



Alicante, Spain & Virtual event

## Urban Challenges and Sustainable Technological Revolution



### Special Session Proposal

#### The role of intermediary cities and towns in regional development

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#### Abstract

##### Background

Worldwide, population in cities have grown steadily and faster than other settlements over the last five decades. By 2050, population in cities are expected to grow further, from 3.5 billion to 5 billion people. Even in developed countries with stagnating demographic trends, cities keep concentrating country population. At the same time, cities' development trajectories are highly heterogeneous: for instance, population in one out of four cities have been shrinking over the last two decades in OECD countries.

While both research and public discourse have been focusing on the trends of the aggregate urban population in countries, or on those of large cities, little is known about the specific features, trends and roles of cities of smaller sizes and towns. In particular, "intermediary cities" have specific features that make them a salient object for understanding regional development. Population size is not the only criterion to define them. More specifically, intermediary cities provide important functions in terms of service provision, amenities, and agglomerations, linking urban and rural areas and making them hubs for an inclusive regional development.

However, intermediary cities are strongly heterogeneous and unequal in their structure and trends. Structural transformation and the macro-trends characterising the economy and the society have strong asymmetric effects across space, challenging the trajectories of many intermediary cities. For instance, the increasing role of knowledge-intensive processes and digitalization, the transition to a carbon-neutral economy, and demographic changes (ageing, migration, etc.), can have differentiated

outcomes on intermediary cities, depending on their structural conditions and their role within regional and national urban systems. At the same time, intermediary cities – under certain conditions – can be attractive destinations for people and firms, with new opportunities emerging from the rise of remote working, better housing affordability, and the potential of concentrating services and amenities serving a larger space.

This session aims at shedding new light on intermediary cities and towns, focusing on their definition, the place-based conditions that make them viable nodes of regional development.

### **The GSSI-OECD special session**

The special session will offer a forum for research that advances our knowledge on intermediary cities, in terms of definition, features, socio-economic trends and role in regional development. We invite quality submissions that tackle the research topics and considerations suggested below (the list is not exhaustive).

- What are intermediary cities? What criteria other than size to define them within the national urban structure?
- Under what conditions intermediary cities are effective places to foster urban-rural linkages and facilitate a strong and balanced regional development? Do they generate positive spillovers and at what spatial scale?
- How do current megatrends (i.e. including remote working, industrial transitions, demographic change, etc.) affect intermediary cities compared to other types of settlements?
- What are the main challenges and opportunities for intermediary cities in terms of public service provision?
- What are the future development scenario for intermediary cities?