Our research explores perceptions of equality of opportunity and trust in institutions. It examines social cohesion in urban and regional areas in Victoria and throughout Australia. We explore the extent to which community members have equal access to resources in the community (education, healthcare, employment, housing) and how this affects, for example:

– community resilience/connectedness and community health and well-being; and

– community engagement and political/civic participation.

Arts researchers have worked across different community groups such as youth, newly arrived and well-established migrant groups, vulnerable groups, and indigenous communities to help determine appropriate means of structuring services and social infrastructure in order to cater to these diverse needs. Our findings have helped to define best practice and map out the conditions required for successful implementation. As such this theme is concerned with transformation and improvement of services.

Our researchers collaborate with different service providers to develop and inform policy. Projects have included: work with interpreters in mental health settings; recording Aboriginal Exemption Policies in Australia; identifying the conditions for enhancing social cohesion and understanding in regional Victoria; research to explain the barriers and facilitators of neighbourhood networks and cohesion; and roadmaps of the conditions necessary for creating access to services for women with disabilities experiencing family violence.
The social cohesion surveys, funded by the Scanlon Foundation, and led by Andrew Markus, were first conducted in 2007 with the aim of developing an evidence base to further understand social cohesion, with a focus on attitudes towards immigration and cultural diversity. Over the last decade, the Scanlon Foundation Mapping Social Cohesion Report has taken its place in Australia’s public life as a major contributor to policy development and debate around migration and cultural diversity.

Since its inception, a total of sixteen surveys have been conducted—nine national, four in local areas, and three experimental—with a total of some 35,000 respondents. In that time, fourteen reports have been issued. The 2015 component of this study is the most extensive surveying of social cohesion issues undertaken in Australian social science research. In addition to the annual national survey, an online survey was translated into 20 languages and was completed by 500 respondents, and 52 focus groups were conducted in four capital cities.

The findings of the Scanlon surveys are used by our national and state government to provide the most reliable indicators of Australian opinion on social cohesion and population issues and they are cited in major government policy studies. The survey’s findings on experience of discrimination have been provided by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection to the OECD. Findings on trust in the Australian political system were presented in a 2014 Senate Occasional Lecture. The data set of the reports are also sought by international agencies and institutes, including the Migration Policy Institute in the United States.

Through his work on these surveys, Professor Markus has made a significant contribution to national debate on the topic of social cohesion. The attitudes uncovered in these surveys are the topic of sustained analysis in major media articles.