



Special Session Proposal



Assessing the socio-economic impact of digitalization in rural areas

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Abstract

The objective of this session is to shed light on how the digital transition can contribute to a more inclusive agro-ecological transition, and how it is implemented in rural areas. It is held by a team of researchers working in the framework of the European DESIRA project.

The project to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires engaging agriculture, as strategic sector into the agro-ecological transition (OECD, 2018; European Commission 2019a,b; McCann and Soete, 2020; Torre et al. 2020). As stated by the Green Deal, the European Union attributes digitalization a central role in sustainable growth. A Rural Pact and an EU Rural Action Plan (COM 2021) will help achieve the goals of this vision. Digital transition appears to be a necessary means to support the actors to carry out this goal.



On the one hand, considering the transformative nature of digitalization and its impacts (Bacco et al., 2019), it becomes important to analyze the brakes to and levers for adopting digital technology on agriculture, agrifood, and rural areas, to promote a more sustainable digital transition.

On the other hand, the digital transformation plays a crucial role in the future of agriculture, forestry and rural areas. However, since digitalization is not good per se, policy support is needed to ensure that it leads to a desirable future by 2040. To provide the expected effects, it is important to be aware that digitalization is, first of all, a process of social transformation, which takes place both as an effect and as a driver of technological change (Rijswijk et al., 2021).

We invite all the researchers interested to open the discussion, to submit papers and to exchange around three major questions:

- (1) How can we improve the capacity of communities to reflect on future risks and opportunities of digitalization?
- (2) How do we improve the capacity of rural communities to reap the opportunities offered by digitalization?
- (3) How can policies (regional, national and European) boost digital changes in rural areas?

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