

Application for EDAC-ESPAnet Winterschool 2014

Alexander Seymer, Department of Sociology, University Salzburg

Title:

Milieus as framework to analyze welfare attitudes transnationally?

Outline:

During the last decade, the interest in relating values and political attitudes increased due to a theoretical desire - Van Oorschot et al. (2008) called it the “cultural turn” - and the availability of data – foremost the European Social Survey. Despite the large amount of publications dealing with the issue, the results of these efforts to grasp the underlying dynamics are meagre. Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies focusing exclusively on micro and macro predictors support mostly narrow conclusions while the big picture is still missing.

The paper is based on the assumption that micro and macro differentiations may fall short in explaining the underlying mechanism in more general terms. To be more precise, I believe milieus as a meso level moderating the micro macro relationship may sort out some of the problems. Milieus are groups constituted by sharing a rather stable and group specific set of values and mentalities (Hradil 2012; Vester 2006) with an increased level of communication amongst group members (Schulze 2005). Of course the greater picture is beyond the scope of one paper, therefore the paper intends to address the measurement of milieus with large scale datasets currently available in a comparative manner as a first step to support such claims.

Theoretically, the paper builds on three different explanations for social milieus: habitus theory by Bourdieu (2001), social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (2001), and the individualization hypothesis by Beck (1992). Due to the

combination of values and mentalities, the concept of social milieus needs to be theoretically differentiated from social stratification concepts and from lifestyle research as well. Both will be discussed in the literature review of the paper leading to the analytical framework of combining values and mentalities in a two-dimensional space to distinguish milieus.

The empirical identification of milieus (H1) is only the first step in the paper as the milieus will be analyzed for different countries. Ideally, similarities in milieus may appear across European countries (H2), which could be interpreted as trends towards transnationalism. Nonetheless, it seems unlikely that the results will support one general pattern for all countries.

In a final step the different groups will be compared with respect to their welfare attitudes. Milieus are most interesting as moderator for individual behavior and thus need to be related to a context. Clearly, I expect to find differences in welfare attitudes across milieus (H3) to support my theoretical argument from the beginning. Beyond the confirmation of milieus as measurable meso concept suitable for welfare attitude research, a comparison of welfare attitudes across countries may lay out future research and further implications in more general terms.

Currently, two methods are still under consideration for the analysis - cluster analysis and latent class analysis. As my interest settles in a mixture of exploration of the specific positioning of the milieus and strong theoretical assumptions about certain disparities, both methods will be tested against the data in order to counterbalance methodological and theoretical considerations. The paper submitted by 10 January 2014 will contain only data from the European Social Survey, but the implied next step includes a validation of findings with other datasets like the European Value Survey or the International Social Survey Programme.

The paper contributes to the debate about attitude formation and tries to provide a measure grasping impacts of social groups - more specifically social milieus. In this respect, this will be only a first step and the presentation and exchange at the winter school should help to tackle methodological and theoretical shortcomings.

Word count: 581

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