

The European Project MERCES: Restoring European marine habitats

The project MERCES (Marine Ecosystem Restoration in Changing European Seas) has been funded in the framework of Horizon 2020, the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme that puts research at the heart of the EU's blueprint for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth and jobs.

MERCES is the first European project focused on the development of tools and solutions for restoring degraded marine habitats, and recovering their biodiversity and functioning. The project will be focused on seagrass meadows, shallow hard bottoms and mesophotic habitats, and deep-sea ecosystems in the Northern Atlantic Ocean, Wadden and Baltic Sea and Mediterranean Sea, which is recognized as a hot spot of biodiversity, threatened and damaged by a plethora of anthropogenic activities.

The potential of ecosystems recovery after restoration actions, will be assessed through laboratory experiments and intense field activities in peculiar areas: from those exploited by humans (Wadden Sea, Gulf of Riga, Oslofjord) to those already under regulation as Marine Protected Areas of Gallinara Island and Portofino Promontory (Ligurian Sea, Western Mediterranean), Porto Cesareo (Ionian Sea, Central Mediterranean), Parc Natural del Cap de Creus, Parc Natural del Montgrí, Illes Medes Islands i Baix Ter and Reserva Nord de Menorca (Catalan Sea, Spain), Kornati National park (Central-Eastern Adriatic), Marine Protected Area of Foca and Gokova (Eastern Mediterranean). Special attention will be dedicated to peculiar deep-sea areas as Mid Atlantic Ridge, Norwegian margin, North Sea and Arctic, Azores, Cap de Creus and Hardangerfjord, hosting ecosystems as hydrothermal vents, coral and gorgonian populations.

Beside a rigorous experimental approach, MERCES aims to export its results into the human society, since it will dedicate huge effort in assessing the recovery of ecosystem services provided to the society and will analyze the socio-economic impacts of restoration. MERCES also own a legal governance and policy, with the final objective of encouraging the development and design of legitimate governance arrangements and effective legal regimes regulating the conservation, restoration and recovery of marine ecosystems in the selected working areas. By creating the European 'Business Clubs' on marine restoration, MERCES will serve as a central source of information-sharing and expert availability amongst scientists developing and implementing new restoration methods, new business and authorities developing regulations that require marine restoration.

All the scientific and socio-economics findings obtained during the project will be transfer to the specialist and general public, by the engagement of several kinds of stakeholders, from public bodies working in the environmental field to the schools, by means of specific informative campaigns.

The project, coordinated by the Polytechnic University of Marche (Italy), involves 28 institutions from 16 different countries: from Norway to UK, across the Mediterranean Sea up to Turkey, and.

The project started on June 1st, 2016 and will have a duration of 4 years.

"MERCES is a cutting edge project, starting a "revolution" on our approach to natural ecosystems. We need to go beyond sustainability. We need to restore marine degraded habitats to ensure the good and services they provide to future generations" declares Professor Roberto Danovaro, the Coordinator of the MERCES project.