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Using agent-based models to compare behavioral theories on experimental data: Application for irrigation games

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Abstract

Behavioral experiments have demonstrated that people do cooperate in commons dilemmas. There are alternative theories that are proposed to explain the data. We will use agent-based models to compare alternative behavioral theories on a series of experimental data of irrigation games. The irrigation dilemma captures situations of asymmetric access to common resources while contributions of all participants are needed to maintain the physical infrastructure.

In our model analysis we compare various alternative theories, including naïve simple ones like selfish rational actors and altruistic actors. We contrast these with various alternative behavioral models for collective action as well as inclusion of other-regarding preferences. The systematic comparison of alternative models on experimental data from 44 groups enables us to test which behavioral theories best explain the observed effects of communication. We do not find that one theory clearly outperform others in explaining the data.

Keywords: Common pool resources, experimental data, agent-based models, calibration

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