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QUALITY OF COMMUNAL LIFE

Social cohesion

We measure social cohesion, thus providing a better understanding of current societal trends. We help communities activate their potential in strengthening cohesion and foster partnerships that improve communal life.

CONTACT



Stephan Vopel



Dr. Kai Unzicker



Hester Weigand

Social cohesion is generally seen as something valuable in itself, as the expression of an intact and solidarity-minded community. In this sense, social cohesion is regarded as a normatively desirable quality that contributes to making society both livable and sustainable. However, modern Western societies face a number of challenges that appear to threaten social cohesion,

including globalization and digital transformation; rising levels of inequality; immigration and increasing cultural, religious and ethnic diversity; and the rise of populists and the related crises of liberal democracies.

This makes it all the more critical to understand changes in cohesion, as well as their causes and effects, in order to enable sound policymaking that nurtures cohesion. Despite the vital importance of social cohesion, the scope of empirical knowledge on the subject is extremely limited. For example, there's been little in the way of specialized, cross-national comparative reporting on the issue. This means that empirical answers to important questions in this area remain scarce. For example, we know too little about whether cohesion is in fact diminishing on a cross-European comparative basis, about what threatens it, and about what measures may contribute to strengthening it. To answer these and other questions, the Bertelsmann Stiftung has developed the Social Cohesion Radar as an instrument of measurement.

Our multidimensional concept of cohesion serves as the frame of reference for our activities. In our model, cohesion consists of stable, trusting and diverse social relationships; a positive emotional attachment to a community whose basic order is accepted as fair; and people's willingness to take active responsibility for the general community and its vulnerable members through volunteer action and solidarity.

Social cohesion does not arise on its own and cannot simply be decreed in all of its facets. However, it is possible to actively design some framework conditions that foster its development. Cohesion presupposes stable and trusting relationships between different people, groups and organizations. Thus, we want to bring together different civil society organizations, working collaboratively to promote strong cohesion in a heterogeneous and open society. Through workshops, conferences and panel discussions, we bring people together in dialogue with one another.

In our numerous studies, we have examined the quality of social cohesion in cross-national comparison, and at the national, regional and local levels. Our results illustrate the course of social development in recent years and provide guidance on how cohesion can be strengthened.

PROJECTS

Social Cohesion

