

A Model to Explore Responsible Behaviour

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Abstract

The theoretical model is based on the innovative combination of factors of influence, referring especially to the relational reflexivity, which through mediation of structure and agency can reach also to the intermediary level and thus potentially contribute to more sustainable aspects of behaviour. Accordingly, paper addresses the issue of responsible behaviour and sustainable development in a holistic way. It distinguishes between three dimensions of responsible behaviour, namely individual, social and environmental. It develops and presents the original theoretical model of factors influencing responsible behaviour based on the Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour emphasising the distinction between consciousness, intentions and behaviour. It includes the idea of personal and relational reflexivity, adopted from the theory of Archer and Donati. Relational reflexivity requires a relational subject who acts reflexively while taking into account his/her relations with significant other ones and simultaneously operates on/with/through social relations. While generating emergent relational goods through these relations, they can contribute to social change in terms of greater solidarity, cohesion and sustainable natural environment. The model thus represents an original systematic connection of various dimensions and types of responsible functioning. It leads to a recognition of a complex intertwinement of systemic and human factors influencing all dimensions and types of responsible functioning considered. The theoretical model represented in the text has been so far preliminary tested – with its results included in other publications.

Keywords: responsible behaviour, reflexivity, sustainable development, theoretical model.

1 Introduction

The main aim of the paper is to present the theoretical model that explores the dimensions of responsible functioning. The theoretical model represented in the text has been so far preliminary tested. The results are included in other publications. The theoretical model is based on the innovative combination of factors of influence, referring especially to the relational reflexivity, which through mediation of structure and agency can reach also to the intermediary level and thus potentially contribute to more sustainable aspects of behaviour. While the model is intended to be tested first on the national case, the results can be nevertheless considered in a wider context of generational changes in the late-modern, globally connected social reality (Howe and Strauss 2008). Recent outburst of the Corona virus has even more emphasised the need for cooperation and solidarity among people and nations. The poorest, excluded groups are paying the highest cost. In addition, the pandemic also tremendously pointed to the global intertwinement of different societal levels. More than ever, humanity has been facing severe social and ecological pressures causing tremendous concerns for the future.

The degradation of natural and social environments is of great concern for scholars, who are interested in the issue of sustainable development (Kirn, 2004; Špes, 2008). It has at least three distinctive dimensions, i.e. economic, social and environmental, which are nevertheless closely intertwined and mutually interdependent (Sogesid, 2014). For instance, eliminating the poverty among vulnerable groups calls for providing social justice and also for protecting natural environment enabling food to grow (ISO 260000; Plut 2004). The deterioration of social and natural environments thus calls for the exploration of the causes for such processes and also for analysing the potential scenarios and trying to predict their consequences.

In order to mitigate or even prevent further deterioration of social and economic environments, there is an urge for more intensive and holistic responsible functioning, which is an underlying framework of the present text. One can notice an alarming effect of individualistic value shift to the behaviour patterns referring to responsible functioning in the last decades.

From a sociological point of view, the issue can be approached on different societal levels. On a macro level, responsible social functioning refers to the ways of strategic steering of different social subsystems. A responsible steering enables subsystems to articulate common goals referring to sustainable development, while providing proper institutional and legal environment for individuals to act. On a micro societal level, the concept refers to a way of functioning that entails individuals' concerns and actions for achieving common goals, which provide a long-term stability and well-being of society and contribute to sustainable social and natural environment (Musil and Lavrič, 2010; Brandon and Lombardi 2005). In addition, one should not neglect the need of individuals to maintain responsibility for their own well-being as well. The deterioration of social and natural environments thus urges social scientists to look profoundly for the causes of what is going on, analyse the potential scenarios

and try to predict their consequences. The environmental responsibility is in that regard only one component of responsible functioning along with social responsibility and individual responsibility.

Individuals act within the institutional environments determined by social structures. The latter are herein conceptualised in terms of functional differentiation as a predominant structural principle of the globalised society, where different subsystems, such as economy, politics, science, etc., are operating based on their own internal principles (Luhmann, 1999). One of the project's premises is that the lack of responsible functioning is due to the fact that a variety of social phenomena falls into the domain of economy as a functional subsystem, organised strictly on the principles of the market competition. Consequently, society does not provide (yet) a strong basis for social solidarity or sustainability of natural environment.

The concept of responsible functioning yields for consideration of yet another environment, i.e. the technological one, which has been substantially influencing social practices and cultural patterns in recent decades. The immense expansion of information, communication and transport technologies has caused the fourth industrial revolution (Schwab, 2017) characterised by new technologies fusing the physical, digital and biological worlds, and even undermining the perspectives on what it means to be human (Haraway, 1991). These breakthroughs are substantiating all aspects of social emergence, let them refer to political actions and governance, economic performance, cultural encounters or everyday practices of human beings. While one can observe significant advantages of such transformations referring to the improvement of the quality of life for population around the globe, there are also severe threats emerging. The rising importance of technological environment in various aspects of social life can further degrade the natural environment and deepen the exclusion of population who cannot afford those technologies or lack the skills required to use them. Technological development can on the one hand raise one's awareness of social and ecological problems around the globe, while new ways of communication can forge new ways of global solidarity. On the other hand, technology can be exploited for purely profit seeking endeavours and can provide grounds for exclusivist, narrow-minded thinking among individuals and collectivity. Technological development can thus provide new opportunities, or generate divisions and exclusion, leading to losing jobs, digital divide and ecological disasters.

2 Constructing a theoretical model

The project is focused on the responsible functioning on a micro level within the Slovenian national environment, which is intertwined with the EU and the global context. In order to explore responsible functioning in the sociological context, the project seeks to establish new ways of understanding cooperation, which is needed on all societal levels. For that purpose, it deploys an innovative theoretical concept of the relational subject referring to a special kind of social differentiation (Donati, 2011). It draws on the presumption that due to technological development, which has enabled new forms of communication in the late modern society, the alternative social differentiation is emerging – the relational one (Donati, 2011). One can see the latter as the outcome of the form of reflexivity centred on the social relations.

When applying the concept of reflexivity, we follow Archer's definition saying that it is "the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa" (Archer, 2012). Being a part of the inner dialogue, reflexivity is seen as an emergent property of individuals, which can activate the causal powers of structures and allow individuals to deliberate on their future actions. On the basis of reflexivity, they adopt certain 'stances' towards society, which constitute the micro-macro link and produce the 'active agent'. Reflexivity, being a mediator between agency and structure, is always contextually dependent (Archer, 2012). Individuals experience world indirectly, through their thoughts and perceptions, while their observations of the environments stimulate self-observations and consciousness (Luhmann, 1999). The important role in that regard is played by discursive influences presenting the semantic variations of reality (Raquaiya, 2009). These variations are conditioned by social imaginaries as specific structural and semiotic orders (Jessop and Oosterlynck, 2008). The internalisation of social semiotics generates a repertoire of unconscious dispositions (Bourdieu, 1990), which orient routine action or can become a conscious repertoire of choices leading to reflexive deliberation and actions that enable the emergence of morphogenesis. It has been argued that "the old routine guidelines are no longer applicable and new ones cannot be forged because nascent morphogenesis is inhospitable to routinization" (Archer, 2012, p. 64), which has substantially influenced reflexive abilities. Social actors are forced to counteract specific social settings and are encouraged to contribute to more favourable social condition, which enables them to respond to challenges of globalisation and market demands. Donati (2011), who has leaned on Archer's perspectives on reflexivity in developing his "relational sociology", has argued that in the context of globalisation and the contemporary social situation, the specific mode of reflexivity has been incited, i.e. the relational one, which is complying with the above-mentioned form of relational differentiation.

Relational differentiation, as the alternative to functional differentiation, implies greater significance of the third sector, social-private sphere, and new civil society (Donati, 2011, p. 25-26). This requires a relational subject, who acts reflexively while taking into account her/his relations with significant others, and simultaneously also operates on/with/through social relations (Archer and Donati, 2015, p. 301). The latter implies a second order reflexivity emerging beyond the contributions of the single actors triggering it, and being extended to social networks as well (Donati, 2011). When being reflexively engaged in social relation in terms of the relational subject, individual or collective actors can generate their own emergent properties through those relations, which contribute to social morphogenesis. In this regard, the sociability is seen as trust and cooperation among people acting in terms of reciprocal relation that can re-emerge in the contemporary social order (ibid).

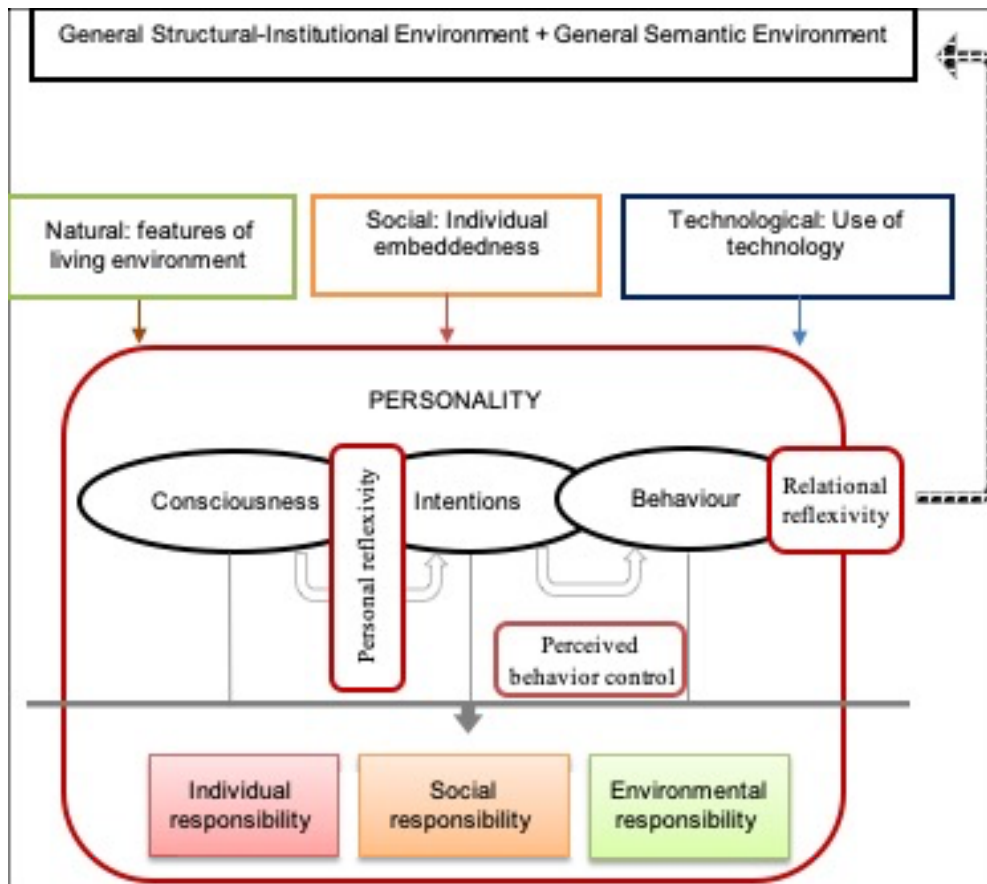
Based on these scientific assumptions and theoretical framework, we explore the responsible functioning also by deploying the theories of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), distinguishing between three conceptual components of responsible functioning i.e. attitudes, intentions and behaviour. We see attitudes as a result of internalisation of social context, while they can also be consciously deliberated through reflexivity processes, being the imperative of contemporary time (Archer, 2012). Intention and behaviour can thus ensue from habitual, pre-reflexive contexts or they can be reflexively deliberated. Studies leaning on such

theoretical prepositions (Haanpää, 2017) have shown that there is an indirect influence of attitudes on behaviour through pro-behavioural intentions, but the factors influencing such attitudes and behaviour remain insufficiently explained. There is also a strong need for exploring direct factors influencing sustainable behaviour, which subsequently influences consciousness, and not just vice versa (Eliam and Trop, 2012). When individuals, groups or networks share same intentions and generate emergent properties through social relations, they become relational subjects (Archer and Donati, 2015), who are able to produce and provide common goods (trust among people, cooperation, collaboration etc.).

We take into account the fact that factors influencing individuals' responsible functioning on the micro level are very complex and exceed demographic frames. For instance, in more developed countries with prevailing post-material values, there can be more individuals supporting environmental sustainability (Haanpää, 2017), but this is not linked to their readiness and actual sustainable behaviour. On the other hand, some studies show that those who have a more stable life are also less interested in sustainability issues (Hadler and Kraemer, 2017). Studies concerning demographical settings reveal unconvincing results as well. One can see women and more educated population in general to be more concerned with eco-friendly behaviour (Polajnar Horvat, 2015). However, factors influencing differences among them can be quite uncertain. For instance, age has a statistically significant influence on sustainable behaviour, but, while young people are more environmental conscious in China, it is just the opposite in Europe. Also, higher income positively correlates with eco-concerns, but living in degraded environment and having a low income, seems to be even more influential. Comparative data indicate the need for considering the factors of influence in the transnational and global contexts, but also in terms of local and national specifics. As Dolenc et al. (2014) observe, it is crucial to consider contextual sociodemographic characteristics.

The proposed theoretical model addresses the individual, social and environmental responsibility at the level of personality by considering the relations and intervening variables between individual's consciousness, intentions and behaviour. While the model places an individual in the contexts of both her/his specific social/natural/technological environments and the general structural and semantic environments, it also assumes the co-creative role of the individual's responsible behaviour: contributing to the morphogenetic social change through relational reflexivity.

Picture 1: The theoretical model



3 Conclusions and suggestions for further research

Because exploring responsible behaviour is a timely and tremendously important issue for the society, nature and individuals, the objective of research should be ambitious, thus demanding original theoretical and empirical approaches and transdisciplinary consideration to reach the research goals.

Based on the theoretical model, the subsequent empirical research will enable a much more complete understanding of factors influencing responsible behaviour in the general population of Slovenia. It can lead to the development of a tool to provide realistic future scenarios, and guide macro-level policy interventions, which can enhance responsible behaviour.

The theoretical model has been developed in order to:

1. Represent extra-semiotic and semiotic factors of an institutional and legal environment of Slovenia referring to the addressed issue, and its relation to the EU recommendations,

- developmental trends and threats, and thus recognise the gaps in structural-institutional environment hindering the responsible functioning on the micro level;
2. Reveal how different dimensions (individual, social, environmental) of responsible functioning are influenced by three systemic environments (natural, social, technological) taking into account the issues brought forward by the fourth industrial revolution;
 3. Reveal how different dimensions and specific elements (attitudes, intentions, behaviour) of responsible functioning are mutually interrelated;
 4. Elucidate the interplay between systemic environments and individuals' cognition and behaviour in terms of relational reflexivity.

The main result – an empirically tested model of factors influencing responsible behaviour – will represent an original systematic connection of various dimensions and types of responsible functioning. It will lead to a recognition of a complex intertwinement of systemic and human factors influencing all dimensions and types of responsible functioning considered. It will enable simulations of a set of future scenarios, and the formulation of specific policy recommendations to encourage responsible behaviour in Slovenia.

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