

6th ESP Europe Conference

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SESSION DESCRIPTION

ID: X6

Islands at the forefront of sustainable and inclusive ecosystem services approaches

Hosts:

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Abstract:

Small and medium islands (SMIs) are social–ecological spaces known for their rich natural and cultural heritage, contributing in a multitude of ways to human well–being. Islands provide multiple ecosystem services (ES) from biodiversity support and marine resources to cultural heritage and recreation, all of which are essential to supporting island societies. Yet, they face distinct challenges such as biophysical vulnerability to climate extremes, coastal erosion, and resource limitations, as well as socio–economic vulnerabilities due to their dependency on external flows and shifting political and development priorities. In parallel, islands are often absent from global and national assessments, risking that their importance is overlooked and their specificities left out of policy agendas. This raises concerns about the horizontal implementation of policy agendas such as the European Green Deal and the Nature Restoration Regulation, which may fail to capture the realities of islands or may lead to outcomes different from those in mainland ecosystems. Furthermore, the plurality of values and knowledge systems within island spaces is often overlooked in ES assessments, potentially weakening efforts to strategically design and implement transformative changes.

These challenges underline the need for tailored ES approaches that acknowledge, among others, scale issues, isolation, resource constraints, and the diversity of cultural and ecological values. Tailored island ES assessments can help ensure that restoration targets, sustainability pathways, and policy instruments are both effective and equitable. These concerns resonate strongly with global island contexts, such as Small Island Developing States (SIDS) or overseas territories, where similar vulnerabilities and governance challenges highlight the need for adaptive and local–specific ES approaches. Therefore, lessons learned from SMIs can provide transferable insights to SIDS, and vice versa, enriching both scientific understanding and policy relevance.

In this session, we aim to advance the framing of ES in island contexts, emphasizing how plural values and multiple knowledge systems can support inclusive governance, sustainable livelihoods, and nature–positive transformations. The session builds on the collaborative momentum of initiatives such as the SMILES COST Action, while also reaching out to broader networks and communities engaged with island ES in Europe and beyond.

We welcome contributions that:

- Present case studies of ES assessment and management in island contexts (marine, coastal, terrestrial, or mixed systems)
- Explore how ES on islands are conceptualized, framed, and communicated in decision–making

- Understanding and addressing the challenges of capturing the plural values of islands
- Examine trade-offs and synergies between biodiversity, ES, and sustainable development in islands
- Share methodological and data innovations for ES assessments tailored to islands
- Cultural ES assessments on islands,
- Investigate temporal dynamics, interregional ES flows, and tele-coupling effects that shape islands' resilience
- Uptake of Nature-based Solutions to improved biodiversity and ES,
- Highlight participatory and inclusive approaches that center island communities, local knowledge, and environmental justice
- Temporal evolution of island ES

Goals and objectives of the session:

The session aims to 1) exchange diverse knowledge, experiences, and approaches on ES in small and medium islands, 2) to advance the conceptual framing of ES for island contexts and discuss their role in policy and governance processes, 3) to explore how inclusive and participatory practices can strengthen the involvement of islanders in ES assessments and decision-making, and 4) to foster networking and collaboration among researchers, practitioners, and island stakeholders beyond existing networks.

Planned output / Deliverables:

To create a collection of island ES case studies for a Journal Special Issue, to explore the potential creation of a new ESP working group on island ES, and to produce actionable recommendations on tailored approaches for island ES to inform both European and global island policy dialogues.

Session format:

Ideally we would like to host a hybrid session with a first part of standard presentations (standard format) and a second part in which facilitated group discussions will take place.

Voluntary contributions accepted:

Yes, I allow any abstract to be submitted to my session for review

Related to ESP Working Group:

Other