



Social Cohesion

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What is it?

Social cohesion shifts the emphasis from 'unity through diversity' to 'unity through commonality'. Diversity and multiculturalism emphasize difference and minimize similarity, and this is what social cohesion aims to address. Although understandings of social cohesion are often polarized between western-based social justice and eastern-based social harmony, the core is unity among all members of a community for the betterment of society. Most Western countries emphasize fairness and social justice: an equitable distribution of rights and opportunities embracing culturally diverse individuals or groups. Most Asian settings emphasize homogeneity: the promotion of social harmony for an equitable distribution of rights and opportunities targeting to meet the basic human needs (e.g., education, housing).

Who uses the concept?

Social cohesion is prominent in research on culture, particularly on diverse societies comprised of varying faiths, racial and ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and socio-economic status. Within academia, it can most notably be found in social work, urban and migration studies, sociology, and human geography research. Practitioners such as policy-makers, social workers, and non-profit organizations make use of this term to unify their neighbourhoods, communities, cities, and nations.

Fit with intercultural dialogue?

Social cohesion is a relevant concept for understanding intercultural dialogue as it promotes inclusion of different cultures and creeds within a

society. Intercultural dialogue serves as a conduit to social cohesion as members within a society can gain cultural competency through contact, an overture for finding common ground to achieve social unity.

What work remains?

Social cohesion is often used as a remedy to overcome shortcomings within existing approaches to cultural contact – assimilation, integration, diversity and multiculturalism. Future research could use it to bridge notions of social justice and social harmony, encouraging scholars to move beyond the perceived dichotomy. Additionally, social cohesion would work well in conjunction with and complimentary to these approaches instead of as a replacement.

Resources

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