

Call for Papers

Media – History – Social Inequalities: An IAMCR 2023 Pre-conference

8 July 2023

The ‘*Media – History – Social Inequalities*’ is hosted by IAMCR’s Communication in Post- and Neo-Authoritarian Societies Working Group and History Section in cooperation with the Institute for Media and Communication Studies at FU Berlin and the Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research at the University of Bremen.

Date: Saturday, 8 July 2023

Time: 09h30 – 17h00 (*Subject to confirmation*)

Venue: Lyon, France (*Details of venue to follow*)

Theme

In recent years, the histories of structural inequality and its ideological and communicative underpinnings have received greater attention, much of it devoted to the works of Thomas Piketty (2014, 2020). In communication studies, structural and long-term perspectives on social inequality, the use of (critical) social theories, and broad structural contextualization became the object of study in the 1970s and 1980s, while in the 1990s and 2000s categories such as social class seemed to be abandoned or delegated to the past. More recently, the issue of social inequality appears to come back to the forefront of communication studies. At least a special issue of *Nordicom Review* (Jakobsson et al., 2021) and a long-term literature review (Mance & Brlek, 2022) might serve as indicators. The point of social inequality has also been addressed in the broader context of studies of knowledge or access gaps. However, these issues of inequality in the media often relate to the micro-level of individual recipients and their participation. Considering inequality in the media in social and structural contexts, including broader symbolic struggles over inequality, still takes a back seat in the discipline.

Yet, with their “specific inherent logics,” the mass media have contributed “quite significantly to the dissemination and production of knowledge about social situations and social differences” (Gajek & Lorke, 2016: 13). In different historical contexts, as in the present, they provide interpretative patterns for the extent, causes, and implications of social inequality and, according to rules such as contingency, alternativity, and selectivity, direct public awareness to the specific facets of unequal life and realization opportunities. The interplay between media and inequality has numerous dimensions: Media inequality trajectories can be socially structural (e.g., via classes, strata, or exclusion processes), institutional and material (media logics and concentration processes), politically enforced, or culturally anchored (constructions of alterities and identities, attributions of meaning). Temporally conditioned differences can be described in the macro perspective of media (political, economic) structures but also in the micro perspective of individual agents’ media actions and thinking. The same holds for location-based differences (local, global), which manifest at the macro level (e.g., North-South or urban-rural divide) and at the micro level between actors living in a similar environment.

The Pre-conference “Media – History – Social Inequalities” will focus on the conditions, causes, and characteristics of the relationship between media and social inequality and its consequences for the present and future. It aims to discuss historical and contemporary connections between media and social inequality. Research interests and perspectives of analysis will be collected and examined. The scholarly contextualization of history, media, and inequality offers the opportunity to interweave different approaches and dimensions of analysis to trace time-related mechanisms of differentiation and distinction in the context of the formation of modern public spheres.

Submissions:

We invite unpublished, innovative contributions, **including both historical and contemporary analyses**, that focus on, but are not limited to, the following research areas:

- *Media discourse*: how are issues of social inequality portrayed in the media? How invisible or visible are issues like poverty? What voices have been excluded from public discourse, and what were the barriers to representation and access to media discourse? What is identified as the cause of inequality: is the individual blamed, or are societal structures blamed? How were the media connected to or dependent on societal structures, institutions, and interest groups in reporting social inequality? What are the effects of the media discourse on social inequality?
- *Media structures*: how are inequalities inscribed in media systems and structures, for example, through ownership, legal frameworks, or attempts to change inequalities in media structures through the organization and hierarchies of newsrooms? What interests, ideas, and ideologies have been mobilized to legitimize inequalities in the communication order? What happens to non-commercial or other media that diverge from dominant media structures in their self-understanding, organization, and content? Which media policy discourses fail or succeed in reforming media toward equality? What consequences do media structures have for the discourse on social inequality in other areas of society?
- *Journalism*: What status do journalists ascribe to social inequality in media reporting? What goals did media professionals pursue, what self-image did they have, and what ethical standards did they follow when reporting on aspects of social inequality? How is social inequality reproduced in journalism – which strata, classes, and milieus are underrepresented in the journalistic profession? What exclusion mechanisms have existed and still exist in this profession?
- *Data, digitization, and media technologies*: how have new technologies contributed to exacerbating or mitigating social inequality? How are datafication processes and algorithms related to social inequalities? To what extent does online discourse on social inequality differ from traditional mass media? Which aspects of social inequality are addressed and negotiated in social networks? Which actors (influencers, civil society activists) are online engaging in social inequality issues?
- *Media use*: how can we understand the historical decoding of media texts and inequalities in media use in terms of class, milieu, race, and gender – in terms of structural inequality? How do media users’ understandings, evaluations, and practices reproduce social inequality today, such as positioning oneself against others through media?
- *The development of communication studies as a discipline and inequality*: what exclusionary mechanisms have existed and continue to exist in our discipline, leading to

inequalities within scholarly communities, barriers to careers, reception, or access to academic resources? What can we learn from history to overcome inequalities in employment structures and reception opportunities? What role has the historiography of communication studies played in the collective memory of the discipline: Which scholars and critical works are remembered and which are forgotten? Is there a tradition of research on media and inequality in our discipline?

- *Theoretical and methodological considerations:* what are theoretical approaches appropriate to study media and inequality? What about the postulate that the combination of stratification, segmentation, and functional differentiation theories helps to adequately explore inequality in the context of the public sphere and the media? What historical periodizations are helpful for the relationship between media and social inequality? What turning points can we see in this relationship? What are the problems of researching social inequality, e.g., problems of sources?

Submission process and deadline:

- Authors should submit an extended abstract of 800 words (not including references, figures, and tables) to: kommge@polsoz.fu-berlin.de by **31 March 2023, 23:59h UTC**
- All abstracts submitted must include name, affiliation, and contact information.
- Abstracts should be written in English and include the main research question(s), research interest, theoretical framework, methodological approach, and key empirical findings (if applicable). We welcome diverse approaches to the topic of media and social inequality from an individual and comparative perspective, including discussion of literature, theories and methodologies, historical and contemporary perspectives, empirical analyses, and case studies.
- Decisions on the acceptance of extended abstracts will be made by **April 30, 2023**.
- A selection of papers presented in this pre-conference will be offered to join a special issue of a journal of media and communication on the subject of media and inequality.

Organizers:

- Anke Fiedler (Vice-Chair, IAMCR Communication in Post- and Neo-Authoritarian Societies Working Group)
- Nelson Ribeiro (Chair, IAMCR History Section)
- Maria Löblich (FU Berlin)
- Erik Koenen (University of Bremen)

Contact email: kommge@polsoz.fu-berlin.de

References

- Gajek, E. & Lorke, C. (2016). (An)Ordnungen des Sozialen. "Armut" und "Reichtum" in Konstruktion und Imagination nach 1945. In E. Gajek & C. Lorke (eds), *Soziale Ungleichheit im Visier: Wahrnehmung und Deutung von Armut und Reichtum seit 1945* (pp. 7–32). Campus.

- Jakobsson, P., Lindell, J., & Stiernstedt, F. (2021). Introduction: Class in/and the media: On the importance of class in media and communication studies. *Nordicom Review*, 42(S3), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2021-0023>
- Mance, B. & Brlek, S. S. (2022). Inequality: The Blind Spot of Western Communication Studies, *History of Media Studies*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.32376/d895a0ea.dd047f5b>
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Harvard University Press
- Piketty, T. (2020). *Capital and Ideology*. Harvard University Press