



## Special Session Proposal

### **Disparities in a Digitalising Islands Networks, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development**

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#### **Abstract**

The purpose of this session will be to explore the challenges and opportunities of the rapid digital transformation induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the Islands.

We know from research at various scales that digital technologies may lead to economic growth and potentially disruptive innovations with strong spatial footprints and potential benefits for whole regions, even peripheral or rural areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent lockdowns increased our dependency on digital technologies and drastically accelerated digitalisation in various domains, from selling products online to working from home and from creatively designing online services and products to building new business models and digital infrastructure.

The session will analyse the factors that influence the ability of the Islands to react, and pro-act, to digitalisation. The focus will be on the ability of (local) entrepreneurship to reconcile spiritual traditions and the impact of technological innovations according to creative resilient models of sustainable development that allow them to reap the great benefits of a structural transformation of the territories without losing their distinctive and qualifying features.

It will bring together a group of experts with diverse backgrounds - from economics to geography and from regional development to data analytics - to present empirical findings and discuss policy responses and their current/potential implications to such accelerated digitalisation processes in a local context, even peripheral or rural. Practical case studies will be presented to inspire interaction and seek possible opportunities.

Participants will analyse the key steps that should be taken by Islands in their digitalisation journey and try to answer the following questions :

- What is the role of Entrepreneurship in fostering the localization of this process?
- What is the relationship between digital transformation of local ecosystems and sustainable development?
- How do technologies radiate into peripheral or rural peoples' quality of living?
- What indicators can measure the effectiveness of the digital transition?

The digital transition is a cornerstone of the NextGenerationEU, a recovery instrument to help repair the economic and social damage brought about by the coronavirus pandemic. For this reason, it is now more crucial than ever, also for the Islands and peripheral or rural areas to steer the political and public debate towards a long-term vision, with innovative and sustainable solutions that can make innovation an engine of development that can enhance their traditions, making them a driving force for the development of their economic systems.