The Emergence of the University.

A Case Study of the Founding of the University of Paris from a Neo-Institutionalist Perspective

Abstract

My case study of the founding of the University of Paris shows how a shift in the logics of medieval education promoted the institutionalisation process that led Paris to become the model university for all subsequent European universities. As my theoretical basis for the analysis of the case, I use an institutionalist framework and complement it with Bourdieu’s notions of capital and field. More specifically, I take a closer look at how old and new institutional logics interact, how “change agents” are structurally embedded, and how it is possible for an institutional logic to emerge without a corresponding institution.

Key words: Abelard, Bourdieu, institutional change, institutional emergence, institutional logics, Middle Ages, paradox of embedded agency

10997 words
Institutional change and emergence have been widely discussed in neo-institutionalist sociology since the mid-1990s (among others, Beckert 1999; Clemens and Cook 1999; Hoffman 1999, 2001; Misangyi, Weaver, and Elms 2008; Seo and Creed 2002). Following Friedland and Alford’s (1991) seminal paper, a number of authors (e.g. DiMaggio 1997; Misangyi, Weaver, and Elms 2008; Patriotta and Lanzara 2006; Thornton and Ocasio 2008) have focused on the role of institutional logics in institutional change, while others have stressed the importance of power (e.g. Lawrence 2008; Lok and Willmott 2006; Rao, Morrill, and Zald 2000), actors (e.g. Beckert 1999; Dorado 2005; Hardy and Maguire 2008) and meanings (e.g. Munir 2005; Zilber 2008). Bourdieu’s name has been mentioned in connection with these concerns, but very few papers (most notably, Battilana 2006) have actually used his theory as an analytical framework for institutional change. Despite this reluctance, I believe him to be a very important author who can integrate the different strands of institutional logics, power, actors and meanings. His notion of fields, furthermore, shows how social actors that are structurally embedded in a field can nevertheless arrive at new ideas for change and reflect on structures that they had hitherto taken for granted – a topic that has occupied neo-institutionalist sociology under the label “paradox of embedded agency” (among others, Beckert 1999; Greenwood and Suddaby 2006; Mutch 2007; Garud, Hardy, and Maguire 2007). The paper at hand is aimed at substantiating these claims by using Bourdieu within a neo-institutionalist framework to analyse of the emergence of an institution. More specifically, I take a closer look at how old and new institutional logics interact, how “change agents” are structurally embedded, and how it is possible for an institutional logic to emerge without a corresponding institution.

In the case study, I have researched into the foundation of the University of Paris in the latter half of the 12th century. The University of Paris not only was the most prestigious university in the Middle Ages but also became the role model after which all later European universities
were fashioned. By choosing such a temporally distant foundation process, I try to leave behind modern assumptions concerning institutions and institution building and focus on the overall characteristics of the process. Modernity, as Zucker (1983) states, is characterised by an institutional self-dynamics with more and more institutions being established in more and more areas of life. This ubiquity of institutions, I believe, may sometimes prevent us from distinguishing institutional processes from other processes, for example organizational or entrepreneurial ones. In contrast, my focus on the Middle Ages – a time with a comparatively low degree of institutionalisation – may draw the contours more clearly. I will describe the foundation of the University of Paris as an analytical narrative. My sources are both primary and secondary. The 12th century is, of course, much more poorly documented than modern times. Still, with regard to my specific research topic, we are lucky to have an autobiography of one of the key actors – Abelard’s *Historia Calamitatum* – and about one million words of his philosophical writings. The autobiography, as all autobiographies, follows the rules of the genre and thus cannot be taken as a pure report of facts. However, as it was published in Abelard’s lifetime, we may assume that he could not diverge too much from the truth, and indeed modern scholars have yet to find an outright lie in his account. Apart from Abelard’s writings in the Latin original and a German (*Abaelard 1987*) and English translation (*Abelard 1972*), I have used small extracts from other original sources, but have mostly relied on the works of established modern scholars of medieval history and philosophy. Thus, for university history, I draw on Cobban (1971), Koeppler (1939), Le Goff (1986), Müller (1996), Gabriel (1969) and Rüegg (1992) as well as on three classics, Denifle (1885), Companyré (1893) and Rashdall (1886, 1936), for scholastic philosophy, on Clanchy (2000), Flasch (1987), Schmidinger (1992) and Makdisi (1974), for Abelard, on Clanchy (2000), Companyré (1893) and LeGoff (1986).
In the following sections, I will first discuss the theoretical model I have used for the analysis. I will then provide some context information on the 12th century. After this introduction, I will elaborate on the key elements of my model and the connexions between them in terms of my empirical data. Finally, the emergence of the institution and implications for modern institutions will be discussed.

THE MODEL OF MISANGYI, WEAVER AND ELMS

As a theoretical starting point, I want to base my paper on the model of institutional change by Misangyi, Weaver and Elms (2008) (Figure 1), who in turn base their model on insights from Giddens’s structuration theory and Bourdieu’s notion of capital. The model shows the recursive interplay of institutional logics, actors and resources. For Misangyi, Weaver and Elms, institutional logics comprise a symbolic level providing identity and meaning, an intermediate level providing schemas, roles and rules, and a substantive level of practices and actions. Social actors, as specified by structuration theory, are enabled and constrained by an institutional logic. At the same time, their actions promote and reproduce the logic. In order to act, the actors need resources in the form of economic, cultural, symbolic and social capital. The value of the particular form of capital is, in turn, defined by the logic. In the case of institutional change, new social actors with different interests promote and draw on a different or new logic and on different(ly valued) resources. The ensuing conflict is inherently political. Its outcome depends on the ability of the attackers and defenders to mobilise support and resources for their stance and on the plausibility and consistency of the new logic.

INSERT Figure 1 ABOUT HERE
While I agree with Misangyi et al. that logics, actors and resources form the key elements of institutional change, I should like to modify their model in a number of respects. First, I want to show that there is a connexion between the symbolic level of the old and the symbolic level of the new logic to the extent that the emergence of the new logic reforms the old logic. Second, I want to include the structural context of the social actors, which is only briefly alluded to by the phrase “social actors empowered by existing structure”. This is where Bourdieu’s concept of the field becomes useful. Third, I should like to address the question how an institutional logic can form without a corresponding institution. This question might be asked legitimately if we analyse the emergence of new institutions rather than, as Misangyi et al. do, institutional change. Connected to that specific case is the question of where the circle portrayed in the model starts. If we define an institution as “exerting patterned higher-order effects on the actions, indeed the constitution, of individuals and organizations without requiring repeated collective mobilization and authoritative intervention to achieve these regularities” (Clemens and Cook 1999, :444f.), then there was not a “new” institution in sight at the time the new institutional logic started to emerge. In other words, can there be an institutional logic without an institution?

Before I identify the major elements – logics, practices and resources – for the foundation of the University of Paris in answer to these questions, I will briefly sketch the relevant historical developments.

**THE FOUNDING OF THE UNIVERSITY: CULTURAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT**

“A complete history of the universities of the Middle Ages would be in fact a history of medieval thought…”(Rashdall 1936, :3). The university as we know it today has its origins in
the Middle Ages; it may, in fact, be its proudest cultural “invention”. While later universities were founded by decree (ex privilegio) and have thus a clearly marked beginning, the oldest universities grew slowly out of custom (ex consuetudine) – a much more interesting process from an institutionalist perspective. Among these, the universities of Paris and Bologna are considered the first, both with regard to age and importance. No exact date or founding document can be established for them, but they served as models for subsequent universities (see Table 1). I will limit my research to the University of Paris, whose magisterial and faculty organization still lies at the basis of modern universities, and to the latter half of the 12th century, where this university emerged as a recognisable organisation.

Before we start with this particular time and place, however, I think it is necessary to dispel some clichés and prejudices that modernity has cultivated vis-à-vis the Middle Ages. The 11th and 12th centuries were a time of rupture and transformation. European population doubled between 1050 and 1200 leaving a huge number of people without subsistence and infrastructure (Herlihy 1971; LeGoff 1986). Traditional institutions did not just fade; they burst, creating insecurity and disillusion. Families could not provide for their children (except the firstborn), and the community had no place or work for them either. People started moving around, sometimes banding together for criminal purposes, but often as vagantes, a group that also formed a vociferous part of the students of the time. The contemporary vulgar songs and troubadour lyrics were full of irony and parody rejecting the Church and its magnates, the king, religious practices and Christian marriage. At the same time, the frustration was also vented against perceived outsiders. In 1007, the first heretics were burnt, and the first crusade started in 1096. Towards the end of this period, however, new societal forms began to take shape: Cities rose, and with them the new classes of merchants, bankers, craftsmen, artists,
and university teachers. Guilds were formed, and in the nobility the feudal system was further developed. In fact, many authors use the term “renaissance” to describe the remarkable cultural, intellectual and institutional achievements of the 12th century.

The Catholic Church, in whose lap the universities were to develop, was not unaffected by the turmoil. Its monasteries, the traditional places of learning, had been following the rule of St. Benedict, but came under increasing critique for not being sincere and strict enough. The 11th century saw a serious crisis of the atrophied monasteries (Suso Frank 1987). This dissatisfaction found two outlets. The first was for monks to leave the monastery altogether and live as hermits in the forests. The second were the reformation movements of Cluny and later Citeaux, which aimed at “restoring” the monastic ideal of austerity and asceticism.

**The pre-university stage**

The high mobility of the population was a boon for the growing cities. However, if people did not want to settle and become citizens, but move on after a certain time, the lack of citizenship had serious consequences. Basically, these non-citizens had no rights and no means to act in a legally meaningful way. The problem was the same for merchants as for university teachers and students, and they responded with the same solution, viz. by forming an association or guild. This association was called “universitas” and referred to any trade, not just university people. The guild of the masters was called “universitas magistrorum”.

In the middle of the 12th century, the monasteries still taught as they always had, but mostly did so in the countryside. In the cities, cathedral schools had emerged for the same purpose. At Paris, there were three: the cathedral school of Notre-Dame, the cloister of Ste. Geneviève and the cloister St. Victor. Ste. Geneviève was the home of the Artists, Notre-Dame of
mainstream theology, and St. Victor of mystical theology. (Note that “home” does not refer to any building in particular as teaching went on wherever master and students agreed to meet.) Most masters and students had clerical status and were under Church jurisdiction. With the rise of the cities in the 11th and 12th century, city schools gained importance over monastic schools in the countryside. And with the elevation of Paris as the capital of a quickly expanding kingdom, the schools of Paris gained an advantage over other renowned schools, such as Laon or Chartres. This led to a concentration of famous teachers at Paris, which in turn brought masses of students to the city.

Scholastic migration to Paris began at the end of the 11th century with William of Champeaux as the first Parisian master to attract students from abroad. The upsurge, however, that was to catapult Paris into being the intellectual centre of Europe and to make its new university the first among equals was triggered by his pupil Peter Abelard.

**Abelard**

“The man who, by his qualities and his defects, by the audacity of his opinions, the éclat of his life, his inborn passion for controversy, and his rare talent for instructions, contributes most to increase and expand the taste for study and that intellectual movement from which the University of Paris issued in the 13th century, was Peter Abelard.” (Cousin, 1836 quoted in Compayré 1893, :4)

“Peter Abelard (1079-1142) was the pre-eminent philosopher of the twelfth century and perhaps the greatest logician of the middle ages. [...] In all areas Abelard was brilliant, innovative, and controversial. He was a genius. He knew it, and made no apologies. His
vast knowledge, wit, charm, and even arrogance drew a generation of Europe's finest minds to Paris to learn from him.” (Guilfoy 2007)

The pivotal role of Abelard in the founding of the University of Paris is undisputed. Abelard came to Paris to study with William of Champeaux, one of the most renowned masters of Logics at the time. His talent for Logics showed quickly, and he soon started challenging William by offering lectures himself. This was not only a breach of etiquette, but a formal offence as Abelard had not yet acquired magisterial status. William had him barred from teaching in Paris, so Abelard moved to Corbeil near Paris taking a considerable number of William’s students with him. His fame as a teacher of Logics grew, and after a while he decided to move on to the “crown discipline”, Theology. He went to Laon to study under Anselm, again one of the most renowned masters of this particular discipline. Again he soon challenged Anselm, attracted his students, and was forced to leave Laon. On his return to Paris this time, Abelard’s reputation had grown so much that he enjoyed a status far more comparable to modern-day celebrities than to a “serious” philosopher:

“What king or philosopher could equal your fame? What kingdom or city or village did not long to see you? Who would not rush to set eyes on you when you appeared in public and crane their necks after you? What married woman, what young girl did not desire you in absence and was not on fire in your presence?” (Heloise, quoted in Clanchy 1997, :1)

While many of his professorial colleagues did not like his thoughts and style, success made him quite invulnerable. By drawing crowds of students – Compayré (1893) estimates 5000 -, Abelard himself became financially independent, but it seems that the worldly and ecclesiastical powers also appreciated what these crowds did to their budget and reputation.
Intellectually, there was no one in sight to challenge him either. This auspicious situation came to an end when Abelard seduced his pupil Heloise and in consequence was ambushed and castrated by members of her family.

In the wake of this public – indeed, internationally noted – humiliation, Abelard (always followed by his students) retired to a monastery, but left after some serious disputes with the monks and started his own small community. Apart from teaching, he concentrated on writing theological treatises. These brought him into direct conflict with Bernhard of Clairvaux, the right hand man of the Pope, advisor to the King of France and the most powerful man in ecclesiastical Europe. Bernhard managed to get Abelard’s books publicly condemned and burnt twice. On the latter occasion, Abelard was also excommunicated. He found sanctuary at the Abbey of Cluny, whose abbot Petrus Venerabilis was himself a powerful man and no friend of Bernhard’s. Abelard spent his last days at Cluny – still writing and re-writing his treatises - and died there in 1142.

The emergence of the university

As mentioned before, there is no clear date or knowledge of a foundational act regarding the University of Paris. However, it can be noted that the transition from single Parisian organisation to model for a European institution happened quite quickly. In the course of the 12th century, Parisian schools grew together, masters associated, and by the beginning of the 13th century, we can glimpse the first organizational structures and artefacts, such as hierarchies or curricula (see Table 2). Certain characteristics, rights and practices of the university as an organisation then became institutionalised patterns, not only for Paris, but wherever new universities were founded. In this way, Paris became the model university for all other European universities.
The foundation process in Paris seems to have been triggered by the masses of students arriving in the city. Let us recall: massive population growth had shaken the foundations of European societies, students were often migrant, in fact rootless, and displayed a tendency for rioting and disrespect of authorities. These students entered Paris, found themselves a teacher, studied for a while, and moved on. Fed by the demand, schools and individual teaching mushroomed, each with its own syllabus, method and practices. In this situation the Church and the City of Paris as well as masters already teaching at Paris had a common interest, viz. to regulate and organise the quickly expanding chaos. The City fathers wanted a legal unity to address and hold responsible, the existing masters some regulations to stifle competition and co-opt new colleagues, while the Bishop of Paris sought to retain control of the education. Thus, in 1150, all private schools were forced under his jurisdiction. In consequence, it seems that the foundation of the University of Paris started with a locally negotiated compromise between the city powers. The university, however, soon attracted the interest of other powers as well – we will discuss this aspect in more detail later on.

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE MODEL

Having presented the context, I should now like to return to my theoretical model discussing its key elements – logics, practices, resources - and the connexions between them. In short, I will discuss how the two different logics of education were upheld by different social actors – defenders and entrepreneurs respectively. We shall also see how the new logic led to a change in teaching practices and technologies, which in turn strengthened it. The struggle between the two logics, finally, also changed the value of the different types of capital, thus enabling the
entrepreneurs to build up their position. Figure 3 illustrates how the key elements fit into the scheme of Misangyi, Weaver and Elms.

Let us now take a closer look at the individual elements.

**Institutional Logics of Medieval Education**

In the case of the medieval university, we may identify different logics applying to the field of culture and education. The first and older one, which I will call “hermetic logic”, viewed knowledge as a treasure, as something precious to be guarded, handled with care by a few select people and kept away from the crowds. The beautifully illuminated manuscripts, uniques whose production took a lifetime, belong to this logic. It was the logic of the monasteries, developed in the Dark Ages, when the monks clung to the few remnants of antique civilisation while around them the world fell apart. It was about repetition, about devoting oneself to the copying of a text as a form of prayer instead of copying it quickly and efficiently. It was, in consequence, about texts being worth this effort, about holy texts or texts far advanced in knowledge. It was about a religion of books, not just about religious books. It was about a society where few could read and few wanted to read for themselves, where the lectio, i.e. the reading from a book paired with an authoritative exegesis, was the sole method of teaching. It was also about technology, about books being made from animal skins and written in a script that, because of all its arabesques, was difficult to decipher. The more so since, as space in books is precious, no spaces were left between single words.
In contrast, there was the new “public logic” of knowledge and teaching. This logic viewed knowledge as something to be accumulated and truth as something yet to be found – by a concerted effort of all human beings capable and willing. The maxim of William of Champeaux at the beginning of the 12th century was: “Knowledge when distributed increases”. This logic viewed reason as peer to the Bible and the Church Fathers when it came to understanding God and the world. It accepted the contradictions and shortcomings in the explanations of the Church Fathers and elevated doubt to a methodological core element. It asked people – everybody - to read and think for themselves and, above all, to discuss matters publicly. At Paris, the episcopal and monastic schools opened their doors to the public and enrol “external students”. This logic viewed books as tools that should be available to everyone.

**New Actors: The universitas magistrorum**

Apart from Abelard, the second major actor in the foundation of the university was the universitas magistrorum, i.e. the association of masters. Although it lacks a number of characteristics of modern professions, we might regard it as a professional body of the 12th century. Like all professions¹ at the time, it was organised as a guild. After Abelard’s death, it seems to have been the collective identity as “scholastics” – i.e. practitioners of the scholastic method - that integrated the hitherto quite loosely and informally structured association. And it were those scholastics that carried Abelard’s ideas on and across the gap of about a generation that we today perceive as lying between him and the founding of the University of Paris. They were, and wanted to be, the “modernii”, the people who believed in the power of

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¹ A classification of the universitas in terms of my model is not easy as it can be regarded as an institution in its own right (for the role of professions as institutionalised agents, see Scott 2008). I place my emphasis, however, with regard to the universitas on their continuing of the scholastic method as a teaching practice and thus on their role as collective actor.
reason, in dispute, and in people reading for themselves. With their activity, they established and promoted other professions as well, above all copyists and booksellers.

On an institutional level, they recognised the need to break free from the Church’s supervision and keep interference from the outside to a minimum. For that reason, they sought backing against the local ecclesiastical power, i.e. the Bishop of Paris and his chancellor, from powers that were, in a sense, further away: the Pope in terms of geography, the King of France in terms of ideology.

**New Practices: The scholastic method**

Logic in the 12th century was taught according to the scholastic method. The scholastic method is dialectical presenting two opposing proposals in order to enter into a dispute about them. Abelard’s most famous treatise, which is lucidly titled “Sic et Non” (Yes and No), was the first scholarly document in the Occident to apply the method rigorously throughout a whole text. “Sic et Non” juxtaposes answers of the Church authorities thus showing that there is no consistent “system” of Christian theology, and concluding that in such a situation reason must decide which answer is the best. In terms of content, it is easy to see the rationalist undercurrent of the method and its zeal for dispute and doubt. In sociological terms, the method quickly became the standard teaching method of the cathedral schools, while the monastic schools still clung to the older method of *lectio*. For the next century, “dialectical” was synonymous to “scholastic” and to “modern” (*modernus*). All three terms were not necessarily positive; traditionalists used them unfailingly in a pejorative sense. The terms, however, provided the new masters and students of the cathedral schools with a collective identity that was to play an important role in the founding of the new university.
Abelard’s second major achievement was to apply the scholastic method, which hitherto had been restricted to logic and philosophy, to theology. In this sense, Abelard is the founder of scholastic theology – indeed, of the word “theology” itself –, which was to dominate the Middle Ages. In his time, however, this way of doing theology was far from undisputed. As we have seen, there was a strong traditionalist, mostly hermetic and mystic movement that wanted the most divine to be left in peace and not be subjected to human inquiry. As Bernhard of Clairvaux ranted against Abelard:

„The faith of the simple is ridiculed, God’s secrets are being torn out by the guts, questions about the highest things are being recklessly aired.” (Clanchy 1997, :7)

The rationalism underlying the scholastic method was mirrored in developments in other societal fields. Thus, for example, the law of the 12th century abandoned the trial by ordeal in favour of more human-based ways of judging. While Bernhard preached the crusade, his opponent Petrus Venerabilis, abbot of Cluny, had the Koran translated to open a dialogue with Islam. Abelard’s moral treatises argued that sin does not lie in desire, which is a natural force, but in consenting to the desire, which is a rational act. This implied that a pagan clinging to his belief because he did not know better did not sin and should not be punished. On broad canvas, it might be argued that the “renaissance” of the 12th century, like its successor in the 15th, abandoned a number of archaic-magical beliefs and opted for a more humanist and rationalist model of society and education.

The scepticism of the method appealed to all those who were disillusioned by existing institutions and their claims to truth and legitimacy. At a different time, it might have been looked upon with suspicion, but as we have seen, the preceding 150 years had witnessed a lot
of doubt and disillusionment in very practical, everyday terms. The scholastic method provided students with a legitimate method of “theorising” their feelings and experiences, i.e. express them in commonly recognised abstract terms and models (for the importance of theorising in practice diffusion see Zilber 2008).

Finally, if we accept that cultural systems construe actors by investing them with the authority to act (Meyer and Jepperson 2000), we can see how the scholastic method shifts the field of legitimate power in education towards a more egalitarian structure. As it argued that reason and enquiry was the way to truth, and as this way was open to everybody, power moved away from those people that were hitherto thought to have sole access to the wisdom of the Church Fathers and the Bible. This more egalitarian structure, although far from being perfectly egalitarian, led to important changes concerning the core and the periphery of the field.

**New practices: Disputatio**

Traditionally, the *lectio*, the reading and exegesis of a text, had been at the centre of teaching. The practice was focused on the master who revealed his knowledge – or more precisely, the knowledge contained in the text – to his disciples. In the course of the 13th century, the *lectio* was turned into the *quaestio*, a more active treatment of the text, in which the master or his pupils confronted the text with questions of their own. The dialectical spirit permitted them to go beyond the text in search of truth. The text, accordingly, moved into the background and became an occasion rather than a manifest. In the next stage, it disappeared altogether, and we arrive at the *disputatio*, the text-free exchange of arguments between scholars. These *disputationes* then became the core and pinnacle of scholarly engagement as they formed the mode of examination for the master degree, but also allowed the university to celebrate itself
in big public disputationes between renowned scholars that drew crowds from all over the city.

**New technology: Books**

The new logic and teaching practices also called for a change in tools, and fortunately, technology followed suit. Paper was introduced to Europe during this time (Frugoni 2008). In comparison with the traditional calf skins, it was much cheaper in production. It was also easier to handle than the wax tablets used since antiquity to scribble words that were not meant for eternity. However, not only the material changed. The format of books also did (LeGoff 1986): from the huge and unwieldy tomes displayed at altars and in monasteries books developed into handbooks in the literal sense of the word. These books could be carried around and consulted at will. Writers exchanged reeds for quills. Using the simpler Gothic minuskel in place of the calligraphic Carolingian minuskel (see Figure 2), they sped up writing. They also left spaces between words, which facilitated reading, and added alphabetical listings and tables of content to their works.

NEW FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

New professions appeared around reading and writing (LeGoff 1986). Most important for the universities were the copyists who copied the official lecture texts (*exemplares*). They, together with booksellers and professional writers, enjoyed the same privileges as other members of the university and were under university jurisdiction. Finally, now that reading for yourself became important, eyeglasses were invented at the turn of 13th century.

**Resources as capitals**
Similar to Hardy and Maguire’s (2008) notion of institutional context, Bourdieu’s (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1996; 1992, 1990, 1984) conceptualisation of the field directs our attention towards the relational qualities of a process or situation. In a field, actors are linked to one another through asymmetrical power relations. The symbolic and material resources - Bourdieu’s “capitals” - determine the actor’s position in the field because they specify how much he or she can “invest” to promote his or her interests. Unequal capital distributions as well as shared social distinctions create a topography of the field in which each actor occupies his or her unique position. The position determines the opportunities and constraints each actor faces. This can be formalised – though not quantified – through the following equation:

\[ \text{Power position of social actor} = \sum_{\text{for all types of capital}} (\text{value of capital} \times \text{actor’s amount of capital}) \]

While each type of capital may be accumulated and thus increase in quantity, the value of each type is linked to the other types to create a sort of “exchange rate” because the types can be converted into each other, for example in learning when economic capital is invested to acquire cultural capital. As a consequence, actors may accumulate a certain type of capital but still become poorer overall as this type loses value in comparison with other types. Vice versa, previously less well endowed actors may suddenly find their fortunes reversed by such a change in the exchange rate. One important implication of this theory is, however, that institutional change cannot be brought about from the periphery of the field as actors there do not have the capital to make change happen. Rather, we might assume that actors that used to live at the periphery, for whatever reasons, find themselves suddenly at the disposal of valuable capital and move, temporarily or permanently, to the centre of the field. Thus Abelard got propelled to the centre by his leading position in the Goliard movement – social capital – and his skills in winning philosophical and theological debates – cultural capital.
Both forms of capital had only recently been recognised as valuable, which explains why Abelard could act the moment he did although he was not part of the establishment. With regard to the emergent perspective, it also emphasises the fact that, important though Abelard as an individual was, his success can only be understood properly in terms of the field he was moving in.

The struggles surrounding the “value” or “exchange rate” of any sort of capital manifest themselves usually as struggles over meaning and interpretation (Zilber 2002). Thus, in our case study, the struggle over whether truth lay in past writings of the Church Fathers or in propositions yet to be discovered can be viewed as a struggle over the value of a traditional education as compared to the value of individual intellectual-logical powers. Both are forms of cultural capital, but distributed differently over the field. Hence, a shift from the former to the latter can – and did - cause significant changes in the power distribution.

Summing up, we can say that that there were two competing logics, the hermetic and the public, in the field. After Abelard’s death, the universitas magistrorum became the focal social actor for change. They construed their identity around the idea of being “modernii” or “scholastics” and sought to gain power through alliances with non-local forces, viz. the King and the Pope. The new public logic was backed by new practices, such as the scholastic method and the disputatio, as well as new technologies of reading and writing, which in turn spawned the emergence of new professions and new social actors. The application of the new scholastic method to the core beliefs held in the field took the struggle to a new societal dimension that was no longer restricted to education. Finally, Bourdieu’s notion of capital helps us understand what Abelard’s power was based on and how he could move from the periphery to the centre of the field. On a more general plane, it links the symbolic struggles
over meaning and interpretation to the substantive level of resources as we can see how shifting interpretations create different exchange values for the different forms of capital.

THE EMERGENCE OF AN INSTITUTION: POWER AND THE FIELD

Having introduced the basic elements of my theoretical conceptualisation – logics, practices and resources – I now want to take a closer look at some issues neglected by the model of Misangyi et al. In line with my three questions outlined at the beginning, will first discuss the effects of the emergence of a new logic on the old logic, and then use Bourdieu’s notions of capital and the field to model the power situation, both with regard to the established powers and to Abelard’s power.

The old and the new logic

As explained above, the founding of the university depended, among other things, on a change of the institutional logics from the hermetic to the public one. This switch, however, was not a linear process. More in-depth analysis shows that the hermetic logic also changed as a consequence of its struggles with the public logic. A third type emerged, which I will call “mystic logic”. As we have seen, the hermetic logic viewed knowledge as a treasure to be guarded and truth as something revealed through the study of existing books. Accordingly, exegesis was the main ingredient of teaching. The role of the teacher was not yet clearly differentiated from the role of the monk as in both cases the study of existing texts was the prime activity. More importantly for our analysis, however, most of these assumptions were implicit and taken-for-granted. As soon as the new logic gained influence, however, these assumptions came under scrutiny and were made explicit. This changed the assumptions and hence the hermetic logic itself. Where before there was room for individual teachers to vary
their practices, and different interpretations of the logic went unchecked, it now began to matter what a master’s interpretations and practices were because it placed him in one camp or the other. In a not very metaphorical sense, Abelard and Bernard fought their battles as champions of one or the other logic, and the way they refined and modified their positions during the years in response to one another affected the logics they stood for.

I will give some examples. In the hermetic logic, knowledge recipients were selected by fate rather than by any planned process. People entered monasteries for hundreds of reasons, and once there, they would develop an interest in books and teaching, or not. The public logic, in contrast, claimed that knowledge should be available to all, and everybody could earn a doctorate if he fulfilled the formal requirements. In opposition to this opening, Bernard and his followers declared that gaining knowledge was not a matter of passing through man-made curricula, but something God granted through revelation, his criterion being the moral quality of a person. As we can see, this position is different from the original, more or less unformulated, hermetic position and moves in the opposite direction from the public logic. A similar process can be shown in the variation of teaching practices. While the hermetic logic followed tradition again rather unconsciously by focusing on the lectio but also allowing for other forms of teaching, the public logic elevated the scholastic method and the disputatio in a very explicit manner. In response to this, the mystic logic not only defended the lectio but emphasised meditation as the only true form because here man communicated with God rather than with fellow men. Thus Bernard advised:

“You will find far more in the forests than you will find in books. The wood and stone will teach you more than any master.” (Bernard of Clairvaux, quoted in LeGoff 1986)
These examples show that a switch in institutional logics is not a straightforward business, but involves repeated reformulations in response to the respective other logic. The process might even, as in this case, spark a more radical opposite version of the new logic – a kind of “fundamentalist” response. Moreover, it should be noted how the content of the original logic invariably changes once its tenets are no longer taken for granted because there is an alternative. All these observations give substance to Maguire and Hardy’s (2009) claim that defensive institutional work is a distinctive activity that comprises far more than simple reproduction. In their eyes, it is about countering assertions, countering categorisations and countering calls for regulations, but with Bourdieu I would like to argue that even more can be said about it. Defensive institutional work is also an attempt to change the “exchange rate” of different forms of capital in order to enrich the defenders. If we consider the main proponents only, Bernard of Clairvaux, right hand man to the King and the Pope, would of course not be interested in widening the circle of people who could legitimately decide what the truth was and what not. Bernard, not a university master himself, would of course not be interested in investing formal university degrees with the power to elevate the social status of scholars. On the other hand, Abelard, as I have shown above, was the man to benefit from all this.

The powers that be

I will now discuss the structural aspects of the case employing Bourdieu’s notions of capitals and the field. Let me start with the three most important existing institutions: king, pope and church.

The kings of France, the Capet dynasty, had followed an expansionist strategy since the beginning of the 12th century, when Paris became the capital of the kingdom. They privileged
The cities to subdue the lower nobility, fought against the big feudal lords (most prominently the English king), and managed to create a nationalist feeling through the crusades. Between 1180 and 1223, the crown lands situated around the Ile de France quadrupled. In this expansion, the University of Paris was not just an economic factor but an ideological one as well. A popular saying went that while Italy had the Pope and Germany the Emperor, France had the University of Paris. The statement shows how a nationalist sentiment was combined with the growing regard for learning. The university provided the kings with an internationally recognised institution.

The popes are perhaps the most important single actors in this power game. As head of the Church, the Pope initially had the same interests as his local representative, the Bishop of Paris. In the course of events, however, the Pope became just as often an adversary of the Bishop guarding the university and its members against the locally motivated demands of the Bishop. The Pope’s interest in the university was threefold. First, he wanted a rationally based theological foundation to persecute heretics and to arbitrate in the developing disputes between the religious orders. Second, he sought to strengthen the papacy against regional or national interests. Third, he needed trained staff for his offices. The conditions for pursuing these interests were favourable as the papacy gained hegemony in Europe at the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th century. Moreover, in the course of time, the popes themselves and many of their cardinals studied at Paris. Thus, for example, three later popes were pupils of Abelard.

The Church as an institution, finally, was important in many respects, three of which I shall discuss here. First, as already mentioned, it was the traditional institution for learning and education. It thus provided the necessary legitimacy to the new organization. Second, it was
The Emergence of the University

the major financing body. As masters were clerics, they were mostly paid from benefices. The most important decision in that respect was to free them from the parochial obligations these benefices brought with them, thus enabling them to devote their time to study and teaching and move to different locations. Students would get a prebend to support them during their studies. In addition, Pope Alexander confirmed in 1179 that university teaching was free because learning was a gift from God and teaching a central task (officium) of clerics. This helped the students, and brought the masters even closer under Church control because it made them dependent on their benefices. Third, the Church was the only supranational European power. Thus the Pope was the only person to be able to grant (and warrant) the licentia ubique docendi, i.e. the right to teach at every university in Europe once a doctoral degree had been awarded. The licentia — and thus the right to grant it — was important because it signalled a high quality of education and enabled scholars to find employment all over Europe. It quickly became the privilege that distinguished universities from other schools and learned foundations.

In this power field, the emergent university, or more precisely the universitas magistrorum, did not command many power bases apart from forming coalitions with the people mentioned above. As we have seen, all of these were interested in the university itself or the services it provided. Cultural capital of the form the university offered became more and more in demand. The most important weapon of the new body was the threat to quit the game, in other words, to go on strike or close down completely. This happened when the university closed between 1229 and 1231. The second power base was the growing social prestige attributed to the doctoral degree, which made it progressively easier for masters to hold their own against

2 Apart from this most common arrangement, masters could also be paid by students or by worldly powers. If they were paid in this way, however, they could incur the charge of simony because they asked money for a service that was stipulated to be free.
external authorities. As soon as it became clear that the degree promoted social mobility, students started to pursue it as an end in its own.

**Abelard’s power struggles**

Authors discussing institutional logics (for example, Rao and Giorgi 2006; Thornton and Ocasio 2008) are quite clear on the fact that no matter how “ripe” for change a situation is, change will not happen automatically, but always needs one or more agents to bring it about. Dissatisfaction with the status quo is not enough to abolish established logics and practices, but actors must actively reinterpret logics or introduce new practices. Inducing change in this sense presupposes power. There is an ongoing discussion in institutionalist sociology of whether change agents should be located in the centre of the field because this is where the power lies (for example, Greenwood and Suddaby 2006), or at the periphery (for example, Fligstein 2001; Misangyi, Weaver, and Elms 2008) because this is where dissatisfaction with the status quo manifests itself most easily. I believe these antitheses can be integrated in a Bourdieuan scheme, in which the field is a dynamic situation and “forces are only manifested in their relationship with certain dispositions” (Bourdieu 1984, :94). In the following, I will show how Abelard, as the pivotal individual agent, moved from the periphery of the field to its centre by accumulating the sort of capital that suddenly rose in value. I can also show how Abelard’s fortunes reversed once he moved into a field where the same capital did not count for much.

To start with, Abelard as a person must have been quite remarkable. In a time when it was taken for granted that the firstborn follows the occupational footsteps of the father, he, although the eldest son of a knight, decided against a military career to pursue his studies of philosophy. In a time when the individual was more a theoretical construct than a social
reality, he wrote an autobiography. In a time when the Church was based on absolute spiritual and worldly power for its magnates and authorities, the young student cleric criticised and challenged his masters publicly – and successfully. His intellectual brilliance was undisputed even among his adversaries. He drew the crowds to Paris or wherever he happened to teach by his reputation in learning and the new methods he used, but also by his eloquence and quick wit. He never shunned an intellectual dispute, no matter what the consequences for his personal well-being and security were.

Agency, however, is not just about individual skills, and thus it is necessary to take a look at Abelard’s social ties and power base in order to get an idea of the resources he could mobilise. He started his student life as a member of the Goliards. The Goliards were wandering students and clerics renowned for their songs and poetry celebrating drinking and debauchery, but even more for their rioting and gambling. Their whole raison d’être seems to have been a permanent attack on the establishment, although we cannot be sure how much of this was of a political as opposed to a purely literary nature. Probably this was the audience that the young Abelard took to his disputes with the masters. While he could thus score on the informal side of education, his masters retaliated unfailingly on the formal side, and he was excluded from further study or teaching. These exclusions, however, were local, while his fame spread through France and Europe. On his return from Laon to Paris, he had acquired celebrity status. The masses worshipped him, the King invited him to court, and the chapter of Notre-Dame made him a master. He had it all: social, economic and cultural capital – till the scandal about Heloise broke.

The fateful consequence of his fall from grace and his castration was less that Abelard left Paris and retired into a monastery – he would return eventually, both to Paris and to teaching. But following an inner catharsis – he took the castration to be a sign of God -, Abelard
decided to write theological treatises. Now, at the time, writing a new book – whatever its content – was a clear signal that someone adhered to the new logic. 50 years before, Anselm of Canterbury still had to apologise for writing a new book when everything important was already laid down in the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers (Flasch 1987). Even worse:

“…I devoted myself to analysing the basis of our faith through illustrations based on human understanding, and I wrote for my students a certain tract on the unity and trinity of God. This I did because they were always seeking for rational and philosophical explanations, asking rather for reasons they could understand than for mere words, saying that it was futile to utter words which the intellect could not possibly follow, that nothing could be believed unless it could first be understood, and that it was absurd for anyone to preach to others a thing which neither he himself nor those whom he sought to teach could comprehend.” (Abelard 1972).

The books provided his enemies with a crystallization point, a document to be taken to a synod, to be sent to the Pope. As in all similar cases in the Middle Ages, the Church was far more concerned about written documents containing heresy than about oral teaching (Courtenay 1989). Moreover, the conflict was no longer about jokes and ribald songs nor about the scholastic method and *disputationes*, but about one of the core beliefs of the Catholic Church: the nature of the Trinity. Abelard was accused of heresy.

In this sphere of the Church, his capital did not count for much. Abelard had few friends in the Church hierarchy and, worse, a man against him that was the most powerful cleric of the time: Saint Bernhard of Clairvaux. Bernhard was a reformer too, but a reformer who wanted to purify the Church and restore the old monastic ideals. He presided over the European-wide
spread of his order, the Cistercians. He was the right hand of the Pope. He was a devoted mystic and enraged by the thought that the most divine issues should be “discussed on street corners”. He disliked the cities and he disliked intellectual disputes. His strategy for dealing with Jews, pagans and heretics was crusade, inquisition and death. While Abelard was lucky to escape physical harm, his books were subsequently condemned and burnt by two synods.

The monastery he withdrew to was not exactly Abelard’s home turf either. The monks did not want fame and they did not want intellectual dispute. They absolutely detested the groups of students hanging around waiting for their idol. And most of all, they detested Abelard telling them that they were stupid, uncivilised and uncouth. Eventually, Abelard was granted permission to leave the monastery again. The pattern of his final years was erratic with one constant source of persecution – Bernhard -, one constant source of support – his students -, but various and changing magnates with enough power to protect Abelard from Bernhard.

In sum, we can see how the logic championed by Abelard was anchored in the students and their anti-establishment feelings. To them, “new” was a positive and promising word. To them, reason was about the only possession they had. The man Abelard then brought his personal qualities, above all his intellectual brilliance and boundless self-confidence, to take the fight to the schools, to challenge and best the old order. The more powerful he became as an individual, the more his thoughts mattered, and when his fortunes reversed, his opponents struck. However, although they destroyed the man, the logics he stood for were too widely disseminated to fade away with him.

Conclusion
The Emergence of the University

What, then, can we take from the case of the University of Paris for the study of modern institutions? Let me return to the three questions I asked at the beginning. With regard to the connexion between the symbolic levels of the old and the new logic, I have shown how the old logic changes in communication with the new one, even up to the point where it develops a third, “anti-new” logic. The driving factor in this process is the degree of explicitness of assumptions on which the logics are based. While the old logic tends to comprise many implicit and rather vague notions that are open to various interpretations, the new and “anti-new” logics tend to be more explicit, precise and extreme in their propositions. This finding adds substance to the comparatively recent interest in defensive institutional work raised by Maguire and Hardy (2009) in showing that this kind of institutional work is far more than a mere defence of the status quo but involves active strategies of shifting logics and accumulating various forms of capital. My analysis, however, departs from theirs when it comes to the question of the defended logic itself. While they argue that “practices tend to be reproduced when the discourse about them is ‘structured’[…] and ‘coherent’” (Maguire and Hardy 2009, :150), I would like to stress that the work invested into this discourse changes the defended logic itself in the ways I have discussed above.

The second question referred to the structural context of the relevant social actors. As I have shown in the two preceding sections, much can be gained from conceptualising social actors with Bourdieu as occupying power positions in a field. These positions are defined by the actors’ different forms of capital and constrain and enable their strategic conduct. This conceptualisation gives a more precise idea of how actors are embedded in, and interact with, institutions. Thus, the case study has shown how Abelard’s social and cultural capital increased in value due to changes in the cultural context (positive valuation of disillusion, scepticism, attack on establishment) and how he then used this capital to move to the centre of the field of education. This observation serves to build a case for the tenet referred to above.
that only actors at the centre of a field can change this field. The case study has also shown how, in the second part of his career, Abelard was forced to act in environments (monastery, Church hierarchy) where his capital did not count for much and thus never regained the force he commanded in the first part of his career. With regard to the universitas magistrorum and the later university, I have been able to show how they could increase the value of their cultural capital by serving the interests of the King and Pope up to the point where they became an independent player in the power game, i.e. an institution with autonomous internal legislation and control. In all these examples, the social actors are construed and legitimated by the field, but also display a certain amount of independency and strategic action. Especially in the case of Abelard, while there are structural constraints, there is no structural determinism in his actions. This may serve as an illustration of my initial argument that it is possible to construe actors as embedded in a field without relinquishing reflexivity and innovative action.

The third question, finally, touched upon the question of emergence and the possibility of an institutional logic without an institution. As we can see from the case of the University of Paris, the public logic emerged before the organisation itself and before this organisation could then develop institutional features. How, then, did it emerge? Several factors came together. First, on the cultural plane, we have seen how disillusion and alienation led to a sceptical and ironic attitude towards established traditions, identities and institutions. This seems to have invited a certain “postmodern” attitude in which playfulness and fun overrode mechanisms of cognitive and social closure – this is certainly true for the Goliard movement in which Abelard took his first steps. While not “anything went” – it never does -, new thoughts and practices had a better chance than usual. At the same time, existing elements on the intermediate level, for example the disputatio as a method of teaching, were incorporated but given a new interpretation. In the same way, most importantly, the scholastic method left
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its home in philosophy and conquered theology. On the substantive level, new resources in the form of different capital types as well as new technologies fed back into the emerging symbolic and intermediate levels. The guild of the universitas magistrorum can be seen as the bracket, or perhaps more precisely the arena, in which these processes came together.

This leads me, finally, to the value of studying historical, as opposed to modern, institutions. Most of the observations described above are in line with general tenets from neo-institutionalist authors linking extra-institutional context factors with a shift in institutional logics. Thus, Clemens and Cook (1999) describe on a general plane how institutional change is driven by a change in schemas (i.e. cultural components) and resources that are embedded in, or enacted through, resources and social networks. DiMaggio (1997) speculates that large-scale cultural changes may be caused by many interdependent actors switching from the old logic to the new. Lawrence and Phillips (2004) emphasise the role of a change in macro-cultural understandings that can serve as a critical precondition for institutional change. What my findings add to these is a more detailed picture of the sequence of events. The insight that the new logic was established before the institution itself, and how it emerged from a combination of changes in the cultural context, agency and change in practices has up to now not been provided in this detail. I don’t want to claim that this sequence is the only possible – this is, after all, only one case study. However, as I predicted, the sequence could be identified so clearly because it was situated in a field with a low degree of institutionalisation compared to modern educational settings. The scholastic method, paper, eyeglasses and copyists were very original “inventions” of a rather revolutionary nature rather than the variations in existing practices modern institutions often build on. This result should encourage institutionalist scholars to conduct more historical analyses reaching back into pre-modern times.
References


Figure 1: The Model of Misangyi, Weaver and Elms (2008:756)
Figure 2: Carolingian and Gothic Minuscule
Figure 3: Shifting Logics of Medieval Education in the Model of Misangyi et al.
**Table 1: Founding dates of the oldest universities in Europe**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Date/Time Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bologna</td>
<td>End of 12th century (ex consuetudine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paris</td>
<td>End of 12th/Beginning of 13th century (ex consuetudine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford</td>
<td>Beginning of 13th century (ex consuetudine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montpellier</td>
<td>Beginning of 13th century (ex consuetudine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicenza</td>
<td>1204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palencia</td>
<td>1208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>1209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arezzo</td>
<td>1215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salamanca</td>
<td>1218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Padua</td>
<td>1222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naples</td>
<td>1224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisbon</td>
<td>1290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lérida</td>
<td>1300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Emergence of the University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1150-70</td>
<td>Estimated founding of the University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1208</td>
<td>First written statutes concerning dress, lectures and funeral attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1213</td>
<td>Chancellor loses right to grant teaching licence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1215</td>
<td>Fixed subjects for exams, minimum number of years for degree, fixed curriculum and textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1219</td>
<td>Pope Honorius III takes masters and students under his protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1220</td>
<td>University excommunicated in totum on conspiracy charges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1220</td>
<td>1st mention of university seal, faculties and nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1229</td>
<td>Riots triggered by change in wine prices, university strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1229-31</td>
<td>University closes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1231</td>
<td>Papal bull “Parens scientiarum” (dubbed the “Magna Charta of the University of Paris”) confirms existing rights and privileges and places university under papal jurisdiction; University reopens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1257</td>
<td>Foundation of the Sorbonne as first university college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1291</td>
<td>Licentia ubique docendi formally granted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: Important dates in the founding of the University of Paris**