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SOCIAL COHESION: THE CANADIAN URBAN CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of social cohesion emerged in the early 1990s in Europe and in Canada and has received growing academic and policy attention since that time. When a federal parliamentary committee issued its final report on social cohesion in June 1999, it concluded that the tensions between globalization and social cohesion were real, and that they were unlikely to disappear of their own accord.[1]

Indeed, social and economic changes have continued to unfold, driven in large measure by globalization. In some regions, these changes have resulted in economic restructuring that has created the conditions for increased population mobility and diversity, persistent unemployment, new forms of exclusion in the age of information technology and network society, and increasing public disenchantment with democratic politics.[2]

Faced with these rapid and profound shifts, "Politicians and policymakers worldwide have gradually come to recognize that these new forms of social cleavages necessitate a new form of governance, which in general entails three elements: (1) promoting trust or 'solidarity' alongside with other traditional welfare and economic policies; (2) a recognition that the process of participation matters as much as the outcome and (3) a more holistic approach to public policy design and co-ordination."[3]

The troubling incidence of shootings in Toronto, questions about "reasonable accommodation" in Quebec, and international events such as the 2005 riots in Paris and Australia have revived interest in the notion of social cohesion as a barometer that can help us understand how well communities and populations are coping with rapid change, and as a guide for policy development that reflects a new approach to governance.

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(1) Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, "Final Report on Social Cohesion," June 1999,
http://www.parl.gc.ca/36/1/parlbus/commbus/senate/com-e/SOCI-E/rep-e/repfinaljun99-e.htm.

(2) Joseph Chan, Ho-Pong To, and Elaine Chan, "Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research," *Social Indicators Research*, No. 75, 2006, pp. 273–302.

(3) Ibid., p. 279.

Since the 1999 report was issued, research on social cohesion has expanded significantly, ranging from efforts to define what social cohesion is, what conditions foster it and what effects its presence or absence can have, to studies increasingly focused on the kinds of interventions that can strengthen social cohesion.[4]

WHAT IS SOCIAL COHESION?

Although progress has been made in defining the concept of social cohesion, it still has a wide variety of meanings, not only in the academic literature, but also in policy use. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development acknowledges that even though promoting "social cohesion" and combating "social exclusion" are central social policy goals in many of its member countries, there is no commonly accepted definition of either of these terms.[5]

A. General Concepts

Generally speaking, social cohesion is a characteristic of the social unit; a macro-level concept that refers to the overall state of social bonds within any society – small, medium or large. It is a "framing concept," an overarching notion that links different policy areas and responds to the growing need in policy discourse for integrative models that help make sense of issues as diverse as income security, neighbourhood safety, and housing.

The fact that social cohesion is such a broad and wide-ranging concept has prompted criticism. Some authors suggest it is little more than a catchword for the most pressing social issues of the day: unemployment, poverty, discrimination, exclusion, disenchantment with politics, along with any other social problem.[6] This is similar to Bernard's critique of social cohesion as a "quasi-concept" that, while grounded in data analysis, is flexible enough to follow the meanderings of everyday policy-making.[7]

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(4)   Caroline Beauvais and Jane Jenson, "Social Cohesion: Updating the State of the Research," CPRN Discussion Paper No. F22, May 2002, http://www.cprn.com/doc.cfm?doc=167&l=en.

(5)   Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Society at a Glance: OECD Social Indicators*, 2005, http://www.oecdbookshop.org/oecd/display.asp?sf1=identifiers&lang=EN&st1=812005031e1.

(6)   Chan et al. (2006).

(7)   Paul Bernard, "Social Cohesion: A Critique," CPRN Discussion Paper No. F09, December 1999, http://www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=311&l=en.

In an effort to clarify the range of ways in which the term is used, Beauvais and Jenson identified five different conceptions of social cohesion:

- common values and a civic culture

- social order and social control

- social solidarity and reduction in wealth disparities

- social cohesion as social networks and social capital

- social cohesion as place attachment and identity.[8]

They note that the definition chosen has significant consequences for what is measured, what is analyzed, and what policy actions are recommended.

B. Work Done by the Policy Research Initiative

Perhaps the most thorough work done by the federal government on the subject was carried out in 2001–2002, when the Policy Research Initiative led an interdepartmental Social Cohesion Network to help clarify the meaning of social cohesion and identify directions for future policy research. The Network found that social cohesion requires "economic and social equity, peace, security, inclusion and access." It does not mean homogeneity or conformity: "Diversity and differences are conducive to social cohesion because they contribute to a vibrant political and social life." It also identified four key elements as necessary and interactive parts of social cohesion:

- *Participation*: Widespread participation in community and social life is fundamental to social cohesion. Full participation requires access to economic, political, and cultural opportunities and involves active engagement with other members of the community and society. Being involved must be a free choice. Society and its members benefit when more citizens are involved in setting and working toward collective and community projects.

- *Bonds*: Trust, connections, networks, and bonds with others (elements of social capital) may be necessary for participation and engagement. However, they are also created and strengthened through participatory activities of various kinds.

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(8)   Beauvais and Jenson (2002).

- *Bridges and institutions*: Institutions and policies such as official languages policy, multiculturalism and the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* mediate differences and encourage understanding and mutual respect. Infrastructure such as transportation and communications provide necessary public support for involvement.

- *Income distribution, equity, inclusion, and access*: These are key to a Canadian understanding of social cohesion. … [C]entral to "the Canadian way" is a thriving new economy that provides benefits for all Canadians and leaves out none.[9]

The work of the Social Cohesion Network is illustrated by a reciprocal, holistic, and self-referential model of social cohesion that demonstrates how social cohesion is created by an equitable distribution of social outcomes, and [how] social outcomes are improved by increased degrees of social cohesion.[10] In this sense, "social cohesion derives basically from equity in the distribution of the very social outcomes (e.g., health results, security, economic well-being, education) that it contributes to. If society fails to distribute its social outcomes equitably, social cohesion deteriorates and social outcomes suffer."[11]

In this model, social cohesion represents the sum of individuals' willingness to cooperate with each other without coercion in the range of collective activities and institutions necessary for a society to survive and prosper, as well as in the complex set of social relations needed by individuals to complete their life courses.

WHY FOCUS ON SOCIAL COHESION?

The underlying concern is that the social exclusion of individuals and groups can become a major threat to social cohesion and economic prosperity for society as a whole. Policies and initiatives supporting social inclusion are seen as a response. Social cohesion, however, is not the same as social inclusion. Cohesion does not necessarily ensure inclusion, since multiple forms of exclusion can exist in a cohesive society.[12] But minimal levels of inclusion are thought to be necessary to sustain social cohesion.

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(9) Policy Research Initiative, *Inclusion for All: A Canadian Roadmap to Social Cohesion*, no date, http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/pi/rs/rep-rap/2001/tr01-rt01/p2.html.

(10) For a graphic representation of this model, see Dick Stanley, "What Do We Know about Social Cohesion: The Research Perspective of the Federal Government's Social Cohesion Research Network," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 2003, p. 8.

(11) Stanley (2003).

(12) Anver Saloojee, "Social Inclusion, Citizenship and Diversity," Paper presented at CCSD/Laidlaw Foundation Conference on Social Inclusion, 8-9 November 2001, http://www.ccsd.ca/subsites/inclusion/bp/as.htm.

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The perceived effects of social cohesion necessarily vary accord depending on the definition used, and whether social cohesion is seen primarily as a cause or consequence of other indicators of well-being. Nonetheless, evidence is accumulating that social cohesion is associated with a number of positive social characteristics and that social equality underpins well-being, both of individuals and communities.[13] Notably:

- Communities with high levels of social cohesion have better health than those with low levels of social cohesion.

- Cities with stronger civic communities have lower infant mortality.

- Societies in which there are high levels of income inequality and diminished social cohesion have higher levels of crime and violence and higher mortality rates.

- At the level of the society, social cohesion can have a powerful effect on health which transcends that available from individual social relationships.[14]

Social cohesion also acts as a buffer to political and economic changes. The World Bank has found that, "A country's social cohesion, i.e., the inclusiveness of its communities, is essential for generating the trust needed to implement reforms."[15]

The circular nature of social cohesion – both as a cause and a consequence – is highlighted by the European Union. In its 2007 Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion, it noted that while strong economic and employment growth is a precondition for the sustainability of social programs, progress in achieving higher levels of social cohesion is, together with effective education and training systems, a key factor in promoting growth.[16]

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(13) Jane Jenson, "Social Cohesion and Inclusion: What is the Research Agenda," Canadian Policy Research Networks, March 2001, http://www.cprn.com/doc.cfm?doc=690&l=en.

(14) Stephen Stansfield, "Social Support and Social Cohesion," in *Social Determinants of Health*, ed. Michael Marmot and Richard Wilkinson, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999.

(15) Jo Ritzen, William Easterly, and Michael Woolcock, "On 'Good' Politicians and 'Bad' Policies: Social Cohesion, Institutions and Growth," Keynote address given at the 56th Congress of the International Institute of Public Finance, Seville, Spain, 28–31 August 2000, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWBIGOVANTCOR/Resources/wps2448.pdf.

(16) Council of the European Union, *Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007*, 23 February 2007, http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st06/st06694.en07.pdf.

CANADA'S SOCIAL COHESION CHALLENGES

A. Immigration and Multicultural Diversity

Most of the recent literature that examines social cohesion in the urban Canadian context focuses on issues related to immigration and diversity. Although immigration and ethnic diversity are considered to have important cultural, economic, fiscal, and developmental benefits in the long run, they tend to reduce social solidarity and social capital over the short run. New evidence from the United States suggests that, in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, residents of all races tend to "hunker down." Trust (even of one's own race) is lower, altruism and community co-operation rarer, friends fewer.[17]

On the other hand, at least one study that measured social cohesion in terms of national identity, social values and attitudes, and social and political participation suggests that differences between newcomers and established Canadians are not significant. With the exception of levels of trust and, for some visible minorities, a sense of belonging, commonalities outweigh differences between newly arrived ethnic groups and established British/Northern Europeans and Francophones outside Quebec with respect to engagement in community life and in democratic processes.[18]

The situation is quite alarming, however, when cohesion is considered in terms of social solidarity and economic equity. Canadian research looking at the extent to which growing numbers of immigrants are successfully integrated into society has found that recent cohorts of immigrants have fared less well in the labour market than their predecessors, despite having higher levels of education and training. Visible minorities (also referred to as racialized groups) perform worse in terms of income, unemployment and labour market participation than other Canadians, leading to an increased likelihood of low income or poverty.[19] About one-fifth of immigrants entering Canada during the 1990s found themselves on chronically low incomes,

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(17) Robert Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture," *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2007.

(18) Stuart N. Soroka, Richard Johnston, and Keith Banting, "Ties that Bind? Social Cohesion and Diversity in Canada," in *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, ed. Keith Banting, Thomas Courchene and F. Leslie Seidle, Institute for Research on Public Policy, Montréal, 2006, p. 25.

(19) Grace-Edward Galabuzi, *Canada's Economic Apartheid*, Canadian Scholars' Press, Toronto, 2006.

a rate approximately 2.5 times higher than among the Canadian-born population.[20] Evidence of greater residential segregation[21] and a more racialized concentration of poverty[22] is emerging in some cities. For example, in Toronto between 1980 and 2000 the number of non-racialized families living in poverty fell by 28%, while the number of racialized families in poverty rose by 361%.[23]

Jeffrey G. Reitz and Rupa Bannerjee of the University of Toronto warn that, "the rapidly growing racial minority populations in Canada experience much greater inequality than do traditional European-origin immigrant groups, and discrimination is a widespread concern for racial minorities."[24] They note that social integration into Canadian society for racial minorities is slower than it is for immigrants of European origin. The authors conclude that, "it is far from clear that existing policies are adequate to address the evident racial divide in Canadian society." For Canada to sustain itself as a successful immigrant society, it will have to overcome this fragmentation by creating new, cross-cutting forms of social solidarity and more encompassing identities[25] as well as reversing the trend of economic exclusion.

B. Growing Economic Inequality

Although immigrant and visible minority populations face some of the worst effects of Canada's growing economic inequality, this trend affects all Canadians. Family after-tax income inequality rose by 35% between 1989 and 2004, economic gains going

(20) Garnett Picot, Feng Hou, and Simon Coulombe, "Chronic Low Income and Low-income Dynamics Among Recent Immigrants," Statistics Canada, January 2007, http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/11F0019MIE/11F0019MIE2007294.pdf.

(21) Soroka et al. (2006).

(22) R. Alan Walks and Larry S. Bourne, "Ghettos in Canada's cities? Racial segregation, ethnic enclaves and poverty concentration in Canadian urban areas," *The Canadian Geographer / Le Géographe canadien*, 50, No. 3, 2006, p. 286.

(23) United Way of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development, "Poverty By Postal Code: The Geography of Neighbourhood Poverty, City of Toronto, 1981–2001," p. 49, http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com/WhoWeHelp/reports/PovertyByPostalCode.php.

(24) Jeffrey G. Reitz and Rupa Bannerjee, "Racial Inequality, Social Cohesion and Policy Issues in Canada," in *Belonging? Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, ed. Keith Banting, Thomas Courchene and F. Leslie Seidle, Institute for Research on Public Policy, Montréal, 2006, pp. 38–9.

(25) Putnam (2007).

primarily to higher-income families.[26] This has led in cities such as Toronto, for example, to a rapid increase in the concentration of neighbourhood poverty, such that many more vulnerable people are living in neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty.[27] These are neighbourhoods where many young men do not work, and where high school dropout rates are still remarkably high. "They may only live a kilometre away from privileged families where a high percentage of the young people are headed for universities and good jobs. Such contrasts, if not addressed, pose a real threat to social cohesion."[28]

C. Quebec Francophones and Aboriginal Populations

At a national level, when social cohesion is measured in terms of national identity, social values and attitudes, and social and political participation, the fault lines are quite different. It is Quebec Francophones and Aboriginal people who remain ambivalent about the country, for reasons deeply embedded in Canadian history: "If social cohesion is well-rooted only in a common sense of national identity and shared values, then Canada faces enduring challenges, especially in integrating [these] historic communities."[29]

POLICY AND PROGRAM OPTIONS

The 1999 final report on social cohesion by the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology concluded that governments should be **moving toward a social investment state** wherein Canadians have access to the means and resources they need to confidently face the challenges of globalization and technological innovation. Some authors observe that a social investment model is gradually replacing the social security paradigm inherited from the 1960s, but that too often rhetoric is not accompanied by action.[30]

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(26) Andrew Heisz, "Income Inequality and Redistribution in Canada: 1976 to 2004," Statistics Canada Research Paper, May 2007,
http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/11F0019MIE/11F0019MIE2007298.pdf.

(27) United Way of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development.

(28) Judith Maxwell, "What is Social Cohesion and Why Do We Care?" Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2003, http://www.cprn.com/doc.cfm?doc=210&l=en.

(29) Soroka et al. (2006), p. 25.

(30) Jane Jenson and Denis Saint-Martin, "New Routes to Social Cohesion? Citizenship and the Social Investment State," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Winter 2003, p. 77.

In its report to the prime minister in June 2006, the federal External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities remarked that "prosperous and vibrant places **support community cohesion and reinforce competitiveness.**"[31] The link between cohesion and competitiveness is emphasized by the OECD, which has found that metropolitan-wide economic growth depends not only on economic interdependencies but also on social cohesion, for which policies have to be deliberately designed. In other words, areas of lower cohesion in a metropolitan region constitute a drag factor that reduces the competitiveness of the region as a whole.

Because cohesion is such a multi-dimensional concept, the range of policy levers and the level of cross-jurisdiction co-ordination required for effective interventions are significant. As with many cross-cutting issues, the need for **coherent and co-ordinated approaches** is especially evident. Table 1, published by the OECD as part of its *Competitive Cities in the Global Economy* research, indicates some characteristics of regions that tend to be either cohesive or segregated, as well as the wide range of policies associated with those situations.

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(31) External Advisory Committee on Cities and Communities, *From Restless Communities to Resilient Places: Building a Stronger Future for All Canadians*, Infrastructure Canada, June 2006, p. 54.

Table 1 – Signals and Strategies for Competitiveness and Cohesion

	Social Separation	Social Cohesion
Markers and markets: factors that lead to separation or cohesion	Residential segregation by race and class	Expanded mixed-income housing opportunities throughout region
	Pockets of poverty and unskilled workforce	Minimal city-suburb gaps and high levels of basic skills
	Lack of retail in inner-city communities	Investor interest in meeting retail demand
	Private transportation with poor city-suburb connections	Regional transportation systems with mix of public and private
	School systems with large disparities in test scores and amenities	School systems committed to improvement in resources and outcomes in all communities
	Environmental disamenities distributed by race and class	Adequate open space opportunities for all communities
	Significant gentrification and displacement due to "successful" redevelopment	New opportunities for local home ownership for long-time residents of distressed communities
	Public infrastructure with few localised benefits	Public infrastructure that includes local ties and benefits
	"Zero-sum" politics and focus on "business climate"	Business leadership for broader social good and environmental sustainability
Policies and strategies: methods to generate separation or cohesion	Fiscal segregation and reliance on local retail sales taxes	Regional tax-sharing with programs to benefit low-capacity areas
	Privatised job training programs that are only employer-based	Employer consortiums with community partners to improve workforce skills
	Lack of inner-city investment programs and no requirement on hiring or contracting	Partnerships to generate retail investment in central cities, including minority business development
	Fragmented transportation authorities and reliance on highways	Unified transportation planning across jurisdictions, and support for public transit
	Multiple school districts and uneven financing	Fewer or coordinated districts and adequate targeted funding
	Environmental planning focused on aggregate measures	Environmental targets for "hotspots" and brownfields redevelopment
	Urban renewal programs aimed mostly at attracting new middle-class residents	Equitable development strategies that promote both mixed-income and residential stability
	Subsidies for public investment with no accountability goals	Community benefits agreements between business and communities
	Specific sectoral leadership groups with limited indicators for success	"Boundary-crossing" leadership groups with broad measures to judge region

Source: Manuel Pastor, "Cohesion and Competitiveness: Business Leadership for Regional Growth and Social Equity," *OECD Territorial Reviews: Competitive Cities in the Global Economy*, OECD, 2006, p. 404.

New community-based practices, such as **community economic development** and the **social economy**, often address many of the policy areas identified in Table 1. As innovative examples of integrated, locally based approaches, they consciously integrate a range of social, economic and environmental objectives that can strengthen social cohesion, especially for marginalized and minority groups.[32]

The link between economic competitiveness, social cohesion and sustainability has been echoed domestically as well. The Conference Board of Canada's 3-year "Canada Project" concluded with 76 recommendations to improve Canadian economic performance, renew Canada's resources strategy, and strengthen the country's major cities.[33] Two recommendations address social cohesion explicitly, namely that provincial and federal governments increase their investments in **affordable housing** in Canada's major cities, and that the federal and provincial governments implement the recommendations of the Task Force to Modernize Income Security for Working-Age Adults (MISWAA)[34] to improve **incentives for working-age adults to enter the workforce**.

The MISWAA's recommendations include **improvements to child benefits**, recognizing that employment for parents requires additional support. Besides facilitating parental employment, strengthened child benefits also **reduce child poverty**. UNICEF has found that childhood poverty creates risks for social cohesion: "those who grow up in poverty are more likely to have learning difficulties, to drop out of school, to resort to drugs, to commit crimes, to be out of work, to become pregnant at too early an age, and to live lives that perpetuate poverty and disadvantage into succeeding generations."[35]

Immigrant groups recommend targeted programming to improve the **economic integration of immigrants and refugees**. Priority issues for improving labour market access include better recognition of foreign education and professional credentials,

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(32) See Chantier de l'économie sociale, Canadian Community Economic Development Network and Alliance de recherche universités-communautés en économie sociale, *Social Economy and Community Economic Development in Canada: Next Steps for Public Policy*, September 2005, http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/?q=en/node/885.

(33) Conference Board of Canada. "Mission Possible Executive Summary: Sustainable Prosperity for Canada," The Canada Project Final Report, Vol. IV, 2007, http://www.conferenceboard.ca/documents.asp?rnext=1905.

(34) The Task Force to Modernize Income Security for Working-Age Adults (MISWAA) brought together prominent members from Canadian business, academia and public life to recommend a new roadmap for reforming income security in Ontario, http://www.torontoalliance.ca/tcsa_initiatives/income_security/.

(35) Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003).

reducing discrimination in sectors such as employment, education, housing and public services, and more community-based support programs (social enterprise funds, special projects funds, community capacity building, information and training) to sustain and enhance the livelihoods of immigrants and refugees.[36]

Canada's growing urban Aboriginal population has been the target of programming to reduce marginalization. Introduced in 1998, the Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) was designed to improve policy development and program coordination at the federal level and with other levels of government in order to **address the serious socioeconomic needs of urban Aboriginal people**. While acknowledging that the UAS represented a step forward in urban Aboriginal policy and programming, Walker has criticized the program's focus on the problem of Aboriginal poverty as a barrier to social cohesion and urban competitiveness without integrating strategies that substantiate Aboriginal rights and strengthen Aboriginal self-determination in urban settings.[37]

Improving the economic prospects of all citizens is one of the key functions of a social investment state. Social cohesion depends on **addressing the economic inequality** in cities by creating access to social supports, training and jobs. But it also depends on **opening up political institutions and processes** to different cultural voices, assuring them of genuine participation in the decisions that affect their communities' futures.[38]

CONCLUSION

Rapid social, economic and technological change, driven in large part by globalization, are intensifying the challenges faced by Canadian communities. The new forms of social cleavage that are emerging require new approaches to governance, involving a more holistic approach to public policy design and coordination, the promotion of trust or "solidarity" alongside other traditional welfare and economic policies, and a recognition that the process of participation often matters as much as the outcome.

(36) Immigrant Community Action Network, "CCEDNet/ICAN Policy Initiative: A Discussion Paper on Community Economic Development," Canadian CED Network, 2007.

(37) Ryan Walker, "Social Cohesion? A Critical Review of the Urban Aboriginal Strategy and its Application to Address Homelessness in Winnipeg," *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2005.

(38) Canadian Policy Research Networks, "Social Cohesion: An Urban Perspective," 2 May 2003, http://www.cprn.com/doc.cfm?doc=256&l=en.

For Canada to sustain itself as a successful, cohesive and competitive society, policy-makers will have to overcome growing social and economic fragmentation by creating new, cross-cutting forms of social solidarity, fostering more encompassing identities, and reversing the trend of economic inequality. Despite its variable conceptualization, social cohesion offers a framework for integrating a range of policy areas in the pursuit of overarching social and economic objectives. The experience of a number of other countries as well as Canadian research and initiatives can usefully inform policy and program design to that end.