

# The Campaign Against Water Privatisation in Italy: Democratising Water from Below

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# Summary

- ◆ National context
- ◆ Demands of the campaign
- ◆ Origin of the campaign
- ◆ The long, winding road to success
- ◆ Reflections



# National Context

- 1994 Galli Law: Introduced full cost recovery but does not require privatisation, nor liberalisation
- Budget Laws, 2002-2009: Required compulsory competitive tendering/partial privatisation of water operators
- Impact of legislation, 1994 to date: Considerable growth of private operations, accompanied by increasing controversy



# **Demands of the campaign**

- ◆ **To outlaw water privatisation**
- ◆ **To outlaw profit making in the water sector**
- ◆ **To remunicipalise water operations**
- ◆ **Paradigm switch in water services:  
From the market to public participation**



# Origin of the campaign

- ◆ **2005:** Trade unions, NGOs and civic associations establish horizontal network to mobilise against Bolkenstein Directive (at European and Italian level) - Stop Bolkenstein! campaign
- ◆ **2006-2007:** Trade unions, NGOs and civic associations establish the Italian Forum of Water Movements; proposed law on water remunicipalisation, supported by 406,000 signatures (above the required 50,000); 40,000-strong demonstration
- ◆ **2008-2009:** Fall of the Prodi government; Forum requests the Berlusconi governments to enact water remunicipalisation, without success; Strategic decision to promote referendum



# The long, winding road to success

- ◆ **April-July 2010:** 1,400,000 signatures collected to request the referendum against water privatisation (above the minimum 500,000 required)
- ◆ **The campaign motto:** It is written water but reads democracy!
- ◆ **12-13 June 2011:** More than 27.6 million Italians vote, 95% of them against water privatisation



# Reflections on the coalition

- ◆ A grassroots, diffused, transversal and bottom-up campaign – with no formal backing from major political parties
- ◆ The usual suspects, but most were without prior campaigning experience (sensitised citizens)
- ◆ Trade unions, NGOs, civic associations, some local authorities and public water companies, missionaries, parishes, artists, legal experts, minor political parties ... plus allies



# Reflections on mobilisation strategy

- ◆ New media (internet, Facebook)
- ◆ Peer sensitisation (door to door, but mostly informal)
- ◆ Numbers do matter for message diffusion: mobilisation strategies adapted accordingly (from conventional to inclusive tactics, suitable for the novice)
- ◆ Numbers do matter for strategy: forum switching from mass demonstrations to proposed law and referendum



# Reflections on allies and opponents

- ◆ **Allies:** Controversial role of some political parties; the Vatican and the Catholic Church; a minority of the media (with some late conversions)
- ◆ **Opponents:** Berlusconi government (who did its utmost to discourage turnout); reticent state media; private and commercialised water companies



# The democratising power of water

- ◆ Water as a common good (thus publicly owned and managed) as catalyst for transversal mobilisation and social support
- ◆ Democracy from below to repossess water as a public service, under a new paradigm
- ◆ Water's democratising power revived what was a moribund instrument of direct democracy

