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WELLSPRINGS OF RESISTANCE STRUGGLES OVER WATER IN EUROPE

EN

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Water is undeniably vital for human life, yet it is precisely because of water's fundamental role that it has long been a focus of struggles in Europe between ruling classes and the people. There have been numerous attempts to rob people of their access to water and deny them decision-making powers over these precious resources and their management. Various social movements have struggled to resist these attempts. So now would seem like an appropriate time to provide a balanced overview of the issue.

The first aim of this publication is to describe the relations of power and institutional strategies at European level regarding water management, which are regaining relevance through the European Commission's revision of both the Water Framework Directive and the Drinking Water Directive.

A second aim of this publication is to provide a structured description of the recent struggles that have taken place at the global, European and local levels against privatisation, advocating the remunicipalisation of water and its environmental protection. The main purpose of this systemising approach is to summarise and discuss the strategies adopted by social movements and some related threats.

The hope is that this publication will stimulate debate among the social movements committed to the struggle over water in Europe and help them build broad alliances and powerful strategies. The study presented here draws not only on literature and documents, but also on robust qualitative research conducted with activists and groups to characterise how vital these struggles are and trace their recent development. The final section of the study sketches out some prospective ways of revitalising the debate on radical, democratic, public water management.

Given the relevance of water management in society, this debate could be crucial in two respects. Firstly, it could shore up all manifestations of social activism regarding water in Europe and unify their articulation in a single, collective voice. The Right2Water campaign has already shown the high level of mobilisation and the tremendous motivating potential of water-related issues. Secondly, promoting a radical, democratic approach in connection with access to water and water management could potentially trigger a broader discussion of how to move forward towards a more democratic, ecologically sound system based on social justice and solidarity. Time is running out and radical changes are needed.

Federico Tomasone,
Project Manager at Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, Brussels Office

INTRODUCTION

Water is essential to life, but it is also an increasing source of profits for the private sector. It is a key factor in various crises across the world, from health, energy, and climate to even war (Mehta/Veldwisch/Franco 2012). As a result, calls for water justice have become central to numerous movements, forming a basis for solidarity across different struggles.

THIS BOOKLET PROVIDES AN OVERVIEW OF:

- > the current neoliberal dynamics of water management
- > the regulatory regime in Europe
- > current and recent European water struggles
- > the lessons to be learnt and potentialities for future campaigns

Water grabbing is a useful term to bring together the often-varied issues and struggles that emerge over water. Ultimately, water grabbing is about control; it captures the transfer of water away from communities to agribusiness, extractive industries, and energy production, as well as the transfer of public services (and common wealth) to private hands. This is a form of accumulation by dispossession; water is no longer a public good but rather a commodity, shifting risk from private investors to the public, whilst profits move in the opposite direction. Water grabbing is not only an issue of privatisation, but also quality, cost, management, and allocation, and is determined by who has the power over how water will be used; and when, where, why, and by whom (Franco et al. 2014).

For many of us, this process has resulted in: increased prices, decreased quality, damaged nature, and, in some cases, water supply being cut off (Mohandes/Teitelman 2017; Cramer 2015). In response, there have been many successful social movements centred on the right to water that reject and resist such attempts at commodification. These movements share issues extending beyond water; they raise concerns over democratic deficits, and they form broad coalitions across communities (see the Balkans).

Many movements, especially those focused on water services, are also involved in resisting austerity, problematising how activists interact with a neoliberal state (Ireland and Portugal are good examples). Others raise the impact of privatisation and financialisation on cost, quality, and access.

A key strategy in the struggle against water grabbing has been the remunicipalisation of water utilities, which has also led to discussion around what a truly *public* water service would look like. Such struggles raise issues not just about water quality and access but go to the heart of what kind of state and democracy we demand, as well as the type of consumption and energy production systems that sustainable water use requires.

The policies and struggles occurring in Europe capture these different trends. Increasing public debt has led to pressure to increase private actor investment, and the EU Commission has encouraged this process. At the same time, however, these conditions provide an opening for social movements to challenge the dominant neoliberal agenda of the European Commission. Alongside remunicipalisation, and other forms of struggle, the review of the Water Framework Directive and current debates over the *Drinking Water Directive* may offer some (if limited) space for a more people-friendly policy. An opening for debate, however, does not guarantee that the dominant discourse of privatisation, the exploitation of natural resources, and cost-driven efficiency markers will be overturned. Rather, water grabbing can only be challenged by learning from existing struggles and building a strong, progressive alternative.



Right2Water
Protest in Brussels, Belgium



An aerial photograph of a tidal flat or salt marsh. The landscape is characterized by a complex network of narrow, winding water channels that meander through dark, textured mudflats. The lighting is soft, creating a range of dark blues, greys, and muted oranges in the mud. The overall composition is abstract and organic, with the channels forming a web-like pattern across the frame.

POWER AND POLICY

Public water management has undergone major shifts. There is contestation over how water should be considered, offering opportunities for activists to shift the discourse away from privatisation. For example, whilst the UN references water as a public good and ‘a prerequisite for the realisation of other human rights’ (United Nations 2002), EU policy is increasingly referring to water as an economic rather than a public good. This began in 1992 with the Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development, which declared water an economic good, linking with a growing discourse on water scarcity (Dublin Statement 1992). Water, for most of the 20th century, had not been a key policy focus, at least in many minority world countries.¹ Up until the 1980s, water services—a natural monopoly—were primarily under public management. However, with increasingly indebted state budgets and a growing discourse of state failure, the 1980s issued in a global period of privatisation framed as the more efficient and cost-effective policy option (Bayliss 2014). The majority world would be the first guinea pig for this neoliberal experiment through pressure from international financial institutions. Financial efficiency replaced public sector goals of access, justice, and equity.

Today, as a consequence, many public-run water companies are encouraged to operate as businesses and come under private law. This is a critical shift and brought water management into the global circuits of capital. Such water policies push for full cost recovery and technocratic policy solutions based on efficiency and environmental economics, often using public private partnerships (PPPs) as the means to do this. This institutional architecture reaffirms the interests of private financial capital rather than service delivery and the public. Yet, it is clear that the interests of private capital do not align to public need. For example, since privatisation, water prices in the UK have risen dramatically even though operating costs have remained the same, with limited investment in infrastructure as profits are diverted towards shareholders (Lobina and Corporate Accountability International 2014; Brignall 2018).

Apart from increasing private interests and the changing ethos of water management, the scale has also shifted to incorporate a more integrative and in some ways environmental approach. This has created interesting alliances between some environmental and conservation groups, and the private sector. Water

1 I am using the terms “minority” and “majority world” rather than “developed” and “developing world”, as development suggests a linear progressivity where the developed world is the norm that others should strive towards. Majority world, instead, highlights that the majority of the world live in these “developing” countries, and the so-called developed world is the minority. It is a bottom-up terminology.

management now tends towards integrative management of river basins, understanding water as an ecological and social system (van Ast/Boot 2003). The Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approach is the basis of the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), which attempts to integrate the scales, stakeholders, sources, and uses of water. This is a useful shift, moving beyond territorial borders and recognising water as a flow resource. However, this has facilitated private sector (stakeholder) involvement, pricing mechanisms, and ecosystem valuation through increased use of environmental economics—water is increasingly given a price (Gerlak/Ingram 2018). There is also a growing trend to treat water governance as a technical issue of *naturally* occurring problems, hiding the politics of such policies and programs. Such technical “solutions” can become a further means to standardize and privatise water rights, as well as outsource decisions to “experts”, excluding affected communities (Roth et al. 2018).

These policy shifts have been very profitable for private water companies and investment funds. The industry talks about water as the “new gold” with a guaranteed return on investment (Bieler 2017, 300). Water services and infrastructure, usually under the guise of PPPs, have become “safe” investments, leading to increasing liberalisation and subsequent financialisation, moving further away from public need (Federici 2012; Harvey 2007). Pure springs and river sources are prime targets for beverage companies, or as new sources for hydro power. The recent case of Nestlé in Canada illustrates the inequalities that are perpetuated by such policies; First Nations communities rely on costly bottled water, whilst Nestlé abstracts millions of litres of water from their land, paying the state of Ontario a mere \$390.38 per million litres (Shimo 2018). States and local authorities have facilitated these processes, with the law becoming an instrument of dispossession (Muehlebach 2016). Indeed, attempts at putting a monetary and exchange value on water, and the increasing use of technocratic management strategies, fits within the broader neoliberal project.

There are multiple lobby groups and private actors that push for further liberalisation and deregulation of the industry. In Europe, private actors such as the European Services Forum are actively lobbying the European Commission for further liberalisation of services (European Services Forum n.d.).² Bringing together public and private actors is the cornerstone of the Water Resources Group and corporate stewardship programs within the International Finance Corporation. Such

2 This includes companies such as Microsoft, the European Banking Federation, and national Business Councils.



programs prioritise economic growth, higher value uses, and financial returns in the allocation of water (Hepworth/Orr 2013). The European Innovation Partnerships also target water, aiming to link private and public actors and “support market opportunities for innovation in the global water sector” (European Union n.d.). These groups link with DG Environment and have access to funding through the European Development Bank. The new Roundtable on Financing Water also promotes policy around increasing investment in water, including Blended Finance, a new form of PPP based on mixed (public, aid, and private) finance (OECD 2018). Outside of the minority world, the private sector has been widely pushed by development agencies and international institutions (Hall/Lobina/Motte 2005).³

There are multiple approaches to liberalizing and privatising water supplies and services. It is rare that full privatisation—divestiture—occurs.⁴ Instead, concessions and licences are more common. These are forms of contractual privatisation where the government body transfers long-term control over water or sewer systems to a private firm, giving them the ability to collect tariffs, which is often covered by a concession fee. It remains nominally government owned, but the private entity manages the system (Food and Water Watch 2013). Concessions normally last between 25 and 30 years.

Such long-term leasing of public assets can be understood as an intergenerational cash transfer, as they enrich current citizens at the expense of future generations through the loss of future revenue sources. Critically, these contracts can include a guaranteed rate of profit that the state or municipality is then responsible for if it is not reached through tariffs (Lobina and Corporate Accountability International 2014). Upfront payments to local governments are also a tactic used by large water companies to lock in contracts. The payment costs are then transferred onto users through tariffs, acting like a deferred loan whilst transferring cost from state budgets to private households and businesses (Lobina and Corporate Accountability International 2014). In times of austerity and cuts to local services, these models can seem increasingly attractive to cash-strapped states.

Tools such as standardized water rights systems, the introduction of financial products, and PPPs further facilitate the transfer of public services into the market.

3 However, since returns have been low and resistance to privatisation has been high, private sector involvement in the majority world has been decreasing from its peak in the late 1990s.

4 In Europe, only England has sold off its water infrastructure.

Public water companies are increasingly using private consulting services such as managerial and financial services, or build-operate-transfer contracts, essentially a form of outsourcing or privatisation through the back door (Lobina and Corporate Accountability International 2014).

Water services are also becoming increasingly *financialised*, speeding up and intensifying the shift away from a public ethos towards shareholder profits. Briefly, financialisation means the increasing importance of financial markets, motives, and institutions in the delivery and management of water. Finance capital has a growing interest in water-related companies, resulting in shareholdings becoming assets to be traded and stock prices governing management decisions. Different financial instruments have been created to facilitate private investment, including water-targeted investment funds. This is not the trading of water itself, but of shares in companies that engage in water-related activities (Bayliss 2014). Capital is diverted from production towards financial markets and a short-term management focus. Many states have facilitated this process through low inflation, anti-union legislation, and deregulation (Bayliss 2014). This process is well underway in the UK water sector, as small-scale infrastructure companies have been increasingly bought out by private equity firms. This has created assets for the financial sector yet resulted in little infrastructure investment. Instead, water services become assets that can be disposed of when downturns occur, treating water as any other form of commodity, and thus making the provision of a key source of life subject to market fluctuations.

As water services in the majority world became less profitable during the 2000s, companies shifted their focus to waste water management, desalination plants, consultation projects and water-based financial products. Most major water companies have been pulling out of Africa, with growth expected in India, Eastern Europe, America, and China. Many projects have been partly financed by development banks. In Europe, the largest water companies, Suez and Veolia (both French), have been shifting their activities away from drinking water concessions towards service provision to public sector water and waste companies (outsourcing). They have exited the UK market, which is now dominated by private equity firms (Hall/Lobina 2012; Corporate Watch 2018). The trend is to decrease direct privatisations and concessions for drinking water whilst increasing service contracts (outsourcing) such as technological know-how, as well as push for further integration of waste, energy, and water services.



EUROPE

A primary purpose of the EU is to establish a common market. The inclusion of public services, including water services, in the common market has been a contentious, but arguably underlying, goal of the Commission. The Commission gives preference to trade rules over service provision (Bolkestein 2002). However, because of the successful European Citizen's Initiative (ECI) Right2Water and continued pressure from activist groups such as the European Water Movement, water services have remained outside the single market and remain somewhat protected from the pressures facing other public services within the EU. As a mediated response, the EU approach to water management tends to reflect the dominant trend of technocratic water management, and each subsequent water-related directive has become increasingly economically orientated (Guerin-Schneider/Breuil/Lupton 2014).⁵ This is problematic in that public companies are treated the same as private ones, and judged on their ability to seek profit, rather than service provision (Hall 2003).⁶

European Water Conferences have been held sporadically for over twenty years; these meetings are coordinated by the commission and tend to be dominated by corporate lobbyists but capture the dominant approach to water management at the European level. Previous conferences have focused on the Water Information System for Europe and Water Framework Directive (2007), development of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) (2009), Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources (2012), and the Flood Directive and update to RBMPs (2015) (European Commission n.d.). In September 2018, The 5th European Water Conference took place in Vienna, which discussed the progress of the various EU water legislations and the review of the Water Framework Directive. It brought together participants including EU countries, economic and environmental stakeholders, and various

5 The most recent directives have included the phasing out of exclusive rights and monopolies, the dissociation of sales and production, and the introduction of competition regulation (Guerin-Schneider/Breuil/Lupton 2014).

6 An example of this, which continues to be a threat for water services, is the Concessions Initiative of 2013. As part of the public procurement review in 2011, the commission proposed three legislative changes: public contracts, utility agreements, and a directive on concessions contracts, which would bring in service contracts under the procurement regime. Activists showed that this could mean that all public services, if they want to remain in public hands, would need to comply with certain conditions, or be put out to tender, facilitating privatisation (Boscheck et al. 2013). Due to public outcry, water services were excluded at the last minute, yet attempts to include similar frameworks have emerged in recent trade agreements with Canada, Japan, and the Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA).

European-level agencies (European Commission 2018b). The conference focused on ways that policy, law, and investment could work together to improve Europe's water (European Commission 2018c). The focus of these meetings captures the underlying tensions within and between different EU agencies (i.e. the Commission and DG Environment), corporate interests, and stakeholders. Recent debate has centred on how to find a solution to the demands of the ECI, a critical obstacle for further liberalisation and privatisation of the European water sector (Interview 4, 2018).

Although there is a common regulatory framework through the Water Framework Directive, each EU member state has ultimate control over how this is implemented and it provides water services, meaning that the range of approaches is mixed. This is called "subsidiarity". Due to the localised nature of water, water services often come under municipal rather than state control. Following the financial crisis of 2008, many local governments faced fiscal challenges and turned towards privatisation as a solution to budget shortfalls. This reflects the common narrative explained in the previous section, where in times of budget crisis, private sector promises of upfront payments and investments can look attractive.

This push towards liberalisation and the selling off of public assets was further pushed onto (especially bail-out) states through the necessity of balanced budgets and low debt ratios through the stability and growth pact as part of the single monetary union (European Commission 2018a). For states such as Portugal, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Ireland, this meant Troika budget monitoring and austerity and the concerted selling-off of state assets such as the establishment of the Superfund for managing public utilities in Greece.



*European Water Movement
Organizers at Firenze 10+10*



WATER FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE (WFD)

Adopted in 2000, the WFD is the EU's primary policy in relation to water. European water legislation can be grouped into three waves of regulation: water quality for human activities (1973–88), pollution prevention (1988–95), and the protection and management of water (1995–present). The WFD, as part of this third wave, addresses multiple water sources, sets guiding principles (including public participation), and integrates economic approaches (European Commission 2008a). It encapsulates international trends in water management, including an increasing economic focus and environmental concerns. The WFD is supported by most stakeholders as a policy that accounts for environmental, social, and economic issues that surround water management; key concerns for water activists tend to centre on issues of implementation, full-cost recovery principles, and current attempts to avoid implementing the demands of the ECI into the review process (European Water Movement 2018).

Importantly, the WFD operates at the river basin level. Each member state was required to provide a River Basin Management Plan (RBMP) by 2009, which is then updated every 6 years. RBMPs are the translation of the WFD into local legislation (Boscheck et al. 2013). Each plan is meant to address: the pressures and human activity present, protected areas, monitoring programmes, environmental objectives; and include an economic analysis of water use. When the objectives of the WFD are not reached, the RBMP must outline how a member state/s aims to reach them.⁷ The more controversial passages are written in a way that allows for different interpretations and implementations (Kaika 2003). Critically, the WFD still states that water is not a commercial product, offering some space for resisting a fully tradeable water market. Following on from this, and because not all of the Directive's objectives had been met, the Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Waters was launched in 2012.⁸ The Water Framework Directive is currently undergoing a review—the fitness check—and the public consultation phase is due to end in early 2019.

The WFD is representative of the increasing technocratic and economic approach to water management. This can be seen in: the polluter-pays principle, the requirement for an economic analysis of water use, required economic assessments

7 For full details of this process and what is included, see the handbook on the WFD (Lanz/Scheuer 2001).

8 The blueprint is a document developed to fill the gaps of existing water legislation, and although connected with the EU's 2020 Strategy, extends to 2050 (European Commission 2017).

of each measure, water pricing, full-cost recovery of water services, and penalties for non-compliance (European Commission 2008b). Article 9 is of particular concern for water activists, as it calls for full-cost recovery and requires member states to use an economic analysis in managing their water resources. Article 9 argues that the price users pay should cover the “operational and maintenance costs of its supply and treatment and the costs invested in infrastructure”, with metering the proposed means for this to occur (European Commission 2008b). Due to their pushback, member states have some subsidiarity power to determine how the social, environmental, and economic effects are included and priced (Lanz/Scheuer 2001). Yet, such principles tend to impact the most marginalised and can act as a form of regressive taxation. Furthermore, how the “full cost” is captured is contentious: How do you put a price on environmental destruction, for example? How can such a price be fair? And is there a way of really balancing economic, environmental, and social concerns through pricing?

The costs associated with meeting the objectives of the WFD have facilitated the increasing role of private investment in the European water and waste sectors. Although stronger environmental standards are critical and are also supported by water activists, how such investment is envisaged is problematic. Critically, those involved in the development of the Commissions’ Directive argued that the need for more investment would be best met by the private sector (Gee 2004, 39). The proposed solutions for procuring such funds include raising tariffs or accessing domestic debt. To meet the costs associated, the EU has set up structural and cohesion funds as well as encouraging private investment (European Commission 2008c).

Although the WFD aims to be integrative and participatory, and to some extent is a policy supported by a wide range of stakeholders, such emphasis on economic and technocratic processes and language makes the WFD hard to navigate, locking out many activists, NGOs, and communities from being able to utilise the participatory channels available. There is, however, some space for participation in the development of each RBMP. Article 14, for example, includes “the right to know” clause—meaning the public has the right to be informed before and during the planning process, has the right to comment, and has the right to access background information on RBMPs and be actively involved through the implementation cycle. However, there are no guidelines on how this is to occur, such that it is up to each member state to interpret this (Videira et al. 2006). The issue of implementation is an ongoing problem highlighted by many activists.



The Drinking Water Directive has recently been under review following the successful European Citizens Initiative (ECI), Right2Water. The Right2Water ECI aimed to challenge the discourse around water in the EU and push for the UN human right to water and sanitation to be legislated at the European level (Right2Water n.d.).⁹ Following the ECI and Fitness Check, it was proposed that some amendments be made to the 1998 directive. The initial recommendations in 2012 proposed to make water conservation a priority through the mandatory use of water metering, and to tackle pollutants. Critically, and in direct response to the Right2Water ECI, by 2015 the European Parliament recognised that water is a public good rather than a commodity and thus prices should be affordable. Furthermore, the Parliament argue that working conditions in the industry should be acceptable and with some democratic oversight, and that water cut-offs for non-payment prohibited (Laaninen 2018, 3). The European Parliament voted on the re-cast Drinking Water Directive in October 2018, however, as David Sanchez from Food and Water Watch pointed out, the amendments fall short of the demands of the ECI and do not secure a universal right to water and sanitation (Sanchez 2018). Positively, some measures were passed that will provide for public water taps and reduce the use of bottled water, but with the possibility that fees could be charged (Laaninen 2018, 5).

Current trade agreements also put access to clean and accessible drinking water and sanitation at risk. Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clauses are a major threat to public water. ISDS (and its regulatory chill) can limit opportunities for remunicipalisation and changes in water legislation. Private water companies have used ISDS clauses to claim compensation for cancelled service management contracts, or changes in future profits due to regulatory or pricing controls (Kishimoto 2015). Companies, well protected by commercial and contract law, have the upper hand, as cases are judged according to commercial law rather than public interest or service standards. Bilateral investment treaties often have equitable treatment standards that can reduce space for public funding and investment. The Trade in Services Agreement (TiSA) is particularly problematic, as it contains a very narrow definition of “public service”, potentially excluding any services that are provided in a mixed way (public and private), permanently locking in existing levels of liberalisation (Kishimoto 2015). The language of CETA is also vague in terms of water and public services, and could create a regulatory chill effect on future regulation, limiting future remunicipalisation attempts (European Water Movement and Food and Water Europe 2016).

9 The Right2Water ECI is discussed in more detail under “Resistance”.

CONCLUSION: THE DOMINANCE OF NEOLIBERAL WATER MANAGEMENT

The neoliberal shifts in water management sharpen the need for an overhaul of how we manage water. The transformation of the public to a profit-serving ethos, technocratic and “neutral” solutions to complex political and societal problems, and the further standardisation and quantification of nature (to the extent that everything has a tradeable price), is part of this neoliberal project. It naturalises and normalises a politics that is based on the exploitation of one class by another.

The full cost of social and environmental impacts cannot be captured in a market system. Yet, water management is becoming increasingly privatised and commodified. Ultimately, what many of these regulatory and management shifts have meant is that public water services are treated the same as private companies. This completely shifts the playing field and ethos of what a public service should be, even when assets and infrastructure remain in public hands.

In Europe, the WFD promoted an integrated approach, as well as bringing environmental concerns into water management. However, this move towards more environmentally conscious policy was teamed with increasing economic and technical management, further shaping water as an economic good and closing off participation for those who cannot navigate the complicated mechanisms. Private interests have influence in the development of EU water policy,¹⁰ highlighting the need for activists to lobby and form regional networks that can push for the Right2Water beyond the local.



Riverwatch
Rosenburg, Austria

¹⁰ This was seen in the Concessions Directive, where industry representatives met with the commission significantly more often—and in the development stages rather than after the fact—than social partners (Boscheck et al. 2013).



RESISTANCE

Despite, and in response to, these regulatory controls and shifts towards more neoliberal water management, there have been numerous successful and powerful protest movements over water. These movements have established broad alliances, and, in some cases, acted as a real challenge to neoliberalism, proposing alternative democratic, public, and common processes of water management. Resistance has successfully delayed, cancelled, and reversed privatisations; protected river systems and the diversion of water sources; and highlighted the health consequences and racial, gender, and class dimensions of water infrastructure. These movements, although often very local due to the localised nature of water, have radical potential, and have shown communities that when they come together, they can win, as has been the case protecting some of the rivers in the Balkans and the successful referendums in Berlin and Italy.

Water movements often comprise broad alliances, including indigenous peoples, NGOs, environmentalists, trade unions, human rights activists, and church groups. Most campaigns start at the local—the source of water—framing water as life—rather than through international organisations. And most are not aligned to political parties. Some movements have led to wider political shifts and campaigns, as is the case in Bolivia, whilst others have made water an election issue, or focused on legal routes. Referendums and public participatory tools have often been key tactics.

Importantly, the commons have become a rallying cry for many movements seeking to go beyond the neoliberal state and private company interests. The commons as a term is contested, but from a radical left position broadly acts in opposition to the market (private) as well as state (public), resisting the “new enclosures” of land and water, but also the knowledge and ways of valuing those spaces, resources and relations beyond the logic of commodities (Federici 2010, 2–4). In contrast, the commons is becoming increasingly mainstream with Elinor Ostrom winning the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009 on the topic, and organisations such as the World Bank and United Nations using the term to describe the need to protect the “Global Commons” through policies that limit access to international oceans and establish ecological reserves, which, although good for conservation, lock out local populations and traditional uses (Federici 2010, 2–3). This is a very different conceptualisation and purpose of the term than that used by the radical left and is problematic, as it reasserts existing power structures at the expense of alternative values and knowledge.

Many movements in North America and Australia, especially around extractive industries, have been led by First Nations people, arguing that water is life, with

its connections to knowledge, dreaming, land, and country (Klein 2015). These alternative discourses have shown the limits and incompatibility of truly integrative and sustainable water management (i.e. integrated with social, political, and potentially spiritual concerns that are intergenerational) with neoliberalism. Movements such as those in South Africa, Detroit, or Bulgaria demonstrate that water infrastructure and accessibility are always gendered and racialised, so progressive movements must be conscious of these interlinking oppressions. As water impacts many facets of daily life, water justice must also be intersectional. The following section provides an overview of the different resistance movements globally, before providing more detail on recent European struggles.

GLOBAL STRUGGLES

Resistance is a global phenomenon. The water cycle does not respect political borders, making cooperation and solidarity necessary. In the majority world, there is a long history of struggles against structural adjustment policies, new hydro-energy projects, extractive industries, agrobusiness and irrigation for cash crops, and issues of quality and access to drinking water, not to mention waste management. The most famous case is the Bolivian water wars in 2001, which not only ousted private water company Bechtel, but radically changed Bolivian politics. Following this trend, and since the 2000s, we have seen increasing water struggles in the minority world. In response to poor and often non-transparent private management, remunicipalisation has become a global trend, doubling in pace between 2009 and 2013 (Hall/Lobina 2013).

Running parallel to the World Water Forums, the Alternative World Water Forum aims to bring together members of the global water justice movement to promote water as a commons, not a commodity (Alternative World Water Forum 2012). The Forum counters the corporate capture of the World Water Forum; activists come together to promote and develop community water management, clean and safe drinking water and sanitation for all, public-public models, and alternative funding models that can allow water management to remain public. Underpinning the Forum is a commitment to workers' rights, indigenous peoples and knowledge, and the rights of women, in opposition to mining and hydrocarbon industry, multinationals, and large-scale agribusiness (Alternative World Water Forum 2012). The most recent meeting was held in Brazil in 2018, and aimed to be a democratic and participatory alternative to the World Water Forum, linking democratic demands with environmental sustainability and access issues (FAMA 2018). These meetings



help build a global water justice movement and provide a space for the multiple movements that struggle around water to share experiences and strategies across the minority and majority world, including but not limited to issues around: anti-privatisation, greenwashing, food-water-energy nexus, austerity, tackling the power of transnational corporations, and broadening the frame of water issues to encompass health, sanitation, food, rights of indigenous peoples, children, women, and peasants (Manahan/Zanzanaini/Campero 2012). The movement has drawn on the Italian Water Forum and their statement: ‘we read water but we write democracy’, highlighting the important links made across struggles and how successes can feed into new movements globally (Manahan/Zanzanaini/Campero 2012).

Beyond the Alternative World Water Forum and networks that have evolved from it, there are a number of global campaigns and organisations established to promote water justice. Following from the fourth World Social Forum, the Water Justice website and hub acts as an online space for water activists to share ideas, experiences, and strategies. The resource is managed by the Transnational Institute, Corporate Europe Observatory, and the Council of Canadians (Water Justice n.d.).

The global Blue Planet Project organises under the banner of “Water is life”, supporting grassroots struggles and the full implementation of the UN Human Right to Water and Sanitation. The organisation is based in Canada and fronted by water campaigner Maude Barlow (Blue Planet Project n.d.). Connected to the Blue Planet Project is the Blue Communities Project that links municipalities and indigenous groups to promote water and sanitation as a human right, phase out bottled water, and promote public and democratically managed water services (Blue Community n.d.).

The UN Human Right to Water and Sanitation was adopted in 2010 as the culmination of a long global water justice campaign, linking in with the UN-designated decade (2005–2015), “Water for Life”.¹¹ The declaration requires member states:

- > **To have an obligation to respect** – refrain from actions that could interfere with these rights
- > **An obligation to protect** – they must protect these rights from interference from third parties
- > **An obligation to fulfil** – where member states must adopt any additional measures that are needed to meet those requirements (Barlow 2013)

11 In 2016, the UN has made a subsequent resolution for the UN Decade for Action – Water for Sustainable Development 2018–2028.

The inclusion of water in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as SDG 6, highlights how water and sanitation have grown in priority at the international level. However, the language used talks of water-use efficiency, scarcity, and management, teamed with access issues (Sustainable Development Goals 2018), suggesting that although access to water and sanitation is on the political agenda, the dominant water management strategies are not challenged (Karunanathan 2018, 10).

There are also increasing struggles around access and quality in the USA, as years of cash-strapped municipalities and structural racism have culminated in cases of whole communities being poisoned and facing cut-offs. The case of Flint, Michigan, encapsulates this. Flint had been a city in decay with highly racialised inequality. To save money, the authorities temporarily diverted Flint's water to the Flint River, a highly polluted water source. Because of sustained pressure and investigations from the community, authorities began providing residents with bottled drinking water. Yet, a whole generation has faced lead poisoning, and many residents now face having their water cut off due to increasing water tariffs (Feeley 2018; Rodrick 2016). Flint highlights the often racialised face of environmental—and water—injustice. Water justice was also the backbone of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, at Standing Rock Indian Reservation, North Dakota, during 2016–17; once again the declaration that 'water is a source of life, not a resource', figured strongly in the movement that was led by indigenous peoples (Looking Horse 2018).

EUROPEAN STRUGGLES

The 2000s have also seen a proliferation of struggles in Europe. Similar to trends outlined above, these have included anti-privatisation and commodification of water services, remunicipalisation movements, quality and access to services, and environmental destruction, resulting in different regional and national forums emerging. As well as local cases, regional movements, including the first European Citizen's Initiative, and the European Water Movement have also taken place, concretely linking all struggles to a regional call for the Right2Water. These movements can be loosely grouped under the headings: regional, anti-privatisation, remunicipalisation, and ecological.



REGIONAL

EUROPEAN WATER MOVEMENT

The European Water Movement was founded in 2012 after the Alternative World Water Forum in Marseille. It adopts the Italian Water Forum manifesto (Naples Manifesto), which frames water as a commons and universal right. The movement is horizontally organised, and currently includes working groups that tackle: current actions, EU water policy, free trade agreements, and communications (European Water Movement n.d.). It provides a critical forum to link European water movements with each other across issues of ecology, remunicipalisation, and anti-privatisation. It coordinates campaigns around European water policy, such as the recent Drinking Water Directive, the Water Framework Directive check-in, Concession Directive and the Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources, and has participated in the Alternative Water Forums and COP21 summits. The movement has 34 members across 10 countries, including public water operators, trade unions, NGOs, environmental groups, and community activists (European Water Movement 2017).



*Alternative World Water Forum
March 2012 / Marseille, France*

EUROPEAN CITIZEN'S INITIATIVE (ECI) ON THE RIGHT2WATER

In 2013, the first successful ECI¹² collected over 1.9 million signatures, demanding that the commission implement the UN Human Right to Water and Sanitation in European legislation. The campaign was coordinated by the European Federation

¹² The ECI is a tool established through the Lisbon Treaty to allow for more participation from European citizens, where issues must be considered by the commission if enough signatures are collected (over 1,000,000) (van den Berge/Boelens/Vos 2018).

of Public Service Unions (EPSU). It framed water as a public good, demanding people not profit-orientated policy. Right2Water was a broad coalition, including existing water justice groups, anti-poverty networks, public health groups, Green parties, consumer groups, NGOs, religious groups, development organisations, and trade unions (Right2Water n.d.). It was not necessarily seen as either left or right, and each country-based coalition responded to the local issues and context (van den Berge/Boelens/Vos 2018; Bieler 2017). The ECI was important in putting issues of water in the public domain, paving the way for many subsequent movements and establishing Right2Water as a rallying cry. The Commission took nearly five years to properly respond to the demands of the ECI and the recent amendments to the Drinking Water Directive still fall short of enshrining the right to water at the EU level (Sanchez 2018).

ANTI-PRIVATISATION

ITALY

The Italian Water Forum has been a critical actor in the European Water justice movement and a model looked to by many other movements. The Forum was established formally in 2006 but can trace its roots to the first Alternative World Water Forum in Firenze in 2003, and alter-globalisation movements occurring at the same time as increasing privatisation of public water services throughout Italy (Bieler 2015). The Forum has been able to bring together diverse actors from NGOs, left-wing groups, and trade unions. There have been some tensions within the Forum, particularly between some trade unions that were not always in agreement over privatisation and what form of company could be considered truly public (Bieler 2015). The Forum was the backbone of the successful nationwide referendum held in June 2011, where over 95 percent of participants voted to reject national legislation that would make the privatisation and liberalisation of water services compulsory. The preparation for the referendum took many years, the collection of over 1.4 million signatures, and included a broad coalition of organisations. The movement maintained a distance from traditional political parties and the left/right divide, and, critically, called for water to be considered a *commons* (Muehlebach 2016). The demands of the referendum although not fully implemented, have prevented the government from selling water services as part of the EU rescue deal (Hall/Lobina 2012). It was also a critical example of the democratic deficit that many water movements since have highlighted, as well as showing that referenda can be successful models for future water movements such as the ECIU and in Greece (Bieler 2015).



The Forum also continues to connect Italian water movements and links with other European movements (Interview 8, 2018).

However, the constitution now includes the requirement for a balanced budget, putting extra pressure on municipal authorities and limiting future remunicipalisation. Yet there are some good examples to learn from: Naples offers a progressive model of public management, turning their water companies into truly public entities (under public rather than private law) (Interview 8, 2018); and Lazio recently approved a regional law that recognised water as a human right and common good, managed on a not-for-profit basis with increased democratic oversight, following a popular local petition signed by 37,000 citizens (Lobina and Corporate Accountability International 2014). Some activists also organised communities to self-reduce (a form of non-payment) their water bills to acceptable levels (Interview 8, 2018). The recent coalition of the Five Star Movement and League have changed the political context for water activists; the Five Star Movement politicians are somewhat supportive of public water, yet the nationalist program of the League raises the threat that such policies could be used to further exclude minorities (Interview 8, 2018).

GREECE

There have been multiple movements that have tried to protect Greek water utilities from privatisation. The Privatisation of water companies were a target of each Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). As part of this, public water utilities were placed into a Super Fund for 99 years, and the water utilities in both Thessaloniki and Athens were required to part-privatise. In response, the citizens of Thessaloniki held, in 2014, a successful referendum where over 98 percent of voters demanded that water remain public. The referendum was self-organised, with activists coordinating the voting and organising international observers. The government tried to declare the referendum illegal, but the large turnout and community support legitimised the process (Bieler/Jordan 2017). The case of privatisation was taken to the Supreme Court, which ruled that water should remain public. Despite this, the privatisation of public utilities continues through the management of the Super Fund and pressure from the Troika. One of the next steps of the campaign is to push for constitutional change to protect public water and continue to influence public debate (Interview 11, 2018).

Another key fight is around accessibility and stopping cut-offs. Activists and public water employees have refused to carry out cut-offs for non-payment, and have reconnected households that have been cut off (Karyotis 2017). This solidarity

action has strengthened support for the trade unions in communities. In response, the company has tried to bring in outside workers and buy off the trade unions in Thessaloniki, aiming to divide the workforce and community. In Athens, the public water utility and the trade union has successfully pushed for free public water taps to be provided in the historical centre of Athens, and they are talking about participating in the Blue Communities project (Interview 11, 2018).

IRELAND

Ireland's water infrastructure is in dire need of investment, with over 40 percent of water lost through leaky pipes. The state used this and the RBMP obligations to try to introduce water charges (Interview 12, 2018). Water charges have been on the agenda of the Irish government for decades. However, under the guise of the bailout, and arguable pressure from the Commission, a national utility, Irish Water, was established in 2013. The utility would consolidate the local utilities and install water meters to allow for the introduction of metered charges (Hearne 2015). Water has been paid for out of general taxation, and a new charge was understood as a double and regressive payment. Irish Water and water meters were legitimately understood by the community as the first step towards commodification of water and its possible privatisation (Interview 12).

What erupted was the largest social movement since independence. The protests have included a range of tactics, from public marches under the Right2Water banner, non-payment of bills (around 50 percent), and communities blockading the installation of water meters. Commodifying water was the last straw after years of austerity. The movement was able to bring together and mobilise community groups, trade unions, and some political groups (Cox 2017).



Right2Water
Protest in Dublin, Ireland



However, environmental groups did not play a role. For many, water became the frame that they could put in all that had gone wrong since the crash; it became *the* anti-austerity movement (Interview 12 and 13, 2018). In terms of activity, the movement peaked in 2014–15. It managed to put off the introduction of water charges and led to the decimation of the Labour Party at the 2016 election, which had been voted in on an anti-austerity platform. It woke up a whole generation of activists, the effects being seen in subsequent protests around housing and women's health. However, Irish Water still exists, and the state is looking to bring in excessive-use charges in 2019, which many see as the first step towards more general charges (Interview 12 and 13, 2018). The water movement is still active, with calls for a referendum on putting the right to water in the constitution a key goal. The inclusion of the Right2Water in the constitution has been a key demand, and legislation that could allow for a referendum is currently in negotiation (being stalled) in the Dail; trade unions and community activists are fighting hard so that this legislation is not forgotten. Activists have been holding film screenings, information stalls, and collecting signatures to prepare the ground for future mobilisation.

SLOVENIA

In 2016, the Slovenian parliament voted unanimously to enshrine the right to water in the constitution. This was in response to growing fear of commercialisation of water resources. This was both the result of a successful citizen's initiative and also political timing, where it became politically opportune for politicians to support the change. However, since the elections, the campaign has lost momentum, and there have been no legislative changes or concrete policies to protect water sources against private interests (Interview 10, 2018).

CROATIA

There are no immediate plans to privatise sanitation and water services in Croatia. However, there are some moves towards the introduction of PPPs in water treatment facilities and changes in policy that could open up water utilities to privatisation. Right to the City, and Zagreb is Ours, a wide left-green political platform established in 2017, fight for public and common goods and a democratisation of public services, including water. They have carried out research on the financial aspects of water in Croatia, and the bottled water industry. They plan to screen *Up to the Last Drop* across small towns and cities to raise consciousness and build up to a referendum campaign demanding constitutional protection for public water.

Activists are working with trade unions to make sure that the issue of public water is not taken up by the right wing (Interview 16, 2018).

BELGIUM

In Belgium, water ownership remains completely public. However, like many other public owned utilities in Europe, there has been some financial pressure when searching for investment. In response, and to ensure that the costs of investment are not borne by low-income households, activists have begun to organise alongside (especially public sector) trade unions. Although not under threat from direct privatisation, activists monitor the situation. Critically, the Brussels local water company, Vivacqua, hosts the European office of the progressive operators Bureau, Aqua Publica Europea (Aqua Publica Europea n.d.), an ally of the European Water Movement. Similar groups have been pushing for Belgian communities to become Blue Communities to help keep Belgian water services public.

REMUNICIPALISATION

FRANCE

In the last decade, France has seen the largest number of remunicipalisations in Europe. This is a result of both public pressure and information showing that public management is more cost effective. Most municipalities have waited until concessions expire, rather than cancelling existing contracts, avoiding compensation claims (Hall/Lobina 2012). Paris was one of the most important examples of this: after public pressure, an audit commissioned by the city of Paris showed that prices were 25–30 percent higher than justified, and there was a severe lack of transparency. The city waited until the contract expired in 2010 to remunicipalise. Since remunicipalisation, there has been an increase in public spending, tariffs have reduced, and an observatory was created to increase transparency (Lobina/Kishimoto/Petitjean 2014). Eau de Paris has helped establish networks with other public operators to counter private sector lobbying, as well as to pool knowledge and skills (Petitjean 2015). In Montpellier, remunicipalisation took place because of public pressure on authorities during local elections and brought together activists and one trade union. The sanitation contract expires in 2021, so activists are preparing for this as well as trying to improve the public management model of water management (Interview 7, 2018).

Despite these wins, the role of private companies, through the need for investment to reach higher ecological standards, has also increased. There is also



an increasing number of public companies that are governed under private law (Interview 7, 2018). The French legal system is not as amenable to bottom-up referendums, so this will not be a focus for future campaigns.

GERMANY

There have been a number of cases of remunicipalisation in Germany. The largest case where a public campaign played a key role was Berlin, where a referendum was held in 2011 and the buy-back completed in 2013. Berlin's water services were under a PPP model that guaranteed a level of 8 percent return on equity to private shareholders, RWE and Veolia, for 28 years, which led to tariffs dramatically increasing and quality decreasing. The Berlin Water Table, an activist network, was established in 2006 to demand remunicipalisation. They researched the company and launched a campaign to publicise the contracts, and, in 2011, successfully voted for the proposition, "Berliners want their water back", which was the first successful popular referendum in Berlin (Berlin Water Table 2014). Rather than challenging RWE's and Veolia's claims for compensation, the senate proposed an expensive buy-back program to remunicipalise Berlin's water, costing nearly €1.3 billion, meaning that the loan to pay for the buy-backs will be paid through customer tariffs over the next 30 years (Lobina/Kishimoto/Petitjean 2014). The campaign is now focused on the democratisation of water services, pushing for increasing transparency and participation of the public utility. Rostock has also recently remunicipalised its water after 25 years. Public pressure is also rising in Stuttgart, with demands for referendums and the termination or non-renewal of contracts (Hecht 2015).

*Berlin Water Table & Berlin Water Council
present the Berlin Water Charter
at the Brandenburg Gate, Germany*



SPAIN

The Public Water Network (RAP) has been promoting public water management and strengthening the Spanish Association of Public Water Supply and Sanitation Operators (AEOPAS) as an alternative to private sector lobby groups. There is a campaign by AEOPAS to promote tap water over bottled water and attempts to link with Blue Communities. Water movements have built up strong relationships with municipal movements and have developed a social pact for water that proposes an alternative, transparent, democratic, and non-commercial public management model (Interviews 8 and 9, 2018). 75 organisations have signed up to the *Social Agreement for Water in Defense of our Rivers and for Public Water* including trade unions, water groups, and the environmental movement (European Water Movement 2018). The town of Terrassa is leading the Catalan water remunicipalisation movement by taking back control from MINA-AGBAR, who had controlled water services since 1842. Terrassa built up social support until they could pressure the municipal government and propose a public water management design when the existing concession expired (Interview 8, 2018). This model includes an observatory; democratic control; and participation of social movements, researchers, and political parties in the administrative council (Steinfert/Kishimoto 2017). Valladolid is another good example of successful public sector management in the Spanish context. The Catalanian movement is also fighting for a referendum to force the Barcelona authorities to ask citizens what type of water management they want. In March 2017, Engineers Without Borders, Barcelona en Comu, and the city administration held a conference titled *Water, a Common Good* to discuss how public water management would look, what types of accountability mechanisms are needed, and the criteria for an independent observatory. They, alongside Terrassa and other municipalities, have created a Catalan-based platform to support and learn from each other (Steinfert/Kishimoto 2017). The campaign Aiguas es vida (water is life), a coalition of community groups, trade unions, solidarity groups, and environmentalists, has focused on spreading information, building links with ecological movements, and pushing public debate on the issue. They have tried to link with other struggles, such as housing; and work with other observatories, universities, and researchers (Interview 8, 2018). They have faced strong pushback from AGBAR, the private water company active in Barcelona, a subsidiary of Suez. AGBAR has carried out legal proceedings and lobbied against the movement, and there is evidence to suggest they may have paid for private investigators to infiltrate activist groups (Interview 8, 2018). Catalonia was also the center of an environmental movement to protect the Ebro River Basin and challenge the RBMP proposed by government.



PORTUGAL

Activists in Portugal are fighting for remunicipalisation but also against policies that may facilitate future privatisation. The bailout and EU directives led to attempts to further consolidate Aguas de Portugal, as well as increased pressure against municipalities that sought to cancel existing concessions (Interview 6, 2018). There have been successful remunicipalisations through public pressure. However, public financing gaps remain a constant hurdle. Mafra, a municipality near Lisbon, was the first to remunicipalise, ending its contract with Be Water after 22 years following a study that showed that public management could reduce tariffs (Water News Europe 2017). In response, Mafra is currently being sued for compensation for breaking this contract. There is also a citizens' initiative to change the status of Aguas de Portugal from a limited (anonymous) company to public law. Workers in Aguas de Portugal, after 10 years of fighting, have now won a collective agreement negotiated by the union STAL (Interview 6, 2018).

ENGLAND

Water services were completely privatized in the UK under Margaret Thatcher's government in the late 1980s. However, in recent years and gaining extra impetus following the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour Party Leader, there is a growing movement to renationalize water services (along with other privatized services such as electricity and rail) (Elliott 2018). The recent report by Karol Yearwood gained media traction and clearly shows that since privatisation, water bills in England are 43 percent more in real terms than they were in 1990, due to high dividends paid to shareholders, a strong argument against privatisation (Yearwood 2018, 2–3). The campaign organisation We Own It, a group that pushes for public services to be for people, not profit, in the UK, is currently pushing for water to be brought back into public ownership. It is currently collecting public comments for a People's Plan for Water that will be tabled to politicians in 2018/9 (We Own It 2018). This crowdsourced water policy aims to push the current renationalisation debate so that a public water utility is also democratic and participatory and responds to the community demands made of it (We Own It 2018).

BULGARIA

Unlike other remunicipalisation campaigns, the campaign in Sofia was spearheaded by a right-wing nationalist movement. In Bulgaria, only Sofia's water is under private concession, although other municipalities are being pushed towards PPPs by the World Bank. In 2000, United Utilities took over the concession, which was then sold

to Veolia in 2010 with promises to reduce economic loss (unpaid bills) and technical leaks. Instead, tariffs increased, corruption scandals grew, and the contract included a right to 17 percent profit (Interview 1, 2018). In 2011, citizens collected signatures to demand a referendum on remunicipalisation, and activity spiked between 2012 and 2013. However, due to the fear of future lawsuits and costs associated with compensation, the city refused to allow the referendum to take place (Kishimoto 2015). This was not a progressive movement. It was a coalition between the centre left party and far right, who wanted to control water as a means to control ethnic minorities, especially the Roma. Public water became a means of boosting an exclusive nationalist project. Previously, Veolia had threatened to cut off water supplies to a poor (primarily Roma) neighbourhood because there was no infrastructure or water meters, meaning no payment. The far right argued that this meant that “Bulgarian people” are paying for Roma water, and have tried to use cut-offs as a form of punishment and a means to stoke ethnic divisions. The concession looks set to continue until 2025, but there are some attempts by progressive NGOs and activists to promote a progressive public discourse about water management to challenge the far right and their attempt to limit the public and access to public services to particular ethnicities or immigration status (Interview 1, 2018).

ECOLOGICAL

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Proposed hydropower plants cover most of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s waterways, including the last wild rivers in Europe. Similar to Serbia, the argument by the state and vested interests is that this would produce renewable energy and help the EU accession process. European companies have come there, as there are few water sources left in Europe that they can dam (an Austrian company is behind the proposed Medna Dam). Legislation is also much weaker and often not applied in the region, which means companies can get away with a lot more. As one activist stated, European companies build dams that pollute the fresh water sources, then new European companies come in to treat them before selling the water back to the community (Interview 14, 2018). Currently, over 300 power plants are planned (Interview 14, 2018). Drinking-water infrastructure is in need of investment, and almost 50 percent of households are not connected to a public water system, with many municipal authorities relying on donor funding for their operational costs. The campaign to protect the rivers has brought together communities across ethnic divides and has included direct and legal actions. Rivers hold a special value



for affected communities. They are a source of income, but all life also revolves around them, which is why the campaign resonates. Activists have blocked the building of dams and rerouted water streams. Community groups are leading the campaign but are supported by a number of NGOs and the Save the Blue Heart of Europe alliance, which tackles all dams and hydropower plants in the Balkan region (River Watch n.d.). Although active since 2016, the alliance brings together people who have been working on the issue for over 10 years. It pools NGOs resources and activist knowledge with the communities at the front line of protest. They first aim to empower communities through sharing information that counters investor propaganda. Other strategies include legal work to connect communities with lawyers, and finally, to have a strong media and public presence to pressure authorities (Interview 14, 2018). The coalition aims to address a few key policies, including regulating concessions, reducing subsidies given to the industry, changing company status from private to public interest, and modifying the European directives on renewable energy, which, despite the environmental damage, consider hydropower a renewable source of energy (River Watch n.d.).

SERBIA

As part of the accession process to the EU, Serbia must meet the standards outlined in Chapter 27, "Environment". It is estimated that to do this, an extra €15 billion in environmental investments are needed, with over €5 billion required in water infrastructure and waste treatment alone (Interview 2, 2018). Although there is no privatisation policy in place, this need for investment opens up space for private actors. There have been cases in Northern Serbia where, due to poor water quality, water treatment facilities were built through PPPs, and it is this model that activists are preparing for. The World Bank has also stated that rather than a social price, Serbia needs to start charging an economic price for water, suggesting a cost that would double the current price (Interview 2, 2018). Activists are gathering information and linking with trade unions to prepare for attempts at privatisation. Also linked to the accession process, through the need for more renewable energy production, Serbia has been building mini hydro-electric power plants on many river sources. This has had a terrible impact on the ecology of the rivers and affecting communities that rely on the water sources. In response, Serbia's first environmental movements have emerged to defend the rivers in Stara Planina. In Pirot, a self-organised protest recently managed to bring in a few thousand protestors against hydroelectric developers (Radonjic 2018). Currently, the movement has little organisational structure, with most actions coordinated through an open Facebook group that now has over 70,000 followers (Interview 2, 2018). The

movement has no clear leaders and is based on local community initiatives and individual actions. They have petitioned ministers and engaged researchers to study the effects of the power plants in order to challenge the narrative that they are “against progress” (Interview 3, 2018). This has included a strong media presence, especially on social media, and a campaign to pressure the banks that are financing the power plants. They have also collected signatures to raise the issue with the EU so that the power plants are not considered environmentally friendly in the accession process. To bring these together, activists have established Right2Water Serbia as a platform that can challenge these attempts at water grabbing and promote water as commons. They are at the early stages of developing organising strategies and campaigns that can hold this broad coalition together and are looking towards other movements in Europe. Researching experience of European remunicipalisations has helped counter the narrative that privatisation is the preferred model in Western Europe (Interview 2, 2018). The first step is an information campaign to raise awareness in the broader community about what is happening and what they can do about it, and to expand the hydropower plant protests beyond Stara Planina.

SLOVAKIA

Between 2010 and 2012, there was a national project that included over 400 communities, which aimed to improve water retention and counter flooding. This project was developed in response to the devastating floods in 2010 and an increasing level of extreme weather conditions. The project included changes to the built environment that would encourage water retention and proper drainage and return water to the natural water cycle. The project reduced flood risk and was popular in the communities where it was rolled out. However, in 2012, funding was cut with a change of government (Interview 15, 2018).



World Water Day
Athens, Greece





LESSONS LEARNT

Water is intersectional, cutting across various crises, issues, geographical locations, and people. Because everyone needs water, broad coalitions can form, linking with anti-austerity and class-orientated campaigns, resonating beyond current political divisions. However, exploring the European movements outlined above, it is clear that each movement is different, responding to the local form of water grabbing that their community faces, whether that is linked to austerity in Ireland, or hydropower in Serbia. Drawing from these movements, there are some commonalities and possible lessons that can be drawn from the strategies employed and threats faced that can inform future campaigns.

STRATEGY

RESONANCE

Most campaigns framed water as central to life, and against water as a commodity, helping to make the campaigns resonate beyond left/right divides. The use of water as a commons was particularly powerful in Italy (Muehlebach 2016). The call for a Right2Water was most successfully used when it was framed as a collective right that had concrete demands attached, negating an individualised rights discourse. This contrast can be seen in the debates over the implementation of the UN Human Right to Water and Sanitation, where private water companies do not necessarily see this as a threat to their business model (Sultana/Loftus 2015). In comparison, the Irish and Serbian campaigns have sought to link their movements to, and expand upon, the wider demands of the Right2Water ECI by using the same slogan. They have used a collective rights discourse around water to raise issues related to democracy and participation, and the public, and to contest the profit motive (Interviews 2 and 13, 2018).

ALLIANCES

All successful water movements have used water as a common issue/denominator to build broad community alliances. These have been open networks, focused on an inclusive “we”, countering a possible exclusive and nationalist politics such as developed in Bulgaria (Interview 1, 2018). The movements have shown that progressive alliances can be made between environmental groups, trade unions, and communities, as was the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and at the European level in the EWM, as public democratic water management affects everyone—from jobs and working conditions to sustainable use and access (Interviews 2, 4, and 14, 2018). Trade unions have also been vital to the discussions

around what a truly public service can look like; the work of EPSU at the European level and local trade unions in Greece, Portugal, and Ireland were essential to the campaigns (Interviews 4, 6, 11, and 13, 2018). Some movements, such as in Croatia and Spain, have also been effective in linking the issue of water with other campaigns around housing or democratic platforms (Interviews 8 and 16, 2018).

POLITICAL CONTEXT AND PARTIES

It is impossible to ignore political actors, as it is down to authorities to implement water policy. However, an ongoing question is whether or not to form alliances with political parties. Many campaigns, such as those in Berlin, Greece, and Italy, chose not to formally align and instead pressured from the outside (Interviews 5 and 11, 2018). This allowed the movements more autonomy and distance from political institutions and resisted being hijacked by politicians for their own gain, and also assisted in keeping the broad alliances together. Yet, this needs to be context dependent; linking with the municipal movement in Spain has helped put democratic water management on the political agenda, the same for Croatia (Interviews 8 and 16, 2018). In contrast, in Italy, although the Five Stars movement may be supportive of a campaign for public water, coalition partner The League could hijack the issue for racist purposes, which would make any political alliances with them or the Five Stars movement (through their alliance with the League) problematic (Interview 5, 2018).

Timing campaigns with elections (local or national) have also been useful for mounting pressure, which worked well in Montpellier, where campaign pressure forced public water management to become an election issue (Interview 7, 2018). However, channelling the Irish campaign into the 2016 election created many tensions, as it became a matter of who was running for election, fuelling party tensions, rather than the issues around water charges (Interviews 12 and 13, 2018). These differences highlight the importance of local context in drawing out the opportunities and possible weaknesses of political alliances.

DEMOCRACY

Since the Naples Declaration, democracy has been a critical demand for the global water justice movement. Local struggles—whether against environmental destruction, mining, or privatisation—have recognized the importance of community control in water services, access, and management. Internal to the movements, the involvement of many different actors in movements makes democratic participatory processes critical to maintain engagement and push the



movements forward. Many of the tensions in the Irish water movement stemmed from a feeling that there was a lack of democracy within the movement, and that control was focused on particular leaders (Interview 12, 2018). Whereas linking water with broader democratic movements such as the municipal movements in Spain and Zagreb is Ours has extended democratic demands to include the democratic management of water, not just internal movement democracy (Interviews 9 and 16, 2018).

THE LAW

In each case, the law has been a target, either through legislative protection or pushes for constitutional changes and referenda. The law is critical, yet it is clear that legislative change does not necessarily mean implementation, as was the case in Italy (Interview 5, 2018). Slovenia has shown that constitutional change does not necessarily mean legislation, and Italy and Greece show that legislative change is not always permanent (Interview 10, 2018). Legal processes can be long and demobilising, individualising struggle rather than being an empowering and collective tool. Referendums, however, can be useful in showing strength, mobilising supporters, building networks, and adding legitimacy to struggles (this was the case in Italy, Greece, and through the ECI) (Interviews 4 and 11, 2018; Bieler 2017, 2014). Yet, like legislative changes, referenda can face issues of implementation. The lack of legislative impact, but mobilising power of the Right2Water ECI, is a good example of this.

THE LOCAL SCALE

Each campaign has worked with local conditions and is fronted by local community activists, who are the ones facing the issues, whether it is the loss of a vital river system in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or threat of their water supply being cut off in Greece. This makes the issue resonate and increases legitimacy in the wider community (Interview 14, 2018). When the wider public can see that this is an issue that has a wide impact and is also mobilising everyone in the community—not just seasoned activists—the movements are stronger and harder to dismiss (Interview 12, 2018). This requires some level of flexibility, spontaneity, and trust in the community from seasoned activists or campaign leaders (Interviews 12 and 14, 2018).

INFORMATION AND PLANNING

In each case, whether preparing for remunicipalisation or fighting against hydropower plants, the gathering and dissemination of credible information has been critical not only in making arguments to authorities but also in swaying public opinion. In Mafra, the collection of data showing how a publicly run utility could be cheaper proved an effective argument for the municipality, whilst in Berlin, the publishing of concession contracts changed public opinion (Interview 6, 2018; Berlin Water Table 2014). It is hoped that scientific evidence documenting the destructive nature of hydropower plants will challenge the dogma that they are environmentally sound (Interview 3, 2018). Research proving that privatisation does not equal efficiency has been critical in changing public opinion. As one Greek activist stated, the first step is to 'inform, inform, inform' (Interview 11, 2018).

Yet alongside the gathering and dissemination of information, it has been critical to plan ahead for the type of public utility or alternative policy demanded in order to propose well-researched alternatives. Planning ahead of concessions ending helped pave the way for remunicipalisations in France; however, as both Berlin and Paris show, these campaigns can take significant amounts of time, even years (Berlin Water Table 2014). The successful example of Terrassa—where a well-thought-out alternative model was implemented—relied upon significant preparation, consultation, and research for how it should work (Steinfort/Kishimoto 2017).

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Most water movements are forms of loose networks. Those that were most successful allowed for all people to participate in the ways they felt best able to contribute (for example, Ireland had a range of tactics that people could engage in) (Interviews 12 and 13, 2018). This requires some degree of organisation and structure, but also flexibility for communities to make the campaign their own. Bosnia and Herzegovina is a good example of finding this delicate balance (Interview 14, 2018). Small and new campaigns may be able to look at groups like the Italian Water Forum and the Catalan networks to learn how larger campaigns and networks can be sustained and coordinated.



SOCIAL MEDIA

The strategic use of social media has been critical as a means by which movements have coordinated and built alliances. In situations like Ireland where mainstream media was refusing to report on the movement, social media proved indispensable as an alternative media source and organisational tool (Interview 12, 2018; Trommer 2018). The use of social media for organising and building networks was also critical for the Stara Planina and Pirot protests in Serbia (Interview 3, 2018). However, and using the same cases as examples, social media can also be problematic if relied upon too much; in Serbia the open Facebook group means there is less formalised networks and organisation occurring, and in Ireland Facebook and Twitter sometimes became the places where issues were discussed rather than face-to-face meetings, leading to issues of “trolling”, and fuelling tensions in the movement.

THREATS

PUBLIC DEBT TRAP

Austerity is a constant threat to all public services. When municipalities have debt, public services are often the first to be cut, and external funding sources sought—increasing tariffs and private investment (Lobina and Corporate Accountability International 2014). Without addressing public debt, this will continue, and cases of remunicipalisation may be threatened (as we see in France, Italy, and Portugal); or public utilities will not be given adequate funding to be properly managed, feeding back into the neoliberal discourse that public companies are inefficient and mismanaged.

COST

Remunicipalisation can be very expensive, accentuating the issue of increasing public debt. There can be financial risks including compensation claims for termination of contracts, as is the case currently in Mafra (Interview 6, 2018). State and municipal governments can enter into costly buy-back options such as Berlin, creating further and long-term financial pressure on water users (Berlin Water Table 2014). Delaying remunicipalisation until concessions are due to end can be one cost-effective strategy that was used in France, but working out other legal loopholes to exit contracts and counter the regulatory chill that such contracts create is necessary.

PRIVATISATION THROUGH THE BACK DOOR

Companies and governments are using new tools and terminology to push for privatisation through the back door, including PPPs, mixed finance or “public” water companies operating under private rather than public law (a limited company) (European Union n.d.). Whenever control (and not just ownership) is passed from public to private hands, this should be challenged as a form of privatisation.

Technology and knowledge transfer also occur when companies are privatised, facilitating outsourcing and subsequently an increasing use of private companies for service delivery. When a public utility is under concession, local and public knowledge is also privatised. Over time these necessary skills are harder and costlier to bring back into the public domain. This creates an asymmetry of information and loss of in-house public expertise, increasing the opportunity for private companies to offer consulting services to remunicipalised companies, a form of outsourcing and further wealth transfer (Lobina and Corporate Accountability International 2014). This is a clear strategy of private water companies Suez and Veolia, who see the provision of services through outsourcing arrangements as both more profitable and politically amenable than direct privatisation (Hall/Lobina 2012). Increasing cooperation and knowledge sharing across public water utilities has been useful to counter this (Lime 2015; Petitjean 2015).



We run the tower Agbar
For the public management of water, Spain



EU POLICY SPACE AND TRADE

The use of EU accession as a rationale for mini hydropower plants and the huge amount of investment required to fulfil the environmental chapters highlights the importance of EU policy in shaping water policy. Water movements based in EU member states, as well as the EWM, have lobbied the EU on this issue, and in using evidence from the Balkan movements, could mount more pressure (Interviews 4 and 14, 2018). Furthermore, the Drinking Water Directive revisions were not as far-reaching as demanded in the ECI (Sanchez 2018), meaning this is still a necessary space to lobby; the next round of RBMPs and the continued WFD review process are good opportunities to do this. Because it is an election year in the European Parliament, there may be more space to pressure politicians.

WATER COMPANIES AND LOBBYING

The 5th European Water Conference held in 2018 highlighted the fact that not only private water companies, but mining and chemical companies, are lobbying for the watering down of water-related regulation (Interview 4, 2018). As well as increasing activity, different private water companies are entering the European market, such as the Chinese Be Group, and existing actors such as Veolia and Suez are changing tactics (Hall/Lobina 2012). As one EWM member stated, this shifting behaviour of capital needs to be monitored and countered (Interview 4, 2018).

Action in Munich against the private water company Nestolia, Germany



ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS

The dominance of environmental economics within EU policy space must be challenged as a form of greenwashing. The uncritical push for more economic analysis, and thus subsequent commodification of water, must be confronted. It not only further commodifies water but provides a language and framework that allows neoliberal policies to claim environmental or conservation merit. The detrimental effects of uncritical environmental policy can be seen in hydroelectric power plants on Europe's last wild river system (Interviews 2 and 14, 2018). This can also divide potential alliances, as we can see in Ireland, where unlike in other water movements, environmental groups were largely in favour of charges and metering for conservation reasons (Interview 12, 2018).

INDIVIDUAL NOT COLLECTIVE RIGHTS

Accepting a human right to water does not preclude privatisation, as it does not define how that right is to be implemented or guaranteed. There have been some uneasy alliances between calls for a right to water and those behind full-cost recovery, with some corporate interests arguing that liberalisation is the most efficient mechanism to guarantee a right to water (Sultana/Loftus 2015). We can see this with struggles over the implementation of the UN Human Right to Water and Sanitation. Issues arise when rights are understood as individual rights, rather than collective or social rights; they can be co-opted and individualised, negating the critical underpinnings and potential of these movements. A liberal, individualised discourse of rights is not enough. What movements are claiming is that the Right2Water is a collective right but that this demand is also material, including the necessary infrastructure, democratic management, public financing, and public control that would allow for real implementation. This means more than an individual right on paper, but the necessary means, i.e. democratic participatory processes, adequate funding and expertise, and structural shifts to the state that would allow for a truly social and democratic Right to Water.

FAR RIGHT AND NATIONALISM

As the case of Bulgaria shows, the right to water is not necessarily a progressive movement but relies on activists to make it one (Interview 1, 2018). Any attempt at framing the "public" as an exclusive national project rather than open, democratic, and inclusive needs to be directly challenged. This could become a problem with The League in Italy (Interview 5, 2018).





**A WAY
FORWARD?**

There are certain themes that are emerging in the different water movements that have particular political potential. The movements are pushing forward debates over the public, democratic management, necessary financing, collective rights, and the environment, and showing that each are linked and necessary for the Right2Water to be realised. These experiences show that the public is much more than a state-owned service but must operate outside of financial markets and the profit motive and be managed democratically.

Starting from where people are, campaigns have been able to push for a more progressive politics; for example, discussions over what a truly democratic public service (i.e. in Catalonia or Croatia) or wild rivers as a commons (the Balkans) have changed the political discourse. Such developments reflect wider left-wing movements that emphasize democratic processes as a means to reach a progressive left goal.

One of the biggest river events in Europe – the *Drina Regatta* near the Bajina Basta dam, Serbia



EUROPEAN LEVEL

The links between Eastern and Western Europe can be strengthened through these movements, creating a truly *European* Water Movement. The EWM platform has achieved this and is a critical platform to link issues and share strategies, acting as a counter to the private water lobby groups that have access to EU policy development. As activists in both Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina pointed out, it is through learning what Western European movements have achieved and the changing discourse around privatisations (or growing remunicipalisations) that can strengthen their own campaigns against privatisation (Interviews 2 and 14, 2018). These knowledge channels are critical and go both ways. Western movements are assisting Balkan comrades in navigating Euro-

pean legislation and can campaign against, and point at, the possible direction and behaviours of (often) European water companies and investors as they start to look towards Eastern Europe, and governments shape policy based on EU accession demands. Conversely, activists in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have shown the contradictory and hypocritical nature of European legislation especially around renewable energy (and hydroelectric power in particular) and investment requirements; these can be useful examples for future European campaigns and lobbying. The EWM is an important platform for continuing this dialogue and solidarity across struggles.

Although the recent amendments to the Drinking Water Directive did not go as far as the Right2Water ECI had demanded, some gains were made that can be built on. The EU will promote public water fountains in public spaces and buildings. The vaguely worded clause stating there is an option to charge for accessing public water is a possible future campaign issue. Furthermore, the stated goal of moving away from bottled water to tap water opens up more space for demanding the necessary infrastructure and services that safe drinkable tap water requires. In the continuing check-in process of the WFD, key areas for the EWM are around public participation and Article 9 (full cost recovery) as well as continuing pressure to implement the Human Right to Water and Sanitation. Because of the impressive lobby work by organisations such as EPSU, and successful campaign models of Spain and Italy, there is a growing number of European ministers who are sympathetic to the demands of the ECI, and thus potential allies (EPSU 2018). Sharing experiences of the Wild Rivers may further counter the dominance of environmental economic rationale. The European Water Movement is developing strategies to intervene in the continued review of the Water Framework Directive, publicising the hypocritical environmental and water policy, and monitoring the impact of current trade agreements such as CETA and JEFTA (Interview 17, 2018).

REMUNICIPALISATION/PRIVATISATION

Some of the European water movements have gone beyond water by pushing a radical reconfiguration of what a democratic public should look like. A common thread throughout all campaigns is the ongoing question of what is meant by the public. It is becoming clear in the many remunicipalisations that bringing these utilities back into public ownership is not necessarily enough, owing to the potential for poor management and a lack of transparency, feeding the nega-



tive discourse on public utilities (Interview 7, 2018). There is a need to challenge “public” models that continue to operate under private law, financial markets, and the profit motive. As one activist pointed out, without changes to the legal framework and institutional form of water management, the same issues will continue to arise (Interview 5, 2018). Rome exemplifies this; the water utility is nominally public, but because Suez controls 20 percent of the stock, they make most of the strategic decisions (Interview 5, 2018). The Greek Super Fund is another example. Although nominally public, these water utilities are governed for profit and are at odds with how a public service for the benefit of the whole community should be run. A truly public service runs counter to the environmental economic argument and broader neoliberal rationale that the market is best at managing services such as water. These movements are showing that profit and a public ethos are not compatible. Starting from the concrete, where people are already experiencing this incompatibility, has been a useful starting point for denaturalizing and countering the dominant neoliberal logic of privatisation (Interview 13, 2018).

Public-Public Partnerships (PUP) are becoming a potential model for municipal services to pool resources and knowledge. This includes two or more public authorities working together on the basis of solidarity to improve capacity; they are not run on profit motives but instead aim to make each public organisation or authority autonomous through increased capacity. This has worked well in Paris, Barcelona, and in some energy companies in the UK (Bradford, York, and Nottingham) (Kishimoto/Petitjean 2017, 172–73).

Central to the public is democracy. Calls for the democratic management of these services, i.e. that the public is not just related to ownership and purpose but also management, has been successful in Terrassa and key to the wider municipal movements in Spain (Interview 8, 2018). This is an incredibly powerful claim, running counter to neoliberalism whilst empowering communities to take back control as well as ownership. Democratic processes and organisational structures both inside movements and in public utilities reflect broader left-wing movements that make the claim that a truly left society must be democratic, meaning much more than the limited form of representational democracy that is the current norm. The somewhat natural links between water movements in Spain and potentially Croatia, and the municipal and left platforms reflects this synergy. Movements in Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and Serbia are arguing that the public should not only be exclusive of private interests, but transparent, participatory, and governed according to social need. The increasing debates within movements about creating

a new democratic public model of water management, governed democratically and according to a public ethos rather than the profit motives, is exciting. Models like Terrassa can be symbolic and used as examples for other struggles.

ECOLOGICAL

There is real opportunity to connect the growing ecological-based movements with anti-capitalist struggles and debates over the common. As Serbian activists have pointed out, the Serbian Right2Water platform could link the ecological with questions over health, privatisation, and inequality, through concrete cases (Stara Planina, the water treatment plants, and future threats of privatisation) with water as the common denominator. This, connected to the importance of the public outlined above, may be able to provide a left political platform through existing movements and policy, centred on public democratic control and ecological issues (Interview 2, 2018).

The ability of the campaign in Bosnia and Herzegovina to bring together different ethnic communities is powerful. This important synergy across communities and more experienced activists also shows how these different knowledge levels can strengthen each other; the next step, as one activist described, is to put pressure on those that the government listens to, such as European legislators, to no longer include hydroelectric power plants as sources of renewable energy, and thus beneficial for European accession processes (Interview 14, 2018).



Save the Balkan Rivers
Vjosa, Albania



The background of the entire image is a close-up of a glass surface covered in rain. Numerous vertical streaks of water run down the frame, interspersed with small, glistening droplets. The lighting is diffused, creating a soft, greyish-blue tone with some darker, more saturated areas where the water is thicker or the light reflects differently. The overall texture is highly detailed and organic.

CONCLUSIONS:

**A RADICAL
DEMOCRATIC
PUBLIC?**

The question of who controls water and for what purpose makes water inherently political. Recent struggles around water in both a European and global context understand water as a common good rather than a commodity increasing profits for the few. But what does a right to water concretely mean? For the European (and global) movements, this is not just a transfer of ownership from private to public hands, nor a cheaper water bill. A Right2Water is a challenge to neoliberal water management, the market, and the increasing commodification of life.

Yet, these movements are not just *against* privatisation or environmental destruction but are thinking through alternatives and building up community power. Water as an essential service and essential to life itself is a concrete starting point for developing a democratic and truly public management agenda. The experiences of privatisation show that it is neither efficient nor necessarily environmental; this is also the case for state-managed services that operate under the same logic. Instead, a public devoid of private property and looking towards the common is being thought through. Demanding that public ownership also means under public law and exclusive of financial markets both reverses the commodification of water but also puts forward a radical shift in purpose—that services should have a public service ethos rather than be profit-driven. This is a wind back of the neoliberal logic that has become so central and almost natural within state policy and the wider community.

The movements show that threats to water mobilise people and can bring together divided communities. This mobilising capacity has succeeded in watering down further austerity programs in Ireland, where they showed the ruling elite that communities had had enough and would say no.

Right2Water
Protest, Ireland



Although such wins are never permanent, they help build community power and memory, feeding into future campaigns. Alliances are also being made across movements, internal to Europe through the EWM, but also globally with the Detroit Water Warriors and water activist Maude Barlow travelling to different European movements to share their experiences of privatisation, and vice versa.

The ecological movements underline that being pro-environment also requires an anti-capitalist politics. Hydroelectric power plants in Bosnia and Herzegovina are being developed as a strategy to “greenwash” their environmental record, being commensurate with a pro-environment agenda through renewable energy targets. Yet, these projects are destroying the environment, as well as the communities that rely on the river ecology for food, water, and local industry. The power plants, whilst assisting EU accession processes, are also channelling profits to European companies and the local ruling elite at the expense of the environment and communities. This is not just about protecting delicate ecosystems but also about challenging these unequal power relations. Movements are demanding that any environmental strategy must be democratic, and community led, not imposed from above by either the government or the EU. Ultimately, economic growth and environmental sustainability are not compatible. These ecological movements, taking a different vantage point from remunicipalisation or anti-privatisation struggles, still highlight the same issues: democracy and the public, and they challenge the neoliberal ethos of profit over life.

This is a global struggle made up of many local struggles. Each struggle is specific to the particular form of water grabbing that they face yet are equally challenging capitalist control over their communities. This is confronted locally by building power and resisting, but also at the European level through lobbying ministers, challenging policies, and making it clear that community resistance is broad, growing, and will continue.

This document goes some way to explain the existing regulative regime and ways in which current European water movements are fighting against it so that future water movements can learn from, and build solidarity with them, linking with the EWM. Water movements are resisting the dominant neoliberal discourse that the right to water is a technocratic debate best solved by market forces, demanding instead increased democratic control of the hydro-social cycle. A true Right2Water must be based on democracy, justice, and equity—it is a collective and democratic right.



INTERVIEW LIST

All interviews and discussions were conducted in Belgrade, October 2018, unless otherwise stated.

1. Bulgarian activist/researcher
2. Serbian water activist, Right2Water Serbia
3. Serbian water activist, Campaign to Protect Serbian Rivers
4. European Water Movement member
5. Italian Water Forum member
6. Portuguese trade unionist
7. French Activist/European water movement member
8. Catalanian water activist
9. Spanish water activist/trade unionist
10. Slovenian water activist
11. Greek trade unionist
12. Irish water activist (September 2018, Cork)
13. Irish trade unionist, Right2Water Ireland (October 2018, Dublin)
14. Bosnian water activist, Wild Rivers Coalition
15. Slovakian water engineer
16. Croatian activist, Right to the City
17. European Water Movement member

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