

# Approaches to Inclusive and Equitable Societies: Diaconal Perspectives

Hans Morten Haugen, Oslo

---

There are two dominant approaches in social science to inclusive and equitable societies. The *social cohesion approach* emphasizes the dominant norms that bind societies together. The *social capital approach* emphasizes how relationships between individuals contribute positively to societal progress. Religions in general, and churches and congregations in particular, have proved to contribute positively to both social capital and social cohesion, by providing spaces for encounters and friendships. This article asks whether these two approaches are adequate for building inclusive communities faced with economic strictures, power abuse, violence, legal restrictions and mental bigotry, which can create tensions and exclude persons from the communities. The article seeks to identify whether a new approach termed *conviviality* could be applied. It finds that this approach makes an important contribution in promoting coexistence amidst divisions and power.

**Keywords:** bonding, bridging, conviviality, social capital, social cohesion

Diaconal research demands an adequate understanding of the political, economic and social forces that shape larger societies or local communities. Without such contextual understanding, advocacy has less impact – and might even have a wrong emphasis.

This article is inspired by the so-called ‘analytical categories approach’ towards the realization of human rights, consisting of structure, process and outcome indicators.<sup>1</sup> Structural indicators seek to measure the policy environment, more specifically laws, policies, and institutions. Process indicators seek to measure the conduct within the policies or programs undertaken. Outcome indicators seek to measure the results of the given policy measures.

An intricate interplay exists between, on the one hand, community organizations and movements and the state apparatus and its ability to foster inclusive policies and limit abusive behavior, on the other hand. Hence, the article asks whether the dominant approaches to inclusive and equitable societies are indeed adequate, or whether there is a need for an alternative approach that better reflects the mechanisms of power and exclusion.

The sad reality is that in many instances the state exacerbates injustices. State employees may seek to gain from cooperating with economic powerful

---

1 Hunt, P. (2003), The Right of Everyone to Enjoy the Highest Attainable Standard of Physical and Mental Health, A/58/427, paragraph 15. See also Welling, J. (2008), ‘International Indicators and Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights’ in Human Rights Quarterly, Vol. 30, No. 4, 933–958, here 950.

actors, many of which might be involved in criminal activities. It is naïve to consider the state as always siding with the people. As with any organization, the state is “a mobilization of bias,”<sup>2</sup> where, for instance, corporate interests are better served than the interests of ordinary citizens.

This article first reviews the recent research on the overall preconditions for achieving peaceful, equitable and inclusive societies. It then analyzes the two dominant approaches to inclusive and equitable societies, social capital and social cohesion, and finds that there are links between the two. Then an unknown and new approach is presented, namely, conviviality, defined as the “art and practice of living together.”<sup>3</sup> The Council of Europe refers to “living together” as an approach for promoting inclusiveness.<sup>4</sup> The article also discusses whether conviviality contributes new insights when faced with poverty, migration and globalization. A comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of the three approaches follows. The research question that this article seeks to answer is the following:

*Are any of the approaches – social capital, social cohesion and conviviality – able to explain how inclusive social progress is achieved and provide guidance in this process?*

Hence, the article uses the term “progress,” and applies neither the standard term “development” or the diaconal term “transformation.” Social progress is understood as the improvement of the underlying determinants of life, making it possible for everyone to uphold their dignity.

## **What Produces Peaceful, Equitable and Inclusive Societies – and What Produces the Opposite?**

There is currently growing agreement that social and political inclusion is crucial to avoid armed conflicts and achieve socioeconomic progress.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the role of political institutions in influencing economic institutions is found

2 Schattschneider, E. E. (1960) *The Semisovereign People, A Realist's View of Democracy in America*, New York, 30

3 Lutheran World Federation, in cooperation with International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action (2013), *Seeking Conviviality – Reforming Community Diakonia in Europe*, Geneva, 4. Note that the term ‘the conviviality’ is defined by the New Oxford Dictionary as “quality of being friendly and lively”, while convivial is defined by the New Oxford American Dictionary as “friendly, lively, and enjoyable.”; †The latter tracing the origin of the term to the 17<sup>th</sup>-century term convivium (feast), consisting of the terms con (with) & vivere (live).

4 Council of Europe (2008), Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the dimension of religious and nonreligious convictions within intercultural education, paragraph 1(b).

5 Cedermann, L.-E., K. Skrede Gleditsch and H. Buhaug (2013), *Inequalities, Grievances and Civil War*, Cambridge.

to be the core explanation for the highly diverse socioeconomic outcomes.<sup>6</sup> The essence is whether the institutions are promoting the common good (inclusive institutions) or benefitting the few and powerful (extractive institutions). A third contribution seeking to explain what lies at the core of societal development emphasizes how an effective and predictable state fosters rule of law and mechanisms for holding those in power accountable.<sup>7</sup> Inclusive policies, accountable institutions and adequately strong states strengthen democracy, which in turn fosters human creativity and innovation.<sup>8</sup>

Hence, compared to even a few decades ago, when neoliberalism dominated the political discourse, there is currently another understanding of what fosters positive societal progress. This understanding has not influenced all decision-making arenas, however. Antisocial austerity packages are still being imposed on European states. Bi- and plurilateral investment and trade negotiations are undertaken in order to become more attractive for trade and investments, but the resulting treaties tend to have little concern for the public and much concern for private profits. These realities of economic power influencing political power, and political power leading to economic power – not only in states with weak transparency and accountability – negatively impact societies and conditions of life.

The role of the state should be to facilitate economic activity, in particular for those who are currently unable to earn a decent salary, or who are not able to keep much of their salary because others own the means through which their earnings are made. One example from an urban context is illustrative: Many of those earning their income by pulling a rickshaw do not themselves own the rickshaw and are unable to find a loan to purchase their own rickshaw.

On the positive side, for the first time in human history there is enough technology, capital and knowledge to allow everyone to live a life of dignity and without abject poverty. Achieving this is prevented only by power relations and power abuse – and by the lack of political will among those in power.

While acknowledging that this affluence of power and scarceness of will is driven by greed and selfishness, this article argues that the key to change may be found in the interplay between the political institutions, social movements, including churches and trade unions, and the sociocultural realities of the respective society. Hence, while culture obviously influences how well the institutions work, the institutions can also influence the prevailing culture and peoples' perceptions. This article sees enhanced participation and changed

---

6 Acemoglu, D. and J. A. Robinson (2011), *Why Nations Fail: The Origin of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, New York.

7 Fukuyama, F. (2014), *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York. Fukuyama used to belong to the so-called 'neo-conservatives' in the United States.

8 Knudsen, C. H. (2011), *The Economic Effect of Democracy and Dictatorship* (PhD dissertation), University of Oslo, Norway.

power structures as means of achieving more peaceful, equitable and inclusive societies.

## Social Capital

The term “social capital” can be traced back to 1916, when the State Supervisor of Rural Schools in West Virginia noted:

If [the individual] comes into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentially sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community.<sup>9</sup>

By emphasizing the multitude of relationships between individuals as crucial for improving the overall living conditions, this understanding is in line with the current definition. Social capital is promoted by two characteristics: First, levels or trust in a society, as measured by a positive answer to the question of whether one can generally trust other persons. Second, one’s self-reported voluntary participation and civic engagement, such as voting in elections, termed “civic cooperation.”

Robert Putnam, the leading social capital scholar, says that social capital consists of “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. [...] A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.”<sup>10</sup> Norms of reciprocity imply that the various contacts between persons are based on more or less equal power relations. The fact that equal power relations might be rare in many contexts immediately shows the potential weakness with both the definition by Putnam and the overall concept of social capital.

It is true that Putnam does not analyze power relations in his studies. There might be good reasons for this, however, the first of which is that there are profound methodological problems in measuring power relations. Second, it seems to be a presumption in the studies of social capital that the power inequalities that are at play in the *outside* world do not predetermine the relationships exercised *within* a given context, for instance, a congregation or voluntary association. Putnam finds, however, with regard to religious life in the United States, that those with high education (termed “high status persons”) have a higher church attendance than those with lower social status. Moreover, through their church networks high status persons are in frequent contact with

9 Hanifan, L. J. (1916), ‘The Rural School Community Center,’ in: *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 67, No. 1, 130–138; here 130.

10 Putnam, R. (2000), *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, p. 19.

persons of lower social status – operationalized as people on welfare or manual workers – compared to persons who are either secularly minded or who are religious but rarely attend church.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the social capital that develops through church involvement might actually reduce the power inequalities, in that high status persons and low status persons come together and build friendships.

While the United States is not typical for the Western world regarding the role of the churches in promoting affiliation and social networking, this phenomenon of “class bridging” does take place on the shared arenas in all countries. While bridging refers to stronger ties *between* different social groups, bonding refers to stronger social ties *within* these social groups.<sup>12</sup> There is also a third form of social capital, namely, linking, which refers to “connections with people in power.”<sup>13</sup> This third form of social capital is not explicitly applied by Putnam.

The third reason for why the power aspect is little present in the social capital analysis is that there is an inherent uncertainty about what the social capital concept actually explains. To illustrate the fluidity of the concept, from the late 1990s on social capital was viewed as a *precondition* for the effective functioning of institutions, on the one hand, and as something whose *absence* makes formal institutions even more necessary, on the other hand. According to this latter understanding,

where interpersonal trust is low and unlikely to improve rapidly, institutional reforms providing better formal mechanisms for the reliable enforcement of contracts and access to credit are even more important than where trust is higher.<sup>14</sup>

Hence, when interpersonal trust is limited or lacking altogether, institutions are somehow able to fill this gap. While this article warned of the difficulties in applying the concept of social capital as a new development approach, that did not prevent international institutions in the realm of development cooper-

---

11 Putnam, R. (2010), *American Grace. How Religion Divides and United Us*, New York, p. 253.

12 Putnam, *Bowling alone*, p. 22, observes that bonding, which could be negatively perceived, does “provide crucial social and psychological support for less fortunate members of the community...”

13 Woolcock, M. and A. T. Sweetser (2002), *Bright Ideas: Social Capital—The Bonds That Connect*. ADB Review, Vol. 34, No. 2, 26–27; here 26. In; in another contribution, Woolcock refers to linking social capital as “enabling members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available in the community”; see Woolcock, M. (2001), ‘The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes’, in: *Isuma: Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1–17; here 14.

14 Knack, S. and P. Keefer (1997), ‘Does Social Capital Have an Economic Payoff? A Cross-Country Investigation.’, in: *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Vol. 112, No. 4, 1251–1288; here 1284.

ation from promoting the social capital concept from the late 1990s onwards. This led to additional elements being added to the concept.

By highlighting trust and institutions and by challenging the over-reliance on economic theory alone, which could not explain different growth outcomes in different states, the initial appeal of social capital is evident. This emphasis on institutions is welcomed. In reality, however, the stronger emphasis on the role of social capital in the economic realm<sup>15</sup> and in the context of institutions has moved attention away from the networks and reciprocal relations between individuals.

The emphasis on the characteristics of institutions as the central element of social capital is seen from the latter part of a definition by the World Bank: "Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together."<sup>16</sup> This definition, of course, depends on how "institutions" are understood.<sup>17</sup>

By applying the social capital concept to all the relationships and exchanges that takes place in the society, the concept has been stretched too far. If one agrees on a more narrow definition, relating to the development of social networks, the "effort involved in building social networks cannot be measured."<sup>18</sup>

These criticisms should not, however, overshadow the fact that social capital, understood as being encompassed by mutual trust and civic participation, will generally promote a positive sense of community. Putnam finds that stronger sense of community correlates positively with both liberty and equality.<sup>19</sup> Those persons who have high religious volunteering tend to volunteer more in society overall, compared to those who are not religiously active.<sup>20</sup> Such volunteering builds networks.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty about what social capital actually encompasses and the problems relating to its measurement, it is obvious that the developing and strengthening of a civil society in the social space between the family and the state is important. Such interactions are particularly important if these interactions take place between persons with different backgrounds

---

15 For an overview of the application of social capital within the economic realm, see Adler, P. S. and S.-W. Kwon (2002), 'Social Capital: Prospects for a New Concept', in: *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 17–40; here 17; on definitions of social capital, see 20.

16 World Bank (1999), *What is Social Capital*, online available at <http://go.worldbank.org/K4LUMW43B0>. Note that also "relationships" and "norms" are referred to in the first part of the definition.

17 North, D. (1990), *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge, 3, provides a widely quoted definition, to the effect that institutions encompass "the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction."

18 Adler and Kwon, *Social Capital*, 23.

19 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 356–358.

20 Putnam, *American Grace*, 445.

who possess different resources, and if the power inequalities do not influence these interactions – or the outcomes of these interactions.

## Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is a term that also had a new awakening in the aftermath of the neoliberal experiments of the 1980s and 1990s. Its use can be traced back to some decades earlier, albeit in the context of cohesiveness within a group.<sup>21</sup> Only in the late 1990s was the term social cohesion applied to the overall societal level,<sup>22</sup> in the context of social inclusion.<sup>23</sup> Then, from the early 2000s on, the concept was applied in two additional contexts. First, in the context of social capital<sup>24</sup> and, second, in the context of institutions and governance, the latter promoted particularly by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).<sup>25</sup> These three dimensions of social cohesion are analyzed below.

*Social inclusion* is emphasized by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) when emphasizing social mechanisms “producing a sense of belonging in society.”<sup>26</sup>

We see that this definition emphasizes *inclusion*, or the first dimension identified above. The same problem as was identified with regard to limiting the concept of social capital applies to the concept of social cohesion, implying that all relations and exchanges within a society can be seen as contributing to social cohesion. This is illustrated by the fact that “willingness to cooperate”

21 For an overview of social cohesion in the literature, starting with Le Bon and Durkheim, see J. G. Bruhn (2009), *The Group Effect. Social Cohesion and Health Outcomes*, Heidelberg, 32–34.

22 As noted by Jenson, J. (2010), *Defining and Measuring Social Cohesion*, London, 15: “social cohesion is a property of a society . . .”

23 There has been a slight shift in how social inclusion is promoted in the context of ethnic diversity. While the Council of Europe (2001), *Promoting the Policy Debate on Social Exclusion from a Comparative Perspective*. Trends in Social Cohesion, no. 1, Strasbourg, said at 5: “Council of Europe does not see social cohesion as being a homogenising concept . . .”, the approach was different in Council of Europe (2004), *Strategy for Social Cohesion*, Strasbourg, 3: “how to manage diversity so that it becomes a source of mutual enrichment rather than a factor of division and conflict.”

24 The strengthening of social relations, contributing to the social capital of a society is the second reason for the attractiveness of the social cohesion approach among politicians, according to Berger-Schmitt, R. (2002), ‘Considering Social Cohesion in Quality of Life Assessments: Concepts and Measurement’, in: *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 58, No. 3, 403–428; here 404–405; other reasons emphasizing how to overcome inequality and social exclusion.

25 Jenson, *Defining and Measuring*, 13.

26 ECLAC (2007), *Social Cohesion. Inclusion and a Sense of Belonging in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Santiago, 16; for additional definitions by international organizations, see Norton, A. and A. de Haan (2013), *Social Cohesion: Theoretical Debates and Practical Applications with Respect to Jobs*, Background pPaper for the World Development Report 2013, 11, online available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/12147>.

was found as the core of the concept of social cohesion, based on findings from a multiyear research project in Canada.<sup>27</sup>

One attempt to systematize social capital identifies six dimensions of social cohesion: inclusion and equality (economic realm), legitimacy and participation (political realm), and recognition and belonging (sociocultural realm).<sup>28</sup> Several of these dimensions relate explicitly to policy measures. This emphasis on the responsibility of political authorities is not, however, seen in other definitions.

The Council of Europe's early approach to social inclusion encompassed ensuring social rights,<sup>29</sup> which is obviously within the international legal obligations of states. Its most recent definition places no emphasis on social rights, by defining social cohesion as "the capacity of a society to manage differences and divisions and ensure the means of achieving welfare for all members."<sup>30</sup>

The fact that the term "divisions" is placed together with "differences" implies that having persons from different backgrounds might lead to divisions.

The *social capital* dimension is more evident in the recent definition by the OECD:

A cohesive society works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward mobility. While the notion of 'social cohesion' is often used with different meanings, its constituent elements include concerns about social inclusion, social capital and social mobility.<sup>31</sup>

The three latter elements are illustrated in Figure 1.<sup>32</sup>

The social mobility element is not found in other definitions of social cohesion. The problem with this definition is that it does not identify the social, cultural and mental barriers among those with low social status and those with high social status. As with trust,<sup>33</sup> social mobility is difficult to measure, while social inclusion can be measured by applying indicators derived from

27 Stanley, D. (2003), 'What Do We Know about Social Cohesion: The Research Perspective of the Federal Government's Social Cohesion Research Network,' in: *The Canadian Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 5–17; here 5, defining social cohesion as "the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper."

28 Rajulton, F., Z. Ravanera and R. Beaujot (2007), 'Measuring Social Cohesion: An Experiment Using the Canadian National Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating,' in: *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 80, No. 3, 461–492; here 464

29 Jenson, *Defining and Measuring*, 6.

30 Council of Europe (2010), *New Strategy and Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion*, Strasbourg, 2.

31 OECD (2011), *Perspectives on Global Development 2012. Social Cohesion in a Shifting World*, Paris, 17.

32 OECD, *Perspectives*, 17.

33 Problems of measuring are also acknowledged by Jenson, *Defining and Measuring*, 16: "a focus on indicators of social capital is likely to be difficult to achieve."





Figure 1: The components of social cohesion.

variables such as inequality, unemployment, education, health and access to technology.<sup>34</sup>

There are potential tensions between local community cohesion and the wider societal cohesion:

The stronger the ties which bind local communities, the greater may be the social, racial or religious conflict between them. The point is that social cohesion at the neighbourhood level is by no means unambiguously a good thing.<sup>35</sup>

This understanding comes very close to the “bonding” social capital, identified above as the second form of social capital, and which was acknowledged by Putnam as to provide “crucial social and psychological support ...”<sup>36</sup> Putnam does, however, also find that those who are active in their local contexts, operationalized as “citizen-participation initiatives,” show a higher degree of tolerance as compared to non-participants.<sup>37</sup> Hence, community involvement influences attitudes, and churches and congregations promote community services that benefit all in need.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, with regard to *institutions and governance*, it is emphasized that high-quality institutions contribute to “building social cohesion [by] pursuing the common good, and through the lowering of economic (and other) di-

34 Jenson, *Defining and Measuring*, 22–23; her other indicators are cultural and ethnic homogeneity, trust, and participation and solidarity.

35 Kearns, A and Forrest, R (2000). ‘Social Cohesion and Multi-Cultural Urban Governance’, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 5–6, 995–1017; here 1013.

36 Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 22.

37 Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 355.

38 Putnam, *Bowling alone*, 68, referring to a study finding that 80% percent of those benefitting from such services are not congregation members.

visions ...”<sup>39</sup> In this context, institutions are understood as to be certain hierarchical organizations with a given mandate, not merely rules or constraints.<sup>40</sup>

Hence, the concept of social cohesion has many of the same problems as those identified with social capital – especially in defining what is actually encompassed by the concept, and what falls lies outside it. There can be no doubt that strong networks, high levels of trust and, extensive co-operation are central characteristics of well-functioning communities or societies.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, inclusion and efforts to curb marginalization require good-quality social analysis, including an understanding of the prevailing policies, and as well as the institutional and legal framework.<sup>42</sup> There is, however, no explicit power analysis within social cohesion.

A final problem of social inclusion is that the different definitions quoted above have identifying subject as “mechanisms”<sup>43</sup> or “society”,<sup>44</sup> neither of which are very precise terms in order to for identifying how to improve cohesion. Rather, one must acknowledge that public policies and the derived rhetoric are crucial in enhancing or undermining social cohesion. This is noted in a British study:

the extent to which social cohesion characterises migrant communities depends less on the strength and variety of their social capital than on the prevailing immigration policy discourse, the backwash of hostility to asylum seekers and refugees and how this impacts on the migrant groups’ perceptions of belonging ...<sup>45</sup>

Hence, public policies and individual’s mentalities influence the sense of belonging, a notion that we saw above was central in to ECLAC’s definition, and identified as the sixth dimension by Rajulton *et al.*<sup>46</sup> Holding public authorities to accountable for how their policies and rhetoric affects newcomers’ sense of belonging is runs contrary to the approach by state leaders in Northern Europe, which promotes assimilationist policies by emphasizing British common

---

39 Easterly, W., J. Ritzen and M. Woolcock (2006), ‘Social Cohesion, Institutions and Growth,’ in: *Economics and Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 103–120; here 111.

40 North, *Institutions*, 3.

41 Khan, H and Muir, R (2006), *Sticking Together: Social Capital and Local Government. The Results and Implications of the Camden Social Capital Surveys of 2002 and 2005*, London.

42 Welling, *International Indicators*, 950.

43 ECLAC, *Social Cohesion*, 16.

44 Council of Europe, *New Strategy*, 2; OECD, *Perspectives*, 17.

45 Zetter, R., Griffiths, D., Sigona, N., Flynn, D., Tauhid, P. and Beynon, R. (2006), *Immigration, Social Cohesion, and Social Capital: What are the Links?*, London, 25.

46 Rajulton *et al.*, *Measuring Social Cohesion*, 464.

British values,<sup>47</sup> Dutch identity,<sup>48</sup> and Danish cohesiveness.<sup>49</sup> If politicians promotes social cohesion as the main approach to solving social problems, they risk ignoring the power asymmetries and the exclusionary character of the prevailing structures.<sup>50</sup>

## Conviviality

Conviviality, or the “art and practice of living together,”<sup>51</sup> emphasizes the importance of the community. It was presented in 2013 by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action (interdiac) – with inputs of from employees of diaconal institutions in throughout Europe – in 2013. Books with similar concerns and visions as the conviviality approach emphasize the value and necessity of shared public space,<sup>52</sup> and conviviality has been applied in order to emphasize interdependence and human beings’ abilities to shape their own world.<sup>53</sup>

Does conviviality belong to a certain political or philosophical tradition? One tradition that emphasizes the value of community is communitarianism.<sup>54</sup> Essential to this thinking is that each community must develop its own principles for benefits- and burden-sharing, and that universal norms are “of little use in thinking about particular distributions.”<sup>55</sup> A critique against com-

47 Cheong, P. H., R. Edwards, H. Goulbourne and J. Solomos (2007). ‘Immigration, Social Cohesion and Social Capital: A Critical Review’, *Critical Social Policy*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 24–49; here 28.

48 Ossewaarde, M. R. R. (2007), ‘The New Social Contract and the Struggle for Sovereignty in the Netherlands’, in: *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 491–512.

49 Haugen, H. M. (2011), ‘Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark and the Multicultural Challenges’, in: *Politics and Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 476–502.

50 Gordon, I. (2006), ‘Labour Market Integration Policies Enhance Social Cohesion’, in: *OECD, Competitive Cities in the Global Economy. OECD Territorial Reviews*, Paris, 368, noting that an emphasis on social cohesion “can obscure real and difficult issues ...”

51 LWF and interdiac, *Seeking Conviviality*, 4.

52 Sennett, R. (2012), *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Co-Operation*, London; see also LWF and interdiac, *Seeking Conviviality*, 16; see by the same author: Sennett (2003), *The Fall of Public Man*, London; Sennett (2003), *Respect. The Formation of Character in a World of Inequality*, London.

53 Illich, I. (1973), *Tools for Conviviality*, London; seeking to promote a post-industrial balance, defining on 12 conviviality as “individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as such, an intrinsic ethical value.” Other books highlighting conviviality are Scott Cato, M. (2009), *Green Economics: An Introduction to Theory, Policy and Practice*, London; ch. 6; Gauntlett, D. (2011), *Making is Connecting*, Cambridge, ch. 7; Maerk, J. (2000), ‘Globalization and the Informal Sector: Economic, Social and Cultural Implications for Latin America and the Caribbean’, in: H. Köchler (ed.) (2000), *Globality Versus Democracy?: The Changing Nature of International Relations in the Era of Globalization*, Vienna, 158–160.

54 For the most important contributions, see MacIntyre, A. (1988), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Notre Dame; Waltzer M. (1983), *Spheres of Justice*, Oxford; Taylor, C. (1985), *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2*, Cambridge.

55 Waltzer, *Spheres*, 8.

munitarianism is that it sees the community as one a closed entity, disregarding both internal diversity and exchange and learning between communities. As *Seeking Conviviality* explicitly warns against closed community thinking, with limited openness towards others and little tolerance for internal diversity,<sup>56</sup> so that the conviviality approach does not correspond with communitarianism.

A tradition that does acknowledge internal diversity and structures of power is civic republicanism, being associated with the name of Hannah Arendt, whose most recognized contemporary authors are Quentin Skinner and Philip Pettit. Civic republicanism presents convincing arguments for why priority must be given to the common good and the community, over own short-term benefit.<sup>57</sup> As noted by Pettit, “[t]he public life of a community is of the utmost importance for the enjoyment of non-domination. [...] ... it is essential, in particular, that there is no domination associated with the *imperium* of government.”<sup>58</sup> The emphasis is on freedom as non-domination, rather than freedom as non-interference, as emphasized in the liberal tradition. The government *can* be abusing its power, but it can also facilitate for the adequate participation of the most vulnerable and marginalized. Hence, in many respects conviviality is close to the republicanism tradition, by seeking to provide an inclusive and public space.

While efforts by Luther and other Christian reformers are acknowledged by civic republicanism,<sup>59</sup> civic republicanism is in fact secular. Conviviality finds its inspiration in the Bible, by building on three “supporting themes” that are primarily Christian: vocation, dignity and justice (see figure 2).<sup>60</sup> *Seeking Conviviality* underlines that diakonia is for all in everyday life.<sup>61</sup> This author believes that these supporting themes, while being central Christian values that are widely recognized, are too general and too difficult to apply as a basis for overall policies or particular decisions.

Rather, the three “bases” for conviviality have a certain practical potential for being applicable: human beings’ the relational nature of human beings; respectful views of others; and reciprocal relationships with others.<sup>62</sup> These characteristics are difficult to measure, but as surveys can be used to measure trust, they can also be used to measure relationality and respectful views, ac-

56 LWF and interdiac, *Seeking Conviviality*, 16.

57 Skinner, Q. (1986), ‘The Paradoxes of Political Liberty’, in: Sterling M. M McMurrin (ed.), *Tanner Lectures on Human Values VII*. Cambridge, 248–249, noting: “we must take our duties seriously, and ... seek to discharge our public obligations as wholeheartedly as possible...this constitutes the only means of guaranteeing ... liberty...”

58 Pettit, P. (1997), *Republicanism. A Theory of Freedom and Government*, Oxford, 166.

59 Skinner, Q (1978), *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Volume 2: The Age of Reformation*, Cambridge.

60 LWF and interdiac, *Seeking Conviviality*, 3.

61 LWF and interdiac, *Seeking Conviviality*, 17.

62 LWF and interdiac, *Seeking Conviviality*, 18.



Figure 2

knowledging that respect is means more requiring than mere tolerance. As for reciprocity, this is highly difficult to measure, as it is by its nature is contextual. Hence, the reciprocity norm is not unconditional, as “it imposes obligations only ... in response to the benefits conferred by others.”<sup>63</sup> This implies that reciprocity is not able to alter (power) relationships, as reciprocity is about responding positively to others’ assistance or benefits.

As for the two other “bases,” relationality and respect, these are essential characteristics of an inclusive community. While neither of them are characteristics of a transformational nature in themselves, acting in compliance with them will change local communities and wider societies.

In *Seeking Conviviality*, the various actors present in the community are analyzed, with a critical approach, both as concerns the actual conduct but also the underlying values. In addition to warning against economic actors’ loan-pushing, greed and profit-seeking, *Seeking Conviviality* warns against the “idea of the person as an isolated and autonomous rational decision maker who seeks to maximize their economic advantages.”<sup>64</sup> Rather, a vision of alternatives, based on partnership and participation, is called for. As for public authorities, their social systems do not function adequately, which may “threaten human dignity.”<sup>65</sup> It is therefore necessary to advocate for policy changes.

There are, in other words, an acknowledgement that everyone has a contribution to make. The diaconal actors are also challenged to improve their context analysis and to better understand the impact of different diaconal ap-

63 Gouldner, A. W. (1960), ‘The Norm of Reciprocity’, in *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 161–178.; here 171;. fFor an updated account of the theories of exchange and reciprocity, see Pyyhtinen, O. (2014), *The Gift and its Paradoxes: Beyond Mauss*, Farnham.

64 LWF and interdiac, *Seeking Conviviality*, 35.

65 LWF and interdiac, *Seeking Conviviality*, 36.

proaches, and they are specifically called on to “explore ways of transforming the economy ...”<sup>66</sup>

It is therefore obvious that *Seeking Conviviality* acknowledges the power structures – both economic and political – at play within the community, and it says that it is possible to mobilize persons and organizations to change these structures. This might sound somewhat naïve, but, as noted above, acting in accordance with the three “Rs”, – respect, relationality and reciprocity, – will do something with the whole community.

As the emphasis of *Seeking Conviviality* is on challenging power, the document reveals there is a surprisingly weak understanding of accountability in the document, by stating: “The churches and diaconal organisations need ... to call people and organisations to account ethically ...”<sup>67</sup> To “call” is weaker than to “hold” someone to account something. Furthermore, by applying the term “ethically,” it seems that it is the conscience of the actors that is to be mobilized. While this might be adequate in some instances, it is certainly not adequate generally. A standard understanding of accountability is to hold those with power to account for wrongdoing (acts of commission) – or for doing nothing (acts of omission), based on objective standards. There is also the possibility for sanctions in cases of non-compliance. This weakness might be explained by the fact that *Seeking Conviviality* is not embedded in human rights. A human rights approach is based on principles for assessing conduct, and these principles are derived from substantive human rights.

If levels of relationality and respect within a community are low, people might be expected to care more for themselves than for others. This in turn leads to low degrees of organizing, which will lead to low levels of participation and lack of empowerment. These circumstances makes it easier for powerful actors to abuse their power, leading to an absence of or unfair negotiations, resulting in exploitation. Those who fall outside of the distribution process will be further marginalized, leading to social exclusion and further injustices.

By seeking to expand the public space, conviviality – understood as the art and practice of living together – can provide a framework for a reinvigoration of innovative community practices. Hence, an inclusivist community will imply high conviviality, while an exclusivist community will lead to low conviviality.

One of the authors introduced as the beginning of this section, Richard Sennett, asks the following:

---

66 LWF and interdiac, *Seeking Conviviality*, 37; wWhen addressing political and corporate actors, the emphasis is negative, by identifying at 7 “practices that have so eroded the common good of all.”

67 LWF and interdiac, *Seeking Conviviality*, 7.

Could community itself become a vocation? Faith, identity and informal sociability suggest ways in which the community among the poor or the marginalized can be sustaining ... [...] For poor and marginalized people, the limits are political and economic; the value is social.<sup>68</sup>

Hence, Sennett acknowledges that faith can contribute to social interaction, resulting in new individual and collective self-perceptions, which are important first steps towards changed social structures. If this approach is to work in multireligious or secularized contexts, it is important that the faith expressions are be inclusivist and not dogmatic. An approach that will contribute to such inclusivist faith expressions is diapraxis, which is defined by one author as “dialogue of life” and “actions in faith.”<sup>69</sup> Simply said, diapraxis takes place when people of different faith or other backgrounds develop new relationships by coming together and working together.<sup>70</sup>

### Comparing the Three Approaches

Social capital and social cohesion have constituted the basis for research programs, with considerable attention coming from academics and international institutions. Conviviality, on the other hand, is a term that is new to many, and explicitly applies a more critical approach to the prevailing structures. All three approaches emphasize *relationality*. All approaches also build on characteristics that are difficult to measure.

While the social capital approach emphasizes *trust* and *networks*, the social cohesion approach emphasizes *inclusion* and *belonging*, and conviviality emphasizes *respect* and *reciprocity*. In this sense, conviviality is not very different from the two other approaches. While it was found above that conviviality's three “supporting themes” (dignity, vocation, justice) are difficult to directly apply directly as bases for policies and decisions, these supporting themes nevertheless serve as ideals in order to characterize societies with high conviviality.

Moreover, conviviality more explicitly than the other two approaches encompasses a critical analysis of the state apparatus and the corporations, specifying that these are possible to challenge. Social capital, on the other hand, can be seen as serving the interests of corporations, as trust, networks and institutions – understood as societal norms – provide a good climate for transactions and other kinds of business conduct. While this author does not share

68 Sennett, *Together*, 273.

69 Snulligan Haney, M., ‘Mission as Witness to African-American Muslims’, in ; in: Dana L. Robert (ed.) (2002), *Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Missionary Women in the Twentieth Century*, Maryknoll, 257.

70 The term diapraxis can be ascribed to the Danish researcher Lissi Rasmussen, based on her publications from field research in the Danish city of Aarhus; see Rasmussen, L. (1997), *Diapraxis og dialog mellem kristne og muslimer – i lyset af den afrikanske erfaring*, Aarhus.

the overall negative perception of corporations as found in *Seeking Conviviality*, the author does hold that it is legitimate to warn against a too naïve understanding of corporate conduct, by for instance, by claiming that corporate self-regulation is adequate.

The social cohesion approach is silent with regard to corporations, and it is rather non-specific with regard to the role of the state, implying that social cohesion is something that is created by the “society”, irrespective of the state’s policies – many of which may be socially and politically divisive – or facilitation for community organizing. Norwegian research has shown that if national or municipal authorities facilitates local community programs promoting participation by persons and groups with traditionally low levels of participation, this has a remarkable effect on the level of organizing, particularly by persons with an immigrant background.<sup>71</sup>

Hence, explicit demands on the national and municipal authorities to promote inclusion – by avoiding divisive policies and stigmatizing rhetoric and by active facilitation of community organizing – is to be fostered. Simultaneously, demands must be made on both individuals and local organizations concerning *their* conduct. In this regard, the conviviality approach goes farther than the social capital and social cohesion approaches, by identifying specific demands on the various actors.

## Conclusion

We asked at the start if any of these approaches are able to explain and provide guidance to inclusive social progress. While all three approaches have certain weaknesses, due both to measurement problems and vagueness or impreciseness concerning the role of certain relevant actors, conviviality is the approach that most explicitly identifies the responsibilities of various actors in promoting inclusive social progress. If *Seeking Conviviality* had applied a human rights approach and not the human dignity approach, the emphasis on accountability would have been more justified and also more solid.

As a theoretical concept, and as a concept that can be generally endorsed across ideological differences, conviviality faces many challenges. It has no concepts similar to bridging, bonding and linking. Its negative view on corporate actors implies that it might be perceived as an approach belonging to the left side of the ideological spectrum. As an approach that guides the empowerment of local communities to make legitimate demands on the power-

---

71 Ødegård, G., K. Steen-Johnsen, Loga, J. and B. Ravneberg (2014), *Fellesskap og forskjellighet. Integrasjon og nettverksbygging i flerkulturelle lokalsamfunn*, Oslo [Community and Diversity. Integration and Networking in Multicultural Communities].



ful, on the other hand, conviviality can be a source of inspiration in promoting inclusive, equitable and peaceful communities.

Hans Morten Haugen has a PhD in law from the University of Oslo and is Professor at Diakonhjemmet University College, Institute for Diakonia and Leadership, P. O. Box 184 Vindern, N-0319 Oslo.

Email: [haugen@diakonhjemmet.no](mailto:haugen@diakonhjemmet.no)