

Editorial

Advancements in Biomonitoring and Remediation Treatments of Pollutants in Aquatic Environments, 2nd Edition

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Worldwide anthropogenic activities continuously produce and release hundreds of potentially toxic chemicals that contaminate ecosystems, leaving devastating effects on the environment and living beings, humans included.

Water pollution has received more and more concern because of the increasing contemporary requests for clean and safe drinking water and the general awareness of the severe conditions of water sources. Freshwater contaminants include industrial effluents containing metals, dyes, pharmaceuticals, other organic compounds, wastewater treatment plant effluents, a complex mixture of municipal, hospital, runoff agrochemicals, and mining activity residues [1–4]. Additional environmental stressors are eutrophication, overfishing, excess exploitation, and land-use changes. The microbiological contamination is a different but equally serious threat to ecosystem stability and human health [5,6]. Seawater is particularly affected by antifouling agents, paints, petrol additives, ship maintenance activities, and existing river contaminants. Moreover, water bodies and their inhabitants are now facing the threats of this century via contamination with nanomaterials, notably plastic debris [7–11]. The requested global efforts to face these problems can probably find significant help in the new tools developed in the research of biomonitoring and remediation technologies.

To design proper remediation strategies, both the origin and impacts of the threats must be accurately diagnosed using chemical, biological, spatial, and temporal integrated data [12–14]. Accordingly, biomonitoring is a transdisciplinary activity that evaluates the type, source, and extent of pollution and its consequences on a single species, the ecosystems' structure, and the food chain.

In monitoring water quality, the physicochemical analyses represent the backbone of the activity. However, even with enforcing the most innovative analytical technologies, physicochemical analyses alone cannot assess or predict the consequences of environmental stressors on the ecosystem inhabitants. The aquatic organisms, animal and vegetal, are exploited to investigate different aspects of the ecosystem. Up to now, they have been irreplaceable as passive samplers, or bioaccumulators, of the xenobiotics present in water, and their tissues are analyzed to determine the presence and concentration of a specific contaminant, even present in traces. This practice allows evaluating over time the appearance and modification of the contaminant content, following or not following a remediation treatment [15–18].

Information about the structural and physiological damages suffered by aquatic biota comes from studying the alteration that occurred to selected biomarkers in cells, individuals, populations, and communities [19–23]. The *in vitro* tests are still of outstanding importance since, in these simplified systems, it is easier to ascertain the toxic potential and biomarker modifications produced by a compound. Moreover, new sensitive organisms can be identified and selected, and more suitable biomarkers can be identified.

In analyzing the more complex environmental samples, all parameters concerning both the organisms and the environmental conditions must be considered. To address this problem statistically, relevant multimetric indices have been developed to integrate



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the complex biomarker responses, provide a holistic approach, and help optimize the monitoring campaigns [13,14,24–26].

The endpoints of ecotoxicological tests have evolved in parallel with biotechnological progress [27]. Morphological and biochemical-based approaches are now supported using transcriptomic analysis and metabolomic studies, allowing us to identify the exact genetic or metabolic function altered by the pollutants. The appearance of genetic damages prolongs the negative impact of pollutants even after their removal [22,28–32].

An analysis of eDNA and eRNA is applied to elucidate the changes in biodiversity and communities' structure. The environmental DNA and RNA metabarcoding technologies represent non-invasive sampling methods since only environmental genetic material is collected and offer more precise and complete population fingerprinting concerning the classic morphological assessment [33–38].

To meet the growing water-pollution-based issues, traditional and innovative technologies for organic and heavy metal remediation are continuously being improved. Remediation procedures must consider the presence of microbial contamination, not in wastewater only, and then these methods must be applied according to the reclaimed water application [39].

Bioremediation procedures proved to be among the most sustainable for environmental remediation. The addition of suitable microorganisms can be effective in the presence of organic contaminants; they can metabolize, absorb, or modify [40–43].

Biosorption phenomena are exploited in constructed wetlands or with the addition of macrophytes or algal species to contaminated water [44,45]. Various natural origin materials are used alone or in combination in bio-physical adsorption treatments [46–49]. Adsorption can be a simple and effective solution, but the regeneration of the adsorbent materials and/or their safe disposal are problems still not completely solved.

Forced aeration, floating aquatic plants, and submerged macrophytes increase the oxygen content and inhibit algal growth, reversing eutrophication in lakes and ponds [50]. The in situ phytoremediation is not widely used because it requires longer treatment times for physicochemical methods, but the low cost and the environmentally friendly characteristics deserve greater attention [51].

The physical removal of contaminants from the water now exploits the most innovative tools, such as nanomaterials. Nanotechnologies represent a deeply studied and applied solution for removing heavy metals, organic pollutants, and microorganisms with the enhanced adsorption and degradation capacity of pollutants via redox reactions [52–55]. These techniques can also employ different solutions, such as metal-organic framework materials [56] or magnetic nanoparticles [57,58]. The zero-valent iron nanoparticles, simple or modified, demonstrate very high efficiency in removing both organic and inorganic pollutants [59].

A different kind of adsorbent is the polyelectrolyte-incorporated material, of which practical application needs further improvements [60]. On the other hand, continuous research efforts are made to obtain optimized filtration membranes for efficient and rapid water remediation [61].

The degradation of pollutant molecules to less harmful derivatives is the main remediation strategy of chemical methods. Photoreactions and catalyst-based photoreactions are successfully employed to treat contaminated water, where the catalysts are nanomaterials, usually metal oxides or carbon dots [62,63]. The potential of these and similar Advanced Oxidation Processes (AOPs) is extensively investigated, especially in tertiary wastewater treatment. Most compounds of emerging concerns are particularly recalcitrant [64–66].

Bio-electrochemical methods developed to repair surface waters can be based on floating bed-microbial electrochemical systems [67,68] or on bio-electrochemical systems (BES), the latter able to remove contaminants while generating electricity [69]. In particular cases, e.g., fluoride remediation, the electrocoagulation process can reach the goal [70]. On the other hand, the piezoelectric effect can degrade the pollutants directly or enhance photocatalysis [71].

Most of the described innovative techniques are effective at the lab-scale level, and various have the potential for real-life applications. Future research should focus on the most promising technologies to scale up and use on environmental, industrial, or urban contaminated water.

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