

**Call for papers**  
**Deadline 21 December 2025**

**EADI/IOB 2026: Shaping Sustainable Futures: Global Challenges, (G)local Solutions?**

[29 June – 2 July 2026, Institute of Development Policy, University of Antwerp, Belgium](#)

**HP12 - Negotiating State–Society Relations through Development: Navigating Constraints and Opportunities in Authoritarian Contexts**

Convened by Tünde Virág and Judit Keller, ELTE Centre for Economic and Regional Studies

Social infrastructure is a network of places and services provided by various actors that enable different types of social interaction, influencing how individuals connect with one another, while also functioning as a platform for collective action and as a means of social control (Latham & Layton, 2022). Development can be understood as a process of change through deliberation, where actors across scales and institutions learn to overcome bottlenecks and seize opportunities within specific contexts. Development initiatives address societal issues and create opportunities by enhancing human capabilities through transforming institutions and power relations that govern social life, shape discourses, and determine resource distribution.

From this perspective, developmental initiatives that provide social infrastructure act as mediators of state–citizen relations. Infrastructure legitimises residents’ claims on the state, while everyday practices of seeking, maintaining, and developing infrastructure involve citizens in ongoing negotiations of belonging and rights. Thus, infrastructure becomes a key entry point for examining how state–society relations are perceived, enacted, and contested in daily life (Lemanski, 2022).

Critical scholarship highlights that contemporary authoritarian states do not exercise power alone, relying on coercion in hierarchical orders (Gerschewski, 2013). Instead, they coexist with non-governmental organisations in complex assemblages that foster interdependence and cooperation (Geva, 2021). Today’s authoritarian states do not completely eliminate local agency, acknowledging that government efforts to enforce discipline are inherently limited and often challenged by resistance, refusals, and negotiations from various actors (Koster, 2019).

This session invites theoretical and empirical contributions exploring constraints and opportunities for developmental agency within authoritarian contexts. How do state and non-state actors navigate repressive policy environments? In what ways do their practices enable incremental change, address social issues, or empower marginalised groups? By foregrounding the tensions between control and agency, the session advances debates on development, social infrastructure, and everyday state–society interactions under authoritarian regimes.

**For further information, you can contact: Tünde Virág [virag.tunde@krtk.elte.hu](mailto:virag.tunde@krtk.elte.hu) Judit Keller [keller.judit@krtk.elte.hu](mailto:keller.judit@krtk.elte.hu)**