

# Foreword

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This volume originated from a set of papers prepared for the annual conference (the so-called 'pre-Adviezen') of the Dutch Royal Economics Society held in December 2000. To these contributions, originally written in Dutch, a number of invited papers written by 'foreign', leading experts in their respective fields were added to provide the present set of contributions on the economics of the digital society. Many if not most of these papers represent research contributions on the economics of technological change, with a direct application to the digital society, carried out at the Maastricht Economic Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (MERIT) at Maastricht University over the last couple of years. All the chapters in the book have been thoroughly revised and refereed before inclusion in the present volume. What appears here are revised versions that take account of those comments. Although the scope of the chapters is fairly broad, it will become apparent that the main theme of the economics of the digital society assures that they are in fact closely interrelated despite the diversity of approach.

The chapters deal with a great many aspects of the digital society and offer a comprehensive picture of the economics behind many of the interesting features of the information society. It has been our aim to bring together and integrate the views of economists and social scientists in closely related fields to provide insight into the influence of the digital society in the core fields of economics. In particular, there are analyses of welfare economics, networks, the diffusion of new businesses and new forms of entrepreneurship, the auctioning of licences, the much-debated role of intellectual property rights and its impact on the diffusion of knowledge, and the upcoming of free software in the open source movement. Furthermore, there are analyses of a number of applications of developments influencing society: the increased work pressure and new diseases affecting the workforce, the economics of digital content, the effects of computer adoption and use on the wage structure and an analysis of the fear of a 'digital divide', the effects of information and communication technologies on the goods and labour market and their interactions, and the macroeconomic consequences of investment in ICT and economic performance and knowledge accumulations. A chapter on the policy challenges concludes this volume.

This study of the digital society is unique in that it addresses most of the economic issues associated with the changes we have been experiencing over the last decades and the ones that will challenge us and our economies in the near future. The chapters of this book therefore provide much useful insight to both social scientists and policy makers interested in the subject. Finally, one may hope they might prove fruitful to further investigation on this important topic.

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