



INSTYTUT
KULTURY
POLSKIEJ

Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Researching Upward Social Mobility



Patryk Różycki, *I'm Leaving for University*, 2024

**16-17 X
2025**

**Institute of Polish Culture
University of Warsaw
Krakowskie Przedmieście 26/28**

Info:
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Thursday | OCTOBER 16

10.00 am – 10.10 am:

welcome remarks
(Magda Szcześniak)

PANEL 1:

10.10 am – 11.30 am

#experience of upward mobility #class difference #qualitative sociology

SAM FRIEDMAN, London School of Economics:
Friendship across Class: How Cross-class Friendship Mediates the Experience of Social Mobility

JUSTYNA KAJTA, SWPS University:
Different Faces of Intergenerational Upward Mobility: Subjective Perspectives on the Journey between Social Classes

coffee break

PANEL 2:

11.40 am – 1.00 pm

#upward mobility stories #life writing #methodology #cultural studies

MORGANE CADIEU, Yale University:
The Infrastructure of Social Mobility: Literature, Architecture, Painting

MAGDA SZCZEŚNIAK, University of Warsaw:
Peasant and Working-Class Memoirs as Socialist Upward Mobility Stories

1.00 pm – 3.00 pm
– lunch break

PANEL 3:

3.00 pm – 4.20 pm

#discourse analysis #meritocracy #upward mobility and politics

JO LITTLER, Goldsmiths, University of London:
The Right-wing Reboot of 'Meritocracy'

KRZYSZTOF ŚWIREK, University of Warsaw:
From Middle-class Society to Financial Freedom: Three Discourses of Social Mobility in Capitalist Poland

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Friday | OCTOBER 17

PANEL 4:

9.30 am – 11.15 pm

**#historical economy #wealth
accumulation #inequalities**

PAWEŁ BUKOWSKI, University
College London: *Movement
at the Crossroads of Europe:
Power and Social Mobility in
Hungary over Two Centuries*

ALEXANDER MAYER, University
of the Bundeswehr München:
*Belief in Meritocracy and
Aspirations to Upward Social
Mobility in German-speaking
Central Europe: Evidence from
Egodocuments (1850-1975)*

MARCIN WRÓŃSKI, SGH
Warsaw School of Economics:
*Intergenerational Mobility over
Nine Generations: Evidence
from Poland (1800-1984)*

coffee break

11.45 – 1.15: closed workshop for
presenters

For several years now, we have been observing a widespread resurgence of interest in class mobility. The broader context for this process is the return of discussions on social inequality, class hierarchies and identities to the public sphere. A unique feature of the contemporary moment is the multiplicity of academic disciplines researching social mobility, as well as an intensive re-evaluation of specific narratives of upward social mobility in Western capitalist cultures. The aim of the seminar is to compare the methodological perspectives of researchers representing several disciplines (or situated on their productive borderlands): economics (Paweł Bukowski, Marcin Wróński), history (Alexander Mayer), cultural studies (Jo Littler, Magda Szcześniak), literary studies (Morgane Cadieu), and sociology (Sam Friedman, Justyna Kajta, Krzysztof Świrek).

All the presenters have conducted important research on the topic of social upward mobility, social inequalities, and class relations and hierarchies. The results of these studies, however, often function in academic “silos,” and the flow between disciplines—their methodologies and sources—is relatively small. Similarly, an insignificant part of the reflection on upward social mobility—its dynamics, the experiences of its subjects, cultural discourses—proposes a comparative approach, i.e. compares different moments and economic systems (different phases of capitalism, state socialism) and different cultural and social contexts. The aim of the seminar will thus be to: 1) ask about the relations between individual disciplines: their sources, tools, main theses; 2) investigate the possibility of designing productive, interdisciplinary and comparative studies of social mobility.

CONVENER:

Magda Szcześniak

ORGANIZATION:

Magda Szcześniak, Justyna Szklarczyk

REGISTRATION:

upwardmobilityseminar@gmail.com

PAWEŁ BUKOWSKI is a Lecturer in Economics at the University College London and the Polish Academy of Sciences. Also affiliated with the London School of Economics. He is a Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of Places, Identities and Memories (PIMs) at UCL. His research focuses on socio-economic inequalities and labour economics. He has won multiple international research grants, founded an expert group – Dobrobyt na Pokolenia and is a member of Concilium Civitas – a group of influential Polish social scientists working abroad. His book, *Inequalities a la Polonaise*, won the Puls Biznesu Scientific Economics Book of the Year 2024 and the Marcin Król Prize 2025, given for a significant contribution to the humanities and social sciences.

MORGANE CADIEU is Associate Professor of French literature at Yale. She is the author of two books: *Marcher au hasard: clinamen et création dans la prose du XXème siècle* (Classiques Garnier, 2019) and *On Both Sides of the Tracks: Social Mobility in Contemporary French Literature* (The University of Chicago Press, 2024). She co-edited the special issue *Beaches and Ports for Comparative Literature* and the volume *Lesbian Materialism: The Life and Work of Monique Wittig for Yale French Studies*. She is currently working on a new book on railroads, memory, and patrimony.

SAM FRIEDMAN is Professor of Sociology at The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He is a sociologist of class and inequality, and his research focuses in particular on the cultural dimensions of contemporary class division. He is the author of *The Class Ceiling: Why it Pays to be Privileged, Comedy and Distinction: The Cultural Currency of a 'Good' Sense of Humour*, and co-author of *Social Class in the 21st Century*. His new book (with Professor Aaron Reeves) entitled *Born to Rule: The Making and Remaking of the British Elite* was named as a '2024 Book of the Year' by *The Economist* and *The Times* and won the 2024 *Mary Douglas Book Prize from the American Sociological Association*. He is the co-editor of *The British Journal of Sociology*.

JUSTYNA KAJTA is a sociologist and researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences at SWPS University (Poland). She holds a PhD in Social Sciences from the University of Wrocław (2017). Her main research interests include class mobility, social and political changes in Central and Eastern Europe, youth, social movements, and qualitative research methods such as the biographical method and discourse analysis. She is the Principal Investigator of the project "RAM-CLASS. Class reproduction and mobility – biographical experiences in academic, artistic, and business fields" (funded by the National Science Centre in Poland).

JO LITTLER is Professor of Culture, Media and Social Analysis at Goldsmiths, University of London. Her books include *The Politics of Heritage: the legacies of race* (ed, 2005) with Roshi Naidoo; *Radical Consumption?*

(2008); *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power and Myths of Mobility* (2018); *The Care Manifesto* (2020) with The Care Collective; and *Left Feminisms: Conversations on the Personal and the Political* (2023). She is currently working on a project called *Ideologies of Inequality* and, with Joel Bakan and Andreas Chatzidakis, a co-edited book titled *Corporate Carewashing* (Bristol University Press). She co-edits *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, is part of the editorial collective of *Soundings: A Journal of Politics & Culture*, is a Trustee of the Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust and a judge for the Stuart Hall Foundation Essay Prize.

ALEXANDER MAYER is a historian of modern and contemporary Germany. He has recently finished a research project titled 'A cultural history of meritocracy and social mobility, 1850-1975'. He has also worked on Nazism and on the history of universities and science policy.

MAGDA SZCZEŚNIAK is Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies at the Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw. Her research focuses on the politics of representing class structures and economic systems, and the question of how class identities are modelled through cultural representations. Author of two monographs: *Norms of Visibility. Identity in Times of Transition* (2016, in Polish) and *Feeling Moved. Upward Mobility and Emotions in Socialist Poland* (2023, in Polish). She has published in *New Literary History*, *Oxford Art Journal*, *Journal of Visual Culture*, among others. Two-time Fulbright scholar (Junior Advanced Research Award and Senior Award). Her research has been funded by the National Science Centre in Poland.

KRZYSZTOF ŚWIREK is a sociologist (PhD in sociology, 2016), Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Sociology, University of Warsaw, where he lectures on classical sociological theories and holds seminars on various currents of critical social sciences. His recent research focuses on representations of social classes and uses of psychoanalytical theory in social sciences. He has published the book *Theories of Ideology at the Junction of Marxism and Psychoanalysis* (2018, in Polish), and authored and co-authored papers that appeared in *European Journal of Social Theory* and *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, among others. Since 2020, he is a member of the editorial team of the journal *View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture*, where he co-edited thematic issues on images of exhaustion (2023) and visual representations of social class (2021).

MARCIN WRÓŃSKI is an Assistant Professor at SGH Warsaw School of Economics. During the 2024-2025 academic year, he serves as the German Kennedy Memorial Fellow and a Visiting Scholar at the Minda de Gunzburg Centre for European Studies (CES) at Harvard University. His research lies at the intersection of economics and economic history.