

## **PrIDe – Pratiche Idriche Democratiche, *Democratic Water Practices***

A Research Project on Water Practice Communities in Emilia-Romagna, after the 2023-24 Floods.

### **Proponents**

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English Abstract

The floods that hit Romagna and eastern Emilia have exposed a deep desocialization of local populations regarding new water-related events caused by climate change. Social reactions to the disaster have been varied, occurring at multiple levels. Spontaneous groups and flood victims' committees have emerged, evolving in ways that the lenses of environmental and territorial sociology can fruitfully investigate.

The **objective** of the project is to analyse the trends of water resocialization starting from organized groups in Emilia-Romagna. More specifically, the research aims to understand how associations and committees develop new knowledge and new practices, within an ideal of **democratic water governance**. The study will not only focus on defence against water-related threats, such as floods, but also on access to integrated services (drinking water & sanitation) and the restoration of symbolic, aesthetic, and ecological values of surface and groundwater.

As regards its **framework**, the study adopts a holistic view of water resocialization (Linton, 2014; Hoolohan et al., 2021), considering individual actions, inter-organizational dynamics, and the influence of political, administrative, economic, and technical-scientific systems (Osti, 2020). By nature, water management is overseen by public entities, such as basin authorities and civil engineering departments, or semi-public organizations, such as former municipal utilities and irrigation-land reclamation consortia.

The theoretical tendency is to open generally autocratic and self-referential management systems to consultation with non-profit entities and to promote participatory moments involving citizens. Other theories from political ecology (Osti, 2023), structural coupling (Wang et al., 2024), and cultural theories (Klijn et al., 2021) emphasize the presence of supra-individual mechanisms producing social disparities in water access and exposure to water-related risks. However, neither organizational nor structural approaches fully clarify the autonomy and creativity of social aggregations (peer groups, families, committees). In water management, these actors are often reduced to mere users, clients, or recipients of expert knowledge and regulations imposed in a top-down manner.

The framework adopted in this study is based on the concept of Communities of Practice (CoP). Though rarely operationalized in the water sector, CoPs are discussed in terms of social learning (King et al., 2023). In our case, the concept will be used as an analytical tool to identify empirical indicators of collective actions aimed at creating water well-being. A series of interviews will be organized with the committees of the flooded population of Emilia-Romagna to reconstruct the points of change of the entire local water system