Bringing technology back in: a critique of the institutionalist perspective on museums

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Abstract

Sociologists that study organizations often analyze the museum from a cultural perspective that emphasizes the norms of the museum industry and the larger society. We review this literature and suggest that sociologists should take into account the technical demands of museums. Drawing on insights from social studies of technology, we argue that museums are better understood as organizations that must accomplish legitimate goals with specific technologies. These technologies impact museums and the broader museum field in at least three ways: they make specific types of art possible and permit individuals and organizations to participate in the art world; they allow actors to insert new practices in museums; and they can stabilize or destabilize museum practices. We illustrate our arguments with examples drawn from the world of contemporary art.
This article assesses some of the major premises of neo-institutionalist explanations of decentralization policy and practices, but focuses especially on the relationship between decentralization and democracy, in the context of the recent and ongoing Indonesian experience...
The institutionalist perspective, however, suggests that region-building cannot stop at simply securing regional political autonomy. Equally - perhaps more important - are matters of who makes decisions, and how. Let us recall two of the institutionalist governance axioms, namely the desirability of decision-making through independent representative associations, and the superiority of participatory decision-making. In an increasingly global economy, these elites and their charismatic leaders may undoubtedly help regions to jostle for influence with national and international organisations (e.g. the EU, or transnational corporations), but they will achieve little in terms of mobilising a regional development path based on unlocking hidden local potential.