



Territorial Cohesion and Insularity: Policies and Tools for Resilience and Growth

Organiser:

Manolis Koutoulakis, Secretary General of the Aegean and Island Policy, Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy (emkoutou@gmail.com)

Abstract

Islands are a key feature of the national territory of many EU countries. **Sweden** (267,570 islands) has the most islands in the world, while **Greece** (3,054) and **Croatia** (1,244) rank 16th and 22nd respectively. Many other EU countries have important communities and resources on island territories. Islands counts about 4.6% of the entire population of the EU-27.

The characteristics of islands vary greatly, depending on location, distance from the mainland, size of the territory and population, and institutional setting. However, islands have additional specific characteristics, which are also common and permanent, and which clearly distinguish them from other territories. In general, long-term development perspectives are fragile even on high performing islands, because of the predominance of low value-added activities based on the exploitation of often-scarce resources. Archipelagos and other situations of double insularity (e.g. Greece's insular space where many smaller islands act as satellites of bigger ones and depend upon them much more than on the mainland) brings extra levels of complexity: islands that face double insularity issues are often less accessible compared to more standard islands and face critical issue related to e.g. access to markets and to (essential) services and labour market shortages that extend beyond individual islands.

These bottlenecks and a lack of economic diversity accentuate the vulnerability of island economies to fluctuations in macroeconomic conditions and to global megatrends, (especially globalisation, population ageing and migration, digitalisation and technological change, and climate change). However, islands are also equipped with precious means to face these challenges and offer growth opportunities linked to their natural and cultural resources, the current energy and digital transition processes and the blue and green economies.

In this respect, the governments of **Croatia**, **Greece** and **Sweden**, (as well as many other EU governments) are searching for new ways to unlock the growth potential and strengthen resilience of their islands. This has focused attention on why some islands prosper more than others, and what public policies can do to maximise the performance of island regions for the benefit of local and national economies. To make good policy choices, there is a need to better

understand island competitiveness and how island-based (or island-proofed) policies can contribute to the well-being of island resident citizens and the sustainable development agenda. An effective multi-level governance framework and coordinated share of (national, regional, local) responsibilities is also needed.

A thematic project convened through EU TSI 2023 on island economies will enable participating national and island governments of **Croatia, Greece and Sweden** (as well as other EU countries and the EC) to work together on integrated solutions to address common challenges and opportunities. Such a project also constitutes a common challenge for the development of new comparable data and indicators on performance and well-being of island regions, which would help national and regional (island) policy makers to implement policies for islands that are placed based and consistent with national and EU main economic, social and environmental strategies.