

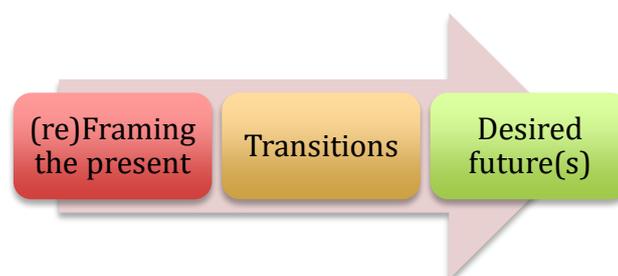
“Just Rural Transitions: Opportunities and Challenges”

Societal, environmental and economic transitions towards new rural regimes are not without opportunities and challenges especially when issues of justice and democracy are put into the frame. The COVID-19 crisis has shed light on the particular challenges that rural areas were already struggling with, as well as highlighting the natural assets that rural space offers. It has made more visible the need to stimulate narratives of systemic changes and just rural transitions. Rural areas are facing difficult dilemmas about their future, echoing wider issues of conflict, access to resources, knowledge and resilience to external shocks. But any transition to a desired future does not come without critical dilemmas such as family/peasant farming or corporate farming; risky, or ethically responsible labour; rural areas as places of production or places of consumption and multifunctional land consolidation; agroecology or industrial agriculture; long or short food supply chains; agribashing or rightful critic of agri-food systems; monopoly power or community control; local knowledge or outside expertise. Choices made for the aforementioned dilemmas have a strong territorial dimension. They have significant implications for crisis management and policy-state responses and entail a multi-level coordination of rural actors.

To this end, in 2022 ESRS not only offers an alternative format for sharing ideas, but brings to the fore questions that encapsulate contemporary and future debates and will be of interest to rural research communities:

- What is a just system? What do we mean by just rural transitions and what are the challenges of achieving this?
- What are the key principles underpinning just transitions?
- What kind of just transitions are emerging? Who is implicated in these transitions? Who decides and who is affected? Who wins and who loses?
- How does knowledge production and knowledge communication influence just rural transitions?
- Where can we expect these transitions to lead us? What does the expected future look like? How have rural areas reacted after the global pandemic? What opportunities have arisen? What are the lasting challenges?
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During ESRS2022, we will have the opportunity to address these critical questions through three discourse strands: Analysing the current situation and (re)framing the present; reflecting on the transition pathways and the role of transdisciplinary knowledge; and identifying a desired future(s).



We extend a warm welcome to the ESRS2022 alternative Congress and expect that a range of in-person events will be proposed, encompassing a wide range of themes that correspond to the issues identified above.

On behalf of the Scientific Committee, Maria Partalidou

□ **(Re)Framing the Present.**

Current systems of production (farming-forestry-fishery etc) and consumption are contested. Critical discussion on the current state of play will bring together local, national and international experiences. We anticipate reflections on (but not limited to): impact of covid-19 on rural society; rural livelihoods; different welfare states response to crisis; diverse agricultures; old and emerging farm resistance movements against injustice; just labour markets and relations on farms/rural businesses; the rural-urban divide and its cultural re-invention by social movements; populist politics; structural injustices and inequalities in access to infrastructures, mobility, social and (mental) health care services for the rural populations; rural poverty; job quality in rural areas; land grabbing, green grabbing and the politics of extraction; access to resources; post-productivism, rural tourism; structures of ecosystem services and the role of forestry.

□ **Transdisciplinary Knowledge production, Ethics and Just Transitions.**

When visioning and planning for a just future, knowledge is crucial for enacting changes in large systems. The question of what to study and how knowledge is used to inform policy makers is important. How do we actually provide evidence and communicate knowledge in order to make a difference? How do policymakers and researchers engage with each other? How do we measure the asymmetric impact of a crisis? What means do we have to generate knowledge? Who is generating knowledge and how is knowledge diffused within our networks? Knowledge by and for whom? What are the ethical choices to be made? How do we educate the new generations of scholars/rural sociologists/people? In other words, we need to find ways to discuss rural transitions through the lens of knowledge, knowledge exchange and ethics.

□ **Desired Futures.**

To build a just future we must recognise steps, opportunities, drivers and emerging solutions to the challenges faced by rural communities, by all those who live and work in rural areas and challenges that the natural environment is facing. Alongside a myriad of concerns that will support the creation of a just future society, the following questions are relevant: To what extent does existing discourse on the rural-urban divide contribute to societal polarisation? What other developments are there in the cultural re-invention of rurality? (commodification of the rural, rural marketing etc.) How has rural society responded to the global shock i.e. coronavirus? What synergies and collaboration between rural and urban areas might be nurtured in the future? How will our rural communities be organised - smart villages; state control or more cohesive local communities? How will our food future look like? How can we advocate on justice beyond humans: veganism, animal rights, and multispecies assemblages? What is the relationship between power, wealth, and data; ownership of tools; digital ruralities and agri-foodscapes? What is the role of regenerative practices and financialisation? Can we achieve climate or environmental justice? What capacity do rural areas have to deal with a global shock?