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Going Beyond Attributional Classification

– The Social Agent Analysis (SAA)

paper on the theory of my presentation at the ESSHC 2014

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Abstract

In this paper I will introduce to you the SAA (Social Agent Analysis). The SAA is a method that expands the common social classification schemes and can make them more precise. With its help you can visualize and check more precisely: Did people also group in reality the way common classification systems suggest? The SAA operates with different levels of social relations and generates relation profiles of single classes. It is tailor-made for all living spaces where registers of persons exist (like for example registers of marriages, addressbooks, member lists or petitions). You can combine it with all classification and stratification procedures that are based on databases.

About me

I grew up in a small town near Hannover. In Münster near the Dutch border, I studied Modern History, Communication Science and Political Science. In those days I was often interested in questions like: Why do some people have social ties with others – but not with others? And what role do their way of communicating and their political background play in that context? When I started researching for my Magister thesis in early 2010 (German equivalent to the master thesis), I realized there is no satisfying method which could answer these questions – at least not at the level of historical social structure analysis, a level which interests me the most. My first big project has been the Delitzsch-Project at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle (supervised by Georg Fertig, Professor for Economic and Social History at the local university). There I am developing the SAA and testing it with a huge database. My student assistant is storing all the available data of the inhabitants of a small Prussian town (Delitzsch) in that database, who lived there between 1870 and 1930. I live in Halle and Hamburg – St. Pauli. Besides my academic work, every now and then I explain as an editor, what complex discoveries scientists from all kinds of fields make.

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The boundaries of social classification schemes

Social classification schemes are a crucial part of social historiography. They put people into groups on the basis of certain criteria. They are archetypical academic models that make it easier for historians to interpret the human beings of their research sites. They do that by reducing the complexity of society to a feasible degree[1]. Usually around ten groups emerge this way. For no one can draw any meaningful conclusion, when trying to take the views of all the single inhabitants of a small town whose number reaches ten thousands of people.

The occupational title is nearly always the most important criterion of historical classification schemes – simply because it occurs in most of the historical registers of persons, and because behind it very meaningful dimensions of a person stand. These are for instance the things he is occupied with day by day, the economic sector he works in, his level of education and – in many, but not all cases – the span of his possible income. Some classifications schemes order single occupations on the basis of fields of activity and form occupational classes this way[2]. Other classification schemes go clearly beyond this rather descriptive way: They are based on a theory assuming that each occupation is an expression of a certain social prestige and status, as well as of a certain culture. Following these assumptions people with certain occupations had a similar economic and social position in society, lead a similar life, experienced similar things, behaved similarly, felt, thought and acted similarly. The logical conclusion form the perspective of this standpoint is: They shared a similar culture and thus had a higher affinity to one another[3].

However, no matter what theoretical background a classification scheme has: Classes remain analytical categories, on the basis of which people have been grouped *first*, namely on the condition on of what one thinks which is plausible in terms of social similarities. The one who aggregates persons this way does indeed not measure, if they also formed these groups *in reality.* Nevertheless, I have the impression, that some historians do not strictly pay attention to this – among German Scholars, whose works on the 19th and early 20th century I know best, but also among social historians in general. In the many regional and local studies I have read so far about Germany, these aggregated groups mostly appear as real social agents with a common culture, a strong cohesion, a common identity and common social norms. And yet I have not read a single study that has basically done research on the question: if the people grouped this way were really connected to each other at different social levels.

The theoretical point of orientation for those kinds of studies is mainly the Bielefeld school, which emphasizes the image of a split class society.[4].

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[1]   For a very comprehensive overview see: Bourchard, Gérard (1996): „Tous les mètiers du monde. Le traitement des donnès professionelles en histoire sociale", Saint-Nicolas, entire chapter 2 (discussed in detail by: bei van Leeuwen Marco H.D. / Maas, Ineke (2011): „HISCLAAS. A Historical International Social Class Scheme." Leeuven, p.18 ff..

[2]   Ibd.

[3]   Overview on the recent state of research on class theory: de Leon, Cedric (2008): „Class". In: „International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences," p.561-564.

[4]   One gets this impression by entering the keywords of the central terms and thesises of these historians (among

Scholars of this school use to make their theses strong; they do so by claiming them to be valid for the whole of Germany[5]. But up to now they also have not done any empirical local history measuring the real networking of thousands of people at the level of different relations. They have not provided statistically solid proof for their assumption, that the people, who belong to the analytical categories of classes, also formed the same groups in reality.

Making social classification systems more precise – with the help of relation profiles

In this paper I will introduce to you a method that directly focusses on that problem – the social agent analysis (SAA). It is tailor-made for all the fundamental mass data that you can find in nearly every archive: registers of persons like marriage registers, lists of members in local (voluntary) associations, petitions and so on, meaning sources that always give names which can be assigned to occupations. With this method one can better estimate, whether the inhabitants of a research site grouped in reality the way common classification systems assume. At first the SAA works with the perspective of these schemes, and afterwards assigns the people of a research site to classes with its help (which will happen mostly on the basis of occupational titles, because most of the historical classification systems work with those titles, as mentioned above). Afterwards it creates an individual relation profile of each of the respective classes. It is does so by checking what kind of relations people of different classes establised with each other, meaning within their class or beyond the borders of their class.

But relations are not necessarily relations; each and every relation has its own quality. Depending on how the respective relation profile looks like one received by doing this check, one can clearly answer, whether the respective class was a purely analytical category or a really existing class within the research area. And, in case a real existing class could be found like this, one knows even more about its character: How cut off was it in a social sense and how open?   Which other class did it have a social affinity to? To which class a political one? And to which one a spatial one?

To put it simply, the SAA checks *whether* and *at which social levels* the following equation proves right:

Analytical Category = real existing, sufficiently networked group (social agent)

In order to make it easier to understand what this means, I will first elaborate on what I consider a social agent. Then I will explain my exact notion of "sufficiently networked". In this context the con-

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others: Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Jürgen Kocka and Paul Nolte) into several website search engines, including Google Books and Google n-gram. Accordingly, an explicit counter position in the sense of "Germany was no class society" does not exist.

[5]   For an elaborate criticism against how these two write history, see: Medick, Hans (1996): „Leben und Überleben in Laichingen 1650-1900: Lokalgeschichte als allgemeine Geschichte", p. 14; especially footnote 3, where Medick calls Wehler a „Treitschke of the late 20th century".

cept of tie strength plays a decisive role. Afterwards I will operationalize this concept step by step – by using the example of the sources available for my dissertation on a German small town. In the end I will show, on the basis of visualizations, how common social classification systems can be expanded and made more precise with this concept.

Also, I decided to call my method "social agent analysis" and not "social actor analysis". I did so in order to clearly distinguish my concept from the actor-network-theory, which also deals with agency and networks, but from a quite different perspective.

Networked people, social agents

The central idea of the SAA is that only networked people can form a real existing group – and such groups are social agents at the same time. I will now shortly explain this correlation, beginning with my definition of the term "social agent." For what one exactly regards as a social agent strongly depends on the very level of analysis; a common definition does not exist[6] (which is the same concerning the terms "agent" respectively "actor" and "agency")[7]. That is why I define "social agent" in a way in which it fits the analytical level "society of a living space" – and thus a level of narration of many historians who, as mentioned above, consider local classes as really existing, networked and acting groups of people.

I see a social agent as a specific form of a network: A group of people whose members have *sufficiently strong* relations to one another (I will explain later what that exactly means). Only loosely tied persons, meaning weak networks, are no social agents in this sense. I consider a group whose members are sufficiently tied to one another a social agent, because it always appears as an impact factor within the social system it is embedded in. It is therefore an impact factor, because it influences other, similarly networked groups of people by its mere existence, sets them boundaries and elbowroom – and is set boundaries and elbowroom by them in return[8]. So social acting happens here at two levels: On the one hand it actively happens inwards, on the other hand passively outwards: Actively inwards, because the group members network among one another (which is indeed a form of social act) and maintain the group this way; passively outwards, because the group as such influences other groups.

Such a passive influence outwards can also change to an active one, purposeful and coordinated: Namely then, when someone mobilizes the group, be it a leader person or an elitarian subgroup. In that case, social acting happens at two levels actively: Inwards and outwards[9]. The Histo-

6   Esser, Hartmut (2000): „Soziologie. Spezielle Grundlagen. Vol. 2: Die Konstruktion der Gesellschaft." München, p.48 f.

7   Emirbayer, Mustafa / Mische, Ann (1998): „What is Agency?" In: The American Journal of Sociology 4 1998, p.963.

8   See Fuhse, Jan A. (2008): „Menschen in Netzwerken". In: Rehberg, Karl-Siegbert (ed.): „Die Natur der Gesellschaft". Frankfurt, p.2934 ff, who interprets various classics of network theory from this angle.

9   In this case many speak of a "collective actor" , see Esser, *Spezielle Grundlagen 2, p.*48 f*.,* who refers to Scharpf, Fritz W. (1997): „Games Real Actors Play". Oxford, p.54 ff.

ry of Events shows, that potentially every group can be activated this way. For me this is one more reason to use the term "social agent".

As I said above, it always and concretely depends on the level of analysis, when one speaks of social agents. In theory you can go down to the tiniest micro level – for instance by researching subgroups within single circles of friends or power groups within political elites. But if you want to test in the sense of the SAA, if category groups like classes resemble real existing social agents, you are having large local groups in mind and are moving at the level of living spaces (meaning here: a certain kind of settlement the people mainly sojourn in, which can be for instance a small town, a quarter of a big city or a village). A working class, as defined by some scholars, can be a social agent only in case mainly workers had strong social ties to one another in the town or village you do research on – and these workers did not connect or rarely connected to physicians, master craftsmen or lawyers at the same time.

However, social relations are not social relations. Each relation has its own quality: People that only greet each other on the street indeed do have a tie. But it is very weak in comparison to the tie between two persons who marry each other. So in order to be able to say something more precise about the form of a social actor, one also has to focus on the strength of the existing ties between its members[10]. That is exactly what I am going to do in the next passages, namely by describing the two thinkable poles and its functions for the social agent: strong and weak ties ("tie" and "relation" are terms being widely used synonymically in academia, when it comes to network analysis). After that, I will comment on the various degrees in between – and then develop a model fitting the historical registers of persons we find in most archives.

Strong ties

Strong ties can be for example those in which people feel emotionally connected to each other, voluntarily spend time together, feel mutually obliged or pursue a common goal with a lot of energy[11]. A typical example for a particularly strong tie is marriage. Strong ties have an important function for social agents. They stabilize them by making a common culture possible between the members of the network[12]. That can be explained as follows: People who are connected by strong ties to one another, synchronize their information more frequently than those who have weak ties to each

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[10] Fundamental: Granovetter, Mark (1973): „The Strenght of Weak Ties", in: „American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 78, No. 6, p.1360-1380; Campbell, Karen E. / Marsden, Peter V. (1984): „Measuring tie strenght. Social Forces 63.; Avenarius, Christine B. (2010): „Starke und schwache Beziehungen". In: „Stegbauer, Christian / Häußling, Roger: „Handbuch Netzwerkforschung", Wiesbaden.

[11] On universally meant catalogs about the strength of ties, see: Boissevain, Jeremy (1974): „Friends of Friends." Oxford; and: Campbell / Marsden, *tie strenght*.

[12] Compare Erickson, Bonnie (1996): „Culture, Class and Connections". In: American Journal of Sociology, no 102, H1, p. 217-251, White, Harrison (1993): „Values Come in Styles, Which Mate to Changes". In: Hechter, Michael / Nadel, Lynn / Michad, Richard: „The Origin of Values." New York, p. 63-91; see also: Fuhse, *Menschen in Netzwerken*, p.2934.

other[13] (which is for instance the reason, why you certainly already have heard the joke someone is telling in your circle of friends from another friend).

Information is the basis of opinions[14], whereby at the same time they enable a culture to emerge within a group. For culture roots in opinions, to be specific: These and those things mean this and that, one has to behave this or that way, live like this or like that and so on (at least this is the common denominator of most of the common anthropological and sociological concepts of culture[15]). Now, the less the amount of information being available to a social agent is, and the more it is synchronized, the more similar the opinions of these persons have to be, and the more similar their culture has to be, too – because the more closely and more intensively connected the circle of persons is, in which only this information circulates.

The reason for that is the way people form their opinions. Forming of opinions works via exchange of information and communicative acts; in many topics one orientates oneself towards the opinion of which one thinks the majority shares, to put it simply. There are two causes for that: Nobody can be an expert in all fields. So the one who synchronizes his opinion which he thinks is the opinion of the majority saves reflexive resources, by trusting in the strength of judgment of his fellow men[16]. In addition, the one whose opinion is too far away from the majority's opinion has to fear exclusion, because he topples the social balance - which indeed bases on a certain consensus of opinions[17]. So when People develop strong ties to each other, it gets more likely, that they have a common culture.

And finally strong ties have another function: They render possible social control within the social agent. For the stronger the participants are embedded in it:

> • the more they are exposed to the opinion of the majority within the agent (including all social pressure to be similar emanating from it).

> • the more information about single members all members share with all other members. Which again leads to the fact, that everybody (can) talk about everyone with everybody.

This is social control. And social control on the other hand stabilizes the social agent, keeps single person from sheering out, supports coherence[18].

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[13] See Granovetter, *Weak Ties*.

[14] On the formation of opinions in different publics [the term that communication science uses for real and virtual networks], see Merten, Klaus (2007): „Einführung in die Kommunikationswissenschaft". Berlin, p. 216 ff.

[15] For an elaborate discussion on different concepts of culture, see: Brumann, Christoph (1999): „Writing for Culture. Why a Succesful Concept Should not be Discarded." In: Current Anthropology Volume 40, Supplement, February 1999.

[16] Merten, *Kommunikationswissenschaft*, p.216; p.236-241.

[17] Donsbach, Wolfgang (1987): Die Theorie der Schweigespirale. In: Schenk, Michael (ed.): „Medienwirkungsforschung." Tübingen, p. 324-343.

[18] Portes, Alejandro / Senesenbrenner, Julia (1993): „Embeddedness and Immigration: Notes on the Social Determinants of Economic Action." In: American Journal of Sociology 98, p.1348.

Weak ties

Logically weak ties are the opposite of strong ties – for instance those relations a person would not necessarily voluntarily engage in, or in which he hardly feels obliged towards the other person (like for instance neighbors that only great each other, or colleagues at work, who are only motivated to cooperate by the need to earn money). As said above, weak ties also take care of information circulating between single networks[19]. In this way they stabilize the entire network[20]. An entire network can be understood as the network all part- or subnetworks are embedded in – for instance a city or a village, which – as already said – depends on one's scientific point of view.

I argue here that weak ties stabilize the entire network for the following reason: Cultural orientations, attitudes and patterns of behavior are formed in networks. Now, if someone from Network A had a weak tie to someone from network B, both networks can exchange Information. Information again is the basis of opinions in terms of content – and while people synchronize their opinions with one another, they agree on certain minimum cultural standards. Of course – each network makes something individual out of the information, but at least due to this bridge between network A and B, there is a certain common basis of information. And thus, there has to be a certain common culture of these two networks. Anyway, it is not thinkable, that the members of these two networks could not have communicated at all, because they were lacking cultural codes for that.

There is a quite illustrative example in history for what could happen, if there are no bridges between networks and thus nearly no common cultural grounds: The encounter between the Spanish and the Aztecs in the 16th century. Both people stemmed from completely different continental networks that did not have even the slightest points of cultural contact for millennia[21]. The few cultural similarities they had at all resulted from the unavoidable and universal experiences each human being makes on this planet: in general when he interacts with his own species, with nature or just the surface of the planet itself.

Exactly such a lack of common cultural codes is generally seen as one main reason for the decline of the Aztec empire: In the first months of the encounter between the Spanish and the Aztecs nearly every gesture, every rudimentary conversation lead to the most absurd misunderstandings. Probably the biggest of these misunderstandings arouse the Spanish greed to an extent that has never been there before: Again and again the Aztecs brought them downrightly unbelievably precious gifts, with the intention to show them the legendary power of their realm. But the Spaniards interpreted this as a repeated gesture of weakness and devotion – and began one of the most adventurous war campaigns in human history, heading directly towards the heart of the realm[22]. Extremely outnumbered, this one could only have been won by the Europeans, because they were

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[19] See Granovetter *Weak Ties* und Wegener, Bernd (1987): „Vom Nutzen entfernter Bekannter". In: Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie, 39 Jg. Heft 2, p. 278-301.
[20] Avenarius, *Beziehungen,* p.107.
[21] Mann, Charles C. (2006): „1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus", New York.
[22] Thomas, Hugh (1993): „Conquest: Cortes, Montezuma, and the Fall of Old Mexico." New York.

the first to take a kind of meta position: Sometime they recognized the misunderstandings as such and then exploited them for their goal purposefully[23].

Describing social agents with strong and weak ties.

After this short explanation on what weak and strong ties are and which general functions they have, I will now elaborate on how one can describe social agents with their help.

First on the strong ties: With them it is possible to contour the social agent more precisely, to measure its boundaries and to find its core. Social agents in the sense of sufficiently strong networks have a sufficiently strong coherence – and that one is founded by strong ties[24]. Within social agents certain norms and a certain control predominates - strong ties enable their emergence[25]. The members of a social agents have a similar culture as argued above – within strong ties it comes to life and is developed[26].

Weak ties on the other hand inform us about the social agent's position within the entire network. In case no or only the unavoidable weak ties emanate from one social agent to another, these agents are broadly separated from each other in a social sense; cultural patterns can barely circulate between them and their culture can hardly resemble.

Of course this has consequences for the entire network: it is less stable then[27], culturally based conflicts are probably more likely to happen. If for instance the society of a modern country can be described as a split class society (which of course includes, that the respective classes are real social agents), such a case would come to pass: The members of a class only strike up the relations that cannot be avoided with members of other classes (which are mostly relations that result from occupational encounters and dependencies). By contrast, voluntary relations nearly hardly ever come about. The appreciation for the culture of other classes and thus for the members of these classes declines as such, social inequalities can now be interpreted as social injustices and provide the subject for social conflicts. By implication, this means logically: the more a social agent is embedded in the entire network, the more bridges he has to other social agents, whereas any number of bridges is thinkable. In case there are many, information spreads from one agent to another, and a certain cultural closeness between these ones can be expected, as well as less culturally based conflicts.

Of course one can imagine bridges between social agents that resemble strong ties, with similar effects bridges have resembling weak ties, as said above. In this case one thing has to be considered: If too many too strong ties emanate from one social agent to another, most likely one has not

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23   Todorov, Tzvetan (1982): „La conquête de l'Amérique: la question de l'autre." Paris.
24   White, Douglas / Johansen, Ulla (2005): „Network Analysis and Ethnographic Problems. Process Models of a Turkish Nomad Clan." Oxford, p.70.
25   Compare Portes / Sensenbrenner, *Embeddedness,* p.1348.
26   See footnote nr. 13
27   Weak ties provide for the coherence of the entire network; see Avenarius, *Beziehungen,* p.107.

to deal with two actors but with a single one. For a social agent indeed does consist of strong ties by definition.

More than just strong and weak ties: degrees of strength of ties within the SAA

However, making a difference only between strong and weak ties is not sufficient. There are namely a lot of shades in between, not even that, more like fluent passages. There are for instance best friends, close friends, the wider circle of friends, good acquaintances, loose acquaintances, and so on[28]. One has to bear that in mind, depending on what one researches.

Theoretically a very multifaceted model of relations can be developed this way, incorporating an endless number of these degrees. Especially anthropologists and sociologists have a high degree of freedom here. After all, they can adjust their questionaires to their model; perhaps they only have to grapple with contradicting or unexpected answers of those polled.

Social historians, on the other hand, depend on the historical tradition. They have to – the other way around – adjust their models to the existing registers of persons, have to deal with big gaps, maybe cannot work with so many degrees. The more sources they have, however, the more they can approach social reality. They have to decide case by case; a universally valid model for the investigation of social agents is something they cannot develop.

The SAA-Model for German small towns

In order to be a little more concrete, I will now introduce the social agent model I developed for the town of Delitzsch fitting the times of the German Empire and the Weimar Republic (1870-1932). Delitzsch was a small town at that time (and still is); I assume that models for other European small towns would look quite similar. The model bases on sources you can find in most of the German municipal and church archives and allows one to draw conclusions on the entire population of the city: Certain registers of persons that show *formalized* relations. Formalized relations are those that are recorded in huge numbers in archives. *Non-formalized relations* – for instance friendships and acquaintances – can most probably not be reconstructed anymore today for that purpose.

A register of marriages is a typical register that indicates formal relations. Among others, it says who married whom and whom the bridal couple chose as a witness at a marriage ceremony. Accordingly, a register of marriages indicates relations. Further registers of persons that do so, are for instance lists of members of certain organizations like parties or associations, class books of schools or petitions for a political issue having been signed by people. These types of relations are varyingly strong. And exactly on these degrees of strength SAA models base, like the one for my

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[28]   Stegbauer, Christian (2010): „Strong und Weak Ties. Freundschaft aus Netzwerktheoretischer Perspektive." In: (ibd.): „Netzwerkanalyse und Netzwerktheorie. Ein neues Paradigma in den Sozialwissenschaften", p.110f.

German small town of Delitzsch does: There the registers of persons are assigned to certain levels of tie strength (respectively: "relation strength"; but the term "tie strength" is more widely used in academia).

I will know take a slightly unusual way: First I will introduce the finished model in a chart, and afterwards explain how I assigned the single registers of persons to the respective degrees of tie strength. I do so, because some quite abstracts thoughts stand behind it that one can surely better fathom with a certain idea of the model in advance – for the central concept, the hierarchy of social ties, is something I already did explain.

What you will see now is a sort of chart with four categories: Type of relation, characteristics, source and rank. *Type of relation* is self-explaining; *characteristics* includes a few keywords describing the respective type of relation. *Sources* indicates which type of relation can be reconstructed through which register of persons; I put here all registers that can be found in a small town. And rank finally assigns the single types of relations to a hierarchy of tie strength – the smaller the number, the stronger the tie level. Now here is the chart:

Rank	Type of relation	Characteristics	Typical sources
1	Marriage	Core family	Registers of marriages, church books
2	Godparenthood	Symbolic Extension of the core family; religious sphere	Church books
3	Witnesses to a marriage	Close friends or family members; patrons	Registers of marriage, church books
4	Membership in an organization with a specifically political interest	Voluntary membership, political acting	Member lists, statutes
5	Membership in a partly political organization	Voluntary membership, political world view	Member lists, statutes, list of the secret police
6	Membership in an apolitical organization	Voluntary membership, mutual leisure time interest	Member lists, statutes,
7	School attendance	Involuntary membership for a long period of time	Class books, school year reports
8	Military service	Involuntary membership for a short period of time	Lists of physical examination, lists of military units
9	Neighborhood	Heritage or influx; place of living chosen voluntarily or because of external circumstances	Adressbooks
10	Declarations of will	No physical relation	Petitions, election lists, donation lists

For the sake of a better background understanding a few more detailed descriptions of the different levels of ties are mentioned below.

Highest levels: direct relation to the core family

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1. Marriages

Marriage founds the core family. This institution is and has been the most important social unit all over the world. By law it is the most intimate space of privacy in many societies. A marriage is conceptualized to endure in the long term and goes along with huge personal, economical and symbolic obligations. In most of the human cultures it obtains a particularly metaphysical meaning[29].

2. Godparenthood

The one who chooses someone as the godparent for his child symbolically and publicly amplifies his special relation to that person. Henceforth this relation gets intensified by additional rights and

duties. The godparent becomes an external part of the core family, be it as a mentor of the child, as a financial supporter or a symbolic parent figure. The execution of the godparenthood happens in public in the divine service. Godparenthood has a particularly religious meaning, because baptism is a sacrament in the catholic as well as in the protestant denomination[30].

3. Witnesses to a marriage

In most of the European countries other persons have to witness the marriage of the bride and groom. Witnesses to a marriage are supposed to aid and abet the married couple in hard times, even though this obligation is meant to be rather symbolic. That is why bride and groom usually chose persons they feel affiliated to in a special way: friends, kins or in some areas also patrons.[31].

Middle levels: voluntary physical relations

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4. Organizations with a particularly political interest.

Membership in such an organization is voluntary. What connects the members is a common political world view by which they distinguish themselves from dissenters. It can be set up socially, eco

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[29]   Haller, Dieter / Rodekohr, Bernd (2005): „DTV Atlas Ethnologie". München, p.221.

[30]   Haller / Rodekohr *Ethnologie*, 185; Fertig, Christine (2009): „ Rural Society and Social Networks in Nineteenth-Century Westphalia: The Role of Godparenting in Social Mobility." In: Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 4 2009, p.497-522.

[31]   Lemercier, Claire (2010): „Formal Networks. Why and How", 7 (source: http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00521527).

nomically or religiously. The members formulate and discuss it again and again and develop it, whereas they often accept ideological leadership from outside their habitat or even are integrated in ideological umbrella organizations. They try to carry their world view against others outside their organization.

From the perspective of class theory, class conscience is translated into class acting in these organizations.

One can count among these organizations for instance:

- political parties
- party-owned organizations of education (like for example the Hitler Youth)
- economic interest associations and labor unions
- political battle-front soldier unions
- religious associations with a political or missionary agenda
- election groups in parent's councils of schools (mostly connected to political parties)

5. Partly political organizations

Membership in these organizations is voluntary. The members primarily get together in order to cherish gregariousness and comradeship. However, in the second place they are ideological and therefore exclusive, even though a world view is less central here as it is in political organizations[32].

One can count among these organization:

- leisure time associations that are officially close to a party
- Veteran associations
- youth brigades (military education of teenagers)
- the Freemansons

In a way, occupational interest associations are also very close to this category. They have a certain political agenda, but also serve as a place for connecting people with the same occupation and for talking shop. Only people with a certain occupation can become members. If one evaluates the lists of these associations, one gets nearly tautological results without any real expressiveness: Bakers were in the bakers' guild, railway officials in the railway officials' association, teachers in the teacher's assembly and so on.

6. Organizations without a particular political interest

Membership is usually voluntary here. The members have a common leisure time interest. Every-

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[32] This conclusion can be drawn from the statutes of the associations of my research site.

one sharing it can – as a rule – become member. The common interest is largely limited to the hobby itself or to the common welfare. In general it is *not* carried against the interests of others [33].

The following associations can be counted among these organizations:

- hobby associations
- homeland and beautyfication associations
- voluntary fire brigades
- charity organizations

Lower Levels: involuntary physical relations

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7. School attendance

Compulsory education forces young people to attend a school. Even though the financial power of their parents has an influence on which school they attend[34], the pupils cannot directly choose their classmates. There is no common intrinsic goal among the students; the goal of every single one (or of his parents) is the individual school career (good marks, making it to the next class). Pupils often spend years with the same persons in one room. Interactions happen coercively.

8. Military service

In most European countries young men were to fulfill their compulsory military service. In Germany it took place at the lower soldier level or the lower officer level, depending on the school leaving certificate[35]. Men qualified for military service could not choose their comrades; in Germany they were mainly brought together with people from the same city or region.

There is usually no common goal in military service; the individual goal is mostly to pass through with as few problems as possible. Interactions happen coercively.

Lowest level: primarily spatial structured and virtual relations

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9. Neighborhood

Where you live usually depends on many factors: If you own or inherit private ground, how supply, demand and prices for flats look like, and where you prefer to move to. So the choice of a neighborhood is only voluntary under certain conditions. And which ties you eventually have to your di-

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[33] This can be gleaned from the statutes of such associations in my research site; in most of them it is said, that the respective associations should be places that are free of politics.
[34] See Paulsen, Friedrich (1906): „Das deutsche Bildungswesen in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung." Berlin.
[35] See Neugebauer, Karl-Volker (1993): „Militärgeschichte des Kaiserreichs 1871 bis 1918. Des Kaisers „schimmernde Wehr"". In: (ders. ed.): „Grundzüge der deutschen Militärgeschichte." Leipzig.

rect and indirect neighbors and how strong they are, is again something that depends on you and your neighbors. This can range from simple greeting in the stairway or at the streets to regularly mutual visits. And that is why data-based sources on neighborhoods are also only partly expressive concerning the relations between people. So empirically one has to define precisely the spatial dimensions of neighborhood. Do only the direct residents count as neighbors? Or does this apply to everybody from the same street or block?

10. Virtual relations (declarations of will)

People can declare their will together without knowing one another at all. They do so by signing a petition or donating an amount of money that is usually quite compact in comparison to their income. Here the sources are: donation-lists, petitions and election books of non-secret election (they name who gave whom his voice).

Five critieria for a hierarchy of relations

That married persons have a stronger tie to each other in general than people just signing a petition together, may intuitively be clear and does not need to be explained any further here. But the more complex the model of tie strength is, the more detailed the chosen ranking has to be elaborated. This is exactly what I am going to do now. I assigned the ten above tie levels with the help of five criteria to a ranking. In doing so, I always asked: Does the criterion apply to the respective level of tie strength? Does it only apply conditionally? Or does it not apply at all? In this sense each criterion weighs differently heavy. That is a reason why all criteria again have their own ranking. In terms of content all five criteria exactly fit those ties that can be recognized in my specific small town registers. Thus they are not meant to be universal, not even in their own ranking. Those who work with different registers of persons, might have to choose different criteria.

Before then the five criteria:

Rank	Criterion
1	Physical interaction
2	Voluntariness
3	Family
4	Mutual responsibility
5	Political world view

In the following passages I will explain these criteria more precisely, and also elaborate on why they weigh differently. With a chart, I will then make plain how exactly the ten levels of tie strength can be hierarchized with the help of these criteria.

The major criterion is *physical interaction*: Only if people meet in reality they can interact with all facets of human communication: verbal, non-verbal, social (in the sense of: I am communicating with you, while both of us know that the group we are being in, is having certain expectation of our behavior and the way we communicate[36]). Physical interaction is most likely the strongest and most direct channel for the construction of opinions and identities and for the individual socialisation, too. For only when people interact physically they can use all their biological functions that qualify them as social beings.

Voluntariness is the second most important criterion. People who voluntarily start a relation to one another consciously decided to get together with other people. The criterion *voluntariness* thus can be defined as: "it is likely that the relation is positive". Voluntariness is therefore adjusted below the factor "physical interaction", because there are also sources among the historical registers of persons, in which people have a voluntary tie to one another, but do not necessarily know about the existence of the others. That is the case in most of the virtual an thus indirect relations, for instance, if somebody signs a petition that also has been signed by others.

The third most important criterion I consider is the factor *family*. The criterion family applies to a tie level in case that one has a direct link to the core family. By speaking of a core family I mean: the married couple and their children. As already said above, the core family is the most important social unit, as it were an anthropological basic constant of the human being.

That the factor "family" anyhow only comes after the factor "physical interaction" and "voluntariness" has to do with the fact, that there are also relations which have only very weak ties to the core family. And it is exactly these weak ties that result from the fact, that those two criteria do not apply in their case. In this manner it is plausible, that one has cousins one cannot bear at all and sees only very seldom and involuntarily, for example because other members of the family celebrate their birthday. Or one has an uncle that emigrated to America and one has met him

physically only very few times – and can remember him only very vaguely. Anyhow, such relations do not play a role in the registers of persons I could find in my small Prussian town of Delitzsch.

At the fourth place the criterion *special mutual obligation and responsibility* is located. If a type of relation applies to that criterion, it means: The participants of that relation take on the responsible for the others being part of it. They support one another, namely in a way that is in the sense of the relation itself, and make sure the relation as such can persist: Married ones take care for one another, comrades fulfilling their military service take on common tasks, members of an association do their services for everybody or pay the membership fee. Especially when it comes to the grade of obligation there can be huge differences; just think of marriages in comparison to the military service. If the tradition of sources requires it, additional sub-graduations should be made here. But

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[36] White, Harrison C. (1992): „Identity and Control: A Structural Theory of Social Action". Princeton, p.312-314.

in the case of the registers of persons for small towns no such thing was necessary; it was enough to make a difference here between "special mutual obligation and responsibility existing" and "special mutual obligation and responsibility *not* existing" (the next chart will make that more clear).

Political world view finally has the lowest weight among the five criteria of hierarchization. If people have a particularly distinct political world view, they interpret certain areas of their perceived environment in a very special way – and to be specific in a way *politics* plays an explicit role in their interpretations. Of course one could ask now, whether life in general and all aspects of it are political, but for pragmatic reasons I will not get involved in such a discussion here.

There are two levels of ties in historical registers of persons of small towns, in which political world view explicitly plays a role: In political and partly political organizations. Concerning the other levels of ties it cannot be said clearly, whether politics plays a major role - everything else would be just pure speculation.

There is a reason, why I placed political world view in the lowest rank among the five criteria for the hierarchization of tie levels. For despite all the ideological supercharge of this term: It is probably much more important for the social behavior to know each other personally, meaning interacting physically, doing so voluntarily and being under an obligation to somebody. My partner or best friend can vote for another party than me. Nonetheless I have a significantly stronger tie to her or him. In the case of a petition, however, a virtual relation: Here I might express my political world view about a factual issue. But mostly I do not even know all of the signatories; lending them money or letting them babysit my children is something I surely would not do.

In the next chart you will see, which of the five criteria are distinct at which level of ties. In this way you can fathom the hierarchization of these levels in detail. I rated a type of tie the stronger the higher the rank of the respective matching criteria is. A higher rated criterion always beats a lower rated one. In case the same higher rating criteria match two different types of ties, I gave that one a higher ranking more lower criteria applied to. An x means: criterion applies, an (x) means: criterion applies conditionally, an empty entry is to say the respective criterion does not apply.

In two cases the crosses are distributed equally: with marriage and godparenthood as well as with school attendance and military service. Following the chart, I will explain in more detail why I gave marriage a higher ranking than godparenthood and school attendance a higher one than military service, without introducing additional criteria. Additionally, I will elaborate on the quite vague statement "criterion applies conditionally" in the respective cases it applies to.

Here now the chart:

	1. physical interaction	2. voluntariness	3. family	4. obligation	5. political world view
1. marriage	x	x	x	x	
2. godparenthood	x	x	x	x	
3. witness to a marriage	x	x	x		
4. organization with a political interest	x	x		x	x
5. partly political organizations	x	x		x	(x)
6. non-political organizations	x	x		x	
7. school attendance	x			(x)	
8. military service	x			(x)	
9. neighborhood	(x)	(x)		(x)	
10. virtual relations		x			(x)

At first, I will explain why marriage and godparenthood respectively school attendance and military service are ranked differently, even though they have the same distribution of crosses. In the case of a marriage all criteria are generally more intensively pronounced. And as a rule, one goes to school much longer than one fulfills military service. Accordingly, at school there is more time to learn to tolerate and understand the other and to get to know him, thus more time to initiate intensive relations like friendships[37]. That is why marriage and school attendance respectively get a higher rank than godparenthood and military service; further criteria for the ranking of all the types of ties are not necessary this way. They would only make the chart unnecessarily complicated.

And now the explanations for the single cases, in which an (x) is existing, thus a criterion only conditionally applies to:

- *partly political organization [(x) with world view]:* In these organizations the world view does play a certain role, but it is less central for this level of tie than in the case of political organizations.

- *School attendance and military service [(x) with obligation]:* The one who attends school and fulfills military service has obligations towards his classmates and comrades only as much as he has to cooperate concerning certain tasks, which are,

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[37] I follow the assumption: the more one gets to know the other, the more tolerant one gets towards him. There is also a counter position, saying: "… the more one can learn to despise him" (on this discussion see: Häußermann, Hartmut / Siebel, Walter (2004): „Stadtsoziologie. Eine Einführung." Frankfurt am Main, p.183.

however, given by *somebody else* (for instance during physical education, singing or camouflaging exercises). This cooperation may of course happen because of personal discernment – but first of all one is forced to do so. And, unlike in associations or in many family contexts, the obligation comes to an end right away, when one leaves school or the barracks.

• *Neighborhood [(x) with "physical interaction", "voluntariness" and "obligation"]:* Being neighbors does not automatically mean interacting physically all the time. The contact with neighbors does not have to be voluntary, and one does not necessarily have move to an area because of voluntary motives. And, last but not least, neighbors are only obliged to one another in a sense they behave in a certain respectful way, in order to get along with each other: No loud music at night, not letting the dog drop at the neighbor's plot, clear away the grime oneself has caused in the stairway, and so on.

• *Virtual relations [(x) with political world view]:* a political world view may play a role in virtual relations, but does not have to: The one who votes for instance for the transformation of a type of school to another may do so *intentionally* because of political reasons, but may do so just as well, because he is convinced that the other type of school simply prepares better for the professional life[38]. A comparable logic might apply to donations.

Range of the scheme

Now we come to a very important question: What range does the above SAA-Model have? How exactly can it map the social ties of the inhabitants of a small town like Delitzsch, and, above all: How does it deal with single cases?

This aspect definitely has to be clarified, before I elaborate on the question, which units of research the population of a living space can be divided into.

As I already said in the very beginning, SAA model like mine have a limited range. They serve to *approach* social reality and do so *more precisely* than those classification schemes that have been developed for social structure analysis are able to (how they are combined with the SAA is something I will show below). The theoretical idea behind SAA models is indeed meant universally: people have ties with one another with different strengths, and the stronger these ties are, the more they form a group. Their practical side, however, depends on the single case, on what kind of sources are available to the historian, sociologist or anthropologist. The more of them exist and the more manifold they are, the more precise one can approach reality with his model.

As I introduced the ideas behind the SAA to an audience for the first time, someone asked me:

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[38] See Tieke, Hendrik (2008): „Bürgertum und Bildungsbedarf in einer Kurstadt um 1900. Die Entstehung von Progymnasium und Höherer Töchterschule in Bad Oeynhausen." In: Quaschny, Rico (ed.): „Die Luisenschule. Zur Geschichte der Höheren Mädchenbildung in Bad Oeynhausen." Bielefeld, p.45-97.

"How can you ever know, whether a certain husband from your data had a stronger tie to his wife than to his buddies in his hobby association? Indeed it could also have been possible that he stopped loving her soon after their marriage, and lived with her only pro forma ever after!". This objection is surely justified; it aims at the fact, that each person is unique and thus every relation between two people is, too. But I have to make one thing clear at this point: I cannot reconstruct single cases, single cases are not at all the level of analysis of the SAA. That is set up in the sources and the nature of the subject of research: *Individual* ties can only be reconstructed with an enormous effort – which is impossible at least for someone that wants to scrutinize an entire small town or a village.

Anyhow, I can claim a certain reasonable representativity for the SAA. Explaining this representativity is a rather complicated issue. It requires a number of logical deductions and conclusions. For that, let us have a closer look at the respective registers of persons of my research town of Delitzsch, meaning registers of marriage, membership lists of associations, class books and so on. Actually they all only indicate: Exactly at the moment a person was recorded in the respective register, he started a *defined relation* to another person recorded there or he already had one that was enduring at that time.

I put "defined" in italic here in order to hint at the fact, that every type of relations you find in registers of persons has its own definition concerning its *content*. And from exactly that definition, it is possible to infer the *minimum-strength* the majority of registered persons had at the level of the respective relation. I will now explain this interrelation; it is the key to the question, how representative an SAA model can be.

For that let us first have a look at the type of relation called "marriage". In the decades around 1900 a marriage is a *formalized tie* in Germany, just as well as all other relations that can be deduced from the registers of persons in Delitzsch. The fact that it is formalized is to say that there was a clear consensus in German society about which requirements people had to fulfill in order to liaise this way, meaning: in order to pass for a marriage couple. They had to marry one another, they had to stay together for a long time, live together and appear as a unit in many social situations. They had to provide for each other, and in case they fathered children, they had to bring them up together. They had to be sexually faithful.

However, such a societal consensus on the character of a marriage could only exist, if at that time *crucial majority* of the married persons, that were registered, fulfilled these requirements *in the least* – and that must have been clearly more than just 50,1 percent. Otherwise the marriage as such could not have been existing as an institution *exactly defined as just explained* – either it would have been hotly debated, redefined, or had died out as a form of a relation. Or a relation with similar functions would have emerged that potential marriage couples "migrated" to: like today, when many people found a core family, socially acknowledged and without marrying one another,

and sometimes even leading a sexually open relationship "in public". But as a rule, all that did not happen in Germany around 1900; couples who would have done that, would have been proclaimed as outlaws widely (as well as in most of Europe in general).

These implied *minimum-requirements* on formalized relations now directly give us guidance on their *minimum-strengths:* If a significant majority of people fulfilled the requirements of a marriage, these persons *interacted* with their partners *physically*, they stayed together *voluntarily*, formed a *core family*, were *obliged* to each other to a great extent. So at the same time they fulfilled the criteria of tie strength for a marriage I discussed above. Otherwise they could not have been a marriage couple at all according to the common definition of a marriage: He who never interacts with a person can also not be a partner in marriage, in order to pick up one of my five criteria here.

What I just said about marriage as an example is of course valid for all other registers of persons, too, and all the types of relations included there. They are also indeed formalized types of relations. And for them as well, generally acknowledged and accepted requirements existed, resulting from their generally accepted and acknowledged definitions. And then, these requirements must also have been fulfilled at least by a clear majority of the participants in those relations in Delitzsch, if those relations could persist as an institution. There are two reasons making it very plausible, that they persisted this way: On the one hand the fact, that there are registers of persons that on these formalized relations that exist in the archives for the whole research time. On the other hand, that neither any narrative sources belonging to these registers give account of a real significant change within the respective types of relations (like for instance statues of associations), nor do the common research literature. Consequently, one can assume that a significant majority of the people being listed in there had a relation that in terms of minimum-strength resembled to what the definition of the respective relation simply required.

What I just deduced in principal says everything about the range of all SAA models: They tell us something about *minimum strengths* of relations, something about how strong the different types of relations were *in the least,* that the *majority* of people from the different kinds of registers had with one another. If now there are enough registers of persons having been handed down, the SAA models even address: How strong the relations were in the least the majority of a living space had with one another, and to be specific, *on various levels*, from the marriages down to the virtual relations.

This way it is possible to get lucidly closer to historical reality, than it would be possible with classification schemes *alone* – simply because we cannot leave the quite waggly foundation of pure attributional sociology, in case we only work with them.

Combining the SAA with systems of classification

Let us now get from theory to practice. How exactly do the work steps look like by which one can find out, if the groups of a classification schema are only analytical categories, or if they resembled real existing social agents?

Step by step, I will now explain how one has to proceed in order to find that out. For the sake of simplicity, I will rely on a scheme of classification here that only groups people by means of occupations (HISCO and HISCLASS for example are such schemes). More complex schemes of classification, including for example income or confession, of course can also be combined with it.

The work steps:

Step 1: Recording and classifying

1. You type in the registers of persons of your research area in a data base. You type in the name and occupation of all the listed persons (or, in the case of registers of marriage and class books, the occupation of the bride's father respectively the child's father, thus of the reference person).

2. In the case of registers in which only names appear but no occupations, you look them up in historical address books – and enter them.

3. You assign each single person in the database to a class of the chosen classification scheme, by means of his occupation or of the reference persons' occupation.

4. You count register per register: How big was the share of the respective class in the single registers?

Step 2: Hierarchizing and subsuming

5. You develop a hierarchy of relations. The scheme I developed above for the small town of Delitzsch can serve as an example for orientation here.

6. You assign every recorded register of persons to a level of tie strength.

7. Then you evaluate at every level of this hierarchy, namely form the perspective of every single class: Which class did the class in focus have relations to? You do so by setting off the shares against one another that were received under step 1.4. Because you take the perspective of every single class in this work step, you have to leave out exactly those registers in which not a single member of the respective class in focus appears.

Step 3: Visualizing

What is actually exiting happens when you visualize the results. For then you get to each individual relation profile of every single class. And – as said in the very beginning – from it you can read how much the analytical category "class" resembles a single social agent, and, in case it did so, how cut

off or open it was in a social sense and which social, spatial or political affinity it had to other clas-
ses.

Now I will present to you seven visualizations. Each one stands for an ideal typical result and is taken from the perspective of an example class (here called "class in focus"). First of all it displays the entirety of all relations having been established by the members of a class in focus. In Detail these are the relations, that a) happened between group members (green) and b) existed between the members of the class in focus and the members of other classes (other colors). Each bar stands for a relation level of the tie hierarchy developed above. The greener the bar, the more rela-tions have been established among members of the class in focus. The more colorful the bar is on the other hand, the more relations have been established by the class in focus with members of other groups at this level. And the more one of the colors is distinct, the more the green group has linked itself to the respective group at a level of relation.

To put it simply, this means: The greener the whole chart, the more the class in focus was a so-cial agent in reality, too. As explained in detail in the beginning, the strength of the single ties at the single levels plays an important role, meaning more refined pictures result here. The charts that follow now will make this clear. With them, I conclude this paper.
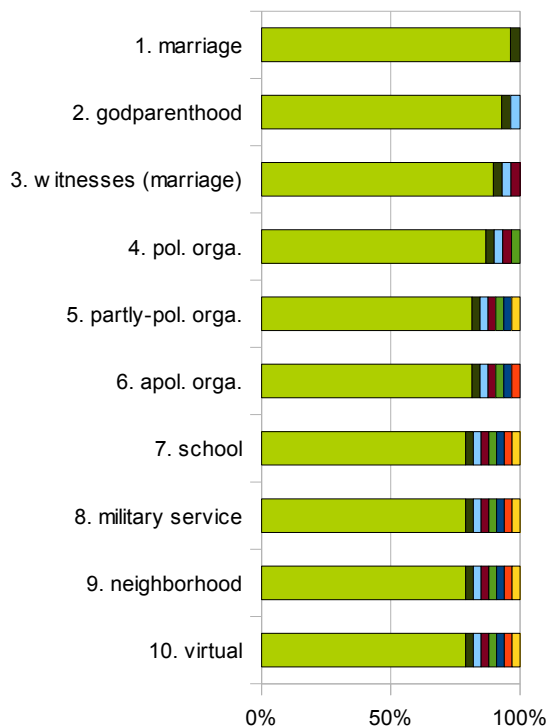

chart 1: class in focus (green) is a social agent, being extremely cut off and closed
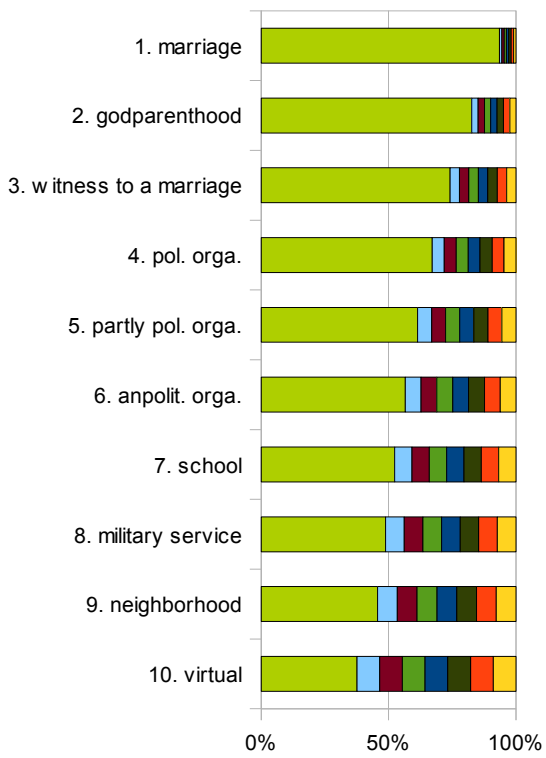
chart 2: class in focus (green) is a social agent, being closed in its core, but open in the direction of its margins
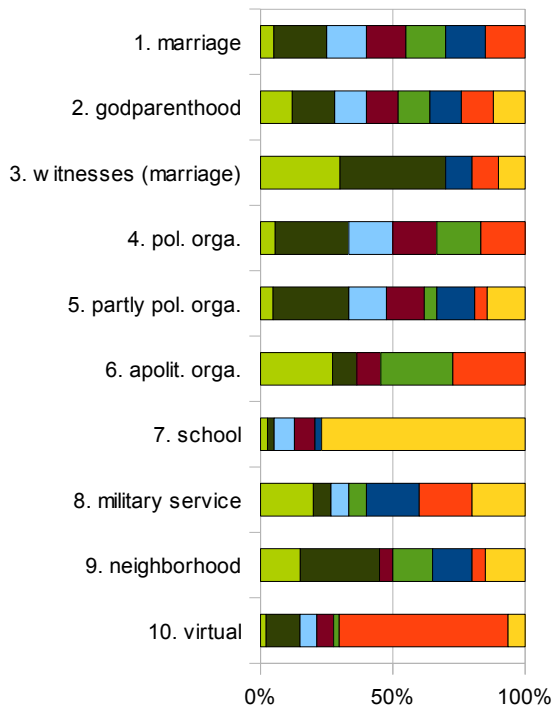

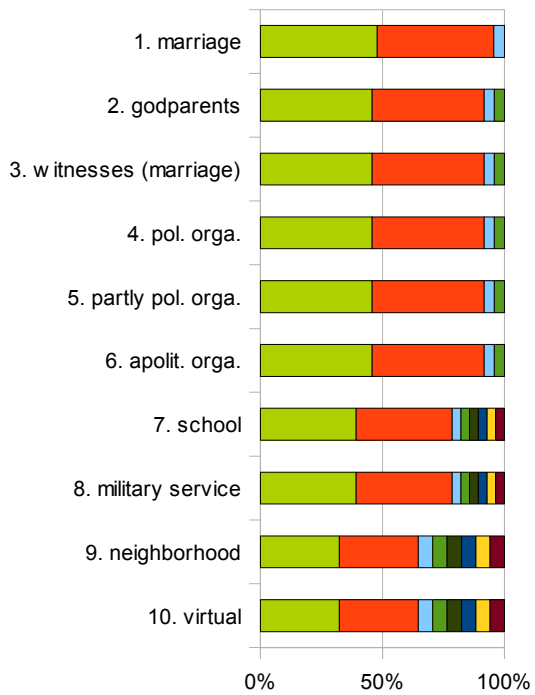chart 3: class in focus (green) is no social agent; it is only an attribute group

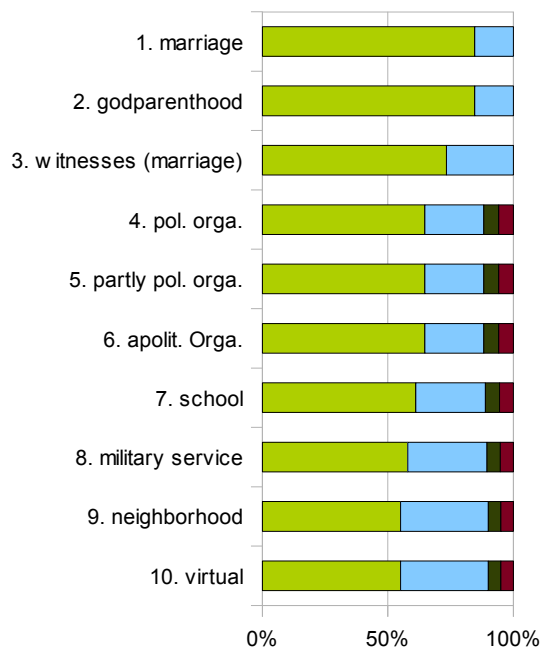chart 4: class in focus (green) forms a social agent together with another class (red)

chart 5: class in focus forms a social agent with a high **social** affinity to another class (blue)
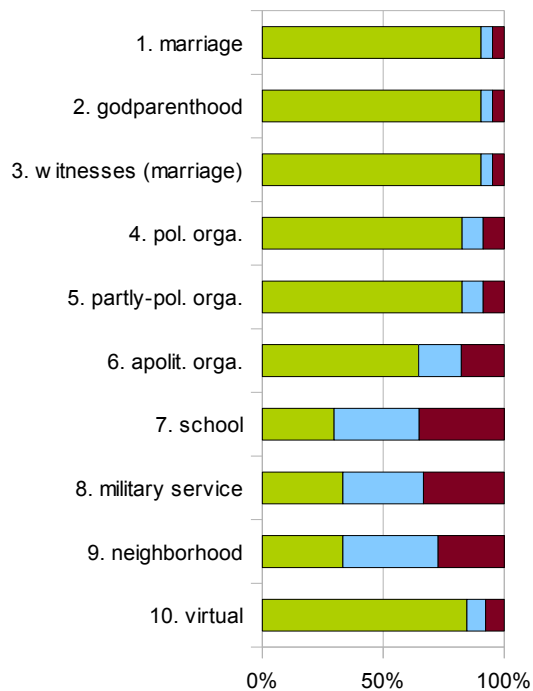
*chart 7: class in focus **spatially** lives together with two more classes (blue, green), but does not form a social agent with them*

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