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AIMING AT SOCIAL COHESION IN CITIES TO TRANSFORM SOCIETY

A potential-oriented perspective

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Does social cohesion exist? Obviously, it does as a term. Otherwise I would not have been able to write this article. But does it also exist as a concept? That is not the same as a term. To exist as a concept it has to be defined or in other words, the term has to be provided with a content; an idea. The difference between term and concept means that it can be defined in different ways. But yet, to exist as a concept, it has to be defined in one way or the other. Is it normally used as a concept, and not just as a term? Far too seldom, in my view. In the common use of it, I would describe its content as floating. People use the term but not with any precise meaning or with a meaning which is taken for granted (Eizaguirre et. al., 2012: 2007).

The choice of words and terms matter. They put our minds on a certain track and direct our attention. They can, for example, put us on track to take things for granted. It also matters, however, how we define them, what we mean by them, more or less intentionally. In addition to term and concept, social cohesion also exists in a third way, namely as something which we can refer to by using the term and concept of social cohesion (Fairclough et. al., 2002). But how can we refer to something which we have no idea about? That is unfortunately the situation with the normal use of the term social cohesion. People use it but do not really know what they are talking about. Then, it gets filled with a content which is taken for granted.

I will start in this article to analyse the use of the term in the EU context. What kind of content has it, why and with what implications? Thereafter, I will draw on recent research to present a preliminary definition of the concept. Finally, I will suggest a further elaboration of that definition, drawing on cultural political economy and based on an explanation of the problems that social cohesion could become a solution to. To highlight the required changes, I will use the concept of social innovation but in the sense of something transformative, which replaces existing societal forms and not only reforms them. The article will finish with the presentation of five criteria which social innovations should comply with to become transformative.

1 The EU Cohesion policy

The EU cohesion policy has its roots in the reassessments of the 1980s. The experience of the 1970s had convinced many politicians that the Keynesian policies of the nation-states did not work anymore. In the second half of that decade, influential organizations such as the OECD had also begun to advocate changes in a neoliberal direction (see e.g. OECD, 1979; Jessop 2002). The British Government after the election of the Tories in 1979 with Margaret Thatcher as the new Prime Minister came to spearhead such a change.

The neoliberals at the time argued, and the current ones still argue, that high unemployment and low growth occur because the market is not free enough, and deregulation has thus been demanded as remedy. The markets must be freed and people must be encouraged or forced to apply for a job, regardless of the quality. Activation, it has been called. Safety is less important. The state should focus on supporting the supply side and not on strengthening demand, whereof the latter was characteristic of the Keynesian policy (Morel et al. 2012). In *Encyclopedia of globalization*, Bob Jessop (2012) defines neoliberalism as a “political project that is justified on philosophical grounds and seeks to extend competitive market forces, consolidate a market-friendly constitution, and promote individual freedom.”

For a start, many politicians on the continent opposed the neoliberal policies represented by the Thatcher government. The current President of the European Commission Jacques Delors became a rallying figure for those who wanted to defend a regulated capitalism, and he was instrumental in developing a response to the crisis of Keynesianism and the emerging neo-liberalism (Novy et al., 2012: 1876). Cohesion policy was central to the EU's reorientation. When established in 1988, it was to replace the nation-state Keynesianism with something else at the European level, but not with neoliberalism. As Liesbeth Hooghe (1998: 459) writes, the reform of 1988 constituted “the bedrock of the anti-neoliberal programme. Though the immediate goal is to reduce territorial inequalities in the European Union, its larger objective is to institutionalize key principles of regulated capitalism in Europe.”

However, it was not a question of replacing a national Keynesianism with a European one. In Keynesianism, social policy concerned redistribution between people. That orientation was shifted in cohesion policy to a redistribution between regions; i.e. from a people-based to a place-based redistribution. That could be seen against the background of the new member states from southern Europe joining the EU during the first half of the 1980s, which highlighted the large differences between the countries. That is the orientation that cohesion policy in Europe has maintained ever since. The view of differences has remained place-based, and as a regional problem. Redistribution should thus take place between regions and places; while redistribution between people at the national level is increasingly restricted. As current cohesion policy does not primarily concern the relationship between rich and poor people (see also Novy, 2011), it is therefore not the same as social policy before the 1980s.

2 What does the EU mean by cohesion?

The European Commission published its first report on cohesion policy in 1996 (European Commission, 1996). It begins commendably with a chapter called “What do we mean by cohesion?”. In line with the regulated capitalism that the initiators of cohesion policy advocated, the report refers to a European social model based on the values of the social market economy:

This seeks to combine a system of economic organisation based on market forces, freedom of opportunity and enterprise with a commitment to the values of internal solidarity and mutual support which ensures open access for all members of society to services of general benefit and protection. (European Commission 1996: 13)

This is the model of society that the European Union should seek to preserve, it is said in the first report on cohesion. Deepening European integration means that the European Union must take greater responsibility and share it with Member States, something which should be done with the help of the cohesion policy. Cohesion must therefore be not only economic but also social, and as stated in the quotation, these two forms of cohesion should be combined. With economic cohesion, the report means “convergence of basic incomes through higher GDP growth, of competitiveness and of employment.” (European Commission 1996: 13)

Social cohesion is said to be a little harder to define. Based on the notion of solidarity, it is associated with “universal systems of social protection, regulation to correct market failure and systems of social dialogue” (European Commission 1996: 14). That creates favourable conditions for economic development, the report stresses. Economic and social cohesion appear in the report as interdependent.

The key term to social cohesion, however, is solidarity, the word of the day at the time of the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900. In fact, as Sven-Eric Liedman (1999) claims in his book on solidarity, its importance at that time corresponds to today's "sustainable development", which was also the theme of the World Expo in Hanover in 2000. Solidarity had also its leading theorist, namely Emile Durkheim, one of the classics in Sociology. Durkheim saw solidarity as a fact and not primarily as an ideal. It was built into the functioning of society. Earlier forms of society were characterized by a solidarity which Durkheim calls mechanical, based on similarity. In such a form of society individuals are similar because they experience the same feelings, cherish the same values and hold the same things sacred. Eventually an opposite form of solidarity emerged, called organic by Durkheim, based on diversity and differentiation (Novy et. al., 2012: 1875).

In the decades around the turn of the previous century, a movement existed called Solidarism (Liedman 1999). It was the third French Republic's official ideology, thought to neutralize the contradiction between liberal economism and socialist collectivism. Liedman describes Solidarism as the culmination of the decades that have been called the Belle Époque. When the World War I broke out, it was eventually forgotten.

The use of the word solidarity in contemporary European cohesion policy has its roots in those decades around the turn of the previous century. It is easy to trace the word solidarity back there, also because it stems from French. It was written into the Code Civil in 1804 and began to be used a few years later by Charles Fourier, one of the early socialist thinkers. For Fourier, solidary did not mean an ideal but a real and mutual dependence, based on the division of labour, thus similar to the approach later developed by Durkheim.

In the 1840s, it spread to German and English as a consequence of the revolutionary sentiments of that decade. Marx used it at a later stage but then only for the class, not for the whole of society. In the Paris Commune of 1871, solidarity became associated with the labour movement. The use of the word solidarity spread during the last decades of 1800s and developed into Solidarism. Large parts of the Left, however, were opposed to. To the left, solidarity concerned the class; partial or collectivist solidarity as Liedman calls it. In contrast, the approach advocated by the Solidarism movement and Durkheim referred to the whole of society.

For both Marx and Durkheim, however, solidarity means a reciprocity. That is a different definition than the one that simply relate solidarity to those who suffer, normative solidarity as Liedman (1999: 86) calls it, which means that the fortunate should care about the poor and oppressed, while they in their turn should accept the privileged position of the fortunate. It is a definition of solidarity that have come to dominate, to the extent it is whatsoever spoken about solidarity nowadays.

The strength of the normative notion of solidarity also depends on its foundation in Catholicism since the 1930s, when Pope Pius XI included it in his famous encyclical (Liedman, 1999: 23). Thereafter, all the Popes have had a lot to say about solidarity, but in the normative sense. Hence, the boundary between solidarity and charity has been relaxed. At the same time, the word has become associated with history and not with the future. It is not a new society that is foretold in the Catholic use of the word, but rather a return to the principles of an old one, as described in the Bible. Currently, the normative notion of solidarity has become very important in structuring the discourse on refugees.

3 The vanishing substance of social cohesion as a concept

Which concept of solidarity does cohesion policy give expression to? In the first cohesion report of 1996, the word solidarity is mentioned around 20 times. When the report a few times hints at an explanation, it is about the relationship with the regions considered to be weak, such as "the poorest Member States and regions and with the most disadvantaged regions and people in the more prosperous Member States" (European Commission, 1996: 11).

In the most recent cohesion reports, the word does not only lack a clear meaning, but it disappears almost entirely. In the EU's fifth Cohesion Report (European Commission 2010), a normative concept of solidarity is purely reflexively expressed in the preface, written by the two Commissioners for

Regional and Urban Policy and Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion: "Our efforts will in particular support development in the poorest regions in line with our commitment to solidarity."

The current cohesion policy is clearly a cohesion on market conditions. It is primarily through our roles in the market, such as for example consumers and wage-workers, that cohesion should be achieved. And it does happen. Even neoliberals have an idea about cohesion, Liedman (1999: 44) reminds about, as "the market links producer and consumer". But some of these social relations causes inequalities. Neoliberals have not much to say about such social relations within what they see as the economy, grounded as they are in neoclassical economics (Fine, 2016).

The influence from neoclassical economics seems obvious in the distinction between economic and social cohesion. The neoclassical revolution of the 1870s consolidated an emerging division between economics and the other social sciences, as Ben Fine (2007: 48) puts it, "with the former tending to offer an individualistic approach (economic rationality) to market relations, and the latter focusing on holistic approaches to non-market relations (and/or "irrationality" in individual behaviour)." In this way, the economists made economics their own subject while other sciences were expected to deal with the rest, understood by the economists as the social.

Well in accordance with this scientific background, the cohesion reports do not say anything at all about the substance in the social relations of so-called economic cohesion. They only deal with the preconditions of such cohesion. What they do say at least a little about is the substance in the social relations of so-called social cohesion, but that rather reflects a conservative thinking. Furthermore, it has almost disappeared in the reports and that, I would say, reflects the success of neoliberalism. As Gamble (2016: 50) says: "Many of the challenges to the survival of the welfare state, whether in its conservative or socialist form, are now expressed in market libertarian language."

This leads me to the quite paradoxical conclusion that the European cohesion policy lacks a policy for cohesion. It really deals with the conditions for cohesion, but a cohesion whose meaning you talk quietly about. This is the outlook that has made its mark on the operation of the Structural Funds across Europe and metropolitan measures, which they have become the transmission belts for. Fully in line with neoliberalism, it is taken for granted that cohesion policy creates the conditions for a cohesion that is in everyone's interest.

In the absence of an idea about social cohesion and thus a signified, the referents have become increasingly important. Social cohesion has become a reference for the situation in certain neighbourhoods (referent), where it does not look socially cohesive, at least not in comparison with the life of the included middle class people in other neighbourhoods. The latter have, thus, become the norm and yardstick. "Be like us", the included call out to the excluded, "and the city will become socially cohesive".

This expresses an empiricist approach, which means that knowledge becomes a matter of putting names (signifier) on the immediate experiences (referents), without spending much time on developing ideas (signified) of what hidden patterns they may express (see also Jessop, 2015: 252). Empiricists comply with WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get); the slogan from the early days of the personal computers when the pioneer printers managed to print out exactly what you saw on the screen.

4 Social cohesion as a problématique

A profoundly different approach to social cohesion ran through "Social Polis - Social Platform on Cities and Social Cohesion", the largest research project up to date on these issues, that lasted from late 2007 until the end of 2010. The project involved 11 research institutions from across Europe (even one from Canada), a network consisting of experienced researchers and more than hundred stakeholders, in terms of government, civil society and private organisations at different levels.

The overall objective with Social Polis was to develop a research agenda on the role of cities in social cohesion and key related policy questions. This was approached on two fronts; by critical analysis of research to date, and by constructing a social platform of networks for information gathering, dialogue

and agenda setting. In contrast to the approach implicit in the EU cohesion policy, Social Polis did not locate the issue of social cohesion to some kind of existence beside economic cohesion, but treated it as overarching, as here explained in an information leaflet:

Since social cohesion concerns society as a whole, at multiple spatial scales, beyond issues of inequality, exclusion and inclusion, and across public, market and voluntary sectors, 'Social Polis' assembles multiple dimensions of relevant debates (on economy, polity, society, culture, ethics) across the city and a variety of life spheres. To facilitate analysis of the highly interlinked dynamics involved in social cohesion, a range of specific fields affecting people's existence are focussed upon.

13 such so-called existential fields were identified. In relation to each one of these fields, research to date were analysed critically in survey papers. These papers were then further elaborated and in the end, some of them were published in a Special Issue of the journal *Urban Studies* in 2012, with the objectives of “conceptualising, exploring and operationalising different meanings of social cohesion to make them useful for studying the dynamics of ‘cities and social cohesion’ in urban Europe” (Miciukiewicz et. al., 2012: 1855).

I was myself part of Social Polis and I got the privilege to popularise the results in a report with regard to the theme “Cohesion of the city as a whole” (Stigendal, 2010). Thinking back on Social Polis, now some years later, its most important achievement, as I see it, can be summarised as the suggestion to treat social cohesion as a *problématique*. To understand that, we need to make the distinction that I presented in the introduction between signifier, signified and referents (Jessop, 2015: 251). Social cohesion is first of all a signifier, a name of something. In the EU cohesion policy, it has become the name of a referent. Social Polis, in contrast, made it the name of a signified by treating it as a *problématique*. This middle position of signifieds is short-cut in the EU cohesion policy. Instead, social cohesion becomes the name of an existing condition, which is then taken for granted. In contrast, Social Polis addressed the ideas and understandings of the cities when they treated the term as a *problématique*.

The concept of *problématique* was used by Louis Althusser (2005), who in his turn had borrowed it from Jacques Martin. It stresses that a word or concept cannot be considered in isolation. It only exists in the theoretical or ideological framework in which it is used (the signified). This framework is called its *problématique*. In the EU, social cohesion is the name of a condition that parts of cities are in while in Social Polis it signifies a mode of understanding. The only thing we have got to know from the EU on social cohesion is what the cohesion reports say on solidarity. And when that disappeared, social cohesion becomes what seems to be. Its self-evidence emerges from referring to situations that seem not to be social cohesion.

When Miciukiewicz et. al. (2012: 1857) say that “no clear progress in understanding ‘urban social cohesion’ has been made ever since the publication of the EC DG Employment and Social Policy’s analysis of Urban Social Development (1992) ...”, I don’t find that strange, given the restrictions of the EU perspective to the referents. The EU expresses an empiricist perspective on social cohesion and the lack thereof, inspired by the life of the included. It takes for granted that something called cohesion more or less exists in the middle class way of life. And it urges us to mainly talk about the lack of cohesion in certain situations and places. When, for example, young people set cars on fire, they break the norm and do not seem to comply with a condition of social cohesion. Thus, social cohesion becomes part of the justification for stopping these young people from setting cars on fire. This so called referent-definition of social cohesion is incompatible with a critical perspective. It does not go behind the obvious and ask what it may give expression to. This is an almost forbidden question, which I now still want to deal with.

5 If social cohesion is the solution, what is the problem?

Whatever we think of contemporary cities, we cannot call them particularly cohesive. On the contrary, cities are characterized by big cleavages between for example rich and poor. Often these categories of people live in different parts of cities which makes the lack of social cohesion highly visible. It is a

reality which we can experience by just walking around. It may also intrude on us when we, for example, hear about riots or read about unemployment figures. In terms of the philosophy of science that I represent, critical realism, this is the level of reality called the empirical.

We respond to these empirical experiences by calling them something, i.e. labelling them with a signifier. Cleavages like the one between rich and poor are usually called inequality. Many of us are not pleased with the signifier, however, but want to make sense of our experiences by providing them with a content; a signified. In science, the signified usually means a definition. By defining a term, it turns into a concept. A common and useful definition of inequality is the one suggested by Amartya Sen (2013) as part of his 'capability approach'. On this basis, inequalities should be seen as differences which violate the human rights of the disadvantaged. Recent research has highlighted the existence of different types of inequality, for example with regard to income (Piketty, 2014).

Others have focused on inequality in terms of health, defined as systematic differences in health between socially determined groups of individuals on the basis of class, gender, ethnicity, age and residency (Marmot, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Health inequality is particularly detrimental to social cohesion. As Sen (2013) has emphasised, health constitutes a human right that comes before other human rights since those rights can only be fully enjoyed if the individual first enjoys good health.

Göran Therborn (2013: 49) makes a distinction between three general types of inequality: vital inequality, existential inequality and inequality in terms of resources. These three types are described as applying to us in our capacities as biological beings, persons and actors, respectively. According to Therborn (2013: 35), "very little theoretical reflection on the meanings and implications of inequality, and of equality, has come to the fore." He calls for a multidimensional and global approach to inequality (2013: 4).

In my view, such an approach should be underpinned by critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975, 1989; Sayer, 1992, 2000; Danermark, 2002). This means a treatment of what we see and experience as not the whole story, but in the first place as belonging to a certain level of reality, called the empirical. We make sense of these impressions and experiences by understanding them as expressing something else, i.e. by treating them as symptoms. As such, the empirical express a specific content associated, in turn, with another level of reality, called the actual. The forms of inequality mentioned above belong to that level. They certainly exist, but express themselves at the level of the empirical.

To explain the causes of inequality, however, we need to understand the existence of the most profound level. That is the level of the real, which embraces it all, i.e. not only what appears to be and what has been actualised, but also the potentials. Before we can establish the actual causes of inequality, we need to know what has the potential to cause inequality. These potential causes of inequality should be seen as the main problems that efforts to achieve social cohesion should address.

This understanding of inequality draws on the broad societal perspective called Cultural Political Economy (CPE) (Sum & Jessop, 2013), underpinned philosophically by critical realism. In line with this perspective, a further distinction can be made of existential inequality into cultural and structural inequality (Stigendal, 2016). This can be motivated by the ontological assumption of our social existence as being both cultural and structural. We become part of the social world by on the one hand making sense and meaning of it, and on the other hand by structuring social relations. According to CPE, this is how we reduce the complexity of the world.

Both cultures and structures have to be produced and reproduced by actors. Otherwise they would not exist (Jessop, 2005). Thereby, actors may also reproduce causes of inequality, even though it is not their intention. In line with critical realism (Sayer 2000), causes should be understood first of all as potentials, inherent in systems, institutions, actors, cultures etc. To get an effect, potential causes have to be actualised by actors who can make a difference due to their capacity for strategic calculation and action. There is, however, always a discretion, by which I mean the scope that "exists for actions to overwhelm, circumvent, or subvert structural constraints" (Jessop, 2016: 55). The concept of discretion deals with the changing 'art of the possible'.

The actualisation of potentials always takes place in specific, contextual and concrete situations. There, different potentials combine to produce effects which should be regarded as emergent as they cannot be derived from only one of the potentials. An explanation of a certain event needs to take the context into consideration. We need to examine the potentials and their properties at higher levels of abstraction, apart from the concrete situations and contexts where they get actualised. By doing that, we can understand that causes are inherent in individuals and other single objects, as mentioned above, but also in how both social structures and contexts of meaning work, i.e. their so to speak structural and cultural mechanisms. But then we need to carry out empirical investigations of concrete situations in order to explain what happens and why.

So what has the potential to cause the inequality actualised in cities and appearing at the empirical level as for example difference in health? I claim that the most important potential causes of inequality are inherent in capitalism (Stigendal, 2018). One of the main effects of neoliberalism is that it has brought about new structural forms for the actualisation of these potential causes, associated with the dominance of finance capital, and with a global coverage, not national. This has led to a major redistribution of wealth, confirmed by for example OECD (2011) and, of course, Piketty (2014).

As part of this new global economic order since the 1980s (Arrighi, 2010; Becker et al., 2010; Therborn, 2011), the responsibilities of cities have been much enhanced. On the one hand, globalisation has put cities at the forefront, strengthening them with regard to their regional and national territories and, generating new prospects. Every employment hub, city or region, has to compete with the others to attract and keep investments in its area. As Doreen Massey (2007: 12) describes it, neoliberalism is made in the city. On the other hand, cities have become concentrations of inequality, where different forms coincide, often also with segregation.

In other words: On the one hand, society has turned into a condition of social inclusion with surrounding borders consisting of demands on what to have, to do and to mean in order to be included. On the other hand, spatial concentrations have emerged of people who do not have, do or mean what is demanded to participate in society. The socially included and the socially excluded thus tend to live in different parts of cities. In between, borders have arisen, which I prefer to see as societal (Graham, 2011). The calm neighbourhoods in the cities where most people go to work in the morning and thus appear as examples of social cohesion represent in fact the included side in the development of society to a condition of social inclusion. What the EU in its cohesion policy has come to see as the solution of social cohesion should from the perspective that I represent, thus, be seen as part of the problem.

6 Prospects for social cohesion in cities

The most comprehensive project to date on the issue of cities and social cohesion, Social Polis, ended up by treating social cohesion as a *problématique*. As explained above, I see this as the most important legacy of Social Polis. That is because it restored social cohesion as an idea, in contrast to using the term as a reference to a natural referent; i.e. what seems to be. The use of the term *problématique* can also be justified in order to treat social cohesion in the first place as a problem, not something which necessarily exists. Cities are not socially cohesive and that is the problem. They can perhaps become socially cohesive, but in that case how and what does it mean?

I have tried to develop this perspective further in the article, by in the first place highlighting potentials. To explain inequality and thus the lack of social cohesion we need to understand the involved potentials, their ability to cause inequality. Let us call these potentials negative, because they cause problems of inequality. In such a perspective, we can also identify positive potential. These are, for example, the ones of the young people who get to know each other across ethnicities and cross the borders of social inclusion everyday they go to school or work. By that, many of them develop an intercultural competence; really a scarce resource among policy-makers in contemporary societies.

To understand this, a perspective is needed which can be called potential-oriented. I want to use this signifier because it can bring hope. It urges us to look after the possible and is in itself an example of what I wrote in the introduction about how the use of signifiers can put us on a certain track. Potential-oriented is the name (signifier) of the perspective (signified) that I have pursued in this article.

Adopting this perspective is the first of five criteria that I have suggested on the basis of the project Citispyce, spelled out as “Combating Inequalities through Innovative Social Practices of and for Young People in Cities across Europe”, where I also participated, which lasted for three years 2013-15, and just like Social Polis was funded by the seventh framework programme. In total, Citispyce involved 13 partner organisations from 10 cities in just as many countries across the EU: Athens, Barcelona, Birmingham, Brno, Hamburg, Krakow, Malmö, Rotterdam, Sofia and Venice. In my own conclusions from this project, I have suggested five criteria, which should be met for initiatives to combat the causes of inequality.

In contrast, the notion of social cohesion, as part of the EU cohesion policy, deals with the inclusion of people in existing society, without addressing the causes excluding them. It presupposes that there is nothing inherently wrong with contemporary society. It simply has to improve its measures to include young people in it. This perspective is also characterized by a de-politicisation of collective action, instrumentalisation of local initiatives, localism and individualism. It is limited to what critical realism calls the empirical and thus associated with empiricism. What appears to be a problem is also seen as the problem that has to be solved. That means that the problems are taken for granted. No particular effort is made to define the problems. Instead, they are perceived as self-defining. If people appear as excluded, that is seen as the problem, not the societal causes of their exclusion. This problem-oriented perspective should not be seen as guidance towards solutions but on the contrary as one of the causes of inequality and, thus, part of the problem.

Various efforts are needed to combat the causes of inequality and at different scale levels. It requires not only reforms but a transformation of society. This should not, however, be seen as a call for revolution. The old dualism of reform versus revolution has to be overcome, in line with the idea of a double transformation, which, according to Novy (2017), “describes the twofold challenge of civilizing capitalism by overcoming the neoliberal mode of regulation while at the same time taking the first steps towards transcending capitalism and its unsustainable social forms ...” That makes the work of local actors particularly important and enables me to put the five criteria in the context of not only combatting the causes of inequality but at the same time also a transformation of society.

Firstly, projects, initiatives, practices and indeed services in general should adopt a potential-oriented approach to young people which means that young people should be seen and approached in the first place as potentials and not only for solving their own problems but for tackling the causes of inequality and developing society. The potential-oriented perspective means to understand causes first of all as potentials. To have an effect, they must be actualised. That always happens somewhere, in a specific context, at different levels and it is made by actors who always have a discretion to make a difference.

Secondly, on the basis of a potential-oriented perspective, it becomes imperative to produce knowledge on the causes of inequality by taking advantage of the experiences, views and cultural expressions of young people. Producing such knowledge in collaboration with young people and establishing contexts which favour creativity can be called knowledge alliances. In principle, they should include all the ones with an interest in combatting inequality, e.g. practitioners in general, public sector workers, citizens, policymakers, young people, politicians and volunteers. The term knowledge alliance is also used by the European Commission in its strategy Europe 2020. The definition, however, tends to be limited to alliances between “education and business”. A broader definition was suggested in Social Polis (Stigendal, 2010), but also by the influential report Cities of Tomorrow. Challenges, Visions, Ways Forward (Hermant-de-Callatay and Svanfeldt, 2011).

Furthermore, the term was picked up and redefined by the Commission for a socially sustainable Malmö (the “Malmö Commission”), which was set up in 2011 against the backdrop of increasing health inequalities. Its main source of inspiration was the WHO Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, led by Michael Marmot, that had published its final report, “Closing the Gap in a Generation”, in 2008. To reduce health inequalities, the Malmö Commission (Stigendal & Östergren, 2013), in the first of two overarching recommendations, proposes that the City of Malmö pursues a social investment policy that can reduce inequities in living conditions and make societal systems more equitable. In the second overarching recommendation, the Commission proposes

changes to the processes embedded in these systems through the creation of knowledge alliances (see also Novy et. al., 2013).

Thirdly, this recognition of young people's knowledge does not of course imply that they know enough. Young people have a lot to learn, but education systems should draw much more on their potential and experience of inequalities. The cultures of young people should be used as tools for education. Young people should be encouraged to express injustices in processes that educate them to become critical citizens with a wish to be politically engaged. To be critical means to learn how to not take for granted, but instead question the obvious and reveal what lies behind.

Fourthly, wherever young people are involved, attention should be paid to how the work is organised. As work makes us who we are, the demand on the quality of jobs should be raised. Just to get a job should not be seen as sufficient. The EU should fund projects which show how the potential of young people could be taken advantage of, enabling young people to learn and grow on the job. Such projects should then serve and be highlighted as sources of inspiration for the development of work organisations in general.

Fifthly, practices that aspire to become innovative, should open up opportunities for young people from different parts of a neighbourhood, city and even across Europe to get to know each other and about each other's situations as well as working together. Young people should be empowered to deal collectively with the problems of inequality, in line with the idea of collective empowerment, based on the notion of collective solidarity. That should be regarded as a concern for all of us and the future of societies. This is the social cohesion to aim at, which also may turn cities into strongholds for the needed societal transformations.

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