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Title: “Partial” knowledge brokers: Environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) and ocean governance

Abstract: Environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) play an important role in ocean and coastal governance, highlighting the need to protect, maintain, and restore healthy ocean and coastal habitats. They can have expertise in social and natural science, public participation strategies, communications, and governance. Because of their role on the periphery – traversing government, civil society, academia – they are uniquely positioned to serve as knowledge brokers in ocean governance issues. At the same time, ENGOS advocate for particular policy solutions, which creates a tension between their work helping different types of knowledge travel among a range of policy, civil society, and research communities and their work advocating for specific programs. If an organization is at the same time transmitting knowledge and seeking to promote one particular perspective, can it, in fact, be a knowledge broker? While ENGOS clearly have relevant skills, do they have legitimacy? Can a reflexive approach allow an advocate, a non-impartial organization, still to serve as a “partial” knowledge broker?

In this paper, I present a case study of Ocean Conservancy, an ENGO that works on the issue of coastal and marine spatial planning. Its program involves educating and informing the public, stakeholders, researchers, and decision-makers (and serving as an intermediary among these different groups) as well as advocacy to encourage US Congressional support of science-based, participatory, comprehensive CMSP as a tool to achieve healthy and sustainable ocean and coastal ecosystems. Ocean Conservancy is at once an advocate, a translator of knowledge, a recipient of information, and a public communicator.