Introduction
social cohesion and democracy: between voice and exit

Bernardo Sorj
Danilo Martuccelli
Introduction

Social Cohesion and Democracy: Between Voice and Exit

In order to understand the dynamics of constructing social cohesion in Latin America we must bring a new perspective to approaches that focus mainly on the pervasive social problems on the continent. While it is true that disregarding these problems would be tantamount to adopting a conservative posture, we must by the same token identify the region’s wealth of positive resources for integration and sociocultural creativity in order to discern how our societies generate social cohesion and how this influences democracy building.¹ Our continent is generally free of strong tensions between the state and the national culture and, compared to most regions of the world, is endowed with a high degree of linguistic and religious homogeneity as well as a deeply-rooted tradition of secularism and inter-religious coexistence. The conquest, followed by the nation states, destroyed the political and religious foundations that might have fostered the emergence of political-cultural movements based on alternative values to modernity. At the same time, the peoples of most Latin American countries self-identify as mestizos, or people of mixed descent, although this has not ruled out racism in various forms. Fratricidal struggles have not occurred among ethnic or religious communities and the inter-state wars of the

¹ See Annex 1 for a discussion of the concept of social cohesion as it is used in the Latin American context (Discussion of the concept of social cohesion).
20th century were tangential and border conflicts largely resolved. In most countries, there is a solid national consciousness associated with shared forms of social relations, lifestyles and tastes with which the majority of the population identifies.

Few regions in the world can lay claim to a similar socio-cultural heritage. Even from the economic standpoint, the sluggish growth in per capita income during the latter half of the 20th century did not reflect the enormous effort to increase production in many countries whose populations had quadrupled by mid-century. What is more, given the higher than average fertility rates of the impoverished populations of these countries, the fact that inequality indicators have held steady is indicative of significant processes of social mobility and wealth distribution.

In addition to these longstanding factors of social cohesion, we must understand how individuals today, within their particular contexts and life conditions — including poverty and limited opportunities —, have become producers of meaning, individual strategies and innovative types of solidarity not predetermined by history or social structures. While this assertion could be misinterpreted as one of naïve individualism, our intention, in fact, is to go beyond the old structuralist determinism. Taking into account the power vectors and social determinants within, and based on, which people define their life strategies and meaning, social analysis must discover how individuals constantly reorganize their perceptions and practices to create new alternatives and possibilities. Basically, the idea is to accept the indeterminate as a fact of life in modern societies. Social analysis reveals the past and scrutinizes the present, but it cannot predict the future.

By focusing on the richness and inclusive vitality of the social fabric in the new social processes underway in societies across the continent, we can pinpoint the contradictory dynamics they produce from the standpoint of social cohesion and democracy. We must include a caveat here with respect to the normative assessment of the progress, setbacks, and shortcomings in our societies. All of these things coexist in Latin America. If it is true that triumphalism is blind to the serious problems assailing the continent, a unilateral emphasis on our deficiencies that fails to acknowledge our achievements (which are real, if flawed) fosters a culture of collective failure and frustration that contributes to the neglect of the public space and encourages demagoguery.

Social cohesion is a comparative concept in which the present situation is compared and contrasted with the past and with other societies. While
comparisons with European and U.S. models (oftentimes stylized and somewhat idealized) are inevitable, we must take care that such comparisons do not lead to explanations premised on our shortcomings: we are what we are because we “lack” certain qualities (Sorj, 2005a). Comparisons with the past are also inevitable. As we know, the danger here resides in idealizing the past and, most importantly, in failing to understand the new mechanisms employed by social actors, and particularly youth, to give meaning to their lives.

Maintaining a balanced perspective towards the forces of change and continuity in societies is the main intellectual and political challenge which we as social scientists are doomed to navigate. This is particularly important when we look at culture, where longstanding trends are continuously updated and adapted by the transformations in progress. It is extremely difficult to decide whether to stress only the new or affirm the permanence of the old, albeit with new trappings. In our study, we focus on the importance of autonomous individual action — somewhat on the margins of (or not directly subordinated to) the traditional social and political-cultural institutions — as the driving force behind new survival strategies and universes of meaning. At the same time, however, we are careful to point out that the space for individual initiative affects, and is affected by, structural and institutional determinants.

Finally, and cognizant of the inevitable risk of overgeneralization, we discuss Latin America as a region. Decades ago, besides acknowledging an obvious linguistic-cultural identity, generalizations about Latin America reflected a time when the political ideologies of social transformation simplified and homogenized the world and were also indicative of the state of the social sciences and the deficit in available knowledge. The opposite is true today. Political ideologies centered on the demands of specific groups fragment social perceptions, at the same time that we are gradually experiencing the inevitable and necessary specialization of social science research. In this new context, a reference to Latin America as a whole would be seemingly devoid of any real relevance. In our desire to further what we believe is the best of social thinking in the region, our project, however, defies such a dismantling. There are two reasons for this. First, we believe that a regional comparison is critical to a common understanding of the problems facing our societies. And second, we are convinced that in a globalized world, shedding light on the common processes and trends among different countries — despite their variations — is part of our commitment as social scientists to the future of the region.
Social cohesion, individual strategies and institutions

Much of the analysis concerning social cohesion in contemporary societies stresses the changes that are taking place in a fragmented world characterized by self-centered individualization. This panorama is associated with the loss of a sense of belonging to the national community, a lack of concern for the common good, the erosion of traditional reference points, and the expansion of information systems coupled with the desire for access to an increasingly broad spectrum of consumer products. What takes center stage, then, is the issue of burgeoning expectations and the capacity of distribution systems (in particular the state and the market) to respond to them.

The way in which social actors cultivate these expectations, and the individual and collective strategies employed to fulfill them, are not expressed mechanically or exclusively in terms of demands on the political system. If that were the case, given the prevailing inequality and poverty indicators in the region, democratic systems would have been completely overwhelmed by now. In order to understand the relationship between the objective situation and the strategies employed by social actors, we must take into account the proliferation of initiatives and different forms of social mediation, that is, the symbolic and associative universes that explain the complex relationship between individuals and the more abstract systems comprising the market and the State.

In the past, facing pervasive, blatant economic and political barriers, social actors associated with others based on specific class, gender or ethnic identities in order to advocate for, or defend, their interests. Hirschman encapsulates this brilliantly with the term voice. The massive influx of migrants from rural areas to the big cities, and the urban-industrial changes of the 1950s heightened expectations. Society's inability to fulfill these expectations (in terms of employment and housing, political participation and symbolic inclusion) caused an “overload” of social demands, which in turn fed authoritarian pathologies or “excesses” leading to various forms of social disorganization. In this context, collective mobilizations were at once a potential linchpin of, and a real threat to, social cohesion.

Contemporary democratization processes are not generally expressed through heightened pressure on the political system. This is only partially due to the erosion of traditional forms of collective participation and the limited effectiveness of new ones. It is also the case that many initiatives are played out on the margins (privately, at the level of individual consumption...
or collective events external to the political system), against the public sphere (various forms of criminal activity), or by leaving the country. The voice (expression/participation in the public sphere) and exit (withdrawal from the public sphere) dialectic, then, permeates our analysis. During the latter half of the last century traditional Latin American social analysis focused on the formation of voice. Today, however, there is a growing need to understand the myriad dynamics of exit.

As we shall argue in the following chapters, voice and exit must be examined together in order to understand the real state of mobilization in Latin America today. Even more so since in all likelihood the two are joined by more than one conduit: the weakness of collective actors triggers the quest for individual solutions to social problems. The way in which emigration is engraved on the collective imaginary, for instance, discourages collective participation. This provides a good illustration of the way in which the proliferation of individual initiatives covers some institutional gaps while simultaneously creating others. It is for this reason that, absent any institutional inscription and translation, there is an enormous risk that these factors could end up undermining social cohesion and the stability of democracies. At the present time, however, we are compelled to acknowledge that they also represent the promise of another more democratic and horizontal form of social cohesion.

Individuation processes are permeating Latin America, but their rhythms and forms of expression in society vary according to gender, urban and rural context, social class, education, generation, and country. Further research is required to map in more detail the ways in which these processes play out in Latin America and their correlation with specific variables. Here we will simply point out examples of how material standard of living, social and educational inequalities and institutional fragility have a powerful impact on the opportunities and foundations for individuation.

A higher degree of individuation means more individual autonomy and initiative and a constant questioning and negotiation of social relations. This leads to greater opacity between the individual subjective world and society, a topic which has been examined from various angles by the founders of sociology (alienation, anomie and disenchantment). Opacity, which leads to anxiety — fuels a vigorous therapeutic industry ranging from psychoanalysis to pharmaceuticals — and alcohol and drug use, and is also manifest in the continuous search for new forms of association and collective expression (music/dance, religion, or sports fervor). While these dynamics are not new, their significance was played down in the social...
sciences, which focused mainly on the major agglutinating social forces of the 20th century: the labor market, trade unions, political parties, and ideologies. As the relative import of these structures has diminished, other spaces for sociability and meaning have become critical to understanding social cohesion in our societies.

The expanding space for individual action, however, does not mean that institutions simply stopped functioning. To the contrary, with the weakening of social norms, values and traditional bonds of solidarity, public regulation is increasingly in demand in domains previously regarded as spheres of private life. **And this is perhaps at the heart of the drama of contemporary Latin American societies: insofar as the social sphere, increasingly penetrated by the market, is no longer sustained through social ties of dependence, favoritism, paternalism, and hierarchy, the state must increasingly assume the role of guarantor of the social pact among free and equal citizens, by means of law enforcement and social protection measures.** In most countries, however, the state has responded poorly to this new social reality. Not only has the social transformation been faster and deeper than the state’s, in many countries government institutions and political systems are still bastions of traditional clientelism and nepotism.

What is more, the emphasis on the growing individuation of social actors in no way precludes the need for collective discourses with which individuals can identify and find recognition and dignity. Individualization, then, is not exclusive of the state or of political discourses able to transmit to social actors an appreciation of their individual capacity and role in society. What it does signify is that individuals, in the contexts in which they find themselves, increasingly are protagonists of their own society and this, in turn, raises the need for a discourse and policy in keeping with the changing times.

Nonetheless, and even with this trend toward individuation, the state-centered patronymical sociability remains tremendously powerful. It undercuts the credibility of democratic institutions by breeding apathy, frustration and rejection. At the same time, it reinforces among some sectors a vision of the state as a huge treasure chest, and there is nothing for it but to wait for a leader in the tradition of Robin Hood to come along and propose distributing the spoils among the poor. Meanwhile, the other facet of the state’s inability to regulate social relations is evidenced, as discussed in more depth later, in the considerable expansion of the space for illicit economic activities that foster a culture of state failure. And these strategies centered on illegality or political apathy have an equally significant corrosive effect on democracy.
Still, the overflow of expectations is not necessarily conducive to political overflow. It can also lead to means of channeling/translating/articulating individual concerns and expectations in universes of meaning constructed on the margins of the political system, or premised on illegality or departure (emigration). Huntington’s famous theory that democracies in developing countries are overwhelmed by an excess of social demands — which Gino Germani had already presaged to a certain degree in his analysis of the Argentine case — only applies to situations in which those demands find political-ideological channels capable of pressuring or backing the political system into a corner. As we shall see in the ensuing chapters, this is only partially true in Latin America. Not only have the old associative systems been modified, individual actors now have unprecedented room for personal initiatives.

Here it would perhaps be useful to summarize the analysis we will develop in these pages:

- Despite ongoing and significant social inequality in the countries of the region, Latin America is permeated by growing demands for equality and by the individuation of everyday sociability and expectations. Future research should map the way in which these individuation processes take on particular features and rhythms in different countries, regions, and urban and rural contexts, among different generations, and particularly, based on material standard of living, education, and income;
- The above is associated with the erosion of traditional mechanisms of social aggregation with their emphasis on the values of hierarchy, social distance, and clientelism;
- This trend is expressed in myriad ways: it is not necessarily channeled toward collective expression or direct demands on the political system, but rather toward the private realm, consumption, violence, emigration, or individual strategies to create meaning and ensure survival. It is also manifest in demands for a more transparent state, social policies that reflect greater solidarity, and more effective and universal legal institutions;

2 Huntington’s basic thesis, that social and economic changes precede institutional transformations is, paradoxically, an application of Marxist thought on the relationship between infrastructure and superstructure by right-wing thinker.
These changes require us to reexamine the way in which we usually conceive of the Latin American reality: the democratic revolution in course must be interpreted primarily from the standpoint of the structural transformation of society and culture. Political and institutional dynamics must be interpreted through the lens of those changes.

The analytical space of social cohesion

What we have discussed so far invites us to develop an approach that elucidates the changes in social cohesion in Latin America from an historical perspective. Besides the social and cultural dynamics examined in the following chapters, it is useful to recall the traditional approach to social cohesion on the continent, based on four pivotal mechanisms, before looking at the current situation. Each of these mechanisms, which are described briefly below, have engendered specific pathologies and fears, which have recurred — and continue to recur — cyclically in the region.

First, the social bond was clearly the main vehicle for social cohesion in Latin America. We shall return to this point later, but the transition in this regard has been such that it would not be an exaggeration to refer to the end of an era. In effect, for a long time, social cohesion was regarded as self-sustaining by means of sociability. The assumption was that the social bond in Latin America was unique — in stark contrast to what occurred in developed societies — in that it could sustain itself without having to be articulated through modern political institutions. Essentially, this social bond was regarded as something less than the community bond, yet more than societal association. Less than the former, because despite the nostalgia over a “natural” relationship among actors rooted in tradition alone, politically-motivated social bonds (tutelage, clientelism, and various forms of patronage) were also very much in evidence. More than the latter because the contractual and ultimately “artificial” and “cold” nature of social relations always stood in contrast to the expectation of a personal, subjective dimension to interpersonal relations, social and economic differences notwithstanding.

While the versions varied from country to country, the emphasis was on the strength of the social bond and a tenacious sociability rooted in the cultural legacy of our unique history, whether as reflected by Gilberto Freyre, or Octavio Paz, or in Chilean writings centered on the image of
la hacienda. In this context, the veneration of mixed heritage [mestizaje] reflected not only an oblique rejection of racism, but also a desire to affirm the permanence of the social bond on other foundations. Obviously, in such a framework anything that conspired against this “substantial” sociability was regarded as a major threat to social cohesion, beginning with fragmentation or violence and culminating in the stereotypical imaginary — one that persists in the region to this day — of a return to “barbarity” through the “invasion” of the masses.

Second, social cohesion was conceived of in terms of the role of conflicts, and particularly class conflict. To ensure social cohesion every society requires mechanisms with which to process social conflicts and organize the representation of opposing interests and social actors and in recent decades, public opinion, play a critical role in this. Various protagonists have embodied the (re)construction of social relations in Latin America, beginning with the political parties and trade unions, followed by “social movements” or “civil society,” and more recently, the growing influence of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

In this context, efforts to build a new and authentic social cohesion have always featured cycles of enthusiasm and disappointment. Each new generation and era has brought with it the hope of democratization or “national redemption” which, together with the relevant collective actor, eventually reached one impasse after another in practice. While in other countries the institutionalization of collective action was regarded as an essential element of democratization, this process in Latin America — constantly stunted by the states’ phagocytic tendency to limit autonomy and absorb social actors — was more a pattern of promise followed by betrayal. Against this backdrop, it comes as no surprise that what most attracted the attention of analysts was the risk of degradation of the actors of social cohesion, who were constantly being subordinated to authoritarian leaders and to the various cooptation strategies employed by states. But here too something new and significant has been consolidated. The democratization and individuation processes underway have forced social actors to pay more attention to public opinion which, in turn — and to the extent that it is inscribed in a universe of horizontal citizenship — transforms the way interests are represented and conflicts negotiated.

Third, and this is true of other regions as well, social cohesion was envisaged from the standpoint of the legal system, or more precisely, existing laws and norms. Just articulating this premise is enough to see its obvious limitations. In contrast to other societies — and especially the United States
where standards of conduct (and their uniquely religious underpinnings) have genuinely served to cement of society since the country’s founding — the effectiveness of legal standards in the region was approached solely from the standpoint of their limitations and shortcomings: the discourse stressed a powerful culture of transgression present in all social relations, which precluded them from providing a handhold for social cohesion. In contrast to what occurred with the social bond, where there was a tendency to extol a certain collective narcissism (the “sympathy” and “human warmth” of Latin Americans), the essence of the discourse concerning the law was strongly self-critical in that it repeatedly drew attention to the failure to respect agreements and commitments (in the public as well as the private realms).

Fourth, the state, together with public policy and its many forms of intervention, has been a focal point of social cohesion in the region. This is especially true since, from the outset, national states could count on a strong sense of national belonging or on the weakness of alternative regional platforms or demands. If there ever was a “we” in Latin America, it was, for a long time, at the national and state level, especially given the state’s pivotal role in Latin American societies for much of the 20th century.

The above notwithstanding, both the state and the nation exhibited weaknesses which today are seriously criticized for several reasons. First, ethnic grievances have been a constant in countries with large native populations. Despite a seemingly united front, national identity has always been a theater of divergent and even opposing positions. Moreover, despite its protagonism in the public scene, the state was often hampered by its limited capacity to respond and to the bureaucratic weight of an administration lacking the resources or the capacity for social spending. The relative inefficiency of the state apparatus was a constant and brought with it the risks of social breakdown associated with a return to anarchy or government mismanagement.

The importance and influence of these mechanisms in the region have been such that they have largely shaped the political debate. Leaving aside their internal divisions, the major political families can be viewed, through the optic of the subject at hand, as a unique combination of these mechanisms of social cohesion. In the same way that social cohesion cannot be dissociated from a political vision, the political sphere is inseparable from a certain conceptualization of social and power relations. Following the proposed order, and at the risk of a certain oversimplification, each political family appears at the intersection of two of these mechanisms:
- The “conservatives” on the continent espouse a vision of social relations based on an original or native form of sociability, which stresses traditional normative agreement over legal recourse;
- For their part, “liberals” upheld the importance of freedoms and therefore laid their bets (more in rhetoric than in practice) on the necessary association between normative-institutional regulation and the existence of autonomous social actors;
- The “populists,” in contrast and almost antithetically, underscored the need to reestablish the old (hierarchical, asymmetrical) social bond on new foundations (revolving around the figure of “the people”), all of this contingent upon the vigor of a centralizing national state;
- Lastly, when it came to social cohesion, the “socialists,” with significant variations from country to country, were defined throughout the 20th century by the search for a viable combination of state and collective mobilizations.

Clearly, an assessment of this nature cannot do justice to the many other factors that are purveyors, at least virtually, of a promise of growing social cohesion in Latin America in the framework of democracy: a wide array of individual strategies actively engaged in the creation of universes of meaning which cannot be reduced to the mechanisms outlined above.

The recomposition of social cohesion

The Latin American reality — whether due to the shortcomings of the State, the lack of observable autonomy in collective mobilizations, or the limitations of the legal framework — was such that our unique form of social cohesion was envisaged as revolving around a self-sustaining social bond (along with a certain conservative nostalgia). Despite the simplified presentation, to some extent, this notion informed academic thought in the social sciences throughout the region. Social cohesion in Latin America was rooted essentially in the social bond, in contrast to a country like the United States, where solid normative underpinnings accord a central and uncontested role to institutions or continental Europe which, depending on the situation, historically opted for a model of social cohesion based on a republican, Jacobin state or else a social democratic or social Christian model of commitments and negotiation. The best of Latin American writing, whatever its limitations, entertained this imaginary and ultimately upheld this premise.
In a social context in which, as we shall discuss in Chapter 1, the traditional social bond is in crisis, what analytical substitute should we draw on to describe the social cohesion we observe on the continent? The debilitation of the principal social, cultural and political mechanisms of societal integration invites us to turn our attention towards individual capacity for action and initiative and the potentially virtuous impact this might have on institutions. Paradoxical as it might seem at first glance, the individual and his or her search for autonomy — and by implication, the emphasis on personal initiative rather than resignation — is increasingly becoming the cement of society. This is contingent, however, on a clear understanding that this individual is not at the origins of society, as suggested in traditional liberal thought, but is instead the product of a particular way of making society (Martuccelli, 2007). While its presence may not be radical news in the region, the concept of the individual was conspicuously absent from past representations, to the point that social scientists approached social actors virtually exclusively from the collective or political standpoint. In this sense, the individual is a novel idea in Latin America and, curiously, one that lends itself to a fresh examination of the past in our societies even as it opens the door to a series of new possibilities for social cohesion, particularly in the framework of democracy.

Let us examine this assertion further, as it might come across as paradoxical. For a long time, the social sciences in the region assumed that “individuals” existed in the countries of the north — in the United States and Europe —, their raison d’être sustained by institutions and social representations. In Latin America, in contrast, the stress was on groups and the community in Latin America and this — together with a stubbornly politics-centered analysis — meant that the notion of “individuals” in our societies was disregarded or even rejected outright (in terms of theoretical acknowledgment). The premise of the present study is that such a reading is completely erroneous. True, the individuals observed in Latin America are the fruit of a different and unique individuation process, but as actors, they are no less individual for all that. To the contrary, as we shall discuss in detail below, in many ways they might even be considered “more” individual than actors in many other societies in the sense that they must face and solve for themselves the sorts of social problems that are processed by institutions elsewhere.

The chapters that follow demonstrate the richness of this viewpoint through a reexamination of each one of the major mechanisms of social cohesion in the region. Each chapter is organized in the same, three-part
format: (a) an introduction that describes the specific characteristics of each mechanism, (b) an exposition of their problems and their promise in the current context, illustrated with specific examples, (c) a conclusion pointing out observable forms of social reorganization from the standpoint of individual practices. But we will begin by briefly reviewing the main thrust of the argument that will be developed in the ensuing chapters:

- The crisis of the traditional social bond creates an opportunity to recognize interpersonal ties which, while insufficient in and of themselves, contribute to an understanding of how the social geography is shaped based on mutual help and new types of solidarity. The latter is no longer confined to community bonds or fixed collective identities, but relies increasingly on affective, elective, or revisited traditional ties (family, youth, immigrants, etc.) in which new technologies play an important role. Most importantly, as the imaginary of the old social bond fades from view, it is necessary to accept the growing importance of horizontal social relations in the region.

- The relative weakening of social actors invites us — without disregarding traditional contestatory or associative participation — to focus on new forms of individual initiatives. These should not be regarded in opposition to the actions of past social movements, but rather as a sort of recomposition of them (as is the case of the NGOs to a certain extent), and a consolidation of new militant profiles that redesign the public-private connection on a different footing. This also means recognizing the growing and unprecedented influence of public opinion in the representation and negotiation of social conflicts.

- With respect to legal standards, we will demonstrate a growing tendency to seek legal recourse, despite the inherent limitations (such as pervasive and intense feelings that of abuse and derision in many national contexts). Here again — and this trend does not solely apply to the realm of individuals but is reflected in the actions of collective actors as well — the very fact of citizens demanding their rights is extremely important. The fight against corruption and the defense of human rights are among its noblest expressions today, even when the Latin American experience is held up to that of other regions of the world.

- Lastly, with respect to the state, we will see how the current times fit along the continuum of historical avatars of nation
state and democracy in the region, and how new challenges in terms of freedoms, policies, or economic regulation calls for a gradual transition from an exclusive system of participation or representation to one that facilitates generalized access to public services, consumer goods, and symbolic inclusion.

The foregoing enables us to better elucidate the crux of our thesis. For a long time, the concept of the individual — and growing individual expectations — in the region was mostly approached as a threat to social cohesion. The reasoning was as follows: awash in foreign cultural influences, Latin American societies engendered individual and collective expectations that were impossible to fulfill. This, in turn overwhelmed the political system, creating myriad social frustrations. In a nutshell, the revolution of expectations gave rise to subjective wishes and desires among actors which society was unable to regulate and which were at odds with each actor’s real and objective capacity to realize.

In contrast, our research underscores that the current revolution of expectations is accompanied by a tangible increase in individual initiatives which have become the main democratizing force in contemporary societies. This is not to say, of course, that individuals can be conceived of “outside” or “against” society since their initiatives, if they are to come to fruition, require cultural and institutional resources. Furthermore, when institutions and public policy are weak, these initiatives may unfold on the margins of, in opposition to, or to the detriment of, the institutions themselves.

To summarize: the revolution of expectations and the ensuing irruption of the masses has been regarded as both a democratizing factor and a very real risk to social cohesion in a democracy. Today the proliferation of individual initiatives in a context of heightened expectations has introduced a new dialectic between institutions and social actors: while individual initiatives are contingent upon institutional resources, they also correct and complement them, and ultimately may compound or exacerbate institutional deficiencies. It is not therefore, always a virtuous circle. Yet it is certainly an active way of generating new forms of social cohesion that hold promise for democratization.
Conclusions

The issue of social cohesion in democracy poses an enormous challenge for social scientists in the region. In recent decades, the subject of social conflict as a source of progress and social change — which meant sweeping structural transformations — predominated in the social sciences. It is increasingly clear, however, that democracy advances not so much by leaps and bounds but through the cumulative effect of small changes and that the conventions of everyday life are just as important as the conflicts.

Social classes have lost their protagonism in contemporary forms of social conflict and State-citizen relationships lack the outward transparency that ideological models once conveyed. New and extremely flexible social networks have expanded along with civil society organizations which have become increasingly active, although their effectiveness is not always obvious. Meanwhile, traditional modes of exercising power (economic, political, and cultural) have lost their edge along with their capacity to transmit or impose values and decisions, which is not to say they have disappeared. What we have, then, is a set of complex dynamics between power centers and social networks, which interact in oblique ways that prove difficult to unravel analytically.

While growing thematic and disciplinary specialization has enhanced empirical rigor in the social sciences in the region, it has also contributed to the abandonment of the classical tradition of Latin American social thinking. Classical social thought was sensitive to the diversity of national histories and the need for comparative studies and dialogue among disciplines to grasp the complexity of social dynamics and it was willing to introduce new concepts and hypothesis to give meaning to local realities. One of the aims of this study is to recover that tradition and to adopt a more daring intellectual approach, which may on occasion include essayism as an intellectual style.

Over the past decade, the concept of multiple modernities in the social sciences helped consolidate the notion that modernization does not imply a single path or destination. This approach, which has already been developed in the most relevant work on dependency theory, has the virtue of recognizing the importance of the diversity of historical experiences and the unique ways in which each society integrates the political and cultural innovations of the contemporary world. Nonetheless, the concept of multiple modernities poses its own set of specific problems, particularly when it leads to a generalized relativism. When, for example, it is asserted...
that all cultural experiences are equivalent in the name of respecting diversity, or the flip side of this, when culture is essentialized to the point of concluding that democracy is only viable in very specific contexts.

With the relative failure of structural reforms to reduce inequality and transform institutions, the issue of multiple modernities began to penetrate the world of policy-makers. International agencies were compelled to acknowledge the importance of diversity and the uniqueness of historical and socio-cultural contexts. And yet to date, this acknowledgment has yielded only timid analytical offerings. The approach taken here contends that there is broad consensus in Latin America over what constitutes a desirable world, namely a democratic social order that ensures liberties and public order, reduces extreme inequality and poverty, and increases transparency in the use of public resources. But the process to construct this new order must take into account diverse historical experiences and the dominant social, political and cultural patterns. In this sense, we are talking about resuscitating the classical agenda of Latin American social thought. In other words, we need to understand how the dominant trends in the international system play out in our societies today so that we can identify the problems and barriers that separate who we are from who we would like to be. This exploration must take into account the inevitable tension between the real and the desired world, and between the major historical tensions that emerge in hegemonic centers and the ways in which they have evolved in the region.

An approach to social cohesion as a concept that must be constructed through a dialogue among different disciplines (economics, sociology, political science, anthropology and history) heightens the diversity and complexity of the issues to be examined and the attention that should be accorded different national realities. The objective of this study is to develop an analytical perspective of contemporary Latin American societies that is not intended to be a systematic or exhaustive study of the myriad facets of social life in the region. Certain issues, such as social movements, for example, are touched on only in passing here and should be included in future, more in-depth research. We highlight issues associated with emergent trends that are germane to social cohesion and frequently have not been sufficiently developed, in some cases because they are not as seemingly straightforward and transparent as the organizations associated with political and ideological discourse. And even within these points, we have had to limit ourselves to a few examples, leaving aside other areas essential to social cohesion such as transformations in the family, gender
relations, education, the development of public opinion, the labor market (which we only discuss from the standpoint of trade unions), the informal sector, new media heroes, the formation of intellectual and entrepreneurial elites immersed in rapid globalization processes, and sports, which are frequently the main outlet for feelings of national identification.

Globalization is a crosscutting issue and therefore is not addressed in a separate section. International relations are only discussed in the analysis of organized crime networks, emigration, and the new populism. We do not examine emerging trends in inter-state relations, which is a particularly relevant topic as new tensions begin to spread across the continent, threatening the relative peace to which we became accustomed in the 20th century. The growing interdependence of infrastructure, energy sources and economies strengthen regional integration and simultaneously exacerbate tensions. While only a short time ago, nationalization processes meant disappropriation and conflicts with corporations from developed countries, nowadays nationalized companies increasingly belong to a Latin American neighbor. The dependency of bordering countries on energy resources has been used for political ends, examples of this being Bolivia's refusal to sell gas to Chile or Paraguayan and Bolivian politicians stoking animosity towards their more powerful neighbor, Brazil. Similarly, many border areas have been transformed into battlegrounds due to migratory flows or trafficking in contraband (including weapons and drugs), while the issue of environmental protection is producing inter-country conflicts, such as that between Argentina and Uruguay over the pulp and paper industry. In sum, Latin America may be losing one of its greatest resources as a region, namely: the harmonious coexistence among countries, as xenophobia is used as a political tool to pit neighbor against neighbor.

In the chapters that follow, we offer a vision of the social dynamics of the continent — conscious that it is only an initial glimpse — based in large part on 20 studies produced especially for the project, "A New Agenda for Social Cohesion in Latin America," organized by the Institute Fernando Henrique Cardoso and CIEPLAN, with a grant from the European Union and the UNDP. While these contributions, which are cited in each section, were central to the preparation of this text, the authors are not responsible for the ways in which their work has been edited and used. In some cases their points have been transcribed literally, while in others they have been expanded upon in our analysis or the original argument has been modified. We are grateful to these authors and exonerate them completely from any
errors or discrepancies of interpretation herein. This study would not have been possible without their collaboration. The body of knowledge available and necessary for an undertaking of this nature is such that a proposal to offer a synthesized depiction of changes in social cohesion in the region exceeds the capacity of any researcher (or two researchers). In each section, therefore, we have relied heavily on their opinions and evaluations, and most importantly, on their vast knowledge as renowned experts in their specific areas.

Finally, we would like to thank Juan Carlos Torres, Sergio Fausto and Simon Schwartznan for their comments on an early draft of this book. We likewise are indebted to the participants at the seminar organized by CIEPLAN in Santiago, Chile — in particular those who discussed the various chapters — and the conference organized in Buenos Aires by the Institute of Advanced Studies of the University of Bologna, for their critiques, which contributed to the final version.

3 The original texts (see Annex 2) are available on the site www.plataformademocratica.org