

EDUCATION, ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

Regimes of Social Cohesion

Societies and the
Crisis of Globalization

Andy Green and Jan Germen Janmaat



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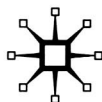
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Introduction

Social cohesion is a widely used – if poorly understood – term, increasingly invoked in different ways by policy-makers since the late 1980s. The frequent usage reflects widespread and diverse concerns about the effects of social change on the social fabric – not least those arising from the growing inequality and social diversity that accompany globalization. The 2008 financial crisis and subsequent global recession brought mounting unemployment and social conflict, and such concerns are now intensified.

At the same time, the concept of social cohesion has experienced a revival in social theory (Chan, To and Chan, 2006; Dubet, 2007; Green, Preston and Janmaat, 2006; Gough and Olofsson, 1999; Osberg, 2003). As Jane Jenson (1998) has rightly noted, questions of social order and cohesion tend to surface at times of rapid social change. The major efflorescence of writings on social cohesion in the nineteenth century – by Comte, Durkheim, Tönnies and others – coincided with the transition to industrial capitalism in Europe, and was a response to the social dislocations that this entailed. In our own time, it has been rapid globalization, and its attendant effects, that have acted as the spur (Green, Preston and Janmaat, 2006).

Politicians and social commentators of different stripes have identified threats, or potential threats, to social cohesion, from the following: rising income inequality (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; OECD, 1997) unemployment and crime (Jenson, 1998; OECD, 1997); the decline of the traditional family (Fukuyama, 1999) and religious observance (CPGNIS, 2007); increased immigration (Council of Europe, 2004; CPGNIS, 2007) and the segregation of migrant communities (Home Office 2001); the proliferation of identity politics and prevailing mores of individualism and self-interest (Reich, 2001; Touraine, 2000); and

political extremism and terrorism (CPGNIS, 2007). Many have claimed that social cohesion is in decline – a view supported by Robert Putnam's (2000) research on the attenuation of social capital in the United States (which he equates with declining social cohesion). To Putnam, associational life has atrophied with the passing of the socially-concerned 'New Deal' generation and the advent of more individualistic younger generations. For the cohorts of Xers and Yers coming to adulthood post-1960, according to Putnam, watching TV and other individualized pursuits have substantially replaced the more convivial associational activities that are the lifeblood of social capital – hence leading to the overall decline in the vitality of civic life.

Overarching these specific – and empirically debatable – trends, has been the allegedly centrifugal effect of globalization, which, at the same time as it increases global interconnectedness and economic integration, has dislocated communities and eroded many of the traditional sources of social cohesion (Green, Preston and Janmaat, 2006). To Manuel Castells, the major theorist of global change, globalization has diminished the effective power of nation states and thus reduced the hold of national identity (Castells, 1997). In its place has emerged a multiplicity of group identities – based on ethnicity, religion, region and lifestyle – whose fragmentation narrows the ambit of trust, reciprocity and collective identification. For Castells, as for other social theorists, such as Delanty (2000) and Touraine (2000), identity and citizenship have parted company. This 'dissolution of shared identities, which is tantamount to the dissolution of society as a meaningful social system,' writes Castells, 'may well be the state of affairs of our time' (Castells, 1997: 355).

Such pessimistic views are by no means universal, and the evidence for each of the trends cited is contested. However, concern about the sustainability of social cohesion is certainly widespread. The term is thus in constant use in both policy and research publications and is likely to remain so, not least with the increasing unemployment and related social problems that will accompany the aftermath of the global recession.

Social cohesion, however, is a term that is both widely used and widely abused. It has considerable emotive power but, like many ideologically – and symbolically – freighted terms, lacks precise definition. Those who have mapped its current usage (Beauvais and Jenson, 2002; Bernard, 1999) acknowledge this, but describe it as a 'multi-faceted' 'quasi-concept' which, despite its unscientific nature, has policy utility as a 'framing concept' (Beauvais and Jenson, 2002). Precisely how it is

defined will vary from context to context, they say, depending on the issues it is being used to frame. This is no doubt the case in terms of its policy usage, and may be inevitable, despite the rather long tradition of more rigorous theoretical writing on the subject in both political philosophy and sociology. However, this does not obviate the problems of using the term in social scientific analysis.

There are at least four major difficulties with the way the term is currently deployed. Firstly, it is almost always used in a normative fashion – that is to say as a signifier for a positive condition for which we ought to strive. This, as with all normative terminology in social science, creates problems for objective analysis, even within a critical realist epistemology that recognizes that subjective beliefs and ideological forces are constitutive of the reality which we seek to understand and which exists independently of our perceptions of it (Bhaskar, 2009). On the one hand, where social cohesion is defined in a particular normative fashion, according to the political preferences of the researcher or policy analyst, this pre-empts analysis of the phenomenon in its entirety, including the different forms of social cohesion which may exist in the real world. On the other hand, it assumes that social cohesion is always ‘a good thing’, which may not invariably be the case. Too much cohesion can, arguably, lead to social insularity and backwardness (Banfield, 1958), economic sclerosis (Olson, 1971) or to a failure to address substantive injustices in society (cf. Marx on religion as the ‘opium of the people’ in his ‘Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Rights’, 1973).

Secondly, the term is often defined through the mere aggregation of socially ‘desirable’ attributes, such as trust, tolerance, active citizenship and so on. These may have no necessary relation to each other and their simple aggregation thus fails to provide a coherent definition.

Thirdly, social cohesion is often defined in terms of its supposed causes (e.g. equality or welfare states) or effects (e.g. greater well-being or faster economic growth). This is problematic not only, again, because it narrows the range of phenomena that may be analyzed as possible incidents of social cohesion, but also because it then prevents any analysis of the causes and effects that are already endogenous to the definition. Including causes and effects in the definition amounts to argument by definition – a logical fallacy which philosophers call ‘*petitio principii*’ (Durkheim, 1982).

Fourthly, definitions of social cohesion are often confused as to their intended level of analysis and thus their units of analysis. Most people use the term to refer to whole societies (usually states); but others,

like Putnam (2000), conflate it with 'community cohesion' or even with 'social capital', the latter normally deemed to refer to characteristics of individuals or to relationships among individuals in bounded groups and communities (Coleman, 1988). The European Commission sometimes uses the term 'social cohesion' to refer to structural cohesion at the supra-national regional level, as well as to societal bonding. This multiple usage not only causes conceptual confusion; it may also lead quantitative researchers into 'ecological' or 'cross-level' fallacies whereby statistical effects at one level are falsely imputed from data gathered at a different level (Smelser, 1976). An example would be the frequent assumption that because more educated individuals tend to be more tolerant in some developed modern societies, more educated societies are always more tolerant – which is, historically, clearly not true (see discussion in Green *et al.*, 2006, chapter 3).¹ All of these usages create barriers to rigorous analysis and have deprived the term 'social cohesion' of much of the explanatory power that former generations of sociologists and political philosophers discovered in the concept.

Among other things, this book aims to do some necessary conceptual ground-clearing. The analysis seeks to establish how the term 'social cohesion' can be used in a more scientific way that advances theory and, at the same time, provides a basis for empirical analysis. It seeks to provide a usable, non-normative and non-exclusive definition of social cohesion, which can then be operationalized in research to analyze the different forms of social cohesion which may be identified in actual societies – the non-normative social types which Durkheim analyzed in *The Division of Labour in Society* (1964).

In Chapter 1 of the book, we analyze the constituents of social cohesion that are specified in different definitions-in-use in policy and contemporary academic writing. The fault lines between different definitions are identified and some empirical evidence is presented on the relationships – or lack of such – between the constituent components of different definitions. This leads to a definition of social cohesion which is non-normative and non-exclusive and which can be used in empirical analysis.

Chapter 2 seeks to identify the major historical traditions of writings about social cohesion and the social order in Western sociology and political philosophy and the logics they imply as to the forces which bind society together. Chapter 3 reviews some historical evidence for social origins of different traditions of social cohesion in the West, and their subsequent patterns of evolution, based on 'longue durée' accounts of historical development and on 'non-absolute' notions of path dependency. Chapter 4 uses the literature on 'varieties of capitalism' and

'welfare state regimes' to develop some provisional theories about the institutional bases of different contemporary forms of social cohesion which may be found in particular regions – or clusters of countries – in the West and in East Asia. We call these 'regimes of social cohesion', in the same way that Esping-Andersen refers to 'welfare regimes' (1990) and Michael Walzer to 'regimes of toleration' (Walzer, 1997).

Chapters 5 and 6 contain most of the statistical analysis. Chapter 5 uses international data on social attitudes and institutional characteristics to test, empirically, whether such regimes can be identified in terms of regions or country clusters that display particular sets of institutional characteristics and social attitudes. Three regimes are identified, which we designate as 'liberal', 'social market', and 'social democratic'. Some common characteristics are identified in the forms of cohesion in East Asian countries and in southern European countries, but these regions are deemed too diverse to constitute regime types *per se*. Chapter 6 continues the statistical analysis by exploring, cross-nationally, the trends in value diversity, seeking to understand the puzzle of the high levels of value pluralism in the social market states.

In Chapter 7, we explore the convergences and divergences in patterns of social cohesion across countries and assess how the different regimes of social cohesion are holding up in face of the global crisis of neo-liberal capitalism unleashed by the banking collapse of 2008. We look firstly at the long-term trends in key aspects of social cohesion, such as social and political trust, inter-ethnic tolerance, and perceptions of conflict along several dimensions. Although the trends show some support for the theory of a secular and widespread decline in social cohesion, we find considerable divergence between the regimes, with social cohesion more robust in some than others.

However, each regime faces major challenges, which differ in each case. They are each vulnerable precisely in the social aspects that have, historically, been most central to their particular forms of cohesion. Social market states, which have placed a premium on widely shared values, are challenged by increasing value diversity, which they find it hard to accommodate. Social democratic states find that their universalistic welfare systems, which have been key incubators of social solidarity, are under pressure. Liberal states, whose cohesion has rested above all on common beliefs in individual freedom, opportunity and merit, seem most at risk, as inequality rises and opportunities decline. As confidence in equity and meritocracy atrophies, little may remain to hold these societies together.

1

Defining Social Cohesion

As suggested above, definitions of social cohesion in current research and policy literature are frequently additive in nature. That is to say they invoke a number of societal characteristics which are taken to be constitutive of a cohesive society. These generally include characteristics which relate to social attitudes and behaviours, but they can also include institutional features of societies taken to be necessary for cohesion to exist. The social attitudes and behaviours commonly invoked include:

- shared values and goals (such as liberty, democracy, meritocracy, equality, etc.)
- a sense of belonging and common identity (including national and other forms of identity)
- tolerance and respect for other individuals and cultures
- interpersonal and institutional trust
- civic cooperation
- active civic participation
- law-abiding behaviour (low crime rates).

The societal institutions deemed to be pre-requisite for social cohesion are often cited as:

- institution for the sharing of risk and providing social protection (the Welfare State)
- redistributive mechanisms (such as taxes) to foster equality or equality of opportunity
- conflict resolution mechanisms.

However, not all definitions-in-use of social cohesion include all of these characteristics or emphasize them in equal measure. Mappings of policy perspectives on social cohesion by Jenson (1998), Beauvais and Jenson (2002) and Bernard (1999) suggest different typologies for distinguishing concepts of social cohesion. Beauvais and Jenson (2002), following Berger-Schmitt (2000), suggest that we can distinguish broadly between definitions of social cohesion which emphasize social bonds and associational activity (social capital type attributes) and those which emphasize 'solidarity and equality'. Bernard distinguishes between definitions which emphasise: 1) liberty and equality (labelled 'inclusive democracy' – i.e. welfare states; 2) equality and solidarity (participatory democracy – i.e. social democracy) and 3) liberty and solidarity (pluralist democracy). The tensions suggested here between liberty and equality will be familiar to all students of philosophical liberalism and can be clearly identified in the policy discourses. The exact meaning of solidarity in Bernard's tripodic typology is harder to decipher, but it is clear in Jenson (1998) that the term is being used in the French 'republican' sense, familiar to social scientists from the work of Durkheim, which involves a sense of social interdependency and common identity and values.

Jenson's distinction does indeed provide a good point of departure for distinguishing between different discourses. Some definitions of social cohesion place much greater emphasis on common values and common identities than others. Jenson cites a definition from the French Commissariat Général du Plan, which refers to common values and identities and links these with a sense of belonging. According to this:

social cohesion is a set of social processes that help to instill in individuals the sense of belonging to the same community and the feeling that they are recognized as members of that community. (quoted in Jenson, 1988: 4)

The Council of Europe, starting from a human rights-based perspective, defines a cohesive society as 'a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing common goals by democratic means' (Council of Europe, 2004: 3). They also note the importance of equality and respect for the individual in fostering social cohesion, but a strong emphasis is again placed on belonging and shared values, though with the latter conceived at various different levels. 'Social Cohesion,' according to their background study, 'comprises a sense of belonging to a family, a social group, a neighbourhood, a workplace, a country...' (Heydt,