

# Growing Economic Inequality and the Role of the Media

Special Session for the 29th Annual EAEPE Conference 2017  
Corvinus University of Budapest, 19-21 October 2017

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A central economic development over the last decades has been the rise of inequality within countries. This trend is most pronounced for income inequality in the US, but in almost all high-income countries income and wealth inequality has been growing since the 1980s. This development also questions modern societies' collective imaginaries and self-descriptions of meritocracy and upward mobility as social status increasingly depends on wealth and inheritance rather than work and own achievements.

After decades of benign neglect, the issue of economic inequality has re-entered the stage of media attention in the western core countries, as the controversial discussion and wide reception of Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014) signifies. Interest in theoretical and empirical analysis of economic and social inequalities increased in the last years, but research on how economic inequality is being mediated to the public is still a blindspot in the social sciences.

Accordingly, in-depth knowledge of the role of media in 'mediating' inequality is still lacking. This session, situated at the intersections of economics of inequality and media studies, will discuss the following two lines of analysis:

- Growing Economic Inequality: Two to three contributions with a focus on a) an empirical analysis of long-term developments of wealth and income inequality; and b) an investigation of the impact of Piketty's work in academia by drawing on an analysis of the post-Piketty contributions, critique and refinements.
- Inequality 'Mediated': Two to three contributions at the intersection of economics and media studies will contribute a) a comparative analysis of economic inequality in the media, exemplified by the coverage of Piketty's book, in selected media in four European countries; and b) a study on inequality topics in the age of embedded mediatisation.

This special session we are proposing for the EAEPE conference 2017 will be interdisciplinary in scope, embracing the fields of economic inequality studies, political economy, communication studies and economic sociology. We bring together leading researchers from those fields, who have been contributing to the study of growing economic inequality as well as critical political economy of the media. Some of the papers will draw from a major international and cross disciplinary study, which looks at the media treatment in the UK, Ireland, Germany and Austria of the best-selling and much-celebrated book *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* and the subsequent debate. The panel will draw on relevant concepts and insights from the theories of mediated communication on the one hand, and from institutional/political economy theories on the other.