

## WORKING GROUP PROPOSAL - XXth European Society for Rural Sociology Congress

**Title:** *The Political Dimensions of Rural Transformations. Exploring the Politicization of the Rural-Urban Divide and its Consequences for European Societies*

**Convenors:** **Tuuli-Marja Kleiner\*** ([t.kleiner@thuenen.de](mailto:t.kleiner@thuenen.de); contact person); **Larissa Deppisch\*** ([larissa.deppisch@thuenen.de](mailto:larissa.deppisch@thuenen.de); contact person) **Jens Jetzkowitz\*** ([jens.jetzkowitz@thuenen.de](mailto:jens.jetzkowitz@thuenen.de); contact person); **Michał Konopski,#** ([konopski@twarda.pan.pl](mailto:konopski@twarda.pan.pl)); **Stefan Becker\*** ([Stefan.becker@thuenen.de](mailto:Stefan.becker@thuenen.de))

\* *Thünen-Institute of Rural Studies (Brunswick, Germany)*

# *Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, Polish Academy of Sciences (Warsaw, Poland)*

**Topic:** Rural areas are undergoing a significant transformation, whether demographic, economic, or toward a sustainable future. These changes vary not only by rural region, but they are also perceived differently by the population, which can be reflected in election results and local protests. Terms such as 'rural revenge' or 'rural revolt' have gained prominence in political and academic discourse, also highlighting the perceived resurgence of the rural-urban cleavage. This divide is attributed in alternation to economic, cultural and political factors. Current discussions focus largely on electoral outcomes in Western democracies and may overlook the multiple ways in which this cleavage manifests itself. The dominant explanatory approaches have so far failed to provide a coherent explanation, and this may be difficult to achieve given the different national and regional contexts and auspices. Against this background, this working group aims to advance the theoretical, conceptual and empirical understanding of the urban-rural political divide by examining its forms, causes and, in particular, its consequences.

**Objectives:** The Working Group aims to bring together researchers investigating the different dimensions of rural transformations in European Societies. It provides a platform for the exchange of ideas and insights to identify political and societal divisions along geographical lines and to develop a better understanding of their dynamics.

Contributions are welcome that address the following questions in particular:

1. Political dynamics of rural regions:
  - Political attitudes and democratic support: can we identify and perhaps explain rural-urban differences?
  - Populism: what drives the popularity of populist movements in rural areas? To what extent do these dynamics challenge democratic principles?
  - Rural-urban divide and affective polarization: among other phenomena, how are political/geographical identities, cultural differences and growing hostility intertwined? (e.g., Boxell et al. 2020; Huijsmans & Rodden 2024).
2. Geographical and cultural polarisation:
  - Political culture: how do structural change processes influence spatial distribution of political and social attitudes?
  - Political communication and schemata: to what extent do urban-rural stereotypes appear in political and public discourse, and how do they affect social cohesion and democratic debate?

**Format:** Academic presentations

### Literature

Boxell L, Gentzkow M, Shapiro J (2020) Cross-Country Trends in Affective Polarization, National Bureau of Economic Research. NBER Working Paper Series

Huijsmans T, Rodden J (2024) The Great Global Divider? A Comparison of Urban-Rural Partisan Polarization in Western Democracies. *Comparative Political Studies* 0(0):1-30. doi: 10.1177/00104140241237458