

Social Cohesion: Challenges and Practices

Jane Jenson

Director of the Family Network
CPRN, Inc.

and

Senior Canada Research Chair
in Citizenship and Governance
Université de Montréal

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Background

- This Keynote Address was made to a small conference of graduate students in community psychology from Eastern Canada held at the University of Ottawa, 2-4 May 2002.
- It was organized by the Centre for Research on Community Services.
- The participating universities were Université Laval, Université de Québec à Montréal, University of Ottawa and Wilfrid Laurier University.

Outline

- Why talk about social cohesion?
- What is social cohesion?
- Three ways to understand marginalization
- Relationships between marginalization and social cohesion

Social Cohesion - The Concerns

- Like John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the absence of social cohesion is deplored
- A critical concept, although not necessarily a forward-looking concept
 - May be linked to a longing to “re-establish a social harmony presumed lost”
 - And, may be a “nostalgia for something that never existed”
 - Or, may be seeking new patterns and innovation



Rarely Defined, But ...

1 Government of Canada's Policy Research Sub-Committee on Social Cohesion (1997)

“The on-going process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity within Canada, based on a sense of trust, hope and reciprocity among all Canadians.”



Rarely Defined, But ...

2 Commissariat général du Plan, France (1997)

“Social cohesion is a set of social processes that help instill in individuals the sense of belonging to the same community and the feeling that they are recognised as members of that community.”

Rarely Defined, But ...

3 Senate of Canada, Committee on Social Affairs (1999)

“The capacity to live together in harmony with a sense of mutual commitment among citizens of different social or economic circumstances.”

→ Four Shared Traits

- 1 Social cohesion is a process
- 2 Social cohesion involves a definition of who is in the community
- 3 Social cohesion involves shared values
- 4 Definitions give insufficient attention to conflicts inherent in pluralist societies and their resolution

A Concept with Five Dimensions

Based on an overview of the literature

belonging	...	isolation
inclusion*	...	exclusion
participation	...	non-involvement
recognition	...	rejection
legitimacy	...	illegitimacy

* “Inclusion” is often “integration” in Eurospeak

Lessons from Other Policy Areas

- Social cohesion best known in the areas of social and economic development → modernity
- Examples:
 - Emile Durkheim and Solidarism - cohesion via social norms that provide for integration
 - Talcott Parsons and socialisation to the normative consensus
 - Norbert Elias and multiple relations of interdependence, including “insiders” and “outsiders”

Discovery of Interconnections

- With the economy: Too much economic liberalisation may lead to undermining social cohesion
- With society: Civil society may be too stressed and require support in order to perform its roles of integration
- With politics and the state: Public institutions play a crucial in managing conflict

Discovery of “Reversing Arrows”

- Social cohesion may generate positive economic outcomes, as well as being the result of a well functioning economy
- Too much social cohesion can exist; not enough support for diversity has negative effects

Social Cohesion and Marginalization

- Obviously, given the variety in the definitions and meanings of social cohesion...
- Understanding the connections between social cohesion and social marginalization will be complex

Signs of Increasing Marginalization

- Poverty on the rise among some categories
- Polarization of incomes, job conditions and forms of employment, and increase in the working poor
- Difficulties of youth, especially Aboriginal youth
- Homelessness
- Some crime indicators

Little Agreement on How to Understand the Root Causes

- Different diagnoses lead to different prescriptions - all touch on **one or more dimensions** of social cohesion
- Therefore, need to look at three questions:
 - What is marginalization, that is, what forms does it take, and which dimension of social cohesion is affected?
 - Who is being marginalized and is this changing over time?
 - Why is this marginalization occurring?



Three Diagnoses, with Reference to Different Dimensions of Social Cohesion

- Diagnoses
 - Work - lack of jobs
 - the inclusion - exclusion
 - also participation - non-participation
 - Poverty - lack of money
 - inclusion - exclusion
 - Exclusion - lack of social ties
 - belonging - isolation
 - inclusion - exclusion
 - participation - non-involvement

Diagnosis #1 - The Problem is Lack of Work

- Changing work place which does not create sufficient or the “right jobs” for the skills mix in the population - therefore social cohesion threatened by unemployment and non-involvement in this key social institution
- What: changing work
- Who: those without needed skills or access
- Why: technology and the legacies of previous public policies



Work and Social Cohesion

Description of Change

Vision of Society

Technology →
Less demand
for workers

Polarized – small elite of
employed with large mass of
non-workers

Technology →
New kinds of
work

Composed of individuals –
differences depend on initiative
and preparation for knowledge-
based employment

Almost business
as usual

Fragmented by threat of
unemployment and need for
flexibility



Work and Social Cohesion

Diagnosis of Work/Social Cohesion Interface

Prescription for Dealing with Social Cohesion

Technology →
high unemployment

Guaranteed income, “job creation” in the third sector, training, in-work benefits

Technology →
opportunities

Investment in human capital, guaranteed income, transition benefits (training, EI, mobility, etc.)

Persistent unemployment in certain social categories

“Employment-centred social policy” – in-work benefits and “reasonable” minimum wage, self-sufficiency, focus on fundamentals

Diagnosis #2 - The Problem is Poverty

- Poverty produces or is accompanied by a number of immediate and long-term consequences
- These are health related as well as linked to capacity to engage fully in society, as a worker, consumer and citizen
 - What: lack of money
 - Who: particular categories, especially young people, single parents
 - Why: individual circumstances, « market failures »



Poverty and Social Cohesion

	Prescription
Poverty is relative deprivation – anyone may be poor for a time	Better over-all income distribution, basic social supports, self-sufficiency and support for labour market participation
Poverty is an absolute condition – the struggle for survival is debilitating	“Break intergenerational poverty”, specific and targeted services for “remedial” purposes

Diagnosis #3 - The Problem is Exclusion from the Mainstream

- The primary significant division in society is between an included majority and an excluded minority
- The goal is to foster a transition across the boundary so more can become insiders rather than outsiders in society
 - What: isolation and lack of capacity
 - Who: unemployed, poor, women
 - Why: individual reasons, social norms, technology

Exclusion and Social Cohesion

Three Discourses

Redistributionist

Social integrationist

Moral underclass
discourse

Prescription

The obverse of exclusion is full citizenship, involves a redistribution of power and wealth

Integration into society follows from access to the labour force

Inclusion follows from moral self-improvement



Analytic Conclusions

- Identification of convergences
 - Around work - but with different notions about how to ensure that labour market functions to generate social cohesion
 - Around sense of competence as grounding for social cohesion - but with different notions of who is responsible for fostering it
 - Around the need to provide a safety net in order to ensure social cohesion
- What are the health and social services programmes to meet these needs?

For additional information go to:

<http://www.cprn.org>

- Jane Jenson, *Mapping Social Cohesion*
- Paul Bernard, *Social Cohesion: A Critique*

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