

Social Cohesion: Definitions, Causes and Consequences

Subjects: Sociology

Contributor: Louis Moustakas

Viewed as the glue that binds societies, social cohesion is considered an essential ingredient to address common societal challenges. Definitions and associated conceptual frameworks usually summarise social cohesion as collective attributes and behaviours characterised by positive social relations, a sense of identification or belonging, and an orientation towards the common good. However, there are a large variety of definitions, and disagreement exists about what constitutes the core components, causes and consequences of social cohesion.

Keywords: social cohesion ; sociology ; social sciences ; social capital ; inequality ; education

As society's social, demographic and economic structures have changed over the last fifty years, policymakers, researchers and practitioners have increasingly shifted away from focusing uniquely on economic growth and have instead concerned themselves with more holistic notions of social cohesion ^{[1][2][3][4]}. Consequently, social cohesion is generally conceived as a multi-dimensional construct, and together, these dimensions are considered crucial in order to address common societal challenges. Academic literature likewise supports the importance of social cohesion, linking higher social cohesion with several positive social outcomes, including environmental sustainability ^[5], social stability ^[6], increased overall health ^{[7][8]}, or an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic ^{[9][10]}.

Despite its growing attention and relevance, the notion of social cohesion remains subject to numerous criticisms and definitional debates. For one, the term has often been vaguely defined in research and practice, leading to criticisms that social cohesion may be merely a quasi-concept upon which researchers or policymakers can superimpose their own interpretations or values ^{[11][12]}. In turn, existing definitions have also been criticised for being overly broad and confusing social cohesion's core meaning with its causes or consequences ^{[13][14]}. As such, through an extensive review of the existing literature, the following entry seeks to provide an overview of definitions and associated literature around social cohesion. In particular, the main definitions and frameworks concerning social cohesion will be presented, a summary of policy perspectives will be outlined, literature on the causes and consequences of social cohesion will be reviewed, and future directions will be proposed.

References

1. Mac Fadden, I.; Santana, M.; Vázquez-Cano, E.; López-Meneses, E. A science mapping analysis of 'marginality, stigmatization and social cohesion' in WoS (1963–2019). *Qual. Quant.* 2021, 55, 275–293.
2. Dobbernack, J. *The Politics of Social Cohesion in Germany, France and the United Kingdom*; Palgrave Macmillan: London, UK, 2014; ISBN 978-1-349-67396-4.
3. Moustakas, L. A Bibliometric Analysis of Research on Social Cohesion from 1994–2020. *Publications* 2022, 10, 5.
4. Kapoor, K.; Weerakkody, V.; Schroeder, A. Social innovations for social cohesion in Western Europe: Success dimensions for lifelong learning and education. *Innov. Eur. J. Soc. Sci. Res.* 2018, 31, 189–203.
5. Uzzell, D.; Pol, E.; Badenas, D. Place Identification, Social Cohesion, and Environmental Sustainability. *Environ. Behav.* 2002, 34, 26–53.
6. Stigendal, M. *Cities and Social Cohesion: Popularizing the Results of Social Polis*; Mapius No. 6; University of Malmö: Malmö, Sweden, 2010.
7. Cradock, A.L.; Kawachi, I.; Colditz, G.A.; Gortmaker, S.L.; Buka, S.L. Neighborhood social cohesion and youth participation in physical activity in Chicago. *Soc. Sci. Med.* 2009, 68, 427–435.
8. Mulvaney-Day, N.E.; Alegría, M.; Sribney, W. Social cohesion, social support, and health among Latinos in the United States. *Soc. Sci. Med.* 2007, 64, 477–495.

9. Razavi, S.; Behrendt, C.; Bierbaum, M.; Orton, I.; Tessier, L. Reinvigorating the social contract and strengthening social cohesion: Social protection responses to COVID-19. *Int. Soc. Secur. Rev.* 2020, 73, 55–80.
10. Dayrit, M.M.; Mendoza, R.U. Social cohesion vs COVID-19. *Int. J. Health Gov.* 2020, 25, 191–203.
11. Bernard, P. La cohésion sociale: Critique dialectique d'un quasi-concept. *Lien Soc. Polit.* 1999, 20, 47–59.
12. Raw, K.; Sherry, E.; Rowe, K. Sport for social cohesion: Exploring aims and complexities. *Sport Manag. Rev.* 2021, 25, 454–475.
13. Chan, J.; To, H.-P.; Chan, E. Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research. *Soc. Indic. Res.* 2006, 75, 273–302.
14. Schiefer, D.; van der Noll, J. The Essentials of Social Cohesion: A Literature Review. *Soc. Indic. Res.* 2017, 132, 579–603.

Retrieved from <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/history/show/109893>