

Challenging Diversity?

The Spatial and Temporal Dynamics of Ethnic Diversity and Social Cohesion

INHARMONICITIES: PROJECT SCOPE

The UK is currently undergoing one of the most significant demographic shifts in recent history. Not only did the proportion of non-White British rise from 13% to 20% between 2001 and 2011, but the diversity within ethnic minority groups has grown substantially.

Across academic, governmental and public spheres, concerns are being articulated that this growing diversity may pose a threat to: the cohesion of communities (such as trust and social capital in neighbourhoods); wider societal cohesion (leading to declining social capital in society); and inter-group cohesion (generating inter-ethnic tensions and driving support for far-right organisations).

When even conservative estimates predict UK ethnic diversity will increase over the coming years, understanding **if, how** and **why** diversity affects social cohesion, and what can be done to ameliorate any pressures and augment any benefits, is of paramount importance to the maintenance of a cohesive, harmonious society.

This project will push forward our understanding of how ethnic diversity impacts social cohesion across four key research streams:

THE "MISSING" ROLE OF SEGREGATION

We know a lot about how the amount of ethnic diversity affects social cohesion. Yet, far less research has explored the impacts of segregation. Highly diverse communities can be integrated, with residents from different groups equally spread across neighbourhoods. However, diverse areas can also be highly segregated, where groups largely live in separate neighbourhoods.

Key questions include:

- What effect does segregation have on social cohesion, alongside ethnic diversity?

- If ethnic diversity can harm social cohesion, do any caustic effects depend on how segregated an area is?
- What drives any emergent inter-group tensions under segregated conditions? And, can positive mixing between ethnic groups play a role in ameliorating tensions in diverse, segregated areas?

ETHNIC DIVERSITY INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF RESIDENTIAL COMMUNITIES

We have learned a lot about how experiences of ethnic diversity in residential communities can impact social cohesion. However, people are actually more likely to experience diversity in their workplaces, and children experience it in their schools, than in their neighbourhoods. Yet, we know less about the role experiences of diversity across non-residential sites play in integration and cohesion.

Key questions include:

- What happens when diversity increases in an environment? Does it lead to more mixing between groups, and is this mixing positive? Or, can it sometimes increase negative encounters? And, what conditions influence whether diversity increases positive or negative contact?
- How does increasing diversity across schools, workplaces and civic groups affect social cohesion? And, how does this compare to growing diversity in residential communities?
- What role can experiences of diversity in workplaces, schools and volunteer groups play in building cohesion and managing tensions across diverse and segregated communities, and vice versa?

ETHNIC DIVERSITY OVER INDIVIDUALS' LIVES: HOW THE PAST MAY SHAPE OUR FUTURE

Much of what we know assumes that as diversity increases within peoples' communities social cohesion shifts accordingly. However, how adults respond to ethnically diverse environments is likely influenced by all kinds of experiences throughout their lives, such as the attitudes of their parents, the diversity of their schools, and how diverse the neighbourhoods were they grew up in.

Key questions include:

- Can diverse schools and neighbourhoods help ainst pejorative parental attitudes? Or, do negative parental attitudes impede any positive effects of diversity?
- Do experiences of diversity in schools/ neighbourhood in one's youth continue to affect social cohesion throughout one's life? And, how persistent are the effects of parental attitudes on later life social cohesion?
- How far do such experiences of diversity in youth influence how people respond to experiencing diversity in their adult lives? And are potential short-term negative impacts of diversity offset by longer-term processes of integration?

CO-OPERATIVE, SOCIAL MIXING AS A MEANS OF POSITIVE CHANGE

We know that positive mixing between groups can help build cohesion. However, what happens when there are no opportunities for mixing? Or, if there are opportunities in diverse contexts but individuals don't mix? Or, if they do experience mixing, but such encounters are predominantly negative? Youth volunteering and service-learning programs, such as the National Citizen Service (NCS), may offer vital opportunities to overcome these obstacles.

Key questions include:

- Can involvement in schemes like the NCS help build cohesion between different groups, and social cohesion more generally?
- Does such participation help young people respond to experiences of diversity in their schools and neighbourhoods? And can such schemes serve as a bridge in areas where mixing is absent, superficial, or mostly negative?

STUDY SITES

This project will focus on these issues in the UK, but will also draw insights from SWEDEN and across EUROPE.

However, to gain more detailed insights, it also takes a more focused look at processes of integration and division across two sites within the UK: OLDHAM and LONDON.

SUMMARY

This project aims to radically expand our understanding of how ethnic diversity is affecting social cohesion in society, while also examining how processes linking diversity and cohesion are interwoven with inequality and disadvantage.

From neighbourhoods to workplaces, from the present to the past, it will generate a more complete picture of the short-term and long-term processes of integration and division occurring in societies today.

In doing so it aims to produce key insights and recommendations, based on robust evidence and analysis, for how any positive and negative effects of growing diversity may be augmented and ameliorated.

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