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Community Conceptions and Social Cohesion: Theoretical, Empirical and Normative Issues

Public policies increasingly reflect a desire to promote social cohesion in response to challenges perceived to be due to diversity. Thus, social cohesion is considered under threat, but also necessary to avoid religious and political conflicts, parallel societies, crime, and to secure the level of solidarity necessary to uphold the welfare state. Such public policies tend to rely on community conceptions, i.e., ideas about what kinds of bonds between community members are conducive to social cohesion. In this paper, I consider the possibility of promoting social cohesion (in particular, trust and solidarity) through policies embedding community con-

ceptions and what the effects of different such community conceptions are. I a) conceptually clarify the core notion of 'community conceptions', b) distinguish between different types of such conceptions (associated with, respectively, conservative nationalism, active citizenship, liberalism and multiculturalism), c) explain their role in arguments for stability as a precondition for justice, d) consider different models of causation through which policies may be thought to affect social cohesion, e) analyse the (limited number of) studies testing the effects of policies, relying on specific community conceptions, on social cohesion, and f) analyse a recent study in Copenhagen on majority and minority commitments to various community conceptions and correla-

tions between individual community
conceptions and trust.