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Reimagining Social Order Through Identity Economies: Towards A General Theory of Social Allocation

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Abstract

Contemporary social challenges increasingly demand interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration, yet efforts to bridge institutional, disciplinary, and community boundaries frequently encounter persistent structural resistance. This paper argues that such resistance cannot be fully understood through technical, organizational, or methodological explanations alone. Drawing on Identity Group Theory (IGT), this study proposes that interdisciplinary collaboration is fundamentally shaped by competing identity economies—structured systems through which groups regulate legitimacy, recognition, authority, and resource allocation.

Within academic, political, civic, and organizational environments, disciplines and institutions function not merely as knowledge producers, but as identity groups invested in preserving narrative legitimacy, boundary maintenance, and internal resource structures. As a result, attempts at collaboration often generate tensions rooted in competing identity narratives rather than purely practical obstacles. Using IGT as an interdisciplinary analytical framework, this paper examines how identity regulation both constrains and enables collaborative problem-solving across complex social systems.

By reconceptualizing interdisciplinary engagement as a negotiation among competing identity economies, this research offers a new explanatory model for understanding why collaborative initiatives succeed, fail, or reproduce existing inequalities. In doing so, the paper contributes to broader debates concerning institutional restructuring, equitable knowledge production, and global governance by demonstrating that effective collaboration requires not only methodological integration, but also the strategic negotiation of identity, legitimacy, and power. This approach positions Identity Group Theory as a novel framework for addressing twenty-first-century social complexity.

Keywords: Identity Economies; Identity Group Theory; Social Allocation; Social Order; Recognition; Belonging; Institutions; Identity