

**The Italian water movement and the “politics of the commons”:  
contesting representative democracy and exploring new patterns of political participation**

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*Abstract*

The unexpected success of June 2011 referenda has been widely considered as one of the most striking political events of the last decade in Italy. Two of the four referenda, promoted by a wide coalition of social forces united in the Italian Water Movements Forum were called against the privatisation of water services. The Italian water movement framed the issues of water services management in terms of “democracy, human rights and the commons”. In the aftermath of the referenda success, reference to “the commons” has become a master frame, inspiring other social movements and mobilisations on various issues such as labour, school and university, occupation of theatres and other public or private spaces... Within the Italian water movement, the reference to the commons entails: *i*) a critique of the institutions of representative democracy and traditional political parties; *ii*) the revitalisation of institutions of direct democracy (i.e. referendum, citizens’ bills...) and the search for original patterns of local participatory democracy within the processes of republicisation of water services (i.e. advisory boards with users, movements and workers’ representatives; *iii*) the adoption by the movement of organisational patterns inspired by the principles of inclusiveness, horizontality and spontaneity (a decentralised and non-professional structure based on local committees of volunteers and militants, the decisions-making process by consensus, the refusal of charismatic leadership...). The interplay of these three different processes constitutes “the politics of the commons” that we tried to disentangle in the present article.

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## Introduction

The Italian struggle against water privatization, started since the end of the 1990s, has represented one of the most original, and unexpected, experiences of popular participation in contemporary Italy, joining a vast coalition of movements, NGOs, trade unions, civic committees and individual citizens. The success story of the national Referenda held in 2011 – including questions proposed by the Italian Water Movements Forum (Forum Italiano dei Movimenti per l'Acqua, hereinafter the Forum) related to the privatization of water utilities and to the margin of profits that these utilities realize – can be regarded as the culmination of this struggle. Since the referenda campaign, the notion of “water as human right and commons” and the *motto* of the Forum ‘Si scrive acqua si legge democrazia’ (‘You write it water, you read it democracy’) have become a popular way of expressing the broader political meaning and relevance of opposing water privatization. By virtue of the referenda success, the reference to the notion of “the commons” has inspired other social movements and mobilisations, standing out as the “master frame” to express grievances on a plurality of heterogeneous issues (labour, knowledge, internet, culture, universities, schools, territory and soil, occupation of theatres and other public spaces...). Furthermore, the notion of “the democracy of the commons” (Bersani 2011) has been proposed in order to promote a broader alliance between these different movements and struggles.

The present article aims at analysing: *i*) how the notion of the commons emerged as master frame within the Italian water movement; *ii*) what this notion implies in terms of the definition of the Italian water movement’ narratives, practices and understanding of the idea of democracy; and *iii*) which are the reasons behind the success of the notion of the commons within contemporary Italian social movements.

The thesis we wish to present is that the reference to the commons entails a plurality of meanings and notions that allow holding together heterogeneous political backgrounds and repertoires of contention. On one side, we propose a framework of analysis in order to highlight three different typologies or subframe of the notion of “water as commons”, exploring in particular their content in terms of *i*) the production of locality, *ii*) the perception, critics and practices of democracy and political participation, and *iii*) the identity, self representation and internal organisation of the movements themselves. On the other side, we identify some commons features entailed in the notion of the commons, namely: *i*) a critique of the institutions of representative democracy and traditional political parties; *ii*) the revitalisation of institutions of direct democracy (i.e. referendum, citizens’ bills...) and the search for original patterns of local participatory democracy within the processes of republicisation of water services (i.e. advisory boards with users, movements and workers’ representatives); *iii*) the adoption by the movement of organisational

patterns inspired by the principles of inclusiveness, horizontality and spontaneity. In order to do so, we retrace the “politics of the commons”, namely the genealogy of the notion of the commons within the Italian water movement and its translation into strategies and practices of political participation.

After a methodological note, the first section of the article synthesizes the international academic debate about the notion of the commons within struggles against water privatisation, describing in particular how the notion emerged within two main streams: the commons as a mode of governance and commons as a political idea. Subsequently the section analyses how the notion emerged within the Italian water movement and the debate that it has generated. The review aims at setting the ground to explain and compare our approach of the “politics of the commons” to those existing. The second section presents the Italian case and the approach of our analysis. Starting from a short description of the evolution of water services reform and of the water movement in Italy, we introduce a typology of *water as commons* discourses and practices: water as common good of humankind, water as a commons of the local territory, and water as a commons beyond the public and the private. The conclusion discusses the typology and its implications for comparative analysis of water policy and politics.

## **Methodology**

In the absence of previous studies on the Italian water movement, the present article inserts in a broader research project aimed at offering the first comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon (Carrozza and Fantini 2013) and draws on:

- i) a literature review on social struggles against the privatization of water services and the notion of the commons, with particular focus on European countries, as well as the review of the growing literature and debate on the commons in contemporary Italy;
- ii) the review of the Forum’s documents, manifestos, videos and press releases, collected from the Forum’s official website and mailing list, as well as published accounts of the movement’s experience by its protagonists (Bersani 2011, Jampaglia and Molinari 2010, Molinari 2007, Mattei 2012, Petrella 2001, Zanotelli 2010). The review has informed the analysis of the framing process of water issues in terms of “human right and commons” undertaken by the movement;
- iii) twenty-one semi-structured interviews with water movement representatives in different Italian regions (Piemonte, Lombardia, Veneto, Lazio, Molise, Puglia) conducted between January and March 2013.

iv) participatory observation to three events organized by the Forum's local committee during the 2011 referenda campaign (two in Turin and one in Milan) and to four events organized in the aftermath of the referenda in 2012 in Turin complemented the analysis.

### **From “Reclaiming public water” to “The democracy of the commons”**

A peculiar cycle seems to shape contemporary policies and social mobilisations on water. On one side, international institutions like the World Bank and the World Water Council are promoting the application of the modernist and technocratic approach of public-private partnership elaborated in high-income countries to address water related issues in the cities of the so-called “Global South” (Goldman 2007). On the other side, in order to contrast these policies, social movements in European or North-American countries are borrowing themes and practices from the struggles in the “Global South”, like for instance the notion of the commons. Examples of this trend include the 2011 referenda against water privatisation held in Italy or the EU Citizens Initiative aiming at the acknowledgement by European institutions of water as human right and commons. This appears as an original paradigm shift, both at the level of public opinion, social movements and academia.

In fact, in Europe debate and conflicts around water supply and service management in urban areas have been mainly revolving around the dichotomy public vs. private (Barraque, Juuti, Katko, 2006 p. 8; Juuti and Tapio 2005). There are few exceptions of relatively marginal cases falling outside this paradigm, related to cooperative or mutual systems of water management, like the case of water sector reform in Wales (Bakker 2003) or, in Italy, the cooperatives that run water small systems in mountain areas (Dotti 2011). The focus on the dichotomy public/private stems as a consequence of a two centuries process during which in Europe a peculiar water governance and management system emerged. While acknowledging differences within each national systems, Barraque, Juuti and Katko underline how all those models converged in making contemporary Europe “the only continent where the great majority of the population is connected to a public water supply (PWS). Most of the population is connected to centralized public sewage collection and treatment (PSCT), and those who are not are able, at least in low-density areas, to rely on efficient decentralized on-site sanitation systems. In ecologically concerned countries, innovation in sewerage has enabled the development of environment-friendly storm-water control” (Barraque, Juuti, Katko p. 8).

We could identify this model as a “modern” approach, framing water in terms of “resource” to be mastered by mobilising technical skills and tools. This is a biopolitical process (Bakker 2012,” p. 619), mediated by mobilising specific knowledge in terms of culture, science and technology in order to build the State, and to impose its presence in the everyday material life of its

citizens through a specific water supply and sanitation mechanism. This process has been mutually reinforcing with the emergence in Europe of a water industry sectors and private water companies (Suez, Vivendi, Thames water,...). Today these companies are the leaders in the global markets of water services and water management, by virtue of an historical tradition of public private partnership - "*gestion déléguée*" in France (Goubert).

Within this water management framework, social mobilisation, conflicts and struggles over urban water services and against their privatisation in Europe have been mainly analysed in terms of "political participation" to "decision making processes" (Fitch, Kimberly 2007) by citizens, users (Pflieger 2006) and civil society, (Hall, Lobina, De la Motte 2005; Hall, Katko, Sanz Mulas, Lobina, De La Motte 2007). Water activists have been talking about remunicipalisation (TNI, remunicipalisation tracker) or republicisation. They keep on referring mainly to the dichotomy public-private, including the most recent cases, like remunicipalisation of water services in Paris (Barraque 2012) or the referenda held in Berlin on transparency and accountability in water services management.

However, beside these experiences, there is an increasing trend in water movements to frame the struggles against the privatisation of water services by referring to the notion of the commons (Bakker 2007). This notion – traditionally referred to forms of collective management of a wide range of natural resources – has indeed inspired and empowered protests and social movement in many areas of the world and particularly in the so-called Global South (Bakker, Trawick). In these countries, urban water systems supply fails short in ensuring universal coverage and serving the whole urban territory, and consequently they have been described in terms of "archipelagos" rather than "networks". These archipelagos are features by the coexistence and overlapping of different forms of water management services and supply: public utilities, private vendors, community managed water schemes (Bakker 2003). The coexistence and overlapping of these different water supply systems, on the one side allows for a greater and more direct involvement of local communities and users in the management of water and "the commons", beside public and private institutions. On the other side, the asymmetrical power relations, the inequality and unfairness featuring these archipelagos generates a multi-layered citizenship.

Which is the meaning and the rationale behind the adoption of the reference of water as commons within European and North American context marked by almost universal coverage of water services, and water management system organised as centralised capital and knowledge intensive industrial services?

Scholars have approached the notion of the commons at least from two perspectives. The first one can be referred to as "the commons as a system of resources' governance and management"

and focus on the modes of governance beyond the public and the private and beyond the state-market dichotomy, in which local communities have a crucial role. In this perspective, the concept of the commons - more precisely of common pool resource management - is rooted in the experiences of the communal or collective natural resources' ownership and management which have been observed in both high income (Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom et al., 1993; Keohane and Ostrom, 1995; Roberts and Emel, 1992) and low income countries (e.g. Nemarundwe and Kozanayi, 2003). The emergence of these systems has been explained in utilitarian terms – in terms of their role as efficient systems for mitigating over-consumption amongst a delimited group of users (Ostrom, 1990) – or, also, emphasizing the moral economies that underpins these institutions (Trawick, 2001, 2003). The second perspective refers to the commons as a powerful political idea to challenge neoliberal order. By “reclaiming the commons” thousands of groups and movements all around the world are organizing their resistance against the neoliberal governance and the commodification of public and private life. (Klein 2001).

Both these meanings of the commons, but particularly the second one, are present in the Italian struggle against water privatization, started since the end of the 1990s, which represented one of the most original and unexpected experiences of popular participation in contemporary Italy, joining a vast coalition of movements, NGOs, trade unions and citizens (Carrozza and Fantini 2013).

Reference to the commons within the Italian water movement emerged as a consequence of two main streams. On one side, by co-organising and participating to alter-globalisation international events like the World Social Forum, Italian activist got acquainted with Latin America indigenous struggles on water resources management framed in terms of “reclaiming the commons”. Consequently they reverberated these experiences in framing the mobilisation against the privatisation of water services in Italy. On the other side, a relevant contribution came from the work of lawyers who took part to the Rodotà Commission, created by the Italian Ministry of Justice in 2006 in order to reform the civil code articles regulating public property (Mattei, Reviglio and Rodotà 2007). The Rodotà Commission proposal did not receive institutional follow up because of the premature fall of the Government led by Romano Prodi in 2007. However it highly influenced the Italian water movement, with this group of lawyers beginning to act as militants and legal advisors to the Forum. These lawyers have been instrumental in drafting the text of the 2011 water referenda. Moreover, two of them, Alberto Lucarelli and Ugo Mattei, in the aftermath of the referenda have been among the protagonists of the re-municipalisation of Naples water services, being appointed respectively as Naples municipality's Councillor on the Commons and Participatory Democracy and Deputy Chair of the Naples Water Agency.

The success of the national referenda held in 2011 can be regarded as the most relevant political success of the Forum. Since the referenda campaign, the Forum's *motto* 'You write it water, you read it democracy' has become a popular way of framing the meaning and the relevance of opposing water privatization in the national context.

The originality of the Italian mobilization, framing water as a common, lies in this genesis in between the worlds of political activism and academia and, indeed, in the impact that this continuous interrelation between discourses and practices had in shaping the politics of water. In this respect, a growing body of literature by scholars and/or activists has emerged with the aim of defining the notion of the commons and its related political agenda (Mattei, Rodotà, Vitale, Bersani), as well as to identify institutional architectures for its governance and management (Mattei, Rodotà, Lucarelli). In parallel, the analysis of the Italian water movement – mainly by its protagonists – presents the struggle for “water as commons” as advocating for more ecologically sound, socially sustainable and democratically governed water resources management system. (cfr Mattei 2013, Bailey 2013, Fattori 2013). This struggle also implies a broader “challenge to the neoliberal order” (Mattei 2013), representing “the backbone of an alternative social order to capitalism” (Ricoverti) and offering a critique of representative democracy, in the name of “water democracy” or the “democracy of the commons” (Bersani 2011).

By virtue of the referenda success, the struggle for water has become a paradigmatic battle for democracy, also as a consequence of the fact that “water has a nearly unlimited ability to carry metaphors’ (Illich 1986: 24). Following the experience of the Forum, the reference to the notion of “the commons” has inspired other social movements and mobilisations (Mattei and Bailey 2013, Rapporto Stato Sociale 2013), standing out as the “master frame” to express grievances on a plurality of heterogeneous issues (labour, knowledge, internet, culture, universities, schools, territory and soil, occupation of theatres and other public spaces...). Furthermore, the notion of “the democracy of the commons” (Bersani 2011) has been proposed in order to promote a broader coalition between these different movements and struggles.

### **Our approach: the politics of the commons**

We analyse these processes in terms of “the politics of the commons”. Our aim is not to join the contemporary debate within Italian politics and academia around the issues whether water is a commons or not, and around the most suitable institutional architecture and political practices to manage the resource. On the contrary, by referring to the notion of “the politics of the commons” we wish to analyse “the political” behind patterning water as a commons. Without adopting a predefined definition of the commons, we approach the issue from a constructivist perspective. On

the one side, we consider that “the commons is what the movement make of it”, interpreting the cultural and social construction of the commons as an intrinsically political action: we are interested in understanding what people are talking about when they refer to the commons and what kind of grievances and proposals are put forward through this reference. On the other side we look at how “the commons make the movement”, namely how the framing of social struggles in terms of the commons shape the identity and the self-representation of the Italian water movement, its internal organisation, its styles and practices of political participation.

Through this analysis, we aim at tracing the genealogy of the notion of the commons within Italian contemporary political debate. In particular we aim at unravelling the historical, social, cultural and political processes that led to the framing of water resources and management issues in terms of the commons within the contemporary Italian political debate. In order to do so, we look at the following variables:

- the main actors and organisations which animate the Italian water movement and which crafted its narrative on the commons;
- the spatial/geographical scale of reference of the struggle for water as a commons;
- the main aims behind the framing of water in terms of commons;
- the actors and modes of governance that are crucial in the political discourse of water as a commons;
- the reference to the theoretical debates supporting the framing of water as a commons;
- the campaigns, initiatives and practices of political participation promoted through the reference of water as a commons.

By looking at the interplay of these variables, we show how the multiple meanings poured into the commons authorise a plurality of itineraries of political militancy, and allow holding together heterogeneous political backgrounds and repertoires of contention. On one side, we show this plurality by highlight three different typologies or subframes of the notion of “water as commons”, exploring in particular their content in terms of *i*) the production of locality, *ii*) the perception, critics and practices of democracy and political participation, and *iii*) the identity, self representation and internal organisation of the movements themselves.

On the other side, seeing beyond the issue of water services management, our analysis points at the issue of democracy, participation, identifying some features entailed in the notion of the commons that are shared by the different social movements that adopt such a reference in contemporary Italy. These common features are: *i*) a critique of the institutions of representative democracy and traditional political parties; *ii*) the revitalisation of institutions of direct democracy (i.e. referendum, citizens’ bills...) and the search for original patterns of local participatory

democracy within the processes of republicisation of water services (i.e. advisory boards with users, movements and workers' representatives); *iii*) the adoption by the movement of organisational patterns inspired by the principles of inclusiveness, horizontality and spontaneity

### **A short description of water sector reform and water movements in Italy**

Contemporary Italian water policies could be summarized in three main phases, which correspond to three different ways of framing the *problems* (and, correspondingly, the *solutions*) of the sector.

In a first phase (1994-2000), the discourse about water sector problem – promoted mainly by national policy-makers and by liberal and pro-market reforms' economists – was focused on the water utilities and their dimensions. While the European policies of the time aimed at promoting at increasing competitiveness of the markets of the local and national public services – such as energy, transportation, communication – Italian's regulations of the 90s were mainly oriented to stimulate the industrialization of the water sector, and, more in general, of the whole sector of the local public services. The traditional, municipal, scale of the water planning and operation was widened (with the introduction of the "A.T.O.", areas of different sizes roughly coincident with the Provinces) and the activities of the supply, distribution and sewage treatment – that were previously often realized by different utilities operating in the same municipality – were unified (with the introduction of the concept of "integrated water system"). A single tariff was introduced for each of the 91 areas in which the national system was reorganized and the financing of the sector switched from general taxation to the "full recovery cost" model. As for the service delivery models several alternatives<sup>2</sup> were made legitimate, with ample space for the local governments' choices. The legislation of this period basically introduced a distinction between the property of water and infrastructures – remaining public – and the water services, which had to be operated by a limited company, whatever its ownership (public and/or private).

The Italian water movement started to emerge and to become visible during this phase, and particularly in the last years of the 90s, inspired by the debates of international circles and events such as the World Social Forum or the Club of Lisbon, founded by the former Portuguese Prime Minister Mario Soares, where the Italian economist and father of the Italian water movement Riccardo Petrella developed his "Manifesto dell'acqua" (Petrella 2001). The inputs coming from these international arenas were initially received in Italy by some international cooperation's NGOs and No global movements, which focused their attention on the topics of the right to water and of the privatization of water resources and services in the Global South. In the 2000,

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<sup>2</sup> Come indicato dall'art. 113 del Decreto Legislativo 18 agosto 2000, n. 267.

the water movement acquired a first formal identity with the creation of the Italian Committee for the World Water Contract (CICMA). Its goal was to promote a "new water culture" inspired to the recognition of water as a fundamental human right and the common good of humanity, to be managed according to the logic of ecological and social sustainability, as opposed to the market oriented policies promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This aim was pursued through an intense cultural activity on the national territory, including several educational initiatives for schools, associations and churches; the rising Italian movement also promoted the organization in Florence of the European Social Forum in 2002 and of the Alternative World Water Forum in 2003.

In a second phase (2000-2006) the public debate was mainly focused on the governance of the water sector, addressing service's delivery models and regulation, and a central role in the debate was played by the local and regional administrations, in charge of the implementation of the reform. A key concern for the national government in this phase was fostering the competitiveness within the sector, also in order to align national practices to the mainstream political orientation of the European Union<sup>3</sup>. While the public services' regulation passed through several changes, and the call for tenders started to be indicated by the national government as the policy instruments to be chosen by local administrations to modify the organization of the sector, these managed to resist and contrast the national guidelines, perceived as a way to promote the gradual privatization of the sector. In this resistance, local administrations found often water movements as important allies in opposing the national regulations, and sometimes the regional regulations (as in Lombardy Region) on the sector. The rising tariffs on water services in the contexts that are managed through public-private partnerships were also a recurrent topic of popular opposition (for example in the municipalities of Arezzo, Aprilia, Latina and Nola), featuring citizens and local administrations against water utilities.

A third phase started in 2006, when the water movements, previously operating mostly at the local scale, emerged at the national scale with the proposal of a bill of popular initiative and, later, with the proposal of the Referendum. A parallel process of formal constitution of the Forum italiano dei movimenti per l'acqua (Forum) was started in 2006 for initiative of several actors, including CICMA, local civic committees, regional Social Forums, ARCI, CGIL-Funzione pubblica (Union) and some catholic associations and groups. The intense activity developed by the Forum in this phase, and particularly the referendum campaign, fostered a new way of framing water issues in the country: water as a common, and as a problem of democracy.

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<sup>3</sup> negli stessi anni era in discussione la direttiva Bolkenstein, che aveva la finalità di facilitare la circolazione di servizi all'interno dell'Unione Europea e la loro liberalizzazione

In this process, a relevant role was played by a group of jurists sympathetic with the Forum and closely involved with its activities, and offering their expertise with the Referendum juridical procedures. The two questions proposed by the Forum – abolition of the obligation to use the call for tenders as ordinary procedure to contract out the services<sup>4</sup> and the abolition of the profit rate of 7% in the tariff of the water service<sup>5</sup> - aimed at contrasting the tightening of the regulation concerning local public services occurring during the fourth Berlusconi's cabinet<sup>6</sup>. While the national political and media establishment remained basically silent during the Referendum campaign, when they were not plainly hostile to the cause of the Forum, the referendum campaign was initially organized and conducted with limited human and financial means. The Forum later succeeded to mobilize thousands of citizens beyond the water activists, and to stimulate a massive participation to the campaign. Even if the international and national context in which the referendum took place definitively encouraged the participation to the referendum and, to some extent, favoured the victory of the Forum, a relevant role was indeed played by this ample and unexpected public participation: the Referendum's campaign offered the chance to express the widespread dissatisfaction with the current political situation in the country through water issue, and contrasting water privatization process became a sort of metaphor for the renewing of Italian democracy.

However, even if the frame proposed by the Forum is now widely accepted, the issue of water in Italy is at a deadlock after the referendum, as the national legislation has not yet been through a comprehensive reform that gives full recognition to the results of the Referendum. In this respect, after the Referendum, the Forum acts as *guardian* of its results, campaigning for its full implementation and denouncing omissions or attempts to advance national or regional regulations that seems to be opposite to these results. Several new initiatives have been put in place, such as a campaign for water re-municipalisation – that has the city of Naples as the more significant example, but that is in progress in several other administrations – and a campaign for the self-reduction of the water tariffs.

At the same time the expression of “commons”, particularly after the success of the is more and more associated to a wide range of issues besides water, coming to be used in the context of a wide range of political and social mobilisations. In this respect, if the implementation of the Referendum results appears difficult, the “commons” as a political idea certainly won a prominent place in the Italian public debate; seems therefore relevant to analyse

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<sup>4</sup> oppure all'assegnazione diretta a società a partecipazione mista pubblica e privata, ma a condizione che la selezione del socio avvenga mediante gara e per una quota non inferiore al 40% (art. 23 bis della legge n. 133 del 2008 modificato dall'art. 15 della legge di conversione n. 166 del 2009)

<sup>5</sup> (art. 154 del d. lgs. n. 152 del 2006, noto come codice dell'ambiente)

<sup>6</sup> Culminated with the so called decreto Ronchi, law November 20, 2009, n. 166

in details the *politics of commons* in the water movement, i.e the discourses and practices that come to be associated to the notion and to give it its current semantic power.

### “Water as a commons” ideal types

In order to discuss the politics of commons in the Italian case, we introduce a typology based on three different notions of water as a common – briefly defined as cosmopolitan, local, radical. Although each notion appears as more or less central in the Forum's discourse in different phases, these notions should be considered as simultaneously at play in the Italian water struggles. The typology has been developed through the collection and analysis of a rich archive of written, audio and video materials (including minutes of the Forum's meetings, official documents, press releases, publicity materials) produced by the Italian water movement, as well as through a set of semi-structured interview to key informants selected among water movement's representatives. Table 1 provides a synthetic comparison of the main features of the cosmopolitan, local, and radical ideal types of water as a common, while a discussion based on the analysis of the ideal types is developed in the last section of the article.

*Tab. 1 - Main features of the three ideal-types of water as a common in Italian water movement*

<i>Variables</i>	<b>Water as a common good of humankind (cosmopolitan)</b>	<b>Water as a local common (local)</b>	<b>Water as a common beyond the public and the private (radical)</b>
<i>Main actors</i>	International development NGOs; missionaries religious-based associations and churches; CICMA; “No Global” networks and movements	Municipalities; trade unions; consumer associations; local sections of national parties and local political movements/civic committees	Social movements and radical left groups; left-wing jurists
<i>Main scale of the political action</i>	Global	Local	National – Scattered
<i>Relevant in which phase of the policymaking process</i>	Water as an industrial problem	Water as a problem of governance	Water as a problem of democracy
<i>Main aims</i>	Raising the awareness of the universal symbolic power of water (water=life) and increase the awareness of the water crisis in the Global South; assuring the legal international recognition of the right to water;	Protecting local communities from powerful outside actors (such as foreign multi-utilities or also higher administrative jurisdictions); defending the administrative prerogatives and political responsibilities of local administrative jurisdictions	Reframing the notion of public property and its usage; ensuring and renewing forms of public participation

<i>Actors and modes of governance that are crucial in the political discourse</i>	Mankind and global democracy	Territory and local democracy	Citizenship and practices of self-government
<i>Relevant theoretical debates</i>	Human rights; critical readings of capitalism and globalization; development studies	Subsidiarity and decentralization; local democracy	Critical readings of capitalism and globalization; juridical and economical literature about the commons, public goods and services
<i>Campaigns/ Initiatives/ Practices</i>	Charter for the International Solidarity for Access to Water; the World Water Contract; Bill of popular initiative (2006); the University of the Commons; ICE; devolution of 1 cent per m <sup>3</sup> to fund international cooperation projects related to water; participation to international events such as the Alternative World Water Forum.	Proposal for amendment or addition to the Municipal or Provincial Statute to declare water services “without economic relevance”; Campaign “Imbrocciamola” to promote tap water drinking in public spaces/restaurant/cafes; Re-municipalisation of local water services; protection and valorisation of the local water and local products; legal actions against Regions or the State	Referendum (2011); Campaign “Obbedienza civile” for self-reduction of the water bill ; City of Naples’ experience of re-municipalisation; decision making process by consensus within the Forum; squatting and reconversion for public uses of public/private unused assets

## **Discussion and (tentative) conclusion**

The polysemy of the notion of the commons”, i.e. its capacity to express and represent a plurality of grievances and political proposal by referring to the same formula, represents a key aspect behind its success within the Forum and other social movements in contemporary Italy. This plurality emerge within the Italian water movement itself where different ideal types of the notion of water as commons coexist and overlap, not without tensions and contradictions.

The three different ideal types recalled above share the same vocabulary and coexist within the practice of the Italian water movement. Each of them seems to emerge as particular relevant within specific period, according to the movement’s historical trajectory. The three ideal types shares different features:

- they stem from and adopt the same narrative about the need to counter the commodification and privatisation of the commons, the public services and ultimately human life, refusing the growing practices and politics of adopting market logics and mechanism to govern everyday human life and to orient the policy making process;
- in spite of the narrative of the commons as a system of governance going beyond the public and

the private, beyond the state and the market, these ideal types seems to share the urgency of firstly “inverting the trajectory”, by halting the processes of outsourcing and delegating public services to private actors, and by reclaiming the assumption of responsibilities by public authority over themes and fields that are considered crucial for the identity and government of the polity, such as water;

- they tend to overlap the notion of “the commons” with that of “the common good”, transforming the struggle against the privatisation of water services into a paradigmatic battle for democracy showing disaffection for the contemporary political establishment and traditional political parties, and advocating for a renewal of the political system, in order to allow a higher degree of participation by citizens and civil society’s groups.

Within the politics of the commons in the experience of the Italian water movement, two elements seems to emerge as particularly relevant for the theme and the debate of the Stanford conference:

1) The commons as a notion to deepen democratic participation in the context of rescaling and glocalisation of water services management

As a reaction of the processes of rescaling and glocalisation (Swyngedouw 2004) currently reshaping water services management in Italy as elsewhere in the world, each one of the three ideal types implies a critic to the system of representative democracy centred on national state institutions. As a reaction to these processes, the notion of the commons entails the advocacy for a more prominent role in water management by actors and scales other than the national state (and the private companies): the humankind, impersonated by international governmental and non governmental organisations; the local territory, its institutions, communities and knowledge, through the (re)invention or (re)discovering of local identity and allegiance; the citizens and their form of self-organisation and self-government to foster direct participation in the management of the common good. In this respect, the commons appears as a notion particularly powerful in promoting practices aiming at reviving and deepening democratic participation, following Appadurai’s approach of “deep democracy”, namely forms of political activism that imply both “roots, anchors, intimacy, proximity, and locality” and the participation to international networks promoting universal values (Appadurai 2001). In this respect, by referring to the commons and the idea of community, the three ideal types also emphasised the relational dimensions of the political struggle: water is not merely conceived as the object of the contention, becoming a powerful tools to define the multiple identity of the movement itself, in relation to the process of glocalisation: a international/cosmopolitan movement acting in global fora such as the World Social Forum; a

movement with deep local root, defending the interest of the local territory against the interference of national or international political and economic powers; a radical movement, exploring new patterns of political participation in the context of the crisis of representative democracy.

## 2) The commons as a notion at the crossroad of representative, participatory and direct democracy

In the narrative of the Italian water movement, particularly after the 2011 referenda, the notions of *participatory* and *direct* democracy are often used as a synonym, not without a certain degree of confusion between the two. In fact, the struggle for “water democracy” and for the “democracy of the commons” is represented as a way to promote and enhance citizens’ direct participation to democratic life.

Beside this narrative, if we look at the experience of the Forum, its main success have been achieved when the movement has played at the intersection of direct and representative democracy: i.e. in the alliance between the Forum and local representative bodies in order to adopt in City and Province councils bills and resolutions proposed by the movement to acknowledge water services as “public services without economic relevance”. The lack of follow up within the Parliament of the citizens initiative law for the remunicipalisation of water services seems to confirm the limit of the action of the Water movement, when failing in creating such alliance between the tools of direct democracy and the institutions of representative democracy.

It is true that the partial and selective implementation of the 2011 referenda results by the Government and the Parliament has nurtured the feelings of distrust towards the institutions of representative democracy that animate some components of the Forum. As a reaction, by referring to the commons, the Forum is increasingly trying to elaborate and implement spaces and practices to increase citizens’ participation to the management of water services and the public good. In such endeavours the movement seems caught in a dilemma. On one side, they seems to reject the mechanisms of participatory democracy as traditionally elaborated within academic circles and tested into participatory/deliberative experiences in policy and decision making process. These tools are perceived as “Trojan horses” to co-opt social movements within water governance and management systems without challenging the ideological assumptions and the power relations that influence and shape these systems. On the other side, the very nature and materiality of water management systems in “modern” high income countries like Italy, organised as centralised capital-intensive and technology intense industrial services, does not seem to offer significant spaces to test and introduce community-led or citizens-led experiences of direct participation in governing and managing the commons. Thus, so far, the most advanced experiences of water services re-

municipalisation, in the name of the commons, such as the one of the Naples water agency, have been translated in the introduction within the institutional architecture of the new public agency of a consultative body with representatives of workers, citizens, elected city councillors and environmental associations. The shortcomings of this approach compared to the movement's aspirations expressed by the reference to the commons, once more recall the role of materiality and technicalities in shaping water management issues and defining power relations, and, in broader perspective, the inherent tension between technocratic rule and democratic participation in our societies.

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