

FROM ME TO WE



**How our democracy can
remain functional,
even in times of crisis.
A pilot study on building
societal resilience**

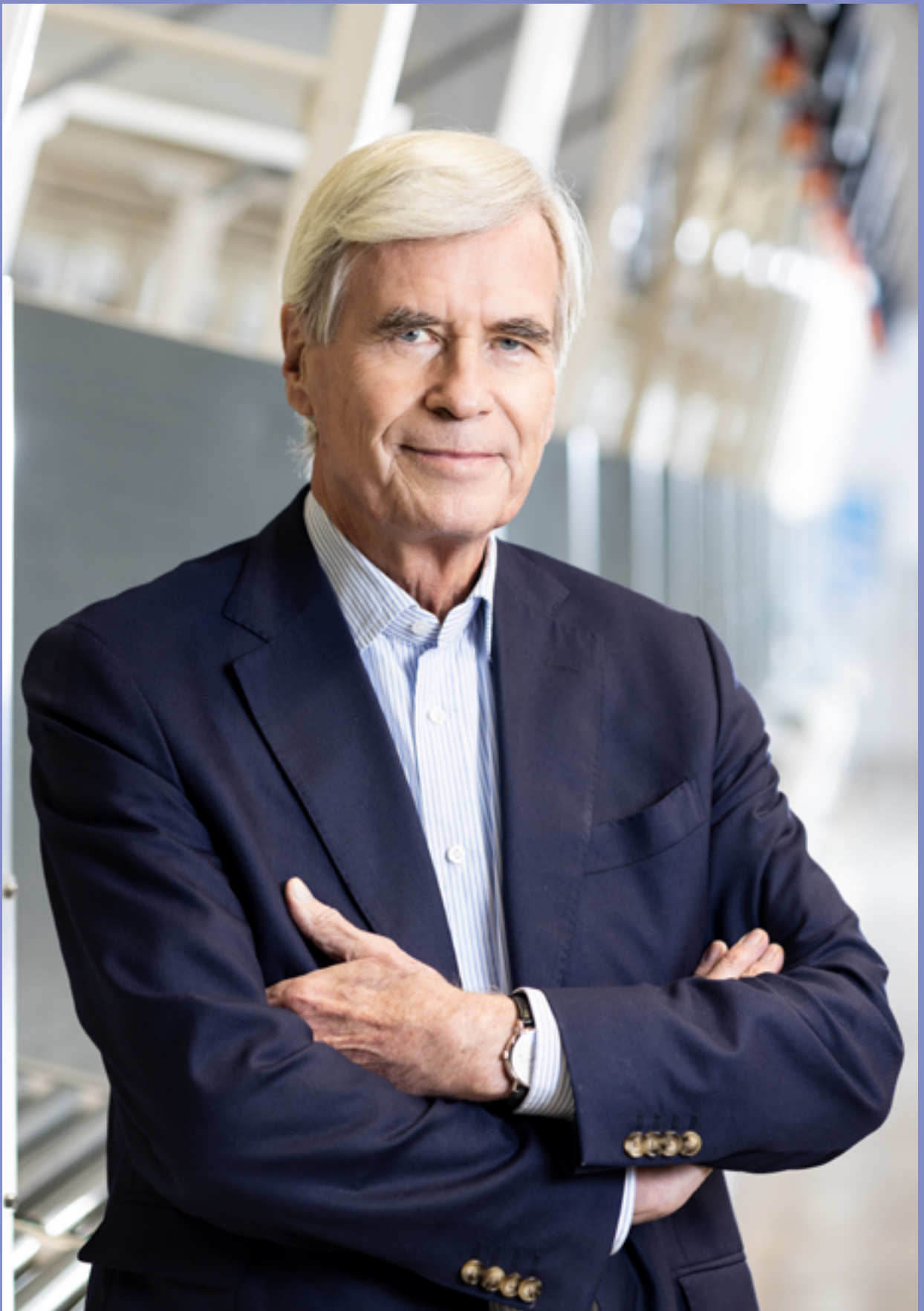
cociety

initiatives for
a resilient society

**“THE SECRET OF
SUCCESS LIES IN
THE ABILITY TO
GET THE OTHER
PERSON’S POINT
OF VIEW.”**

Henry Ford





We live in times that are challenging so many things we take for granted — our democracy, our solidarity, our trust. The numerous crises of recent years, including the pandemic, wars and the climate crisis, have transformed both the systems around us and our relationships. Cracks that were quietly deepening have been brought abruptly to the surface, exposing divisions between neighbourhoods, individuals and views.

This trend is further exacerbated by the social echo chambers and digital filter bubbles we inhabit. At the same time, spaces for genuine exchange are rapidly vanishing. Fewer people are volunteering, neighbourhoods are losing their sense of community and, paradoxically, amidst all this digital connectivity, loneliness is on the rise. Polarising issues such as the Covid pandemic have played a role in stifling debate. Where pubs, the market square or the neighbourhood once served as places for people to meet and interact with others outside their own circle, social and emotional voids are now opening up.

It is becoming increasingly clear that social dialogue depends upon opportunities for people to come together — it requires new spaces, new rituals and new ways of interacting.

This is where Cociety comes in. As a non-profit organisation, Cociety researches and develops approaches to nurturing what we need to establish social resilience; it aims to empower us to engage in dialogue that transcends party lines and diverse backgrounds by providing a framework based on empathy, a scientific approach, and a willingness to listen.

The CoSaturday dialogue format trialled new approaches to building bridges with the aim of showing that human connection can still succeed. Research has shown that under certain conditions, spaces that act as sounding boards can strengthen collective resilience and help build effective social interaction.

Cociety researches and promotes social resilience. This goal is driven by the vision and passion of Dr Marina Beermann and Anna Keremen, who launched a project that addresses dissent as well as the complexity and contradictions of our contemporary world.

I warmly invite you to get to know Cociety, to explore the findings yielded by the two-year CoSaturdays project, and — most importantly — to join in, contribute your thoughts, get involved and play an active part. Social resilience does not emerge from nowhere — it flourishes with every conversation, every encounter and every time we say 'we'.



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46

percent of
citizens

**believe they can express
their opinions freely.**

(Allensbach Institute for Public Opinion Research, 2025)

48%

of Germans feel connected to society. Among 16 to 29-year-olds, the figure is 36 percent. (GIM market and social research institute, 2023/2025)

67

percent of respondents

who use social media as their main source of information feel inhibited about expressing themselves freely online. This is particularly true for contentious subjects. A possible explanation: outrage logic in the digital sphere. Those who consume traditional media experience such inhibitions less frequently.

(Friedrich Naumann Foundation, 2025)

17

million. That's the number of times that "divisions in society" came up in German media in 2021/2022. Ten years earlier, there were 250,000 mentions. However, studies also show that the topic is over-represented in the media, which can create the impression that society is more divided than it really is.

(Cologne Journal of Sociology and Social Psychology, 2023; Steffen Mau, 2024)

26.97

million people

in Germany engaged in unpaid volunteer work in 2024. That's equivalent to 37.7 percent of Germans aged 14 and older. In 2019 the figure was 39.7 percent.

(German Survey on Volunteering FWS, 2025)

19%

of Germans feel lonely at least occasionally. This is an increase of 14 percent since the Covid pandemic. (DIW German Institute for Economic Research, 2024)

73 percent of citizens **are concerned about social cohesion. 35 percent agree fully that society is falling apart.**

(Leibniz Institute, 2025)

95%

of respondents agree that greater unity is required in Germany in view of global political instability. (Rheingold Institute, 2025)

71

percent of respondents are of the opinion that the state of democracy in Germany has deteriorated.

(Deutschland-Monitor, 2025)



TOGETHER WE ARE STRONGER



Journalist and resilience expert Dr Christina Berndt explains how heavily our democracy, economy and long-term stability depend on a functioning society

Resilience is a word that, in times of overwhelming stress, can easily sound like self-help jargon. It conjures images of breathing exercises, crisis management and private inner strength. However, to view resilience solely through the lens of the individual is to think too narrowly.

Amidst global conflict, fraying alliances, the effects of climate change, antidemocratic currents and rising polarisation, the defining question of our era is not merely how we cope as individuals. It is also this: how does a society remain capable of action when crises overlap, trust evaporates and social cohesion weakens?

As multiple crises unfold simultaneously, the resulting confusion has led some to seek security and others to retreat into defensiveness, cynicism or weariness. This trend represents more than just a sombre public mood; it is a warning sign. A society in which citizens grow estranged from one another loses not only its social cohesion but also its collective power.

History confirms that societies are as vulnerable to breaking as individuals, as evidenced by the collapses of the Roman Empire, the German Empire and the Weimar Republic. Although every societal collapse has its own unique causes, the primary antidote to decline — and the key to a stable, prosperous future — is resilience. Consequently, resilience is studied not only in psychological and economic contexts but in sociological ones as well. In a societal sense, resilience is not a state of invulnerability; rather, it is a form of collective elasticity. It is the community's ability to absorb pressure without fracturing, to navigate conflict without losing its identity, and to process crises collaboratively rather than merely enduring them.

The data underscores the urgency of this issue. According to a 2023 analysis by

the think tank More in Common, 80 percent of respondents believe that life in Germany is fundamentally unfair. This sentiment is echoed in a more recent 2025 survey by the Cologne-based Rheingold Institute, in which 89 percent of participants said that society is divided and the collective sense of “we” has vanished. These figures represent a profound challenge to social cohesion — and, by extension, to the stability of society as a whole.

According to sociologist Steffen Mau, who, along with Thomas Lux and Linus Westhäuser, authored the acclaimed 2023 study *Trigger Points: Consensus and Conflict in Contemporary Society*, the German public is suffering from “change fatigue”. Many feel overwhelmed by the constant pressure to adapt their behaviour — from their diets and home heating habits to their mobility choices — in response to a rising tide of global instability. When so many people are convinced that society is drifting apart, it cannot be dismissed as a mere feeling. “A lack of solidarity can endanger our liberal democracy in the long run,” warns psychologist Stephan Grünewald of the Rheingold Institute.

The stakes are high, not least because resilience is a critical economic factor. While cohesion, flexibility, and job satisfaction boost performance, constant disputes, strikes, skilled labour shortages and high rates of sick leave erode productivity. Moreover, when inequality increases, society suffers significant losses in its capacity to create value. France serves as a current example of how deepening social divisions and tensions can place an entire nation under immense pressure. There, the widening gap is eroding the very foundations of social cohesion. To reverse this trend and bolster societal resilience, we must look to the Scandinavian model. As a 2017 Bertelsmann Foundation study highlighted, this requires prioritising social justice, equitable educational opportunities, accessible healthcare

and broad access to the labour market — regardless of gender, migration background or social status.

Rising inequality poses a significant threat to long-term societal stability. To maintain political and economic agility, we require a workforce and citizenry willing to embrace innovation and navigate unconventional paths. The success of essential reforms depends on marginalising obstructionist and populist rhetoric. Ultimately, societies characterised by initiative, flexibility and resilience are the ones best equipped to recover from global shocks.

For our society, the mandate is clear: we must act now to strengthen our society's resilience by leveraging the forces that already hold us together. As of 2024, approximately 27 million people in Germany (36.7 percent of those aged 14 and older) are active volunteers. Whether in schools, neighbourhoods or local organisations, their daily contributions maintain our social cohesion. True resilience is not born of grand debates; it is forged in these small, quiet moments of reliability where people know, listen to and trust one another.

Resilience is therefore rooted in connection and cohesion — in the genuine opportunity to participate and the conviction that one's actions matter. When individuals feel their voices carry weight, they are far more likely to embrace responsibility. Those who experience agency are less likely to retreat into the safety of their private lives. By seeing themselves as vital threads in the social fabric, they remain committed to the community even in times of crisis. Resilience flourishes where self-efficacy is transformed from a mere concept into a lived experience.

So what needs to be done?

Resilience is not a plaster for cracks that have already formed; it is a proactive measure — a form of democratic hygiene.

It begins with a return to conversation, particularly with those whose worldviews challenge our own. We need the peace activist in a room with the conscriptionist; the frequent flyer in dialogue with the cyclist, the environmentalists with the Harley-Davidson riders' club. On a smaller scale, it means the Müller family finally engaging with their “annoying” next-door neighbours.

Ultimately, social divides can only ever be bridged through dialogue. This is no easy feat, particularly when it comes to heavy-duty issues like integration, migration, climate change and biodiversity. The real danger arises when dialogue itself becomes toxic — when a difference of opinion is perceived not as an opening for exchange, but as a personal attack. When disagreement is mistaken for hostility and social media platforms trade nuance for outrage, the room for understanding disappears. When we lose the ability to talk, we lose our capacity to solve the problems that face us all.

We see this in the citizens' forums and assemblies of active communities, as well as in German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier's “Ortszeit Deutschland” initiative, which creates a dedicated space for public dialogue. The goal is to discuss pressing issues without collapsing into irreconcilable differences, perhaps even allowing participants to

refine or reconsider their own perspectives. Then there are initiatives like “#Ichstehauf — Schools for Democracy and Diversity”, which empower teachers across Germany to bring these values into the classroom — because an open culture of debate must be nurtured early.

But dialogue alone isn't enough. A stable society requires an educational culture that imparts more than just knowledge — it must cultivate the capacity for independent judgment. It needs media that bridge divides rather than deepen them, and shared spaces where collective action prevents distance from turning into defensiveness. Finally, it requires structures that enable participation and prioritise the art of listening. Resilience, after all, isn't just about “weathering the storm”; it's about taking action before feeling overwhelmed turns into feeling defeated.

Perhaps this is the most critical shift of all: social resilience is not a reactive shield, nor is it a plaster for cracks that have already formed. It is a pro-active measure — a form of democratic hygiene. To empower a society, we must start early: through educational pathways that unlock opportunities for participation, approaches that champion active listening and a language that doesn't immediately alienate. Above all, we need a culture that reminds us daily: those who disagree with us are not our enemies.

Despite the challenges, there is a silver lining in the data: most people actually want to find common ground. The 2025 Rheingold survey reveals that 95% of Germans recognise the need for national cohesion in an unstable world. Crucially, 77% said they were looking for real-world community experiences — even with those whose views differ from their own. To capitalise on this, local communities need to revitalise civic clubs and social spaces that facilitate meaningful, face-to-face interaction.

But we must not underestimate the power of individual engagement either. In his 2023 study, Steffen Mau concludes that social cohesion is felt most deeply by those who are actively engaged in their communities.

Societal resilience is therefore not a luxury; it is the silent prerequisite that allows democracy to function not merely as an institution but as a lived experience. It begins the moment we stop taking the “we” for granted and start recognising it for what it is: something fragile, precious and worth protecting.

Dr Christina Berndt has been writing about psychology and medicine for the Science and Society section of the Süddeutsche Zeitung for over 25 years. Her book *Resilience — The Secret of Mental Strength* (2013) was on the Spiegel bestseller list for two years, has been translated into 14 languages (not including English, as of going to print) and continues to shape the debate to this day.

1:43:06



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Anbau**Futtermittelimport**

25% der erwerbsfähigen Futtermittel werden in Deutschland importiert

Verarbeitung**Arbeitsmarkt**

Die Arbeitsbedingungen in der Fleischverarbeitung sind oft mangelhaft. Neue Gesetze versuchen dem entgegenzuwirken.

Handel**Mangelnde Transparenz im Siegeldschungel**

Für Verbraucher:innen ist es wegen der Vielzahl an Kennzeichnungen schwierig herauszufinden, wie nachhaltig ein Produkt ist.

Konsum

Billigfleisch/Preis für Bio
Biofleisch ist doppelt so teuer wie konventionelles Fleisch.

**Entsorgung/
Ende der
Verwendung**

Fleischexport
Wir produzieren mehr Fleisch als wir brauchen.

Fleischalternativen

Der Markt für Fleischalternativen wächst sehr dynamisch.

96% des Fleisches in Deutschland kommt aus **Massentierhaltung**

Die EU Agrarpolitik beeinflusst die deutsche Lebensmittelproduktion

Gesellschaftliche Folgekosten: In Einberechnung der "echten" Kosten wäre Fleisch 2,41€/kg teurer



BREAK OUT OF THE BUBBLE



While conflict can be uncomfortable, it is the bedrock of any functioning democracy. More and more people are avoiding conflict today because it breeds uncertainty and they aren't sure how to handle it. A diversity of opinion can certainly be exhausting, but it is necessary

The neighbour who votes differently. The colleague with opposing views on migration. The brother you haven't spoken to about politics since the pandemic. Many of us are familiar with these fractured relationships — and most of us actively avoid them. Yet our societal challenges are becoming more complex and urgent. Trust in institutions is dwindling and people are retreating further into comfortable bubbles. This deepening sense of division stifles genuine dialogue before it can even begin, ultimately threatening the very fabric of our shared society.

This is where Society comes in. Founded in April 2023 as a non-profit limited company, Society is a network of nine civil society organisations representing fields as diverse as climate protection, education, culture, international development and democracy building. By learning from one another and working together, members achieve a far greater impact. They are united by a shared commitment to social responsibility — and by a common patron and benefactor, Prof Dr Michael Otto.

Through their individual initiatives, the member organisations demonstrate what resilient transformation looks like in practice — whether through education, cultural initiatives, climate action or international development. Society serves as a platform centred on resilience: a society's capacity to democratically navigate crises, change and uncertainty without falling apart. Without social cohesion, networking, openness and a capacity for change, societies lose this resilience, and with it, the ability to progress.

Society's research and application projects — including the CoSaturday format — actively test and demonstrate how people can create a functioning society

together. The design of this long-term social science study incorporates the following core principles of resilience, translating them into a practical framework for public dialogue and collective resonance:

Adaptability

The willingness to embrace change with an open mind, remaining receptive to learning even when stepping outside one's comfort zone.

Networking

The practice of cooperation and information sharing. Because complex challenges require collective knowledge, networking fosters collaboration to unlock holistic perspectives and shared solutions.

Empowerment

The act of equipping individuals and communities with the tools and support necessary to confront change effectively and with self-determination.

Diversity

A strategic safety net that provides a rich variety of skills, perspectives and options during a crisis.

The CoSaturdays project is an applied research initiative designed to explore the abstract nature of resilience and examine how dialogue between strangers on contentious issues can strengthen it. After all, a society cannot comfortably handle crisis and change without effective cooperation. To ensure a quantifiable outcome, the project was scientifically evaluated from the outset to pinpoint the precise factors that could reinforce societal resilience.

Spiel

- Wir gehen respektvoll miteinander um
- jede Meinung zählt
- Ich - Botschaften
- Keine Verallgemeinerungen
- Keine Monologe
- Konstruktive Kritik
- Hände hoch
- Verantwortlich sein

“IT WAS A FIREWORKS DISPLAY OF EMPERICAL SOCIAL RESEARCH”



The Cociety CoSaturdays were designed to explore and promote societal resilience. An interview about safe spaces, triggering topics and why even experts sometimes need a reality check



Ms Beermann, Ms Keremen, the two of you are the driving force behind the CoSaturdays — a rather unconventional research project.

How did it come about?



Marina Beermann: The idea was born in 2021, in the middle of the Covid years when Prof Dr Michael Otto, our patron, and the directors of his non-profit organisations asked themselves this: how exactly do we handle social conflict? At the time, people were hotly debating the restrictions imposed during the pandemic, and later, the correct response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the protest campaigns staged by climate activists. Very soon, wherever you turned, conflicts and divisions were emerging between different camps. It suddenly became clear just how fragile social peace and social cohesion actually were. Everyone realized that a functioning society was more

than a valuable asset — it was crucial for a stable democracy. Bearing this in mind, a group of non-profit organisations connected to Michael Otto came together to form Cociety — Initiatives for a Resilient Society. When I joined Cociety as its director in late 2022, I asked myself what constitutes a resilient society and what does it take for a democracy to continue functioning in times of crisis.

How did the ultimate format arise?

Anna Keremen: We had many ideas in the beginning. One was to develop a kind of TED Talk, to present attention-grabbing formats on a big stage in the traditional way: well-known people talk and others listen. But Marina was convinced that to really make an impact and promote social resilience in society, we needed an approach that focused on human inter-

One hundred people from in and around Hamburg, Germany, took part in a study on societal resilience over a period of around two years. Half of them participated in four full-day events while the other 50, the control group, did not.

Treatment group 
Control group 

2023

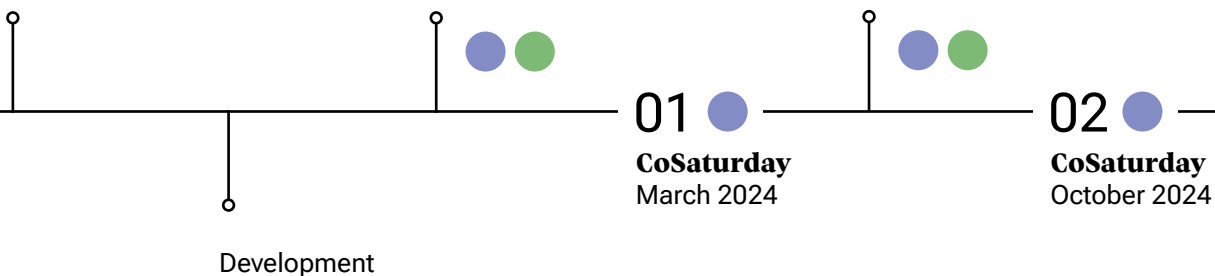
Project design definition

2024

Survey 1 collection of baseline data

2025

Survey 2 questionnaire



actions and participation, and whose possible effects could be demonstrated scientifically.

Marina Beermann: Our non-profit network came up with the idea of a citizens' panel pretty quickly after that. The exact configuration of the project and scientific studies to support it followed bit by bit.

What were the greatest difficulties you encountered?

Marina Beermann: Not having very much to go on was quite a challenge. We were unable to find comparable studies that had attempted to operationalise and measure societal resilience. We needed external expertise to help recruit and manage the participants, and we had to find independent partners for the third-party collection and processing of quantitative and qualitative data. We also needed experienced people to lead

the group discussions. Eventually, we were lucky enough to stumble across Agentur Q.

Mr Tabino, you are one of the founders of the market research agency Agentur Q. What sparked your enthusiasm for the CoSaturdays initiative?

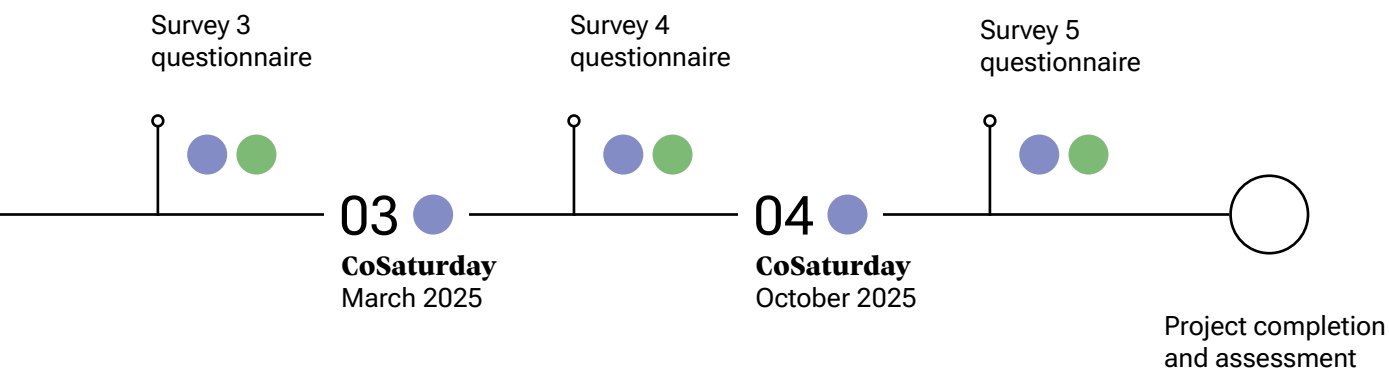
Oliver Tabino: Our initial contact with Marina in May, 2023 kindled our interest right away. Our team had done work for government agencies, led group discussions on racism and studied the importance of European institutions. In addition to working for Q, I volunteer in schools, where I lead value discussions for children and young people. Traditional projects such as these were not nearly as demanding as what Society had in mind. But we were given a rough idea of what to expect and were willing and flexible enough to engage in a complex,

long-term study of this kind. That's also what appealed to us.

For the study, 100 people were asked to take part in a series of resilience surveys over a period of two years. Fifty of them attended CoSaturday dialogue forums, while the others, who were their socio-demographic twins, did not. What was the significance of this approach?

Anna Keremen: Citizen engagement formats are usually implemented in connection with specific events or to achieve a particular, predetermined result. In traditional market research, participants may be asked to judge the flavour of a new soft drink or offer an opinion before an election, but that's the end of it — their involvement is over. Exploring a question as complex as ours required a much longer time period. For the purpose of

2026



quantifying the effect of our discussion format, we implemented a medical study format, in which a treatment group is given medication and a control group is given a placebo. To this end, the CoSaturday participants met in person and interacted with one another whereas the control group responded individually by way of an online questionnaire.

“We wanted to find out whether societal resilience was **more than the sum of its parts.**”

Marina Beermann

Marina Beermann: We were particularly interested in discovering whether societal resilience depended on people's individual resilience in that society — or how people interacting socially with one another impacts our collective resilience. In other words: is societal resilience more than the sum of its parts? To determine how everything connects and how best to promote and measure resilience, we sifted through the available literature, examining the various approaches to resilience research in the fields of psychology, sociology, economics and

ecology. In the end, we combined different empirical social research methods. The result: moderated discussion groups large and small, and as diverse as possible; pedagogical presentation of contentious topics according to specific criteria; motivational talks by experts; various qualitative methods of opinion polling; live polling by app and a specially designed resilience questionnaire for collecting quantitative data from both groups. At one point, Gero Sefas, a moderator from Q, referred to it as “a fireworks display of empirical social research”. And indeed it was.

Oliver Tabino: Only this approach could have done justice to the complexity of our core question and to the world in which we live. We knew from the start we wouldn't be working in a sterile lab environment — and that there wouldn't be any easy answers. A society is a living system, and people's views and behaviours change. Interpersonal dynamics are impossible to control.

How do you find people to take part in such an intensive format?

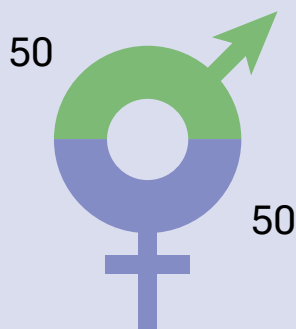
Anna Keremen: We teamed up with a fieldwork agency that had access to potential participants and was also capable of recruiting additional people with a specific profile.



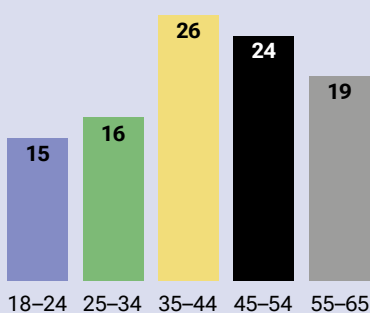
SLICE OF SOCIETY

The panel of 100 participants was put together to reflect the average Hamburg population in 2023. The treatment and control groups comprising 50 people each shared the same sociodemographic characteristics

Sex



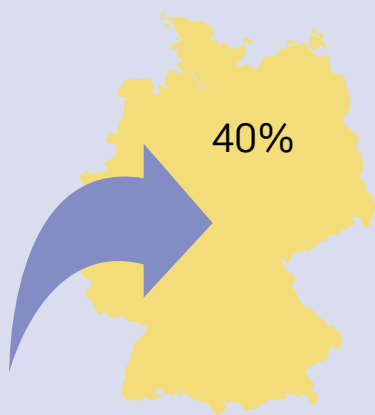
Age



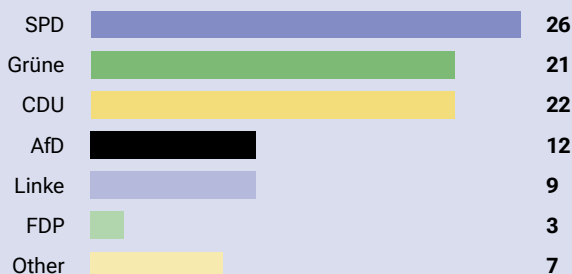
Place of residence



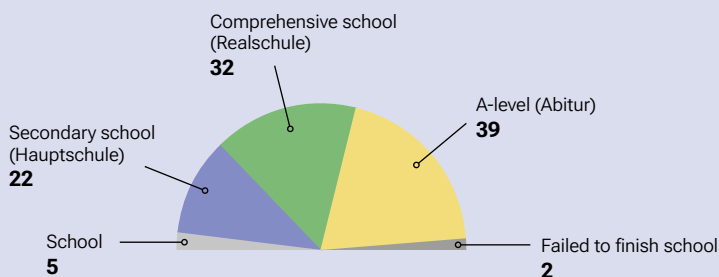
Percentage with an immigrant background



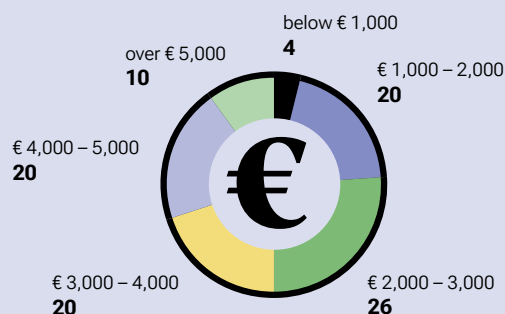
Political party affiliation



Education



Net household income



Our project required a diverse group that reflected Hamburg society. It had to statistically correspond to Hamburg demographics in 2023 regarding income, political party affiliation, education and possible immigration background. Putting together such a group wasn't easy, especially since the 50 CoSaturday participants and the other 50 in the control group had to match each other exactly and fulfil the same predetermined criteria. This is called creating socio-demographic twins, and was essential for making valid comparisons and reliably assessing the project's impact. The fieldwork agency also ensured participants' anonymity, so vital to the independent collection and analysis of data.

Oliver Tabino: The project required a high level of commitment from participants. They received financial compensation from Society, of course, but giving up four entire Saturdays over two years proved difficult. On the first CoSaturday, in spite of agreeing to do so, several people did not show up and offered no explanation for their absence. In their defence, they had no clear idea what to expect. Perhaps their courage deserted them. As the project continued, there were further isolated no-show instances, but they were explained by illness or even the birth of a child.

Marina Beermann: ... this was a challenge on each occasion as we were trying so hard to keep the scientific parameters in place. To a certain extent, however, changes in the composition of a panel authentically reflect social reality.

“Many of the participants clearly felt it unusual for their views to be heard or taken seriously.” Anna Keremen

Anna Keremen: What amazed but also shocked us was how some of the participants were surprised to be invited back for a second, third and fourth CoSaturday. For us, there was no question of anyone being thrown off the project for expressing an opinion deemed incorrect. But many of the participants clearly felt it unusual for their views to be heard or taken seriously.

Oliver Tabino: It's not really all that surprising. We are constantly confronted these days with other people's views, and being judged almost everywhere — at work, in public, on social media. Rub someone the wrong way and they'll be quick to

“At first, most people simply announced their view. Later, they began to listen, ask questions and show understanding.” Oliver Tabino

openly insult you, ghost you or unfriend you, all of which are exclusionary behaviours of one kind or another.

How do you create an inclusive framework that prevents this from happening?

Marina Beermann: It starts with small things, or those that are perceived as such: a location where people feel unobserved and unconstrained despite the scientific framework; a catering concept that addresses different dietary choices and needs; moderators who formulate questions without judging, who are empathetic rather than aloof, and who involve each participant, even those who perhaps hesitate, ponder or frown; experts who impart knowledge but don't pontificate, who are able to explain complex subjects to a general audience using simple words and inclusive language. When we began looking for speakers, we received some rejections from people who were not interested in speaking to those outside the scientific community. Some researchers also don't feel comfortable speaking

in unconventional settings such as ours.

Anna Keremen: There were times during the CoSaturdays when we had to make experts stop talking and listen. After giving a short presentation on their subject, they were expected to listen to the group discussion and only interrupt with facts, studies and statistics if what the participants were saying was clearly incorrect. For many of them, this role was unfamiliar — but it was also an instructive experience.

Oliver Tabino: Absolutely. And a true reality check. One expert had spent many years researching meat consumption, the first CoSaturday's subject of discussion. Hearing people express so many different views on the topic astonished her. But her admitting this had a positive effect on the participants and created an atmosphere of safety and trust.

Marina Beermann: I remember our first debriefing very well. There was lots of talk about the participants and their behaviour,

which was then contextualised and assessed. It bothered me no end. I thought, we project managers, experts and moderators are also part of the group. And like anyone else, we are stuck in our respective bubble. No one is really objective, we all have our ambiguities, our prejudices. We each construct our own social reality. Over the course of the project, I made some important life experiences that changed my perspective on certain issues.

In addition to dietary choices, the CoSaturday discussions focused on integration, equal opportunities and Germany's social market economy. What made you choose these particular topics?

Anna Keremen: They are all contentious topics, and we chose them consciously according to the four “arenas of inequality” described by the sociologists Steffen Mau, Thomas Lux and Linus Westheuser in their book *Trigger Points* (2023). The topics themselves were merely a means to an end. What interested us primarily was to

find out how discussing them affected social cohesion.

Marina Beermann: We chose the topics to simulate stressors in line with resilience theory. Conflict is inherent to a democratic society, but instead of shutting people out, it's important to use disagreement as a starting point to learn, and to find a workable compromise.

So the CoSaturdays weren't just about peace, love and unity?

Anna Keremen: No, they certainly were not. The CoSaturdays dedicated to discussions about integration and equal opportunities were very emotionally charged, and discriminatory statements were expressed. This affected me deeply, not just as project manager, but on a personal level.

Marina Beermann: Oh yes, it was also not the first time I thought: how on earth will we manage as a society with so much pain and distrust evident in the population? But I also wondered how we could improve the project in order to create a secure environment for this kind of conflict.

Oliver Tabino: We had to make sure the emotional intensity didn't lead to personal attacks. Sometimes, when the debate continued during the break, we moderators were forced to step in and intercede by asking



people to take a moment to rephrase what they wanted to say. At the beginning of the project, we went over modes of communication and agreed on a set of rules that we expected everyone to abide by.

Marina Beermann: The most important thing was not to moderate a conflict away, but to brave it out. Some issues are so close to people's hearts that it's almost impossible for them to remain objective. And that's okay. You just have to find a way to steer things back from the brink.

Oliver Tabino: What I found particularly fascinating was how the group managed to regulate

Oliver Tabino studied sociology and political science before specialising in qualitative market and social research, as well as social media research. He has worked as a university lecturer in Pforzheim and Heidelberg. In 2008, he and his business associate Kerstin Klär founded the Mannheim-based market research agency Q.

its own conflicts as the CoSaturdays progressed. Very often, it was not the louder participants who spoke up, but the quieter ones, those holding more balanced views.

What else did you learn about group dynamics?

Oliver Tabino: On the first CoSaturday, most people simply announced their view or positioned themselves for or against something. But with

every subsequent CoSaturday, they improved considerably in listening, asking questions and showing understanding. It's very difficult, of course, to map and measure developments like these statistically, but such observations also demonstrate that something had shifted in people's thinking and behaviour.

“The CoSaturdays were a simulation of a micro-public sphere where societal issues could be worked out in miniature.” Marina Beermann

Marina Beermann: Over the course of the project, we could observe how participants learned to accept conflict as being normal and productive. To an extent, the CoSaturdays were a simulation of a micro-public sphere where societal issues could be worked out in miniature. The most heated debates were those that revolved around the same controversial and divisive issues that constantly feature in the media, things like “too much gender”, “Islamification fears” and “it no longer pays to work”. But after interacting with each other, listening to the experts' input and taking part in discussions in which each topic was

addressed from a cultural, economic, social and ecological standpoint, many participants broadened their perspectives. This is what we gleaned from the questionnaires, at any rate, in which the experts were rated as being trustworthy, unbiased and unpatronizing, an approach that certainly helped to foster an open transfer of knowledge.

Anna Keremen: We also observed and identified a variety of coping strategies in dealing with conflict situations. Some participants shut down entirely and refused to entertain views other than their own. This had a stifling effect on the group's collective resilience. But we also identified strategies that foster group resilience.

Do you regard the CoSaturday project as a success?

Marina Beermann: We didn't find a miracle cure, a way to make society more resilient at the push of a button. And the project had its limitations, which must also be considered. But we can say this much: our dialogue format was effective. And we found a way to measure its effectiveness. We were able to observe a change in the people who participated in the CoSaturday project over the two-year period — a statistically significant change. We also found new answers to the question of what constitutes a resilient society. We are calling the levers we have identified

A COSATURDAY CLOSE UP

These are the stages the 50 members of the treatment group passed through on a typical CoSaturday

- 1. Topic reveal**
At the beginning of each event, participants learn which conflict issue will be addressed.
- 2. World café**
In small, mixed groups, participants move through four world cafés, where the conflict issue is examined from a political, economic, social and cultural perspective.
- 3. Expert input**
Each world café discussion begins with a standardised, 10-minute presentation of the issue at hand.
- 4. Dialogue & moderation**
The small groups exchange views according to previously agreed rules on how to communicate and interact with one another.
- 5. Voting & prioritisation**
After each round at the world café, participants rate the discussion via smartphone. They are polled six times over the course of the day.
- 6. Fishbowl discussion or “talking and listening”**
In various dialogue formats, participants reflect on what they have learned.



Dr Marina Beermann studied ecological economics in Oldenburg, Basel and Siena, and earned a PhD on entrepreneurial resilience within the context of climate impact research. While working for WWF, she led the partnership with EDEKA, Germany's biggest food retailer. The transition expert has headed up Society since 2023

Anna Keremen joined Society as project manager in August 2023. Prior to that she led climate and global partnership communications for the international foundation platform F20. After earning a BA in international relations and an MA in sustainability management, she initially worked for a food start-up before joining the sustainability division of real estate and mortgage bank DZ HYP.

“transactional resilience factors” to highlight how crucial a functioning social negotiation process is for us to be able to thrive.

What can other formats, tools and platforms learn from your findings?

Anna Keremen: Promoting societal cohesion and mutual understanding requires a holistic approach. I'm thinking, for instance, of suitable AI-based applications that would address issues from different angles and perspectives while providing the relevant sources, naturally. This way, people could make their minds up in a balanced way. When it comes down to it,

we need more spaces for open dialogue in an environment of trust, where differing opinions can find acceptance, or at least expression, and be heard.

That sounds like a challenge. Do we, as a society, have time left to implement something so innovative? Or have the conflicts slipped away from us?

Oliver Tabino: I'm convinced that we are on the threshold of a decade marked by massive culture wars. We can't just turn the clock back on developments over the last twenty or thirty years. But sitting around and doing nothing is no solution either. Each of us can attempt to change things in our own micro-universe.

Anna Keremen: The power of personal connections we experienced at the CoSaturdays truly gives me hope. That has to be our starting point.

Marina Beermann: A lot of strength is required, openness and courage to interact with others – not just from citizens but from government, businesses, the scientific community and civil society. In the end, we all benefit from societal cohesion and preserving social peace. The good thing is: our findings show that we are not powerless. The better our interactions with each another, the more resilient our society.

A SAFE EXCHANGE

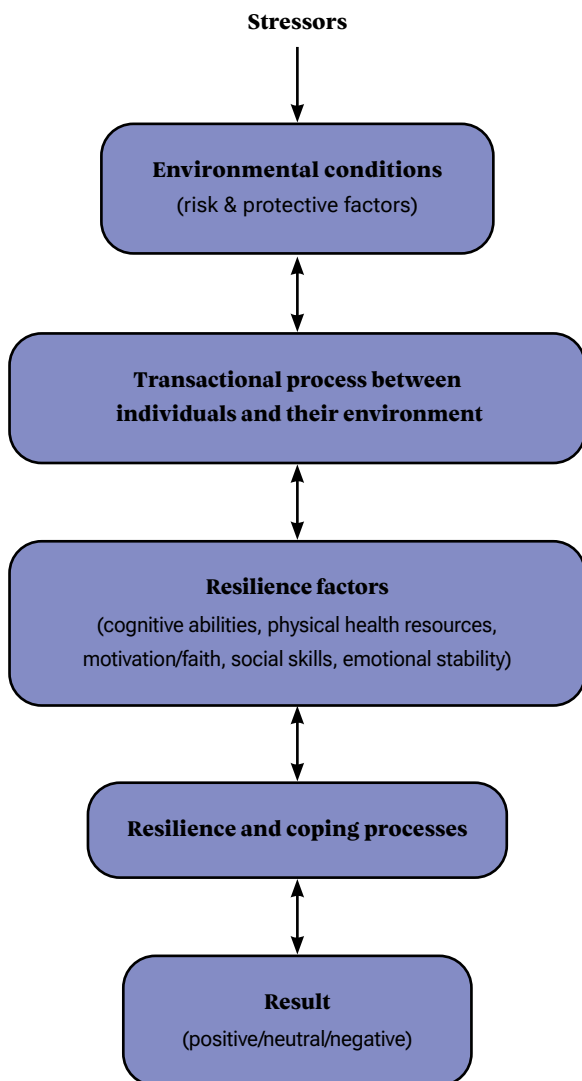


Discussions on contentious social issues took place in Hamburg over the course of four Saturdays. The goal was to find out whether talking about controversial topics with strangers strengthened people's resilience

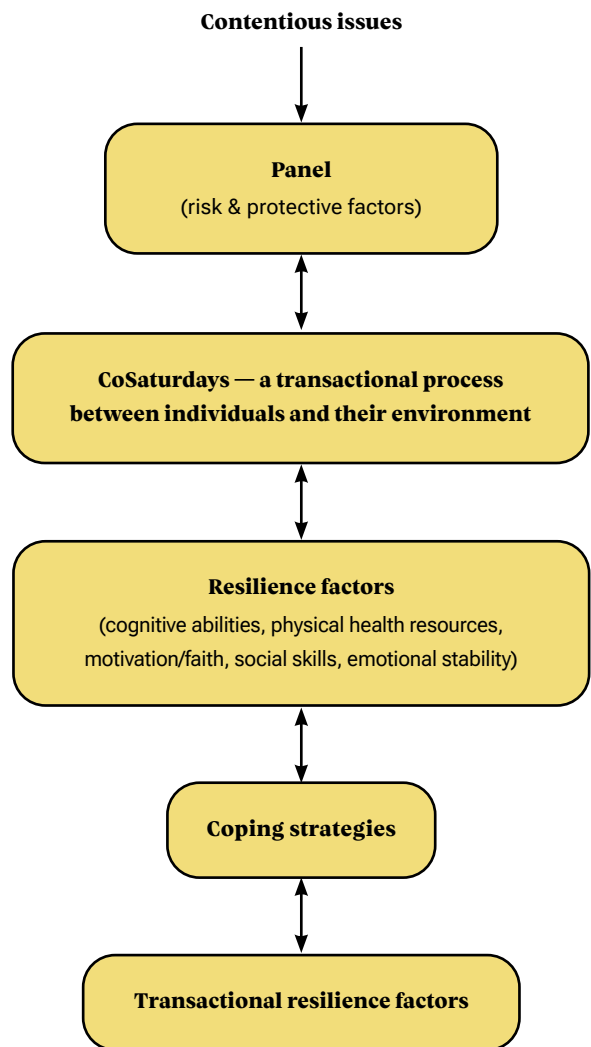
The CoSaturday project considered a number of scientific principles, including the resilience modelling framework advanced by educational researcher Prof. Dr. Corina Wustmann. This framework views resilience as a dynamic process whereby individuals encounter various challenges and pressures, known as stressors. Their ability to cope with

these stressors depends on the personal and social resources at their disposal. The way in which they perceive and process stressful situations is influenced by their interactions with their environment. Their resilience is also determined by how they handle a given situation and which resources are available to them.

Resilience modelling framework according to Wustmann
(2004, 65)



Positioning the CoSaturdays project within the modelling framework



... eingewanderten Menschen & ihrer Nachkommen

Integration he...
(social) Le...
Migrations...
Faktoren, insb...
Wohnen, Ges...
Sprache in Han...
Chancen

1a) Kinder und Jugendliche mit Migrationshintergrund erleben im Bildungssystem, dass sie „anders“ sind. Institutionelle Diskriminierung und Rassismus sind Alltagserfahrungen. Dies beeinträchtigt das Selbstwertgefühl und das Lernen.

2a) Wohnen ist menschliches Grundbedürfnis und Menschenrecht. Wohnen ist nicht nur Unterkunft, sondern bedeutet auch, über private Rückzugsmöglichkeiten zu verfügen und diese nach den eigenen Bedürfnissen und Vorlieben gestalten zu können.

3a) Höhere physische und psychische Belastung durch die Integrationsverföhrung. Höhere Barrieren, die einen Zugang zum Gesundheitssystem erschweren, z. B. Sprache sowie Benachteiligung und Rassismus - beispielsweise größere Schwierigkeiten, einen Termin bei einem Hausarzt zu bekommen.

...gerierte Nachbarschaften erschweren die ... und Integration von Geflüchteten und Migrant:innen

...ung des Bildungssystem ... und schafft Ungleichheiten ... kein Bildungserfolg ist. Es ist ... wie und was multilinguale Kinder im ... System bzgl. ihrer Familiensprachen erleben.



BUCKING THE TREND



Our personal resilience diminishes in challenging times. However, the study shows that it is possible to counteract this development. The effectiveness of the CoSaturdays was exhibited in strengthened transactional resilience factors

Cociety wanted to know: is there a statistically significant difference between those who attended the CoSaturdays in person and those who served as sociodemographic twins in the control group? To this end, all participants completed a questionnaire comprising 40 questions relating to resilience five times over the two-year duration of the project. Looking at the statistical analysis, it became clear that three responses stood out significantly in the treatment group compared to the control group. And this was independent of factors such as age, gender and political views:

- 1. “I am open to learning new things by discussing socially controversial subjects with others”**
- 2. “I can grasp and assess important sociopolitical issues well”**
- 3. “A well-functioning society requires people to take responsibility for themselves and others”**

The word “significant” here indicates how the changes in attitude observed in the treatment group were not random but were causally linked to the format developed by Cociety — thus demonstrating the effectiveness of the approach.

An ideal environment for developing resilience

The CoSaturdays simulated and structured social dissent and consensus, as well as a wide variety of life experiences and opinions, on a small scale. The aim was not to end the day with a shared outcome or point of view. Rather, it was to enable participants, as citizens, to engage in a structured way with social reality and diversity, as well as with the complexity and contradictions of our contemporary

world. The demonstrable changes in resilience in those who participated in the CoSaturdays involved skills and attitudes that develop particularly through social interaction and exchange, bridging the gap between the individual and society. To illustrate this, Cociety proposes referring to these skills and attitudes as transactional resilience factors. In our case, these were:

- 1. Openness**
- 2. Critical thinking**
- 3. Willingness to take responsibility**

The transactional part is the dynamic interaction and mutual influence between the individual and their environment within a social context.

The interplay between individual and societal resilience

A resilience score was derived from the resilience questionnaire, which served as a measure of the participants’ individual resilience. Using mixed-effects models, it was demonstrated that the three transactional resilience factors, in turn, influenced the development of individual resilience ($R^2 = 0.18$). This means that 18 percent of the differences in resilience scores between participants can be explained by the extent of the transactional resilience factors. It is evident that fostering such transactional resilience factors is important not only for social cohesion, but also for an individual’s ability to adapt and cope, although individual resilience is determined by many other factors as well.

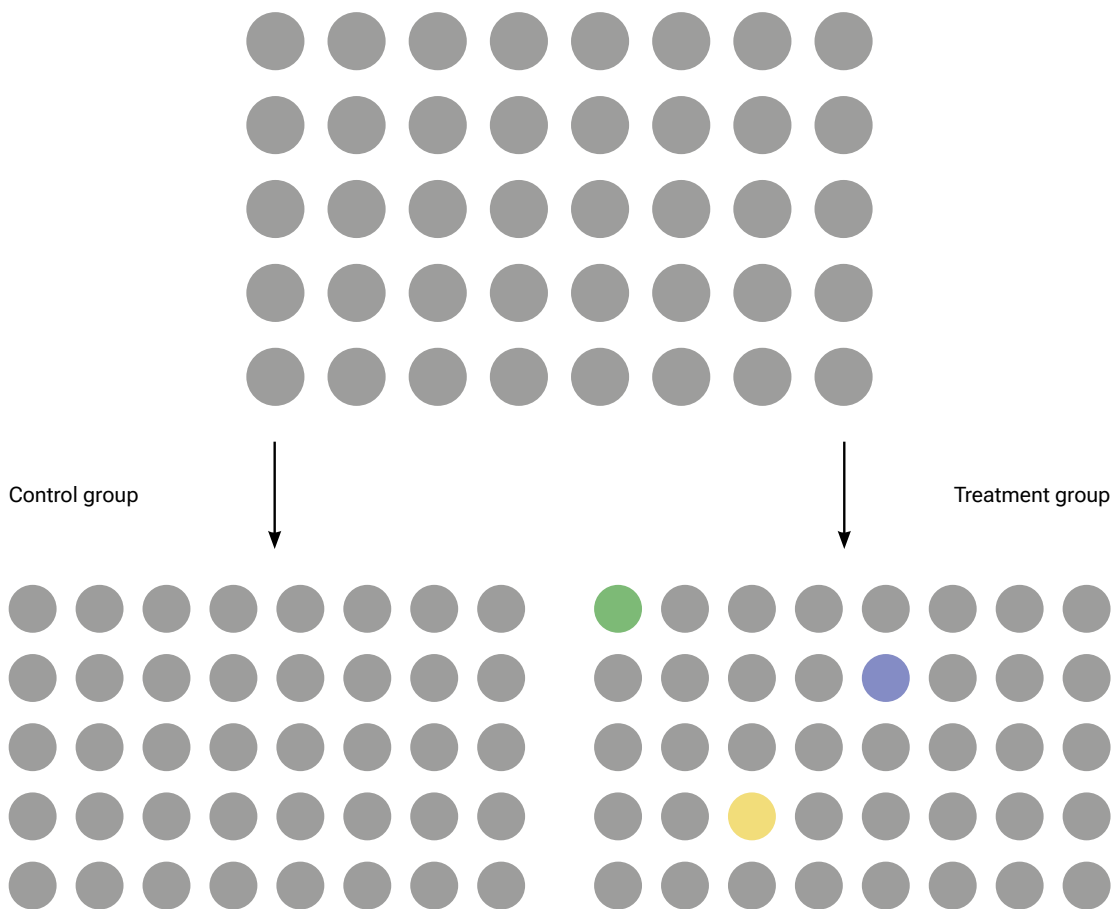
Challenging times for everyone

The data from the quantitative survey also reveal a downward trend across the entire panel: individual resilience declined steadily between 2023 and 2025. This suggests that external factors — such as inflation,

climate change or Russia’s invasion of Ukraine — had such a profound impact on us all that our individual ability to cope with crises diminished. In short: we are living in challenging times. Despite this

downward trend, however, the fact that the CoSaturday format succeeded in significantly increasing three transactional resilience factors makes the potential of this approach unmistakable.

The 40 questions on the resilience questionnaire

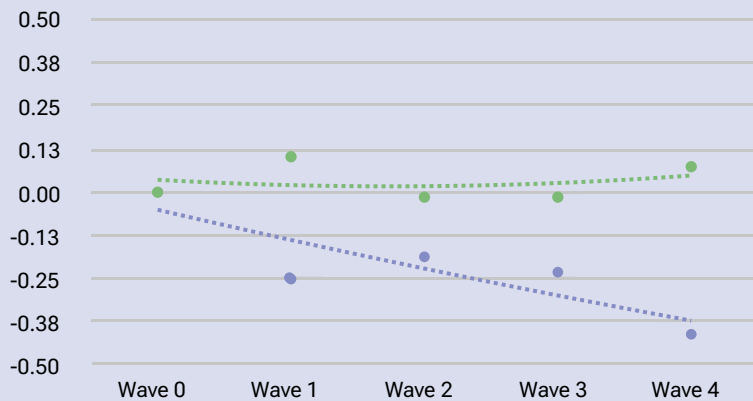


When the data was aggregated across all measurement points during the two-year period, a statistically significant interaction effect was demonstrated in the longitudinal analysis for three questions. This indicates a demonstrable change in attitude. The p-value indicates the probability of error. A value of $p = 0.099$ means that the postulated relationship is considered true with a probability of 90.1% ($1 - 0.099 = 0.901$). The smaller the p-value, the more robust the finding.

- **Transactional resilience factor “openness”:**
 $p = 0.025$
- **Transactional resilience factor “critical thinking”:**
 $p = 0.057$
- **Transactional resilience factor “willingness to take responsibility”:** $p = 0.099$

Changes in response behaviour — in detail

“I am open to learning new things by discussing socially controversial subjects with others.”



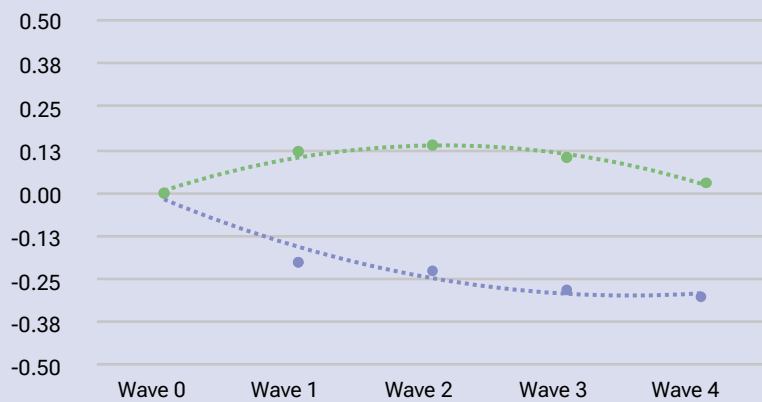
- Treatment group
- Treatment group trend
- Control group
- Control group trend

X-axis: Measurement points

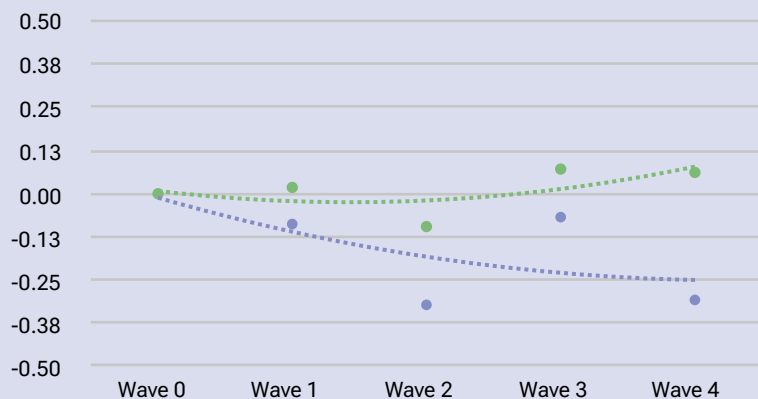
Y-axis: Difference in means

In each wave of the survey, all participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with certain statements using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The following three graphs show how the average responses changed over time compared with the baseline value at the beginning of the survey.

“I can grasp and assess important sociopolitical issues well.”



“A well-functioning society requires people to take responsibility for themselves and others.”



- **What do the figures mean?**

Experience shows that in longitudinal studies of this size, measurable changes tend to be minimal. But since resilience is regarded as a stable personality trait that only changes gradually, even a small increase can have a measurable effect. The results indicate that those who participated in the CoSaturdays over the two-year period responded to the resilience questionnaire differently than those in the control group. The differences in response patterns were particularly significant for three factors: openness, critical thinking and willingness to take responsibility. The figures clearly show that participation in the CoSaturdays led to changes in resilience.

- **CoSaturdays as a safety factor**

The term psychological safety describes supportive factors that reduce the effects of stress or crises and increase the likelihood of a positive outcome. The CoSaturdays helped participants remain resilient. The subject of “openness” is a case in hand: without the CoSaturdays, participants’ approval ratings would have dropped over time as they did in the control group. The CoSaturdays, however, lessened this downward trend by 0.078 points per measurement point. Further data also indicates that the vast majority of participants regarded the CoSaturdays as a safe space, and all participants — regardless of age, background, education level and political opinion — would participate in a CoSaturday again.

THREE STEPS TO RESILIENCE

Based on the findings of this longitudinal study, the developmental model conceived by Cociety is an ideal-type illustration of how societal resilience could emerge and potentially serves an explanatory and practical approach

WE

Openness is everything

A willingness to engage in dialogue with others, even on complex topics, to reflect on oneself and learn new things is the basis for everything else: without openness there's no listening, no shift in perspective and no change.

Critical thinking

Understanding political contexts is crucial for developing self-efficacy. It is essential for forming opinions and getting involved. As such, it's a key skill for strengthening democracy.

Willingness to take responsibility

A resilient society is one in which its members demonstrate an awareness of social connections and interdependencies and are prepared to participate as "part of a larger whole".

ME

79

percent of participants indicated that after each respective event, their interest in the CoSaturday topic was greater than before. Only five percent indicated that their interest had decreased.



98%

of participants felt they could express their opinions freely during the CoSaturdays. 94 percent were of the opinion that their views were taken into account during the discussions. 80 percent indicated that they had learnt something new about the topics and 67 percent indicated that the CoSaturday topics continued to occupy them periodically over the two-year survey period.

3/5

of participants often or very often spoke with others about the CoSaturday topics.

ALL

CoSaturday participants would take part in a format like this again, 53 percent without receiving financial compensation.

78

percent of respondents indicated that they had gained a better understanding of other participants' opposing views.

18%

of the individual resilience measured can be explained by three transactional factors. This means that the greater an individual's openness, and willingness to think critically and take responsibility, the higher their personal resilience. Given the many factors that shape us, our values and our attitudes, this is a significant figure.

3

transactional resilience factors were reinforced among those who participated in the CoSaturday dialogue format: their openness to engage with others, their understanding of broad social issues and their willingness to take responsibility.

(NOT) A GOOD APPROACH



People have different ways of dealing with conflicts, crises and change. Qualified observations over the course of the CoSaturdays project made it possible to identify a variety of approaches, known as coping strategies. These help a person to emerge from a difficult situation either weakened or stronger

Coping strategies that foster resilience

“I learn from other perspectives”

In this strategy, people use social interaction with others as an opportunity to reflect on their own views. They don't enter discussions primarily to judge others, but to critically re-evaluate their own position. Key features of this strategy are openness and willingness to change.

“Other people are affected too”

In this case, people recognise that what they perceive as personal problems are often embedded in a social context. Engaging in dialogue with others reinforces togetherness and makes them feel less alone. It encourages a collective consciousness that promotes responsibility and a sense of connection.

“Change is a natural process”

This strategy combines a realistic view of societal development with a confident outlook. Conflict is understood to be part of historical and social processes of change. This provides context and perspective and a constructive attitude toward change.

Coping strategies that lessen resilience

“I'm only interested in people like me”

In this strategy, people prefer to interact only with those who hold similar views. This can have a stabilising effect, but it often narrows their perspective. It's an example of how social bubbles are created, which tend to limit openness and dialogue with others.

“Things are far worse elsewhere!”

In this case, people downplay stressful situations or compare them to far more difficult ones. This may ease their burden temporarily, but as a result, they may not address real challenges seriously. Distancing oneself from an issue can quickly turn into passivity.

“That's got nothing to do with me”

This strategy demonstrates how people protect themselves from emotional stress by keeping certain topics at arm's length. They engage in conflict superficially or avoid it altogether. This makes development more difficult, even if keeping something at a distance may provide relief.

“I see what I want to see”

In this case, a person's self-image is paramount, regardless of whether or not it matches reality. They ignore the uncomfortable tensions between what they know, what they believe and how they act. This has a temporary stabilising effect but impedes the learning process.

“I don't know where to begin”

Engaging with others can make people more aware of societal problems than they were before. This is a crucial first step, but it can cause feelings of insecurity or powerlessness. What's important is whether it leads to withdrawal or motivates a person to act.

Spielregeln

- * Respekt & Fairness
- * Jede Meinung zählt
- * Ich - Botschaften
- * Keine Monologe
- * Konstruktiv sein
- * Verantwortung übernehmen
- * Sicherer Raum



SPACE FOR CHANGE



The CoSaturday format brought together people from different backgrounds. There was no prior preparation, which made the responses very genuine. After the project had ended, some of the participants very kindly shared their thoughts with us

“We need a better understanding of the issues, more background and a wider context in order to get everyone on board.”

Ivonne,
CoSaturday participant



“Life is complicated. Black and white thinking or aiming for simple solutions won’t advance the dialogue at all.”

Merlin,
CoSaturday participant





“Democracy thrives on us talking to one another constructively — and that doesn’t happen nearly often enough.”

Marcella,
CoSaturday participant



“Everyone is seen as part of the whole; no one is judged for what they say. There’s so much value in that.”

Wolfgang,
CoSaturday participant

**“The format made me realize
once again how much people
miss genuine interaction.”**

Ingrid,
CoSaturday expert



“It’s not easy to think of a place where you can meet so many different people as you do at the CoSaturdays.”

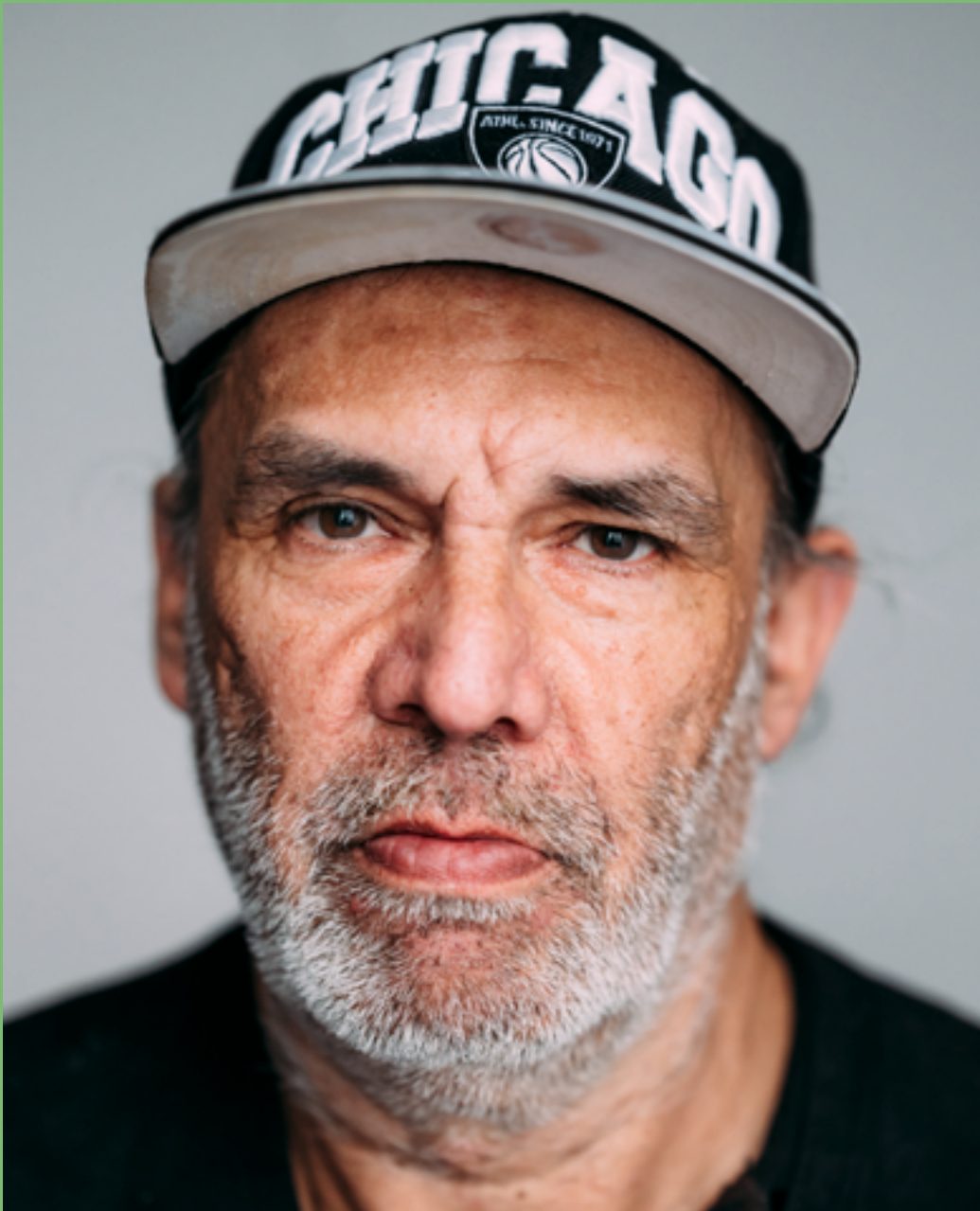
Werner,
CoSaturday participant





“It’s okay to express your views and opinions. But you shouldn’t impose them on others.”

Isabel,
CoSaturday participant



“Sometimes you just need to listen for five minutes. It’s often the hardest thing for people — myself included.”

Fred,
CoSaturday participant

“I always thought I was totally open-minded. Then, in the discussion, I realised how quickly I also judge others.”

Chrissi,
CoSaturday participant





THE WAY TO WE



Stepping outside our own bubble doesn't just broaden our horizons — it builds collective resilience. The CoSaturday approach offers a practical blueprint for doing exactly that, showing us how to actively foster and sustain democratic cooperation

Strengthening collective resilience requires tackling systemic socioeconomic inequalities in areas such as education, healthcare and economic opportunity. Social cohesion inevitably comes under pressure when the structural foundations that support civic engagement begin to erode. Yet, our communities are often less divided than they feel. The real culprit is rarely a fundamental disagreement on the issues, but rather a lack of meaningful interaction.

The CoSaturdays initiative demonstrates that well-designed spaces for interaction do more than strengthen social cohesion: they create the essential framework for overcoming crises democratically. Interestingly, our study tracked a broad decline in individual resilience across both the treatment and control groups between 2023 and 2025. However, CoSaturday participants bucked this trend by showing statistically significant improvements in three key transactional resilience factors: openness, critical thinking and a willingness to take responsibility. Strengthening these competencies ultimately enables individuals to manage conflict more constructively and view their societal roles more purposefully.

The increase in “openness” indicates that participants see real value in engaging with others – including those with differing views. This trait reflects a deeper willingness to discuss contentious issues, dismantle barriers and benefit from the exchange, both personally and collectively. Openness signals a capacity for conflict resolution and a willingness to learn and change, particularly through a realisation that none of us has all the answers. It is also essential to the relationship between individuals and society and thus a critical foundation for responding to collective change in all its forms. The second key factor in transactional resilience, “critical thinking”, shows that

people feel better equipped to understand and contextualise increasingly complex sociopolitical issues. Consequently, the format has helped to foster a stronger sense of political self-efficacy across the entire treatment group. This shift is a fundamental prerequisite for political opinion-forming and civic engagement, making it an essential competence for the preservation of democratic systems.

Social cohesion doesn't mean agreeing – **it means engaging.**

The increase in the “willingness to take responsibility” factor points to a greater understanding that social stability requires a balance of give and take, a shift in thinking from “I” to “we”. It reflects a sense of belonging and an awareness of our social interdependencies. Consequently, participants see themselves as part of a larger whole and demonstrate a better grasp of systemic frameworks such as Germany’s social market economy. This strengthened “we-identity” in turn drives the solidarity needed to sustain a functional community – and to confront shared challenges and crises.

These developments are further supported by qualitative observations gathered throughout the project. While participants developed diverse methods for managing conflict, the most effective strategies consistently reinforced the three transactional resilience factors: critical thinking, openness and civic responsibility. In short, the CoSaturdays significantly shifted the mindset of participants.

The results of this format-based approach show that bringing together a cross-section of society successfully heightened awareness of different life experiences and the power of human connection. For example, by sharing vulnerable life stories, some participants realised, “I am not alone with my problems”, which led to a realisation that seemingly individual issues frequently possess a broader, systemic dimension.

Furthermore, the format’s methodological and didactic elements helped strengthen participants’ resilience. For example, experts introduced each social conflict issue through a short presentation examining four distinct perspectives: economic, social, cultural, and — depending on the topic — ecological, political or legal. This approach established a common ground, reducing the complexity of the issues and encouraging a more holistic viewpoint. Accompanying survey results showed that the CoSaturdays were universally well-received. Almost all participants reported that they could express their opinions freely, felt their personal views and experiences were valued, and gained new insights.

The impact of the CoSaturdays extended far beyond the event itself. Many participants engaged in deep discussions about the topics and reported heightened interest in issues of social conflict. Their unanimous willingness to participate again underscores a readiness to engage in honest, respectful conversations. In an era where individual resilience often seems to be waning, this is by no means a given.

Of course, the study has its limitations. Given the limited sample size of 100 participants drawn exclusively from the Hamburg region, the findings cannot be considered representative of Germany as a whole. Panel attrition and participant replacement must also be factored in. And yet, the

project remains pioneering; it makes societal resilience and its promotion quantifiable. Crucially, however, a quantifiable impact only became apparent with repeated participation.

Rather than treating resilience as a buzzword or an end in itself, we view it as a society’s ability to remain democratic and capable of action, even in turbulent times. Stability does not come from avoiding conflict, but from our capacity to face it openly together. This is the foundational principle behind the CoSaturdays – and it offers a scalable framework that can be adapted for other cities, larger panels, companies and organisations.

The time has come to take the next steps. On the following pages, we outline actionable recommendations for policymakers, civil society, citizens, academia and the business community. Ultimately, building a truly resilient society requires all of us to play our part.

Actionable ideas for policymakers

- **Strengthen our power to act together**

Social cohesion isn't automatic: actively safeguarding it is the foundation of democratic resilience

- **Foster a readiness for change**

Help citizens to see crises as opportunities for change — through targeted educational initiatives and public communication strategies designed to strengthen adaptability and a willingness to learn

- **Institutionalise spaces for dialogue**

Support local and national programmes that embed regular, professionally facilitated forums on controversial topics into our permanent social infrastructure

- **Facilitate encounters in everyday life**

Invest in and promote inclusive, accessible spaces and events that bring together people from diverse backgrounds and different walks of life

- **Enable repeated participation**

Design project formats and funding mechanisms that support repeated participation and drive deeper learning and cognitive shifts

- **Rethink political communication**

Address the decline in institutional trust by adopting citizen-centred communication strategies that reflect a greater diversity of viewpoints

- **Expand the National Resilience Strategy**

Formalise the promotion of transactional resilience factors by explicitly anchoring them within the National Resilience Strategy (GRS)

Actionable ideas for civil society

- **Diversify public discourse**

Create community formats designed to attract a highly diverse demographic in terms of social backgrounds, ages, origins, political views and life circumstances

- **Start with the realities of everyday life**

Design programmes that are flexible and inclusive, geared towards people's actual life situations while allowing for varied paths and paces of personal transformation

- **Develop scalable micro-formats**

Develop replicable, low-barrier discussion formats that incorporate the core pillars of the CoSaturdays: evidence-based input, a secure environment, clear ground rules and an open-ended dialogue process

- **Make impact (more) visible**

Integrate structured impact-monitoring tools to track shifts in participant attitudes, communication capacities and overall resilience

- **Build bridges of trust**

Partner with municipalities, educational institutions, media outlets and communities to engage hard-to-reach demographics. Where appropriate, offer financial compensation for participation

Actionable ideas for research

- **Investigate transactional resilience factors**

Expand the testing and study of social interventions to gain a deeper understanding of how collective resilience is built and sustained

- **Test and refine development models**

Continuously test the social resilience model using broader, multi-regional and cross-country samples

- **Examine long-term effects**

Set up longer-term studies to understand how transactional resilience factors and individual resilience dynamically influence one another over a period of more than two years

- **Isolate format elements**

Use experimental design to identify the most critical components of successful dialogue, including participant diversity, facilitation, setting, duration and input from experts

- **Explore opportunities for knowledge transfer**

Investigate the interactions between individual, organisational and societal resilience

Actionable ideas for businesses

- **Understand resilience as a core competence**
Shift the perception of resilience from a “nice-to-have” benefit to a strategic core competence for handling major organisational changes such as digital disruption and cultural shifts
- **Bring dialogue into everyday working life**
Effective communication formats do more than strengthen team cohesion; they also boost the psychological and mental resilience of team members
- **Encourage diverse learning spaces**
Create safe spaces for learning and shared experience where a culture of openness can flourish and where different perspectives are valued as resources rather than points of friction
- **Empower leaders**
Equip leaders with the tools to lead difficult conversations, integrate diverse viewpoints and actively model constructive, inclusive dialogue
- **Embrace social responsibility**
Recognise that businesses and their employees are part of society with a vital role to play in championing democratic values and strengthening resilience both within their organisations and across the wider community

Actionable ideas for citizens

- **Seek out unfamiliar encounters**

Consciously engage in conversations with people outside your usual social circles — whether at work, in community clubs or online

- **See disagreement as a learning opportunity**

Treat internal resistance to differing views as an opportunity to expand your horizons. Ask questions and listen before forming judgements, remembering that the exchange is a valuable outcome in itself

- **See yourself as part of the “we”**

Those who see themselves as part of the collective “we” think and act beyond their personal interests. Even small actions, like maintaining a respectful tone in daily interactions, can make a difference

- **Remain human**

Share personal worries, doubts and vulnerabilities in moderation. Authenticity fosters mutual trust and encourages others to open up in return

- **Cultivate critical media literacy**

Critically evaluate incoming information by consulting a diverse range of sources. Discuss the impact of disinformation with your peers and help others recognise misleading narratives

- **Get involved in voluntary work**

Contribute time to clubs, civic initiatives or aid organisations. This strengthens social cohesion, increases self-reliance and brings communities closer together



CLEAR STATE- MENTS



Societal resilience is also a matter of everyday solidarity. These voices show why resilience today calls for more than crisis management: what we need are relationships, responsibility, a sense of community, and the courage to explore new ways of participation

“The climate and biodiversity crisis is the greatest challenge of our time. To combat the sense of powerlessness in the face of this overwhelming task, we need spaces for dialogue to help us reconnect and regain a sense of agency.”

Meike Rothschild

Marketing Chair, Communication & Fundraising, WWF Germany

“I deeply believe that if you want to broadcast, you have to listen. This is the core of our mission at NDR. It is the only way to understand, make sense of things and build bridges. This is exactly what initiatives like the CoSaturdays support: genuine encounters and dialogue on an equal footing.

Hendrik Lünenborg

Director of public broadcaster Norddeutscher Rundfunk

”

“

Resilience is not a soft topic — it is a leadership responsibility. Transformation is achieved by people who take responsibility and are willing to learn from one another. Those who embed this in their culture lay the foundation for sustainable success.”

Petra Scharner-Wolff
CEO, Otto Group

“Democratic resilience has been neglected for too long, and this makes it all the more important to strengthen the resources that lie within society: the citizens, their creativity and their intelligence.”

Prof Dr Harald Welzer
Sociologist, social psychologist and publicist

“Without easily accessible spaces like those the CoSaturdays offered, many things remain abstract. We need places and formats like these where people can come together, exchange ideas, explore concepts and take action.”

Prof Dr Jutta Allmendinger
Sociologist, Berlin Social Science Center WZB

“Societal resilience is a key component if we want to tackle and overcome current and future crises. It strengthens democratic cohesion and our capacity to act.

”

Dr Jan-Hinrik Schmidt
Programme executive, Research Institute Social Cohesion (FGZ)

“

To sustainably strengthen societal resilience, we need to embed dialogue formats in government and business so that they become effective at all levels.”

Dr Josef Merk

Federal Executive Committee, Mehr Demokratie e.V.

“Societal resilience is not a static state, but an ongoing process. Societies must continually renegotiate what they wish to preserve, how they wish to live together, and how to deal with uncertainties.”

Dr Pia-Johanna Schweizer

Transformation and resilience researcher, Research Institute for Sustainability (RIFS)

“Research shows that social cohesion is more robust than many believe, but it is clearly under pressure. Resilience is built when people actively experience participation and agency, perceive trust and justice — and shape change together.”

Dr Kai Unzicker

Senior Project Manager, Bertelsmann Foundation

“We become resilient when we see ourselves not as pawns of global events, but as active participants. Resilience arises when we recognise problems, demand effective rules and solutions, and actively work towards them.

”

Prof Dr Jan Skudlarek

Philosopher and author, MSB Medical School Berlin



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Research design & findings

How did we conduct our research? Scan the QR code with your smartphone for more details on how we designed the Society study, our methodologies and supplementary findings. For anyone interested in gaining deeper insight into our data and analyses.



Videos & impressions

Faces, voices, perspectives: scanning this QR code will reveal video interviews with participants and others involved in the project, as well as impressions of our CoSaturday dialogue format. A close-up glimpse of the people and the moments that shaped the CoSaturday experience.