Exploring institutional change

The contribution of co-production to shaping institutions

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The importance of effective institutions for development is well established. There is however, a continuing debate on how to stimulate institutional reform within highly complex political and cultural contexts. This working paper explores sociological theories of institutional change to consider how service co-production, involving organised communities and state agencies, can influence the systems of rules and behaviours that underpin urban governance. Using examples of co-production in Harare, the paper highlights how the cumulative impact of joint activity has generated small-scale adaptations in the institutionalised practices of public administration – creating spaces of engagement and negotiation leading to incremental institutional change.

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1

Introduction

The drive for institutional reform and the creation of 'effective' systems of governance in the global South are central to the current discourse of international development policy. The quality of institutions, as the underlying 'rules of the game' (North, 1990), and systems of governance, as reflected in the capability of public bureaucracy and the mechanisms of accountability available to citizens (Levy, 2014), hold primary importance both as objectives and outcome measures for development policy. While the importance of institutions is well established and widely discussed in development literature (see for example Ackerman, 2004; Grindle, 2004; Leftwich and Sen, 2010; North *et al.*, 2009; 2011), scholars including Evans (2004), Khan (2012) and Andrews (2013) have emphasised the failure of 'monocrop' policy approaches that have sought to impose models of governance, but with little reference to existing institutional environments and power relations. There is a growing argument, as suggested by Levy (2014), that institutional and governance reform should be conceived of as a process of evolutionary change, rather than a set of conditions that can be engineered through policy intervention. This paper contributes to an ongoing discussion on governance in the global South by adopting a sociological lens to understand institutional change; using co-production to explore empirically how spaces of engagement can be established to initiate incremental processes of institutional adaptation.

Within a framework of 'new institutionalist theory' (see Peters, 2005), a sociological perspective emphasises the importance of social interaction in forming and changing institutions. Central to sociological theory is a view that institutional conditions are malleable and, while there may be strong forces that work to preserve particular arrangements where these favour elite interests or maintain an equilibrium position, that institutions can change as a result of the 'friction' between rules and the effects of their application on social actors. Scholars including Mouzelis (2008), Knudsen (2008), Mahoney and Thelen (2010) and Brousseau and Raynaud (2011) highlight how institutions are reproduced and adapted through use, with rules being (re)formed incrementally as new practices become accepted and embedded to replace existing institutional arrangements.

Elaborating the processes of institutional change has particular importance for the design of public sector reform policy, which relies heavily on the transmission of new rules through organisational structures to shape the day-to-day activity of service deliverers. Identifying routes to influence public governance arrangements is a core goal for development policy as well as being a key objective for organised poor communities seeking more inclusive approaches to service delivery. The significance of engaging structures of authority is underlined by Manuel Castells who states 'the relationship between the state and the people is

organised around the institutional distribution of urban services, coupled with the institutional mechanisms of political control' (Castells, 1983: 190). In common with Levy (2014), a sociological institutionalist approach focuses on building grounded momentum for change, rather than defining optimal policies or tailoring existing models of governance and public administration for use in the global South.

Understanding institutional change as a social process allows for organised communities to be agents and active participants in engaging the state in pursuit of micro-adaptations to institutional arrangements. In this paper, service co-production is used to illustrate how frameworks for collaboration between organised communities and state agencies can be created to influence rules and institutionalised behaviours governing the provision of services. By connecting a discussion on institutional theory with a case study on the outcomes of co-production in practice, this paper aims to explore the mechanisms of institutional change within an urban governance context. Taking this approach is intended to demonstrate how, following Mitlin (2008), co-production can be adopted as a strategy for organised groups of the poor to carve out spaces of dialogue and negotiation to improve the operation of urban institutions.

The paper begins with an examination of institutional theory, defining the importance of a sociological understanding of institutions in the contexts of highly complex social and political environments, which provide the working arena for development policy. The discussion is extended by considering service co-production, highlighting its instrumental use to challenge and affect the institutionalised practices of service management. Theory is explored empirically using a case study of Zimbabwe and the relationships between organised community groups and the City of Harare Council over the period 1997 to 2013. The paper concludes with a discussion of co-productive approaches to urban development, drawing out implications for institutional theory and policies targeting reform of institution arrangements in cities of the global South.

2

Defining Institutions

The creation of 'effective' institutions is widely recognised as being central to the achievement of economic growth and development and is well established as a focal point for international policy and action (Jutting, 2003; Leftwich and Sen, 2010; Andrews, 2013). While the importance of institutions is accepted, defining what is 'effective' and building a clear understanding of how institutions operate within particular contexts, provides a greater challenge. Kingston and Caballero (2009) underline the lack of a standard definition of institutions as a key difficulty in constructing empirical studies of institutional performance and change. Recent analysis of institutions have been set within, what has been termed, 'new institutionalism' which, according to Peters (2005), offers theory rich analysis of institutions from a number of disciplinary perspectives. These institutional theories, as summarised in Figure 1, offer a range of explanations to locate institutions variously as a product of society, while assigning differing agential qualities to people in relation to structures of authority.

Each strand of institutional theory has a distinct characteristic, but all share a common feature of seeking to explain, from differing perspectives, the causal relationship between higher order conditions and specific effects in society (Amenta and Ramsey, 2010). In this paper emphasis is given to sociological theory, where institutions are understood, following Hodgson (2006: 2), as 'systems of established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions'. Institutions can therefore be seen as mechanisms that define and control behaviour within society, recognising that these mechanisms are socially grounded and 'evolve through complex, long-term interaction between state and society' (IDS, 2010: 12). As the 'rules of the game' 'institutions are systematic patterns of shared expectation, taken-for-granted assumptions, accepted norms of routines of interactions that have robust effects on shaping the motivations and behaviour of sets of interconnected social actors' (Chang and Evans, 2005: 99).

Institutions, when seen as providing the framework for social interaction as Chang and Evans (2005: 102) point out, create both the constraints and the enabling mechanisms for social and economic activity, with institutions being inherently 'constitutive of the preferences and world views of their constituents'. Using this definition, institutions are not separate from the social existence of individuals, but embedded in cultures and normative values that are internalised and affect both self-identity and more widely, social and organisational behaviours (Tilly, 1984). Adrian Leftwich (2010) underlines that the creation of institutions rests on the interaction between social structure and the operation of individual agency; being dependent on social actors to adopt and accept norms that are key to maintaining stable social conditions. Douglass North (1990) describes the operation of institutions as a matrix, where formal rules found in laws, regulations and policies are embedded in and overlap with deep-seated social attitudes and values, distinguished as informal institutions (Casson *et al*., 2010). Barley and Tolbert (1997: 93) see the complex and constitutive character of institutions as a 'web of values, norms, rules, beliefs and taken for granted assumptions'. Institutions then are understood here as constraining *and* enabling, but moreover as defining the prevailing boundaries of social action.

An important distinction between institutional theories is the treatment of time and in particular views on the stability of institutions between episodes of change. Historical and rational choice theories emphasise the persistence of institutions, with change taking place at 'critical junctures', defined as a point where a decision

Figure 1. Institutional Theories

INSTITUTIONAL THEORY	CHARACTERISTICS
Normative Institutionalism	The function of institutions is governed by interpretation of social norms and conditions.
Rational choice Institutionalism	Emphasises the function of institutions through systems of rules and incentives as individuals maximise self-interest.
Historical Institutionalism	Institutional function is governed by precedent and the persistence of rules along a 'path' until affected by exogenous shocks.
Empirical Institutionalism	Eschews structure to suggest that institutions are important to establish a framework of action, but other variables such as political interests are more important for policy choices.
International Institutionalism	Connects with international regime theory and the structures of interaction between state-level institutions.
Sociological Institutionalism	Institutional function is determined by the relationship between society and the state.
Discursive Institutionalism	Institutions are the substantive content of ideas and the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed.

Source: Information drawn from Peters (2005) and Schmidt (2008; 2010)

is made to adopt a particular institutional trajectory, from among a selection of trajectories, after which it becomes increasingly difficult to return to the original point before a decision was made (Mahoney, 2000). Hogan (2006) points out that there is not a standard for identifying a critical juncture, but suggests that criteria could be adopted that consider whether 'generative cleavages' result in significant, swift and encompassing change. Identifying key 'moments' requires a temporal analysis to determine the narrowing of options and a sequence of events that consequently lead to different institutional trajectories (Pierson, 2004). While critical junctures are typically discussed as major exogenous events such as revolutions, economic crises and electoral landslides, they may also be the overt markers of more incremental sedimentary processes. These might be termed 'micro-junctures', that have significance as precedent in ongoing processes of gradual institutional adaptation, as argued by Mahoney and Thelen (2010), but lack the 'critical' character of a point of no return.

A key feature of sociological approaches to institutional theory is discourse, which Schmidt (2008: 305) defines as the 'substantive content of ideas, but also the interactive processes by which ideas are conveyed' and applied in practice. While Schmidt (2008; 2010) suggests discourse as a separate 'institutionalism', it can also be seen, following Peters (2005), as part of sociological theory and the means through which institutions are articulated, challenged and changed. Empirically, the observation of how discourse is used as a tactic to define and create spaces in the negotiation between communities and the state, as well as how

changes in discourse signal shifts in institutionalised practices, provide a key insight into how governance reform can be actualised. The importance of discourse as a tool of political engagement has been illustrated by Millstein *et al.* (2003), who examine how, in the context of South Africa, community organisations used discursive approaches to define spaces to challenge for housing. Discourse, as Fischer (2006: 25) notes, 'make some things important and other things insignificant', with discourse being a 'technology' of urban governance in the global South, as illustrated in case studies by Nyamu-Musembi (2006) in the context of Mombasa; Kamete (2002) in Harare; and Myers (2003; 2011) in Zanzibar.

Institutional Hierarchy

It is important to recognise that institutions do not take homogeneous or monolithic form as a unified and impenetrable set of rules. Institutions, when operated through organisations of the state, are porous and exhibit inconsistencies, overlaps and dysfunctionality, which create opportunities for adaptive change at a micro-level (Mitchell, 1991; Painter, 2006, as cited in Frodin, 2012). Mahoney and Thelen (2010) identify the 'play' between rules and their interpretation, as space where ambiguity provides opportunity to define the application of institutions in practice. The implementation of rules reflects the human interests and objectives of those organisations and individuals that hold authority. The work of Harriss-White (2003) on India, for example, illustrates how the private status
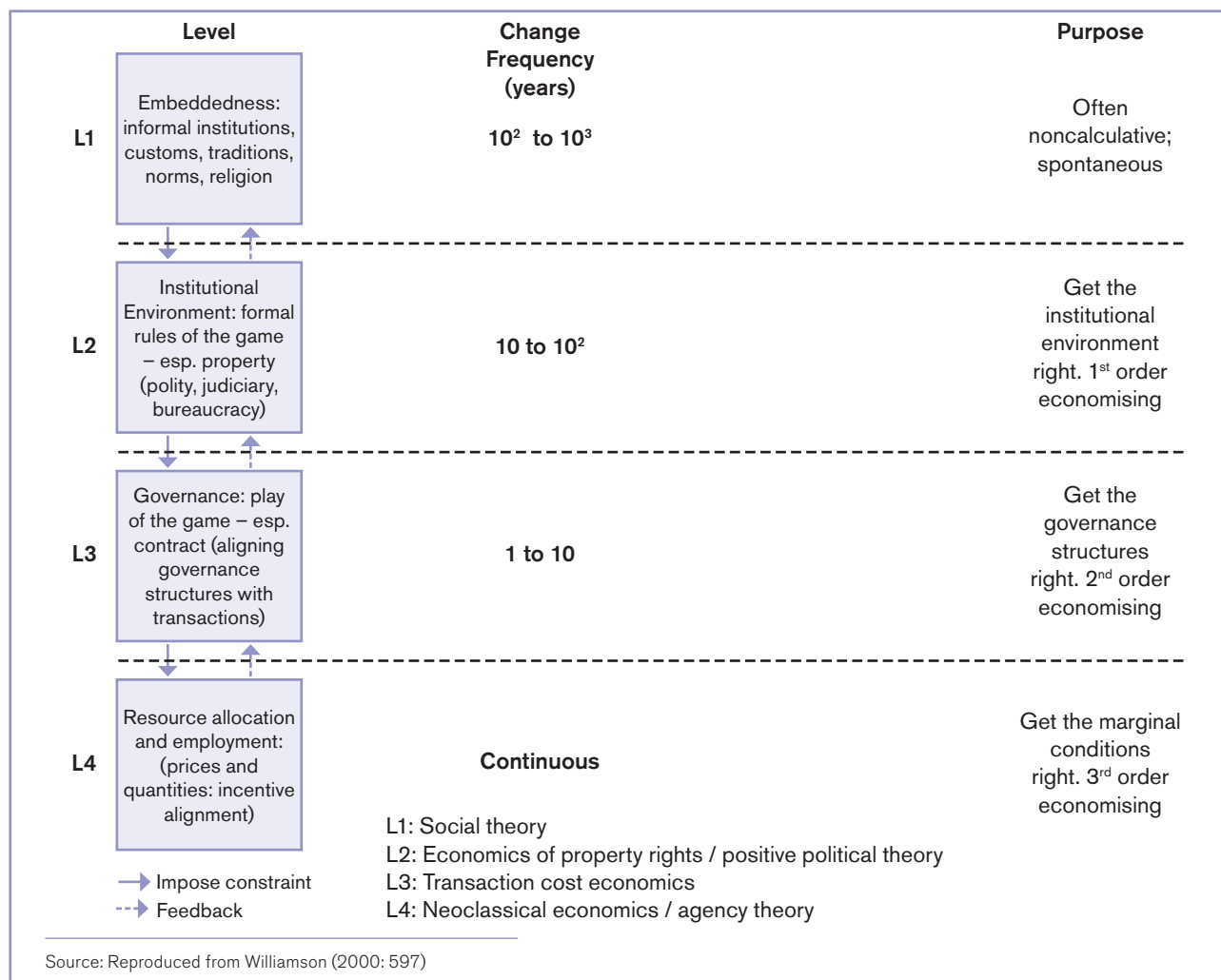
and cultural identity of officials shapes the functioning of the state and, by extension, the ways in which rules are exercised. The variable application of rules is also recognised by Leftwich and Sen (2010: 44) who quote Margaret Levi (2006), stating that institutions are 'empty boxes' without the organised human agency that makes them work. The power of institutions is manifest through human action; providing the structures for social interaction and behaviour and the spaces for agents to influence the substance and the application of rules.

Institutions also have differing degrees of authority and can be viewed, as Williamson (2000) suggests, as varying in social embeddedness. Williamson illustrates this in the form of a hierarchy, as Figure 2, where deeply established cultural norms, customs and religious practices provide a foundation for social behaviour and expectations. These deeply embedded norms provide an institutional framework for the creation of rules codified in law and reflected in polity. Laws in turn provide the basis for systems of governance and regulation that structure economic and social behaviour. Finally, institutions frame interactions, such as found in the market, affecting prices and economic transactions.

Williamson's (2000) model highlights how institutions, at different levels, change over varying timescales from the processes of constant change found in markets to embedded cultural norms that change slowly over hundreds of years.

While Williamson's analysis is primarily focused on economic conditions, and the specifics can be challenged when applied empirically to development contexts in the global South, it offers a schema to identify the relational character and the comparative mutability of institutions. Williamson's framework is useful in underlining the systemic connection between institutional categories to explain how practices, such as co-production, may behave as a change function within institutional environments. Of particular interest is the suggestion that underpinning dynamic institutions shaping governance and the operation of markets are more socially embedded beliefs, practices and rules, which provide a 'super-structure' to constrain the possible scope of institutional change. As discussed further below, this has implications for the extent to which externally imposed policy can affect embedded forms of institutionalised behaviours.

Figure 2. Williamson's Institutional Hierarchy

Level		Change Frequency (years)	Purpose
L1	Embeddedness: informal institutions, customs, traditions, norms, religion	10^2 to 10^3	Often noncalculative; spontaneous
L2	Institutional Environment: formal rules of the game – esp. property (polity, judiciary, bureaucracy)	10 to 10^2	Get the institutional environment right. 1st order economising
L3	Governance: play of the game – esp. contract (aligning governance structures with transactions)	1 to 10	Get the governance structures right. 2nd order economising
L4	Resource allocation and employment: (prices and quantities: incentive alignment)	Continuous	Get the marginal conditions right. 3rd order economising

→ Impose constraint
--→ Feedback

L1: Social theory
L2: Economics of property rights / positive political theory
L3: Transaction cost economics
L4: Neoclassical economics / agency theory

Source: Reproduced from Williamson (2000: 597)

3

Co-production and Institutional Change

The idea that public services are co-produced, with inputs from both state agencies and citizen consumers, has developed since the late 1970s to reflect a hidden co-dependency at the heart of service delivery. Co-production has previously been described as the mutual reliance between state 'regular producers' of public services ranging across health, policing, education and environmental management and the users of these services who have vested interest in provision that effectively and efficiently meets their needs (Sharp, 1980; Whitaker, 1980; Parks *et al.*, 1981; Joshi and Moore, 2004). The relationship, constructed through services, is institutionalised both formally in legal and policy frameworks that set the managerial scope of delivery and informally, in the expectations of users. The perceived ability of individuals to access services that meet their needs forms a key pillar of the social contract between citizens and the state and, for many individuals, a principal way in which they experience the institutional authority of state agencies (Batley *et al.*, 2012). It is suggested here that the relationship between citizens and the state, as organised through the production and use of services, is not only important in respect of public management, but as a point of engagement, can be used to influence institutionalised behaviour on issues of service delivery.

Co-production can be positioned, when viewed instrumentally, beyond public management literature to connect with social movement and collective action theory, akin to Fung and Wright (2003), as a means of creating spaces of deliberative and discursive action. While the characteristics of service co-production can vary considerably in relation to the context and the objectives of those involved, it is essentially the co-ordination of diverse inputs (including finance, labour and knowledge) into the creation of a common output, which serves the interests of both state regular producers and service users. Co-production then is more than self-help and is different from standardised forms of participation, because it focuses on transformative acts. Transformation includes changes to the production of services, as voluntary inputs are incorporated into processes that would more generally be seen, within a Weberian bureaucratic model, as core state responsibilities. Additionally, as part of negotiating collaborative input into services the terms of relationship between state and citizen co-producers are changed, creating a new basis for service governance. While it is important not to underestimate the difficulty of establishing co-production and overcome the social and political barriers that inhibit the formation of collective action (as discussed by Woolcock and Narayan, 2006; Krishna, 2009; Mahmud, 2010; Thompson and Tapscott, 2010), creating opportunities for participation can shift the frame for state – social relationships (Gaventa, 2004).

Recent work on co-production has highlighted the complex motivations of people choosing to contribute to service provision (Alford, 2014; Fledderus *et al.*, 2014; Pestoff, 2014; Verschuere *et al.*, 2012). Alford (2009) discusses the intrinsic rewards of engaging in co-production as including opportunities for social interaction, participation in democratic processes and acting in ways that are consistent with social values. In short, co-production can be a vehicle to critically engage institutional actors and practices. Viewed in this light when citizen groups, and in particular those in the weakest economic and political positions, engage in co-

productive activity with the state it can have 'localised institutional effects' (Houtzager, 2005: 15) to create new practices that subvert existing power relationships, albeit for discrete areas of co-produced service delivery. Establishing new patterns of behaviour and experiences of collaboration offers the potential to affect how actors understand contextual challenges and their expectations of what is possible.
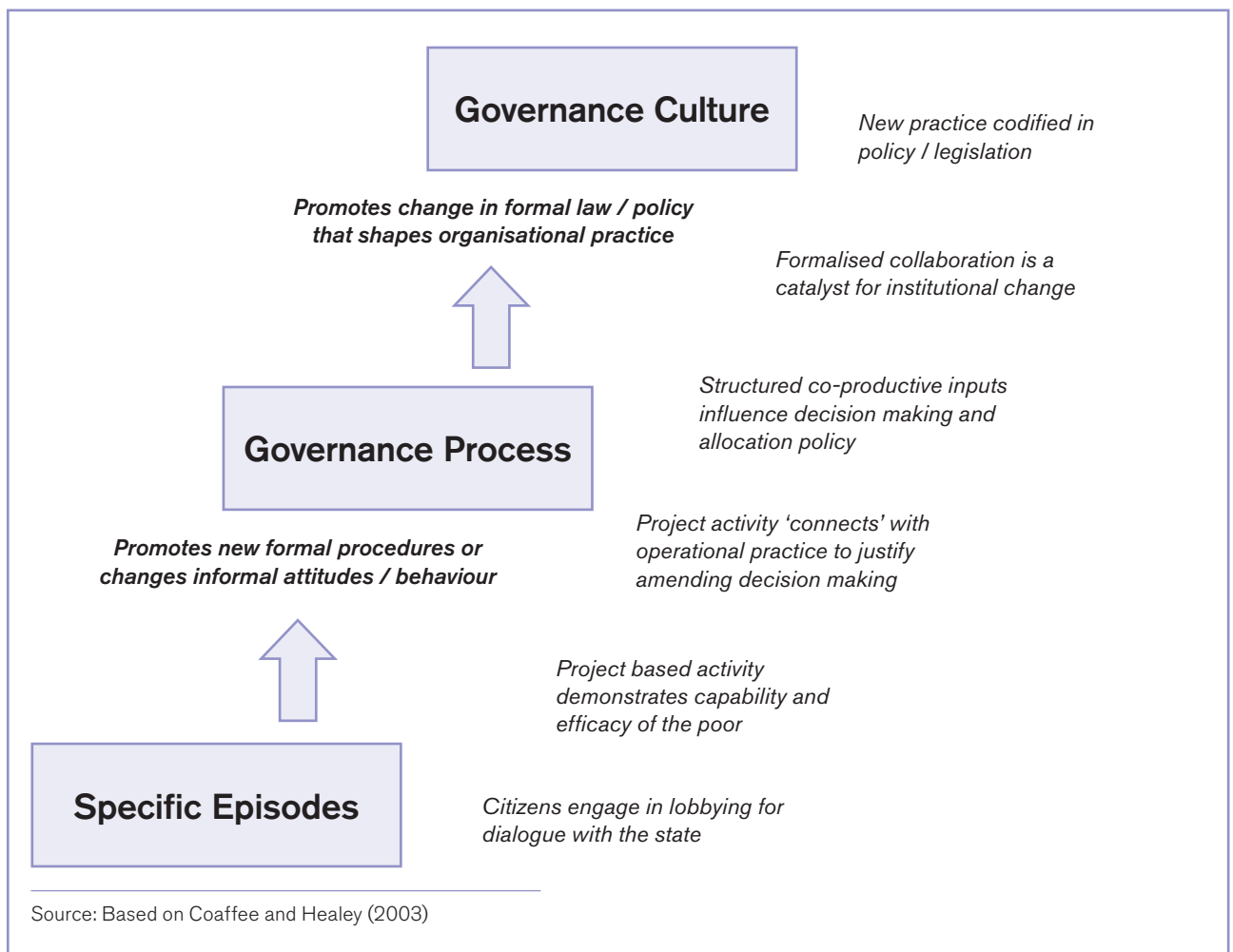
The impacts of engagement have been considered by Coaffee and Healey (2003) and Healey (2006) who examine, in the context of UK urban regeneration policy, how community-based innovations in local governance arrangements can change the institutionalised practices of local government in service delivery and economic development. They are interested in how innovation can 'transform the mainstream, rather than just incorporate new ideas and practices in ways which neutralise threats to established practices and the various power relations embedded in them' (Coaffee and Healey, 2003: 1983). Healey (2006: 303) draws from Anthony Giddens' (1984) analysis of the relationship between structure and agency (structuration) to identify the flows of interaction that 'shape the materialities and identities of actors and create the structural forces which they experience'. Change is achieved through the cumulative impact of engagement in institutionalised practices, from an initial discursive form, to affect the routines of governance. When considered through sociological theories of institutional change, this suggests a causal relationship between discourse and the adaptation of formal systems of routinised governance manifest in the adoption of new managerial vocabularies and practices.

Mitlin (2008: 339) has suggested that co-production can be employed 'as a grassroots strategy to secure political influence and access resources and services'. As illustrated in Figure 3, co-production can form part of a process of engagement, leading to institutional adaptation. Figure 3 describes how organised citizens initiate discursive engagement with the state in order to begin a dialogue and overcome bureaucratic obstacles to accessing services or resources. Relations are formalised through the development of projects, or 'specific episodes' of engagement which demonstrate the capacity and efficacy of community-based action and in turn impact on the behaviours and institutional practices of the state. Formal engagement can lead to co-productive structured inputs into localised delivery, affecting decision making and allocation policy. Participation in operational practices impacts on governance cultures and ultimately contributes to the adaptive development of new policies and formal regulation.

While Figure 3 is presented as linear process, to emphasise the steady creation of relationships and capacity, institutional change is conditioned by a complex web of interdependent factors. Bebbington (2013: 6), in his analysis of natural resource extraction, suggests that 'the reproduction of institutions takes a great deal of work' and that in this effort a route may be found to catalyse institutional change. On the same theme, Mahoney and Thelen (2010: 4) argue that 'institutional change often occurs precisely when problems of rule interpretation and enforcement open up space for actors to implement existing rules in new ways'. Using co-productive approaches as a form of creative problem solving in development is illustrated by Patel *et al.* (2002), who describe the process negotiating for the relocation of 20,000 rail-side shack dwellers in in Mumbai to make way for a city infrastructure improvement programme. By providing co-ordination and leadership, organised communities created a space for action within a state-led development scheme. Engagement was achieved in part by adopting repertoires of project delivery familiar to state organisations, but also by providing a source of capacity and expertise that was unavailable within state agencies.

Opportunity can also be created when the state creates exceptions to institutional arrangements and invites community-based organisations to participate in development projects. Mitlin and Muller (2004) highlight a co-productive housing programme in Windhoek, Namibia where the state, recognising its lack of capacity to meet the demand for housing, sought a partnership with the community to provide affordable housing. Mitlin and Muller (2004) identify that this initiative reflected a strong political commitment, grounded in the principles of the national liberation movement (as a shared cultural identity), and also as a pragmatic strategy to manage the cost of urbanisation. The Namibian case study provides an example of where co-production, as Mitlin (2008: 349) points out, creates 'openings for citizen involvement in [institutional] areas that have been reserved for the state'. While the approach could be challenged by critics such as Cooke (2004) as a form of co-optation, this example provided an avenue for low income communities to establish an active engagement in the day-to-day practicalities of service provision (Mitlin, 2008). The case illustrates the potential role of co-production as a means of engagement with the state, but moreover how communities may use co-production to demonstrate their capacity to contribute to development.

Figure 3. Idealised Process of Engagement Leading to Institutional Change

Governance Culture

New practice codified in policy / legislation

Promotes change in formal law / policy that shapes organisational practice

Formalised collaboration is a catalyst for institutional change

Structured co-productive inputs influence decision making and allocation policy

Governance Process

Project activity 'connects' with operational practice to justify amending decision making

Promotes new formal procedures or changes informal attitudes / behaviour

Project based activity demonstrates capability and efficacy of the poor

Specific Episodes

Citizens engage in lobbying for dialogue with the state

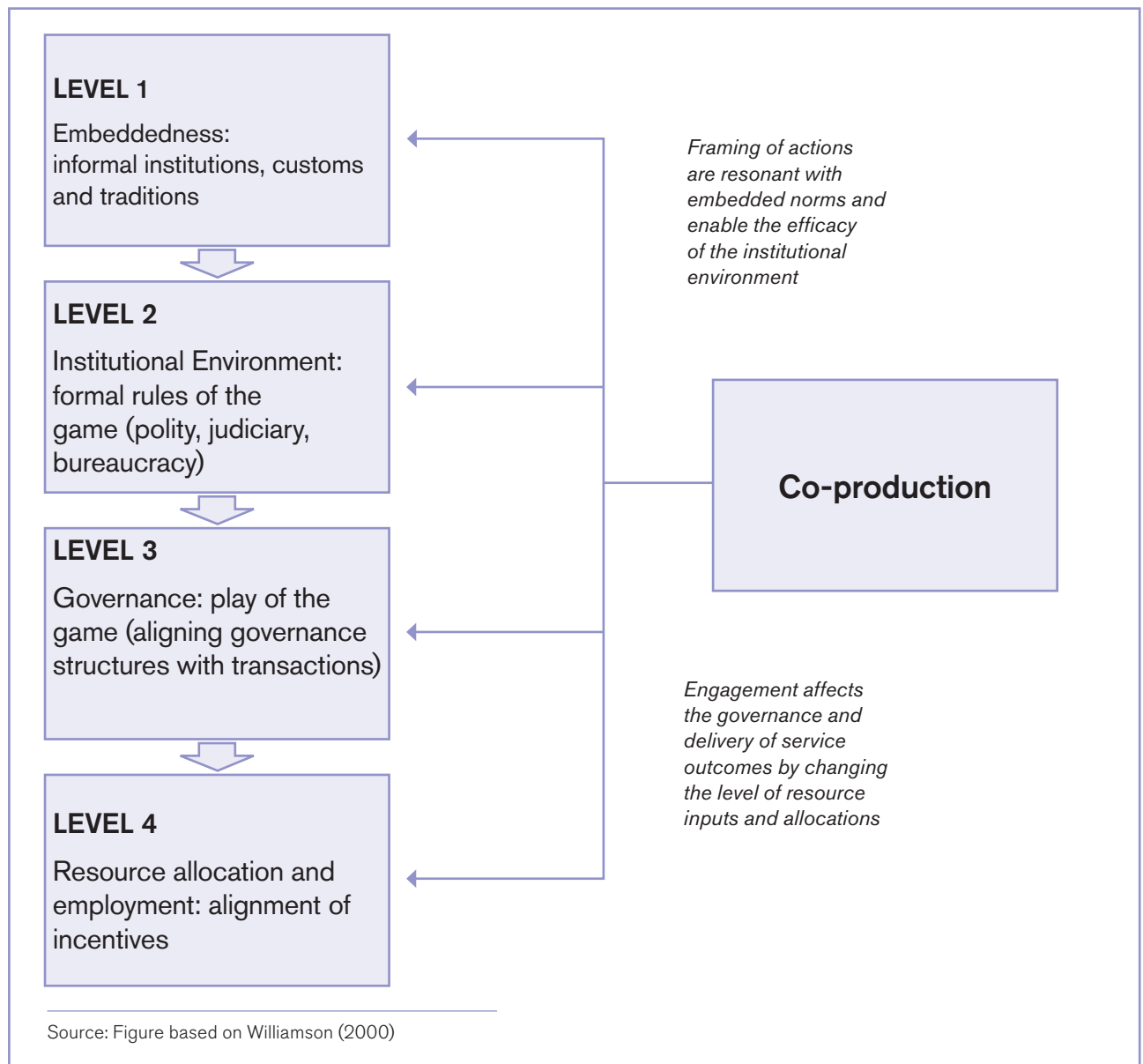Source: Based on Coaffee and Healey (2003)

4

Affecting Change through Service Co-production

Drawing on Williamson's (2000) institutional hierarchy, as presented above, to distinguish between informal institutions as embedded cultural norms and formal but dynamic governance and market conditions, co-production can be positioned as being institutionally connected at multiple levels. Figure 4, illustrates how co-production can firstly be framed to resonate with established societal values, giving legitimacy to demands and proposed actions. In practice poor communities may connect to notions of national identity or ideas of fairness and equal treatment to reinforce claims. Linking to social values is significant because, as Kingston and Caballero (2009) citing Libecap (1989) note, the strength of connection to embedded institutions affects how potential rule changes are perceived by decision makers and therefore their likely acceptance. For co-production to overcome the embedded resistance inherent in institutional structures, new approaches and demands need to appear to be legitimate. The practices of co-production can be tailored and borrow legitimacy from normative values such as the basic human need for shelter or shared cultural practices, which may be particularly powerful in recently independent countries where narratives of struggle frame political discourse.

Co-production can secondly be located to address specific organisational deficiencies found in discrete services areas or in market determined processes, as represented in level four of Williamson's hierarchy. The tactical application of co-production enables specific issues to be addressed that contribute to the achievement of stated policy goals or add value to the operation of identified public services. When presented as problem solving or, as Fung and Wright (2003: 17) suggest, a form of 'deliberative solution generation', co-production allows communities to demonstrate positive contributions to civic life and establish a basis for negotiation. Co-production when considered within this framework provides a participative and discursive vehicle for social actors to engage with each other in ways that may fall outside of normal bureaucratic practice to challenge the application of administrative rules and procedures.

Organised low income communities, using co-production as a vehicle to engage state agents in negotiation on access to services, must find a way to connect their actions into public service management arrangements. Tactically co-production, which can vary significantly in scale and type across different urban contexts, is targeted to maximise the prospect

Figure 4. Co-Production and Williamson's Institutional Hierarchy

LEVEL 1

Embeddedness:
informal institutions, customs
and traditions

LEVEL 2

Institutional Environment:
formal rules of the
game (polity, judiciary,
bureaucracy)

LEVEL 3

Governance: play of the
game (aligning governance
structures with transactions)

LEVEL 4

Resource allocation and
employment: alignment of
incentives

*Framing of actions
are resonant with
embedded norms and
enable the efficacy
of the institutional
environment*

Co-production

*Engagement affects
the governance and
delivery of service
outcomes by changing
the level of resource
inputs and allocations*

Source: Figure based on Williamson (2000)

of support from more powerful state organisations. As found by Cress and Snow (1996; 2000) in their work with homelessness NGOs in the USA, efforts to engage the state were effective where groups were able to diagnose problems in ways that were narratively coherent to the policies of the state. Diagnostic analysis in turn was used to negotiate a forward action plan that included NGOs as co-producers of services, working with homeless city populations. Kingston and Caballero (2009) help to connect this practice of tailoring to institutional theory, suggesting that in situations where there is an asymmetry of power, agents will choose to take an adaptive approach and devise new rules that are analogous to rules with which they are already familiar.

'Islands' of Activity

A key feature of projects of co-production is that they create episodes of interaction (as described in Figure 3), which take place within broader institutional and managerial frameworks, but are treated as discrete activities that can operate semi-independently from prevailing systems of rules. When viewed as 'pilot schemes' or 'development projects', co-production can be positioned as an exception to normative practices; creating spaces for adaptation of both institutionalised processes and relations. The use of 'exceptionality measures' in development has been discussed by Swyngedouw *et al.* (2002: 543) and Baptista (2013)

as tools to preserve elite interest in contexts of the management of neoliberal cities. It has also been argued (see Crook, 2010; Levy, 2011) that public sector reform could be more effective if focused on small-scale 'islands of effectiveness' within otherwise difficult governance settings. Exception making, when seen through a sociological institutional lens, can be regarded as a mechanism to introduce new micro-practices, in ways that avoid the higher levels of risk associated with larger scale systemic changes.

Levy (2014: 80) illustrates the creation of 'islands' of economic growth in Bangladesh, where 'the overall political environment is too fragmented and contested for any effort at broad-based policy reforms to be effective'. In Levy's example, narrowly focused interventions, geared towards cumulative and incremental changes in institutionalised practice, provide a means to significantly improve economic performance in target sectors, while also creating precedent for other institutional adaptations. Establishing modes of operation, which do not destabilise equilibrium relationships, but demonstrate the efficacy of new approaches and forms of relationship, can develop into more substantive reform. The expectation that islands of effectiveness can have a positive impact on related areas of institutionalised behaviour is supported by sociological institutional theory, which suggests people have a tendency to 'adopt rules [and positions] which are analogous to rules with which they are already familiar' (Kingston and Caballero, 2009: 164). Co-production, when aligned with existing institutional arrangements, does not threaten prevailing structures of authority, making it more likely, following Houtzager (2005: 16 referring to Skocpol, 1992) that state actors will adopt new policies and approaches that are low cost or have limited requirements for institutional adaptation.

The important link between small-scale initiatives and more substantive institutional change has been discussed by Brousseau and Raynaud (2011: 66) who offer a useful distinction between 'institutional environments', which are the macro-terms of social interaction, and 'institutional arrangements', which govern the micro-dynamics of bilateral relationships. They suggest that the former provides a stable and generic infrastructure, while the latter represents more malleable rules of engagement. These two institutional arena are overlapping and necessarily connected and can be understood, with regard to the processes of change, as consistent with sociological theory on the evolution of institutions. Brousseau and Raynaud (2011) suggest that institutional change is initiated at a micro-level and, as new rules become more widely accepted, they affect, more broadly, social behaviours. In highlighting the inherent connection between institutional environments and arrangements, Brousseau
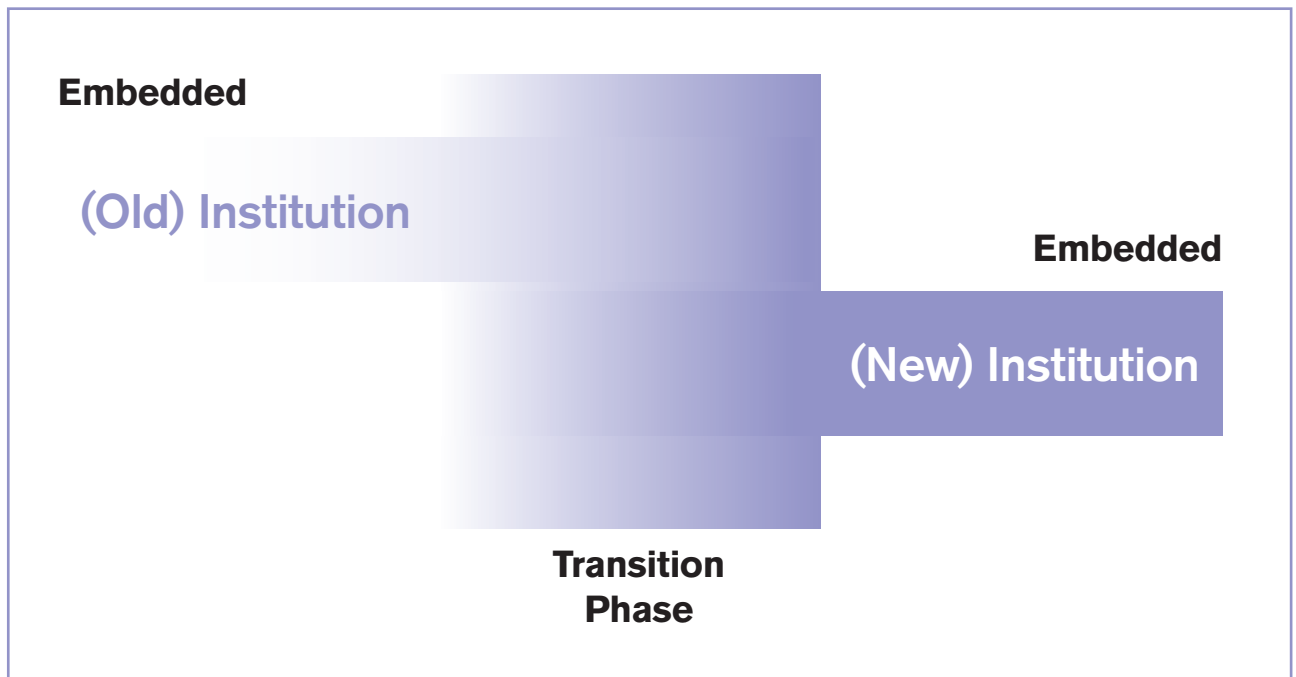
and Raynaud focus on adaptive and iterative processes as a primary means by which institutions change.

Processes of Transition

The processes by which micro-adaptations to arrangements become more substantive changes in institutional environments suggest that a transition occurs whereby an 'old' set of rules is replaced by a 'new' set. Sociological institutional theory suggests that, within particular contexts, institutions are tested constantly through everyday interactions: 'each time rules and resources are actualised they are reproduced' (Mouzelis, 2008: 197). The corollary of this being new practices within existing institutions, when adopted, can become embedded and further reproduced with use, assuming the ongoing efficacy of new arrangements. The acceptance of new rules that work in practice, resonates with Knudsen (2008) and Mahoney and Thelen (2010), who suggest that new arrangements are more readily absorbed into 'organisational routines' where they are broadly consistent with existing practices. Thus, where new approaches are introduced into existing institutionalised frameworks, as exceptions or projects, this creates an 'authorised' space for new institutionalised behaviours to be normalised and adopted as responses to frequently occurring problems and delivery requirements.

Approaches that promote small-scale adaptations of institutions, particularly in adverse or dysfunctional political environments, may offer a route to improve governance arrangements. Kingston and Caballero (2009: 156) state that 'institutional change is usually incremental since it is often easier to achieve consensus on small adjustments than to affect major changes to existing rules'. At an organisational level, stability of operation and the availability of problem solving capacity have an important impact on the expectations of actors and their regularised behaviours (Knudsen, 2008). When grounded in, and authorised through, the managerial structures of an organisation, adaptive practices may be replicated beyond the specific area where the innovation has first taken place, with routines providing the 'containers of information that can be transferred in selection processes' (Knudsen, 2008: 147). For example, within a local government setting, if a non-standard practice is adopted to achieve a specified goal and if this exception has been authorised through political and managerial structures, the practice may spread within the organisation, if an operational benefit is evident from its adoption. Incremental implementation of new practices is confirmed by Hall (2010), who observes that once actors have adjusted their institutionalised 'habits' (practices) they become more interested in further reforms that enhance the new position and become reluctant to revert to former arrangements.

Figure 5. Institutional Transition

Embedded

(Old) Institution

Embedded

(New) Institution

**Transition
Phase**

Incremental approaches to institutional change can be effective when small changes take place within a wider set of 'rules', without destabilising the institution per se. The sedimentation of small-scale changes into larger scale shifts in institutions is consistent with theory where, as Kingston and Caballero (2009) point out, there are multiple points of equilibria within a process of 'evolutionary' institutional change. Such a process could be theorised as a 'transition phase' where both 'old' and 'new' institutions operate simultaneously, while 'new' rules become embedded and reproduced through application, as illustrated in Figure 5. A transitional phase would operate where rules are embedded in social environments and change occurs in response to cognitive shifts in how actors perceive institutionalised situations (Peters, 2005 citing Berger and Luckman, 1967). The slow transition towards a tipping point differs from historical and rational choice version of institutional theory, but would, as described earlier, be consistent with the notion of micro-junctures that act as markers and precedents of institutions in transition.

Conceptualising a transition phase allows for the identification of spaces geared to resolving dysfunction in institutional systems, contributing potentially to the operational functionality of discrete areas of activity and systems of governance. As suggested above, this type of transition could operate through the development of co-productive projects and creation of exceptions that do not overtly conflict with existing rules. The adoption of co-productive approaches that are broadly consistent with existing institutions – both the intent and the operation of rules – has significance because, as Barley and Tolbert (1997) point out, 'enacting scripts that encode institutional principles … [allows] actors [to] simply behave according to their perception of the way things are'. Framing engagement as problem solving may have particular importance where adaptive change is being sought by groups outside of the elite; where non-elite groups more likely to realise the cumulative benefits of small changes to institutional practices over a long period of time than be successful in a single challenge to prevailing practices.

5

Research Method

To explore, empirically, the operation of co-production and its effects on urban institutions, a case study of community-state collaboration in Harare, Zimbabwe was undertaken. The research has been conducted with the Zimbabwe Homeless Peoples Federation (ZHPF) and its NGO partner Dialogue on Shelter Trust (Dialogue) to investigate the impact of episodic projects of co-production on institutions over a 16-year period, from 1997 to 2013. To add to the contextual description of Zimbabwe as a site for research, as outlined below, Zimbabwe was selected as a case study because of its institutional environment. Firstly, much of the colonial institutional architecture governing land use and basic service provision remains intact, despite political and economic changes and burgeoning demand for urban development. Secondly, the adverse political climate has severely constrained the opportunity to challenge the power and instruments of the state through democratic routes. The environment for poor urban communities in Zimbabwe is one where they look to collective action to compensate for the lack of capacity and dysfunction of the state. Thirdly, ZHPF and Dialogue had been active for some 16 years and had a wealth of experience of negotiating with the state and evidence of the impact of actions on institutions.

A case study approach is well suited to tracking the impact of co-production on informal institutions as manifest through the attitudes and behaviours of state agents towards low income urban communities. It is also an appropriate method to investigate the origins of micro-adaptations in formal administrative institutional behaviour (Ostrom, 2005). The complexity of socially embedded institutions requires close examination making, as Yin (1981: 59) suggests, case studies useful 'in a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident'. The research was undertaken within a temporal frame in order to identify 'junctures' in institutional behaviour, also recognising as Pierson (2004) suggests, that social processes may not be evident in an analysis of single moments.

Data were collected during 2013 and early 2014 as part of PhD fieldwork and included semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 48 participants. A balanced selection of participants were selected that included residents of low income communities; the leadership of ZHPF; managers and staff of Dialogue; officers and a politician from the City of Harare Council; and officers of associated quasi-public agencies involved in land and housing issues in Zimbabwe. In addition, the fieldwork included the collection and analysis of key documents including policy papers, building regulations, council committee reports, management information and press articles. Careful data analysis was undertaken to identify how co-production functioned and how it impacted on the processes of institutional operation. In addition the strategies and behaviours of organised communities were examined to assess the changing patterns of relations and how these affected expectations of actors.

The research was structured to explore, empirically, the operation of institutions and the effects of co-production on institutionalised behaviours and established administrative practices of urban governance. By considering the micro-spaces and mechanics of the application of rules, the intention was to describe and elaborate how institutions function in practice and observe the processes of institutional adaptation. Locating the analysis of co-production within institutional theory allows for a shift away from a framework of public management to detail the implications of new civic relationships, the processes contributing to problem solving and the medium term impact on structures of authority within a city context. While the specific activities associated with co-production are necessarily contextual, the use of a case study approach enables close examination of the operation of institutions in ways that contribute to deepening theory and strengthening policy.

6

Changing Institutions in Practice – Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has a turbulent history since independence in 1980. Founded with strong developmentalist principles, the first government of Zimbabwe sought to re-engineer the nation and the state by removing racist policies of exclusion, building economic growth and investing in public service provision (Chimhowu, 2009; Bourne, 2011; Bratton and Masunungure, 2011; Manjengwa, 2012). While the narrative of a strong independent African nation remains at the core of national politics and identity, Zimbabwe has experienced a long series of political and economic crises that have undermined the capability of the state to achieve its original ambitions. There has been an on-going contest over land reform (Moyo and Yeros, 2007; Hanlon *et al.*, 2013), failed structural adjustment and economic collapse leading to hyperinflation (Dashwood, 2003; Bond, 2007; Andreasson, 2010; Potts, 2010) and long periods of internecine and party-political conflict (Alexander and McGregor, 2003; Chan, 2011; Raftopoulos, 2013). In this context state bureaucracy has been increasingly politicised with the governing party, ZANU-PF, becoming authoritarian and violent in its efforts to contain dissidence and political opposition (Raftopoulos, 2000; Sachikonye, 2006).

Bracking (2005) describes how Zimbabwe, from the 1990s, created an 'exclusionary mode of political rule', where institutions were shaped and deployed to preserve the interests and authority of the political elite. The operation of Zimbabwean politics contradicted the post-independence ambition to build an equitable society, instead creating structures to control wealth for the benefit of the personal and political ambitions of the party-state. These conditions limited the scope for political participation, with opposition to government tightly controlled through laws that limited public assembly and gave authority to security services to target individuals and groups deemed anti-nationalist.[1] Institutions became moribund, with a lack of direct challenge to existing rules and a state bureaucratic architecture geared to preserving elite interests. For urban poor communities in Harare there was both a severe lack of capacity within city authorities to implement regulations (Chatiza, 2010) and where institutional enforcement was in place it, according to Chitekwe-Biti (2014), was used to criminalise the survival strategies of the poor.

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[1] Statutes including the *Public Order and Security Act* and *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* gave the state considerable power to suppress political opposition and civil society organisations and to limit public gatherings.

It was into this context of politicised and dysfunctional institutional conditions that ZHPF and Dialogue were established in 1997. Recognising that popular direct challenge to the authority of the state was untenable, ZHPF and Dialogue sought to engage national and city government in discussion on issues of access to land, housing, basic services and urban poverty.[2] From the outset ZHPF and Dialogue aimed to mobilise communities in order to demonstrate their capability as prospective partners in development and initiate programmes of co-production with the state. A ZHPF leader commented that their aim was to 'prove to the government that we are people that are not homeless and hopeless, but homeless and hopeful'.[3] They saw the importance of engaging the state to promote meaningful change; avoiding violent confrontation by connecting to council procedural, administrative and service delivery systems, in order to influence institutionalised behaviours.[4]

ZHPF and Dialogue worked to cultivate new spaces of discussion and negotiation by insistently pursuing opportunities to engage city and national government on a range of urban development and service governance issues. The City of Harare Council commented that at 'first we were not even prepared to discuss with them [ZHPF and Dialogue]. But when they kept pestering us we began opening up.'[5] Despite the danger of appearing to challenge the state, ZHPF and Dialogue continued to press for meetings with city and national government, organising public clean-up actions and working to raise their visibility with Ministers and city officials. ZHPF and Dialogue achieved a breakthrough in 1999 when they attended the National Housing Conference. While the meeting was open to established organisations working on housing issues, ZHPF and Dialogue, as small and newly formed groups, lacked the resources to actively participate. They did, however, attend workshops at the conference and were able to present the work of ZHPF and Dialogue focusing on community action to address housing need. Their contribution at the conference found the attention of journalists interested in their participative approach to housing development, with subsequent press reports raising their profile nationally.[6]

Involvement in the National Housing Conference proved to be a 'micro-juncture' for ZHPF and Dialogue as it helped to reposition them with government departments as legitimate contributors to national debates on housing and urban poverty. It also assisted in building networks with the City of Harare and other municipalities. As a result of efforts to engage officials and politicians, ZHPF and Dialogue were able to secure support for a co-production project in Harare: the construction of pay toilets in Mbare. As suggested in Figure 3, regular contact and dialogue helped to deconstruct discursive and epistemic barriers between citizens and state organisations, leading to more substantive co-productive projects.

The strategy adopted by ZHPF and Dialogue focused on positioning low income communities in a positive role as agents of change and as credible partners in the delivery of public services. The prospective contributions of urban poor communities were carefully framed to resonate with deeply embedded ideas of national unity and address under-resourced and dysfunctional institutional systems of urban management, as suggested theoretically in Figure 4. Firstly, the initial claims of ZHPF for land sought to connect with powerful post-colonial narratives of belonging and nationhood that are central to political discourse in Zimbabwe (Raftopoulos, 2004; Alexander 2007; Bourne, 2011). Drawing on the accepted idea of the importance of land, ZHPF and Dialogue argued the legitimacy of recognising the 'land issue' in an urban context. Secondly, ZHPF and Dialogue invoked cultural values of communality and collective self-help as a means for communities to work together and contribute (co-productively) to meeting the challenges of urban development.[7] This approach deftly avoided an easy rejection, by city authorities, that communities were asking for resources that were unavailable. Thirdly, in promoting co-productive approaches ZHPF and Dialogue were able to offer additional resources towards the delivery of City of Harare priority issues of housing and urban management. In contributing to housing and infrastructure development, ZHPF and Dialogue influenced the application of regulations to affect how state actors understood the impact of institutions on low income communities.

To explore the practice of co-production and its implications for institutional adaptation in Zimbabwe, three examples are now used to highlight micro-processes of change. ZHPF and Dialogue have avoided direct confrontation with the state, instead seeking meaningful change in the institutions governing land, housing and basic service provision in Harare. By engaging in discussion with the state, communities have come to know the internal processes of the City Council and identify opportunities to target administrative and procedural practices that prevent low income communities from accessing basic service provision. The cumulative impact adaptations have led to more

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[2] Interview with Dialogue, 5 July 2013.
[3] Interview with ZHPF, 8 May 2013.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Interview with City of Harare, 7 May 2013.
[6] Interview with ZHPF, 8 May 2013.
[7] Interview with Dialogue, 5 July 2013.

substantive shifts in both institutionalised behaviours and in the formation of City Council policy.

Housing Waiting Lists – Documenting Identity

The City of Harare Council maintains a housing waiting list for the allocation of homes and residential stands (housing plots) in the City. In May 2012 there were some 41,461 people on the waiting list.[8] There has been little movement in this list, with the Council reporting in 2011 that just 16 stands were allocated to individuals and a further 2,954 stands were allocated to housing co-operatives operating in Harare.[9] Chitekwe-Biti (2014) points out that the City Council last allocated completed homes in 1996. The City of Harare Director of Housing accepts that the waiting list, as a device to register and respond to housing demand, is dysfunctional and has lost the confidence of homeless residents of the City[10] and, according to Chatiza and Mlalazi (2009), is frequently ignored when allocations are being made. Chitekwe-Biti (2014) notes, from surveys undertaken by ZHPF and Dialogue, some ZHPF members have been on the waiting list for two decades without being invited to an allocation interview. While the ineffectiveness of the housing list process is widely known, it remains a key bureaucratic tool for the City Council to define identity and determine the distribution of resources.

The use of the housing waiting list to validate individual need and determine the allocation of stands was challenged by ZHPF and Dialogue in 2002, when they were invited to be part of a housing development programme in the Harare suburb of Crowborough North. ZHPF and Dialogue were offered 150 stands for ZHPF members, but to be eligible members needed to be registered on the City Council housing waiting list. The allocation of stands was an important micro-juncture for ZHPF and Dialogue as a first formal recognition of their role as a housing development partner and the culmination of lobbying, since 1998, to be included in City land allocation processes.[11] It also provided an opportunity to demonstrate the viability of community incremental development of housing in Harare and set a precedent for future housing development programmes. The eligibility criteria were, however, a major barrier for many prospective ZHPF beneficiaries of the land allocation.

To join the housing waiting list individuals had to present identity documents such as birth certificates, marriage certificates and payslips as proof of income. Meeting this criterion was highly problematic as few of these documents are typically held by poor people (Mitlin, 2004). A Dialogue manager commented '[i]t's ok for the middle class who have papers, but for the poor it's not so straight forward getting an ID'.[12] As the City Council had made a decision to allocate stands to ZHPF and Dialogue, it provided an opportunity to identify the problem and negotiate a concessionary adaptation to institutional practice. The City of Harare Council agreed that ZHPF members could use their ZHPF community savings books as proof of identity, removing a barrier to the allocation of stands for the Crowborough North project. An adaptation to the Council housing allocation process was agreed whereby applicants were 'pre-checked' by ZHPF using the savings record, prior to attending an interview with the City Council Housing Department to join the housing list.

While objectively this appears to be a minor amendment to a bureaucratic process, it provided a major breakthrough for ZHPF and Dialogue to overcome an embedded institutional practice that excluded people in poverty from having their housing need legitimised. The example is consistent with theory, and the process of adaptation shown in Figure 3, where a 'co-productive field' was established through the allocation of land. As the City Council and the community (ZHPF and Dialogue) were committed to the development of the stands at Crowborough North, it provided both an opportunity space for negotiation and an incentive to problem solve. While shifting responsibility for confirming the identity housing list applications to ZHPF could be critiqued as a form of governmentality, the change in this institutionalised process helped to resolve a key exclusion affecting people in poverty. It also, following Andrews *et al.* (2012), created precedent for other adaptations to the administrative practices of the City Council's urban management of Harare.

Adapting Building Regulations

A further example of negotiated change to institutionalised processes directly affecting urban poor residents in Harare can be seen in the application of building regulations and land use policy. Watson (2011) and Berrisford (2011) have highlighted the disjunction between the formal rules and administrative processes of urban management and daily practices and experiences of life in African cities. For Lund and Boone (2013: 10) the use of land provides a literal terrain where institutions are played out in contexts of 'ongoing competition over resources, authority,

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[8] City of Harare Director of Housing, 3 May 2013.
[9] City of Harare Council – Department of Housing and Community Services Annual Report 2011.
[10] City of Harare Director of Housing, 3 May 2013.
[11] Background information obtained from Dialogue and confirmed during interviews with ZHPF, 8 May 2013.
[12] Discussion with Dialogue, 4 February 2013.

deliming jurisdictions and property distinctions and the categorization of persons'. Despite the apparent poor fit of institutional frameworks in Zimbabwe with the conditions of urban growth, there is ambiguity in how regulations are perceived by city residents. Building standards are seen as criminalising the survival strategies of the urban poor (Chitekwe-Biti, 2014) and simultaneously as aspirational, representing a standard of living and legitimacy that is the ambition of many. A ZHPF member in Crowborough North recalled that when he lived in a wooden shack in Mbare he always wanted a house that was 'well-built – one that is on the plan'.[13] The statement reflects both a desire to occupy a high quality property, normatively one that is brick built, but also to be considered a legitimate resident of the city: living in a formalised area recognised in planning documents.

As highlighted by Kingston and Caballero (2009) and Bebbington *et al.* (2010), people have complex relationships with institutions and a tendency to want to gain concessions to existing systems, rather than create new and unfamiliar rules. The desire to engage in decisions on how rules operate and adapt the regulations which affect everyday life is consistent with the sociological institutional theory discussed above. The theory has an empirical application through co-production. In Harare communities in their relations with the City Council have made strenuous efforts to vary the terms of planning regulation on the sequence of construction of housing and service infrastructure. The Zimbabwean *Regional, Town and Country Planning Act* and *Urban Councils Act* forbid the construction of residential property until service infrastructure (water, sewage and roads) have been completed. However, as has been established internationally (Cities Alliance, 2006; UN-Habitat, 2011; Wakely and Riley, 2011) incremental construction processes can be an effective way for people on very low and unstable incomes to build homes. Neither low income communities nor financially weak city authorities can afford large scale up-front capital investment in infrastructure construction, creating a significant barrier to housing development.

As part of a co-productive housing development scheme, part-funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, in the Harare suburb of Dzivarasekwa Extension, ZHPF and Dialogue negotiated a local variance to planning regulations to allow housing construction to take place in parallel with the installation of service infrastructure. Working through a joint management team, which included community and City Council officers established to oversee the delivery

the Dzivarasekwa Extension project, representations were made to the City Council, in its role as Planning Authority, to permit the development. The City Council agreed an exception to planning rules to permit the installation of temporary supply of water, using boreholes, and the construction of Eco-san dry sanitation units in place of reticulated sewage systems, while housing construction took place.[14] The variation in planning regulations enabled people to move onto stands, using temporary arrangements, thereby making the incremental development affordable (Chitekwe-Biti, 2014). Moreover, it was a micro-juncture in the application of planning regulations and provided a precedent for co-productive housing development in low income communities.

Slum Upgrading Strategy

Beyond changes to individual institutional practices, the co-productive engagement of community and state actors in Harare has had a wider impact on City Council policy affecting 'squatter' settlements. In addition to the housing project at Dzivarasekwa Extension ZHPF, Dialogue and the City of Harare Council were funded by the Gates Foundation to produce a 'Slum Upgrading Strategy' for the City. The aim of the Strategy was to create a policy 'alternative to evictions by providing a framework within which the city and different stakeholders can support improvements in these [slum] areas'.[15] The Strategy is notable because it is the first formal recognition, by the City of Harare, of informal settlements. Previously, according to Chitekwe-Biti (2014), these communities remained invisible on City maps and while recognised as a problem, were treated as temporary, aberrant and as separate from the urban fabric of the City.

The Strategy identifies 37 'slum' communities, of various sizes, located across Harare as part of a process of documenting informality, which, as Appadurai (2012: 639) states, provides the 'tools that enable poor urban communities to mobilize knowledge about themselves in a manner that can resist eviction, exploitation and surveillance in favour of advancing their own rights, resources and claims'. The Upgrading Strategy in its first paragraph makes a clear statement towards co-production by setting out the following:

'Due to city level and external factors the City lacks adequate technical and political capacity to fully mobilize their ['slum' dwellers] participation let alone provide the necessary services required in slum areas.'[16]

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[13] ZHPF interviewee Crowborough North, 2 July 2013.
[14] Confirmed by City of Harare, 7 May 2013.
[15] City of Harare Slum Upgrading Strategy, p. 1.
[16] Ibid.

The Upgrading Strategy asserts that 'slums' are a consequence of the failure of municipal governance systems. The resolution of this failure is through adaptation of institutionalised processes governing the management of land, distribution of services and investment in service infrastructure. The discourse used in the Upgrading Strategy moves away from narratives of 'blaming' the poor and removing settlements as urban blight, to promoting participative approaches to in-situ and incremental upgrading. The Strategy does not distinguish between ZHPF and non-ZHPF settlements, but applies to informal developments across the City. A key statement in the Strategy marks a shift in approach by the City of Harare from policy of demolition, to one of improvement of rights and environmental conditions:

The 'Council's general perspective regarding slums has traditionally been of removing them. However, the housing and community services sector now accepts the existence of slums and will make efforts to structure responses to situations of inhumane conditions, tenure insecurity and inadequate infrastructure.'[16]

While the Upgrading Strategy reflects the interests of low income community members, as evident in the content and the language used, the objectives of the City of Harare are also made clear. These indicate a desire to formalise low income settlements, bringing housing construction up to standards defined in legislation; reinforcing the role of the City Council as the statutory Planning Authority; increasing revenue income to fund new infrastructure investment and maintain service delivery; and to extend territorial control, through community-based organisations, to informal settlements in order to, for example, prevent slum development on wetlands. The Strategy articulates a different discourse of low income communities from that more typically used in Harare, accepting informality, but setting a condition that the challenge of delivering housing improvement is one shared by communities and the state.

The funding provided by the Gates Foundation was a catalyst to extend the terms of engagement between communities and the City of Harare beyond the limits of administratively defined relationships. The funding built upon the accumulated experience of working together and the bonds of trust formed by ZHPF, Dialogue and the City of Harare over 16 years. The high profile position of the Gates Foundation was an incentive to accelerate the development of co-productive working and increased the importance of adapting institutional practice to ensure that projects were delivered.

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[16] City of Harare Slum Upgrading Strategy, p.15.

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Conclusion

Understanding institutional change as a social process brings issues of agency to the fore and highlights the formative value of building spaces of dialogue and co-production to shape institutions. While sociological theories of institutional change are less well established than those founded on historical and rational choice theories, they are significant for the design of development policy. Centrally, sociological institutional theory provides a framework for 'working with the grain' (as suggested by Levy, 2014); utilising the assets, shared cultures and capacity of social actors to support inclusive forms of urban development. As suggested by a number of scholars including Knudsen (2008), Mahoney and Thelen (2010) and Brousseau and Raynaud (2011) small-scale adaptive changes can lead to more substantive shifts in institutions and institutionalised behaviours over time. However, to be sustainable, these changes must be situated and fit political and social realities – reflecting the web of incentives and constraints acting upon social agents.

Drawing from an empirical case study of institutional change in practice, this paper has sought to highlight how decentralised action, initiated at a community level, has contributed to institutional adaptation. Changes in the application of rules and administrative procedures have manifest as 'micro-junctures' or small adaptations, incremental gains and precedent which have combined over time to shift institutionalised thinking and behaviour. These micro-junctures do not have the same immediate impact as is suggested by the critical junctures of historical institutional theory but, in keeping with the

sociological theory used in this paper, provide markers of cumulative change in institutions. The steady adaptation of institutions which reinforces the efficacy of rules, offers the potential, as suggested by Leftwich (2010), to create institutions that are both procedurally and substantively legitimate and moreover functionally appropriate to the urban context in which they are employed.

In this paper co-production has been used to illustrate how, in practice, small-scale collaborative projects can be significant in changing the institutionalised practices of public administration. Co-production is constructed on spaces of negotiation and problem solving, providing a framework to generate mutual benefit to citizens and to the state through the creation of service output. While the specific focus of projects of co-production may be related to particular service sectors or geographical locations, what has been shown is that the experience of coming together to deliver a development scheme can have a much wider impact on the terms of state – social relations. In the case of Harare, the deliberative processes of making co-production work changes the expectations of those involved, which in turn affects the way in which they interpret and apply institutions. Despite new arrangements being fragile until solidified in new rules, the case study provides an indication of the potential cumulative impact of small-scale adaptations to create more effective and sustainable forms of urban governance and the creation of institutional arrangements that reflect the reality of local conditions.

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The importance of effective institutions for development is well established. There is however, a continuing debate on how to stimulate institutional reform within highly complex political and cultural contexts. This working paper explores sociological theories of institutional change to consider how service co-production, involving organised communities and state agencies, can influence the systems of rules and behaviours that underpin urban governance. Using examples of co-production in Harare, the paper highlights how the cumulative impact of joint activity has generated small-scale adaptations in the institutionalised practices of public administration – creating spaces of engagement and negotiation leading to incremental institutional change.

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