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## **A Durkheim-inspired interpretation of social mechanisms relating to health, longevity and sense of coherence in ageing populations**

### Abstract

It has been known for a long time that social variables are related to morbidity and mortality. In sociology Emile Durkheim opened this field of investigation and it is still of central interest in sociological inquiries. Questions have also been raised about how these relations can be interpreted within sociological theory. This article argues that Durkheim's ideas about social facts in conjunction with J. L. Austin's analyses of performatives and Durkheim's ideas about nomie and anomie can be used for such an interpretation. There is no claim that these theories exhaust the relevant possible sociological theoretical interpretations of how social variables are related to morbidity and mortality. As an example of this, it is pointed out that the results reported here are partly in line with Antonovsky's theory of sense of coherence. The analyses are complemented by a presentation of a space of social actions inspired by the theory of social institutions derived from the work of T. Parsons.

Three central mechanisms are developed: the production of social facts, the production of social fact information and, the production of nomie and anomie. The text is centred on how social facts and self-esteem are produced. Production of social facts, social fact information and self-esteem are related to salutogenic processes.

Key words: social fact, nomie, anomie, performative, identity, sense of coherence, health.

## ***Introduction***

The relationship between social factors and longevity and health was an early theme in social science. One such example is the study of suicide by Emile Durkheim, first published in French in 1897 [1]. This line of inquiry was followed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and questions have been asked about how best to develop the Durkheimian analyses [2]. Thus, this presentation is guided by the research question of whether it is possible to develop mechanisms [3] or functions that promote health and longevity related to Durkheim's theories. I focus on the development of this theoretical tradition and omit other very important factors relating to health and longevity. It is also clear to me that my experiences are not unique. In social work there are practices similar to my work, such as methods to focus problem solving. I intend to give a theoretical interpretation of such experiences in order to explain aspects of how such praxis works.

After a brief introduction of the pathways from activities to health, this presentation focuses on two main theoretical interpretations of salutogenic mechanisms, which concern (a) production of social facts, production of social fact information and the importance of arenas for social fact production, and (b) production of nomos and anomie and the great variety of possible social arenas. Both these mechanisms also produce variations in sense of coherence.

A common assumption is that various human functions have to be exposed to functional load to be maintained. One such dominant function is physical activity, and the trainability of humans [4] even at older ages has been documented [5–10]. It has also been shown that ordinary domestic activities make a significant contribution to maintaining physical fitness among the elderly [11]. Thus, I assume in this presentation that maintaining or moderately increasing physical activities promotes health and longevity. Another theme is the production of sense of coherence, which has been related to salutogenic outcomes [12, 13].

Another guiding principle is that the older a cohort grows, the greater the variation between individuals becomes in many important aspects [14, 15]. Thus, it is important to understand that generalizations about people in older age groups are less accurate, as there are greater proportions of the population whose values differ greatly from the central value. This large variation among the elderly means that there are those who are almost independent of the kinds of processes to maintain health put forward in this presentation and others who depend on them to a large extent. Activities and arenas of action also vary

widely among the elderly.

The line of my argument is to describe general salutogenic mechanisms that are at work in everyday social interaction. These mechanisms are of much greater importance for the elderly population, which has a larger proportion of individuals who have lower reserve capacity, like the frail elderly. For a 50 year old person with normal strength and fitness, a fortnight's lack of training through daily activities is not very important for his or her ability to lead a normal life. For an aged person living with marginal strength and physical fitness, not engaging in daily activities for a fortnight together with lack of daily training will lead to a much higher risk of falling, for instance, compared with the middle-aged person with greater strength [11].

## ***Mechanisms of social facts production and their relation to health and longevity***

One outcome of social interaction is the production and maintenance of social facts<sup>1</sup>. First I shall present an analysis of social facts and then relate this to health and longevity. The analysis draws first on fundamental insights from Emile Durkheim [1, 16] and second from an analysis by J. L. Austin of how to do things by words [17].

Social facts are two-sided coins. A promise is a social fact. Another example is a joint decision. One can give a promise to someone, and then that person, or any person, may refer to that fact, the promise. Thus one side of the coin is the individual instance of the social fact. The other side is the social institution by which it is possible to accomplish the individual instance<sup>2</sup>. Let me take a simple social fact produced by a simple ritual: selection of the first catcher in the children's game "Run and Catch." In England, this could be done by counting-out rhymes like "Eeny, meeny, mony, my, Barcelona, bona stry" chanted by the group leader pointing to each child in turn. The child on whom the last word falls is chosen [18]. In my experience this can be done by nursery rhymes.

Among a group of 5 year old children who say that there is nothing to do, I suggested 'Why not "Run and Catch"?' After an acceptance, I said

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<sup>1</sup> "Of course the elementary qualities of which the social fact consists are present in germ in individual minds. But the social fact emerges from them only when they have been transformed by association since it is only then that it appears. Association itself is also an active factor productive of special effects. In itself it is therefore something new. When the consciousness of individuals, instead of remaining isolated, becomes grouped and combined, something in the world has been altered." 1. Durkheim, E., *Suicide, a study in sociology*. 1951, Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press. 405 pp. p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> "First, it is not true that society is made up only of individuals; it also includes material things, which play an essential role in the common life. The social fact is sometimes so far materialized as to become an element of the external world. For instance, a definite type of architecture is a social phenomenon; but it is partially embodied in houses and buildings of all sorts which, once constructed, become autonomous realities, independent of individuals. It is the same with the avenues of communication and transportation, with instruments and machines used in industry or private life which express the state of technology at any moment in history, of written language, etc. Social life, which is thus crystallized, as it were, and fixed on material supports, is by just so much externalized, and acts upon us from without. Avenues of communication which have been constructed before our time give a definite direction to our activities, depending on whether they connect us with one or another country. A child's taste is formed as he comes into contact with the monuments of national taste bequeathed by previous generations." 1. *Ibid.* p. 348.

the meaningless words and pointed at participants one after the other ‘*Ole dole doff kinke lane koff, koffe lane binke bane ole dole doff*’ and a social fact was established: the first catcher.

My analysis of this simple establishing of a social fact draws on linguistics. Language operates by conventions or rules governing signs. There is a wide range of possible sounds that can be used for language. Small babies make noises, but they develop a faculty to distinguish the sounds that are used in the tongue spoken around them. These sounds are called phonemes and they are very strongly determined by convention. It is interesting to note that it is possible to study these phonemes with a very small sample from a population. This is an important methodological insight by which phenomena determined by convention can be studied with just a few instances. Linguistic information is established by conventional rules.

Utterances like ‘I promise you that X’ or routines as in the example of “Run and Catch” have been analysed by J. L. Austin [17] as performatives. When people use performatives, they are doing things with words, as Austin puts it. In my analyses here, I have generalized Austin’s ideas on the utterances of words to a wider range of actions, and I have also replaced “to do things by words” with “to establish social facts by actions”.

This kind of social fact production is governed by a set of rules [17] that are generally independent of the linguistic meaning of the uttered words, if there are any. In many cases, there is a linguistic meaning that is clearly related to the social fact established, but if so, it is just an accidental consequence of the applied rules. The rules to establish these kinds of social facts are:

- 1) behavioural conditions for what to say and/or do,
- 2) participant conditions for who can take part,
- 3) conditions for the qualification of and relations between participants,
- 4) conditions for the situation,
- 5) conditions for the place where the social fact can be established, and
- 6) conditions for the use of natural objects or artefacts (as symbols).

The behavioural conditions are obvious. They are what is said and/or done. These rules must simply be followed; otherwise the social fact is not accomplished. Utterances are often part of these conditions, but there can also be other things like exchange of tokens, exhibiting artefacts, making marks or pictures, or just moving in accordance with patterns.

The participant conditions are also followed, but this is not always noted by the participants. In my experience, it has been possible for me to do the routine to establish a first catcher among groups of 5 year olds, but not among 12 year old children. In the latter case, they do not accept me as a suitable person to perform the routine. It is also interesting that these conditions can include participants who are not physically present. Teenagers can easily take an object or an empty spot to represent a person. In my upbringing in Lutheran Christianity I was taught that in the Holy Communion service, the total congregation of present and earlier living members took part in the celebration. Physically present participants gathered in a semicircle, with the absent ones of the congregation virtually present at the imagined, non-physical semicircle, thereby completing a full circle.

The conditions for qualification of and relations between participants can be quite elaborate. For example, to establish a marriage in a church in Sweden, there have to be two candidates who have certificates that they are not currently married, there must be a minister who has been ordained to perform a marriage ceremony, and there must be at least two witnesses.

The conditions for the situation can be that the occasion has been announced in a special way, for instance the annual meeting for stockholders in a company or the formal agenda for taking part in a meeting.

The conditions of place are sometimes very important. The social fact is dependent on where it is performed. In most cultures, burial grounds are cherished. The places where we accomplish the social fact of burying our dead are sacred even in secular societies. Another example is rituals performed by street gangs in large cities where they mark their turf by rituals and marking the area with symbols. This latter example also has conditions for using natural objects or artefacts.

### ***Social fact information***

When actions are performed in accordance with rules for producing a social fact, it is not only the social fact that is produced. What is usually also produced, but not observed by the participants, is the social fact information processed by the participants. They receive unobserved, unintended and often unconscious information about the conditions that produced (or sometimes failed to produce) the social fact. Thus they get information about who the participants are, what relations they have with the other participants, what the situation is, and about the place as one arena where they belong. I propose that

this kind of information is very important for human identity formation and maintenance.

There are occasions when the social fact information makes itself strongly felt. This is often the case when a performance misfires [17] so that the social fact is not established [19]. An example from my experience:

A family comprised of mother Greta, father and 5 year old daughter Anna moved to an area with newly built one-family houses. Greta was anxious on Anna's behalf: could Anna find a new girl friend? After a day or two, Greta was happy to tell me that Anna had found a new nice friend, Barbara. The next day Greta turned to me and told me in a worried voice that Anna had got so upset yesterday that she had left Greta and Barbara and gone to her bedroom, where she had stayed weeping for almost an hour. What was the matter with Anna? To my question about what had happened, Greta told me that Anna and Barbara had come dashing into her kitchen in a jolly mood and with red cheeks. Anna said that Barbara said the nursery rhyme runs like this: "Ole dole *doff* ... but it should run Ole dole *moff*. Please tell Barbara because she does not take my word for it." But Greta told Anna that Barbara was right. The nursery rhyme runs "Ole dole *doff*." At that point, Anna started to cry and ran into her bedroom. Greta asked me: "How can she become so upset just by being in the wrong on *moff* instead of *doff*?"

My interpretation of this is that Anna lived under uncertain premises. The family had just moved to this new area and Barbara was a new friend. In this uncertain situation, Anna felt that she could depend on her mother under all circumstances. When her mother told Anna that Barbara was right, Anna got the social fact information that it was her mother and the new girl Barbara who could do this social fact together and that she, Anna, was excluded from this spirit of community. This is a typical trait of social fact information that we react to, usually without being fully aware of what information we are reacting to.

This phenomenon is also relevant in the context of some analyses within the ethnomethodological tradition. This tradition studies what people (ethnos) do (methodology) to accomplish things. One such area of investigation is conversational analysis. A main result is that conversational openings, closings and subject changes often follow habits or rules [20, 21]. These rules are a part of the pragmatics of a language. What is accomplished then is, for example, the closing of a conversation. These are also examples of social facts.

Conversations are often directed at accomplishing ends such as social facts. For example, invitations are typical results of conversations. Results of conversations are often produced in a standardized way. People have to pay attention to these standards during the conversation in order to accomplish a result that they are comfortable with. One such standard device is pre-sequencing. The results produced could be the same across cultures, but accomplished by different sets of rules. An example:

Among the middle class in western Sweden 20 years ago it was the custom to build long pre-sequences of utterances before issuing an invitation or asking for a small loan of money *et cetera*. A conversation could run like this:

- 1) It looks as if we shall have nice weather this weekend.
- 2) Yes, it should be nice.
- 3) What are your plans for the weekend?
- 4) None so far.
- 5) Karin and I are planning to start the barbeque season in our garden.
- 6) That's a good idea.
- 7) We thought that we should invite some couples to join us.
- 8) How nice.
- 9) Do you think that you and Hanna can join us at 3 pm ...

A function of the pre-sequencing is that a speaker does not have to finish what he or she was saying and thus does not place the other person in the situation of having to decline an offer, invitation or request. There are several opportunities to stop the sequence before it has come to its end [22, 23]. In the example above this could have been done at position 4 by delivering the response "Yes, I am leaving for a weekend in London" instead of "None so far". The receiver has to attend to the conversation so that he or she is not suddenly facing an offer that cannot be refused.

When I visited a summer school in Ann Arbor, Michigan, 20 years ago I used the way described above to speak with my new friends there. They were annoyed by my way of building pre-sequences. They felt themselves "forced into a corner" and asked me to get to the point at once without any pre-sequencing. The important aspect here is that we achieved the same outcome, such as an invitation, but we did it in different ways. Thus, when I did things like invitations in a way which differed from the way these things were done in Ann Arbor at that time, I was perceived as a manipulative person.

Thus, when we use divergent ways of doing the same social facts, such as invitations, they are accomplished as such but also often unobserved social



fact information is conveyed about the oddness of that divergent person who is not one of us living in this place. I would suggest that many of the sentiments and attitudes between social groups have their roots in or are at least fertilized by this kind of social fact information. As such, they are also part of identity formation within these groups and provide a sense of coherence.

There is an important methodological conclusion to draw from this analysis. To study the mechanisms of social facts, we need to study the conditions or rules by which these are produced. With knowledge of these rules, we are able to analyse what the social fact information is, and thus how the identity of those taking part in this praxis is formed and what content it has. As many of these conditions or rules are unobserved in ordinary life, this kind of information processing has to a large extent been ignored by social psychology.

*Why is social fact information important for health and longevity, especially in older ages?*

At about the same time as I worked with an intervention study in an aged population [24], Antonovsky developed his ideas about what promotes health, salutogenesis, as opposed to what causes unhealth [12, 13]. The sense of coherence was one of the salutogenic forces he proposed. Since then, there has been a lot of research estimating this sense in populations, relating it to health and longevity [22, 23]. It has also been reported that the sense of coherence can be increased in older people by social interventions designed to create an active and productive everyday life [24]. These studies have investigated statistical correlations between sense of coherence and health. I am trying to uncover some mechanisms that produce these correlations.

My analysis of the production of social facts shows that social fact information concerns the connections people build in a network of different positions and expectations between participants, and how they are tied to places of importance for people and their identities. My interpretation is that the production of social fact information results in identity formation and maintenance as well as a sense of connection to the social and physical surroundings. To my mind, this is very much what sense of coherence is about. My theory suggests that a sense of coherence is produced during interaction, rather than being a personal trait that is stable by 30 years of age, as suggested by Antonovsky [22]. Even if this relation to sense of coherence is disregarded, I propose from my experience that social fact information is of importance for identity maintenance and everyday activities, especially among vulnerable elderly persons. An example:

Ulla lives in a nursing home. She is quite capable of hearing, speaking and making decisions in her everyday life. She manages to eat if the food has been prepared in portions suitable to chew. I observed her breakfast, where two nursing orderlies assisted four clients at a table. One of the orderlies asked the other: "What does Ulla want to have on her bread?" The other orderly replied: "She wants marmalade." The first one prepared a sandwich and gave it to Ulla. During this sequence, Ulla sat totally inactive looking down at the table.

My interpretation of this suggested that Ulla was socially excluded by the way the orderlies acted. The social fact was a decision about a sandwich, and that social fact was accomplished without her participation. The social fact information from this interaction was that Ulla was excluded, analogous to the exclusion of the daughter Anna in a previous example. There was no justification for this exclusion of Ulla. It would have been just as easy to ask Ulla what she wanted on her bread. She was clear in thought with the capacity for decision-making and speech. For months the routine at the breakfast table had excluded her as a person. She reacted with passivity. It had harmed her identity and the passivity was harmful as such. In my experience, I have hundreds of such examples.

There are at least two important lessons to learn from this. It is well known that old persons who are relocated when they become dependent on others for daily living get confused [26, 27]. They are stressed and their identity is threatened. In such situations, it is very important to support identity processes instead of excluding persons. They need to be integrated into the social fact production in the nursing home. Among the easiest things to change are the everyday decisions that I have given an example of; they can be joint decisions where the client is one part.

The other lesson is that the inclusion of clients into social fact production also promotes activity in them. Even a simple thing like the change in body posture from looking down at the table to looking up at the orderly is important. The production of social facts in interaction with other participants is precisely an activity that in most cases results in larger movements than the altering of posture. Because it puts some load on functional capacity, activity is the main route to maintaining strength and health. Elderly people are at higher risk of exclusion from arenas and have lower reserve capacity, so it is of greater importance for them to be able to produce social facts in interaction with others.

## ***The importance of arenas for social interaction***

Let us define an “arena” as a “sphere of interest, activity, or competition” [28]. From an individual’s perspective an arena is, predominately, a place restricted by boundaries, which in many cases are norms, where there is a certain kind of activity in which the person wants to take part and where the interaction is performed in ways that the person approves of. This concept was used and elaborated during an intervention study [24] and subsequently during experiences working with elderly care organizations. During ageing, individuals are not only at risk of losing functions, but also social relations and arenas. Ageing could be described as a battle to retain functions, social relations and arenas. Let me give an example:

Arnold, a 73 year old man, described how he was very proud of his working life, but of even greater importance was his experience of having and raising children. He lived as a widower in a rented flat in a neighbourhood with many children. Arnold missed the interaction with children very much. He added that there were no children to interact with. They were all occupied with school, nurseries, or daytime child minders. Once he went out to a playground to see if he could establish some contact with the child minders and their kids. On that occasion, the child minders gathered the children and left the playground, leaving him with a sense of having been accused of child abuse.

It was not that Arnold had lost his faculty to raise children, but the arenas in which to do so. Let us look at another example:

When supervising a team at a day care centre for persons who had mild dementia, I gave the staff the task of constructing arenas where the clients could take an active part. The clients had lunch at the centre. The meals were delivered to the centre because the kitchen was very small and only two persons could work in it at a time. After two weeks, one of the orderlies told me that now she used the kitchen for such an arena. There were three ladies who enjoyed doing the dishes, so now this had become their task. The sad thing was that there was only space for two of them at a time. The good thing was that there was a race to the kitchen after lunch each day. The loser of the race alternated among the three ladies. The first one was happy washing dishes and the second was happy drying them, but the third was dissatisfied. The orderly told me: Every time the third lady comes, I give her a broom and a dustpan and ask her to sweep the floor. They are never willing to do that. Is it not odd

that they refuse?

No, it is not odd to refuse to sweep the floor. The ladies had mild dementia, but were not silly. They have been in this kind of arena many times before. They have had a meal at a friend's house, they have helped the hostess to bring out the china to the kitchen, they have helped with doing the dishes, but they have never been asked to sweep the floor. If any guest should ask for a broom, she would be at risk of never being invited again. It is simply not the way things are done in this arena.

This last example from working with arenas, even in social institutional care, has two important implications. First, the introduction of this new arena gave room and the stimulus to take part in activities to a greater extent than before. This is a general phenomenon. These activities are helping to promote health and longevity. Second, the examples provide a connection between the ideas of arenas and social facts. To do the dishes is not just an action to increase hygiene, but because it is also done in a place and by participants it is surrounded by conventions that make it a social fact. Different arenas are, among other things, characterized by the operating social fact conventions. When Durkheim [1, 29] introduced the ideas of social facts, he was very careful to tie them to social communities.

My use of social facts ties them to social communities, small or large. For instance, it could be the right way of doing the dishes within a marriage. Sometimes a husband can find that he has met all hygiene standards of doing the dishes, and then his wife comes and does something else that belongs to the way that we do the dishes in our home, satisfying the conditions needed to establish the social fact that "the dishes are done".

This then is the importance of social arenas. They are the places where we accomplish social facts, thus making it possible to engage in activities that promote health and longevity and at the same time providing us with social fact information which supports our identities, our social and physical relations, and also produces a sense of coherence.

In this connection it is important also to point out that artefacts can have this character of social facts, so that a building can tie us to a history of our community, while a ring can tie us to a marriage [1]. An example is when a widow in her daily routine of making breakfast suddenly becomes aware of cooking two eggs, one for herself and one for her husband, and thereby is struck once again by the grief of being bereaved. This social fact aspect of artefacts is also important to health and longevity, especially for old people.

When their arenas are threatened, or they are even physically deprived of them, as on relocation to a nursing home [26], they encounter difficulties in motivating themselves and they are at risk of confusion when their identity-forming social fact information is lacking.

*Different kinds of institutions and arenas*

With acknowledgement of the importance of arenas, we need to be able to describe the large variety of possible arenas that are in danger of being closed off to the elderly or that need to be opened for them. I choose to structure the space of arenas according to the types of social institutions in mainstream sociology based on Parsons [30–32]. Thus, I distinguish the following types of social institutions and corresponding arenas:

Economy: The production and distribution of social products and services. In this institution, there are habitual patterns of interaction. People bargain, pay a price, settle an economic agreement, receive a salary, etc. The arenas are places for paid work, shops, restaurants, markets, etc. In modern societies these arenas have been focused on human desires. Some citizens find the basis for their evaluation of what is important in life in economic terms. It is typical that the elderly are excluded from the labour market and even from the opportunity to get loans and participate in other economic activities, yet they are free to consume.

Social control: The production of safety in society. The production in this institution is typically accomplished by parliament, police, defence units, law courts, state and local bureaucracies, etc. The interaction patterns and thereby accomplished social facts take place according to laws or by law-enforced rules. People are not supposed to engage in the same kind of interaction as in the economy. Example: “Well, officer, of course I drove too fast, but is it possible for you to overlook this for 150 euros?” The citizens who find the basis for their evaluation of what is important in life in this institution determine their ideas of what is right according to social control institutions. There are arenas here open to the elderly. The mean age of lay assessors in courts is higher than that of the population in general, but it is also true that there is an informal but very strongly enforced age limit for lay assessors. I tried to get retired accountants and public prosecutors to start an investigation into economic fraud. This proved impossible because it was considered a too serious task for retirees to engage in.

Biological and social reproduction: The production of humans, human relations, and human values in society. In this institution, there are arenas such

as fertility clinics, antenatal care, delivery wards, maternity welfare, postnatal care, child care, preschool, primary school, secondary school, medical services, university training, family and kinship interactions, etc. The habits in these arenas are generally more directed towards satisfying personal needs and training individuals to perform social tasks. The interaction is generally also more restricted by personal relations. If you tell a friend that you had a wonderful lunch in your nephew's home, it is not appropriate to apply interaction habits from economics or social control. "Oh, that's nice. Tomorrow I'll buy my lunch at his place." Or: "Oh, tomorrow I'll exercise my equal right to have a lunch there too." Citizens founding their values on this institution estimate human dignity and human values. Arnold in the aforementioned example had the ability to raise children, but he was excluded from the arenas where children are raised.

Culture: The production and preservation of pictures. By pictures, I mean a generalized concept including not only paintings but also literature, science, music, and myths. Arenas in this institution are publishers, orchestras, museums, universities, etc. Citizens who find the basis for their evaluation of what is important in life in this institution estimate aesthetic values, such as the quality of the pictures. In their interactions, they often dissociate themselves from economic, social control, and social reproduction values. They are not impressed by price or costs. They place aesthetic values ahead of rules or human relations. It turns out that many ageing citizens maintain interaction in these arenas as long as their faculties to do so are still present.

There is also a fifth institution of importance, religion. This institution has as its object to relate to transcendental phenomena. For this presentation, I leave this institution aside.

*Fundamental value orientations rooted in the values of the main social institutions*

The four principal social institutions foster values of different kinds in participants. In life, most citizens have their main commitment to one of the social institutions that shape their personality traits. On the other hand, at least in order to be regarded as normal citizens, individuals have to act according to all four institutions and with the three fundamental value orientations described below [32].

There are those for whom economics is most important and they develop two main traits, to produce or to consume. Those with the production incentive compete and are satisfied when they have produced goods or services, while those with the consumer incentive compete in having the latest goods and/or

competing with the price paid. I call both categories “doers”. Examples from my interviews with elderly production-inclined doers may run like this: “I have been striving all my life and I have managed ...”. In an affluent society, consumers compete in having the best consumption. There are several ways to compete in consumption, whether it is to have an exclusive item or to get the best bargain. In any case, they are doers by production and/or consumption.

There are also those taking their values from social control and competing to get things running. These are also doers, but in a manner of having done the right things according to rules and opinions. Example: “I was responsible for the development of medical services in Göteborg.”

There are also those inspired by social reproduction, who takes pride in developing humans and human relations. They cherish personal relations and I call them “belongers”.

Finally there are those who take their values from culture and compete in having or producing high-quality experiences. These I call “experiencers”.

I shall use these fundamental value orientations to describe the variety of and the possibilities for promoting activities among the retired population. Before that, I shall develop my last theoretical tool: the nomos production process in mundane reality.

### ***The production of nomos***

I shall now present a straightforward attempt inspired by Durkheimian sociology to analyse nomie production in relation to the production of self-esteem. This presentation is neither an exegesis of Durkheim nor an explanation of Durkheimian ideas but a construction that draws on my reading of the tradition. It utilizes Durkheim’s prime interest in professional groups and his main ideas of nomie [1, 29].

I take nomie to refer to an isomorphism or coherence between the social order and the individual mind that makes actions and society intelligible to the person. Nomie is also one of the foundations of moral humanity and thus of morals in society [33]. Anomie is one of the phenomena where the nomie is defective, a state beyond isomorphism, or the absence of coherence.

Durkheim’s analysis of anomie is very complex and was developed over a long time. His ideas about anomie and nomie do not form a consistent theory

[34, pp. 163–164], and are thus open to more specific elaborations like mine. The simple ideas used here are mainly derived from [1, 29]. Even more narrowly, I mainly take my inspiration from Durkheim's examples of the analysis of anomie as a result of rising expectations in an unregulated expanding field of opportunities [1, p. 214 and p. 271]. An example is the anomie produced by an expanding stock market with rising values, where an investor does not have any standard to decide whether he is successful among a group of investors, even though he makes a huge profit. Watts Miller [33] elaborated on the analyses of anomie. He referred to Jean-Marie Guyau who provided Durkheim with the main source of the term anomie and contributed to the development of the concept in *A sketch of a morality without obligation or sanction* (French original 1885). Guyau also proposed that sociology must become the sociology of risk.

My model for a mechanism using the anomie concept takes the form of a set of propositions concerning an individual's actions in a social context to obtain nomie and thus avoid anomie. Nomie production presupposes first of all a *pre-nomie situation*, characterized by two main features:

- 1) The individual is active with a personal interest within a valued field of human endeavour.
- 2) There is a risk of failure, as well as an opportunity to succeed, in this field of endeavour.

Nomie is constructed and maintained by social actions. An individual generally needs other persons' judgements of the results obtained in the valued field of endeavour. In this case, we can identify three *nomogenic factors*:

- 1) Observers should be available to pass judgements on the individual's accomplishments.
- 2) These observers should be competent in the field of endeavour concerned and also competent to apply rules of judgement in this field.
- 3) The judgements have to be fair, i.e., unbiased and willing to act according to an agreement on the basis of evaluations.

Nomie–anomie has two sides, the individual and the social, and a corresponding linkage of actions. When any of the requisites 1–5 are absent, the individual actor is vulnerable to the experience of anomie; it is difficult to interpret the action as a part of a social order, and more specifically, to evaluate if the action is successful or not. In the social perspective of anomie, a common standard or moral for this type of action or praxis of passing



judgements in the field of endeavour is lacking. A person can experience anomie even if there is a social nomie, but the person just happens not to experience one or more of the required conditions. If there is a social lack of common standards or praxis, the individual is of course even more likely to experience anomie. This latter condition affects most of the individuals who strive to succeed in a field.

Durkheim's example of the prospering investors who committed suicide was that, although they became very rich, it was impossible for them to judge if they themselves were successful or not. They might have been even richer if they had made alternative moves in their careers as investors. Thus, they experienced an anomie leading to suicide [1].

Note that in Durkheim's example, the point of departure for the analysis is the fact that the individual faced a premonitory situation: he was active with a personal interest in a valued field of endeavour where a risk of failure existed along with an opportunity for success. Both in the personal and social perspectives, it is important to notice that anomie is salient only in fields of endeavour valued by the actor and the society. This aspect is in many cases overlooked by authors using the anomie concept, as they refer generally to the erosion of norms. Anomie, in my model, is produced by erosion of norms in society only if the area regulated by the norms coincides with the individual's interest in the valued field of endeavour. Thus, if the regulation of a field of endeavour erodes, this does not necessarily lead to anomie if that field also loses value in the society. As modern societies are differentiated also in this aspect, anomic states in parts of the society might develop, while others are unaffected by this loss of regulation. Thus, it seems to me as if almost all anomie phenomena are restricted and not embracing all individuals or the whole society. The nomie in this respect is often local.

There are many consequences that can be developed from the five requisites of nomie. One significant conclusion is that these five requisites are also one important way for the production of recognized esteem and self-esteem. In this line of reasoning, the five requisites also provide a good approximation of an analysis of what it is to give and have responsibility for something. A responsibility means to take on, or often to be assigned, a risk of failure in a field of endeavour valued by the individual at least as an accepted social value. Thus, to have responsibility for something provides one possibility for gaining recognized esteem, that is, the expressed evaluations by competent judges, as well as self-esteem by succeeding in the valued endeavour and getting positive feedback from this success. Durkheim anchored many of his analyses in work communities or professions [29]. Thus, I shall illustrate the model by an

analysis of professions to draw on these insights to investigate elderly citizens' activities in different arenas.

In this model, the professional groups are engaged in a process of nomie–anomie production. From the individual perspective, a profession offers an opportunity to risk and gain recognized self-esteem. It is focused upon a field of endeavour that is valued by the individual and where the individual by engaging in actions has both an opportunity for success and a risk of failure. There are other persons passing judgements in the field of endeavour. The other persons are perceived to be competent in this field and in applying rules of judgements. The judgements are passed according to an agreement on the grounds of evaluation.

From the social perspective, professional groups are constituted by actors who share a field of endeavour that they value, and where, by their actions they expose themselves to the risk of failure, generally with the intention of succeeding. In this group, they are passing judgements on actions in the field, especially on group members' actions or accomplishments, and they develop competence in the field as well as in applying rules of judgements and an agreement on grounds of evaluation. From the perspective of nomie–anomie production, the professional groups produce local nomie for the field of endeavour.

One further elaboration of the nomie–anomie dimension is a distinction between different types of nomie. It is easy to fall into the trap of assuming that because anomie is in general undesirable, conversely all forms of nomie are desirable. However, if nomie means, basically, an isomorphism between the social order and the individual mind, a situation where the individual considers him or herself worthless and is regarded as worthless by significant others is nomic, but nevertheless undesirable. While recognizing that nomie is in general desirable, it is useful for some purposes to make a simple distinction between “bad” and “good” nomie, or between *dysnomie* and *eunomie*.

This straightforward attempt to develop a tool for analyses of nomie production and thereby production of self-esteem is by no means meant to capture the richness and flavour of the analysis of professions in the Durkheimian tradition. The same kinds of phenomena are also studied by other traditions. The point here is not to disqualify any of the other traditions' results or methods but to emphasize this simple way, derived from Durkheim, to deal with the problems.

The five requisites of nomie in the nomos production model point to some

pairs of central parameters to be studied in social communities. The pairs are constituted by the individual and the social perspective on nomie–anomie (Table 1). In focus, together with these parameters, are the actions and the degree of nomie–anomie produced.

*Table 1. Central parameters of study suggested by the nomos production model*

<b>Individual perspective</b>	<b>Social perspective</b>
Valued field of endeavour	Value placed on field of endeavour
Alternatives to valued field of endeavour	The structure of fields of endeavour
Risk of failure due to performance	Visibility of actions in the field of endeavour
Received judgements of performance	Judgements passed in a field of endeavour
Perceived competence of judges	Socially defined competence in the field of endeavour
Perceived competence to apply rules of judgement	Socially defined competence to apply the rules of judgement
Acceptance of grounds of evaluations	Establishment of the grounds of evaluations
Acceptance of fairness of judgements	Procedures to produce fair judgements

*Nomos production as a mechanism contributing to health and longevity for the elderly*

The importance of nomos production for elderly citizens' health and longevity is twofold. The most fundamental mechanism is that nomos is produced in interaction with other participants in a social community. Lack of such a community reduces the possibilities for obtaining and maintaining nomos which leads to difficulties in maintaining self-esteem and might lead to confusion, depression and even suicide. The second reason for the importance of nomos production is that the ambition to take risks in a field of valued endeavour is a very important and strong motivation for activities that promote health and longevity. It turns out that in real life nomos produced by fulfilment of a responsibility is also the accomplishment of a social fact with its health-promoting qualities.

One extreme but often prevalent situation is when an old person is inactive, just sitting, moving around the flat, eating and sleeping. Such persons are often in need of services from home helpers. The clients complain that life and everything is so boring. There is nothing to do.

Whatever the worker suggests, for example, take a walk, go shopping or call a friend, the client refuses.

In my interpretation, these clients are lacking an aspect of consciousness that most of us have—that is, that we attend to the situation where we are but we also wish to be somewhere else or to be doing something else. We can listen seriously to instructions from our boss and at the same time make plans for the party next Saturday. It is these beliefs about what will happen in the future that motivate us. It is our belief about what our vacation on Mallorca will be like that motivates us to pay for the holiday journey in advance. These kinds of beliefs I call dreams. What the bored inactive old client lacks is dreams of what he or she would like to do. The situation where the client is bored—wanting something to do but with nothing desirable, in his or her mind, to do—is a typical nomic situation: a fit between mind and perceived reality. This situation is unfortunately stable, keeping the person inactive and seriously damaging health, an example of *dysnomie*. The way of getting out of this impasse is to introduce a seed of *anomie*, the dream, which could be turned into a nomic state by the efforts to fulfil the dream. This is an important motivating force that produces actions which put load on physiological and psychological functions, giving the needed training and thus promoting health and longevity. The introduction of *anomie* to promote actions could be called *euanomie*. These observations points to two distinctions *eunomie/dysnomie* and *euanomie/dysanomie*.

In my work with home helpers, I have explained this situation and assigned a task to them: they shall, by everyday conversations, help the clients to formulate their dreams. When clients have formulated their dreams, the helpers will put the responsibility back on the clients and ask them how they will accomplish those goals. Then, helpers must keep talking with the clients about all the obstacles that prevent them from achieving what they are dreaming of and at the same time assure them that, when they have decided on what, how, and when to do something, they are entitled to get suitable assistance to reach that dream. What is done by this simple matter is to get clients to:










- 1) decide to take a risk to accomplish something that is of importance to them, the dream,
- 2) make an agreement with the home helper about under what circumstances such behaviour should be judged as a success, and
- 3) get the response from the home helper who—after all the talk about the difficulties and how they should be solved—is a competent judge of the endeavour.

This is just a simple example of how nomos production lifts a person out of meaningless lethargy into meaningful activity, an activity where the individual produces a salutogenic functional load, higher self-esteem and social facts, with social fact information serving to enhance one's sense of coherence. I have seen at least a hundred examples of how these mechanisms have produced these results.

These actions take place in the large space of arenas described earlier. It is important for the production of health and longevity in the elderly population that individual actions, social fact production, social fact information production and nomos production find such arenas. In many modern societies, there is a strong tendency to exclude elderly citizens from major parts of these spaces and thus prevent them from taking advantage of their health-promoting mechanisms. It is especially important that social services provided for dependent elderly make use of these spaces. Clients should be offered opportunities to take on responsibilities through activities aimed at achieving their important goals and according to their main value orientations as doers, belongers or experiencers. In a home for old people there can be economic, security, social reproduction, cultural and religious responsibilities entrusted to clients with different value orientations. An outline of this space of opportunities is given in Table 2. In this endeavour, it is also very important to engage volunteers in the established arenas.

In my experience, the best way of engaging retired persons as volunteers in a home for old people is to find a simple well-demarcated task, find three doers who are interested in that task, and assign the task to them. It is also important for them, as a symbol of belonging in the situation and premises, to have exclusive access to some part of the building. They often ask for an office and a telephone, but in my experience the minimum requirement for artefacts as symbols is a locked wall cupboard to which they have the key. Then, it is manifest for them that it is their place. The doers are good at recruiting interested belongers and experiencers. Why three doers? This is because they take on a responsibility but they do not want to be too tied up by the volunteer assignment. They want to share the responsibility so that they can share opportunities to engage in other responsibilities also, such as caring for their grandchildren when their children are occupied by other things.

Table 2. Space of arenas by social institutions with dominant attitudes and typical actors as a frame for arenas providing activity structures in a society

		<i>Social institutions</i>				
		Economy	Social control	Biological and social reproduction	Culture	Religion
Goals to achieve by the arenas within the social institutions		Production & distribution of exchange valuables	Security for individuals & society	Humans, human relations and humanitarian values	Pictures in abstract sense	Values of the existence beyond the mundane
Organizations		Factories, farms, stores, exchange markets	Parliament government, courts of law, police, defence	Medical service, pre- schools, schools, kinship groups	Museums, libraries, theatres, orchestras, universities, artists	Churches congregations, sects, orders
<i>Main value orientation</i>		<i>Typical actors</i>				
Doers		Producers, consumers	Achievers according to rules and opinions			Ministers, abbots, priests
Belongers				Carers, educators, relatives, joiners		Believers followers
Experiencers					Creators, collectors, preservers, performers	Mystics
In all cells marked  there are also possibilities for two complementary main value orientations.						

## **Conclusions**

From Durkheim's theory I developed three mechanisms presented in this report relating to social facts, social fact information, and nomos production which generate health and longevity by exposing individuals to:

- 1) an activity leading to training by a functional load,
- 2) identity formation by social fact information concerning "who I am",
- 3) a sense of coherence from social fact information about my relations and my place in the world, and
- 4) enhanced self-esteem by accomplishing desirable social facts.

These mechanisms are of increasing importance with increasing age, as elderly persons have a higher vulnerability and thus need more salutogenic influences and are also at higher risk of exclusion from social arenas where these mechanisms are working.

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