Social Cohesion: Still Contested, Still Useful

Friday, September 6, 2002 – It may be difficult to reach a consensus on its meaning. It may not be clear whether it is a cause or an effect. But the "quasi-concept" of social cohesion is extremely useful in *framing* conversations about complex social relationships.

That's one conclusion Jane Jenson, Director of CPRN's Family Network and Researcher, Caroline Beauvais came to in a recent review of the state of research on social cohesion (*Social Cohesion: Updating the State of the Research*, CPRN Discussion Paper F/22, May, 2002).

For example, in the European Union today, they argue, social cohesion policies lead to contemporary social exclusion being approached in a *multidimensional and dynamic way*, addressing simultaneously isolation, passivity and powerlessness. This kind of multidimensional awareness is a valuable addition that leads to coordinated action in a range of policy fields.

Jane Jenson recently elaborated on the growing literature on social cohesion in two presentations.

In "***Social Cohesion: Challenges and Practices***" she reviews definitions of social cohesion, their strengths and shortcomings. She goes on to identify five dimensions of social cohesion and the connection between social cohesion and changes in the economy, society, politics and the state.

In "***Social Cohesion in Canada and Europe: The Same or Different?***" Jenson compares Canadian and European views of the quasi-concept and their implications for citizenship regimes.

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