

Remunicipalisation of water services in Europe. Comparative study of the Neapolitan and Parisian cases

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ABSTRACT

After the politicisation of urban water services governance, over a hundred European cities have implemented water services remunicipalisation reforms inspired by the theory of water management as a common. This paper aims to answer questions about the contextual variables that impact the water utility governance processes and the factors that determine the policy-makers' choices. In particular, the work reconstructs the water remunicipalisation reforms of Paris (2009) and Naples (2011) with the Process-Tracing method, compares them, evaluates their outcomes and formulates previsions about their continuance. We base the analysis on qualitative data collected by documentary investigations and 27 in-depth interviews with protagonists of the remunicipalisation processes. Despite implementing the same management model, the water remunicipalisation has produced profoundly different governance processes and outcomes. The Parisian remunicipalisation was quick, efficient, almost conflict-free, and produced a slight implementation gap, whereas the Neapolitan one was long, complex, highly conflictual and generated a substantial implementation gap. Contextual variables and actors' behaviour are essential in explaining water policy reform outcomes. The protagonists of analysed reforms have taken decisions based on opportunities and limits defined by their local contexts and the relational systems in which they are historically embedded.

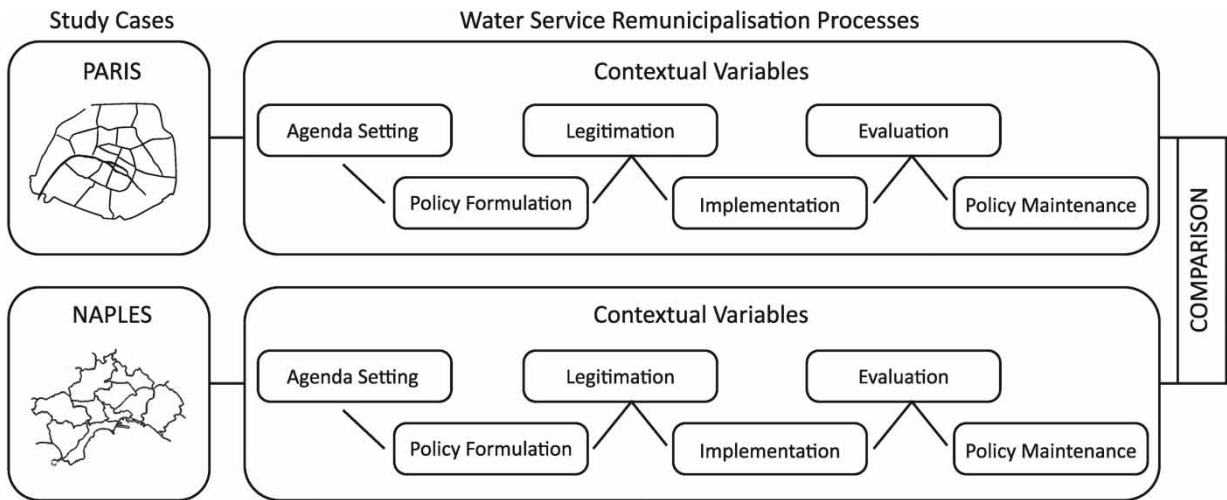
Key words: Embeddedness, European water services, Urban governance, Water management, Water policy, Water remunicipalisation

HIGHLIGHTS

- Comparison of the remunicipalisation processes of European water services.
- Tracing, explanation and evaluation of the water remunicipalisation processes.
- Biophysical, cultural and institutional variables impact the water utilities' governance.
- Remunicipalisation actors' choices are embedded in the local relations, structures, territory and history.
- The analysis of governance processes must be multilevel.

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GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



INTRODUCTION

Since the 2000s, water services governance has undergone an intense politicisation in local European debate caused by the spread of local mobilisations against the outcomes of an urban water governance mode based on water management as a mere private good (Turri, 2022). They demanded the remunicipalisation of the privatised water services so that municipalities could manage them directly, according to the in-house model and not-for-profit principles.

We define governance as ‘what happens beyond an organisation – that is, the capacity to organise collective action, to build coalitions and partnerships directed towards specific goals’ (Le Galès, 1998: 496). Governance is not a linear process, not always rational; it is incomplete and prone to discontinuities (Le Galès & Vitale, 2013).

The term remunicipalisation generally refers to reforms that reverse the privatisation process of public services (Clifton *et al.*, 2021). Scholars have used different concepts to describe these reforms. However, remunicipalisation has become the most spread expression to indicate reforms for fulfilling the direct management of water services by public authorities through public-law companies (Bauby & Similie, 2013; Chiu, 2013; Bauby *et al.*, 2018; Romano *et al.*, 2022). This concept is used even when such reforms occur on a national or regional scale or when services are made public for the first time (McDonald & Swyngedouw, 2019). Assuming this broad meaning of the remunicipalisation concept, we include in the remunicipalisation category the phenomenon of de-corporatisation. De-corporatisation reforms transform private-law companies owned by public entities and managed through profit-driven logic (Verhoest, 2018) into public-law corporations.

In this paper, we present two cases of water remunicipalisation reforms sharing the same pragmatic and ideological motivations (Romano *et al.*, 2022). In 2009, the Parisian government did not renew the outsourcing contract with the two multinationals. It transformed a Public-Private-Partnership into a public law company to manage the urban water service in-house. Similarly, in 2011, the Neapolitan government de-corporatised the joint stock company responsible for local drinking water supply, creating a public law company to manage the service in-house. Both governments have justified such a reform with the will to improve the water service from a social, environmental, and quality perspective and manage it as common by commoning practices. Commoning describes the practical processes of mutual sharing and collaboration triggered by the communities that use the commons (Feinberg *et al.*, 2021).

The scientific debate on local public services management focuses mainly on corporate models and rule sets that regulate the utility sector on a national scale (Wollmann *et al.*, 2016; Lippi & Tsekos, 2019). However, little attention is paid to the impact of contextual variables and actors' behaviour on water governance. From this analytical perspective, we compare two cases of implementation of the same water governance model but within very different contexts from the economic, political and historical points of view.

CASES' SELECTION AND METHOD

Our research rotates around two working hypotheses: firstly, the same governance model produces different outcomes in different contexts since contextual variables set possibilities of action to the actors of the policy-making process; secondly, such actors select their action strategies non only based on their preferences, but also the relational systems in which they are embedded and that they have inherited from the past.

To test such hypotheses, we have analysed the whole remunicipalisation processes of Paris and Naples. We have purposely decided to compare two cities that have implemented the same governance model within significantly different contexts from a biophysical, socio-cultural, institutional and historical point of view. This allowed us to evaluate the impact of contextual variables on the remunicipalised water companies' outcomes more accessible. Despite the contextual differences, the two remunicipalisation processes share many common points that make their comparison feasible: they took place during the period of maximum expansion of the European movement for water remunicipalisation; they were subject to a robust politicisation process during the municipal elections; both electoral campaigns of centre-left candidates proposed the remunicipalisation for pursuing similar policy goals; both local governments have implemented the same water corporate model, based on the presence of civil society representatives in the management board (MB) of the company, with the right to vote policy decisions, and in the supervisory board (SB), with the task to control the MB's conduct (Dardot & Laval, 2019; Barbera *et al.*, 2016).

We have collected qualitative data of political, infrastructural, institutional, biophysical, social, economic and cultural nature from academic works, official documents and journalistic services. Moreover, we have realised 27 in-depth interviews with privileged observers.

Data refer to the period between 2001 and 2020. Documents about the Naples water company's budget stopped in 2018, and only general information on its financial status can be deduced from the municipality's Consolidated Balance Sheet; however, these data do not go beyond 2020. Consistent with this, we decided to exclude data concerning the Parisian remunicipalised company referring to 2021 and 2022 to compare elements from the same historical period thoroughly.

Data collected were processed employing two techniques that aim to identify the causes of social phenomena: the first is the third variant of Process Tracing Methodology (Bennett & Checkel, 2015), called Explaining-Outcome Process-Tracing. To craft a minimally sufficient explanation of an outcome, we engage in a narrative and logical decomposition of the causal mechanisms that produced it. The second is the Comparative Policy Analysis (Schmitt, 2012), which aims at identifying causal regularities underpinning two or more policy choices.

After establishing an initial chronology of events based on the literature, we have organised semi-structured in-depth interviews to fill the knowledge gaps with actors who played a crucial role in the remunicipalisation processes. Thus, we interviewed: members of both MBs and SBs of the two companies who also held political positions (aldermen or city councillors); employees; local activists who participated in the remunicipalisation; academics and journalists.

Since numerous scholarly works have been published on the Parisian remunicipalisation process (Barraqué, 2012; Pigeon, 2012; Bauby & Similie, 2013; Chiu, 2013; Le Strat, 2013; Sinai, 2013; Lorrain, 2016; Bauby *et al.*, 2018), while few studies have been realised on the remunicipalisation case of Naples (Lucarelli, 2015;

Landriani *et al.*, 2019; Agovino *et al.*, 2021), 18 of the 27 in-depth interviews relate to the Neapolitan case due to a more significant number of unidentified causal links. We collected such interviews between November 2018 and December 2019 in Paris, Montreuil, Milan, and Naples. The interviews' contents concern sensitive issues, like interpersonal conflicts, so we have decided to present them anonymously during the following narrative. Some respondents initially accepted the interview request and then refused to answer the questions about political conflicts between local activists and politicians. We interpreted this behaviour as evidence of the bitterness of the contentious dynamics.

We have classified the interviewees according to 5 typologies: academic experts, non-academic experts, employees, members of the MB and SB of water companies, and local activists. Two Neapolitan respondents and a Parisian one belong simultaneously to the category of academic experts and local activists: we have categorised them as local activists, given their active role in policy-making processes. We summarise these types in the Table 1 and associate each interview with a number.

We have articulated a conceptual framework to simultaneously explain the impact of contextual variables and actors' behaviours, evaluate the reforms' outcomes, and formulate predictions on water services. The models and concepts that make up this framework come from the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework (IAD) (Ostrom, 2005) and the Policy Process Framework (PPF) (Goyal & Howlett, 2020).

The IAD appeared to be the more fitting framework to be applied here since this is the theoretical framework that has most enriched and operationalised the contextual variables. The action situation, which is the situation in which the IAD actors act, is outlined by three typologies of variables that affect the types of actions that individuals can take, the benefits and costs of these actions and their potential outcomes. The first regards the attributes of the biophysical and material world. The second concerns community attributes, which refer to every variable that defines the culture and values shared within a community. Finally, there are the working rules, the official norms that individuals use to make decisions and justify actions.

Table 1 | Type of interviewees (handled by the author).

Type of interviewees	Paris	Naples
Academic experts	Interview n. 1	Interview n. 11
	Interview n. 5	Interview n. 16
	Interview n. 8	Interview n. 18
		Interview n. 20
		Interview n. 22
		Interview n. 25
Non-academic experts	Interview n. 2	Interview n. 15
	Interview n. 4	Interview n. 24
Employees	–	Interview n. 12
		Interview n. 27
Members of MB and SB	Interview n. 3	Interview n. 9
		Interview n. 14
Local activists	Interview n. 6	Interview n. 10
	Interview n. 7	Interview n. 13
		Interview n. 17
		Interview n. 19
		Interview n. 21
		Interview n. 23
		Interview n. 26

Within an action situation, individual and collective actors act based on the fallible learner model, a variant of the bounded rationality model that assumes the incrementalism of policy changes. Fallible learners are actors who can make mistakes. However, when people repeatedly interact in free and open communication, they can better understand their situation and adopt strategies to solve social dilemmas. The actors' strategic choices do not depend only on personal motivations but also on the context in which they operate, which provides them with the essential information to calculate the payoffs produced by their actions. Therefore, behaviours such as reciprocity, opportunism or cooperation can be fostered by the surrounding environment's norms, institutions and attributes.

IAD permits explaining the situations in which the policy-makers act and their possible choices. However, it does not equip the scholar with an explanatory model of the policy-makers behaviours and the diachronic development of a policy-making process. The PPF is fitting to fulfil these goals and is compatible with IAD since it assumes the bounded rationality of the actors, the incrementalism of policy changes and the idea that the protagonists of a policy cycle can be both individual and collective.

PPF originated from the union of two metaphors: the policy streams and the policy cycle. The PPF shows how a policy change results from the flow of three streams. The problem stream is composed of multiple policy problems. The policy solution stream is given by the simultaneous flow of many potential policy solutions. Finally, the political process stream is the result of the convergence of all political factors that make citizens and their political class assume a specific definition of a problem and a particular idea of its solutions. Such streams flow incessantly and in parallel until a window of opportunity opens, during which the actors may be able to couple them, producing a policy change.

Individual and collective actors act within the streams as entrepreneurs, investing more or fewer resources to promote their partisan policy solutions. The categories of actors applied in this work are the following: an epistemic community is a group of experts involved in defining political problems. An instrument constituency is a set of actors who define and advocate particular policy tools to face political problems. Social movements are groups of heterogeneous individuals with the general purpose of generating systemic changes in a social field. A problem broker is an individual actor who invests resources to spread a given definition of a problem. A person engaged in pushing her/his policy solutions is called policy entrepreneur. A program champion acts to facilitate policy implementation. Finally, policy targets concern individuals and groups that share nothing but belonging to that slice of the population to which a specific policy is addressed. Therefore, their reaction to such a policy may represent the origin of a new political problem for politicians.

Finally, we evaluated both remunicipalisation processes' outcomes to identify an eventual implementation gap, representing the difference between policy-makers expectations and the actual policy outcomes (Hudson *et al.*, 2019). We have operationalised the implementation gap by assessing the reforms' outcomes in the light of the common goals announced by the policy-makers who proposed and then implemented the water remunicipalisation. We have identified five shared legitimating motives of remunicipalisation: (1) long-term ecological sustainability of the water consumption pattern; (2) increased transparency of local water management operations; (3) improvement of service quality and water losses; (4) citizen participation in the management of the service; (5) improvement of equity in access to drinking water and sanitation for all citizens.

In conclusion, we have used a descriptive and monographic approach to expose the outcomes of our analysis.

RESULTS AND EXPLANATIONS

Consistently with our research design, the comparison of the remunicipalisation processes is preceded by an overview of the most salient traits of working rules, local culture and bio-physical contextual variables that affect the action situation within which policy-makers took decisions.

Parisian context

In 1998, the French framework recognised the local authorities' right to manage local services in-house by introducing the instrument of the Régie à Personnalité Morale et à Autonomie Financière. It is a public-law company financially and legally autonomous from its public owners.

In 1984, the City of Paris concluded two 25-year affermage contracts with the multinationals Veolia and Suez to distribute drinking water and collect bills. Veolia was responsible for serving on the right bank of the Seine, while Suez was responsible for the left bank. Affermage contracts generally provide that the private operator is responsible for operating and maintaining the utilities but not financing the investment. The natural expiry date of the contract was 2009, while its early termination would have obliged the municipality to pay a pricey penalty. Due to such penalties, municipalities often choose not to terminate outsourcing contracts in advance and do not re-insource local services (Marques, 2021). In 1987, Paris delegated the production and transport of water, infrastructure renewal and control over the work of the private partners to the public-private-partnership Société Anonyme de Gestion des Eaux de Paris (SAGEP). 70% of its shares belong to the municipality, 14% to Veolia, 14% to Suez and the remaining 2% to Caisse des Dépôts et Consignations.

With over 2 million inhabitants, Paris is a city that has successfully overcome the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy showing a flourishing economic situation. Although the urban budget deficit reached € 7 billion in 2018, the public tax collection capacity is excellent (Mairie de Paris, 2019). Parisians share a strongly post-materialistic local culture, which focuses on environmental protection issues (Savitch & Kantor, 2002). Since the 1990s, Parisians have progressively decreased their water consumption because of their ecological awareness and rising water bills caused by the costs of bringing water infrastructure up to EU environmental standards (Florentin, 2015). Notwithstanding the water price growth and the appearance, in the 1990s, of a national problem stream linked to the decline in legitimacy of the delegated water management model (Lorrain, 2016), in Paris, there have never been local mobilisations to remunicipalise water management. Since the 1990s, the claim to remunicipalise water services has been promoted by an instrument constituency composed of experts from environmentalist and humanitarian associations such as Attac France, France Nature Environment or UFC-Que Choisir and the Green and Communist Parties (Interviews n. 2, 6).

Neapolitan context

Contrary to the French case, the Italian framework does not equip public-law companies (called Azienda Speciale-AS) with financial and legal autonomy from their public owners. The municipality that owns an AS must approve every managerial decision the MB takes. This procedure makes more transparent management decisions than a joint-stock corporation; however, it risks a slowdown of the company's management processes and a subordination of the managerial choices to the timing and objectives of the local policy (Galanti & Moro, 2014).

The municipality has historically managed the Neapolitan drinking water service through an AS. In 1999, the City of Naples passed a council resolution formalising the in-house entrustment to the AS until 2028 (Comune di Napoli, 2015). In 2001, the municipality corporatised the AS, transforming it into a municipally owned joint-stock company ARIN. In this case, the change in the legal nature of the water company did not cause the termination or modification of the entrustment agreement but only caused it to be modified.

With almost 1 million inhabitants, the city of Naples is historically marked by high levels of unemployment, low levels of social capital and a robust materialistic culture which has proven to be unable to take on the new economic challenges of the post-industrial economy (Savitch & Kantor, 2002). Naples' public debt almost

reached € 5 billion in 2018 and has not decreased anymore¹ due to a capacity to collect public taxes that does not exceed 50% (Comune di Napoli, 2020). Clientelism and patronage² between the Neapolitan political class and its policy targets is a trait of the Neapolitan political context, which harms the local administrations' capacity to invest resources in public services (Brancaccio, 2018). The wastewater treatment plant does not meet the minimum standards of EU Directive 91/271/EEC (Utilitatis, 2022). Naples' drinking water infrastructure is also in poor condition; however, water losses have gradually decreased from 41% in 2018 to 27.4% in 2020 (ISTAT, 2022).

In the early 2000s, Neapolitans showed a strong interest in water governance issues. Their activism strongly contributed to the emergence of the largest, most transversal, horizontal and impacting social movement in contemporary Italian history: the movement against water privatisation (Carrozza & Fantini, 2016). It has been gathered in the Italian Forum of Water Movements (IFWM), which required the recognition of water as common and the remunicipalisation of privatised water services.

WATER REMUNICIPALISATION PROCESSES' COMPARISON

We compare the remunicipalisation reforms thanks to the policy cycle metaphor, chronologically sequencing the reform processes in a heuristic key (see Table 2).

Agenda-setting

Soon after the election of the left-wing coalition led by Bertrand Delanoë, Anne Le Strat, a green party city councillor and EU militant activist against water privatisation, was appointed as CEO of SAGEP. She assumed the role of problem broker in the agenda-setting stage and the role of policy entrepreneur in the policy formulation phase (Interview n. 8). Negative indicators coming from three different reports on the Parisian drinking water system³ reinforced the problem stream about water delegation at the local scale. Such reports denounced a low level of transparency on delegated operators' management choices, insufficient control systems by the municipality, an unjustified growth of water prices and a missed use of public funds allocated to modernise water networks. The administration renegotiated contracts with SAGEP, Veolia and Suez in response to this problem stream. Thus, control and monitoring responsibilities were transferred to the municipality, and the delegated operators were obliged to renew all the urban water systems by 2009.

In that same period, a continental problem stream produced by local mobilisations against water privatisation (Turri, 2022) began to flow over Europe. It took on local connotations in 2003 when the assembly of mayors of the Naples district approved a resolution for the delegation of the entire regional water system to a private-public-partnership company (Lucarelli, 2015). That year, the first Neapolitan Committees for Public Water (NCPW) was born to oppose that resolution. Its primary problem broker was Father Alex Zanotelli, an evangelist engaged in humanitarian projects in developing countries. Also, academics such as Ugo Mattei, Riccardo Petrella, Maurizio Montalto and Alberto Lucarelli assumed the role of problem brokers during the agenda-setting stage both at the local and national scale within the IFWM. In 2004, the municipality brutally censored Zanotelli's public speech against water privatisation, making the rounds of local and national media and giving enormous visibility to the NCPW's mobilisations. Contextually, the CNPW's participants undertook an internal professionalisation process

¹ https://www.ilsole24ore.com/art/napoli-via-patto-draghi-risanare-debito-5-miliardi-AEI7EIDB?refresh_ce=1

² Patronage is a specific form of clientelism where public officeholders proffer public resources in return for electoral support (Stokes, 2011).

³ "Rapport de l'Inspection générale de la Ville de Paris" (2001); "Rapport de Service Public 2000, Gestion du service commercial des eaux de Paris" (2002); a report published in December 2003 by the Cour de Comptes that had a particularly strong echo in French public opinion, given the national importance of the body that published it (Lorrain, 2016).

Table 2 | Chronological summary of the Parisian and Neapolitan policy cycles (handled by the author).

Policy cycle phase	Paris	Naples
Agenda setting	<p>2001–2005 2001: First election of Bertrand Delanoë 2001: Anne Le Stat became CEO of SAGEP 2001–2003: indicators of negative outcomes of delegated management 2003: contracts renegotiation</p>	<p>2003–2006 2003: delegation of the regional water system to a private-law company 2003: NCPW's foundation 2004: Father Zanolelli's censorship 2004–2006: protest against water privatisation 2006: regional privatisation abrogation</p>
Policy formulation	<p>2005–2007 2005: decision to terminate the contract with SAGEP and dismantle it 2005–2007: study of possible public management models 2007: announcement of the decision to manage the entire water cycle through a public-law Régie</p>	<p>2006–2007 2006: national communication campaign of IFWM for water remunicipalisation 2004–2009: EU infringement procedures against Naples regional district 2009: resolution of the municipality to remunicipalise local water system</p>
Legitimation	<p>2007–2009 2007–2009: local election campaign on water remunicipalisation 2009: Delanoë re-election</p>	<p>2010–2011 2010–2011: local election campaign on water remunicipalisation 2011: De Magistris election</p>
Implementation	<p>2009–2019 2009: Eau de Paris foundation 2010–12: resolution of implementation concerns 2012-ongoing: direct management of the entire urban water system</p>	<p>2011–2019 2011–2014: resolution of juridical matters about remunicipalisation 2015–2016: experimentation of water commoning 2016-ongoing: direct management of the entire urban water system</p>
Evaluation	<p>Environmental sustainability: improved Water networks in excellent condition left by Veolia and Suez, which removed them between 2003 and 2009. Since remunicipalisation, EdP has invested 70–75% of its profits in environmental projects.</p> <p>Transparency: improved Veolia's and Suez's reports showed a severe lack of transparency on the company's profits and activities, whereas EdP published its financial statements and reports annually and clearly.</p> <p>Service quality and water losses: same as in the past Before the remunicipalisation, water losses never exceeded 15%, and water quality was always excellent. After the reform, the situation stayed the same.</p> <p>Citizens' participation: unfulfilled Citizens never had the right to participate in water governance.</p> <p>Social equity: improved</p>	<p>Environmental sustainability: worsened Before remunicipalisation, the water supply and treatment infrastructures were in poor condition. ARIN financed profits to renovate them and renewable energy projects. After remunicipalisation, ABCNaples stopped these projects and only invested in water loss reduction initiatives.</p> <p>Transparency: worsened Before remunicipalisation, ARIN published its budget documents punctually and clearly. After remunicipalisation, ABCNapoli financial statements publishing became discontinuous and opaque.</p> <p>Service quality and water losses: same as in the past Before the reform, water quality was excellent, but water losses exceeded 40%. After remunicipalisation, drinking water quality remained excellent, and water losses decreased by 13%</p>

(Continued.)

Table 2 | Continued

Policy cycle phase	Paris	Naples
	Before the reform, there were no social equity programmes for access to drinking water. With remunicipalisation, the municipality lowered water tariffs and launched projects to ensure free access to drinking water for low-income families, the homeless and squatters.	<p>Citizens' participation: unfulfilled Initially, the Neapolitan government recognised the right of citizens to participate in water governance. After remunicipalisation, this right was denied de facto.</p> <p>Social equity: improved The Neapolitan municipality extended the number of families eligible to receive a bonus for paying their water bills.</p>
Policy maintenance, succession or termination	Possible future change of water governance if the colour of the governing coalition changes or if EdP is not awarded the management of metropolitan water services	Possible future changes in water governance if the colour of the governing coalition changes or if ABCNapoli does not find the resources to renovate the sewage infrastructure and increase its environmental performance.

on the Italian water system's technical, administrative and regulatory aspects, led by the academics mentioned above (Interviews n. 10, 21, 26). In 2006, the citizens' pressure resulted in the withdrawal of the regional resolution for water privatisation.

Policy formulation

In 2005 the Parisian municipality decided to avoid the renovation of the delegation contract with SAGEP and dismantle it. After that, the City Council established an epistemic community to sift through the possible water managerial models: it involved different experts from environmental and consumer associations⁴, research centres⁵, law firms⁶ and all the personnel working for SAGEP (Sinai, 2013). In 2007, the mayor announced that he would not renew the delegation contract with Veolia and Suez in 2010, and the entire water service would be entrusted to a single public-law operator. The same year, the municipality bought the shares from Veolia and Suez and terminated the contract with SAGEP without paying penalties.

In Naples, unlike Paris, the policy solution stream aimed at responding to the local problem streams relating to water privatisation was formulated nationally. Indeed, in 2006, the epistemic community of the IFWM assumed the role of problem broker and instrument, launching a capillary communication campaign for the local services remunicipalisation and the management of water as common. With the EU infringement procedures (n. 2004/2034 and 2009/2034) against the Neapolitan regional district due to the poor state of water treatment plans, such a campaign strengthened the local problem stream. Legitimised by the national political process stream, the NCPW assumed the role of local instrument constituency, launching a campaign to remunicipalise ARIN.

Legitimation

In both cities, the water remunicipalisation reform was one of the key policy proposals of the coalitions that won the municipal elections. By analysing the public speeches of the mayoral candidates, the objectives pursued using

⁴ The collaboration with the France Nature Environnement and UFC-Que Choisis associations officially began in this phase.

⁵ BIPE statistical research institute (<https://lebipe.com/en/>), FP2E (<https://www.fp2e.org/>).

⁶ Adamas lawyers consortium (<https://www.lawyersconsortium.org/>) and the Safran legal support association (<https://www.ge-safran.fr/>).

such reforms were the same: an increase in service quality, transparency, social equity in accessing the resource, the participation of users in water management operations, and environmental protection.

In Paris, during the 2009 elections, the outgoing mayor Delanoë led a centre-left coalition. This coalition assumed the role of instrument constituency committed to solving the problems of the water delegated model by implementing the remunicipalisation of SAGEP. Popular reaction to his policy solution was practically absent (Lorrain, 2016). However, the entire electoral campaign was focused on such a policy goal – alongside the ecological transition – since it was one of the rare subjects on which the coalition's components found common ground (Bauby & Similie, 2013). The centre-left coalition victory legitimised the remunicipalisation reform.

In Naples, while the local election campaign was taking place, the IFWM organised a massive communicative campaign to win a national referendum that would abolish a law for the mandatory privatisation of local water services. In 2010, Luigi De Magistris was the mayoral candidate of a coalition of centre-left civic lists and parties that unanimously supported the water remunicipalisation. The NCPW supported De Magistris' candidacy, assuring his victory. The remunicipalisation policy received political legitimacy at the local level, with the electoral victory of De Magistris, and at the national level, with the overwhelming referendum victory against water privatisation (95.35% of the votes were against privatisation).

Implementation

The implementation stage began immediately after the elections in Paris and Naples and proved problematic.

The Parisian remunicipalisation implementation was made possible by opening two separate windows of opportunities between March 2008 and December 2009: the re-election of the Delanoë's coalition and the natural expiry of the delegation contracts with Veolia and Suez. One of the first measures of the renewed Delanoë government was the appointment of Anne Le Strat as deputy mayor, giving her a chance to become the program champion of the policy change. In February 2009, SAGEP was remunicipalised and transformed into the Régie Eau de Paris (EdP). According to the Water Act of 1964, water resources are to be managed at the district level, prompting the municipalities to create an inter-municipal Régie for in-house water management. Being a municipality with administrative autonomy, Paris could create a Régie without a higher authority's permission or enter an inter-municipal context (Bauby & Similie, 2013). Since January 1, 2010, it has managed the entire Parisian drinking water service: the water collection, purification, transport and distribution; in 2012, it also internalised all the phases of collecting payments.

The Parisian government has declined the concept of commoning by including in EdP's MB 5 'citizens' representatives'. 5 of the 18 MB's members are citizens: 2 of them are EdP's workers, and 3 come from the associative world; the remaining 13 are city councillors, and the deputy mayor is its chairman. The city council defined that society representatives have to come exclusively from the associations France Nature Environnement (FNE) and UFC-Que Choisis (UFC). They have cooperated with the government since the policy formulation phase (Interview n. 9). However, such a nomination mechanism leaves great perplexities regarding the possibility of defining these people as 'representatives of citizenship' (Bauby & Similie, 2013).

The municipality fixes the EdP's objectives yearly by the Contrat d'Objectifs, which describes its goals and 130 performance indicators. The company must publish monthly, quarterly and annual reports about progress in achieving these goals. The MB's activity should be subject to SB control, a participatory arena of academic experts, local politicians and UFC and FNE representatives. EdP's MB effectively solved the problems encountered in the implementation phase in just two years. Such problems originated from the fact that, after nearly thirty years of the delegated model, municipal departments and the same EdP employees lacked the skills to manage the water services using the public-law tools (Pigeon, 2012). The main issues related to the transition

from private accounting and purchasing procedures to public ones, the lack of information technology systems suitable for the storage and management of data about water consumption, the transition of employees from private companies to the public Régie, and the opposition of municipal employees to remunicipalisation. The EdP's MB solved all these obstacles by investing resources in innovation: it acquired new specialised staff and new work tools, organised training courses for long-time employees, and defined four 'harmonisation' agreements with the unions of the new employees (Sinai, 2013). An interviewee confirmed that MB's discussions always took place without conflicts (Interview n. 9). The only strong conflict between the SB and the municipality arose in 2017, when the UFC spokesperson proposed to realise studies about the EdP's expansion at a metropolitan scale (Interview n. 3). The conflict between the EdP president and the SB president resulted in the SB's definitive closure, as confirmed by its website.

In Naples, the De Magistris' election was the window of opportunity for the implementation at the local scale of a policy solution planned by the IFWM at the national level. This epistemic community interpreted the remunicipalisation reform as an opportunity to experiment with a form of water commoning that would have solved the rampant crisis of democratic representation (Interview n. 26). The ABCNapoli's MB should have been composed of 5 representatives of civil society, selected through a self-nomination or by drawing lots. An SB of 21 members should have controlled the MB's work, including citizens and municipal councillors. Unlike Paris, the municipality would not have defined the corporate objectives a priori. Instead, every MB decision would have had to be approved or rejected ex-post by the City Council.

Given the lack of a preliminary reform planning process on a local scale, the implementation phase was complex, slow and marked by deep conflicts between the municipality and the citizens' representatives. We can divide it into three sub-phases, each characterised by different actors. During the first phase (2011–2014), a group of jurists from the IFWM assumed the role of program champions. Moreover, in rotation, they occupied the 5 MB's places due to the absence of ordinary people willing to assume such a responsibility because of their fear of not having the necessary skills and the obligation to work for free (Interview n. 12). During such a sub-phase, the MB faced the difficult legal transition from a joint-stock company to AS. The municipality should have asked its water district authority to approve the remunicipalisation. However, in 2011, the Campania region had not yet completed the procedures for establishing such an authority. The municipality, without district approval, transformed ARIN into AS Acqua Bene Comune Napoli (ABCNapoli) through a council resolution. By verdict 4599/2014, the Council of State in 2011 declared the municipality's behaviour legitimate, given the lack of water district authority, and in 2014 ABCNapoli started to manage drinking water distribution services. After that, a series of bitter conflicts caused a break in relations between the municipality and the national Forum jurists, ratifying the end of the first sub-phase.

During the second sub-phase (2015–2016), Maurizio Montalto, an environmental lawyer from the local NCPW, was appointed ABCNapoli's extraordinary commissioner, assuming the role of program champion. In place of the MB and SB, he created the Civic Council, a space open to all citizens for planning water policies. Thanks to its high levels of expertise in water infrastructures and resources management (Interviews n. 10, 12, 21, 25), the City Council implemented social equity, communication and training programs (ABC Napoli, 2016). It also sought to design a sustainable solution to the municipality's deliberation of entrusting to ABCNapoli the management of the city sewers and hiring 99 workers from the San Giovanni purifier lifting plant. It fulfilled an investigation that underlined that hiring so many new workers would have exceeded the available liquidity of the company and the extreme danger of employing workers in the sewers due to their poor condition. Thus, the City Council planned a three-year financial return plan for hiring all the workers and requested the municipality to cover the expenses for the sewers' process of securing (Interviews n. 12, 21). However, the government rejected these proposals and removed Maurizio Montalto, decreeing the end of the cooperation with the NCPW.

With the re-election of the De Magistris government in 2016, the third sub-phase (2016–2021) opened, over which the mayor and the City Council assumed the program champion role. The city council appointed Sergio D'Angelo, a manager of social cooperatives and former alderman of the De Magistris government, as extraordinary commissioner; he held this position until 2021, when he became city councillor. Between 2017 and 2019, D'Angelo hired about 230 workers from several municipally owned companies that were on the verge of failure due to the municipality's inability to settle their debts⁷. In that period, the fixed cost of ABCNapoli's personnel increased by almost 3 million (ABC Napoli, 2019). In parallel, operating profits decreased from 3,909,000 € in 2010 to 60,922 € in 2018 (Comune di Napoli, 2018). In the opinion of an activist and an employee, there has been a patronage pre-election agreement between municipal candidates and public employees to use the remunicipalised company profits to save hundreds of public jobs in exchange for electoral support (Interviews n. 12, 21). The MB was reconstituted in 2021 and composed of people with legal or social skills without experience in the water sector⁸.

Evaluation

Assessing both remunicipalisations' outcomes, we can state that in Paris, there was an implementation gap only in the dimension of citizen participation. On the contrary, the Neapolitan implementation gap regards environmental sustainability, transparency and citizen participation.

Regarding environmental sustainability, Veolia and Suez received 153 million € to update water networks from the municipality (Le Strat, 2013), which they had not yet realised in 2003. The contracts renegotiation obliged the multinationals to renew more than 1,100 km of pipes, valves and public devices by 2009 and install remote meter reading devices. After remunicipalisation, EdP invested most corporate profits in projects to improve wastewater infrastructure, protect biodiversity and groundwater, and produce renewable energy. Between 2010 and 2014, EdP invested 70 of more than 90 million € of profits/year in these projects; from 2014 to 2019, the resources invested in environmental sustainability reached 75 million €/year (Eau de Paris, 2021).

Concerning transparency, reports published by Veolia and Suez showed a severe lack of transparency regarding company profits and activities (Cour des Comptes, 2003). Conversely, EdP has published its balance sheets and reports annually.

Regarding service quality, EdP has inherited high technological and health efficiency levels from the past. The delegated companies have done extensive interventions on infrastructures in the 1990s and the 2000s and the water distributed has always passed the health checks carried out by the regional health authority. The analysis of the rate of returns and water losses shows that the quality of the EdP distribution system is excellent (Cour des Comptes, 2017), and the user satisfaction rate has never dropped below 88% (Eau de Paris, 2021).

The only implementation gap is about the participation of citizens in EdP's management. In Paris, the citizens have never had the right to cooperate with the government in water policy planning since the MB and SB were open only to FNE and UFC representatives.

Regarding social equity, a City of Paris survey reported that 25–30% of the increases in the price of drinking water between 1984 and 2002 were not justified by the infrastructure management costs declared by Veolia and Suez (Ville de Paris, 2003). With the remunicipalisation, EdP lowered the cost of water by 8% and launched impactful programs to ensure free access to clean water for low-income families, the homeless and illegal occupants (Sinäi, 2013).

⁷ 99 ones came from the San Giovanni lifting plant (Landriani et al., 2019).

⁸ https://www.abc.napoli.it/index.php?option=com_jumi&view=application&fileid=12&Itemid=446&c=p8-9

At its creation in 2001, ARIN had over 40 million € in debt (Comune di Napoli, 2012). In just eight years, it became a company with a profitable balance sheet: in 2007, net profits reached 2,602,000 € (ARIN, 2008), and in 2009, they were 4,606,000 € (ARIN, 2010). ARIN invested part of its profits in programs for the construction of a treatment plant, the renovation of drinking water infrastructure and the production of renewable energy through photovoltaic systems. After remunicipalisation, ABCNapoli stopped constructing the new treatment plant (Interview n.27) and sold almost all the photovoltaic plants (ABC Napoli, 2014, 2016). The limited available data shows that the municipality has not yet approved any sewer renovation projects. ABCNapoli's only action on environmental sustainability is creating a mapping system of the water networks and instant detection of faults and losses. Thanks to this, ABCNapoli reduced water losses from 41% to 27.4% in a few years (Landriani *et al.*, 2019; ISTAT, 2022). However, we do not deem this single result sufficient to positively assess ABCNapoli's long-term environmental performance.

Before remunicipalisation, ARIN published its budget documents annually, which appear to us easily understandable (ARIN, 2008, 2010). After the remunicipalisation, ABCNapoli published budget documents discontinuously until 2018 (ABC Napoli, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018) due to the delays of the municipality in their approval. Furthermore, understanding the data became more difficult. We can find information about the company management since 2016 in the Municipal Consolidated Balance Sheet. However, in these documents, the items of expenditure or income of public companies were not separated, making it impossible to understand ABCNapoli's activities and investments. We only know that ABCNapoli's earnings were zero in 2018 and 2019 (Comune di Napoli, 2019, 2020).

The service's technological and sanitary quality appears to be in continuity with the past. ARIN inaugurated the first internal water analysis laboratory in Italy, certified by the Local Health Authority, which analyses and publishes data on water quality every week (Interview n.27). ABCNapoli continues to provide this service and the water quality has remained excellent. As already shown, the rate of water losses has decreased, and service for measuring and repairing faults in infrastructures has been active since 2018 (ABC Napoli, 2018). However, the wastewater treatment plant state remains bad.

The more profound implementation gap is in the citizen participation field. Although the Neapolitan government recognised the residents' right to participate in policy-making, it rejected many citizens' proposals until 2015. From that date on, citizens are no longer part of the MB. In 2021 municipality reconstituted the MB, but it chose its members through procedures and criteria other than those listed in the ABCNapoli's statute.

Regarding social equity, in 2017, the municipality approved a resolution to expand the number of families who can receive a bonus for paying water bills.

Policy maintenance, succession or termination

Despite the significant differences between the reforms' outcomes, the two case studies are comparable for the City Council's decision to invest most of the corporate resources in pursuing objectives consistent with the local culture, which in the Parisian case is environmentalist and in the Neapolitan case is worked-related. Moreover, in both cities, with the decrease in media attention on water management as common, a discursive shift occurred in the language of local politicians. In Paris, water governance has become a concern of environmental protection, whereas, in Naples, it has been connected to safeguarding employment.

In 2014, Hanne Hidalgo replaced Mayor Delanoë, leading a centre-left coalition similar to that of her predecessor. In 2021, Gaetano Manfredi replaced Mayor De Magistris, leading a centre-left coalition comprised of some parties supporting remunicipalisation in 2011. So far, the water governance of both new local governments shows complete continuity with the past. The governance of both companies is embedded in centre-left governments' coalitions' electoral and political strategies. This insight makes us suppose, in line with some interviewees,

that the water services' governance resulting from the reforms could change if the local government changes its political colour in future (Interviews n. 1, 4, 8, 10, 21).

Finally, the water governance model in both cities will be maintained if the two remunicipalised companies overcome some challenges. In our opinion, the most EdP significant challenge is to extend its supply area to the metropolitan city of Grand Paris. In Naples, on the other hand, the real challenge for ABCNapoli is to renovate the sewers and achieve high levels of long-term environmental sustainability in a local context characterised by public debt.

CONCLUSIONS

The comparison between the Neapolitan and the Parisian water remunicipalisation cases proves our starting hypothesis correct. Water service governance is the outcome of the actions of the system's actors. Their possibilities of action are, in turn, determined by contextual opportunities and limits defined by biophysical, social, political, cultural and institutional variables at the micro, meso and macro level. Moreover, actors choose their action strategies based on their preferences and the system of traditional relationships, habits and expectations embedded in the local history.

The comparative analysis of the behaviours of the reforms' protagonists permitted us to identify some generalisable findings to improve the knowledge of the mechanisms that originate urban water services' governance.

The actions of the actors who assume the role of problem brokers, policy entrepreneurs, program champions, process brokers and political entrepreneurs are more decisive than those of others in giving shape to the water services' governance. The second lesson is that such key actors can change over time, and the water policies also change with them. We explain the almost total lack of an implementation gap in the Parisian case through the constant holding of Anne Le Stratt of the position of policy entrepreneur throughout the entire remunicipalisation process. Conversely, along the Neapolitan policy-making process, this role has been assumed by various actors, creating the conditions for a variance between the opening objectives of the policy change and its actual outcomes. The third piece of evidence is that the users' preferences, culture and expectations impact the governments' choices as much as public policies influence the citizens' lives. Indeed, both remunicipalisation processes highlight the close connection between the local policy solutions and the policy targets' characteristics. Just as the Parisian policy-makers have invested most of their profits in environmental projects, the Neapolitan ones have invested the water company's profits in patronage strategies. Both governments knew that most of their fellow citizens would approve of their policy choices.

Moreover, the comparison work shows that the actors' behaviours are determined not only by their personal motivations but also by the limits and opportunities that biophysical, socio-cultural and institutional variables put on their agency. In fact, the French regulatory environment allowed the protagonists of Parisian remunicipalisation to create a Régie with financial, managerial and legal autonomy from the entity that owns it. In doing so, the MB's members had the chance to choose the strategies best suited to pursue the initial goals of the reform. Vice versa, the Neapolitan remunicipalisation actors, have established a water company totally subordinated to the financial and managerial choices of the municipality due to the AS being the only public company model provided by the national regulatory framework. This fact has enabled the Naples government to block MB's strategies for pursuing the original objectives of remunicipalisation and using the company's resources opportunistically.

Besides, in Paris, the efficient modernisation of the water infrastructures by the delegated operators (2003–2009) and favourable local economic conditions allowed the policy-makers to implement expensive environmental programs without asking for a loan. Conversely, Neapolitan policy-makers chose to avoid looking for resources for financing the sewers' process of securing due to their enormous costs, which would undoubtedly

have exceeded the spending power of a municipality afflicted by a severe public debt and a stagnant economy. Indeed, the EU institutional context has pushed member states to delegate the management of water services to local authorities without possibly managing them in-house in conditions of budget deficit (Polizzi & Vitale, 2010).

Within such an institutional framework, cities with good economic status, such as Paris, have an advantage over economically depressed cities, such as Naples, in providing the same services as in the past through strategies such as raising taxes or renting/selling public spaces (Savitch & Kantor, 2002). Similarly, based on post-materialistic values, the Parisian socio-cultural and institutional context has fostered cooperation among the local political class and experts belonging to the instrument constituency demanding the Parisian water remunicipalisation since the 1990s. Vice versa, the Neapolitan context, characterised by materialistic values, widespread socio-economic malaise and patronage customs, has fostered the opportunistic behaviour of the political class, which took advantage of the remunicipalised water company's profits to be re-elected in 2016. Finally, both case studies prove that the current contextual variables and the past forms of public governance determine public water companies' governance. In Naples and Paris, the two governments have implemented top-down and centralised water governance models similar to those widespread in Eurozone in the period before New Public Management (Turri, 2022).

Our contribution enriches the academic literature on the governance of public water companies from a methodological and heuristic perspective. Methodologically, the characteristics of an urban governance process can be fully grasped by simultaneously observing the causal process that generated it at different levels (Tosi & Vitale, 2016). In this way, a scholar can include both contextual and behavioural variables in the analysis, explaining the choices and contentions among the key actors of the development processes of services and their outcomes and formulating hypotheses about their future developments. Concerning the knowledge of urban water services, this essay demonstrates that the public water governance processes are not only characterised by relational, structural and territorial embeddedness but also by temporal embeddedness (Granovetter, 2017). Actors do not behave or decide as atoms outside their context. They choose action strategies based on the socio-political structures they belong to, the features of the territorial place they are located and the social networks in which they are embedded. However, such social networks have a past, and the transactions among networks' actors follow historic structures, which persist over time, impacting the ongoing decision-making processes.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data cannot be made publicly available; readers should contact the corresponding author for details.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare there is no conflict.

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