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# **Rural on the Move: Transitions, Transformations, Mobilities and Resistance**

## **BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**

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## **PUZZLING OUT THE DRIVING FORCES OF DESERTIFICATION IN THE HIGH ALGERIAN STEPPE PLAINS**

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The sedentarisation of shepherds at the margins of the dessert and the introduction of private land ownership in the high Algerian Steppe plains has led to deep transformations of the way of dwelling that increase desertification. There is an urgent need to understand this process of transformation and its drivers, which are more anthropogenic than natural, to mitigate the destruction of this fragile geosystem. Based on field observations, an oral survey with 188 household heads and statistical analyses, the paper describes the process of desertification where short term economic strategies and political misunderstanding are the key elements. Agro-sylvo-pastoral practices that are no longer in balance with the environment increase the desertification. The demise of transhumance, which involve grazing year round around the house, causes stress to local resources. And all the more so because former nomads started to cultivate lands, including on the chott, that are not suitable to growing crops, destroying the indigenous vegetation that fed the sheep. Moreover, the import of water and fodder breaks the link with local environment, requiring shepherds to limit the size of their herds. Consequently, these practices contribute to overgrazing. The transformation of the way of inhabiting and exploitation are greatly determined by the capital of the household, which allows for compensation of local shortages. Assembling the pieces of the puzzle also requires underlining the amateurism of political leaders and administrations who have little experience with the local geosystem, who took several unsuccessful measures and who never get the time, due to political instability, to learn from their mistakes. The paper shows that the sedentarisation occurring in this fragile environment with low soil fertility is creating rural systems that are less resilient to climate fluctuations and severely impacting both the environment and the poorest people.