

Social Cohesion, Cultural Policies and the Compendium

Definitions

The Council of Europe defines social cohesion as “the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means”.

According to John Foote in his paper “*Social Indicators of Culture*”, favorable conditions for social cohesion include:

- *economic conditions* such as equitable income distribution, absence of income polarization along ethnic, gender, regional and class lines, depth and duration of poverty, and unemployment rate;
- *life chances or equality of opportunity* such as access to public health facilities and insurance, access to higher education and literacy, adequate and affordable housing and employment; and
- *quality of life* including real and perceived personal and population health, and personal/economic security.

Activities

ERICarts and the Compendium Community of Authors are also contributing to a compilation of social cohesion indicators being developed by DG III Social Affairs of the Council of Europe. The goal is to identify indicators that demonstrate and quantify, wherever possible, the impact that cultural policies and programmes may or may not have on the achievement of social cohesion goals and outcomes over time. As a first step, the Compendium Community of Authors are currently:

- Collecting information and data which would show the levels of participation in cultural life between social groups and differing from each other with respect to gender, age or education, e.g. buying books, going to the movies, taking a music class, attending a concert or opera performances.
- Examining the major trends or developments in the status or role of amateur arts (voluntary or socio-cultural activities) in the last decade as well as identifying the status of reading centres, youth clubs with cultural activities, neighbourhood, community, and intercultural centres
- Mapping audience surveys which would indicate levels of participation in cultural life according to income, ethnicity, religion.

A longer term goal is to identify links between policies that support participation in cultural life and the broader issues of civic participation, citizenship, civil society development, and social cohesion.