The Mesolevel Approach as an Inter-disciplinary Methodology in Social Science and the Humanities for Cross-country Studies

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Outline

- The mesolevel approach

- Its application and results:

✓ In Sociology and Comparative Economic Studies: Institutional X and Y-matrices

✓ In Psychology: Social Mental models

✓ In Linguistics: Language "constants"

The mesolevel approach

- The mesolevel approach is increasingly understood as a specific methodology in Economics (Dopfer & Potts, 2007; Elsner, 2007; Kirdina-Chandler, Maevsky, 2020), Social Science (Kirdina, 2015) and the Humanities (Kuz'mina, 2020).

- "The methodological meaning of identifying the mesolevel is that it is at this level that structures are formed as the main characteristic of the system" (Deryabina 2018, 33), the structures providing social dynamics.

- The function of the mesolevel is to organise coordinated interaction (understanding) between the subjects of the microlevel within the social systems of the macrolevel.

The mesolevel approach cont.

- This means identifying and exploring stable structures that provide:

- the integrity of the system under consideration at the macro level - it can be a nation-state, language, civilization, etc.

- mutual understanding and interaction of elements of the micro-level - in social systems, the micro-level is often associated with individuals or persons.

The mesolevel approach and cross-country studies

- My personal professional experience testifies that cross-country studies are one of the most effective methods for determining the specifics of meso-level structures (meso-structures).
- This is due to the established comparison procedures that characterise cross-country studies. When you compare, you understand the features and differences.

SOCIOLOGY AND ECONOMIC COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Institutional X and Y matrices as meso-structures

What are institutions?

- "Institutions are the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic, and social interaction. They consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct), and formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights). Throughout history, institutions have been devised by human beings to create order and reduce uncertainty" (North, 1991 : 97).
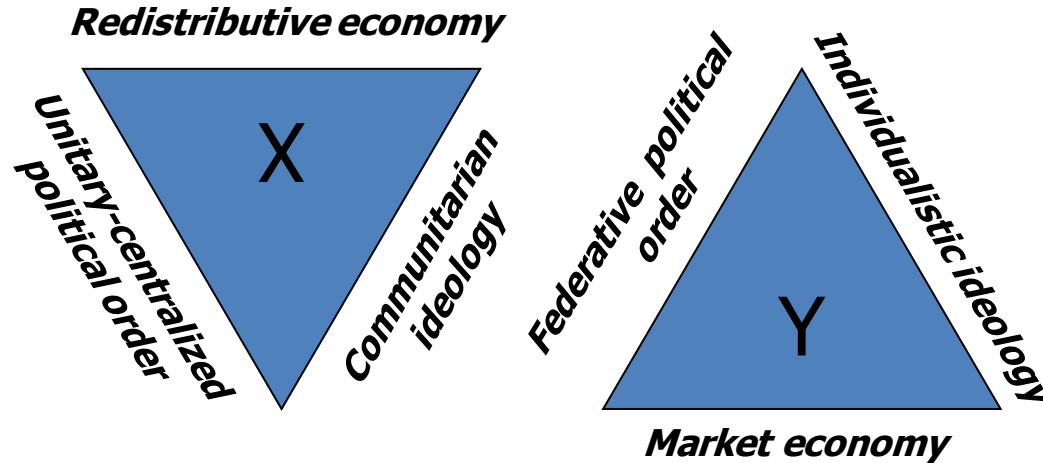
Institutions = meso-structures

- "In fact, the study of mesoeconomic structures is equivalent to the study of institutions … (Kleiner, 2003 : 16).

- The mesolevel is the space for the transition of a particular rule into a generic rule through the perception of these rules by a population group (Dopfer, Potts, 2008: 102–103; Dopfer, 2012 : 133).

- The mesolevel embraces not only the process of creation and functioning of the rules-institutions, but also the changes in the rules. The process of meso coordination "will itself tend to become institutionalised" (Dopfer, Foster, Potts, 2004 : 277)

Institutional matrices

- These are sets of institutions regulating the main spheres of any society, such as the economy, politics and ideology. So, particular economic, political and ideological institutions represent the "institutional matrix" of societies.

- Two main types of institutional matrices can be identified: the X-matrix and the Y-matrix.
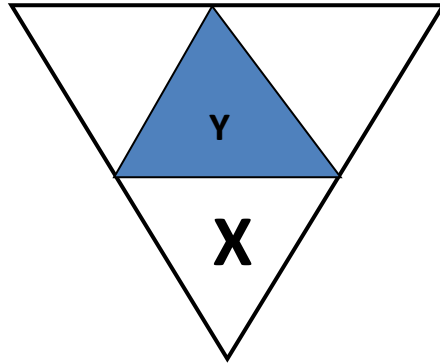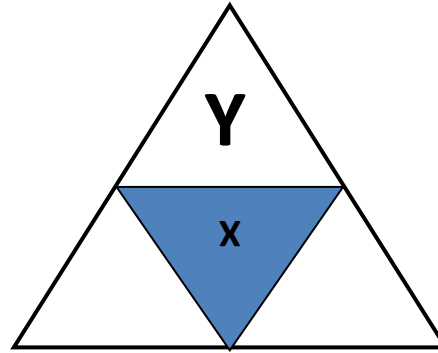
X- and Y-matrices

Redistributive economy

Unitary-centralized political order

X

Communitarian ideology

Federative political order

Individualistic ideology

Y

Market economy

*** Redistributive economy with the Center
   mediating the economic transactions**

* Centralised political order (top-down model)

* Communitarian ideology (We over Me)

* Market (exchange) economy

* Federative political order (bottom-up model)

* Individualistic ideology (I over We)

Combinations of X- and Y-matrices

Russia, China, India, most Asian, Middle Eastern, Latin American as well as some other countries

Europe and Western Offshoots: US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand

Institutional matrices theory (IMT) in Russia and beyond

- The main ideas are presented in many books and articles (see: www.kirdina.ru in Russian and English)

- The IMT is included in the "Sociological Encyclopedia", 2003 and "Sociological Dictionary", 2010, 2012 (both in Russian).

- The IMT is presented in curricula on Sociology, Economics & Political Science courses offered at main Russian universities (*Russian Internet data*).

- Discussion about the IMT and summaries of its main provisions (with critiques) can be found in various journals, for example, in the *Journal of Economic Issues,* 2014-2018.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

X (non-Western) and Y(Western) social mental models as meso-structures

Social mental models as meso-structures

- Social mental models (SMM's) provide explanations about how something (important for social interactions) works in the real world and spreads it to members of society or people belonging to the same culture.

- The main function of SMM's is to support mutual understanding of such important things among members of society (or people of given culture) thereby ensuring its integrity.

Clarification of social mental models

- SMM's in our research represent the particular perception of the reality from the point of view of its "dimension" and unity, and corresponding to this perception the way of solving problems (decision making).

Differences between SMM
(Alexandrov, Kirdina, 2013)

Mentality models' characteristics	"Non-western"(X) social mental model	"Western" (Y) social mental model
"Dimension" of the world	Continuity	Discontinuity
Perception of the world	Holistic and interrelatedness	Analyticity and fragmentarity
Type of decision making	Intuitive type	Rational type
Dominating among the population of countries	Eastern countries and Russia	Northern America and Europe

LINGUISTISC

Language "constants" as meso-structures in the nation-states with a predominant X or Y matrix

Linguistic research

(Kirdina-Chandler, Kruglova, 2019).

- Testing the hypothesis about the connection between the dominance of the institutions of the X- or Y-matrix, and the peculiarities of the linguistic designation of the main social structures.

- In our sample we compare the etymology of the word «society» in the languages of those countries where X-matrix institutions dominate (Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Hindi / Sanskrit) and Y-matrix institutions dominate (English, French, German).

Language "constants"

- By means of language constants, the language reflects the essential features of social relations and the social world. Using these constants in everyday life, the individual interiorises the social world.

- Language constants are "basic historical concepts", or long-term structures" (Durinova, 2015: 70), which "do not exist outside of verbal embodiment" (Durinova, 2015: 69) and reflect the core of social reality, transmitted through national languages.

- The word "society', which we have analysed, is one of these language constants.

- Etymological analysis means that we find the source and method of formation of a word, establish from what other words it is derived and with what other words it is associated.

"Society" in Russian language

- The Old Russian word "society" or *obshchestvo* /общество/ goes back to the Proto-Russian basis *obshch* meaning "what is around", "circulated around, surrounding". It is also associated with the ancient words meaning "something that belongs to all". This word is often found in legislative acts, for which it is important to indicate that something do not belong to one family, but to what is common ownership according to collective responsibility.

"Society" in Chinese language-1

- Chinese word "society" 社会 （shehui） consists of two words-syllables, each of which reflects a different facet of the concept of "society" in Chinese.

- The main translations of the first "word-syllable" 社 (she） - "society", "association", "association", "cooperative", "commune" [大 Large Chinese-Russian Dictionary]. However, you should also pay attention to the ancient and its medieval meaning. In the texts of the times of the Zhou dynasty (1045 BC. e. - 221 BC. e) this hieroglyph meant the union of 25 courtyards with the common altar of the earth, during the time of the Han dynasty (206 BC. - 220 years. AD) - a rural community of five or ten yards, as well as a unit of self-defense. At the same time, this hieroglyph had the meaning "field spirit", "birth land", outdoor altar [spirit land] "and" land temple (as symbol state) ".

"Society" in Chinese language -2

- The second hieroglyph 会 means "union". The semantics of a hieroglyph, clearly reflected in its visualization, can be defined as "a meeting under one roof" or "one under a roof". If we look at the rarer variants of the translation of this word, we will see that there are such outdated values as the "mutual aid group". The origin of this hieroglyph is due to the fact that in the Chinese rural community there always existed a system of mutual responsibility (Bao Jia), and the community itself, and not the nuclear family, was the lowest fiscal unit. Thus, this hieroglyph denotes a single and indivisible integrity with the common economy.

- So, it can be seen that in Chinese both hieroglyphs, which formed the word "society," denote a single sacral structure, with collective responsibility and mutual responsibility.

"Society" in Japanese language

- The Japanese hieroglyph 社会 denoting "society" was borrowed into Japan from China [Akahori, 2010]. It sounds as *shakai (*in Latin transcription). It also reflects the idea of the holiness of the place of residence of people living together [Akahori, 2010, 2018].

- Despite the attempts of Japanese intellectuals of the late XIX century. reassigning "society" in accordance with the meaning inherent in the Western tradition, its historical designation has taken root, which is characteristic of many Asian countries, including Korea and Vietnam [Sako, 2007, 2008; Takezava, 2010]. For Asian countries, "society" is primarily "ideological unity" [Akahori, 2010].
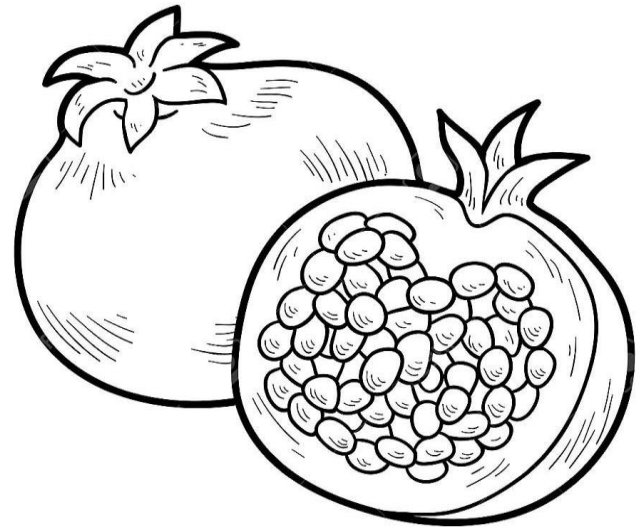
"Society" in Hindi/Sanskrit languages

- In modern Hindi, the word "society" (writing समाज - samaaj) is essentially the Sanskrit word samAj. It comes from the verb aj - "to gather together", but also "to win, to subdue". In Sanskrit, this word had the meaning "congregation, meeting, society", as well as "congestion. This etymology of the word "society" is closely connected with the most important role of the community in the life of India [Alaev, 1981, 2000], which was also characteristic of the history of Russia. One of the common meanings of "society" was "to keep the environment clean" [Alaev, 1981, 2000].

- In Urdu (other popular Indian language) , the word Arabic origin is mashara (معاشرة). In Arabic, it has two basic meanings: intercourse (friendship) or cohabitation (community, cohabitation).

- Even this brief excursion into the etymology of the word "society" in Indian languages shows that they are based, first of all, on the idea of uniting people to perform common tasks.

What is common for X-country languages?

- Summing up the analysis of the etymology of the word "society" in the languages of such different cultures as Russian, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian we find, nevertheless, common content of this word.

- For these countries the word "society" reflects a certain sacred idea of living together - this concept is formed "from above", or from "general to particular", the idea of the whole in this case is decisive. We do not see references to individuals in the structure of this most important word "society" of all these languages.

The visual metaphor of the perception of the society in these countries can be presented as a pomegranate

The destruction of the integrity of a pomegranate leads to the death of all its grains. Conversely, if we try to isolate one grain, this ultimately leads to the death of the entire fruit. Therefore, the existence of a pomegranate as a whole is the key to the "survival" of this structure. The links between the elements of this structure (grains) are the links of the morphological type, meaning they belong to a common whole.

"Society" in English language

- English and French belong to the languages of the Romance group, which developed from the once unified Latin language. Therefore, the word "society" in these languages (*society* - in English and *société* - in French) is to a large extent related to the semantics of the root and the semantic potentials contained in Latin [Durinova, 2015: 87]. Society in Latin is *societas*, in turn, derived from the noun *socius* (comrade, friend, ally). Historically, the second precedes the first, that is, the term "society" has appeared to denote the union of interacting friendly (allied) individuals that are in relation to each other.

"Society" in French language

- In French, the word "society" also represents an anthropological basis: in the XV century it was defined as the "union of equal people for a common cause" [Budagov, 1940: 171].

- Researchers of the French language specifically note in the term "society" the meaning of the connection of individuals. "The role of an individual is decisive … in the origin of this connection: societies are products of the action of two independent individuals, the relationship between which is symmetrical (the contract assumes equality of the parties) and which each pursues its own goals" [Durinova, 2015: 88; see also Branca-Rosoff, Guilhaumou, 2003: 143-179].
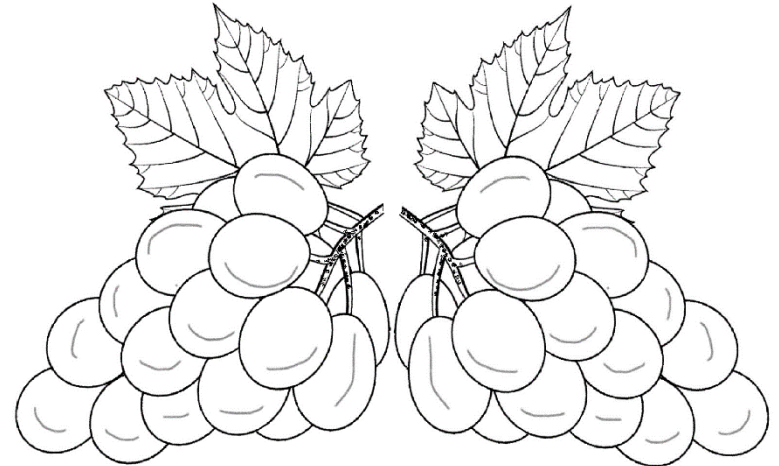
"Society" in German language

- The etymology of the German word "society" (*Gesellschaft*) refers us to the old German word "geselle" (companion, comrade) and to the abstract-unifying suffix "-schaft" (the same as in English -ship).

- Here we see the same anthropocentric logic of the word-formation of society, as in the English and French based in Latin.

What is common for Y-country languages?

- The content of the word "society" in English, French and German languages follows a different logic "from particular to whole (general)", or the deductive logic of aggregation "from the bottom" (bottom-up): from individuals to society.

- The primary point here are individuals forming alliances.

The visual metaphor of the perception of the society in these countries can be presented in an image of grapes

- Although grapes are combined on the same brush, they are to some extent autonomous and not protected from the outside world by a single shell, like grains in pomegranate. Each of the grapes is connected with a brush in its own way, and the removal of one (or more) of them is possible without causing damage to the whole brush. Forming a grape bunch as a certain integrity is an increment of all new grapes.

Conclusion

- The mesolevel approach is increasingly understood as a specific methodology in Economics, Social Science and the Humanities. This approach focuses on the study of the mesolevel, i.e. meso-structures.

- Psychology explores social mental models of such meso-structures, Sociology and Economics explore institutions (institutional matrices), and Linguistics explores language constants.

- The function of the meso-structures is to organise coordinated interaction (understanding) between the subjects of the microlevel within the social systems of the macrolevel.

- This methodology is very promising for cross-country interdisciplinary research.

Thank you for your attention!

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Материальная среда

Институты

Индивидуум-
ментальность
Mentality

Institutions

Material environment