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The Concept of Social Cohesion: Overview and Historical Perspective

Social cohesion is a concept with a history. It is not simply an academic concept or a catch-all word meaning many things. Rather, it is what is helpfully termed a 'quasi-concept' – a hybrid operating within policy communities. Paul Bernard describes such a concept as:

> … 'hybrid' because these constructions have two faces: they are, on the one hand, based, in part and selectively, on an analysis of the data of the situation, which allows them to be relatively realistic and to benefit from the aura of legitimacy conferred by the scientific method; and they maintain, on the other hand, a vagueness that makes them adaptable to various situations, flexible enough to follow the meanderings and necessities of political action from day to day.
>
> Bernard, 1999: 2

In his work on the diffusion of various concepts in the development community, Desmond McNeil terms such a concept an 'idea' and states:

> … it is more than simply a slogan or 'buzzword' because it has some reputable intellectual basis, but it may nevertheless be found to be vulnerable on analytical and empirical grounds. What is special about such an idea is that it is able to operate in both academia and policy domains.
>
> McNeil, 2006: 335

In other words, both these authors stress the utility, if not the necessity, of concepts remaining ambiguous. There is a message here:

> *The definition selected for the quasi-concept will have direct consequences for whether the UNRISD-Commonwealth Secretariat project on social policies in small states will be able to identify a link between social cohesion and social policy.*

Writing in 2002, Regina Berger-Schmitt decomposed the concept of social cohesion into two dimensions.

> (1) The first dimension can be shortly denoted as the inequality dimension. It concerns the goal of promoting equal opportunities and reducing disparities and divisions within a society. This also includes the aspect of social exclusion.

> (2) The second dimension can be shortly denoted as the social capital dimension. It concerns the goal of strengthening social relations, interactions and ties and embraces all aspects which are generally considered as the social capital of a society.
>
> Berger-Schmitt, 2002: 404–405

These two dimensions are discussed in the following sections, with a third being added, that of social cohesion's relationship to institutions and governance.

1.1 Social cohesion as social inclusion

The concept itself, and therefore the expectation of a relationship between social cohesion and social development, is relatively recent. In the mid-1990s in Europe and the broader world of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the concept of social cohesion made a dramatic comeback in the policy world of 'after neoliberalism' (Jenson, 2007). It appeared simultaneously in several key organisations, albeit in different versions and with some applications broader than others.[2] More recently, there has been an upsurge in the attention paid to it in Latin America (for example, ECLAC, 2007). Often, the concern was that social cohesion was under threat and policy steps must be taken to reinforce it.

The complex of social cohesion, social inclusion and social policy

One of the first institutions to revive the concept was the OECD. Beginning in 1980, the OECD became the leader in diffusing a claim among its members and within policy communities that 'social policy in many countries creates obstacles to growth' (quoted in Deacon *et al.*, 1997: 71). By the early 1990s, however, concerns arose about stability and the limits of structural adjustment, both in the OECD countries and elsewhere. Social cohesion became a key word in policy discussion and warnings appeared of the need to balance attention to economic restructuring with caution about societal cohesion in order to sustain that restructuring. In 1996, the OECD high-level conference, *Beyond 2000: The New Social Policy Agenda*, concluded with a call to its members for a 'social investment approach for a future welfare state' and new social expenditures focused on areas where returns are maximised in the form of social cohesion and active participation in society and the labour market (OECD, 1997). Social cohesion in this context was not defined and one had to decrypt from its usage that essentially it meant social stability.

The European Union (EU) also declared that the economic and social cohesion of Europe was a main policy goal. This was confirmed in the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 and reaffirmed when the Lisbon Agenda was announced in 2000.[3] For the EU, as well as for the OECD, social cohesion is something to strive towards, to be created via 'modernised' social policies, regional redistribution and new forms of governance involving both more active citizenship and mechanisms for identifying best practices. With the 2005 mid-term review and adjustment of the Lisbon Strategy the policy directions have been modified, but the overall goal remains.

At the same time, the Council of Europe launched what has become one of the most important efforts to use the concept to organise its work on social development, and it is in the Council's work that a clearer and more consensual meaning of social

cohesion as social inclusion began to take clearer shape. It is worth quoting the Council's understanding of the concept at length:

> 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. Social cohesion is a flagship concept which constantly reminds us of the need to be collectively attentive to, and aware of, any kind of discrimination, inequality, marginality or exclusion.
>
> The Council of Europe does not see social cohesion as being a homogenising concept that is only based on traditional forms of social integration, which nonetheless are important, such as: identity, the sharing of the same culture, adhering to the same values. It is a concept for an open and multicultural society.
>
> The meaning of this concept can differ according to the socio-political environment in which it evolves. …
>
> 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;
>
> • to dignity and social confidence.
>
> Any insufficiency of access to any of these fields operates against social cohesion.
>
> <div align="right">Council of Europe, 2001: 5</div>

We see in this 2001 presentation two important characteristics of the concept of social cohesion. First, the experts are careful to avoid any suggestion that they are endorsing a more traditional vision of social cohesion, one which would demand 'homogeneity' of or consensus around values to the detriment of a respect for social diversity. The historical lineage of social cohesion as a concept, among authors concerned with social order, accounts for this caveat.[4]

Second, no real definition is provided. The same publication, presenting the *Strategy for Social Cohesion* adopted by the European Committee for Social Cohesion in 2000, states: 'it does not define social cohesion as such but seeks to identify some of the factors in social cohesion …' (Council of Europe, 2001: 15). This strategy was meant to give rise to a number of policies, around which the Council of Europe would promote initiatives (see Appendix A). All these were in the domain of social policy and social development, and indeed this publication actually focused on *social exclusion*.

Such a focus follows directly from actions of the Council such as a 1998 recommendation of the Parliamentary Assembly which provided an analysis very close to

that of the OECD summarised above about the dangers to social cohesion of insufficient attention to social policy. Several of the recommendation's articles capture this logic:

> 7. Poverty and exclusion must not be the price to pay for economic growth and well-being. Today, social exclusion is no longer a marginal problem in Europe: it is a painful and dramatic reality for millions of people. …
>
> 12. … it is urgently necessary today to give fresh impetus to the fight against exclusion and to take up the challenge of strengthening social cohesion.
>
> 13. In particular, social cohesion means promoting a Europe of social rights, these being fundamental human rights on an equal footing with civil and political rights.[5]

This focus on ensuring social rights characterised the Council of Europe's notion of social cohesion through the early years of the decade and was shared by other governments. For example, as early as 1997 France's Commissariat général du Plan developed a definition of social cohesion: 'social cohesion is a set of social processes that help instil in individuals the sense of belonging to the same community and the feeling that they are recognised as members of that community' (quoted in Jenson, 1998: 4). The social processes considered by the French government over the last decade have been primarily those usually treated under the heading of social exclusion, poverty and inequality, and the methods proposed involve larger and/or redesigned social policies and programmes. Thus, the Plan de cohésion sociale (Plan for Social Cohesion Policy) put into place by the French government in 2004 involved new efforts and 20 programmes grouped under three headings: employment, housing and equal opportunities, particularly for children, women and immigrants.[6]

Similarly, the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) recently defined social cohesion 'as the dialectical relationship between mechanisms of social inclusion/exclusion and people's reactions, perceptions and attitudes to the ways in which these mechanisms operate in producing a sense of belonging to society' (Tokman, 2007: 82). One result of the social and economic changes experienced by the countries of Latin America over the last decades has been an even larger informal sector and the concomitant limited nature of social protection coverage. Three concrete strategies to strengthen social cohesion are proposed, and these strategies share with the Council of Europe as well as with France a focus on employment and social rights as the route to increasing social cohesion (Tokman, 2007: 105–106):

> The first is the incorporation of the informal sector into the modern sector. The starting-point is the acknowledgement of informal-sector workers' economic and social rights, so that they may be in a position to meet the obligations imposed by entry into the formal sector. Efforts should also be made gradually to introduce a minimum threshold of labour rights for informal-sector workers, as well as fiscal measures to promote them. The second

strategy is aimed at disguised employment relations or employment relations not foreseen in the legislation and that involve one or more enterprises. This would need to be developed in accordance with the provisions of three ILO instruments: Convention No. 177 and Recommendation No. 184 concerning home work, and Recommendation No. 198 on the employment relationship. Continuing deficiencies in national legislation regarding the attribution of responsibilities among the enterprises involved in subcontracting workers and products should be settled. The final strategy is based on the policies adopted by more advanced countries seeking to combine flexibility for enterprises with employment security for workers. It is advisable to bear in mind the lessons learned during the application of these policies, and to adapt them to the structural peculiarities of Latin American countries. It is vital to enhance employment security and social protection, for the public to have more favourable perceptions thereof. Each country can – and must – combine the two objectives according to their own particular needs, just as the developed countries do. The progress achieved in these areas, though modest in certain countries in the region, would certainly contribute to achieving the dual aim of a 'flexicurity' strategy.

The complex of social inclusion, newcomers and social integration

When the Council of Europe decided on a revised *Strategy for Social Cohesion* in 2004, the perspective had shifted slightly (Council of Europe, 2004: 3–4). Beyond the traditional social policy realm was attention to diversity (ethnic and/or religious) as a potential threat to social stability, and to democracy as a method for achieving social cohesion:

1. As understood by the Council of Europe, social cohesion is the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means.

2. All societies have to live with the strains and stresses caused by divisions and potential divisions. For example, there are in all societies disparities of wealth between richer and poorer people; when these disparities are excessive, or tending to increase, cohesion is put at risk. Again, no society is without ethnic and cultural diversity; the question is how to manage diversity so that it becomes a source of mutual enrichment rather than a factor of division and conflict. A cohesive society is one which has developed satisfactory ways of coping with these and other strains in an open and democratic manner. This means taking action to reduce inequalities and restore equity so that these various divisions remain manageable and do not grow so as to threaten the stability of society.

3. No society is fully cohesive. Social cohesion is an ideal to be striven for rather than a goal capable of being fully achieved. It constantly needs to be nurtured, improved and adapted. Each generation has to find afresh a manageable equilibrium of forces. This is a constantly shifting equilibrium which has to adapt to changes in the social and economic environment, in technology and in national and international political systems.

4. Social cohesion is not only a matter of combating social exclusion and poverty. It is also about creating solidarity in society such that exclusion will be minimised. At the same time, in so far as poverty and exclusion continue to exist, there is also a need to take

specific measures to help vulnerable members of society. A social cohesion strategy must therefore tackle exclusion by means of both prevention and cure.

5. During the twentieth century, Western European States came to accept responsibility for achieving a balance between economic growth and social justice. Despite the considerable variations from country to country, the European approach is sufficiently distinctive when compared with other world regions that it has often been referred to as the European social model. The European approach now faces a series of questions and strains, however. The challenge for Europe in the twenty-first century is to find ways of adapting these social policy achievements to changing needs and changing circumstances without losing their essential character.

6. Present-day Europeans are aware of a number of potential threats to social cohesion. For example, changing employment patterns and doubts about the sustainability of social security systems give many the feeling that their future welfare is becoming more uncertain. Social and crime problems in run-down areas of cities may make people feel less secure in their daily lives. Others again see growing multiculturalism as a threat to traditional identities. At the same time, new risks of poverty and exclusion are emerging, such as inadequate access to new information and communication technologies or to privatised utilities (water, electricity, etc.).

7. For these and other reasons, social cohesion is currently perceived by many as being at risk.

Awareness of the challenges of managing diversity has been one of the pillars of the Government of Canada's approach to social cohesion (Hulse and Stone, 2007: 110–112).

This concern about the link between social cohesion and diversity has emerged even more strongly in some countries, in ways that sometimes diverge from the Council of Europe's carefully balanced analysis. In Britain, at first little attention was paid to social cohesion; the preferred approach was one of analysing social exclusion, defined as a multidimensional complex of reasons for marginality. After the election of the Blair government in 1997, a Social Exclusion Unit was established to provide a broad overview of issues of marginality and social challenges. However, following the outbreak of civil disturbances in northern England in 2001, policy discourse identified 'insufficient' social (often termed community) cohesion as the danger (Hulse and Stone, 2007: 114). A number of government reports coalesced around the notion that there was a need to build a 'successfully integrated society' and increase 'community cohesion'. Strategies range from teaching citizenship in schools and English-language training to new immigration laws.[7] There are fears that immigration has produced a society too diverse to cohere and that it is undermining 'the common values that hold British society together' (Cheong et al., 2007: 28). Social cohesion has become a key word in partisan as well as policy discourse.

In similar ways, social cohesion and immigration are closely linked in New Zealand's policy discourse (Hulse and Stone, 2007; Peace et al., 2005); good immigra-

tion policies and effective integration are thought to generate social cohesion. The Netherlands, shaken by violent incidents in its multi-ethnic cities, has shifted its policy perspective from one of social citizenship to policy efforts to foster, in contrast, a strong sense of Dutch identity (Ossewaarde, 2007).

Some studies focus on social cohesion in cities and local communities. Kearns and Forrest (2000) present a good overview of this literature and in doing so provide a useful list of the five constituent elements they found in the ways the concept was used. These are: (i) common values and civic culture; (ii) social order and social control; (iii) social solidarity and reductions in disparities of wealth; (iv) social networks and social capital; (v) territorial belonging and identity. They examine the ways in which local, regional, national and supranational governments are promoting social cohesion at different levels of government. Their overview leads to the cautious conclusion:

> A city can consist of socially cohesive but increasingly divided neighbourhoods. The stronger the ties which bind local communities, the greater may be the social, racial or religious conflict between them. The point is that social cohesion at the neighbourhood level is by no means unambiguously a good thing. It can be about discrimination and exclusion and about a majority imposing its will or value system on a minority. A city of neighbourhoods with a high degree of social cohesion could be a city with a high level of conflict within and between neighbourhoods. Similarly, a nation of highly cohesive cities with strong and distinct images could be one in which shared values and norms are relatively parochial and with wide intercity inequalities of lifestyles and living standards. Thus, the need for a simultaneous, multilevel perspective on social cohesion.
>
> Kearns and Forrest, 2000: 1013

Subsequent studies of urban areas have made use of these dimensions (for example, Van Beckhoven and Van Kempen, 2006).

1.2   When social cohesion becomes social capital

In an earlier overview of the literature, we observed an increasing tendency to define social cohesion as social capital or to use the two as synonyms. As we said at that time, if an analysis sought to treat social cohesion as capable of 'doing' something, it would often 'treat social capital and social networks as the constitutive element' (Beauvais and Jenson, 2002: 14).[8] As a recent study for the UK's Joseph Rowntree Foundation put it: 'social capital … is perceived as a key resource to ensure "system stability" defined in terms of social cohesion. With its notions of consensus and harmonious interaction by different groups, social capital is in some senses the practical tool to achieve social cohesion' (Zetter *et al.*, 2006: 22).

Robert Putnam summarises the concept of social capital as follows:

> … the core insight of this approach is extremely simple: like tools (physical capital) and training (human capital), social networks have value. Networks have value, first, to the

people who are in the network. … What makes social networks even more interesting, however, is that they also have implications for bystanders.

<div align="right">Putnam, 2007: 137–138[9]</div>

Thus, the claim is that communities with high levels of social capital will not only provide resources to individuals, such as shared informal child care among mothers in low-income neighbourhoods (the example given by Brisson and Usher, 2007: 1) or higher levels of happiness (Helliwell, 2005), but also will have a collective resource leading, inter alia, to healthier societies (Kawachi *et al.*, 1997), better development outcomes (Narayan and Pritchett, 1999) or innovation (Kaasa, 2007).

Social capital as a concept is no more clearly defined than social cohesion, nor is its intellectual lineage clear.[10] In a relatively recent review of the, primarily, economic literature on social capital, Durlauf and Fafchamps (2004: 61–62) state:[11]

> One conclusion we draw from our survey is that the most successful theoretical work on social capital is that which … models social capital as a form of social network structure and uses the presence of that structure to understand how individual outcomes are affected in equilibrium. From the empirical perspective, the role of networks in facilitating exchange is one of the most compelling empirical findings in the social capital literature … . With respect to empirical work in general, social capital research has led to the development of a number of interesting data sets as well as the development of a number of provocative hypotheses, [but] much of the empirical literature is at best suggestive and at worst easy to discount. So while one can point to no end of studies in which a variable that is asserted to proxy for social capital has some effect on individuals or groups, it is very difficult to treat the finding as establishing a causal role for social capital.

Another similar review (Quibria, 2003) considers not only the confusion of definitions but also the debate about whether it is really a form of capital (Knorringa and van Staveren, 2007; see also Brisson and Usher, 2007: 2–3 for a review of this debate).

Immediately after social capital was (re)introduced[12] by Robert Putnam is his work on Italy and the USA, there were rapid-fire critiques of his early definition of social capital as always being a 'positive' thing: 'social capital refers to features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam *et al.*, 1993: 167). One criticism is that if social capital is indeed social it will therefore be inherently traversed by power relations. This comment has appeared in the economics literature (Knorringa and van Staveren (2007) analyse the state of play).[13] Such critiques led to conceptual refinements, introducing different forms of capital. A common typology distinguishes three forms of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking (Ferlander, 2007: 118).

Despite scepticism about the power of the empirical analyses, policy communities have pursued strategies to increase social capital. Several examples exist.

Social capital as a tool for public policy

The Government of Canada's concerns about social cohesion in the late 1990s soon morphed into attention to social capital at the beginning of the new decade, and a major research initiative was launched in 2003. In the following quotation from the final report, we note immediately differences between thinking about social capital and that of social cohesion:

> Family, friends, and acquaintances frequently constitute an important asset essential to the well-being of Canadians. When one is seeking support to make it through hard times, searching for a new job opportunity, or simply living a full and active life, it pays to know people. This is the simple idea behind the concept of social capital. A wide range of research illustrates the ways in which the availability and use of various social ties may make a difference to individual well-being. Policy Research Initiative, 2005: 1

The object is not to increase the well-being of Canada, but of Canadians. The role of the state is to allow individuals to develop, acquire and retain social capital, defined as 'the networks of social relations that may provide individuals and groups with access to resources and supports' (PRI, 2005: 6). These networks are the result of certain social determinants (such as age, gender and income) and can lead to certain results (in terms of health, income and participation). One of the results considered is social cohesion, with the observation being that some forms of social cohesion may be less positive than others (PRI, 2005: 8). The Policy Research Initiative (PRI) recommends that policy-makers should pay attention to three areas of policy: those targeting populations at risk of social exclusion; those supporting major life transitions; and those promoting community development efforts.

The bulk of the actual policy experiments (as opposed to recommendations about how to do it, such as those provided by the PRI) to promote social capital involve efforts to improve outcomes in poor or disadvantaged neighbourhoods or localities. The goals are to improve health,[14] safety, economic development, social development and so on (see, for example, Khan and Muir (2006: 8), who partially review the literature). Flint and Kearns (2006) report, for example, on reliance on registered social landlords in Scotland as a mechanism for developing social capital in deprived communities.

In other words, as with the efforts to foster social inclusion described above, the goal is to improve outcomes and overcome disadvantage, viewed as being the result not only of individual characteristics but also of neighbourhoods. Thus, in collaboration with the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP), the London Borough of Camden carried out two surveys of social capital in the area, in 2002 and 2005. The notion of social capital underpinning the action research, as well as the policy strategy, is made clear in this extract:

> There is a now an impressive body of research that testifies to the importance of active communities and a strong civil society for individual and communal well-being. In partic-

ular, it seems clear that social capital has an important contribution to make towards tackling poverty and disadvantage. Communities with strong networks, high levels of trust and well-established habits of co-operation and association are generally much better off than those without these things. … Of course, government cannot simply invent social capital any more than it can invent money or employment. … But that does not mean that government cannot do anything to strengthen civic culture. … there are a range of steps that a local authority such as Camden can take – for instance, redesigning the public realm to encourage everyday interaction, supporting grassroots community associations, asking people to get involved, and supporting them when they do.

<div align="right">Khan and Muir, 2006: 1–2</div>

Sometimes these efforts are developed in order to shift responsibility for support from public services to the community, in the general rethinking of the responsibility mix that has been happening over the last decades, including that of promoting both more active societies and more active citizenship (Geddes, 1998: 21; Franklin, 2007).

Immigrant communities have also been a focus of those using the concept of social capital. In a recent research report presented to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the authors examine the interaction between immigrants' social relationships in their community (their social capital), and the development of a stable and integrated society (social cohesion) at the local level. They find that attention to the patterns of social capital, distinguished by type, is useful but that:

> In the end, the extent to which social cohesion characterises migrant communities depends less on the strength and variety of their social capital than on the prevailing immigration policy discourse, the backwash of hostility to asylum seekers and refugees and how this impacts on the migrant groups' perceptions of belonging, and the instrumentality of social cohesion policies implemented in the simplistic form of inclusive citizenship. From this perspective we suggest that the concept of social capital, premised on a notion of social cohesion and consensualism, is at best only partially relevant to the more contested political landscape and host community responses at the present time.

<div align="right">Zetter et al., 2006: 25</div>

1.3   Social cohesion, institutions and governance

A third stream in the social cohesion literature is one which focuses on institutions and governance. Because this literature shares the concept of social cohesion with the other two literatures described in Sections 1.1 and 1.2, there is a certain amount of overlap. Indeed, we find one much-cited example in this literature closely related to the social capital approach and another closely (and institutionally) tied to the social cohesion as social inclusion focus.

Policy attention slid towards social capital in a frequently cited argument about social cohesion and development that emerged from the World Bank in 2000 (Easterly et al., 2006).[15] The authors make a two-step argument. First, development outcomes (economic growth) depend on effective institutions. Second, effective

institutions are those with 'room to manoeuvre', which depends in turn on the level of social cohesion, because politicians will be able to realise their development projects without being undermined by political and other threats from competing elites or the population.

After some consideration of the most useful definition, the authors settle on defining 'social cohesion as the nature and extent of social and economic divisions within society' (Easterly *et al.*, 2006: 105). With this definition, the concept can be measured by three kinds of indicators: (1) ethnic diversity; (2) income distribution; (3) trust and other attitudes. Via a regression analysis the authors find that a correlation exists between economic outcomes and these indicators of social cohesion. They conclude that: 'our findings support the two-stage hypothesis we outlined at the beginning: more social cohesion leads to better institutions, and that better institutions in turn lead to higher growth' (Easterly *et al.*, 2006: 113) and that 'together, these suggestive empirical results show that building social cohesion – through the construction and maintenance of high-quality institutions pursuing the common good, and through the lowering of economic (and other) divisions – has been, and remains, a vital task for countries wrestling with development' (Easterly *et al.*, 2006: 111).

The policy implications are large, and so too is the need for a research agenda about how healthy institutions might be brought into being and maintained. But these authors end on a somewhat disappointing note with respect to the policy implications, pointing simply to the importance of education and arguing that the state '… can, in some cases, also actively help to create social cohesion by ensuring that public services are provided fairly and efficiently (i.e. treating all citizens equally), and by actively redressing overt forms of discrimination and other social barriers' (Easterly *et al.*, 2006: 117). In such recommendations they join with proponents of 'fostering social cohesion' via social inclusion, such as the Council of Europe.

The OECD was a second locale for promoting the link between institutions, governance and social cohesion.[16] Simultaneously with the identification of the social policy/social cohesion link described in Section 1.1, came attention to the locations in which social cohesion most needed attention. As the then-Secretary General wrote:

> Complementarity among macro-economic, structural and territorial policies is important for several reasons:
>
> • structural economic changes depend for maximum success on stimulation of regional and local entrepreneurship and innovation;
>
> • central government policies rely on dynamic communities in which business, public authorities and civic society can establish new partnerships and follow approaches adapted to their circumstances;
>
> • dynamic communities can strengthen social cohesion by, for example, facilitating 'welfare to work' policies to integrate the unemployed and excluded, and by pioneering new forms of democratic participation.   Johnston, 1998: 4

Work by the Territorial Development Policy Committee (as part of the OECD's Public Governance and Territorial Development Directorate) addresses the themes of metropolitan governance and urban competitiveness, as well as their interdependence. It was a major locale (although by no means the only one) that led to what has been termed the 'new conventional wisdom'.

Sometimes termed the competitiveness-cohesion-governance problematic (Buck *et al.*, 2005), in this view, shared by academics and policy-makers, 'success' in the world of 'after-neoliberalism' depends on a combination of economic competitiveness, social cohesion and responsive governance. This position is based on a stance also visible in policy perspectives of the EU at least since 2000 – that economic performance depends on good social policy, including policies promoting territorial, social and economic cohesion (Beauvais and Jenson, 2002: 21; European Commission, 2004; Turok, 2006: 353).

Identifying what are described as the threats of market volatility and segmentation, as well as rising individualism and declining civility, there has been a turn to what might for our purposes be labelled a policy paradigm based on the following policy logic:

> The key idea that has emerged to link these concerns is that *social cohesion improves economic performance*. This is a more positive way of saying that social division and fragmentation undermine long-term economic success. Communities that pull together may be able to reverse the tide of urban decline creating a stable environment, restoring confidence and assisting each other. A strong social fabric comprising active civil institutions, connected communities and common values is said by some commentators to function better economically. Different elements of society contribute to the collective endeavour through some shared sense of purpose, mutual support or simply agreed norms and rules of behaviour. This helps to limit selfish practices, conflict and instability, and generally improves the durability of economic relationships. Turok, 2006: 355

In cities, beyond a focus on labour market activity (see the quotation from Johnston above), a good deal of attention has gone to the negative effects of crime, both on attracting talent and on business performance. Therefore, the capacities of local institutions that control, limit and discourage crime are important. Another focus is on education and training and the relationship to social cohesion. Lastly, social networks' links to business performance are identified as key, and these networks can be institutionalised via either private or public action or both.[17]

Once again, as we have seen with the literature on social capital, there is a good deal of scepticism about the *effects* of social cohesion and the direction of causation.[18] In other words, there is little consensus that social cohesion can *do something* at the level of the community, city or country.

> Looked at in detail and in the light of available evidence, the new conventional wisdom that social cohesion is causally connected to economic competitiveness at the level of the

city looks less convincing. The impact of social circumstances on economic performance appears weaker than the effects of economic change on social conditions. Economic success seems to support some forms of cohesion (particularly social inclusion, equality and stability) provided it is broad-based enough to create a range of jobs relevant to the resident population. Narrowly focused growth that excludes sections of the population from improvements in well-being may increase inequality, insecurity and social stress. Given the lack of substantial research on the subject, these are not definitive or universal conclusions, but rather a challenge to policy-makers, advisers and researchers to go beyond superficial generalisations and platitudes about cohesion being the key …

<div align="right">Turok, 2006: 364–365</div>

Ian Gordon sounds a similar warning about the caution that must be exercised.

The notion of 'social cohesion' – as a shorthand way of indicating all the various respects in which social relations within particular places can (increasingly) make a difference to their economic performance – may be more of an obstacle than a help ... There is a real temptation (within a new conventional wisdom about policy for cities) to see this as actually representing some single kind of quality which places can develop in order to simultaneously remedy the shortcomings of markets in terms of both social outcomes and economic performance … To recognise the relevance for economic as well as social goals of issues falling under the umbrella of 'social cohesion' (or of social capital or inclusion) is then only an entry point to understanding the issues that have to be faced and the kind of actions that do (or do not) have a potential to advance these goals.

<div align="right">Gordon, 2006: 368–369</div>

1.4   Conclusions from the literature review

With these warnings in mind, what might we conclude from the last decade of explicit attention to social cohesion (and social capital)?

First, it is important to note that for a significant body of the literature and the policy discussions, social cohesion is a property of a society (whether defined as a city, country or Europe). It is not an individual characteristic. Social cohesion is something to be 'encouraged', 'fostered' or 'protected'.

It is an end product, one that results from good policy for social development. Threats to social cohesion come from bad policy (insufficient attention to social rights or economic inclusion, for example) or from policy which is too unidimensional. Sometimes the single dimension is described as 'too many' rights for newcomers and insufficient attention to promoting common values, and sometimes the unidimensionality is described as 'insufficient' attention to diversity. In other words, the actual interventions prescribed vary, especially with respect to dealing with immigration and/or diversity.

The policy conclusions that emerge from this body of literature is that social policy may need to be redesigned for new times if social development is to be achieved. As the result of social changes of a big sort (for example globalisation and migration

flows; restructured labour markets; families and demography; and income polarisation) or the fall-out of ideological preferences (whether too much Keynesianism or too much neoliberalism), there is a need for new policy strategies. Indeed, some call for a new social architecture and forms of social protection in order to rebuild cohesion and confront new social risks (Esping-Andersen *et al.*, 2002; Jenson, 2004; Tokman, 2007). There is not, as yet, a consensus on what this design should be, or whether it will work to overcome threats such as social exclusion and marginality.[19]

The measurement implications that follow from this body of literature are that a focus on indicators of social capital is likely to be difficult to achieve and is of marginal utility for the research question of the UNRISD-Commonwealth Secretariat project.

Second, when social cohesion is defined as social capital, the policy implications are different. At the outset, it must be recognised that a good deal of this literature now focuses on outcomes at the level of the individual or on health. The finding is that individuals who live and work in networks are not only healthier than others, but also happier. Moreover, there is strong evidence that social capital is *correlated with* certain positive outcomes, but causation is not established.[20] Even important research initiatives, such as that to measure social capital in the Borough of Camden, end with the call for more research. In the concluding paragraph, the authors say: 'If the science of social capital is as yet underdeveloped, then there is little by way of established practice, nor any clear responsibility for engineering improvement. … The challenge now will be for the council to think creatively about ways to promote community cohesion that will take account of the complexity and changing nature of social capital' (Khan and Muir, 2006: 43). Another much-cited study also ends with a call for a research agenda (Easterly *et al.*, 2006).

The measurement implications that follow from this body of literature are that a focus on indicators of social capital is likely to be difficult to achieve and of marginal utility for the research question of this project.