Why are deep-sea sponges important? Although a ubiquitous and abundant component of deep-sea benthic communities, sponges have been largely overlooked in deep-sea research. In many areas sponges are the dominant organism in terms of abundance (up to 16 individuals/m²) and biomass (over 90% of total invertebrate biomass) and form complex ecosystems known as sponge grounds, gardens, aggregations and reefs. Their biodiversity, ecological importance and biotechnological potential is assumed to be similar to or even higher than other deep-sea ecosystems such as cold-water coral reefs or vents/seeps systems.

Why study deep-sea sponges? Deep-sea sponge-dominated communities form a variety of vulnerable marine ecosystems widespread throughout the North Atlantic in areas such as shelves, slopes, seamounts, mid-ocean ridges, canyons and fjords which often coincide with fishing and other human activities. In spite of their importance, they have so far received relatively little scientific or conservation attention.

What is SponGES? SponGES is a research and innovation project funded under the H2020 Blue Growth BG1 call aimed at “Improving the preservation and sustainable exploitation of Atlantic marine ecosystems”. Its overarching goal is to develop an integrated ecosystem-based approach to preserve and sustainably use deep-sea sponge ecosystems of the North Atlantic.

What will SponGES do? Over 4 years of research and interaction with stakeholders, SponGES will:
- Strengthen the knowledge-base on North Atlantic sponge ground ecosystems.
- Improve innovation and biotechnological application.
- Model and predict threats and impacts to these ecosystems.
- Advance the science-policy interface.
- Develop tools for improved resource management and good governance.

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