

Aquatic mesocosm strategies for the environmental fate and risk assessment of engineered nanomaterials

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| 29 | fate and effects, across their life-cycle and in an environmental risk perspective. |
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Life-cycle oriented approach • ENMs (metals- and C-based) • Aged nano-enabled products Water column Suspended particles Microbiota Macrobiota Sediments Standardization – Data management systems

 Exposure-driven environmental risk assessment

- Regulation
- Safe(r)-by-design

Abstract

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In the last decade, mesocosms have emerged as a useful tool for the environmental study of engineered nanomaterials (ENMs) as they can mimic relevant exposure scenario of contamination. Herein, we analyzed the scientific outcomes of aquatic mesocosm experiments, with regard to their designs, the ENMs tested, and the endpoints investigated. Several mesocosms designs were consistently applied in the last decade to virtually mimic various contamination scenarios with regard to ecosystem setting as well as ENMs class, dose and dosing. Statistical analyses were carried out with the literature data to identify the main parameters driving ENM distribution in the mesocosms and the potential risk posed to benthic and planktonic communities as well as global ecosystem responses. These analyses showed that at the end of the exposure, mesocosm size (water volume), experiment duration and location indoor/outdoor had a major role in defining the ENMs/metal partitioning. Moreover, a higher exposure of the benthic communities is often observed but did not necessarily translate to a higher risk due to the lower hazard posed by transformed ENMs in the sediments (e.g. aggregated, sulfidized). However, planktonic organisms were generally exposed to lower concentrations of potentially more reactive and toxic ENM species. Hence, mesocosms can be complementary tools to existing standard operational procedures for regulatory purposes and environmental fate and risk assessment of ENMs. To date, the research was markedly unbalanced toward the investigation of metal-based compared to metalloid and carbon-based ENMs but also nano-enabled product. Future studies are expected to fill this gap, with special regard to high production volume and

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potentially hazardous ENMs. Finally, to take full advantage of mesocosms, future studies must be carefully planned to incorporate interdisciplinary approaches and ensure that the large data sets produced are fully exploited.

1. Introduction

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Assessing the environmental impact and hazard of engineered nanomaterials (ENMs) is challenging due to their specific physico-chemical properties compared to bulk and free-ion species^{1,2}. In the last decade, an extensive amount of research has been carried out to understand ENM fate and effects upon release in the environment. The majority of these studies employed standardized experimental strategies, usually addressing single endpoints in simplified systems (e.g. single-species ecotoxicity tests, one-parameter dependent transformation), to provide straightforward information for regulatory purposes. However, such approaches are often not representative of true environmental complexity and may not reproduce mechanisms driving ENM behaviour and effects in the ecosystem. In recent years, efforts have been made on the development and use of alternative testing strategies (ATS) that enable the study of ENM environmental risk in more realistic frameworks, e.g. by including the aging of ENMs in natural matrices as well as their interactions with natural components during trophic or trans-generational transfers^{2,3,4}. Among the ATS, mesocosms are considered invaluable tools, allowing for a more comprehensive simulation of key ecological processes compared to other single standardized test or standard operational procedure (SOP)^{2,5,6,7}.

Mesocosms can be defined as an enclosed and essentially self-sufficient experimental environment and have been extensively used to investigate ecological processes and the environmental fate and effects of xenobiotic chemicals^{8,9,10}. Mesocosms allow (I) self-sustainability for the duration of the experiment, (II) feasibility of sampling and measurement of multiple bio-physico-chemical endpoints and (III) the possibility to identify direct and indirect effects of the tested compounds^{5,11,12}. Such strategies have already been implemented to generate regulatory data in the evaluation of pesticide contaminations^{13,14} and have recently been proposed for ENM environmental risk assessment (ERA). Regarding ENM ERA, mesocosms enable to simultaneously investigate ENM behavior and effects using an exposure scenario-driven approach^{5,15}. They provide exposure and hazard data that account for ecological synergies but also interdependent transformation processes⁵. This is particularly relevant, as the validity of conventional standardized tests is challenged by the

unique properties of ENMs and their dynamic evolution upon release in the ecosystem¹.

Exposure and hazard data obtained in ENMs dosed mesocosms can be gathered in database and fed into fate models, hazard scoring schemes, and environmental risk assessment models^{16,17}. They can also serve as input for high throughput experiments to better elucidate the mechanisms involved².

While a definition of mesocosms has been debated with regard to the operational time and size, terms such as microcosm and mesocosms have interchangeably been used in literature for describing similar systems. A literature survey in 2012 focused on ENM studies in both terrestrial and aquatic mesocosms, reporting only twelve instances of published works¹⁸. However, during the last decade, the use of mesocosms in ENM fate and nanosafety studies has consistently increased with more than 200 research items between 2008-2020 (source: Web of Science; keywords nano*, mesocosms and microcosm) (Fig. 1). These works investigated ENMs in either aquatic or terrestrial mesocosms and a part of these items have already been reviewed with a focus on terrestrial environments¹⁹ and ENM toxicity⁴.

Here, we reviewed papers focused on fate and impact of ENMs in aquatic mesocosms to provide an overview of the relevant strategies, mesocosms designs, and their findings. An extensive screening of these papers was carried out in order to select (I) experimental mesocosm investigating ENMs and (II) studies focusing on the aquatic ecosystem. A final selection of about fifty peer-reviewed papers was obtained excluding short-term experiments (<1 week) with no acclimation time as well as single-endpoint and single-species oriented studies, which have been already reviewed by Bour et al. (2015)4. A detailed list of the selected literature and further information of the selection criteria are reported in the Supporting Information (Table S1). A further aim of the present work is to relate the ENM fate and nanotoxicity for aquatic organisms to the environmental risk in relevant environmental scenarios. Statistical tools were employed to identify important parameters determining the long-term partitioning of ENMs in aquatic environments. This will be used as the basis to discuss ENMs exposure towards benthic and planktonic compartments as well as ENMs hazard and systemic ecosystem responses to ENM contamination. Finally, the interest of aquatic mesocosms in ENM lifecycle-oriented and ERA studies, as well as the current limitations and knowledge gaps, will be discussed.

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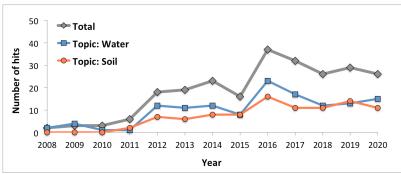


Figure 1. Web of Science outcome for nano* (topic, title) studies with topic of mesocosms and microcosms in the period 2008-2020 (grey, diamonds). In blue (squares) and orange (circles) the studies focused on water and soil compartments, respectively.

2. A large panel of ENM environmental exposure scenarios

2.1 Diverse aquatic mesocosm designs

Figure 2 provides an overview of the main designs found in the literature, where aquatic mesocosm strategies are categorized based on their location and the ecosystem mimicked. A detailed list of these works, with additional information regarding the ENM properties, experimental setups and endpoints addressed is provided in the Supporting Information (Table S1). In general, a major distinction in experimental approaches is achieved between indoor laboratory-scale facilities and outdoor systems operated in the natural environment (ex situ or in situ), which have been equally reported in literature. A further distinction is obtained along a salinity gradient, i.e. from freshwater (84% of the literature) to estuarine and seawater (16% of the literature) ecosystems (Fig. 2).

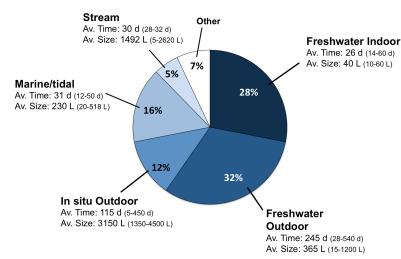


Figure 2. Mesocosm designs applied in the studies of ENM environmental fate with corresponding average experimental duration (Av. Time) and average water volume in the mesocosms (Av. Size). In parenthesis the range of minimum and maximum values applied for each design. "Other designs" refers to low-volume (<10 L) constructed wetland and sediment-oriented studies.

Freshwater indoor mesocosms have been implemented to mimic both lotic and lentic ecosystems. Relatively small aquaria (e.g. 10-15 L) were employed to study microbial communities²⁰ or specific trophic chains²¹, while larger modular set-ups (50-60 L tanks) were used to simulate complex ecological frameworks^{e.g.22,23,24}. These systems ensure the control of several parameters (e.g. pH, temperature, water volume, sediment depth) and allow high repeatability²⁵. Macro-organisms tested across these studies have included a variety of aquatic macrophytes and grazing animals as well as echinoderms, crustaceans, insects and amphibians larvae, and fishes. Authors used natural inoculums to colonize the mesocosms with primary producers sampled from the environment to be mimicked. Sediment matrices typically consisted of artificial sediments combined with sieved natural sediments. Similarly, aqueous phases consisted of commercial water with a pH and ionic strength close to the

actual environment spiked with water samples collected in the field²². This allowed controlling the water chemistry and porous media properties (texture, density, metals content) while providing natural inputs to the mesocosms. Indoor mesocosms have been extensively used to study the fate of a wide range of ENMs. The exposure to the ENMs usually took place over a period of several weeks (26 days on average) and was preceded by an acclimation phase (approx. two weeks) for the equilibration of the (eco)system (e.g. settling of suspended matter, pH/Eh stabilization, development of microbiotic communities).

Freshwater outdoor mesocosms achieve more realistic exposure scenarios at the expense of less control and a lower feasibility compared to laboratory-scale set-ups. These experiments account for seasonal changes and varied weather conditions (e.g. precipitation, drought). They are prone to colonization by organisms from the surrounding environment, resulting in an enhanced complexity but diminished control of parameters such as water volume, temperature and overall biodiversity. Small 10-20 L mesocosms were occasionally employed outdoors to monitor algae population response over several months after ENMs contamination^{26,27,28}. The most consistently applied outdoor design made use of larger facilities (365 L on average) optimized for longer exposure testing (245 d on average) e.g. 29,30. While more challenging with regard to repeatability and the possibility for standardization, these systems provide information about long-term contamination effects^{e.g.31} and ecosystem response and recovery. For instance, freshwater, wetland ecosystems were simulated for periods up to 1,5 years in rectangular-shaped containers (3.5 m³) lined with a uniform soil layer (~20 cm) and a sloped-bed allowing humidity and redox gradients between permanently and periodically flooded areas²⁹. The watertight enclosures were open at the top to allow variation of the water volume due to rainfall, evaporation and transpiration. Native plankton and benthic bacteria communities were brought with natural groundwater and soil matrices. Macro-organisms tested include terrestrial and aquatic macrophytes, molluscs, crustaceans, and fishes as well as unintentional insects.

Stream freshwater mesocosms allowed for the addition of ENMs to flowing water in order to monitor their mobility and transformation during transport. Outdoor studies employed hybrid flow-through/recirculating systems to model wastewater treatment plant and constructed wetland effluents^{32,33}. Briefly, these consisted of two collecting pools connected by 18×0.5 m sloped channels presenting riffle and glide sections. Engineered nanomaterial-amended water in the top pool was gravity-fed to the bottom and then partially or totally

recirculated in order to maintain a stable volume and an essentially closed system. The resulting mesocosms were colonized with insects, fishes, and snails and were tailored for studying the effects of ENMs on the periphyton and algae populations. These systems necessarily employ large water volumes and usually operate for short periods of time (weeks), also to limit wastewater volume. Flow-through designs were also employed in an indoor study, with small recirculating containers used for exposing snails and algae under permanent water flowing conditions. Although less representative of whole stream ecosystems, this approach presented several advantages such as the possibility to accumulate large algae populations and to perform highly replicated experiments³⁴.

In situ mesocosms were obtained by contaminating an artificially bounded portion of a natural lentic ecosystem. Furtado et al. applied such a strategy in two different studies where round-shaped polypropylene sheeting, suspended from a floating ring and sealed to the sediments, was directly placed in a sheltered bay of a littoral lake^{25,36}. These open-bottom designs represent a straightforward approach for studying larger volumes (2400-3000 L) with natural matrices. These studies were carried out over a relatively short-term of 30 d. Longer exposure periods were achieved by Jovanovic et al., with a similar design where 1100 L fiberglass tanks were attached to a platform anchored in the middle of a lake³⁷. Their mesocosms were filled with sediments and filtered lake water followed by introduction of zooplankton, macroinvertebrates, macrophytes and fishes before exposure to ENMs for three months. Larger in situ mesocosms (> 5000 L) were also used for the evaluation of community structures in contaminated ditches^{38,39,40}. These systems focused on sediments and benthic community structure and recolonization of polluted areas following sediment contamination by ENMs for periods of up to 15 months.

Marine mesocosms have been less implemented compared to freshwater ones. Some pioneering works have been achieved in saltwater scenarios^{41,42,43}, which are to date the least investigated compartments (approx. 15% of the reported literature). This can be ascribed to the low predicted environmental concentrations (PEC) expected in marine environments due to the ENM removal from the water phase at high salinities⁴⁴. In a few instances, indoor facilities used small tanks (20 L) containing natural seawater and sediments for the study of native bacteria and plankton communities^{42,43}. More recently, larger systems (>300 L) were applied to study low-dose addition of ENMs to open water⁴⁵ or coastal ecosystems previously colonized with molluscs and echinoderms⁴⁶. Tidal cycles in estuarine ecosystems

have also been mimicked. Buffet et al. investigated the response of benthic worms and filter-feeders to ENM-contaminated intertidal sediments in outdoor facilities⁴⁷, ⁴⁸. In their study, pre-contaminated sediments in ~5L containers were introduced in a top-tank and cyclically received aerated natural seawater from a reservoir. Similar designs (with 2 reservoirs to mimic the tide) have also been used indoors in more complex ecological setups including plants, snails, clams, shrimp and fish^{41,49,50}.

2.2 ENM dosing scenarios and total doses

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When selecting the ENM to be investigated in aquatic mesocosms, a broader attention has been given to potentially hazardous materials, such as antimicrobial and (photo)catalytic Aq-, Ti-, and Ce-ENMs (34%, 15%, and 16% of the aquatic mesocosms studies, respectively). Cu-, Au- were also the subject of some studies, whereas little or no attention was paid to several high production ENMs such as Zn-, Si-, Fe-, Al-ENMs and low production volume materials such as quantum dots. For instance, Si-based ENMs were mostly neglected, despite SiO₂ ENMs being one of the most produced^{51,52}. Similarly, C-based ENMs (e.g. fullerenes, nanotubes, graphene) were investigated to a lower extent (10% of the studies) compared to metal-based ENMs. A graphene ENM was only recently included in a study despite its increasing production and application rates⁵³. Carbon-based ENMs such as graphene and CNTs can display enhanced toxicity when interacting with natural components^{54,55}, which should be further characterized in realistic environmental settings. In general, the selection of ENMs should be based on criteria identifying the potentially most impactful materials in environmental contexts. For instance, Arvidsson et al., identified "global production volume" and "short-term ecotoxicity" as relevant proxy measures for assessing ENMs environmental impact⁵¹. They further provided a proof of concept assessment classifying several ENMs on a low-to-high production vs toxicity basis. Similar criteria can be used to identify the most relevant ENM to be investigated in future aguatic mesocosms.

Whatever the ENMs, the absolute dose injected can strongly affect both their exposure and hazards of the mimicked ecosystem, as many physico-chemical processes (aggregation, dissolution, adsorption) are kinetically controlled by the concentration^{31,56}. With a few exceptions, contamination of the mesocosms at low mg.L⁻¹ levels has emerged as the best compromise between environmentally relevant concentrations and qualitative and quantitative analyses in the complex matrices investigated. To date, half of the mesocosms experiments used mg.L⁻¹ contamination levels, whereas less than 20% were carried out at the

more environmentally relevant low µg.L⁻¹ levels (Fig. 3). Although lower than the 273 concentrations typically applied in in vitro ecotoxicity studies, these ranges are higher than the PECs, mostly expected in the range of ng.L-1 and µg.Kg-1 in water and sediments, 275 respectively⁴⁴. A well-known challenge in mesocosm studies performed at environmentally 276 relevant concentrations is the analytical feasibility of detecting and quantifying low concentrations in matrices with high natural backgrounds (e.g. detecting Ti-ENMs within 278 sediment naturally rich in endogenous Ti). Recent studies confronted these issues by applying powerful analytical methodologies using spICP-MS (for metal-based ENMs)^{35,45,57} or 280 optimized HPLC-MS (for carbon-based ENMs) able to detect pq.L-1 levels46. The use of 281 isotopically-labeled ENMs shows a great potential for detecting and discerning ENMs apart from the natural background at realistic contamination concentrations and can be applied to a wide range of metal, metalloid or carbon-based ENMs. For instance, similar techniques 283 enabled the detection of 109Ag-enriched Ag-ENMs58 or multi-isotopically labelled 284 ¹¹¹Cd⁷⁷Se/⁶⁸ZnS QDs^{59,60} at concentrations as low as ng.L⁻¹ in complex matrices. Furthermore, 285 understanding the isotopic fingerprint of ENMs can help distinguish natural from 286 287 manufactured ENMs, and even the synthetic methods and manufacturers of engineered 288 ENMs⁶¹. Such methodologies have surprisingly received scarce attention in mesocosm investigations (e.g. 141Ce-enriched Ce-ENMs⁶²) and may represent a straightforward solution 289 for overcoming the current dosing limitations in mesocosm studies. 290

More than addressing the absolute doses, several studies assessed the role of the dosing scenario in the global response of the ecosystems to ENM contamination^{e.g.22,31,33}. Two main mesocosm dosing procedures were published *i.e.* (I) "pulse" treatments that mimic single contamination events and (II) "press" treatments describing continuous addition of low doses of ENMs over the duration of the experiment. These are also referred to as acute or chronic exposures, respectively. Although equally reported in literature (Fig. 3), in recent years press contamination was increasingly applied in order to mimic the chronic exposures expected in aquatic ecosystems^{31,63}. The mesocosms dosing influenced both the ENMs fate and effects, affecting partitioning between the environmental compartments and bioaccumulation and biomagnification in organisms^{31,64}. Using multivariate analysis, Nassar et al. recently highlighted that the dosing scenario constituted the main parameter to consider when investigating the environmental risk for a given ecosystem exposed to ENMs with different sizes and coatings⁶⁵.

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Figure 3. The dosing procedure (left) and ranges of concentrations (dose, right) applied for aquatic mesocosm contamination. The dose concentration ranges refer to the total ENMs input in the mesocosms at the end of the experiment.

2.3 ENM partitioning within ecological compartments

More than the absolute dose, the environmental risk posed by ENMs stems from their accumulation and speciation within ecological compartments. ENM partitioning in mesocosms is driven by bio-physico-chemical transformation processes leading to the distribution of large aggregates in the sediments and more well-dispersed ENMs or dissolved metals in the water column. Espinasse et al., reported short aqueous residence times in a wetland mesocosm for a range of ENMs (Ag > TiO_2 > SWCNT > CeO_2 ENMs) with half-lives in the water ranged from 36 h for CeO_2 -NPs to 10 d for Ag-NPs⁶⁶. Such an environmental partitioning results from dynamic (bio)transformations in the ecosystem regulated by environmental factors such as the water chemistry, the ENM properties, the exposure scenario and the mesocosm design.

To investigate the contribution of each of these parameters on the ENM partitioning, multivariate analyses were performed on data extracted from the papers reviewed herein. Among the fifty peer-reviewed papers initially screened, 31 that comprehensively reported the concentrations of metals detected in the environmental compartments as well as data about both the ENMs used (e.g. composition, size, coating) and experimental parameters applied (e.g. dose and dosing, mesocosm location, duration and total water volume of mesocosm) were selected (Supporting Information, table S2). It must be noted that the analysis did not include environmental factors that showed low variability between the studies (e.g. pH, 8.2 ± 0.6 in average) or large daily or seasonal changes during the experiments (e.g. pH, T, dissolved O_2). Parameters that were not comprehensively investigated/reported across the studies under exam (e.g. organic and total suspended matter) were not included in this analysis. ENM partitioning was expressed as the percentage of injected metals found in the water column at the end of the experiments (107 d on average), which is an indicator of ENMs environmental distribution often reported in literature.

PERMANOVA analysis (Supporting Information, Table S3) showed that at the end of the exposure mesocosm size (water volume), experiment duration and location had a major role in defining the metal partitioning (p-value<0.05). In Canonical Correlation Analysis (Fig. 4), a strong linear correlation was identified between the mesocosm water volume and the percentage of metals in the water (R² = 0.163, p-value ≤ 0.001). This is attributed to a higher water height in larger mesocosms, resulting in longer settling time and metal persistency in water. Conversely, the experiment duration was inversely correlated to the percentage of

metals in water ($R^2 = 0.049$, p-value = 0.023), which is consistent with the kinetics of ENMs settling onto surficial sediments.

The mesocosm location (i.e. indoor or outdoor) had a significant impact on the system variance (PERMANOVA, $R^2 = 0.064$, p-value ≤ 0.005) but in Canonical Correlation Analysis this parameter was poorly correlated with the percentage of metals in the water. It is noteworthy that the long-term accumulation of the metals/ENMs in the sediments was observed independently of the location, suggesting that both indoor and outdoor designs were consistent in reproducing the behaviour of metal ENMs in aquatic ecosystems on the long-term

It must be noted that, since the data used for this statistical analysis referred to the end of the experiments (107 d on average), the results presented here may underestimate the role that parameters played over the short term. For instance, the intrinsic ENM physico-chemical properties (size, chemistry, coating), the water chemistry (freshwater vs seawater), and the dosing scenario had no major role in defining the metal partitioning at the end of the experiment (p-value>0.05). For the dosing scenario, the Canonical Correlation Analysis suggests that press dosing (chronic) was directly correlated with the percentage of metals in the water, whereas pulse dosing (acute) was inversely correlated (Fig. 4). This was consistent with the observations reported in literature, i.e. that for a given ENM dose pulse additions caused a short-term higher aqueous concentration but also rapid settling of the ENMs onto the sediments, whereas press treatments lead to a higher persistence of ENMs in the water column on the longer term. For instance, Colman et al. showed that, in wetland mesocosms, water [Aq] in chronic exposures matched those of the acute treatment after three weeks, and were ~200-fold higher after 7 months at equal total doses³¹. In pond mesocosms, Ce-ENMs sedimentation rates were not significantly different following pulse or press dosing, but chronic addition resulted in a higher final Ce concentration in water column after 1 month²². Comparable behaviors were also observed in stream³² or saltwater ecosystems^{41,43,49}.

Nonetheless, a limitation in the statistical analysis was due to the lack of data available about important parameters driving ENM fate. For instance, while conductivity was often reported as an estimate of mesocosm water ionic strength, the ionic species in solution were seldom characterized. Similarly, while macrophytes and associated biofilm have been described as a main factor for ENM fate^{e.g.67,68}, estimates of the biomass and surface area are missing. Statistical analysis such as the one presented here will benefit from more comprehensive datasets including such data and future mesocosms studies are expected to fill these gaps.

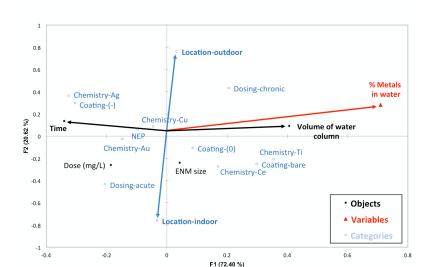


Fig. 4. Canonical Correlation Analysis showing the relationships between qualitative (blue) and quantitative (black) parameters and the amount of metals in the water column (%, red) at the end of the experiments. The arrows identify the significant parameters (p-value<0.05 in PERMANOVA) and the angle between the arrows indicates the degree of linear correlation between them.

3. Environmental risk for aquatic ecological niches

3.1 The benthic compartment: high exposure to less reactive ENMs

A predominant accumulation of the ENMs and metals onto the sediment was transversally reported across the studies, driven by homo- and/or hetero-aggregation with natural

colloidse.g.⁶⁹,⁷⁰ and interaction with various aquatic organisms⁶⁶. Thus, benthic organisms are predominantly exposed to aggregated ENMs, accumulated at the top sediment layer (0-1 cm)^{23,71,72}. Once in the sediments, ENMs can be remobilized via bioturbation, feeding, and entered the food web. Studies highlighted ENMs biomagnification and ENMs trophic transfers, e.g. from biofilm to insect larvae, molluscs and fish^{24,41,64}.

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403 The risk posed to the benthic communities did not only depend on the relatively more important doses in sediments but also on the metals speciation. Studies described 404 405 (bio)transformation processes are relevant in such dynamic redox environment and after interaction with benthic biota. Oxidation/sulfidation is a major transformation pathway for 406 407 ENMs such as Aq, Zn and Cu in sub-oxic and anoxic environments^{29,56}. Lowry et al., showed that sulfidation of Aq-ENMs in freshwater sediment and organisms involves the oxidation of 408 Aq(0) to Aq(1) and subsequent formation of Aq₂S and sulfhydryl compounds²⁹. The 409 transformed Ag-ENMs remained bioavailable to benthic species^{29,31,66}. However, the 410 diminished solubility and reactivity of these by-products translated to slower metal 411 dissolution, lower uptake and weaker damage on aquatic plants, benthic microbial 412 community and (in)vertebrate compared to pristine ENMs^{73,74,75}. In the case of Cu-ENMs, sulfidation could even enhance mobility and dissolution, contributing to a faster 414 transformation of the pristine ENMs via Cu-S- and Cu-O- binding with organic matter⁶⁷.

Grazing benthic macroorganisms such as snails and filter feeders have been shown to 416 accumulated Ag-, Ce-, Cu- and C-ENMs^{23,46,48,76} and had the highest concentration factor in 417 complex food webs exposed to Au-ENMs⁴¹. In estuarine ecosystems, evidence of DNA 418 419 damage and oxidative stress in clams exposed to Cu- and Aq-ENMs is attributed to the uptake of aggregated ENMs containing redox active metals⁴⁸. In freshwater ecosystems, ENM contamination led to behavioural alterations of bivalve filtering capacity (Ce-ENM76) 421 and molluscs excretion rates (Au- and Cu-ENMs⁷⁷). Ce-ENMs also induced oxidative stress to snails and genotoxic effects in amphibian larvae^{24,78}, linked to the uptake of aggregated 423 ENMs and the subsequent bioreduction of Ce(IV) in Ce(III)^{70,76}. In these studies, citrate coated 424 Ce-ENMs were less aggregated and more bioavailable 76, but caused lower oxidative stress, 426 likely because of the antioxidant properties of the organic ligands²³.

Macrophytes and benthic algae were found to be an important target for Ce-³², Ti-^{33,34}, Ag-³¹ and Cu-ENMs⁶⁷,⁷⁹. Aquatic plants present a high surface area and could sequester a significant fraction of ENMs in the long term, mostly due to adsorption and uptake onto plants roots, tissues and associated microbiome^{67,68,80}. These processes influence ENMs cycling by immobilizing the ENMs and reintroducing them in the food web^{29,66}. However,

most studies did not identify the main interaction mechanisms between ENMs and plant 432 tissues. Negative effects on periphyton endpoints (e.g. algal density, viability, diversity, 433 434 chlorophyll production, biomass growth) were also observed at relatively high doses (> 1 435 mg/L) of Ti-^{27,33}, Al-²⁶, and Fe-ENMs²⁸ in lotic and lentic ecosystems. 436 Biofilms associated with sediment and benthic organisms were also often identified as an important sinke.g.41,81 and can contribute to the immobilization of the ENMs as well as their 437 438 biotransformation^{68,82} and entry in the food web⁵⁰. However, the impact of ENMs on benthic microbiota appeared to be limited, even in the case of the expectedly toxic Aq- and Cu-440 ENMs. Several studies found negligible effects on prokaryote abundance and diversity in 441 saltwater⁴³ and freshwater sediments⁸³. On a longer term, the stability of microbial community function and structure was associated with a developed tolerance to metals in 442 constructed wetlands81. Interestingly, other studies highlighted how resilience depends on 443 444 population density and how specific taxa were more sensitive to contamination⁸⁴.

3.2 The planktonic compartment: low exposure to more reactive species

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Because ENMs primarily partition onto the sediments, most of the research focused on the fate and effects in the benthic compartments and data available on planktonic communities are limited. However, despite the presence of low ENM concentrations in the water column over time, exposure of planktonic biota involved potentially more bioavailable, reactive and consequently potentially toxic ENMs and metals.

consequently potentially toxic ENMs and metals. Several works investigated the role of dissolution as a transformation pathway that might release toxic by-products as free-metal ions. Avellan et al., recently showed the (bio)dissolution of Au-ENMs by bacteria within biofilms growing on macrophytes and the metals complexation in stable cyanide, hydroxyl or thiolic derivatives⁶⁸, ⁸². A rapid dissolution was also observed in freshwater for Cu nano-pesticides⁸⁵ and Al-ENMs²⁶ and it can be expected for ENMs such as ZnO, whose toxicity has been related to ions rather than nanoparticulate forms⁵⁶. In other studies, quantitative assessment of dissolution was difficult to estimate due to re-complexation of the resulting ions with natural suspended matter. Furtado et al., found relatively low dissolution rates of Ag-ENMs in freshwater lake mesocosms at low ionic strength and high dissolved organic carbon (DOC), and concluded that free metals such as Ag⁺ ions were removed by complexation with natural organic matter (NOM)³⁵. Hence, while ENMs were observed to decrease in size, they may have formed

larger hetero-aggregates rich in metals. Other studies showed that plant derived DOC stabilized the Ag- and Ce-ENMs in suspension and that the adsorption of organic ligands blocked the oxidation sites and prevented dissolution^{86,87}.

Furthermore, decreasing the ENM size, due to the progressive desorption of metals, can dramatically change their behavior, leading to enhanced mobility, reactivity, and toxicity. In wetland mesocosms, smaller Ce-ENMs interacted more with suspended solids and were significantly more bioavailable to (micro)organisms⁸⁸. Similarly, in a marine ecosystem, the negative effects of Ag-ENMs to plankton communities were associated with diminishing sizes and dissolved silver ions in solution⁴⁵. Tsiola et al., showed that Ag-ENMs and the resulting dissolved Ag ions significantly affected seawater planktonic microbial communities⁴⁵. In particular, they observed noxious effects on specific species and highlighted the potential damage to photosynthetic activity of cyanobacteria. In freshwater, Ag-ENMs affected the abundance and had a hormesis effect on the planktonic microbial communities⁸⁹. In the water column, a bioaccumulation of Ag-ENMs was found in dragonfly larvae²⁹, whereas the toxicity of Ce-ENMs was observed in amphibian larvae⁷⁸. A significant bioaccumulation of Ag-ENMs and Ti-ENMs was also observed in higher organisms such as fish species^{21,29}.

3.3 Global ecosystem response

Mesocosm studies provide a global view of the ecosystem responses including toxicity arising from indirect interactions with ENMs as well as shifts in complex ecological processes and ecosystem functioning^{30,78}. For instance, the noxious effects of Ce-ENMs toward secondary consumers in pond mesocosms was not observed in parallel experiments with direct or trophic chain exposures⁷⁸. The authors attributed the toxicity to changes in the microbiota community, affecting the nitrogen cycle and litter decomposition. Thus, the ecosystem equilibria may be altered following disturbances to key ecological processes related to biota respiration or nutrient production and consumption. Toxicity to detritivores such as chironomid larvae²⁴, combined with shifts in the structure of fungal and bacteria communities^{90,91,92}, have also been shown to alter organic matter decomposition and the availability of nutrients.

A decrease in chlorophyll production and algal biomass as well as variations of abiotic parameters such as redox potential and dissolved oxygen were reported after exposure to Fe-^{20,28}, Al-²⁶ and Ti-ENMs²⁷. Further studies suggested a limited impact on the long-term, but effects of Ag- and Cu-ENMs on photosynthesis and methane metabolism⁸³.

In a few instances, the authors reported major ecosystem disruption and were able to characterize a complex cascade of effects following contamination. A strong eutrophication was observed in wetland mesocosms due to a synergistic effect of either Au- or Cu-ENMs with nutrient enrichment, which led to an extended algal bloom (>50 d) in comparison with nutrient only treatments⁹³. In this case, an increase in water turbidity eventually affected plant growth and caused up to 92% reduction of the ecosystem primary production. Colman et al., related the toxicity of Ag-ENMs to macrophytes and phytoplankton with a general disruption of the ecosystem resulting in increased methanogenesis³⁰. In this study, an initial damage to autotrophs led to the release of DOC and an increase of heterotrophic prokaryote abundance and respiration. In turn, the consumption of dissolved O₂ and diminished photosynthetic activity resulted in hypoxia, which combined with elevated CO₂ and decreased methane consumption led to a 40-fold increase of CH₄ in the wetland. Although such processes were observed after single pulse additions at relatively high doses of Ag-ENMs, a similar response of a lower magnitude was also identified in further experiments at lower concentrations³¹.

Other studies reported minor or no changes in the ecosystem functioning, but identified negative effects on specific ecological niches. In lake mesocosms, amendment of Ti-ENMs led to a significant decrease of soluble reactive phosphorus and although a wide range of organisms (phytoplankton, plants and fishes) was unaffected³⁷. The authors reported a significant decrease in the biomass of Rotifer species, which typically display high reproductive rates and tolerance to environmental changes. Similarly, in two different studies, the exposure to Ag-ENMs had no major consequences on most organisms under investigation but affected benthic nitrifying bacteria, decreasing nitrification rates in the ecosystem and altering the nitrogen cycling^{72,84}. Recently, Li et al., further investigated these processes, with a focus on the synergies between ENM and endogenous metal species⁹⁴.

4. Environmental perspectives and current knowledge gaps

4.1 Need for life-cycle oriented approaches

ENMs release in the environment can occur at any stage of the value chain, i.e. from synthesis to application/use and eventual disposal (Figure 5). The environmental research so far has mainly focused on pristine ENMs (85% of mesocosm studies considered herein) rather than nano-enabled products (NEPs). However, given the strict control at production and processing sites, incidental discharge into the environment may be more relevant during the

use and end-of-life phases. Environmental research on aged ENM by-products and NEPs is still very limited, especially in the case of mesocosms studies (11% and 4% of the studies considered herein, respectively).

Recent studies have stressed the need for life-cycle oriented approaches considering realistic exposure scenarios and the actual state of ENMs entering the environment^{6,95,96} and their further aging in natural matrices^{3,97}. Aquatic mesocosms represent an invaluable tool for lifecycle oriented studies, as they implicitly account for the bio-physico-chemical aging of these NEPs and aged ENMs and can highlight differences in environmental fate and impacts over long periods. For instance, an estuarine mesocosm experiment focusing on consumer products containing Ag-ENMs, found a gradual release of up to 99% of the Ag ions over 60 days⁴⁹. The Ag released by three different NEPs displayed higher persistence in the water column compared to ionic Ag and pristine Ag-ENMs, and enhanced bioconcentration in biofilm, snails and clams. On the contrary, Auffan et al., reported diminished aqueous persistence of Cu-ENMs associated to fragmented paint NEPs⁹⁸. In their study, only 1% of the Cu remained in the water column after 28 days, compared to 10% of the pristine ENMs. In addition, the paint matrix prevented (bio)transformation of the ENMs, with regard to dissolution and complexation. More recently, Chatel et al., reported an enhanced bioaccumulation of pristine Ti-ENMs compared to cement-embedded counterparts in freshwater snails99.

These studies highlighted a significant difference between pristine and matrix-embedded ENMs, suggesting that most results gathered to date should be considered with caution, as they may not be representative of the actual behavior of ENMs entering the ecosystem. The characterization of pristine ENMs is still fundamental for risk assessment and management, and is the basis for understanding transformed ENM properties⁵⁶. However, future research should focus on NEPs especially in the context of safe(r)-by-design products¹⁰⁰. In particular, priority should be given to reproducing aged NEPs from realistic sources and to the application of relevant dosing for better mimicking real contamination scenarios. In this framework, protocols/strategies have been developed for the production of suitable materials, i.e. fragmented NEP and relative ENMs-free products to be used as controls^{95,96}. Better use of these protocols should overcome current limitations in the understanding of NEPs environmental release, exposure, risk, and life cycle assessment^{101,102}.

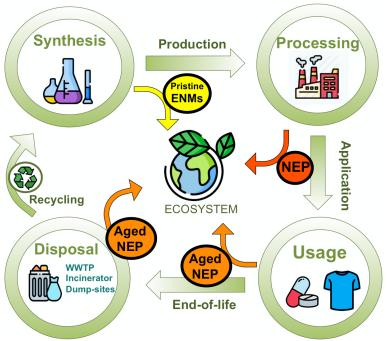


Figure 5. The potential release of pristine engineered nanomaterials (ENMs), nano-enabled products (NEPs), and aged NEPs along ENM value chain.

4.2 Toward the standardization of mesocosm experiments in nanosafety

Although the popularity of mesocosms and similar ATS is arising, especially for ecotoxicity purposes^{2,4}, such methodologies are surprisingly under-utilized for ENM environmental risk assessment. Main limitations identified are the lack of standardized protocols and the lack of comprehensive data sets applicable to all potential contamination scenarios. However, depending on their application, ENM contamination scenarios will likely concern specific environmental compartments, whose assessment should be grouped and prioritized. For instance, Ti-ENMs released from sunscreen consumer products accumulate in sediments in near-shore freshwater and seawater environments and likely affect offshore environments to

a lower extent^{103,104,105}. Similarly, WWTP and constructed wetland effluents as well as river sediments downstream of production sites were identified as hotspots of ENMs contamination 106,107. In this context, mesocosms should be seen as tools for regional-scale evaluations of such impacted areas, i.e. providing information about ENM fate and effects under the most relevant conditions. While the current lack of standardization of mesocosms translates to a lack of regulatory relevance, the same argument may be valid contrariwise, as the lack of regulatory relevance currently hampers mesocosms use. Standardization may be considered challenging, due to the overall complexity of mesocosms compared to other more classic approaches. However, it must be noted that specific designs, e.g. for mimicking pond and wetland environments, have been consistently applied in the last decade with essentially identical procedures. Similarly, dual-tanks systems for mimicking the tidal cycle have been applied and optimized to reproduce estuarine environments. These designs have allowed for the study and comparison of several ENM classes in potentially affected environmental compartments, and provide set up examples for future research investigations. In general, no mesocosms design is a priori better than another, since the design should be tailored to mimic the exposure scenario of interest. Nonetheless, the design must be comprehensive of the ecosystem setting and complexity, for instance with regard to micro-biota and organisms, which should be representative of both the planktonic and benthic compartments. Biota populations and mesocosm sizes should also be harmonized, in order to avoid stress or behavioural changes e.g. due to population densities. According with the studies reviewed here, experimental periods of several weeks or months are recommended, in order to allow mid- to long-term observations of ENMs fate, ecosystem response and trajectory. Furthermore, an acclimation period is also recommended prior contamination to better mimic the equilibrated ecosystem. Finally, mesocosms are self-sufficient environments and once operating should not be extensively manipulated except for sampling, e.g. with the addition of organisms, food sources or nutrients. Future studies will need to further identify and characterize the most important parameters influencing ENM exposure and hazard, which will in turn define the designs applied to future experiments.

5. Conclusion

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Mesocosms are increasingly being used for the study of ENM environmental fate and effects, 616 and were reviewed here with a focus on aquatic ecosystems. When compared to most SOP, the advantage of mesocosms is the possibility to mimic realistic contamination scenarios, 617 618 comprehensive of natural complexity and synergies between contaminants and natural 619 components. Addressing multiple endpoints during dynamic ecological processes allows a realistic, kinetic-oriented investigation of ENM exposure and hazards of target ecological 621 niches. Furthermore, mesocosms incorporate experimental periods of months to years, thus 622 allowing the long-term characterization of ENM contamination and ecosystem response and 623 624 Different mesocosms designs were consistent in showing that ENMs entering the aquatic

Different mesocosms designs were consistent in showing that ENMs entering the aquatic environment will be predominantly removed from the water column and accumulate onto the sediments. Statistical analysis suggests that such an accumulation will occur in the long-term, independent of ENM physico-chemical properties. As a result, the potential risk for aquatic benthos is defined by a higher accumulation of less reactive species (e.g. homo-/hetero-aggregated, sulfidised). On the contrary, the risk for planktonic species will result from a lower concentration of potentially more reactive ENM/metals.

Future studies will need to address current knowledge gaps, with special regard to the identification of the most environmentally relevant ENMs/NEPs and their realistic dosing. In addition, the scientific outcome to date had a stronger focus on the characterization of the ENM fate than ecological effects and ecosystem responses, which are crucial for risk assessment. Large and heterogeneous datasets are produced within mesocosms that should be fully exploited. In this context, researchers should carefully define analytical and operative strategies in advance, in order to generate findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable data for the nanosafety community and stakeholders.

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