Social cohesion: a conceptual and political elucidation

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Abstract

This paper aims at clarifying the concept of social cohesion by embedding it within a dynamic, multi-scalar and complex understanding of socioeconomic development in the city. Section One gives a European perspective on the relationship between social cohesion and urban policy views. It shows how the contemporary EU territorial cohesion discourse holds an inclination towards the functionalization of social cohesion to the benefit of competitiveness. Section Two shows the complexity and multidimensionality of social cohesion as a *problématique*, a discursive field dwelling on the paradox of apparently opposite aspirations of belonging and differentiation. It systematises social cohesion as an 'open concept', distinguishing between its socioeconomic, cultural, ecological and political dimensions. Section Three offers ways to accommodate tensions and contradictions inherent in capitalist market economies, and reveals the contradictory ethics driving collective action and change. It argues in favour of a progressive neo-structuralist approach that offers the epistemology to democratic political movements to conceptualise and lay out policies to make cities more inclusive for all inhabitants in all their uniqueness and diversity.

Keywords: social cohesion; urban development; social exclusion; social capital; citizenship; scale; problématique

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Social Cohesion in Cities – conceptual and political clarifications

Social cohesion is a key European policy concern as well as an academic concept which refers to diverse aspects of the dynamics of social relations, such as social exclusion, participation and belonging. For Bernard (1999, p. 65) it is a "quasi-concept, that is, one of those hybrid mental constructions that politics proposes to us more and more often in order to simultaneously detect possible consensuses on a reading of reality, and to forge them". Dictionary definitions place "cohesion" as the action or fact of holding firmly together or forming a unit. It refers to a state in which components 'stick' together to form a meaningful whole (Chan et al., 2006, p. 289).

Several attempts at defining and operationalising social cohesion have been made and resulted in a multiplicity of understandings, all of them stressing its multidimensionality (Jenson, 1998, Berger-Schmitt, 2000, Fainstein, 2001, Kearns and Forrest, 2000, Maloutas and Malouta, 2004, Woolley, 1998, O'Connor, 1998). In general, scholars consider a cohesive society a goal or at least a general direction in which society should evolve, and often include the means by which it may be achieved (Berger-Schmitt, 2000, p. 4).

In this article, we will neither present an alternative nor a final definition, but expose the collective learning process as undertaken within "Social Polis – Social Cohesion in the Cities" which has led to an

understanding of social cohesion as a *problématique* (cf. section Two). In a generic but helpful approximation, to foster social cohesion in cities means creating neighbourhoods and agglomerations where people "live together differently" (Patsy Healey) or – more precisely – "have the opportunity to be different and yet be able to live together" (Mikael Stigendal)[1]. This approach refers to an apparently unsolvable paradox, an inherent contradiction in human conviviality in general, and in modern capitalist societies in particular. To be at the same time entitled to be different and to receive equal treatment poses pressing challenges: How to tackle unity and diversity, difference and equality, autonomy and inclusion? How much social mix and homogeneity a neighbourhood need to be cohesive (Murie and Musterd, 2004)? How much diversity does a city need to be creative and innovative (Hillmann, 2009)? How to deal with diversity of daily experiences, ageing and life styles in neighbourhoods (Guentner, 2009)?

There is an apparently unsolvable tension for urban inhabitants to be free and autonomous to enjoy a broad plurality of life styles on the one hand, and to recognise and claim for equal rights and access to urban infrastructure and fair chances of social and spatial mobility for all of them, on the other hand. This tension can only be addressed dialectically through the lens of the dynamic and complex relationships between people, and between people and nature within cities. The discussion about the paradoxical relationships between a 'just urban society for all' on the one

hand, and the right to individual and community-based freedom on the other hand has had a long history (Arendt, 1958, Sennett, 1977).

What is new today is that the tension between aspirations for individual freedom and general social justice has become part of a dominant discourse that subjugates the search for social cohesion to an almost unchallenged competitiveness rhetoric that has driven claims for a universal welfare state to the background (cf. section one). To deconstruct this dominant discourse, social cohesion needs to be re-problematised by considering a wide spectrum of processes and outcomes, causes and effects relating to urban inhabitants' lives. But as concepts and reality are related, defining a social object lies never "outside" the object (Bhaskar, 1998), but is part of the social practice in socio-political struggles (Vranken, 2008, p. 22).

This paper starts by giving an overview of the policies on social cohesion with a focus on Europe and the way the urban question is tackled. It addresses social cohesion as a specific concern and a specific perspective to look at social issues in the city. Section two conceptualises social cohesion as a *problématique* which is the only way of tackling simultaneously a variety of problems of "living together differently" without being homogenized or excluded. To problematise the multi-dimensionality of social cohesion in the city, section Two lays out four dimensions of urban life which cover the diversity of the *problématique* of social cohesion in the city as a whole. Section Three explores the political implications of the

problématique-grounded reconceptualisation of social cohesion and volunteers an alternative approach to match diversity and freedom on the basis of equal civic, social and political rights.

1. Social Cohesion in Cities on the European policy scene

In European policy discussions, social cohesion is a nodal point in the discursive field which dwells on the contradictions of equality and diversity, unity and autonomy, as well as on the concern of building social order and repairing the damage caused by capitalist modernisation (Berman, 1988, Cowen and Shenton, 1996). From this perspective, problematising social cohesion draws attention to the danger of urban disorder inherent in modernisation of capitalist societies based on class cleavages and constant transformation of economic activities and their resources.

More than a century ago, Emile Durkheim popularised the term social cohesion in a reflection on the social implications of modernisation (Jenson, 1998). "The division of labour in society" (1893) was written in the context of rapid social change associated with industrialisation and urbanisation at the end of the 19th century. For Durkheim, social cohesion can be achieved by two routes. Firstly, via 'mechanical solidarity', characteristic of traditional societies where likeness and similarities among individuals is the basis of cohesion, and social molecules cohere and act together as they have

no action of their own (cited in Giddens, 1972, p. 139). Secondly, in complex societies, cohesion is achieved via 'organic solidarity', in which "social harmony comes essentially from the division of labour. It is characterized by a cooperation which is automatically produced through the pursuit by each individual of his own interests. It suffices that each individual consecrates himself to a special function in order, by the force of events, to make himself solidary with others" (Durkheim, 1933, p. 200). From this perspective, talking in 'urban' terms, the city as a whole' is the place where weak ties of organic solidarity build bridges between social groups and territories.

Without using the term social cohesion – which to them would probably be incompatible with capitalism - Marx and Engels describe the disruptive modernizing forces as "all that is solid melts in the air" (Marx and Engels, 1986), an idea taken up and elaborated further by Schumpeter as "creative destruction" (Schumpeter, 1947, p. chap 7). It was the dark side of progress, the "terrible and tragic convergence, sealed with victims' blood" (Berman, 1988, p. 75), from poverty to unemployment and social disintegration, that gave rise to the idea of shaping development as conscious human intervention to correct these disruptions (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). The visible hand of human actors, collective civic agency, social movements and the state, shapes modernisation and urbanisation with profound effects on the life of urban inhabitants. Criticism of decay, exploitation and disorder

(Engels, 1999) resulted in a long history of urban reform to heal the city from the perils of capitalist progress, marrying nature with the city, restoring harmony and achieving "wholesome" living (cf. Swyngedouw and Cook (2012).

Historically, social and political struggles related to the reparation of the damages caused by capitalist modernisation abound. Measures as outcomes of struggles ranged from wage subsidies in Speenhamland in the 1790s (Polanyi, 1978) over Bismarck´s corporatist welfare state to the more universal welfare state of the Post-War social contracts (Byrne, 2005) and the successful middle class benefiting universal welfare state within the national power container in Western and Northern Europe at the golden age of capitalism (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 2007, 1998). The social market or mixed economy model based on the idea of constantly negotiating a social order permitted the participation of relevant socio-political groups in society, often via corporatist arrangements. It took the form of a coherent estate-like but stratified and hierarchically gendered society. For this Fordist mode of regulation, also referred to for its Keynesian accommodation via an institutionalisation of class conflict (Bowles and Gintis, 1986), a condition of crisis arose in the 1970s in North-Western and continental Europe, giving way to a cut-back of the welfare state, impacting on social cohesion mainly by increasing levels of structural unemployment and precarious employment

as well as new forms of authoritarian state (Becker, 2002, Boyer, 2000, Jessop, 2002a, 2002b, Swyngedouw, 2000, Aglietta, 2000).

In Europe, social cohesion gained momentum as a key concept in policy and research exactly at a moment when features of social cohesion connected to the welfare state started to erode. In this specific conjuncture, social cohesion became a political issue in Europe because of the failure and contestation of existing, but also the denial of alternative more redistributive integrative mechanisms. At least as far as the official discourse goes, it became a key concern for European integration, in the first place through the pursuit of territorial cohesion (Faludi, 2007, Servillo, 2010), with Cohesion Policy being "the most explicit and most visible expression of solidarity within the EU" according to the general director of the DG-Regio of the European Commission (Ahner, 2009). Healthier Member States must show solidarity to less healthy in order to achieve the more homogeneous material basis required to build cohesion.

Already in the early 1990s, the DG Employment and Social Policy of the European Commission proposed a proxy definition of social cohesion (CEC, 1992) in the report "Urban social development. Later the "European Union First Cohesion Report", while recognising that "The solidarity dimension is given practical effect through universal systems of social protection, regulation to correct market failure" affirms that "[t]he promotion of social cohesion requires the reduction of the disparities which

arise from unequal access to employment opportunities and the rewards in the form of income (CEC, 1996, p. 14). ← There is something wrong in this quotation. Please check text.

The social objectives became part of the Lisbon Agenda which proposed Competitiveness and Social Cohesion as its key objectives in 2000. But the focus on the Knowledge-Based Economy in the Lisbon Agenda has reduced social cohesion to its functional role in achieving and maintaining competitiveness (Apeldoorn et al., 2009): A "guiding principle of the new Social Policy Agenda will be to strengthen the role of **social policy as a productive factor**" (CEC, 2000, p. 5, original emphasis). This is also the core message of the European Commission's Staff Working Paper *Cohesion Policy and Cities: the urban contribution to growth and jobs in the regions* (CEC, 2005): Bring cohesion to cities by creating more and better jobs, and improving the employability of people in want of work. This embodies a new compromise of competitiveness and social cohesion (Boddy and Parkinson, 2005, Apeldoorn et al., 2009), creating a "de-socialised" and a "de-policised binary" that leaves no room outside its own rationale (Maloutas et al., 2008, p. 260).

Although in general the view on social cohesion is functional and subordinated to competitiveness, European Union's strategies of urban and regional development have recently tried to bring "economic and social cohesion" together (CEC, 2009b). This is at the base of the Commission's

'new' approach to territorial cohesion which aims at fostering an integrated approach to development that considers the specificities of each place[2]. The Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion (CEC, 2008) and the *Barca Report* (Barca, 2009) are paradigmatic policy documents in this line, as they foster a place-based strategy to cohesion in which the diversity of territories in Europe is considered an asset to promote cohesion and the specificity of places is taken into account.

This is in tune with policy conceptualizations from other European institutions which defend a more open perspective on future development as collectively and democratically constructed and in line with the European heritage of social welfare. "*Towards an Active, Fair and Socially Cohesive Europe*", published by the Council of Europe (CoE), goes beyond social inclusion in the labour market, as it is more concerned about a broad range of social relations, bonds and balances that are foundational to a 'good society' and a healthy democracy (CoE, 2008, p. §29, pp13). The CoE sees advantages in the concept of social cohesion over others as inclusion for it is a "guiding motto for social policy (…) drawing upon a set of aspirations and visions that have evolved over time and were considered quintessential" to Europe (CoE, 2007, p. §6, pp3). Such an open approach is most in tune with the academic discussion about social cohesion in the city within Social Polis, which does not only stress its multidimensionality but also its ethical, cultural and societal roots. As Moulaert and Nussbaumer (2009) argued:

social cohesion has been and should be socially constructed, it cannot be proclaimed or 'discursively materialised' by granting it a slot within a grand ideological discourse.

Summing up, in EC circles, the term social cohesion emerged in the policy discourse only when social cohesion became a pressing issue. Policy analysis is multi-dimensional, but embedded in hegemonic policy discourse and non-economic aspects are of interest primarily because of their economic functionality. The power of this discourse derives from its capacity to frame conversations, set goals and make sense of complex relationships of policy issues in socio-economic development (Beauvais and Jenson, 2002, p. 20, 31). Conceptually, it offers an integral analysis, but in practice it is strongly linked to and subordinated to the competitiveness discourse. The next section will look at the different dimensions of social cohesion as a *problématique*.

2. Social Cohesion as a *problématique*

There is large agreement on the multidimensionality of social cohesion (see introduction above). In a literature overview on social cohesion in urban spaces, Kearns and Forest describe social cohesion as "the harmonious development of society and its constituent groups towards common economic, social and environmental standards". They identify the following

five elements: (1) Social networks and social capital, (2) common values and a civic culture, (3) place attachment and an intertwining of place and group identity, (4) social order and control and (5) social solidarity and a reduction in wealth disparities (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, p. 999). This shows that social cohesion is not about a single issue, fitting one definition and addressing a clearly specified problem, but a set of issues which embraces a variety of dimensions of human conviviality; it deals with the resultant challenges to respect citizens' and communities' diversity as well as urban inhabitants' desire to belong and to identify with a group and a place.

Social cohesion approached as a *problemátique* recognises that defining what is to be considered as the problem of social cohesion in the city is no simple, value-free decision. It implies asking the right questions and obtaining deep insights into the life world of urban inhabitants as well as structural knowledge about causalities, contexts and time-space-regularities.

Efforts to foster solidarity in capitalist societies driven by the tension between cooperation and competition have to dwell on these contradictory dynamics but will not be able to solve them once and for all, as there is never only one solution, recipe or strategy available. Cities are privileged places of the multiple dynamics of the inherently contradictory *problématique* of social cohesion which becomes even more complex when competitiveness-oriented cities either foster internal socio-cultural cohesion

or ethnic diversity to obtain competitive advantages against other places. As will be shown in this section, the choice of concepts influences the way problems are identified and solutions proposed. This section is divided in four parts, according to four perspectives on the *problématique* with respective affinities to the four academic disciplines and policy areas which dominate urban social cohesion research and policy.

2.1. Socio-economy: Solidarity and Social Exclusion

A socioeconomic perspective on social cohesion stresses the disintegrative effects of social inequality and exclusionary dynamics in the access to resources and markets. It is of crucial importance to avoid that the wealthy and powerful actively exclude themselves from broader society (Byrne, 2005). Solidarity and reduction in wealth and income disparities are required to create equal opportunities and a sense of fairness. Solidarity is linked to forms of redistribution (Kearns and Forrest, 2000) and to social contracts about the financial foundation of the welfare state (De Swaan, 1988). Dahrendorf et al. describe a socially cohesive society as a society preventing social exclusion and enabling all to become part of and belong to it: "Social cohesion comes in to describe a society which offers opportunities to all its members within a framework of accepted values and institutions. Such a society is therefore one of inclusion. People belong; they are not allowed to be excluded" (Dahrendorf, 1995, p. viii). Social cohesion

offers a broader approach than social inclusion, as it permits a "stronger set of references to the functioning of democracy and the healthiness of society. Moreover, social inclusion focuses on 'specialised' policies and actions whereas the concept of social cohesion seeks a broader, more civic and societal responsibility" (CoE, 2007, p. §6, pp3).

This is in tune with the French republican tradition, which focuses on *le tout social*, society as a whole (Xiberras, 1998), stressing relational issues like the disruption of social ties between the individual and society. This socioeconomic perspective and the policy efforts intended to let all become part of the social whole, put conflict and exclusionary structures at the centre stage of the *problématique*. Social exclusion and inclusion depend crucially on the current functioning of the labour market which is the main system of distributing resources, currently leading to increased unemployment, precarious work, working poor and discrimination of migrants (Castel, 1998, Barlösius, 2004, Littig, Grießler 2005). Respective remedies have been directed at the forced inclusion training programmes and precarious work contracts, most emblematically achieved in Hartz IV, Germany's broad workfare reform (Brütt, 2009).

A German-speaking strand of discussion dwells on the concept of *Teilhabe* (partaking, participation) (Kronauer, 2002, 2007, Novy, 2007), which links the socioeconomic and political dimension of cohesion. It stresses the importance of equal access to the services and infrastructure of

the city, from public transport and public spaces to housing, health and education (Novy et al., 2009). It takes the trend towards local welfare systems into account (Andreotti et al., 2012), but considers universal welfare rights a pre-requisite for social cohesion. Therefore, it supports universal policies beyond the urban domain, in tune with a broad conception of citizenship as introduced by Marshall (1950). It relates to the discussions about the role of the public sphere in the building of society within an economy with a very advanced division of labour. Public life has eroded in what is often called 'the second modernity', because of the growing dominance of the 'labour society' (Arendt, 1958), as well as the fragmentation and individualisation of the public sphere (Sennett, 1977). Economic transformations may increase the spatial concentration of excluded or deprived groups in certain neighbourhoods with contradictory dynamics of gentrification and social mixing. Although the impact on local cohesion might be positive within a gated community, social exclusion in the sense of segregation between rich and poor neighbourhoods might be increasing, thereby burdening cohesion in the city as whole.

2.2. Culture: Common Values and Identity

The second perspective adopted here to problematize social cohesion is cultural and focuses on identity and common culture as key dimensions of belonging to a social whole, which is often territorially expressed: Cities are

places of encounter, formed by networks of interaction bringing people from different backgrounds, as age and life styles together through migration, commuting and cooperation. This creates hybrid cultures and cultural heterogeneity in multiple time-space frameworks (Simonsen, 2008b, Dukes et al. in this volume). A strong attachment to place and the intertwining of people's identities with places are considered important elements for social cohesion (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, p. 1001) that is based on a civic culture of shared values and "a common set of moral principles and codes of behaviour through which to conduct their relations with one another" (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, p. 997).

In Europe, the debate about the 'moral principles and codes of behaviour' emerging from (national or religious) tradition and distinguishing good and bad behaviour and persons has become increasingly important. These principles were justified either by an essentialist understanding of identity, mainly on the political right, and a trend towards agonistic politics on the left, expulsing enemies from the democratic domain (Mouffe, 2006). The tendency toward ethical closure found at both sides of the political spectrum can be understood by use of Max Weber's concept of social closure. This concept means that a dominant group safeguards its position and privileges by monopolizing resources and opportunities for its own group while denying access to outsiders (Weber, 1978). Closure is a process through which social groups maximise advantages by limiting

access to privileges and opportunities – 'rights' in Weber's terminology – to a circle of selected persons. Social cohesion via bonding goes hand in hand with some type of exclusion via demarcation. An essentialist understanding of identity and clear boundaries between "we" and "them" freezes the distinction between insiders and outsiders (Lacan, 2000, Zizek, 2002). "Imagined communities" based on invented histories, acquired rights, language, religion or ethnicity are the culturalist foundations of a highly problematic separation of insiders and outsiders, us and them (Hobsbawm, 1990, Anderson, 1991). Strong ties within a community can be accompanied by the tendency to discriminate and exclude those people who do not naturally belong to that community (cf Narayan, 1999, p. 8), a phenomenon typical in certain types of nationalism, but increasingly used in host-stranger-relationships, in segregating neighbourhoods but also in corporatist organizations on the left (e.g. housing associations). Place-based traditions were never "pure", they have always been hybrid, "since they can be understood properly only as the historically negotiated creation of more of less coherent symbolic and social worlds" (Simonsen, 2008a, p. 100). Often, multi-ethnic tensions are not produced but noticeable at concrete places. Inhabitants with different habits co-exist and people in their everyday life are confronted with their differences according to class, gender and ethnicity (Lykogianni, 2008). However, these places can never be definitively "purified" and remain diverse (Mingione, 2009).

Further socio-cultural aspects are social networks and social capital meaning "a high degree of social interaction within communities and families" (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, p. 999). Social capital as used by Bourdieu links different dimensions of "capital" – social, cultural, symbolic and economic. Bourdieu defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership of a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital. (...) The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network (…) of those to whom he is connected" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249). Bourdieu connects symbolic and social capital to economic capital and explains how individuals find access to social capital in unequal ways, as the possession of all forms of capital is polarised (Bourdieu, 1980, 1986). More than Coleman and Putnam, the other two 'founding fathers' of contemporary social capital theory, Bourdieu underscores the discriminating role of social class and other social 'distinction' factors among people. For Siisiäinen (2000, p. 2), the crucial advantage of the Bourdieuan perspective is that it emphasises conflict and the power function of social capital (social relations that increase the ability of an actor to advance her/his interests). It becomes a resource in the social struggles that are carried out in different social arenas or fields.

2.3. Ecology: Sustainability and ecological justice

While there is a long tradition of holistic approaches towards nature-society relations, it was only over the last decades that these approaches have re-entered urban development analysis and discourse. As environmental "goods and bads" are unevenly distributed in the city, processes of social exclusion in the city have to be linked with issues of ecological justice. The key message of mainstream sustainable development approaches is that ecological, social and economic concerns have to be understood and tackled simultaneously (WCED, 1987). Although it was criticised by political economists as a "fantasy of socio-ecological cohesion" (cf. Swyngedouw and Cook, 2012), the sustainability discourse has increased the awareness of a broader and more systemic approach towards urban development. Political ecology in turn managed to link the political economy of capitalism to issues of nature and ecology and to territorialise ensuing conflicts. Overcoming the "artificial ontological divide between nature and society" (Swyngedouw and Cook, 2012) results in a renewed focus on the city (Swyngedouw, 2006, Heynen et al., 2006, Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003). As the city as a territorial unit is a constantly emerging contradictory whole, to create cohesive cities requires not only social, but socio-ecological cohesion and justice. This has implications for urban collective action and

policy fields like housing and transport where exclusion and access are part of everyday life.

2.4. Politics: Citizenship and Participation

The final perspective on social cohesion we adopt here is political and synthesises the three aforementioned dimensions by stressing political action as participating in public affairs, but also as crucial for being a full member of the local community. Citizenship is a historically constructed set of rights and duties which organize the type of belonging to a society (cf. Garcia et al. 2012). As belonging is related to political equality, 'full' citizens enjoy equality of rights and opportunities. This is in line with welfare theories conceptualising citizenship encompassing civic, political and social rights (Marshall, 1950) as well as theories of democracy which stress the mix of direct, representative and participatory democracy as crucial for democratic governance (Leubolt et al., 2009).

While forms of cosmopolitism remain highly idealistic, new types of multi-level governance, citizenship, democracy and participation emerge to challenge a conception of full citizenship based solely on nationality. The latter is increasingly problematic because of the internationalization of the labour market, the hollowing-out of national social protection systems (welfare states) and the increasing mobility of citizens within Europe which requires more flexible forms of political rights and participation as well as a Europe-wide system of universal social rights. It is the lack of common

norms and institutions providing for labour, social and political rights which is increasingly undermining social and territorial cohesion.

Therefore, a key focus of innovative approaches is linking rights to residence instead of an imagined "natural" national identity. This may rehabilitate the city as a political territory, a *polis,* where citizenship is linked to everyday life (García and Claver, 2003, Bauböck, 2003). But it also calls for planetary democracy based on universally valid human rights (Dukes and Musterd, 2012). In European cities, new residents from non-European countries have joined and transformed the urban fabric. Sassen in her work on global cities stresses the resulting polarisation within cities, while Hamnett (2003) focuses on the emergence of a new middle class (Sassen, 1991, Burgers and Musterd, 2002, Hamnett, 2003, 2001). The emerging occupational structure reflects an increasing insecurity in the labour market, social and demographic change, international migration and the growing impact of the hegemonic competitiveness discourse on the organization of labour processes and work organization. Accelerated by the recent international financial crisis and its consequences for public spending, the foundations of social cohesion in Europe as a whole, and in European cities in particular have been shaken up. Further curtailment of national welfare as well as urban social services provision will be a probable outcome of the growing public debt due to the bank-crash and recession that started in 2008 and is still not under control. It is within this unstable socio-

economic setting that citizenship is renegotiated. Struggles about citizenship overlap with those about social exclusion (Berghman, 1998, p. 258-259), again showing the growing complexity of the social cohesion problématique and the need to tackle it in a politically comprehensive way.

3. Shaping socially cohesive cities

This final section discusses ways to come to terms with the multidimensional tensions inherent of the social cohesion problématique, investigating how to move on from understanding social cohesion as a complex *problématique* to politicising the diverse issues of social cohesion. It starts to unravel political and normative consequences of the decision to take social cohesion as a *problématique*. . Placing problems of cities and particularly those of disadvantaged people in poor neighbourhoods at the heart of current concerns about societal cohesion (Forrest and Kearns, 2001) the closing section of the paper focuses on cities as a laboratory for shaping cohesive cities without opposing economic and social objectives.

This effort to foster urban social cohesion includes new ways of politicising the *problématique* by reorienting the relationship between science and society through transdisciplinary research with stakeholders on an equal footing (CEC, 2009a) within multi-scalar democratic processes

with involvement of all interested parties and confrontation of different interests and communication (Novy et al., 2012).

3.1. *Locational competition and fragmented spaces*

Neoliberal policies have been a political project with severe implications for urban development, as it has been based on the primacy of competitiveness, subordinating other dimensions of urban development to an 'entrepreneurial' alliance of big business and the state (Peck and Tickell, 2002, Peck, 2008, Harvey, 2005), and on a tendency to individualise, privatise and fragment urban life (Mac Pherson, 1962) (Harvey, 2000, p. 236). Market capitalist development has intensified socio-spatial polarisation and economic instability. As a response, from the 1990s onwards, several political coalitions at a diversity of spatial scales made an effort to tackle the problems of growing disparity by linking competitiveness and social cohesion (Ache and Andersen, 2008, Boddy and Parkinson, 2005, Fainstein, 2001, Turok, 2006).

But in many of these policy efforts – if they ever go beyond the discursive stage – it has not been clear whether social cohesion is seen as an objective by itself or as merely functional for competitiveness (Reeskens, 2007, p. 35), but unable to even deliver the latter, as the ongoing crisis since 2008 has shown. "Under cover of a concern with 'social exclusion', and a rhetoric of solidarity, society dissolves into market relations … Ways of integration into society other than via the labour market are neglected"

(Levitas, 1996, p. 12). Labour market integration via education and training has been the most important current functionalist instrument of this workfare policy which tends to substitute for universal welfare provision (Peck, 2001, Bieling, 2009). Large scale urban redevelopment projects based urban policies often privilege increased competitiveness as an investment criterion over improved social service provision and community development (Moulaert, Swyngedouw and Rodriguez, 2003, Brenner, 2004, European Commission, 2007, Arantes et al., 2000). Another strategy has been delineating communities of self-interest within the urban space (Moulaert et al., 2010), based on identity-building as a resource in locational competition. Place-based identities have also been mobilised for selective cohesiveness within urban societies with increasing overall socio-economic and cultural-political cleavages. The current economic crisis is aggravating these disruptive processes.

3.2. Constructing socially cohesive cities

Neoliberal politicization of social cohesion has either hollowed out or destructed collectivist traditions, and a general amnesia prevails about the viability of collective action in creating cohesion (Judt, 2010); records on successful application of negotiated post WW II social cohesion arrangements seem to have been removed from the collective memory (Martinelli, 2010). Collective action withdrew from a universal struggle for

an emancipatory welfare society in favour of a post-political approach of targeted expert-coordinated initiatives and movements (Crouch, 2004). A specific contested type of policy has been *community- centred localism* (see Moulaert et al., 2010, for a synthesis of this debate). Such policy can focus on specific targeted interventions in favour of social cohesion within existing communities. But social cohesion within a community may disclose the exclusive features differentiating it from other communities or spheres of society which might result in situations where social cohesion in some place or in some respect becomes a threat to social cohesion at other places or in other contexts (Jenson, 1998, p. 4). But it can also be a reformist first step toward rebuilding a new type of multi-level and universal welfare state based on equal rights of all inhabitants. To evaluate these complex dynamics, a multi-scalar analysis is required (Brenner, 2004, Köhler and Wissen, 2003, Paul, 2002, Swyngedouw, 1992, 1997, 2004).

Urban communities can be enablers of citizenship rights using their multidimensional diversity (see section 2) to generate socially innovative and politically progressive initiatives working through different but interconnected spatial scales. Local initiatives as "bottom-linked" (García et al., 2012) seems to be a most promising approach to avoid the localist trap in trying to solve local problems at the local level alone (Moulaert, 1996, Moulaert et al., 2010, p. 6ff.). In this articulated spatiality, the neighbourhood is not only the site of existence of a proactive community to

accommodate diversity and equal rights but also the appropriate scale to drive their general recognition and institutionalization into effective social cohesion policy.

Cities that had become "institutional laboratories" for neoliberalising urban life (Brenner and Theodore, 2002), might become places which accommodate diversity and equality (see Arendt, 1998) by means of political mobilisation and awareness-raising about the limits of current neoliberal urban development on articulated spatial scales (Rodriguez and Rodriguez, 2009, Arantes et al., 2000, Moulaert et al., 2003). Diverse experiments on social innovation have been tried out over the last decades and show the viability of the transformation of the city in this concern (Moulaert et al., 2010, Mac Callum et al., 2009, Moulaert, 2002). A further step has been undertaken since 2007 by "Social Polis – Social Cohesion in the City" project which considered the separation of critical urban research from political mobilisation and policy making as a hindrance to elaborate an agenda for social cohesion in the city. It has come to the conclusion that a process of social learning involving all relevant actors is the only way to overcome this separation. Social learning is very much a matter of relational understanding and activism, built on a jointly developed ethics of collective action. It is very strongly embedded in pragmatism and holism (Moulaert and Mehmood, 2012) =

Following a progressive neo-structuralist approach (Moulaert, 1996) social cohesion not only refers to the integration or the inclusion of particular social groups – or their negation – but addresses the generic forces and agencies that create these interdependencies and enlarge agency via options of choice expressed in a shared ethics (Sen, 2001). A *progressive neo-structuralist understanding of society* (Alcock, 2006) links different dimensions, levels and scales (Byrne, 2005, p. 65f, Immerfall, 1999, p. 121f) in a context-sensitive integrative collective action and policy-making. Such approach does not "naturalize" structural constraints, but perceives them as emerging and therefore open to collective shaping through conscious and ethical agency.

Relevant for a progressive neo-structuralist perspective on social cohesion are the different attempts to grasp development as an embracing concept to measure good life. Different efforts have been undertaken which stress individual capabilities and their enlargement as crucial for human convivality (Nussbaum, 1999, Deneulin, 2005, Robeyns, 2005, Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2009, Sen, 2001). Based on the Human Development Index suggestions on a more effective measurement of quality of life beyond the GDP have been presented, stressing the importance of reducing inequality, of measuring wealth and non-economic assets and giving due credit to sustainability (Stiglitz et al., 2009, Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). These undertakings broaden the database for public debate and qualified

democratic decision making; but at the same time they put too much stress on outcomes, and not enough on multidimensional processes of development and the social reproduction of norm-systems and collective action (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2009).

A city that offers a good life for all its inhabitants is one where they are allowed to be different and yet able to live together, thereby politicising the problem of social disintegration. A concrete utopia of socially cohesive cities within territorially cohesive macro-regions has to elaborate a regulatory setting which accommodates freedom, equality and solidarity (Novy and Lengauer, 2008, Balibar, 1993). The challenge of social cohesion implies cultural change overcoming adherence to a single-language, mono-ethnic norm, and accommodating diversity, equality as well as multi-identity exchange. Within this context, cities can become places of belonging and territories which accommodate place-based specificities with equal opportunities for quality of life. Socio-economically, social cohesion would be fostered if the European economic treaties abandon inherent market fundamentalism and return to a mixed economic order which experiments with a constructive synergising between markets, regulation and planning as well as with private, communal and public ownership. This would enable cities to consolidate a plural economy based on a mix of paid and voluntary work, and export as well as caring economy (Gibson-Graham, 2007, Fraisse 2012 in this issue). Politically, the challenge consists in

advancing from an essentialist and exclusionary concept of national citizenship which creates "outsiders" toward a scale-sensitive and inhabitant-centred conception of citizenship (cf. Garcia et al. 2012). This would allow establishing a societal citizenship guaranteeing rights for everybody (Beauregard and Bounds, 2000).

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Footnotes:

[1] We owe these definitions to personal communication and collective brainstorming in Social Polis.

[2] This is not so different from the social policy perspective launched in the early 1990s when local development was put forward as a strategy to combat social exclusion.