

Indicators for Measuring Social Cohesion

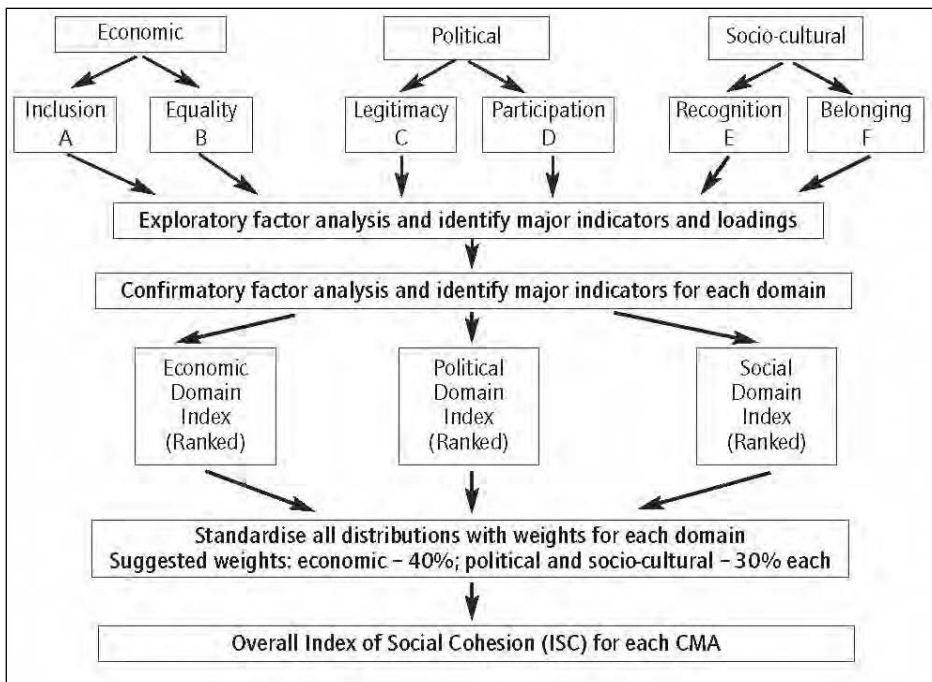
In their recent review of the policy literature on social cohesion Kath Hulse and Wendy Stone conclude that:

... the policy concept of social cohesion has been invoked, albeit reluctantly in some cases, in public policy debates in North America, Europe and Australasia ... It is clear that there is no one definition as a policy concept and, as yet, no agreed upon indicators, despite determined development work by a number of authors ... Hulse and Stone, 2007: 117

Given that there is no agreement, this section canvasses a number of publications that have proposed indicators of social cohesion, defined as social inclusion and, to a lesser extent, as social capital.

Several studies have tried to get a good measure of social cohesion by concentrating on a single country. This strategy has the advantage, in a data-rich case such as Canada, of identifying good indicators for a concept with a complicated definition. For example, in order to make comparisons within Canada across census metropolitan areas (CMAs), Fernando Rajulton *et al.* (2007: 464) developed a multi-dimensional measure of social cohesion, based on six dimensions adapted from Jenson (1998).

Figure 1. A Multi-dimensional measure of social cohesion



Drawing on the 2000 National Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating (NSGVP) they created an overall index that drew heavily on a measure of participation but also included measures of economic distribution (Rajulton *et al.*, 2007: 468).

While some of the variables were easily measured from public sources, a significant number of the belonging and participation measures depended on having a comprehensive survey of political and civic behaviour such as the NSGVP, a tool which is not available in many countries, as the authors of the next example found.

Robin Peace and colleagues in New Zealand undertook a literature review and then summarised the indicators used internationally:

In most projects of the Council for Europe and the EU, the key indicators are:

- demography
- inclusion in the labour market
- employment/training
- social benefits
- housing
- education
- participation in social, cultural and political life.

These are often accompanied by indicators of racism and discrimination, reflecting the European concern with extreme and institutionalised forms of racism and discrimination. These indicators typically include the following:

- data on racism and discriminatory acts
- data on racially violent crimes and harassment
- number of complaints of discrimination and convictions
- data on patterns of discrimination in government
- data on direct and indirect discrimination.

Peace *et al.*, 2005: 15–16

William Easterly *et al.* (2006: 106ff) used a somewhat similar set of indicators for their multi-case analysis examining the correlation between social cohesion and economic growth. They began by enumerating the most common direct measures of social cohesion:

- memberships rates of organisations and civic participation;
- measures of trust – constructed from the percentage of respondents in each country replying ‘most people can be trusted’, in the World Values Survey;²¹
- measures of income distribution – the Gini coefficient and share of income of the middle 60 per cent of the population;

- ethnic heterogeneity, measured by an ‘ethno-linguistic fractionalisation index’, calculating the probability that two randomly selected persons from a given country will not belong to the same ethno-linguistic group.

They had to drop the first measure, however, because of lack of data. There were simply not enough surveys of these rates to allow them to carry out their comparative and quantitative analysis. Therefore, their analysis actually only used trust (which was available for some cases), the two measures of distribution and the ‘ethno-linguistic fractionalisation index’.

In her work on measuring social cohesion across the EU, Regina Berger-Schmitt (2002: 413–414) provided a set of indicators to measure the two dimensions she identified as underpinning the concept – inequality and social capital.²²

The inequality dimension covers the following issues:

- regional disparities
- equal opportunities for
 - women and men
 - generations
 - social strata
 - disabled
 - citizenship groups
- social exclusion

The social capital dimension includes the following components:

- social relations and activities within primary social groups and associations
- quality of social relations
- quality of societal institutions²³

The EU has done an immense amount of work on developing indicators appropriate to its commitment to social inclusion announced in the Maastricht Treaty and confirmed in 2000 by the Lisbon Agenda.²⁴ These indicators cover income, employment, education and health (the indicators, as summarised by ECLAC for its own work, are presented in Appendix B).

For its part, ECLAC is working on developing indicators of social cohesion in Latin America and the Caribbean, summarised in Figure 2 (ECLAC, 2007: 39).

The emphasis on disparities is evident when the precise measures are discussed, as well as in the labels themselves. For example, the education indicator is broken down into four measures:

1. The net preschool enrolment rate is the percentage of boys and girls in the relevant age group who are enrolled in preschool. Universal, quality preschool education is an effective tool in combating future (or inherited) inequalities.
2. The percentage of persons over 15 years of age who have not completed primary education. The lack of a primary (basic) education is a very serious obstacle to individuals' productive integration into the labour market.
3. The percentage of persons over 20 years of age who have not completed their secondary education.
4. State expenditure per student in the public education system compared to upper middle class family expenditure per student is suggested as a secondary indicator. This indicator would register disparities between different social strata with regard to the quality of education.

ECLAC, 2007: 41

Figure 2. System of social cohesion indicators: components and factors

Indicators		
Gaps	Institutions	Belonging
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income inequality • Poverty and indigence • Employment • Education • Health • Housing • Pensions • Digital divide 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effectiveness of democracy • State institutions • Market institutions • Family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiculturalism • Trust • Participation • Expectations of mobility • Social solidarity

The notion is clearly that greater social cohesion is based on access to social rights in an equitable and/or egalitarian fashion. The same assumption underpins the EU's social indicators and those proposed by some academics.

We note that most indicators of social cohesion measure gaps. The emphasis is on disparities, usually defined in terms in equitable or egalitarian access to services, income and well-being.