



Special Session Proposal



Economic, Social and Spatial Inequalities in Europe in the Era of Global Mega-Trends (ESSPIN)

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Abstract

The rapidly changing environment during the first two decades of the new century has been marked by the emergence of new drivers or dynamics that have exercised multiple pressures on welfare and socio-spatial cohesion in Europe (and elsewhere) and have raised new challenges for policy and collective action.

The EU integration processes, the financial crisis, the pandemic, the digitalization of the economy, the unbalanced patterns of globalization, the refugee and migration crisis, and the climate change-related disasters and threats have increased vulnerability of significant social groups and places, triggered discontent and populism, and raised new challenges to development and social policy.

These global mega-trends – each one and in combination with each other – are expected to have “creative destruction” type of effects that may lead to a paradigm shift in many aspects of economic and social life and may leave an asymmetric spatial and social footprint. They may blend a cocktail of welfare uncertainty, social turbulence and political instability that may challenge (or even threaten) basic institutional arrangements and democracy in Europe.

A complex set of theoretical propositions, ideological preoccupations, and institutional arrangements are confronted with the hard evidence of frequent market and policy failures. Understanding the nature of – and the interdependencies among – the drivers and the outcomes they configure, is apparently, a task of extreme importance that may provide valuable insight to both academic theory and policy making.

The goal of the Special Session is to re-examine the nexus of social, economic, and spatial inequalities in the EU as well as the various typologies, arrangements and mixes of policies and to address them in the light of emerging and highly interacting mega-trends and challenges that threaten to increase pressures and make policy choices even more difficult.