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P27. Can islets be considered repositories of neighbouring coastal biodiversity?

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Islands and offshore shallow reefs are, in general, areas of high biodiversity, behaving many times as stepping stones for the passage of species from one biogeographic region to another. Their situation apart from the continent allows for species with large larval dispersal to colonize and coexist with local species. But what about islets or reefs that stand only a few kilometres from coastal shores? Are their biological communities any different from the those that are present in the neighbouring coast? How different are communities from islets located only a few kilometres apart? Can islets serve as a repository of neighbouring coastal biodiversity acting as special reserves?

In this study we first describe the subtidal algal communities of two islets in the neighbourhood of São Miguel Island, Azores, and their associated macroinvertebrates. We evaluate the effect of depth on the structure and composition of those communities and compare them to those from the nearby island shore. We used a stratified sampling design considering depth as a single factor, with replicates at three depth levels: 4–6 m; 12–14 m; 20–22 m.

Results revealed that, in general, the studied islets and the neighbouring island' subtidal communities share a similar structure and composition, suggesting the islets may act as special reserves and be a repository of the island biodiversity.