

Mancur Olson's Collective Action Theory 50 Years Later. A View from The Institutionalist Perspective

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Abstract. This essay is a tribute paid to one of the most distinguished landmarks in social theory – Mancur Olson's *The Logic of Collective Action*, which has recently turned 50 years old. We look at it as a specific stage in the debate that takes place in social sciences. In 1965 it was path-breaking due to the use of economic reasoning applied to social phenomena, but today the very same method of analysis is being challenged by institutionalist thought. This is, however, the way that social sciences evolve and Olson's theory is no exception. The very assumptions employed by Olson are being questioned nowadays with respect to their compliance with reality and proper depiction of incentives that drive human behaviour. Nonetheless, it still remains a milestone in the process of recognizing the mechanisms governing collective actions.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1965 Mancur Olson published his *opus magnum* "The Logic of Collective Action"¹. It was highly prized as an essential contribution to the body of literature explaining successes and failures of collective action. It also served as a useful tool in clarifying how coordination deficiencies could lead to suboptimal macroeconomic outcomes (see Colander 2008). In 2015 *The Logic* turned 50 years old, but it did not cease to be a fundamental reference point in the debates on collective action. It continues to provide scholars with cardinal insights into the theory mostly thanks to its universal method of individualistic perspective and economic calculus. Methodological individualism was actually the reason for its success as it allowed for refutation of former theories. However, this approach has its limitations and leaves certain phenomena behind, usually those stemming from social and institutional features of actors' behaviour. The progress in social research that took place over the last half of century allows us pointing to some shortcomings in Olson's theory.

¹ Throughout the paper we refer to this book as *The Logic*.

In this paper we are trying to reappraise *The Logic* from a double-distant perspective. On the one hand, the distance relates to long time interval since its publication with its relevance to political economy and technological change and on the other hand it refers to employing different methodological lenses. Yet it is not our intention to disprove Olson's theory, far from that. We intend rather to look at it as a distinct stage in the process of theorizing in social sciences. *The Logic* was a huge step forward in understanding collective action in the 1960s, because it proved former theories wrong, but it is being undermined by modern research in a similar manner. We are inclined to believe that it is the shift from perceiving human actors as *homo oeconomicus* to the picture of more socialized individuals acting in specific institutional arrangements that shows the highest potential to push our understanding further.

The paper is organized as follows. In the second section we briefly summarize Olson's theory for contemporary reader and portray it as a participation in the debate on collective action that took place in reference to previous theories. In the third section we pay attention to certain aspects of Olson's work that seem to be overlooked or misinterpreted by modern political economy, whereas they should in our opinion return to the commonly known legacy of *The Logic*. In the fourth section we review the critique of Olson's theory as seen through institutionalist optics which mainly challenges the assumption of perfectly rational and autonomous individual as employed in *The Logic*. The final section concludes.

THE LOGIC OF OLSON'S THEORY

The publication of *The Logic* was ground-breaking in its time. It provided novel and original explanation of group behaviour which convincingly contradicted established theories. The reason behind it was that Olson employed entirely different perspective of individualist approach to the phenomenon under investigation. He basically claimed that treating group behaviour in the same manner as individual behaviour was erroneous even if all members of the group shared the same interests and all would profit on taking up a collective activity. According to Olson a group should be treated as an assembly of rational individuals, not as an entity itself. His main assumptions in deriving the theory were thus methodological individualism and rational behaviour of individuals. Former explanations of collective action based on some form of holistic approach deprived an individual of the possibility of making his own decisions based on personally defined rational interest and could not explain the lack of organized action performed by groups bounded with seemingly common interest.

The theories that Olson criticized were long established in social sciences, mainly in sociology, psychology and political sciences. They claimed that people were characterized by an instinct of self-organization which pushed them into collective action in order to achieve common goals. Other theories claimed that the evolution of humanity from small hunter-gatherer groups into complex societies caused dissolution of small groups which used to offer individuals protection and sense of belonging. This in turn triggered the replacement of these primal groups into associations and social groups which performed similar social functions. Surprisingly enough, Olson did not refute past theories completely. He assumed that they could be right up to a point. But they were definitely not sufficient in explaining why certain groups do organize themselves and achieve their goals while others do not despite sharing the same goals and being potentially a powerful pressure group on political arena.

There was another puzzle at this time that Olson successfully challenged. In political sciences a well-established conviction dominated that political activity and lobbying of interest groups were beneficial for society as a whole. This view – named as pluralist approach – assumed that all these groups represented vital interests of various social groups and offered them influence on domestic policymaking. However, a large

number of these groups entangled in conflicts and disputes guaranteed that particular interests were kept in check and a kind of equilibrium was achieved in which no interests were overrepresented on political arena. In reality, as Olson showed, the table was tilted and the equilibrium was far from optimal as only well-organized groups with considerable resources were represented at the table. Other groups, either interested in pursuing public interest or the well-being of broad masses, were not there.

Olson thus assumed that group behaviour should be explained by economic calculus determined by the incentives and costs that each member of a group faces. In other words, Olson applied economic method into social phenomenon, which understanding was at best vague. He claimed that even if individuals do share a common goal and even if transaction costs of organizing a group are nil, this is not enough for a collective action to take place. We should rather consider the relation of benefits to costs on individual, not group, level. First, even if collective benefits are large, the benefit gained by single individual will probably be much smaller and may not cover the costs borne. And second, if all members of a group will benefit from the collective action, then there is no particular incentive for individual to engage herself into these activities.

However, we all know that groups do organize and often obtain the benefits they struggle for. So what are the determinants of performing a successful group action? Olson suggested that there are two premises worth of consideration: the size of a group and the mechanism of selective incentives.

Small groups are able to provide collective goods only through voluntary action of their members. The incentives to free-ride or shirk are limited here by social control or by transparent effects of group action. However, a small group can take up a successful collective action even if only one member of the group will cover all the costs – under the condition that the benefits will outweigh the costs borne by this particular individual. In this situation shirking and free-riding do not matter, because the group will obtain benefits anyway. For all of these reasons Olson names these groups privileged ones and points to the fact that these groups are most successful in gaining privileges and providing collective goods. He also notices that many successful large groups actually work in subgroups: committees, councils, and boards, because this is efficient. Similarly business lobbies often gain privileges because they are organized not as the whole business class, but as oligopolistic branches which pursue their own particular interests.

Then there are intermediate groups, in which no member of the group is able to gain benefits large enough to bear all the costs of acting, but the number of members is small enough to be successfully monitored. Thus it is hard to predict whether a successful collective action will take place. However, a system of incentives and effective organization make it possible that such a group will act and obtain privileges.

And finally Olson points to huge groups, which he calls latent ones, that face the most severe difficulties to take up collective action. These groups face three problems to successfully organize themselves. First, the larger the group is, the lesser individual benefits are. Second, large groups create incentives to freeriding and face difficulties with regard to just and effective distribution of costs. And third, in large groups the collective good will be supplied less optimally than in small ones. In effect, rational and self-interested individuals have very limited incentives to act as a group considering the costs involved and predictable gains. There is substantial incentive to free-ride instead and bear no costs of collective action especially that no one can be excluded from benefitting from it. In this situation a collective action will not take place. Unless – as Olson stresses – some selective (positive or negative) incentives will be created which will eliminate free-riding and encourage individual actions. Olson notes clearly that in a large group “no collective good can be obtained without some group agreement, coordination, or organization” (p. 46).

For the reasons described above, the most successful large groups like labour unions or associations of professionals (for instance medics or lawyers) are well-organized established groups. However, Olson emphasizes that their success depends on a careful choice of selective incentives and that their political power is only a by-product of the ability to provide non-collective goods and to attract new members. Since the par-

participation in collective action is not necessary to become a recipient of a collective good, there must be other non-collective goods worthy of gaining, but unavailable to outsiders (like extra insurance, insiders' access to information or legal services). Only in these circumstances individuals will be willing to devote their time and money for the sake of group action. Here Olson also notices that very often political power of a specific organization derives from the control over resources (number of members for example) and non-collective activity, not the other way round. It is not political activity, which brings new members, but specific goods that are valuable for individuals.

There is one more condition that Olson points to when it comes to the supply of collective good and that is coercion. He emphasizes that in order to eliminate the situation of free-riding and with low possibility to apply selected incentives, coercion becomes the ultimate alternative if we wish to have the good supplied. Thus the supply of public goods and services is possible only because people are coerced to pay taxes or other public levies. Similarly it is often the coercion to become member of labour union and to financially contribute to its activities that brought the political successes of unions. Coercion may thus be the key to successful collective action although one can easily imagine that often it may not suffice.

To recapitulate shortly, in his work Olson showed that small, well-organized privileged groups are able to achieve collective benefits at the expense of the rest of a society. In contrast, large latent groups face serious difficulties to organize themselves and take up a successful collective action and thus are usually at lost position. This usually concerns such groups as consumers, tax-payers, patients or citizens. It is thus the logic of individual behaviour and reaction to costs and benefits that will drive the behaviour of a group. Common interest and collective gains are not enough. Thus the bargaining table is always tilted toward small groups leaving large groups behind.

REREADING OLSON'S THEORY IN NEOLIBERAL TIMES

The most distinguished theories usually have a life of their own. Charles Darwin's evolution of species and Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity have most often been quoted and alluded to as well as misunderstood or distorted. Not even to mention their echoes in political and social rhetoric. The same can be said of economics. The classics of Adam Smith or John Maynard Keynes are often referred to, yet rarely read in extenso. In effect Smith tends to be portrayed as an extreme liberal, whereas his ethical and institutionalist inclinations are silenced down. The same happens with Keynes whose work is mocked by many modern economists as etatistic and anti-liberal. Can we contend that the same happened to Olson's theory of collective action? That kind of claim would be reaching too far, because this is not a kind of general theory that is prone to refutation from a variety of standpoints. Its firm methodological foundations and rigorous analysis make it also difficult to reject or corrupt. However, we believe that the currently dominating neoliberal paradigm tends to blur or recede some of Olson's findings and propositions which happen to be at odds with the general climate of contemporary political economy. This is why in this section of the paper we point to some of the contents of *The Logic* that happen to stay in background, but still provide interesting insights into the logic of social and institutional order. They are well-worth the time and space to highlight as they stand against some of the implicitly taken assumptions when referring to *The Logic*.

The first issue concerns the conflict between individual freedom and a provision of collective and public goods. As we have already shown in the previous section, small and large groups have different capabilities to achieve their goals. The former do have specific characteristics that allow them to organize quite smoothly and pursue a common goal. The latter, however, are not equipped with such features. Because of free-riding public goods require coercion to be supplied. This issue has important political and axiological con-

sequences. In a system that values individual freedom over anything else, the supply of public goods would be disproportionately low assuming the consistency of social values and policy. On the other hand, the interests of small groups which organize freely would be met at the expense of the whole society. However, this situation in the long term would most probably turn freedom into meaningless slogan. The execution of freedom in this particular case would eventually bring serfdom. The provision of public goods like national defence, legislation and law enforcement or good governance requires coercion so that other civic and political freedoms may be protected. The extent of public goods provisioning (education, health care, social insurance, etc.) depends of course on political bargaining, but the basic mechanism remains intact. This is, however, an issue of social or political philosophy which should take the responsibility for social discourse and making final decisions. Unfortunately the universal language of mainstream economics emphasizes the freedom of choice and action of each and every rational individual and dismisses the reasoning in holistic social perspective. In effect some normative propositions of libertarians tend to misperceive the social results of such unrestricted freedom.

Similarly, Olson demonstrates that political triumphs of labour unions were a result of coercion either granted by state legislation or obtained by sheer violence. When the size of unions depended only on voluntary cooperation and membership of workers, their power was usually insufficient to pursue collective goals. It was the coercion that gave them enough power to bargain with employers. Thus we can observe the same phenomenon as described above: only through the limitation of personal freedom workers could benefit on collective action. This phenomenon was more closely investigated by John Kenneth Galbraith (2012) who in similar vein claimed that economic and political influences of employers required countervailing power of unions. It is thus no wonder that employers aim at dividing unions and promoting freedom. So in fact this is a dilemma between individual freedom and social (and consequently individual) welfare. If we choose to give up freedom, we may benefit from collective goods. Yet if we choose to protect freedom, we may end at a heavily tilted table, limited welfare, and accordingly restrained positive freedom.

Correspondingly, making a distinction between coercion related to union membership and to paying state contributions is illogical on this very ground. Olson writes explicitly that the argument against unions cannot “rest alone on the premise that the union shop and other forms of compulsory unionism restrict individual freedom, unless the argument is extended to cover all coercion used to support the provision of collective services. There is no less infringement of ‘rights’ through taxation for the support of a police force or a judicial system than there is in a union shop” (p. 88-89). To put things differently, individual freedom is highly ineffective when it comes to provisioning of public goods. The same applies to the struggle for better working conditions for employees. Freedom can be beneficial for highly trained specialists, but not for all the labourers. It is only coercion and limitation of freedom that will prove beneficial in this very context.

This may seem quite surprising of Olson to herald such conclusions as he was a convinced liberal. However, these are the only plausible claims that stem from his theory. It is interesting to notice that he actually followed John Maynard Keynes’ idea that the logic of micro differs from the logic of macro. What seems attractive for an individual does not have to be beneficial for the society as a whole. In fact there can be a substantial contradiction in this relation. Olson does not write this explicitly in his book, but his conclusions suggest that if there are public goods to be supplied, then the coercive state is the only actor that is able to do it effectively. Thus the libertarian ideas of minimalistic state may actually bring a decrease of general welfare in exchange for more negative liberty.

The second issue we find worthy of mentioning here is the problem of collective action itself. Olson’s theory is usually mentioned when one wishes to make a claim that people face serious difficulties to organize themselves. This is of course true. Yet Olson never claimed that people should not strive to undertake collective action. As a matter of fact considerable parts of his book are devoted to discussing examples of successful

collective behaviour and the reasons why certain groups triumphed. He emphasised the significance of selective incentives and structural premises which brought success in such efforts. Olson also admitted that there are other reasons to take up collective action, including altruism, ambition or moral causes, but relegated them into the field of psychology. Olson's analysis was firmly grounded in economics and its assumptions of rational maximizing behaviour determined the path of his analysis. He was well aware that he offered a field-specific, not general, theory of collective action.

And finally third, according to *The Logic* there is a tendency in complex societies that small groups pursue their goals at the expense of large groups unable to organize themselves. In effect, the whole economy suffers from inefficient allocation and diminished efficiency of economic endeavours. This sclerosis is also the cause why economic growth tends to slow down when pressure groups have secured their interests and constrain any efforts to reform the political and economic order – a thesis that was elaborated in more detail in his later book *The Rise and Decline of Nations* (1982). In short, when interest groups pursue their particular goals, the general welfare of society is sooner or later scaled-down. However, the point of departure of Olson's analysis was a situation in which certain groups demand a collective good to be supplied by the third party that is the state. For this reason they organize, adopt certain strategies and perform lobbying. Thus one group's gain tends to be another's loss.

Olson did not take into consideration, however, a situation when a group of people comes together and works on a certain project like building bridge, preservation of natural or cultural heritage, or involvement in charity. It was not Olson's intention to analyze the behaviour of such groups since they usually fall beyond the scope of economics. Yet this is why the works of Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues should not be perceived as an attempt to disprove Olson's theory, but rather as an extension of it that includes other examples of group behaviour. And lastly, interest groups are assumed to be competing with each other. In effect privileged groups usually win, whereas latent groups loose. One can, however, find examples where this claim does not hold. For instance the unionization of the whole labour market under one helm in post-war Swedish welfare state proved beneficial for the whole society with rising wages and standard of living. When unions are divided, they tend to rival each other, but when they are united into one or two main bodies and confronted with common opponent (employers in this case), they learn to reason in macro scale as particular interests are silenced down by organizational structure and internal haggling. Similarly the existence of Mondragon cooperative in the Basque region in Spain seems to have been beneficial for the whole region even though it was far from entailing the whole economy. These examples are naturally not enough to refute the theory as a whole, but they show its limitations and encourage pushing Olson's agenda further.

BRINGING INSTITUTIONALIST APPROACH INTO *THE LOGIC*

Olson's theory was a remarkable success and triggered an avalanche of new research. Reuben (2003) surveys these new streams of studies analysing various aspects of collective action phenomenon. He unwillingly shows at the same time that all the research following the theory focused on similar questions that is provisioning of collective goods, free-riding problem and appropriate modelling of an individual actor. Although the latter concerned changing utility functions, learning capabilities or acting in networks as well as assuming certain cognitive limitations and bounded reasoning, the basic scheme remained constant. It was still the model of a rational and autonomous individual maximizing her interests. For this reason Olson's theory was still unable to explain certain phenomena, like the functioning of civil society or latent groups achieving their goals against all the odds. What could have been the problem were the assumptions them-

selves that defined the boundaries of (mainstream) economics as a scientific discipline, but at the same time were highly abstract and reductionist with respect to human nature.

Revision of the assumptions employed by Olson must have come from outside of mainstream economics, since the latter proved unable to reach beyond its own patterns of thought and modes of analysis. It was thus institutionalism, based on distinct analytical foundations, that provided an influential and constructive critique of Olson's theory. Institutionalism in the traditional, post-veblenian approach studies actors' behaviour and economic processes that take place in a particular context and so dismisses a priori assumptions concerning human nature or natural laws. Methodological individualism is therefore exchanged for an anthropological view of an individual. Furthermore, institutionalism employs an interdisciplinary perspective which embraces sociological, psychological, historical and political views of reality and human nature. Thus when trying to explain certain phenomena an institutionalist does not begin with making assumptions, but prefers to recognize the nature of the analyzed object or situation first. To begin analysing collective action with unreal assumptions about human nature in mind means entering a path leading to untenable conclusions.

The main points of institutionalist critique are, however, not directed against the assumption of rationality of individuals. People usually act rationally trying to achieve optimal results of their actions. The point is that there is no such thing as universal rationality that could be employed in analysis of any case of human behaviour. There are various kinds of rationality which assign different goals to human actions and, moreover, each and every individual follows various rationalities within different social structures and at different points in time (see the concept of *homo agens-institutionalist* developed by Chmielewski 2011). What is rational and what is not depends thus largely on culture and accepted system of values and rationality of human actions can only be understood in particular context and situation. Consequently, we should not employ instrumental and utility maximizing rationality (a product of Western culture itself) in order to understand collective actions in general. The involvement in labour movement could for example be a matter of class belonging and participation in a struggle for women rights could be seen as a matter of what is considered morally right. And both cases are perfectly rational in their own perspective.

Much more important limitation in Olson's argument than the assumption of rational behaviour comes from the premise that individuals are autonomous actors making sovereign decisions in relation-free and institutionally sterile environment. In reality, people behave in entirely different way, they are embedded in a dense network of interpersonal relations and ties which heavily influence their behaviour. Granovetter in his seminal paper (1985) even claimed that the embeddedness of people in given structures of relations is far more consequential than the fact that social institutions impose rules of behaviour on individuals. In the latter case people still behave like atomized decision makers, though constrained by a specific set of rules. However, even if people act within certain institutional or organizational frames which structure their choices, then on everyday basis they refer to their relations with other people as the most influential reference point. As a matter of fact, no logic of appropriateness could be forged in a society deprived of any interpersonal ties.

The influence of institutional and social environment on individuals remains a substantial strand of research in modern economic sociology (Talmud 2013). The phenomenon of institutional matrix that hides behind socially accepted system of values and thinking patterns has been analyzed by many scholars (e.g. Douglas 2012, Kirdina 2003). This is a claim hardly acceptable by the proponents of methodological individualism, but in reality individuals often do not make conscious choices, it is institutions that make choices for them. Olson criticized the view that a group bound together by common interests could be perceived as an ontological entity and treated as an individual. Although it seems difficult to challenge this view, it is also easy to notice that groups and institutions influence individual interests, both in explicit and implicit way. By defining what is valuable and prestigious, society determines goals of individuals guiding them for

example into charitable activities or struggle for human rights. And implicitly, the generally accepted patterns of thought indicate what is morally right and wrong as well as what is appropriate and what is not. It is thus shared patterns of thought that keep civic society alive, not individual interests.

On the background of methodological reservations sketched above it is much easier to understand and accept the empirical critique of Olson's theory. We have already mentioned that the research program pursued by Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues was aimed at finding out why collective action does happen and how come it succeeds (see Ostrom 2010, 2000). Ostrom's point of departure was thus different from Olson's. It also diverged in many aspects, including the aim and level of analysis (see Grodzicki, 2015, for summary). However, it was not carried out to undermine his theory, but was rather an attempt to look at the phenomenon of collective action from a different angle. In her research Ostrom revived in a sense the theories that Olson disregarded. According to Ostrom people's social activity often stems from the fact that they have internalized certain social norms that incline them to act. Besides, individuals differ. Some of them behave as if they were maximizing personal utility function, whereas others follow internal motivation for social cooperation and altruistic behaviour. Thus assuming existence of representative actor in explaining social phenomena tends to lead us astray. Research on collective action should help us discover and define the conditions under which group behaviour is possible and hopefully successful instead of concluding that some groups are plagued with a dismal tendency to fail. Ostrom never claimed, however, that Olson's theory was false. It rather worked in a very specific conditions of rivalry and short-termism that we may find on certain markets, like stock exchange (Ostrom 1998). But collective action concerns not only markets, but more often social cooperation. Societies are built by people involved in long-term relations and structured by network of social norms and we should research collective action that takes place in such circumstances. For a population consisting of atomized individuals is not a society.

In a recent study Trumbull (2012) also challenged some of Olson's conclusions. He argued that it is not that much organizational issues that stand behind a successful collective action in public policy, but legitimization. Various coalitions succeed when they are able to create a trustworthy narrative convincing the public and decision makers that their interest is compatible with general welfare and morally legitimate. Thus the alleged weaknesses of latent groups seen in poor organizational abilities and differentiated interests may become their strength, because public opinion perceives their endeavours as more sincere than ambitions of organized and well-financed pressure groups. The former also tend to contribute to the general welfare instead of satisfying particular interests. Trumbull also claimed that it is very often ideological motivation that counts more in successful collective action than tangible benefits. And finally in modern politics it is often politicians that take the responsibility for organizing certain interests, like public health services, pension systems or fiscal transparency. This is of course tying agreement – a groups with specific common interest is provided with political representation in exchange for electoral support. Yet in effect dispersed and unorganized individuals are successfully granted with access to public goods or services.

Save from methodological issues, there is one more thing that forces us to revise Olson's conclusions and that is technological change that happened since the publication of *The Logic*. One of the main reasons that latent groups were unable to organize themselves were high transaction costs of coming together and forging a consensual interest. Today, in times of the Internet, social media and mobile phones, these costs are considerably lower. It is much easier for people sharing similar interests to find and identify themselves, organize a meeting or a massive event. Also, thanks to World Wide Web representatives of a group have access to experiences of other groups, active domestically and abroad, or lawyers and organizations providing legal and procedural assistance, often free of charge. Thus some of the former barriers in communication and coordination have vanished. One could have observed examples of spontaneous organization and events in cases of the Occupy movement, the Arab Spring demonstrations or ACTA and TTIP protests. Besides, the

very idea of commons concerning sharing knowledge, know-how, design or digital data through the Internet (and in real world as well) has recently grown much in importance and popularity (e.g. Rowe, 2013; Bollier and Helfrich, 2012). Mainstream economics perceives this phenomenon in terms of diffusion of the factors of production or zero marginal costs of production, while heterodox approaches are more inclined to look at it as a social fact which facilitates cooperation and collective action.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this paper we have tried to show that Olson's theory of collective action was actually a product of its time (a claim also shared by Dixit 1999) and that its relevance to social issues has been changing over time. *The Logic* was of course an important voice in the debate on collective behaviour and was not written in scientific and scholarly vacuum. By employing new method of analysis Olson disproved previous theories that treated groups as individual entities. He preferred instead to use the model of rational individual following her personal interests. However, his choice of method and analytic perspective was also highly related to the scientific climate at the beginning of the second half of 20th century. In 1960s many social scientists, not only economists, but also anthropologists, have turned to the issue of how individuals make choices thus leaving the holistic-cultural explanations behind (Mayhew 1989). Surprisingly then, the choice of Olson's methodology and argumentation was influenced by the shared patterns of thought within academic profession of the era instead of being an entirely conscious personal decision. Olson was himself a subject to institutions that inclined him to follow a specific mode of reflection.

But this is how progress in social sciences is made. In a scientific debate some views are replaced by other in a progressive and periodic manner. As much as Olson refuted past theories, his own theory has also been continuously challenged by another scholars since the very day of its publication. The most influential critique, in our opinion at least, has been produced by the institutionalist stream of research which adopted entirely different methodological stance and vision of human nature. The success of Ostrom's research programme is especially revealing in this matter. However, her agenda is nowadays being pushed even further, which may eventually lead to new theories and approaches providing new insights into the theory of collective action and the commons. For example in a recent study de Moor *et al.* (2016) concentrated on a question of adaptation and change as well as historical dynamics of commons' self-governance principles. The static view of governing the commons has thus earned a dynamic dimension. There are also attempts to overcome the individualism—holism dichotomy in social sciences, so that behaviour of individuals can possibly be explained by structure or agency based on the context of situation instead of adopting a priori assumptions of human nature (Kirdina 2015). Yet whatever the future of the research on collective action will be, *The Logic* shall remain a landmark in the fundamentals of modern social sciences.

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