



Special Session Proposal

Opportunities, risks and challenges of digital transformation in tourism: ICT, local development, environment and the human factor

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Description:

Tourism, earlier and more intensely than other sectors, is experiencing the pervasiveness of the digital transformation of the contemporary economy and society. There is no aspect of the tourist experience that has not been affected by the consequences of the digital revolution (travel design, collection of information, reservations, payments, use during the actual trip, to the experience feedback and its social sharing / socialization). Nevertheless, the Destination management has been completely reshaped by the digitalization.

In particular, the spread of the sharing-economy in the hospitality sector (where it is also called sharing-hospitality or short-term rental tourism) is radically changing the structure and management of many destinations by offering accommodation options ranging from single beds in shared rooms to luxurious villas, with significant consequences on the hospitality industry and on the management of destinations. On the other hand, digitization is affecting many other aspects of tourism from the search for experiences, the experience itself, to the sharing of it through social media. Crucially, digitalization is also enabling the management of structures and destinations in a way that is increasingly attentive to the environmental footprint.

The rapid development of digital twins in tourism, designed to enable destinations to make data driven policy decisions, together with the application of AI in tourism, is making clear that the human factor is - as well - of paramount importance in driving the decision-making process toward socially acceptable outcomes.

The main objective of this special session is to deepen and broaden the understanding of digitization on all these aspects related to tourism with particular attention to the economic aspects, territorial planning and management of destinations also in relation to the economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of tourism, and their consequent implications for regional development and enterprises.

Here follows a list of examples of key topics considered particularly relevant for this Session:

Key Topic Area:	Key Topic Examples:
I. Digital Transformation, Spatial Planning, and Regional Development	- The impact of ICT on regional tourism competitiveness and cohesion.
	- Digital innovation in remote, rural, or less developed tourism areas.
	- Methodologies for integrating digital data (e.g., big data, social media data) into tourism territorial planning.
II. Sharing Economy, Governance, and Local Impact	- The governance and regulation of short-term rental tourism (e.g., Airbnb) at the destination level.
	- Spatial consequences of sharing hospitality on housing affordability and urban structure.
	- Economic and social trade-offs of the sharing economy for local residents and traditional hotel industries.
III. Technology, Sustainability, and Environmental Footprint	- The role of Digital Twins and AI in environmental monitoring and sustainable destination management.
	- Assessing and mitigating the environmental and energy footprint of digital tourism platforms and infrastructure.
	- Smart destinations initiatives focusing on resource efficiency and carrying capacity.
IV. The Human Factor, Decision Making, and Social Acceptability	- Ethical and social challenges of AI adoption in tourism planning and policy.
	- Public engagement and participation methods in the era of data-driven Destination Management.
	- The role of digital literacy and skills for local stakeholders and tourism workers.