Appendix. Concepts and Definitions

Action. All human behaviour when and insofar as the acting individual attaches subjective meaning to it. Action in this sense may be either overt or purely inward or subjective; it may consist of positive intervention in a situation, of deliberately refraining from such intervention or of passively acquiescing in the situation (cf. Weber 1947, p. 88).

Behaviour. Any activity (or non-activity), either intended and foreseen or unintended and unforeseen. Thus, it also includes not only motivated action, but also the outcomes of, for instance, biological processes or chance.

Choice. The encompassive process of orientation (information search), and valuation, selection and implementation of behavioural alternatives. This mental activity is not restricted to ‘logical’ and reasoned thought, but also includes moral, ethical, emotional considerations. This study uses ‘choice’ and ‘decision making’ as synonyms.

Cognition. Cognition is understood in the broad sense of the (subjective) interpretation and representation of the world. It includes processes of attendance, selection, processing and organising of information.

Cognitive schemes. Cognitive or mental schemes represent the knowledge structure of individual agents which provide them with the opportunity to organise information and to structurally interpret experiences, events, behaviours, situations, etc. (cf. Bandura 1977b, 1986, D'Andrade 1995, Piaget 1975, Wyer and Gordon 1984).

Concept of the person. See ‘Model of man’.

Context. The (institutionally) structured environment from which individual actors deduce information about options and constraints for behaviour and the values attached to these.

Culture. A more or less shared, loosely internalised set of ideas, transmitted and reshaped by interaction through which individual actors attribute meaning and coherence to the world and its materialisation in objects, symbols and behaviour (cf. D’Andrade 1995, Hammel 1990, Handwerker, 1986).

Decision making. See ‘Choice’.

Information. All the explicit and implicit models, meanings and messages that may result from the interaction between contextual or personal stimuli and agents’ interpretative capacity.

Institution. A relatively coherent set of rules comprising information about the meanings of objects, symbols, behaviours and events in specific recurrent situations of interaction between people, about the participants’ rights and duties in these situations, and often accompanied by sanctioning mechanism that enforce expected behaviour (cf. Burns and Flam 1987, D’Andrade 1984, Denzau and North 1994, Langlois 1986c).


Mental schemes. See ‘Cognitive schemes’.

Model of man. A set of basic premises about human capabilities, constraints and characteristics
that are relevant for understanding behaviour in a setting specified by research goals. The premises of a demographic ‘model of man’ relate to the underlying biological dimension of demographic behaviour, the role of mental agency in human behaviour, the importance of motivation and rationality in decision making, the social embedment of individuals, and the time-dependency involved in personal development.

Personal considerations. The information content that actually enters the decision making process and the principles along which this information is attended and processed.

Rationality. Rationality denotes a style of behaviour that is appropriate to the achievement of given goals, within the limits imposed by given conditions and constraints (H.A. Simon 1964, p. 405).

- bounded. The concept of bounded rationality recognises that behaviour is rational not with respect to the richness of the objective world, but only with respect to a model of reality that rests on partial information and limited reflection (Sen 1987, H.A. Simon 1957, 1978, 1979a).


- substantive. ‘Substantive rationality’ refers to the extent to which appropriate courses of action are chosen to optimally achieve given goals in view of the characteristics of the objective environment in which people make their decisions (cf. Simon 1978, 1979a, 1987).

Rules. The rule concept captures the idea of abstracted, generalised and socially shared information about the definition of actors, situations, events, valuations) in short the interpretation of the world (meaning-giving) and about expectations, norms, rights and obligations) the prescription of behaviour (behaviour-guiding) that is produced, maintained, transformed and implemented in the interaction of individual agents, and that often tends to be organised into institutional systems of rules that apply to particular spheres of social activity (cf. Burns and Flam 1987, D’Andrade 1984, Hargreaves 1980).