

Communication and Capital(ism)

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, 28-30 August 2025

*Mid-term conference of the European Sociological Association,
Research Network 18 - The Sociology of Communications and Media Research*

The small-scale and focused mid-term conferences of the European Sociological Association's Research Network 18 seek to ensure that the sociological investigation of media and communications is given full focus, distinguishing its work from that of large international associations, which provide important forums for communications and media research but do not have especially sociological concerns.

The challenges facing societies today seem daunting even by the most volatile historical standards. These include deepening economic inequalities, class antagonisms, the rise of radical right-wing authoritarianism around the world and violent wars that may soon erupt into even wider international conflicts. Generative AI is increasingly reshaping virtually all relations, and digital tech giants are running amok along with their increasingly unhinged owners. Somewhere behind all this, looming on the horizon is an ecological crisis. While many of these issues are intricately interlinked and, among other things, speak volumes about the deepening power imbalances and crises of liberal institutions, their causes and trajectories may be divergent and contradictory, with outcomes that seem difficult to predict.

As the conference title suggests, no social issues can be addressed without recourse to communication or capitalism. For Hanno Hardt, critical scholar and former professor in Ljubljana, communication could be considered "the *sine qua non* of human existence" (1979, 1). In this sense, the study of communication must always be the first stepping stone, but one that is now influenced and shaped in various ways by digital giants and media-as-industries. Similarly, critical authors have historically regarded capitalism as a system that cannot be ignored in a holistic social analysis. Sociologist Wolfgang Streeck has, for instance, asserted "that contemporary society cannot really be understood by a sociology that makes no reference to its capitalist economy" (2012, 1). In other words, the sociology of communications and media must inevitably include or address these two of the most fundamental social relations in its research.

In line with these premises, the conference will feature a plenary round table on digital platforms and labour and plenary talks by critical scholars who have addressed the dynamic between communication and capitalism throughout their careers:

- Kylie Jarrett (University College Dublin, Ireland)
- Graham Murdock (Loughborough University, UK)
- and Slavko Splichal (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia).

The *Communication and Capital(ism)* conference aims to bring together contributions that explore the unpredictable and unstable social terrain in the era of digital capitalism. It seeks to critically engage with these issues and their consequences by focusing on the role of social communication, media, and journalism. We are looking for theoretical and empirical submissions that may include, but are not limited to, the following topics:

- Theoretical reflections on political economy and cultural studies;
- The role of critique and criticality for the sociology of media;

- Digital capitalism, imperialism and colonialism;
- Digital platforms and tech giants;
- Labour and platformisation of working conditions;
- Capital, class, gender, and race;
- Global media corporations and media-as-industries;
- Capitalism and journalism;
- Sociology of news;
- The material and ideological impact of advertising;
- Transformations in political communication;
- Democracy and democratic transformations;
- The public sphere;
- (Re-)presentations in journalism and the media;
- Possible alternatives to the existing political/economic malaise and digital capitalism.

ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

- Abstract submission deadline: 1 April 2025
- Notification of selected abstracts: 15 May 2025
- Conference dates: 28-30 August 2025
- Abstracts should be sent to The Conference Organising Committee,
rn18esasubmission@gmail.com

Abstracts should be sent as an e-mail attachment (400-600 words including title, author name(s), email address(es), and institutional affiliation(s)). Please insert the words “ESA RN18 Submission” in the subject. Although we do not provide a template for the abstract submission, we expect abstracts that include a rationale, research question(s), theoretical and/or empirical methods applied, and potential results and implications. Each abstract will be independently reviewed by two members of the ESA RN18 Board based on the call for papers.