



Special Session Proposal

Uneven Prosperity: Spatial Polarisation, Social Vulnerability, and In-Work Poverty

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Abstract

This special session examines the diverse drivers, spatial patterns, and policy decisions that have shaped the uneven distribution of wealth and prosperity, in relation to the general topics of ERSA 2026. It considers a range of contexts, including economic, social, quantitative, and qualitative perspectives, as well as global, national, and local scopes (OECD, 2011; Poverty, Prosperity, and Planet Report 2024, 2024).

Technological innovations, the COVID-19 pandemic, cyclical crises in economic development, and demographic shifts are challenging traditional employment patterns, the fair distribution of incomes, and the maintenance of people's quality of life (De Becker, 2023). A significant share of the workforce, even in developed countries, faces the risk of in-work poverty, limited access to social services, and worsening housing conditions (Eurostat, 2025; Krutulienė & Miežienė, 2025). These trends are closely linked to broader processes of social-spatial polarisation and peripheralisation, in which certain regions (and their citizens) are “left behind” or “don't matter” (Hudson, 2015; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Hence, it is crucial to examine the cumulative effects, institutional and political capacity, and resilience to economic and social shocks in these problematic territories (and their populations) to develop place-based strategies and interventions that reduce deprivation and break the vicious circle of poverty.



To address these issues, the special session focuses on thorough, comparative research that combines spatial analysis and mixed methods. The session aims to facilitate fruitful scientific discussion and the exchange of diverse viewpoints by interlinking social justice, uneven income distribution, and spatial polarisation. Additionally, the session will offer valuable insights and place-specific measures to effectively mitigate deprivation and widening inequalities.

References

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