



Radical Relationality from the Periphery: Water Movements and Liminal Commons in Southeast and Central Europe

MILICA KOČOVIĆ DE SANTO 

LYDIA KARAZARIFI 

INGA KUŽMA 

**Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article*

COLLECTION:
COMMONS,
COMMONING,
AND SOCIETAL
CHANGE THROUGH
TRANSFORMATIVE
ACTIONS

RESEARCH ARTICLES

 ubiquity press

ABSTRACT

This article examines how water movements in European semi-peripheries enact radical relationality through concrete struggles over water, infrastructure, and governance. Based on a comparative analysis of five cases from Serbia, Poland, and Greece, it shows how communities respond to privatization pressures, ecological disasters, and governance failures by transforming defensive mobilizations into liminal commons – durable yet flexible arrangements that emerge within institutional uncertainty and are grounded in territorially embedded hydro-social identities.

Focusing on semi-peripheral contexts marked by legal pluralism, fragmented authority, and incomplete marketization, the analysis shows how ruptural moments create institutional gaps that enable collective learning, institutional bricolage, and the reconfiguration of governance practices. In these cases, liminal commons emerge as transitional arrangements maintained through negotiation, relational practices, and care-based norms.

By empirically grounding radical relationality in specific hydro-social territories, the article contributes to commons scholarship by demonstrating how semi-peripheral conditions shape distinct pathways from water defense to commoning, highlighting the roles of crisis, territorial embeddedness, and relational identities in contemporary struggles over water governance.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Milica Kočović De Santo

Institute of Economic Sciences,
Serbia

mickocovic@gmail.com

KEYWORDS:

radical relationality; liminal
commons; hydro-social identity;
semi-periphery; ruptural
moments; collective actions

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Kočović De Santo, M., Karazarifi, L., & Kužma, I. (2026). Radical Relationality from the Periphery: Water Movements and Liminal Commons in Southeast and Central Europe. *International Journal of the Commons*, 20(1), pp. 333–346. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.1672>

INTRODUCTION

Over the past three decades, water governance in Southeast and Central European semi-peripheries has become a site where neoliberal commodification, infrastructure decay, climate pressures, and regulatory fragmentation converge. Privatization attempts have weakened public capacities, while ecological degradation increasingly exposes water to enclosure, provoking collective mobilizations to defend access, democratic control, and socio-ecological relations.

Climate change has intensified water scarcity, ecological vulnerability, and infrastructure risks, while governance failures have increased exposure to environmental harm. Water thus becomes a focal point where ecological disruption, institutional weakness, and social contestation intersect.

We argue that in semi-peripheral European contexts, socio-ecological ruptures in water governance catalyze the emergence of liminal commons – durable yet flexible governance arrangements grounded in radical relationality and hydro-social identities. Through these arrangements, defensive mobilizations evolve into participatory, care-based, sufficiency-oriented commoning practices that operate within legal and institutional gaps.

We focus on semi-peripheral settings because their structural position between state and market generates institutional liminality. Weak but present state capacity, legal pluralism, partial commodification, and living memories of non-capitalist arrangements create spaces where neither state nor capital fully consolidates control, allowing for commons innovation through contestation and institutional bricolage.

To analyze these processes, we examine water struggles through the lens of radical relationality, a perspective in which relations constitute identities rather than merely linking pre-existing entities (Escobar, 2020). We apply radical relationality using the concept of hydro-social identities (Linton & Budds, 2014; Boelens et al., 2016), which capture the historically specific, material, and symbolic relations through which communities and waterscapes co-constitute with each other. This approach shifts attention from abstract resource rights to concrete territorial struggles over specific waters, infrastructures, and socio-ecological relations, where defensive repertoires evolve into liminal commons (Varvarousis, 2022) as sufficiency- and reciprocity-based governance that resists enclosure.

We raised three research questions. First, how do socio-ecological ruptural moments in semi-peripheral contexts catalyze transitions from water defense to liminal commons across different territorial settings? Second, how does radical relationality operate through territorially embedded hydro-social identities to mediate this transformation?

Third, how do semi-peripheral conditions enable distinctive forms of commons innovation in water governance?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

COMMONS IN LIMINAL SPACE OF SEMI-PERIPHERY

Our analysis builds on evolving commons scholarship. While Ostrom's (1990) foundational work emphasized stable, bounded institutions for common-pool resource management, recent scholarship critiques this focus (Quintana & Campbell, 2019), highlighting commoning as ongoing practices of collective decision-making and care (Linebaugh, 2008; Bollier & Helfrich, 2019). Urban commons literature (Stavrides, 2016; Malamidis, 2021) examines temporary, legally ambiguous arrangements through public space defense. Protest commons frameworks (Tomašević et al., 2018; Apostolopoulou et al., 2022) analyze governance created through resistance to enclosure. Degrowth commons (D'Alisa et al., 2014; Varvarousis, 2022) frame commoning as an alternative to growth-dependent capitalism.

Water commons are increasingly subject to enclosure and commodification. D'Odorico et al. (2024) conceptualize water commons as collectively governed resources supporting food security, cultural practices, and livelihoods, yet increasingly exposed to appropriation and dispossession. Water movements worldwide mobilize through collective action, emphasizing solidarity networks and knowledge exchange to advance democratic access and decision-making beyond profit-oriented logics (Bieler & Jordan, 2018; Bieler, 2021; Gasseau, 2024). These movements actively reproduce commons and promote rights-based alternatives (Boelens, 2015; Sultana & Loftus, 2019).

Focusing on Serbia, Poland, and Greece, we address theoretical imperatives for understanding alternative development pathways. In world-systems analysis, semi-peripheries occupy liminal positions as sites of both exploitation and resistance (Wallerstein, 1974). Marketization remains incomplete due to interrupted post-socialist transitions (Serbia, Poland) or structural adjustments (Greece). EU membership or association, imposed obligations that exceeded domestic capacities, creating structural dependency in which foreign investment flows without technology transfer, while privileged interests erode public goods and lock economies into subordinate global roles. Yet everyday life continues to depend on inherited practices outside the market, such as reciprocal labor, communal management, and assemblies.

Rather than viewing these conditions as failures, we conceptualize them as generative gaps that open spaces

for commons innovation. Semi-peripheral regions function as laboratories of the in-between, where inherited practices persist alongside neoliberal restructuring and climate shocks (Cassano, 2012; Kallis et al., 2022). Political ecology and critical commons studies emphasize how commons emerge through struggle within varied neoliberalizations (Bakker, 2010; Swyngedouw, 2009; Martínez-Alier, 2002). Degrowth scholarship provides a normative framework centered on care, sufficiency, and collective reproduction, while decolonial and post-development approaches legitimize semi-peripheral experiences as sources of organizational knowledge, foregrounding “usable pasts” rather than deviations from dominant models (Escobar, 2020; Santos, 2016; Dolenec & Žitko, 2013; Dolenec et al., 2014).

While these literatures inform our analysis, radical relationality serves as the primary analytical lens. Radical relationality and hydro-social identity perspectives theorize waterscapes as co-produced socio-natures in which water acts as an agent shaping subjectivities and institutions (Linton & Budds, 2014; Boelens et al., 2016; Strang, 2020).

RADICAL RELATIONALITY AND HYDRO-SOCIAL MEDIATIONS

Radical relationality (Escobar, 2018, p. 67) recognizes “the fundamental interdependence of all life forms,” challenging Western separations of nature/culture, human/non-human, and subject/object. Entities exist through relationships rather than as discrete units. Without concrete mediation, however, this perspective risks remaining an abstract ontology.

Territorial embeddedness grounds relations in specific places, where concrete neighborhoods, villages, or river valleys actively participate. Topography shapes settlement, soil determines cultivation, and rivers carve possibilities. Hydro-social identity captures how water, society, and power intersect to shape territorial identities and cultural practices (Boelens et al., 2016). Drawing on hydro-social cycle theory (Linton & Budds, 2014; Swyngedouw, 2009), we understand water and society as mutually constitutive, generating distinct waterscapes that vary across space and history. Our contribution is to ground this perspective empirically through hydro-social territories in semi-peripheral contexts, demonstrating how territorial positioning shapes distinct forms of commoning across urban, rural, and riverine settings.

RUPTURAL MOMENTS AS CATALYSTS FOR WATER COMMONS

We define ruptural moments as socio-ecological events that cross critical thresholds, exposing accumulated governance failures and triggering rapid reconfiguration of hydro-social relations. Drawing on critical tipping points theory (Lenton et al., 2008; Otto et al., 2020), we use the

concept of tipping points to capture the suddenness and cascading effects through which new practices, alliances, and political imaginaries spread beyond their initial sites.

In semi-peripheral contexts characterized by fragmented authority and legal pluralism, such ruptural moments do not destabilize coherent systems but instead reveal and widen existing institutional gaps. These moments make hydro-social dependencies visible and politically actionable, enabling defensive mobilizations to evolve into experiments with alternative coordination and governance. At the same time, ruptural moments serve as critical junctures that open political opportunities for collective learning, contestation, and social change (Della Porta, 2020).

We identify three recurring types of water-related ruptures: 1) Ecological crises, where sudden environmental disasters expose long-standing regulatory neglect and cumulative ecological pressures; 2) Privatization attempts, which pose immediate threats of enclosure to established public or communal water arrangements; and 3) Institutional collapse, in which broader restructuring undermines regulatory capacity, accountability, and coordination.

Extensive research shows that crises can catalyze democratization and knowledge production through social movements (Della Porta, 2013; Della Porta & Zamponi, 2022; Della Porta et al., 2017). In Southern and semi-peripheral European contexts, the 2008 financial crisis served as such a juncture, fostering new commons as alternatives to capitalist relations and austerity-driven enclosures (Apostolopoulou et al., 2022; Roussos & Malamidis, 2021). In water governance, austerity and post-socialist restructuring have often intensified ruptures by dismantling public capacity without establishing effective alternatives, fragmenting authority across agencies, concessions, and public-private arrangements. These conditions amplify socio-ecological vulnerability while simultaneously creating opportunities for collective intervention and resistance (Stavrides, 2016; Federici, 2014).

FROM DEFENSE TO LIMINAL COMMONS

To clarify how liminal commons emerge within semi-peripheral contexts, we distinguish three analytical levels.

Structural Liminality as an Enabling Condition

Semi-peripheral positioning creates structural liminality characterized by incomplete marketization, fragmented state authority, coexisting legal orders (EU directives, national law, customary norms), and living memories of non-capitalist arrangements. This produces institutional spaces where neither state nor market exercises full hegemonic control. Within these gaps, formal law coexists with informal norms in what von Benda-Beckmann (2002)

terms legal pluralism. Structural liminality serves as an enabling condition for commons innovation but does not constitute the commons themselves.

Liminal Commons as a Pathway for Contesting Governance

Liminal commons emerge as pathways for contesting and renegotiating governance within these generative gaps. Following Varvarousis (2022, pp. 40–42), they feature: (1) transitional yet potentially durable formations operating within institutional interstices rather than consolidated legal frameworks; (2) flexible yet normatively anchored arrangements combining fluid membership with care-based ethics; and (3) formations rooted in social movements that extend beyond protest by transforming defensive mobilization into generative commoning.

Such arrangements arise in crisis contexts that destabilize established identities and governance certainties. In semi-peripheral settings shaped by post-socialist transition, austerity, and incomplete commodification, this enables experimentation with collective coordination that connects remnants of past arrangements with emerging identities and alternatives.

Types of Liminal Commons Across Territorial Contexts

Liminal commons in the semi-periphery take distinct forms depending on territorial positioning and water materialities. As this paper will show liminal institutionalism (Belgrade, Thessaloniki), hydro-territorial resistance (Topli Do), hydro-territorial resilience (Stagiates), and more-than-human commoning (Odra).

METHODOLOGY

COMPARATIVE DESIGN

We use a similar-outcomes design, selecting cases that vary in geography (urban, rural, riverine), institutional history (post-socialist, post-authoritarian), and crisis type (privatization, pollution, enclosure), yet display similar transformation patterns. While presenting five cases, our comparative analysis operates at three analytical levels: urban (Belgrade, Thessaloniki), rural (Topli Do, Stagiates), and riverine (Odra). Paired cases within each category distinguish shared mechanisms from place-specific expressions.

We intentionally bridge geographies typically studied separately – urban infrastructure, rural watersheds, and riverine systems – to show how water connects across spatial categories. Critiques of commons research highlight its tendency to examine cases in isolation, overlooking historical entanglements and cross-scalar relations that

sustain or constrain commoning (Cleaver, 2000; Quintana & Campbell, 2019; Wagenaar, 2024). Our analysis emphasizes shared threads created by water's material flows and distinct mobilization strategies that emerge from liminal contexts.

Each case study follows a common analytical structure to enable comparison: territorial and historical foundations, ruptural moments, commons practices and mobilization, and the transition from defense to commoning. This framework captures both recurring mechanisms and context-specific variations across urban, rural, and riverine cases.

DATA COLLECTION

The Serbian cases¹ are based on research conducted within the EPICA project consortium (2020–2024), including fieldwork and Living Lab activities related to the Sava Blocks and Topli Do cases. Primary data on participatory practices in public space and defensive mobilization were collected between 2022 and 2024 through: (a) a quantitative survey on citizen participation (n = 212, June–July 2022); (b) case-study mapping of the Sava Quay defense (128 participatory activities, 2013–2023), including five focus groups (10–15 participants each); (c) a case study of grassroots mobilization in Topli Do; (d) participatory action research in the Mesna Zajednica SAVA Living Lab (Block 45, approximately 80 daily participants, including a final participatory exhibition and conference in October 2024); and (e) a qualitative study of more-than-human relations based on 17 semi-structured interviews (Blocks 44, 45, 70, 70a).

The Greek cases² were part of ongoing PhD research (2022–2024) on water movements and water commons in times of crisis, following an ethnographic approach. Data were collected through participant observation in Pelion Mountain and Volos for three months, and in Thessaloniki in September 2023 and April and December 2024; document analysis of archival collections, articles, and materials produced by water movements between 2009–2024; and twenty semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

The Polish case³ was based on desk research and previously published work (2022–2024) on the Odra River crisis and rights of nature (Zawadka, 2023; Kępski, 2022; Barcz, 2017; O'Donnell & Talbot-Jones, 2018).

POSITIONALITY

As researchers from these semi-peripheral contexts, we bring embedded knowledge and access, as well as potential limitations, which we address through collaborative interpretation with movement participants and international comparison. We participate in collective actions resisting neoliberal water enclosure and openly align with the movements we study.

RADICAL RELATIONALITY FOR WATER COMMONS AND COMMONING

SERBIAN CASES: FROM SOCIALIST LEGACY TO NEOLIBERAL RESISTANCE

Sava Quay: Urban Liminal Institutionalism

Territorial and Historical Foundations

The Sava River Quay in New Belgrade includes blocks 44, 45, 70, and 70a, a modernist urban waterfront built during the Yugoslav self-management period. Conceived in the 1962 Regulatory Plan, these blocks dedicated 70–75% of their area to green and leisure spaces, streets named after non-aligned leaders, and collective amenities. Designed as multifunctional infrastructure, the quay and embankment serve as both flood defenses and public recreation spaces. This dual function made the river inseparable from everyday life. Residents remembered it as the backbone of community identity.

The socialist planning framework, rooted in *mesne zajednice* (MZ) (local sub-municipality units/community councils), institutionalized bottom-up participation and direct democracy in the mid-1970s (Kočović De Santo, 2024). The 1974 Constitution further strengthened MZs, making them pivotal units of decentralized governance and enabling residents to decide on housing, utilities, culture, education, and communal and environmental issues. In this context, New Belgrade Sava blocks and Sava Quay emerged as territorially rooted commons, where water infrastructure, urban planning, and communal life were co-constitutive. This case highlights the dialectical relationship between urban planning and ideology by revealing the complex interplay between material spatial arrangements and ideological transformation.

This raises a fundamental question: can spatial interventions grounded in one ideological context trigger ideological change in another through incremental bottom-up practices? New Belgrade blocks serve as living reservoirs of self-management memory – territorially embedded in their urbanism and architecture – preserving social imaginaries of alternative economic arrangements that once financed universal basic services: education, culture, housing, healthcare, and social-ecological welfare (Kočović De Santo, 2024). These spatial and institutional legacies not only shaped collective memory but later functioned as operative resources for collective action and institutional bricolage.

Ruptural Moments

The quay and embankment became the initial frontlines of conflict. Between 2016 and 2022, ongoing violations transformed the area into a contested landscape, reflecting neoliberal development pressures typical of post-socialist

urban transformation. Efforts to enclose the embankment not only threatened public space but also endangered flood protection, the city's main drinking water reservoir, and symbolic commons.

Because these enclosures targeted multiple infrastructures of urban life simultaneously, the rupture expanded from a spatial conflict into a multi-dimensional defense of urban life. After the post-1990 transition, neoliberal reforms accelerated after 2000th (Lazarević Bajec, 2009), shifting governance toward privatization and speculative urbanism. Fragmented utilities and reduced public services have made riverside and green areas increasingly vulnerable to real estate capture, eroding the embankment's role as urban commons. This ruptural moment galvanized residents into collective action, as the defense of the quay became a catalyst for broader mobilization around public spaces across New Belgrade, connecting environmental, cultural, and social claims.

Commons Practices and Mobilization

Between 2016 and 2023, residents documented ninety-six distinct collective actions (Milovanović Rodić et al., 2025a). Of these, thirty-two involved formal institutional petitions, such as lawsuits, appeals, and administrative complaints, while others took the form of assemblies, neighborhood forums, protests, and cultural events. The collective repertoire thus ranged from legal-administrative engagement to everyday practices of care, such as communal cleaning and tree planting, oriented toward the defense of public goods (Ibid).

Moving in and out of official channels (Milovanović Rodić et al., 2025b), these practices enabled residents to negotiate hostile governance while safeguarding a measure of collective autonomy, transforming institutional engagement itself into a site of commoning. This hybrid strategy illustrates what we call liminal institutionalism: on the one hand, engagement through petitions, consultations, and local councils; on the other hand, the maintenance of autonomous assemblies echoing the ethos of sub-municipal local units (*mesne zajednice*) (Kočović De Santo, 2024; Mijailović, Kočović De Santo, 2025).

These practices are deeply rooted in hydro-social and more-than-human identifications through which collective action expanded beyond the quay itself. The defense of the embankment catalyzed parallel initiatives such as protecting green fields, resisting tree cutting, and opposing speculative rezoning – while simultaneously affirming multispecies communities as co-constituents of urban life. In residents' narratives, the river (as “queen”), winds, trees, animals, and pets appeared not as background elements but as active participants shaping everyday urban rhythms and identities.

Transformative Impacts and New Commons Formation

Although immediate victories were often temporary, their effects proved transformative. The defense of the Sava Quay generated liminal commons in which episodic mobilizations left durable imprints on collective capacities, practices, and identities. Urban commoning extended beyond the embankment, as promenades were reimagined as community stages, playgrounds treated as shared property, and riverside spaces sustained through volunteer care.

Through these practices, residents enacted a hydro-social urban identity rooted in relational ties to the river and its multispecies community. By engaging the river, embankment, and green fields as living actors rather than passive backdrops, collective action articulated a post-anthropocentric form of commoning that blurred the boundaries between ecological defense and social reproduction (Braidotti, 2022).

The Sava Quay case thus demonstrates how urban commons can emerge from defensive struggles over critical infrastructure. Beginning with the embankment, mobilizations expanded toward multiple public goods, producing new institutional practices, solidarities, and political subjectivities. This form of urban liminal institutionalism captures both the fragility and generative potential of commons in semi-peripheral contexts, where fragmented governance opens space for innovation in collective action.

Topli Do: Territorial Resistance – Rebellious Spirits of the Place

Territorial and Historical Foundations

Stara Planina (the Balkan Mountain) is a protected area of exceptional ecological and cultural value. Its relative isolation has helped preserve distinctive landscapes, practices, and social relations. Mountain livelihoods – pastoralism, smallholder agriculture, and forest foraging – have historically depended on collective cooperation, most notably moba, which also produced a material heritage of shepherds' shelters and livestock structures (pojate). These practices demonstrate a long continuity of commons and commoning embedded in the territory of Stara Planina. Settlement patterns are water-centered, with villages forming around rivers and springs, embedding hydro-social identities in which water is constitutive of community life rather than a separable resource.

The village of Topli Do exemplifies this configuration. Ecological abundance and chronic demographic decline shape a hamlet of approximately thirty residents, surrounded by waterfalls and strict nature-protection zones. These conditions increase vulnerability to externally imposed extractive projects. In this context, water is not

merely a resource but a relation, memory, and livelihood, as captured by a resident's statement: "The river is not just a river. The river is memory and life..." (Kočović De Santo et al., 2025).

Ruptural Moments

Serbia's accession to the European Energy Community in 2006 committed the country to expanding renewable energy production. However, policy design disproportionately favored small hydropower plants (SHPs), without adequate hydrological, ecological, or socio-spatial assessment. In 2009, the introduction of "privileged producer" status – offering feed-in tariffs at twice the market rate and guaranteed twelve-year purchase contracts, which externalized financial risks onto citizens through electricity surcharges while insulating investors from local accountability (Kočović De Santo et al., 2025).

This permissive framework relied on outdated and inappropriate planning instruments, including a 1987 military "wartime" siting inventory never intended for environmental governance, while local permitting procedures often bypassed environmental assessments and construction conditions. In Topli Do, as elsewhere in Stara Planina, these institutional shortcuts left rivers under strict protection regimes vulnerable to enclosure.

Independent scientific audits exposed the scale of harm. A 2018 field study led by Prof. Ratko Ristić documented, across forty-six SHP sites, the diversion of entire river flows into derivation pipes, systematic failure to maintain ecological minimums, and non-functional fish passages, resulting in the ecological collapse of headwater streams (Ristić, 2018). At a broader scale, more than 3,000 hydropower schemes mapped or planned across the Balkans reveal a transboundary drive to enclose rivers and commodify flows in the name of the "green" energy transition (Schwarz, 2019).

In Topli Do, these developments constituted a ruptural moment not only because of environmental degradation, but because they directly threatened the material conditions of undefined survival – drinking water, livestock, irrigation – and undermined deeply embedded relations between territory, water, and community.

Commons Practices and Mobilization

In July 2019, the newly formed grassroots Alliance of Village Communities of Stara Planina declared an "ecological uprising" against SHPs, explicitly legitimizing extraordinary forms of resistance. This declaration catalyzed 120 days of continuous barricades in Topli Do, culminating in a direct confrontation between villagers and the SHP private investor on 7 October 2019. As one resident recalled: "That day here was war... The investor left... and never returned"

(Kočović De Santo et al., 2025). The uprising reframed the conflict as an expression of a rebellious spirit of place emerging from depopulated mountain regions often treated as politically marginal.

Mobilization combined three tightly interwoven registers of action. First, villagers engaged in legal and administrative scrutiny by monitoring permits, initiating lawsuits, and collaborating with independent experts. Second, they practiced embodied resistance through barricades, vigils, and constant physical presence along threatened river sites. Third, symbolic and performative actions – such as *Moleban za reke* (2018), articulated moral claims grounded in cultural and spiritual relations to water.

Digital infrastructures amplified these efforts, enabling rapid coordination beyond the village and connecting a multi-scalar coalition of residents, scientists, mountaineers, activists, journalists, and cultural workers. In Topli Do, radical relationality unfolded as hydro-territorial resistance grounded in embodied knowledge of place. Villagers mapped risks to water supply, livestock, and irrigation, documented regulatory violations, and asserted that rivers under strict protection regimes are life and therefore no one could privatize them for energy production. The July 2019 declaration normalized community self-defense in the face of asymmetrical power, transforming fear and resistance into collective legitimacy.

From Defense to Commoning

Victory against SHP projects did not result in formal institutional consolidation but instead enabled everyday practices of commoning oriented toward the reproduction of life and territory. Through moba, villagers rebuilt about twenty houses, repaired six small bridges, renovated the church, upgraded shared septic systems, and reactivated both the *zadruga* (cooperative) and the *mesna zajednica* (MZ, sub-municipal unit). Since 2020, the annual Free Rivers & Mountains Festival has anchored these practices in a shared cultural calendar.

Commoning in Topli Do thus functioned as an anti-model: a refusal to translate resistance into technocratic management structures. The MZ served pragmatically as a coordination interface with municipal and protected-area authorities, while decision-making remained rooted in open assemblies held in either the village store or cooperative and supported by a Viber group connecting about 80–90 members, including descendants living elsewhere. This arrangement constituted a form of polycentric governance deeply rooted in place and identity, nesting local rules and care practices within broader legal frameworks without ceding commons to private capture.

Each year on October 7, villagers commemorate Topli Do River Defense Day, embedding the moment of rupture into

the temporal rhythms of community life and reactivating water defense as an ongoing practice of commoning rather than an exceptional event.

Polish Case: The Odra River Person

Territorial and Historical Foundations

The Odra River is Poland's second-longest river and a major hydrological, ecological, and cultural artery of Central Europe. Throughout the twentieth century, engineers heavily modified it for navigation, industry, and agriculture, resulting in a legacy of pollution, overregulation, and ecological degradation. Governance of the river has long been shaped by conflicting public narratives that obscure cumulative environmental pressures: the Odra is simultaneously imagined as “wild” despite extensive regulation, as a national border rather than a transboundary socio-ecological system, and as controllable infrastructure rather than a living ecosystem (Zawadka, 2023). These framings have legitimized technocratic control while marginalizing ecological and social concerns.

Recent scholarship has challenged these perspectives by conceptualizing rivers as water heritage – historically, layered socio-ecological entities requiring protection, care, and re-imagination rather than solely technical management (Kępski, 2022). Related approaches frame rivers as multispecies assemblages (Strang, 2020) and as hyperfacts spanning human and non-human temporalities (Normark, 2014). In the case of the Odra, collective memory and cultural production embed floods, pollution, and infrastructural interventions, shaping hydro-social identities that link environmental degradation to broader questions of responsibility and governance (Barcz, 2017).

Ruptural Moment: The 2022 Ecological Disaster

A decisive ruptural moment occurred in the summer of 2022, when a massive bloom of toxic golden algae (*Prymnesium parvum*) caused widespread fish mortality along large sections of the Odra. Although scientists had long warned of the river's vulnerability, the scale and visibility of the disaster transformed accumulated governance failures into a publicly undeniable crisis. Investigators discovered fragmented regulatory oversight, inadequate wastewater treatment, permissive industrial discharges, and the absence of effective monitoring mechanisms across jurisdictions.

Rather than being an isolated ecological shock, the disaster exposed long-standing institutional incoherence in river governance. The Odra became a national symbol of regulatory neglect, sparking public outrage and reopening debates on accountability, environmental responsibility, and the limits of technocratic water management in Poland.

Commons Practices and Mobilization: “Osoba Odra”

In the aftermath of the disaster, civic mobilization intensified around the recognition of water as a common good and the need for alternative governance approaches grounded in more-than-human relationality. Central to this mobilization was the campaign “Osoba Odra” (“The Odra River Person”), initiated by a coalition of NGOs, legal experts, activists, and artists. Inspired by rights-of-nature initiatives in Ecuador, New Zealand, and India, the campaign seeks to grant the Odra legal personhood, shifting its status from an object of regulation to a subject of rights (O'Donnell & Talbot-Jones, 2018).

The campaign combines litigation strategies with public education and civic engagement, emphasizing stewardship, biodiversity protection, and accountability for polluters. As a form of legal commoning, *Osoba Odra* institutionalizes radical relationality by embedding more-than-human agency within existing legal frameworks. Rather than replacing state regulation, it operates through constitutional law, EU environmental directives, and international jurisprudence to expand collective responsibility for the river.

Alongside legal efforts, grassroots groups engaged in water quality monitoring, biodiversity observation, and collaboration with scientists and local communities, producing civic knowledge that complemented and contested official expertise. Cultural and literary interventions contributed further to reshaping public imaginaries, presenting the Odra not as a technical object for authorities to manage, but as a shared socio-ecological heritage.

GREEK CASES: WATER AS A COMMONS AT DIFFERENT SCALES

The Case of Thessaloniki: From Anti-Austerity to Water Movements

Territorial and Historical Foundations

Water management includes the provision of water services, infrastructure maintenance, and water quality control, all shaped by broader political and economic contexts. In Greece, water supply and sanitation in the two largest cities, Athens and Thessaloniki, are managed by state-owned companies (EYDAP and EYATH, respectively), which hold the largest share of assets, while municipalities manage the rest of the country's water services (Nikolaou, 2017). The 2008 financial crisis severely undermined welfare infrastructure and increased pressures to privatize public and common goods, with profound consequences for daily life (Douzinas, 2013). Anti-austerity movements emerged to defend democracy and the commons in everyday life (Della Porta, 2015; Roussos & Malamidis, 2021).

Ruptural Moments

Thessaloniki, as the second largest city, became a focal point of resistance to water privatization between 2011 and 2014, amid the proliferation of horizontal grassroots initiatives and social centers organized around solidarity and community provision (including SOS to Nero, the EYATH Union, K136, and Water Warriors). These mobilizations brought together trade unions, lawyers, environmental organizations, social movements, observers, and activists to defend water as a public and common good.

The rupture intensified with successive institutional shifts affecting water utilities. In 2011, the state transferred the assets of the Thessaloniki and Athens water companies to the Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF), established to facilitate the privatization of public infrastructure under the Greek Structural Adjustment Programs (Roussos & Malamidis, 2021). In 2018, authorities moved EYATH assets to the Growth Fund, accelerating the financialization of water. In 2023, new reforms triggered a renewed cycle of collective action—authorities incorporated water companies into Independent Regulatory Authorities managing energy and waste and proposed tariff increases.

Commons Practices and Mobilizations

The campaigns and mobilizations of the water movement led to an independently organized, bottom-up referendum against water privatization in Thessaloniki in 2014. The referendum results showed that 98% were opposed to privatization, with more than 50% of registered voters participating (Nikolaou, 2017). The formation of the movement and its campaigns were crucial for informing people in neighborhoods, open markets, and city halls (Nikolaou, 2017).

Assemblies and meeting points emerged during the referendum and campaign preparation, creating spaces for interaction, communication, and relationship-building Karazarifi, L. (2024, October 1). Thessaloniki's water movement joined a transnational network of solidarity and knowledge exchange among activists and water specialists, drawing on shared experiences and collective tools of resistance. Based on interviews with members of the water movements, the referendum aimed to protect water from privatization and keep it in public hands by affirming water as life, democracy, and resistance to austerity. It left a legacy in the use of legal mechanisms to protect water as a public and common good, and in the socialization around the exchange of experiences and knowledge production related to water.

From Defense to Commoning

The referendum victory halted privatization attempts and generated a legacy of water protection through the formation of multi-scalar alliances. In the years that

followed, water as a public and common good remained under pressure at both national and local levels through proposals and reforms promoting indirect privatization, the integration of public water companies into Independent Regulatory Authorities, increases in water tariffs, and persistent gaps in infrastructure maintenance, all unfolding alongside new environmental crises.

Within this evolving context, commoning appears as a continuum of dynamic and shifting relations extending from earlier mobilizations into the present. Water movements and grassroots initiatives demonstrated reflexive capacities through legal strategies, open assemblies, press releases, and cultural events, drawing on earlier layers of collective action while broadening alliances in response to recurring pressures in defense of water.

Cultural collective actions, such as concerts and open discussions organized in 2023 and 2024, created sustained spaces for contestation and negotiation around water utilities. These spaces of awareness-raising functioned as democratic arenas for imagining and praxis, foregrounding questions of property, access, control, and environmental common goods. Through these processes, movements produced knowledge about current challenges and articulated alternative approaches informed by experiences in Greece and beyond (Author 2, 2024). In this sense, water embodied democracy, socialization, and resistance in the ongoing protection of socio-ecological relations beyond profit-based economies.

The Case of Stagiates: Resistance to Enclosures and Water Commons

Territorial and Historical Foundations

Stagiates is a small village on Pelion Mountain in Greece and serves as a paradigmatic example of grassroots “commoning innovations” rooted in grassroots informal structures of open democracy centered on water commons (Apostolopoulou et al., 2022: 154; Author 2, 2024).

Villagers widely recognize water as the reason for the village’s existence. Since the eighteenth century, water-dependent textile production has shaped local economic flows, connecting Stagiates to the wider region of Magnesia in Central Greece (Koletsos, 2003).

Historically, villagers drew water from Krya Vrisi, which functioned not only as a source of supply but also as a site of socialization, cultural gatherings, and local pride. The community traditionally managed its hydrological network, embedding water governance within everyday social relations. Inscriptions highlight the value of water and community.⁴

Ruptural Moments

In 2009, the first attempts by a local bottling company to privatize the water of Krya Vrisi led to the creation

of APODRASIS, an independent group of active citizens seeking to improve life in the village and protect water from privatization. In 2010, the national Kallikratis reforms implemented changes in local government centers, trending toward centralization (Kyvelou, Marava, 2017), and incorporated Stagiates into the municipality of Volos. The Kallikratis reforms affected the self-determination of local communities and the possibilities for dialogue in relation to water commons. From 2011 to 2018, the municipal water company of Volos attempted to add chlorine to the water network from the Krya Vrisi source and to bring the self-managed irrigation system under control, which led to local resistance.

Local communities responded by safeguarding Krya Vrisi, opposing privatization, and organizing cultural actions in support of the commons. Solidarity networks expanded across the broader area of Pelion and Volos to support local initiatives. The COVID-19 crisis introduced another period of enclosure, affecting part of the Krya Vrisi water sources, the local school – a communal space – and the local museum. These critical moments created opportunities for new periods of collective action around water and the commons. During and after this tipping point, the Popular Assembly of Stagiates expressed the claim and practices of Free Water, APODRASIS, the local community, and the Cultural Association of Stagiates.

From Resistance to Commoning

Water, intersecting with other social and environmental struggles – such as polluted air, anti-mining efforts, and land issues – became a core element of the community. Linked to various moments of rupture, the response of the Stagiates Popular Assembly emerged from solidarity exchanges among networks of social movements, activists, and artists. These intersecting struggles often seek alternatives beyond the current status quo of capitalism and extractive economies. The Stagiates Popular Assembly reopened enclosed spaces, such as the school, in 2024. The local representative is now part of the assembly. The Stagiates Assembly continues to care for the source at Krya Vrisi and conducts significant cultural work for the life of the village and the reproduction of the commons. Solidarity networks have played an essential role in this process.

In times of extreme weather-related emergencies,⁵ the Popular Assembly of Stagiates has conducted collective actions focused on water as a commons, in solidarity with communities in the city of Volos and other villages in Pelion. During the intense floods of 2023, named Daniel and Elias, the Stagiates Popular Assembly provided water from the source to affected areas using a mobile water tank. These collective acts of solidarity toward the commons

began before the disasters and expanded into care for the community beyond the village and during times of emergency.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: TRANSFORMATIVE IMPACT AND COMMONING FORMATION

Across cases, water struggles emerge from ruptural moments where governance failures intersect with socio-ecological crises. Although the triggers vary – privatization, austerity, ecological disasters, institutional collapse – defensive mobilization consistently serves as the entry point into commoning practices shaped by territorial context and radical relationality.

Territorial positioning shapes distinct forms of liminal commons. In urban contexts (Belgrade, Thessaloniki), movements operate through and around formal institutions, combining legal instruments, referenda, and petitions with informal assemblies and cultural practices. This produces liminal institutionalism that defends public infrastructure while layering autonomous practices onto participation mechanisms.

In rural contexts (Topli Do, Stagiates), hydro-territorial resistance activates customary cooperation, popular

assemblies, and place-based care rooted in everyday water relations. These struggles generate territorial commons oriented towards socio-ecological reproduction and polycentric governance, sustaining autonomy amid depopulation, weak state presence, and enclosure threats.

The riverine case (Odra) advances more-than-human commoning, combining legal and cultural strategies to reframe the river as a potential legal subject. By linking local action to rights-of-nature frameworks, commoning extends beyond resource defense toward ontological and jurisprudential transformation.

CROSS-CUTTING MECHANISMS

Ruptural moments serve as generative gaps that expose governance failures while creating political opportunities for collective intervention. Ecological crises, privatization attempts, and institutional collapse render hydro-social dependencies visible and politically actionable. In liminal semi-peripheral contexts, ruptures widen existing institutional gaps rather than destabilize coherent systems, allowing defensive mobilizations to evolve into experiments with alternative governance. Ruptural moments thus catalyze collective learning, solidarity networks, and institutional bricolage, transforming crisis into conditions that enable commons innovation. The comparative findings are summarized in [Table 1](#).

CASE	RADICAL RELATIONALITY	RUPTURES	MOBILIZATION	COMMONS/COMMONING OUTPUTS
Belgrade (Sava Quay)	River and quay as living actors; more-than-human	Illegal barges, flood-zone restaurants, privatization (2016–2022)	Formal petitions, protests, defense of existing public goods, creation of new	Liminal commons (citizen assemblies, cultural stage, playgrounds as shared property, riverside supported by volunteers); urban liminal institutionalism
Topli Do	River = life; hydro-social identity; rebellious spirits of place	SPP projects threatening headwaters (2017–2018); October 7 confrontation	Women-led care, barricades, intergenerational solidarity	Moba village reconstruction, Institutional and political re-claiming; Free Rivers & Mountains Festival; hydro-territorial resistance
Thessaloniki	Water = democracy; commons vs. austerity	2008 financial crisis; inclusion of water in HRADF privatization fund (2011–2014)	Referendum (2014), union–citizen coalitions, international solidarity	Water as a medium to protect and reproduce democracy ; protection of public utilities, convergence of struggles, alliances, solidarity networks, knowledge-exchange
Stagiates	Water source as cultural anchor; more-than-human collaboration; Water = reason for the existence of the village, force for aid or destruction; Water=life	Privatization attempts (2009, 2011); COVID-19 repression; climate-change disasters (2023 floods, fires)	Popular assemblies, APODRASIS, solidarity with artists/activists	Community self-management of irrigation; cultural events, libraries, festivals; resilience commons
Poland (Odra)	River as <i>hyperfact</i> (Normark, 2014); water heritage, more-than-human	2022 Prymnesium parvum algae disaster	Civic–legal campaign “Odra River Person;” NGOs, lawyers, artists	River = legal subject; water commons through rights-of-nature framework

Table 1 Comparative analysis: Commons and Commoning outputs.

Hydro-Social Identities as Mediating Structures

Radical relationality becomes politically actionable through territorially embedded hydro-social identities shaped by material dependencies, cultural memory, and obligations. These identities mediate territorial positioning and shift from defense to commoning. They are relational and situational and continually reworked in practice.

In urban contexts, identities form around public utilities and planning legacies, gradually reorienting toward more-than-human solidarities. In rural contexts, identities are rooted in territorial autonomy and everyday water relations, where customary practices persist as living governance forms. In the riverine case, regional identity formation produces the river as a co-produced entity, demanding legal recognition through rights-of-nature frameworks.

Transformation into liminal commons involves shifts from bounded to relational identities and from defensive to generative orientations. Collective identity emerges as an outcome of commoning practices sustained through negotiated solidarities.

Institutional Bricolage in Legal Pluralism

Liminal semi-peripheral contexts enable institutional bricolage, allowing communities to recombine formal law, EU directives, customary norms, and movement infrastructures. Urban movements layer regulations and assemblies, producing liminal institutionalism. Rural communities nested customary practices within local institutions, sustaining territorial commons. The riverine case extends bricolage into ontological and jurisprudential domains through river personhood.

From Temporary Defense to Durable Commons

The transition from defensive mobilization to liminal commons occurs through three mechanisms: capability accumulation via collective learning and solidarity networks; institutional layering that adds new practices onto fragmented governance; and relational reorientation as actors shift toward generative roles as commoners and environmental publics.

CONCLUSION

Water struggles in Serbia, Greece, and Poland illustrate how socio-ecological ruptural moments in semi-peripheral Europe enable communities to transform defensive mobilizations into liminal commons that prefigure post-growth democratic alternatives. Examining five cases across urban, rural, and riverine contexts, this article shows that radical relationality is not an abstract philosophical stance, but a lived mode of collective governance rooted in territorially embedded hydro-social relations.

First, we empirically ground radical relationality by demonstrating how it operates through hydro-social territories where water, society, and power intersect. Water is not merely a resource but a relational actor shaping identities, obligations, and political subjectivities. In Belgrade, identities are tied to the river and socialist planning legacies; in Topli Do, headwaters symbolize territorial survival; in Thessaloniki, water emerged through anti-austerity mobilizations as a site for defending democracy and collective rights; in Stagiates, water commons are reproduced through community self-management and care practices; in Poland, the Odra achieved legal expression through river personhood campaigns. Across these contexts, hydro-social identities mediate shifts from defensive repertoires to liminal commons.

Second, we conceptualize liminal commons under institutional uncertainty. Rather than viewing commons as temporary activities or fully consolidated institutions, we show how liminal commons persist through ambiguity, negotiation, and care-based norms, operating within semi-peripheral institutional gaps shaped by legal pluralism, fragmented authority, and incomplete marketization.

Third, we reframe semi-peripheral positioning from a deficit into a generative resource. Overlapping legal orders, weakened state capacities, and partial marketization enable institutional bricolage, allowing communities to recombine state law, EU directives, customary practices, and movement infrastructures. These conditions allow commoning practices to stabilize without full institutional closure, offering concrete pathways beyond the state-market binary.

In the liminal spaces of semi-peripheral Europe, communities are already reimagining human-water relations through liminal commons, territorial resistance, river subjectivity, participatory water governance, and communal autonomy. These practices do not merely resist enclosure; they prefigure relational, care-centered, and democratic futures grounded in lived socio-ecological interdependence. Transformations from defense to liminal commons follow recurrent mechanisms – capability accumulation, institutional layering, and relational reorientation of political subjectivities – demonstrating that commoning in semi-peripheral Europe is neither accidental nor purely episodic.

While our analysis identifies mechanisms present in successful cases, it cannot claim these mechanisms are sufficient conditions for the emergence of liminal commons in general. Systematic comparison between successful and unsuccessful mobilizations thus represents an important direction for future research, necessary to better understand the limits, vulnerabilities, and conditions under which defensive mobilizations collapse rather than evolve into durable commons arrangements.

NOTES

- 1 Milica Kočović De Santo was an active team member of the project EPICA – Empowering Participation in Culture and Architecture: Activating Public Resources for and with Community (ID 7744648).
- 2 Conducted by Lydia Karazarifi, based on an ongoing PhD Research in Political Science and Sociology at Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence (2022-Ongoing) on water movements and commons, supervised by Prof. Donatella Della Porta and Prof. Lorenzo Zamponi. The research was funded by a PNRR doctoral scholarship.
- 3 Analyzed by Inga Kuźma.
- 4 Krya Vrysi water source and its water streams interplayed with storytelling, proverbs, costumes, childhood memories, and socialization activities.
- 5 Fires and phenomena Daniel and Elias in 2023, connected to floods, water, electricity cuts, and other destructions.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Milica Kočović De Santo  orcid.org/0000-0003-3304-7801
Institute of Economic Sciences, Serbia

Lydia Karazarifi  orcid.org/0009-0005-8299-7346
PhD candidate, Political Science and Sociology, Scuola Normale Superiore, Florence, Italy

Inga Kuźma  orcid.org/0000-0003-0195-0270
Associate Professor, Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Łódź, Poland

REFERENCES

- APODRASIS.** (2009–present). *Stagiates Popular Assembly archives* (communiqués, minutes, event programs).
- Apostolopoulou, E., Bormpoudakis, D., Chatzipavlidis, A., Vázquez, J. J. C., Florea, I., Gearey, M., Levy, J., et al.** (2022). Radical social innovations and the spatialities of grassroots activism: Navigating pathways for tackling inequality and reinventing the commons. *Journal of Political Ecology*, 29(1), 143–164. <https://doi.org/10.2458/jpe.2292>
- Bakker, K.** (2010). *Privatizing water: Governance failure and the world's urban water crisis*. Cornell University Press.
- Barcz, A.** (2017). *Animal narratives and culture: Vulnerable realism*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Bieler, A.** (2021). *Fighting for water: Resisting privatization in Europe*. Zed Books. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755640409>
- Bieler, A., & Jordan, J.** (2018). Commodification and ‘the commons’: The politics of privatising public water in Greece and Portugal during the Eurozone crisis. *European Journal of International Relations*, 24(4), 934–957. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066117728383>
- Boelens, R.** (2015). *Water, Power and Identity: The Cultural Politics of Water in the Andes*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315867557>
- Boelens, R., Hoogesteger, J., Swyngedouw, E., Vos, J., & Wester, P.** (2016). Hydrosocial territories: A political ecology perspective. *Water International*, 41(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508060.2016.1134898>
- Bollier, D., & Helfrich, S.** (2019). *Free, fair and alive: The insurgent power of the commons*. New Society Publishers.
- Braidotti, R.** (2022). *Posthuman feminism*. Polity Press.
- Cassano, F.** (2012). *Southern thought and other essays on the Mediterranean*. Fordham University Press. <https://doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823233649.001.0001>
- Cleaver, F.** (2000). Moral ecological rationality, institutions, and the management of common property resources. *Development and Change*, 31(2), 361–383. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00158>
- D’Alisa, G., Demaria, F., & Kallis, G.** (Eds.) (2014). *Degrowth: A vocabulary for a new era*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203796146>
- Della Porta, D.** (2013). *Can democracy be saved? Participation, deliberation and social movements*. Polity. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm065>
- Della Porta, D.** (2015). *Social Movements in Terms of Austerity*. Polity Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199669745.013.50>
- Della Porta, D.** (2020). Protests as critical junctures: Some reflections towards a momentous approach to social movements. *Social Movement Studies*, 19(5–6), 556–575. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2018.1555458>
- Della Porta, D., O’Connor, F., Portos, M., & Ribas, A. S.** (2017). *Social movements and referendums from below: Direct democracy in the neoliberal crisis*. Policy Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22p7kks>
- Della Porta, D., & Zamponi, L.** (2022). Social movements and the politics of expertise. *Social Movement Studies*, 21(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm597>
- D’Odorico, P., Dell’Angelo, J., & Rulli, M. C.** (2024). Appropriation pathways of water grabbing. *World Development*, 181, 106650. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2024.106650>
- Dolenec, D., Majstorović, D., Medarov, G., Sekulić, D., Simović, V., & Tomašević, T.** (2014). The struggle for the commons in the Balkans. In V. Bibić & S. Horvat (Eds.), *The Balkan forum: Situations, struggles, strategies* (pp. 9–34). Bijeli val.
- Dolenec, D., & Žitko, M.** (2013). *Ostrom and Horvat: Identifying principles of a socialist governmentality*. <http://www.grupa22.hr/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Dolenec-ZitkoWorking-Paper-2013.pdf>.
- Douzinas, C.** (2013) *Philosophy and resistance in the crisis: Greece and the future of Europe*. Polity Press.

- Escobar, A.** (2018). *Designs for the pluriverse: Radical interdependence, autonomy, and the making of worlds*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822371816>
- Escobar, A.** (2020). *Pluriversal politics: The real and the possible*. Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478012108>
- Federici, S.** (2014). From commoning to debt: Financialization, microcredit, and the changing architecture of capital accumulation. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 113(2), 231–244. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-2643585>
- Gasseau, G.** (2024). Negotiating the public: Re-municipalization, water politics and social reproduction. *Globalizations*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2024.2313807>
- Hellenic Republic Asset Development Fund (HRADF/TAIPED).** (2011–2014). *Official decisions and asset transfer lists* (Government Gazette).
- Kallikratis Reform.** (2010). *Law 3852/2010—New architecture of self-government and decentralized administration* (Government Gazette A 87).
- Kallis, G., Varvarousis, A., & Petridis, P.** (2022). Southern thought, islanders and real-existing degrowth in the Mediterranean. *World Development*, 157, 105957. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.105957>
- Karazarifi, L.** (2024, October 1). *When social movements meet through water flows: A reflection from the Greek context through two festive events*. *Undisciplined Environments*. [https://undisciplinedenvironments.org/2024/10/01/when-social-movements-meet-through-water-flows-a-reflection-from-the-greek-context-through-two-festive-events/\(undisciplinedenvironments.org\)](https://undisciplinedenvironments.org/2024/10/01/when-social-movements-meet-through-water-flows-a-reflection-from-the-greek-context-through-two-festive-events/(undisciplinedenvironments.org)).
- Kejski, M.** (2022). Water heritage: Towards an interdisciplinary framework. *Heritage Studies Review*, 8(2), 52–69.
- Kočović De Santo, M.** (2024). Yugoslav self-management – the forgotten anti-capitalist seeds of degrowth. *Cultura Económica*, 42(108), 50–85. <https://doi.org/10.46553/cecon.42.108.2024.p50-85>
- Kočović De Santo, M., Milovanović Rodić, D., Maruna, M., Cigić, P., & Dragičević Šešić, M.** (2025). Participatory practices in the defense of the public good and creation of the commons in the area of the village of Topli Do, municipality of Pirot [Participativne prakse u odbrani javnog dobra i stvaranju zajedničkog na području sela Topli Do, opština Pirot]. In N. Mihaljinac & S. Jankov (Eds.), *Empowering participation in culture and architecture: Activating public resources for and with community* (pp. 105–137). Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Institute for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television.
- Koletsos, S.** (2003). *Stagiates* (2nd ed.). Εκπολιτιστικός Σύλλογος Σταγιάτων “Άγιος Σεραφεΐμ”.
- Kyvelou, S. S., & Marava, N.** (2017). From centralism to decentralization and back to recentralization due to the economic crisis: Findings and lessons learnt from the Greek experience. In J. Ruano & M. Profiroiu (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of decentralization in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32437-1_12
- Lazarević Bajec, N.** (2009). Rational or collaborative model of urban planning in Serbia: Institutional constraints. *Serbian Architectural Journal*, 1(1), 81–106. <https://doi.org/10.5937/SAJ0902081L>
- Lenton, T. M., Held, H., Kriegler, E., Hall, J. W., Lucht, W., Rahmstorf, S., & Schellnhuber, H. J.** (2008). Tipping elements in the Earth’s climate system. *PNAS*, 105(6), 1786–1793. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.0705414105>
- Linebaugh, P.** (2008). *The Magna Carta manifesto: Liberties and commons for all*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520932708>
- Linton, J., & Budds, J.** (2014). The hydro-social cycle: Defining and mobilizing a relational-dialectical approach to water. *Geoforum*, 57, 170–180. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2013.10.008>
- Malamidis, H.** (2021). *Social Movements and Solidarity structures in crisis-ridden Greece*. Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv18x4hxs>
- Martínez-Alier, J.** (2002). *The environmentalism of the poor: A study of ecological conflicts and valuation*. Edward Elgar. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781843765486>
- Mijailović, A., & Kočović De Santo, M.** (2025). “Mesne zajednice” through time: What is the priority – legislative reform or new models of local self-government? [Mesne zajednice kroz vreme: šta je prioritet – zakonodavna reforma ili novi modeli lokalne samouprave?]. In N. Mihaljinac & S. Jankov (Eds.), *Empowering participation in culture and architecture: Activating public resources for and with community* (pp. 239–275). Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Institute for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television.
- Milovanović Rodić, D., Kočović De Santo, M., Maruna, M., Cigić, P., & Dragičević Šešić, M.** (2025a). Participatory practices for the protection and improvement of public and common property in the Sava quay area in New Belgrade [Participativne prakse za zaštitu i unapređenje javnog i zajedničkog dobra na području Savskog keja na Novom Beogradu]. In N. Mihaljinac & S. Jankov (Eds.), *Empowering participation in culture and architecture: Activating public resources for and with community* (pp. 73–105). Faculty of Dramatic Arts, Institute for Theatre, Film, Radio and Television.
- Milovanović Rodić, D., Maruna, M., Teofilović, V., & Kočović De Santo, M.** (2025b). From online platforms to on-ground actions: Synergies of digital and analog civic engagement in non-inclusive New Belgrade’s urban transformations. In *Keeping up with technologies to shape joyful cities: Proceedings of the 10th International Academic Conference on Places and Technologies, Belgrade, 22–23 May 2025* (pp. 402–408). University of Belgrade, Faculty of Architecture. https://doi.org/10.18485/arh_pt.2025.10.ch47

- Nikolaou, K.** (2017). *To Nepó ως Κοινό Αγαθό πέρα από τις Εταιρείες και το Κράτος* [Water as a common good beyond the companies and the state]. Εκδόσεις Λαϊκό Πανεπιστήμιο Κοινωνικής και Αλληλέγγυας Οικονομίας “UnivSSE Coop”.
- Normark, M.** (2014). Hyperfacts and flat ontologies. In *Designs for an anthropology of the contemporary* (pp. 183–206).
- O'Donnell, E., & Talbot-Jones, J.** (2018). Creating legal rights for rivers: Lessons from Australia, New Zealand, and India. *Ecology and Society*, 23(1), 7. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-09854-230107>
- Ostrom, E.** (1990). *Governing the commons: The evolution of institutions for collective action*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511807763>
- Otto, I. M., Donges, J. F., Cremades, R., Bhowmik, A., Hewitt, R. J., Lucht, W., Rockström, J., Allerberger, F., McCaffrey, M., Doe, S. S. P., Lenferna, A., Morán, N., van Vuuren, D. P., & Schellnhuber, H. J.** (2020). Social tipping processes for stabilizing Earth's climate by 2050. *PNAS*, 117(5), 2354–2365. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1900577117>
- Quintana, A., & Campbell, L. M.** (2019). Critical commons scholarship: A typology. *International Journal of the Commons*, 13(2), 1112–1127. <https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.925>
- Ristić, R.** (2018). *Guidelines for sustainable planning and management of small hydropower plant catchment areas in protected natural*. Faculty of Forestry.
- Roussos, K., & Malamidis, H.** (2021). Social movements and the commons: A framework for understanding collective action in crisis-ridden Southern Europe. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 26(3), 359–379. <https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-26-3-359>
- Santos, B. de S.** (2016). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*. Routledge.
- Schwarz, U.** (2019). *Hydropower pressure on European rivers: The story in numbers* (Summary report). WWF/EuroNatur.
- Stavrides, S.** (2016). Toward an architecture of commoning. *ASAP/Journal*, 1(1), 77–94. <https://doi.org/10.1353/asa.2016.0004>
- Strang, V.** (2020). Envisioning a sustainable future for water. *AQUA – Water Infrastructure, Ecosystems and Society*, 70(4), 404–419. <https://doi.org/10.2166/aqua.2020.101>
- Sultana, F., & Loftus, A.** (Eds.) (2019). *Water politics: Governance, justice and the right to water*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429453571>
- Swyngedouw, E.** (2009). The political economy and political ecology of the hydro-social cycle. *Journal of Contemporary Water Research & Education*, 142(1), 56–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1936-704X.2009.00054.x>
- Tomašević, T., Horvat, V., Midžić, A., Dragišić, I., & Dakić, M.** (2018). *Commons in Southeast Europe: Case of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia*. Institute for Political Ecology.
- Varvarousis, A.** (2022). *Liminal commons: Modern rituals of transition in Greece*. Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755638932>
- von Benda-Beckmann, F.** (2002). Who's afraid of legal pluralism? *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, 34(47), 37–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07329113.2002.10756563>
- Wagenaar, H.** (2024). Advancing the commonsverse: The political economy beyond Ostrom. *International Journal of the Commons*, 18(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.1400>
- Wallerstein, I.** (1974). *The modern world-system I*. Academic Press.
- Zawadka, M.** (2023). Odra. Dłaczego tak jest? I co dalej? – zamiast wstępu. *Studia Śląskie*, 92, 13–33. <https://www.cceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1161765>.

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Kočović De Santo, M., Karazarifi, L., & Kuźma, I. (2026). Radical Relationality from the Periphery: Water Movements and Liminal Commons in Southeast and Central Europe. *International Journal of the Commons*, 20(1), pp. 333–346. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/ijc.1672>

Submitted: 21 October 2025 **Accepted:** 10 May 2026 **Published:** 06 August 2026

COPYRIGHT:

© 2026 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

International Journal of the Commons is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press.