Social Cohesion as a Real-life Phenomenon: Exploring the Validity of the Universalist and Particularist Perspectives

Abstract:

Unlike most studies on social cohesion, this study explores the concept as a real-life macro-level phenomenon. It assesses to what extent the conceptions of social cohesion suggested by several macro-level approaches represent coherent empirically observable forms of social cohesion. Additionally it discusses two perspectives on social cohesion – the universalist and the particularist perspective. The former would expect social cohesion to be related to stages of socio-economic development. The latter hypothesizes enduring, regionally unique regimes of social cohesion resisting the homogenizing pressures of modernization. The paper finds evidence for both perspectives. On the one hand, a syndrome of social cohesion was identified consisting of trust, equality, order (i.e. lack of crime) and consensus on basic values which correlates closely with indicators of socio-economic development. This finding supports the universalist perspective. On the other hand, and consistent with the particularist perspective, the study found regionally unique patterns for Latin America, Eastern Europe and Scandinavia.

Introduction

Globalization, and the socio-economic restructuring and migration processes it involves, have put social cohesion decidedly on the political agenda. Politicians in Western Europe fear that the rapid economic changes and the ongoing influx of migrants are steadily undermining the glue that holds society together. These concerns have only been fanned by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the London and Madrid Underground, and by the steady process of individualization, which according to many politicians can be blamed for producing atomization and disengagement, considered to be the opposites of social cohesion.

Despite the increasing salience of the term social cohesion in policy circles, there is little clarity on its meaning as scholars so far have not been able to reach agreement on a definition of the concept. In fact, although inspired by Durkheim's relatively parsimonious concepts of mechanical and organic solidarity, contemporary scholars have only complicated the concept by showing the distinct propensity to understand social cohesion as a multidimensional and multilevel phenomenon representing some desirable state of affairs. Put differently, many modern approaches provide elaborate and rather ideal and utopian understandings of the term. Judith Maxwell (1996, 3), for instance, understands social cohesion as "building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in a common enterprise, facing shared challenges, and that they are members of the same community". Even the relatively parsimonious definition suggested by Chan et al (2006, 290) contains several constituent elements: "Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that include trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioral manifestations".

Remarkably, to my knowledge none of the authors providing elaborate definitions of the concept have explored whether the proposed constituent components are interrelated. In other words, are societies characterized by value consensus also more equal, more trusting, more civically minded, and less criminal?

Can societies be identified displaying the proposed form of social cohesion with all the positive qualities it is said to include? It is important to explore this since we need to know whether some proposed version of social cohesion refers to an actual real-life phenomenon or merely to a hypothetical state of affairs. If the latter is the case, policies devised to enhance social cohesion are likely to fail, for instance because they benefit only some constituent components and have unintended negative side effects for other components.

This study will therefore explore whether one or several phenomena can be observed empirically that combine components associated with social cohesion and that could thus be labeled as real-life manifestations of social cohesion. Additionally, it will assess to what extent these real-life manifestations conform to perspectives that I labeled “universalist” and “particularist” (see explanation in the third section). I start by explaining the distinct approach followed by this study and by reviewing the main theoretical approaches to social cohesion that identify it as a macro-level phenomenon. The purpose of this exercise is to identify a collection of empirically observable components of social cohesion suggested by these approaches. I then discuss the universalist and particularist perspectives and explain which forms of social cohesion would support either of these perspectives. Subsequently, I explain the data sources, the indicators selected to tap the social cohesion components and the methods of analysis. Finally I present the main findings.

Social cohesion: assessing macro-level approaches

Interestingly, even most of the empirical studies of social cohesion have not critically engaged with the multidimensional conception of social cohesion advanced by many theoretical approaches. These studies have by and large proceeded from one theoretical approach and explored how the concepts offered by such an approach can be made measurable. Examples of such studies are Letki (2008) and Rajulton et al (2007), who developed measurements of social cohesion as a local phenomenon, and Dickes et al (2009), who relied on Bernard’s (1999) theoretical approach to construct indicators of social cohesion as a societal feature. By not challenging the theoretical models, these studies merely reproduce the multidimensional conceptions of social cohesion advanced by these models. Rajulton et al (2007), for instance, have developed a composite index of social cohesion composed of three domains for census metropolitan areas (CMAs) in Canada. They remark that CMAs can compensate a low score on one domain with a high score on the two others and thus still achieve a relatively high ranking on social cohesion. They miss the point however that the social cohesion rankings thus obtained represent qualitatively different forms of social cohesion. CMAs with the same score on the social cohesion index can have very different social cohesion profiles, while CMAs with different scores may show quite similar profiles. These likely outcomes put the usefulness of composite multidimensional indexes into question.

To my knowledge so far only Green et al (2003; 2006) have explored to what extent the social cohesion components suggested by various theoretical approaches co-vary. Their analysis which focused on national level characteristics produced a syndrome of social cohesion consisting of aggregate levels of social and institutional trust, civic compliance and (the absence of) violent crime. However, apart from highlighting social capital theory, they did not specify the theoretical approaches that

inspired their selection of components and indicators, which makes this selection somewhat arbitrary.

This study will adopt the same approach as Green et al but will be explicit about the theoretical models it utilizes. As the objective is not to embrace a particular theoretical model from the start and attempt to make it measurable but rather to critically scrutinize the consistency of the social cohesion models proposed by various theoretical approaches, the current study will not draw on one but on several theoretical approaches for its choice of indicators. Consequently, I start from an open and parsimonious definition of the concept which does not implicitly or explicitly convey a preference for any of the theoretical approaches: social cohesion – in my understanding – is simply the property that keeps societies from falling apart. This definition does betray one crucial assumption: social cohesion is a characteristic of a society, not of a community or other sub-state entity. Green et al (2006) point out that only a macro-level understanding of social cohesion allows researchers to capture both *inter-* and *intra-*community conflicts within society. Equating social cohesion with social capital and considering it to be a local-level phenomenon would in their view not be able to detect the nature of inter-group relations (harmonious or antagonistic). In addition, Chan et al (2006) argue that social cohesion should not be seen as the property of an even higher level of analysis either because the sovereign state is still the prime policy maker and frame of reference for most citizens. I agree with these observations and will consequently only draw on theoretical approaches which understand social cohesion to be a societal-level phenomenon.

Apart from considering only societal-level approaches I apply Moody and White's (2003) useful distinction between the *ideational* and *relational* dimension of social cohesion to broadly frame these approaches. The ideational dimension refers to shared norms, values and identities as the affective side of social cohesion. The relational dimension refers to the observed relationships between members within a collectivity. The concepts clearly have their origin in Durkheim's (1984) notions of mechanical and organic forms of solidarity, which he used to describe the nineteenth century transformation of society from a loose collection of small communities based on shared values and identities to a more integrated whole held together by inter-dependencies and conflict-regulating mechanisms. Durkheim believed nonetheless that modern society also to some extent depended on shared values and feelings of belonging and he saw professional organizations as key agents in generating and maintaining such values and identities.

The components of social cohesion highlighted by the societal-level approaches can all be classified as either representing the ideational or relational dimension of social cohesion. In addition to the aforementioned approaches of Green et al (2003) and Chan et al (2006), I have identified those of the Council of Europe (2005) and Kearns and Forrest (2000) as macro-level approaches. The Council of Europe (CoE) defines social cohesion as "society's ability to secure the long-term well-being of its members, including equitable access to available resources, respect for human dignity with due regard for diversity, personal and collective autonomy and responsible participation" (Council of Europe, 2005: 23). Kearns and Forrest (2000: 997) provide the following definition: "a socially cohesive society is one in which the members share common values which enable them to identify common aims and objectives, and share a common set of moral principles and codes of behavior through which to conduct their relations with one another". They identify five "constituent components" of social cohesion: (1) common values and a civic culture; (2) social order and social control; (3) social solidarity and reductions in wealth disparities; (4)

social networks and social capital, and (5) territorial belonging and identity (*ibid.* 996). Table 1 shows the components highlighted by each approach and classifies these components as either ideational or relational. Kearns and Forrest's approach is clearly the most elaborate. The CoE's approach is mainly inspired by the relational and therefore organic solidarity dimension of social cohesion. By contrast, the ideational dimension predominates in the approach of Chan et al, heavily drawing from social capital theory as it does. The four approaches are thus very different in their understandings of social cohesion, which only adds to the relevance of assessing which of these approaches – if any – advances a reasonably coherent conception of the term. The components displayed will be operationalized and subjected to analysis in the ensuing sections.

Table 1 about here

Social cohesion: a universal or regionally specific phenomenon

Interestingly, the latest study of Green et al (2009) differs markedly from their previous studies in its approach to social cohesion. These previous studies, as noted above, aimed at identifying a coherent phenomenon of social cohesion at the societal level consisting of interlinked constituents. Rather than aiming to discover a general phenomenon of social cohesion applicable to all western states, the latest study sought to verify the empirical validity of claims about unique and durable 'regimes' of social cohesion specific to a world region. Drawing on the literature about varieties of capitalism and civic culture (see below), it postulated the existence of four regionally based social cohesion regimes in OECD countries: (1) a liberal regime, marked by relatively low levels of equality and high levels of civic participation, value diversity and tolerance; (2) a social-democratic regime, characterized by high levels of equality and trust; (3) a conservative / social market regime, for which relatively low levels of civic participation and tolerance and relatively high levels social hierarchy and order are expected to be distinctive; (4) an East Asian regime, marked by high levels of equality and social hierarchy and low levels of value diversity and tolerance. Table 2 provides a complete picture of these regimes, of the components they are expected to include and of the countries in which they are said to be prevailing. The signs in the table indicate relative levels. Thus, levels of social order are proposed to be low in the liberal regime countries compared to those of countries with other regimes. Performing cross-sectional analyses on administrative and aggregated survey data, Green et al (2009) found evidence for a distinct English-speaking liberal and a distinct Scandinavian social-democratic regime, while little empirical support was found for the existence of a social market regime comprising the countries of mainland Western Europe.

Table 2 about here

The contrasting approaches of the studies of Green et al reflect the well-known opposition in the social sciences between 'universalists' and 'particularists' (the labeling is mine). The former believe that social phenomena are primarily the product

of general processes with universal validity. The same processes should by and large yield the same outcomes irrespective of time, place and local culture. Socio-economic and political evolution proceed in the same way everywhere following similar stages of development. This line of thinking broadly characterizes scholars associated with modernization theory, such as Rostow (1960), Deutsch and Foltz (1963), and Pye and Verba (1963). Although this school of thought was losing popularity once it became apparent that the Third World countries were not following the same path of development as the Western countries, it remained influential among certain political and cultural theorists. Today the idea that socio-economic development drives the same process of value change everywhere around the globe is, for instance, clearly the key message of Ronald Inglehart's work. He argues that as agricultural societies industrialize they will experience a cultural change from traditional religious to rational secular value orientations. Additionally, as industrialized societies become post-industrial, so their citizens will gradually consider post-materialist values to be more important than materialist ones (Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

The particularists, by contrast, assert that social change does not follow the same logic of development everywhere. Countries, regions and cultures evolve in their own unique way, showing qualitatively different paths of socio-economic development. As Bendix (1964: 1) puts it:

> Belief in the universality of evolutionary stages has been replaced by the realization that the momentum of past events and the diversity of social structures lead to different paths of development, even where the changes of technology are identical.

Scholars associated with this school of thought tend to understand culture as an enduring phenomenon shaping rather than being shaped by political and socio-economic processes (e.g. Huntington 1996; Putnam 1993). A distinction can be drawn between hard-line and more moderate particularists. While the former assign absolute primacy to culture and civilization as the drivers of human agency (e.g. Huntington 1996), the latter do not deny that modernization has produced commonalities among countries with similar levels of development but argue that despite these homogenizing pressures cultural and institutional differences persist. It is among the latter that we can place scholars who have identified various regimes of capitalism and scholars who have pointed to lasting differences between countries in the strength of civic culture. Authors of the first-named group include Hutton (1995), who has contrasted the shareholder model of the English-speaking countries to the stakeholder model of mainland Europe, and Esping Andersen (1990), who has distinguished three enduring regimes of welfare capitalism among western states. Typical representatives of the second group are Kohn (1944, 1994), who claimed that a civic brand of nationalism prevails in western Europe and an ethnic illiberal variety predominates in central and eastern Europe, and Brubaker (1992), who argued that the contrasting principles on which the immigration and citizenship policies of France and Germany are based (*Ius Solis* versus *Ius Sanguinis*) are rooted in different conceptions of the nation (civic in France; ethnic in Germany).

As social cohesion in many definitions is understood as a broad phenomenon incorporating cultural, social, economic and political elements, it is pertinent to explore the concept in the light of the two contrasting perspectives. Is social cohesion a phenomenon that correlates closely with stages of socio-economic development? If so, the universalist view would be supported. Or can we identify enduring qualitatively different regimes of social cohesion among countries in a similar stage of

socio-economic development, which would endorse the particularist school of thought? These are the key additional questions this study seeks to answer. From a policy perspective these questions are most relevant. If social cohesion is manifested in ways that are in agreement with the particularist perspective it makes no sense for countries to emulate social cohesion models from other societies because these models are culturally specific and path-dependent phenomena. If, on the other hand, social cohesion follows the logic of the universalist perspective, policies can be devised that promote socio-economic development and thereby engender more desirable forms of social cohesion.

As the aforementioned pioneering works of Green et al have partially addressed these questions as well, it is important to highlight that this study aims to complement Green's studies in the following ways: (a) it not only seeks to explore the validity of the particularist perspective but also that of the universalist view, which was not an explicit objective of Green's studies; (b) it makes use of a much larger sample of countries (70 states worldwide, while Green's studies were restricted to OECD states); (c) it seeks to explore hypothesized regimes of social cohesion diachronically over a period of two decennia.

Data and indicators

The data presented in this section serve in first instance to tap the eight components of social cohesion as distilled from the four definitions discussed previously (i.e. the components displayed in Table 1). They also make it possible to scrutinize whether syndromes or regimes of social cohesion can be identified which are in agreement with the universalist or particularist perspective.

I found one or more indicators for each of the eight components (see Table 3). These indicators all have their limitations, but compared to alternatives they seemed to be the best option. I acknowledge, for instance, that (the inverse of) the homicide rate is a very crude and one-sided measure of social order, but given the deplorable comparability of other cross-national crime statistics I preferred it over other indicators. Similarly, discussing politics with friends may be a good indicator for political engagement but it need not say anything about actual political participation. Using indicators of actual participation (such as voter turnout), however, have the drawback of not only tapping political engagement but also the possibility to participate (i.e. in authoritarian states people may feel very engaged but they are likely to be prohibited from expressing this in terms of actual participation).

As Table 3 further shows, the data have been taken from a variety of sources. The data for all the subjective indicators have been drawn from the 1999-2004 Wave of the World Values Survey, the only international opinion survey with a global scope. The data of five of these indicators are national means, those of three indicators represent percentages, while those of the four indicators for the 'shared values' component represent the inverse of national-level standard deviations (SDs). I made sure that the indicators based on administrative data (the gini coefficient and the homicide rate) matched the years of the 1999-2004 Wave as closely as possible. Thus all data pertain to the end of the 1990s and early 2000s. I compiled data on as many as 70 countries worldwide. The analyses were sometimes based on less than 50 countries, however, due to missing data.

Table 3 about here

The indicators selected to measure the shared values component deserve further explanation. Of course we need to ask ourselves 'which values' when we seek to assess the degree of consensus on them. Unsurprisingly, there is no agreement about the values that matter. While Bellah et al. (1985), for instance, deem a common Christian morality to be the glue that holds society together (a morality that they think has been eroded by individualism), Almond and Verba (1963) and Dahl (1967) argue that values relating to the institutions of democracy are key. Social cohesion, in their view, is assured when citizens agree on the political institutions and procedures and on the ways to participate in them. Given the disagreement about which values should be shared, we selected no less than four indicators to tap into a variety of values. Two of these are composite dimensions comprising a range of socio-cultural attitudes and thus partly addressing the morality Bellah et al consider crucial. These are the dimensions *traditional versus secular values* and *survival versus self-expression values* created by Inglehart and Welzel (2005) by means of factor analysis. Both dimensions represent coherent syndromes of values and can be seen as continuums. Low values on the first dimension represent religious and traditional orientations while high values denote secular beliefs. Low values on the second dimension represent materialist convictions while high values denote post-materialist orientations. Appendix 1 shows the composition of both dimensions. The other two indicators concern support for the democratic system and support for gender equality, which thus tap more into political and civic values.

Results

Assessing the four theoretical approaches

I start by assessing whether the definitions of social cohesion offered by the four approaches discussed previously represent coherent syndromes. For this to be the case, the components included in these definitions have to co-vary and show a strong relation to a latent factor. I conducted an exploratory factor analysis (using the default option in SPSS) on the indicators of social cohesion shown in Table 3 to explore these relationships. This analysis is based on a sample of 41 countries worldwide. The default option is the un-rotated solution using listwise deletion of missing values. It is programmed to produce a minimum number of latent unrelated factors explaining a maximum amount of the variance in the indicators. In other words, it tries to 'squeeze' the variation in as many indicators as possible in one factor. Consequently, if the collection of indicators captured by the first factor is not in line with any of the definitions, we can be fairly sure that none of these definitions reflect a coherent syndrome of social cohesion.

The analysis produces four factors (see Table 4). This already tells us that comprehensive theoretical understandings of social cohesion are not likely to reflect coherent real-life phenomena. The first factor shows strong correlations (i.e. loadings of more than .50 or less then -.50) with nine indicators and explains 32 per cent of the variance. It comprises equality, social trust, social order, sexual tolerance, national skepticism (as indicated by the negative loading of national pride), *disparities* on the traditional/secular and survival/self-expression values indicators (as indicated by

negative loadings of these indicators), and *consensus* on support for democracy and gender equality. The core components of this factor are social trust, equality and disparities on traditional/secular values with loadings of .7 and higher or -.7 and lower. Similarly, the second factor captures civic participation, ethnic tolerance, lack of institutional trust, national pride and pluralism on gender equality (which all have loadings of more than .50 or less than -.50), has civic participation as core component (i.e. with a loading of more than .70) and accounts for 20 per cent of the variance. The remaining two factors each comprise just one indicator (political discussions and level of belonging). Given their insignificance we chose to disregard them in further analyses.

Table 4 about here

I am thus left with two factors. Given the variety of indicators they comprise it is not easy to find appropriate labels, but in view of their core components I provisionally call them 'solidarity' and 'participation'. I saved the country scores on these factors. High scores on the solidarity factor thus represent high levels of social trust, equality, diversity on religious/secular values, etc; low scores represent their opposite. A similar logic applies to the participation factor.

Interestingly, the four shared values indicators are related in opposite ways to the solidarity factor: the higher the score on solidarity, the greater the disparities on religious/secular and survival/self-expression values and the smaller the disparities on support for gender equality and democracy. It highlights all the more the need to distinguish between values in examining how shared values relate to social cohesion. More intriguingly, it seems to sustain the idea that societies can handle substantial degrees of cultural pluralism on a plethora of issues provided there is consensus on a number of key norms and values regulating inter-group conflicts (Parsons 1970). This somewhat contradicts the opinion put forward by Mann (1970: 423) that social cohesion does not depend on value consensus but on the "pragmatic acceptance by subordinate classes of their limited roles in society". More research into the precise role of shared values is needed, however, to state this conclusion with more certainly.

Most importantly, however, the factors extracted are not in agreement with any of the definitions of the aforementioned macro-level approaches. In other words, these approaches all advance incoherent, multidimensional conceptions of social cohesion. Remarkably, even the model proposed by Green et al is not in line with any of the factors even though it is based on empirical analysis (institutional trust is not correlated with social trust and social order, as in Green's model, but with tolerance and civic participation; the inconsistency with the findings of Green et al is probably explained by the fewer number of countries in their study).

The fact that the aforementioned conceptions of social cohesion do not represent coherent syndromes does not rule out the possibility that the social cohesion profiles of specific countries *are* in line with these conceptions. This would be the case if these countries exhibit all the components of social cohesion proposed by these conceptions. As Figure 1 shows, there are indeed four countries – Sweden, Denmark, Netherlands and to a somewhat lesser extent Finland – that have high values on both the solidarity and participation factor and that are thus very likely to combine high levels of social trust, equality, order, sexual tolerance and consensus on basic values with high levels of participation, ethnic tolerance and national pride. The social

cohesion profiles of these countries can thus be said be in agreement with the definitions of social cohesion proposed by the Council of Europe, Chan et al and Kearns and Forrest and to approximate that of Green et al. Whether the profiles of these countries can be conceived of as distinct regional and historically evolved regimes of social cohesion, which would be supportive of the particularist perspective, or only as an accidental and short-lived combination of conditions is a question I will return to below. For now, the finding that the four conceptions of social cohesion do not reflect coherent phenomena but only the profiles of a few specific countries indicates that these conceptions are unlikely to represent forms of social cohesion that can easily be pursued and adopted by other countries. Their usefulness in policy terms may thus be quite limited.

Figure 1 about here

Assessing the universalist perspective

This leads us to the question whether the observed factors are related to stages of socio-economic development. If they are, the universalist/modernist perspective would be supported and the forms of social cohesion they represent might be amenable to policy intervention. It needs to be noted, however, that this study's identification of (at least) *two* factors of social cohesion is difficult to reconcile with the universalist perspective as this perspective would expect to find a single, universally valid syndrome of social cohesion. I used World Bank data on purchasing power parity (PPP) (World Bank 2001) as a proxy for socio-economic development: the higher the PPP per capita of a country, the more advanced I consider its stage of development to be. Figures 2 and 3 show that there are highly significant positive links between PPP per capita and each of the two social cohesion factors. The link with solidarity is particularly strong: PPP per capita explains as much as 43 per cent of the variation in solidarity. Thus, solidarity and participation indeed appear to be a function of level of development, which is in agreement with the universalist perspective.

Considering again the composition of both factors, the direction of the relation moreover makes sense, particularly for the solidarity factor: the more advanced a country is socio-economically, the more trusting, equal, safe, and tolerant its society is, and the more likely it is to combine consensus on basic values with pluralism on substantive values. This concurs with theoretical expectations. Social trust is likely to represent trust in the anonymous fellow citizen as it was tapped with the item "most people can be trusted / you cannot be too careful". This kind of 'thin' trust is typically high in advanced post-industrial states where the bonds between the citizens are manifold and based on mutual dependencies. By contrast, 'thick' exclusionary forms of trust reflecting close relations with family members and suspicion of strangers are characteristic of isolated rural communities which predominate in societies in the early stage of modernization (Newton 1999). Likewise, it is not surprising to find advanced states having more equal societies. The burgeoning middle classes, dwindling working classes and extensive public welfare systems of these states have significantly reduced inequalities of income and opportunity. The rapidly industrializing societies in the take-off phase modernization, in contrast, are coping with dramatic inequalities (Kuznets 1955). It also makes sense to expect order and

compliance to be stronger in advanced societies. Rising living standards reduce the need to break the law and the extensive monitoring and prosecution capacities of the state increase the risk of capture and punishment. Similarly, one can expect to find higher tolerance levels in advanced societies. The development of conflict-mediating and mollifying institutions, including public welfare arrangements, has enabled these societies to deal with ever increasing levels of pluralism and has made the citizens of such societies become accustomed to cultural diversity and develop an attitude of respect for people with different ideas and lifestyles (Crepaz 2009; Evans and Toth 2008). Finally, the finding that advanced societies typically combine pluralism on substantive values with consensus on basic political values is consistent with the notion that western liberal democratic states can tolerate considerable value diversity because they have developed widely accepted norms and institutions regulating inter-group relations (Dahl 1967; Rose 1969).

The relation between socio-economic development and the participation factor suggests the following regularities: the more advanced a society, the higher its civic participation rates, the lower the trust in institutions, and the higher the levels of national pride. The higher participation rates in advanced societies make sense theoretically because citizens in affluent democratic states have the resources and opportunities to engage in civic participation. The lower institutional trust levels in advanced societies are at first sight surprising because public institutions in these societies have more financial means at their disposal and are therefore more effective in meeting the needs and demands of citizens than institutions in poorer societies. However, people in post-industrial societies have also become more critical of authority and hierarchy as part of the wider cultural transition from materialist to post-materialist values (Inglehart 1990, 1997; Dalton 2004). These cultural changes are likely to have had a greater impact on people's evaluations of public institutions than the performance of these institutions. The higher levels of national pride in advanced societies are more difficult to grasp theoretically, though. One would expect secularization, individualization and the change to postmaterialism to have undermined collective identities, such as a sense of national pride, in these societies and thus to find higher levels of national pride in poorer societies. In sum, in view of the components of the two factors, the relation of socio-economic development with participation is slightly more difficult to interpret theoretically than the link of socio-economic development with solidarity.

Figure 2 about here

Figure 3 about here

Assessing the particularist perspective

In addition to the close relationships of solidarity and participation with socio-economic development, Figures 2 and 3 also show remarkable variation in the factor scores of countries with similar levels of PPP. While being as poor as some Latin-American states, the post-communist countries, for instance, have solidarity levels equal to the ones of many affluent western states. The reverse applies for participation. On this factor the African and Latin-American states have levels of participation which are equal to or sometimes exceeding those of western states, and it

is the post-communist states recording the lowest levels. Moreover, the variation between the – more or less equally prosperous - western states is substantial: while Sweden tops the list Germany has a participation level that is as low as most post-communist states. All this indicates that solidarity and participation levels are not only a reflection of socio-economic development. Historical trajectories unique to each region are likely to have left their imprint as well, thus providing purchase to the particularist perspective.

The low participation levels of post-communist countries clearly support this observation. As many authors have pointed out, decades of totalitarian, communist rule have wiped out civil society in these countries and have made people suspicious of state institutions (Janmaat 2006; Schoepflin 2000; Smolar 1996). The legacy of this period has been "hourglass" societies, composed of a mass of citizens minding their own business at the bottom, economic and political elites vying for power and wealth at the top, and a "missing middle" of minimal connections between these groups (Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1997: 91). This raises the pertinent question of how lasting this legacy will be. Can we expect post-communist societies to overcome this heritage within the years to come and revert to levels of participation 'in line' with their level of socio-economic development? Or has civil society always been a phenomenon alien to this region and was there thus little for communism to destroy? In that case participation levels may well stay low for the next decades or centuries.

Phrased more broadly, if we can identify regimes of social cohesion – for instance a regime of post-communist countries comprising relatively high levels of solidarity and low levels of participation - how durable are they? Do they extend over generations or possibly centuries, or are they relatively short-lived phenomena, perhaps so short-lived that it is more appropriate to talk of temporary clusters of conditions rather than regimes? Unfortunately but not surprisingly, it is next to impossible to empirically scrutinize the existence of *longue duree* regimes of social cohesion because opinion surveys, which are essential for exploring the ideational dimension of social cohesion, have been conducted only from the 1950s onwards. Only by relying on archival data of behavior – as Putnam (1993) has famously done for his study on civic culture in Italy – or on secondary sources – such as the observations of early scholars like De Tocqueville on American society in the mid-nineteenth century – can a (necessarily incomplete) case be made for social cohesion regimes with deep historical roots. However, the different waves of the WVS do allow us to explore continuities in attitudinal components over a 20 year period. Thus, we can at least determine whether some 'regime' is nothing more than an accidental coincidence of conditions at a single point in time or whether it represents a stable collection of properties over two decades. If the latter is the case, we have some provisional indication of the existence of long-term regimes of social cohesion.

I will use the first (1981-84), the second (1989-93) and the fourth (1999-04) wave of the WVS to explore the regimes hypothesized by Green et al (2009) (i.e. the regimes shown in Table 2). These regimes, it must be admitted, only relate to the prosperous countries. I chose to confine myself to these countries since it is only for this group that longitudinal data are available, making it possible to explore regime stability. I added two more indicators based on WVS items to the existing set of indicators in order to tap the hypothesized regimes as closely as possible. These are *active civic participation* and *respect for parents*. The first is a compound index based on 15 items about reported voluntary work for a range of organizations. It represents the mean of the number of different organizations the respondent does voluntary work for (see Appendix 1). The second represents mean values and taps the component of

social hierarchy (see Appendix 2 for the full wording of the item). Since the postulated regimes did not make specific claims about the level or the strength of a shared sense of belonging I omitted the two indicators on identity. I further had to omit all four indicators on value diversity because of missing values in the first wave. Instead, I selected the materialism-postmaterialism values scale and used the SDs of this scale as a measure of value diversity. This scale consists of four items and is a subset of the aforementioned survival-selfexpression values scale (see Appendix 2). Lastly, data from the UN and World Bank on homicides (social order) and income gini (equality) were collected for the years 1981 and 1990 to match the survey data of the first and second wave of the WVS. I thus proceed with ten indicators for which data were found for the three points in time noted above. Table 5 lists these indicators and the components of the proposed regimes they are meant to tap.

Table 5 about here

Testing the regimes proposed by Green et al (2009) involves asking three questions: (1) to what extent do the patterns in the data match the expected substance of the regimes?; (2) to what extent can we find the hypothesized country clusters?; (3) how stable are the substance and country clusters found in the data? I used group means and hierarchical cluster analysis to explore questions 1 and 3, and 2 and 3, respectively. To begin with group means, I assigned sixteen OECD countries to the regimes they are expected to exemplify and calculated the regime mean score on each of the indicators for each of the three waves. Table 5 presents the results of these computations. It also includes the overall mean so that we can assess whether a particular group has a relatively high or low score on some indicator. Low scores more than one standard deviation (SD) from the overall mean are given in italics; low scores less than one SD from the overall mean are in normal style; high scores less than one SD from the mean are given in bold; high scores more than one SD are in bold and italics.

It turns out that the data of Table 5 are broadly in line with the proposed regimes substantively. Indeed we see that the liberal group of countries has relatively high levels of inequality, crime, tolerance and civic participation (both active and passive). Likewise, the social democratic Nordics are relatively high on social trust and low on crime and inequality. The continental group conforms to the expected regime by showing relatively low levels of crime and passive and active participation, and medium levels of income inequality. The predicted strong social hierarchies and exclusionary ethno-cultural identities of the East-Asian regime are confirmed by East Asia's high score on respect for parents and very low score on ethnic tolerance. Yet, we also find scores not in line with the predicted regimes. Thus, for a 'conservative regime demanding moral consensus' we find surprisingly high value diversity in the European continental group of countries. By contrast, value pluralism is surprisingly low in the liberal societies. Likewise, the assumed individualism of these societies does not prevent them from showing relatively high levels of respect for parents. Lastly, the high ethnic tolerance levels of continental Europe are difficult to match with their supposedly exclusionary ethnic identities.

Table 5 also allows us to assess the stability of the proposed regimes. The overall picture is ambiguous. On some components the mean scores are fairly stable over the three points in time for all four groups, which is consistent with the idea of

relatively enduring regimes of social cohesion. This is the case with social order, social hierarchy and value diversity. On other components some groups show relatively stable scores while others have more volatile patterns. This can be seen for inequality (stable levels in the English-speaking and Continental European groups but declining ones in the Nordics and in East Asia), social trust (declining in the English-speaking group and stable in the other groups), passive participation (stable in the English-speaking and continental group, but rising sharply in the Nordics), and ethnic tolerance and political trust (declining sharply in East Asia and stable in the other groups). Finally, there is one indicator (active participation) on which all four groups show sharply rising levels over the 20 year period.

The second question stated above was explored with hierarchical cluster analysis. In this analysis the forming of clusters of cases occurs in a series of stages. At each stage the two cases (or clusters of cases) that are most similar on all the variables are clustered. Thus, the further the analysis proceeds the fewer clusters remain but the larger the differences between the clusters become and the more heterogeneous the clusters become internally. In other words, in the initial stages it produces many clusters which are relatively homogenous internally and in the final stages just a few highly diversified clusters are left over (Cramer 2003). The best visual representation of this process is a dendrogram, which displays the different clusters as horizontal lines on the x-axis. The higher the value on this axis, the fewer the number of clusters and thus the more internally diverse each cluster is. The branching points on the axis (i.e. the moments when new clusters are formed) offer good insight into the internal homogeneity of each cluster for a specific cluster solution (by cluster solution we mean the number of clusters produced at a certain stage).

Figure 4 shows three such dendrograms, one for each wave.[1] We used the same countries and indicators for each of these analyses to ensure over time comparability. Japan, South Korea were excluded because these countries had missing data for passive and active participation in the first wave. The remaining European and American countries are thus expected to fall in just three clusters – an English-speaking one; a Scandinavian one and a Continental European. Focusing on the dendrogram of the last wave, we can see that the three cluster solution (as shown by the three horizontal lines) only partially corresponds to the predicted country groupings. We can indeed discern a distinct Scandinavian cluster composed of Denmark and Sweden although the Netherlands also forms part of this. Likewise we see a large continental European continental but this group is heavily ‘polluted’ with English-speaking countries (Britain, Ireland and Canada). The US forms a separate cluster. In short, an English-speaking group of countries cannot at all be identified. Thus, the geographic dispersion of English-speaking countries could be said to be emblematic of their disparate social cohesion characters.

Figure 4 about here

A comparison of the three dendrograms over time confirms the relative cohesion of the Scandinavian group and the absence of an English-speaking cluster. We can see

[1] We used standardized variables (Z-scores) for these cluster analyses as this ensures that each variable is given equal weight in the analyses.

that Denmark, Sweden and to a somewhat lesser extent the Netherlands always stick together. In the first wave they are accompanied by Britain and Canada but these countries move to the continental European cluster in the second and third wave respectively. We further see that Italy moves from a separate position to the continental cluster in the second wave.

In short, the data provide only partial support for the 'stable regimes of social cohesion' hypothesis. Whether a predicted regime can be identified substantively or in terms of the countries it is said to include depends on the indicators and countries examined. Two clusters seem to be quite stable – a continental European one with Belgium, Germany, France, and Spain as core countries and a Scandinavian one grouping Denmark and Sweden – and these could thus possibly be conceived of as regimes. However, the unexpected companions in these clusters (Ireland and the Netherlands respectively) and the transfers of Britain, Canada and Italy undermine their external distinctiveness and put their longevity into question.

Conclusion

The analyses of this study have shown that none of conceptions of social cohesion proposed by a number of macro-level approaches refers to a coherent empirical phenomenon visible in a large number of states that could be labeled social cohesion. As these conceptions thus constitute merely multidimensional theoretical constructs, their use for empirical and policy-oriented approaches can legitimately be questioned. Working with such constructs is problematic in policy terms because interventions aimed at improving social cohesion as a whole could well have differential effects (positive and negative) for the constituent components of social cohesion.

A factor analysis on all the components of social cohesion suggested by the macro-level approaches produced four factors, two of which captured most of the variance. The first of these I labeled 'solidarity' because of the high loadings of social trust, equality, consensus on basic values and social order on this factor. The second was labeled 'participation' as it comprised civic participation as its main component and was further found to be related to ethnic tolerance, national pride, and (a lack of) institutional trust. Both factors showed a strong positive correlation with GDP per capita. I considered this finding to be supportive of the universalist/modernist notion that social cohesion should be related to stages of socio-economic development.

More difficult to reconcile with the universalist perspective was the finding that the post-communist and Latin-American countries differed conspicuously on both factors while showing approximately equal levels of socio-economic development. It suggested that historical processes unique to each region also play a role in shaping social cohesion to the point that it is appropriate to speak of regionally distinct and relatively enduring 'regimes' of social cohesion. This finding is more in line with an ideographic/particularist understanding of social cohesion. Putting this perspective to the test also produced mixed evidence, however. Verifying the substance, the country membership and the stability of the four regimes of social cohesion postulated by Green et al (2009), I found evidence for a reasonably distinctive and stable Scandinavian model characterized by high trust, (declining) inequality and low crime rates. I also identified a continental European cluster but this group saw several English-speaking countries joining it in the 1990s and exhibited unexpectedly low

levels of social hierarchy and surprisingly high levels of value pluralism and ethnic tolerance. I found no evidence at all for a distinctive liberal English-speaking regime of social cohesion.

Due to data limitations, I could only assess the regime stability for this limited group of Western countries, however. Possibly, the particularist perspective would have received more solid support had I been able to examine social cohesion characteristics longitudinally for other world regions, such as Latin America and the post-communist countries. Particularly over-time public opinion data is in short supply for these regions. It is therefore recommendable that future research exploring the dynamics of social cohesion in non-western contexts rely less on attitudinal and more on behavioral indicators (also as proxies for attitudes), using records and other archival material as data sources.

Notwithstanding the indicative and incomplete conclusions of this study regarding the validity of the universalist and particularist perspectives, I believe to have advanced the research on social cohesion in two other ways. First, the discovery that civic participation does not co-vary at the national level with social trust indicates the limited empirical utility of social capital-inspired definitions of social cohesion, such as the aforementioned one by Chan To and Chan. After all, the non-relation between trust and participation suggests that it is very difficult to develop forms of social cohesion that combine the two. Yet, and secondly, this does not exclude the possibility that there are countries combining relatively high levels of trust and civic participation (or any of the other characteristics of social cohesion seen as precious and worth pursuing for that matter). In fact, our analyses found the Scandinavian countries to manifest just such forms of social cohesion. They constitute so to speak the living proof for many theoretical and normative understandings of the concept. Yet, since the kind of social cohesion seen in Scandinavian countries is likely to constitute a regime, i.e. a path-dependent stable collection of characteristics unique to the region, it cannot be adopted by other countries or only with great difficulty. In this sense, definitions of social cohesion that reflect such regimes present unattainable forms of social cohesion, i.e. forms not achievable by other states. By contrast, efforts to reduce income inequality and crime and to enhance trust and consensus on basic values simultaneously could well be effective since these components do co-vary cross-nationally (to form the 'solidarity' syndrome alluded to above) and are closely related to socio-economic development. We thus believe that the value of this paper lies in having identified a form of social cohesion that can realistically be pursued.

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Tables and figures social cohesion article

Table 1. Components of social cohesion suggested by four macro-level approaches

	Macro-level approaches			
	Green et al	Chan et al	Council of Europe	Kearns and Forrest
Ideational	Social trust	Social trust		Common values
		Sense of belonging		Sense of belonging
Relational	Institutional trust	Civic participation / social capital	Civic participation /political engagement	Civic participation / social capital
	Social order and compliance		Tolerance *	Social order and compliance
			Equality	Equality

* properly speaking tolerance is ideational as it represents an attitude. I classified it as relational however as it is relevant for the regulation of inter-group relations in modern societies

Table 2. Regimes of social cohesion proposed by Green et al (2009: 94, 95, 101)

	Liberal	Social-democratic	Conservative	East Asian
Equality	-	+	+/-	+
Order	-	+/-	+	+
Civic participation (active and passive)	+	+/-	-	-
Social trust	+/-	+	+/-	+/-
Tolerance	+	+/-	-	-
Cultural pluralism	+	+	-	-
Social hierarchy	-	-	+	+
Countries	English-speaking	Scandinavian	Continental European	Japan, South Korea, Taiwan

Table 3. Operationalization of social cohesion components

Component	Indicator	Item(s) in survey	Data source
Common values	Consensus on traditional-secular values (1.5 - SD) Consensus on survival-selfexpression values (1.5 - SD) Consensus on gender equality (1 - SD) Consensus on democracy as preferred system (1 - SD)	Composite dimension called 'Tradrat5' in WVS database; Composite dimension called 'Survself' in WVS database; When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women (agree; neither; disagree) For each one of the following political systems, how good a way would you say it is of governing this country? - Having a democratic political system (very good; fairly good; fairly bad; very bad)	WVS 1999
Shared sense of belonging	Geographic unit of identification (mean) National pride (mean)	Which of these geographical groups would you say you belong to first of all? (locality or town; region; country; continent; world) How proud are you to be a [COUNTRY] citizen? (not at all proud; not very proud; quite proud; very proud)	WVS 1999
Social trust	Percentage saying most people can be trusted	Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? (most people can be trusted; can't be too careful)	WVS 1999
Tolerance	Percentage not mentioning immigrants as unwanted neighbours Percentage not mentioning homosexuals as unwanted neighbours	Which people would you not like to have as neighbours? - Immigrants/foreign workers (mentioned; not mentioned) - Homosexuals (mentioned; not mentioned)	WVS 1999
Institutional trust	Trust in parliament (mean)	How much confidence do you have in Parliament? (none at all; not very much; quite a lot; a great deal)	WVS 1999
Civic participation political engagement	Number of different organizations respondent belongs to (mean) Discussing politics with friends (mean)	Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organizations and activities and say which, if any, do you belong to: [respondent can choose from 9 different organizations – see Appendix 1] (mentioned; not mentioned) How often do you discuss political matters with friends? (Never; Occasionally; Frequently)	WVS 1999
Social order	100 minus number of homicides per 100.000 inhabitants		UN
Equality	1 minus Gini coefficient of income inequality		World Bank

Table 4. Dimensional structure of social cohesion indicators (factor loadings)

		Extracted dimensions			
Components of social cohesion	Indicators of social cohesion	'solidarity'	'participation'	3	4
Civic participation / political engagement	Discussing politics	.40	-.37	**.64**	.26
	Belonging to different organizations	.09	**.75**	.43	.35
Tolerance	No objection to immigrants as neighbours	.32	**.52**	-.27	-.02
	No objection to homosexuals as neighbours	**.59**	.46	-.45	-.14
Social trust	Most people can be trusted	**.81**	.33	-.07	.12
Institutional trust	Trust in parliament	.05	**-.61**	-.49	.04
Common values	Consensus on gender equality	**.62**	**-.53**	.16	-.27
	Consensus on democracy as preferred system	**.50**	-.29	-.25	.27
	Consensus on traditional/secular values	**-.86**	-.28	-.15	.19
	Consensus on survival/selfexpression values	**-.62**	-.33	-.46	-.07
Shared sense of belonging	National pride	**-.52**	**.68**	-.07	-.35
	Geographic unit of identification	-.45	.11	-.39	**.62**
Social order	100 minus number of homicides	**.58**	.04	-.09	.28
Equality	1 minus Gini coefficient	**.76**	.28	-.35	.04
Explained variance		32%	20%	12%	7%

Figure 1. Country scores on the solidarity and participation factors

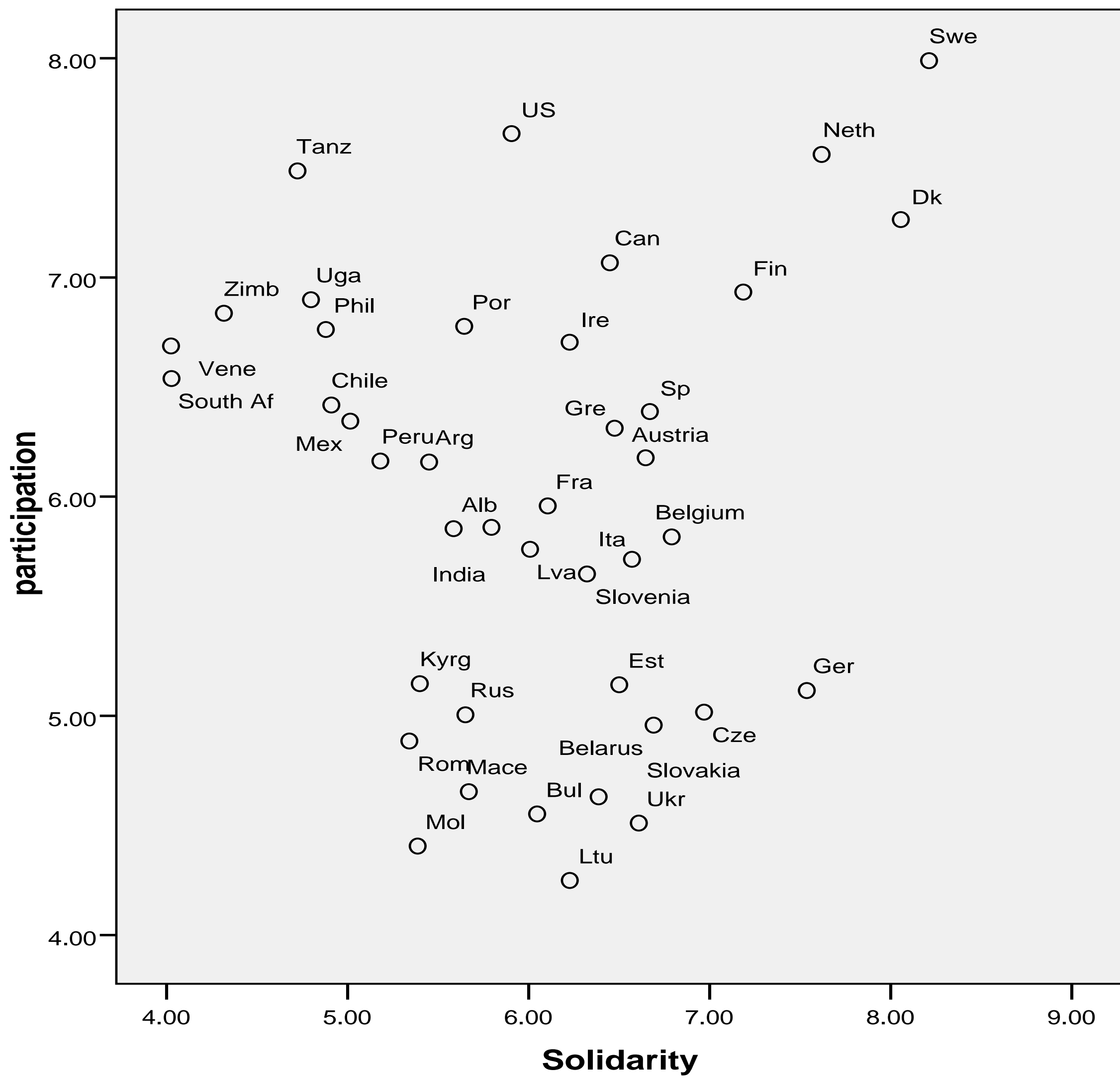
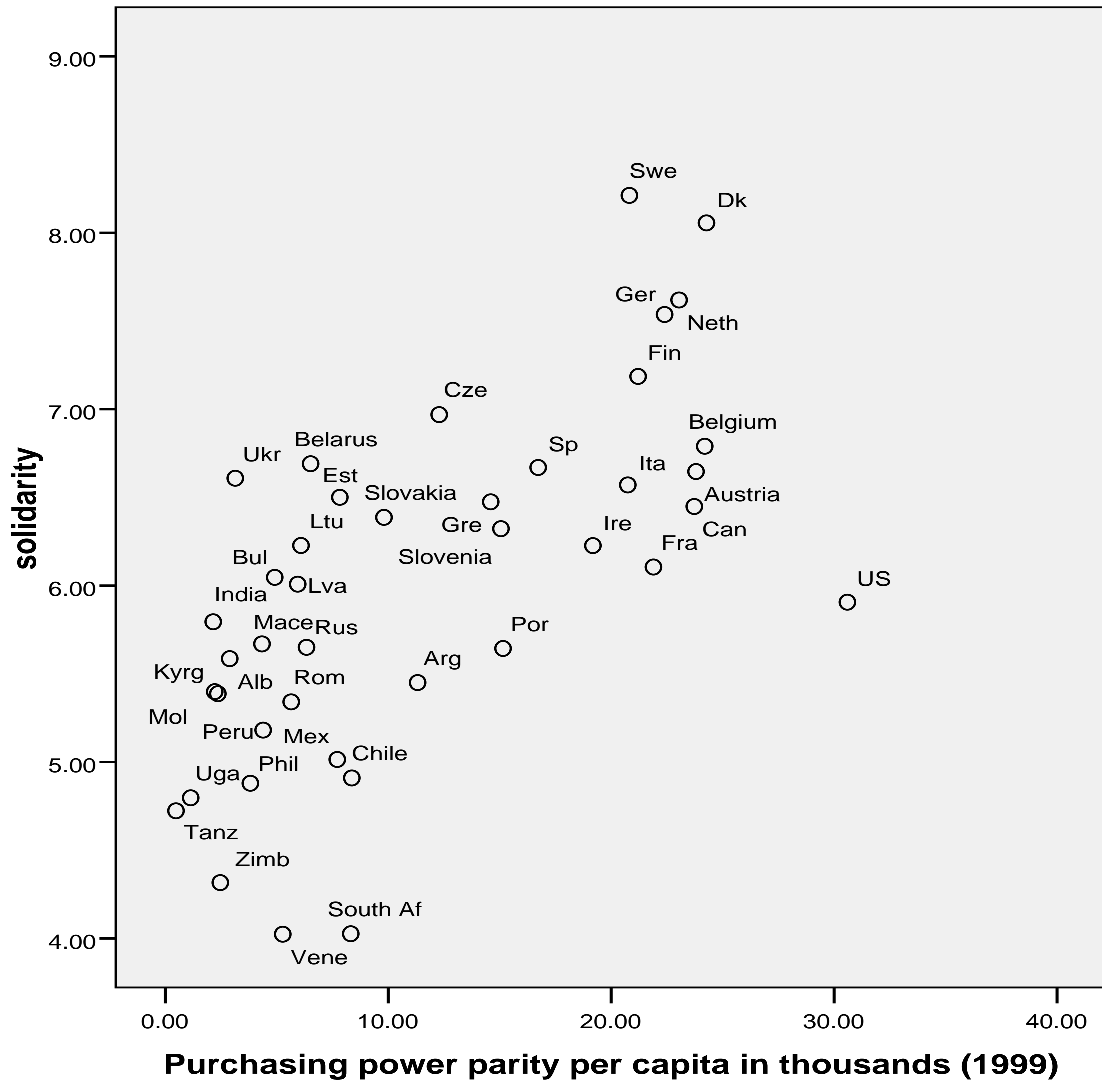
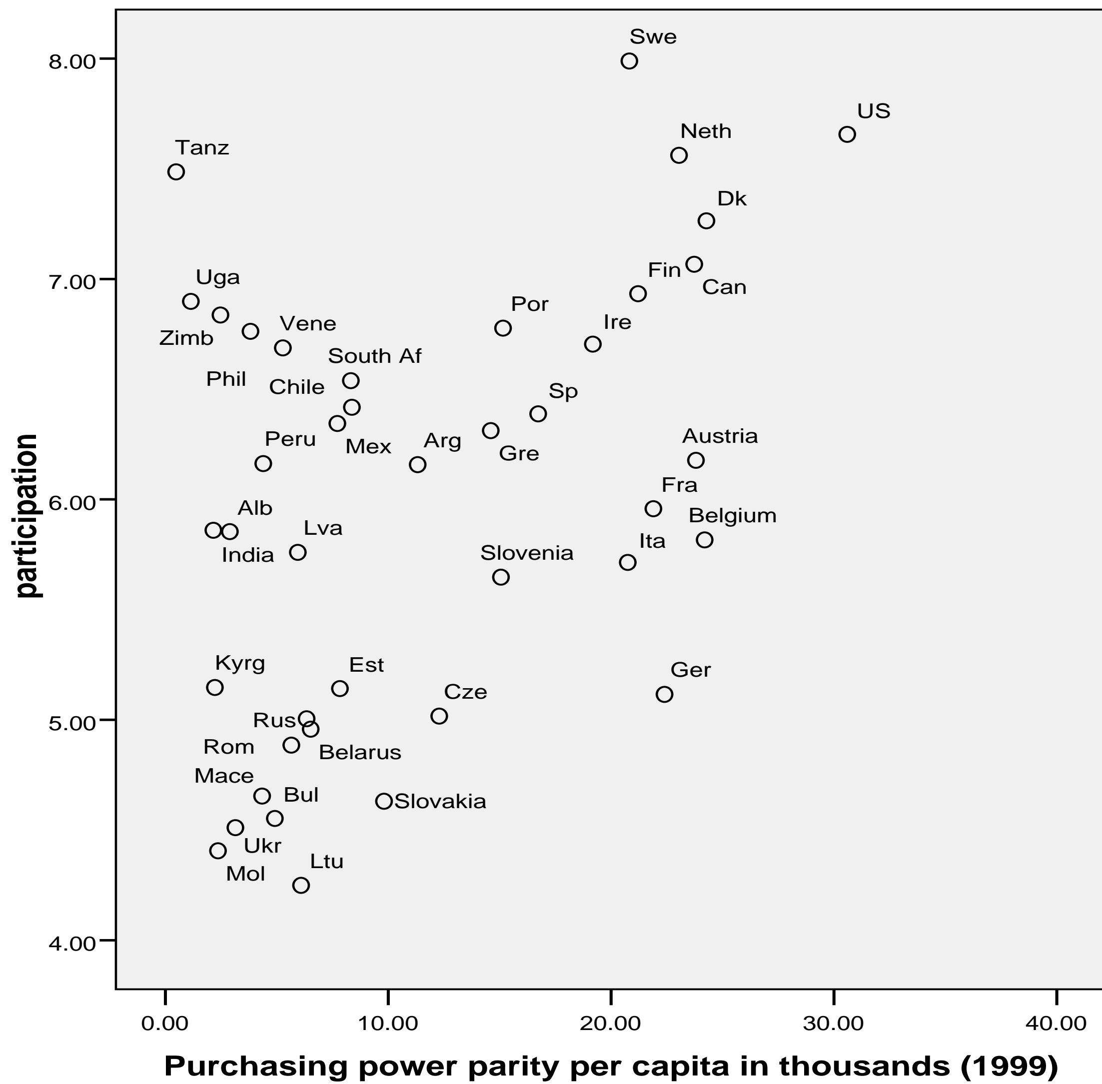


Figure 2. The relation between solidarity and economic prosperity



r = .66; p = .000; R^2 = .43

Figure 3. The relation between participation and economic prosperity



r =.42; p = .006; R^2 = .18

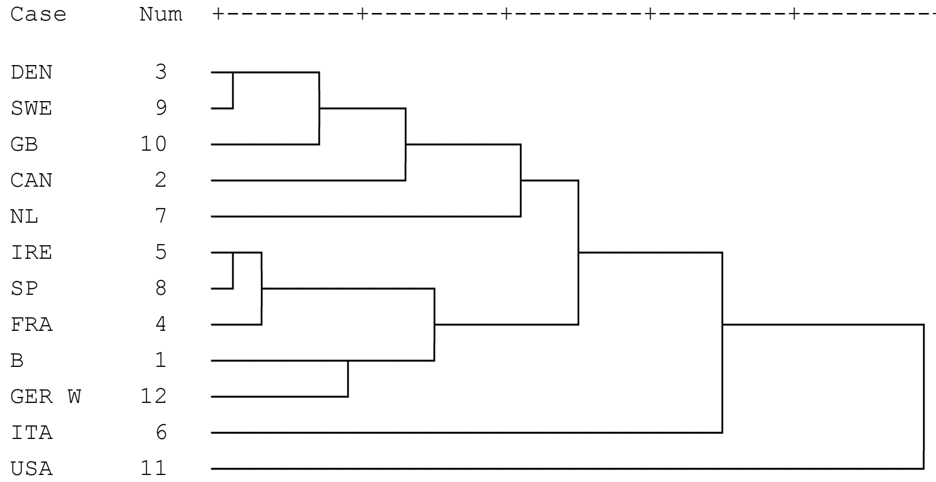
Table 5. The substance of social cohesion models (group means on social cohesion indicators)

		Liberal Anglophone			Conservative Continental European			Social-democratic Scandinavian			East-Asian			Overall mean		
Components	Indicators	1981	1990	1999	1981	1990	1999	1981	1990	1999	1981	1990	1999	1981	1990	1999
Civic participation	Passive (belonging to)	**1.03**	**.95**	**1.14**	.60	.75	.82	**1.18**	**1.40**	**1.98**	-	.61	.77	.89	.94	1.13
	Active (doing voluntary work)	**.40**	**.47**	**.72**	.30	.33	.30	.32	.32	**.47**	.08	.07	.25	.33	.35	.46
Trust	Most people can be trusted	**44.7**	**48.7**	34.9	31.2	35.9	36.4	***52.6***	***58.1***	***59.8***	39.4	38.0	34.3	40.7	44.9	41.6
	Trust in parliament	47.4	**45.0**	36.5	45.4	44.2	41.6	**56.0**	**50.6**	**60.2**	**53.6**	*31.5*	*16.3*	49.6	44.4	41.8
Tolerance	Immigrants as neighbours	**91.9**	**91.9**	**89.5**	89.3	**86.1**	**88.4**	**93.7**	**89.0**	**93.5**	**94.7**	*65.0*	*68.3*	91.7	85.6	87.4
Cultural pluralism	Postmaterialism scale (SDs)	.61	.63	.58	**.66**	**.67**	**.64**	.62	*.58*	*.52*	.60	.64	.57	.63	.63	.59
Social hierarchy	Respect for parents	**70.9**	**72.3**	**73.0**	**69.9**	**71.1**	64.6	*50.4*	*51.0*	48.2	**80.3**	***86.0***	**82.0**	66.6	68.3	64.8
Inequality	Gini coefficient	**37.3**	**35.3**	***37.0***	31.9	30.3	**31.9**	33.2	*25.0*	*27.2*	**34.2**	30.0	27.4	33.9	30.5	31.7
Crime (inverse of social order)	number of homicides per 100.000	**3.52**	**3.38**	**2.45**	1.22	1.23	1.38	1.13	1.20	1.08	1.00	.60	1.55	1.84	1.79	1.59
	N (countries)	4	4	4	6	6	6	4	4	4	2	2	2	16	16	16

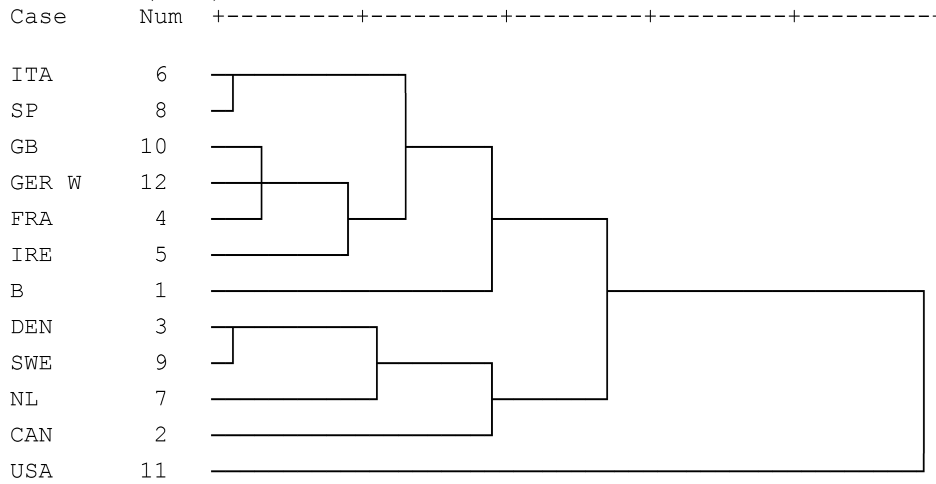
The Anglophone group includes the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland;
The Continental European group includes Germany, Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain and Italy;
The Scandinavian group includes Denmark, Sweden, Iceland and Finland;
The East-Asian group includes Japan and South Korea.

Figure 4. Country membership of social cohesion models (hierarchical cluster analyses)

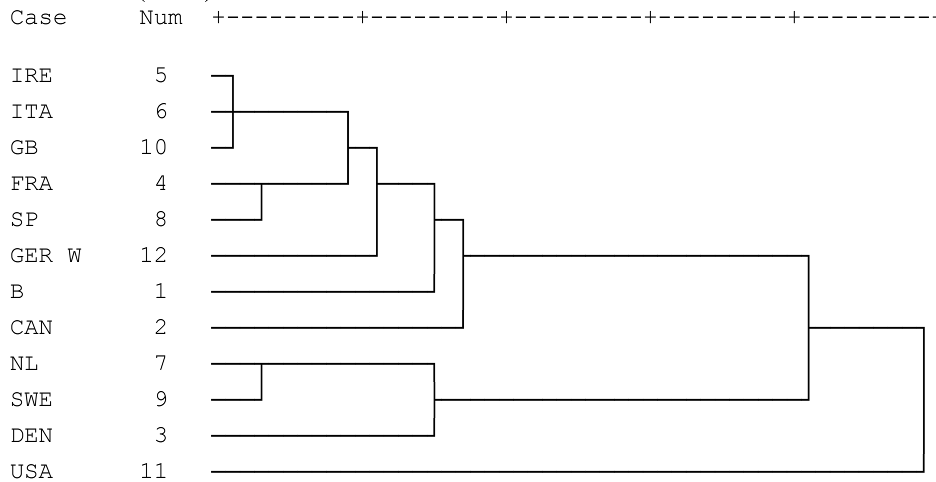
First Wave (1981)



Second wave (1990)



Fourth wave (1999)



Appendix 1. Composition of social cohesion indicators

The composition of the religious-secular and survival-selfexpression dimensions:

Items from WVS	Traditional-religious vs rational-secular values *	Survival vs selfexpression values **
	Factor loadings	Factor loadings
God is not very important in respondent's life	.91	
It is less important for a child to learn obedience and religious faith than independence and determination (autonomy index)	.88	
Abortion is always justifiable	.82	
Respondent does not have a strong sense of national pride	.81	
Respondent opposes more respect for authority	.73	
Respondent gives priority to self-expression and quality of life over economic and physical security (4-item Materialist/Postmaterialist Values Index ***)		.87
Respondent describes self as very happy		.81
Homosexuality is always justifiable		.77
Respondent has or would sign a petition		.74
Most people can be trusted		.46

* secular is positive pole; ** selfexpression is positive pole; *** see Appendix 2.

Nb: adapted from Inglehart and Welzel (2005: 49).

Items composing the civic participation indicator:

"Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organizations and activities and say which, if any, you belong to:"

- social welfare for elderly, handicapped or deprived people;
-religious or church organizations;
- education, arts, music or cultural activities;
- trade unions;
- political parties;
- third world development or human rights;
- conservation, environment, animal rights groups;
- professional associations;
- youth work;

A not mentioned;
B mentioned

Active civic participation: Respondents were also asked whether they did voluntary work for these nine different organizations.

Appendix 2. Additional social cohesion indicators drawn from WVS

Respect for parents:

“Which of the two statements do you tend to agree with? < A – regardless of what the qualities and faults of ones parents are, one must always love and respect them; B – One does not have the duty to respect and love parents who have not earned it by their behaviour and attitudes”

Items composing Materialism-Postmaterialism index*:

Maintaining order in the nation (-)
Giving people more say in the decisions of the government (+)
Fight rising prices (-)
Protect freedom of speech (+)

* Postmaterialism = positive pole; a minus indicates that the item is negatively correlated with the index, a plus indicates a positive correlation

See Inglehart (1990) for a full description.