



## Special Session Proposal

### Local Rural Perspectives on Disparities in a Digitalising (Post-COVID) Europe

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#### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has been present all over Europe and fundamentally changed our view on the world. Certain processes, such as digitalisation, have been accelerated, while others have just appeared. However, these tendencies have not affected settlements and regions of different levels of development, organization, and density equally: there is evidence proving that pre-existing socio-economic inequalities (urban-rural, central-periphery disparities) intensified rather than offset the COVID epidemic (Haase, 2020). Rural societies far from economic hubs faced pandemic differently than developed urban regions and took up the challenges on the basis of diverse social characteristics. On the other hand, the epidemic has exacerbated low-density rural areas for the urban “COVID refugees”. As a result of accelerating digitalisation and the spread of remote work, the temporary or permanent migration of the urban population to rural areas has intensified (Nemes et al. 2021), that . which can lead to an influx of urban values, attitudes and, last but not least, capital in certain rural areas.

In this section, we will examine how spatial-social reorganization caused by the COVID-19 epidemic has affected remote rural settlements. Local perspectives help us understand and evaluate special problems and strategies appearing in rural countryside of Europe. The most important questions of these session are connected to the topic of rural disparities:

- What problems and challenges have rural local communities faced during the pandemic?

- How have the specifics of the pandemic (illness, quarantine, confinement, restrictions, etc.) manifested themselves at the individual, family and community levels? What effects has the epidemic had on family relationships and personal relationships?
- How has the nature of work changed in rural society? What economic problems, conflicts and difficulties have arisen in connection with the effects of the pandemic?
- How has the digital switchover and distant education affected the lives of children, young people and families?
- Will after the crisis, rural life return to the pre-COVID rhythm, or the influx of urban migrants bringing new life and resources, blending rural and urban cultures into a viable basis for local prosperity? How could central and local policies lessen negative and enhance positive effects?
- How do digital social inequalities manifest themselves in the context of rural areas? How do digital capital and the rural way of life relate? How does the residence experience depend on the extent of digital capital?
- How and along what factors do inequalities materialize in rural society?

In this section we are expecting presentations that use a local, micro- perspective, with empirical evidence and local case studies on the latest social developments in rural areas and settlements, whether with a quantitative or qualitative social research methodology.

*Literature:*

Haase A. (2020). *Covid-19 as a Social Crisis and Justice Challenge for Cities*. *Frontiers in sociology*, 5, 583638. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2020.583638>

Nemes, G. – Tomay K. – Sulyok, J and Orbán É. (2021) *Second is the new first? - Conversion of second homes into primary ones during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (manuscript)*