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STRUCTURAL POWER AND INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS ANALYSIS
„FILL YOUR BASKET, GET YOUR PREFERENCES“

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Abstract

In this article, we will address current deficits of the study of power in IR by introducing a new concept of structural power. After briefly presenting existing concepts of relational power, of structural power as well as of conceptualizing power as the possession of resources (power-as-resources), we will introduce our concept of structural power as an approach suitable for bridging the gap between existing concepts (by strongly focusing on the importance of the structural level). We will show that structural power has a relativizing character and that it exists detached from a specific, case-related, relation between states. Furthermore our approach will offer the possibility to operationalize structural power, as well as the effects of the concept of interdependence introduced by Nye and Keohane.

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This work is part of their work on structural power in the study of International Relations and a condensed version of their article for International Theory (IR).

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1 INTRODUCTION

Hardly any theory or approach of IR can claim evidence and explanatory power without addressing the question of the ontology of power. In this article we will, by introducing our concept of structural¹ power, offer a new path towards understanding a concept of structural power famously introduced by Susan Strange (1987), but still lacking clarity in operationalization and application. By addressing the questions: *“How does structural power work and how is it constituted? / How does structural power change the rules of the game? / Through which kind of transmission channels does structural power affect the power position of states and what are the underlying power resources of structural power? What is the relationship between structural power and other forms of power?”* our approach will offer an innovative approach towards the study of power in IR.

To lay the foundation, we first give an overview of the existing approaches and debates on power in IR. Secondly, we present our core assumptions and propositions. In a third step, we introduce our theoretical framework of structural power. We then will also address the question how structural power can be understood and how its effects can be explained. Furthermore, it will be shown how structural power works and how a state might be able to improve its own position in terms of possessing structural power.

¹ Here we define structure as the interrelation or arrangement of parts in a complex entity.

2 DISCUSSION - POWER AND IR

In the field of IR, a variety of approaches have been developed to understand what power in international affairs actually means, how it is used, what sort of overt or covert mechanisms it relies on and what kind of power sources should be considered more important than others (see Baldwin 2002). Typically, realist and neo-realist theories conceptualize power as the overall amount of capabilities possessed by a state. In this understanding, the possession of a larger number of relevant resources (like GDP, population, size of the military etc.) transforms more or less automatically into more (hard) power and therefore into more security for the state in an anarchic international system (Bauermann/Rittberger 1999: 250).

Hard power is concerned with applying military and economic means to shape the behavior and bend the will of other actors. In this relationship, a state can apply different means to influence the behavior of another state. Depending on the capabilities of a state, these means can range from military force (or the threat of it) to coercive diplomacy or economic sanctions. It is assumed that the larger a state's power resources are the greater is the probability of being able to achieve the superior national preference (Waltz 1990, Mearsheimer 1995, Grieco 1995: 27). According to the logic of realist approaches, an analysis of a state's hard power capabilities is sufficient to explain why a state has been able to establish preferred outcomes on the international level.

However, empirical analysis of international relations has shown that the mere possession of hard power capabilities is not sufficient for a state to govern outcomes in an effective and preference-satisfying way on the international level. Even the distinction between high politics and low politics seems to be no longer feasible for understanding international relations. For instance, the United States of America today hold an undisputed pre-eminence in the international system with regards to hard power capabilities (Norrlof 2010, Joffe 2009), especially when it comes to military power - a pre-eminence which is almost second to none in historic comparison (Ferguson 2005). However, although these hard power capabilities should allow the U.S. to shape outcomes such that they match their preferences in international politics, as the power-as-resources/hard power approach would assume, empirical research has shown that over the last decades the USA have had increasing difficulties satisfying their preferences unilaterally.² Especially in spheres like global economics and environmental policy, the use of hard power to impose unilateral preferences has become insufficient and inapplicable when it comes to complex and high-

2 Take for example the problems of the U.S. to achieve its preferences in the North-Korea and Iran conflicts, as well as in the sphere of international trade (e.g.. implementing the Singapore topics into the WTO regime).

ly interdependent problems such as climate governance, fighting international terrorism etc.³

In response to the shortcomings of the concept mentioned above, such as the lack of clarity in empirical application and explanatory range, a second strand of scholars in political science has conceptualized power as a relational concept in which power is seen as a causal relationship between states in international relations. Based on the famous notion of Max Weber describing power as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance” (Weber 1947), here power stems from the relationship between two or more actors and the context the actors are imbedded in. Consequently, power cannot simply be derived from resources and transmitted into capabilities here and is instead based on the actor’s ability to effectively use material and nonmaterial resources in a specific context, to “get B to do something that B would not otherwise do” (Dahl 1957) and to enforce outcomes suiting his preferences. By offering a concept of understanding the value of power-resources in a contextual setting, this approach allows a more sophisticated and elaborated explanation of power.

One famous approach working with a relational concept of power was presented in 1977 by Nye and Keohane in “Power and Interdependence”. However, Nye and Keohane do not offer a clear concept of operationalizing their understanding of power for analyzing empirical consequences or implications of their thoughts. Moreover, despite arguing against a neorealist conceptualization of power, they fail to fully unpin from the implications of neorealism because they stick to its ontology. Nye and Keohane widely adopt the realist ontology of IR as an “anarchic self-help system” instead of basing their theory on the excellent elaborated interdependence as a state of modern politics. (Gu 2010).⁴

The third widely debated understanding of power in international relations depicts power in structural terms. Proponents of this understanding see power as mainly related to the establishment of structures, or the control over structures, in international relations (Fels 2011). The concept of structural power became popular with the writings of Susan Strange (see Ward 1987, Lawton et al. 2000). Strange defines structural power as the power “to decide how things shall be done, the power to shape frameworks within which states relate to each other, relate to people, or relate to corporate enterprises” (Strange

3 As Nye and Keohane have observed (Nye / Keohane: 2001), the use of force or open coercion to exercise power is nearly impossible between the nuclear powers and very unlikely between states which have highly interdependent bilateral economic relations taking place in a global system of mutual dependence (Nye / Keohane: 2001, Keohane 2004), and to use military force is of course the most costly and in a democracy the most unpopular option, as the examples of the Vietnam War and the ongoing Afghanistan War show us. The distinction undertaken by realists between high politics and low politics is in wide parts insignificant to understand and explain international relations taking place under these conditions.

4 Although the concept of soft power (Nye 1990a, 1990b, 2004a, 2004b) is shortcoming, when it comes to explaining the whole range of international relations and advocates of soft power have so far failed to clarify when and where governments of great and middle powers changed their position on major issues due to the ideational attractiveness and normative persuasion of other countries. While there are cases in history in which hard power played a crucial role in allowing one party to coerce another to subdue, proponents of soft power theory found it much harder to present such examples and to present an analytical framework which allows us to operationalize soft power in international relations (see Kagan 2002).

1988: 25). She adds that structural power “means rather more than the power to set the agenda of discussion or to design” (ibid.). Strange emphasizes that “power over structures” is more important than “power from resources”, thus arguing for a reconsideration of the actual value of economic resources and military capabilities for the outcomes of divergences between great powers in the modern world (Strange 1996: 25-30). This notion of power as a dispositional concept presents a fundamentally different approach to the conceptualization of power than the concepts of hard and soft power. In Strange’s understanding, power cannot only settle outcomes within interstate relations due to material or ideational factors but “even more importantly”, power can shape and define the structures or tacit bargains states are actually embedded in and these structures become a resource of power by framing the rules of the game in favor of the actor. This comes close to what Steven Krasner (1985: 14) calls meta-power, i.e. the power “to change the rules of the game”. Volgy and Imwalle (2000), for instance, show how “hegemonic strength” can be measured in terms of structural capabilities.⁵ But under the preposition that structure can also become a resource of power itself for obtaining structural power (by e.g. reproducing structures) as well as shaping the behavior of other actors, the logic of structural power becomes tautological in argumentation. In these terms, it is hard to explain any decline in power of a hegemon when considering the hegemon’s actions to be rational.

Another shortcoming in Strange’s theory is that she does not address what an interlinkage between the possession of resources and the ability to exercise “power over structures” looks like and how this relation could be operationalized.

On a theoretical level, Stefano Guzzini (1993) categorizes three strands of thinking with regard to structural power. Firstly, he identifies “indirect institutional power”, which is related to Krasner’s meta-power concept, being understood as control over outcomes not via direct confrontation but by changing the setting in which confrontation occurs. Secondly, he describes Strange’s understanding of structural power as being a “non-intentional power”. Non-intentional because of the fact that the structure shaped by the interplay of the hegemon’s actions can but need not work in favor of the hegemon’s preferences in a specific historical setting. The structure does not directly promote the interests of the hegemon, it facilitates them in an indirect and barely controllable way, without enabling the hegemon to “activate” the structure in a specific situation. And finally, Guzzini identifies “impersonal power”, where he differentiates between two conceptualizations. The first of these is “a positional concept that focuses on the impersonal bias of international relations, which systematically gives an advantage to certain actors due to their specific position or roles in the international system”. The second conceptualization

5 Strange’s take on power is part of a broad field of structural approaches. On the one hand, she contributes to approaches of neo-Gramscian as well as realist authors in the field of international political economy (IPE). James A. Carpasso, for instance, understands structural power as the power “to govern the rules which shape bargaining power”. For Carpasso, this kind of power is “crucial to the understanding of dependency” (1978a: 4, 1978b). Conversely, Strange’s research (Strange 1987) corresponds with the current debate about the power of the “American Empire” that is concerned with changes in military, economic and institutional settings on a regional and global level (see Ikenberry 2004). The question whether U.S. hegemony is in decline or remains unchallenged still mainly depends on structural factors in terms of institutions, military and economics (Ikenberry 2003, Katzenstein 2005; Ferguson 2003; Mann 2003; Bacevich 2008, Joffe 2009, Layne 2010, Zakaria 2009).

“stresses the link between knowledge and power, arguing that power requires prior intersubjective recognition” (Guzzini 1993: 462).

Looking back, it can be said that numerous scholars of IR have undertaken remarkable efforts to address the questions of the ontology, the causes and the effects of structural power in international relations. However, the existing approaches fall short when it comes to the operationalization of the concept of structural power for the analysis of international relations and when it comes to the theoretical explanation of the causation mechanisms of structural power. In all these theories, there is a lack in addressing the questions mentioned in the introduction, which are essential for the understanding and conceptualizing of power.⁶

Our approach to structural power presented below will offer a framework to address and answer these questions. Before outlining our approach, we will briefly present another attempt at addressing the discrepancy between the outcomes in the realm of IR and the distribution of hard and soft power, which proved fruitful for our considerations regarding structural power.

In the field of bargaining theory, on a case-to-case basis, empirical studies have shown that the outcomes of bilateral and multilateral negotiations frequently do not directly correspond to the distribution of resources between the negotiating parties. To address this, attempts have been made to identify variables responsible for success or failure in negotiating situations that determine the outcomes beyond the mere distribution of resources (Petersen 1986). These variables (or factors) include impatience, salience attributed to the issue, risk of break down, inside and outside options, skills of the negotiators, etc. (Muthoo 2000). Most of these factors are endogenous and overlap in their logic with Keohane’s and Nye’s aforementioned concept of vulnerability - the resources and player’s ability to let go of the desired goal and to bear the correspondingly high costs of its loss. The negotiating skills as an attribute of members of the diplomatic corps are another variable hard to operationalize. Furthermore, Stefanie Bailer has shown in a recent study on bargaining success in the European Union that such skills are not often rewarded and hence do not seem to be of considerable importance (Bailey 2004). The exogenous variable, which goes beyond the availability of resources, is the *outside option* (OO). We define outside option as follows. The options available for agent A in a bargaining situation to get the desired good are at the same or better terms via a possible alternative negotiat-

6 Other widely discussed theoretical approaches in international relations explore at length the question how preferences develop with regard to foreign affairs, but fail to explain why certain preferences of a state prevail over other states’ preferences on an international level. Not only neo-liberal approaches (e.g. Moravcsik 1997, Dür 2007, 2010, De Bèvre/Dür 2007), but also constructivist approaches (e.g. Wendt 1999, Onuf 1989, Kratochwil 1989), based on different ontological propositions, deal with the question how external preferences of states can be explained and the competition for influence between rationally acting, endogenous social groups holding different preferences (neo-liberalism), or the importance of social identity and social learning for the normatively founded development of preferences, as reasons. Due to their theoretical scope and problem they, however, fail to offer a satisfying answer to the question why certain states are able to achieve their preferred outcome while others are not. In short, they do not provide a sufficient concept of power and its effects on the international level, especially because they do not aim to do so. The question how a state’s preferences develop and whether they are the results of a normatively founded process or rather of rational cost-benefit analysis, is not of interest to us. Our theoretical concept is meant to offer explanations in order to put across why some states are able to achieve their preferred outcomes while others are not.

ing partner. The alternative is in this case an *outside option* for player A and weakens the bargaining position of player B (Schneider 2005). This variable is crucial for our further consideration of structural power, but before we proceed, we would like to briefly introduce some preliminary assumptions.

3 PREPOSITIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

We agree with a broad range of scholars assuming deep interdependence of international relations (most famously Keohane/Nye 2001, Keohane 1984, Keohane/Nye 1999, Baldwin 1980). This means that the actors to an increasing extent are not able to satisfy the full range of their own needs by themselves and are therefore dependent on cooperation, trade and negotiations. The actors' only, yet limited, alternative might be war (we consider states as the primary, though not sole, agents of IR). However, this alternative becomes more and more costly and unattractive. Accordingly, actors try to satisfy their own needs in ongoing negotiations with each other. They act boundedly rational, which means that they are comprehensively – but not fully – informed.

Furthermore, we assume that *goods* satisfy the *needs* of states. Theoretically, any need may be completely satisfied (a satisfaction of 100%) or not at all (a satisfaction of 0%)⁷ and the state of interest will be located on some place between these two theoretical poles. We define *goods* more widely as anything that may meet a need and can hypothetically be exchanged for other goods. We also follow the assumption that needs of states accumulate from the needs of different groups (social, economic, etc.) and that we are able to elaborate these needs through analysis and to rank needs, like e.g. Moravcsik (1991, 1993, 1997), Schirm (2011, 2009, 2005), Dür (2007) and others have shown.⁸ Needs as well as goods differ in quality, as we will show below.

Goods and Types of Goods

First, let us clarify the difference between resources and goods. Resources are anything an actor can theoretically access freely within his cruising radius. These resources turn into goods, when another actor articulates a corresponding need and exchange with another good is possible.

We basically distinguish three types of goods: *material*, *positional* and *ideational* goods. Examples for material goods are money, resources, manufactured products etc. The term positional goods refers to a convenient positioning, may it be in geographical terms, e.g. a passage for transport, or in terms of negotiation, e.g. a certain asset in an IGO such as the IMF. Ideational goods are more problematic to define. These goods do not per se exist. In contrast to material or positional goods, ideational goods are of a virtual nature; they only exist as long as there is a need for them. Without the idea of general human rights, for example, there can be no need for the good “human right”. Should an adequate need for the idea of universal human rights arise in a country such as Germany, then good “human rights” in China could be seen as an ideational good. Moreover, a state's need for greater recognition or legitimacy may be satisfied by a good, e.g. in the form of a visit by the U.S. President.

7 The quality of needs stated in percentages is used in this paper for the purpose of better illustration and exemplification and not for analytical purpose.

8 It is not the objective of this paper to develop a method to measure the needs in qualitative terms, but it is important to note that it is possible to elaborate and rank the needs by using analytical tools, which are already well introduced (Moravcsik 1997).

Such a wide conceptualization of goods allows us to include a full range of IR-issues in our analysis. Since we assume that goods can generally be exchanged in any combination, this distinction is primarily made for the subsequent operationalization.

Availability of Goods

More important than the distinction between the different types of goods is the aspect of *availability*. Basically, we distinguish three levels of availability – goods of *general* availability (e.g. soil, wind, low-tech products etc.), goods of *limited* availability (e.g. oil, rare earths, know-how, UN Security Council membership, key markets etc.) and goods of *exclusive* availability (such as certain patents and technologies, access to certain geographic areas like the Panama Canal, ideational goods, etc.). As a measure of scarcity, availability of the goods is not primarily dependent on the number of goods potentially available but on the amount of goods *actually* available for exchange. A raw material may be widespread, i.e. a *general* good, but if it is extracted only in relatively small amount, without an option to increase its amount in the short term it becomes a *limited* good. This implies that the availability of goods may be artificially limited by the actors (e.g. due to an actor's strategy). Know-how is in principle unlimitedly reproducible, but is usually spread by the owner in a very limited way.

Since the vast number of goods falls in the categories of limited or exclusive goods, actors permanently compete for goods, especially in those cases where the needs of two or more actors overlap. Goods inevitably become objects of trade if one actor needs them and is not able to produce them himself or to substitute them at acceptable costs. Consequently, players are at any given time engaged in different negotiations with states and non-state actors to satisfy their own needs via acquisition or exchange of goods.

Critical to the significance of goods is also the nature of actors' needs in the particular constellation.

Needs

Needs differ in their *relevance* and *urgency*. Here we follow in part the bargaining theories (see Muthoo 2000, Schneider 2005). The relevance of the needs of an actor will depend on the accumulation of the relevance and the urgency by endogenous groups trying to shape the government's policy - the more a group is able to push its needs, or the more groups share common needs, the stronger their relevance.⁹ The urgency of the needs depends on the discrepancy between the extent to which an actor has already satisfied a need and the (theoretical) possible maximum coverage. For example, the need for security in Germany may be covered at 80%, in contrast to Israel's only 40%. Hence the urgency in Israel in this area is much higher. We can derive the relevance and urgency of the actor's needs by analyzing the preference of the state (e.g. through the interpretation of strategy papers, government files, news coverage, interviews, documents, speeches etc.).

⁹ Cf. e.g. Moravcsik (1997).

Rare Goods

The significance (as a quality) of goods is the combination of their availability on the one hand, and the relevance and urgency (as well as their accumulation among the actors) on the other hand. A combination unfavorable for an actor (low availability on the one side and/or high relevance and urgency of the needs on the other) leads to *rarity* of goods, which is why we speak of *rare* goods. Hence “rare” does not mean scarcity of goods per se, but a high demand in contrast to the amount of goods available. Rare goods are by virtue of their quality more important than non-rare goods.

The total of all goods that can be offered by an actor for exchange is his *basket*.

Structural Power

After these preliminary considerations, we will introduce the core of our approach to structural power. Let us go back again to the outside option variable.

As mentioned above, player A can strengthen his position vis-à-vis actor B if he can boast an outside option (OO) in a negotiating situation.¹⁰ This OO (player C) has a good that meets the needs of A and is offered under comparable or better conditions. Player C has to be apparent as an (willing and able) OO for B. Since B’s perception of C being an OO for A is crucial, it gives A the possibility to bluff. It also makes a situation possible where B is aware of C being A’s OO, but does not realise A’s non-awareness of C being an OO. In this case, the structural power of A has a non-intentional character.

Goods that C will be offered by A in exchange do not need to be the same goods as are offered to B. The more OOs actor A is able to accrue, the weaker is B’s position in negotiations with A in this round, since we assume the power relation here to be a zero-sum game. In addition, A may be an OO for C in some other bargaining situation. Accordingly, this may mean a power gain for C in a parallel negotiation round. Due to the fact that a reasonable alternative exists, A now possesses (structural) power (e.g. A may play C off against B), even though A’s capability endowment remains unchanged. Only the specific situational context, namely the emergence of one or possibly even several OO gives A (structural) power.

¹⁰ Likewise connected to this consideration is the lack of structural power in the case of martial conflicts, in which no negotiations of any kind take place. Here the resources are only used for one’s own needs (for attacking or defense), so that in this case any measurement results in measuring resource power.

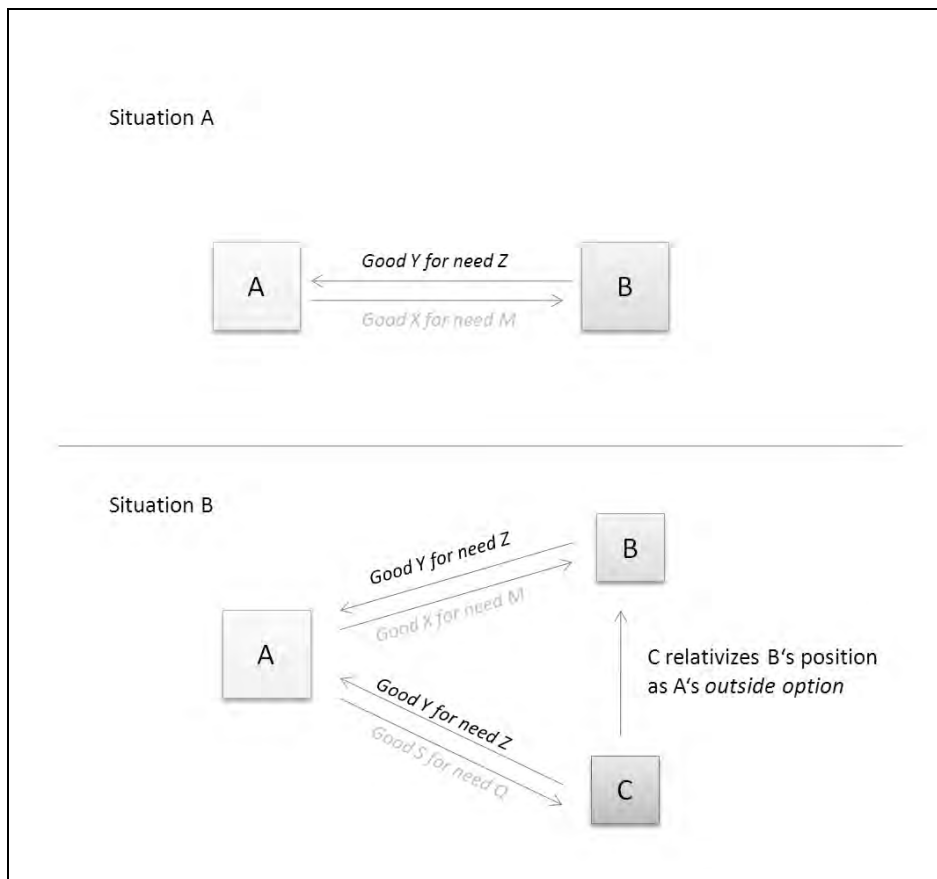


Figure 1: The Importance of Outside Options for structural power

The ability to attract OO and also to become an OO for third actors depends on how *rare* the goods in the basket of an actor are. Basically, the rarer the goods in the basket are, the higher is the probability of attracting OOs or of becoming an OO for other actors. The main point for our considerations is that the combination constituted from the needs of all players and all goods offered by them for exchange constitutes a structure which may provide actors with structural power in negotiations. Accordingly a state has structural power when:

A state possesses a specific set of goods (basket) which it may offer for exchange in an international bargaining situation and parts of the composition of its basket meet the demand of other actors particularly well AND his own needs are highly compatible with the range of supply (baskets of all other actors) in the system in which the state is embedded. Due to the former aspect, the possibility rises to be an OO for other players, because of the latter aspect the number of potential OOs for the actor himself rises.

4 UNDERSTANDING OF STRUCTURE

It becomes clear that our structural concept varies greatly from Strange's idea of structure: Hyperbolically said, in Strange's concept the structure resembles a labyrinth in which the powerful actor opens and closes doors and even moves walls for the mice that are inside. He is thereby able to determine the routes they take and to shape the labyrinth according to his wishes.¹¹

We understand structure as a fluid, emergent network of interactions and relations of the actors involved, which is constituted by the goods or rather their attributes as well as by the needs of the actors and thus determines the quality of the goods contained in the actors' baskets. The quality of the goods can be influenced by all actors both, directly and indirectly and provides the context for power-as-resource. The resources, and accordingly the resource power, influence the structure, but are located on a different level (see figure 2) than the structure and the structural power. Resources and resource power influence structural power without being an immediate part of it.

The implicit logic of this understanding of structure resembles Adam Smith's notion of a market: The market is constituted by simultaneous actions of self-interested actors that do not fully control their actions' effects; it influences the actors' further actions. (Balaam / Veseth 2008)

This shows that structural power possesses a resource-based as well as a relation-based character. Resource-based, because - according to our concept - resources have a major influence on the composition of a state's basket: The possession of resources correlates, as expected, strongly with the availability of material and positional goods for the actors - the more resources are available to an actor, the more goods he potentially has to offer, the greater is the statistical probability that a larger number of *rare* goods is among them (furthermore a great concentration of resources in one spot may also be a rare good). At the same time, as mentioned above, our concept of structural power also contains an important relational aspect: Resources in general are of limited value. Their value is significantly influenced by the relation between resources and the needs which in turn in their totality (in a global context) constitute a structure. This structural context codetermines the rarity of the resources and significantly influences their quality as goods.

This structural context is also the reason why we talk of *structural* instead of relational power. This nomenclature is based on the assumption that although relations determine the quality of an actor's goods, this determination can only be carried out by including the entire "market" / structure with all its elements and their causal relations, that is all baskets noticed by the actors with all the contained goods as well as adjunctive needs. In the end, resource- as well as relation-related aspects are inextricably linked to this structure, yet they are conceptionally situated on a different level than the structure formed by them.

¹¹ For example, consider the principle of "Kompetenz-Kompetenz" (having authority to determine - also one's own - authorities) within the EU.

At this point, it is justified to ask if it is really necessary to introduce a further structural level similar to the relativizing effects of the relational concept of power. Looking closely at the concept of relational power, certain shortcomings become obvious. A relation requires the interaction of two or more actors, it is constituted by interaction. The relation between this limited number of actors results into an ad-hoc structure which only exists for the limited duration and scope of this specific action. Therefore the effect is purely linked to the intention of the actors involved (because a relation needs an active start by the actors), as well as restricted to specific duration of the process. This concept implies the isolation of the actors involved from all other previous, simultaneous and subsequent interactions on a temporal and spatial level. This concept is therefore unable to offer a understanding independent from the specific interactions of a limited number of actors. In contrast, our concept of structure offers a context which logically connects the multiple relations taking place under the conditions of interdependent anarchy by focusing on a meta-level. Effects caused by interaction may be intentional or non-intentional, as shown above, and unfold independently from the rigid borders of a specific relation.

Again, structural power does not operate per se but through relativization. It influences the value of a possession in a specific context either positively or negatively. Whenever state A has access to more OOs than B to realize its needs and therefore possesses more structural power, the value of the resources B owns is relativized. Due to the existence of alternatives, B is no longer able to use these resources effectively as a coercive means towards A. Structural power influences A's resource power relativizingly, by weakening or strengthening it with respect to actor B.

Even in a constellation in which only actor A and actor B enter negotiations (as for example in the case of exclusive goods), and in which OOs are available to none of the actors, structural power is present. In this case, however, structural power is located at two extremes: One actor (A) - the actor who possesses the exclusive goods and whom the other actor (B) is dependent on if he wants to satisfy his need for these goods - holds 100% of structural power, whereas B has 0 % structural power. Here, the structure itself does not have a relativizing effect because one counterpart does not possess anything that could relativize resources of the other player and consequently its power position.¹² A very similar situation is to be found in constellations of 50% vs. 50%, that means in case of a par situation. Due to the fact that structural power takes effect with the same intensity on both sides, the relativizing effects negate each other.

As a result, in any negotiating situation neither structural power nor resource power can exist on their own – they influence each other and are conceptionally inextricably linked.

¹² It is important to note that zero denotes an actual power level and therefore has to be a feature of power in theoretical considerations. A relationship in reference to power becomes an empty vehicle if a constellation in which one actor holds 100% of the power and the other holds 0% power is not possible. For a relation to work out, both sides need to have a "value" – without countervalue, the power position is inevitably absolute and tautologic.

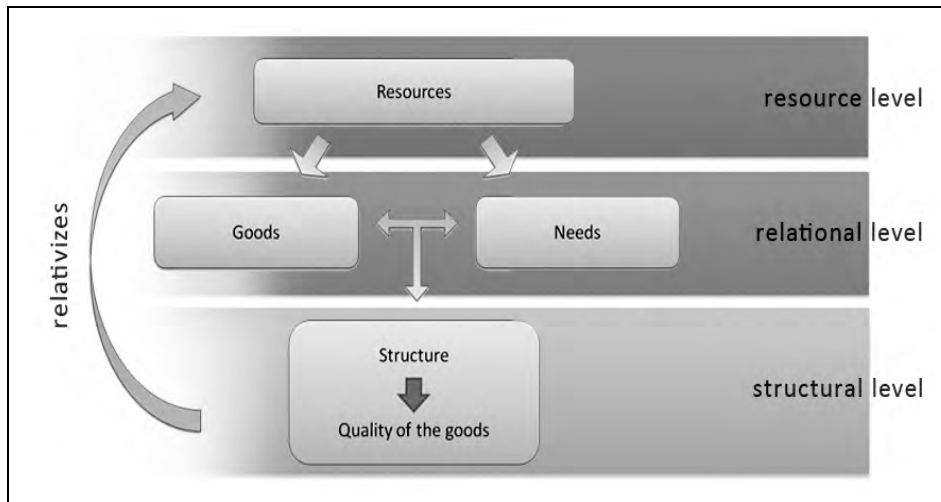


Figure 2: Interaction of the three types of power
 Source: A. Pustovitovskij

To sum up, the concept presented above works as follows:

Goods that an actor can offer in exchange as well as the actor's needs are derived from the resources of an actor, which can become material, positional or ideational goods. These resources turn into goods whenever another actor articulates a corresponding need, and the resources can be exchanged for other goods.

The relations between the goods and needs of all actors constitute a structure. This structure, at the same time, determines the quality (more or less rare) of the goods. The quality of the goods determines the actor's structural power. Structural power can influence the actors' (resources) power by relativizing it.

Coming back to the labyrinth allegory mentioned above, any actor here is simultaneously both designer of the labyrinth and "mouse", competing against other actors in creating the most favorable structure (the shortest possible way to the cheese). The following paragraph will sketch how actors are able to influence the structure, and hence their structural power.

5 INFLUENCING STRUCTURAL POWER

There are basically two possibilities to influence one's own structural power or that of the competitor – by manipulation on either the resource- or the relational level. By manipulating his own basket or that of another, or by manipulating his own need for goods or that of another, any player can to a certain extent influence the structural power level.

Greater rarity can be achieved by upgrading the actors' own products (e.g. technological improvements, changes in conditions, occupation of important positions, limitation of the *availability* of goods, etc.) or the degradation of the goods of other actors (such as downgrading of nuclear threat by a missile shield, implementation of new practices, new way of goods delivery etc.). In this context, any race for technology and production advantages – may it be in terms of exercising control over raw materials or in terms of competitiveness, key patents or military strength is nothing but an approach to relatively improve one's own basket in comparison to those of other players. Hence, any effort in this direction does not only contribute to the – more obvious – hard and soft power, but also to the structural power.

However, an increase in structural power in one area does not imply that the state in general becomes (structurally) stronger. Even though we assume that all goods are principally exchangeable, we do not deny that negotiations and the exchange of goods are usually limited to particular sectors. The reason may be that trade patterns have long been established, or else linked to the problem of weighting the value of goods against each other precisely. It is for example easier to calculate the value of a barrel of oil in US\$ than in the range of concessions in the field of TRIPS. This semi-permeability of sectors is due to reasons of practicability, not the logic of the structure. This is also one of the reasons why a large amount of structural power in one area - e.g. security or environmental technologies - does not automatically imply that the actor holds a large amount of structural power in general.

As sectors however differ regarding their urgency and the relevance of adjunctive needs, the probability that they contain rare goods can also vary greatly. As rare goods are more uncommon in the textile than in the semiconductor sector, the importance of the actors' positioning within the latter substructure is more important for their general structural power.

In addition, players can create new needs for other actors in their own interests or modify existing ones, making their goods more attractive and rare, e.g. through technological progress, framing, etc.. Apart from influencing the competitors' needs, an actor can also try to manipulate his own needs – either by reducing them to a minimum or by substituting them with other needs that the state is able to satisfy by itself. An extreme example of this is North Korea.

The continuing conflict on the Korean peninsula and the insensitivity of the North Korean regime towards the pressures and sanctions of states superior in hard and soft power (e.g. the USA, South Korea, Japan and even to some extent the PR China) can well be explained in terms of structural power. On the one hand, North Korea profits from limiting the material needs of its population and from substituting needs that can-

not be met for ones that can be met on the basis of a government ideology. On the other hand, Pyongyang creates a strong need for security and normalization among its neighboring states and other actors by keeping up a constant threat. With regard to South Korea and Japan, this threat can be defined as the danger of a military conflict, which North Korea would not be able to win but which would cause a large number of casualties. From an American perspective, the threat is the danger that military technology could be sold to Iran or Syria. From a Chinese perspective, the North Korean threat can be seen as the danger of large numbers of refugees. From a general western perspective, the threat lies in a continued “hostage-taking” of the North Korean people by its own government.

Only Pyongyang is able to deliver the goods needed to satisfy the other players' needs for security and normalization without an armed conflict. In this constellation, North Korea little yet exclusive goods in its basket and needs only a limited number of widely available goods - food and energy supplies. Pyongyang therefore holds a relatively large amount of structural power compared to its own resources.

Apart from these considerations, the resolutions we mentioned prove another point. Whenever an existing interdependency is questioned, for example by threatening to withdraw it by implementing sanctions, the goods in question are once again put up for bargaining. It can usually be assumed that the party calling this constellation into question expects its counterpart to have no convincing OO. Even the act of threatening is a negotiation conducted one-sidedly by the threatening party, based on its own assessment. Of course, the players may bluff with regard to available OO or their own needs, as already mentioned above. Taking into account common trade conflicts, it becomes clear that such situations constitute a large part of the daily routine of IR

6 CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have tried to address deficits of power research and present an approach for a solution by answering the key-questions we introduced above. We have shown how structural power works and how it is constituted and which transmission channels it uses to affect the power position of states. We have traced the underlying resources of structural power and explained the relationship between resources and structural power. Structural power is of course intertwined with the two other levels of power. Hence we can speak of a complex system in which the effect is more than just a sum of its parts. The concept of structural power is not limited to a deterministic understanding of the effects of resources on a state's power position. It is also not restricted to a relational context shaping the value of power resources logically restricted to the duration of the specific relation. Instead, the structural context or the structure the actors are embedded in exercises considerable relativizing influence on the resource level. The effect of the structure is not limited to a specific interaction of actors.

Our approach does not only offer a way of operationalizing Nye's and Keohane's concept of interdependence, we propose a different understanding of its ontology - beyond the ontology of interdependence and also neo-realistic approaches. In our understanding, the uncertainty of anarchy in the realm of IR can neither be bridged by regimes, nor are the actors able to diminish the uncertainty by accumulating a larger amount of capabilities. This is because there is still a form of power that no actor can ever fully control or calculate in advance.

Nonetheless, improvements could be made: regarding analyzing the urgency of actors' needs: This concept could be more thoroughly examined, on the basis of the proposition that it is of elemental necessity for more accurate predictions, since this directly influences the goods' qualities. Here, we also encounter the question, whether a fundamental hierarchization of needs (e.g. such as proposed by Maslow, 1943) would be possible. Finally, empirical verification is needed to promote progress regarding these and other questions.

To sum up, in this paper we proposed an approach which manages to connect resource, relational and structural power and to construct a coherent, non-tautological concept of power. Our approach offers a clear concept of (structural) power, which can be used for further empirical research to foster the knowledge on power in contemporary IR by overcoming deficits of existing theoretical approaches. Furthermore, the approach could, if it applied correctly, be used to link power research and constructivism¹³ on an empirical level.

¹³ We do not refer to the notion of constructivism proposed by Wendt (1999), which is primarily concerned with identity attribution. Rather, we refer to Onuf's (1989) and Kratochwil's (1989) line of thinking. Here, the focus is on the social construction of reality, especially via language and the attribution of specific meanings. This is where we see the link: The idea that an importance shift of resources and needs could well be used for constructivist analyses.

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