



Science for the greater good: how a Math professor saved the Italian coastline from Big Oil



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ABSTRACT:

Trained as a physicist, Dr. Maria D'Orsogna is a hands-on activist fighting to protect the Italian countryside and seas from Big Oil. In 2007 she learnt of proposed oil activities in her home region of Abruzzo, Italy where century-old wineries were to be uprooted to build wells, refineries and pipelines, turning scenic Abruzzo into an oil district. Although based in California - 6,000 miles away - Dr. D'Orsogna took it upon herself to raise awareness and educate the public at large. She blended her scientific training, her experience as a professor, and her strong desire for social justice into an environmental movement that rapidly spread from Abruzzo across the country. Over the years, she traveled from town to town in Italy, educating citizens about environmental and health effects, debating Big Oil, exposing political corruption, engaging the Catholic Church, putting pressure on decision makers to act for the common good. While in California she used social networks and blogging to expose wrongdoings of the oil and gas industry, coordinate letter writings, keep raising awareness and spur action. Thanks to public uproar, spearheaded by Maria's unwavering efforts, Abruzzo banned oil drilling and for the first time ever, in 2016, the Italian parliament imposed a no-drill zone of 12 miles encompassing all of Italy's 5,000 mile coastline. Overall she helped stop 40 oil leases, earning the nickname "Erin Brockovich of Italy". Maria's story is a testament of how, by engaging with the community, scientists and educators can truly make a difference.

Host: Mary Sehl, M.D., Ph.D.

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