

The Future of the Peoplehood Index Project

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The opening piece described the state of the Project circa February 2009. The project has now doubled its lifetime, and has reached the ripe age of 18 months. This is a good opportunity to take stock of current inventory, and the plans going forward. Let us start with a quick summary of some key events of the past nine months, during which the project began the process of institutionalization: (a) The project has started operating out of our temporary home at the Re'ut Institute in Tel Aviv. (b) Serena Eisenberg was hired as project manager. (c) The Project gratefully acknowledges grants from the NADAV Foundation and Jim Joseph Foundation, which together with existing contributions will sustain the project (if frugally) for up to 18 months.

The project's goals for this next period are to synthesize a conceptual framework that will guide the PI going forward; based on that framework, to create a long-term plan for data gathering and analysis; to complete three specialized deployments with operating partners; and to identify its permanent home. Vigorous work has started on all these fronts, but the most crucial of them is the first one, and here the discussion engendered by the pilot survey is invaluable.

The term "Peoplehood Index" is ambitious, especially so in the complex and multidimensional context of Jewish Peoplehood. There are questions of what aspect of Peoplehood is being tracked, for what purpose, how the data is collected, and how it is analyzed. The contributors to this *Peoplehood Papers* volume, in addition to heartening support for the very endeavor, offer some constructive criticism and suggestions. Some of the comments are specific to the details of the pilot survey, but some apply more broadly. Such input is critical to the success of the project; the task is too challenging to tackle without harnessing the collective wisdom of the best minds. The project has now initiated a structured process to elicit feedback and suggestions, and let me use the opportunity to invite all readers of this *Peoplehood Papers* volume to chime in. This is not the place to delve into certain technical social-scientific methodological issues, though they are important and must be addressed. But our starting point consists of some broad questions, to which both professional social scientists and lay people alike can lend insight. Here are some of the issues on which we seek feedback:

1. While the pilot version focused on the US and Israel, the PI has its sights set on the Jewish people all over the world. Do you agree it should, or would it be better off focusing on the 85% of the Jews residing in Israel and North America, and doing a good job of it?

2. When considering Jewish communities in the world, the PI views Israel as a "first among equals", with an emphasis on both 'first' and 'equals.' Do you agree or disagree with this view?
3. There are many ways of getting at Peoplehood, witness the diverse viewpoints expressed in the *Peoplehood Papers* Volumes 1-3, the collection edited by Revivi and Kopelowitz, and many other places. The PI has focused on the notion of "connectedness" or "closeness" (indeed, its initial name was the "closeness index", or "*madad hakirva*"). We'll drill down on "connectedness" below, but even before we do, how important do you think this concept is in the context of discussing peoplehood? What are the other concepts that you view as more, or at least no less, important?
4. Connectedness is multifaceted; one question is connectedness between what. The PI has so far placed the greatest emphasis on people's connectedness with some other, different collective. For example, the pilot study asked American Jews about their connectedness with Jews in Israel, and vice versa. But one can also ask about intra-community connectedness, that is, about the collective to which one belongs). The pilot study had some such questions (for example, when asking about connectedness with the Jewish people), and our current project with the DC Federation delves into the subject much deeper. Finally, one can consider connectedness not to another collective, but to a concept (for example, Holy Scriptures). Call these inter-community connectedness, intra-community connectedness, and concept-connectedness. How do YOU see the relative importance of these types of connection when discussing Peoplehood?
5. Regarding inter- and intra-community connectedness, how would you rank the various units of analysis in terms of their importance to Peoplehood – the nation, the local community, a particular institution? Another collective or network?
6. Then there is the question of what dimension of connection do you focus on. The pilot survey followed a very well established methodology in sociology and social psychology, and made a distinction among the cognitive dimension (what people know and believe), the affective dimension (how they feel), and the behavioral (what they do). What do you think of these dimensions' relevance to Peoplehood, and what other dimensions would you press into service?
7. Do you think survey-based research, possibly including some in-depth interviews of a small sample to get deeper insights, is the right methodology to stick with? If not, how would you augment or replace it?
8. What are some of the terminological and linguistic pitfalls to watch out for when asking people Peoplehood-related questions?
9. Finally, from the standpoint of policy or programmatic needs of your specific organization (if you have one), what would you like to see included in the Peoplehood Index?