



CoNet newsletter (January 2010)

The URBACT Cohesion Network CoNet - 11 cities are exploring current approaches to strengthen social cohesion in neighbourhoods.

SOCIAL COHESION – everybody’s aim is difficult to define

A difficult term

Social Cohesion is a positive term. Cities, regions and states all declare increasing or strengthening social cohesion as one priority of their political or administrative endeavours. Like „well-being“ or „happiness“ it is much talked about but hard to define. What does „social cohesion“ mean?

Often Social Cohesion is understood as the glue or bond that keeps society together in the face of cultural diversity. The British Centre for Social Cohesion (www.socialcohesion.co.uk) is looking at „community cohesion“ and particularly at the Muslim communities in Britain in that sense. Sometimes „Social Cohesion“ and „Social Capital“ are used synonymously or as subcategories of each other.

Both the European Union and the Council of Europe use „Social Cohesion“ in a much broader sense. It is not only understood as the glue keeping society together in the face of cultural diversity, but also in the face of economic, social and educational disparities. For the European Union greater social cohesion until 2010 is one ultimate aim of the Lisbon strategy adopted ten years ago. (<http://portal.cor.europa.eu/lisbon/Pages/welcome.aspx>)

Search for indicators

To follow progress on the Lisbon Strategy the EU named economic, educational and social indicators to measure developments in this field. Crucial indicators measure poverty and unemployment.

The research project „Social Cohesion Indicators in Flanders“ aims at creating a comprehensive set of indicators for social cohesion to be adopted by cities and communities in the Flemish region of Belgium. (www.socialcohesion.eu)

The Council of Europe defines „Social Cohesion“ as the capacity of a society to ensure the well-being of all its members, minimizing disparities and avoiding marginalization. In 2005 the Council of Europe’s Director General of Social Cohesion published a methodological guide (http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/GUIDE_en.pdf) to the concerted development of social cohesion indicators.

The new URBACT network TOGETHER, led by the city of Mulhouse will closely look at the application of this tool on a city level and focus especially on the aspect of co-responsibility of different stakeholders.

A topic for CoNet?

In CoNet „Social Cohesion“ is not understood in a narrow sense focussing on cultural diversity only, which is of little importance for the problems to be solved in Liverpool or Zabrze. It is understood in the wider sense looking at economic, social and educational disparities in our cities. CoNet is not primarily about definitions or statistical measurements of social cohesion. In this network we explore current approaches to strengthen social cohesion in neighbourhoods in the fields of community life, education and economy on the neighbourhood level. We examine and develop integrated approaches in deprived



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neighbourhoods of our cities and learn together from good practices and solutions in the 11 CoNet cities.

Nevertheless: discussing „concepts of inclusion“ at our next CoNet network meeting in Sofia on 25 and 26 February will show how our current approaches are influenced by our understanding of the complex term „Social Cohesion“.

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CoNet at the URBACT annual conference in Stockholm

The URBACT annual conference in Stockholm was held on 25 November 2009. There were two contributions from CoNet partners to workshops.

Samira Hack from Malmö presented the youth center „Green House“ in the Fosie district of Malmö. The youth center is administered by four young people, including Samira, who grew up in the neighbourhood.

Teodora Tsanova from Sofia outlined the Bulgarian capital's approach on inclusion. Showing the „Social Cohesion Diagram“ from the CoNet Baselinestudy she examined the situation along the six corners: economy, education, community life, environment, housing and health.

CoNet meeting in Zabrze 3 and 4 December 2009

The CoNet Team from Zabrze organized the meeting proudly presenting the industrial heritage of this Silesian city. Amongst the venues was a former coal mine and former swimming pool for workers.

Zabrze's Local Support Group presented different approaches to integrate long term unemployed people from the Biskupice neighbourhood into the community and the labour market. A new scheme, the „Local Activity Programme“ focusses on 30 families with multiple disadvantages.

These presentations stimulated discussions on target-group and area based approaches for services and programmes to excluded people. No common „recipe“ for the topic was formulated. Both principles „as much target-group focus as possible and as much area focus as necessary“ and the reverse „as much area focus as possible and as much target-group focus as necessary“ are valid.

Next CoNet network meeting in Sofia 25 and 26 February 2010

The next CoNet meeting in Sofia will focus on „Social Enterprises“ and „concepts of inclusion“. A cultural center addressing the Roma community in the Krasna Poliana neighbourhood and a project providing employment for people with mental disabilities in the Slatina neighbourhood will be visited.



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