

Social Classification and Interests in Ontario Wine Industry

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Abstract

Drawing from a qualitative study of the Ontario wine industry, we examine how organizations operating in industries that produce goods with a prominent cultural component selectively classify their practices as fitting in with artistic and commercial logics. The findings highlight different ways actors aim to advance their interests when confronted with multiple logics. The paper offers insights into the micro-foundations of institutional logics by examining their critical role as resources that wineries use to advance their interests through a process of classification.

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Introduction

Institutional theory has devoted a great deal of attention to isomorphic tendencies in organizational fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), as well as to institutional change processes (e.g., Anand & Watson, 2004; Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002; Rao, Monin & Durand, 2003; Seo & Creed, 2002) and the role of actors in actively maintaining or disrupting and transforming institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). These scholars' overarching interest in how organizations adapt to and challenge institutional pressures has increased the prominence of the notion of institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008), or the "socially constructed rules, norms and beliefs constituting field membership, role identities and patterns of appropriate conduct" (Greenwood & Hinings, 2006: 819) that get transmitted through regulatory, normative, and cognitive processes (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). A crucial manifestation of institutional logics is in the social construction of the associated classifications and categories (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

We draw on this literature to examine how organizations, when confronted with multiple institutional logics, advance their interests by selectively classifying their practices as aligned with particular logics (DiMaggio, 1997) and how such classification may be reflective of the power struggles taking place in the field (Oakes, Townley, & Cooper, 1998; Reay & Hinings, 2005). Actors' interests reflect their orientation and motivation to advance and sustain the claims that are preferential to them (Ranson, Hinings, & Greenwood, 1980), and power is the means to meet such interests (Greenwood & Hinings, 1988). Our focus on classification acknowledges the critical role of institutional logics as resources complicating in maintaining or transforming power relations (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Actors selectively comply with institutional logics in their attempts to advance their interests, and in doing so, they shape the conditions for the reproduction of prevailing logics (Bourdieu, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Yet not enough attention has been paid to the micro-foundations of institutional logics (Powell & Colyvas, 2008; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) and particularly to how organizations purposefully navigate the different field-imposed demands associated with the presence of multiple logics in a field. While researchers have acknowledged the presence and dynamics of multiple, and sometimes conflicting, institutional logics in a given field (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008), limited understanding exists of how the process of classification impacts actors' behavior in their attempts to interpret and selectively comply with the demands imposed by these logics. Nor has adequate attention been paid to how actors work to navigate divergent interests when confronted with multiple institutional logics.