Social Cohesion: Where Things Stand

Friday, July 12, 2002 – It's very useful, everybody's employing it, but they don't necessarily agree on its meaning. That's social cohesion.

The concept, or quasi-concept of "social cohesion" emerged in the first half of the 1990s in Europe and Canada. It has caught on rapidly, filling a big gap in the analytic language as the term that captures the "macro" picture for social policy discussions. As Jane Jenson, Director of CPRN's Family Network, pointed out in her 1998 paper, *Social Cohesion: The State of the Canadian Research*, social cohesion meant different things to different people, even as it inspired a burst of intellectual activity in international organizations, national bureaucracies, universities and think tanks, and policy communities in general.

Now, a new paper by Dr. Jenson and Family Network Researcher, Caroline Beauvais provides a structured analysis of the direction the literature has taken over the past four years. In ***Social Cohesion: Updating the State of the Research***, the authors find that there are still many definitions of social cohesion. They also find there is little empirical support, as yet, for making strong statements about whether social cohesion is an independent (causal) variable, or a dependent (resultant) variable.

Nevertheless, they still value the term. They argue that the existence of correlations like that, for example, between social cohesion and the distribution of income, help link the economic and the social, and make it more difficult to overemphasize the economy at the expense of social "fundamentals".

You can access or download a copy of their paper by clicking here.

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