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Social Cohesion: A Concept for an Open and Multicultural Society

Résumés

Council of Europe. 2001. "Promoting the Policy Debate on Social Exclusion from a Comparative Perspective." Trends in Social Cohesion, No. 1.

[http://www.coe.int/T/E/social_cohesion/Analysis_and_Research/Publications/Coh%20E9sion%20sociale%20n1%20\(A\)-6.pdf](http://www.coe.int/T/E/social_cohesion/Analysis_and_Research/Publications/Coh%20E9sion%20sociale%20n1%20(A)-6.pdf)

This new series "Trends in Social Cohesion" was launched by the Social Cohesion Development Division in order to provide a forum for observation and analysis of the developments taking place on matters of social cohesion in the Council of Europe member states. Each issue will address important aspects concerning social protection and social cohesion. Social cohesion, as defined by the Directorate General of Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe, is a concept that includes values and principles which aim to ensure that all citizens, without discrimination and on an equal footing, have access to fundamental social and economic rights. The meaning of this concept can differ according to the socio-political environment in which it evolves. Indeed, the main objective of this series is to clarify the content and the value of the concept of social cohesion within different contexts and national traditions. From an operational point of view, a strategy of social cohesion refers to any kind of action which ensures that every citizen, every individual, can have within their community, the opportunity of access: to the means to secure their basic needs; to progress; to protection and legal rights, and to dignity and social confidence. These different points illustrate the complexity of all that is covered within the concept of social cohesion. Indeed, it is a foundation of democracy and requires seeking out logical complementarities between different actors and different institutions. It aims to give full expression to peoples' individual capacities, to social groups and organizations and to avoid any kind of marginalization and exclusion by reducing the risk of neglecting and wasting human resources. Finally, through allowing different identities and cultures to speak out, it is a guard against any kind of fanaticism. This publication aims to define current practices, analyze and disseminate methods used and point out the tools and instruments that can further social cohesion.

Don Smart, Simone Volet and Grace Ang. 2000. "Fostering Social Cohesion in Universities: Bridging the Cultural Divide." Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University (Australia).
<http://aei.detya.gov.au/general/pubs/social/cohesion.pdf>

Australia currently has on its campuses one of the highest proportions of international students of any country in the world. But this study reveals that Australian and international students mix relatively uneasily and infrequently on Australian university campuses and seeks to explore this problematic "social stand-off." The authors argue that lack of interaction between Australian and international students is detrimental for students and the national interest since opportunities for broadening and sustaining personal, economic and international relations and understanding are not being maximized. The paper examines evolutionary shifts in official Australian policy towards international students; reviews the research literature on the social cohesion "problem"; reports on students' experiences and perceptions of this problem; identifies some Australian university initiatives that seem to have fostered interactions; discusses what kinds of principles and strategies seem to be important in fostering interactions; and offers future directions for research.

Jo Ritzen, William Easterly and Michael Woolcock. 2000. "On 'Good' Politicians and 'Bad' Policies: Social Cohesion, Institutions and Growth." The World Bank.

[http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/Research/workpapers.nsf/568b4463f7c6e237852567e500514be6/ecf6a93d3c4126fe8525695f006fb0ef/\\$FILE/wps2448.pdf](http://wbln0018.worldbank.org/Research/workpapers.nsf/568b4463f7c6e237852567e500514be6/ecf6a93d3c4126fe8525695f006fb0ef/$FILE/wps2448.pdf)

Policy and institutional quality are to a large extent endogenous. This statement reflects the constraints to policy reform, constraints that can be a major impediment to changes that are dearly needed to bring about better living standards for all people, but especially the poor. To be sure, considerable debate remains regarding the details of which policies are most likely to achieve these ends, as the recent protests in Seattle and Washington attest. There is increasingly broad agreement, however, on good policies, e.g., that greater prosperity is achieved by ensuring a stable and open macroeconomic environment, by building accountable and inclusive public (legal, financial, political) institutions, and by investing in health, education, and social safety net programs. The majority of politicians understand both intuitively and substantively what these good policies (or "best practices") are, and most have the best of intentions with respect to trying to bring about a better life for all in their country. But if this is so, why do too many "good" politicians end up standing for, defending, or perpetuating policies that undermine rather than advance general prosperity? In short, why are good politicians so often associated with bad policies? In this paper, the authors seek to address the causes and consequences of constraints to policy reform in developing countries. They argue that one of the primary reasons why otherwise good politicians enact bad policies in countries all over the world, but especially in low-income countries, is that they experience significant social constraints in their efforts to bring about reform. These constraints – or what the authors call "room for maneuver" – are shaped by the degree of social cohesion within a country. Social cohesion is defined as a state of affairs in which a group of people (delineated by a geographical region, like a country) demonstrate an aptitude for collaboration that produces a climate for change. A country's social cohesion is essential for generating the trust needed to implement reforms. Inclusiveness of the country's communities can greatly help to build cohesion. Citizens have to trust the government that the short-term losses that inevitably arise from reform will be more than offset by long-term gains. On the other hand, countries divided along class and ethnic lines will place severe constraints on the attempts of even the boldest, civic-minded, and well-informed politician (or interest group) seeking to bring about policy reform. The paper hypothesizes that key development outcomes

(the most widely available being economic growth) are more likely to be associated with countries that are socially cohesive and hence governed by effective public institutions. The essence of the argument is that pro-development policies are comparatively rare in the developing world less because of the moral fiber of politicians (though that surely matters) than that good politicians typically lack the room-for-maneuver needed to make desired reforms. This lack of maneuverability is a product of insufficient social cohesion and brings about weak institutions.

What's New?

The theme for the latest issue of the Canadian Journal of Law and Society (Vol. 16, No. 2, 2001) is "Citizenship, Social Rights and Social Cohesion." The articles published deal with various topics, but they all share a similar concern: the importance of social rights in determining social cohesion. For those interested in getting a copy of the journal, contact Professor Ruth Murbach at: murbach.ruth@uqam.ca

The International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) is holding its Fifth Biennial Conference on "Transforming Civil Society, Citizenship and Governance" which will take place on July 7-10, 2002 in Cape Town, South Africa. For more information, visit the ISTR's website at: <http://www.jhu.edu/~istr/conferences/capetown>

The Database on Local Initiatives to Combat Social Exclusion (LOCIN) is a database developed by the European Commission, containing more than 700 local initiatives, which are examples of good practices and innovation in the fight against social exclusion in European countries. Consult the LOCIN's website at: <http://.locin.jrc.it/en/>