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European Society and Human Capital: Assessment of EU Legislation on Social Cohesion and Human Values

Abstract

Objectives. The aim of this paper is to reflect on the legislation of the European Union (hereinafter EU) regarding human capital, human values and social cohesion by presenting two main approaches: (1) the relevant legislation underlining the protection of human capital, human values and social cohesion in the European society; (2) the social mechanisms and related concepts of governance, social entrepreneurship and active citizenship of the EU, focusing on providing different approaches to the economic, historical and legal phenomena and processes. *Methodology.* The research uses the qualitative methods of thematic analysis and legal documentation and it focuses on (1) the legal collection provided by the EUR-Lex database depending on the selected period (2006–2023) and the domain of the document by using the legal and network analysis of EU documents using the selection criteria of document number and document type; (2) the exploration of the systematic bibliography involving documentation and research on the links between human capital, human values and social cohesion. *Results and discussion.* The results of the research highlight the role of EU legislation and scientific knowledge in a multidisciplinary and multifaceted analysis. *Conclusions:* In conclusion, the subject of the study is an open debate, involving both the theoretical understanding and the mechanisms of EU multi-level governance.

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1 Introduction

The scholarly literature on human capital, human values, active citizenship and social cohesion provides complex approaches to studies evaluating practices, policies and strategies. Much of the scholarly literature addresses the social, cultural and historical determinants that differentiate research designs on humanistic heritage and variations in social cohesion at the community and societal levels. This analysis makes two main contributions. Firstly, attention is paid to the conceptual framework of human capital and human values in Europe, reflecting the findings of the relevant literature in this field. Secondly, the study aims to examine the EU legislation itself by identifying ten legal instruments related to human capital, active citizenship and social cohesion. Therefore, this paper offers a discussion of three focused areas: (1) human values and skills; (2) active citizenship and social entrepreneurship; and (3) social cohesion, focusing on creating an analytical framework for interdisciplinary research on active citizenship

Keywords

EU, human capital, social sustainability, social cohesion, governance

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and identifying the determinants of multi-level governance.

Based on these three features, the study focused on legislative changes and implementation aimed at processing information on human capital and social cohesion in European society. Thus, this study uses an alternative framework to articulate and evaluate two areas of the taxonomy of core concepts, addressing (1) the integration of scientific knowledge and constructs that complement human capital and institutional governance, and (2) the development of approaches to a legally sound framework that illustrates the role of social cohesion and universal values. These two areas of research focus on both legislative and scientific resources that have social, historical, economic and educational roots.

Furthermore, this overlap will be assessed in terms of individual and institutional inputs and outputs that indicate a strong link between social cohesion and human values, including a wide range of legal and conceptual attributes associated with social rights, social change, social behaviour, quality of life, equal treatment and democratic life.

For a comprehensive analysis, the study will also take into account the conceptual and practical importance of EU legislation integrating human capital, civic engagement, social dialogue and participation.

Therefore, the following analysis associates the extent to which the legal framework approaches social and related domains, proposing a long-term analysis of the EU legal framework of more than seventeen years (2006–2023), supporting the need to expand the societal taxonomy by including legal outcomes, cross-analytical and functional linkages through empirical and theoretical developments. This approach can demonstrate both the role of human capital and individual differences (values, participation, civic engagement and individual behaviour). In addition, the research aims to highlight some specific findings: the contextual dimension of societal and legal mechanisms, the role of social resources, human capital and social cohesion, and to facilitate the development of a human capital-based analytical framework by focusing on social engagement and human values.

2 Methodology

The research methodology used is thematic analysis and legal documentation, which involves researching legal texts by identifying the relevant themes that focus on a set of documents during the selected period (2006–2023). The current research uses the qualitative methods of thematic analysis and legal documentation using the legal database EUR-Lex (2023). The data were retrieved during the period from December 10, 2023 to January 10, 2024. By examining the legal scope of the research findings, the legal documentation of EU law collected over two decades reflects a set of ten documents from 2006 to 2023, allowing for an in-depth analysis of EU initiatives and legislative stability, focusing on the political perspective and human capital.

This is followed by a content analysis using a comparative legal study designed to contribute to a theoretical and legislative assessment based on a review of the academic literature over the past three decades, from 1994 to 2024.

The study consists of four sections. The first section reviews previous studies using conceptual correlations to provide an interdisciplinary and legal analysis of EU legislation. The second section contextualises human values that reflect the traditional framework of the relationship between social and organisational processes. The third section is devoted to the results and discussion of EU legislation focusing on human capital, active citizenship, social cohesion and participation, and the role of multi-level governance. The fourth section confirms the narratives of social cohesion

and the principle of justice by tracing the causal link between human capital and social cohesion. While the overall legal content is represented by eight main areas of analysis and research that assess the governance framework and criteria, ten areas trace the EU's legal governance and contextualise the humanist legacy and human values over the period 2006–2023. These areas are as follows:

(1) Human capital management, sustainable development, social cohesion and people-centred leadership, as set out in Regulation (EU) 2021/241 and Regulation (EU) 2020/852;

(2) human interactions and humanistic heritage, as set out in Decision (EU) 2017/864 (2017);

(3) the main characteristics of equal opportunities, equal treatment, human capital and human development, as set out in Decision No. 771/2006/EC (2006);

(4) a series of interconnections between human values, quality of life, human development, "active ageing", "engaged citizens" and "engaged citizenship", as highlighted in Decision (EU) 2023/936 (2023), which contributes to EU resilience and civic participation;

(5) the centrality and characteristics of human capital, active participation, active citizenship, social entrepreneurship and social rights, as well as the promotion of democratic life and the dissemination of common values, as referred to in Regulation (EU) 2021/817 (2021) and Regulation (EU) No 346/2013 (2013);

(6) the importance of human relations, human dignity and pluralism, referring to the principles of responsibility, subsidiarity and proportionality set out in Regulation (EU) 2021/692 (2021), which requires participation and civic engagement;

(7) achieving organisational, cultural and social preparedness, democratic values and the promotion of human rights, as set out in Decision No. 283/2010/EU (2010), which links and involves "intercultural dialogue", "European integration", "democratic values", "historical education", "creativity", "European history" and "cultural dialogue";

(8) the contribution of different forms of participation as expressed in Commission Decision (EU) 2019/721 (2019) on the proposed citizens' initiative by (a) strengthening human capital, democratic life and citizens' initiatives; (b) calling for equality, social cohesion and resilience at the regional level; and (c) enhancing civic engagement.

3 Literature Review on Human Capital and Human Values: Empirical and Theoretical Developments

In many contexts, research on the connection between human capital, active citizenship and social cohesion refers to a few key theoretical concepts that link civic engagement, participation and social

cohesion (Cheng, Fleischmann, 2010: 1-10; Mills, 2013: 120-134).

Other studies explore the intellectual framework and roots of human values and humanistic heritage (Aspy, D.N., Aspy, C.B., 1998: 85-95), referring to social capital, social cohesion, knowledge and a human-centred approach. Most studies examine both community convergence and social cohesion (Heywood, 2023). Few studies overlook the social and organisational context that sheds light on the policy framework and conceptual patterns (Coelho, Hanel, Johansen, Maio, 2019: 34-51; Weinberg, Flinders, 2018: 573-592).

Therefore, Cornwall, Robins and Von Lieres discuss the idea of the concept of 'narratives of participation' and civic engagement (Cornwall, Robins, Von Lieres, 2011: 01-32). This idea shifts the role of institutional governance based on the constructive vision of the functionalist approach to the human capital perspective (Ishita, Oard, Fleischmann, Cheng, Templeton, 2010: 1-4) and structural changes in the open economy (Bye, Fæhn, 2022: 1021-1049).

In the late 1980s, Feather discussed the relationship between the different subsets of values, linking the theoretical perspective to the research area focused on human capital and moral judgements (Feather, 1988). From a different focus, Mayton, Ball-Rokeach and Loges argue that the status of humanistic contextualisation suggests a new insight into human values, human beliefs, social change and social behaviour (Mayton, Ball-Rokeach, Loges, 1994: 1-8).

Mascarenhas (2017) refers to this approach by empirically investigating the governance processes and functions of "organisational citizenship behaviour", pointing to a multidimensional conceptual construct linked to four requirements: human capital, communication, individual behaviour and organisational communication. In addition, a growing volume of literature measures and analyses the role of public institutions and public decisions in promoting human values, human rights, active citizenship, social cohesion and individual participation (Williams, 2024), social environment and leadership (Eckardt, Tsai C-Y, Dionne, et al. 2021: 269-295).

Since the mid-2010s, several studies have mapped the structure of human values and ideals, such as freedoms, human dignity, and equality, articulating a link with human attitudes, a multidimensional understanding of human motivational interrelations, and the behavioral and organizational representations of human values (Coelho, Hanel, Johansen, Maio, 2019: 34-51). Most scholars contribute to the setting of the organisational and functional framework of social cohesion by exploring the constructive interfaces of human capital and human resources in organisational management (Suhonen, Paasivaara,

2011: 4-16), following the principles of participation, responsibility and networking (Compton, Meier, 2016: 609-629).

4 Results and Discussion

a. EU Legal Perspectives on Human Values, Human Capital and Active Citizenship

The EU legal framework on human values and human capital is based on two approaches. The first approach is based on the causal relationship between ideas, value settings and humanistic heritage, as assessed by Decision (EU) 2017/864 (2017), and the second approach captures the link between society, democracy, citizens and participation, as classified by Decision (EU) 2023/936 (2023). The two legal documents reinforce the essential role of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, following the dominant perspective of human rights protection and the exercise of fundamental rights.

Furthermore, Decision (EU) 2017/864 (2017) takes into account the organisational mechanisms of civil society participation and the structural framework of the voluntary sector. Decision (EU) 2017/864 (2017) works with European Heritage Label concepts that address social, cultural and political factors related to human capital, namely: "understanding", "identity", "inspiration", "cohesion", "dialogue", "human heritage", "value creation", "knowledge".

A large part of Decision (EU) 2017/864 (2017) deals with the determinants of cultural, social and religious heritage, developing a complex understanding of the input and output factors. In the area of humanistic heritage and the interaction between the state, society, citizens and social cohesion, Decision (EU) 2017/864 (2017) focuses on human capital, cultural heritage and linguistic diversity, explaining the role of intercultural dialogue, history and quality of life. The core insight of the same decision also points to multiple levels, where the protection of social rights and human values is implemented through the processing of two stages.

The first stage supports the theoretical orientation based on the operationalisation of the link between human capital, human creativity, responsibility, cooperation and dialogue. The second makes an organisational contribution by framing three catalytic factors, namely public awareness, new patterns of participation and human capital development. In addition, the legal analysis of the EU framework covers the key processes of social cohesion and participatory governance, including the social and cultural environment and the representative role of the EU Member States.

As an operational result, the legal arguments exposed by Decision (EU) 2017/864 (2017) and Decision (EU) 2023/936 (2023) focus on the legitimacy, organisation and identification of human values and humanistic heritage. This point is directly observable, promoting the representativeness of knowledge transfer, creation, sustainable development and social cohesion.

b. Linking Multilevel Governance, Social Entrepreneurship and Active Citizenship

The second section of the study operationalises the links between multilevel governance and active citizenship. While first section draws on the two legal contexts of human values theorising and humanistic inheritance, the second section includes a more observational focus, looking at different aspects of multilevel governance, social entrepreneurship and active citizenship. Furthermore, for this thematic relationship, the analysis reported five EU documents adopted during the period 2006–2021, as follows: Decision No 771/2006/EC (2006), Regulation (EU) 2021/817 (2021), Regulation (EU) 2021/692 (2021), Regulation (EU) No 346/2013 (2013) and Commission Decision (EU) 2019/721 (2019).

Additionally, an analysis of the determinants of governance and the links between human rights and active citizenship shows that the prevalence of citizen participation and engagement is directly related to structural and organisational characteristics.

The author's approach considers the broader legal literature, focusing on four explanatory principles and factors: (1) equal treatment and equal opportunities [Decision No 771/2006/EC (2006)]; (2) social inclusion, dialogue and resilience for an inclusive society [Regulation (EU) 2021/817 (2021)]; (3) the supporting mechanisms and policies for the respect of human dignity, human values, freedom, democratic life and social life [Regulation (EU) 2021/692 (2021)]; (4) reinforcement of the citizens' initiatives, individual participation and equal opportunities [Commission Decision (EU) 2019/721 (2019)], social entrepreneurship [Regulation (EU) No 346/2013 (2013)].

Therefore, Decision No 771/2006/EC (2006) constructs the system framework that includes the protection of human rights and guarantees the principles of equal treatment and non-discrimination. Based on four ethical principles, values and objectives (rights, representation, recognition and respect), Decision No 771/2006/EC (2006) and Regulation (EU) 2021/817 (2021) also show the role of the institutional-based mechanism of multi-level governance that meets the needs of citizens and organisational requirements in the field of inclusive participation.

c. Narratives About Human Capital and Social Cohesion

Previous sections have assessed the multi-dimensional framework, mainly scaling human capital and human values, pointing to the importance of EU legal documentation. The last part of the research provides a direct analysis of human capital and social cohesion, pointing to the different organisational capacities and social order. Therefore, the analysis focuses on the legal findings of Regulation (EU) 2021/241 (2021), Regulation (EU) 2020/852 (2020) and Decision No 283/2010/EU (2010). To make this link, the research reports on three EU documents adopted during the period 2010–2021. As a result, the research reports that human capital and social cohesion played an important role in EU legislation during this period by identifying three specific themes of analysis: (1) human capital, resilience and freedoms [Regulation (EU) 2021/241 (2021)]; (2) human activity and information [Regulation (EU) 2020/852 (2020)]; (3) human capital and social cohesion.

This first topic of analysis follows a resilient and pro-social perspective approaching social rights, social protection, public engagement, social rights and freedoms and social cohesion. Additionally, the idea of human capital and social cohesion is based on three social and economic foundations: digital transition, social resilience and structural change [Regulation (EU) 2021/241 (2021)].

The second topic of analysis conceptualizes human capital and information through the promotion of two broad conceptual categories tended to map the sustainable investment and human activity Regulation (EU) 2020/852 (2020)]. Besides, the results of the legal analysis of Regulation (EU) 2020/852 (2020) also revealed the role of regulatory mechanisms focusing on the three perspectives: (a) social support and social sustainability; (b) public policies and sustainable economic processes; and (c) social governance and resources.

An alternative topic of analysis derives from the link between human capital and social cohesion, reflecting organisational preferences, civic engagement and social cohesion. Given the context of Decision No 283/2010/EU (2010), social responsibility and social polarisation are also developed. Based on the three topics of analysis, the results of the research frame the orientation of human capital and human values towards sustainability and social cohesion.

5 Conclusions

Based on the multidimensional legal analysis of the links between human capital and human values

in European governance, the article summarises the contributions of EU legislation to this process and mechanisms. Specifically, ten EU legal documents examining the role of active citizenship and social cohesion have been examined. By emphasising the role of human capital and human values, and by linking the theoretical and legal approaches in EU legislation, the article reveals significant findings for research on the legal resources of human capital and conceptual links to human values, active citizenship and social cohesion. This study also examines the relationship between conceptualisations and new dimensions of social cohesion, analysing how EU legal instruments categorise and implement policy strategies and mechanisms.

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