



'Bridging' Social Capital Seminar Series

Seminar no.3: Diversity and social cohesion

29 September 2008, 4.00 to 5.30

Background

This is the third seminar in a series jointly organised by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Carnegie UK Trust Inquiry into the Future of Civil Society in the UK & Ireland. The aim of the series is to improve the understanding of the dynamics of social capital by exploring its operation in a number of different contexts.

The seminars will provide an opportunity for practitioners, academics and policymakers to share insights into how 'bridging' social capital is generated and how it can enhance the effectiveness of civil society associations and organisations committed to change and contribute to a more inclusive and socially just society.

Objectives

This seminar aimed to:

- Explore the link between diversity, social capital and social cohesion.
- Explore the implications of this relationship for policy and practice.

The speakers

The speakers at the seminar were:

Nick Johnson (Institute of Community Cohesion) who presented the current policy context and reviewed how debates around social cohesion and multiculturalism have evolved in recent years.

Nick Acheson (University of Ulster) who summarised what the research evidence says about the relationship between diversity and social cohesion in the US, the UK, and more specifically in Northern Ireland.

Karl Wilding from NCVO chaired and facilitated the seminar.

In a nutshell

Summary of Nick Johnson's presentation and comments

- Globalisation has led to increasing mobility of both emigrants and immigrants.
- The increase of choice throughout public service delivery is leading to increased segregation along faith and race lines in local areas. This is

combined with persistent inequalities between ethnic groups which policies have failed to reduce.

- An over-emphasis on the monetary value of immigration has ignored the real local level effects of immigration which has led to worsening public opinion.
- Understanding super diversity and people's own identity is important to managing the experience of immigration. There should be recognition that communities are heterogeneous and have a diverse range of experiences and issues within them. It is an over-simplification to talk of groups as the Muslim or Sikh community.
- The current multicultural model adopted in Britain focuses on difference and excludes commonalities. Cohesion is better brought about through stressing a common good that unites people in an area.
- Cohesion needs to be made sustainable through building long-lasting links at the community level.
- It is important to understand that poor housing and poor education leads to negative perceptions between groups, and that improving these will contribute to better cohesion.
- Current measures of cohesion are not sufficient. To understand cohesion it is important to explore what is happening at the local level rather than to focus on the more generalised perception of cohesion.

Summary of Nick Acheson's presentation and comments

- The relationship between ethnic diversity and cohesion is complicated. Putnam argues that in the short to medium term immigration and ethnic diversity will challenge social solidarity and inhibit social capital. In the long run, however, successful immigrant societies create new forms of social solidarity. The challenge is to create a new broader sense of "we".
- In the UK Lawrence and Heath found ethnic diversity among settled people is positively related to cohesion - the more diverse a neighbourhood, the higher the cohesion. However the higher the proportion of recent immigrants, the lower the community cohesion.
- Evidence from Northern Ireland suggests that bridging activities do not necessarily lead to greater inter-group trust. It appears that there is a great deal of mixing across communal divisions, but this is done in such a way that explicit cross-community issues are not addressed. This could be described as functional integration - people are often ready to work across boundaries around shared interests on the understanding that differences are never discussed. This leads to a fragile cohesion which is perceived as being easily damaged.
- Bridging activities do not necessarily lead to bridging identities. In cases where the drivers of exclusive ethnic identification are strong, bridging leads to functional bonding around temporary identities which are kept separate from people's primary identity by group norms.
- Community and voluntary organisations are extremely important at controlling levels of outright conflict. If there is a lack of organisational links between communities, you are much more likely to have overt violence.
- There is a clear link between policy, policy implementation at the local level and social capital - what really matters in how people feel about where they live is actually about how effective public services are, and how fair they think they are.

Diversity and Social Cohesion

Nick Johnson (Institute of Community Cohesion)

Introduction

This presentation gives a brief overview of some of the public policy debates around social cohesion generally and the challenges of diversity.

A recent history

In recent years the issue of social cohesion has been unavoidable in the media. The issue came to public prominence after the 2001 disturbances in Northern towns and was followed up by the Cattle report which reflected the concept of parallel lives within communities (i.e. people living side by side but not interacting with one another). More recently the social cohesion debate has been seen primarily through the lens of counter-terrorism and Islamic extremism which has clouded the original debate.

A changing world

One of the effects of globalisation is that population mobility both in and out of the UK is changing; in addition to the British living abroad and migrants coming to the UK, people move around for different periods of time during the year. So there are not only an increased number of people moving but also increased levels of movement generally.

The British experience

Some of the issues that emerge from the British experience are:

- White flight from urban centres to rural areas.
- Changing population in many inner city areas. Data from academics at Bristol University show increasing polarisation of schools within neighbourhoods.
- An increase in choice mechanisms throughout public service delivery is leading to increased segregation along faith and race lines in local areas.

These issues occur alongside persistent inequalities which in recent years have been neglected. Despite governmental goodwill and legislation inequalities between ethnic groups have not been substantially reduced.

The management of migration and worsening public opinion

Migration has been managed in economic terms but there has not been enough attention paid to the social and community impacts of migration. There are real resource conflicts at the local level. For instance, many rural areas are experiencing migration and diversity for the first time and are not properly prepared.

Poor migration management has in part led to worsening public opinion around issues of immigration, asylum, and race relations. The MORI combined issues of concern poll shows that immigration is at the top of people's concerns. Since the mid 90s views about immigration and the impact of migration have worsened and become more negative. Another poll showed that for the question "Do you agree that Britain is losing its culture?" there was a 50/50 split of people in London who agreed and disagreed. In other parts of the country there was a dramatic weighting of people who agreed with that statement - as high as 66/24 in the North East.

The challenges of super diversity

There is growing diversity within as much as between communities. It is important to recognise that communities are heterogeneous, with a diverse range of experience within them including intergenerational issues, conflict, and marginalisation. There is no 'Muslim' or 'Sikh' community per se.

The experience of migration in the UK is changing:

- Increasing diversity in areas which have traditionally been less diverse.
- Diaspora identities compete with national identities.
- Easier communication and travel have changed the way people speak about identity.
- Policy makers have struggled to keep up with changing identities.

Has multiculturalism failed?

Britain is a multicultural country with diversity embedded in many ways. However the multicultural model adopted in Britain, like many other multicultural models, focuses upon difference and excludes commonalities. It has relied in too many ways on anti-discrimination practices and promoting equalities, believing this would be enough to bring interaction between communities. But in order to achieve cohesion and integration, it is important to broaden that focus.

The cohesion and integration debate

Since the Cantle report there has been a lot of debate about parallel lives that underpin inequalities between groups. However we have not moved a particularly long way from the Cantle analysis. In the UK there remain too many places where communities have become polarised and segregated through ignorance, fear of others, demonization, and in some cases a lack of proper leadership at a local authority level and within and between communities. In addition there are still initiatives that fundamentally reinforce difference and separation, such as the government's Preventing Violent Extremism agenda, which prevent us from moving on from 2001.

Cohesion and integration is about:

- Promoting a concept of belonging in an area at different levels; local, regional and to some extent national;
- Valuing diversity through tackling disadvantage and inequalities;
- Promoting the interaction in the workplace, schools and neighbourhoods;
- Recognising that cohesion is different in different parts of the country.

To improve cohesion we need to:

- Understand that the problem is not diversity – it is poor housing, poor education, fear of difference, and the perception that particular groups are granted better access to services, which create tensions.
- Stress the common good that unites people in a local area rather than stressing individualism e.g. through school twinning, many sports and arts programmes and positive inter-faith networks.
- Make cohesion sustainable through building long lasting links at a community level.
- Ensure that schools, regeneration schemes, and workplaces are places where people interact with one another and understand difference and diversity.

Where next?

There is a need for a more meaningful measurement of social capital. The social capital literature and arguments have synergy with definitions of what a cohesive community is (i.e. trust, reciprocity, interaction and engagement). Improving how this is measured throughout the UK will be important in informing us about how cohesive we are. Currently measures of cohesion are not sufficient. To understand cohesion it is important to explore what is happening at the local level rather than to focus on the more generalised perception of cohesion.

Bridging social capital and managing ethnic identity in diverse communities

Nick Acheson (Social and Policy Research Institute, University of Ulster)

Introduction

Robert Putnam has argued that

- Modern societies are increasing in ethnic diversity;
- In the short to medium term immigration and ethnic diversity will challenge social solidarity and inhibit social capital;
- In the long run, however, successful immigrant societies create new forms of social solidarity and dampen the effects of diversity. The challenge is to create a new broader sense of “we”.

This presentation examines the second claim – that ethnic diversity and social capital are negatively associated at the small area level and question the third – that bridging activities lead to new forms of shared identity by using Northern Irish evidence to illustrate the complexity in the relationship between bridging and identity.

Putnam’s evidence suggests that the more ethnically diverse a neighbourhood:

- The less trusting people are of everybody;
- The lower the confidence in local government;
- There is less confidence in people’s own ability to exert influence;
- The lower the expectations of cooperative behaviour;
- The less likelihood there is of engaging in voluntary activity or in giving;
- The fewer friends an individual will have within that neighbourhood;
- The lower perceived quality of life;
- The more time spent watching TV.

Before returning to Putnam’s prescriptions, it is worth comparing this evidence with evidence from elsewhere. First, some UK evidence: Laurence and Heath (2008) measured the predictors of community cohesion and in a variation of Putnam’s findings, they conclude:

- Ethnic diversity among settled people is positively related to cohesion – the more diverse a neighbourhood, the higher the cohesion;
- The higher the proportion of recent immigrants, the lower the community cohesion;
- Inter-ethnic friendships are positively correlated with greater community cohesion;
- The greater the levels of disadvantage, the lower the levels of community cohesion.
- The relationship between the variables is different for different ethnic groups, that is to say, compositional variables do matter.

In Canada, research has found that the extent of ethnic diversity is a poor predictor of the levels of social capital (Aizlewood and Pendakur, 2007): “Scores on social capital indicators tend to increase as community-level diversity increases, but socio-demographic factors have greater explanatory power, particularly age, education and income”. This suggests that in a highly urban society like Canada, ethnic diversity is not the place to look to understand variation in levels of social capital. This seems to support the findings of Laurence and Heath for the UK. Diversity can be important for social capital, but it has relatively low explanatory power when set against compositional and contextual variables.

This is reflected in country level data in Europe where the effects of diversity are either difficult to pick up or are affected by other factors. Hooghe et al (2006) analysed data drawn from the European Social Survey and from OECD data on migration patterns for 21 European countries and concluded that in Europe at the nation-state level rising ethnic diversity and increasing rates of inward migration have had no significant detrimental effects on social cohesion. In summer 2007 on the VSSN discussion list, Putnam stated that he is not arguing that compositional and contextual variables are not important, but that even if these are taken into account, ethnic diversity poses a deep and measurable challenge to community cohesion that policy is right to address. His position does not seem that far from that proposed by Laurence and Heath for the UK; the difference lies in the UK problem being identified by recent immigration rather than ethnic diversity in itself.

Bridging and bonding: some puzzles

US data may be exceptional. Putnam acknowledges that racial segregation is widespread if not universal at the local level in the US. Banting and Kymlicka (2006) suggest that the American history of slavery, the civil war and black emancipation cast a long shadow in a way not replicated anywhere else. The UK, as an old colonial power is much more like the Netherlands and similar European countries that had multi-ethnic empires than the US.

This is not to deny the importance of bridging social capital as a resource for community cohesion. This debate has been about the relative importance of ethnic diversity as a driver for low stocks of social capital against other plausible contenders. Putnam argues:

It is my hypothesis that a society will more easily reap the benefits of immigration, and overcome the challenges, if immigration policy focuses on the reconstruction of ethnic identities, reducing their social salience without eliminating their personal importance. *In particular it seems important to encourage syncretic, ‘hyphenated’ identities; identities that enable previously separate ethnic groups to see themselves in part, as members of a shared group with a shared identity* (Putnam, 2007: 161)

Putnam then argues that public policies are required that will create more opportunities for “meaningful interaction across ethnic lines” arguing that such places and activities will enable people to become comfortable with diversity over time. This suggests that bridging social capital is both a necessary and sufficient condition for the creation of ‘syncretic’ identities and greater inter-ethnic comfort. It is a view that has a high salience in current UK policy, notably in its response to the report of the Commission on Cohesion, Our Shared Future, repeating a core argument of the equivalent Northern Ireland document of two years earlier, A Shared Future. But the Northern Ireland evidence shows that there is something very odd about the underlying assumption.

Some perplexing implications of the Northern Ireland evidence

Putnam suggests that in the US, just about the only measure not negatively affected by ethnic diversity is membership of voluntary associations. But do voluntary associations necessarily offer the meaningful interaction Putnam is looking for?

There are two questions to address here:

- Whether what Putnam calls “syncretic” identities do in fact lead to greater ease in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods;
- Whether, even if this is the case, the interactions that occur in civil society organisations do have this effect.

The Northern Ireland evidence from the study we undertook shows that neither is necessarily true. The evidence comes from a survey of voluntary and community organisations conducted in 2006. The study found that in the Northern Ireland friendship ties are predominantly in-group, although there is some evidence of friendships being formed across the divide. In-group ties are even more strongly apparent within families. Around one third of respondents said all their relatives were the same religion as themselves and around 85% said all or most of their relatives were the same religion as themselves.

The pattern of membership of voluntary organisation boards or management committees fits the same pattern; these measures suggest it lies between the degree of cross-community friendship ties and family relationships. It may be that the formal ties of management committees are more constrained by ethnic divisions than are friendships, in that organisations are more constrained by divided neighbourhoods, or it may be an artefact of the data in that ‘friendship’ is not defined in the Life and Times data and might be widely interpreted by respondents. But the data do show that the structures of individual voluntary organisations do not in themselves overcome divisions and may possibly reinforce them.

However the evidence suggests that the activities of many voluntary and community organisations do provide a site for cross-community mixing around commonly shared concerns. Almost all respondents to the survey (96.2 per cent) thought their organisations provided opportunities for people from differing backgrounds to do things together; while the proportion dropped to just under two thirds (65 per cent) when it was a matter of encouragement to work on explicit cross-community issues. This evidence suggests that the activities of voluntary organisations are an important site for mixing across the ethno-sectarian divide. This was reflected in the 65.7 per cent of respondents who reported cross-community friendships and socialising taking place and low levels of anxiety expressed.

However, some important caveats must be entered here. Only 30.1 per cent of respondents said that the question of Protestants and Catholics working together was addressed directly in discussions about organisations’ work. A larger proportion of organisations addressed equality of access to services, where 60.1 per cent of respondents reported doing so and for the large majority of these (78.1 per cent) it was not at all divisive. These results suggest that the issue of Protestant Catholic relations is most readily addressed within the context of the service functions of organisations, but that there is a resistance to confronting the issue in more general contexts.

It is evident that the Protestant organisations appeared to be less likely to engage with issues to do with cross-community working. The results show that a notably higher proportion of Catholic organisations were both willing to discuss Catholics and Protestants working together and address the issue of equality of access to services, than was the case for the Protestant group of organisations. It is perhaps particularly

noteworthy that fewer than half of Protestant organisations reported discussing equality of access to services.

The findings suggest that whilst there would appear to be a great deal of mixing across communal divisions among all respondents, this would also appear to be done in such a way that explicit cross-community issues are not addressed, in many cases even to the extent of discussing equality of access to services. It is also clear that the degree to which organisations are embedded in one or the other of the two main ethno-sectarian groups in Northern Ireland may influence the likelihood of addressing cross-community issues in an explicit way. The ethno-sectarian composition of management committees appear relevant to organisational behaviour in ways that echo generally lower levels of trust among Protestants of the intentions of Catholics since the 'Good Friday' agreement, than the reverse (ARK, 2006).

Qualitative data

We found three accounts of how organisations manage cross-community contact:

- Those that denied the relevance of the issue;
- Those that assumed their work had a cross-community impact although no evidence was presented;
- Those that addressed the issue directly.

The second of these was by far the most common response. Darby (1986) notes that there are three common methods that are adopted to manage relations between the communities in Northern Ireland:

- Avoidance;
- Selective contact;
- Functional integration

Darby means avoidance of contact through managing forays from single identity neighbourhoods carefully – shopping trips, journeys to work and socialising. It can also mean avoiding the issue where contact is necessary, for example the workplace (including voluntary sector workplaces). Tactics of avoidance of this sort are very clearly in evidence; this was sometimes interpreted as a virtue. This is what Darby means by selective contact – contact over one issue but not another. For example, farmers share equipment and time and buy and sell to one another at farmers' marts, whilst ensuring that land ownership almost never crosses communal boundaries. In other words activities can look integrated, but bottom lines are carefully preserved. What we see in much voluntary action in Northern Ireland is functional integration, that is to say people are often ready to work across boundaries around shared interests on the understanding that differences are never discussed. What came across from our research very strongly was a sense of fragility; people were reluctant to address the issue of communal difference in these settings as they were aware that doing so could be very damaging if not handled very carefully. People took pride in "leaving politics at the door" and could be very defensive if challenged about this. It has to be said that this type of cross-community integration has its value. Darby argues that the settings in which this occurs are very robust, able to absorb a fair amount of external pressure and this feature has played its part in keeping the lid on the violence. This attribute of cross-community activity has also been noted by Varshney (2002) in respect to communal violence in India.

But it is not what Putnam has in mind. In these contexts the strength of these structures is precisely related to the way they do not address questions of communal identity.

The evidence supports Darby's insight that patterns of avoidance and functional integration are central to how people in Northern Ireland manage life in a deeply divided society. The qualitative data, in particular shows how in many organisations there are social norms of avoidance that ensure that trust gained within the setting is not undermined by broader issues of general inter-ethnic distrust. This generates social capital that supports the purpose of the organisation, but does not necessarily develop into generalised norms of reciprocity and trust that cross ethno-sectarian barriers outside those specific contexts.

People develop hyphenated identities like 'Catholic single parent' or 'Protestant pensioner' in these groups but only if they leave the first half of these identities at the door and never acknowledge them. The relative ease and frequency of such cross community collaboration appears linked to the strong adherence to the norm of not referring to ethnic differences for fear of causing offence. It is as if hyphenated identities, far from being a path towards creating new networks of solidarity, left people having to choose which half of the duo to adopt depending on the requirements of the network they were participating in at any one time. In this way, high levels of in-group trust may have no particular implications for inter-group trust between Catholics and Protestants.

This analysis suggests a modification to the distinction between bonding and bridging social capital that is normally drawn. The treatment of this distinction in much of the social capital literature tends to assume that it is individual people who move in and out of bridging or bonding networks, being based on the individual agent. Networks that cross other identity formations are treated as unproblematic. But the Northern Ireland evidence suggests something rather different is going on. The voluntary associations that create cross-community coalitions around specific interests are not necessarily creating bridging social capital at all. Rather, they may be creating new forms of bonding social capital around a specific new identity in a particular field that is durable precisely because it has a weak impact on bridging trust. The evidence suggests that the norms of reciprocity fostered in these settings serve to protect the ethnic formation of individual agents from challenge. The social capital available has utility for the field and for the agents within it whilst they are in it. Its utility may carry over into other fields but only so long as the identity it sustains is not challenged. The distinction between bonding and bridging should thus be drawn around the identities that are defined within specific fields. The norms that shape inter-ethnic shared identities simultaneously create an in-identity and an out-identity; the shared identity and the social capital it generates is only useable insofar as it excludes identities that are not shared.

The Northern Ireland case shows that the relationship between bridging social capital and the construction of social identity is much more complicated than Putnam seems to think. Bridging activities do not necessarily lead to bridging identities as people are very adept at managing their relationships with others in ways that preserve their sense of self, splitting off activities that might question these into a separate box. The Canadian example is also relevant in this context. Here the opposite effect seems to be evidenced. Ethnic diversity appears largely irrelevant to stocks of social capital because the political context foregrounds identities that welcome diversity; to be Canadian is to welcome and value ethnic diversity and there is a high general level of trust in government to manage immigration properly.

Both cases illustrate the general point. The relationship between ethnic identity and national identity is subject to forces beyond local impacts. Where these foreground and reinforce ethnic separation through processes of identity formation people will

manage their local relationships in ways that seldom call these into question. Where these foreground a shared national identity, particularly one that values ethnic diversity, people will do the same, but with the opposite effect. Bridging social capital has its own value even in cases like Northern Ireland, but identity formation is seldom part of this.

Discussion

David Tyler (Community Matters)

I wondered how robust you think the Canadian data really is. Many Canadians and certainly the English speaking ones don't have a good word to say for the French speaking ones and they seem to resent the focus on French language, so it feels like a more divided society than the data suggests.

Nick Acheson

I don't want to spend too long commenting on Canada, I just introduced it to say the fact that the situation is different in Canada. The political settlement that arose in order to keep Quebec in the federation in the 1970s led to a particular kind of policy towards multiculturalism, which is embedded in the Canadian constitution and is not open to political debate. Canadian policy has been set up to more recently recognise, assimilate and make allowances for other existing minorities in Canada before the most recent immigration began. If you ask a Canadian what do they think about being a Canadian, diversity is what springs to mind because that is what being a Canadian means. If you remove that you actually remove the basis of the federation itself, without that there would be no Canada.

The other thing about Canada is that it is a new immigrant country, and the Canadians are actively recruiting highly educated people to come to Canada, which is a very different situation to the UK. It is worth mentioning because the implications are quite different to what actually happens at community level.

Erin Van der Maas (Carnegie UK Trust)

I have a question for both of you about the differences in the theories you put forward. The Putnam theory seems to suggest that once migrants have settled, the problem has gone away. The Cattle thesis suggests that the multicultural policy separated the settled population in Northern towns and that caused or drove the problem. If there is a crisis, can we agree on what it is and if so, can we get the right sort of policy reforms to address it?

Nick Johnson

To some extent they are perhaps not as opposite arguments as they might initially appear. Where Putnam's thesis applies to some of the more settled communities here because the response to new migrants has been one of keeping people separate, and that form of segregation and separateness actually inhibited the process that Putnam describes as being the process of creating a new 'We' and the broader understanding of who we are. I think clearly the pressures of migration and change are at the heart of what Putnam's saying. What I am particularly keen to find out more about is why some parts of Britain have done it better than others, and what their experiences are telling us. There are still many Northern towns where you do have really harshly segregated communities, really harshly segregated schools and a lot of fear and mistrust. The problem there has been the lack of desire to build a new 'We', and keeping people separate as a policy tool. My suspicion is the successful areas have been the ones that have been more about promoting the sense of a shared identity and shared belonging, as Putnam advocates.

Nick Acheson

Putnam defended his position on the Voluntary Sector Studies Network discussion list by saying that it is not that differences in the context and composition of areas don't matter, but they don't matter as much as diversity in itself. What is interesting about the evidence he suggested is the difference between different parts of Britain which seem to indicate that these contextual variables are actually more important in terms of looking at the kind of social cohesion outcomes we talked about.

It may well be different policy makers will make a difference. There is good evidence that stocks in social capital at local level are actually influenced by local policies; there is a clear link between policy and policy implementation at local level and social capital. This suggests that what really matters, how people feel about where they live is actually about how effective public services are, and how fair they think they are. Stocks in social capital are so high in social democratic countries like Sweden, because people trust and value public services, which are universally used. You made a very good point earlier on, about if you get that right, it goes a long way to sorting the problem out: if people feel there is equal access to local services in local places, people will start thinking they live in the same place.

[No name]

What we need to do is to take account of the bigger picture, which is to look at all the different variables that impact on cohesion. You were asking what makes different places work more efficiently and be more cohesive than others. You looked at Cornwall and argued that it is more cohesive than the North West. An obvious difference there is the levels of wealth that are available in those places. Have we mapped that at all? Have we looked at those correlations with the work of Laurence and Heath? You were saying that one of the big issues was that the types of deprivation in those areas did make a difference. It is when people have got something to feel tense about in relation to each other that they will not have such a cohesive relationship.

We talk about local policy but we need to think about national policy. I think Canada is a very interesting example that we shouldn't just dismiss, because we have an example of a society that does welcome immigrants and does so wholeheartedly. The last two elections in this country have been fought around who can be toughest on immigration and despite what is going on at local level, if the dominant national political debate and what you see in the media is anti-immigration and verging on the xenophobic on occasions, then of course that is going to be reflected on what happens locally. We need to bear in mind the way that we handle the debate. Do you see that debate only getting worse, given the economic climate?

Nick Johnson

I fear in the short term yes, and I agree that the national debate clearly has an impact upon local attitudes and local views, but only to a certain extent. I think it creates an unhealthy climate that is going to take a while to overcome. Resource allocation at a local level does create pressure on services because funding formulas are slow to respond to changes in the population of an area. If you get a lot of new communities coming into an area, the schools and hospitals are not funded to cope with that. So GP waiting lists go up and this creates real local issues that can get magnified by the local press. We do need to change the debate but let's do the things that we can do first; let's get the data right, let's get the funding right so that there are not those kind of pinch points at a local level, and *then* begin to take on the national argument.

The economic situation is only going to make it worse in the short term because too many people have couched migration in purely economic terms - that it boosts the national economy. If there is increasing unemployment and lack of jobs then that does not necessarily have the same appeal as it might have done before. So we need to keep putting forward the positive case for migration but at the same time we also cannot expect things to change overnight unfortunately.

Nick Acheson

I still would have thought in that sort of scenario of change pressure on immigration will actually fall because the choice to come to a country like the UK is a rational choice for people; they come here because they think they will find work of some sort in order to sustain themselves, and that includes immigration from outside the EU. I suspect the key question here is looking at the drivers of immigration. The evidence around at the moment suggest that the political situation in Britain has driven the argument around increased immigration much more than the numbers of existing and established minority groups already in the country. If we did not have a tremendous increase in the numbers of people coming here, people would be less sensitised to the issue.

Nick Johnson

It is not necessarily in terms of numbers. The way our communities are changing is happening far more rapidly than at any time previously. I think that it is the sheer pace of change that unsettles people and therefore makes them more vulnerable to either extremist arguments or the media that is scapegoating people. It is about pace and about visible signs of change - people seeing, for instance, the local corner shop putting up signs in Polish. This kind of thing makes people uncertain about what is happening in their community.

[No name]

I don't want to take the debate too much away from the economics and disadvantaged because I thought that was a really interesting point. I've got a specific query about Northern Ireland. I wonder if you had any evidence about the non-Catholic and Protestant minorities and how they are then incorporated or not, and viewed within the communities.

Nick Acheson

Northern Ireland like a lot of other places is becoming a much more diverse society. Ten years ago the difference between Belfast and any other city you can think of in the UK, was really quite startling in terms of ethnic diversity. Now there are about 35,000 Poles living in Northern Ireland, and a great many Lithuanians and people from other Eastern European countries. There are also growing numbers of people coming from Africa and from the Philippines.

One response to that has been similar to the response in England, which is quite xenophobic and hostile but localised in particular areas from white working class people who are competing for housing and jobs etc. There have also been attempts to assimilate the immigrants to the existing grand narrative of Northern Ireland. Because 99.9% of Polish people are Catholic and more of them are actually mass-going Catholics than Irish Catholics, many Catholic churches have been revitalised, but this has been viewed with suspicion by Protestants. These new migrants find it perhaps more difficult to assimilate into Protestant neighbourhoods than they do Catholic neighbourhoods, but that can also be because of other pressures on housing. There is a very strange and difficult relationship between the two, which is not properly understood. Not enough research has been done on this so the jury's out as to what the impact is going to be.

[No name]

A lot of the community cohesion policies and initiatives we are noticing tend to be targeted at the local government level. We feel there is not enough around what community groups should do and what their role should be. Is there any way you could enlighten us on that?

Nick Acheson

That is undoubtedly the case. I think there is clear evidence in Northern Ireland that community and voluntary organisations have been extremely important in controlling the level of outright conflict. This is reflected in the Cantle report which reflects that when you don't have those organisational links between communities, you're much more likely to have overt violence. A large study in India by an Indian social scientist called Varshney looking at Muslim/Hindu violence in India and why Hindu/Muslim violence is worse in some cities than in others, suggests that cities where there was no outright violence, were the cities where inter-community contact between civil society organisations was the strongest. He argued that the organisations don't have to be mixed organisations, but they must have institutional links with organisations on the other side and do things together collectively on common issues.

You need those organisational links. Organisational contacts are very good at controlling rumours, cooling situations, providing back channels for communication. It is important to keep building at the local level those links between organisations from different areas where people are living or around different issues, different faith groups, whatever it might be.

[No name]

One problem is that the role of voluntary organisations can be limited to those who are already pre-disposed to thinking about working within the community.

Nick Acheson

A number of European studies show us that people, who get involved in cross-community activity, tend to be those people who are more likely to get involved across community activity, which is a self-fulfilling prophecy. There was also a study a number of years ago which looked at Sweden, Germany, and the United States and it suggested that the attitudes of people who volunteered for five years were exactly the same as attitudes of people who had volunteered for one year. In other words being a volunteer doesn't make any difference to people's attitudes. So when you do these studies, what you have to do is control for people's pre-existing attitudes. You want to be able to say that in fact being a volunteer or being involved with a voluntary organisation means you are going to have higher stocks of social capital, but these people tend to have higher stocks of social capital anyway before they get involved.

John Eversley (London Metropolitan University)

Both speakers have commented on the poor quality of data, I'm interested in what they would say about ways of combating it. To me it feels as though we place far too much reliance on national resources and data, particularly out of date data. Have you seen any examples of good practice? Also a lot of the interventions that people talk about are very crude and tokenistic.

[No name]

One of the problems with research around diversity is that there is an underlying assumption that because you ask people to tick a box, you identify people's values and attitudes. Hyphenation in the US has been positive to a certain extent but it is

problematic because if I look at my social network of African-Americans in the US, there are people who are different, people in my family I don't share values or attitudes with. The same goes for the people with whom I work and people from different parts of the country. A lot of the social capital literature related to diversity, may not be as sensitive as it could to intra-cultural differences. There is a lot more to diversity than the label that we attach to the people being studied.

Nick Johnson

The Institute of Community Cohesion runs a practitioners network for frontline people involved in cohesion activities to exchange information and good practice online. We get people to meet a couple of times a year and discuss big themes as well and we have over 400 people and about 150 from the voluntary sector. What we are trying to do is not just have the superficial interventions but we want to follow through what happens further down the line. We are about to launch a database on good practice and what happens locally which include examples from the public, private and voluntary sectors, at national, local and international levels. Again it is not just about one off initiatives, it is about people following the experience on and trying to assess what happens at the end of it. We also have on our website schemes nominated for the Baring Foundation Awards for Bridging Cultures and designed to cover meaningful good practice that can be maintained, updated and shared.

Nick Acheson

Regarding the first question about the inadequacy of the data, certainly as far as Northern Ireland is concerned, it is a big problem. We simply do not know and the government does not know either, and has no mechanism at this stage of really finding out what is going on there because it is such a recent phenomenon. We do not really understand the relationship between this new immigration and existing divisions. This is a huge research agenda to work on and we need to look at ways of actually pushing that forward.

Obviously all African-Americans are not any more alike than any other kind of American, and yet it becomes an important issue politically, particularly when you have an opportunity to have elected an African-American president. Putnam's argument was that given the current salience of the issue in people's minds, it is important to find out whether it is salient and in fact this seems to be the case based on evidence found in the situation in America.

One of the things which it does not deal with is the whole issue about the role of the state and the role of public administration in all of this. There seems to be clear evidence that where there are strong welfare states, the shared narrative is not that much threatened by diversity in the European context. What is a really, really important point to bear in mind, is that public administration does actually matter, it does make a difference. Very often it is where you have to start to make the difference because that is where most of the money is after all.

Nick Johnson

I partly agree and partly disagree with that. I agree that administration is important and this comes back to the point that several people have made about economics. Undoubtedly disparities of wealth are a crucial factor impacting on cohesion. However research done in Scandinavia in recent years suggests that the Scandinavian experience could be very troubling for those of us who think an answer to this is very strong welfare models and levels of equality. Some groups have argued that the welfare model has sustained social solidarity for so long because everyone who benefitted from it was perceived as being similar. However Scandinavia is beginning to struggle with the challenges of diversity, immigration

increasing nationalism and Far Right extremism, and a sense of 'the other' coming in. They are unsure how to respond to this and how to make the continued argument for wider solidarity in the face of opposition. The desire is there, but I think the Scandinavian Nirvana that many on the Left in Britain talk about, is not quite as simple and as straightforward as we might wish it to be. How Scandinavia answers some of those questions in the years to come will tell us a lot about some of these issues.