

European Legacies of Socio-Economic Transformation

International Workshop at the European New School (ENS) of the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder), 19-20 March 2026 jointly organized by the Economic Sociology Sections of the German and Polish Sociological Association

Today's European societies are shaped by inherent social, cultural and political inequalities. Property ownership, income, usage rights or working conditions are distributed unequally affecting an individual and their family's chances of accumulating capital, of access to consumption goods, their voting patterns and even their life expectancy. These inequalities are durable and create socio-economic realities and group conflicts that shape which paths of socio-economic changes are likely, possible or imagined. Many socioeconomic inequalities can be seen as the result of – or are framed to be the result of – past processes of economic transformation. Crisis and economic raptures of the past have shaken up the distribution of property ownership, income and wealth, working conditions, and market access. For example, the fall of the socialist regime in Eastern Europe brought about the embrace of private property and propelled neoliberal privatization movements. Similarly, over the last decades, deindustrialization has turned into a legacy, which set whole regions in precariousness in terms of income, unemployment and life-satisfaction; or digitalization redefines “good” and “bad” working conditions, as much as it re-draws the boundaries of (intellectual or physical) property, consumption opportunities, economic opportunities for migrant communities and chances for green transition and renewed growth. All these processes reproduce and re-shape beaten tracks of inequality, while they also create new socio-economic realities and narratives for what is possible and deemed feasible in the future. Moreover, the perception and re-interpretation of transformation processes of the past are important referential points for present-day economic discourses on inequality and moral economies.

Drawn together, whenever we look at present socio-economic inequalities and patterns of stratification (e.g. regional disparities or the semi-peripherality of Central and Eastern European countries) we are also inevitably looking at the result of past processes of transformation and bygone crises. And wherever contemporary European capitalist societies debate the present or future socio-economic structure they make implicit use of knowledge and legacies of the past that are crystallized in socio-economic inequalities and inscribed in present discourses and economic memories. This calls for an interdisciplinary endeavor, to redefine and broaden such notions as transformation, financialization or post-socialism. In this workshop we want to tackle this challenge by bringing together research on socio-economic inequalities with the research that reconstructs the current understanding of the time frames and geographical (dis-)continuities concerning European societies.

For this workshop, we invite early-career and senior scholars to reflect upon long-term legacies of socio-economic transformation in European societies in order to explain contemporary inequalities, as well as evaluate the viability of future transformations. Which past transformations and crises do we see reflected in the socio-economic stratification, political polarization and cultural conflicts within European economies today? How do past experiences of economic transformations shape the means and imaginations of changing contemporary inequalities? And how do narratives and economic memories about these moments and raptures shape moral economies, as well as the criticism and justification of present inequalities? What are suitable theoretical perspectives or theoretical advancements to grasp and study these links between transformation and socio-economic inequalities?

The concrete topics of transformation research that could be explored during the conference with regard to their actual or narrated long-term effects on inequality include, but are not limited to:

- How have deindustrialization and deindustrialization myths effected spatial polarization and regional disparities?
- In what ways has financialization of housing contributed to housing shortages?
- How has the redistribution of firms and landed property through government policies and agencies (such as the Treuhand in Germany) in Eastern European countries after the end of the iron curtain effected wealth inequality?
- How does the collective memory of socio-economic transformations of the past factor into current assessment of economic inequality?
- What is the long-term impact of the introduction of the Euro on the distribution of market opportunities for firms and industries in European countries?
- How does the collective memory of the financial and Euro-Crises of 2008/09 and 2011 effect future images of European transformations and discourses about them?
- How has the liberalization of financial markets and the privatization of social security impacted wealth inequality and the distribution of social risks?

The conference is organized as a collaboration between the Polish and German Sections of Economic Sociology of the Polish and German Sociological Associations (PTS & DGS). We welcome both empirical and theoretical contributions that interlink a long-term perspective on socio-economic transformations and current inequalities within Europe.

We are looking forward to a productive discussion of early stage and advanced scholarly work and offer **two formats**:

- a) Project-Pitches: In a designated poster session, scholars can pitch their project idea and receive feedback on their theoretical approach and empirical design.
- b) Talks: In multiple session, scholars can present their theoretical arguments and empirical findings and engage in a productive discussion.

Please submit an abstract of approx. 200 words to legacies@europa-uni.de by January 6th and indicate which format you would prefer. We particularly welcome submissions by doctoral researchers and will give their submissions priority. There will be limited funding granted to support travel and accommodation for scholars who do not have access to the necessary funding through their institutional affiliation. Participants will be informed about their selection by January 15th.

Conference Organizers:

Philipp Golka, Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies

Mikołaj Lewicki, University of Warsaw

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