Call for Papers

Regions in transition - bringing Eastern Europe back in

Meeting of the "Sociology of Europe" section at the
42nd Congress of the German Sociological Association "Transitions"
from 22-26 September 2025 at the University of Duisburg-Essen

When the Bulgarian intellectual Ivan Krastev spoke of the "end of imitation" in East Central Europe in 2015, he not only proclaimed the end of the paradigm of (post-socialist) transformation, but also fundamentally questioned its core assumption of a one-sided harmonisation of East Central European social orders with Western European 'models' as a central process of EU integration. For Krastev, it was clear that the normative assumption of imitation and catching up did not lead to the harmonisation of East Central Europe with "the West", but on the contrary contributed to differentiation, ambivalence of integration and disintegration and to a critical perspective on Europe. However, both the sometimes overly normative transformation research as well as the EU research strongly influenced by Western European perspectives and the East Central European Euroscepticism of the late 2010s overlooked the strong momentum that East Central European and Eastern European societies in particular had created. Moreover, the theoretical potential inherent in these dynamics of ambivalent transformation went largely unnoticed by sociology.

On the one hand, this concerns political and economic transitions, which did not proceed in a linear fashion in any post-socialist society, but already revealed numerous conflicts during the establishment and shaping of political and economic systems that are also challenging Western European societies today: Conflicts over political and cultural self-determination, divisions between liberal and national-conservative models of modernisation, the establishment of oligarchic and authoritarian media monopolies and the struggle for hegemonic identity discourses have shaped the post-socialist social formations in Poland, the Baltic states, Hungary, Ukraine and Croatia since the 1990s and have turned nation state formation, democratisation, economic liberalisation and Europeanisation into fundamentally ambivalent and conflictual processes. At the same time, the different experiences with migration movements emphasise the interconnectedness of Eastern and Western European societies. It is important to understand these processes and make them compatible with sociological theorising.

On the other hand, the dynamics of post-1989/91 nation state formation, particularly in the territory of the former Soviet Union, show that regional disparities as well as competing territorial claims and ultimately active attempts to shift borders by force were and are also an aspect of 'regions in transition' that has long been ignored in Western social science – although the territory of the former Soviet Union has been considered the most conflict-ridden region in the world since 1991 and has recorded more armed conflicts and wars since 1992 than any other region in the world. Existing and intensifying dynamics of violence, including interstate wars since 2008 at the latest (which were mostly caused by Russia), are transitions that are causing socio-political shifts throughout Europe, as illustrated by the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

And finally, transitions in East-Central, South-Eastern and Eastern Europe encompass all those dynamics of societal self-organisation that are often an answer to specific weaknesses and gaps in state action or compensate for them, but at the same time have a high potential for social, political, cultural or even technical or economic innovation. This includes innovative forms of political protest and democratic innovations at a local level as well as the expansion of start-ups and citizen science as a means of social resistance in Ukraine against the Russian war of aggression, creative resistance in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine and accelerated digitalisation as elements of building social capital.

To summarise, this also raises the question of whether the persistently high level of social and political dynamism in Eastern Europe is not simultaneously playing a pioneering role for Europe as a whole and whether developments are ultimately taking place here that are reaching Western Europe with some delay: *Are we in a phase of the 'easternisation' of Europe?*

Against the background of these considerations, we welcome contributions to the section event that address the above or, among others, the following further questions and produce empirical and theoretical findings:

- How are global references, narratives, public discourses etc. of the EU and Western European societies shifting as a result of the integration and transformation processes mentioned above?
- What concrete forms of political resistance and social, economic, etc. innovations characterise regional or country-specific developments? What concrete forms of political resistance and social, economic, etc. innovations characterise regional or country-specific developments? How can these be fruitfully theorised?
- What are socio-theoretical implications of the developments and challenges addressed?
- What national and supranational responses have the member states and the EU developed to the prevailing conflicts and challenges?
- What futures are implied by the transformation paths of Eastern Central, South Eastern and Eastern Europe with regard to the current accession candidates?
- What do Western European countries and Central Eastern/Eastern European countries have in common regarding various social and transformative processes?

We ask for the submission of abstracts (maximum 500 words)
until 31 March 2025
to the following three addresses:
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