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Challenges in a world in transition- M2

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Intro to social inequalities

In the last lesson

- Introduction to the module
- The sociological perspective
- SDGs: views on «development» and cruciality of inequalities



Inequalities

- Differences and inequalities
- Stratification and mobility
- Global inequalities



Group and social differences

- Age
- Gender
- Socio-economic status
- Race
- Ethnic belonging
- Religious denomination
-



Social differences and Social inequalities

- Are the same?
- When social differences become inequalities?



When differences turn into inequalities

- Inequality= unequal treatment on the bases of social differences
- Discrimination: a person is treated differently or excluded by an opportunity or service without justification (evaluation: we recognize that the unequal treatment is unfair)



Treatment of differences and consequences

Differences are not recognized

Lost of social capital and potentialities for economic, cultural and social development

Differences are not considered

Policies, services, practices risk to amplify existing inequalities

Differences become source of inequality

Segregation processes that limit individual and social development

The right to difference and recognition of dignity of the differences are denied

Violence (example: GBV)



Differences & Inequalities



Intersectionality

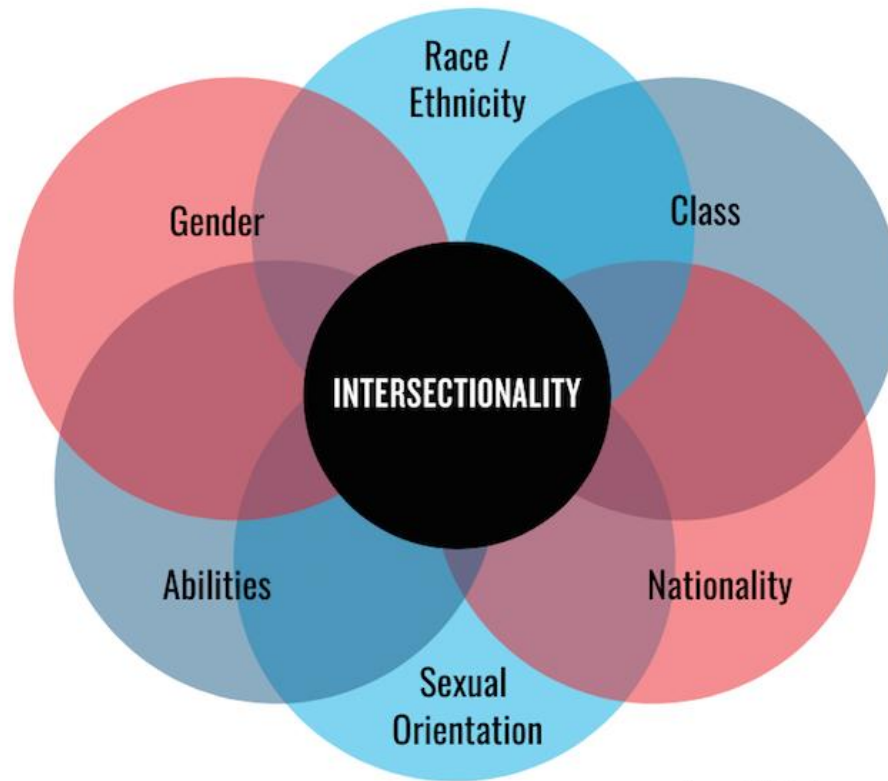
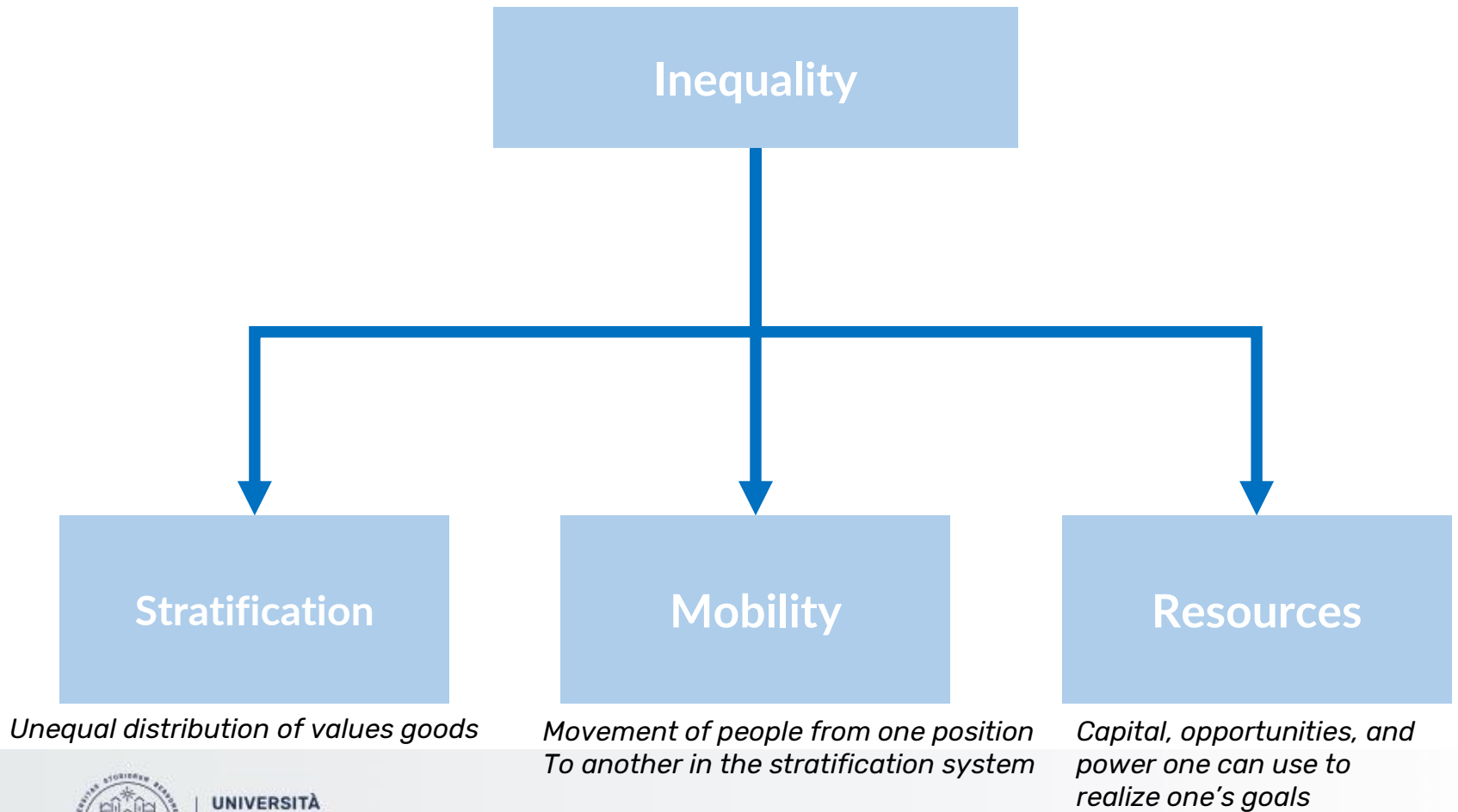


Image: First Book



Inequality: three main research topics



Differentiation and stratification

- Differentiation
 - process by which the parts of a community assume different social identities in terms of function, authority, and power
- Stratification
 - distribution of individuals or groups on a scale of distinct social positions on the basis of possession of economic, political, cultural and symbolic resources



Factor of differentiation/inequality

- Economic factors
- Socio-cultural factors
- Political factors
- Stratification
 - Within society
 - Between societies



Very rich and very poor countries

Country	GDP per capita, PPP (2017) (US dollars)	Life expectancy at birth (2017)	Happiness score (average 2015 - 2017)
Ireland	76,744	81.4	7.0
Switzerland	66,307	83.5	7.5
Norway	62,182	82.0	7.6
United States	59,927	79.5	6.9
Iceland	55,322	83.1	7.5
Netherlands	54,422	82.0	7.4
Denmark	54,356	80.7	7.6
Austria	53,879	82.0	7.3
Germany	52,555	81.5	7.0
...	...	...	...
Ethiopia	1,903	65.6	4.4
Uganda	1,868	60.5	4.2
Madagascar	1,558	66.3	3.8
Liberia	1,285	61.9	3.5
Mozambique	1,250	56.1	4.4
Niger	1,018	62.7	4.2
Congo, Dem. Rep.	889	63.8	4.3
Burundi	735	57.9	2.9
Central African Republic	727	52.9	3.1

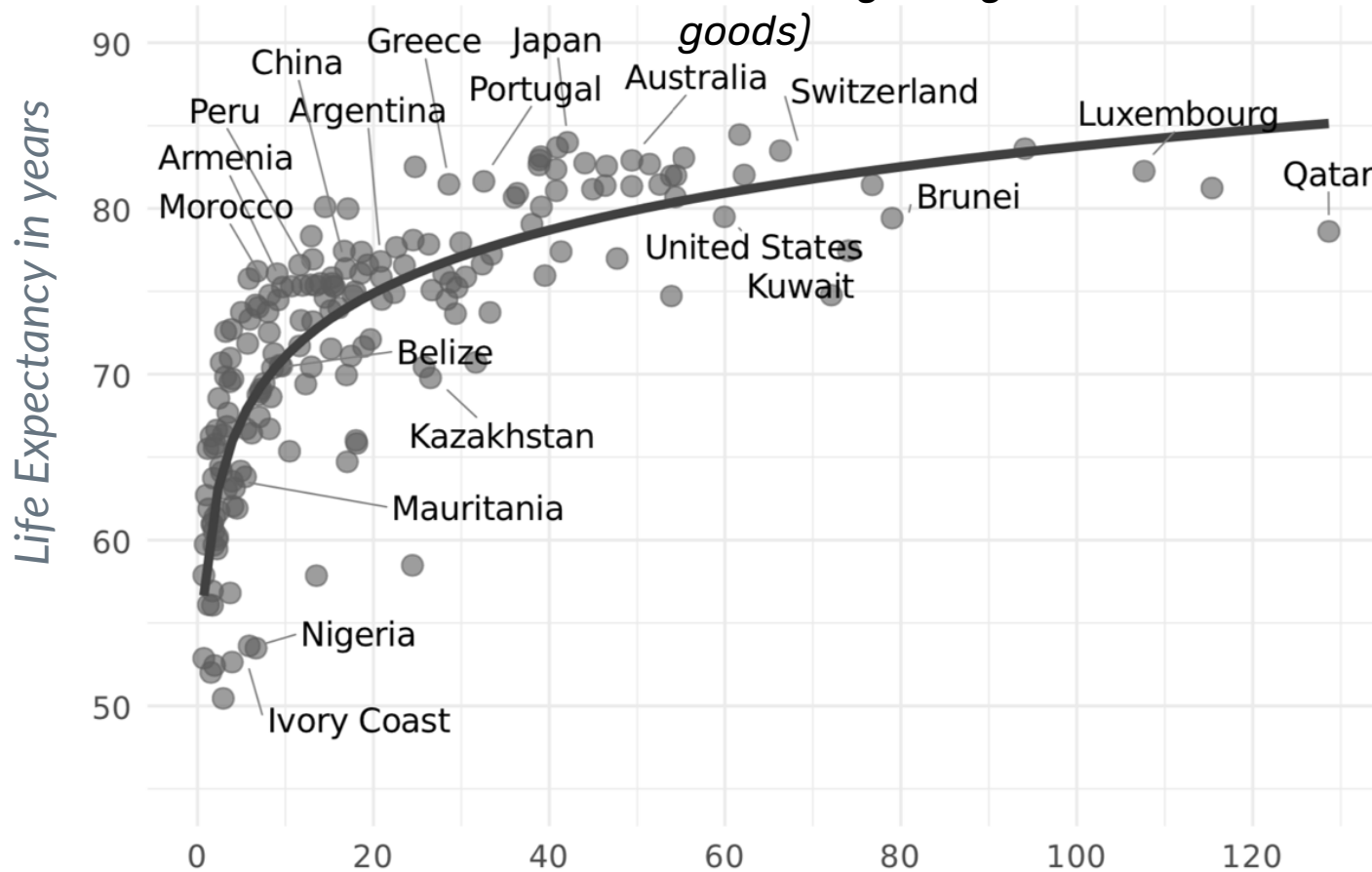
Source: Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2018; World Bank, 2017a; World Population Review, 2017.

The Preston Curve

Association between Life expectancy and GDP

The world is unequal!

Where you are born makes a lot of difference for your well-being, living standards, health (=valuable goods)



GDP per capita, PPP in thousands of US dollars



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Source: World Bank, 2017a; World Population Review, 2017¹⁴

Stratification

- The study of social stratification concerns the study of the unequal distribution of valuable goods
 - Comparing, ranking
- Between-country stratification
 - We compare, for example, the average standards of living in Burundi with the average standards of living in France
- Within-country stratification
 - We compare the distribution of valuable goods between different social groups existing in the same country
 - Grouping by age, gender, socio-economic status....



Social class

How do we rank individuals (or groups) in society?

- Social class and social status
- Social class: Hierarchy based on occupation
- Marx and Engels
 - They were focused on two classes:
 - Capitalists and laborers
 - Industrialization came hand in hand with unequal distribution between the rich businessmen who own the factories and machines (capital) and the laborers who worked for a low income
 - Capitalists had more favourable social class positions than laborers

Social class and valuable goods

- Erikson and Goldthorpe
 - Multiple social classes: social classes defined as aggregates of social positions that are identified in terms of relationships within labor markets and production units
 - Occupation as key element to access valuable goods

→ Social class associated with valuable goods (well-being, living standards, health)



Life expectancy at birth by gender and social class in England and Wales, 1997-99

Social class	Examples of occupation	Males	Females
Professional	Doctors, engineers	78.5	82.8
Managerial and technical / intermediate	Managers, school teachers	77.5	81.5
Skilled non-manual	Clerks, cashiers	76.2	81.2
Skilled manual	Plumbers, electricians	74.7	79.2
Partly skilled	Warehousemen, security guards	72.7	78.5
Unskilled	Cleaners, messengers	71.1	77.1

Social Status

- Social class does not capture all bases of social stratification. Social status needs to be considered too
- **Subjective ranking** of individuals or groups *in terms of honor esteem and respect*
 - Ethnic groups
 - Education
 - Age
 - (Gender)

 - Idea that “white people have more prestige than black people” or that “men need to be more respected than women”

 - Occupational prestige

Occupational Prestige in the US (1989): Top-5 and Lowest-5

Occupation	Prestige score
Physicians	86
Lawyer	75
Computer systems analyst or scientist	74
Teachers / College professors	74
Physicist or astronomer	73
⋮	⋮
Ushers	20
Maids and housemen	20
News vendors	19
Vehicle washers and equipment cleaners	19
Miscellaneous food preparation occupations	17

Source: Nakao & Treas, 1994.

Status & Development outcomes

- Status is also a central cause of development outcomes, as it works as a key mechanism in the reproduction and structuring of inequality.
- Class or ethnic classifications mediate access to employment in segmented labour markets, access to social networks and chances in the educational system.
- On the international level the **status of countries** as developed or developing can result in unequal access to positions in international organisations, which we will come back to below.
- Access to leading positions in transnational corporations offers opportunities for stabilising the class position of global economic elites.
- Very importantly national citizenship is an ascribed status that mediates highly unequal access to material living standards, safety and many other things.



How much is your passport powerful?



A passport index

- The Index ranks all of the world's passports by the number of destinations their holders can access without obtaining a visa in advance.
- The passport index data is also combined with World Bank GDP figures to create the Henley Passport Power score, which indicates widening economic inequality between countries.
- Henley Passport Ranking (based on data from the International Air Transport Authority)
- <https://www.henleyglobal.com/passport-index/ranking>



The most powerful passports in the world in 2026

- 1. Singapore (192 destinations, 193 in 2025)
- 2. Japan (188 destinations, 189 in 2025)
- 2. South Korea (188 destinations, 190 in 2025)
- 2. United Arab Emirate (188 destinations)
- 3. Sweden (187 destination, as in 2025)
- 4. Germany, Spain, Italy, Luxembourg, Switzerland; Austria, Belgium, France, Ireland, Portugal, Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden (186 destinations, 188; and 187 in 2025)
- <https://www.henleyglobal.com/passport-index/ranking>
- *2025: US drops out of world's most powerful passport top 10 list for the first time (now ranks 12° as Malaysia:*
<https://edition.cnn.com/2025/10/14/travel/travel-news-most-powerful-passports>



Least powerful passports

- Nigerian passport holders, for example, can access only 44 destinations visa-free (20% of the world), with these countries accounting for just 1.5% of global GDP.
- The lowest-ranking entry in the Henley Passport Power score is the Afghan passport, which provides visa-free access to only 24 countries and less than 1% of global economic output.
- Citizens of the index's lowest-ranking countries – including Iraq (visa-free score of 29) and Syria (visa-free score of 26) – are being **shut out of many opportunities for economic mobility and growth**,



Income and Wealth



- Individual and groups can be ranked in a hierarchy (a social ladder) in particular regarding income and wealth
- What about the degree of stratification according this valuable good?

Gini-coefficient

- Range: **0** – **100**
 - **0** = everyone in a country has the same income or wealth
 - **100** = all the income or wealth is in the hands of one single person
- It summarizes the **overall stratification** within a society
- If in a country 10% of the population hold the 40% of the total income of that population → there is income stratification

Countries	Gini coefficient (year)
North America	
United States	41.5 (2016)
Canada	34.0 (2013)
Mexico	43.4 (2016)
South America	
Argentina	42.4 (2016)
Brazil	51.3 (2015)
Asia	
China	42.2 (2012)
India	35.1 (2011)
Indonesia	39.5 (2013)
Japan	32.1 (2008)
Pakistan	33.5 (2015)
Africa	
Nigeria	43.0 (2009)
Egypt	31.8 (2015)
South Africa	63.0 (2014)
Europe	
Denmark	28.2 (2015)
France	32.7 (2015)
Germany	31.7 (2015)
United Kingdom	33.2 (2015)
Italy	35.4 (2015)
Russia	37.7 (2015)
Sweden	29.2 (2015)
Oceania	
Australia	34.7 (2010)

Income stratification

Source: World Bank, 2017b.



Top 10 richest persons (men) in the world in 2025

Ranking	Name	Net Worth (USD, as of April 7, 2025 (2018))	Nationality
1	Elon Musk (Tesla, SpaceX)	362.5b	United States
2	Jeff Bezos (Amazon)	189.4 b	United States
3	Mark Zuckerberg (Meta)	174.9 b	United States
4	Larry Ellison (software)	161.8 b	United States
5	Warren Buffett (Berkshire Hathaway)	154.4 b	United States
6	Bernard Arnault (LVMH)	152.3 b	France
7	Larry Page (Google)	122.5 b	United States
8	Sergey Brin (Google))	117.6 b	United States
9	Amancio Ortega (Zara)	113.7 b	Spain
10	Steve Ballmer (Microsoft)	110.6 b	United States

Top 10 richest women in the world in 2025

Ranking	Name	Net Worth (USD, as of April 7, 2025 (2018))	Nationality
1	Alice Walton (Walmart)	101 B	United States
2	Francoise Bettencourt Meyer & Fam (L'Oreal)	81,6 B	United States
3	Julia Koch & Fam	74,2 B	United States
4	Jacqueline Mars	42,6 B	United States
5	Rafaela Aponte- Diamant	37,7 B	Switzerland
6	Savitri Jindal & Fam	35,5 B	India
7	Abigail Johnson	32,7 B	United States
8	Miriam Adelson & Fam	32,1 B	United States
9	Marilyn Simons & Fam	31 B	Spain
10	Melinda French Gates	30,4 B	United States



The one percent

- The within-country stratification in income and wealth in contemporary societies is highly skewed, and much is in the hands of the top 1 percent.
- Scholars describe this phenomenon as the “one percent”

Suggested documentary

- “The One Percent” (2006)
- This 80-minute documentary focuses on the growing “wealth gap” in America, as seen through the eyes of filmmaker Jamie Johnson, a 27-year-old heir to the Johnson & Johnson pharmaceutical fortune. Johnson, who cut his film teeth at NYU and made the Emmy®-nominated 2003 HBO documentary Born Rich, here sets his sights on exploring the political, moral and emotional rationale that enables a tiny percentage of Americans – the one percent – to control nearly half the wealth of the entire United States. The film includes interviews with Nicole Buffett, Bill Gates Sr., Adnan Khashoggi, Milton Friedman, Robert Reich, Ralph Nader and other luminaries.
- Available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK35cxb3rkA>



Health and social problems are worse in more unequal countries

