Social Cohesion Nexus

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# Active Citizenship and Social Cohesion

## Résumés

**European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1998. "Local Partnerships: A Successful Strategy for Social Cohesion?"** This paper can be downloaded at: http://www.eurofound.ie/index.shtml

This document offers a brief summary of the main conclusions and results from a European-wide research project on the role of local partnerships in promoting social cohesion. The research examined the growth of "local partnership" approaches to combating problems of social exclusion. It analyzed how partnerships worked and what they contributed, and suggested guidelines for policy-makers for the future development of this approach. Studies were undertaken in 10 European Union member-states. The national studies indicate that where local partnerships work effectively, they can have a significant impact on issues such as unemployment and social exclusion, and are complementary to the role of mainstream policies. However, building and maintaining successful partnerships is a complex process that requires a considerable investment of time and resources.

**Council of Europe, 1999. A Report on the Brainstorming Session Held in November 1999 on "Education for Democratic Citizenship and Social Cohesion."** See: http://culture.coe.fr/postsummit/citizenship/concepts/erap99_60.htm

This document summarizes the discussions that took place during the "brainstorming session" that paved the way for the Conference of European Ministers of Education on democratic citizenship and social cohesion, which was held in Cracow in October 2000. The main purpose of the session was to clarify the link between education for democratic citizenship and social cohesion. Participants in the session defined social cohesion as an unlimited, multidimensional concept, which seeks to mould society into a coherent - but not homogeneous - whole. Social cohesion comprises a sense of belonging - to a family, a social group, a neighbourhood, a workplace, a country, and even a continent (Europe). As an instrument for social cohesion, education for democratic citizenship helps to turn individuals into responsible citizens who are engaged in the process of life-long learning. The qualities necessary for citizenship and social

cohesion include concern for the general good, a capacity for self-management, self-confidence and loyalty. It is important to develop and combine the theoretical, practical and social knowledge necessary to meet the challenge of a society in constant evolution. The individual must be able to use a range of skills to adapt to circumstances while still viewing society with a critical eye. Other key individual qualities needed for social cohesion are a sense of commitment and personal ambition.

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**European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 1997. "Active Citizenship and Community Involvement: Getting to the Roots**." This paper can be downloaded at: http://www.eurofound.ie/index.shtml

This paper provides a review of key research on the concept of active citizenship and its implication for social policy across the European Union. Taken broadly, active citizenship can mean any form of productive contribution to society. The paper identifies three main sources of policy concern in relation to stimulating greater citizen involvement:

1. A perception that the current economic polarization between advantaged and disadvantaged groups in society is dangerous for social cohesion. Cohesion depends on the relatively advantaged sections of the population feeling solidarity with the worse-off, and the worse-off feeling that they have social protection.

2. A perceived need for public services and social protection to be reshaped to cope with restricted resources and increased demand, and to reduce pressure by mobilizing greater self-help.

3. A perceived need for the presence of widespread democratic support for the legitimacy and efficacy of the European role in social policy and legislation.

The Foundation's research on active citizenship found that citizen participation in practice takes place largely through the local community sector - the range of small autonomous groups and networks that can be found to one degree or another in every locality. Their activities are, for many individuals, a necessary stepping-stone between the privacy of the household and access to some form of public life. The research concluded that local community action was of universal importance but such activity is often very patchy. Whether the sector has any coherence, collective public voice, and momentum of development depends on its degree of self-consciousness and may be critically affected by whether there are local umbrella groups or projects to help develop and coordinate the sector. However, it is functioning well below its potential in most places because of lack of recognition and support.

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# What's New?

To know more about the debates and discussions that took place during the Social Cohesion Workshop in Toronto on October 27-28, contact Marc Fonda (Program Officer at SSHRC) and

ask for the report that summarizes some of the most important issues raised at the meeting. His e-mail address is: Marc.Fonda@sshrc.ca

The Centre for Policy Alternatives has recently issued an updated version of "Flying Without a Net" by Amanda Brown and Jim Stanford. This provides comparative data on Canada and each province, current to 1999, on a range of indicators such as: employment rate, minimum wage, gender equality, poverty rate, and so forth. The report is available at: http://www.policyalternatives.ca

The Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), in collaboration with the Université libre de Bruxelles, will hold an international conference on "Social Cohesion and Social Protection : New Convergences or Nostalgic Hopes?" on January 25-26, 2001. The Conference program can be found at: http://www.juris.uqam.ca/maitrise/Colloques_et_Actes/colloques.html

At its annual meeting in Ottawa last month, the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) adopted a resolution on "Reducing Child Poverty and Its Negative Effects on Health." The resolution reconfirmed the CPHA's commitment to the reduction of social and economic inequities by working in partnership with health, social, and anti-poverty organizations and coalitions to influence the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to develop and implement a comprehensive, coordinated network of policies aimed at reducing poverty and barriers to health experienced by people in poverty. For more information contact Dr. Dennis Raphael, Department of Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto at: d.raphael@utoronto.ca