Contextual Effects on Hopelessness in the Second Half of the Life

Davide Morselli

Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research LIVES – University of Lausanne
Contact: davide.morselli@unil.ch

Abstract

INTRODUCTION. Depression and suicidal ideation are tightly linked to the lack of hope in the future. Hopelessness begins with the occurrence of negative life events and develops through the perception that negative outcomes are stable and pervasive. Most of the research has investigated individual factors predicting hopelessness (e.g., Abramson, Metalsky, & Alloy, 1989). However, other studies have shown that the social context may also play an important role: disadvantaged contexts exacerbate the feeling that future is unreachable and hopeless (e.g., Elliott, 2000).

AIMS. In this study we investigate the role of shared emotions (**emotional climates**, Rimé (2007)) on the sense of hopelessness during the second half of the life. Emotional climates have been defined as the emotional relationships constructed between members of a society and describe the quality of the environment within a particular community.

METHODS. We present results of multilevel analysis (individuals nested into cantons) to explore the relationship between characteristics of the Swiss cantons and hopelessness. At the individual level data from the NCCR-LIVES project "Vulnerability and Growth. Developmental dynamics and differential effects of the loss of an intimate partner in the second half of life" (n =2832) were used. At the canton level, we used official socio-economic indicators and aggregated data from Swiss Household Panel.

RESULTS. Results show that hopelessness was mainly explained by individual factors as life events and personality. However canton's unemployment rate and climates of optimism or pessimism had also an effect on the individual perception of hopelessness.

CONCLUSIONS. Individuals are more likely to feel hopeless after having experienced critical events (i.e., loss of the partner in the late life) in cantons with high rates of unemployment and with a high share of negative emotions. On the contrary, positive emotional climates play a protective role against hopelessness.

Hypotheses

We expected that:

- hopelessness would have a **positive relationship with depression, and negative life events**.
- hopelessness would be related to personality traits. In particular, **positively correlated to neuroticism and negatively to extraversion** (see Chioqueta & Stiles, 2005).
- in socio-economically **disadvantaged cantons** people would be **more likely to experience hopelessness**.
- socio-economic conditions would be linked to psycho-social factors (Perez-Smith, Spirito, & Boergers, 2002), and thus that **disadvantaged cantons would be more likely to develop negative emotional climates**.
- shared emotions within each canton would increase or reduce the probability of their residents to experience hopelessness: **an optimistic (i.e., positive) climate would decrease individual hopelessness, while a depressive (i.e., negative) climate would increase it.**

Individual Data and Measures

Individual data: NCCR-LIVES "Vulnerability and Growth", a study on psychological adaptation to marital break-up in the second half of the life, 25 Swiss cantons (w/o Ticino). Age: 40 to 92 years, $M = 61.71$, $SD = 13.24$; Men: 43.36%, Women: 56.99%.

Measures:

- *Hopelessness*: Hopelessness scales (Beck, Weissman, Lester, & Trexler, 1974).
- *Depression*: Centre of Epidemiology Studies Depression Scale (CES-D, Radloff, 1977).
- *Neuroticism* and *Extraversion*: BFI-10 (Big Five Inventory, Rammstedt & John, 2007)
- *Negative life events*: 39.41% divorced or separated, 20.06% were widow, (1.49%) unemployed.

Canton Data and Measures

Socio-economic factors (retrieved from the SFSO)

- Cantons' GDP in 2011: 48733 CHF in Uri to 156795 in Bâle-Ville, $M = 69509$, $SD = 24987$.
- GDP variation since 2008: from -0.02% in Jura to 0.08% in Nidwald, $M = 0.02$, $SD = 0.03$
- Cantons' unemployment rate in 2011: from 0.91% in Obwald to 5.97% in Genève, $M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.29$

Emotional Climates:

Indicators aggregated from the Swiss Household Panel (Wave 2011)

- *Climate of optimism:* 'Often plenty of strength, energy and optimism". $Min = $ -1.96 in Vaud, $Max = $ to 0.74 in Schaffhouse.
- *Climate of depression:* "Often have negative feelings, blues, being desperate, suffering from anxiety or depression". $Min = $ -0.62 in Appenzell Rh.-Int., $Max = $ 2.39 in Valais.

To reduce indicators' bias, a spatial weighting approach to context data (Elcheroth et al., 2013) was applied. A between-canton distance weighting matrix was computed as the minimum travel time to move from the geographical centre of one canton to the those of the others and the difference between the proportions of the four national languages in each canton (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Switzerland According to Different Types of Distance
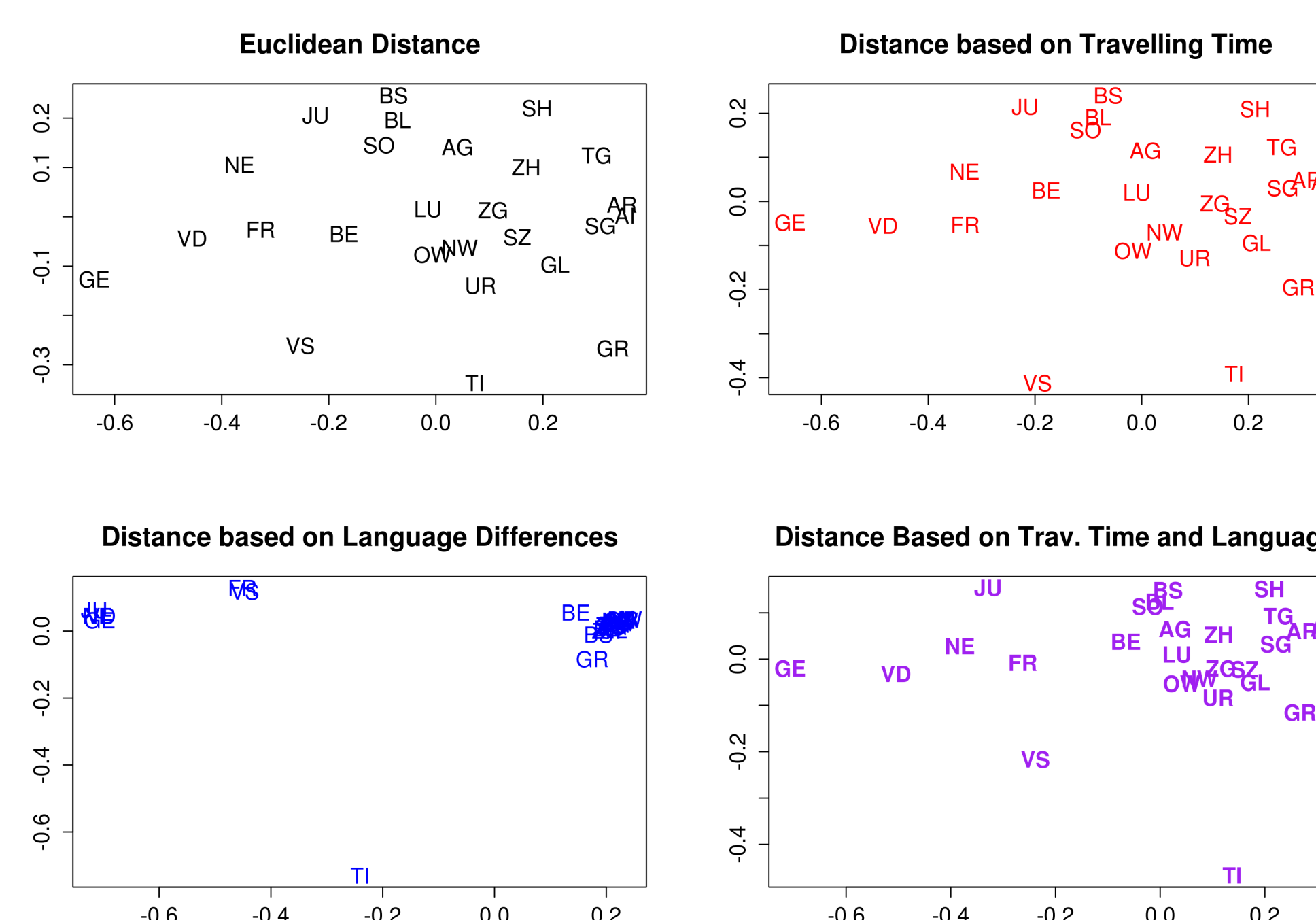
Results

Table 1: Spearman Correlations between Canton-Level Indicators

Adjust for multiple tests = holm

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
GDP per capita	1.00				
GDP change since 2008	−0.07	1.00			
Unemployment Rate	0.49	−0.52	1.00		
Climate of Optimism	−0.39	0.61*	−0.87 ***	1.00	
Climate of Depression	−0.03	−0.24	0.39	−0.46	1.00

Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Table 2: Standardized Regression Coefficients of Two-level Models of Hopelessness

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Intercept	.05 (.03)	.05 (.03)	.05 (.03)	.05 (.03)	.05 (.03)
Men	.00 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.00 (.03)	.00 (.03)
Age	.12 (.02)***	.12 (.02)***	.12 (.02)***	.12 (.02)***	.12 (.02)***
Unemployed	.18 (.12)	.18 (.12)	.18 (.12)	.18 (.12)	.18 (.12)
Separated	−.07 (.04)*	−.07 (.04)*	−.07 (.04)*	−.07 (.04)*	−.07 (.04)*
Widow	−.09 (.04)*	−.09 (.04)*	−.08 (.04)*	−.09 (.04)*	−.09 (.04)*
Depression	.49 (.02)***	.49 (.02)***	.49 (.02)***	.49 (.02)***	.49 (.02)***
Neuroticism	.18 (.02)***	.18 (.02)***	.18 (.02)***	.18 (.02)***	.18 (.02)***
Extraversion	−.14 (.02)***	−.14 (.02)***	−.14 (.02)***	−.14 (.02)***	−.14 (.02)***
GDP	−.04 (.02)*	−.02 (.02)	.00 (.02)	−.03 (.02)	−.02 (.02)
GDP change since 2008	.00 (.02)	−.02 (.02)	−.02 (.02)	−.01 (.02)	−.01 (.02)
Unemployment Rate	.09 (.02)***			.08 (.02)***	.08 (.02)***
Climate of Optimism		−.08 (.02)***			
Climate of Depression			.08 (.02)***		
Climate of Optimism (resid.)				−.06 (.03)ᵃ	
Climate of Depression (resid.)					.05 (.03)ᵃ
BIC	6017.88	6015.02	6016.68	6027.15	6027.91
Log Likelihood	−2953.94	−2952.51	−2953.34	−2954.65	−2955.03
Num. obs.	2583	2583	2583	2583	2583
Num. groups: canton	25	25	25	25	25

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, ᵃ $p < 0.08$

Main Findings

- Most of the variance of **hopelessness is explained at the individual level** and by psychological factors, but **also context plays a role**.
- Both socio-economic (i.e., **unemployment rate**) and social psychological factors explained between canton differences of hopelessness.
- Unemployment rate correlated with emotional climates.
- **An optimistic climate decreased** the probabilities of high hopelessness, a **depressive climate increased** them.

References

Abramson, L. Y., Metalsky, G. I., & Alloy, L. B. (1989). Hopelessness depression: A theory-based subtype of depression. *Psychological review*, 96(2), 358. (02678)

Beck, A. T., Weissman, A., Lester, D., & Trexler, L. (1974). The measurement of pessimism: the hopelessness scale. *Journal of consulting and clinical psychology*, 42(6), 861. (03229)

Chioqueta, A. P., & Stiles, T. C. (2005). Personality traits and the development of depression, hopelessness, and suicide ideation. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 38(6), 1283–1291. (00088)

Elcheroth, G., Penic, S., Fasel, R., Giudici, F., Glaeser, S., Joye, D., … Spini, D. (2013, September). Spatially weighted context data and their application to collective war experiences. *Sociological Methodology*, 43(1), 364–411. Retrieved 2013-10-16, from http://smx.sagepub.com/lookup/doi/10.1177/0081175013486757 (00003) doi: 10.1177/0081175013486757

Elliott, M. (2000). The stress process in neighborhood context. *Health & place*, 6(4), 287–299. (00110)

Perez-Smith, A., Spirito, A., & Boergers, J. (2002, June). Neighborhood predictors of hopelessness among adolescent suicide attempters: Preliminary investigation. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 32(2), 139–145. doi: 10.1521/suli.32.2.139.24400

Radloff, L. S. (1977). The CES-D scale a self-report depression scale for research in the general population. *Applied psychological measurement*, 1(3), 385–401. (25470)

Rammstedt, B., & John, O. P. (2007). Measuring personality in one minute or less: A 10-item short version of the big five inventory in english and german. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41(1), 203–212. (00378)

Rimé, B. (2007). The social sharing of emotion as an interface between individual and collective processes in the construction of emotional climates. *Journal of Social Issues*, 63(2), 307–322. (00050)