



**UNIMORE**  
UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI  
MODENA E REGGIO EMILIA



Cycle of seminars organised as part of the PhD Course in Labour, Development and Innovation, Unimore - Marco Biagi Foundation

Visiting professor call

Marco Biagi Department of Economics

## **Cycle of seminars: Smart city management through institutional theories and soft data analysis**

### **Evgenii Aleksandrov**

Associate Professor,  
Nord University Business School  
Bodø, Norway

This seminar series explores the intersection of institutional theories, smart city management and qualitative data analysis. Students will gain insights into contemporary institutional theory, learn about the dynamics of managing smart city initiatives, and develop skills in analyzing 'soft' data. Through these interconnected topics, participants will understand how theoretical frameworks, practical management strategies, and qualitative research methods can be integrated to address the complexities of modern urban development and can make connections to their own research topics.

The cycle of seminars will be taught in English and assume active participation of students in generated discussions along with the reading of the literature for each seminar.

### **SEMINAR 1**

April 03, 2025 (Thursday) 10:00 -12:00; 13:00 - 15:00 – Room 32, Marco Biagi Foundation

---

#### **Institutional theory and its contemporary streams: application to own research and examples from smart city and management research**

In today's academic landscape, there's a growing recognition of the importance of interdisciplinary approaches in management research. One key area of focus is institutional theory, which offers valuable insights into how organizations and institutions operate and evolve. This seminar aims to enhance students' understanding of institutional theory, particularly its contemporary streams. We will delve into foundational concepts, such as institutional logics, institutional entrepreneurship, and institutional work. Additionally, we'll explore how these ideas can be applied to real-world research projects, with examples from the development of smart cities.

Key content:

- *Covering the role of theory in research and value of institutional theory in particular*
- *Unpacking traditional streams of institutional theory unpacking such concepts as institution, institutionalization, isomorphism, decoupling*

- *Unpacking contemporary streams of institutional theory, including institutional logics, institutional work and institutional entrepreneurship*
- *Examples from smart city and management field*

### Suggested readings:

- Meyer, J. W., Greenwood, R., & Oliver, C. (2017). Reflections on institutional theories of organizations. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, T. B. Lawrence, & R. E. Meyer (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of organizational institutionalism* (2nd ed., pp. 831–852). Sage.
- Battilana, J., Leca, B., & Boxenbaum, E. (2009), “How actors change institutions: towards a theory of institutional entrepreneurship”, *The Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 3 No.1, pp. 65-107
- Johansen, C. B., & Waldorff, S. B. (2017), “What are Institutional Logics - and Where is the Perspective Taking Us?”, In Mazza, C., Meyer, R., Krucken, G. & Walgenbach, P. (Eds.), *New Themes in Institutional Analysis: Topics and Issues from European Research*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar
- Lawrence, T., Suddaby, R. and Leca, B. (2009), “Introduction: Theorizing and studying institutional work”, in Lawrence, T., Suddaby, R., and Leca, B. (Eds.), *Institutional Work: Actors and Agency in Institutional Studies of Organizations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.1-27
- Thornton, P. H., Ocasio, W. and Lounsbury, M. (2012), *The Institutional Logics Perspective. A new approach to culture, structure, and process*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 50-74.

## SEMINAR 2

April 10, 2025 (Thursday) 10:00 -12:00; 13:00 - 15:00 – Room 32, Marco Biagi Foundation

---

### Smart city management dynamics: role of metrics, politics, bureaucratization and citizens

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the adoption of smart initiatives by organizations and cities. These initiatives involve the use of advanced technologies and digitalization to enhance services and products. However, successfully implementing these initiatives requires specialized knowledge and skills in various areas, including assessment, management, and governance. One prominent example of such initiatives is the Smart City agenda, which aims to create sustainable and efficient urban environments. This seminar will explore the opportunities and challenges associated with smart initiatives, focusing not just on the technology itself, but on how it is managed. We will discuss why smart city initiatives alone are not a guaranteed solution for a sustainable future. Key topics will include the role of metrics, politics, bureaucratization, and citizen involvement. Based on the example of Arctic, we also cover how the context is important determinant to understand smart city initiatives.

#### Key content:

- *Covering idea of smart city for urban sustainability*
- *Revealing traditional vision on smart city development*
- *Opening up a critical view on urban dynamics and smart city development from position of metrics, politics, bureaucratization and citizens*
- *Examples from the research field*

### Suggested readings:

- Aleksandrov, E., & Dybtsyna, E. (2024). Smart cities for a sustainable Arctic? Introducing critical debate. *Polar Geography*, 1-21.
- Aleksandrov, E., Dybtsyna, E., Grossi, G., & Bourmistrov, A. (2022). Rankings for smart city dialogue? Opening up a critical scrutiny. *Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting & Financial Management*, 34(5), 622-643.
- Grossi, G., Meijer, A., & Sargiacomo, M. (2020). A public management perspective on smart cities: 'Urban auditing' for management, governance and accountability. *Public Management Review*, 22(5), 633-647.
- Khodachek, I., Aleksandrov, E., Nazarova, N., Grossi, G., & Bourmistrov, A. (2023). Smartocracy: Context entanglement of the smart city idea and bureaucracy in Russia. *Organization Studies*, 44(10), 1625-1647.
- Vanolo, A. (2014). Smartmentality: The smart city as disciplinary strategy. *Urban studies*, 51(5), 883-898.

## SEMINAR 3

April 17, 2025 (Thursday) 10:00 -12:00; 13:00 - 15:00 – Room 32, Marco Biagi Foundation

---

### Analysing soft data

This seminar is tailored for students interested in the nuances of qualitative data analysis. Participants will engage with various forms of 'soft' data, including interview transcripts, observation notes, and visual materials. The session will cover essential strategies for coding and interpreting qualitative data, with a focus on methodologies such as the Gioia method. Through practical exercises and collaborative discussions, students will learn how to transform raw data into structured, meaningful insights. This hands-on approach aims to build confidence and proficiency in navigating the complexities of qualitative research.

Key content:

- *Working with the qualitative data interpretation*
- *Connection of theory and data analysis – basics of strategy for analysis*
- *Interactive session - Analytical procedures and Gioia methodology*
- *Creation of data structure*

### Suggested readings:

- Alvesson, Mats, & Kärreman, Dan. (2007). Constructing mystery: Empirical matters in theory development. *Academy of management review*, 32(4), 1265–1281.
- Gehman, J., Glaser, V. L., Eisenhardt, K. M., Gioia, D., Langley, A., & Corley, K. G. (2018). Finding theory–method fit: A comparison of three qualitative approaches to theory building. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 27(3), 284-300.
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organizational research methods*, 16(1), 15-31.
- Langley, A. (1999). Strategies for theorizing from process data. *Academy of Management review*, 24(4), 691-710.
- Sætre, Alf Steiner, & Van de Ven, Andrew. (2021). Generating theory by abduction. *Academy of Management Review*, 46(4), 684–701.

*Each seminar will be organized in an interactive way, requiring the engagement and active participation of students. Interactive sessions will be included in each seminar.*

*After each seminar, there will be one time slot (in total 3 slots) during which students have the possibility to discuss the seminar topic with the professor. In addition, the professor will be available for ad-hoc individual meetings.*

**Coordinator of the cycle of seminars**

Sara Giovanna Mauro,  
Assistant Professor, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, "Marco Biagi" Department of  
Economics ([saragiovanna.mauro@unimore.it](mailto:saragiovanna.mauro@unimore.it))