is possible to use this type-description in the concrete researches: changes of the institutional complex can be served as a measure for changes of institutions (i.e. if the law of a State changes concerning church’s extra-ordinal function, the church becomes meso-institution. Correspondingly, every institutional complex, that church participated

⁸ This approach opposed to the idea, that first organizational frame of the human society was more “democratic”, “family type” etc. Based on these definitions of institutional development, it seems that the “first” rational frame for society was expanding family-type-ruling on the whole society. And the “democratic”, based on “elections” and etc. the organizational form still existing in the beginning of XIX and XX century tribes (i.e. the Indians of North America) are consequences of the development and not the “natural” state of affairs.

in, changes⁹. But in some cases, an institution lost its' macro-functions officially, on the normative level, but preserved in institutional complex with the power/politics¹⁰.

Opposed to this, the “first” dimension, focused on the perceptions, approaches and the behavior of institutional participants in it, can provide an opportunity to find the basis of institutional changes.

There are two kinds of institutional changes:

1. Differentiation and De-differentiation:

Differentiation: The case, when new institution emerges from the existing one. An emerged institution preserves the type and form of the “parental” institution.

Re-differentiation: The case when several institutions are unified in one institutional form.

Examples: In Scandinavian States in the 80-s of XX century an emergence of the institution of elementary education from school education institution has begun. Now it has its own values, rules and selection criteria. The same example is an emergence of militia troops from the army.

There are opposite cases of re-differentiation too: in medieval ages creation of the institute of “citizenship” (or “city”) combined in itself several before existing institutions. Or, the emergence of civic society in post-Soviet countries, which united the former existing institutions of dissidents, underground, kitchen-talk and others.

⁹ This must not be understood as if institutional change depends on the organizational (in the above-mentioned case – change of the law) changes. This concrete change would be possible only if, e.g. the concrete form of the family as institution begins to change and will not be tied more with the church in the institutional complex.

¹⁰ **Concrete example:** Changing of the institution of the church in Georgia (from medieval ages to nowadays): *Story, how orthodox church of Georgia keeps its macro institutional type till the end of XX century (it was in the institutional complex together with power/politics. Only the other parts of this complex changes/substitutes each-other, i.e. family, education, etc.), How it became partly meso-institution during the Soviet period, and how it faces nowadays challenge to be transformed into an absolutely meso institution, by political demands to return to it its lost macro-functions.*

The reasons of differentiation/re-differentiation can be distribution/division of labor, impulse from outside (from macro level¹¹, adopting laws, changing constitution), wish of agents for consolidation due to important common problems etc.

2. **Re-institutionalization:** Institutional change, when the institution changes and moves towards the other institutional form and type:

As we have mentioned above, the main participants of the institution are active actors or agents. But by general view, they act in different conditions of control and repression. Some of these conditions are too strict, some of them – less. The place, where the controls and repression are equal or, “less” is the best place for acting agents. I am not using the word “freedom” as the slavery can be the value of the institution and, correspondingly, of the agent. It is easier to reify slavery on the level and form of conceptual institutions, then on idealistic or realistic levels.

The meso level is attractive for the agents¹², as the realm, with the most possibilities to create and defend their own restrictions/apparatus: it is self-regulating system of institutions.

By this view, any deviance is an attempt to make its own controlling-value system, which is not prohibited on the meso level¹³. Accordingly, the main reason of the institutional change is the attempt for transforming it in self-regulative processes. (Another main point is that the basis for institutional change must be an actual, or potential agent, or, main actor). When the deviants are passive actors/observers, these attempts end without success, and an institutional repressive apparatus begins to work.

¹¹ Example for this is the above mentioned – emergence of civic society as an institution in the post-soviet period: one of the bases for this was the official position of the West to have contacts mostly with civic society organizations.

¹² Or for them who want to become agents, but have not corresponding place in the existing forms and types of institution.

¹³ Contemporary family phenomena can be served as an example. Sociologists considered 20 years ago homosexual couples as a deviant behavior. Today they are speak about them in the terms of Social Diversity.

But in some cases normatively defined passive actors can radically change the institution¹⁴.

When the resistance from the side of existing institutional complexes is strong, the process of re-institutionalization easily transforms in revolution. When the resistance is weak or plastic, the meso-dominant process takes over. The one of the examples of the latter is the direction of the institution of contemporary family from micro institution form to the meso one¹⁵. Also, the elected power-holding positions can be accounted as the part of meso-dominance, but here under consideration must be taken the level of the power, charisma, etc.

According to the above interpretation, the deviant behavior is not the destroyer of the institution, but a strengthener: by superficial, common, everyday life view meso-dominance keeps institution in its formal margins, keeps the labels of the roles. The immanent changes are hard to mention and thus, for the common, everyday eye these radical changes are not connected with a social earthquake.

¹⁴ **Concrete example:** Emergence of the university, as institution in the medieval Europe. Story about the emergence of the university as institution from church and from guilds: at the beginning the university was the unification of guilds of professors and students, partly (more or less) controlled by the clergy. The development of the university as separate institution from the guilds caused by the “student right” movement, raised in Bologna, Paris, etc. The consequences were not the same in every place, but these movements create the structure of the university as institution (It changes its form and type, and transforms from meso institution – conceptual form [guild] to macro-institution – realistic form [university]).

¹⁵ See note # 74.

Institutionalization – Two Dimensions:

From the view of the forms and types of institutions, institutionalization is the process of legitimization of values and repressive apparatus conducted by the potential or/and actual agents towards/from concrete institutional forms and types. “Conducted towards/from” means searching for passive receivers and observers. Institutionalization completes, when three roles (agent, passive receiver and observer) collect themselves around legitimized values and restriction apparatus.

Thus, the first question to answer is what the institutions are for:

I. Parameters of Meso-dominance

The theories, “what are institutions for”, can be divided in two parts: 1. They are for satisfaction of basic needs of humans (Parsons, Malinovski) 2. They are mostly empty forms, which can be filled by society members for and with their aims, demands, expectations (Gehlen¹⁶, Plessner¹⁷). By the view from the forms of social institutions, both of these positions are true: Institutions are for satisfaction of basic needs for passive members and for observers of the institutions. But for the agents – they really are empty forms, filled by them with the concrete reifications (concrete realizations, demands, evaluations). But this emptiness vary and as based on the type of institution: the empty space on micro level is too narrow, on the macro level it is bigger, but bounded with strict margins, and is mostly free, wide and self-constructive on the level, labeled by us as “meso”.

The institutional change from this point of view is the orientation of the agents to widen the empty space (for freer behavior). The micro-level is too narrow and too filled. Macro-level is more appropriate, but the orientation of agents toward macro level ends with the creation of dictatorships and macro-micro institutional complexes. But, on the

¹⁶ Zijdervald, Anton C. The Institutional Imperative. Amsterdam University Press. 2000. pp.33-34: “For instance, the goal of a formal dinner party is usually not the satisfaction of the need for food. It certainly is not meant to appease one’s hunger. It is, in a sense, a *leerform*, an empty form which is filled with other motives and aims, such as networking, flirting, gossiping, forging political compromises, and making mafia deals”.

¹⁷ The same can be said about Plessner’s Role Theory.

other side, the existence of democracy, constitutional state and division of the power are the consequences of macro-orientation, i.e. macro-dominance. The facts of French revolution, the Soviet Union and Nazi regime is nothing, but the examples, illustrating that it is possible to overcome cyclic nature of history¹⁸.

After the clarification of the dangerous nature of macro-domination, the attention, not only intellectually and politically, but of the public sphere too, has turned to the meso level, and meso dominance comes on the scene. The meso-level, as it is self-constructive and self-defined by the agents, is principally endless, and is not as dangerous, as macro dominance; The legislative margins for it creates on the macro level, by active participation from meso-layer.

Individual as an Agency

But the above done description is not sufficient: It describes and explains general frames, but does not describe the concrete mechanisms of the changes. For clarifying this last point, the concrete case of the revolutionary situation in the State has taken¹⁹: The situation of that time can be described as a case, when some persons are used to have radically different and contradictory roles²⁰.

The reasons for that are: When the macro-level (State/power/politics) is authoritarian, it does not allow the existence of any kind of meso bodies, except very weak and depending on macro-institutions. In the society there are a number of potential agents, who wish to gain their institutional positions. On the macro level there are some

¹⁸ Here we have to turn to the side of Heidegger and mention, that his conclusion about the “by Fuhrer’s voice the Being speaks” was based on his phenomenological belief, that ‘understanding of the being’ (metaphysic) develops towards nationalism and nazi. But institutionally and socially, that is only two, and empirically overcomeable consequences.

¹⁹ The source of this explanation: Kreutz, Henrik. “Gutgemeint ist das Gegenteil von ist gelungen”. in: Materials of the Conference: “Organisierte Kriminaliteat oder ‘Invisible Hands’?” Universitaet Erlangen-Nurnbeg. 20.07.-21.07. Nurnberg. 2001: Reconstucting social roles and types of pre-revolutionary society in Russia of the beginning of XX century.

²⁰ In Kreuz’s example, Roman Malinowski, at the same time, was Duma member, criminal authority, security agent, etc.

empty places for agents, and possibility to create some new, but in the end, the number of these places became less, than number of personalized demands. These potential agents, who remained without places, begin to move in the direction of meso-institutions to create some kind of self-constructive institutional forms. This kind of action is strictly prohibited by the totalitarian state. Some of these newly created groups are criminals or revolutionaries, but most of them are only intellectually opposing the government. But, the state begins to create the special secret police services, which start to penetrate in such circles and by this penetration real anti-state, criminal and revolutionary bodies begin to create. This is not the end of the story: By this new civic service the loss of the clearness and definitiveness of the civic service in general has begun: As the aims of that secret police was secret and hidden, no one person in the state can demand from them a clear rapport or a clear professional/ethical behavior. They begin to create the revolutionary groups by themselves, recruiting citizens in these groups, oblige them to work not only for revolution, but for the state/police too, etc. On the other side, for the most citizens it was absolutely un-understandable the fact that these kinds of activities partly were carried out by the representatives of civic police: civic police members were in business relations with criminals and in some cases had material profit from this collaboration. These too, changes attitudes of citizens and they joined the revolutionary and opposition groups, becoming double and X-ble agents and etc.

By these actions the number of individuals emerges in the state, who, at the same time, have to fulfill the roles of the agents of different levels: they have to be at the same time idealists, realists and conceptualists. The consequences of these are the personalities as networks, or agencies, and absolutely vague characters of the key public and other roles.

These are the preconditions of the revolution, or, most painful institutional change – raised by the wish to make wider institutional boundaries, and ended with the step backward - creation of the [in some cases more] totalitarian environment – macro-micro institutional complex in its mostly primordial sense.

We can consider here, that the fact of existence in the society, and concretely, in the public sphere the individuals with different and contradictory agent roles, indicates on the a) totalitarian system in the State and b) dangerous and Revolutionary pre-

conditions²¹. Or, in other words, the more different and contradictory agent roles are possible to ascribe to the individuals, acting in the public sphere, the more totalitarian and unstable the State is.

Meso-Macro and Meso-Micro Institutional Complexes in Contemporary Social Systems

As contemporary development of the meso-dominance indicates, the social systems of the ‘developed’ states are more and more characterized by only two institutional complexes: Meso-Macro and Meso-Micro.

Meso-micro: Nowadays the only way to reach the micro level is to pass the meso-realm. Everything - information, goods, and messages – is possible to find in micro-institutional places only via meso-institutions.

Meso-Macro: macro level, as it was shown above, is necessary for existence of the meso-level. Besides, to guarantee the un-transformability of the macro-level in totalitarian state and dictatorship, several micro-meso institutional conjunctions exist: elected power positions, social security, health-care etc.

According to the distribution of the roles, in contemporary ‘developed’ social systems it is possible to describe the main orientation point: one individual-one agent. On the contrary, the ‘developing’ country role system is “one individual – agency”. “Agency” here means the network of agents.

But it is not the only difference between the social roles of the ‘developed’ countries and of that of the ‘developing’ countries: In the ‘developed’ countries the general orientation is one agent-one individual, but due to the institutional complexes, some agent position, attitude, is dualistic: In macro-meso level they have realistic-conceptual positions (roles), at the same time, and on the meso-micro level – conceptual-idealistic positions (roles)²².

²¹ I would mention here, that nowadays in Georgia and in most post-Soviet countries the situation can be described in the same terms and concepts.

²² It means, that the content of agent roles becomes more complex.

Finally, if it is necessary to formulate the difference between social roles and institutional attitudes in public sphere roles in the ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ social systems, we must say, that:

1. In the ‘developing’ countries different and contradictory agent roles are ascribed to a certain individual. This individual is obliged to fulfill the roles of different kinds of agents on the different institutional levels (i.e. he is obliged, according to the level, be either an idealist, or a realist, or a conceptualist). Individual is an agency. Individual is a system of agents.
2. In the ‘developed’ countries the system - one individual/one agent takes place. But in some cases these concrete agent positions (roles) are two-dimensional: according to the institutional complex, they are either idealist-conceptualists, or realist-conceptualists.

The difference between these two positions is clear, but, there are the similarities, that give possibilities for the ‘developing’ states governments to simulate some parts of the ‘developed’ systems²³.

²³ If someone succeeds to show only two agent/roles of public sphere actors to the West, and hide the others, by superficial view it is easy to make a mistake. The parts of the ‘developed’ systems, as a rule simulating by the power holders of the ‘developing’ states are: elections, transparency, state budget accountability, free market, etc.

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