
Inequality of What? Social Monitoring and the Difficult Choice of Analytical Concepts and an Implementable Metric

The growing debate on the degree of social inequalities stresses the need to achieve a common understanding of the kind of (in)equality in question. Analytical concepts and indicators that are suitable to measure inequalities are the very foundation of comparison: What dimensions, aspects, or aspirations are taken into account, and with what priorities? The discussion on social inequalities evolves both with different theoretical and normative choices and corresponding legitimizations and with the evolution of diverse scientific methods and data sources. There seems to be a broad consensus recently that GDP per capita cannot serve (any more?) as a good proxy for well-being on a macro level of society. This has induced a lively discussion on what should replace the outdated metric. This discussion is likely to impact social life in terms of practical policies, as public debate and political decision-making on (in)equalities are framed and informed by social indicators and monitoring systems. Accordingly, there have recently been a number of high-level initiatives from the political sphere which aimed at an improved measurement of human well-being. It stands out that there is still an important gap between the theoretical debate on highly sophisticated concepts of social (in)equalities on the one side and their effective implementation in (in)equality measurements and social monitoring on the other side. Moreover, the understanding of the emergence of social inequalities requires analyses of its driving forces on the meso and the micro level of society. The Mini-Conference focuses on different metrics of inequality which are discussed in different disciplines and the political sphere, on their justification, and on the methodology of implementation.

Invited for the Mini-Conference are theoretical as well as empirical (and potentially interdisciplinary) contributions which deal with one or several of the following questions: What kind of analytical concepts and indicators are suitable to measure social inequalities? How big is the overlap between alternative approaches, and what are their important differences (advantages, disadvantages)? What possibilities are there for combining different approaches? What new approaches are made possible by recent data trends and research methods? What impact have recent political initiatives had on the practice of inequality monitoring so far? Are there similar approaches in different countries? How can yardsticks used for the measurement of social inequalities (dimensioning, weighting, thresholds) be justified in practical research? What are the political implications of different concepts of (in)equality and social monitoring?