2 Weighing the options
Methodological Considerations

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"There is nothing more boring than a chapter on research methodology."

Although no one has written this opening quote (to our knowledge), many a researcher, and many more an activist and policy maker, have thought it. And yet, what comes out of a research project is dependent on what goes into it, and nowhere is this more important than in a field of study with few, if any, established research criteria. Such is the case with "alternatives to privatisation".

Our intention in placing this chapter at the start of the book is twofold. The first is to explain in detail the ways in which we have identified and evaluated "successful" alternatives to privatisation. Our aim is to be as transparent as possible about our data gathering and conclusions and to allow readers to assess better for themselves the significance of our findings. The second reason is to provide baseline methodological frameworks that can be taken up (and altered) by others, with the aim of expanding the volume, reliability, and comparability of research in this field. We will continue to employ some modified versions of this methodology in our own future research but expect that it will morph into different shapes as we learn about its strengths and weaknesses and as we test the pros and cons of employing universal norms in a heterogeneous world of service delivery. Indeed, we have already learned much from this initial "mapping exercise" and will adjust some aspects of our work in the future. What we present here, however, are the frameworks and terms of reference given to our research teams at the outset of this project – warts and all – to contextualise the data gathering in this book as accurately as possible.

The lack of a consistent and transparent set of research methods on alternatives to privatisation has been our primary motivation in this regard. Despite the best intentions of those who have done research in this area – including many of the contributors to this volume – a review of the literature on alternatives is akin to comparing apples and oranges (and several other fruits). Although interesting in its insights on how and why particular

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alternatives developed, the existing case study material is largely descriptive in its orientation, has no established criteria for what constitutes an "alternative", and no consistent ways of evaluating success or failure. At best, the writing provides interesting accounts of how particular alternative models developed and what they have accomplished (or not). At worst, it offers competing, even contradictory, notions of what is meant by a "public" service with no explicit definitions or evaluative criteria to allow for objective evaluation or to compare experiences across sectors or regions.

We do not expect, or want, to resolve all of these tensions in the literature. Nor do we wish to uncritically universalise notions of "public" or "success". We are not looking for blueprint solutions. A rigid research methodology that ignores uneven economic, social, and political developments, and vastly different cultural formations, erases diversity and would be counterproductive in many ways. It is simply not reasonable to expect to be able to compare different service sectors in different places on a linear, item-by-item basis with a single, inelastic research model. As Hachfeld et al. note with regard to water services:

> There is no exemplary model of "good" or "progressive" public water management. The quantity and quality of water, as well as the need for water, vary from place to place. Water is also an important cultural good, and different societies have developed historically different cultures of water. These cultures reflect existing and often uneven power relations in societies. Therefore, the public systems of water and sanitation services are historically grown and some existing cultures of water are highly problematic. It would neither be possible nor desirable to develop one model of water management to be implemented everywhere. Instead, responsible ways of handling water need to be developed around existing local structures. (2009, 4)

Finding an appropriate methodological approach to this contextual diversity is therefore a major challenge. The neoliberal approach has been to sweep away difference by arguing that all human behaviour is ultimately based on self-interest that responds to signals from the market. There may be differences in the way people produce and consume a service, but self-maximisation is seen to be central to all service behaviours, with concepts of marginal utility serving as a universal indicator to explain everything from "willingness to pay" to the creation of "social capital" (Whittington et al., 1991, Harriss 2001, Merrett 2002; for a critique, see Fine 2001). Using this rationale, neoliberal researchers see individualised behaviour behind every action, allowing them to argue that marketised forms of service delivery are necessary, despite (indeed because of) a diverse cultural world.

At the other extreme, some post-modernists have rejected any notion of universality, seeing universal norms as "a mere stepchild of erroneous

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patterns of Enlightenment thought, incapable of adaption to a world of incommunicability and irreconcilable cultural difference" (Harvey 2000, 86). Cultural perceptions of water, historical practices of medicine, and localised forms of energy production are seen to be too different from place to place to allow for consistent forms of assessment, or reproducibility, and should not be subject to imposed globalised norms. Post-modernists (and some Marxists) have also cast aside talk of universal norms and values, especially notions of "human rights" that are seen to be captive to bourgeois institutions and prone to mere reformism – giving people the "right" to water, for example, but also imposing the "responsibility" to pay for it via wage labour (for a discussion, see Boyd 2009).

Yet human rights and social justice (even if vague slogans) remain amongst the most powerful ideas in social movements, attracting and requiring some kind of methodological middle ground. Following Harvey (2000), our aim has been to construct a dialectical bridge between universals and particulars, one that allows for the use of widely acknowledged objectives (such as "equity" and "accountability"), while at the same time recognising that such generalisations are fraught with cultural and political tensions that disallow easy comparisons and may be irreconcilable at times.

The challenge is how to apply universal values and notions of justice while still accommodating difference, a task made all the more difficult by the rapidly changing political, technological, and demographic terrain of service delivery. We can reject the linear, teleological notion that advanced capitalist countries will show the way, but being *opposed* to privatisation (or "modernisation") is not enough. It is important to have a *positive* philosophical orientation.

Our approach has been to propose a normative set of "criteria for success" against which alternative service delivery models can be evaluated. These criteria are intended as a reference point for research, not an anchor point, and are open to debate and change. The objective is to provide explicit and transparent criteria in a field with no few analytical markers.

The selection of criteria should come as little surprise to readers familiar with the debates over privatisation. Much of what we have selected as "criteria for success" are the polar opposite of what has been seen to be wrong with privatisation – e.g. lack of transparency, inequality, unaccountability, and so on. But once again we are not only *reacting* to privatisation. The emergent literature on alternatives has begun to establish its own universal objectives (though not always explicitly or clearly), on which we have drawn. And finally, we have modified and developed some concepts that have been inadequately articulated in the literature on alternatives to date (such as "public ethos").

Asserting universal categories is the easy part. The difficulty is making them dialectical, allowing for some universal notion of what constitutes an acceptable standard while allowing for differences across sector/place. We

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have attempted to do this in several ways. First, we have chosen criteria (such as equity) with sufficient elasticity of meaning to allow for variations in interpretation on whether they have been adequately met. This is particularly useful for the survey-oriented nature of the research that has been conducted for this book, where data are typically highly aggregated and where fine-tuned analyses are generally not possible. Second, and notwithstanding the aggregate nature of data availability, we created subcategories within our criteria that allowed (or forced) researchers to probe specific aspects of the ways services are provided, allowing for partially disaggregated evaluations and lending some degree of objectivity to the criteria (such as the impact of tariffs on equity). And finally, by associating our research with critiques of privatisation we rule out many of the neoliberal interpretations of the criteria we are using, such as the marketised notion that "efficiency" should be defined in narrow financial terms.

By providing researchers with a strong normative vision of alternative services, while still allowing for subjectivity, we feel we are advancing understandings of what constitutes an alternative to privatisation and what makes it successful or not – as realised by the different interpretations of service delivery models within the pages of this book. By the same token, our methodological approach cannot and should not hold permanently, especially as an index of its own success. It will require refinement in application and more explicit ideological orientations towards the influence of larger market forces.

There is certainly a practical and political need for such an approach. As Harvey also notes with reference to the development of universal norms for human rights, "To turn our backs on such universals at this stage in our history, however fraught or even tainted, is to turn our backs on all manner of prospects for political action" (2000, 94). Such expediency is all the more relevant in the world of service delivery, given the abject failures of privatisation and the immediate life-and-death realities of health care, water/sanitation, and electricity affecting at least one-third of the people on the planet. Applying universal concepts across different sectors and regions, while still allowing for local interpretation, is not only justifiable academically, but is necessary politically if we are going to have a coherent global dialogue about the kinds of service delivery alternatives we want to propose and achieve in the 21st century.

PLANNING THE RESEARCH

The research for this book was part of a larger process of designing a five-year plan for the third phase of the Municipal Services Project (MSP).[2] The first two phases of the project focused on a critique of the commercialisation and privatisation of public services, with a focus on southern Africa.

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After seven years of investigating models to which we were opposed, we felt it was time to design research on service delivery systems of which we were supportive. We also felt it was necessary to be more global in our scope, in part because of the dearth of "alternatives to privatisation" in southern Africa (as indicated in the section in this book that deals with that continent) and in part because of the vibrant debate that was taking place about service delivery alternatives in other parts of the world, notably Latin America and parts of Asia. We had established working relationships with many of the individuals and organisations involved with this book and asked if they would be interested in collaborating on an international initiative to explore alternatives more systematically. Having already recognised some of the limitations of the research in the field to date, there was a keen collective commitment to moving research (and advocacy) forward in a more coordinated manner.

An initial planning meeting of about a dozen academics, activists, social movement organisers, and NGO and labour representatives resulted in a plan for a three-stage research initiative. The first stage – the product of which is this book – is intended as a "mapping exercise" to gauge the scope and character of alternatives to privatisation in water, health care, and electricity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The aim has been to provide a rough indication of the types and numbers of alternatives that exist, the extent to which they can be considered successes or failures, how they compare with one another across regions and sectors, and the usefulness of the methodological tools employed to categorise and assess them. The next stage of the research involves a closer examination of key cases and thematic issues, while the third stage will examine the lessons to be learned from the global research for southern Africa.

A mid-research workshop of some 35 researchers and other interested parties allowed for discussion of preliminary findings of the mapping exercise research, and an evaluation and recalibration of some methodological tools (such as whether or not to include "corporatised" service entities in our definition of alternatives). Regular telephonic and electronic communications allowed for further refinements, as did close collaboration of most regional researchers, contributing to dialogue across sectors.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the book is divided into three sections. The first is largely conceptual in orientation, exploring ideas and actors related to alternatives to privatisation. These chapters in Part I are intended to advance our understanding of the possibilities for, and limitations of, alternatives to privatisation. Hence the chapter on social movements is designed to evaluate the impact and influence of social movements on the delivery of basic services such as water/sanitation, electricity, and primary health care in countries in the South, with a focus on the role of social movements in developing, advocating for, and/or participating in the delivery of such services that have an explicitly anti-privatisation

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focus. Because a reasonable literature on this subject already existed, the authors were able to comment on the state of the debate and draw global conclusions on the significance of social movements in this field. The chapters on the state, labour organisations, and the current status of neoliberalism had similar mandates.

The chapter on gender, by contrast, is more pioneering because there has been virtually nothing written about gender and alternatives to privatisation. The authors were therefore tasked with providing a literature review summarising the existing scholarship on the gendered power relations in public services and social reproduction, the implications of privatisation and marketisation of basic services for women's rights and citizenship, insights into the gendered considerations for the study of the construction of alternatives to privatisation, and an assessment of the kind of empirical and theoretical research required to further our understanding of the gendered dimensions of alternatives to privatisation.

The empirical studies in the second section of the book were more uniform in their research mandates, with researchers in each of the three sectors and three regions being given the same terms of reference in an effort to create as comparable a set of studies as possible, as follows:

- implement and evaluate the methodological tools for classifying and evaluating "alternatives to privatisation" in your sector (water/sanitation, electricity or primary health care) and in your region (Asia, Africa or Latin America);
- advance our empirical and conceptual understanding of these alternatives in your region/sector;
- advance our understanding of what constitutes "success" with the alternatives in your region/sector;
- identify interesting and important case studies for the next stages of the project;
- advance communication between researchers and activists working on alternatives in your region/sector and, where possible, across regions/sectors;
- develop research and advocacy networks for the next stages of the project.

We explain the first three aspects of this mandate in more detail below.

IDENTIFYING AND CLASSIFYING ALTERNATIVES

Researchers were asked to identify as many alternatives to privatisation in their region/sector as possible, using a predefined typology. Our objective in constructing this typology was to give better definition to what constitutes

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an alternative to privatisation and how one should determine whether or not a particular example should be included. Our starting point here was to use a "negative" definition, excluding private and for-profit operators from what we consider to be an alternative. This exclusionary method removed all forms of public-private partnerships (PPPs) from our investigation, as well as services that involved governmental, non-governmental, or community-based organisations operating on a for-profit basis – the rationale for this being that profit-seeking behaviour is at the core of the problems associated with privatisation and commercialisation.

This negative definition was enhanced by "positive" characteristics of defining alternatives as service entities that are composed of (i) state bodies that operate on a non-commercial basis and are subject to political control and oversight and (ii) non-state organisations operating on a non-commercial basis. A third category involves partnerships within and between these individual institutional formations.

These definitions explicitly avoid attaching social, ideological, scalar, or other subjective criteria to our categorisation of an "alternative". These latter factors were left as variables to be evaluated in the assessment of how well an alternative service model performed (on which more, below). In other words, the only criteria for a service to be considered an "alternative to privatisation" were that it be not directly linked to the private sector, not profit-oriented in its operations, and that it be run either by a state or non-state entity operating with the express purpose of providing services in a non-profit manner.

The end result of this typologisation is provided in Table 2.1. The categories are overly simplistic – and the acronyms clunky and in need of refinement – but the result is a more clearly delineated notion of alternatives than has been used to date and certainly an improvement on the ambiguous use of the term "public" that has served as proxy for a diverse range of alternatives in the literature.

Most importantly, these typologies make a sharper and more explicit distinction between public and private than has been developed to date, without drawing a hard and fast boundary between the two. There remains considerable debate (including within our own project) about the "public" nature of corporatised services (i.e. those that are state-owned and operated but run like private corporations), and there are other fuzzy areas of public/private overlap. It was felt that the definitions we established gave sufficiently objective boundaries, while, at the same time, allowing for subjective decision making for determining whether or not to classify a particular entity as an alternative to privatisation. Though not flawless, this methodology is another illustration of the creative tension that we have tried to construct in the early stages of the research as we surf between the universal and the particularist aspects of the criteria we have employed.

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Table 2.1 Typology of "alternatives to privatisation"

Institutional type	*Description*	*Examples*	*Name/acronym*
Public entity A single public sector agency working on its own to deliver a service	Any state body that is publicly owned, managed, and financed, and subject to political control and oversight	Government bodies and departments (at all levels of state – local, district, provincial, national, regional); state utilities and parastatals; state development agencies (bilateral, multilateral). This category can include "corporatised" service entities run on private sector operating principles, subject to an evaluation of their "success".	SiP (single public sector)
Non-profit entity A single non-profit agency working on its own to deliver a service	Any non-state, non-commercial organisation with an identifiable membership base (formal or otherwise) that operates on a non-profit basis and willingly plays a role in one or more aspects of service delivery with no significant involvement by the state	Community-based organisations (CBOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), churches, foundations, social movements, trade unions, etc. There may also be hybrid cases in which the state provides some resource and management support to non-profit entities (e.g. government-organised NGOs [GONGOs]).	SiNP (single non-profit sector)
Partnership Two or more public and/or non-profit entities working together to deliver a service	Any substantial contractual collaboration between two or more agencies in the public and/or non-profit sector for the purpose of operating and/or financing the delivery of a service over an extended period of time	Partnership combinations can include two or more public entities working together (within the same level of government or across levels and boundaries of government), two or more "non-profit" entities working together, or combinations thereof.	PuP (public-public partnership) NPNPP (non-profit/non-profit partnership) PuNPP (public/non-profit partnership)

"CRITERIA FOR SUCCESS"

Once identified, alternatives were then subject to an assessment of their "success". Our approach to this evaluation, as noted above, was to use a limited number of predefined norms that we considered to be positive indicators of success, with the understanding that none of these criteria can be entirely objectively assessed and that they are open to re-evaluation as part of the research exercise. Our choice of criteria was drawn from the global anti-privatisation literature, the literature on alternatives to privatisation, and our own (re)configuration of criteria based on our familiarity with the debates.

These criteria, and the evaluations they informed, are intended as preliminary, first-cut attempts at providing broad-based comparisons of the successes/failures of different alternatives and attempts at improvements and reforms in public sector provision. They are not intended to be comprehensive assessments. As such, researchers were asked to provide general insights on broad categories of success, with the understanding that all of the criteria were open to subjective evaluation, that no single service entity could possibly meet all of the criteria, and that there was the potential for significant tensions between categories (e.g. increased efficiency at the expense of jobs). Researchers were asked to evaluate each service they identified as a potential example of a successful alternative to privatisation and to record these evaluations in "data sheets".

The remainder of this chapter discusses the normative categories we chose and the subcategories we consider to be of importance within them. Entire books can (and have) been written on the items listed here, but our review is intentionally brief, intended to give general indications of the rationale for choosing the criteria and the key questions related to them. This is in part to reflect the reality of the terms of reference given to the individual research teams and in part to indicate the preliminary, scoping nature of the research. It did not make sense to place too tight or complex a set of methodological constraints at this initial stage, particularly when the national/regional level of data gathering did not allow for detailed, disaggregated analysis, and when our approach is an explicitly iterative one.

Table 2.2 provides a summary of the normative categories developed for the research and the relevant analytical criteria that apply to each. A more detailed narrative of each category is provided below.

Equity

Inequity is arguably the single largest concern with privatisation, with low-income households and other marginalised groups being left out of the service delivery equation (or being offered substandard services) because they cannot afford to pay market rates. Not surprisingly, providing more

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Table 2.2 Normative "criteria for success" employed in the research

Normative category	*Related analytical criteria*
Equity	• *Is physical availability of the service equitable for different social groups (e.g. location, time-distance, gender, age, race, class, ethnicity, etc.)?* • *Is the quality of the service equitable (e.g. product, end-user relations, etc.)?* • *Are quantities of the service equitable (e.g. amounts of water, amperage of electricity, levels of health care)?* • *Are pricing systems equitable?* • *Is equity formalised, legalised, or institutionalised in some way?*
Participation	• *Is the depth of participation adequate (e.g. meaningful participation versus mere consultation, etc.)?* • *Is the scope of participation adequate (i.e. what is open to participation and is it sufficient – policy making, budget decisions, day-to-day service operations, etc.)?* • *Is participation taking place at appropriate scales (i.e. local, national, regional, etc.)?* • *What powers do constituents have to make substantive changes?* • *Is participation equitable (in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, ability, income, education, workers, NGOs, CBOs, etc.)?* • *Is participation sufficiently representative (i.e. if not everyone participates, are the participants representative of "stake-holder" groups)?* • *Are there adequate resources for participation by a diverse range of society (transportation, time off work, etc.)?* • *Is participation conducted in culturally appropriate ways?* • *Are appropriate and adequate amounts of information made available to participants?* • *Is participation formalised, legalised, or institutionalised in some way?* • *Is the model of participation robust (i.e. can it adjust to new situations, is it learning as it goes)?* • *Was there adequate preparation and consultation before beginning the participation process?*
Efficiency	• *Is the service delivered in a financially efficient manner (e.g. per unit of service delivered)?* • *Is the service delivered in a resource-efficient manner (e.g. water and electricity losses, administration costs, environmental impacts, etc.)?* • *Are adequate investments being made in long-term maintenance?* • *Do efficiency gains undermine other potentially positive outcomes (e.g. equity, affordability, environment, wages, health and safety, quality, etc.)?* • *Do efficiency gains take into account other services and/or levels of government (e.g. downloading, ring-fencing, etc.)?*

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Table 2.2 (continued)

Normative category	*Related analytical criteria*
Quality of service	• *Is the overall quality of the service acceptable in terms of end product (e.g. primary health, water quality, etc.) and relations with end users?* • *Is quality improving?*
Accountability	• *Are policy makers and service providers accountable to end users?* • *Is accountability provided at the appropriate scales (i.e. local, national, regional, etc.)?* • *Is the quality of accountability high (i.e. trustworthy, understandable, verifiable)?* • *Is accountability equitable (i.e. do all service users receive the same depth and quality of accountability)?* • *Are there clear chains and/or mechanisms of accountability that are formalised, legalised, or institutionalised in some way?* • *Are there adequate resources to ensure/enforce accountability?*
Transparency	• *Are operational mandates of the service readily available to the public and understandable?* • *Are policy decisions about the service readily available to the public and understandable?* • *Are capital and operating budgets of the service readily available to the public and understandable?* • *Are there sufficient resources to ensure/enforce transparency?*
Quality of the workplace	• *Are there mechanisms for workers/unions to participate in the operation, management, or policy making of the service?* • *Are workers paid a fair salary and benefits?* • *Do workers feel "empowered"?* • *Do workers have adequate training and education?* • *Are there adequate numbers of workers (to ensure quality, safety, sustainability, etc.)?* • *Are there good relations between frontline workers, managers, and end users of the service?* • *Is there equity amongst workers (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.)?*

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Sustainability	• *Financial sustainability* o *Is there sufficient (state) spending to ensure continuity of the service model in terms of operating and capital funds?* o *Does the service model rely heavily on donor support?* • *Social sustainability* o *Can the social engagement mechanism (e.g. volunteerism) be sustained?* • *Political sustainability* o *Is there sufficient political support for the model at different levels?* o *Can the alternative be sustained in a global context of neoliberalism (i.e. is it robust enough to survive serious opposition)?* • *Environmental sustainability* o *Are adequate resources available in a sustainable way to support the service and its growth?* o *Are appropriate types of technologies and resources being used (e.g. coal vs. solar)?* o *Are appropriate scales of resource use being employed?*
Solidarity	• *Does the service help build solidarity between workers, community, bureaucrats, politicians, NGOs, end users, etc.?* • *Does the service help to build solidarity with other service sectors (health, water, electricity, other)?* • *Does the service help to build solidarity between other levels of service delivery (regional, international)?*
Public ethos	• *Does the model help to create/build a stronger "public ethos" around service delivery amongst some or all of the following groups: community, workers, government officials, and politicians?* • *Does the model suggest new ways of thinking about the concept of public ownership/workers' control/community control?* • *Does the service model explicitly oppose privatisation and commercialisation?*
Transferability	• *Is the model transferable to other places in the country/region/world in whole or in part?*

equitable services is a central objective of most, if not all, alternative service delivery experiments (Equinet 2007, McIntyre and Mooney 2007).

But equity is not an easy concept to measure. For some countries/cases, it is about policies that ensure distribution of resources according to need and policies that *reduce* inequality by treating unequals unequally (vertical equity). For others, it might be couched as a state-provided basic minimum package of benefits for all or for "targeted groups" ensuring that nobody falls below a certain level (e.g. "free basic water" in South Africa). Differences between countries reflect different equity goals (Wagstaff et al., 1991). It is therefore critical to break the concept into a series of subcategories that probe specific areas.

Much of the case study literature highlights improvements made in accessibility, particularly in terms of class and location. Information on other indicators, such as gender and ethnicity, is not as readily available. There is also a dearth of information on the reliability of a service. Particularly for water and electricity services, many countries are faced with chronic shortages or outages in service (Nakhooda et al., 2007). Part of equity is overcoming physical, economic, and cultural barriers that people encounter in accessing services and participating in decision making. It involves recognition that "social disadvantage and powerlessness underlies the social stratification that generates (health) inequity" (Equinet 2007, 173; see also McIntyre and Mooney 2007).

There is little to draw on from existing research for suggestions on how to evaluate equity in terms of quality. It is likely that this will be a function of both equity and quality in a broad sense – meaning that if a case study ranks high in both quality and equity, it is likely it will have strong equity in terms of quality. However, it is possible that a service could have strong quality but due to poor levels of equity fail to provide a quality end product to all end users.

There are also important political debates about what constitutes sufficient amounts of water, electricity, or health care, in part because they are environmentally and socially determined and in part because it imposes definitions of needs (Ruiters 2007, Dugard 2009). There are baselines below which most "experts" agree quantities are insufficient. At the same time, there are debates about what constitutes adequate services for effective citizenship, as well as how this impacts on overall designs of systems. Health systems are largely geared to curative needs of the wealthy and large water systems are designed for middle-class users, while the poor are relegated to "basic" use. The questions of how much and whether needs and wants or only "effective" demands are met are fundamental questions of the relative power of social classes and the commodification of nature and its instrumentalisation as a resource (Harvey 1996).

Another relevant equity question is whether water, electricity, and health care as social rights of citizenship are to be free, universal, and paid from taxes. Where differential costs are imposed, the issue is

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that higher-income households may pay twice as much for a service as lower-income households, but if their household incomes are 10 times as high, then pricing is unfair. One argument says that unequals need to be treated unequally through cross-subsidies. Tariff structures (rates-based, block rates, lifelines, internal cross-subsidies, etc.) are important factors in determining equity, for consumption of a service as well as for fixed connection fees. There is general agreement in the municipal services literature on the need for a progressive tariff system, including a base amount of inexpensive or free access (either on a universal or selective basis). These two elements stem from the recognition of a "right" to particular services, with those who use more or hold more financial resources paying more than those who are poor or use less. Cross-subsidies from other sectors and tiers of government are also important here. Some countries use local taxes to fund services and others use intergovernmental transfers to fund services. The degree of progressivity in tax regimes is important. So too is the question of residential versus commercial rates.

Within the literature equity is described both in terms of practice and as a formal procedure. While both are important, without formal or institutional commitments to equity, there can be questions over how it can be guaranteed or applied in a consistent manner. In the case of the public-public partnership (PuP) between Rand Water and the municipality of Harrismith in South Africa, for example, there was an informal practice of not cutting off service to households if they failed to pay. However in the absence of a formal policy or commitment guaranteeing this practice, residents cannot be sure they will all receive such treatment or for how long it may last. Moreover, in assessing alternatives, we would like to explore whether nominal equitable access is reflected in imputed benefits and outcomes and whether they can be measured. For example, what is the under-five mortality rate in areas in which alternatives are being tried?

Participation

Participation of citizens and non-governmental organisations in decision making and implementation of services has become something of a mantra in all of the services literature, be it pro- or anti-privatisation, with references having sprung up in what might seem like unlikely places, such as the private sector-dominated World Water Council. For some, participation refers to clear transfers of power and decision-making abilities, while for others it is seen more as a form of consultation and education. When everyone from radical community activists to neoliberal institutions is talking about participation, it is likely that they are not talking about the same thing (Murthy and Klugman 2004; Balanyá et al., 2005). It is therefore critical to be as specific as possible about the forms of participation that can be considered "successful".

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The scope and depth of participation will likely be influenced by factors of scale. If participation happens only at the local level it may be difficult to affect policy decisions that take place at regional, national or international levels. Similarly, if participation occurs only at a regional or national level, the depth of local participation may be weak or insufficiently representative of the communities directly affected by the service.

There is often no special consideration given to how to incorporate and empower marginalised groups within "the community"; power dynamics often continue to exist in these spaces (Murthy and Klugman 2004). Equinet, commenting on the experience of representative participation in health care systems in Zambia, argues that representative mechanisms often fail to represent communities fully, particularly vulnerable groups (2007). There is also a growing feminist literature that has drawn attention to the (potentially) high costs of participation on the part of women, since many development projects – especially in the water sector – focus on women's participation while ignoring the gendered aspects of household management. Indeed, participation might just add more work with little benefit (Cleaver 1998, 2000).

Even if marginalised groups are included in participatory mechanisms the question of representativeness must be considered: Do representatives reflect the diversity of the population in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, location, and age? Are representatives of groups fairly chosen/elected? Is representativeness even an appropriate mechanism if broad-based participation is the objective?

Nakhooda et al. note that the capacity of community members to participate is constrained by financial and human resources and access to technical expertise (2007). It is one thing for the state to make a commitment to community participation and decision making; it is quite another to devote time and resources to ensuring that everyone is able to participate. There need to be adequate resources allocated for communications, training, fora, and outreach.

Conducting participation in culturally appropriate ways may help lead to a meaningful experience for participants and may also help to increase the effectiveness of the process. Cultural practices pertaining to everything from discussion styles and leadership structure may need to be taken into account.

Participants must be provided with sufficient information on which to make informed decisions and interventions. This may include technical, financial, and other information. The availability of information in multiple formats is significant because community members will have different access points depending on income, location, etc.. This includes having information presented in ways that allow all participants to understand technical or bureaucratic language.

Murthy and Klugman also suggest the creation of "participation contracts" (2004, 84) to detail clearly the relationship between community/civil society and the government/institutions, guaranteeing equal

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decision-making power in setting priorities and specific policies and monitoring implementation. Such contracts can help to outline the scope, level of participation and the inclusion of marginalised voices. Equinet echoes that sentiment, believing that in order to assure that real community participation occurs in health systems, the role of communities must be formally recognised in law and institutional practice (2007).

Although models must have a certain degree of permanence if they are to be consistent, there may also be reasons for adjusting practices due to changing circumstances, recognition of mistakes, etc.. Does the model in question allow for this kind of dynamism, learning, and flexibility? Hall et al. note the importance of early community involvement to ensuring successful and effective participation. Not only are the "hows" of community participation important but also the "whens". These authors concluded, in their study on PuPs in the health sector, that "the most effective PuPs had the longest lead-in times and had the community as a partner" (Hall et al., 2005, 36).

Efficiency

"Public" systems are often assumed to be less efficient than their private counterparts, despite research that suggests otherwise. It is therefore critical to assess the efficiency of alternative models of service delivery by similar and different criteria as well as broaden our definitions of the concept.

Efficiency is typically described when "x" inputs produce "y" outputs, and these benchmark criteria need to be considered with alternatives as well. But it is important to contextualise the analysis and to give it longer time horizons. Health care, for example, does not produce homogeneous outputs, with "curing" and "caring" requiring very different forms of measurement. The effects of health prevention may also only be registered many years later and require new forms of evaluation.

Privatised entities often claim better efficiencies but this can be at the expense of long-term investments in equipment and personnel. Factoring in these longer-term costs and benefits into efficiency measurements of alternatives is important. In the case of the remunicipalisation of the water utility in Grenoble, France, Avrillier writes that maintenance, renewal and improvement of technical systems have improved threefold compared with the experience of privatisation (2005).

Some efficiency criteria can also be at odds with others. Financial efficiency, for example, may come at the cost of workers' health and safety and working conditions or community participation. In the example of Honduras's national water authority, SANAA, efficiency appears to have been achieved at the cost of workers, with the loss of 35% of jobs having gone unnoticed in most evaluations of the programme (Lobina and Hall 2000). More broadly, there is a need to challenge the belief that the private sector is more efficient than the public, despite ambiguous empirical evidence and despite the fact that mainstream definitions fail to adequately address the

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social goals of service delivery such as quality of life and dignity (Spronk 2010). An accounting of "social efficiency" would be more appropriate, though difficult.

It is also important to note whether efficiency gains of a particular service are occurring at the expense of another sector or another level of government (e.g. downloading or uploading). Scale is a factor in assessing efficiency since many private sector studies ignore wider impacts and focus on narrow criteria. Finally there are intangible, unmeasured outcomes that public services can provide for societies that must be taken into account (such as promoting cultural practices and providing safe environments).

Quality of service

Perceived poor quality is another justification used by neoliberal policy makers to privatise public services. Yet quality is also a problematic concept, shaped by cultural perceptions and market demands. Evaluating alternatives on this basis is therefore an important, but tricky, counter to the argument that the public sector has to keep up with private sector expectations. The false argument that private bottled water is better than public tap water is a case in point (Clarke 2005).

Accountability

While the World Bank defines accountability as "the degree to which governments have to explain or justify what they have done or failed to do" (World Bank 1999, 284), Murthy and Klugman (2004) note that there are richer understandings of the concept than simple "answerability", making distinctions between the scope of accountability (who is accountable and to whom) and whether the accountability mechanisms have any enforceability. The World Bank definition, like that for corruption, surreptitiously places the focus, and generally the blame, on the public as opposed to the private sector as a matter of definition (with the false presumption that the market makes the private sector accountable). At higher levels, accountability is something to be negotiated, limited not to immediate interests but global ones. Accountability extends both vertically and horizontally, as the community has the power to hold a service provider accountable through legal mechanisms, not just internally from one level of personnel to another.

The literature provides several examples of how this might be achieved. Montemayor's (2005) understanding of accountability emphasises the need for a clear chain of accountability to respond to, and deal with, community concerns and comments. Nakhooda et al. (2007) argue that an independent regulatory body can improve transparency, participation, and accountability. Gomez and Terhorst emphasise the need for accountability via a unit of "vigilance and social control" composed of citizens/ civil society (2005, 123).

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Transparency

Having access to information about the operation of a service is crucial to creating a transparent environment. In the case of water remunicipalisation in Grenoble, France, Avrillier notes that citizens have access to information on water services and costs and have open debates about them, but it is not clear whether this information is easily accessible or understandable to the public (2005). Having access to financial information also allows citizens and community groups to put the policy and operational information in context, giving them the tools to challenge policies if budgets do not follow stated aims.

Quality of the workplace

Frontline workers are essential to the delivery of services whether they are public or private, with many workers exposed to serious health risks. Any alternative to privatisation must take into account workplace health and safety as well as systems that allow for worker participation.

While discussions of participation generally focus on community, there is also the question of workforce participation and forms of workplace organisation. Depending on the model being used (cooperative, PuP, public utility), different types of worker participation/organisation will exist, from full control to joint-management committees to minor input on issues directly related to the workplace. *Aguas Bonaerenses SA* in Buenos Aires, Argentina, is a public sector operator with representation from water workers and users in the regulatory body and management of the water company. This participation has led to increased coverage in water and sewage, the building of new pipelines and improved water pressure (Hall and Lobina 2006). In Kampala, Uganda, the 1999 reform process brought in a new collective agreement with the union, guaranteeing them involvement in all aspects of restructuring and a new unit management committee was created, with a seat for the union. There are many cases in which workers performing important and sometimes dangerous tasks are extremely poorly paid. This can force workers to resort to bribes and extra payments to survive. In this environment it is hard for things not to be inefficient (Hall and Lobina 2006).

Workers' sense of "empowerment" is important as well, but difficult to quantify in any comparative sense, and can come from many different sources for different workers. Evaluating this component will require observation of, and interaction with, workers themselves. Other indicators, such as worker participation, pay and benefits, and relations between worker and management, may help to evaluate objectively the degree to which workers feel empowered in an alternative service delivery system.

A major part of investing in workers is providing proper and adequate training to perform in their jobs. In Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, the water

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utility received an Asian Development Bank loan that provided support for training on several key issues: organisational development, water supply maintenance and management, financial management and accounting, computer systems, and English language skills. In Porto Alegre, Sabesp operates a continual training and education programme for employees covering technical aspects and administrative and managerial issues. It also runs computer classes and literacy programmes for the workers (Hall and Lobina 2006).

Many regions lack sufficient health care professionals to implement essential services; those that remain often feel frustrated and undervalued and are forced to work in under-resourced facilities. Parts of east and southern Africa are suffering from a dramatic shortage of health workers, particularly in rural areas (Equinet 2007). There is a desperate need to train and retrain health care workers to ensure an effective health care system. Real wages need to be increased, and workers need to be provided with incentives such as professional development, meaningful career paths and improved working and living conditions. Beyond this, there are also social needs of frontline workers: transportation, housing, education for their families, electricity, and their own access to health care. Some research illustrates a problematic approach to labour issues in the context of public utility restructuring. A reduction in employees is automatically assumed to lead to an increase in efficiency, not recognising that a higher-quality and more equitable service can sometimes take more time and require additional workers (Hall and Lobina 2006). Positive results of efficiency are often expressed in ratios of workers per service-access point or connection, such as the *Perbadanan Bekalan Air Pulan Pinang* (PBA) water utility in Malaysia that boasts a ratio of workers to end users of 1:373 (Santiago 2005). This type of quantitative analysis can have negative consequences on the health and safety of workers, as well as the quality of the service.

Labour is often perceived as a cost to be reduced or something to be made more efficient. There is an implicit assumption in some of the literature that workers try to "avoid" doing their job and need to be made more efficient. Whereas this may be the case in some situations, many frontline service workers go above and beyond what is required of them in their job and are strongly committed to the goals of the service. As Hall and Lobina argue, "the knowledge and commitment of workers, and the capacity of their unions to participate in restructuring and improvements, should be seen as key strengths to be encouraged" (2006, 12). In Colombia, the public water sector has followed the trend of privatisation in outsourcing work and has imposed a flexible, precarious model of employment where workers lack security and stability (Velez 2005). In the case of the publicly owned utility SANAA in Honduras, which underwent serious restructuring in 1996, reducing the workforce by 35% and instilling buzzwords of "dedication, enthusiasm, integrity and pride" were seen as positive outcomes. In the case of Sabesp, in Brazil, a state-owned water utility that underwent substantial

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restructuring, employment levels were reduced through "a moderate and one-off reduction" and costs were significantly reduced by 45% through outsourcing of ancillary operations (Lobina and Hall 2000, 48–49).

Hall and Lobina also note that the relationships between workers and the community are an important element that strengthens the delivery of the service (2006). In a slum project in Ahmedabad, India, workers developed relationships with community members, creating a cycle of gratitude and pride, which deepened the workers' commitment to, and involvement in, the project. Similar experiences were reported in several projects in rural Pakistan. Pro-privatisation pundits often characterise public sector workers as lazy and inefficient beneficiaries of state spending, creating tensions between workers and the community they serve. Alternative forms of service delivery must avoid these unnecessary, false, and counterproductive binaries.

Finally, it must be asked whether the benefits described above extend to all workers along gender, race, ethnic, age, and other demographic and socio-economic lines.

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Sustainability

Alternative forms of service delivery should be sustainable over a reasonable period of time if they are to be considered successful (though short-lived examples can serve as indicators of what is possible and as lessons for future initiatives). Sustainability happens on many fronts.

In order for an alternative service delivery system to sustain itself financially, there must be adequate resources provided. Existing public alternatives utilise a great diversity of funding structures, with some receiving strong and sustained financial support from the state, while others practise some form of cost recovery from end users. This is a possible point of tension. Within the literature some view financial autonomy or independence from the state as a positive development, while others label this as a form of commercialisation that forces public services to valorise finances and private sector management principles.

A common constraint is finding funding outside of international financial institutions, many of which have stipulations about private sector involvement or may not be willing to support alternative models such as cooperatives. Balanyá et al. note that there is a "desperate need for funding mechanisms that are without political conditions and that are oriented to serve societal goals instead of economic and ideological objective" (2005). Relying on progressive donor funding may also prove to be a problem, however, as donor withdrawal could undermine the systems being developed.

Some alternative service models rely heavily on volunteers from the community, in the form of volunteer labour or in terms of time commitments necessary for the participation process. While it is often beneficial to have strong volunteer participation, consideration must be given to how

this volunteerism affects community members and whether this level of involvement can be sustained. Also, is the model robust enough to deal with changing demographics and/or socio-economic conditions (e.g. xenophobia)? Are the processes internal to social movements and community organisations robust and democratic enough to sustain long-term interest and capacity building? Are there hidden costs of participation (e.g. do social movements lose "independence" and the ability to criticise if they join a participatory process)?

There is disagreement within the current literature on what the relationship should be between alternative public utilities and the state. Some researchers argue that having a supportive and involved state and government is crucial for the success of a public utility. In Hall et al.'s examination of PuPs in the health sector, the authors note that government policy played a significant role in supporting and/or facilitating partnerships (2005). Local and national governments played a key role in public alternatives in the water sector in Porto Alegre, Kerala, and Caracas (Balanyá et al., 2005). However, others argue that having independence and autonomy from the state is what is necessary to succeed. Murthy and Klugman assert that decentralisation implies that leadership remains with people elected by community members not bureaucrats, and connect decentralisation to a higher level of community participation, although decentralisation can involve devolution of responsibility for delivery without necessary resources as well as capture of resources and provision by local elites (2004, 83). Reynoso (2000) contends that there are important benefits to local planning and management, as opposed to a top-down approach, which is unable to adapt to the specific context and issues of the state. However, Reynoso also argues that there is a need for a supportive state to help facilitate and oversee the objectives of the public alternative. Equinet views the state as playing a key role in establishing "people-centred" health systems, but they make a distinction between a strong state and a domineering state, seeing the role of states to act "with" society, not in replacement of it (2007).

Beyond the political climate at a local/national level, there is recognition of the need to have change at an international or global level to facilitate these alternatives. Balanyá et al. conclude that real public alternatives cannot be achieved within the context of neoliberalism, that despite progress and individual victories there is a need for a more enabling environment:

> The cumulative impact of these neoliberal policies is a fundamental obstacle to the development of public provision of essential services. Lasting solutions, it seems, are only feasible if this model of development is replaced by a different model of globalisation, one that facilitates progressive public solutions rather than hindering them. (2005, 8)

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Environmental resources are another element that must be considered in an evaluation of alternatives. "Public" providers have been amongst the worst abusers of natural resources (Soviet electricity generation being but one example), and it is critical that we do not overlook questions of resource type and consumption rates simply because they are being done in the public domain. It may be that alternative sources/forms of resources are required, and it is incumbent upon public providers to ask and investigate the difficult resource questions that many private providers are loathe to query.

Similar responsibilities apply to choices of technology (e.g. coal-fired versus solar electricity), some of which can be determined by the momentum of previous delivery practices and ideologies. Determining the appropriate types of technologies is partly a question of the environmental resources available but also a question of the social, economic, and political factors associated with the objectives of the service delivery models that are chosen.

Finally, while some aspects of service delivery are inherently local, the resources required to provide them can be much broader in their reach. From tapping into regional watersheds to sourcing health products from overseas producers, it is important to determine the most appropriate and sustainable scale of resource procurement and distribution. In the electricity sector, for example, there is a growing debate over whether it is better to produce large transmission grids for regional distribution from large generating sites or to have small-scale decentralised production.

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Solidarity

One of the main aims of building non-private systems is to create clusters of activity and "solidarity" between different sectors of society and synergies between service providers struggling to improve services in the public sector, be they government officials, frontline workers or community members involved in a project. Solidarity is a difficult concept to define, however, and with very different manifestations in political life. And yet there is something palpable about a service delivery system that generates bonds and commitments across space and scale, and this generalised phenomenon of bond making and knowledge sharing amongst non-private participants is important to understand.

Traditional social democratic and welfarist systems have been criticised for failing to produce real social solidarity (Williams 1989, Ignatieff 1995). Hall presents an interesting discussion of solidarity within public services, drawing on the notion of a "European Social Model", which espouses a commitment to income equality, progressive tax systems, public ownership, and political solidarity (2008). He also describes financial solidarity, which has led to centrally financed development spending to help reduce inequalities between individual member states, including financing for infrastructure, retraining of workers and funds to help fight discrimination

in the workplace. Whatever the definition, understanding the extent to which non-private service systems can overcome the individualising and alienating effects of commercialisation is an important aspect of evaluating and promoting alternative models of delivery.

Public ethos

Throughout the literature on alternatives to privatisation there is an implicit assumption that these models have a greater degree of "publicness" and "public ethos" than their privatised counterparts, but little is given by way of explicit definitions of what this means. Balanyá et al. write that publicness involves commitments to "societal objectives, including democracy, environmental sustainability and human security" and further delineate a "progressive publicness", involving direct citizen participation in addition to the goal of serving public needs (2005, 260). In their notion of "public", they include a wide variety of not-for-profit management models, from cooperatives to municipal utilities to corporatised entities. Cann also offers a broad understanding of publicness as something that goes beyond formal public ownership and management. It is described as containing several elements pertaining to different actors within the system: taking pride in one's work (workers), valuing staff (management and users), transparency and accountability (policy makers), and community participation (2007).

There is also the question of whether an alternative needs to be explicitly "anti-privatisation" in its motivation and composition. Speaking to the question of public-public partnerships, Hall et al. note that some PuPs can be seen as an explicit defence against privatisation while others have actually been used to pave the way for privatisation (or at least PPPs), bringing into question their commitment to a public ethos (2005). This question is also of relevance to cooperative models and partnerships with non-governmental agencies, many of which act autonomously from the state and are not directly accountable to the public at large. In the case of health cooperatives in Costa Rica, Gauri et al. perceive the latter as part of a broader trend towards the privatisation of public services, intended to "increase private sector participation and to introduce market-like mechanisms in health care to enhance efficiency" (2004, 294).

As difficult as it is to define, public ethos looms large in the motivation for alternative service delivery models, making it all the more important to try to understand.

Transferability

Transferability is not an indicator of success, per se, but rather a way of understanding relationship with other alternatives in other sectors/places. A particular model of service delivery may work well in one place/sector

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but not in another. Geographical location, population size, political climate, available technologies, existing state and non-state institutions, and attitudes of citizens to the state are some of the many factors that will influence the ability of a particular model to start up and survive. An analysis of these considerations will also help to indicate the adaptability/suitability of certain models to other contexts. For example, some argue that cooperatives are more efficient in population clusters of 50 000 or less (Munoz 2005). A similar argument is often applied to participatory schemes. However, Balanyá et al. argue that notable examples in Porto Alegre and Recife have shown that scale is not necessarily an obstacle to participatory management (2005). Should an alternative be considered more successful if it has greater potential to be reproduced elsewhere? No two options are ever going to be exactly alike, and although related in many ways through similar technology, solidarity, and support across scales, we must resist the idea that alternatives can be imposed from outside. Nevertheless, the extent to which lessons – practical or theoretical – can be learned from one model and adopted in another is a useful point to know.

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CONCLUSION

The list of "criteria for success" provided here is a long and ambitious one, and it is important to reiterate that none of the sectoral/regional studies in this book looked at every one of these factors; nor were they expected to. The criteria are intended as reference points and guidelines – important screening tools for what has been a relatively unprogrammatic field of study to date. The more detailed case studies that will form the second stage of this research project will provide more fine-tuned analysis of these criteria, but even then it will only be possible to explore a limited number of factors in any detail given the complexity of concepts such as equity and accountability.

Our hope is that we have provided clearer and firmer parameters for the investigation of alternative service delivery mechanisms than has been offered to date and that they serve as a reasonable basis for comparing service models and experiences across regions and sectors. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, however, and we encourage readers to review as many of the chapters in this book as possible to get a fuller sense of the degree to which we have been able to provide such an analytical and comparative platform.

We particularly encourage people to read across sectors, with the aim of stimulating more dialogue between health care, water, and electricity activists and researchers. For if we are to develop meaningful universal guidelines for "alternative" essential services, they must be as convincing across sectors as they are across place and culture.

NOTES

1. Special thanks to Amanda Wilson for her work on the literature review for the "criteria for success" section of this chapter.
2. See www.municipalservicesproject.org for more detail.

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