

Forum for Institutional Thought: A platform for an exchange of ideas about institutional economics in Poland

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Abstract: This article presents the history, objectives, and scope of activity of the Forum for Institutional Thought Association. The Forum is an initiative by a group of social sciences' representatives gathered around the belief that the institutional approach currently offers the best way to understand the world, particularly the changes that happen in the economies undergoing a systemic transition.

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The Forum for Institutional Thought Association emerged from a group of social sciences representatives gathered around the belief that the institutional approach currently offers the best way to understand the world, particularly the changes that happen in the economies that undergo a systemic transition. The Association comprises economists, lawyers, political scientists, and sociologists – individuals from leading Polish academic centres.

Professor Anna Ząbkowicz initiated the idea of the Association in December 2015 at the Jagiellonian University. In November 2016, the Association was legally brought to life. *The Forum for Institutional Thought Association* endeavours to create and strengthen endeavours that take the form of a platform for institutional studies. We understand institutions as the *rules of the social game, norms, regulations, and habits* that shape social behaviours and create boundary conditions for political, legal, and economic decisions. The form of such understood institutions defines the political foundations for the organisation of countries, and through legal legitimacy, it affects economic performance and citizens welfare.

Institutions introduce to social sciences interdisciplinary optics because they are the foundation of mutual trust, the trust for public authorities, the effectiveness of satisfying social needs, and the quality of dispute resolution in societies.

By eliminating exploitation and monopolies, political and economic institutions shape pro-innovation incentives that affect individuals, social groups, entrepreneurs, and politicians. Through forcing them to economise, educate themselves, invest, innovate, employ new oper-

ating techniques, and resolve conflicts, the institutions foster economic development. Unfortunately, institutions can also be destructive.

Created through political processes, the shape of economic institutions conditions economic entities' actions, thus determining the wealth and poverty of nations. Influencing economic incentives and behaviours by creating legal order, including the binding force of contracts and private property protection, institutional arrangements create and reinforce the potential for the provision of public goods, shape markets as areas of economic freedom, and open opportunities for everyone according to their abilities and talents.

The Forum for Institutional Thought endeavours to strengthen the recognition of these significant institutions, including the organisations that determine social prosperity, support cooperation and collective activity, and affect production levels along with the distribution of generated wealth.

This approach gives rise to various perceptions of modern management's consequences, including serious income disparities or climate change, which may all be deduced from studies on the validity of power (derived from political decisions or economic strength) and its legitimacy (derived from law or civic participation).

The cognitive methods developed in institutional economics – which add the value of interdisciplinarity to the conducted analyses – expose elements otherwise invisible in other approaches, which circumvent or insufficiently explore their multidimensionality, dynamism, and complexity.

The issues related to the development of institutions and institutional thinking have become the subject of research and academic discussions at conferences and seminars organised by the Forum for Institutional Thought Association. These meetings aim to broaden the knowledge and bolster the awareness of the determinants, threats, and challenges to the development of learning economic reality through the prism of institutional thinking.

Organised since 2016, the seminars of the Forum for Institutional Thought stimulate important subjects that explain theoretically, methodologically, and empirically – both in a conceptual and pragmatical dimensions – the suggestions for the perception of cause, essence, and possible consequence of the observed and experienced social phenomena. These seminars happened in many Polish cities between 2016 and 2022.

The first seminar, titled 'Wokół metody. Jak badać instytucje?' (Concerning the Method: How to Study Institutions?) happened on November 7, 2016, in Łódź. The second seminar on November 20, 2017, was organised in Poznań to discuss 'Szkolnictwa wyższego w warunkach zmian instytucjonalnych' (Higher Education During Institutional Changes). The third seminar occurred in Krakow on October 25, 2018, under the title 'How Economic Tools Apply to Judicial Institutions and to Judicial Checks and Balances,' which discussed the quality of political institutions in general, systemic, and constitutional contexts. The fourth seminar in Białystok on October 25, 2019 reflected on 'Państwo i jego transformacje. Retrospekcja i projekcje' (The State and Its Transitions: A Retrospective and Predictions), which debate the different approaches to the state's role, transition, and institutions in the modern economy. The fifth seminar was held online on October 27, 2021 and was titled 'Central and Eastern European Economies in Goldilocks Age: A Model of Labor Market Institutional Choice,' and it discussed the issues of modelling an institutional choice in the labour market. The sixth seminar was also held online on February 10, 2022, in cooperation with Zespół Badawczy Mechanizmów Zarządzania Działaniami Zbiorowymi Rev 4.0 (Research Team for Group Activities Management), under the title 'Knowledge Production Regimes.' The seventh seminar happened on November 24, 2022, in Warsaw, and was titled 'Myśl instytucjonalna wobec kryzysów' (Institutional Thinking in the Face of Crises).

The seminars held by the Forum gathered numerous academicians, doctoral students, and practitioners who consider the institutional cognitive apparatus as a significant, interesting, and convincing cognitive proposal for social life.

Another important series of initiatives fostered by the Forum for Institutional Thought are academic conferences. The first such conference, titled 'Zrozumieć kapitalizm – podejście ewolucyjno-instytucjonalne' (Understanding Capitalism: An Evolutionary-Institutional Approach) happened on October 20, 2017, in Warsaw, aiming to answer how the institutional approach enables one to study social reality and draw conclusions about the nature of capitalism.

The next conference was co-organised with the World Interdisciplinary Network for Institutional Research (WINIR), initiated as a part of 'Institutions and Survival' series. It happened in Krakow on February 20–21, 2020. The most detailed part of the debate between representatives of domestic and foreign research centres explored the socio-economic reasons for abandoning democracy and hybrids of institutional determinants of governance.

Results of the Forum's scientific work spread also through its activities in the publishing market. In 2018, the Forum published a monograph titled *Zrozumieć kapitalizm. Ujęcie ewolucyjno-instytucjonalne* (Understanding Capitalism: An Evolutionary-Institutional Approach) edited by Anna Ząbkowicz, Maciej Miszewski, Paweł Chmielnicki, and Sławomir Czech, with a preface by Geoffrey Hodgson. The Forum for Institutional Thought also edited a special issue of *Catallaxy* 5.2/2020 (December).

Moreover, every two years, the Forum announces a competition for the best master thesis to promote young graduates who recognise the cognitive value of institutional economics.

The Forum for Institutional Thought plans a number of activities for the near future. On September 28, 2023, a scientific seminar will be held at the seat of the Polish Economic Society in Warsaw, aiming to discuss the issues of institutions and sustainable development. Moreover, the Forum prepares a second edition of the international conference 'Institutions and Survival,' titled 'Challenges for Sustainability,' scheduled for February 22–23, 2024, at the University of Białystok.

Finally, the Forum plans to prepare a second book, entitled *Economic Policy in Transition Economy in Institutional Perspective: The Case of Poland*, edited by Maciej Grodzicki and Anna Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, to be published by Routledge.

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None reported.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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