Challenge 4: Developing future scenarios on social cohesion in the Netherlands

Representative:

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Background of the problem:

The Dutch government asked several knowledge institutes (e.g. CBS, NIDI, SCP) to think about the (effects of the) demographic changes in Netherlands in the year 2050. The SCP was asked to think about how social cohesion would develop in the Netherlands in the light of the future demographic composition. Social cohesion is a multi-dimensional concept, but for this project it can be understood as trust within and between different social groups in the Netherlands (Chan et. al., 2006). The SCP is interested in the probable mediating role of digitalization in social cohesion. Furthermore the SCP wants to explore the possibility of Agent Based Modelling for answering questions involving trust between social groups.

Challenges:

For SCP the use of ‘complex systems’ methods is new. It is an open question whether these methods can be of added value for a knowledge institute like SCP, where the main purpose is scientific research for the benefit of policy making. Therefore, SCP would like to investigate whether agent based modelling can be of value to inform policymakers.

Main questions to be addressed:

1. How can Agent Based Modelling be useful for answering policy questions concerning social cohesion/trust?
2. What is the effect of digitalization (for instance: social media) on social cohesion/trust within and between social groups (for instance: ethnicity, education level, age) in the Netherlands? (most important question to be answered, preferably answered by ABM)
3. Which other methods can be used to model the influence of (social) media use be modelled on cohesion/trust between social groups in the Netherlands?

Inspiration for answering the above question can be found in intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 1998, Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), or social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Flache et. al., (2017).

Complex Systems Science aspects:

Ideally, an Agent Based Model will be developed which can be used to explore future scenarios for social cohesion under the influence of social media use. Think about ingroup and outgroup trust
between various social groups in the Netherlands and possible (often suggested polarizing) effect of social media.

**Possible societal importance/impact:**

SCP wants to inform policymakers about social cohesion in the future. The developed ABM serves as a tool by giving insight in what-if-scenario’s. Relevant results can possibly be part of a SCP publication and/or can also be (part of) a publication in an international peer-reviewed scientific journal.

**Important disclaimer:** SCP wants to maintain ownership over possible results of the project. It is important that publication of possible relevant results do not conflict with the SCP media strategy and can therefore only be made public at the appropriate times in line with the SCP media strategy.

**Initial literature:**

- NIDI, CBS, CPB, SCP, PBL en RIVM (2019a). *Verkenning Bevolking 2050 Inventarisatie van toekomstverkenningen.* NIDI, CBS, CPB, SCP, PBL, RIVM.