

Looking for the *cosmopolitical fish*: monitoring marine pollution with anglers and congers in the Gulf of Fos, southern France¹

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ABSTRACT

Following a heated local controversy over the construction of a waste incinerator in the Fos-sur-Mer industrial area near Marseille, residents pointed to the lack of knowledge of the industry’s cumulative impact on their health and environment. Under pressure, some of their representatives supported the creation of an independent scientific organization, the Ecocitizen Institute for Pollution Awareness (IECP). Its aim was to conduct independent, localized scientific research on the chronic effects of pollution, and to lobby the administration to change its regulatory practices. This paper examines the work of the IECP to ensure that the “undone science” (Frickel et al. 2010) of pollution and its impacts gets done, by focusing on the specificities of this highly industrialized site. We look at a participatory biomonitoring experiment aimed at documenting pollution in the Gulf of Fos, where scientists working for the IECP accepted anglers’ concerns and requests and switched from a standard sentinel species to another species (conger or *Conger conger*). We tell the many stories that were shared with us about how congers qualified as a more suitable “cosmopolitical fish” in the study of pollution. Elaborating on actor-network theory and multispecies ethnographies, we go on to discuss the appropriateness and success of congers as the newly appointed sentinel species aiding the detection of mercury and PCB contamination hotspots. We argue that this demonstrates the importance of the “ecology of multispecies relations” (Stengers 2010) in maintaining the livability of the area.

KEYWORDS: pollution; citizen science; environmental monitoring; bioindication; sentinel species; multispecies relations; cosmopolitics

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