

# Cultural contingencies of social cohesion

## Philosophy

It is our hunch, and our experience in modelling, that whenever a proximate issue is in focus, more generic, basic contributors of social behaviour tend to fade out of focus. We also believe, based on observing the world, that there actually are generic aspects about social cohesion that always play a role, albeit in the background of proximate factors. These are for instance visible in the political dynamics of various societies around the world that show historic continuity across generations.

'Social cohesion' can mean many things, but since we build agent-based models, its meaning cannot extend beyond our agents' capabilities. For agents that can join and leave groups, we define social cohesion as the feeling of belonging together in one group; in a model where agents can act, it also manifests itself as the capacity for collective action of groups.

## National culture

Our ideas about generic issues of social cohesion find strong backup in the continuity and explanatory value of culture at the level of society (with nation as a proxy), as apparent from the work of scholars on culture such as Hofstede (G. Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) and Minkov (Minkov & Hofstede, 2012). The continued relevance of culture is argued convincingly by many scholars (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018; Smith, Fischer, Vignoles, & Bond, 2013; Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010). Although change is fast and ubiquitous, history repeats itself quite a bit, e.g. in politics, and this is because cultures are persistent as drivers of collective behaviour. Culture is relevant for all walks of life, in particular for defining the social structure of a society as more like a market, a family, a machine or a pyramid. This structure in turn is important for the dynamics of social cohesion. How can one integrate or split a market, how a pyramid? Building agent-based models that make culture happen can clarify social dynamics and cohesion (G. J. Hofstede, 2015).

## Social identity

Based on these 'facts of international history', we would like to create a foundational model of social cohesion. In everyday life, culture is 'carried' by social identity. People are not usually conscious of their culture in the academic sense, but they are acutely aware of their social identities and the behaviours they are supposed to show based on those identities. The GRASP meta-model of sociality (Gert Jan Hofstede, 2017) captures this.

Identities are usually theorised about by assuming that people have diverse identities. These identities can occur simultaneously: one can belong to several smaller groups as well as one larger society, and each of these identities can be salient depending on context. Social identities can motivate intergroup phenomena as response to status inequality due to social comparison (Brown, 2000). Here, the Social Identity approach (SIA) will provide us with a conceptual toolkit for refining our model. SIA proposes that social identification, and the perception of people as fellow group members (or outsiders), is a fundamental basis for collective behaviour (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner 1986; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987). SIA can help to explain how social context affects a certain identity and how this influences which normative in-group behaviours are salient. As groups have their own social norms and expected behaviours, when a particular social identity is salient the group members are expected to act within those norms. For our purposes, the processes that make people's attributions of group membership shift are particularly important. This includes both me believing to be part of a group, and others doing so (Dignum, Hofstede, & Prada, 2014). Building upon an ongoing review of the current state of ABMs that implement parts of SIA in model applications, we will discuss and include formalisations of social categorisation, saliency, identity, and the accompanying behaviours.

## Aims

We are thinking of two ABM versions to develop during the summer school.

## 1. Social Identity world

The first version would have no content other than group belonging. It requires us to precisely formulate how we conceptualise sociality and belonging, and to unambiguously implement these ideas. The resulting model can be seen as a refinement of GRASP world (Gert Jan Hofstede & Liu, 2019) using SIA notions.

## 2. Social Resource world

The second version would have resources, as well as norm- or value-based mechanisms to divide those resources. We do not have a developed case in mind, but concentrate on the generic situation. This is because any case immediately requires so many specifics that there is a risk to lose the principles from view. The main question we wish to address is how inequality in resources links to othering. We hypothesize that this relation is mediated by values (as not-necessarily-conscious mental attributes in the minds of individuals) and norms (as rules for distributing resources shared in groups). For instance, unequal resource distribution is seen as intrinsically a proper thing in hierarchical societies, but not in egalitarian ones.

## Data sources

The generic, society-level issues can be captured in the following data sources:

- World Values Survey, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp>. This is an ongoing research collaboration between countries all around the world, now in its 7<sup>th</sup> wave of data collection. It can be mined for longitudinal trends or cross-national comparisons.
- Hofstede 6D model, [www.geerthofstede.com](http://www.geerthofstede.com) (> Research and VSM > Dimension Data Matrix). This is the coherent database of Hofstede dimension scores, shown to have continued validity for understanding cross-national differences in all domains of life, from suicide rates, school performance, economic success, to political and governance systems.
- World Bank open data, <https://data.worldbank.org/>, with e.g. GINI coefficients and world development indexes.

## Extensions

If any participants have a case that could further specify the model, we could develop a third version implementing that case. For instance, a differentiation of the resources in spatial or quality terms could be interesting; a well-documented regional historic case could be illuminating. To compare the model to real world data, it is important to look for data that allows for the generic elements to remain in focus besides the proximate factors.

So far, in our model, values and norms are taken as given. This is realistic in the case of 'deep culture' as software of the mind. However, in the longer run – across many generations-, cultures are subject to selective pressures. If there are participants with experience in evolutionary models, we could explore how resource dynamics could feed back into cultural values.

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