



*Special Issue Reprint*

## **Ecosystem Services, Sustainable Rural Development and Protected Areas**

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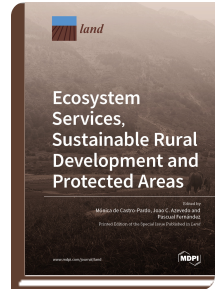
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Enhancing social and economic development while preserving nature is one of the major challenges for humankind in the current century. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment showed an alarming degradation of ecosystems and exacerbated poverty for many groups of people across the world due to unprecedented changes in ecosystems caused by human activities in the 20th century. Sustainable Rural Development is key to maintaining active local communities in rural and semi-natural areas, avoiding depopulation, and preserving high-ecological-value sites, including protected areas. Establishing protected areas is the most common strategy to preserve biodiversity around the world with the advantage of promoting the supply of ecosystem services. However, depending how it affects economic opportunities and the access to natural resources, it can either attract or repel human settlements. The convergence of development and conservation requires decision-making processes capable of aligning the needs and expectations of rural communities and the goals of biodiversity conservation. The articles compiled in this Special Issue (nine research papers and two review papers) make important contributions to this challenge from different approaches, disciplines and regions in the world.



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