

Social dynamics. Inequalities, integration, mobility and migration

Call for Papers :: Conference at the Centre for Social Sciences
(CSS, Hungarian Academy of Sciences Centre of Excellence)

Budapest, 16–17 November, 2020

According to international social science research, in recent years social disparities have increased and unprecedented social phenomena have been exacerbated and these have led to new political and social responses and a reorganisation of the social reproduction system. The purpose of the conference is to gain a clearer picture of social shifts and immobility in the post-millennium international context. Social mobility is hampered by growing inequalities, income and wealth distribution imbalances and a dysfunctional school system, while new channels for mobility have opened up, with international and national migration becoming massive.

The financial, migration and environmental crisis has triggered a stronger than ever political integration / disintegration of society. The former system, targets and paradigm of welfare regimes, the range of beneficiaries and the source and use of financial resources have taken a new turn in many countries, serving social stability rather than the chance to change disadvantages. Citizens' (civic) activity and interest-enforcement potential are weakened and the legitimacy of political integration is filled with populist, authoritarian elements.

Organizing committee:

Dorottya Szikra, Imre Kovách (chair), Boldizsár Megyesi, Bence Ságvári and Attila Papp Z. (CSS)

Working groups:

1. Social inequality and integration
2. Political integration of society
3. Hidden patterns of integration. Inequalities and imbalances in large networks
4. Redistribution and Social Inequalities in a Changing Political and Economic Context
5. Civil society, social movements and the structural conditions of democracy in Western and Central and Eastern Europe
6. The social consequences of the transformation of food production and consumption
7. Examining Social Mobility Using Digital Historical Databases
8. Transnational social mobilities
9. Child (im-)mobilities in Central and Eastern Europe: critical perspectives on precarity and potentiality in transnational care arrangements
10. Changing norms of caring and parenting practices

1. Social inequality and integration

Convenors: Péter Csizmadia, Ákos Huszár and Luca Kristóf (Institute for Sociology CSS)

In recent decades, income and wealth inequalities have increased in most countries around the world. The section seeks to find out how this affects the division of societies and the implications for different areas of social life.

On the one hand, we expect presentations on the topic of how the structure of society has changed in the various countries of the world in recent times. To what extent may traditional concepts of social structure or stratification research, such as class, order, stratum or milieu, be used to describe the structure of our societies? What is the dimension on which inequalities can be differentiated, and to what extent are they related? Are there any recent changes in this respect? The question is also the extent to which the structures of today's societies are rigid or permeable to members of society: will the increase in income or wealth inequalities also be accompanied by a decrease in social mobility?

On the other hand, presentations are expected in this section that contribute to an exploration of the various consequences of inequalities. How do growing incomes and wealth inequalities appear in different areas of social life, such as consumption, culture and leisure activities? To what extent do the social relations of individuals change or even narrow? What kind of challenges do they create for social inclusion? What potential social conflicts can be a result, and to what extent do they lead to the escalation of social conflicts? Finally, what problems does the rise of social inequalities generate or may generate for political representation? Is there any plausible democratic political integration at a time of high or rising inequalities?

The theme of the section is the relationship between social inequalities and social inclusion. Lectures on the relationship between stratification, the integration or disintegration of the entire society, and the political, institutional, cultural, and normative mechanisms of integration, which may also address certain marginalised groups, are expected. Presentations may cover any interrelated topic of social inequality and integration, but in particular key groups and institutions of economic, political and cultural integration; mechanisms of integration and disintegration and redistribution; as well as presentations on the integrating or disintegrating effects of power, culture and consumption; and social, school, territorial and housing mobility and immobility.

2. Political integration of society

Convenors: Dániel Oross, Andrea Szabó (Institute for Political Science CSS)

The section focuses on the mechanisms and interactions through which the political system repeatedly creates the conditions for human coexistence and channels society to operate the political subsystem.

We expect lectures that demonstrate, through theoretical or empirical means, the actions, activities, attitudes and norms of political integration that, on the one hand, increase the political cohesion of society and, on the other hand, reduce the likelihood of political conflict, and at the same time facilitate the development of the political system's diffuse legitimacy.

Hungarian research experience (see Gerő-Szabó 2017) shows that political integration works completely independently of other integration mechanisms, and that the political leaders - and the parties behind them - are at the centre of this process. It is therefore worth examining separately the role of leaders and parties at the centre of political integration processes.

The panel also seeks to reflect on Jürgen Habermas's theory of welfare privatisation, which states that the welfare state transforms citizens into clients as a result of the social state system, effectively preventing citizens from resisting the privatisation attempts of the system, leading to low participation and objection potential among citizens. The conference panel on the mechanisms and interactions of political integration should not, therefore, neglect presentations on civil activism.

3. Hidden patterns of integration. Inequalities and imbalances in large networks

Convenor: Bence Ságvári (Institute for Sociology CSS)

Nowadays there is an unprecedented amount and detail of human behaviour data: social media and networks, cell phone calls, huge amounts of text data or even sensor information. The industry for collecting, linking, selling and analysing “digital footprints” is developing at an accelerated pace. However, these data are increasingly suitable for exploring those fundamental social issues that have been the focus of social science's attention for more than a century. In fact, there are more and more opportunities to try and answer questions that could not have been researched due to the earlier lack of analysable data.

The purpose of this section is to provide a forum for the presentation of research findings that explore the process of social inclusion, through a new type, in whole or in part, of non-traditional quantitative data source or methodology. The data may be textual and / or network information from Internet services, telecommunication data, or any other data source that goes beyond classic survey type data. The topics of presentations may be the results of already completed research, as well as methodological innovations or those critically examining opportunities.

4. Redistribution and Social Inequalities in a Changing Political and Economic Context

Convenor: Dorottya Szikra (Institute for Sociology CSS)

The countries of Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet region have undergone significant political and economic transformation in the last decade. Their welfare systems experienced important paradigmatic changes (such as the re-nationalisation of private pensions in many countries), while there have been significant parametric reforms affecting the level of benefits (e.g. in unemployment and family policies). In addition to the classic forms of welfare redistribution, new types of (re)distribution have emerged, such as project-based or political merit-based redistribution. This section awaits papers analysing the region's widely interpreted welfare redistribution processes in a changing political and economic environment, including the transformation of democratic institutions and the effects of the economic crisis. We are also looking for papers on the impact of changing redistribution processes on class, gender, and/or ethnic inequalities.

5. Civil society, social movements and the structural conditions of democracy in Western and Central and Eastern Europe

Convenors: Márton Gerő (Institute for Sociology CSS), Pál Susánszky (Institute for Political Science CSS)

Researchers dealing with civil society and social movements have long debated the role of civil society and social movements in the process of democratisation and in the maintenance of democracy. Both Central European-inspired theories of civil society and neo-Tocquevillian theories argue that civil society is a key player in the process of democratisation. On the one hand, these organisations provide the basis for the mobilisation of political action and contribute to the spread of democratic values and, on the other hand, play an important role in broadening and sustaining the publicity. The primary role of social movements in this system is the dynamic and continuous renewal of democracy, the emergence of new topics and the development of social innovations.

Others, however, point out that democracy depends primarily on structural factors: political culture, political framework conditions and opportunity structures and, even more so, the social fabric influence the success of democratisation processes in a country. Thus, civil society organisations, groups, or various social movements merely act as mediators of their structures. That is, civil society organisations function as guardians of democracy when the society around them is ready to do so: the values of democracy are widespread, the state and government are responsive to them, and social inequalities are relatively moderate.

The panel wishes to contribute to this debate. Speakers are welcome to apply for the following topics:

- studying the transformation and development of civil society,
- examining the links between social fabric, values, inequalities and political participation,
- analysing the correlations amongst social structure, values, inequalities and the characteristics of civil society and social movements,
- examining the relations between civil society and social movements, and between the state and parties, viewed in the light of democratisation or counter-productive processes,
- comparative research focusing on comparing political participation, civil society and social movements in Western and Central and Eastern Europe.

6. The social consequences of the transformation of food production and consumption

Convenors: Imre Kovách and Boldizsár Megyesi (Institute for Sociology CSS)

In this section, we would like to discuss the transformation of European food production and agriculture over the past few years and their social implications, based on theoretically sound, empirical research. The section intends to focus on the issues of food system transformation, such as urban agriculture, short food chains, food self-sufficiency, the emergence of alternative food networks, and changes in the situation of small farmers.

Featured topics:

- The European Union places great emphasis on transforming urban food systems to achieve sustainability goals (For example: FOOD 2030, Milan Urban Food Policy Pact); what are the opportunities for cities in this transformation?
- While production for own consumption in the countryside and rural areas in Eastern Europe is declining, such practices are at the same time becoming more popular in some parts of Western Europe.
- How do new agricultural technologies and theories (to mention just three fundamentally different ones, GMOs, precision farming and agro-ecological approaches) affect the transformation of food systems?

The theoretical background of this part of the section consists of papers analysing the transformation of Central European agriculture, including small-scale production (Jehlička and Smith, 2011; Kovách, 2012; Swain, 2013; Tisenkopfs et al., 2011) and the position of alternative food chains, and also builds on their writings (Benedek and Balázs, 2014; Fonte, 2013; Fonte and Papadopoulos, 2010; Lamine, 2005; Renting et al., 2012).

Given the importance of the issue in European science and public policy today, the section's agenda should be accompanied by lectures focused on practice and discussing public policy issues.

In this section, lectures on food self-provisioning, on-farm cultivation, self-sufficiency, alternative and short food chains, and the wider social context of agricultural transformation in agricultural and food societies, (small) urban and rural societies internal integration and analysis of integrative / disintegrative relationships between the city and the village (tourism, food, environment, culture, traditions, values and norms) are also welcome.

7. Examining Social Mobility Using Digital Historical Databases

Convenor: Kiss Zsuzsanna (Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty for Social Sciences)

The section aims to introduce and discuss possible new digitalisation-based methods of historical social mobility research.

The lessons learned from recent historical sociological research is that the problems of the structural transformation of historical society and the process of social mobility are still present in Hungarian social historical research. At the same time, it can be seen that most of these research projects are based on “artisanal” methods, the in-depth exploration and analysis work of individual researchers.

How can the ever-easier access but still limited use of digital capabilities in historical research (in Hungary) change this situation? To explore future research directions and ways we are looking for candidates who, as they themselves have applied this technique, will help to review the individual methodological solutions that have emerged in recent years, from family history research to mobility research using computerised data capture, data processing, and data visualisation tools.

In addition to discussing methodological issues, however, we also consider case studies that have produced new results in some previously explored (or not yet investigated) field of the study of the structure of historical society using the above techniques / methods.

8. Transnational social mobilities

Over the past two decades, social mobility in the CEE countries has become increasingly transnational. An ever greater number of people move to other countries temporarily or permanently, children are being born abroad, families stay or return after spending some time in a foreign country. This section aims at contributing to the emerging debate in social sciences concerning the social impacts of this novel form of mobility.

A, A diaspora is born

Convenor: András Kováts (Institute for Minority Studies CSS)

Over the last 10 to 15 years, the number of people moving abroad from Eastern and Central Europe has increased significantly. Social and political discourse is heavily thematic about emigration, and more and more research data are available on the subject, although there is still a great deal of scientific debate to be had. A particularly interesting aspect is the evolution of the cultural attachment and identity of Hungarians living abroad during the emigration process and the institutionalization of a new diaspora. The panel will attempt to present the results of some comprehensive data analysis and use local case studies to find answers to emerging questions.

B, Diaspora and education - weekend schools in the EU

Convenor: Attila Papp Z. (Institute for Minority Studies CSS)

Weekend schools (supplementary schools) can perform a variety of functions: linguistic-cultural heritage transfer, performance enhancement, or even resistance to the values of mainstream education. The characteristics of these forms of training are also determined by the historicity, integration and attitudes towards the mother country, and the expectations of the diaspora groups themselves. The purpose of this section is to present the related phenomenon of diaspora and education in the context of recent migration processes.

C, Migration and mobility between Germany and the countries of the CEE region

Convenor: Margit Feischmidt (Institute for Minority Studies CSS)

We examine the relationship between social mobility and transnationality, as well as the differences between the European migration regime and the conditions of solidarity and competition between people of different migration backgrounds. The purpose of the panel is to analyse the migration exchange between Germany and Hungary and other Central and Eastern European countries in a regional context.

9. Child (im-)mobilities in Central and Eastern Europe: critical perspectives on precarity and potentiality in transnational care arrangements

Convenors: Zsuzsanna Árendás, Noémi Katona and Vera Messing (Institute for Sociology CSS)

Since the latest round of EU accession to Central Eastern Europe, the region has experienced an increase in labour-related mobility. This phenomenon has attracted a lot of research attention, mostly in terms of quantitative studies, and less in the form of qualitative investigations and ethnographies. Although some questions, such as the integration of this mobile labour, are often robustly present on the research maps, issues less directly related, such as the well-being of dependent family members, especially of the children, remain at the margins of academic attention. In the CEE region, the care-related issues of 'left behind' dependents, especially of children, keep emerging as a striking new social reality – bringing with it normative prescriptions and policy responses, as well as innovative social service models, especially in countries such as Romania, Bulgaria and Poland, but more recently in Hungary as well.

Our panel points to the production and reproduction of precarities and potentialities surrounding and emerging from labour mobilities in transnational European spaces of labour, care and education. Focusing on so-called 'left behind children' and 'mobile children' (those moving along with their parents), our panel is a contribution to multiple fields, most notably migration studies and critical childhood studies. We argue against one-dimensional representations of migrant subjectivities of children affected by European mobilities, and thereby highlight some of the unique features of transnational experiences emerging from the narratives of children. While engaging with childhood studies, we write against essentialised conceptualisations of children, and emphasize the multitudes of social experiences.

Methodologically, we want to contrast children's narratives of migration and/ or "being left behind", as well as children's narratives of transnational spaces of care and education, with those of adults – those of parents, care-givers, educational and social service providers, policy advocates and policy makers, while at the same time also engaging with mobility-related education, social and care networks and issues and the narratives of professional support and education providers (e.g. teachers, social workers, paid care givers), as well as the institutional arrangements put in place to cater to the needs of this vulnerable population. Our approaches are strongly interdisciplinary, emerging from mobility studies, critical childhood studies and critical social policy, sociology of education and citizenship studies. While analysing the various types of dislocations and their effects on labour-related mobile people and their families (whether travelling with them or remaining in place), we go beyond methodological nationalism and the constraints of a single nation-state: our case studies run across several nation-state borders and bridge across different European (and non-European) locations.

10. Changing norms of caring and parenting practices

Convenor: Judit Takács (Institute for Sociology CSS)

Early 21st century Western capitalism can be diagnosed as suffering from care deficit and facing a stalled gender revolution, at the heart of which we can find that the masculinization level of women's life course in most countries has not been matched with men's similarly increased engagement in family responsibilities. For example, the provider role that tends to overshadow other components of fatherhood, is primarily conceptualized in an economic context, and remains a major aspiration for many fathers in Europe and elsewhere. According to Hochschild (2012), even though by the first decade of the 21st century more men believe in sharing the second shift than a few decades earlier, most of them still also believe that their job comes before their wife's. In this context valuing and sharing care work can be interpreted as a main task to be achieved in the future. In a similar vein, Nancy Fraser (2007) presents two postmodern welfare state models that are currently conceivable in an emerging new world of economic production characterized by less stable employment and social reproduction with more diverse families. These are the Universal Breadwinner model (where the key to achieve gender equity is promoting women's employment), and the Caregiver Parity model (where the key to achieve gender equity is supporting informal care work). However, in Fraser's view we should strive for achieving a Universal Caregiver welfare state, where the "gendered opposition between breadwinning and caregiving" (2007: 61) would be dismantled. – We would like to invite participants to discuss different aspects of how the norms of caring and parenting practices have been changing in this context.