'Unite Unite Europe' [*]
The political and cultural structures of Europe as reflected in the Eurovision Song Contest

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Abstract

This study focuses on the voting matrix of the yearly song festival, the Eurovision Song Contest. It analyzes the cohesive bonds among the participating nations and studies the positional equivalencies in taste. The cohesive bonds analysis reveals a three-Bloc political structure. The cohesion of each Bloc is based on different sentiments and interests. The Western Bloc can be viewed as a coalition based on historical and political interests. The Northern Bloc draws its solidarity from common cultural and primordial lingual codes (i.e. German). The diffuse Mediterranean Bloc probably achieves its unstable alliance from common cultural experiences. In contrast, the structural equivalence analysis – which focuses on taste as revealed by similar patterns of voting – portrays a more diffuse structure, interpreted as 'islands of taste'; these are dispersed in line with cultural and lingual cleavages. The implications of these findings are discussed.

1. Introduction

Paradoxically, Europe is currently evolving in two opposite directions (Joffe, 1993). One formerly Communist Eastern Bloc is being broken down into a multitude of small peoples, fighting for sovereignty over ancient pieces of identity.

This paper will focus on the Western democratic Bloc, which is evolving into a unified economic, cultural, and political whole.

The Treaty on European Union, signed by 12 kings and presidents at Maastricht on 7 February 1992, states:

> [We are] **resolved** to mark a new stage in the process of European integration undertaken with the establishment of the European Communities, **Recalling** the historic importance of the ending of the division of the European continent and the need to create firm bases for the construction of the future Europe... **Desiring** to deepen the solidarity between their peoples while respecting their history, their culture and their traditions... **Resolved** to continue the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe...

This call for solidarity, and the cooperation of joint parliaments and monetary councils will surely transform Europe's stature and influence worldwide (Capotori et al. 1986; Serfaty 1992). Yet, despite the enormous importance of this evolving structure of cooperation, most of the research is directed elsewhere; scholars focus either on the internal functioning of a single nation or on comparative studies of nations' political and economic institutions. A short observation of the major journals on Europe – sociological or political – proves the scarceness of research on Europe's structure as such. There are only a few exceptions to this claim, but such studies mainly focus on economic and industrial relations (Breiger 1981; Knoke 1990). As a result, there are few appropriate descriptive and theoretical models to use for analysis of the interrelationships between the European nations. Thus, questions about solidarity, coalitions, prominence and power – all of great political, economic, and social importance to the Union – cannot be satisfactorily answered.

This exploratory study has several objectives. First, in response to the absence of structural analyses of Europe, an agenda for further examination of this unique evolving structure is proposed; a way to decipher one of the organizing codes of international relations in Europe by analyzing a cultural festival. By using the votes in the Eurovision Song Contest, current political and cultural divisions, coalitions and factions among the European nations are deciphered, and the voting matrix of this contest will reveal one generic structure in Europe's international relations.

The utility of network analysis as a tool to study political and cultural relations on macro levels will also be displayed. The answers obtained can contribute to the theory of cultural and political analysis of large systems of exchange, to the understanding of European political and cultural structure, and to the empirical study of both. Finally, the concepts of objectivity and fairness – which are so crucial to the European Union – as reflected in the network analysis and its outcomes will be discussed.

It should be stressed at the outset that although the data are taken from a 'non-serious' event, the endeavor is indeed serious. At issue is the structure of Europe. The Eurovision Song Contest is one highly original way to study it.

2. The Eurovision – the politics of taste and tasteful politics

International contests have always been a unique festival of nations. The fame of winners and the sorrows of losers have served to mobilize national sentiments and to foster identification with major national 'symbolic heroes.' Over the past years, the media has intensified and even sanctified these contests. The Olympic Games, the World Championships, the World Cup Finals and other events have won a place in the national and the international agenda.

The annual Eurovision Song Contest falls in this category. Each year, the European Broadcasting Association sponsors the contest in a host country (the winner of the previous year). Each nation's broadcasting association independently decides on the procedure of song selection. Usually there is a national contest, the winner of which is sent as that nation's representative. The chosen songs reflect the current taste of the nation's mass entertainment industry or the elites' preferences, and usually merge a universal pop culture with indigenous national and cultural components. Fringe artists are rarely selected.

The Eurovision Song Contest is very popular; the European Broadcasting Association estimates that more than one billion people worldwide watch the contest, and although the contesting songs hold center stage in this setting, they are merely one aspect of this popular event. Nationality, culture, and sexuality are also conspicuous features. The Eurovision Song Contest is so popular because it is a manifestation of national taste and cultural prowess, of beauty and glamour, and of language, ethnicity and sexuality.

The major difference between sport spectacles and cultural drama is based on rules of evaluation. Unlike competitive sports, the appreciation of music has no clear objective criteria. The winning song has no special traits: no superior harmonies, tunes or orchestration. In fact, the appreciation of music can have no objective rules, since songs reflect national taste, native rhythm and primordial meanings.

This subjective factor of cultural evaluation is immanent in the contest and gives rise to multiple dimensions of comprehension and appreciation. The evaluation of foreign songs is dependent on a cultural match between the evaluator and the evaluated. Enjoyment of songs is thus a function of the encounter between national and cultural tastes. Yet, subjectivity notwithstanding, a democratic decision is made about the winning song. Blinded to other States' votes, and unable to vote for its own performer, each participating nation ranks ten of the other contesting songs. The voters of each nation – a select group of people from the mass media and popular culture – have ten ranks to allocate: one through eight, ten and twelve points (to the best song). The ranking is forced; the songs to rank are freely chosen. This procedure ensures a diffuse matrix, or a non-zero count in most of the cells. It actually forces the structure's density by dictating the amount of relations. The sum of the votes in this process is the final judge of quality; the song receiving the most points is victorious.

As in other contests, fairness and equal access to winning the Eurovision are the raison d'etre of the event. Most important, the contest is supposed to be unpreju-

diced. There are no explicit expectations for one nation to favor the song of another. The decision of each country is meant to be unrelated to national conflicts and to local coalitions. In moral terms, such competitions are intended to be held under "a veil of ignorance" principle (Rawls 1971). A decision or selection process made through such a mechanism guarantees fair outcomes.

The participating nations thus form a tribune of arbiters of cultural worth. The voting process of this tribune establishes a sociometric matrix of mutual artistic liking. This network of mutual likes and dislikes has definite sociometric or social network properties. International clique formations and positional equivalencies hide behind the votes. This analysis argues that this voting matrix reveals a more generic and hence more interesting structure.

This underlying structure may be thought of as an infrastructure, the base of the superstructure of cultural evaluation. The primary determination is the generic features of this infrastructure; is it a manifestation of a political structure, a cultural structure, or merely a geographical one? What socio-cultural processes or attributes generate the results of this cultural decision process? Within the framework of fairness and objectivity, what are the latent biases in the contest, what is the basic code of this bias, and who is favored by this underlying structure?

If the voting process was unbiased as the rationale of contests demands, a loose and diffuse network, with few or no cliques or subgroups among nations that favor each other, would be evident. Yet, as a non-random structure emerges, it indicates bias in the contest. It is our contention, then, that this bias represents the underlying political and cultural structure of Europe; European unity and solidarity, national rifts and ethnic conflict are reflected in the results of the contest. The Eurovision Song Contest folds in the voting matrix the underlying political and cultural structure of Europe.

Deciphering the structural codes of the voting matrix has profound implications that exceed the contest's results. This study posits that this code mirrors deeply rooted national relations between the European states. Thus, the outlook as well as the findings of this study imply a political and a cultural perspective. As previously mentioned, Europe continues to evolve in a unique way: the establishment of a common market, the development of commerce and services, the expansion of international traveling arrangements, etc. The results of this opening, or loosening of the state–society bond, of politics and economy, of culture and social organization remain to be seen. The analysis of the Eurovision Song Contest – the festival of the 'jesters of the kings' – will reveal more about kings and kingdoms than about jesters.

3. Structural analysis – methodological and substantive themes

Although the analysis of social structure as a network of reciprocal relations among social 'actors' is relatively new (Wellman 1988; Marsden 1992), this approach is slowly developing into a full-blown sociological paradigm (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). It has unique presuppositions, a set of theoretical constructs,

methodological imperatives and its own bag of statistical tools (Galaskiewicz and Wasserman 1993). Network analysis focuses on the *relationships* between social actors, be they individuals, groups or events (Mizruchi and Galaskiewicz 1993). It also studies typical positions in the network, which are independent of specific persons or institutions (Sailer 1978; Borgatti and Everett 1992). This flexibility makes the method suitable for both micro- and macro-levels of analysis, with possible aggregation at different levels.

Structuralists agree that instead of looking at individuals, it is preferable to study structures of social exchange, whether between persons or organizations (Cook and Whitmeyer 1992; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). These structures mold human action and social functions, they open access to Bloc communication networks, and they shape resource flows in society (Burt 1992). Interrelations between actors are analyzed in terms of cliques and social positions, the occupants of which share cultural proximity or structural equivalence (Burt 1978; Sailer 1978; Borgatti and Everett 1992). Accordingly, network analysis locates groups, finds structurally-equivalent positions in social systems, and may even detect temporal changes in network structure. The main features of this emerging paradigm are summarized as follows.

(1) Behavior is interpreted in terms of structural constraints on activity, rather than in terms of inner forces within units...
(2) Analyses focus on the relations between units, instead of trying to sort units into categories defined by inner attributes...
(3) A central consideration is how the patterned relationships among multiple alters jointly affect network members' behavior...
(4) Structure is treated as a network of networks that may or may not be partitioned into discrete groups...
(5) Analytical methods deal directly with the patterned, relational nature of social structure... (Wellman 1988: 20).

One of the main distinctions in network theories is the 'cohesive bonds' perspective versus the 'structural equivalence' view. The cohesive bonds perspective studies the intensity of social relations between every two actors in a social network. The goal of this analysis is to find clusters or cliques in the network and to find the cohesive social groups in the matrix. The analysis ranks dyadic relations in regard to the intensity of their 'cliqueness.' A clique is defined as "a set of actors with cohesive bonds to one another and without cohesive bonds to other actors in the network" (Burt 1978: 194).

The second branch of network analysis looks for actors who have a similar role or positional equivalence in a social system. Such actors have similar relations with other actors in the social system. They have a 'jointly occupied position.' This is "a set of actors structurally equivalent to one another and nonequivalent to other actors in the network" (Burt 1978: 192). Actors who share an equivalent position can be aggregated to be a single actor in the network.

In line with these two approaches, this study proceeds in two interrelated directions. First, an attempt is made to expose the cohesive bonds among the participating nations in the contest. By clustering the nations, this study locates which of them tend to vote for each other, and points to which ones have strong ties. These cliques are hierarchically ranked, from most cohesive to least cohesive. A nation that secures a position in a clique also assures some reciprocity in the evaluation process. Thus a large clique forms a firm basis for gaining points in the contest, irrespective of song quality or national taste. In contrast, a non-cliqued nation will find itself in a vacillating position. In the long run, cliques are an important resource. The goal here is to uncover a basic code to explain voting behavior in the contest and to assess its generic features. The cohesion analysis results will be interpreted in terms of 'political support', since relations mean support to achieve victory.

Second, structurally equivalent positions in the network and location of the nations that have similar voting patterns are analyzed. The equivalence analysis shows which nations tend to allocate points to all other nations in a similar manner, it focuses on similar patterns of evaluation. Nations that are found close to one other are interpreted to share common patterns of evaluation. The measures of proximity in this analysis point at similar 'cultural tastes.' The analysis also examines attributes of these positional equivalencies, and shows that an aggregation of nations can be made into a few culturally equivalent positions.

It should be pointed out that there need be no natural or artificial linkages between nations that have mutual commitments (within a clique) and possess similar tastes or voting patterns. For example, two nations might form a clique for political reasons, yet espouse dissimilar cultural evaluation patterns.

4. Method

The following analysis is based on the votes made in 18 years of the Eurovision Song Contest (1975–1992). [1] The analysis is based on the average number of points each nation gave (and received) over this time period. One criticism leveled against the use of averages to study structures claims that unless the same structure is recurrent every year, the average is a distorting and even an artificial procedure with which to work. Based on preliminary analyses, we were convinced that the votes (or points) within each year are relatively unstructured, and are mainly influenced by the specific musical and artistic performance. The concern of this study is not with the yearly structures or with their changes. The study focuses on the average voting (or ranking) as a structure of relations that emerge in the long run. The properties of this structure are beyond the sum of structures within single year tallies. The stability of structural measures serve to untangle a different theoretical question than the one pursued in this paper.

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[1] This period was chosen since it begins after the Oil Crisis (1974) and ends before the advent of new nations on the scene.

During the chosen period, 24 nations took part in the contest, although not all participated simultaneously. Monaco, Cyprus and Iceland have not participated in the same contest, and the following analysis did not include the latter two states. As a result, 22 nations form the matrix for the analysis. Monaco remained in the matrix since it participated in the contest more frequently than Cyprus and Iceland. The voting matrix has been analyzed with a social network analysis program (STRUCTURE), and with a multidimensional analysis technique (AL-SCAL). For purposes of spatial display, additional computations have been made with Smallest Space Analysis program (Shye 1985).

5. Findings

5.1. The politics of taste: The rule of the Western Bloc

In order to study the relationships in the European network, the average matrix has been submitted to analyses using STRUCTURE (Burt 1992). The specification of the model searched for cliques in the data, with strong component selection (for details see Burt 1978; Schott 1992). The results of the clique cluster analysis are shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 reveals that the European nations coalesce into five meaningful cliques: the first consists of Ireland, Malta and Luxembourg; the second Turkey and the former Yugoslavia; the third Italy, Spain, Monaco and Greece; the fourth England, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Israel and France; the fifth Germany and Sweden, together with Norway, Denmark and Belgium. Three nations – Austria, Finland and Portugal – have no consistent reciprocity with other European nations; they are relatively isolated.

Through this structural lens, Europe is characterized by weak ties and small cliques (Granovetter 1973). Table 1 ranks the cliques from the most tightly knit to the least.

Revealing as this depiction is, the cluster analysis is still limited in its ability to show the systemic overall pattern of these cliques. It ranks dyads, but does not take into account all the relationships to each other. Therefore, the distance matrix of the cohesion configuration has been analyzed by Smallest Space Analysis (Shye 1985). This analysis depicts the distances between the nations as a whole. The result is shown graphically in Fig. 2. The strong ties (detected in Fig. 1) were superimposed on the spatial map as well as the Bloc interpretation which follows. The interpretation of these findings is based on a reiteration process that moved back and forth between Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

A close look at Fig. 2 shows that the countries can be said to align in three major blocs. The *Western Bloc* consists of England, Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Malta, Luxembourg and Israel. This Bloc is the most prominent in Europe. The *Northern Bloc* includes Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Belgium. The *Mediterranean Bloc* binds together Italy, Greece, Spain, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Monaco. Portugal, Austria and Finland are isolates.
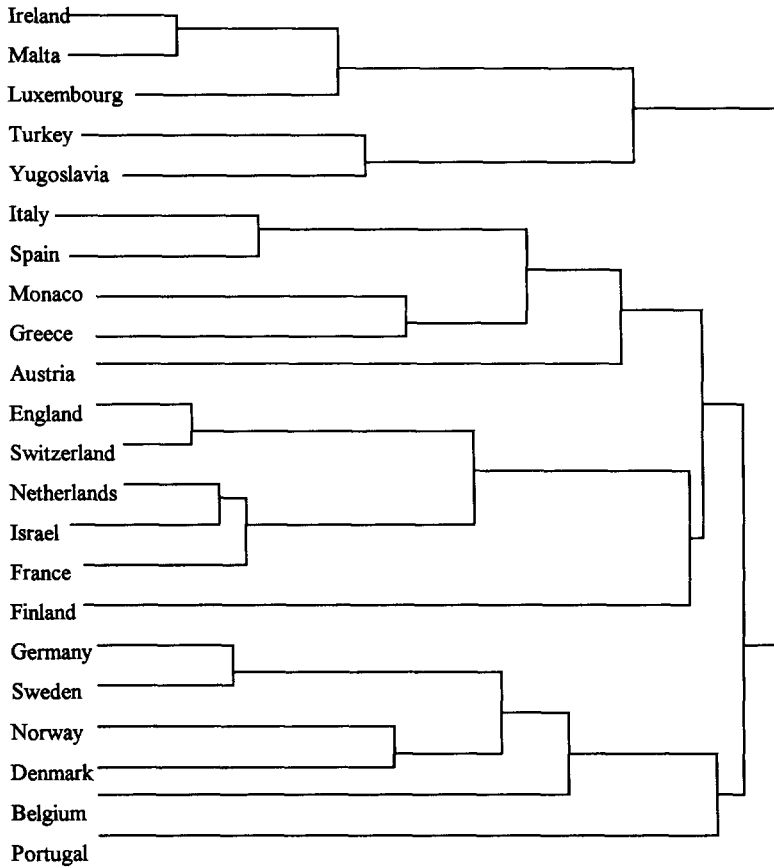
Fig. 1. Tree diagram of cohesion cluster analysis.

The Western Bloc incorporates two of the five cliques found in Fig. 1. The English language seems to be the common denominator between the two main cliques. However, language is not the main linkage rule of this Bloc; there are

Table 1
Rank order of cliques by cohesion level

Rank order	Clique [a]	Bloc
1	Ireland – Malta – Luxumburg	Western
2	England – Switzerland	Western
3	Netherlands – Israel – France	Western
4	Italy – Spain	Mediterranean
5	Germany – Sweden	Northern
6	Yoguslavia – Turkey	Mediterranean
7	Monaco – Greece	Mediterranean
8	Norway – Denmark – Belgium	Northern

[a] A single line within cliques denotes a first-order tie; a double line denotes a second-order tie.
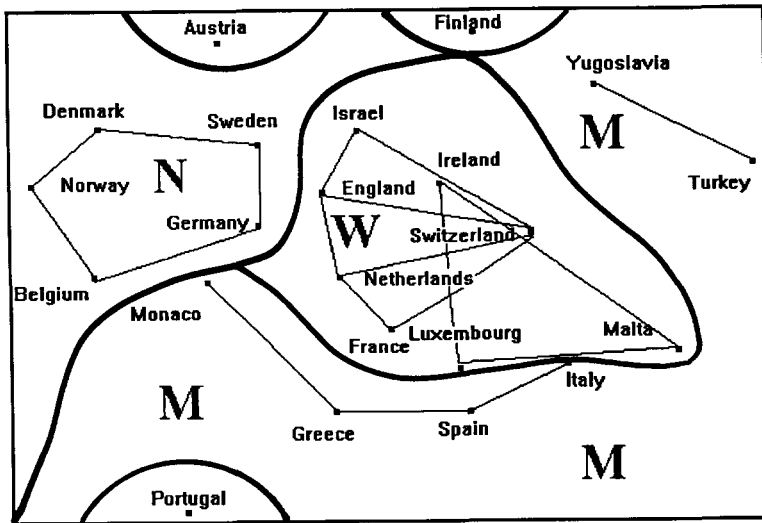
Fig. 2. The politics of taste: Spatial map of cohesion of cliques. W = Western Bloc, N = Northern Bloc, M = Mediterranean Bloc.

political as well as historical roots for its formation. For example, Israel and the Netherlands have a close-knit relationship dating back to the help Jews received during World War II, and even to the expulsion from Spain in 1492. Israel also has a unique relationship with France, also resulting from the aftermath of World War II, and from political and military cooperation during the first years of Israeli statehood. Israel is also linked to England, a nation which has had a long-lasting impact for political reasons and in reciprocation for its support of Israel. Malta's tie to England is similar.

Although Ireland shares a language and cultural proximity with England, there is no direct link between them. Political rivalries are probably reflected in their non-direct relationship. France is possibly another central player in the Western Bloc, binding the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Israel. Again, the Western Bloc seems to be based mainly on political grounds; nations whose coalition is formed through historical foundations and interests, not on cultural homogeneity. The interlocking of cliques into a Bloc is therefore very interesting and has far-reaching implications.

The Northern Bloc is culturally homogeneous and seems to be dominated by Germanic languages. The nations in the Northern Bloc are also located in close proximity to one another, mostly on the northern shores of Europe and Scandinavia. Television and radio transmissions across the borders perhaps help to unite the nations' tastes. This Bloc seems to be a closely knit one, a fact that is so demonstrated in Fig. 1. Thus, in comparison to the Western Bloc, the Northern Bloc is primarily characterized by cultural commitments. Yet language is no guarantee for inclusion in the Northern Bloc; Austria is an example of this. On the

Table 2
Average points received and number of victories by Bloc

Bloc	Average points	Victories [a]
Western	4.09	12
Northern	2.72	5
Mediterranean	2.67	2
Isolates	1.62	0

[a] There are 19 winning votes in 18 years. Sweden and France received the same number of votes in 1991.

other hand, geographic proximity is also not a guarantee of inclusion, as evidenced by Finland (Finish is not of German origin). Thus, language and culture seem to be necessary, yet not sufficient, conditions for inclusion in the Northern Bloc.

Finally, the Mediterranean Bloc is characterized by a common cultural spirit. This Bloc is a combination of two cliques. The first – Yugoslavia and Turkey – seem to share a common Muslim culture and music. The second – Italy, Spain, Greece and Monaco – shares either proximity or a similar cultural heritage. Language and religion are hardly the common denominators of the Mediterranean Bloc. What seems to bind it together are common experiences of sea and history, which helped to create similar cultural tastes for music, dance and sexuality.

These findings reveal that extensive weak ties dominate the infrastructure of the votes, with only a small number of tightly knit cliques. Yet, even this loose structure is enough for the Western Bloc to dominate the Eurovision Song Contest. The relative solidarity of the Western Bloc, and the fact that the other States also support its members, is enough for the Western Bloc to achieve prominence. Table 2 shows the relative prominence of the three Blocs.

The Western Bloc is the most prominent of the three Blocs. Indeed, in the 18 years of the Eurovision Song Contest examined here, 11 were won by one of the Western Bloc nations. This can be attributed to the centrality of the English language in pop culture, the common denominator of the contest. However, since each nation sings in its own language, the words and accents have limited impact. A more fruitful explanation suggests, as mentioned earlier, that three of the five strongly knit cliques in Europe are located in the Western Bloc. Actually, as Table 1 demonstrates, winners are mostly likely to belong to the three most tightly knit cliques. Accordingly, the Western Bloc's strength lies, in part, in the interlocking strong dyadic relationships of its members. Thus, the historical and political alliances between the nations form and strengthen the Western Bloc. Their reciprocity supports their centrality and dominance in European taste.

Table 2 clearly supports this claim. The average number of points received by nations in the Western Bloc is much higher than that of the Northern and Mediterranean Blocs. Moreover, it is obvious that the Western Bloc dominates the competition; it has won two-thirds of the contests. This figure is all the more impressive when we consider that the Bloc is comprised of 36% of the contestants.

According to the evidence in Table 2, the Northern Bloc is second in prominence. Its winning songs are proportionate to the size of the Bloc (about 23%).

The Mediterranean Bloc came in third, with a similar average vote to the Northern Bloc nations, yet with less success in winning. Two points need to be raised here. First, the Mediterranean Bloc has one strong clique, yet it is the most diffuse of the three. The nations within this Bloc are scattered over a relatively large 'geographical' area. Thus, there is low binding reciprocity among this Bloc's members, and each tends to reciprocate with different nations. Second, more than members of the other Blocs, the nations in this Bloc select songs with clear traces of traditional flavor, and traditional popular music – being local and primordial – is not appreciated in the more Western-oriented countries, where modern universal pop-oriented music is preferred.

Finally, the three isolated nations 'pay the price' for having non-reciprocating allies. Their average vote is almost negligible, and none has ever come close to winning the contest. Thus, even this counter-example illustrates the importance of cliques in the infrastructure of Europe. To be in a clique is an important asset; not to be part of a clique becomes an insurmountable obstacle.

The first part of the analysis has deciphered latent commitments and inter-locking relationships among the European nations. The findings point in two directions. First, there are no large and strongly knit cliques in Europe. As the data in this research indicate, Europe is an ensemble of nations, most often with weak ties between them. Yet despite this overall looseness, there are clear coalitions, the importance of which emerges in the long run. Moreover, these coalitions are not randomly aligned. As shown in Fig. 2, there are clear geographical, cultural and political factors which unite nations. The three identified Blocs and their interrelationships show that Europe is largely dominated by the Western Bloc, a coalition of English- and French-speaking nations. The strong cliques in this Bloc are one of its collective assets.

5.2. Tasteful politics or local islands of taste

The previous section utilized algorithms that identify cohesion by looking at cliques in a social network. This analysis deciphers latent political and cultural coalitions which coalesce into three unique Blocs. This section will assess to what extent nations within the defined blocs share similar patterns of receiving and allocating votes, in order to study similar 'tastes', whether cultural, political, or historical. On a theoretical level, whereas the first analysis focuses on the social or political structure of Europe, the present discussion deals with its cultural structure.

For that purpose, the same matrix was submitted to a multi-dimensional analysis using the ALSCAL procedure in SPSS-X, with a non-symmetrical shape. This procedure analyzes the similarity between nations in terms of allocating and receiving points. It produces clearer results than Structural Equivalence in Structure, which largely ranked the nations with respect to their prominence (for discussion of these issues see Borgatti and Everett 1992). The results are based on a two-dimensional solution. The solution had a Stress Value of 0.474, and an R^2 of 0.270. That is, 27% of the initial variance can be explained or reproduced by the following two-dimensional solution.
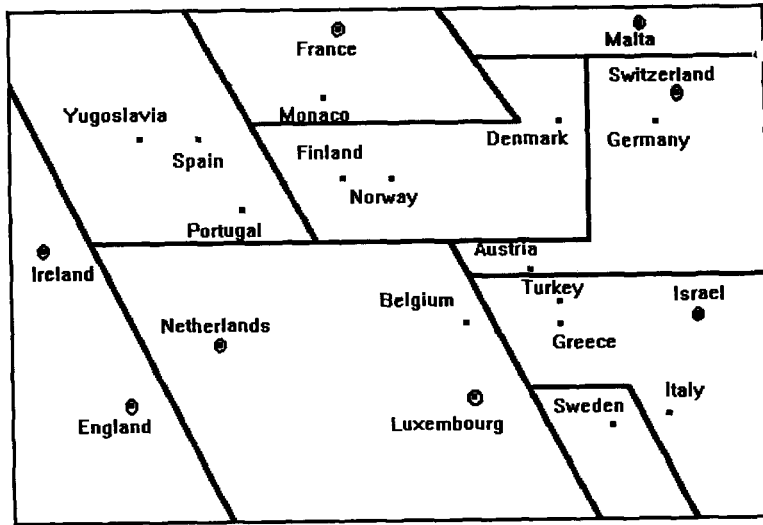
Fig. 3. Cultural islands of taste: Spatial map of MDS analysis of voting behavior. Note: Western Bloc nations are circled.

The results of the analysis are presented in Fig. 3, a spatial map that depicts a common or similar distribution of votes. Nations that agree in ranking all other countries are found close together on the map. The greater the distance, the more dissimilar the pattern of allocating and receiving points. These similarity measures are interpreted to mean 'common tastes'. The boundaries between these 'islands of taste' are again based on the similarity tree produced by ALSCAL.

In contrast to the three-Bloc structure in the previous section, the spatial map in Fig. 3 shows a much more varied dispersion. Again, this is a non-random dispersion. By studying Fig. 3 thoroughly, several definite areas, or islands of tastes, can be detected. One group of nations is composed of Ireland and England – the Atlantic group; another consists of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg – the Western Shore group; another, Germany, Switzerland and Austria, is located in central Europe. In close proximity we find Italy, Israel, Turkey and Greece – the Mediterranean Sea group. Denmark, Norway and Finland also share taste, and Scandinavia is the common denominator. Monaco and France compose another group, while Spain and Portugal, along with Yugoslavia, seem to have a common evaluation of European music – making up another Mediterranean Sound group. A few cases can be characterized by a unique voting pattern, most obviously Sweden and Malta.

The spatial map in Fig. 3 portrays 'islands of taste.' These islands are mostly a reflection of language and cultural homogeneity. In that regard, the islands are dispersed with clear logic. The English-speaking countries are farthest from the German-speaking nations. The Iberian states – Spain and Portugal – are closer to the French and English region than to Italy, Greece and Israel. Beyond the

cultural homogeniety of these islands, we posit that geographical proximity is a major explanation, since radio and television broadcasts cross the borders and influence local receptivity to nearby musical and cultural influences.

The most interesting finding is again related to the prominence of the nations that form the Western Bloc in the cohesion analysis. Fig. 3 offers another explanation for this Bloc's total command over the contest; its cultural diversity ensures votes to the Bloc by other nations. The nations that comprise the Western Bloc in the previous section are circled in Fig. 3. The findings show that the Western Bloc is composed of countries that have almost non-related evaluation and voting behavior. The eight Western Bloc countries are dispersed on the outskirts of the cultural or common-taste map. Ireland and England are far on the west. France and Malta have southern taste. Switzerland is the representative in Central Europe, whereas the Netherlands and Luxembourg define the taste of the western coast. Israel represents the Mediterranean style. The contention is that political and historical circumstances have formed these nations into a Bloc, and its diversified cultural composition is one of its power bases. This dispersion supports the 'political interpretation' of the Western's Bloc solidarity. Since the tastes of these countries are dissimilar, their mutual exchange is based on political and historical circumstances.

In comparison, the nations in the Northern Bloc are closely positioned. Except for Sweden, which is unique in the Bloc, all the countries share similar voting patterns. There is an almost total consensus about the quality of other countries' songs, and non-Scandinavian nations tend to view these nations with little distinction.

These findings also make clear why the Mediterranean Bloc is marginal. Its countries are culturally dispersed and do not reciprocate beyond the near cultural area. In comparison, the Western Bloc is characterized by cross-cultural exchanges and cliques (Israel and the Netherlands; England and Switzerland; Ireland and Malta). In conclusion, the political unity of the Western Bloc has brought into it diverse patterns of resource allocation and resource gathering. This cultural diversification is, in the final analysis, an important collective resource.

The countries near the center of the map have a universal taste – they vote in an average manner, and are also thus voted for. Austria, Portugal and Finland (the isolated countries in the cohesion analysis) all have an average or universal taste and distribution pattern. This might explain their marginal position. Being fair and objective correlates with the non-availability of cliques. Fairness and objectivity perpetuate the negligible role of these nations in the contest.

Fig. 3 also reveals that there is no connection between clique membership and voting behavior. For example, Ireland and Malta form the most tightly knit clique. Yet they have very different evaluations concerning Europe's songs. They are almost orthogonal on the map. Israel and the Netherlands, like England and Switzerland, are additional examples of this. Although committed to each other, each evaluates the contestants in completely different ways. Ireland and England do not reciprocate intensively. However, they view Europe – and Europe views them – in similar ways; they are structurally equivalent.

6. Discussion – Europe unveiled

The sociological research on international relations does not usually focus on the exchange relations between different countries (Knoke 1990). This study shows the utility of such a structural outlook, for both descriptive and theoretical purposes. Inter-kingdoms are the subject, and singing jesters its means of study. The Eurovision Song Contest was established in 1957 as a result of efforts at European unity begun in the early 1950s. The Eurovision may be interpreted as a symbol of European unity. Thus, the political and cultural boundaries imprinted on this symbol of unity serve as clues to the development of the structure of Europe.

The findings of this study reveal a three-Bloc political structure. The cohesion of each Bloc is based on different sentiments and interests. The Western Bloc can be viewed as a coalition based on historical and political interests. The Northern Bloc draws its solidarity from common cultural and primordial lingual codes (i.e. German). The loosely reciprocating Mediterranean Bloc probably achieves its unstable alliance from cultural experiences associated with the sea.

The foregoing analyses also reveal that the Western Bloc dominates the entire structure, winning most of the points and the contests. This domination is explained by the relative cohesiveness of the relations between dyads in the system, and by the diversified cultural orientations of the respective countries within the Bloc. This cultural diversification makes the Western Bloc the most esteemed, and the one who attracts – yet does not reciprocate – votes from other islands of taste.

Fairness is one of the cornerstones of contests. Equality of opportunity to win is a basic premise. Indeed, small and marginal countries, such as Monaco or Malta, stand on equal footing with 'empires' such as England, France and Germany. Yet, the findings of this research unveil systemic biases in the contest. However, the biases are not akin to the world – system conception (Knoke 1990); small countries – like Israel and Ireland – have a high probability of winning the contest. Nevertheless, the basic 'equal opportunities' premise of the contest cannot be sustained; nations who do not command entry into a clique, and whose voting behavior tends to be universal, have few chances of winning. Thus, their fairness is their weakness. Their objectivity becomes their major hindrance to success.

This would be unimportant were it a local, sphere-bound occurrence. However, we maintain that similar structures underlie other exchange relations among the European States. Thus, if biases influence singing arenas, they are much more likely to operate in spheres that are more interest-oriented, be they economic, cultural, or social. For example, if the joint economic councils of the European Union will be biased in the long run, just as we have found the Eurovision Song Contest to be, then non-symmetrical relations will develop. In time this might erode the Union's basic premises and cause a complete malfunction.

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