MEASURING AND VALIDATING SOCIAL COHESION: A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH

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The fabric of modern and richer societies, including many European countries, is facing new challenges posed by the recent economic and social development.
The aim of present work is to create and cross-validate synthetic macro indexes of social cohesion based on the observation of micro level variables.

A two steps strategy:
1. Defining a national level index of social cohesion;
2. Correlating it with several national level variables concerning people’s well-being, economic welfare, education, health, socio-demographic characteristics.
## What is Social Cohesion?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Formal relationships</th>
<th>Substantial relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>Behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Insertion/exclusion:</td>
<td>Equality/Inequality:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a shared market capacity, particularly regarding the labour market</td>
<td>equality in chances and conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Legitimacy/Illegitimacy: maintenance of public and private institutions which act as mediators</td>
<td>Participation/Passivity: involvement in management of public affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociocultural</td>
<td>Acceptance/Rejection: pluralism in facts and also as a virtue i.e. tolerance in differences</td>
<td>Affiliation/Isolation: share of common values, feeling of belonging to a same community</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Bernard, 1999*
DATA

We use:

2008 EVS European Values Study data

- a large-scale, cross-national survey on basic human values;
- it contains subjective and objective items measuring attitudes towards and behaviours regarding social relationships, participation and trust at many levels of social reality;
- 3 waves since 1981 (every 10 years)
- 39 European countries
- sample of 1000 adult individuals per country
## AN INDIVIDUAL BASED INDEX OF SOCIAL COHESION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity spheres</th>
<th>Formal relationships</th>
<th>Substantial relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political</strong></td>
<td>Confidence in:</td>
<td>Participation in:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vi1 national distributive systems;</td>
<td>vi7 legal political activities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vi2 national organizations;</td>
<td>vi8 illegal political activities;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vi3 authority institutions;</td>
<td>vi9 political concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vi4 satisfaction and approval of democracy and government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(institutional trust)</td>
<td>(political participation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sociocultural</strong></td>
<td>vi5 proximal solidarity</td>
<td>Participation in:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vi6 distal solidarity</td>
<td>vi10 social associations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(solidarity)</td>
<td>vi11 political associations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>vi12 cultural associations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>vi13 youth and leisure associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(sociocultural participation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dickes et al. 2009
CORROBORATION OF THE THEORY

Source: Dickes et al. 2009
A BOTTOM-UP APPROACH: FROM MICRO TO MACRO LEVEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor analysis</th>
<th>Activity spheres</th>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First order</td>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Institutional trust</td>
<td>political participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sociocultural</td>
<td>Solidarity</td>
<td>sociocultural participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second order</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Formal relations</td>
<td>Substantial relations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dickes et al. 2009

For each dimension, intermediate variables have been first standardized and successively aggregated.

Data have been aggregated at national level and merged with 66 macro indicators adopted by international institutions to measure social, economic and demographic characteristics for 2008.
### Classification of the Macro-Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 domains</th>
<th>14 sub-domains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment, work and economy</td>
<td>Employment and Unemployment, Vulnerable groups, working conditions, economy, purchasing power, power and life conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and education</td>
<td>Health, education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demography</td>
<td>Population, natality and fertility, mortality, nutiality and divortiability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective well-being</td>
<td>Life satisfaction, happiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional indicators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Acket, 2010*
RESULTS: CROSS-COUNTRY COMPARISONS

The diagram shows the relationship between the VALCOS INDEX: Substantial Relations and the VALCOS INDEX: Formal Relations. The points are color-coded to represent different EVS groups:
- North: grey
- West: black
- South: red
- East: blue
- Former SU: purple

Countries such as DK, NL, LU, FR, FI, CH, AZ, NCY, KOS, and others are plotted on the graph, indicating their positions in terms of social cohesion at both formal and substantial levels.
RESULTS: INSTITUTIONAL TRUST AND ECONOMIC DOMAIN

Rho = 0.68**

Other relevant correlates:
- Part-time employment (0.61**)
- Unionization rate (0.55*)
- GDP per inhabitant (0.60**)
- HICP (0.50*)
RESULTS: SOLIDARITY AND HEALTH DOMAIN

Rho = -0.61**

Other relevant correlates:
• health expenditure (0.55*)
RESULTS: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND DEMOGRAPHY DOMAIN

\[ \text{Rho} = 0.83^{**} \]

Other relevant correlates:
- Urbanization rate (0.58^{**})
- Fertility rate (0.56^{**})
- Life expectancy at birth (0.78^{**})
- Infant mortality (-0.59^{**})
RESULTS: SOCIOCULTURAL PARTICIPATION AND ECONOMIC DOMAIN

Rho = 0.69**

Other relevant correlates:
- Jobless households (-0.42*)
- Unemployment rate (-0.65**)
- Long-term unemployment rate (-0.61**)
- Unemployment rate of women (-0.62**)
- Part-time employment (0.64**)
- Unionization rate (0.58*)
- GDP per inhabitant (0.71**)
- Social protection expenditure (0.45*)
- Minimum wage (0.47*)
- At risk of poverty rate (-0.46*)
RESULTS: FORMAL RELATIONS AND EDUCATION DOMAIN

\[ \text{Rho} = -0.59^{**} \]
RESULTS: SUBSTANTIAL RELATIONS AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

Rho = 0.55**

Other relevant correlates:
• Life satisfaction (0.56**)  
• Aggregated index of SWB (0.57**)
CONCLUSIONS:

1. countries with higher social cohesion show lower levels of unemployment and higher levels of other forms of employment such as part-time job. Similarly, these countries are characterized by higher levels of people investing in education over the life course;

2. more cohesive societies are also reporting better economic performances in terms of higher GDP, social expenditures, lower levels of inflation, less unequal societies and lower risk of poverty;

3. those societies are not only richer, but also safer: countries with higher levels of social cohesion correlate with lower levels of mortality due to car accidents and lower rates of suicides and of infant mortality. On the contrary, these countries are characterized by higher fertility rates and life expectancy when 65;

4. higher social cohesion is positively correlated with a higher participation of women and young people to the political and working life of their countries, more intense social participation and confidence in new technologies;

5. More cohesive societies are also characterized by higher quality of life.

Present results are encouraging showing that it is possible to build a reliable index of social cohesion starting from individual level variables.
THANKS FOR YOUR KIND ATTENTION!

FOR MORE INFO CHECK:

HTTP://VALCOS.CEPS.LU/