

Social Cohesion and Tipping Points: Perspectives, Approaches and the Way Forward

Transdisciplinary Symposium at Free University Berlin, 20-21 August 2020

- Call for Participation -

Thematic Focus

Fast and inadequately regulated social, political, ecological and technological transformation processes, such as climate change impacts, major environmental destruction, land concentration and growing right-wing populism, are increasingly affecting societies across the globe. Such change processes, associated with growing inequalities within the social fabric, enhance the risk for social fragmentation. Thus, understanding how social cohesion can be protected and strengthened is an important objective for interdisciplinary research.

A deeper understanding of the socio-economic and cultural context in which rural and urban communities are embedded, is a prerequisite for protecting and strengthening social cohesion. Societies' capabilities to govern multiple transformation processes depend on functioning formal and/or informal institutions allowing for access to public services, security in public spaces, natural resources, such as land and water, markets, capital/credits, and education, health, knowledge and income opportunities. The aim of this symposium is to understand how policies and their implementation promote or impede the governance of social cohesion. Additionally, we would like to discuss to what extent the concept of tipping points may improve our understanding of social cohesion.

We aim at discussing social cohesion combining perspectives from various scientific disciplines and practical experiences. We would like to learn from the different approaches how the concept of "social cohesion" can be used to address specific research questions. Finally, we are interested in debating the idea of social cohesion as a "crucial system feature" of societies that could suffer an (irreversible) change if it is "tipped". Tipping points can be understood as "*a steady change in some control parameter ultimately leads to a qualitative change in the system state when some threshold is passed*" (Lenton, 2013:6)¹.

More specifically, we would like to discuss the following research questions:

- What are different perspectives on social cohesion?
- What are the key risks regarding social cohesion?
- How can social cohesion be strengthened in the future?

¹ Lenton, Timothy M. (2013): Environmental Tipping Points. In *Annu. Rev. Environ. Resour.* 38 (1), pp. 1-29. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-environ-102511-084654



Participants

We invite researchers and practitioners from various fields, working on social cohesion, conflict, natural resources, criminal networks and tipping points. Participants should be open-minded and willing to engage in inter- and transdisciplinary exchange based on agile methodologies.

Please, send a short statement of interest (max. 400 words) **sharing your thoughts on the concept of social cohesion until the 15th of May** to regine.schoenenberg@fu-berlin.de & schilling@uni-landau.de.

Background

The Symposium takes place in the frame of the BMBF/BioTIP project PRODIGY “Process-based & Resilience-Oriented management of Diversity Generates sustainability” (www.lai.fu-berlin.de/prodigy/index.html) which aims at identifying cascading, inter-dependent tipping points among ecological, economic and social systems. We started our research by observing societal, economic and ecological transformation processes in culturally diverse and ecologically similar systems in the border region of the three countries Brazil, Bolivia and Peru. The symposium is co-organized by the Peace Academy Rhineland-Palatinate.