

men. Thus, Anna Jonasdottir states: "the fact that our society is male-dominated in all areas does not mean that women have no influence at all; what they lack is authority – as women" (p. 25).

I find this reasoning problematic. I would *not* argue against her observation that women's new participation, in particular the integration into representative politics, is supported by arguments on "difference". But these arguments are far from being limited to the humble justification described by Jonasdottir: that women should be seen as a useful complement to men. In practical politics, they are at least as often stated in terms of *interests*: the well-known arguments that women represent different interests, different values, from men. Thus the "utility" considerations which apply to women politicians do not only, or even primarily, address their usefulness to men. They as much, or more, concern some women's obligations to other women; the mandate to act as "women's own representatives". Neither is "utility" in this broader sense a consideration that entered politics with women. All of representative politics live with, and through, political mandates. We expect all our politicians to deliver on their promises, as categorical or/and vague as they might be. Although it is still rare to find any explicit "man's mandate", thinking in terms of women's mandates need not be *that* different. For centuries, arguments on difference have legitimized practices which kept women out of public life. Today they instead legitimize practices which secure, in collectivity, the presence of women. Why should this be contrary to authority?

In the format of a book review it is hard to give credit to all the important discussion points that are raised through Anna Jonasdottir's work. Some – I know – have already been elaborated on. In *Acta Sociologica* in 1992, Øystein Gullvåg Holter presented a thorough comment on Jonasdottir's application of Marxist method and the discussion of exploitation. The article on "women's interests" and Beatrice Halsaa's comment, published in *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidsskrift* in 1985 and 1987, are by now standard references whenever this concept is touched upon. Similarly, the debate on how "sex matters to democracy", between Anna Jonasdottir and Carole Pateman, which took place in this very journal in 1988, is an interesting one. Anna Jonasdottir's theoretical project is an ongoing one; *Love Power and Political Interests* presents her starting-point more than the finishing line. Clearly, it is a project that deserves to be noticed, and debated, all the way through.

*Hege Skjeie, Institute for Social Research, Oslo*

Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen & Frank Longstreth (eds.): *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 257 pp.

There is clearly, within political science and sociology, a renewed interest in the ways in which institutional variables shape political processes and influence political decisions. Whether one is referring to the "historical institutionalism" of Theda Skocpol or the "new institutionalism" of James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, the core seems to be one of historical analysis, case-oriented research and qualitative data. This is definitely the case with one of the more recent contributions to the field – a collection of essays and case studies that seeks to delineate and apply an

analysis also implies, the role of political and administrative leaders in this process should not be underestimated.

The third main concern of the book is the role of institutions in facilitating innovation in public policy. The question is really how institutions, conventionally conceived as “servants” of continuity, affect the generation and adoption of new ideas within particular policy fields. Desmond King, in his essay on work-welfare programmes in Britain and the US, gives a poignant account of how institutional factors affected the transformation of policy proposals to political decisions and public schemes, and how ideas on welfare reform were shaped “. . . by the political institutions within which legislation was drafted” (p. 241). Peter Hall’s chapter on changes in British economic policy addresses the shifts from “Keynesianism” to “monetarism” that took place during the 1970s. Hall demonstrates, and quite convincingly so, how the potential for major redirection of policy is affected by institutional factors such as the erosion of trade union power, the combination of cabinet government and a two-party system, standard operating procedures in the civil service and the basic structure of the British media.

Margareth Weir, in her historical analysis of employment policies in the US, introduces the concept of “bounded innovation” – drawing attention to the fact that particular institutional arrangements may be conducive to the creation and diffusion of new ideas while at the same time setting boundaries on the type of change possible. On the one hand, Weir shows how the fragmentation and permeability of American political institutions increase the likelihood of policy innovation; of new ideas being adopted by political and administrative leaders. On the other hand, she also demonstrates how this very fragmentation, while instrumental for the free flow of novel ideas and original proposals, may make it hard to formulate a coherent policy tailored to the objectives of the administration. Within the field of employment policy, the fragmentation also weakened the executive in its relations with Congress, and created problems in securing congressional approval for programmes that required a stronger role for government.

This last point ties neatly in with Ellen Immergut’s concept of “veto points” in political systems; areas of institutional vulnerability where the mobilization of opposition can obstruct and prevent policy innovation. Her argument, made in a comparative analysis of health policy-making in France, Switzerland and Sweden, is that different solutions to similar problems should be understood in light of the disparate opportunities for successful opposition that exist within different political systems. The existence of such opportunities or veto points, be they requirements for parliamentary approval or popular support, allows executive decisions to be “tried” and eventually overturned at certain stages in the policy process.

A basic assumption shared by these authors is that institutional variables are important determinants of public policy; they structure the interaction among relevant actors in the policy process, channel their attention and define the basic rules of the game. There is, of course, nothing particularly new or original in all this. However, there is an attempt here at elaborating and integrating certain themes that takes the argument beyond the standard observation that structures matter: First, there is what we could call the contingency hypothesis: that the impact of formal institutions is contextual, i.e. dependent on environments and circumstances. Second, there is the focus on change; on how institutions evolve, become objects of contention and of design and reorganization. Third, there is the underscoring of the reciprocal relationship between institutions and politics; of the impact of institutions on political outcomes and the “vulnerability” of institutions to political decisions.

The concept of “institution”, however, is slightly blurred at the edges as there is

no real attempt at a more precise and “collective” definition. The only author who directly addresses the concept at some length is Peter Hall who defines institutions as “. . . the formal rules, compliance procedures and customary practices that structure the relationship between individuals in the polity and economy” (p. 96). That said, there is certainly – as the editors point out – some controversy in the literature as to what should count as an institution. The fact that this group of scholars seems to work from a common understanding of what constitutes an institution and thus agrees on the core of an historical–institutional approach, perhaps makes the need for a more precise and formal definition less pressing.

As the reader may have guessed, I think this is a good book. There is coherence well above the usual workshop-turned-book project, and the contributions (or the participants at the Boulder workshop from which the present book originates) seem to have been carefully selected to fit an overall scheme or purpose. All the essays, in one way or another, address the same question, namely: how do formal institutions and more informal, yet fairly stable, structural arrangements influence the content of public policy, and how are these institutions, in turn, affected by political decisions? As such, the book is a fine illustration of the potential of institutional analysis in political science. Most chapters offer a blend of historical scholarship and political analysis that adds to our understanding of the role of institutions in shaping political outcomes, and the book certainly deserves to be widely read among students of government and public policy. Last but not least, most chapters are explicitly comparative and should be of interest to any scholar puzzled by the variety of solutions proposed and adopted by different nations to roughly similar problems.

*Knut H. Mikalsen, Institute of Social Science, University of Tromsø*