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SOCIAL COHESION, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

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Kath Hulse and Wendy Stone

Interest in the concept of social cohesion has waxed and waned since Durkheim's foundation studies at the end of the 19th century, with the greatest interest being in times of fundamental economic, social and political change. The term is used in at least two different ways: firstly, in a policy context, to indicate the aims of, and rationale for, certain public policy actions; and secondly, as an analytical construct to explain social, political and sometimes economic changes. This article focuses on the first of these and traces the recent usage of social cohesion, spanning its take-up and influence within the Canadian policy environment, through to its usage (or otherwise) across liberal welfare regimes such as the UK, the US, Australia and New Zealand, and contrasting these experiences with its application in European institutions. The differential usage across these geopolitical settings is highlighted. Drawing upon Esping-Andersen's welfare state typology, and an explicit acknowledgement of national differences in relation to ethnic and cultural diversity, various explanations for these differences are discussed and their policy consequences explored.

Introduction

Social cohesion has been discussed by academics and policy-makers since the time of Durkheim writing at the end of the 19th century. Interest has waxed and waned over the years, with the greatest interest being in times of fundamental economic, social and political change, such as the 1940s and 1970s (Jenson, 1998; Pahl, 1991). The most recent wave of interest by policy-makers can be traced to the mid-1990s in Canada and in transnational organisations concerned wholly or mainly with Europe, such as the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU), as well as in those with a broader remit such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank. Most recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in social cohesion amongst policy-makers in other countries including the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

The term 'social cohesion' is used in at least two different ways: firstly, in a policy context to indicate the aims of, and rationale for, certain public policy actions; and secondly, as an analytical construct to explain social, political and sometimes economic changes (Chan *et al.*, 2006). The distinction between these usages is often not clear. Whilst policy-makers may use social cohesion as a policy concept, they sometimes draw on academic literature. Similarly, academic researchers sometimes move between using policy terminology and employing concepts which have explanatory value. In this article,

we are specifically interested in the development of social cohesion as a policy concept, acknowledging that the two uses of the term intersect and blur at times.¹

Whilst there is some interest in, and debates about, social cohesion as a policy concept, there is little agreement about what social cohesion is, the positive and negative implications of different 'levels' of social cohesion and whether, and in what ways, public policy actions could help sustain or improve social cohesion. This article aims to contribute to current debates in two ways. Firstly, it traces the recent upsurge of interest in social cohesion in public policy debates in Canada, the US, the UK, Australia and New Zealand and key European institutions. Secondly, based on this account, it reflects on the ways in which different political and cultural contexts have helped shape these debates.

The Development and Use of Social Cohesion as a Public Policy Concept in North America, Europe and Australasia

North America

Social cohesion played a central role in debates about social policy in Canada in the mid- to late-1990s. Originally it entered into policy debate as a means of thinking about some of the social stresses and strains being experienced as a result of several factors, including the effects of neoliberal, pro-market policies on aspects of wellbeing such as poverty and health, the challenges associated with high levels of immigration, and some loss of confidence in public institutions as a means of assuring the health and welfare of Canadians (Jenson, 1998, p. v).

In 1996, the federal government established an organisation, now known as the Policy Research Initiative, to provide a 'whole of government' perspective across portfolio areas, supported by research into some of the medium- and longer-term issues facing it. The first priority was to examine issues of social cohesion, resulting in a report which included what became one of the most frequently cited recent definitions of social cohesion as:

the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity within Canada based on a sense of trust, hope and reciprocity amongst all Canadians. (cited in Jenson, 1998, p. 4)

The concept of social cohesion generated considerable discussion amongst Canadian policy-makers and researchers in the mid- to late-1990s, including the work of Canadian Policy Research Networks, an independent think-tank whose research and other activities played an important role. Initially there was support for the idea, which was seen as protecting and promoting multiculturalism, in view of significant changes in the level and type of migration into the country (Department of Cultural Heritage, 2001, p. 7, cited in Chan *et al.*, 2006, p. 277). Subsequently, it was also seen as a 'big picture' concept which got social policy issues on to the public policy agenda in an era of neoliberalism. Its value was in assisting in framing discussion of issues about the future health and welfare of Canadians (Beauvais & Jenson, 2002, pp. 30–32).

Canadian researchers and policy-makers also had concerns about an emphasis on social cohesion in policy debates. Firstly, they saw a danger that an emphasis on shared values in the definition cited above draws attention from other valid perspectives such as social justice and human rights as a framework for discussions of social policy. Secondly, in a diverse and multicultural society such as Canada, different perspectives and some conflict was to be expected, and democratic institutions were available to manage these differences. Thirdly, social cohesion was ambiguous in a political sense in that it could be embraced by conservatives who wanted to maintain current social policies or return to past ones, as well as by reformers (Beauvais & Jenson, 2002; Bernard, 1999; Jenson, 1998).

Consequently, in the 2000s, discussions of social policy in Canada have made less use of social cohesion as an organising framework (an assessment shared by Spoonley *et al.*, 2005). The main reasons appear to be the critique of the concept outlined above, ongoing difficulties in defining and measuring social cohesion, and a fear that conservatives would use the concept as a justification for policies about values rather than those seeking to address economic inequalities, social connectedness or political participation. Debates have increasingly used other policy concepts such as social capital, poverty and social inclusion/exclusion, and social citizenship.

Canadian debates about social cohesion had little resonance in the US; instead, the different but related concept of social capital was widely used in policy debates from the mid-1990s. Like social cohesion, this concept was an older one with some claim to academic legitimacy (Winter, 2000a) and had been used intermittently in the US, for example, by Jane Jacobs (1961) in her seminal work on American cities and by James Coleman (1988) in his writing about the social context of education.

It was the work of Robert Putnam which caught the attention of US academics and policy-makers alike. He and his colleagues originally posited that high levels of social capital, indicated primarily by membership of voluntary organisations, were positively associated with a robust, participatory democracy, whilst low levels weakened participation in community and political life. This was an argument that voluntary horizontal cooperation between people is easier in a community that has inherited a substantial stock of social capital, in the form of norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement (Putnam *et al.*, 1993; Putnam, 1995). In this context, social capital 'refers to features of social organizations, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action' (Putnam *et al.*, 1993, p. 167).

Putnam's thesis was subsequently expanded to include membership of informal networks as well as participation in voluntary associations (Putnam, 1995), together with an assertion that strong social networks have positive outcomes across a range of areas, such as improved school performance, lower crime rates and better public health, both for members and for non-members (Putnam, 2000, 2004). In many respects, Putnam's ideas relate back to Durkheim's view of trust, reciprocity and interdependence as functional necessities for social stability and social order, but also struck a chord in view of the long history of communitarianism in the US (e.g. Fukuyama, 1996).

Putnam's concept of social capital was widely used by policy-makers as a rationale for policies and programs in the US and elsewhere (Mayer, 2003). It also was the trigger for an exponential increase in the number of scholarly articles on the concept (Halpern, 2004).

It is not our purpose here to review this extensive literature and the subsequent debates as this has been done elsewhere (Fine, 2001; Winter, 2000b), except to reflect that this idea of social capital had a different focus than in much of the contemporaneous European debate. This debate drew particularly on the work of the French sociologist Bourdieu (1986, p. 248) who used the concept to refer to all of the resources (actual or potential) that are linked to possession of a network of social relationships. Social capital was not merely about membership of social networks, but was concerned with access to various types of resources that were produced in social relationships. Some writers have further explored this idea (e.g. Fine, 2001) while others, notably from the World Bank, have arguably attempted to combine Putnam's focus on networks with Bourdieu's attention to unequal power relations and access to resources (e.g. Narayan, 1999; Woolcock, 1998, 2000).

A review of work produced by major research and policy institutes in the US, such as the Brookings Institution and the Urban Institute, confirms that whilst ideas about social capital have had a major influence, the concept of social cohesion has been little used in policy debates, even after events such as 9/11 in 2001 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Public policy has dealt separately with issues of 'restoring community' (drawing on concepts such as social capital and community building) and economic participation under the banner of welfare reform (drawing on ideas such as personal responsibility, independence and self-reliance). We examine this dualism further in the second part of the article.

Europe

Debates about social cohesion in Canada did resonate with, and generate interest amongst, researchers and policy-makers in European institutions where social cohesion had been a long-term, although not well defined, goal. In particular, the EU has as one of its goals 'strengthening economic and social cohesion' (European Commission, 2004). Influential and much cited work for the European Commission followed that of the Canadian McCracken (1998, p. 3) in stating that:

Social cohesion is viewed as a characteristic of a society dealing with the relations between societal units such as individuals, groups, associations as well as territorial units. (Berger-Schmitt & Noll, 2000, p. 2)

The specific objectives which were established to achieve this goal include reducing economic and social disparities between regions and social groups (including promoting equal opportunity in terms of gender and disability and combating social exclusion) and strengthening the connections and relations between people and regions (including improving transport connections, encouraging social solidarity and reinforcing a European identity) (Berger-Schmitt & Noll, 2000, pp. 35–36). The latter overlaps with, but is not confined to, the ideas about social capital which had such prominence in the US.

As the EU has progressively expanded to incorporate the countries of central and then eastern Europe, member countries have experienced various forms of internal tensions due to a range of factors, including movement of people both within the Union

and from outside, prompting further concerns about social cohesion. In 2000, the European Council meeting in Lisbon committed the EU to the integration of employment, economic and social policies, with social cohesion being seen as critical to economic success. The Lisbon Strategy has generated further work in 'modernising' the European Social Model in which social exclusion (yet another influential concept related to social cohesion, discussed below) was seen as the 'greatest threat' to social cohesion (Hunt, 2005, p. 113). The EU's Social Agenda aims to give citizens confidence in their individual and collective ability to manage economic and social changes, and nominates two priority areas for action: working towards full employment and developing a more cohesive society with equal opportunities for all (European Commission, 2004, 2005).

Similarly, the CoE, which has broader membership than the EU, gives priority to social cohesion in Europe. It is responsible for the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter and has a perspective on social cohesion which is based on human rights, including social rights. The Council's summit in 1997 identified social cohesion as a major priority and established the European Committee for Social Cohesion to develop this area. The Strategy for Social Cohesion, as revised in 2004, commits the Council to various measures:

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. (European Committee for Social Cohesion, 2004, p. 2)

The principles on which the Strategy is based are twofold: social cohesion has to build on a basis of human rights; and responsibility for it is shared by all sectors: governments, the private sector and civil society (European Committee for Social Cohesion, 2004, pp. 3–8).

The approach to social cohesion across the institutions of both the EU and the CoE, although it differs in emphasis, refers to a distinct European Social Model which balances economic development with social cohesion (for example, European Economic and Social Committee 2004, Council of Europe 2004). Behind much of this work appears to be a perception that the model is under threat from factors including greater fluidity of markets in capital and labour across national boundaries. We consider the political and cultural context for this use of social cohesion further in the second part of the article.

In parallel with this work for European institutions, individual countries have increasingly referred to social cohesion in public policy debates. In this article, we look specifically at the example of the UK in which the national government, at least until the early 2000s, used social exclusion rather than social cohesion (or social capital) as its key public policy concept. The term 'social exclusion' was initially used in France to refer to people on the margins of society who were excluded from the social insurance system (Room, 1995; Silver, 1994). By the mid-1990s it was being broadened in a European context to refer to the processes through which some groups, and people living in some regions, became economically marginalised and social disadvantaged (Arthurson & Jacobs, 2003, p. 5). Arguably, this was more acceptable to governments than an older concern with inequalities which focused on the distribution of resources amongst all households, rather than the circumstances of poor households, and was also seen by some reformers on the

left side of politics as more powerful than older concepts of poverty which focused on the material, but not social or cultural, aspects of disadvantage.

In the UK context, the dominant reading referred to the multidimensionality of seemingly intractable social problems. The government's much quoted definition of social exclusion 'as a shorthand label for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health, and family breakdown' (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998, p. 1) clearly emphasises this multidimensionality. Thus, social exclusion referred to the cluster of attributes associated with 'wicked' social problems, such as teenage pregnancy, homelessness, suicide and school truancy. The public policy response emphasised coordination across government portfolios, or 'joined up' solutions. It is not our purpose here to review the extensive literature on social exclusion in the UK (see Arthurson & Jacobs, 2003; Room, 1995); rather, we are interested in the preference for social exclusion over alternative concepts such as social cohesion (or social capital).

Levitas (2005) provides a detailed account of the development of social exclusion as a policy concept in the UK from 1996. She contends that ideas about social exclusion were embedded in three separate discourses which enabled a government elected on a 'Third Way' platform in 1997 to move between them. These were a 'redistributionist' discourse which drew attention to inequalities at all levels of society, a 'moral underclass' discourse which focused on the behaviours of 'excluded' people themselves, and a 'social integrationist' discourse which had a particular focus on integration via paid work. The essence of Levitas' argument is that the government moved away from the former and towards an inconsistent combination of the last two discourses (Levitas, 2005, p. 28). This strand of critical social policy analysis posits a tension between ideas about 'social justice' (which draws heavily on thinking about rights, including human rights and ideas about the social rights of citizenship going back to T.H. Marshall) and social cohesion (which can be construed, according to this reading, as associated with social order and social control).

Specific interest in the policy concept of social cohesion in the UK can be traced directly to the civil disturbances in the northern cities of Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001. Initial responses were couched within a discourse of 'law and order' or social control. Subsequently an Independent Review Team was established by the Home Office to consult with people and organisations in the affected areas on 'the issues that need to be addressed in developing confident, active communities and social cohesion' (Independent Review Team, 2001, p. 5). It found that many local communities had strong levels of internal social connections and a strong sense of identification based on factors such as language, cultural background and religion, together with arguably high levels of local level social cohesion, but lived separate and parallel lives with little connection across communities. The processes which led to residential segregation of different communities undermined societal level social cohesion. The Review Team drew on the Canadian work but made no reference to work on social cohesion for the European institutions, instead drawing on the work of UK academics Kearns and Forrest (2000).

Robinson (2005, p. 1415), in a critique of the Review Team's work, suggests that its use of 'community cohesion' (referring to societal level social cohesion) 'represented an empty vessel into which the preoccupations of contemporary public policy were poured'.

He further suggests that its use in this context points to a more restrictive idea of multiculturalism in UK society than had applied previously, a fascination with communitarianism and an 'evangelical commitment to generated social capital through the promotion of mobility and greater social mix' (Robinson, 2005, p. 1425). In other words, the appropriation of the concept of social cohesion into public policy was a response to issues grounded in the processes of increasing social/spatial segregation, but focused more narrowly on an overlay of residential segregation of some ethnic groups.

Subsequently, the House of Commons Select Committee on Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions inquired into whether the events of 2001 were symptoms of underlying changes to the level of social cohesion, again referring to societal level social cohesion. Its report also defined social cohesion primarily in social and cultural terms, rather than economic ones. A cohesive community is one where:

- there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
- the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued;
- those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities; and,
- strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods (House of Commons Select Committee on Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions, 2004, p. 7).

It appears from this definition that the key driver of debates about social cohesion in a UK public policy context has been a fear that strong social networks in some locations, and within some ethnic groups, might weaken social cohesion at a macro level, and that these networks may be compounded by economic marginalisation and social disadvantage.

Australasia

In Australasia very little research or policy has to date used the social cohesion concept *per se*. However, over the past decade there has been a dramatic increase in academic and policy research in Australia about 'community'. This has come about due to concerns about a perceived decline in 'community' which echoes debates in the US, and to increased knowledge and concern about the impact of neighbourhood effects on the life chances of individuals, families and, in particular, children. Putnam's work has resonated strongly with public policies aimed at 'strengthening community', 'building community' or 'community capacity building' (Adams & Hess, 2001) and has also influenced some parts of the non-government sector (e.g. Hampshire & Smeaton, 2001).

At a federal level, policy objectives that draw on notions of individual and community 'self-reliance' have been put forward as encouraging more active citizenship than a model based on reliance on government provision of services. Through a process of 'welfare reform', these notions have radically altered the Australian welfare system from one initially based on principles of universalism to a now highly targeted system of income

support based firmly on notions of 'mutual obligation' (Reference Group on Welfare Reform, 2000).² Bryson and Mowbray (2005) have argued that the use of terms such as 'community' and 'social capital' within this context merely reflects policy rhetoric enabling neoliberal ideas to continue to dominate the substance of policy development in Australia, rather than reflecting a concern with community life per se. Others have pointed to more general problems arising from using ill-defined terms such as 'community strengths' in government policy, resulting in 'little way of knowing whether and how government and other efforts facilitate or undermine community strengths or the factors relating to them' (Stone & Hughes, 2002, p. 63).

As in Canada and Europe, national statistical and research organisations in Australia have sought for some years to develop concepts and indicators to measure social wellbeing. This reflects an appreciation that established measures of economic performance tell only part of the story. There has been a slow but gradual increase in interest in social cohesion for its potential to provide an organising framework for measuring social, rather than economic, progress. Much of this has drawn heavily on the Canadian and European work discussed above. For example, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2005, p. 40) defines social cohesion as:

the connections and relations between societal units such as individuals, groups (and associations' (Berger-Schmitt, 2000, p. 2, following McCracken, 1998); it is the 'glue' that holds communities together. Cohesiveness is created from connections based on a shared sense of belonging and attachment, similar values, trust and a sense of 'social solidarity'.

Similarly, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has been working on developing indicators of social as opposed to economic 'progress' for several years. One of the key measures it has developed is 'family, community and social cohesion' which is conceptualised as a 'bottom up' process which is the sum of, or derived from, well-functioning family and community life together with their shared values (ABS, 2006a, p. 148). Reflecting the Australian policy emphasis, social capital is seen as a major element of social cohesion in this context (see also ABS, 2006b).

This work, and the government policy directions it reflects, does not specifically consider the spatial elements of social cohesion, unlike in Europe and the UK, nor does it refer to the process of economic and social exclusion or the discussion of values and identity which have featured in social cohesion debates elsewhere. Instead, issues around economic marginalisation have been discussed within the separate and parallel 'welfare reform' discourse which has informed the development and implementation of policies and programs designed to (re)connect people on welfare benefits with paid work. This separation of discussions about family and community 'strengthening' from discussions about economic participation is similar to that in the US. Commentators such as Marsten (2004, p. 77) argue that the romanticised view of community which features in this type of government policy 'fails to recognise that there will always be characteristics of communities that include people and exclude others'.

In New Zealand, consideration of social cohesion is also quite recent and, whilst it has appeared in some policy documents, there is no consensus that it should be a goal of

social policy and there has been little public discussion (Spoonley *et al.*, 2005, p. 107). Consideration has been associated primarily with consideration of the consequences of a change in the composition of immigration from the late-1980s, away from traditional European source countries and towards countries of the South Pacific, Asia and Africa.

A definition of social cohesion in a New Zealand context sees it as a desirable end state, rather than a process:

New Zealand becomes an increasingly cohesive society with a climate of cooperation because all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy. (New Zealand Immigration Service, 2004, cited in Spoonley *et al.*, 2005, p. 98)

This definition is an attempt to articulate what social cohesion might look like in a society which is becoming even more culturally diverse. It draws directly on the work of the Canadian Jenson (1998) who articulated these five dimensions.

In Sum: Ambivalence or Embrace?

The above account indicates 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, and traces the transfer of ideas between countries and institutional settings in the years 1996–2006. The account also highlights some of the most commonly used and influential definitions of social cohesion which have circulated in these geopolitical areas. 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 (e.g. Berger-Schmitt & Noll, 2000; Chan *et al.*, 2006; Rajulton *et al.*, 2003; Spoonley *et al.*, 2005).

Our account of the usage of social cohesion by policy-makers also highlights the differential take-up of the concept in countries and transnational organisations with different institutional arrangements and socio-political histories. Whereas it had a significant influence on the Canadian policy landscape, at least initially in the 1996–2006 period, and has been enthusiastically embraced by policy-makers working within a Europe-wide environment, social cohesion has to date been treated with a higher level of ambivalence in other contexts. As we have seen, during the same period, policy discourse about community in countries such as the UK, the US, Australia and New Zealand has centred more on concepts such as social capital and social exclusion. In the next section we reflect on possible causes of these differences and the consequences for public policy.

The Political and Cultural Context of Social Cohesion as a Public Policy Concept: Some Reflections

That there has been such varied take-up of social cohesion across the countries and transnational organisations discussed here is curious, given the common concern with 'community' throughout the 1996–2006 period. The countries discussed in this account are all typically seen as variants of a liberal welfare regime, following Esping-Andersen's influential and much-discussed typology. Such regimes are one of three ideal types in

Esping-Andersen's original formulation. They rely heavily on the market, rather than the family or the state, for 'welfare production' and are characterised by dualism in the provision of welfare, indicating dualism in underlying power relations (Esping-Andersen, 1999, pp. 29–33, 73). Whilst recognising a long-standing and robust debate about this typology (summarised, for example, in Hulse, 2003; O'Connor *et al.*, 1999), the idea of a liberal welfare regime type provides a useful lens for examining the development of the policy concept of social cohesion in the countries in our study. The European institutions are by definition transnational and therefore cannot be directly compared with the individual countries. They do, however, enable a contrasting perspective on the development of the policy concept of social cohesion. In this section we reflect on the political and cultural context for policy debates.

Social Cohesion and Social Solidarity

According to Esping-Andersen, liberal welfare regimes are characterised by social guarantees being restricted to 'bad risks', a narrow conception of what risks should be considered 'social', and substantial state encouragement of private markets. They have weak labour market regulation, residual welfare states and non-familialist policies. Importantly, the dominant mode of solidarity is said to be individual, and the locus of solidarity is the market (Esping-Andersen, 1999, p. 85: Table 5.4).

Viewed in this way, policy-makers in the liberal welfare countries discussed in this article would be likely to embrace concepts that emphasise relationships between individuals as the source of social cohesion. It does appear that social cohesion, where it has been included in debates in these countries, has been viewed as predominantly a 'bottom up' rather than a 'top down' phenomenon (Witten *et al.*, 2003). This is sustained via a myriad of relationships between people and groups, many of which relate to the routine connections of everyday life. In practical terms, 'social cohesion is about getting by and getting on at the more mundane level of everyday life' (Forrest & Kearns, 2001, p. 2127). This might in part explain the attraction of Putnam's ideas about norms of trust, reciprocity and voluntary participation by individuals in the organisations of civil society in the liberal welfare countries. Policies designed to restore or increase levels of social cohesion thus emphasise strengthening families and social relationships at a micro level and can be seen in each of the countries.

The policy concept of social cohesion as used by European institutions has a different emphasis. Whilst it includes ideas about cooperative social relationships, the main focus is on threats to social cohesion because of the negative effects of market distribution of resources. This idea of social cohesion is essentially as a 'top down' process which has a strong institutional focus and which draws on some of the ideas about social exclusion. It is about reducing inequalities, divisions and cleavages, not between individuals but primarily between social groups, including those which have an ethnic and/or spatial basis. A focus on institutions and social groups could be expected to resonate more strongly with countries with other types of welfare regimes (social democratic and conservative, in Esping-Andersen's typology), many of which are members of the European institutions discussed in this article. The important point is that the

dominant mode of solidarity in these regime types is not individual but either universal or based on kinship and corporatism (Esping-Andersen, 1999, p. 85). This institutional focus also enables incorporation of a framework of rights, whether those associated with citizenship or more universal human rights.

In short, one possible explanation for differences in the development of the policy concept of social cohesion is a fundamental difference in understanding about the source of social solidarity. In the liberal welfare countries, it is seen as a 'bottom up' process deriving from the norms that underlie voluntary involvement in social networks and organisations, whilst in the European institutions social solidarity is seen primarily as a 'top down' process deriving from the capacity of institutional structures, particularly those of the state, to address inequalities and differences.

Social Cohesion and the Transformation of Social Models

A related way of looking at the international development of the policy concept of social cohesion is as part of negotiation of the transformation of social models in the countries and institutions covered in this article. Such negotiations can be seen as following almost two decades of neoliberalism in the liberal welfare countries and promotion of neoliberal ideas elsewhere. Neoliberalism posited that social policy provision, usually expressed as government social expenditures, was a drain on economic performance and undermined individual self-reliance and enterprise (Layard *et al.*, 1994; Murray, 1994). Researchers and policy-makers who wished to dispute these assumptions searched for a concept that would challenge the notion that government policy actions to improve social justice inevitably resulted in a trade-off in terms of reduced economic efficiencies (Saint-Martin, 2004, p. 3).

Social cohesion entered into policy debates in Canada in the mid-1990s as a concept with some academic credentials and with the potential to bring to the fore issues of concern which received low priority, or were ignored by, policy debates which centred on globalisation, economic development and competition. Depending on one's theoretical perspective, promotion of the concept in this way could be viewed as a form of 'resistance' to neoliberal political projects through the promotion of an alternative policy language within policy networks (e.g. Yeatman, 1998), as another 'new' concept juggling for position in the 'market place' of public policy (Gwartney *et al.*, 2006) or as a 'higher level' concept which enables social and economic policies to be seen as connected and interdependent (e.g. Berger-Schmitt & Noll, 2000).

Whilst it is possible to see these Canadian discussions as a form of resistance to a neoliberal political project (for example, Prince, 2001), this is less apparent in the other liberal welfare countries studied. Social cohesion can be viewed as one of a number of concepts, along with others such as social capital and social inclusion/exclusion, which were being put forward for attention by policy-makers as they sought to transform social models beyond the high mark of neoliberalism as exemplified by the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the US and the UK.

In the period 1996–2006 the social models of the liberal welfare countries have undergone substantial change which, although in differing degrees, has been towards a

social model based on participation through paid work. This model was developed in New Zealand after 1991 (Boston *et al.*, 1999), the US after 1996 (Grogger & Karoly, 2005), the UK after 1997 (Levitas, 2005), and Australia and Canada in the 2000s (Jamrozik, 2005; Lightman, 2003). The new employment-based social model emphasised connection, inclusion, integration or participation (the terminology varies between countries) through paid work. In the best known example, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act was signed by President Clinton in August 1996, vowing to 'end welfare as we know it'. This required people to work, search for work or prepare for work through training, in exchange for time-limited welfare payments both in any one period and over a lifetime. The objective was to move people from welfare payments and into paid work, with the underlying assumption that it is through such work that people participate fully in society.

This is not to suggest absolute convergence between the liberal welfare countries, rather, what Pawlick and Stroick (2004) in examining Australia, the UK and the US refer to as 'one discourse' but 'three dialects'. All have introduced social policy changes designed to ensure that people of working age engage in labour markets, even if on low wages, rather than receive (or rely solely upon) social security benefits. Public policies have thus emphasised tax credits for low wage earners, welfare to work programs and other employment-related social policies. Pawlick and Stroick share our assessment that little attention has been given to social cohesion in US debates, but that the concept has played a part in the transformation process in the UK through maintenance of a broad social safety net combined with policies to support local economic development initiatives, and in Australia through public policies to support partnership arrangements aimed at local social and economic development.

Changes to labour market regulation in the liberal welfare countries, however, mean that paid work is increasingly organised by way of individual contracts, for example, the implementation of 'WorkChoices' legislation in Australia in 2006 which provided a legal framework for individual contracts in lieu of a system of collective bargaining involving trade unions (Australian Government, 2006). One might question how such a system of individual contractual arrangements, particularly where workers do not have skills or experience to bargain with, contributes to social cohesion, which is usually assumed to involve voluntary social participation. Durkheim (1964 [1893], pp. 200–229) raised this very issue in 1893, distinguishing between 'organic and 'contractual' solidarity.

The assumption that participation in employment will ensure self-sufficiency and lead to improved economic and social wellbeing for individuals and households appears to reflect also a resurgence of some older liberal (rather than neoliberal) ideas about independence and self-reliance. A recent example of this is a Green Paper in the UK:

For individuals and families, the benefits of work are clear. Work is the best route out of poverty. It strengthens independence and dignity. It builds family aspirations, fosters greater social inclusion and can improve an individual's health and wellbeing. (Department for Work and Pensions, 2006, p. 2)

Whilst transformation of the social model in the liberal welfare countries has focused on 'welfare to work' policies, we can observe a parallel set of policies aimed at 'strengthening

families and communities', such as programs aimed at reducing or eliminating child poverty, strategies to include people with disabilities, and place based programs to build 'sustainable communities' in areas of economic and social disadvantage. For example, in Canada, substantial changes were made in the late-1990s to provincial/territory social assistance programs such that, for example, sole parents must search for work after their youngest child reaches school age whilst, at the same time, the Social Union Framework Agreement between the federal government and provincial/territory governments (except Quebec) signed in 1999 has seen collaborative working arrangements in areas such as the National Child Benefit, early childhood development, child care, and benefits and services for people with disabilities (Government of Canada, 2006). Similarly in Australia, since July 2006, 'welfare to work' changes mean that sole parents whose youngest child reaches school age and people with disabilities who are deemed capable of working must seek work. At the same time, the federal government has increased payments to families (family tax benefit) and has a variety of programs to assist with child care costs, facilitate early childhood development and provide services for people with disabilities. In particular, its 'Stronger Families and Community Strategy', launched in 2000 and since renewed, makes explicit the role of families and communities in preventing a host of 'social problems' through nurturing children, caring for those in need, helping people to take up work opportunities, and neighbourliness (Howard & Newman, 2000, p. 2).

The paradox of this dualism is that there has been little exploration of whether policies to ensure participation in paid work by people of workforce age (including those with parenting and caring responsibilities, older people, and those dealing with disabilities and health issues) are likely to diminish the number and quality of cooperative social relationships outside of work. If parents, carers and some grandparents are in paid work, will local social networks change in a way that may affect social cohesion, particularly where this is seen as a 'bottom up' process?

In a European context, there is a more extensive literature on the process of transformation to the welfare state models in response to fundamental economic, demographic, social and technological changes (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 2002; Ferrara *et al.*, 2001; Taylor-Gooby, 2005). Unlike in the liberal welfare countries, institutions such as the CoE and EU are increasingly invoking social cohesion as a higher order concept to protect the European Social Model which is seen an integral part of a European identity (European Committee for Social Cohesion, 2004, p. 2). This indicates a distinct cultural and political dimension to the use of the concept.

Invocation of social cohesion as part of an argument about a threat to the European Social Model appears to be in part a reaction to the dominance of the US model of employment-related social policies, expressed via transnational institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (Deacon *et al.*, 1997; Deacon, 2001). The question underlying much of the debate about the European Social Model is whether this will inevitably become more like the US. In this context, the policy concept of social cohesion has symbolic as well as substantive usages. Jepson and Pascual (2005) refer to the European Social Model as one of the fastest growing 'European catchwords', arguing that its dimensions are largely rhetorical and are intended to legitimise the politically constructed and identity-building projects of the various European institutions.

Social Cohesion and Cultural Diversity

Along with individualism and dualism, another explanation for the ambivalence with which the policy concept of social cohesion is viewed in the liberal welfare countries is that they are among some of the most culturally diverse in the OECD. Notably, Australia, Canada and New Zealand have rates of foreign born residents that far exceed most European countries.³ To raise issues of 'shared values', identity, attachment and belonging under the umbrella of social cohesion opens a metaphorical 'can of worms' which politicians, other than populist ones, have been reluctant to do.

As we have seen, one of the original reasons for adoption of the social cohesion framework in Canada was a perceived threat to the multicultural society (Jenson, 1998). After initial enthusiasm, commentators expressed concern that emphasis on the cultural dimension of social cohesion, shared values and commitment to community draws attention from other ways of looking at the cleavages and differences, such as social justice, inequality and discrimination (Beauvais & Jenson, 2002; Jenson, 1998). The fear was that this cultural dimension would be used to develop policies based on the values of 'mainstream' Canada and associated 'approved' modes of behaviour with an explicit integrationist agenda. Such an agenda might not value diversity in cultural heritage and be simplistic in view of the overlapping identities and complex senses of attachment and belonging being experienced in an increasingly multicultural society. There has subsequently been a change in focus to concentrate on individual rights and social citizenship, and a focus on institutional settings using concepts such as 'social architecture' which describe 'the *roles and responsibilities* as well as *governance arrangements* that are used to design and implement relationships among family, market, community and state' (Jenson, 2004, p. 3). In this process, earlier debates about cultural diversity, as well as social cohesion, appear to be more muted; rather, there is an emphasis on life course transitions, work, health, family and, more generally, 'citizen engagement' (Government of Canada, 2006).

There have been occasions when governments in liberal welfare countries have had to consider the cultural dimension of social cohesion more explicitly in response to well-publicised civic disturbances, such as those in the northern English cities in 2001 and in a number of suburbs in Sydney (Australia), such as Redfern (2004), Macquarie Fields (February 2005) and Cronulla (December 2005). Many of these events occurred in, or close to, areas where residents are economically and socially disadvantaged and come from a variety of cultural backgrounds. We have already seen a concern with societal level social cohesion in the UK, and in a major speech by the Australian prime minister shortly after the Cronulla 'riots' which manifested some underlying tensions of multiculturalism:

In the 21st century, managing our social cohesion will remain the highest test of the Australian achievement. It demands the best Australian ideals of tolerance and decency, as well as the best Australian traditions of realism and of balance. (Howard, 2006)

The theme of the speech was an assessment of 'the Australian achievement' and the need for a 'sense of balance', including between economic development and social cohesion,

between national identity and cultural diversity, and between rights and democratic responsibilities.

Some of this is echoed in debates in European institutions, whose member countries were historically more homogenous than the liberal welfare 'settler' countries. With greater movement between countries as well as into Europe from other parts of the world, there is also a fear that increased levels of migration may impact on social cohesion and could be a more serious challenge to 'the European heritage' than economic globalisation and the growth of a single market. Taylor-Gooby (2005, p. 666) argues that, despite this challenge, the institutionalisation of left-wing influence in many European countries is likely to insulate their welfare systems against the impact of greater cultural diversity.

Hong Kong researchers Chan *et al.* (2006, pp. 284, 292), argue that social cohesion requires only norms around participation, cooperation and mutual help, and associated behaviours that correspond with these. They contend that there is no place for 'liberal' values such as 'respect for diversity' or tolerance in a definition of social cohesion, giving the example of 18th century agricultural societies where social cohesion may have depended on other values such as hierarchy or 'respect for tradition'. Whilst we understand the context of this work, which is to develop a clear definition that can be operationalised and thus enable a system of measurement, our review indicates that the policy concept of social cohesion is inextricably embedded in its cultural and political context. Indeed, part of its value is in bringing to the fore discussions about values and norms, the ways in which people behave in relation to each other, and the extent to which democratic political processes are able to deal with different values, multiple and overlapping identities, and complexities in attachment and belonging.

In Conclusion

This article has traced the development of the policy concept of social cohesion in the liberal welfare countries and in key European institutions in the years 1996–2006, finding that it has been regarded with considerable ambivalence in the former, and with increasing enthusiasm in the latter. The exception to this was in Canada in the mid- to late-1990s when the concept generated some support. The reason for this difference is not clear but may reflect, *inter alia*, the use of social cohesion as a form of resistance to neoliberalism, a distinct European flavour to social policy debates in Quebec, and explicit differentiation between social policy in Canada compared to the US.

Our account of the development of the policy concept indicates that it includes at least three dimensions, with the emphasis differing between countries and institutional settings. Firstly, social cohesion has been used to refer to the social relations of everyday life through family and other social relationships, networks and associations, incorporating some of the ideas around social capital. In this sense, it is envisaged as a 'bottom up' voluntary process in which people and social groups play the major role, with government as an enabler and facilitator. Secondly, social cohesion has referred to the reduction of differences, cleavages and inequalities between groups of people and between people living in different geographical areas, including some of the ideas associated with another policy concept, social exclusion. This dimension has been largely, although not entirely,

seen as a 'top down' process, with government having the major role in establishing institutional settings to ensure societal level social cohesion. Thirdly, and this is an important point, social cohesion has been more than the sum of these two dimensions (or, more narrowly, than the sum of social capital and social exclusion). It incorporates a distinct cultural dimension, referring to the norms underlying the 'ties that bind' people together and which include a sense of common purpose, shared identity, common values such as tolerance of difference and diversity, and behaviours which reflect these.

Governments in the liberal welfare societies have enthusiastically adopted the first of these dimensions, have been reluctant to embrace the second, and have shown various degrees of reluctance and enthusiasm in dealing with the third, cultural, dimension of social cohesion. We have suggested three reasons why this could be the case: the assumption that social solidarity is based on individual and voluntary relationships; the transformation of social models to ones based on contractual relationships in paid work, grafted onto older liberal values of self-help and self-reliance, and supplemented by government support for 'strong families' and 'sustainable communities'; and the perceived political dangers of debates about values, identity and belonging/attachment in culturally diverse societies. In contrast, the European institutions have at times used social cohesion as an overarching or umbrella concept encompassing all three dimensions.

NOTES

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2. 'Mutual obligation' is a policy term used in Australia to describe the set of obligations and activities required of persons in receipt of government provided income support payments. These include job search, training and community activity such as caring and volunteering.
3. The percentages of foreign born residents in 2000–2001 was 23 per cent in Australia, 19.5 per cent in New Zealand and 19.3 per cent in Canada. In Europe, only Luxembourg (32.6 per cent) and Switzerland (22.4 per cent) had such high percentages. Of the liberal welfare countries, percentages were significantly lower in the US (12.3 per cent) and UK (8.3 per cent) (OECD, 2006, p. 23).

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