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A Restoration sector for sustainable blue growth and marine habitat recovery

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Abstract

Deterioration of marine ecosystems destroys their biodiversity and functioning, thus degrading many habitats of keystone organisms and causing the collapse of the natural capital. Habitat loss has been observed in tropical coastal systems and is an increasing concern for the European Seas. Increased awareness of 1) the issues arising from the degradation of nature such as loss of provisioning and recreational services and 2) the renewed societal appreciation of blue and green spaces for our lives, raises the ambition level for marine ecosystem conservation and management.

Gradual change in societal appreciation of the coasts and oceans and the ecosystem services they provide coupled with shock events causing mass mortalities, and the recent COVID pandemic, strengthen the restoration narrative. This is reflected in the UN Decade of Restoration Ecology and the policy drive in the EU in the Green Deal and a new Biodiversity Strategy in line with the motto 'Biodiversity is essential for life. Our planet and the economy depend on it. When nature is healthy, it protects and provides'.

Traditional conservation approaches in the marine environment include 1) limiting impacting human activities and 2) securing appropriate and adequate spaces for networks of protected areas for habitat recovery. However, beyond conflicts for space from human activities causing impacts, there are new business opportunities for innovation in support of restoration and ocean health.

Societal and policy demands for change in business models towards sustainability, circularity, biodiversity, offsetting initiatives and corporate social responsibility, support the creation of a new sector actively supporting marine ecosystem restoration with innovative products and solutions. Examples of solutions developed by private, government and science partnerships around restoration cases will be presented based on the AFRIMED and MERCES projects' focused Business Clubs, showing the emergence of a multifaceted Restoration sector with new companies occupying the 'Blue space'.

Keywords

restoration, blue growth, recovery, business