



IDENTIFYING THRESHOLDS AND TRAPS

PURPOSE OF DISCUSSION

The purpose of this discussion is to identify thresholds of potential concern in your system and the existence of potential traps. These types of system dynamics are particularly important to be aware of for navigating towards more sustainable futures. A first important step in managing threshold and traps is simply to acknowledge that they may exist in your system. This is fundamental mind-set to adopt, so that we can take precautions and build buffers to thresholds, and so that we respond in an appropriate way to traps. See also two related activity sheets.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Are there known biophysical or social limits or tipping points in your system that should be avoided? Are there previous examples where there have been major shifts in the state of the system?
- If there is more than one threshold of potential concern, at what scales do they operate (e.g. household, community, region), and is there evidence to suggest that they may interact and produce cascading effects throughout the system? (see related activity sheet)

Phase 3: Exploring system dynamics

Module A: Understanding social-ecological dynamics across scales

Work card 19: Identifying thresholds and traps

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- How might crossing these potential thresholds affect the overall development trajectory of the system, and future benefits in the system (e.g., bundles of ecosystem services and the wellbeing of different stakeholder groups)?
- Are there any signs that your system, or parts of the system may be in a trap? Look for persistent problems, where previous interventions have been unable to change the dynamics.
- Are you able to see and explain why the system remains stuck in this situation? Which are the main reinforcing feedbacks, and what are important cross-scale interactions to consider? How is the trap dependent on potential thresholds in the system?
- What are the effects of the trap on different groups of people in the system?
- What are the effects of the trap on the environment?
- Do you have any immediate insights into how you might break the reinforcing feedbacks that are locking the system into this particular trap?