

Litter near the sea, back to the source: Labels and inscriptions as a guideline to the origin of the waste

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Litter in the seas and in the ocean is a global problem that is current nowadays. Much is already known about the quantities, locations and types of marine litter. For this project, the researcher searched for the added value of labels and inscriptions found on litter items. This added value was expressed in the form of a shift or specification of the type of origin.

For this study the researcher collected litter in the port, the inland port and on the eastern beach of Ostend. In addition, waste was also obtained from a Proper Strand Loper. The collected/received litter was analysed on the basis of material type, ability to recycle, OSPAR-category, weathering and presence of labels and inscriptions (examples of this are logos, production sites, expiry dates, icons...). Via the internet the researcher searched for brands and production sites that could be linked to these labels and inscriptions.

Then, each item was linked to one or more types of origin(s): tourism, fishing (including recreational), aquaculture, offshore activities, construction and industry, events, general (food, textiles, sanitation, medical, varia) and unidentifiable. Items on which labels and inscriptions were found were classified twice in this step. A first time without and a second time while taking into account the presence of the labels and inscriptions.

The study gives an indication of the origin of the waste in Ostend and of the added value of studying labels and inscriptions on litter items. The results show that a large part of the items cannot be linked to a specific type of origin (21-65%). Besides, there appears to be waste from fishing or offshore activities at each location (22-70%). The percentage of this is highest in the inland port.

This thesis is one of the rare attempts to trace the origin even better by means of labels and inscriptions found on litter items. Of the collected items, 11.5% contained labels and inscriptions. 7% of these labels and inscriptions had an added value in the classification of the item in type of origin. This added value is mainly situated in a shift from 'general - varia' and/or 'unidentifiable' to 'food' (5.7%).

The new information from this thesis offers perspectives for future research and innovation projects, and can also be consulted by policymakers and organisations to base future measures on.