

Innovation at the Service of the Traditional Economy

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While innovation is widely recognised as a major driver of economic growth, large segments of the economy remain unable to fully benefit from its potential. These include a broad range of activities based on traditional production processes that lack the capabilities required to adopt or integrate innovative tools and practices. This limitation is particularly evident among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as in lower-income countries and in remote or peripheral regions. In such contexts, national or regional innovation ecosystems often fail to provide the necessary conditions for innovation to emerge and diffuse, due to factors such as weak digital infrastructure, limited access to research institutions, geographical distance from markets and services, and shortages of relevant skills.

As a result, socio-economic disparities between countries, regions, and economic structures, especially along core-periphery lines, continue to widen. At the same time, innovation potential remains underutilised as a means to enhance productivity in traditional economic activities and to improve the well-being of broad segments of the population.

Although research addressing these challenges does exist, it has received considerably less attention than the dominant innovation literature, which tends to focus on R&D-intensive sectors, start-ups, and high-technology activities. Expanding and deepening research on innovation at the service of the traditional economy, as well as of weaker regions and societies, is therefore essential. Such work can contribute to productivity growth, social inclusion, and the reduction of territorial and structural disparities.

This special session invites theoretical and empirical contributions addressing innovation processes, policies, and practices that support traditional economic activities and less-advantaged regions. Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

1. Factors shaping the ability of traditional industries to adopt and adapt innovation
2. Policies promoting innovation in traditional industries
3. Innovation capabilities and constraints of small and medium-sized enterprises
4. Typologies of innovation tailored to the needs of weaker economic activities
5. Innovation ecosystems in peripheral regions and lower-income countries
6. Innovation mentoring, advisory services, and intermediaries for SMEs
7. The impact of innovation gaps on commuting patterns and internal migration
8. Core–periphery interactions within national innovation systems
9. Innovation in small businesses in peripheral areas
10. Comparative and in-depth case studies