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AI and advanced digital technologies: old wine in new bottles or transformative tools for urban and regional economies?

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Abstract

Urban and regional economies have always been affected by new technological developments in heterogeneous ways. On the one hand, new technologies and, more specifically, digital technologies tend to cultivate wild expectations about their transformative nature and how they can affect economies usually through productivity improvements. However, such positive economic effects are neither guaranteed nor spatially homogeneous. The economic literature is full of examples of either delayed economic effects or expectations which were never materialised. At the same time, there are bright examples of how new technologies drastically affected growth trajectories of cities and regions. On the other hand, such technologies can generate indirect effects as they have the capacity to intervene with the perception of space, the costs related with distance and the capacity of different places to either gain further advantages or partially overcome inherent limitations associated with central or peripheral locations, respectively. Thus, despite how such technologies affect the overall economy, it is difficult to claim that their disaggregated effects are homogenous across firms, space and territorial scales.

This Special Session welcomes contributions which reveal the spatially sensitive way that new technologies, including digital technologies and AI, are adopted by economic actors and how they affect urban and regional economic activities. We are interested in conceptual and empirical studies that highlight how transformative or not such technologies can be for different economic actors at local and regional scales. We are keen to hear about AI and how such technologies can lead to heterogeneous economic effects. We are also interested in how digital technologies are interwind with other, maybe more established, technologies in order to support diverse policies, including but not limited to, twin transitions.