General Conclusions

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As seen in the preceding chapters, trends observed in contemporary capitalist societies across the world are operating in Latin America, albeit with the particular characteristics shaped by its history, developmental levels and social structures. What is more, a specific process is underway in the region associated with the dialectic between the expectations and initiatives of social actors in a general framework of democratization of social relations. The challenge that social cohesion represents for present-day institutions and politics must be understood in the framework of this two-tiered analytical reality.

Latin America: comparative structural similarities

What are the trends in the region, common to other parts of the world, which were accelerated by the impact of the demise of communism, new globalization processes, transformations of productive systems and the new information and communication technologies? They can be summarized conceptually as *individuation, dedifferentiation and deinstitutionalization*.

Individuation generally refers to the study of the major historical processes that shaped the production of individuals in modern times. In the context
of Latin America today, however, it involves the accentuation of individual idiosyncrasies and a context in which decisions are increasingly transferred to individuals in a culture devoid of fixed values and references points. Individuals are increasingly responsible for decisions about the meaning of their place in the world, their survival strategies, and their negotiations with their social surroundings in the absence of clear, pre-established rules or normative systems. The expansion of the space for individual action does not mean, however, that institutions have simply stopped functioning. To the contrary, weakened norms, values and traditional bonds of solidarity fuel demands for public regulation, social policy and formal contractual relations in spheres heretofore considered within the confines of private life. This has led to the increasing judicialization of social relations.

Individuation in Latin America takes on the unique characteristics we described at length in the preceding chapters. To these we must add the characteristics of the labor market where individuals’ social positions and roles are less univocal relative to other, more advanced, societies. Although we were unable to go into depth about the employment issue, it too is critical to the discussion. Pluriactivity is common practice in many countries of the region, mostly among low-income sectors but also among middle sectors. This means that in one’s lifetime, one might engage in a plurality of “occupations” involving myriad “identities” (it is not uncommon, for example, for a formal worker to go through periods of informal work, or for a salaried employee to “round out” his or her income by taking an outside job). Both phenomena describe an atmosphere in which social cohesion is organized based on greater societal porosity.

Individuals are bound by their social context. Obviously the same options are not available to a poor Latin American considering emigrating to a developed country to work under precarious or illegal conditions, compared to a middle class youth who is wondering whether or not to study at a foreign university and then remain abroad to work with a multinational corporation. The same is true of illegal acts, since a poor criminal can anticipate a very different fate than a rich one: the former is liable to be convicted without an adequate defense, while the resources of the rich infractor will ensure access not only to ample legal support, but also to the possibility of leveraging funds or contacts to corrupt police or court officers if need be. Indeed, what we have here is a research agenda on the complex relations between individuation and social stratification.

By the dedifferentiation of social subsystems, we mean the erosion of the boundaries that divide them, and the interpenetration and colonization
of different spheres of power (for example, the influence of economic power on scientific research, the influence of the judiciary or the media on political decisions, the weakened ethics inherent to each profession or public function, and the growing presence in public life of topics previously confined to the private realm). But in Latin America, added to this first tier of blurred boundaries is a historic legacy in which social subsystems were always low density and enjoyed little autonomy, especially because the culture of transgression and the imposition of economic and political power significantly undermined the autonomy of the public authorities. Latin America, then, faces the dual challenge of building autonomous social subsystems in contexts in which a new capitalist culture is weakening them.

Deinstitutionalization (or perhaps detraditionalization) refers to the erosion of the foundational values of modernity and of the dominant ideologies of the 20th century (family, work, homeland, progress) and the forms of socialization and representation associated with them (school, universal draft, trade unions, political parties, universal ideologies), which have been replaced with more gelatinous and fluid forms of sociability and solidarity. Tradition is no longer a beacon for action and actors must base their behaviors on new criteria that require an increasingly larger does of reflexivity. Here again the challenges for the region are manifold, since the penetration of the universalist values of modernity, particularly through the school system, was highly deficient, although this varied enormously from country to country (the chasm between Uruguay and Bolivia comes to mind, for instance).

These three processes are interconnected. Individuation influences, and is the result of, dedifferentiation and deinstitutionalization processes and vice versa. In Latin America these trends are overdetermined by the legacy of pervasive inequality and poverty and a patrimonialist state. The dynamic of dedifferentiation, for example, is particularly influenced by the rampant corruption that destroys the autonomy of state subsystems, by an informal sector that erects a parallel economy behind the state's back, and by violence that increasingly privatizes security. Prominent among deinstitutionalization processes is the crisis of traditional political party systems and the emergence of collective actors with politically fragmented, and fragmenting, demands. Similarly, dictatorships and hyper-inflation, in their moment, left an indelible imprint on social processes that is still felt today in political culture and institutions.

We are confronted, then, with the challenges of 21st century modernity arriving on the heels of a past with few virtues to recommend it, by way of
processes marked by the extreme fragility of the public space and social inequality. It is important to understand just how these trends operate as we reflect on the enormous challenges lining the path to democratic consolidation in the region. The new winds blowing hamper institution-building processes, yet also bring with them fresh potential for the development of a democratic culture.

More individuation means more autonomy and personal initiative and the constant questioning and negotiation of social relations and this widens the chasm between the individual subjective world and society. Compounding this is the waning influence of the major social adhesives of the 20th century. Ultimately we are experiencing a deinstitutionalization of the old values that paves the way for new associative and symbolic cultures. Young people today, for example, reorganize into new patterns of sociability, beliefs and solidarity in which consumption, the cultural industry and new forms of religiosity occupy an important space. The few existing ethnographic descriptions of these patterns, however, have yet to be fully integrated into political and sociological analysis.

Secular utopias are in a state of collapse. The breakdown of collective visions of the future brings enormous pressure to bear on individuals, who become the main vehicles for the construction of meaning in their lives, a circumstance that alters the way collective demands are expressed. The latter, as we have discussed, are often expressed in the lexicon of human rights, of demands on the state, or of group victimization constructed around a reference to a current or past injustice. Although these demands and forms of victimization may lead to reparations and more effective insertion into the modern world, they also create new sources of tension and social fragmentation.

Latin America: the surprise of democracy from the ground up

Yet along with these trends — which resemble those observed in other regions of the world — we must consider another, extremely powerful aspect, one which serves as the foundation for many of the conclusions of this book. Latin America has experienced — is experiencing — an unprecedented democratic transformation. What is radical and new about this process can be described based on three elements: (a) the structural depth of the process; (b) its progressive spread to every social group; and
(c) the fact that society and culture, rather than the political-institutional sphere, are at the heart of this transformation. Let us briefly examine each one of these points.

First, while this democratization process partially coincides with the restoration of democracies in the 1980s, it represents a radical departure from the past in that it has genuinely emerged as the fruit of a series of structural factors. Through processes of urbanization, globalization, expanded educational coverage and new communication systems — but also due to structural reforms — Latin American societies have become more individualized and democratized than ever before. Despite an apparent status quo that might be conveyed by certain inequality and poverty indicators, the social fabric, association patterns and symbolic universes have undergone profound changes in Latin America. Indeed, social life has changed more dramatically than the state or the economy as society has become more porous and dynamic. This includes progress in gender relations and in the recognition of ethnic diversity. The democratization of symbolic universes and expectations, together with the questioning of traditional authorities and a generally reinforced anti-authoritarian culture, inform one of the most profound revolutions witnessed in Latin America in recent decades. As we have seen, it has had powerful implications at all institutional levels, from the family, to the school, to relations with the established authorities. This transformation, which we will return to momentarily, has a tremendous liberating potential, but also poses risks for social cohesion.

Second, this democratization is not confined to regime changes (from authoritarian to democratic) nor is it only perceptible in certain social categories. As we have seen, an egalitarian desire is palpable across social boundaries and permeates all social actors, albeit with varying levels of intensity. Traditionally vertical relations progressively give way to more horizontal forms whose vigor and demands are tangible in the workplace, in gender, intergenerational, and inter-ethnic relations, and in public interactions including, of course, relations with the political authorities. Here again, this process is both promising and problematic. While the old social cohesion based on patrimonial and hierarchical ties has been largely destabilized, it has yet to be completely replaced with a form of social cohesion rooted exclusively in equality. That notwithstanding, and in marked contrast to the recent past, the democratic transformation has been massive and widespread. Tocqueville is no longer a foreign author in Latin American countries. But the version that is taking root is unique and goes hand in hand with another civil religion — human rights discourse.
— and other vehicles for social organization, values and social practices
(the mass media, expectations of individual and collective consumption,
transgressions of the law).

Third, and defying many predictions, society and culture, rather than
political systems (and the democratic transition associated with an alleged
“third wave”), are the driving force behind this democratizing process. This
is clearly one of the reasons that the democratic transformation, despite its
depth and breadth, has yet to be sufficiently theorized and noticed on the
continent. The traditional assumption in Latin America was that changes in
the direction of democracy would come from the political realm, or at least
the economy and no one ever really gave serious thought to the possibility
that it could come from culture and society. And yet, as we have endeavored
to show systematically throughout this study, the opposite has occurred.
Culture and society have become democratized, in their demands and in
their forms, more deeply and more robustly than the political system and
even many institutions.

The democracy that was meant to have arrived “from above,” has materialized
“from below,” unquestionably with characteristics, “deformations” and
ramifications associated with a less than virtuous institutional substratum.
The state has been hard-pressed to adjust to this new reality and confronted
with a citizen-driven revolution, the political discourse often seems to
be trailing behind. This transformation, for example, requires new fiscal
demands in the form of taxes and a closer link between public spending
and citizens’ sense of belonging and control of government. All of which,
needless to say, makes corruption increasingly less acceptable. A series of
factors that engenders new and deeply-rooted frustrations today, but could
auger a new type of citizen relation tomorrow.

In any event, this democratizing tension is at the heart of a dialectic
between two processes — expectations and initiatives — which we have
repeatedly emphasized throughout this study. On the one hand, across
Latin America today citizens’ expectations have risen significantly (in
terms of more horizontal social relations, higher levels of consumption,
symbolic participation in nation, and of course, rights). On the other,
and despite the many institutional shortcomings described herein,
equally visible in the region is a proliferation of individual initiatives and
opportunities for action. Of course these supplemental actions (relative to
the past) do not occur uniformly (not all actors take equal advantage of
them) and there is quite a bit of variation among them (some rely more
on individual capacities while others leverage collective resources and
still others combine the two, as we saw in our discussion of emigration). In any event, the dialectic elicits institutional responses and gives rise to radically different social phenomena depending on the particular milieu, or country, or actors involved. Sometimes, the combined effect of these two factors portends clearly democratizing forms of progress, while in others, the chasm between them translates into very real and profound dangers. The inherent ambivalence of this dialectic generally complicates efforts to anticipate the direction changes will take. Only using very broad strokes and contextual empirical reviews as controls, were we able to design three overarching equations:

- The first scenario produced by this dialectic occurs when expectations rise without a corresponding increase in the ability of actors to realize them. This was one of the historical roots of the populism of the 1960s (when the demands overloaded the political system). It is, as we have pointed out, one of the causal factors behind expanding violence and organized crime in the region, and (albeit with different trappings) the return to populism and victimization processes. As in the past, this vision embodies the fear of the “masses.” But where some would interpret this as an overarching process, our study accords it only partial relevance.

- The second equation — almost as the inverse of the preceding scenario — occurs when increased expectations are accompanied by, or find an outlet in, opportunities for overwhelmingly individual action. More forcefully put: until very recently, this possibility was simply ignored in the region given the prevailing paternalistic vision of social actors. From the standpoint of social cohesion in democracy, it is a response imbued with an insurmountable ambivalence. While it is now possible to find individual solutions to collective challenges (emigration, horizontalization of the social bond, new individual uses for community resources, and creativity thanks to the culture of new social ties), it also can impede the search for solutions to certain problems that necessarily must be collective or public. In this sense, unmitigated praise for individual initiative is an ideological trap. The real increase in practical initiative on the part of actors in Latin America clearly enables them to individually bridge institutional gaps (and this occurs in all ambits of social life). It cannot under any circumstances, however, constitute a political horizon in the long term.
Finally, the social and cultural depth of the dialectic between growing expectations and greater capacity for action by individual actors invites us to look beyond the mere individual solution of collective problems towards a new basis for the intersection between institutions and individuals. This is clearly the virtuous circle that should serve as our guidepost in the coming years. Institutions should not blame individuals, nor tie their hands. To the contrary, institutions must be structured in such a way as to effectively bolster the initiatives of actors, so as to foster a new type of bond between the two. The individual does not exist in opposition to institutions. The individual, in his or her constitutional fragility, is the product of a way of making society. The political debate in the region and the long tradition of ideological rivalry between collectivism and individualism often cloud the essential and inextricable link between the affirmation of collective institutions on one side and the expansion of individual autonomy on the other. Unquestionably, as this study shows, this virtuous circle is far from a reality in Latin America. But the foundations have been laid. And in some arenas, admittedly under critical modalities at the moment (let us consider, for example, the growing recourse to law), some positive signs are beginning to emerge. It is important to understand that the consolidation of institutions cannot be accomplished to the detriment of the growing capacity for individual action, but must instead be rooted in that capacity, and indeed must encourage it.

Latin America is having serious problems translating new social patterns at the institutional level. This matter should receive concerted attention in the coming years. In effect, the disconnect between institutions and the social reality, between the legal country and the real country, has long been remarked in the region. The general assumption has been that the former (under foreign influence) were way “ahead” of the latter (and the atavisms of our societies). That line of reasoning rings false today, at least in part. The transformation of the social bond and the growing relevance of citizens’ demands have been such that, at the moment, individuals and society have the feeling that they are “ahead” of their institutions. The latter are at once the compulsory and indispensable channel for individual complaints and the eternal obstacle to the translation of their aspirations.

The future of democracy will be written by associating and developing the virtuous circle between institutions and individuals. This association
involves the reconstruction of authority among people — politicians, public officials, and citizens —, in the context of social relations that demand a differential of expertise and positions of authority, and in the sphere of norms and laws. This issue is at the heart of all contemporary modern societies. In Latin America, however, it is aggravated by the loss of respect for authority associated with corruption, by a culture of transgression and low educational levels. One of the main challenges for the social sciences in Latin America, and for the design of democratic political projects, is to think about how to construct authority on democratic foundations. But what keeps many of the region’s intellectuals from addressing this issue is the tendency to mechanically equate the issue of authority with that of authoritarianism or “the right.” Avoiding the subject, however, does nothing to avert the constant danger that the “lack of authority” will fuel authoritarian temptations.

A new challenge for social thought

The difficulty of reaching consensus on the situation of social cohesion on the continent largely stems from this new state of affairs. Is there more or less social cohesion today than before? The construction of “objective” indicators is an attempt to answer this type of question, yet fails to address its precursor, which is: exactly what is the nature of social cohesion? If this question is not answered, one ends up supposing that social cohesion can be chronologically measured and compared using the same indicators, as if we were dealing with the same entity in each case. In the endeavor to discern the qualitative dimensions of this phenomenon — in our case what has actually changed in Latin America with these democratic winds that are blowing — have inclined us towards an historical interpretation of the transformation in progress.

We are ill-prepared, however, to contemplate this challenge. Why? Because the desociologization and depolitization of Latin American social thought due to the invasion of economism somehow blocked interdisciplinary dialogue. We have only a poor grasp of the new social dynamics on our continent. Most contemporary analyses and studies of political systems conclude that they are in “crisis,” yet have not managed to identify alternative dynamics and projects to reorganize the political system. Latin American critical social thought is struggling to reinvent itself following the crisis of its underlying paradigms (its vanguardism in the
1960s and 1970s, interpreting the will of the people and, in recent decades, the desire to simply be an expression of social movements (Sorj, 1989).

With its unilateral emphasis on distributive aspects and its excessive and not always rigorous application of the concepts of inclusion/exclusion, social thinking has neglected to address the issues and needs of the middle classes, which constitute the linchpin of stability and social cohesion. To give just one example, these sectors are the backbone of the workings of public institutions, but this role requires a certain ethos in which members of the middle layers see themselves as the defenders of the common good of the nation. In the past, of course, this sense of national inclusion created mechanisms for the exclusion of other social groups. This was particularly the case when the middle classes, ethnocentrically decided that they (and their interests) were the embodiment of “decency” and “civilization.” But we must bear in mind that during the developmentalist period in many Latin American countries, the sense of being part of the construction of a nation facilitated the establishment of institutions imbued with the “aura” of public service. Today, in contrast, much of this middle class ethos is concentrated in extragovernmental organizations linked to international agendas that are more frequently engaged in condemning the state, and the rest are sick of politics and are even losing the positive connotation of belonging to the nation.

We must reflect on the complex relationships between state, society and the political system in order to design development strategies with equity, particularly in democratic contexts. The power of classical Cepaline thought lay not in an economic policy paradigm but in its intellectual underpinnings, in its sensitivity to the historic specificities and social dynamics of the region.

Inequality and poverty, for example, are statistical conglomerations that tell us little, very little, about the social lives, associative worlds and construction of meaning in contemporary Latin American societies. The same is true of categories such as social inclusion and exclusion. There is no question that limited access to social services or to opportunities in the labor market contribute in crucial ways to the construction of a sense of exclusion. Yet this assumes a pre-existing inclusion in terms of expectations of access to equality. And this feeling is not elicited by a mechanical relationship with socioeconomic indicators. Feelings of exclusion, frustration and social anomie are present in sectors with the highest social welfare indicators (ostensibly the “included”). The included/excluded dichotomy has often left the middle classes out of the analysis of social dynamics, even though they are one of the pillars of political life in the region.
We must therefore understand the new ways of organizing symbolic and associative universes in Latin America. Since the way in which expectations are developed by social actors, and the individual and collective strategies they employ to realize them, are not expressed mechanically or exclusively in the form of demands upon the political system. Social expectations channeled through new associative groups (whether religious or cultural), the expectations and realities associated with emigration, virtual communities, music, alcohol or drug use, gang membership and organized crime — none of these fit into the simple dichotomy of integrated/excluded. In response to the many facets of social cohesion, Latin American social thought must revitalize its theoretical imagination and carry forward the work of its classical theorists.

Reinstitutionalizing politics

To conceive of politics in modern societies is, in the first instance to conceive of a collective project capable of creating a sense of a shared set of values and beliefs, even as people pursue their individual interests. Democratic politics is built on and builds a project of nation in which individuals find shared values, a sense of being part of a shared destiny and a national community with which they identify positively and in which they find elements of dignity and self-recognition, a project that simultaneously recognizes the legitimacy of the diverse interests and world visions held by groups and individuals. In Latin America, social cohesion in democracy must be processed by institutions able to absorb and express conflicts as a constitutive and legitimate part of the social order and incorporate them into the heart of social life.

Where do we begin to work a change that can produce quality institutions and policies in which citizen participation and oversight are not reduced to voting or to periodic outbursts of dissatisfaction? The struggle against dictatorship led us to overestimate the capacity of civil society, which has established itself in democracy as a demander of the state rather than a mechanism for political representation capable of articulating transformative visions of power relations and distribution systems. The radical state/market dichotomy is not overly helpful either. When the synthesis between nation and politics does not take place in programmatic terms and through transparent institutionalized mechanisms for political representation, the task is transferred to circumstantial leaders who give voice to the frustrated
desires of the community. Politics becomes the byproduct of leaders able to catalyze these grassroots aspirations, and the destinies of our countries are ultimately held hostage to each new election.

We must refocus the debate on societal models that the contemporary political realm has proven incapable of expressing. This means giving some thought to the reorganization of systems for social participation, political party representation, and political discourses. Public policy debates (an imperative) can elicit clear and objective evaluations of how to optimize scarce resources with clearly defined objectives. However, the debate over models of society entails openly addressing conflicts of interests and differing visions of what constitutes a desirable society and what is within the realm of the possible. Obviously the politics underlying different models of society cannot find expression in the absence of coherent and viable public policies. That said, the space for debate over what type of society is desirable absolutely cannot be reduced to a laundry list of public policies, no matter how inspired. Politics, especially in a region such as Latin America, cannot ever be reduced to social engineering.

This does not mean a return to millenarian approaches in which society must be reinvented in each election, or the development of “projects” for nation wherein lie the solution to all problems. To the contrary, it has to do with approaching politics as an ongoing process, one in which alternative solutions to specific problems are offered up for public debate in the context of a normative vision that understands that society is permeated by mutually legitimate conflicts of interest.

How to move in this direction? We do not believe that orthodox/heterodox or state/market dichotomies are useful in crafting creative alternatives for development strategies. As indicated in the preceding chapter, we must revitalize the technocratic-reformist model, which — at least in some of its versions — had the merit of focusing on fiscal accountability and transparency, monetary stability, a reduction of the state’s clientelistic interference in market mechanisms, recognition of the role of the private sector, and social policies targeting the poorest sectors. Devoid of a policy of meaning, however, this technocratic-reformism ran into serious limitations.

The new political discourse must appeal not just to the “people” or the “masses,” but also to individuals, addressing them as responsible citizens capable of effective oversight of state actions. In order to reconstruct political institutions in particular we must revisit the relations between the individual, networks, and pyramids (that is, hard nuclei of power such
as the state and large corporations). A higher degree of individuation and the proliferation of fluid networks do not mean that power centers have disappeared. Instead, they have undergone a dual transformation, at the internal level and in relation to their surroundings. State structures must be increasingly permeable to citizen interaction and oversight or they run the risk of becoming obsolete. In this sense, it is essential to break out of the current perception that the only ones paying taxes are formal sector employees and entrepreneurs. All products available for consumption are taxed and therefore everybody pays taxes (especially since income taxes account for only a minimal percentage of tax revenues in most systems in the region). It is critical to disabuse the middle and upper classes of the notion that they have to be the only financiers of the state, while fostering among lower income sectors a sense of their role in this task. These two elements are essential to expanding a citizen conscience that is more willing to contribute to public spending in the region. Here too the virtuous circle is found in the intersection between collective institutions and individual initiatives.

Citizen inclusion, nation and social cohesion in democracy

The unilateral value placed on the market, coupled with social policies proffered as little more than compensatory measures to fill its gaps, diminish society as a whole as well as the symbolic dimensions of politics and public goods and service-provision. In Latin America we are far from identifying totally with an individualistic, market-centered culture capable of creating a sense of community — indeed it is difficult to imagine our ever doing so. This is not only attributable to the obvious limitations of the market today (and its failure to offer most citizens a sense that the opportunities and recompense it has to offer are fair). It is also due to the fact that the republican tradition and the role of the protector-state (with powerful paternalistic connotations) are deeply embedded aspects of our culture which we must address if they are to change.

The national culture is part of the common good in a society. It is an intangible and immeasurable source of richness whose value is renewed, empowered, devalued, or destroyed by the actions of citizens and political leaders. This is particularly true when it is transformed into xenophobic nationalism. Paradoxically, globalization processes have left citizens increasingly conscious of the nation in which they live, and not only
because of the impact of new communications media. When international institutions following cosmopolitan agendas established indicators to rank countries in the international system, they reinforced each individual's sensitivity to the relative “value” of his or her own society. This new reflexive nationalism can be a factor in diminishing the sense of value of the national society or else a potentially galvanizing and motivating force for citizens.

To move in this direction we must develop — in a collective effort that demands the participation of each social sector in its unique sphere of action (social scientists, decision-makers, politicians, civil society) — new political discourses capable of engendering nonxenophobic nationalistic projects and new forms of associativism and participation that reinforce (or reconstruct) the institutional system. Latin America arrived at democracy by default, largely due to the crisis of authoritarian regimes. The time has come to give it a content with which society can identify.

To begin with, this requires a better understanding of the societies in which we live: the conflicts and social cohesion they produce and the opportunities available for discourse and for political actors who are the conduits between society and the state. We cannot forget that while social cohesion and democracy can lead to a fruitful synthesis, it can also, as has oft occurred on the continent, set us on yet another collision course.

Conceiving strategies for social transformation unquestionably includes developing more effective and socially just public policies. Even more crucial, however, is our ability to identify the historic moment and the social structures in our countries upon which to construct new alliances and discourses for new types of consensus which, translated into political action, will lead to the transformation of the state.

On the threshold of this new century, Latin American nations must react to agendas mainly set by the countries to the north. There is nothing historically new or intrinsically unworthy about this. The objective is to successfully confront the challenges thrown our way, but not the discourse they are wrapped in and still less the specific solutions. In Latin America (except perhaps for a few countries) issues of ethnic belonging as an alternative to, or in confrontation with, national participation are not really on the table today. What is at stake and affects people's sense of national dignity and pride is not their identification with the nation but their identification with political institutions. While there is a lot of room for improvement in terms of integrating indigenous populations and combating prejudice and racism, the problems of belonging in Latin America are not the same as those faced in Europe or the United States, for example. The
challenges we face essentially reflect broader social schisms that affect all citizens, albeit unequally: enormous inequalities, limited opportunities for decent employment, violence, and the shortcomings of public institutions, which cause many to emigrate and others to withdraw from, and exhibit increasing cynicism towards, democratic institutions.

A narrow public policy focus tends to overlook something equally important in modern democratic societies and that is the development of visions/projects for society with which most citizens can identify and which make them feel as if democracy is a central value in their lives. This has increasingly less to do with creating a new collective actor imbued with political and organizational density and more with collective capacity and the design of common goal-oriented projects. There will be no social cohesion without a broadbased political debate over projects that deepen democracy on the continent. In order to achieve this, we must move beyond our nostalgia for a past that is not coming back as well as the apologist celebration of the new.