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Abstract

This article aims to clarify the concept of social cohesion by embedding it within a dynamic, multiscalar and complex understanding of socioeconomic development in the city. Section 1 gives a European perspective on the relationship between differing views of social cohesion and urban policy and how its relation to competitiveness is inherent to contemporary EU cohesion discourse. It examines the ambiguity of policy orientations that seek an answer to this failing functionalisation. Section 2 unravels the complexity and multidimensionality of social cohesion as a *problématique*. It systematises social cohesion as an 'open concept', distinguishing between its socioeconomic, cultural, ecological and political dimensions. Section 3 offers ways of accommodating the tensions and contradictions between cohesion and competitiveness inherent in capitalist market economies, and argues in favour of a progressive neo-structuralist approach, capable of laying out policies to make cities more inclusive for all inhabitants in all their uniqueness and diversity.

Social cohesion is a key European policy concern as well as an academic concept relating to diverse aspects of the dynamics of social relations, such as social exclusion, participation and belonging. For Bernard, it is a

> quasi-concept, that is, one of those hybrid mental constructions that politics proposes to us more and more often in order to simultaneously detect possible consensuses on a reading of reality, and to forge them (Bernard, 1999, p. 65).

Dictionary definitions place 'cohesion' as the action, or fact, of holding firmly together or forming a unit. It refers to a state in which components 'stick' together to form a meaningful whole (Chan *et al.*, 2006, p. 289).

Several attempts have been made to define and operationalise social cohesion, resulting

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in a multiplicity of understandings, all stressing its multidimensionality (Jenson, 1998; Berger-Schmitt, 2000; Fainstein, 2001; Kearns and Forrest, 2000; Maloutas and Malouta, 2004; Woolley, 1998; O'Connor, 1998). In general, scholars consider a cohesive society as a goal or at least a general direction towards which society should evolve, and often as the means by which it may be achieved (Berger-Schmitt, 2000, p. 4).

In this article, we will present neither an alternative nor a final definition, but direct the reader through the collective learning process undertaken within "Social Polis: Social Platform on Cities and Social Cohesion" which has led to an understanding of social cohesion as a *problématique* (see section 2). To use a generic but helpful approximation, fostering social cohesion in cities means creating neighbourhoods and agglomerations where people "live together differently" (Patsy Healey) or—more precisely—"have the opportunity to be different and yet be able to live together" (Mikael Stigendal).[1] This perspective refers to an apparently unsolvable paradox, an inherent contradiction between human ability to live together in general and in modern capitalist societies in particular. To be at the same time both entitled to be different and to receive equal treatment poses pressing challenges: how can we tackle unity and diversity, difference and equality, autonomy and inclusion? How much social mix and homogeneity are required for a neighbourhood to be cohesive (Murie and Musterd, 2004)? How can we deal with diversity in daily experience, ageing and lifestyles within neighbourhoods (Guentner, 2009; Hillmann, 2009)?

There is an apparently unsolvable tension for inhabitants of the city to be free to enjoy a broad plurality of lifestyles on the one hand, and to recognise and claim equal rights, dignity and access to urban infrastructure together with equal opportunities of social and spatial mobility on the other. This tension can only be addressed dialectically through the lens of the dynamic and complex relationships between people, and between people and nature within cities. The discussion about the paradoxical relationships between a 'just urban society for all' on the one hand and the right to individual and community-based freedom on the other has a long history (Arendt, 1958; Sennett, 1977; Moulaert *et al.*, 2010). It is strongly related to issues of human dignity, recognition and rights, as discussed in the context of global human rights (Seoane, 2004).

What is new now is that the tension between aspirations for individual freedom and general social justice has become part of a dominant discourse which subjugates the search for social cohesion to an almost unchallenged competitiveness rhetoric that has proclaimed the pursuit of individual interest as the privileged driver of human progress. To deconstruct this dominant discourse, social cohesion must be reproblematised by considering a wide spectrum of processes and outcomes, modes of human behaviour (competition, co-operation, association …), causes and effects relating to urban inhabitants' lives. Yet since concepts and reality are related, defining a social object never lies 'outside' the object itself (Bhaskar, 1998), but is part of social practice in socio-political struggles (Vranken, 2008, p. 22).

This article begins by giving an overview of social cohesion policies with a focus on Europe together with the way the urban question is tackled. It addresses social cohesion as a specific concern and a specific perspective for examining social issues in the city. Section 2 conceptualises social cohesion as a *problématique*, considering simultaneously a variety of problems associated with 'living together differently' without becoming homogenised or excluded. This section

outlines four dimensions of urban life covering the diversity of the *problématique* of social cohesion in the city as a whole. Section 3 then explores the political implications of a reconceptualisation of social cohesion in the light of its problematisation and volunteers an alternative transdisciplinary approach to cover both diversity and freedom.

1. From Modernisation to Social Cohesion in Urban Policy

In European policy discussions, social cohesion forms a nodal point in the discursive field, dwelling on the contradictions of equality and diversity, unity and autonomy, as well as on the concern of repairing social damage caused by capitalist modernisation (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). From this perspective, problematising social cohesion draws attention to the danger of urban disorder in 'modern' capitalist societies stemming from their inherent economic transformation and class divisions.

More than a century ago, Emile Durkheim popularised the term social cohesion in his reflection on the social implications of modernisation (Jenson, 1998). "The division of labour in society" (1893) was written in the context of rapid social change associated with industrialisation and urbanisation. For Durkheim, social cohesion can be achieved by two routes; first, via 'mechanical solidarity', characteristic of traditional societies where likeness and similarities among individuals are the basis of cohesion; and secondly, via 'organic solidarity'. For Durkheim, complex societies are characterised by cooperation and by division of labour which arise automatically through each individual's pursuit of his/her own interests. The sheer force of events gives everyone solidarity with others (Durkheim, 1893/1933, p. 200). From this perspective, the city as a whole is the place where weak ties of organic solidarity build bridges between social groups and territories.

Without using the term social cohesion, Marx and Engels metaphorically expressed the disruptive modernising forces as "all that is solid melts in the air" (Marx and Engels, 1848/1986), an idea taken up and elaborated further by Schumpeter as 'creative destruction' (Schumpeter, 1947, ch. 7). It was this dark side of progress, the "terrible and tragic convergence, sealed with victims' blood" (Berman, 1988, p. 75), from poverty to unemployment and social disintegration, that gave rise to the idea of shaping development as conscious human intervention in order to correct these disruptions (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). The visible hand of human actors, collective civic agency, social movements and the state, shapes modernisation and urbanisation with profound effects on the life of city inhabitants. Criticism of decay, exploitation and disorder (Engels, 1999) resulted in a long history of urban reform to heal the city from the perils of capitalist progress, marrying nature with the city, restoring harmony and achieving 'wholesome' living (see Cook and Swyngedouw, this issue).

Historically, social and political struggles intended to repair the damage caused by capitalist modernisation abound. Measures as outcomes of struggles range from wage subsidies in Speenhamland in the 1790s (Polanyi, 1978) through Bismarck's corporatist welfare state to the more universal nation-based welfare states within western and northern Europe in the golden age of capitalism (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 2007). The welfare state institutionalised class conflict (Bowles and Gintis, 1986) and took the form of a coherent estate-like, but stratified and hierarchically diversified, society. From the 1970s onwards, although with uneven

effects across the Western world, the welfare state began to regress, affecting social cohesion by causing structural unemployment and precarious employment as well as new forms of authoritarian state (Jessop, 2002; Swyngedouw, 2000; Aglietta, 2000).

In Europe, social cohesion gained momentum as a key concept in policy and research exactly at the moment when those features of social cohesion connected to the welfare state started to erode. In this specific conjuncture, social cohesion became a political issue not only because of the ineffectiveness of existing social policies, but also by the refusal to apply alternative, more redistributive, policies. In the official discourse at least, social cohesion became a key concern of European integration (Faludi, 2007; Servillo, 2010). Wealthier member-states must show solidarity towards the less well-off in order to achieve the more homogeneous material basis required for building cohesion. This was the idea put forward by Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, when the term 'economic and social cohesion' first entered European regional policy (Single European Act 1986).

At that time, the concern about cohesion reflected the

> fear that in the absence of appropriate accompanying policies, market forces would not of themselves be sufficient to eliminate regional divergences, but rather the reverse (Armstrong, 2001, p. 23).

This fear became explicit when causes and symptoms of 'new poverty'—partly due to the transition to the post-Fordist economy—were conceptualised and discussed at policy level under the label of social exclusion (Moulaert, 1996; Moulaert *et al.*, 2007; Armstrong, 2001). Combating social exclusion within cities and their neighbourhoods became the main inspiration of the European Urban programmes (1990–2006) and also of other EU-supported programmes like Neighbourhoods in Crisis. With the subsequent establishment of cohesion policy, the concept as a correction for market failure was clearly defended in the European Union's *First cohesion report*

> The promotion of social cohesion requires the reduction of the disparities which arise from unequal access to employment opportunities and the rewards in the form of income (CEC, 1996, p. 14).

The social objectives became part of the Lisbon Agenda, which proposed competitiveness and social cohesion as its key objectives in 2000. Yet the focus on the knowledge-based economy has limited social cohesion to a functional role in achieving and maintaining competitiveness (Apeldoorn *et al.*, 2009) in the European socioeconomy as a whole

> [a] guiding principle of the new Social Policy Agenda will be to strengthen the role of social policy as a productive factor (CEC, 2000, p. 5; original emphasis).

This message was reaffirmed in the 2005 paper on *Cohesion policy and cities: the urban contribution to growth and jobs in the regions* (CEC, 2005) and again confirmed in the documents of *The urban dimension in European Union policies for the period 2007–2013*, in which cities and metropolitan areas, "the engines of economic development", must tackle "obstacles to growth and employment, such as social exclusion and environmental degradation" (CEC, 2010, p. 3). This embodies a new compromise between competitiveness and social cohesion (Boddy and Parkinson, 2005; Apeldoorn *et al.*, 2009), creating a "de-socialised" and a "de-policised binary" which leaves no room for manoeuvre

outside its own rationale (Maloutas *et al.*, 2008, p. 260) and moves policy attention away from cities and neighbourhoods exposed to severe exclusion dynamics (Moulaert *et al.*, 2007).

However, other policy conceptualisations in line with the European heritage of social welfare defend a more open perspective on future development as collectively and democratically constructed. In … *towards an active, fair and socially cohesive Europe*, the Council of Europe sees advantages in the concept of social cohesion over others as a

> guiding motto for social policy … drawing upon a set of aspirations and visions that have evolved over time and were considered quintessential (CoE, 2007, §6, p. 3).

Such an approach is generally in tune with academic discussion about social cohesion in the city within Social Polis, which not only stresses its multidimensionality, but also its ethical, cultural and societal roots.

Summing up, the term social cohesion emerged in the policy discourse only when social cohesion became a pressing issue. It is, however, embedded in the hegemonic policy discourse. Non-economic aspects are of interest primarily because of their economic functionality and subordinated to the competitiveness discourse. The power of this discourse derives from its capacity to frame conversations, set goals and make sense of complex relationships of policy issues in socioeconomic development (Beauvais and Jenson, 2002, pp. 20, 31).

2. Social Cohesion as a *Problématique*

As we observed in the previous section, cohesion policy in Europe in general, and territorial-cum-urban cohesion policy in particular, utilised—mainly implicitly—several meanings and nuances of social cohesion. These meanings developed in close correspondence with the debates and discourses on social cohesion in European policy circles. In scientific literature, a comparable proliferation of meanings can be found. In a literature overview on social cohesion in urban spaces, Kearns and Forest define social cohesion as

> the harmonious development of society and its constituent groups towards common economic, social and environmental standards (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, pp. 998–999).

They identify five constituent elements: social networks and social capital; common values and a civic culture; place attachment and an intertwining of place and group identity; social order and control; and, social solidarity and a reduction in wealth disparities (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, p. 999). This definition suggests that social cohesion is not about a single issue, addressing a clearly specified problem, but a set of issues, embracing a variety of dimensions of human living-together; it deals with the resulting challenges involved in respecting citizen and community diversity as well as the urban inhabitant's desire to belong and to identify with a group and a place.

Social cohesion approached as a *problemátique* recognises that defining what is to be considered as the problem of social cohesion in the city is no simple, value-free decision. It implies asking the right questions and obtaining deep insights into the experience of urban inhabitants as well as structural knowledge of causalities, contexts and time–space regularities. Cities are privileged places of multiple dynamics, which become even more complex when their drive towards competitiveness within the urban hierarchy fosters both greater internal socio-cultural cohesion and growing antagonism between diverse social groups at one and the same time.

As will be shown in this section, the choice of a concept influences both the way problems are identified and the solutions proposed. This section is divided into four parts, in accordance with the four perspectives of the urban social cohesion *problématique*.

2.1 Socioeconomy: Solidarity and Social Exclusion

A socioeconomic perspective on social cohesion stresses the disintegrative effects of social inequality and exclusionary dynamics on access to resources and markets. It is of crucial importance if the wealthy and powerful actively exclude themselves from broader society (Byrne, 2005). Solidarity and reduction in wealth and income disparities are required to create equal opportunities and a sense of fairness. Solidarity is linked to forms of redistribution (Kearns and Forrest, 2000) and to social contracts concerning the financial foundation of the welfare state (de Swaan, 1988). Dahrendorf describes a socially cohesive society as inclusive and caring

> Social cohesion comes in to describe a society which offers opportunities to all its members within a framework of accepted values and institutions. Such a society is therefore one of inclusion. People belong; they are not allowed to be excluded (Dahrendorf, 1995, p. viii).

Social cohesion offers a broader approach than social inclusion, as it permits a

> stronger set of references to the functioning of democracy and the healthiness of society. Moreover, social inclusion focuses on 'specialised' policies and actions whereas the concept of social cohesion seeks a broader, more civic and societal responsibility (CoE, 2007, §6, p. 3).

This is in tune with the French republican tradition, which focuses on *le tout social*, society as a whole (Xiberras, 1998), stressing issues such as the disruption of social ties between the individual and society. This socioeconomic perspective and the policy efforts intended to encourage all to become part of the social whole, put conflict and exclusionary structures at centre stage. Social exclusion and inclusion depend crucially on the current functioning of the labour market with its inherent tendency towards increased unemployment, precarious work expectations, an increase in the working poor and discrimination against migrants (Castel, 1998; Barlösius, 2004; Littig and Grießler, 2005). Remedies have been directed towards inclusion training programmes and precarious work contracts, most emblematically achieved in Hartz IV, Germany's broad workfare reform (Brütt, 2009).

A German-speaking strand of discussion dwells on the concept of *Teilhabe* (partaking) (Kronauer, 2002, 2007; Novy, 2007), which links the socioeconomic and political dimensions of cohesion. It stresses the importance of equal access to the services and infrastructure of the city, from public transport and public spaces to housing, health and education (Novy *et al.*, 2009), an issue taken up by the current Viennese government. While taking progressive elements of local welfare systems into account, (Andreotti *et al.*, this issue) consider universal welfare rights beyond the urban domain as prerequisites for social cohesion, in line with the broad conception of citizenship as introduced by Marshall (1950). Socioeconomic polarisation tends to increase the spatial concentration of excluded or deprived groups in certain neighbourhoods with contradictory dynamics of gentrification and social mixing. Although the impact on local cohesion might be positive *within* a gated

community, social exclusion in the sense of segregation between rich gated communities and poor neighbourhoods might be increasing, thereby threatening cohesion in the city as whole—resulting in turmoil as in the case of protesting youth in European cities in 2011.

2.2 Culture: Common Values and Identity

The second perspective on problematising social cohesion is cultural and focuses on identity and common culture as key dimensions of belonging to a social whole: cities are places of encounter, formed by networks of interaction bringing together people from different backgrounds, ages and lifestyles through migration, commuting and co-operation. This creates hybrid cultures and cultural heterogeneity in multiple time–space frameworks, but this is often territorially expressed (Dukes and Musterd, this issue). A strong attachment to place and the intertwining of people's identities with places are important elements for social cohesion (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, p. 1001). They refer to a civic culture of shared values and "a common set of moral principles and codes of behaviour through which to conduct their relations with one another" (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, p. 997).

In Europe, the debate about the 'moral principles and codes of behaviour' emerging from (national or religious) tradition and how to distinguish between good and bad behaviour and persons has gained in prominence. These principles are justified either by an essentialist understanding of identity, as demonstrated mainly on the political right, and a trend towards agonistic politics on the left, although both sides of the political spectrum expel enemies from the democratic domain (Mouffe, 2006). This similar positioning at both ends of the political spectrum reflects Max Weber's concept of social closure (Elias and Scotson, 1993), in which a dominant group safeguards its position and privileges by monopolising resources and opportunities while denying access to outsiders (Weber, 1978). Closure is a process through which social groups maximise advantages by limiting access to 'rights' to a circle of selected persons, without necessarily basing the distinction of insiders and outsiders on ethnic categories (Elias and Scotson, 1993).

"Imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991) based on invented histories, acquired rights, language, religion or ethnicity are the essentialist and culturalist foundations of a highly problematic distinction between insiders and outsiders, 'we' and 'them' (Hobsbawm, 1990; Lacan, 2000; Žižek, 2002). Strong ties within a community can be accompanied by discrimination and exclusion of those who do not naturally belong to that community (see Narayan, 1999, p. 8), a phenomenon typical in certain types of nationalism. This is increasingly the case in host–stranger relationships in segregating neighbourhoods but is also evident in originally inclusive corporatist organisations (such as housing associations, trade unions). Often, multi-ethnic tensions in general are not produced but become noticeable in concrete places. Inhabitants with different habits co-exist and people in their everyday lives are confronted with their differences according to class, gender and ethnicity (Lykogianni, 2008). Territorial traditions have always been hybrid, "since they can be understood properly only as the historically negotiated creation of more of less coherent symbolic and social worlds" (Simonsen, 2008, p. 100).

Further socio-cultural aspects are social networks and social capital meaning "a high degree of social interaction within communities and families" (Kearns and Forrest, 2000, p. 999). Social capital, as used by Bourdieu, links different

dimensions of 'capital'. He defines social capital as

> the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership of a group—which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital. … The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network … of those to whom he is connected (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249).

Bourdieu connects symbolic and social capital to economic capital and explains how individuals access social capital unequally (Bourdieu, 1980, 1986). More than Coleman and Putnam, the other two 'founding fathers' of contemporary social capital theory, Bourdieu underscores the discriminating role of social class and other social 'distinction' factors. For Siisiäinen (2000, p. 2), the crucial advantage of the Bourdieuan perspective is that it emphasises conflict and the power function of social capital which becomes a resource in the social struggles that are carried out in different social arenas or fields.

2.3 Ecology: Sustainability and Ecological Justice

While there is a long tradition of holistic approaches towards nature-society relations, these only re-entered urban development analysis and discourse in recent decades. As environmental 'goods and bads' are unevenly distributed between and within the city, processes of social exclusion in the city have to be linked with issues of ecological justice. The key message of mainstream sustainable development approaches is that ecological, social and economic concerns have to be understood and tackled simultaneously (WCED, 1987). Although it was criticised by political economists as a "fantasy of socio-ecological cohesion" (see Cook and Swyngedouw, this issue, p. 1962), the sustainability discourse has increased the awareness of a broader and more systemic approach towards urban development. Political ecology in turn managed to link the political economy of capitalism to issues of nature and to territorialise ensuing conflicts. Overcoming the "artificial ontological divide between nature and society" (Cook and Swyngedouw, this issue, p. 1965) results in a renewed focus on the city (Heynen *et al.*, 2006; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003). As the city as a territory is a constantly re-emerging contradictory whole, to create cohesive cities requires not only social but socio-ecological cohesion and justice as well. This has implications for urban collective action and policy fields like housing and transport where exclusion and access are part of everyday life.

2.4 Politics: Citizenship and Participation

The final perspective on social cohesion we adopt here is political and synthesises the three aforementioned dimensions by stressing political action as participating in public affairs, essential for being a full member of the local community. Public life has eroded in what is often called 'the second modernity', because of the growing dominance of the 'labour society' (Arendt, 1958), as well as the fragmentation and individualisation of the public sphere (Sennett, 1977), with disastrous consequences for the excluded. Over recent years, a broad literature has made connections between human rights and dignity, stressing recognition, dignity and empowerment as crucial for socially inclusive cities (Perrons and Skyers, 2003; Seoane, 2004).

Citizenship is an historically constructed set of rights and duties that organise the type of belonging to a society (see Eizaguirre *et al.*, this issue). As belonging is related to political equality, 'full' citizens enjoy equality of rights and opportunities. This is in line with welfare theories conceptualising citizenship as encompassing civic, political and social rights (Marshall, 1950) as well as theories of democracy which stress the mix of direct, representative and participatory democracy as crucial for democratic governance (Leubolt *et al.*, 2009).

While forms of cosmopolitanism adhering to a 'global citizenship' remain highly idealistic because there is no political movement or bodies which enforce global citizenship rights, new types of multilevel governance, democracy and participation emerge to challenge a conception of full citizenship based solely on nationality. The latter entitling criterion is increasingly problematic because of the internationalisation of the labour market, the hollowing-out of national social protection systems (welfare states) and the increasing mobility of people. These three developments combined require more flexible forms of political rights and participation as well as a Europe-wide system of universal social rights (Novy, 2011). It is the lack of common norms and institutions providing for labour, social and political rights which is increasingly undermining social and territorial cohesion.

Therefore, a key focus of innovative citizenship approaches is linking rights to residence instead of an imagined 'natural' national identity. This may rehabilitate the city as a political territory, a *polis*, where citizenship is linked to everyday life (García and Claver, 2003; Bauböck, 2003). Yet it also calls for planetary democracy based on universally valid human rights (Dukes and Musterd, this issue). In European cities, new residents from non-European countries have joined and transformed the urban fabric. This transformation also includes the emergence of a new middle class (Hamnett, 2003; Sassen, 1991; Burgers and Musterd, 2002).

Accelerated by the recent international financial crisis and its consequences for public spending, the foundations of social cohesion in Europe as a whole, and in European cities in particular, have been shaken. Further curtailment of national welfare as well as urban social services provision will be a probable outcome of the growing public debt due to the bank crash and recession that started in 2008 and is still not under control. It is within this unstable socioeconomic setting that citizenship is to be renegotiated. Struggles about citizenship overlap those about social exclusion (Berghman, 1998, pp. 258–259), again showing the growing complexity of the social cohesion *problématique* and the need to tackle it in a politically comprehensive way.

3. Shaping Socially Cohesive Cities

This final section discusses ways to come to terms with the multidimensional tensions inherent in social cohesion as a complex *problématique*. It makes a start in unravelling political and normative consequences of the decision to take urban social cohesion as a *problématique*. Efforts to foster urban social cohesion include new ways of politicising the *problématique* by reorienting the relationship between science and society. This requires not only new policies, but also a new culture of mutual learning and democratic forms of conflict resolution. Transdisciplinary forms of knowledge production contribute to this undertaking, as it can foster social cohesion as active empowerment of citizens based on a republican understanding of knowledge production. Academic research should be organically related to the socialisation and

democratisation of the access to and use of knowledge (Thompson Klein, 2001); it should be publicly accessible to 'user groups' via open-source technologies, having the potential to facilitate "powerful interventions into local systems" by the "taking of ownership" of the results from transdisciplinary processes by groups that are involved (Häberli *et al*., 2001, p. 21). Public platforms of knowledge exchange are essential to mobilise experience and know-how to combat exclusion, foster cohesion and facilitate participation, achieving 'socially robust knowledge' (Nowotny, 2003). Encouraging examples are CityMine(d) which mobilises academic knowledge for grassroots activism and gives it a place in urban interventions, debates and appropriation of public spaces (Healey, 2004; Stigendal, 2010). At the other end of the governance scale are the EU co-sponsored UrbAct initiatives which engender important insights for inclusive cities—see, for example, the outstanding experiences with youth empowerment in Malmö (Stigendal, 2006).

Let us now examine what a politicised problematisation means for the tension between competitiveness and cohesion in urban policy, especially by referring to the diversity of meanings of the urban socioeconomy among stakeholders and actors. As said, we will adhere to a neighbourhood-linked perspective in developing our argument and explain how the involvement of a wider diversity of actors and their priorities leads to an alternative political (and policy) agenda.

3.1 Cohesion versus Competitiveness in the Urban Socioeconomy

Mainstream urban economic policies to foster economic growth are based on promoting competitiveness. They are supported by an 'entrepreneurial' alliance of big business and the state (Peck and Tickell, 2002; Peck, 2008; Harvey, 2005) and have strengthened the tendency to individualise, privatise and fragment urban life (Harvey, 2000, p. 236). The policies supported by this élite alliance have intensified social inequality and economic instability. As a response, from the 1990s onwards, several political coalitions at a diversity of spatial scales have made an effort to tackle the problems of growing disparity by seeking to conciliate competitiveness and social cohesion (Ache and Andersen, 2008; Boddy and Parkinson, 2005; Fainstein, 2001; Turok, 2006). Yet in many of these policy efforts—if they ever go beyond the discursive stage—it has not been clear whether social cohesion is seen as an objective by itself or as merely functional for competitiveness (Reeskens, 2007, p. 35). The record of competitiveness-based policies still remains highly ambiguous. On the European periphery, policies apparently aimed at increasing competitiveness have substantially undermined the economic position of southern Europe, the Baltic countries and Ireland, with more mixed records in eastern Europe (Becker, 2010). And, within the 'European core's' regions, growing income and wealth inequality has accelerated (Cassiers and Kesteloot, this issue). In sum, throughout urban Europe, over recent decades, the subordination of social cohesion objectives has undermined economic stability.

3.2 Constructing Socially Cohesive Cities

Clearly, over recent decades, neo-liberal politicisation of social cohesion has hollowed out collectivist traditions and a general amnesia prevails about the viability of collective action in creating cohesion (Judt, 2010); records on successful application of negotiated post-WW-II social cohesion arrangements seem to have been removed from the collective memory (Martinelli, 2010). Collective action withdrew from a

universal struggle for an emancipatory welfare society in favour of a post-political approach of targeted expert-co-ordinated initiatives and movements (Crouch, 2004). In the field of urban policy, a specific and often contested type of public action has been community-centred localism (see Moulaert *et al.*, 2010, for a synthesis). Such policy can focus on specific targeted interventions delineating communities of self-interest within the urban space and foregrounding identity-building as a resource for local competitiveness. Yet social cohesion within a community may disclose the exclusive features differentiating it from other communities or spheres of society; and this could result in situations where social cohesion in some place or in some respect becomes a threat to social cohesion in other places or contexts (Jenson, 1998, p. 4). In contrast, such policy can also be a reformist first step towards rebuilding a new type of multilevel and universal welfare state based on equal rights of all inhabitants. To evaluate these complex dynamics, a multiscalar analysis is required (Brenner, 2004; Köhler and Wissen, 2003; Paul, 2002; Swyngedouw, 1992, 2004) and should involve the participation of a diversity of stakeholders (Novy and Habersack, 2010; CEC, 2009).

Urban communities can be enablers of citizenship rights by valorising their multidimensional diversity (see section 2) to generate socially innovative and politically progressive initiatives working through different but interconnected spatial scales. 'Bottom-linked' local initiatives (Eizaguirre *et al.*, this issue) have shown their capacity to avoid the localist trap in trying to solve problems at the local level (Moulaert *et al.*, 2010, p. 6). In this articulated spatiality, the neighbourhood is not only the site of existence of a proactive community to accommodate diversity and equal rights, but is also the appropriate scale from which to mobilise in favour of the integration of citizenship rights into effective social cohesion policy.

Thus, in conclusion, cities that had become 'institutional laboratories' for neo-liberalising urban life (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) might now accommodate diversity and pursue equality by means of political mobilisation and awareness-raising about the limits of current neo-liberal urban development and how it can be turned around (Rodriguez and Rodriguez, 2009; Arantes *et al.*, 2000; Moulaert *et al.*, 2003). Diverse experiments based on social innovation have been successfully tried out over recent decades (MacCallum *et al.*, 2009; Moulaert, 2002). Connected to this is the "Social Polis: Social Platform on Cities and Social Cohesion" project launched in 2007, which considers the separation of critical urban research from political mobilisation and policy-making as a hindrance to build an agenda for social cohesion in the city, and argues that a process of social learning involving all relevant actors is the only way to overcome this separation. Social learning is very much a matter of relational understanding and activism, built on a jointly developed ethics of collective action. It is very strongly embedded in pragmatism and holism.

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

to collective (re)shaping through conscious and ethical agency.

In a city that offers a good life for all its inhabitants, they are allowed to be different and yet able to live together. Yet this city should politicise the problem of social disintegration. A concrete utopia of socially cohesive cities within territorially cohesive macro regions should include a regulatory setting which accommodates freedom, equality and solidarity (Balibar, 1993). The challenge of social cohesion implies cultural change capable of overcoming adherence to a single-language, mono-ethnic norm and facilitating diversity, equality as well as multi-identity exchange. Within this context, cities can become places of belonging and territories which accommodate place-based specificities with equal opportunities for quality of life. Socioeconomically, social cohesion would be fostered if the European economic treaties abandon inherent market fundamentalism and return to a mixed economic order which experiments with a constructive synergising between markets, regulation and planning as well as with private, communal and public ownership (Moulaert and Nussbaumer, 2005). This would enable cities to consolidate a plural economy based on a mix of paid and voluntary work, an export as well as caring economy (Gibson-Graham, 2007). Politically, the challenge consists in advancing from an essentialist and exclusionary concept of national citizenship which continuously produces 'outsiders' towards a scale-sensitive and inhabitant-centred conception of citizenship (see Eizaguirre *et al.* this issue). This would allow establishing a societal citizenship guaranteeing rights for everybody (Beauregard and Bounds, 2000)

Note

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

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