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**RISE AGAINST:**

A DIALECTIC OF CONTROL PERSPECTIVE ON DRESDEN'S  
WITHDRAWAL FROM THE UNESCO WORLD-HERITAGE LIST

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**INTRODUCTION**

On June 25<sup>th</sup> 2009, the UNESCO withdrew the city of Dresden, Germany, from its seminal list of World Heritage sites. It was the first time the World Heritage Committee had to go that far to sanction in-compliance issues.<sup>1</sup> Compliance with the UNESCO's prescriptions is usually understood as a natural interest of the organizations in charge of the sites, as these same organizations are responsible for applying for the accolade and for making a case for the necessity to get listed. The so-called Dresden Elbe Valley became listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004 as "an outstanding example of land use, representing an exceptional development of a major Central-European city" (World Heritage Committee, 2004: 39). However, in early 2005, the city of Dresden, via a referendum among its citizens, voted in favor of building a bridge right through the valley under protection (the so-called

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<sup>1</sup> One other site went through the withdrawal procedure: the Arab Oryx sanctuary in Oman. In this case, in-compliance was no reason anymore as the site had disappeared: the authorities had reduced the site by 90% to allow for oil drilling.

*“Waldschlößchenbrücke”*). Subsequently, the bridge project grew into a polarizing conflict among the organs of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and the city of Dresden. The World Heritage Committee, in its 2006 session, demanded proposals for other designs, even suggesting the construction of a tunnel instead of a bridge, and placed the site on the list of endangered sites. This prescription enjoyed vigorous support by social movements that had been opposing the project for years, by the federal State of Germany, by German intellectuals (e.g. Nobel Prize laureates Günter Blobel and Günter Grass), and by famous architects (e.g. Gerkan, Marg and Partners). The city of Dresden, pushing legal arguments to the fore, began building the bridge nonetheless. The dispute unfolded over three more years parallel to the construction. In 2009, the World Heritage Committee voted to delist the site for non-compliance issues, a premiere worldwide while the bridge itself was opened on August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

In this paper, we draw on this case to make an important point for current institutional theory building. We complement existing research that primarily focuses on resolving institutional multiplicity (Smets & Jarzabkowski, forthcoming; Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010) by unravelling a case of unresolved multiplicity. In particular, we share the concern that institutional multiplicity provides organizations with leeway for resisting environmental influences (Oliver, 1991; Pache & Santos, 2010). Moreover, we extend these arguments by studying the process of how this stifles conflicts, how they unfold and, finally, how they become particularly difficult to resolve. Towards this end, we introduce Giddens’ concept of dialectic of control (1984) in order to develop a preliminary framework that explains these aspects: (1) why and how members of one organization enter internal conflict over their organization’s goals (and/or means to reach these goals), (2) how their dialectical confrontation makes the conflict spill over the organizational boundaries to become a field-wide issue, and (3) how this process decouples the object of dispute (i.e. the means) from the initial goals, thus dooming any chance for compromises. Discussing our observations, we deliver theoretical contributions to current debates on the resolution of institutional multiplicity and offer implications for cultural policy. More specifically, our study points out that policy needs awareness towards the substitution of material motives by symbolic beliefs that may fuel the acceleration of such conflicts.

## THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Institutional multiplicity has become a going concern for institutional theory building (Dunn & Jones, 2010; Purdy & Gray, 2009; Wright & Zammuto, 2013). The key point of these arguments is that institutions host different logics that may be in conflict with each other and thus trigger various organizational responses (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Greenwood, Diaz, Li, & Lorente, 2011; Lounsbury, 2008; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Scholars in this domain usually focus either on the effects of multiplicity on the field level or on how organizations reconcile multiplicity. Regarding the former, famous empirical examples are tensions among community versus vertical integration logics in banking (Marquis & Lounsbury, 2007), among professional and market logics in health care (Reay & Hinings, 2005; Reay & Hinings, 2009) and tensions among state and market logics public administration organizations (Purdy & Gray, 2009). Regarding the latter, studies on the organizational level offer detailed process views of how actors embed elements from conflicting logics into everyday practice and thus find ways to handle multiplicity. Zietsma and Lawrence (2010), for example, show how social movements contested harvesting practices in British Columbia's forestry industry and, later, reached consent over new practices with industry representatives. Similarly, Smets and Jarzabkowski (forthcoming) show how various institutional logics become transformed into new practices in a law firm whereas Smets and colleagues (Smets et al., 2012) track the diffusion of such novel practices into the field.

A second line of argument pertains that organizations may also ignore potentials to reconcile multiplicity since organizations may resist institutional influences. On the one hand, Oliver (1991) stresses that a firm's external resource dependencies determine whether organizations resist institutional pressures or not. On the other, Pache and Santos (2010) bemoan that this argument circumvents situations of institutional pluralism where environmental demands may be ambiguous or unclear, thus diluting the appropriate organizational reaction. They conceptualize that organizational responses to multiplicity are contingent upon the nature of the conflicting environmental demands and the echo that these demands find among organizational members.

We remain sympathetic to the idea that some organizations and/or individuals may aim to reconcile institutional conflicts. Yet, we extend this argument by the complementary thought that other actors may very well resist these attempts. In what follows, we strive for

exploratory, context-sensitive insights about how the interactions of both sides give birth to conflicts, escalate them, and enter into what resembles an institutional dead-end. To achieve this, we carry out an in-depth case study on the conflict surrounding the bridge in Dresden. Furthermore, we propose to rely on and develop the dialectic control perspective. From this perspective, inter-individual, but also inter-organizational relations, are naturally prone to asymmetries in power, conflicts and change, as each interaction among agents is a new instance of field structuration (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). In other words, structures “are consciously established, maintained, fought over, and argued about rather than taken for granted as if they were unchangeable features of the world” (Sewell 1992: 24). According to Giddens’ treatment of the resources of domination in social systems, conflicts emerge in the agents’ attempts at monitoring, controlling and influencing the action of others, thus “subdividing the resources which yield modalities of control in social systems” (1984: 283). He proposes that, in such interactions, the subordinates, knowledgeable as they are about their situation and the institutional landscape they evolve in, are able to influence the activities and modalities of control of the superiors and thus balance what he calls the *dialectic of control*.

## CASE STUDY

Our analysis is based on a collection of 542 documents from public and private archives, totaling 6508 pages.<sup>2</sup> In addition, we conducted 18 interviews (lasting from 0h25m to 3h42m), with actors involved in the project and/or the conflict. All but one interview were taped and transcribed. We enhanced this body of data by reviewing a set of 304 press articles published by the most widely distributed local paper (including 23 additional interviews given to the press by actors involved in the project between 1994 and 2000), and by collecting visual data such as maps, 3D visualizations, as well as documentary videos and numerous pictures we accrued during repeated visits to the construction site. To improve the validity of this investigation, we triangulated information among several data sources, making equal use of interviews, documents, maps, and press coverage, and considered information as ‘existent’ only when we could find confirmation from two different sources, documents and interviews. In terms of analysis, our approach corresponds to what Giddens (1984) calls an analysis of strategic conduct. In such an analysis, “the focus is placed upon modes in which actors draw

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<sup>2</sup> All data was collected and analyzed by the first author. When we speak of “we” in the context of data collection data analysis, we do so only to comfort the reading flow.

upon structural properties in the constitution of social relations”; this means “giving primacy to strategies of control within defined contextual boundaries” (Giddens, 1984, p. 288). This grants similar importance to structural, organizational, and agentic processes. Our findings show three main phases.

## **FINDINGS**

***Phase 1: Endogenous Emergence of the Conflict.*** The motivation of the project finds its roots in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the City foresaw a circular evolution of its urban structures, with two rings running around the city center. Since then, every decade or so, planning for a new bridge over the Elbe, more or less at this same location, has been put to the fore by the Administration as an adequate solution to solve urban problems of various natures. Eventually none of these plans ever evolved into a real construction project (often due to financial problems; sometimes to historical events, such as war efforts in the late 1930’s, or the reunification of Germany in the late 1980’s). On October 3, 1990, Germany was reunified. In the former GDR, traffic had remained limited due to shortages in car distribution (for more on this, see Zatlin, 1997). Upon reunification in 1990, Dresden experienced a boom in traffic. Roads and other infrastructures received newly focused attention from the Administration, and traffic forecasts further reinforced the expectation of traffic increases. In 1991, traffic volumes reached levels that were not expected until the year 2000 and the Administration started working on a bundle of measures to solve this new problem. In 1994, it presented an encompassing traffic concept, with numerous corrective measures to the Council. Among other things, the concept included the construction of a new bridge. In this phase, we show how numerous members of the city administration and city council entered an internal conflict about the priorities for the city and the means to deal with the forecasted traffic increase. Facing resistance, the decision-makers at the head of the administration, in favor of the bridge for various reasons (more details in the full version) organized a workshop to objectify the bridge as the best solution, provoking an internal breakup in the organization.

***Phase 2: Moving the Conflict Exogenous.*** The aforementioned process of organizational fragmentation into two sides (opponents versus supporters) inflated during the subsequent years of planning. Specifically, it resulted in the withdrawal of the Head for urban development and the neutralization of his team, around 2001. While the former retired from public affairs altogether, members of the team for strategic urban development engaged in various movements and initiatives against the project outside the borders of their former

employer and dedicated quantities of energy to the related debates. In return, this second phase was especially marked by the necessity for the supporters of the bridge to make the project comply with a critical mass of institutional prerogatives in order to make it pass through the official plans appraisal delivered by the Regional Directorate (the local authority in charge of granting construction permits). We refer to this as the enactment of institutional fit (and, by opposition: of institutional misfit). However, as the opponents among the planners had left the Administration and engaged into new career paths, including activism against the bridge project, the disruptive mode moved from operatives (i.e. planners and urbanism experts) to decision-holders (i.e. local politicians in the council, in particular left-wing politicians). Thus, it shifted the dominant disruptive mode to a more authoritative action, politically-driven, and nested into the democratic nature of the decision process in large municipalities. In 2004, the city administration received the official appraisal of the project. But then, in 2005, the Council shifted in favor of a left-wing coalition opposed to the project. The Council seized the opportunity and asked for alternatives to the bridge. Supporters among the councilors, now an official minority, organized a public referendum on the matter to displace the decision-making in the citizens' hands. On February 27, 2005, 67.9% of the voters favored the construction of the bridge, thus binding the City to the project for three years. Consequently, former planners and other opponents drew on a new actor in the field in order to enact the project's institutional misfit even more blatantly: the 2004 UNESCO-WH status of the Elbe Valley.

***Phase 3: Institutional Dead-End.*** The aforementioned referendum did not just provide leverage in terms of domination among coalitions. It also represented a strong legal anchor to secure and legitimize the project, displacing the practice of evaluating its institutional (mis)fit into the hands of legal jurisdictions, with a clearer "right or wrong" scope of decisions. Meanwhile, options came to the fore: tunnels, other locations, other designs: the Federal Minister for Transport even spoke about financing the difference in cost for the development of a bridge that would satisfy the WH Committee. However, the dialectic of control at play doomed any chance for compromise. Opponents and supporters abandoned their hand on the project to other, legal jurisdictions thus granting to the project a life for itself. The supporters, meanwhile, refused to engage into a compromise with their adversaries:

„We had, among us, no trust left. The opponents did not accept the referendum and tried and act against the bridge via court procedures and the UNESCO. Thereby there was no consensus

possible, like: ‘we look in each other’s eyes and we agree with each other, we build a bridge, but a bridge that would satisfy the UNESCO. (...) This could have been a possibility, a line of compromise. But there was no trust left, because my party and the conservatives said, they had learnt to know the others, if we had allowed for a one-millimetre shift in the plans for this bridge, we would have opened it all again, the whole project would have failed” (Member of the Saxon State Parliament, local liberal faction, interview).

A similar feeling was observable among opponents too:

„They couldn’t care less about the UNESCO, because they had a referendum and could play the democratic card. And with it they won elections, with it they became interesting for many citizens: ‘they hold their word, they give us [i.e. us, citizens] a bridge, and they don’t care about the UNESCO’ -which is unbelievable actually- ‘it seems we [i.e. we, the citizens] are more important in the end’ ” (Former employee of the Administration interview).

Eventually, each step performed by supporters in favor of the bridge, e.g. via channeling work in the Administration or blocking decisions in the Council, reinforced the opponents’ impression of a well-thought complot. The bridge project developed a specificity that is particularly interesting for neo-institutional analysis: the project took the capacity to characterize agents in such a way that people were either supporters or opponents. In June 2009, because the Council could not manage to vote itself out of the situation, the WH Committee withdrew the site from the list and broke up with the City, thus deflating the field that had expanded around this issue.

## **DISCUSSION**

As Kraatz and Block rightly put it (2008), disruption does not occur against an organization but for the organization and often starts from within. In this article, we use the idea of dialectic of control as a means to explain the birth and rise of an institutional conflict. In particular, the idea of dialectic of control accounts for the possibility for agents to disrupt the status quo in their organization and in their field.

Organizations are fragmented representations of the fields they adhere to. Socialization shapes individual preferences and interests and contributes to the agents’ projections about the future of their organization (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). And yet: organizational decisions are made in the name of all. As Seo and Creed argue (2002), such interactions carry a large potential for frustrations and conflicts. While it shares common themes, the dialectic of control as an approach to institutional conflicts differs from Seo and Creed’s (2002) dialectical perspective on institutionalization and institutional change.

According to Seo and Creed, change emerges out of institutional contradictions, which they define as the fight over interests and ideas that are not well served by the status quo. While we remain sympathetic to this approach, we illuminate struggles over control and power – a crucial element in the theory of structuration, and a missing link in institutional theory (Clegg 2010). Agents need to draw upon specific schemas, norms and resources in order to make organizational action proceed or stop, with opponents to the decision counter-balancing new developments in a fight over hierarchy-based power-relationships and mutual control.

In terms of implications, this focus sheds light on an intriguing phenomenon, namely: how the dialectic of control over controversial organizational action provoked a phenomenon of goal displacement in Dresden, i.e. how the bridge project got decoupled from the actual goal: the reduction of traffic. As a matter of fact, during most of the conflict, the agents quickly ceased debating the initial goal of the project; instead members of the Administration and of the Council argued about location and design (i.e. the means to reduce traffic). Contrary to Pache and Santos' predictions (2010 – in their model, breakup only occurs over goals), this configuration of the conflict did not facilitate a consensus and ended up in an organizational breakup all the same and ultimately a breakup between City and WH Convention. At all critical moments, the supporters managed to secure the decision to build their solution. Consequently, the opponents kept on disrupting the course of action, drawing on a multitude of jurisdictions, arguments, and partners. In this dialectical game over institutional fit and misfit, the dynamics of a vicious circle can be observed: resisting the actions of the others became an end in itself, no matter what. At the end of the road, building a bridge seems to have become more important than the actual traffic issue that had motivated the project 20 years ago. The more the opponents tried to attack the project, the more occasions they actually gave the supporters to counteract disruptions and herewith to reinforce the institutional fit of the project, thus institutionally embedding the solution even more. In virtue of the dialectic of control at play in social systems, the opponents tried harder upon each failed disruption. This provoked an escalation of the situation that decoupled the very goal from its means.



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