

## Journal of Institutional Economics: Special Issue on the "Institutional Analysis of Gift"

### Special Issue on the Institutional Analysis of Gift

Since Mauss's well-known *Essai sur le don* first appeared in 1925, gifts and gift exchange have often been studied and theorized within the field of anthropology. Important contributions include those of Levi-Strauss (1969[1949]), Bourdieu (1979, 1997), Gregory (1982), Strathern (1988), Polanyi (1957), Gouldner (1973) and Sahlins (1972).

Norms, routines and rules are examples of institutions, which have varying degrees of influence on economic and social practice. They also change and evolve historically. The gift is an example of a practice underpinned by institutions that served historically, for instance, to reduce uncertainty in social interactions (Sahlins, 1972). Nevertheless, Institutional Economics literature has rarely focused on the nexus between gift and institutions in modern societies.

Conventionally, in all social sciences, gift-giving actions have been embodied in a social exchange theory. This raises, at the outset, a fundamental question: what is it to give? Or what is a gift? Mainstream economics offers a perspective on the gift, which is constructed around exchange, axioms of self-interest, instrumental rationality and utility-maximisation that predominate within conventional forms of economic analysis. As Hodgson (1988: 161) points out: "The utilitarian model of 'rational economic man' cannot capture the nature and function of the commitment to moral values, nor the complexities of the 'gift' relationships that is typical in this sphere".

Institutional economics literature has traditionally neglected the analysis of gift with the exception of Hodgson (1988) who argues a) that commodity exchange contains elements of gift and always relies to some extent on trust and b) that both contractual and non-contractual elements such as gift are important in a developed system of exchange and its analysis.

Another exception is Boulding's *Grants Economics* (1973), where a particular communication based way of dealing with reciprocity in gift relationships is proposed. Boulding writes: "One of the most important aspects of the grants economy is the role it plays in the building up of integrative structures and communities – that is, groups of people who have some feelings of identification and benevolence toward each other" (p. 27).

This special issue is attempting to fill the gap Institutional Economics literature left in the analysis of the gift to move beyond utilitarian approaches to gift and 'exchangism' and to investigate aspects of institutionalism in relation to gift and gift-giving actions. The call is open to both theoretical and empirical approaches to the institutional economics of gift. Also, the call is open to contributions from any discipline. We invite contributions addressing one or a number of the following questions:

- Can the gift itself be considered as an institution, and if so, which kind of institution: formal, informal, spontaneous, etc.?
- What is the relationship between institutions, on the one hand, and gift, exchange, reciprocity on the other?
- Is the gift situated within or reaching beyond the logic of reciprocity and/or institutions?
- Can gift-giving, altruism and/or solidarity be institutionalized and legally enforced without losing some of their characteristics such as spontaneity, freedom, etc.?
- What are the institutional mechanisms that underpin gift and gift-giving actions?
- What are the various social and analytical levels of the exploration of gift: global, local, micro, meso, macro?
- What is the role of gift as an institution in communism and capitalism?
- What is the relationship between individuals, societies, gift-giving and cooperation?

- Normativity of gift and institutions

Please submit your abstracts of 200 words by 30 June 2018 to [Ioana Negru](#) (please include also correspondence email and affiliation). The abstracts will be scrutinized by the Guest Editors of this special issue, namely Stefan Kesting, Ioana Negru and Paolo Silvestri. The authors will be notified by 15 of July 2018 regarding the acceptance or rejection of abstracts. We expect the final papers to be submitted no later than 31 of December 2018. Please note that the acceptance of abstracts does not necessarily imply the acceptance of the paper for the special issue.

**Submission Deadline: 30 June 2018**