

**The Differential Impact of Communicated Ideas
Bridging the Gap between Rationalism and Constructivism**

Diana Panke***Abstract**

Constructivist and rationalist approaches to IR generate competing hypotheses and often refer to empirical evidence as the debate on the influence of the European Commission in the European Unions illustrates. Instead of rejecting rationalist accounts on the basis of constructivist arguments or vice versa, bridge-building approaches develop scope conditions for competing hypotheses. However, due to one-sided action theoretical assumptions, prominent bridge-building approaches suffer from biases towards either rationalism or constructivism. The systemic approach as developed in this paper, by contrast, abstains from action-theoretical recurrences and instead relies on behavioural assumptions. It identifies contextual variables (polity and policy) which influence the varying impact of communicated ideas between changes of substantial interests (best grasped by constructivism), over adaptations of strategic positions (best grasped by rationalism) to no changes at all. Contrary to prominent bridge-building approaches, this paper concludes that the shadow of votes and different voting procedures do not facilitate bargaining dynamics, while a high norm diversity is not conducive for arguing.

Introduction: Rationalism and the Constructivist Challenge

When Onuf, Kratochwil and Wendt introduced constructivist approaches into International Relations (Onuf 1985, Onuf 1989 Kratochwil 1984, Kratochwil 1989, Wendt 1987), the broader field could not imagine that the so called 'idea-based' approaches (Goldstein/Keohane 1993) will one day pose a serious challenge to 'interest-based' theories. Nowadays, constructivist approaches no longer lead a shadowy existence. Rationalism and constructivism are no substantial

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theories of IR, but very popular as different action-theories. Accordingly, rationalist and constructivist theories focus on similar research questions and produce competing hypotheses.

Based on methodological standards of the current scientific paradigm, hypotheses are maintained, as long as they are not disconfirmed (Popper 1968). If two competing hypotheses point towards empirical evidence, either both hypotheses are disconfirmed and, therefore, dismissed, or neither hypothesis is dismissed, but their scope conditions need to be clarified, so that overlaps are avoided. 'Bridge-building' approaches choose the latter option. They assume that empirical reality can be interpreted and reconstructed by rationalist and by constructivist approaches alike. Simply speaking, it depends on the respective setting whether rationalist reconstructions or whether constructivist reconstructions grasp reality better. As a consequence, bridge-building approaches attempt to specify scope conditions for competing rationalist and constructivist hypotheses. The main question is: which approach should ideally be applied to what kind of empirical instance? Recently, Checkel criticised these undertakings for their focus on action theoretical micro-mechanisms (Checkel 2004). Often, bridge-building attempts introduce one-sided action theoretical assumptions through the back door. Depending on whether rationalist or constructivist action theoretical assumptions are given priority, hypotheses and scope conditions are either biased in favour of rationalism or constructivism. Starting out from this critique, I develop an alternative theoretical frame, which rests on a behavioural assumption and avoids action-theoretical biases.

The argument of this paper proceeds in four steps. The next paragraph briefly elaborates on the core differences between rationalism and constructivism (II). In order to illustrate the need for bridge-building approaches, it draws on the debate on the influence supranational entrepreneurs in the European Union. It formulates competing hypotheses on bargaining dynamics and efficiency-increasing (rationalist accounts) influence of the Commission on policies in the Council of Ministers and on argumentative dynamics and substantial influence (constructivist accounts). Since empirical studies provide confirmation to both hypotheses, neither rationalist nor constructivist theories alone are suited to grasp the influence of the Commission as a supranational entrepreneur adequately.

To account for the phenomenon that the Commission sometimes exerts substantial influence on EU policies and sometimes only enhances the effectiveness of interstate negotiation, scope conditions are required. Therefore, section three reviews prominent gap-bridging undertakings and discusses their suggestions on scopes of competing rationalist and constructivist hypotheses (III). However, since most of them rely on the assumption that the social constructivist action theory is prior to the rationalist theory of action, existing bridge-building theories are often biased towards constructivism. As a consequence, they overestimate the substantial influence of the European Commission.

This paper develops a new bridge-building approach, which avoids biases towards rationalism hence, efficiency increasing influence of the Commission as well as towards constructivism, hence substantial influence of the Commission (IV). In contrast to existing approaches, it abstains from any action-theoretical assumptions. Further, it does not inquire into contextual conditions under which actors engage in strategic action or in communicative action, because this would implicitly set one of the action theories as prior to the other. At the same time, it does not assume that action-theoretical predispositions are personally fix. Instead of theorizing the realm of intentional action, this paper relies on less demanding behavioural assumptions and theorizes how contextual variables enable and prevent meaningful interaction. The basic argument put forward in this paper is that ideal scope conditions of constructivist and rationalist approaches can be developed by inquiring the likelihood of whether actors in particular institutional arenas share certain reference systems (for the common evaluation of arguments or for the common evaluation of bargaining acts).¹ If actors share reference systems for the quality of arguments but not for what constitutes bargaining threats, a constructivist hypothesis will be better equipped in explaining a phenomenon than a rationalist hypothesis. If actors share a common standard for

¹ Meaningful interaction is present if actors do not talk cross-purposes but mutually relate to speech acts in a manner, conducive to the development of a compromise or a consensus. Meaningful interaction presupposes shared reference systems, on which actors commonly assess the quality of speech acts, so that A can react to B (and vice versa) in a manner incrementally producing an outcome (compromise or consensus). There are two types of meaningful interaction: arguing and bargaining. Arguments can be evaluated on shared standards for truth, rightfulness or appropriateness and facilitate changes of substantial interests and consensus. Bargaining acts, by contrast, can be evaluated on shared standards for what constitutes costly external constraints (threats) and facilitate adaptations of strategic positions and compromise.

what defines a bargaining threat, but share no standard for the quality of arguments, rationalist hypotheses will be superior to constructivist ones.

The fifth section illustrates these theoretical considerations in drawing on the debate on the influence of the European Commission on policy-outcomes (V). The Commission in the Council of Ministers serves as an example for actors with access to decision-making arenas lacking formal bargaining power (such as many NGOs in IOs). Neither rationalist nor constructivist theories alone adequately grasp the influence of the Commission as a supranational entrepreneur. The bridge-building approach developed in this paper suggests that whether the Commission can influence policy outcomes substantively or only enhance the effectiveness of policy-making depends foremost on the presence and type of shared reference systems. Shared evaluative standards for arguments reflect the ideal scope for the application of constructivist approaches and, thus the necessary (but not sufficient) condition under which actors such as the European Commission most likely exert substantial influence. Rationalist approaches accounting for efficiency-increasing influence of actors such as the European Commission have their ideal scope where actors share standards for the evaluation of bargaining threats but not for the evaluation of arguments.

This paper takes issue with prominent constructivist and rationalist claims in the gap-bridging literature. Contrary to constructivist bridge-building approaches, it concludes that high transparency and norm density are not conducive for arguing, changes of substantial interests, and consensus. In contrast to rationalist bridge-building approaches, this paper claims that variables such as the shadow of votes and different voting procedures do not facilitate bargaining dynamics, changes of strategic positions, and compromise.

I. Rationalism and Constructivism: Common Grounds and Differences

Rationalism and constructivism are no substantial theories of IR, but different action-theories (Risse 2003, Ulbert 2003, Adler 2002). Accordingly, the major difference between rationalism and constructivism is ontological (and not epistemological) in nature (Wendt 1999, Risse 2003).

At its core, rationalism is based on a methodological-individualist concept of rationality, according to which the actor is prior to and can be studied independent of social structures. Human beings are strategic rational actors with exo-

generously defined substantial interests that remain fix during interactions (Zangl/Zürn 1994, Plümper 1995, Landwehr 2006). Rationalism as an action-theory captures individual instrumental 'goal-seeking under constraints' (Snidal 1991, Snidal 2002: 74). While substantial interests are exogenous, strategic preferences on how given substantial interests are best pursued can change when communicated ideas (via speech acts of bargaining) about external constraints (such as the distribution of bargaining power) influence means-ends calculations and the adaptation of strategic positions (strategic positions are on how to pursue substantial interests best) (similar Fearon/Wendt 2002, Scharpf 1989, Schelling 1978, Shepsle 1989; Putnam 1988).

Constructivism, by contrast, rests on the ontological assumption that intersubjective meaning is constitutive for intentional action (Wendt 1987). The actor is not the ontological prior, but agent and structure are mutually constitutive (Ulbert 2003, Wendt 1987, Wendt 1999). Intersubjective meaning influences and is constitutive for the selection and development of actors' substantial interests. It is created and changed through the exchange of argumentative speech acts during interactions. Since intersubjective meaning can be created, reproduced and changed during interactions, constructivism conceptualizes substantial policy interests as endogenous (substantial interests are about what actors want).² Rationalism and constructivism attribute different impacts to communicated ideas. In rationalist accounts, ideas communicated directly or indirectly through speech acts of bargaining (see below) facilitate changes in strategic positions and compromise, whereas constructivism claims that argumentatively communicated ideas (see below) are conducive to changes in substantial interests and consensus.

² This is because the intersubjective ideational structure is constitutive for actor's substantial interests in two regards. Firstly, substantial interests to be pursued in action plans are developed on the basis of a common conception of the situation in which actors find themselves. When the situational definition changes, the original action plans might not fit any more to the social construction and would thus prevent useful interactions. Therefore, a changing construction of a situation can lead to a redefinition of actor's substantial interests. Secondly, when the very ideas on which substantial interests are based change during interactions, the substantial interests might themselves change in turn.

	Rationalist approaches	Constructivist approaches
Substantial Interests and strategic positions	Endogenous strategic positions, exogenous substantial interests	Irrelevance of strategic positions, endogenous substantial interests
Rationality	Strategic rationality (means – ends calculations govern actions)	Communicative rationality (actions are embedded in social contexts and communicative in nature, thereby interests are at disposition)
Institutions	Institutions are regulative (costs implications enable or prevent certain actions)	Institutions are regulative and constitutive (enable or prevent certain actions; define actors' identities and influence interests)
Typical speech acts in interactions	Bargaining acts (demands, threats, concessions)	Arguments (propositions with reasons related to the intersubjective world)
Potential impact of communicated ideas	Adaptation of strategic positions to new ideas on costly external constraints; substantial interests remain fix	Change of substantial interests to new ideas on truth, rightfulness or appropriateness, strategic positions remain irrelevant

Table 1 Ontological assumptions

Constructivist approaches do not establish complete new research agendas, but often inquire into the same empirical phenomena as rationalist approaches. Like their rationalist counterparts, constructivist theories on the war and peace in the international system (Wendt 1999), on compliance with international norms (Checkel 2001; Checkel 1999b, Finnemore/Sikkink 1998), and on the influence of actors without formal power (Christiansen 2002, Christiansen et al. 2002, Christiansen/Jørgensen 1998; Elgström/Jönsson 2000, Young 1991b) provide empirical evidence for their hypotheses. Competing hypotheses that additionally refer to empirical evidence are potential falsifications. However, hypotheses need not be completely dismissed when scope conditions for competing hypotheses can be clarified, so that overlaps are avoided. As argued here, the latter point of departure leads to a difficult, but fruitful way in handling competing constructivist and rationalist approaches. The debate on the range of influence of the European Commission as an actor lacking formal bargaining power illustrates the added value of such an integrated approach.

Theoretically consistent rationalist approaches implicitly conceptualise interactions as bargaining processes. During interactions, actors adapt their strategic positions to the bargaining power of other actors as constraints for the pursuance of their (exogenously defined and fix) substantial interests. Intergovernmentalism is an example for a substantial theory of IR that rests on rationalist action-theoretical foundations (Moravcsik 1998, Hoffmann 1966, Hoffmann 1982, Taylor 1983). This approach theorizes that the Commission cannot exert influence via bargaining (posing threats, demands or concessions to member states), since it lacks formal votes (as bargaining power) in the Council of Ministers. However, the European Commission can improve the efficiency of interstate-bargaining though detecting existing state interests (Moravcsik 1999: 283-285) or through mediating efforts (arranging package-deals, issue-linkages, and side-payments) (Hoffmann 1966: 888, Taylor 1983: 101, 109, Tranholm-Mikkelsen 1991).

Constructivist approaches presume that interactions are characterised by the exchange of arguments. During processes of arguing, communicated ideas can facilitate changes in actors' substantial policy interests (Risse 2001; Risse 2004). Since formal bargaining power does not matter, actors such as the European Commission can exert substantial influence in the Council of Ministers, if the Commission succeeds in persuading member states. The Commission is especially successful in exerting substantial influence on EU policies, if the Commission possesses an ideational advantage and can develop new and innovative arguments (Adler 1992, Adler/Haas 1992, Edler 2000, Joerges/Neyer 1997b, Joerges/Neyer 1998: 222-223; Kohler-Koch 1996: 205; Christiansen 2002, Christiansen et al. 2002, Christiansen/Jørgensen 1998; Elgström/Jönsson 2000, Young 1991b).³

Empirical studies highlight that arguing and bargaining coexist in interactions in the European Union (Elgström/Jönsson 2000, Edler 2000, Panke 2002). This indicates that rationalist and constructivist accounts only explain parts of the complex reality of social interactions, albeit different ones. Rationalist and constructivist approaches with similar substantial foci are not necessarily mutu-

³ Intergovernmental approaches formulate a similar scope condition, but attribute efficiency-increasing instead of substantial influence to its presence: The European Commission is especially effective in mediating between member states, if it possess an informational advantage (Moravcsik 1997, Moravcsik 1999).

ally exclusive. They might complement one another and provide a more comprehensive explanation of the empirical phenomena in question, if scope conditions for both approaches can be developed in order to avoid contradictory claims. Ideal scope conditions would distinguish spheres of substantial influence from spheres in which the Commissions' influence is confined to increasing efficiency. In order to solve the puzzle of the varying influence of the Commission in the Council of Ministers, it is crucial to elaborate on contextual conditions, under which either rationalist or constructivist approaches offer a more adequate account of the complex reality of social interactions. Therefore, the next section discusses prominent bridges between approaches.

II. Bridge Building Approaches

The Habermasian concept of communicative action as alternative to rationalist logic of strategic action became prominent a decade ago. According to the communicative logic of action actors are prepared to change their ideas in the wake of the better argument (Müller 1994).⁴ The first stage of the German IR debate crystallised around the questions whether communicative action actually exists and whether the modelling of communicative action contributes to theories of International Relations. In order to distinguish strategic from communicative action empirically, typical speech acts were linked to both logics of action (Müller 1994, Müller 1995, Risse-Kappen 1995). Whereas bargaining is the mode of communication that is attributed to strategic action (Keck 1995, Keck 1997a, Schneider 1994), communicative action is characterised by arguing. As soon as empirical insights pointed towards the coexistence of arguing and bargaining in international negotiations the emphasis of the debate shifted (Müller 2002, Risse 2003, Zangl/Zürn 1996; Elgström/Jönsson 2000). The next step was concerned with the quest for contextual conditions facilitating communicative action. Habermas' earlier writings and the distinction between the definition of a situation and the co-ordination of action plans served as basis for the development of hypotheses

⁴ Strategic rational actors calculate means-end relationships, when they pursue their exogenously given and fix substantial interests (Fearon/Wendt 2002, Keck 1997b, Schneider 1994). The logic of communicative action, by contrast, assumes that actors transcend substantial interests and strategic preferences, in order to achieve mutual understandings during interactions (Verstaendigung) (Habermas 1995).

on spheres in which the different logics of action are ideally located (Habermas 1995a): Actors cannot engage in strategic action but only use communicative action if there is no common construction of the situation (see also Christiansen 2002: 36, Elgström 2000, Elgström/Jönsson 2000: 692-693; Müller 1995). Other approaches, such as Esser's frame selection model, are biased towards rationalism and assume a primacy of strategic action serving as the meta rationale guiding actors' conduct (Esser 2004). Both approaches are biased in favour of the 'natural' logic of action, when contextual conditions are examined which either hinder the evolution of the primary logic of action or favour the evolution of the secondary logic of action.⁵

Constructivist and rationalist action-theoretical assumptions are mutually exclusive. Consequently, it is impossible to construct an overarching meta-logic that equally encompasses the logic of strategic and of communicative action. Besides biases resulting from one-sided action-theoretical recurrences, "first generation" bridge building approaches suffered from two further shortcomings. First, causal chains between contextual factors and modes of action are very weak. Even propositions deduced from the Habermasian discourse theory are not convincing.⁶ Although deliberations in normative *discourse theory* presupposes that persuasion can take place, its transfer to the *empirical-analytical level*, according to which approximations to the ideal discourse conditions favour the logic of communicative action, remains unexplained. Moreover, even interactions under approximated ideal discourse conditions face the risk of dissent. Dissent

⁵ The discussion on the role of 'transparency' illustrates the influence of action-theoretical assumptions. Saretzki's implicitly assumes communicative action as dominant: Whenever a triadic structure can be established, communicative action will take place. Saretzki argues that the public can serve as a standard for the evaluation of arguments and allows, therefore, for the required triadic structure (Saretzki 1996). This leads to the hypothesis that public settings favour communicative action (see also Risse 1999). Contrary, Checkel claims that arguing is endorsed by private settings, because the actors are then freed of the pressure to make their marks (which is only important for means-ends calculations of strategic rational actors) (Checkel 1999a: 549, Checkel 2001: 563). The discrepancy of both hypotheses stems from the different logics of actions that are presumed to be primary. The assumption of the logic of communicative action as naturally predominant leads to the proposition that public settings favour processes of persuasion. Checkel's hypotheses that private settings are conducive to processes of persuasion, by contrast, is based on the strategic logic of action.

⁶ The Habermasian discourse theory aims at the development of propositions about ideal decision making procedures for modern societies, as procedures allowing for deliberation and thus for legitimate outcomes (Habermas 1983, Habermas 1995a, Habermas 1995b see also Schaal/Strecker 1999).

cannot be theorized, if the Habermasian normative theory is transferred to the empirical-analytical level.

Second, speech acts of arguing are not exclusively linked to communicative action. For strategic actors, rhetorically recurring to arguments instead to bargaining acts might be a rational means to pursue fix substantial interests (Schimmelfennig 2003, Schimmelfenning 1997). Since actors can use arguments without being open to changes of substantial policy interests themselves (Schimmelfennig 2003, Schimmelfenning 1997), and since empirical insights pointed to the coexistence of arguing and bargaining speech acts (Holzinger 2001, Holzinger 2004; Elgström/Jönsson 2000; Ulbert 2003, Ulbert et al. 2004), the mere presence of argumentative speech acts cannot serve as a good indicator for communicative action and processes of persuasion.

While the “first generation” of bridge-building approaches inquired whether contexts facilitate the recurrence of rationalist or constructivist logics of action and the associated speech acts, the “second generation” overcame the above problems in focusing on the effectiveness of argumentative speech acts. Instead of inquiring into conditions and their impact on the applied logic of action, newer bridge-building approaches focus on the conditions under which arguments make a difference: They asked ‘When is arguing effective?’ According to these approaches, a high degree of institutionalisation is conducive to effective arguing (Deitelhoff/Müller 2005; Zangl/Zürn 1999: 943). High norm density and high institutionalisation approximate a common life world, which, in turn, serve as a presupposition to successful communicative action and effective arguing (Habermas 1995a). In addition, “second generation” bridge-building approaches emphasize contextual variables such as transparency. They claim that public settings strengthen effective argumentation (Elster 1989 Risse 1999; Risse 2003) because the public serves as substitute for a common ideational reference system (Saretzki 1996). Yet, for two reasons these bridges are also problematic. First, approaches inquiring into the effectiveness of arguments presuppose that arguing takes place. They do not examine conditions for successful bargaining and cannot account for bargaining dynamics. Since arguing and bargaining coexist empirically (Holzinger 2001, Holzinger 2004; Elgström/Jönsson 2000; Ulbert 2003, Ulbert et al. 2004), approaches that exclusively focus on the effectiveness of arguing are biased towards constructivism. Second, the dependent variable “effectiveness of arguing” is not explicitly defined. A closer look on the proposed

causal mechanisms reveals that instances of effective arguing do not refer to processes of persuasion due to certain communicated ideas. Rather, contextual variables such as ‘transparency’ are assumed to accelerate the *quantity of argumentative speech acts*, which is presumed to facilitate persuasion. The focus on the quantity of argumentative speech acts, in turn, does not allow to distinguish between the varying qualities of arguments. As a consequence, “second generation” bridge-building approaches neglect that not every communicated argument is per se good and convincing. Likewise, not every bargaining threat is per se a costly external constraint to an actor’s action plan and facilitates the adaptation of strategic preferences.

In order to theorize different processes of ideational change (ranging from changes of substantial interests, over adaptations of strategic positions, to no changes at all) an unbiased bridge-building approach must inquire theoretically into the *quality of communicated ideas*.

III. The Systemic Approach to Interactions

This paragraph develops a new approach on interactions that relies not on (intentional) action-theories but on a behavioural assumption.⁷ It is not biased towards either rationalism or constructivism, since it does not presume either that communicative action has a primary status or that strategic action is primary. Most fundamentally, it starts from the *behavioural premise* that ideational changes are induced by processes which are not consciously controlled by the affected actors but unintentional (Zukin/Snyder 1984). This paper presumes that actors automatically filter relevant from irrelevant information communicated during interactions. Thus, irrelevant ideas are filtered without actors’ conscious motivation to do so. Without any conscious motivation and intention of actors, remaining new ideas could replace the very ideas underlying the strategic positions or substantial policy interests.⁸

⁷ Unlike action, which by its nature is intentional, behaviour is unintentional in character.

⁸ As discussed below, the systemic approach to interactions theorizes the likelihood for collective changes of interests or preferences, not individual ideational change. It merely inquires into contextual factors as necessary (not sufficient) variables that facilitate the production of either a consensus or a compromise (that rest on processes of collective ideational changes). The systemic approach on interaction focuses on the aggregate (all

The crucial question, thus, is: Under which conditions can different types of ideational change be expected? In order to develop propositions about ideal scopes of competing rationalist and constructivist approaches, the systemic approach distinguishes between processes of *individual ideational change* and processes of *collective ideational change*. Propositions on ideal scopes must be based on the prospects for processes of collective ideational change, because collective ideational change (as processes of ideational change of all interaction's participants) influences outcomes of interactions much more strongly than individual processes of ideational change (as ideational change of only some participants). Interactions are essential for both *ideational change of strategic positions* and *ideational change of substantial policy interests*, because interactions accelerate opportunities for ideational change by increasing the flow of ideas. However, the flow of ideas alone is not sufficient for the deduction of ideal scopes of rationalist and constructivist theories because it cannot account for the *type of ideational change* that might occur.

The systemic perspective on interactions rests on a behavioural assumption and is, therefore, no action-theory in itself. It avoids action-theoretical recurrences in distinguishing between contexts which are either especially conducive to changes of strategic positions or of substantial interests. A system is characterized by two necessary conditions. These are that "(a) a set of units or elements is interconnected so that changes in some elements or their relations produce changes in other parts of the system, and (b) the entire system exhibits properties and behaviours that are different from those of the parts" (Jervis 1997: 6). The totality of speech acts expressed by the participating actors (as the units of the system) composes a system of interaction.⁹ Within systems of interactions *collec-*

participants of an interaction that are required for the production of outcomes as either compromise or consensus) and not on single participants. Whether a specific new idea induces ideational change of a specific actor (sufficient condition) cannot be explained in the abstract and is not the subject-matter of the systemic approach.

⁹ Speech acts and logics of action can be distinguished analytically (see also Holzinger 2001, Müller 2002, Risse 2003). Whereas actors behaving according to the logic of communicative action can only use arguments, actors behaving according to the strategic logic of action or the logic of appropriateness can potentially use both types of speech acts, since the selection of the speech acts is subject to the type of rationality. It is, for example, strategically rational for an actor to use an argument instead of a speech act of bargaining, in order to pursue her interests, when her bargaining power is perceived as too low and the changes for influence are expected to be higher through arguing. Hence, from the fact that actors use arguments it cannot be deduced the actors follow the logic of communicative action and are themselves consciously motivated to become persuaded.

tive ideational changes are systemic effects of communicative exchanges. They are only likely under specific conditions related to the type and content of the dominant pattern of speech acts.

There are two types of speech acts: arguments or bargaining acts. An argument links a proposition to reasons related to the intersubjective world.¹⁰ A speech act of bargaining is characterized by a demand, a concession or a rejection, which can additionally be linked with a threat or reasons that are related to the subjective world. However, communicating one type of speech acts is not sufficient for inducing processes of collective ideational change (facilitating either compromises or consensus). Collective ideational change requires meaningful communication. Communication will not be meaningful if actors talk cross-purposes and cannot relate to each other. Meaningful communication, by contrast, presupposes that all participants share standards of how to evaluate the content of speech acts. Meaningful communication is characterized by the possibility that B (as well as the other participants) understands the content of the speech act of A, evaluates the quality of communicated ideas and replies to A in a manner that allows A (and also the other participants) to reply meaningful again (Panke 2002).

This analytical distinction fits well with the interactionist approach, since this approach links prospects for ideational change to the dominant pattern of speech acts in combination with systemic preconditions and **not** to logics of actions.

¹⁰ Both concepts, the subjective and the intersubjective world, are social constructions. Whereas all actors are affected more or less equally by the intersubjective world, the subjective world refers to the internal conditions (domestic constellations such as positions and influence of organized interests) with which an actor is confronted. His own subjective world affects an actor more intensively than other participants of interactions (who themselves face their own subjective worlds).

	Structure 'arguing'	Structure 'bargaining'
Type of dominant speech acts	Arguments (propositions with reasons related to the intersubjective world)	Bargaining acts (demands, threats, concessions, reasons related to the subjective world)
Shared standards for the evaluation of the content of speech acts	Common standard for truth or rightness or appropriateness	Common conception of what constitutes bargaining power and on the reputation of speakers
Systemic effect: possible influence of communicated ideas on the majority of actors	Change of substantial interests	Adaptation of strategic positions to new ideas on external constraints (e.g. bargaining threats)
Incrementally achieved results of interactions	Consensus	Compromise

Table 2

Two Structures in Systems of Interaction

In interactions based on the mutual exchange of meaningful speech acts, results (compromises or consensus) to which all participants can agree can be achieved incrementally (without voting or authoritative decision). Hence, *collective ideational change* can only take place when communication is meaningful. To generate meaningful interaction it is necessary to have a consensus among the actors of how the content (not the intention!) of speech acts is to be understood. Only when this precondition is fulfilled, meaningful communication is possible. In order to initiate processes of *collective ideational change* the contents of the speech acts must therefore fulfil certain criteria. Which criteria for the quality of the content of speech acts can be defined in the abstract?

Processes of collective ideational change of substantial interests presuppose two elements. The first necessary condition is that arguments are the dominant pattern of speech acts. Second, standards for the evaluation of the quality of ideas need to be shared among the actors. Such standards refer to what constitutes truth (causal ideas), rightness (normative ideas) or appropriateness (ideas on values) in a given context to a particular point in time (Habermas 1995a). When both conditions are fulfilled, I refer to this pattern of meaningful communication as 'arguing as a structure of interaction'. Only when arguing as the structure of interaction has emerged, it is likely for argumentative speech acts to lead the participants to question the ideas underlying their own substantial interests without having been consciously prepared or motivated before. A change of sub-

stantive preferences is possible, when the ideas underlying the original substantial interests are affected by the ideational change. Processes of ideational change of substantial interests can result in a consensus as outcomes of interactions.

There is a second pattern of meaningful communication: 'bargaining as the structure of interaction'. For bargaining as a structure of interaction to evolve, it is not only required that bargaining constitutes the predominant pattern of speech acts, but also that actors share a standard for the evaluation of credibility. Credibility encompasses two components: a subjective and an intersubjective part. The intersubjective standard to evaluate a bargaining speech act refers to the bargaining power of an actor. Bargaining power is a complex social construct, which does not only entail formal vetoes but also such elements as the preference intensity and the alternatives of action (Tsebelis 1990, Thomson et al. 2003). Regarding the subjective part, it is necessary that a positive attribution of a particular actor's reputation is undertaken by the other actors. Otherwise a threat, demand or concession is not meaningful because the other actors cannot rely on its realization. Moreover, it is necessary that actors share a common conception of bargaining power and a common perception of the actors' reputation for bargaining as the structure of interaction to evolve. Within bargaining as the structure of interaction, ideational change of strategic positions is likely and can result in a compromise, when new ideas on the distribution and nature of external constraints (such as the costs imposed by threats) are communicated and evaluated as threatening.

Only when a structure of interaction has evolved, it is likely that the participants of an interaction (without having been consciously prepared or motivated before) unintentionally start to question, in reaction to communicated ideas, the ideas underlying their own strategic preferences and/or substantial interests. When ideational change occurs, a change of strategic preferences or substantial interests can be expected. If new ideas on appropriateness, rightfulness or truth are circulated and commonly assessed as good, ideational change will be likely and facilitate changes of actors' substantial interests. The chances for ideational changes of strategic positions will be accelerated if bargaining dynamics evolve and if communicated new ideas on external constraints are evaluated as threatening.

The systemic approach on interactions accounts for the coexistence of argumentative speech acts and speech acts of bargaining without generating ten-

sions between them (Panke 2002). It is a heuristic yardstick for conceptualizing the potential impact of communicates ideas ranging from the absence of ideational change, over ideational change of strategic positions, to ideational change of substantial interests. Since the systemic approach abstracts from logics of action, it bridges the gap between rationalist and constructivist theories with similar substantial foci. Yet it does so without introducing a bias towards either constructivism or rationalism. In applying the systemic approach as a heuristic instrument, contextual preconditions for the evolution or maintenance of any of the structures of interaction (shared reference systems) are inquired into in the next paragraph. Constructivist hypotheses on the influence of the Commission within the Council of Ministers provide good accounts of these parts of the complex social reality, in which actors share argumentative reference systems, but no common reference system for bargaining. Likewise, rationalist hypotheses most adequately capture dynamics of social interactions if actors share a common conception of what constitutes bargaining power but not for truth, rightfulness and appropriateness. If actors share no reference systems at all, none of the structures of interaction can emerge. As a consequence, actors can either abstain from a policy outcome altogether or recur to authoritative decision-making or voting. If actors share reference systems for arguing and bargaining, and both types of ideas are circulated frequently, the systemic approach on interactions cannot provide a prediction of whether bargaining dynamics, changes of strategic positions, and compromise or whether arguing dynamics, changes of substantial interests and consensus will ultimately prevail.

IV. The Influence of the European Commission within the Council of Ministers

This section illustrates the value added of the systemic approach as a heuristic yardstick. It does so by accounting for the varying influence of the European Commission in the Council of Ministers which conventional approaches cannot cope with. It develops hypotheses on the impact of various contextual variables on the evolution of arguing or bargaining as structure of interaction.

Unlike the member states, the European Commission has no vote and, therefore, no formal bargaining power in the Council of Ministers. As a consequence, the Commission's primary influence is communicative in nature (voice

instead of veto). With regard to the nature of the Commission's influence, there is disagreement between intergovernmental and supranational theories of European integration. Theories informed by rationalism (e.g. intergovernmentalism), on the one hand, conceptualize the Council of Ministers as an arena for inter-state bargaining. Since the Commission has access to the Council but no vote, it cannot pursue own substantial interests via bargaining. Instead of substantial influence on policy-outcomes, the Commission can only increase the efficiency of inter-state bargaining via means of activation and mediation – if the Commission possesses an informational advantage vis-à-vis the member states (Hoffmann 1966, Hoffmann 1982, Moravcsik 1993, Moravcsik 1997, Moravcsik 1999). Theories informed by constructivist action-theoretical foundations, on the other hand, conceptualize the Commission as a supranational entrepreneur with substantial influence on policy outcomes of the Council of Ministers – despite its lack of formal votes. During processes of argumentation, the Commission can persuade state actors by means of the better argument (Edler 2000, Joerges 2000, Joerges 2001, Joerges/Neyer 1997a, Joerges/Neyer 1998, Young 1991a, Young 1999).

Theories drawing on rationalist and constructivist action-theories arrive at different theoretical propositions regarding the range of influence of the European Commission and also present empirical evidence for their claims (Elgström/Jönsson 2000, Moravcsik 1999, Young 1999, Sandholtz/Zysman 1989). Instead of counting empirical evidence of competing hypotheses as mutually disconfirming, this paper specifies the scope conditions for both types of hypotheses. The systemic approach on interactions resolves contradicting expectations on the Commission's influence in the Council of Ministers through contextualisation. It examines whether contextual variables influence the impact of communicated ideas, ranging from ideational change of strategic positions to ideational change of substantial interests. In order to develop scope conditions for hypotheses on the influence of the Commission, this paragraph inquires whether prominent contextual variables facilitate the presence of common evaluative standards in the Council of Minister. If it is likely that actors share standards for bargaining power, but not for assessing the quality of arguments, rationalist accounts will be better equipped in adequately grasping the Commission's *efficiency increasing influence*. Constructivist approaches will better account for the Commission's *substantial influence* on policy outcomes, if contex-

tual conditions facilitate shared reference systems for common assessments of arguments, while a shared evaluative standard for bargaining power is lacking.

The next step discusses policy and polity variables and inquires whether they affect the likelihood that actors share either of the two reference systems in the Council of Ministers.

In general, with truth, rightness and appropriateness, there are three possible standards on which the quality of arguments could be evaluated (Habermas 1995a). While truth is a standard often shared between actors in the Council of Ministers, rightfulness and appropriateness less likely serve as common evaluative yardsticks for the quality of communicated arguments.

Appropriateness serves as reference standard for the quality of ideas relating to values and is constituted by axiomatic value interpretations (meaning, content, status, and scope) (Habermas 1995a: 41). Value interpretations are diffused through socialisation (Habermas 1995a: 40-42), hence, it is unlikely that actors on the European level share a standard for questions of values (appropriateness), because ideological and cultural diversity facilitates differences in the socialization.¹¹ As a consequence, arguing cannot be expected as a structure of interaction with regard to elements of appropriateness.

Normative ideas express common interests and are evaluated in regard to the standard of rightness (Habermas 1992, Habermas 1995b). The quality of normative ideas is measured by the extent to which they articulate the common interest (Habermas 1995a: 42). As long as normative ideas are exchanged in order to factor out what is not in the common interest, actors most likely share a vaguely defined standard for rightfulness. Yet, when norms are positively defined in content and scope, it is unlikely that a common evaluative standard still exists. The scope of a new norm most likely overlaps with other norms on the European, national or regional levels. Scope conflicts, however, cannot be resolved by reference to only a single common interest. Rather, norm hierarchies have to be established. For the structure of interaction 'arguing' to be maintained, this would require that the actors share a hierarchy of standards. In the European context,

¹¹ The issue of how far the engagement within European institutions leads to the identity changes of the participating actors is highly debated (see Beyers 1998, Beyers/Dierrickk 1998, Laffan 1998 vs. Hooghe 2002, Wessels 1998). The debate, however, centres rather on the question of degree of socialisation into European institutions rather than on the question of whether the identities of the actors are identical.

cultural and political diversity suggests that there is no shared overarching hierarchy of standards. Hence, one can expect that bargaining as the structure of interaction evolves at the end of interactions.¹²

The standard of truth encompasses epistemological and methodological principles and sometimes even ontological elements. Usually it is shared within a scientific community (Habermas 1995a: 37-43). For questions of truth, arguing as the structure of interaction can most likely evolve and, in turn, facilitate ideational change of substantial interests. Especially at the lower levels of the Council of Ministers, such as the working groups but also in the COREPER, actors are specialised experts and it is very likely that they share a standard for what constitutes truth.

Distributive and re-distributive issues are inherently value-laden with regard to questions of distributional justice (Saretzki 1996: 35-36). Therefore, they facilitate the evolution of bargaining as the structure of interaction. Truth aspects, by contrast, are of high relevance for *regulative issues* and are – compared to value-laden issues – conducive to the development of arguing as the structure of interaction.

Institutional differentiation could also influence the evolution of structures of interaction. The Council of Ministers is strongly differentiated in a vertical manner. On the lowest level are the working groups, as highly specialized arenas composed of national experts. The high level of shared expertise makes recurrences to common standards for the evaluation of truth-related arguments very likely. Also, their common professional background facilitates that experts share at least a vague common standard for rightfulness, in order to funnel common interests in their area of specialisation (see also Checkel 1999a: 549). Yet, when norm conflicts arise because norm hierarchies are required, differences in na-

¹² The 'hierarchy of norms' argument finds empirical support in studies on the development of the norm 'gender mainstreaming' in the developmental aid policy of the European Union. Even though there is a widespread consensus among the European member states that the norm of gender mainstreaming expresses a common interest, the norm was defined through bargaining at the end of the interactions (Elgström 2000, Elgström 2001). While Elgström cannot explain this finding, the systemic perspective suggests that 'gender mainstreaming' is in conflict with scope and content of other norms inherent in the focal idea 'good governance'. Conflicts over norms cannot be resolved by reference to either one of the standards for rightness. Solving norm conflicts within arguing as the structure of interaction would require that actors share an overarching common standard for the hierarchy of norms. This however, cannot be expected in the Council of Ministers

tional legal landscapes and regulatory traditions facilitate a collapse of arguing as the structure of interactions. Yet, most likely bargaining as the structure of interaction cannot evolve, since the experts lack shared conceptions of what political bargaining power is. At the same time, formal bargaining power cannot serve as a common yardstick, since formal voting mechanisms are absent in working groups. The loophole for such instances is delegation to the next higher level, the COREPER (Committee of Permanent Representatives). The COREPER is an arena composed of national delegates on the diplomatic and bureaucratic level. Compared to working groups, the level of shared expertise is lower and the COREPER is more strongly politicized. This is conducive to a shared conception of political bargaining power, even though formal voting procedures are lacking. Therefore, in the COREPER bargaining as the structure of interactions can evolve besides arguing, depending on the type of issue at hand (distributive and redistributive vs. regulative). Yet, if arguing and bargaining as structures of interactions break down, because common norm hierarchies are absent, the issue can be referred for decision to the ministerial level. This arena is highly politicized and structured by formal voting procedures. Therefore, it is most likely that actors share a common standard for assessing the quality of bargaining acts on the ministerial level. At the same time, specialization and shared expertise decrease compared with the COREPER. In addition, while working groups and COREPER engage in preparatory tasks, the Ministers are ultimately responsible for definitely defining scope and content of the norm. Together, both aspects diminish the likelihood that arguing as the structure of interaction can evolve and be maintained on the ministerial level in the Council and facilitate bargaining as the structure of interaction.

Interactions within the working groups, the COREPER, and the ministerial level in the Council of Ministers take place in the 'shadow of the vote'. In rationalist approaches, such as intergovernmentalism, *voting procedures* are central for the explanation of outcomes. The distribution of votes influences the bargaining power of states, and differences in bargaining power, in turn, are reflected in content and scope of compromises. Within the Council of Ministers there are different voting modalities (varying between unanimity and weighted

and the IGCs because of the diversity among the member-states and the richness of norms on the European level.

votes). Hence, it is interesting whether they influence the prospects for arguing and consensus or bargaining and compromise. The systemic approach to interactions suggests that voting rules (simple or qualified majority, equal or weighted votes, unanimity) are irrelevant for the evolution of arguing or bargaining as structures of interaction. While the presence of voting rules is important for the likelihood that actors share a common conception of what constitutes bargaining power, there is no logical connection between different types of voting procedures and the likelihood that bargaining as a structure of interaction develops or is maintained. Comparing unanimity with simply majority rule, the difference in the formal bargaining power is in the distribution of veto positions. While every actor can exert a formal veto preventing a policy outcome under unanimity rule, only some actors can do so under majority voting. Yet, the number of effective veto players does not affect the likelihood with which actors share the perception that formal vetoes of others threaten the pursuance of own policy interests. Hence, the type of voting procedures does not facilitate bargaining or arguing as the structure of interaction, while the existence of any formal voting rule in the arena of interaction facilitates bargaining as a structure of interaction.

Based on the centrality of the Habermasian concept of a common 'lifeworld' (Habermas 1992), first and second generation bridge-building approaches informed by constructivist reasoning often claim that a high *degree of norm density* resembles a common lifeworld, which facilitates effective argumentation, changes of substantial interests and consensus (Deitelhoff 2003, Risse 2003, Göler/Marhold 2003, Deitelhoff/Müller 2005). Yet, such accounts are not only biased towards constructivism, but also ignore the possibility that existing norms could have been established through bargaining and are expressions of compromise rather than of normative consensus. The systemic approach to interaction, by contrast, suggests that a high norm diversity is not conducive to effective argumentation and consensus, but to bargaining and compromises. A high diversity of norms increases the possibility that norm conflicts arise regarding content or scope. This requires the establishment of a norm hierarchy, which, in turn, furthers the development of bargaining as the structure of interaction.

Bridge-building approaches assuming the superiority of communicative to strategic action claim that a high *level of transparency* increases the impact of arguments, because the public facilitates the triadic structure of arguing (Saretzki

1996).¹³ On the contrary, lines of reasoning fitting well with rationalist action theoretical assumptions highlight that closed doors free actors from public pressure of interest representation (Checkel 2001: 563). According to this argumentation, in-camera settings facilitate effective argumentation, because public constraints on changes of substantial interests can be side-stepped by pretending bargaining dynamics and restraints (tying-hands strategy) (Putnam 1988).

The systemic approach to interaction avoids one-sided action theoretical assumptions and comes to a different assessment. Transparency in itself does not facilitate a specific type of speech act. Concerning some issues, an audience might regard arguments as appropriate speech acts, while in others it might wish for interest-representation via bargaining speech acts. Transparency is also not conducive to a specific standard for the evaluation of ideas (truth, rightness, and appropriateness or a common conception of bargaining power). In public as well as in in-camera settings, actors can principally recur to all standards alike. Hence, 'transparency' has no influence on the likelihood that arguing or bargaining can evolve as structures of interaction.

In a nutshell, the expected influence of the European Commission varies according to the issue at hand, the level on which it is dealt with and the diversity of existing prior norms. All contextual factors that are conducive to arguing as the structure of interaction characterize the ideal scope of constructivist approaches. Variables such as regulative issues, working groups, and low normative diversity open a window of opportunity for the European Commission that can be used for

¹³ The analytical distinction between speech acts and logics of action is an important progress, on which the concept of argumentative self-entrapment is built (Risse 1999, Risse 2000, Risse 2003). According to his argumentation, the public forces state actors to use argumentative speech acts, regardless of the underlying logic of action. Changes of positions occur not because the actors are intrinsically motivated to become persuaded, but rather because they become caught by their own arguments, which cannot be recalled in public without a loss of reputation. Thus, the public as a third standard brings about an argumentative dynamic. However, this line of reasoning presupposes that the public appreciates arguing of their representatives more than bargaining. This implicit assumption, however, might not be generally valid, because in some situations the public might expect their representatives to push through the 'national interest' or the preferences of organised interests through bargaining. Additionally, the concept of argumentative self-entrapment is not based on unitary assumptions about the level of strategic rationality. On the one hand, it presupposes perfectly strategic actors, calculating their reputational costs. At the same time, however, it is implicitly assumed that the actors are hardly rational regarding the selection of their speech acts, since they would otherwise anticipate the argumentative trap and eventually avoid the use of arguments at all. Because of these shortcomings, it can not generally be upheld that transparency allows the public to operate as a third standard which automatically favours arguing.

substantial influence on outputs via strategies of persuasion (necessary condition). However, the Commission possesses not per se better arguments: Whether or not the Commission's ideas win the ideational competition, depends on their innovative quality and uniqueness (c.f. Adler 1992, Adler/Haas 1992, Edler 2000, Joerges/Neyer 1997b, Joerges/Neyer 1998: 222-223; Elgström/Jönsson 2000, Young 1991b). All contextual factors facilitating bargaining as the structure of interaction (redistributive and distributive issues, ministerial level, and high normative diversity) resemble the ideal scope of rationalist approaches. When these variables are present, the Commission's influence is most likely restricted to increasing the efficiency of inter-state bargaining. Again, bargaining as the structure of interaction is only one necessary condition for Commission's influence. In addition, the Commission must possess informational advantages and be perceived as neutral arbiter in order to mediate between the member states or activate their true positions (c.f. Moravcsik 1997, Moravcsik 1999).

V. Conclusion: The Added Value of A Systemic Approach on Interactions

Rationalist and constructivist theories attribute a different influence to the European Commission as an actor with access to the Council of Ministers but without vote. Whereas theories based on rationalist assumptions hypothesize that the Commission can exert only efficiency-increasing influence in the bargaining process within the Council, approaches informed by constructivism highlights substantial influence via arguing. Given the empirical variance of the Commission's influence (compare i.e. Moravcsik 1998, Sandholtz 1992, Sandholtz/Zysman 1989) and the empirical finding that speech acts of arguing and bargaining coexist in interactions on the European level (Elgström/Jönsson 2000; Müller/Risse 2001), bridging the gap between constructivist and rationalist approaches becomes a crucial task (Checkel 2000, Wiener 2003). In order to resolve the contradictions and assign ideal scopes to rationalist and constructivist theories, this paper developed a systemic approach to interactions. This bridge-building approach permeates incompatible rationalist and constructivist action theoretical assumptions, which are responsible for the focus on either ideational change of strategic positions or ideational change of substantial interests. In

combining a broad behavioural premise with a systemic approach, it can account for the varying impact of communicated ideas.

<i>The Influence of the European Commission</i>		
Contextual variables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • low diversity of norms, low overlap between content and scope of norms • regulative issues • low level of hierarchy in the Council (Working Groups or COREPER) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high diversity of norms: necessity of establishing norm hierarchies • distributive and re-distributive issues • high level of hierarchy (level of Ministers in the Council)
Impact of contextual variables	<p>→ facilitates <i>arguing</i> as the structure of interactions</p> <p>→ facilitates <i>changes of substantial interests</i></p>	<p>→ facilitates <i>bargaining</i> as the structure of interactions</p> <p>→ facilitates <i>changes of strategic positions</i></p>
Expected influence of the Commission	Substantial influence	Efficiency-increasing
Ideal scope of theories	Constructivist hypotheses	Rationalist hypotheses

Conventional bridge building approaches hypothesize that highly institutionalized arenas and settings with high transparency are better theorized by constructivist approaches. This assessment is due to a pro-constructivist bias. The systemic approach on interaction, by contrast, suggests that both variables have no influence at all on the evolution of either one of the structures of interaction. Different voting procedures do also not influence the dynamic of interaction towards either bargaining or arguing. According to the bridge building approach of this paper, constructivist approaches are ideally applied to interactions on low levels of hierarchy, when they deal with regulative issues. Given that actors mutually attribute credibility and share ideas of what constitutes bargaining power, rationalist approaches are better suited to provide hypotheses for late stages of interaction (when a hierarchy of norms has to be established), namely for distributive and re-distributive issues and for interactions on the ministerial level.

Constructivism challenged the formerly dominating rationalist paradigm and led to the production of alternative hypotheses. Especially through “gap-

bridging” approaches, a rich and fruitful dialogue between both camps was initiated. However, bridges were often built on uneven fundamentals, because they explicitly or implicitly recurred to action theories and introduced one-sided biases. The systemic approach on interaction abstains from one-sided ontological assumptions and does not enter the debate on the better micro-foundation (which cannot be resolved). Instead of one-sided action theoretical presumptions, it ultimately relies on a behavioral assumption. This allows for an alternative focus on dynamics of interactions, which conceptualizes two types of ideational change (substantial interests, strategic positions) as systemic effects in interactions, for which the actors were not consciously prepared or motivated.

The added value of the systemic approach is threefold. (1) On the theoretical level, the systemic approach on interactions offers a bridge between rationalism and constructivism. It serves as an overarching frame based on which ideal scopes of rationalist and of constructivist approaches with similar substantial foci can be deduced. (2) On the level of substantive theories, the systemic approach on interactions is a heuristic yardstick that allows for a comprehensive conceptualization of varying patterns of influence of actors with access to arenas of interaction in which they lack formal bargaining power (the European Commission, secretariats, or NGOs). (3) Finally, the systemic approach has implications for the conduct of empirical research on interactions. The emphasis of the systemic approach is less on the transport of ideas and not at all on actor’s motivations for the selection of speech acts of arguing or bargaining. Rather, the empirical analysis concentrates on the contextual preconditions for assessments of the quality of communicated ideas, which allow for processes of two types of ideational change (changes of strategic positions, changes of substantial policy interests). Hence, it could be fruitful for empirical studies concerned with outcomes of interactions to analyze whether the preconditions for either one of the structures of interactions (shared standards of reference/ shared conception of what constitutes bargaining power, mutual attribution of credibility) are present in specific interactions.

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