

Introduction

Communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed. . . . Communication is . . . the basis of human friendship; it produces the social bonds . . . that tie men together and make associated life possible. Society is possible because of the binding forces of shared information circulating in an organic system.

— James Carey (1992, pp. 22-23)

Cultural activities are the creative elements of our existence—expressions of who we are, where we come from, and where we wish to go.

— *The Ties that Bind* (Standing Committee on Communications and Culture of the Canadian Parliament, 1992, p. 2)

In *Culture as Communication*, James Carey (1992) contrasts the ritual and transmission views of communication. A transmission view of communication, he writes, centres on the extension of messages across geography for purposes of control. A ritual view, in contrast, conceives of communication as “a process through which a shared culture is created, modified, and transformed,” and centres on “the sacred ceremony that draws persons together in fellowship and commonality” (p. 43). This ritual view links *communication* to terms such as *sharing*, *participation*, *association*, and *fellowship*.

As Carey notes,

the projection of community ideals and their embodiment in material form—dance, plays, architecture, news stories, strings of speech—creates an artificial though nonetheless real symbolic order that operates to provide . . . confirmation, . . . to represent an underlying order of things, . . . to manifest an ongoing and fragile social process. (pp. 18-19)

In contemporary societies characterized by rapid, multidimensional, and often unpredictable change, these dimensions of communication and cultural expression play particularly important functions, enabling us to articulate and represent our multiple understandings of the (shifting) underlying order of things, and to help us work through our social processes and make necessary changes.

The stream of cultural research that explores the linkages between culture and social cohesion in societies provides an emergent avenue to further our understanding of the roles of communication and cultural expression in society. From a variety of perspectives, the papers in this special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Communication* explore the various dimensions, functions, and contributions of culture in building social connections within increasingly diverse societies and communities. These papers originated as presentations at a research round table

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entitled “Making Connections: Culture and Social Cohesion in the New Millennium,” which took place in Edmonton on May 26 and 27, 2000. The event was co-organized by the Canadian Cultural Research Network (CCRN) and the Cultural Information and Research Centres Liaison in Europe (CIRCLE) and sponsored by the Department of Canadian Heritage. The papers have been revised and updated for this publication.

The overall theme for the round table was “culture, connectedness, and social cohesion.” As a common basis to begin the discussions, the following definitions were presented:

Connectedness: Ways that citizens connect to each other and to the rest of the world through intricate networks of social, economic, political and cultural ties (Government of Canada definition).

Culture: Ways of living together (UNESCO definition).

Social cohesion: The capacity to live together in harmony with a sense of mutual commitment among citizens of different social or economic circumstances (Senate of Canada definition, based on a review of common elements in various national definitions). (CIRCLE/CCRN, 2000, p. 3)

The common thread running through the definitions is that they are fundamentally about relationships among people. The fabric of societies is built through social networks and symbolic patterns, and culture is seen to play an important role in maintaining a sound social fabric of communities, societies, and nations.

The round table was conceived as an opportunity to explore these concepts and their connections at an early stage in this area of research, and as a learning opportunity. While the initial set of definitions were provided, researchers brought to the table a breadth of interpretations and perspectives. Each researcher grappled with the concepts and their applicability in her/his unique intellectual and geographical context. Thus, the authors used a variety of definitions within their arguments and insights, and this diversity has been retained in the papers in this collection.

Most enlightening were the wide array of insights on the ways social cohesion concerns have been articulated in different societies, how the linkages between cultural and “social cohesion-related” policies have been developed in Canada and Europe, and the ways in which culture and social cohesion have played out on political agendas (on these issues, see especially the papers by Sharon Jeannotte & Dick Stanley, Canada; Lidia Varbanova & Anelia Dimitrova, Bulgaria; Rod Fisher, United Kingdom; and Jordi Pascual i Ruiz, Spain).

So, what is social cohesion?

Social cohesion is a relatively new term and while widely used to discuss current economic, social, and political situations, its conceptualization is only now developing some clarity and continues to evolve. (This is not to say it has no historical antecedents. In her article, Jane Jenson grounds the concept historically in sociological debates on social order involving, for example, Thomas Hobbes and Émile Durkheim.)

Social cohesion is often viewed as a “negative concept” in that it is only “seen” when absent, and is frequently discussed in terms of threats (Jenson). The concept is implicated (if not always explicitly used) in writings on the growing strains on the fabric of society and in discussions of social exclusion and social connectedness. The need to address the issue of social cohesion is rooted in society’s perceived fragmentation and the reluctance of individuals to participate in civil society: “What is at stake in social cohesion is the need to preserve democratic society, while simultaneously establishing new forms of social relationships in response to ongoing and deep-seated change” (Social Cohesion Nexus, 2001, n.p.). It is a concept that can be used “to imagine a more positive future, one which seeks new patterns and innovation” (Jenson, p. 142).

In recent years, the issue of *social cohesion* has ascended political agendas as a multifaceted horizontal policy issue, incorporating a cluster of public policy interests often subsumed within the term. Jane Jenson’s article in this collection summarizes an extensive review of discussions and literature on social cohesion in Canada and abroad which the Canadian Policy Research Network has conducted over the last few years. In the article, she outlines common elements of the contemporary conceptualization and use of the term, and identifies five dimensions to the concept: belonging/isolation; inclusion/exclusion; participation/non-involvement; recognition/rejection; and legitimacy/illegitimacy.

Jenson points out that while rarely defined explicitly, there have been some efforts to develop a working definition. In Canada, the federal government’s Social Cohesion Network¹ defines social cohesion as “the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunity within Canada, based on a sense of trust, hope and reciprocity among all Canadians” (in Jeannotte, 1999, p. 5). The focus is on the non-coercive relationships that hold us together (Stanley, 1997). The process is as important as the outcome. In conceptualizing social cohesion within a policy context, social cohesion can be seen as an *outcome* of investments in social and cultural programs and in social capital (Jeannotte, 1999). This view allocates central roles to social and cultural programs and policies in the process of maintaining the fabric of our society.

Cultural researchers are cautious and critical in their approach to these discussions. A repeating theme throughout the round table was that social cohesion can bridge or exclude, that the notion should not be “oversold,” and that it needs evidence and research. Numerous authors in this issue feel that it is important to critically examine the “policy use context” of the concept in particular. As Ron Fisher notes, in policy practice, social cohesion has a variety of meanings, and is gaining ground as a “fashionable concept” while remaining vague and generally ill-defined. According to Jane Jenson, the term is a critical concept but not necessarily a forward-looking one, and can be used to attempt to establish a link to a “lost moment of social harmony” which may have never existed. Thus care must be taken not to fall into the trap of nostalgia. On the other hand, Andreas Wiesand tells us that while some people regard the concept as “culturally progressive,” we

must remember that it can have different connotations and may even be used by politicians in a very conservative, even repressive manner.

(Re)conceptualizing the terrain of culture

In contrast with *social cohesion*, *culture* is a term with a long and varied history of use with a constellation of meanings. From this collection of papers, a general consensus evolves that we must move beyond traditional paradigms, beyond divisive categorizations and definitions of the past, in order to further our thinking about culture in productive manners.

In their opening paper, Sharon Jeannotte & Dick Stanley suggest a process-oriented approach, defining culture as “a set of tools to help us make sense of the world and relate to each other, and to define us to each other” (p. 134). *Culture* and *the arts* are seen as elements of a continuum. Thus, talking about culture as ways of living together refers to “the tools of culture as we use them day to day”; talking about the arts refers to the same tools “but this time as we try to adapt them for new uses or for changed contexts All ‘ways of living together’ require and involve a degree of creativity and artistic expression (‘high’ and otherwise) and all our appreciations of ‘the arts’ inform us of what our ways of living together are” (p. 134). This moves the discussion beyond the generally held view that there is an inherent contradiction between these concepts, yet allows for the examination of historically grounded problematics which have developed as certain definitions and perspectives have become embedded in oppositional categories and operationalized in policies, programs, institutions, and hierarchies (Baeker).

Towards this end, some authors offer intriguing conceptual tools and platforms to assist in this process of “moving beyond” and reformulating our thinking about culture to reflect more clearly the cultural realities in the world in which we live. Greg Baeker proposes that a reorientation of the policy focus from *culture* to *cultural resources*—defined as “those symbols and symbolic processes through which we communicate and reproduce larger social realities” (p. 184)—may be useful. John Hannigan adapts British sociologist John Urry’s three “social topographies” or metaphors of space—regions, networks, and fluids—to illuminate some of the essential features and characteristics of our global cultural environment. He argues for according greater attention and legitimacy to the de-territorialized, non-linear, unpredictable, and sometimes chaotic movement of global fluids, and points to cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s typography of five dimensions of global cultural flows that together constitute the building blocks of the “imagined worlds” of persons and groups across the globe: ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes.

Kazimierz Krzysztofek proposes reframing the debates around “global culture,” local cultures, and multiculturalism to acknowledge the new *differentiated* global culture market that is emerging, and to direct attention to the varied dynamics at play when global and local cultural elements interact and this mixed reality is addressed by individuals and collectivities. Krzysztofek sets out five possible scenarios to ponder: complete acceptance of global culture; total rejec-

tion of global culture; selective adaptation; hybridization; and cultural dualism and pluralism. Amidst a range of other intriguing ideas presented in the paper, Krzysztofek argues that cultures resist globalization by confirming their reference points, and generating differences in order to differentiate themselves from global culture:

When some of the elements of specificity undergo destruction, the result is the unraveling of the social tissue, degradation of cultural systems, and detachment of industry from its own moorings and from the network of socio-cultural linkages. When national sovereignty declines and frontiers become symbolic lines on the map, culture signs and symbols come to the fore acting like fingerprints, something that people can call their own and which does not melt into a single global culture. (p. 301)

Selecting such fingerprints, however, is not a straight-forward matter. The full complexity of the selection and creation of such symbols and symbolic identities is illustrated by Sanjin Dragojevic in his explanation of the complicated and multilayered considerations involved in the case of the countries of Southeast Europe. On a smaller scale, Lidia Varbanova & Anelia Dimitrova's recounting of the debate regarding the effects of the unique Cyrillic alphabet on the economic development of Bulgaria is also instructive.

Culture and social cohesion: Identifying the links and pathways

From a culture perspective, the starting ground for articulating and sketching out possible linkages rests in a remarkably wide variety of social functions and benefits that have been allocated to arts and culture, pronounced at one time or another, in various settings and situations. These are extensively documented in the article by Terry Cheney. As most authors remarked, including Cheney, these various ideas require additional conceptual analysis and empirical evidence in order to evolve from loose claims to well-grounded foundations. Nonetheless, planting a few flags in the terrain to mark off a few of the more promising pathways to explore may be useful.

Culture builds social capital and trust in society

A growing number of analysts are now reassessing basic perspectives on fostering economic development and what constitutes economic success, and there is now a broad discussion of the dependence of economic growth on investments in healthy social relations—the agenda of economic development now includes issues of social well-being and cultural policy (Jenson). Social capital and trust form the roots of connections in society, which in turn leads to social cohesiveness. The rational institutions of modern society can work because they are underpinned by subjective, tradition-rich, value-laden institutional structures, “the ones that sustain sociability, that actually carry the trust” (Jeannotte & Stanley, p. 135). What role does culture play in all this? If culture is the creative element, our expressions of who we are, where we come from, and where we wish to go, then “culture is the very thing which stores and carries those subjective, tradition-rich, value-laden institutional structures that undergird the sources of our well-being.

Culture is how we transmit those trust bearing structures to one another and to future generations. Our cultural artefacts . . . are the blueprints or templates of those structures” (p. 135).

Further to this, Higham points out three ways in which the arts might be indispensable techniques for facilitating the development of trust amongst citizens, as new sources of an eroded social capital:

- by generating low-risk conversation across and amongst the various diversities of modern communities;
- by generating public habits of innovation, creativity, and flexibility; and
- by generating public values of tolerance and respect, which are necessary for peaceful co-existence within and across national borders.

Culture is a venue for democratic inclusiveness and civic participation

The evocation of social cohesion issues often arises in discussions around social exclusion and diminished levels of civic participation. As Pascual i Ruiz notes, there is a general feeling that the more people are engaged in cultural activity at a practical level (as opposed to engaging as audiences), the more likely they are to participate actively in the democratic process (Fisher & Fox, 2000; cited in Pascual i Ruiz). Cultural participation is a fun form of public engagement, and has a way of opening minds and receptivity to “others” (Jeannotte & Stanley). According to François Matarasso (1997), the importance of participation in the arts “is not just that it gives people the personal and practical skills to help themselves and become involved in society . . . but that it opens routes into the wider democratic process and encourages people to *want* to take part. Participation is habit-forming” (p. 82; cited in Fisher).

Cultural institutions help ensure equitable access to knowledge in society and facilitate meaning-making

Jordi Pascual i Ruiz refers to the crucial role that cultural institutions make to the redistribution of information in society—a generally recognized cause of social inequities—in a way which converts the general overabundance of “information” into “useful knowledge for social practice.” The City of Barcelona’s “Accent on Culture” plan broadly outlines some of the points to link: “Cultural services and facilities, along with initiatives and educational strategies for the fostering of cultural practices, all serve as instruments of the redistribution of knowledge, and are therefore indispensable to the maintenance of social cohesion” (Pascual i Ruiz, p. 173). Predictably, public libraries are allocated the key role here. Eva Brinkman & Cas Smithijzen report that the government of the Netherlands looks upon culture and the media as agents of social cohesion because they help bridge the gap between “information society” and newcomers into society. Related to this general theme, Greg Baeker asks: How might cultural institutions become “civil learning institutions” capable of engaging citizens in complex and contentious issues at the community level?

Culture is a laboratory to experiment with social innovation and to test new symbolic resources

Artists provide us with new symbolic resources to make sense of our world, transforming our ways of seeing things and understanding ourselves and our relationships with others (Jeannotte & Stanley). Culture allows people to retain contact with their roots, enhancing feelings of community and self-identity, while at the same time, by a process of “re-invention,” the arts can create “fruitful fusions of old and new cultures” (Fisher, p. 165). This process plays out both at a societal level (see, for instance, Krzysztofek and Dragojevic) as well as at local and more personal levels (Hannigan).

The key role played by communications media in the circulation of symbolic resources to foster the building of social bridges in societies, or their failing to do so, is highlighted by Varbanova & Dimitrova, and by Celestino Spada. Varbanova & Dimitrova argue that media preoccupation with national “failures” is harmful to social cohesion, especially when, at the same time, the media give inadequate attention to cultural and other achievements in society. Spada argues for the social importance of domestically produced television fiction to create meaningful symbolic reference points for individuals and a nation more generally. In both cases, the production of stories that might be conducive to “social cohesion” is influenced (some might say undermined) by the economic imperatives underlining media businesses. These imperatives have led to strategies such as the pursuit of sensationalism to sell newspapers or garner ratings, or the importation of cheap foreign (often U.S.) content to fill airtime or shelf space (see, however, Spada’s argument that a number of factors are now converging to increase attention on creating original television fiction, although within this larger economic and operational context). While more research is required to determine how sharing television or other media experiences might generate or reinforce social cohesion, indigenous (or domestic) shared cultural and communication channels, products, and experiences have long been associated with the creation of national and local identities and loyalties, and the building of the fabric of societies.

Culture is an integral component of governance to improve citizens’ quality of life

Colin Mercer’s examination of the linkages among concepts of culture, governance, police/policy, and quality of life generates a matrix of strategic connections for locating discussions of cultural policy, essentially concerning the city but arguably expandable beyond that focus. Mercer argues that quality of life provides the fundamental rationale of evaluation for urban (and other) forms of cultural policy. He views “the city” as a charged field of cultural conduct formation and management—a field of governance. Cultural policy, in this context, embodies “a logic of persuasion by management of existing urban resources” (p. 319). Mercer sees cultural policy evolving to a sense of ethical (population or community) management, acting out on a fragmented plural field characterized by multiple cultures. Greg Baeker, in contrast, calls for cultural *policy* to evolve to a cultural *planning* approach, which would balance sectoral concerns with more integrated and holistic strategies of urban development and operate on a broad definition of

cultural resources. Both Mercer and Baeker argue for the need to rescue cultural policy from the aesthetic domain which has historically dominated it.

In a related article, Michel de la Durantaye's analysis of municipal cultural policies in Quebec confirms that the quality of life of citizens is intimately tied with the creation of these policies (and the consequent cultural development actions of municipalities). Furthermore, he observes that as community identity and quality of life assume ever-increasing importance for citizens, the notion that the quality of social bonds is tied to the quality of cultural bonds is gaining favour. Regional and local cultural policies and practices—and the expectations and aspirations that form their underpinning—are seen to contribute to both *strengthening local identities* and *building communities*.

De la Durantaye argues that a reorientation of cultural policy towards the local government level is needed, a reorientation which would acknowledge the “municipalization” of cultural policy he and others are observing in Quebec and right across Canada. Mercer's paper suggests the timing may be right for a parallel conceptual reorientation of cultural policy to accompany this shift. He observes a growing trend which favours *community* as the cornerstone of identity in emerging concepts of governance, which means that concepts like community, identity, “belonging,” human and social capital, and civil society have now become “mainstream.”

Arts and culture are social development tools

Intersecting with these conceptual arguments in various ways, one finds the pragmatic use of culture and the arts as social development—or neighbourhood development—tools. These actions are generally based on arguments resting on the perceived benefits to individuals and to neighbourhoods/communities of these activities, and sometimes on demonstrated improvements resulting from these programs and initiatives. Arts and cultural activities are seen as one of an array of tools to address social problems in innovative ways.

Rod Fisher reports that the U.K. government's energies are focused on combating “social exclusion,” acknowledging the chronic failure of mainstream-focused policies in deprived neighbourhoods, and shifting to “targeted neighbourhood renewal.” Sports and cultural initiatives are a primary tool and are viewed by many as effective against local crime and health problems. In France, the Policy of the City addresses urban social development issues in areas deemed in need of “assistance.” As part of this regulatory and action framework, cultural actions of the state have followed six axes in these areas: artistic involvement in these communities; the inclusion of “emerging” cultures in neighbourhood cultural development and festivities; artistic education; amateur art; the mobilization of artists to co-operate with inhabitants to envision the development of neighbourhoods and mend urban social fabrics; and anthropological research into cultural life on the outskirts of urban centres.

Eva Brinkman & Cas Smithuijsen emphasize the desirability of clearly situating cultural/arts policy in the context of social policy objectives. Their research in the Netherlands indicates that social cohesion policies must be people, not arts,

directed, and that the key to fostering social cohesion through culture is to increase popular participation in so-called community arts. Reflecting on the situation in Bulgaria (and the Balkans more generally), Varbanova & Dimitrova point to linkages between social cohesion concerns and the need to rebuild community self-confidence, and suggest that cultural-oriented initiatives have a role to play here.

Cities as a locus for cultural diversity and civic engagement

The papers situate discussions of culture and social cohesion in a dynamic, multi-dimensional, and rapidly shifting contemporary context characterized by two key factors—the increasingly inescapable multiculturalism of societies, and the growing importance of cities as crucibles of experimentation, action, and social evolution. These subjects emerged as recurrent themes in discussions during the round table and reappear in the papers in this collection.

The multiculturalism of societies: “Managing” diversity versus managing in diversity

In discussions of social cohesion and its multidimensional character, the links between social cohesion and cultural diversity have come to the fore (Jenson). An important focus of the social cohesion debate is on *societal diversity* as a factor affecting social cohesion, with both a positive and negative potential. In this context, one senses that references to policies of “managing” diversity are undesirable and inappropriate. Managing *in* diverse societies is the new paradigm. A cohesive society is defined as one in which “accommodation of socioeconomic conflicts is well managed . . . social cohesion is fostered by careful and sensitive management of mobilized differences (or cleavages) of all sorts—cultural, linguistic, and economic” (Jenson, p. 149). When diversity is identified as an important factor, cultural policy is often the key tool available, both for counteracting negative effects and achieving positive ones.

Given the prominence of cultural diversity in discussions about social cohesion, Canada’s multiculturalism policies and practices quickly become key components in sketching out the linkages between social cohesion, culture, and cultural policy. Frances Henry’s article points out the difficulties and limitations inherent in the “Canadian model.” She suggests that the Canadian *Multiculturalism Act* is a primarily symbolic measure that has failed to control racism against ethno-racial minorities, and argues that a stronger “radical” or “critical” multiculturalism is required before Canada can become an exemplar for other nations. The current multiculturalism policy focuses on limiting diversity to symbolic rather than political or transformative kinds of change, and emphasizes culture at the expense of structure. It is focused on providing opportunities “to engage in activities that deal with ethnicity and culture rather than dismantling barriers to equal opportunity in employment, housing, and the institutional structures of Canadian society” (p. 237).

Cities as crucibles and loci of experimentation and action

Issues of cultural diversity, emerging and hybrid art forms and identities, and social cohesion play out most prominently in urban spaces. Cities have always

played a key role in the emergence of new ideas and social arrangements, and continue to be the fundamental economic unit of calculation (Mercer). Large cities are increasingly becoming strategic sites for global flows of capital, information, images, and people (Hannigan). John Hannigan describes the contemporary metropolis as “the locus of the dense human relationships out of which culture flows” and “a petri dish” in which new claims form, materialize, and assume concrete forms (p. 284). Cartographers of the information age point out that the nodes of the Internet are not mapped by country, but by individual cities, urban blocks, and buildings. Action occurs locally, contextualized and grounded by constituted communities, both local and distributed. The impacts of this action may, however, have international effects.

At the same time, the active cultural and social development roles played by local governments must also be recognized. As mentioned earlier, it is at the local level where the links between social and cultural development intuitively coalesce (de la Durantaye) and where some of the most innovative experiments in alternative policy and planning systems are taking place (Baeker).

To improve our understanding of contemporary cultures and their linkages with social capital, issues related to connectedness and social cohesiveness must be examined at the local level, at the level of cities, of neighbourhoods, of individuals. Of course, this latter need also highlights, as John Foote points out, that our current ability to understand the individual consumer/participant in cultural experiences is woefully inadequate and must be addressed in a multifaceted way.

Civil society organizations: The third sector

Another underlying and recurrent theme is the key role played by third sector/civil society organizations in issues and actions related to culture and social cohesion. Despite all the nurturing actions of governments, Pierre Mayol notes, cultural works, experiences, and creations are ultimately dependent on the involvement of motivated, dedicated, and competent individuals who are part of civil society. Ensuring the ability for citizens to take an active role in the cultural and social growth of their communities is an important function of the state (Mayol). The connection between cultural policies and civil society is an important one.

Civil society organizations are key to building capacity for change in society, in partnership with or in opposition to government actions or inaction. Government support appears to be crucial to many of these organizations (at least in the cultural sphere) and their ability to foster public debate, action, and change. In her article, Catherine Murray traces some of the key government–NGO partnerships recently observed in Canada, where a government department nurtured the development of a third sector organization so that, for instance, it would be available to build informational exchanges and, over time, offer advice to the government. The corollary to this, on one hand, is the unpredictability of continued government support and, on the other hand, the somewhat problematic creation of these organizations within a government orbit rather than being firmly rooted “outside” with wide grassroots or multi-organizational support. The credibility of these organizations is key to their ability to act effectively in society, garner public attention to

their messages and actions, build alliances, and impact social and political agendas (Murray; Varbanova & Dimitrova). However, organizational stability and sustainability continues to be a plaguing issue for NGOs around the world, diminishing their ability to act and to evolve independently.

Baeker also reminds us that these civil society organizations may embody and institutionalize some of what may need to be changed for a more equitable and meaningful cultural development landscape. As Naseem Khan (2001) observes, “The true debate—it has only slowly come to be realized—is not in fact about inclusion or of different cultural traditions, but about the ability of old structures to change” (cited in Baeker, p. 186).

One emerging feature of the activities of cultural civil society organizations highlighted by Catherine Murray is the growing coalition-building exercises evident on special issues and initiatives, such as an international cultural diversity accord. Her review of some of these activities points out the relative isolation of cultural organizations from non-cultural equity-seeking organizations to date, and some of the limits to the effectiveness of this activity. Interestingly, Varbanova & Dimitrova observe that while the third sector in Bulgaria is growing extensively, it is still not a serious force for change or a factor for social cohesion primarily because strong national and regional networks of NGOs are still lacking. These observations suggest further investigation of both systemic and localized challenges faced by these organizations, and the benefits brought to them through national and international coalition-building networks would be valuable. As Matko Mestrovic points out, the civil sector of society may hold within it the keys to a more fruitful and rewarding path of sociocultural evolution, an alternate vision of development which privileges community bonds, human relationships, and the art of democratic participation.

Concluding remarks

The importance of sensitivity to context and the need to be cautious in transferring research analyses and conclusions to different countries and communities cannot be overstated. In each paper, an author’s engagement with the concepts of culture and social cohesion, and their attempts to link the two, resulted in rich discussions and explanations which inevitably took into account multidimensional considerations of their contemporary society as well as historical conditions. Varbanova & Dimitrova’s search for discussions on “social cohesion” in Bulgaria is particularly instructive. What is the value of this debate in situations where the challenges of economic and social conditions overshadow other concerns? Or in Spain, where the debate has not yet occurred due to a variety of socioeconomic and historical conditions (see Pascual i Ruiz): Will changing circumstances and growing immigration mean that the debate may emerge in short order? These case studies serve as crucial reminders of the necessities of understanding the grounded realities and contexts within which “social cohesion” concerns develop and play out, and the diversity of ways in which cultural connections may be discovered.

Note

1. The Social Cohesion Network is a research network of the Government of Canada's Policy Research Initiative. It is one of four research networks launched in 1997. Although the other three original networks have been disbanded, the Social Cohesion Network continues to function. For more information, visit the Policy Research Initiative's Web site at <http://policyresearch.gc.ca>.

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