

Martin Dimitrov –Finnemore: Norms, Culture, and World Politics (1996)

Finnemore makes a significant contribution to integrating the insights of sociological institutionalism with the current body of IR scholarship. Without her piece, the March, March & Olsen, and the Scott arguments remain abstract and it is not clear how they would apply to IR.

Framework: In sociological institutionalism social structure is ontologically prior to and generative of agents. World cultural rules constitute actors (states, organizations, individuals), world cultural norms produce organizational homogenization and isomorphism. Norms and rules make up institutions which diffuse around the world.

Empirics:

--Isomorphism within states:

- A. Western models of formal bureaucratic organization have spread around the world, not necessarily because they provide the most efficient solution to problems, but because they are socially legitimated “myths”; conformity with bureaucratic structure is just “ceremony”
- B. Standardization of educational systems
- C. Defense organized along the same lines in countries with divergent amounts of external threat
- D. Rise of the welfare state

--Isomorphism across states:

- A. Western-style bureaucratic states have spread around the world –strong cultural support for statehood and illegitimacy of other forms of political organization
- B. Global spread of norms of human rights

Problems:

--Sociological institutionalism describes the status quo –what institutions exist; it doesn't provide convincing explanations **why** these particular institutions have arisen or **how** they have come about

--Most scholarship in this vein assumes peaceful diffusion of Western cultural rules and norms around the world. Need to allow for imposition of culture through force and fiat.

--Assumption of a homogeneous Western cultural model is misguided. Equating progress (economic growth achieved through markets) with social justice (equality achieved through bureaucratic regulations) is erroneous. Conflicts between progress and equality and markets and bureaucracy create tension, contradiction, and constant normative contestation.

--Even with these qualifications, the assumption that there is only one **Western** model is a manifestation of cultural imperialism –revival of dependency paradigms where the periphery needs and wants to emulate the West (the core); alternative cultural models exist

--Too much emphasis on form and not enough attention to content –even if developing countries were to adopt a Western model, they can change it to suit their own needs; though most countries have welfare, the meaning and content of welfare policies is not the same everywhere ; need to look deeper than the surface

--Little room for agency –a country just adopts (or is forced to adopt) rules and norms