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Type of contribution: Presentation

Title: **Towards an Intercultural Approach to Social Cohesion**

Abstract:

Multiculturalism as a political ideal and as a public policy is under attack. It is founded on notions of culturally derived differences and its critics include European politicians and interculturalists who call for greater communication and dialogue. In theoretical terms, interculturalism offers no distinct answers to the challenges faced by multiculturalism and does not offer a valid political alternative (Kymlicka 2012). However, a theoretical reappraisal suggests that interculturalism may provide a timely change in emphasis. This paper argues for a 'soft' version of interculturalism (Levy 2012), one that focuses on local 'encounters of difference' (Modood and Meer 2012) and emphasizes different forms of communication and interaction across diverse individuals and groups. In line with multicultural theory, this interculturalism recognises the value of identity and cultural recognition however; it also suggests that forms of diversity such as citizenship rights and migrant statuses present new issues of inequality. This approach also implies the need for increased effort to bridge differences between diverse groups and raises important questions for urban governance, such as the extent to which informal and everyday forms of communication play a role in intercultural cohesion. This paper aims to re-conceptualise social cohesion in inter-cultural terms through a critical review and synthesis of literatures on diversity and social cohesion. The findings identified four organising categories: cosmopolitan encounters, neighbourly interactions, transformative experiences and political deliberations. The question of what binds and connects individuals and groups living in diverse urban spaces, pushes current conceptions of social cohesion to the limits. The implications of this review are that an intercultural approach to social cohesion may offer a sounder basis for a multiculturalism of the future.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Interculturalism, Social Cohesion, Neighbourhoods