

Social Cohesion and Well-being: Implications for the Human Development and Capabilities Approach

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The paper connects the concepts of social cohesion and human development as defined under the human capabilities approach. Initially, the literature used to explain social cohesion is reviewed and a new definition is proposed that extends along previous ones. The stand that social cohesion can essentially be measured only through “subjective” or perception-based indicators is supported in this paper. Further, the literature present in sociology, social psychology, and development studies is analyzed and a theoretical framework is proposed to explore the conducive effects of cohesion on human development. Finally, empirical evidence is presented to infer this link between cohesion and human functionings and some additional questions for further research are raised.

Keywords: *Social Cohesion, human development, capabilities approach, well-being, quality-of-society, trust*

1. Introduction

There has been many diverse approaches to assessing human well-being and quality-of-life. Regardless of their differences, a general consensus in past decades has been reached on the need to overcome traditional income-oriented measures of well-being, with the “human development” (i.e., the “capabilities approach”) undouble being one of the main instigators of this line of thought. However, almost a universal feature of all these approaches is the focus on the individual. While aspects concerning state and market have been investigated in regard to the capabilities approach, the importance of social factors and social context have been given a less central role. The broad question that is at the heart of the analysis presented here is that of social determinants and their important role in well-being. In particular the paper is concerned with theorizing and assessing the importance of social cohesion, conceptualized here as a “social quality” for well-being of humans and the implications that derive from considering social cohesion into the analysis of human capabilities.

Social cohesion is a concept that has been continuously gaining on importance in different academic disciplines as well as on the national and international policy agenda. However, the problematic lies not only in conceptualizing the impact that social cohesion has on well-being, but also in proposing reasonable measures for assessing cohesion. If we conceptualize social cohesion as a social quality, then that quality can only be valued and judged by the members of that society. In recent years a proposition has been made by scholars to use perception-based (i.e., subjective) multidimensional indices for measuring cohesion. This proposition is supported here and we seek to take this relatively new approach one step further in suggesting a definition that has been missing so far as well as some conceptual improvements. Further, social cohesion is carefully examined here and a conceptual review is presented to enable a “consensus” amongst a variety of approaches towards the concept. Importantly, for the first time the significance that “civic identity” (the developmental process in the formation of citizenship) is recognized – as an identity dimension in fostering social cohesion on the national level. Besides this, it is suggested that generalized (i.e., societal) trust and perception of fairness are key components that condition social cohesion on the macro-level.

It is claimed here that social cohesion has an intrinsic and instrumental role in the expansion of human capabilities. Not does social cohesion only permit for a greater range of freedoms available to the individual, it also makes it able for individuals of different backgrounds to unite in achieving common goals with greater efficiency. In this sense, social cohesion acts not only as an “opportunity structure” for individuals in achieving well-being, it also enables the strengthening of so-called “group-dependent” or “social capabilities” that individuals alone would not be able to have or achieve. As the human development approach is primarily concerned with assessing “functionings” rather than capabilities, a set of cases is presented in the last section to infer the empirical link between social cohesion as conceptualized here and its importance to individual functionings. Additionally, data from the European Social Survey pertaining to cohesion is compared with rating of life-satisfaction as well as with the human development index (HDI). Using simple bivariate correlations we find a robust association between social cohesion, subjective well-being and human development as measured by the HDI.

2. A Cohesive Society: Towers a Definition of National Social Cohesion

Despite the growing devotion in the last two decades of academics and policymakers alike, social cohesion (hereafter SC) has remained a concept on whose meaning there is no general agreement. The theoretical confusion on SC has led some to believe that social cohesion is nothing more than a “buzzword”, a “quasi-concept” or a “concept of convenience”, much like “globalization” (Bernard 2000). According to Ranci (2011, 2795) it is a fuzzy concept, including heterogeneous dimensions such as social integration, solidarity, inequality, place attachment or identity. Chan et al. (2006, 280) have rightly claimed that “when social cohesion becomes synonymous with a ‘good society’ it no longer carries analytical value.” Although any definition of the concept has to start by acknowledging that SC is by default a multidimensional as well as a “fuzzy” concept, this does not mean that it is without analytical value, unclear or meaningless altogether. Regardless of the differences in defining SC, it is important to recognize that in many aspects there is considerable overlap between these various definitions and that the analytical value of the concept lies exactly within this “consensus”. The aim here is not to get entangled in an endless discussion about SC, because intuitively we associate it with certain notions of “sense of belonging”, trust and equity under others. Rather, it is to understand what the importance of SC is, how it can come about and particularly what its effects on human wellbeing are. In the literature screened for this article, four distinct aspects of the problematic of defining SC are evident:

- a) In the way the concept is used in the academic discourse as opposed to the policy discourse -- the origins of SC can be traced back to Durkheim’s conceptualization of “social solidarity” and “social integration” which is primarily used in the academic disciplines of sociology and social psychology and was traditionally used to describe “growing integration” (Durkheim 1984). This approach is also evident in Lockwood’s (1964) definition of “system integration” and “social integration”. On the other hand, the definitions used by the OECD and more widely in the policy discourse is to be understood in the context of John Rawls notion of a “well-ordered society” (OECD 2011, 53). However, in the policy discourse, the concept is used in multiple settings and in a more indiscriminate fashion. SC has become a central policy goal for national and international policy makers in the past two decades. Beauvais and Jenson (2002), point out that “in the beginning of the 90s, social policy analysts found an expression for the ‘big picture

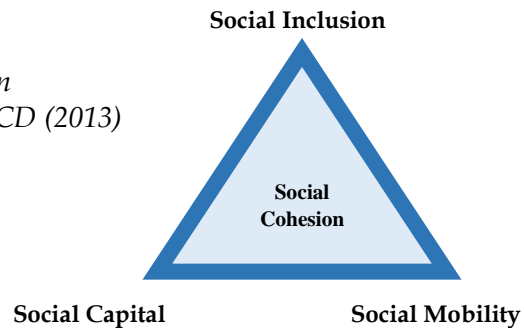
framing' of their discourse – social cohesion". Often the definitions used in policy include too many component and mix the defining elements with the effects of SC. We take a closer look at the definition that the OECD uses to illustrate this point.

- b) In its distinct use in the European as opposed to the non-European approach -- the European approach emphasizes more strongly the role of social exclusion, inequalities, fight on poverty and marginalization (Mărginean 2009). A characteristic of a socially cohesive society is then the shared perception that the distribution of power and material resources is fair (Langer et al. 2016, 4). It also ascribes an active role to governments in achieving cohesion. For instance, "economic" and "social cohesion" – as defined in the 1986 Single European Act – is about 'reducing disparities between the various regions and the backwardness of the least-favored regions'. The EU's most recent treaty, the Lisbon Treaty, adds another facet to cohesion, referring to 'economic, social and territorial cohesion' (European Commission 2016). The non-European approach (primarily used in North America, Australia, and New Zealand) on the other hand, places more emphasis on attitudes and norms that include trust, a "sense of belonging", as well as the relation of individuals to each other based on these perceived bonds which might result in greater solidarity among members (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2001; Portes and Vickstrom 2015). In this sense, social cohesion has to do more with the quality and nature of connections between people and groups. The position that is supported in this article and that has been previously proposed by other scholars (see: Hooghe 2012; Langer et al. 2016) is that there should be a unified approach towards SC that integrates both these aspects.
- c) In the way it is seen as a "state of affairs" as opposed to a "process" -- In an influential study used across literature on "developing a definition and analytical framework for empirical research", Chan et al. (2006) claim that "in daily usage, 'cohesion' refers to the level of cohesiveness of a group or community; it is therefore clearly a state of affairs, not a process". Further, "the word 'process' would elicit a counter-intuitive implication that there exists some 'end-state' or 'maximal' level of social cohesion" (ibid, 281). This view is challenged here.
- d) In the way social cohesion is treated (or not) as a macro-concept. That is, the chosen unite of analysis for assessing cohesion. This aspect is widely overlooked but discussing it is fundamental as it can easily pose the problem of "endogeneity" when, for instance, looking at the impact of SC on a dependent variable, such as human development. The question is also weather SC should be measured using more conventional 'objective' measures, or 'subjective' measures to assess it. A distinction needs to be made between cohesion on the kinship or group level and cohesion on the national/supranational level – what we define as "national social cohesion" (NSC).

The OECD (2011, 17) uses a triangular definition of social cohesion based on the components of social inclusion, social capital and social mobility (See Figure 1). The notion of social cohesion is often associated with the narrower concept of "social capital" (Helliwell and Putnam 1995; Ritzgen, Easterly, and Woolcock 2000). Narayan (1999, 27) states that social capital is a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition for a society to be cohesive. However, using social capital as a component of SC can be misleading for two reasons. First, social capital refers to a group of individuals, while SC is seen as a holistic concept extended to the level of the entire society. Social capital refers to

the collective value of all "social networks" (who people know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (Putnam 2001). Second, the definition is confounding the defining elements of SC with its effects. As discussed later, SC is seen here as a collective "opportunity structure" for individuals and in this regard greater social capital, mobility and inclusion will be an outcome of SC and not the defining component of SC. To illustrate this, imagine individual A entering society X where there is little or no cohesion and individual B entering society Y which is a cohesive society. The chances that individual B is going to develop a larger "stock" of social capital, climb up the social ladder easier and be more included in society are much higher than for individual A.

Figure 1. The components of social cohesion
 Source: Adapted with permission from OECD (2013)



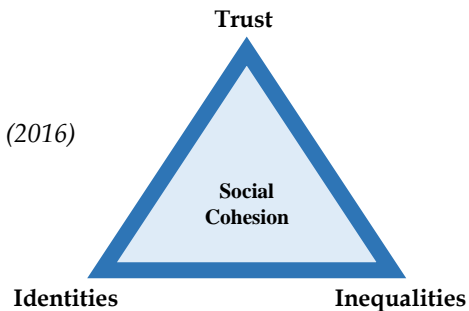
SC as a macro-concept is aimed at assessing the quality of a society at large. Although, cohesion can obviously be present in a community, a social group as defined by ethnicity, religion or kinship, SC as a holistic concept implies a more cross-cutting notion. Conceptualizing social cohesion in the sense of NSC is also more useful for cross-country comparison and measurement. Further, when we talk about SC, we also talk about a subjective "internalization" of what our stand in a given society is. Langer et al. (2016) argue that SC is essentially a matter of how individuals perceive others and the state and not of more 'objective' measures of interactions. Therefore, the most feasible way to measure it is by looking at these perceptions.

Of course it would be problematic to claim that there is an "end-state" for SC. However, claiming altogether that it is not a process is misleading for two reasons. First, because although there might not be an "end-state", there is certainly a "trajectory" by which a society can become more (or less) cohesive over time. Second, because actors can impact cohesion within a country through their actions. These actors include governmental, non-governmental, community and social institutions. In this regard, social cohesion is seen here as being a "process" (Jenson 1998) rather than a state of affairs. There is much evidence, especially from Canada and the European Union, to assert that state institutions and policies in particular can have significant impact in the way this "process" is shaped (see: L. Hooghe 1996; Reitz and Banerjee 2007; Atkinson 2009).

More recently, Langer et al. (2016) have provided a feasible way of measuring social cohesion through a perceptions-based multidimensional index composed of: a) trust, b) inequalities and c) identities (see Figure 2). The authors apply the new index to see how the lack of cohesion is related to conflict and violent events in 17 African nations. They emphasize three types of relationships as relevant to social cohesion: relationships among individuals of the same group; relationships among individuals across groups; and relationships between individuals and groups and the state (ibid, 4). However, the three indicators proposed do not have enough discriminating power and

need to be further specified. Moreover, using inequalities as a secondary components of social cohesion can be confusing because socio-economic inequalities (horizontal and vertical) are normally assessed through different more 'objective' indices such as income inequalities, gender inequalities, differences in access to healthcare, education, and others. In addition, inequalities represent a "negative" in this definition as opposed to the other two elements (i.e., trust and identities). Inequalities do not represent an "affectional" component such as the other two which makes it harder to claim that the measures used truly represent a perception – i.e., the term "inequalities" does not capture accurately the conceptualization and measures proposed by Langer et al. (2016).

Figure 2. Social Cohesion Triangle
 Source: Adapted (with permission) from Langer and Steward et al., (2016)



The new definition presented below is based on the secondary components suggested by Langer et al. (2016) although with some significant modifications that capture the holistic nature of SC. It also uses a triangular definition of social cohesion based on the components of: a) generalized trust, b) civic identities, and c) perceived fairness. Each indicator should be weighted equally and should be seen as substantive to SC (see figure 3). The reasoning for selecting these indicators is presented below.

Generalized (“Societal”) Trust -- when we talk about trust, we are not simply talking about social capital. Norms of trust play a pervasive role in social affairs, even sustaining acts of cooperation among strangers who have no control over each other's actions (as opposed to social capital). But the full importance of trust is rarely acknowledged until it begins to break down, threatening the stability of social relationships once taken for granted (Cook 2001). Indeed, studies show (Ember and Ember 1992; Chambers and Melnyk 2006) that there is a stark correlation between the lack of inter-group trust and the outbreak of violent conflict. Lack of trust across groups does not only raise the probability of conflict, it also impedes economic progress (see: Gambetta 1988; Knack and Keefer 1997; Beugelsdijk, Groot, and Schaik 2004; Stewart 2013; Langer et al. 2016).

“Generalized trust” is an important societal resource. In social science, the concept of generalized trust is currently receiving extensive academic attention, and rightly so, because it plays a considerable role in our political and social lives (Stolle 2002, 408). The scope of generalized trust also needs to be distinguished from identity-based or kinship-based forms of trust, which only include people one personally knows and those individuals who fit into a certain social identity category that one holds (ibid, 209). Generalized or social trust is more likely to create the “social bonds” and act as the “social glue” which is how SC is commonly referred to (Schmeets and Hooghe 2011). We suggest that it should be measured within two domains:

- a) Horizontal – these are the aspects of perceived trust involving interactions of one group to another. In a multi-religious or multi-ethnic setting, it implies the extent of trust within groups. Data pertaining to this dimension of trust is present in different barometer surveys, which often provide evidence of trust in others by group.
- b) Vertical – these are the aspects of perceived trust involving interactions of the individual vis-à-vis the state and its institutions. A society where citizens have trust in the state as a whole, would be characterized by higher levels of cohesion. This information can also be obtained from different surveys which provide evidence of citizens’ trust into the political establishment, respective institutions, and perceptions of corruption.

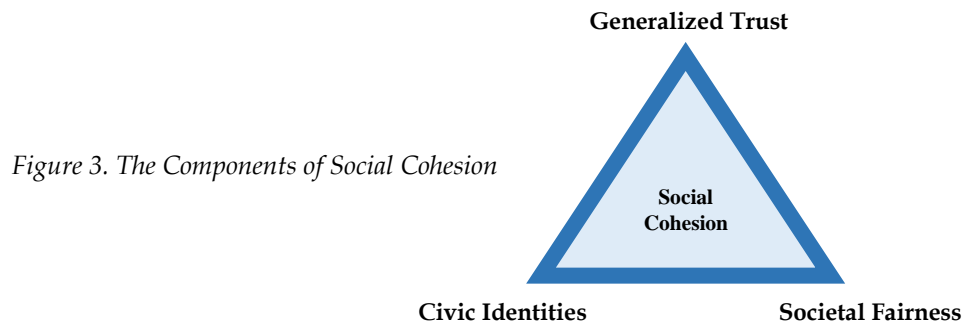
Civic Identities -- A strong indicator for social cohesion would be a society where “civic identity” or “civic nationalism” is relatively strong compared to group identity. Civic identity is an identity status in its own right – one that can become as integral to individual identity as race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, or any other deeply claimed aspect of self (Knefelkamp 2008, 17). By “relatively strong” to group identity, we mean a society where members feel a strong attachment to their country of residence relative to the attachment to their ethnic/religious identification. This is not to say that individuals give up their group identity all-together, but rather that it is not conflicting with their civic identity and that regardless of these differences, there is what David Easton (1965) would call attachment to/support of the “political community”. Moreover, civic identity also implies respect for diversity which is in line with many previous conceptualizations of SC.

We might observe that in conflict or post-conflict (so-called “deeply divided” or “fragmented”) societies, interaction between groups of different backgrounds is limited. The lack of support for the political community in turn impairs cooperation between these groups not only in economic matters, but also institutional cooperation, making the state-apparatus often ineffective or biased towards one particular group. The inference here is that there is a developmental process in the formation of citizenship or “civic identity” that will have the potential to “soften” the psychological identification in terms of ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ (Tajfel et al. 1971), leading thereby to a more inclusive notion of identity. What is often overlooked in the academic literature is the importance that “state/nation building” has in creating and cultivating such an inclusive “sense of belonging” and generally in fostering cohesion. In this sense, SC should be seen as a necessity for creating and maintaining a functional democracy.

The term “civic nationalism” in this paper is used to denote the phenomenon that a single overarching shared identity exists regardless of the ethnic and other divisions in the society (Law 2005, 47). Civic identity should not be limited only to the nation state and can also develop in a supranational setting. The EU can undoubt be conceptualized as a shared supranational political community. In fact, what is called “cohesion policy” is the policy behind the hundreds of thousands of projects all over Europe that receive funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund (European Commission 2014). Often these policies are aimed at promoting a common “European identity”. Pertaining to this, the measures should address whether one feels attached at all to the political community or how strongly they feel attached to their ethnic/religious identity. This data can also be obtained from barometer surveys, but also from national censuses.

Perceived Fairness -- Fairness can be conceptualized here within the Rawlsian notion of “justice as fairness” (Rawls 1985). Rawls envisions that fairness is enabled not only if every person is entitled to basic liberties, but also given “fair equality of opportunity”, meaning that individuals, regardless of their social background, ethnicity or sex should not only have the right to opportunities, but should have an ‘effective equal chance as another of similar natural ability’ (ibid, 227). If we consider social cohesion as being a subjective internalization of what our stand in society is then the perception of how “fair” that society is becomes crucial. Particularly important here is also if members of a society feel that they are being treated unfairly because of their background by institutions or other groups.

The reason why fairness presents a better perception-based indicator for assessing cohesion is because inequalities are sometimes institutionalized, as exemplified by unequal pay on the basis of gender. On the other hand fairness is more subjective in nature when, for instance, women perceive that they receive unfair treatment at work, although they might obtain the same pay as their male counterparts. The same can be extended beyond the gender dimension, to include race, ethnicity, discrimination based on citizenship (whether one is a citizen or a migrant), and sexual orientation. We talk about “societal” fairness because fairness is not only a matter of laws and intuitions. For instance, the laws might be fully impartial when dealing with the rights of ethnic minorities, such as the Roma communities across Europe. However, deeply rooted social norms can create a discriminatory environment for individuals belonging to the Roma community, even in some advanced democratic societies (Colacicchi 2008). Therefore, it is important to note that fairness is just as much a matter of socio-cultural factors, such as norms and traditions, as of formalized systems of rules. Perugini et al. (2003, 255) point out that fairness can be achieved in different ways, for instance by ‘splitting endowments equally (equality), by balancing out inputs and outputs in the transaction (equity), or by reciprocating in kind (reciprocity)’. Taking this into consideration we must assert that fairness necessarily implies a reciprocating relationship among members of society.



Consequently, we arrive to a definition which is applicable for NSC and can be used in research, analysis, and measurement into the subject.

A “cohesive” society is characterized by inter-group trust between social groups that differ in their background (religious, ethnic, gender), as well as trust of these groups towards the state and its institutions; where the psychological identification of individuals as inhabitants of a certain political community (their civic identity) is strong relative to their psychological in-group or kinship identification. Where the state and the society are perceived as being fair towards all members regardless of their background and free of favoritism for certain groups, and where this fairness is manifested through reciprocation.

In the new definition, “social capital” and “trust” have been replaced with “generalized trust” as it includes the relation of groups to one-another within a society and the relations of these groups to the state. If social cohesion is to be a holistic concept than its constitutive components have to be holistic as well. On the other hand, inequalities have been replaced with “perceived fairness”, because including “fairness” into the definition makes it possible to claim that social cohesion is about the individual’s subjective internalization of his/her stand in society. Including fairness into the definition makes it also possible to better integrate Rawls thoughts into the concept of cohesion as advocated by the OECD who has been dedicated to investigating social cohesion in more recent years. Additionally, by conceptualizing that “civic identity” is a developmental process in the formation of identity based on citizenship, the idea that social cohesion is also a process of “growing integration” as initially denoted by Durkheim his followers is supported. Identification based on a shared political unit is seen as an indication that members of a society have a common identification property that is able to surpass the in-group/out-group cleavage and thereby contribute to SC.

3. Social Cohesion and Human Capabilities

When looking at the implications of SC on the capabilities approach, it would be advised to initially consider the external factors that influence well-being. One that obviously comes to mind is economic position or material well-being, as usually measured by per capita income. However, Helliwell and Putnam (2004, 1436) point out that although real per capita rates of income have quadrupled in the past 50 years in most advanced economies, aggregate levels of subjective well-being have remained essentially unchanged. Even though “well-being” has been interpreted in many different ways in the past decades, today there exists a general consensus on the need to overcome traditional, income-oriented, welfare measures (see: Griffin 1988; Sen 1992; Alkire 2002; Gasper 2007; Nussbaum 2011). The vast evidence that suggests that non-economic factors are just as important to human well-being as economic ones is formidable. Relevant here is to say that wealth is a better predictor of well-being at low levels of economic development. At higher levels, material factors appear to have more modest effect on well-being (Diener and Oishi 2000; Frey and Stutzer 2002) . This is most likely due to the marginal utility of income and national wealth – i.e., the “post-materialization” of well-being.

Well-being is seen today as a multidimensional entity with diverse, interdependent dimensions and sometimes independent ones that are only vaguely correlated with each other. This view permits for a richer understanding of the human condition. However, the role of SC and other social determinates in expanding capabilities has not been investigated sufficiently. In recent years there has been an attempt to close this gap and assess how social factors and the social

context (to include SC) shape well-being (see: Kawachi and Berkman 2000; Stewart 2005; Currie et al. 2009; Stewart 2013; Delhey and Dragolov 2016). The problematic of considering SC as a determinate of human development is that both are essentially pluralistic approaches. One would be right in claiming that there could be a problem of endogeneity here – i.e. that both SC and human development are caused by confounding factors. However, at least in principle, an individual can have certain capabilities on his/her own, whereas creating trust, fairness and a sense of belonging does implicitly require social relations. In this sense the impact of SC on human development should be broadly conceptualized as the impact that the macro-level has on the individual. In theoretical terms, we suggest that SC has an important *intrinsic* as well as an *instrumental* value that is conducive to human development.

First, the intrinsic value of SC lies in that the individual's capabilities to function are shaped to a great extent by social structures and social context. What a person is able *to be* and *to do* is often dependent on this "social environment". In this sense, SC acts as an "opportunity structure" which conditions/enables the expansion of human capabilities and freedoms. Well-being according to Sen concern also the 'range' of choices a person has – not how she values the elements in that range or what she chooses from it (M. Nussbaum and Sen 1993, 34). However, a person's ways of valuing things are structured through social roles, practices, and relationships (Alkire and Deneulin 2002, 67). Individual preferences and choice of life-style are often embedded in social structures, i.e. shaped by the actual social norms, traditions and institutions. According to Stewart (2013) this affects the very choices that individuals make – not only among the capabilities they may have reason to value, "but those that would not be classified as being capabilities people have reason to value, such as drug-taking, abuse of others and violence". Consequently, the individual can never be assumed to be completely self-sufficient and when looking at human well-being, taking a closer look at the social environment is crucial. Hence, the quality of SC present in a society will influence these choices as well. A society that is characterized by higher levels of trust in others and in institutions, greater fairness and greater support for the political community will be a society that permits for a greater expansion of human capabilities – i.e., it will permit for a greater "range" of choices available to an individual. Defining SC as an opportunity structure for the expansion of capabilities is also in line with Nussbaum's conceptualization of "combined capabilities" (Nussbaum 2011). For Nussbaum, combined capabilities "are not just the abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the personal, social and economic environment" (ibid, 20). In deeply divided societies the individual is often not capable of fully enjoying the freedom of movement, certain political freedoms, and in some cases even the basic capabilities of security and bodily wellbeing.

Second, the instrumental value of SC lies in that some capabilities are only possible within the collective and cannot be "harnessed" by the individual alone. It is particularly here that SC becomes of crucial importance to the capabilities approach because some capabilities are "group-dependent" (Stewart 2005). Higher SC enables cooperation among individuals which in turn fosters these group-dependent capabilities that individuals then can control and make use of. These are the capabilities that "individuals alone would neither have nor be able to achieve, if they did not join a collectivity" (Ibrahim 2006, 404). Group dependent capabilities are usually referred to as "social capabilities" in the sense that they can be exploited by individuals as parts of teams or groups (see: Ibrahim 2006; Lanzi 2011). Ibrahim (2006, 398), points out that particularly in developing countries, the use and exercise of human capabilities usually takes place in a collective setting. Resource-poor Individuals can choose to act collectively to seize an economic

or social opportunity. A society that is characterized by higher levels of generalized trust, support for the political community and fairness will not only permit for a greater range of choices available to the individual, it will also make it able for individuals of different backgrounds to unite in achieving common goals with greater efficiency. Lanzi (2011, 1095) points out that cohesiveness is important to capabilities because it facilitates the design of incentive schemes for social cooperation and social learning. Further, SC as manifested by social trust helps to minimize transaction costs and to manage public goods or collective resources (Elster 1989). It would be possible to claim that this position is in line with the theories on “collective action” (see: Olson 2009). However, strong social cohesion at the macro level may, or may not, coincide with equally strong cohesiveness at the micro level. Individuals can feel a strong sense of belonging to the whole political community, without daily involvement in peer-groups, local communities and the like (Lanzi 2011, 1093).

Hence, considering SC into the analysis of capabilities is relevant because according to this approach the individual is considered to be a ‘means’ and an ‘end’ in its own right. However, the individual is not always the main agent in shaping his/her well-being and we suggest that expanding individual capabilities forms the end, or the objective, while fostering and promoting social cohesion can be a means to achieving this objective. Pertaining to psychological wellbeing, Ferris (2006) points out that the forces that impact psychological health can be endogenous and exogenous. Endogenous forces may include mental, emotional and psychological responses of the individual to his/her life condition (Hagerty et al. 2001). Whereas, exogenous forces include the “social structure, cultural and social psychological influences of the social environment that impinge upon the individual, group and community” (Ferris 2006, 34). SC is precisely such an exogenous force and considering this, it would be well advised to include it into the research, analysis and measurement of human development. Although various approaches to quality-of-life assessment use different notions of this concept and highlight different indicators as relevant, an almost universal feature of them is the focus on the individual. The position advocated here embraces a notion of well-being that does not consider only individual constituents, but also societal qualities such as SC. Importantly, there is no universal way of measuring human well-being. Each approach contains information that is not contained in the other measures and each approach has unique theoretical and methodological limitations. Hence, considering SC into the analysis of human development and well-being can only enhance our understanding of the human condition.

4. Social Cohesion and Human ‘Functionings’

“Capabilities” are the mere opportunities or freedoms of an individual and can therefore hardly be measured. The capabilities available to a person translate into “functionings” and the human development approach is primarily concerned with assessing these functionings, as they can be actually measured. Empirically speaking, there is evidence to suggest that SC impacts individual functionings through multiple channels. A discussion of various examples and cases is presented below to infer the link between cohesion and functionings. The link between SC and economic growth in particular has been investigated in more detail especially in industrial nations. McCracker (1998, 19) prescribes a responsibility to advanced industrial nations (in his context Canada) to “develop a society in which improvements in social cohesion and economic properties go hand in hand” and thereby “provide a working example” that can be followed. Considering

SC into the analysis of economic growth present an extended view on the determinants of growth beyond the simple models of labor, capital, and exogenous technical advancement. It is evident that it is much harder to achieve economic progress for a society that is ridden in conflict and lacks cohesion. Furthermore, we know that social solidarity has the capacity to mobilize entire communities to financially support a single individual in need. Income is considered one of the key indicators (along with education and health) of human development as measured by the human development index (HDI). One of the most extensive contributions in investigating the impact of SC into economic processes comes in a volume entitled “The Economic Implications of Social Cohesion” (Osberg 2003). It examines the impact of SC on a number of important issues in Canada, including health, the well-being of children, macroeconomic performance, voluntary activities, the role of community institutions, investment and regional development. Their findings show that cohesion has, in most cases, significant impact on these outcomes. Furthermore, Foa (2011) constructed a “Social Cohesion Index” using a sample of 155 countries and found that each point increase of the index was associated with a rise of 14% in potential GDP over a period of 20 years.

The levels of cohesion in a society do not only reflect on income, but also on other essential functionings. In a three-year study conducted in neighborhoods of Chicago, the authors find that the more cohesive neighborhoods had a significantly higher participation of youth aged 11-15 in physical activity (Cradock et al. 2009). This is to support the claim that SC can have a direct impact even on indicators such as health and bodily well-being. In a more recent study (Delhey and Dragolov 2016), the authors use multilevel regression to determine the effects that SC has on subjective well-being (SWB) in 27 European Union countries. They find that Europeans are indeed happier and psychologically healthier in more cohesive societies. We constructed a “Social Cohesion Index” using perception based indicators from the seventh round (see: ESS Round seven 2014) of the European Social Survey (for composition of the index see Appendix one). In our sample, we are able to confirm a strong positive correlation (explained variance = 0.60) between social cohesion as conceptualized here and individual ratings of “overall satisfaction with life” in 22 European societies (see Appendix two).

Important to consider is also how the separate components of SC laid-out earlier in this paper impact human functionings. For instance, La Porta et al. (1996) claim that ‘trust has a significant and large impact on performance of social institutions’. Dearmon and Grier (2009) confirm earlier cross-sectional studies finding that trust is a significant factor in development and show that trust significantly interacts with both investment in physical and human capital. Trust also leads to reduced transaction costs, higher investment ratio, encouragement of innovation, and better performance of government institutions (Knack and Keefer 1997, 1252). Since the influential studies of Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993), there has been many studies linking the concept of trust and economic growth. However, human development should be seen as a more complex entity as suggested earlier. Özçana and Bjørnskov (2011) claim that social (i.e., generalized) trust is associated with the broader concepts of development, and not only economic development. Furthermore, they explore the empirical association between social trust and the speed with which countries have developed (change in HDI) from 1980 until 2005 for approximately 86 countries around the world. In their sample, generalized trust is robustly associated with the growth of the HDI in these countries over this period.

Although there is a large absence of research assessing the impact of ethnic and/or civic nationalism on well-being, countries with the most successful record of building civic national

identity are also countries that perform higher in human development outcomes. The inference is that a strong sense of belonging to the country of residence will have an impact on the psychological well-being of its members, particularly for newcomers. Phinney et al. (2001, 506) point out that becoming part of the host society is an important goal for most immigrants, and attaining this goal contributes to their psychological well-being. Tajfel and Turner (1979) initially proposed that the groups which people belong to are an important source of pride and self-esteem. Groups give us a sense of social identity: a sense of belonging to the social world. Using data from the European social survey, we find only a modest correlation between individual ratings of feeling 'closer' in the sense of 'emotionally attached to' or 'identifying with' the country of residence and ratings overall life-satisfaction (see Appendix 4). We stipulate that more in-depth research is needed to assess the importance of "sense of belonging" to wellbeing.

Perception of fairness as conceptualized above is a crucial component of the quality of society. On the macro and meso-level, there is a lot of evidence to support that perceptions of fairness have an important impact on well-being and life satisfaction, particularly at the work place. Based on a survey of 1958 employees in 228 Italian social service organizations under public and private ownership, Tortia (2008) finds that worker well-being is crucially influenced by fairness concerns. Similarly, another study (Sparr and Sonnentag 2008) finds that perceived fairness of supervisor feedback is positively related to job satisfaction and feelings of control at work, and negatively related to job depression and turnover intentions. On the macro-level Bjørnskov et al. (2009) conducted a study to assess the link between fairness perceptions and subjective well-being. Using the World Values Survey data and a broad set of fairness measures, they find strong support for the positive association between fairness perceptions and subjective well-being (ibid, 35).

Using the social cohesion index proposed here and comparing it to HDI levels of 2014, we can claim that SC is robustly associated (explained variance = 0.43) with human development in 22 European Societies (see Appendix 3). Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to assess the importance of SC on all other aspects of human development, we can claim that even as a holistic measure SC has an important impact on human functionings, respectively, the perception of the quality of society at large has a real impact on human development outputs. Further research in this topic should address: a) the ways in which we can develop a comprehensive measures for cohesion; b) if a historical growth/decline in SC is related to a growth/decline in human development as assessed through HDI as well as other measures;); and d) further assess the impact of cohesion and specific human functionings.

5. Conclusion

Social cohesion is a concept that has unique analytical value particularly when evaluated on the macro-level. The view presented here is that regardless of the many conceptual differences, there is sufficient common ground for seeking a more unified approach towards cohesion. Moreover, the only feasible way of measuring cohesion is through subjective or perception-based measures. Social cohesion is essentially conceptualized here as a "social quality" and this quality can only be judged and valued by its members. The indicators identified here (generalized trust, civic identity, perceived fairness) are crucial components that need to be examined when evaluating and comparing cohesion on the macro-level. If we want to use cohesion as a more holistic concept than its secondary components must be holistic as well.

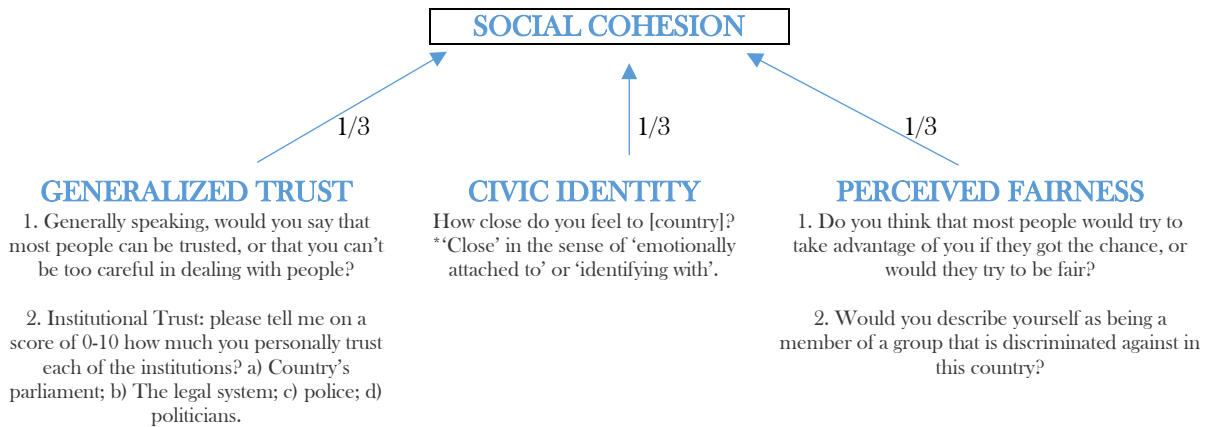
In a time of increasing migrant flows from the “global south” to the more richer countries as well as in a time of rising socio-economic inequalities on both ends, fostering social cohesion should become a central policy goal for industrial and “developing” countries alike. The idea that social cohesion is a process of growing social integration is supported here, but for this social integration to take place the state has to pursue an active role. This can be done under others by promoting a common sense of civic identity for all members of society regardless of background and by increasing trust in institutions. However, strengthening social cohesion in a society is just as much a matter of socio-cultural factors, norms and social context. Therefore, contributive actions towards creating a cohesive society can also happen largely outside of the realm of governance, to include actions of community and social institutions.

The paper provides the theoretical framework for assessing the impact of cohesion on human capabilities as well as empirical evidence to infer the link between cohesion and functionings. In a cohesive society, individuals will have more possibilities to expand their capabilities. The value of social cohesion in the expansion of capabilities lies in that it acts as an “opportunity structure” and as a “catalyst” of group-dependent capabilities. Social cohesion is not only likely to help avoid violent conflict as previously investigated by scholars. It is also conducive to well-being and human development. We show a significant correlations between the “social cohesion index” developed here with subjective ratings of overall life satisfaction and more importantly a significant correlation with levels of HDI in the respective countries. Of course more research is needed into the impact of cohesion on human functionings, but this paper broadly makes the claim that social cohesion influences human development outcomes such as income, health and education. Consequently, social cohesion as a determinant of human development deserved more attention in this regard.

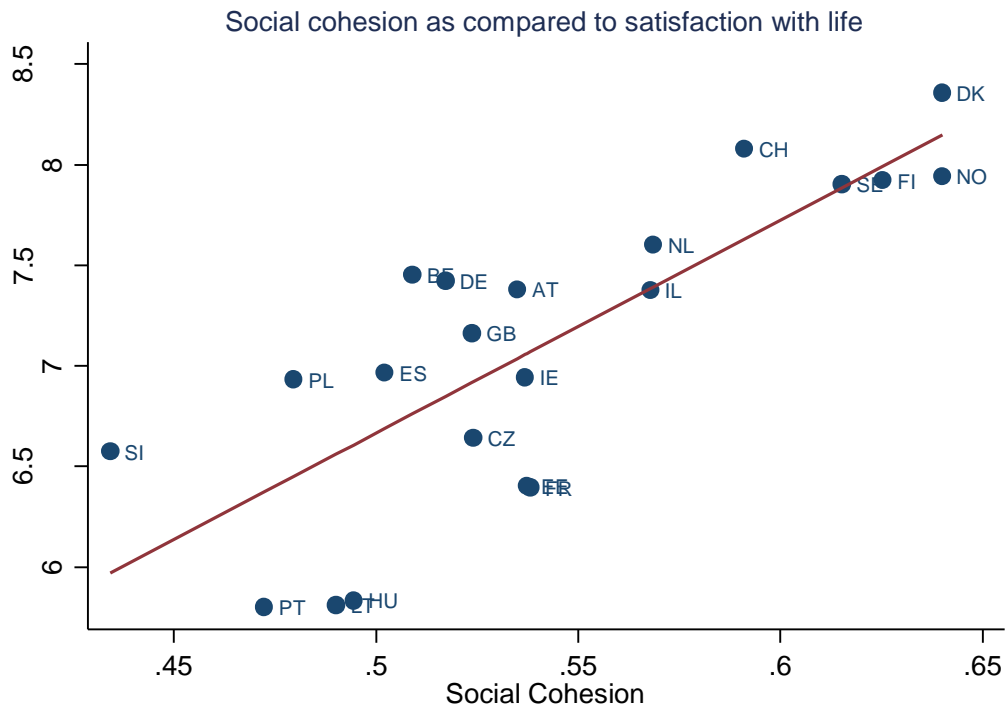
Appendices

Appendix 1: Composition of the Multidimensional perception-based social cohesion index

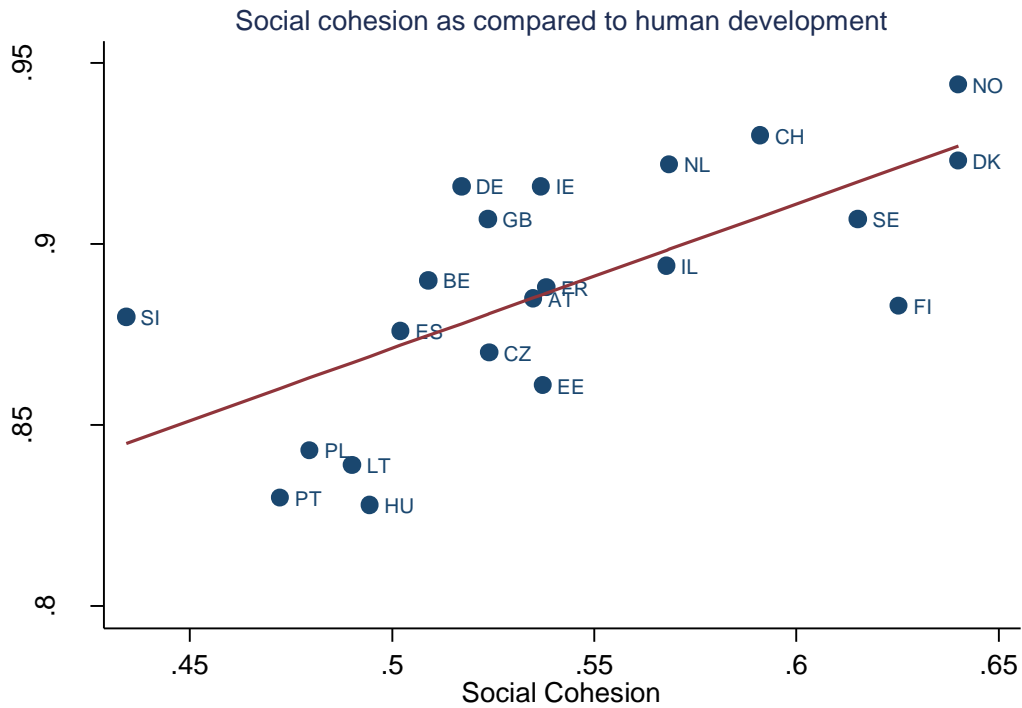
*Using data from the seventh round of the European social survey (see: ESS round 7, 2014)



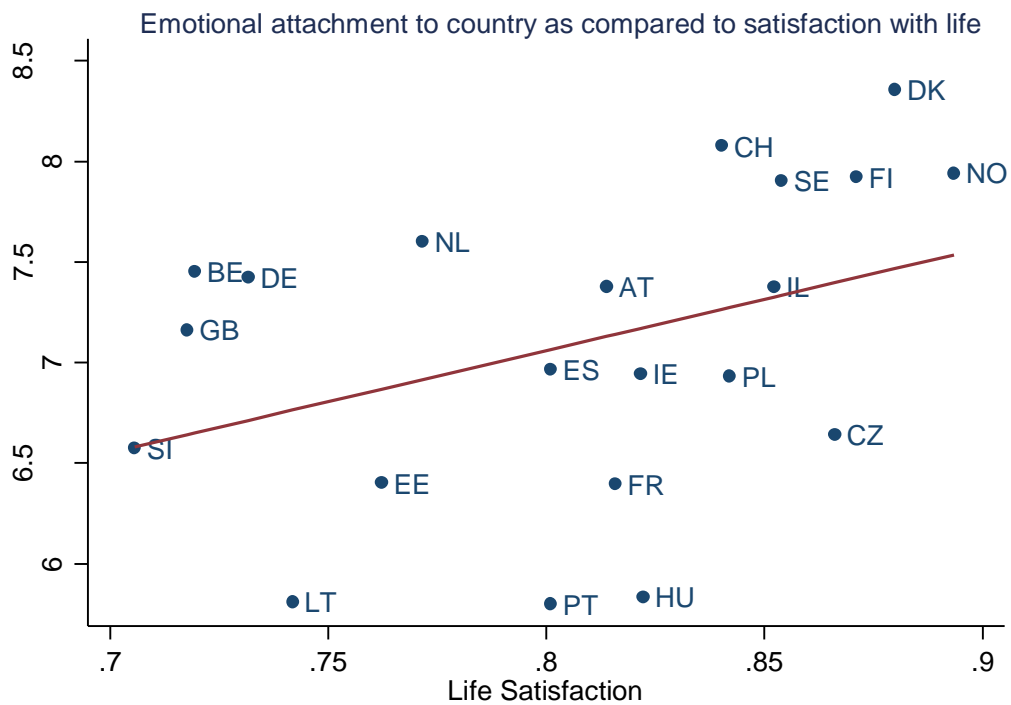
Appendix Two: Social Cohesion as compared to individual ratings of overall satisfaction with life in 22 European Countries



Appendix 3: Social Cohesion as compared to Human Development Index (2014 levels) in 22 European Countries



Appendix 4: Overall life satisfaction as compared attachment to country in 22 European Countries



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