



# Special Session Proposal

## Innovating from the Periphery: Digitalisation, Ageing and Regional Responses to Global Multicrisis

Kadri Leetmaa\*, Ingmar Pastak, Garri Raagmaa (University of Tartu Department of Geography) / \*corresponding

### Abstract

This session addresses rural and peripheral regions as critical sites where global transitions and overlapping crises are actively negotiated and responded to. While global trends affect all places, the capacity of peripheral regions to generate place-sensitive responses and innovations remains comparatively underexplored in regional and spatial research. Much of the literature on innovation and transition continues to privilege metropolitan regions, often treating rural areas as merely adopting urban-led solutions. At the same time, many contemporary global transitions inherently depend on processes unfolding in peripheral contexts and require responses rooted in rural spaces and communities. Moreover, rural areas increasingly function as pilot territories for managing population ageing under conditions of institutional constraint, service retrenchment, and growing reliance on digital and technological solutions. These regions are often among the first to confront the challenge of sustaining wellbeing and development in ageing societies within increasingly technology-rich and digitalised governance and service environments.

The session invites contributions that engage with, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- **“Large issues, small places” perspectives**, examining which global challenges require territorially specific responses in rural and peripheral regions and how place-based innovation can contribute to more regionally just transition pathways.
- **Economic, social, and public-sector innovation in rural contexts**, including who drives innovation in peripheral regions, which governance constellations and policy instruments enable it, and how rural-specific innovation support differs from simple urban-to-rural diffusion models.
- **Institutional and territorial conditions for innovation**, focusing on why some rural environments become “sticky” innovation spaces while others do not, including the role of key institutions, institutional capacity, trust-building, and community-based learning.
- **Intersections of peripheralisation, digitalisation, and population ageing**, addressing rural areas as pilot sites for age-friendly and technology-rich localities and examining how digital transitions interact with existing social and spatial inequalities.
- **Bottom-up and community-driven innovation processes**, including locally developed digital solutions, informal learning networks, and social innovations emerging from social and spatial margins.

The session welcomes conceptual, empirical, methodological, and review-based papers that contribute to a deeper understanding of how innovation and adaptation emerge in rural and peripheral regions.