

Call for Ideas

International Law and Agent-based Modeling

24 May 2022 (online)

As part of the Social Simulation Fest of the European Social Simulation Association ([website](#)), the Human Rights Nudge project is organizing an interactive workshop bringing together legal scholars and modeling experts to discuss the potential application of agent-based modeling in international legal research. We are currently seeking *ideas* from scholars identifying international legal questions or puzzles that would benefit from an agent-based modeling approach.

Description. Recent years have seen important developments in methodological approaches in international legal scholarship. From quantitative to qualitative social science approaches, historical and anthropological perspectives, new methodologies have brought new insights into how international law and its actors operate. What remains unclear, however, is to what extent the existing methodologies can explain highly complex processes of state behavior relevant to international law. Such behavior evolves through time and depends on the action and cooperation of heterogeneous actors acting at different levels – from state representatives, government officials, NGOs and state organs, international institutions, civil society, etc.

Agent-based modeling (ABM), a computational social science method that has been largely overlooked as a method for legal research, is uniquely suited to gather insights into these processes and lead us to new insights, for example about the behavior of systems like the state. The method may help us break the black box of the state, reproduce the behavior of different state organs, explore the development of norms, deal with court decision making strategies, or test the unintended consequences of laws.

Agent-based models simulate the actions and behavior of different entities (agents). These may include anything from a virus to individual human beings, or states, depending on the goal of the simulation. Agents can have any number of attributes, follow diverse behavioral

rules, objectives, and interaction patterns. They exist in an environment – abstract or highly realistic – and can move around, interact with their environment, and with each other. They may exchange information and be affected by each other's behavior. Their interaction with other agents can be based on the perceived closeness of characteristics, pure chance, or geographical factors, to name a few. All behavior and interactions take place over discrete time steps and at each time step, variables of interest can be observed. These might include changing attributes of or connections between agents, their behavior over time, or patterns that emerge from the interplay of their behavior, interactions, and the environment without having been anticipated.

In international law, the potential of ABM remains largely unexplored. This workshop initiates a dialogue between legal scholars and agent-based modelers to see where ABM can be usefully employed in international law research.

Submission: Please send us a 500-word description of your ideas (an international legal question or puzzle) that you would like to discuss/to which ABM might apply usefully. No experience with computational social science methods is required but do specify if you have such experience.

The ideas are to be sent to katharina.luckner@uni-hamburg.de and veronika.fikfak@jur.ku.dk by 21 March 2022. We will select participants by 04 April 2022.