

Credibility as a Tool in Policy Analysis: Governing Land, Housing and Natural Resources

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Zhejiang University, School of Public Affairs (SPA), Hangzhou, China

Abstract

The adoption of specific institutional forms is often propagated as a means to achieve greater efficiency in the planning and policy-making over land, housing and natural resources. In this regard, one may think of programs, such as land titling, slum formalization, privatization of affordable housing, and payment for ecological services. However, the evidence over the successes of such programs is divided. Some studies ascertain greater efficiency (e.g., Lawry et al., 2017; Galiana and Schargrotsky, 2010), others do not or are ambiguous (Choplin and Dessie, 2017; Grima, 2016; Jones, 2017; Ward *et al.*, 2011). Why would a certain institution work in one context, while the same institution fails in another? The likely answer is because institutional form is secondary to function as may be expressed through its credibility. This special issue welcomes submissions that aim to examine this question theoretically, methodologically and empirically.

Keywords: urban and regional development; informality; land and housing; credibility thesis; endogeneity; institutions and property rights

1. Introduction: Credibility as a tool

“Credibility is a powerful metric” and “has much to offer both the academic and practitioner perspective on... tenure analysis and policy” (Griswold, 2015)

The research on credibility is an expanding field on the success and failure of policies that aim to change the institutions that govern land, housing and natural resources. Whereas most existing studies focus on the *form* in which such policies try to deliver new institutions (i.e. through land titling, slum formalization, privatization of affordable

housing, or the payment for ecological services), the studies on credibility zoom in on the way how institutions *function* irregardless of their form (Celhay and Gil, 2020; Davy, 2018; Monkkonen, 2016).

Significant research on credibility has been and is being conducted, leading to a body of literature on different sectors and resources, including slums and informal settlements (Oranje et al., 2020; Zhang, 2018; McClymont and Sheppard, 2020), affordable and commercial housing (Celhay and Gil, 2020), land (Nesru et al., 2019; Clarke, 2018), and natural resources, such as grassland (Fan et al., 2019; Zhao and Rokpelnis, 2016), mineral resources (Fold et al., 2018), and water management (Gomes and Hermans; 2018; Mollinga, 2016).

Furthermore, credibility as a theoretical and methodological lens for the study of land, housing and natural resources has found application in the Global South and the Global North alike. To date, the research on credibility has involved the following continents and countries: Asia (China, India, Malaysia, Bangladesh); Africa (Ghana, Ethiopia, South-Africa), Latin America (Mexico, Chile), Europe (United Kingdom, Serbia, Greece, Israel, Turkey); and Australia. As a result, research can now draw on not a few comparative and individual country case-studies.

2. Lessons learnt

“Institutional credibility refers to peoples’ acceptance of an institution based on their perceptions of that institutions’ accountability, representation, legitimacy, transparency, fairness and justice” (Pero and Smith, 2008: 17)

What can be inferred from this body of literature? Aforementioned studies can by and large be structured around three questions:

- Assessing the importance of function by disproving the relation between the form and performance of institutions;
- Advancing the methodology around and the measurement of credibility, and;
- Assessing the functions of institutions and the conditions for decreasing credibility.

For one, concerning the refutation of the assumption of form versus performance, we find, on the one hand, studies that have demonstrated that formal, private, and secure institutions may *fail* to deliver (Mollinga, 2016; Nor-Hisham and Ho, 2016; Miyamura, 2016). Contrarily, other studies ascertain that informal, public, and insecure property rights *can* function, i.e., are credible, according to social actors and economic agents (Zhang, 2018; Clarke, 2018; Marois and Güngen, 2016).

Two, research on credibility has been effectuated through qualitative and quantitative proxies that include but are not limited to:

- The perceptions of institutions (Pero and Smith, 2008) according to the FAT Institutional Framework (or more specifically, along Formal, Actual, and Targeted dimensions) (Arvanitidis and Papagiannitsis, 2020);

- Institutional conflict as can be operationalized through its incidence, length, intensity, outcome, nature, timing, and involved actors (Yang and Ho, 2020; Ho, 2014);
- Transaction costs and Agent-based Modelling (Fan et al., 2019; Ghorbani et al., 2021).

Three, research has examined the functions of institutions such as, for instance, the provision of social welfare and political influence (Zhang, 2018; Sun and Ho, 2018), social cohesion and access to urban resources (Celhay and Gil, 2020), sustainability (Zhao and Rokpelnis, 2016), and the catering for customary markets (Fold et al., 2018). Simultaneously, research has also pinpointed the conditions under which the functionality or credibility of formerly functioning institutions might shift or risk being undermined (Zeuthen, 2018; Pils, 2018).

3. Output, planning and funding

A selection of high-quality publications can be potentially considered for publication as a paper in a special issue of *Land Use Policy*. All paper manuscripts will be subject to external review. The planning for the special issue and review of selected manuscripts is as follows:

Activity	Deadline
Submission 1 st full draft	1 July 2021
Deadline revised papers	30 September 2021
Submission for external review	31 October 2021
Publication (if accepted)	1 st half of 2022

4. Program

This special issue welcomes papers organized around one (or more) of the aforementioned questions:

- Assessing the importance of function by disproving the relation between institutional form and performance;
- Furthering the methodology around and the measurement of institutional credibility;
- Determining the various functions that may be performed by institutions and the conditions for decreasing functionality or credibility.

The special issue brings together leading and emerging, young scholars from various disciplines – sociology, economics, planning, law, political science, anthropology, geography or related disciplines. Contributions are welcomed that study the credibility of institutions and property rights that govern land, housing and natural resources around the world, regardless of whether positioned in the Global South or the Global North.

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