4 Redefining Public Services

> We need to continue to struggle over these meanings because in doing so we articulate more clearly what we want the public and ourselves to be.
>
> (Mansbridge, 1998, p. 12)

Having deconstructed liberal notions of public and public services I now turn to the matter of alternative conceptualizations, starting with the question of whether we should simply abandon the word "public" altogether given how compromised it is by marketized notions of a public sphere and neoclassical conceptions of public goods. I will argue in this chapter that we are better off reconstructing "public" and "public services". There is nothing *inherently* market-oriented about these words, and we should not be forced to give up such important, evocative and widely recognized expressions, particularly if there is to be a global and inclusive *pro-public* dialogue to unite international movements in favour of effective and accessible public services in the future.

My proposal is to *reclaim* and *remake* these terms, first by reconfiguring the definition of public (infusing it with new universal but flexible meanings), and second by developing alternative indices for what constitutes a public service (in contradistinction to the commodified neoclassical categories outlined in Chapter 3). The goal is to propose a revised methodology for defining public services in ways that are not captured by market logic, while at the same time being simple enough for anyone to understand and debate (as opposed to being the purview of "experts").

By removing public services from the constraints of their individualized consumptive properties we can focus instead on questions of how "essential" they are to daily life and their potential benefits from "collective provision". The result is a new analytical grid that puts *need* and *equity* at the centre of public service definitions. The model also helps establish a clearer ontological distinction between public and private spheres, while at the same time highlighting a more positive and progressive dialectical link between them.

These are necessarily broad and tentative proposals, intended to illustrate the theoretical and practical potential for new definitions of public services

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that can be expansive and universal in nature but shaped by local context as well. This argument also sets the stage for a discussion in Chapter 5 about how redefined public services may actually be delivered (with a focus on rescuing and reinventing notions of "the state" while expanding public service delivery options to include non-state, non-profit actors). Chapter 6 then asks how we might evaluate the performance of these new public entities.

These revised definitions and assessments of public services have at their core the principle of universality: *everyone should have equitable and affordable access to all forms of public services*. This means "everyone in the world", but is necessarily complicated by questions of political boundaries and whether there are obligations to deliver public services beyond local and national jurisdictions. Universality must also account for exclusions beyond class inequalities to include an intersectional understanding of how race, caste, gender and other socially-constructed axes have created and reinforced inequities within existing public services, often obfuscated by liberal notions of universality. The conceptual challenge here, as per Rossi and Táíwò (2020, np), is "how to be anti-capitalist without ignoring the more than residual racial [and other] stratifications in contemporary capitalism". Their answer, which I align myself with here, is to "tackle both questions at the same time", highlighting the material contradictions of market economies while at the same time acknowledging that public service inequalities are facilitated by racist, misogynist, homophobic and other biases that are part and parcel of the variegated realities of capitalist markets around the world. As such, anti-racist, anti-homophobic and anti-misogynist policies are constitutive of a broader universalist materialist politics, not add-ons. The discourses and practices of class-based universality must therefore take the multifaceted challenges of inclusivity seriously.

Public Versus Commons

I begin the chapter with a brief review of heated debates around the use of the term "commons" versus "public", reminding us not only of the need for a new conceptualization of our bourgeois public sphere but also our limited choice in linguistic alternatives. As provocative as the commons literature is in proposing substitute notions of public and public services, I will argue that it does not offer a sufficiently robust conceptual framework to replace notions of public, while potentially splintering the potential for broad-based partnership-building on a pro-public future.

Some of the most vigorous challenges to privatization over the past three decades have come from activists and academics working in the traditions of a commons, typically defined as "the shared resources which people manage by negotiating their own rules through social or customary traditions, norms and practices" (Quilligan, 2012, p. 2). Much of this literature rejects the term public, which it interprets as a form of state governmentality that operates in the interests of a market elite: "In theory, public still means

people; in practice, public means government (as captured by elite interests who regularly impede the people's political rights and capacity to control their common goods)" (Quilligan, 2012, p. 2; see also Bollier, 2003, 2014).

This critique of public applies to its use in socialist states as well, with socialism seen as proxy for a hierarchical, self-serving state, advancing a false sense of inclusivity while enriching a bureaucratic minority in undemocratic and environmentally destructive ways that promote the same productivism and accumulation strategies as the market. As Özgün (2010, p. 377) argues: "Public" has been one of those theoretical devices that defined socialist alternative visions in their opposition to capitalism across all theoretical fields, but which was actually a product of eighteenth-century liberal governmentality. "Public" becomes the master signifier of socialism in its opposition to "private property," but it still carries a reference to "ownership" relations …. "Public" never denotes "everybody"; it always signifies a limit, set by a certain social, linguistic, or jurisprudential criterion, and refers exclusively to a specific population …. In this respect, the term "public" does not undo the specific set of social relations around "property" (or dispose the restrictions stemming from ownership) but delegates these relations to an abstract collective body". Özgün insists (2010, 378) that rejecting the word public "is the necessary thing to do, especially at this moment, when all possible uses of the term are already systematically contaminated by neoliberal politics".

In this sense, public is seen as a false alternative to private:

> Too often it appears as though our only choices are capitalism or socialism, the rule of private property or that of public property, such that the only cure for the ills of state control is to privatize and for the ills of capital to publicize - that is, to exert state regulation …. We have been made so stupid that we can only recognize the world as private or public. We have become blind to the common.
>
> (Hardt, 2010, p. 346, 52)

For Holloway (2010, p. 58), "It is often assumed that the only cure for the ills of capitalist society is public regulation ….[but] the political project of instituting the common … cuts diagonally across these false alternatives – neither private nor public, neither capitalist nor socialist – and opens a new space for politics."

In this view, the commons are seen as the only true alternative to private – distinguished from a public/private binary and offering a qualitatively different project from traditional state services: a form of social interaction that is more inherently collective, equitable and democratic than the public institutions of capitalism and socialism, "offering fairer, more direct access to resources (and thus higher efficiency) than can be gained through distributive enterprises operated as private monopolies or state hierarchies" (Quilligan, 2012, p. 3). A commons, Quilligan (2012, p. 3) maintains, is better

than public because it "conveys the sense of human meaning, being and intersubjectivity that lie at the heart of social engagement …. [an] expression of social mutuality and collaboration … providing [the] epistemological and political leverage points for transforming the global economy and creating globally representative governance". For Özgün (2010, p. 377), commons signify a

> collective social form that is different from the 'public' – it doesn't 'substitute' the 'public' but transcends it … allowing us to speak a political language that is not structured with the binary opposition imposed by classical liberal and socialist discourses, and thus makes it possible for us to imagine a different form of 'collectivity.'

Many commons writers also like to note that commons can be used as a verb ("commoning") emphasizing its dynamic status: "I use [commoning] because I want … to portray it as an activity, not just an idea or material resource" (Linebaugh, 2008, p. 45). Public, by contrast, is depicted as static and unchanging.

Problems with the Commons

I agree with the spirit of these arguments – and in particular the criticisms of marketized notions of public – but there are tensions and inconsistencies in the commons literature that often go unproblematized. First, the language and idea of a commons is not as self-evident or consistent as its proponents suggest. There is no widely agreed upon definition, and the descriptions that do exist are wildly diverse ideologically (even contradictory), often employed for very different political aims. Indeed, they have become a "ubiquitous presence in the political, economic and even real estate language of our time. Left and Right, neoliberals and neo-Keynesians, conservatives and anarchists use the concept in their political interventions" (Caffentzis & Federici, 2014, i92; see also Caffentzis, 2010; McDermott, 2014).

An explicitly market-oriented commons literature has become particularly popular over the past two decades, with widespread embrace of the commons language by neoliberal policy-making institutions such as the World Bank (2006, p. 1, 5), which aims to "protect and improve the global commons" via the "transfer of financial resources and environmentally friendly technologies, technical assistance, and development of markets for environmental goods and services". The Bank even argues that "many of the practices that must be changed … to protect and improve the global commons are in the private sector province" (see also FiC, 2020).

The Global Water Initiative – a partnership of the World Economic Forum, Coca-Cola, Dow Chemicals and other large corporate and multilateral agencies – has expressed its desire to manage a "water commons", using market tools and entrepreneurial incentives to argue that communal

decision-making should not shut the market out but rather assist in finding a middle ground between the state and market forces (see www.weforum.org/projects/global-water-initiative). Barnes (2006, xvi) argues for a "Capitalism 3.0" that "assigns new property rights to commons trusts, builds commons infrastructure, and spawns a new class of genuine co-owners". In time, he argues, "corporations accept the commons as their business partner … [and] still make profits" (see also Barnes, 2011).

This is not to suggest that all notions of a commons are inherently market oriented – far from it – but it does highlight the fact that virtually any word that is applied to the collective consumption of goods and services can be captured and co-opted in some way by market interests (just as "public" has). Innumerable expressions once thought to be the sole purview of the left have been embraced and distorted by neoliberalism (such as the notion of a "human right to water", which has been championed by private water companies as an argument in favour of privatization (Bakker, 2007; Karunananthan, 2019; Sultana & Loftus, 2019). As such, the term "commons" is no more inherently progressive than "public".

A second concern with the commons literature is that it tends to grant *a priori* status to a particular form of "community" which it sees as inexorably leading to positive and equitable outcomes, assuming that localized commoning is a natural and innately positive behaviour that all humans can intuitively understand and practice. There are many examples of such commons in practice in different sectors (Holder & Flessas, 2008; Hudson et al., 2019; Ostrom, 1990; Ostrom et al., 2003; Wall, 2014), but there are also commons systems that are highly unequal along gendered, ethnic, class and other lines, often romanticized away in the name of "tradition" (Bakker, 2008; Claessens et al., 2021; Matose et al., 2019; Zwarteveen & Meinzen-Dick, 2001). Commons behaviours change over time as well, but can be ossified in academic and popular literature as ever-present realities (Netting, 1997).

It must also be asked why humans are deemed capable (even destined) to work collaboratively within a "commons" but somehow incapable of working collectively within a "state"? Why does the commons literature grant special ontological status to community-level associations? Why not also acknowledge that humans are capable of constructing intersubjective and social forms of "public" that go beyond the physical, institutional and social boundaries of a local group (on this point see Calhoun, 1998)? In its celebration of localized community as uniquely and intrinsically dynamic and progressive, the commons literature simultaneously demotes notions of a broader "public" to that of a stagnant, state-captured monolith with no potential for transformative social and economic struggle.

It is oddly ironic, then, that much of the commons literature advocates state-like formations to govern their non-hierarchical interactions, with Quilligan (2012, p. 4) for example, arguing for "social charters" that "outline a group's rights and incentives for a shared resource," which may

include "a legal entity or fiduciary association of citizen stakeholders which operates as a trust". Ostrom"s (1990) highly influential work on "Governing the Commons" expands this to include inter-scalar forms of (global) governance, with complex state-like apparatuses to enforce "established rules". A form of state in everything but name.

A third concern with the commons literature relates to the question of what goods and services are actually included in the notions of a commons and how they interact with each other. For Quilligan (2012, p. 5) the list is fairly long, comprising "water, food, forests, energy, health services, schools, culture, indigenous artifacts, parks, community zoning, knowledge, means of communication, currency, and ecological and genetic resources". But why end here? What of the (often much less fashionable) services that are left out of most commons discussions, such as sanitation, storm water drainage, waste management and snow ploughing? Why are these services seldom if ever mentioned in the commons literature? Is it because they do not have their own "sense of human meaning, being and intersubjectivity" (Quilligan, 2012, p. 2)? Can a commons only form around services with higher social value, and if so who determines this status? The logistical challenges of who coordinates this complex mix of services and how they interact with each other are seldom explored in the commons literature.

Finally, the term commons is largely academic and not widely employed in popular discourse. It is not as "powerful and broadly recognized" as Quilligan (2012, p. 3) insists, nor readily "apparent to everyone … in clear and simple terms". Nor is it easily translatable from English. *Comunalidad* is a neologism coined by indigenous leaders in Oaxaca, Mexico, "to share with others their way of being and thinking" (Esteva, 2014, i152), but the term is not widely used outside the region. *Ubuntu* (an Nguni word with phonological variants in various other African languages), is often mentioned as another potential expression that captures the spirit of a commons, but this too is difficult to translate, and better captured in complicated aphorisms such as the Zulu phrase "*umuntu ngumuntu nga Bantu*" (Ramose, 2002, p. 231). But *ubuntu* has also been coopted by neoliberal ideologues keen to illustrate how "*ubuntu* capitalism" can be harnessed to improve corporate management, and has even been used to re-brand entire countries in a market-friendly direction (McDonald, 2010). If clarity is one of the goals of choosing an alternative terminology to "public", commons does little to advance that agenda.

Rethinking Public(s)

Given these criticisms, I see little value in replacing the term public with commons. In opting to stay with public we can acknowledge its murky past while committing to changing its future. Rather than "sharing the dismay of political scientists who, faced with the impossibility of pinning down an exact meaning of the public good, fanaticized about abolishing the term

altogether …. we must learn to live with, even welcome, a concept that remains continually in contest" (Mansbridge, 1998, p. 17).

However, there are few conceptual markers to assist with such a redefinition. Debates about the meaning of public tend to be about public-this or public-that, with public applied as a taken-for-granted adjective, while the substantive subjective debate focuses on the noun (e.g. public values, public space, public planning, public hospitals) (Dahl & Soss, 2014). The word public itself is rarely problematized; reified in ways that are static, binarized and state-ified. As a result, debates about publicness tend to fall along the predictable liberal continuum of state versus private outlined in Chapter 3.

Moving beyond this impasse will require four substantial changes to our conceptualization of the term. The first is a separation of public from its axiomatic association with government (see especially Cumbers, 2012). On this point it is possible to open notions of public to include other actors such as community associations, NGOs and other not-for-profit organizations. These non-state entities may only represent a portion of a population at any given time or place – and therefore may be "private" in some respects – but they can signify a collective sense of being and responsibility beyond the individualized self.

Second, there must be a delinking of public from its structural role in facilitating private capital accumulation. Uncoupling this historical relationship will require deep-seated changes to our notions of a bourgeois public sphere – nothing less than a revolutionary shift in the ways in which states engage with private capital materially and ideologically. These changes will be extraordinarily difficult to bring about, but if we are to extract public from the clutches of market forces, and explore meanings beyond its commercialized and Euro-centric constraints, it is critical that we ask, as per Fraser (1992, p. 115), what "non-liberal, non-bourgeois" notions of public might look like.

Third, it is important to infuse public with a more dynamic and elastic sensibility, while still retaining a universal set of core meanings. In this regard, public can have fixed and relative features, with standardized principles around the meaning of public in *all* contexts (to allow for global dialogue and action), while acknowledging a variegated terrain of expectations and actualizations of what constitutes public on the ground, taking into account different cultural, political and economic practices. In other words, new concepts of public need to be dialectical in their orientation, allowing for universal representation and localized variation, with each mutually constitutive of and shaped by the other.

In this regard it may be more useful theoretically and practically to think in terms of *publics* – in the plural. As Calhoun (1998, p. 22) notes: "public life depends on communities – multiple and diverse – but not on the presumption of or attempt to create a single larger community". The challenge is finding an appropriate balance. Too universalistic an interpretation and public can become totalizing and unbending. Too relativistic and the result may be so

open-ended as to become meaningless, even restrictive, lending itself to "narrow, stereotypical and nostalgic understandings" of what constitutes differences of identity in the public realm (Eisenberg & Kymlicka, 2011, pp. 5–6).

Finally, new concepts of public necessarily require a redefinition of what is meant by private, as well as relocating the boundaries and nature of engagement between public and private. Here too it is essential to challenge bourgeois constructions of the assumed commodifiability of the private realm. Rather than private being a naturalized form of possessive individualism (Bromley, 2019; Macpherson, 1962), private activity can also be reimagined in dialectical terms as it engages with the collective. The intent here is not to erase or diminish the value of private, but rather to (re)enrich it by infusing private activities with a clearer sense of their independence and relationship with the public, as well as a sense of purpose beyond neoclassical notions of trickle-down benefits for the public good.

On this point, Marx long ago spoke of two types of human individuality. The first is the "private individual" as proprietor and owner of the commodity. The other is the "social individual", outside of the commodity process: "a personality type that is not less but rather more developed as an individual because of its direct social nature. As opposed to the empty impoverished, restricted individuality of capitalist society, the new human being displays an all-sided, full rich development of needs and capacities, and is universal in character and development" (Amariglio, 2010, p. 336). Any effort to reimagine the private should see it in its historic context. Otherwise, we "run the risk of naturalizing and eternalizing the most recent form of individuality" (Amariglio, 2010, p. 336).

Redefining Public Services

This abstract reconceptualization of public can now be concretized with a discussion of how it manifests itself in a redefinition of "public services", following the same four principles.

First, it is essential to break from the assumption that public services must be provided by the state, with the addition of non-state, non-profit actors such as community associations and NGOs. This point is taken up at length in Chapter 5 and will not be discussed further here.

Second, it is necessary to uncouple public services from their marketized characteristics and their seemingly inexorable responsibility in facilitating private capital accumulation. Instead of public and private services being defined by their consumptive characteristics of rivalry and exclusion, we can reject these criteria altogether and replace them with non-commodified identifiers. As Altvater (2004, p. 53) notes, "Non-rivalry, and above all non-exclusiveness, are not 'natural' or 'technical' characteristics of some goods, but rather they are attributed to them". There is "no way to 'objectively' define what is or should be 'private' or 'public.' Hence, the discussion of public goods is first and foremost a matter of normative decisions".

The challenge, therefore, is to establish alternative normative frameworks for determining what constitutes a public or private service. What follows is a modest and preliminary attempt to outline one such alternative, using principles that define public services in fundamentally different ways than neoclassical economics. The intent is to extricate public services from their neoclassical trap by establishing an entirely different set of public/private criteria. In doing so, debates about alternatives to privatization can move away from being *against* something captured by the commodity process to being *for* something with its own ontological principles.

My proposal – and it is exactly that, a rough set of ideas intended to contribute to a discussion rather than an attempt to lay down a formal new theory – is to create two categories for determining what constitutes a public or private service. The first is an assessment of how "essential" a service is. The second is an assessment of the benefits of "collective provision". The intent is to create intuitive, easy to understand criteria for defining public and private services that make their classifications transparent and measurable, while at the same time being open to evaluation and debate. I have also employed broad universal norms with sufficiently flexible characteristics to allow for adaptation across place, time and sector.

Figure 4.1 outlines this proposed new model (note the difference with Figure 3.1). Some public and private services remain the same as they were in the neoclassical model (e.g. restaurants would likely continue to be defined as private in this framework because they are not necessarily "essential" and are unlikely to benefit from "collective provision", although food services associated with other public institutions like schools and hospitals could be perceived differently, and some state-owned restaurants have been

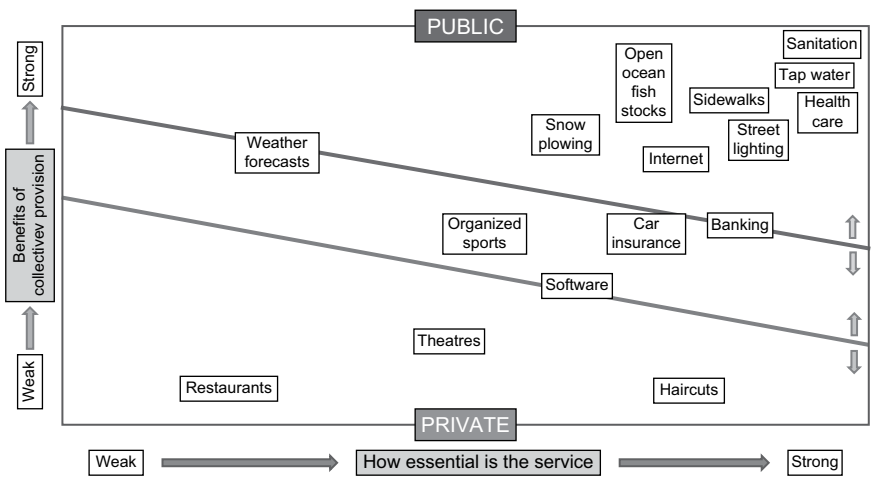

Figure 4.1 Defining a Public or Private Service

Source: Compiled by author

excellent in the past (see Jäggi et al. (1977) on Bologna's experimentations)). Other services would need to be reclassified (e.g. tap water would be considered a public service given how "essential" it is to daily life and the substantial benefits associated with "collective provision").

There would also be a considerable "grey zone" in this model, with services potentially switching between public and private depending on the social, economic, geographic and political realities of a particular place (e.g. organized sports may work best if coordinated privately in some places but better done publicly in others). In short, these are intended as "universal norms" with explicit analytical criteria, but they are also contestable across time, sector and place.

Importantly, this is not a re-tweaking of neoclassical concepts. The latter has been tried many times over, "each of which brings along its own idiosyncratic model and relies on its own set of special assumptions" (Shmanske, 1991, p. 4) but all of which ultimately operate within a marketized, commodified framework. My proposal here is a fundamentally new way of defining what is meant by a public service, unencumbered by commodified market characteristics. The following sections describe why these criteria were chosen and how they can be measured.

Measuring "Essential"

The X-axis of Figure 4.1 measures how "essential" a service is to the people that consume them, referring to the importance of a particular service to a person's ability to lead a healthy and productive life, regardless of the service's market value or its consumptive characteristics. The more essential a service is, the more "public" it becomes.

Measuring this indicator can be done with a combination of universal and subjective factors. An example of a universal factor is biological need. To illustrate, drinking water is necessary to sustain life, and has no substitutes. It is absolutely and universally essential for all people. As such, clean and easily accessible water (such as tap water) would be placed firmly on the public end of the X-axis. Biological necessity could also be claimed for other services such as healthcare, food and housing, pushing them to the right side of the public axis in Figure 4.1. A case can also be made for *social* and *economic* necessity. Access to services such as education and high-speed internet, for example, can be argued to be essential for a healthy and productive life given how important they are to job prospects and social networking.

More subjective criteria could also be employed when measuring how essential a service is. Access to safe sanitation is a good example. Its biological importance is well established, but it is also critical to people's sense of dignity and security, adding to the case for defining it as a public service (particularly for women and girls who face harassment, assault and stigmatization without access to secure and adequate sanitation facilities) (Saleem et al., 2019; Winter & Barchi, 2016). Defining and measuring subjective

criteria is inherently more difficult than evaluating objective ones – and assessments can change across place and time – but subjectivities are important if there is to be a flexible framework for determining what constitutes a public and private service in different contexts.

These are not perfect forms of measurement, but they serve as a starting point for a broader range of non-market factors in determining how essential a service is. Even haircuts could be considered "essential" in this model, if personal appearance is high on the list of a person's sense of self-esteem. But, as we shall see below, this criterion need not make it a "public" service.

Measuring the Benefits of "Collective Provision"

On the Y-axis of Figure 4.1 is a measurement that evaluates the benefits of providing a service "collectively", by which I mean a public agency such as a government or democratically accountable non-profit organization (including NGOs, worker co-ops and community groups). The higher the potential benefits of collective provision of a service, the stronger the case for its "public" classification.

Measuring the benefits of collective provision would also be determined by a combination of universal and subjective criteria. An example of universal criteria is once again biological. Collective provision of water and sanitation, for example, has strong and well-documented benefits in terms of general health outcomes (Rosen, 2015). Having a single public provider can help to reduce or eliminate water borne disease by making water services affordable and accessible for all. Similar arguments can be made for the collective provision of waste management (e.g. reduction of disease vectors), primary healthcare (e.g. better prevention of communicable illness) and electricity (e.g. refrigeration of food and medicines) (Giusti, 2009; Rahman & Alam, 2021). In other words, if there are strong objective health and environmental benefits associated with the collective provision of a service there is a strong case for making it public, regardless of its market characteristics.

There can also be strong *social benefits* associated with collective provision, including mutuality, cohesiveness, trust and learning. Collective forms of education, for example, can improve inter-group awareness and empathy, while collectively organized sports can be more inclusive of marginalized households, potentially contributing to the reduction of social tensions (Adams et al., 2007; Parker et al., 2019). On the other hand, some services can have very low social benefits associated with collective provision. Haircuts may be a case in point. Although a stylish cut may be important to one's self-esteem (making it "essential" at a personal level) there may be few if any society-wide benefits associated with their collective provision, pushing haircuts to the "private" end of the Y-axis spectrum.

Similarly, there can be strong and weak *economic benefits* associated with collective provision. On the strong side, there can be significant efficiency gains linked with natural monopolies such as water and electricity, where

multiple, parallel infrastructure systems make little financial sense. Capital intensive services are particularly predisposed to such collective productivity, but labour-intensive services can benefit as well, such as mail delivery (Panzar & Waterson, 1991). By contrast, some services have very low potential economic benefits from collective provision (with some having potentially negative outcomes). Theatre and music are possible examples. As important as these activities may be to leading a fulfilling life, collectivized production of the arts is unlikely to save money given their geographic dispersal and could serve to stifle inventiveness and local creativity if centralized fiats determine what constitutes good art, weakening the overall benefits to society, and thus placing them towards the "private" end of the production spectrum (although state subsidies for private arts programmes may be required to ensure diversity, highlighting the necessarily dialectical nature of public and private realms).

This revamped conceptualization of public services requires us to live with more subjectivity than we are accustomed to in our marketized public sphere. Universal criteria such as health and self-worth can form the basis of some public/private decisions, but to fully embrace and operationalize a belief in multiple *publics* it will be necessary to accept difference across place, time and sectors, with diverse outcomes as to what constitutes a public service and a (fluctuating) grey zone around where the boundaries between public and private lie. The key is having criteria that are clear to everyone, with decisions made about public and private delivery that are not determined strictly by their market characteristics, and which can be decided upon in democratic and transparent ways (with different democratic processes having their own subjective characteristics).

All of this is in direct contrast to the neoclassical model of assigning public and private labels based on narrow assumptions about individualized utility maximizing behaviour, which, in the end, erases any ontological division between public and private by allowing the private sector to own and provide virtually any public service. Interrupting this logic and replacing it with new normative criteria such as the "essential" nature of a service and the benefits of "collective provision" strips the existing public-private debate of its inherently commodified sensibility, allowing those *in favour of* public provision of certain services to argue for public service delivery using an ontologically independent set of principles rather than being forced to *fight against* privatization using the marketized logic of neoclassical theory.

Public Means "Everyone"

New definitions of public services must also grapple with the question of who gets access to them. In this regard it is worth recalling the Oxford English Dictionary's (OED, 2007) definition of "public" quoted at the outset of this book: "belongs to, affects, or concerns the *community* or the *nation*" (emphasis added). The OED also notes that public was once defined as "of

or belonging to the human race as a whole", noting that this interpretation is now "obsolete, rare" – a definitional narrowing of public that parallels the increasingly narrow nature of our bourgeois public sphere.

More progressive definitions of public (and public services) cannot be limited by these geographic and jurisdictional boundaries. Truly "public" services must be universal and global in their aspirations; they cannot be available to some people in some countries and not to others. They must be committed philosophically to comprehensive global access and work practically towards that goal. If not, universal publics become an empty signifier, with subjective boundaries determined by the interests of those with the most relative public power (within and across borders). As a popular saying in health care has it: no one is safe until everyone is safe – a proverb made all the more poignant with the arrival of COVID-19 and the need for universal care and vaccinations against this disease and future pandemics.

This is not to say that public services should never have physical boundaries. There are physical constraints to some services (such as water) and cultural thresholds for others (such as education). Logistical and financial limitations are also very real. It is acceptable, therefore, to celebrate and expand excellent local public service provision based on local resources and capacities, particularly if they can inspire improvements elsewhere. But good quality public services that are available in one location and not in another can only be partial and temporary victories. Universal public health care in Norway, for example, can be lauded for its accomplishments, but with hundreds of millions of people around the world without access to basic forms of public primary healthcare, Norway's public healthcare success is inherently a limited one.

Achieving universal high-quality public services for everyone in the world will be extremely challenging, of course, and may never be fully realized. Even within clearly demarcated municipal and national boundaries it is remarkably difficult to actualize comprehensive and equitable services for all residents; a task complicated by debates over citizenship and legal status. Extending these principles beyond state boundaries confounds matters exponentially. Who decides what services should be extended beyond a particular jurisdiction? Who pays for them? What if public service delivery practices in one location are not suitable culturally or technologically in another? Should essential public services be "imposed" on a community that may not want them, no matter how "essential" they may be deemed internationally? These are intractable ethical, practical and theoretical questions for which there are no easy answers.

Neoclassical theory certainly does not have satisfactory responses to this challenge of universality, grounded as it is in individualized and inherently restrictive marketized logics. All it can do is scale up theories of national public goods to that of "global public goods", applying the same concepts "from a global perspective" (Kaul et al., 1999, p. 2, 9; see also Kaul, 2005, 2012). As a result, mainstream debates about constructing globalized public

services remain trapped on the same public/private continuum as national-neoclassical narratives on the topic, with virtually any global public good capable of being provided by private companies (Andonova, 2017; Kremer, 2006; Maskus & Reichman, 2004).

Nor is the commons literature particularly well equipped to manage this global challenge, theoretically or practically. For the most part, commons operate at a hyper-local level, with small-scale services considered to be inherently better than national or regional ones because they are closer to the people that use the service and are therefore more likely to democratic, accountable and sustainable in their design and operation. When the commons literature does grapple with questions of internationalism, it is typically in terms of a polycentric "network of commons" intended to unite local communities within and across national boundaries (Carlsson & Sandström, 2008; Fritsch et al., 2021; Giest & Howlett, 2014). But it is unclear how this scaling up fits with notions of local forms of autonomy, and it is difficult to imagine how global networks would operate without state agencies facilitating the process. As Harvey (2012, p. 87) notes in his criticism of the autonomous literature, they "have no answer to the problem" of universality, caustically noting that it is "naïve to believe that polycentrism or any other form of decentralization can work without strong hierarchical constraints and active enforcement". He points to their

> vague hope that social groups who have organized their relations to their local commons satisfactorily will do the right thing or converge upon some satisfactory inter-group practices through negotiation and interaction. For this to occur, local groups would have to be untroubled by any externality effects that their actions might have on the rest of the world, and to give up accrued advantages, democratically distributed within the social group, in order to rescue or supplement the well-being of near (let alone distant) others …. History provides us with very little evidence that such redistributions can work on anything other than an occasional or one-off basis.

What would an alternative model of truly inclusive global public services look like then? I do not have a definitive answer to this question but would argue that the only way to move in a more universalist direction is with an explicit and unequivocal philosophical commitment to the notion that "public" services must be available to everyone in the world, with an associated collective responsibility of ensuring equitable global access.

If we are to address the urgent challenge of scaling up public services at a global level we are left with no option but to work with the "public" mechanisms currently in place (i.e. the state) and the potential for cross-border solidarity in the form of public-public and public-community partnerships. But we will also need to reclaim, rework and expand these tools and processes – extracting them from the ideological and material restrictions of

(neo)liberal capitalism and building new platforms of publicness that are more inclusive in their intent.

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that we have little choice but to remake and reclaim notions of public, detaching it from its marketized constraints and applying new analytical frameworks. My proposal is to retain a core sense of universality while at the same time expanding this principle to include contextual subjectivities, captured in part by the pluralization of public to *publics*.

This extended notion of publics can be applied in concrete terms to a rehabilitated definition of what constitutes a public service: first by creating new, non-marketized indices that evaluate how "essential" a service is and to what extent it benefits from "collective provision"; and second by employing objective and subjective criteria to determine whether a service is best provided by a public or private agency in any given context. In other words, some services will always and necessarily be considered public, while others may be deemed best provided by the private sector, with goods and services in between that may vary from place to place. The key argument here is that decisions around public and private services need to be based on use values rather than exchange values, serving to create a more distinct ontological difference between our public and private spheres.

We are now left with the question of how to operationalize this new public service framework. What types of agencies should provide public services and how do we ensure that they advance non-marketized principles of flexible universality? It is to these questions that I turn next.