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Update No. 26 – April 19, 2002

## **Trust, Social Attachment and Cohesion**

### **Résumés**

**Selma Sevenhuijsen. 1998. "Too Good to Be True? Feminist Considerations About Trust and Social Cohesion." Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen, IWM Working Paper No. 3, Vienna. <http://www.univie.ac.at/iwm/p-iwmwp.htm#Sevenhuijsen>**

This paper provides a critical feminist analysis of theories of trust and social cohesion. The central problem with what the author calls "the malestream literature on trust and social cohesion" is that it continuously circles around a construction of a self-interested, self-contained person as the paradigmatic image of human nature. Trust has been a problem for social and political theory ever since liberal contract theories conceived society as a compact between individuals, who are in their very nature driven by egoism and self-interest. The dominance of this self-contained, calculating individual in malestream theories of trust and social cohesion has produced, according to Sevenhuijsen, at least five problems. First, this "bounded individual" is continuously engaged in complicated configurations of self and other – as an individual who would like to engage in trust, but who is withheld from this by a mysterious Other, who cannot be known and whose behaviour is uncertain, opaque and risky. The tragic element of this situation is that this self needs the other for his activities, but he cannot count on the other's trustworthiness.

The second problem with the dominance of economic man and the bounded individual is that trust is over and over again reified. It is frequently turned into a thing, a static phenomenon, an attitude of individuals or a characteristic of social systems. The resulting reifying definitions complicate more than they elucidate. In fact they keep us away from thinking in the direction of trust as a phenomenon of human interaction. The third problem deals with the undertheorized activity of trust in the current literature on trust and social cohesion. Trust is overwhelmingly reduced to or equated with other social phenomena. The most recurrent analogies here are with friendship, solidarity and voluntary cooperation, or social capital. It is, however, quite unclear what differentiates trust from these other concepts. It looks, then, as if the discursive gaps on trust in social and political theories are filled by associating it with more familiar themes, so that this omission is not exposed in its full extent. This brings the author to her fourth observation, which is that the undertheorizing of trust is not only covered up by equating it with other phenomena, but also by delineating it from its supposed opposites. Here Robert Putnam's book is

a case in point. The absence of a clear definition of trust is balanced by a whole series of phenomena that are constructed as its opposites and which trust is supposed to counter: "defection, distrust, shirking, exploitation, isolation, disorder and stagnation intensify one another in a suffocating miasma of vicious circles" (Putnam, 1993: 177). But as feminist philosophers have often argued, dualisms are not just opposite pairs of thinking. There is always a hierarchy involved in dualistic thinking, in which one side of the opposites figures as the "better" and preferable side. In her final observation, the author reflects about what is actually marginalized, suppressed and backgrounded in the malestream literature on trust.

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**Daniel J. Hruschka and E.O. Smith. 1999. "Ritual Process and Social Cohesion: Understanding Mechanisms, Considering Ethics." Paper presented to the 19th Annual Meeting of the Association for Politics and the Life Sciences, September 2-5, Atlanta.** <http://198.110.216.3/apls/1999conference/abstract/smith1.html>

Social cohesion is fundamental to the human condition. At the basis of social cohesion is altruistic behaviour among potentially unrelated individuals. Anthropologists have long recognized the importance of social cohesion and it is a well-studied phenomenon, referred to by various names in the literature. One of the most frequently used labels is *communitas*, coined by Victor Turner. Social cohesion expresses itself at the individual level through feelings of attachment for group members and identification with group symbols. Within simple evolutionary models, it is easy to imagine a group of kin-related individuals forming this type of association, but the association of unrelated individuals poses problems. *Communitas* has defied adequate explanation by cultural anthropologists, who have generally neglected biological and psychological mechanisms that may undergird the feelings of attachment necessary to maintain associations of unrelated individuals. An approach that combines cultural and biological analyses may generate a better understanding of the formation and maintenance of these non-kin related groups. Cultural anthropologists have noted that ritual plays an important role in creating *communitas*. Meanwhile recent research in neuroendocrinology of attachment and bonding offers the possibility of a more complete understanding of the bases of social attachment and cohesion. Neuroendocrine status influences a variety of social behaviours in both animals and human. The paper reviews existing research into the biosocial basis of group formation and maintenance and offer suggestions for new avenues of research.

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**Mark Gradstein and Moshe Justman. 2001. "Education, Social Cohesion and Economic Growth." <http://www.cepr.org/meets/wkcn/3/3507/papers/gradstein.pdf>**

Theoretical developments that emphasize the central role of human capital in economic growth have led to an increased appreciation of the extent to which education contributes to growth, but may have biased our understanding of the nature of its contribution. A general emphasis on the instrumental role of education in transmitting knowledge downplays its effect on growth through its role as a socializing force. The contribution of education to growth plays a dual role in building human capital and promoting a common culture. In this paper, the authors seek a better understanding of this role as it bears on the positive political economy of public schooling and growth, and on normative analyses of education systems in multicultural societies. The paper focuses on the role of state schooling in reducing transaction costs by shrinking the "social distance" between individuals in the economy. The paper also indicates that when different

cultural groups separately determine the cultural orientation of their school curricula, this may result in excessive polarization and sub-optimal growth. The optimal trajectory involves a gradual, reciprocal convergence of school curricula towards the middle, but may be difficult to implement in a political context in which curricula are determined by legislative bargaining.

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## **What's New?**

The Social Cohesion Network will be holding its next workshop on Tuesday, April 30, 2002 on "Social Cohesion Indicators: How Can We Measure What Holds Us Together?" The workshop will take place from 1:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Richelieu Room, Ottawa. For more information, contact: <http://policyresearch.gc.ca/page.asp?pagenm=root&langcd=E>