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Conference Time: 31st May 2023, 05:59:54pm CEST

## Conference Agenda

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 Authors

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## Session Overview

### Session

#### 0905-378: Water Conflict, Negotiation, and Mediation in Alpine and Pyrenean areas between the 15th and the 20th century

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*Time:* Thursday, 24/Aug/2023: 11:15am - 12:45pm  
*Session Chair:* Salvatore Valenti

*Location:* Unitobler – F 013

53 seats Unitobler, Lerchenweg 36

Panel

### Session Abstract

Society and water are intrinsically linked, interdependent, and mutually constituted. Water is a crucial element for human life and for any social production. It flows through mountains, valleys, and cities, connecting distant places and people in an intricate bundle of relationships. Human societies continuously manipulate water for these reasons. As a result, the right to access, techniques and technologies to distribute it, and for what purpose are fields for conflict, negotiation, and mediation among different social groups.

Combining approaches from economic, political, and social history and archaeology, the proposed session will examine the multifarious processes of social inclusion and exclusion, the distribution of benefits and burdens, and the mediation of various interests on and through water resources in the Alpine and sub-Alpine Italy, as well as in the French Pyrenees over the long term. Water was abundant in these areas but accommodating the interests of all the stakeholders, and territories involved was a complex process. Specifically, the session explores how different institutions and groups access water, preserve, contest, and negotiate water rights and water uses in a dynamic that involved economics, politics, law, and material aspects. As a result, the session contributes to our understanding of the strategies and methods past societies have developed to manage and to govern water, a resource that is both vital and limited.

### Presentations



#### Water Conflict, Negotiation, and Mediation in Alpine and Pyrenean areas between the 15th and the 20th century

*Chair(s):* Salvatore Valenti (Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Italy)

*Presenter(s):* Salvatore Valenti (Ca' Foscari University of Venice), Rachele Scuro (Ca' Foscari University of Venice), Matteo Di Tullio (University of Pavia), Anna Maria Stagno (University of Genoa)

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#### Water conflicts in late nineteenth-century Italy: the struggle for Milan's aqueduct, 1881-1891.

Salvatore Valenti

The 1880s were a decade of intense changes in water access, use, and distribution in Italy. In the context of evolving legal and institutional principles, ancient and established water rights, privileges and new laws, users, and uses the Italian society was still seeking an ordering principle for water policy.

Hydroelectricity's first steps, the sanitation of cities, and the increasing of the irrigated surface put pressures over existing users and established uses of water. In this process, many actors competed for the exploitation of a limited set of water resources. A private company and Milan city council projected to build an aqueduct using the springs of the river Brembo in the province of Bergamo to supply fresh water to the city. Municipalities, irrigation consortia, and of the Province of Bergamo all opposed the project, which, they argued, put at risk the valley's entire economy.

Throughout the analysis of municipal minutes, political negotiations, changes to the project, legal trials, rulings of public agencies, and pamphlets this paper will reveal a complex bundle of material interests, and their difficult coexistence over a crucial but limited element for any aspect of human society.

#### Moving mills or irrigated moats? The role of water between economics and environment in the early modern Venetian State.

Rachele Scuro

At the end of a fast expansion in the northern Italian Peninsula, by the 1420s Venice, passed from being a sea city to a State characterised by a variety of environmental habitats, from the Alps to the plains of Veneto. The multiplicity of settings went hand in hand with areas diversified by their economic specialisations and use of resources. The main cities and towns at the foot of the mountains saw a sturdy manufacturing presence, while the Dolomites and plains focused on commodities and connected specialised industries. In all cases, water was the key element.

In the beginning, the *Serenissima* policy toward the resource remained mild, yet the situation changed during the 1550s when water became a matter of state, controlled by central magistrates. From that moment on, any subject should have asked (and paid a fee) to be granted water rights.

This paper will investigate how and to what aims water was used in the Venetian *Terraferma* in the early modern period. It points to three main goals: first, to identify the social groups interested in the exploitation of water, and to what purpose according to the environmental and economic characteristics of the areas. Secondly, to pinpoint where and how any specialisation occurred. Finally, to overview how Venetian central offices would impact the local balance between economics, as well as social and jurisdictional conflicts through the concession (or not) and to whom of water, and how they were willing and/or able to govern water demand and management.

## **Contested Water. Natural resources, economic activities, and sustainability problems in northern Italy during the early modern period**

Matteo Di Tullio

This paper aims to present the main objectives and the provisional results of a project on the management of natural resources and the emergence of sustainability problems in early modern Lombardy, in northern Italy. Specifically, I will present an analysis of the water conflicts in the districts of Milan (State of Milan) and Brescia (Republic of Venice), which I am conducting through systematic reading of the primary sources produced by some institutions and large landowners in those territories. In the case of Milan, I am considering some important 'welfare' institutions, like the *Misericordia consortium* and the *Quattro Marie schola*, while for Brescia I am focusing on the local *Ospedale Maggiore*. In both cases, I will have the opportunity to provide a long run analysis from the late fifteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. These case studies are particularly suitable to my aims due to the abundance and the seriality of documents still preserved at the local archives.

In this paper, I will focus on how I am collecting, processing, and analysing these records in order to study sustainability in the past. The systematic study of these litigations, in fact, provides the possibility to understand when and in which period some management issues happened, for which reasons they occurred, which actors were involved and so on. In other words, the quantification and qualifications of the water conflicts provide the opportunity to reconstruct the environmental management in a multi-perspective way and to consider the intricate nature of the emergence of environmental, economic and social sustainability problems.

### **The materiality of conflicts and the shared use of water. The canals of Callastre, Eyne and Rondole between the 18th and 20th centuries**

Anna Maria Stagno

The paper aims to explore the connection between rights and materiality, analyzing the practices of distribution and sharing of water that, through the functioning of some channels that various communities linked to the hamlets of Rondole, Callastre, Lio and Eyne in the French Cerdagna, used for the irrigation of meadows and fields. These irrigation channels in fact, originated from the same streams with a complex repartition in each channel, but then it is also evident that in many parts, the channels were supplied with each other.

The archaeological investigation of the courses of the aqueducts allowed to document not only the complex systems of diversion and re-introduction of water from one canal to another, but also the numerous transformations in the waterways and diversions - including traces of destruction of one of the channels. Traces interpreted as the result of a dense negotiation and conflictuality around water resources. The analogous conflictuality emerges from documentary sources and oral memory linked to these channels. Investigating the materiality of the practices to share and divide water and their transformations allows us to grasp not only the profound materiality connected to the exercise of possession and vice versa (how changes in access rights and usurpations are reflected in the material evidence), but also put in question the dichotomic consideration of the mechanisms of conflictuality and solidarity, as the two appears to coexist in the same time, and showing the complexity of the social relationship around the shared use of resources, beyond the rhetoric of conflicts which emerge by archival documentation.

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