15 Struggles for water justice in Latin America

Public and 'social-public' alternatives

Susan Spronk, Carlos Crespo and Marcela Olivera

Latin America was the first region to adopt neoliberalism as its hegemonic model, as well as the earliest to develop and implement explicit alternatives. In Latin America, struggles against water privatisation have played an essential role in delegitimising the neoliberal model, such as the infamous "Water War" in Cochabamba in 2000 and the constitutional referendum in Uruguay in 2004 (Kohl and Farthing 2006, Taks 2008). Thanks to these and other struggles that seek to defend water as a human right and common good, Latin America has changed from being a region in which the neoliberal model was dominant to a territory of hegemonic instability in which alternatives are being sought and contested (Sader 2009). For this reason, the world is looking to Latin America for alternative models of service delivery, which challenge the commercialising logic of neoliberal capitalism.

Due to these popular mobilisations, private water contracts in Argentina, Bolivia, and Uruguay have been cancelled, returning water delivery services to public and state control (Hall and Lobina 2006, Lobina and Hall 2007). It is no coincidence that these are also some of the countries in which the electorate has opted for left-of-centre governments that actively campaigned against neoliberalism, widely seen as an undemocratic form of development. As stated by the *Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida* (Coalition for the Defence of Water and Life – the *Coordinadora*), the organisation that emerged to coordinate the protests during the Cochabamba water protests in 2000, the struggle for water is connected with the broader fight for popular control over natural resources: "[T]he fundamental problem is who decides about the present and future of the population, natural resources, work and living conditions. In relation to water, we want to decide for ourselves: this is what we call Democracy" (cited in Crespo Flores 2006b, 4; all Spanish translations by the authors).

This chapter provides an overview of a diversity of actually existing and proposed alternatives to privatisation in the water sector and in urban and rural areas in Latin America. Whereas there is no "perfect" alternative, the region is replete with many examples of "successful" alternatives to

privatisation, including statist and communitarian solutions to the challenge of providing non-commercialised forms of water and sanitation for all.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

From a comparative perspective, it is not surprising that there has been a lot of social movement activity resisting privatisation in the water sector during the neoliberal era (1970s to present). The Latin American and Caribbean region has a long history of revolution and social struggle (Wickham-Crowley 1992, John 2009). Indeed, the Mexican Revolution of 1910 was one of the first revolutions of the 20th century, followed by Bolivia in 1952, Cuba in 1959, and Nicaragua in 1979. Social movement organisations such as the Coalition for Water and Life in Bolivia and the Coalition for Water and Life in Uruguay have built on these traditions of revolution and struggle to defend the "commons" against the incursion of private capital, which made significant inroads in this region during the wave of privatisation sponsored by international financial institutions (IFIs) in the 1990s.

In many ways, the Latin American region was a guinea pig for the World Bank and IMF policies of privatisation of the 1990s. The reasons that privatisation was such a popular policy choice at the height of neoliberalism in Latin America were twofold. First, 18 out of 21 countries in Latin America in the late 1970s were run by authoritarian governments that borrowed heavily from international banks, leaving a legacy of illegitimate debt (McMichael 2008). By the time the Washington Consensus was implemented in the early 1980s, newly democratic governments were particularly vulnerable to the dictates of the IFIs, which made the extension of new structural adjustment loans conditional upon water privatisation (Grusky and Fiil-Flynn 2004, Goldman 2007). Ideologically oriented towards neoliberalism, many governments followed suit, privatising basic services, including water and sanitation.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, as a highly urbanised region with relatively wealthy populations, water utilities in Latin America were considered to be attractive, and the region attracted the bulk of private investment internationally in this sector (see Table 15.1). In many ways, the existence of numerous well-functioning municipal water utilities in the larger cities was a testament to success of the state-led development model of the previous era (Weisbrot et al., 2002). By the time governments opened up the water sector to private investment in the 1990s, the Latin American region was full of relatively well-functioning, government-owned utilities that were ripe for picking.

Although privatisation made the furthest inroads in the Latin American region, it has been estimated that more than 90% of water still remains in public hands. A notable exception is Chile, where water privatisation is well advanced; it is the only other country in the world besides the UK to

Table 15.1 Total private investment promised in water and sanitation in developing countries, by region, 1990–2002

Region	*Private investment promised (US$ billion)*	*Percentage of investment in water and sanitation*
East Asia and Pacific	17.0	39.0
Europe and Central Asia	3.5	8.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	21.3	48.9
Middle East and North Africa	1.3	3.0
South Asia	0.2	0.5
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.2	0.5
Total	43.6	100.0

Source: Hall and Lobina (2006, 41).

introduce fully private water markets and to privatise public water utilities by complete divestiture (Budds 2004). Mixed public-private companies involving multinational water companies also continue to provide services in several cities in Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru. The shares of several of the renationalised water companies in Argentina were also sold to local private companies (Lobina and Hall 2007). Nonetheless, most households in Latin America which have access to an improved water source, receive their water from a single individual public provider. And despite the setback created by privatisation, the Latin American region has higher rates of access to improved water sources than Asia and Africa (Hall and Lobina 2006). As of 2008, approximately 93% of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean had access to potable water (80% in rural areas and 97% in urban areas), while 79% had access to sanitation (55% in rural areas and 86% in urban areas; WHO and UNICEF 2010).

Given the relative success of former models of development, several scholars have advocated for a resurrection of the "developmental state" (Gwynne and Kay 2000). Between the 1940s and 1970s, central governments throughout the Latin American region centralised control over water and sanitation services as part of an "import substitution industrialisation" (ISI) development strategy. In line with the Keynesian-developmentalist thinking of the time, basic infrastructure and service provision were seen as essential to maintain capital accumulation, to assist in the reproduction of labour, and to help maintain social harmony.

By contrast, in this chapter we argue that although the state-led model of development produced some undeniable benefits, such as the extension of social benefits to large segments of the organised working class and sustained rates of economic growth (Weisbrot et al., 2006, Sandbrook et al., 2007), it cannot be forgotten that the ISI model was highly exclusionary

(Nun 1969). Indeed, ISI was unable to overcome the deep-seated racial and class inequalities in the region (Thorp 1998, McMichael 2008) and served to further exacerbate uneven development between rural and urban areas (Lipton 1977). The social problems created by unplanned urbanisation, such as large slum and shanty-town populations that lack potable water and sanitation, tend to be particularly acute in one or two "primary" cities in each country (such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil), where the ISI-sponsored commercial trade and secondary industries tended to be concentrated (Portes and Roberts 2005), which are contrasted to "brown regions" that lie on the periphery of the capitalist world economy (such as the *favelas* of Rio or rural areas in Brazil's northeast region), which are similarly characterised by low levels of "stateness" and a deficit of public services (O'Donnell 1993). In the absence of the state, however, many local populations in these latter regions have come up with their own solutions to the problem of providing water and sanitation. Indeed, Latin America's water justice movement tends to look to these examples of "actually existing commons" in their search for ways to reinvent the social economy in the hopes of creating a more sustainable future.

SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The team conducting the research for this chapter was composed of academics and labour and social movement organisations in the region.[1] We began the project by conducting a survey of peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on "alternatives to privatisation" in the water sector in Latin America. Not surprisingly, given the penetration of privatisation in the sector, we found that the academic literature is much stronger on criticisms of privatisation than on its alternatives; only 24 of the 200-odd documents address the issue of alternatives, and even these references are indirect (e.g. looking at anti-privatisation campaigns or providing cursory overviews of municipal service reform). While this lacuna in the literature demonstrates the importance of the research, it also meant that we needed to rely on primary data more than initially expected. To collect primary data the research team conducted Web searches and interviews with social movement and union leaders throughout the region, largely those affiliated with the Red Vida and with Public Services International (PSI).

Conducting the research by working with Latin America's largest anti-privatisation networks produced at least two limitations. First, we selected cases from countries that are part of the "left turn" in Latin America because they are of particular interest to scholars and activists seeking to learn more about the challenges involved with implementing alternatives in a post-neoliberal structural adjustment context. Second, we focused on cases that are fairly well known in the activist community. We were able to collect more information on cases in which civil society organisations

and trade unions have successfully defeated government campaigns for privatisation. Previous research has demonstrated that given strong tendencies towards "cherry picking", public utilities threatened with privatisation may be amongst the best-performing in the region. Nonetheless, there are case studies of "successful" public water utilities not included in the survey in countries where public utilities have never been threatened with privatisation, such as Costa Rica. Given the fact that there is little public information about water operators in that country (since social movement organisations have other preoccupations), and our own resource limitations, we decided not to include Costa Rica in the survey. In addition, we included only one case study from Brazil (Porto Alegre), despite its importance in the sector. Given our team's Portuguese language limitations and the fact that Brazilian activists have already conducted their own survey on "successful" public water companies (da Costa et al., 2006, ASSAMAE 2007), we decided to focus our efforts on collecting data in countries with less capacity for progressive research. Finally, we decided to exclude Cuba – although it is evidently a relevant case for discussion of alternatives to neoliberal capitalism – given difficulties with access to information and the creeping commercialisation taking place in the water sector there (see Cocq and McDonald 2010).

The case studies that are represented in the survey therefore reflect the regional strengths (and weaknesses) of the Red Vida network and come from countries where there has been a public debate on alternatives to privatisation: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.[2] Despite the study's limitations, we believe that these cases are representative of a variety of service delivery experiences in different contexts, such as more "developed" states such as Brazil and Argentina and the poorest nations of the hemisphere such as Bolivia and Honduras. Furthermore, the exercise provides a map of actually existing alternatives and utopian visions of service delivery in the water sector in Latin America, representing examples of what social activists in the region consider to be best practices in the sector.

TYPES OF ALTERNATIVES FOUND

In total, our research team documented 26 successful alternatives in the water sector in Latin America (see Table 15.2) We documented nine cases of single public providers (municipal water utilities), 12 non-profit non-state providers (including community-run systems and cooperatives), three non-profit/non-profit partnerships, and two public/non-profit partnerships. In addition, we documented experiences of four national-level public-public partnerships (PuPs) and four examples of international PuPs (see Chapter 2, this volume, for a fuller discussion of research methodology and the typologies employed).

Table 15.2 Types of alternatives in the Latin American water sector

Type of alternative	*Name of entity*	*Location*
SiP (single public sector)	Hidrocapital	Caracas, Venezuela
	Aguas Bonaerenses S.A./SOSBA	Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina
	EMAAP-Q	Quito, Ecuador
	ETAPA	Cuenca, Ecuador
	EAAB	Bogotá, Colombia
	Empresa Pública de Medellín	Medellín, Colombia
	EMCALI	Cali, Colombia
	OSE	Uruguay
	DMAE	Porto Alegre, Brazil
SiNP (single non-profit sector)	APAAS	Cochabamba (Sebastien Pagador), Bolivia
	Cooperativa de Servicio de Agua Potable 1 de mayo TUNTIRANCHO Ltda.	Cochabamba (Primer de Mayo), Bolivia
	SAGUAPAC	Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia
	COSMOL	Montero, Bolivia
	JAPOE	Rural Honduras
	COOPI	Villa Carlos Paz, Córdova, Argentina
	Aguas Santafesinas S.A.	Santa Fe, Argentina
	COOPLAN	Santa Cruz de la Sierra (Plan 3000), Bolivia

	Acueducto Comunal	Concepción de Naranjo, Costa Rica
	Servicio de Agua	Vereda de la Palma, Colombia
	CENAGRAP	Rural Ecuador
	La Sirena	Cali, Colombia
NPNPP (non-profit/non-profit partnership)	ASICA-Sur	Cochabamba, Bolivia
	FEDECAAS	Santa Cruz, Bolivia
	Chilimarca	Tiquipaya, Department of Cochabamba, Bolivia
PuP (public-public partnership)		
National	AyA and ASADAS	Costa Rica
	SANAA	Honduras
	ASSAMAE	Brazil
	Aguas Bonaerenses S.A. and local water utilities	Argentina
International	OSE and ESSAP	Uruguay-Paraguay
	Sabesp and AyA	Brazil-Costa Rica
	Aguas Bonaerenses S.A. and SEDAM-Huancayo	Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina-Huancayo, Peru
	OSE and AAPOS	Uruguay-Potosí, Bolivia
PuNPP (public/non-profit partnership)	Cooperation between OSE and Maldonaldo Council (after 2005)	Uruguay
	ACUAVALLE S.A.	Valle de Cauca, Colombia

DEFENDING THE STATUS QUO

Given the legacy of the developmental state, the "status quo" in Latin America means supporting large, public utilities owned by the state and usually controlled by a board that is most often governed by some combination of elected politicians and representatives of civil society. When we asked Latin American water activists which public utilities were worthy of particular mention for excellence, two examples stood out: EAAB in Bogotá, Colombia, and EMAAP-Q in Quito, Ecuador. According to the "criteria for success" established for this research, however, these corporatised "public" companies are not necessarily non-commercialised "alternatives" since they operate much like private businesses, as corporatised entities.

Since 1955, the *Empresa de Acueducto y Alcantarillado de Bogotá* (EAAB) has been providing water and sanitation services to the capital Bogotá, Colombia, a city with over 7 million inhabitants. As of 2004, 96% of the population had potable water, and 88% had sanitary sewerage connections, which is a very high rate of coverage for a city in which almost one-third of the population lives under the poverty line – a service coverage that is comparable to wealthier cities such as Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Santiago, Porto Alegre, and São Paulo (Gilbert 2007). For many decades, the EAAB has employed a system of cross-subsidisation in its tariff structure. The redistributive effect of this subsidisation has diminished over time; however, the company has adopted more commercial practices in compliance with the neoliberal water sector reform law adopted in 1994 (Law 142). In 1995, the difference between the tariff paid by the rich and the poor was 7.4 times, and in 2004 it was 4.6 times (Gilbert 2007). Over the past decade or so, water tariffs have risen so much that consumption has dropped. The water company now has a production surplus, allowing it to sell water to the nine surrounding municipalities. Indeed, due to the drop in consumption, EAAB will not need to expand its water production until 2012 (Gilbert 2007).

The clearest indication that EAAB represents a commercial model of service delivery is the degree of private sector participation in the company. Since 1998, the French multinational water company Veolia has run the concession contract for a water purification plant, which serves 30% of the residents of Bogotá. In terms of "public ethos", the EAAB also scores rather low. The general manager of EAAB, Alberto Merlano, has even publicly endorsed the idea of privatisation in the media (BNAmericas 2004), arguing the EAAB is an "exception" to the general trend of "inefficient" public services (see Spronk [2010] for a critical analysis of the erroneous way that the concept of "efficiency" is defined in contemporary debates about public services).

A similar trend towards corporatisation was observed in the case of the *Empresa Metropolitana de Alcantarillado y Agua Potable* (EMAAP-Q),

in Quito, another example of another well-performing public utility, which has adopted private sector business practices, including the granting of concession contracts. Originally founded in 1960, the company achieved major improvements in its coverage rates under the administration of progressive Mayor Paco Moncayo (2000 to present). The municipal council appointed General Manager Juan Neira Carrasco, who was recruited from the private sector to restructure the public utility and to inculcate a "corporate culture" (Belletini et al., 2006). The reforms have worked. Under new management, the public water company has made some impressive achievements. In August of 2000, the coverage was 72.28%; by March 2007, it was 96.87%. For sewerage, the coverage increased from 65.77% to 95.65% during the same period. This expansion is largely due to the utility's success in securing international loans from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), amongst other IFIs. The IDB has used its influence to pressure the management to privatise parts of its operations. In 2006 the mayor and the general manager proposed to grant a private concession in an area of new urban expansion near a new airport, which was defeated by a coalition of ecological and citizen groups who managed to convince the mayor that privatisation would not mean cost savings for the company (Buitrón 2008).

RECLAIMING PUBLIC SERVICES

Because social movement organisations have been so active in fighting the neoliberal water privatisation agenda in Latin America, the region is home to many cancelled contracts. Most famous amongst these cases are the cancelled contracts following the 2000 "Water War" in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and the subsequent cancellation of a 40-year contract with Suez in the neighbouring cities of La Paz and El Alto, also in Bolivia. In Argentina, water companies were returned to state control following the economic crisis of 2001 in the cities of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe. A preliminary analysis suggests that none of these post-privatisation cases present "successful" alternatives as of yet but are best described as works in progress.

Over the past eight years, the public water company in Cochabamba, SEMAPA, has lurched from one crisis to the next. After the population of Cochabamba successfully expelled Bechtel from Bolivia in 2000 (Olivera and Lewis 2004), a project to democratise the management of the utility – known as "*control social*" (social control) – was intended to resolve the problems with corruption that have historically plagued the public utility. While the former board of directors was staffed exclusively by professionals and politicians, since April 2002, three members elected from the macrodistricts (voting jurisdictions divided by population and territory) sat on the board. However, the many problems that have historically plagued public utilities have remained unresolved with a minimal degree of "social control" (Sánchez Gómez and Terhorst 2005, Crespo Flores 2006a, Driessen 2008).

Since the company was returned to public hands in 2000, two general managers have been dismissed for acts of corruption. General managers and the mayor, who sits on the board of directors, have used the company as a *botín político* (political booty), filling the company with their family members and friends. Due to these and other problems, the IDB cancelled payments on an $18 million loan, the first part of which was to be dedicated to the "modernisation" of the company's management structure (Spronk 2007). The utility is once again scrambling for finances in order to maintain and expand the city's water and sanitation system. In May 2009 the Ministry of Water expressed an intent to intervene in the company and dismiss the board of directors due to mismanagement. Although there is public sentiment that the residents of Cochabamba "won the war" but "lost the water" (Caero 2009), residents in the poorest neighbourhoods have done as they always have and taken matters into their own hands, creating organisations of independent water committees.

In the case of La Paz-El Alto, social organisations also proposed a model for a "public-social company" with a very high level of popular participation, including a popular assembly with elected delegates from all regions of the city that would formulate the policy of the water company (Pérez 2005). Facing pressure from the mayors of La Paz and El Alto and international donor agencies – all of whom favour the formation of a public-private partnership (PPP) – the proposal has slowly transformed into a "light" version with a minimal level of public participation (Crespo Flores 2006c). In early 2009 all plans for introducing a participatory structure in the utility were scrapped, and the government Water Ministry commissioned a private consulting firm to propose a new model of management for the municipal utility.

In Argentina, the process of reversing some of the region's largest concessions has also been fraught with difficulty. Between 1991 and 1999, as part of one of the world's largest privatisation programmes covering a range of sectors, water and sanitation concessions with the private sector were signed, covering 28% of the country's municipalities and 60% of the population (Galiani et al., 2005). In the years following the economic meltdown in December 2001, many of the concession contracts, which were already facing difficulty, were cancelled due to the devaluation of the peso, which made it nearly impossible to profit under the terms of the contracts. While the water company in the province of Buenos Aires was taken over by workers (see the case of ABSA, below), concession contracts in Buenos Aires and Santa Fe were cancelled and new water companies were formed. Whereas *Aguas y Saneamientos Argentinos* (AYSA) and *Aguas Santafesinas* (ASSA) have performed as well as could be expected under difficult conditions, having promised major investments (Lobina and Hall 2007), new managers have faced enormous challenges to repair the damage left by the previous concession owners. In the case of Buenos Aires, for example, the private concessionaire had failed to realise $900 million in projected investments (Lobina and Hall 2007).

In sum, returning water to public control has often been a frustrating process since public operators have had to clean up the mess left by the private sector, including large debts and underinvestment in infrastructure. It must also be noted, however, that local perceptions that public water utilities in Bolivia have "failed" need to be understood within the context of heightened public expectations following years of social movement mobilisation, which has politicised the issue of service delivery. Although the public perception of the remunicipalised public utility in Cochabamba has not been satisfactory, SEMAPA may have performed better than the private company in terms of the concession contract on items such as the number of new water and sewer connections (Coordinadora 2005). To suggest that there might be a gap between perception and reality is not to deny, however, that progress at the local level has been frustrated by corruption, the lack of investment, and the slowness of reform at the national policy level.

There are a number of other examples in which public sector trade unions – as opposed to civil society organisations – have played a protagonist role in reclaiming public services by defending them against the threat of privatisation. Workers in Cali and the Valley of Cauca, Colombia, and in the national water company of Uruguay have presented rescue plans to keep water under state control. In the Colombian cases, these efforts required sacrifices on the part of workers who have accepted revision of their collective agreement and a revision of the pension plan, and the elimination of severance pay, certain bonuses, and benefits in order to keep the company in public hands. In the case of *Obras Sanitarias del Estado* (OSE) of Uruguay, the union was actively involved in investigating and trying cases of corruption within their own ranks, managing to save the enterprise from financial disaster (author interviews with Adriana Marquisio and Margarita López).

Originally founded in 1952, OSE provides water and sanitation services at the national level in Uruguay. According to the United Nations (UN), Uruguay is the only country in Latin America that has achieved nearly universal access to improved water sources and adequate sanitation (WHO and UNICEF 2010). Furthermore, around 70% of the waste water collected is treated. The Federation of State Employees of OSE (*Federación de Funcionarios de Obras Sanitarias del Estado*, FFOSE) has played a key role in reversing privatisation in the area of Maldonaldo, a wealthy suburb of Montevideo, which was granted a concession in 1993. When faced with the further threat of privatisation in 2000, the trade union began to organise. Over the next two years, FFOSE held numerous assemblies to study the issue and to draft proposals for the company's restructuring. In 2002, the union organised a process to rid the company of corruption, sanctioning over 100 workers (author interview with Adriana Marquisio). Thanks to the participation of the trade union, the company was turned around in the space of a few years from a corrupt and inefficient institution to a public water company that runs a surplus budget and may now be considered a model public utility.

NEW FORMS OF PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

Public-public partnerships

The initiative to promote PuPs has taken off quickly in the water sector in Latin America. Although there are many national-level PuPs in which national water regulators have supported the creation of partnerships between different utilities within countries, international PuPs are a newer phenomenon. Within the Red Vida, the initiative was first timidly approached in 2004 in Uruguay as part of conversations between OSE, FFOSE, and members of the *Coordinadora* in Bolivia. In August 2008, there was an event in Cochabamba specifically about this issue, and in May 2009, the principles were launched in Paso Severino, Uruguay (Red Vida 2009).

A cursory comparison of national and international PuPs suggests that while PuPs have both political and technical aims – to share experiences of "best practices" between two public, non-profit entities – the national PuPs place more emphasis on technical aspects, while the international PuPs have more political aims. International PuPs such as that between the workers, operated water company in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and the public water company in Huancayo, Peru, are good examples of what social movement researchers Keck and Sikkink call the "boomerang effect", when groups in one country appeal to citizens of another through transnational alliances, and these citizens pressure their own government to pressure the offending regime (1998, 13).

There are several examples of national-level PuPs, including in Honduras, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Brazil, particularly in the rural areas where water systems are administered through community-based bodies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs; Phumpiu and Gustafsson 2009). The state water companies provide assistance to these PuPs by technicians employed by the national water corporations (SANAA, AyA, and ASSAMAE). The Costa Rican case is particularly successful, where the national water institute has created a separate administrative body for this task, the ASADAS. In 2000, water supply coverage in Costa Rica was 98.5% at the urban level and 75.4% at rural level. Brazil also has a long history of internal collaboration between public water companies of larger and smaller size (da Costa et al., 2006, Hall et al., 2009).

Interestingly, the most notable PuPs in the region have been trade union initiatives piloted by water workers' unions in Uruguay and Argentina. Two factors help to explain this. First, as social organisations, trade unions are in a privileged position to offer support to other social organisations since they have institutional sources of funding through trade union dues and employer support. Second, the Public Services International (PSI, an international public sector trade union umbrella group) and the Transnational Institute (TNI) have been active in the region promoting the formation of

PuPs. International travel has been financed by organisations such as TNI. In the Valley of Cauca, Colombia, and in the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina, trade union organisations affiliated with the PSI have been involved in providing technical support to the peri-urban and rural water committees. Building on these national experiences, the first international PuPs in the region were also initiatives of trade unions affiliated with the PSI, including the FFOSE in Uruguay and the *Sindicato Obras Sanitarias de la Provincia de Buenos Aires* (SOSBA), a trade union which runs the public water company in the province of Buenos Aires.

One of the best-known cases of international collaboration between two public-state water companies is the PuP signed between the worker-run cooperative water company ABSA (in the province of Buenos Aires), which is run by the trade union SOSBA, and SEDAM-Huancayo (Peru). The partnership aims to reform the municipal water company in Huancayo, which, along with all other public water companies in Peru, has been threatened by privatisation. At the local level, the PuP has involved the cultivation of close relations between the local water workers' union (SUTAPAH), the Frente, the Federation of National Water Workers' Unions of Peru (FENTAP), and activists from TNI. Since 2002, social organisations in Huancayo, represented by the Defence Front for Water in the Junín Region (*Frente de Defensa del Agua de la Region Junín*, FREDEAJUN), have successfully staved off privatisation through a series of public mobilisations, the largest of which brought thousands of people to the streets in March of 2005 (Terhorst 2008).

After signing the PuP in June 2007, SOSBA sent a team of engineers which conducted a diagnostic of the public company. The report included suggestions for administrative reform of the company (that represent cost savings of up to 35%) and advice on how to manage diminishing water supplies in the region with the melting of glaciers. As of 2008, the PuP hit a political impasse. Local authorities have resisted implementing the restructuring plan despite local and international civil society pressure. As one authority put it to Luis Isarra, a leader of FENTAP, during one of his visits to Huancayo, "Where am I going to put the people who worked on my political campaign if I do not have control over the water company?" (author interview with Luis Isarra).

The experiences with PuPs have sponsored a debate within the Red Vida about how to evaluate the success of such initiatives. The initiative has provided political tools to local activists seeking to reform corrupt and politicised water companies, but the PuP model has had limited success in convincing local authorities to adopt measures to restructure utilities. Philipp Terhorst (author interview) reports that the administration of SEDAM-Huancayo is pursuing a PuP with the water company in Lima, which the central government has been trying to privatise for years. It is likely that the Peruvian government is implementing this alternative "PuP" as a political strategy to avoid restructuring and to prepare the ground

for future privatisation. If the government is successful in privatising the company in Lima, there will be more pressure to do the same in Huancayo.

Civil society participation in large urban utilities

The water companies of Caracas, Venezuela, and Porto Alegre, Brazil, have improved services by democratising decision making and therefore can be considered exemplary cases of successful alternatives to privatisation in the water sector in Latin America. In these two cases, the institutionalisation of popular participation in the processes of budgeting, planning, and even execution of water projects (particularly in the former case) has contributed to increased coverage rates and involved citizens in daily aspects of service delivery. These successful experiences of participatory decision making demonstrate that involving users in the planning and execution of water service delivery can make water utilities more "efficient" in social terms by making service provision more equitable.

Hidrocapital, which serves the capital city Caracas and the surrounding region, is amongst the most innovative public water companies in Latin America. Like many cities in the mountainous regions of South America, most of the urban population of Caracas has access to an improved water supply, but providing water to the poorer neighbourhoods that climb up the hillsides has been a challenge. Under the management of progressive Mayor Aristóbulo Istúriz (1993–1996), the city established local forums to hear citizens' concerns about problems with water supply and sanitation. Whereas at first public participation was limited to protest, these forums were the forerunners of something more substantial. Following the national election of Hugo Chávez in 1999, a citywide communal water council was created in Caracas comprising representatives of the water company, local government, and civil society, and was later institutionalised as the technical water committees (*Mesas Técnicas de Agua* – MTAs). Indeed, the case of Caracas is a good example of how progressive mayors of major urban centres can sometimes influence national politics. In other words, municipal politics sometimes matter beyond the local scale.

The MTAs have been established as a way to involve the public in decision making. As Santiago Arconada Rodríguez describes it, the MTAs are a "way of co-ordinating all the knowledge the community [has] about their water network with the human, technical and financial resources that [belong] to them through their public water company. This was seen as necessary to harness the skills needed to solve the problems and the proposal suggested a huge change" (2005, 132). Through involvement in the *mesas técnicas*, communities are involved in the mapping, diagnosis, and planning for solutions to the water problem, as well as in project execution (e.g. digging the trenches for the pipes). Promoters of the project emphasise the importance of "co-responsibility" of the state and citizens in water services: "Community that participates – Community that achieves results".

The experience of the MTAs is remarkable because it scores highly in categories where many state companies are found lacking: participation, solidarity, public ethos, equity, sustainability, and even transferability of the model. According to one group of independent investigators, the participatory model also scores high in terms of gender equality (Allen et al., 2006), which is a particularly weak point of most state utilities and many community systems (see Chapter 5, this volume, for an extended discussion of gender issues and "public" services).

Since the establishment of the MTAs, Caracas's coverage of drinking water service rose from 82% in 1998 to 89% in 2003, and sewerage from 64% to 72% (Simpson 2009). In 2004, the national water regulator/holding company Hidroven announced that Venezuela had already achieved the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) water target of halving the proportion of people without access to safe water between 1990 and 2015. The Venezuelan government also predicted that they would reach the same MDG target for sanitation by 2010.

The municipal water company of Porto Alegre, the DMAE, is one of the better-known examples of participatory management in the Latin American region. It has been heralded by social movement organisations as a model of good public management. Technicians and activists from the DMAE have been involved in providing advice and solidarity to water warriors elsewhere, such as Bolivia (Souza and Kruse 2002). Under the participatory budgeting regime implemented by the left-of-centre Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores*, PT; see, *inter alia*, Abers 1998, Baiocchi 2005), DMAE's coverage rates in poor areas of the city improved dramatically: potable water by 23% and sewerage by 40%, despite a high rate of urban growth (8%; Maltz 2005). As discussed in further detail below, however, the DMAE lost much of its social character after the PT was defeated in the elections in 2004, which raises questions about the sustainability of the model.

Cooperatives in urban areas

The cooperative model potentially presents an alternative form of collective ownership that defies the capitalist logic of private property. Compared to private businesses or state-owned utilities, which are controlled by shareholders or elected officials, cooperatives that provide basic services have certain organisational advantages that make them potentially more democratic (Ravina 1996). Nonetheless, as the following case studies of water cooperatives in Argentina and Bolivia suggest, cooperatives face the same market imperatives as private businesses and state-owned utilities, especially given increasing pressures of corporatisation.

The experience of a worker-controlled water utility in the province of Buenos Aires, *Aguas Bonaerenses Sociedad Anónima* (ABSA), has been heralded by the UN as a model water company. The province of Buenos

Aires has 10 million inhabitants distributed over 74 cities with 48 municipalities, which are served by ABSA. Azurix, a subsidiary of ENRON, was granted a concession in 1999, but it only lasted for three years, during which time the company failed to invest in the maintenance and expansion of services, leaving behind a severely debilitated company (Amorebieta 2005). In the wake of the financial crisis of 2001–2002 and the bankruptcy of ENRON, the union proposed to take over the company as its technical operator (replacing Azurix), forming a cooperative which is run by the workers called the *5 de Septiembre*. The provincial government agreed with the idea and bought Azurix's shares, leaving the union with the 10% of shares that they already had.

In its context, ABSA is a successful public water company, having achieved 70% of water coverage and 45% sewerage coverage over a vast and dispersedly populated geographical area. Under the administration of the workers' cooperative controlled by SOSBA, the company has improved the rate of payment among users from 30% to 80% (Amorebieta 2005). While the experience is a successful model of service delivery, the cooperative appears to measure its own success in commercial terms (e.g. number of workers per connection, rates of cost recovery from end users, etc.). Public participation in the utility also appears to be low, although this is common amongst well-functioning public water companies that have enjoyed a high level of public investment.

Another example, SAGUAPAC, may be the largest urban cooperative in the world, serving the central part of the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. The cooperative was created in 1979 during the dictatorial period, during which time Santa Cruz was transformed from a colonial backwater into an economic powerhouse, largely due to the channelling of state funds to develop the agro-export sector and the discovery of oil and gas in the region (Eaton 2007). Today, SAGUAPAC provides water services to around 871 000 inhabitants (although the total urban population of Santa Cruz is around 1.5 million) and sewerage services to about 50% of the population (although it is unclear whether this refers to the total urban population or those with water connections with SAGUAPAC) (Yavarí 2005).

A study by researchers at the University of Birmingham (Nickson 1998) conducted in the late 1990s found that SAGUAPAC is one of the best-run water companies in Latin America measured by criteria of efficiency, equity and effectiveness because it had

- a low level of unaccounted-for water;
- a low number of employees per 1 000 water connections;
- efficient accounting: 100% of all connections are metered;
- a 96% bill collection efficiency rate;
- 80% water coverage, despite rapid population growth;
- a 24-hour supply of clean water.

While the cooperative has been heralded outside of Bolivia as a model (Constance 2005), Bolivian water activists see the cooperative less favourably. The major concerns pertain to public participation and coverage rates. Statements about the utility's supposedly high coverage rates ignore the fact that the utility's concession area is a restricted geographical area within the centre of the city. The peri-urban areas are served by nine small cooperatives, including Plan 3000 (discussed below). Indeed, SAGUAPAC's area of service does not extend beyond the "fourth ring", inside which live the wealthiest residents of the city. Furthermore, the claims of internal democracy need to be verified, since critics claim that SAGUAPAC, along with the telephone and electricity cooperatives, are run by secret societies similar to the Masons, referred to as *logías* (Ferreira 1994). In sum, there are serious questions about equity in service delivery given the failure of SAGUAPAC to extend its services beyond elite neighbourhoods at the centre of the city.

Testifying to the fact that SAGUAPAC is not the sole service provider in Santa Cruz de la Sierra is the existence of the Water Cooperative of Plan 3000 (*La Cooperativa de Aguas del Plan Tres Mil*, COOPLAN) in the poor suburb of Plan 3000. As Uruguay activist and political analyst Raúl Zibechi describes it,

> In the middle of a racist city of white elites, the nucleus of the agro-export oligarchy, Plan 3000 is an immense and poor suburb of almost 300,000 inhabitants mostly of Aymara, Quechua, and Guarani descent; a microcosm composed of 36 Bolivian ethnic groups. It is a city that – in the name of the struggle against inequality – the residents of Plan 3000 resist the machista, oppressive, and violent culture of the local elite. (2009a, 14)

COOPLAN was established in 1986 by the residents of Plan 3000 in order to address the problems created by reluctance of SAGUAPAC to expand services to peripheral neighbourhoods. Today it provides about 80% of households within its service area with potable water (121 000 of 151 000). In 2001, the national water regulator granted the cooperative a concession of 15 years as the sole service provider. The cooperative does not currently provide sewerage services, but it is planning to build a sanitary sewerage collection network thanks to a loan from the IDB and the European Union. Amongst other accomplishments, the amount of water unaccounted for was reduced from 63% to 29% between 2003 and 2008.

Community-run water systems in rural areas

In many ways, providing potable water to rural communities is a more challenging task than providing water to urban areas due to high rates of poverty and physically dispersed populations, which makes the provision of networked infrastructure more expensive and financing difficult.

According to WHO and UNICEF (2010), in 2008, 50 million people, or 9% of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean, did not have access to improved water supply, and 125 million, or 23%, did not have access to improved sanitation. As noted above, as a percentage of the unserved population, rural residents are over-represented, meaning that access to water and sanitation remains a problem in rural areas of Latin America.

Although there are a few countries, such as Costa Rica and Brazil, in which the national state has supported community initiatives in rural areas through the financing of water infrastructure, the story of service provision in rural areas of Latin America is generally one of state neglect. Nonetheless, in the absence of the state there are hundreds of examples of well-performing water systems that have been built by communities with additional support from local authorities and NGOs.

The Council of Potable Water in the Municipality of Jesús de Otoro (*La Junta de Agua Potable de la Municipalidad de Jesús de Otoro*, JAPOE) is considered to be the best example of a successful communal water system in Honduras (author interview with Erasto Reyes). Located in the Department of Intibucá, JAPOE is a communal water system that has been designed to protect the sub-watershed of Rio Cumes. In 1993, the project received financial support from Catholic Relief Services in order to instal a potable water system. In 2005, the system also received donations from AGUASAN of the Swiss Cooperation Agency (COSUDE) for institutional strengthening. In the beginning, JAPOE received financial help from the state through the Social Investment Fund of Honduras. The project has been executed directly by the water committees and represents a case of self-management financed by donor support. This committee is subdivided into 10 sectors, each of which has a board of directors that sends a representative to the assembly, which is the maximum authority of the project. Thanks to these projects, the coverage of potable water in the city rose from 50% of the population in 1993 to 91% of the population in 2005. At present, the system provides water to nearly 12 000 people with 1 500 connections. The water provided is not meant for domestic use, but it is suitable for human consumption because it is treated with chlorine. The project is also taking steps towards installing a treatment plant and micro- and macrometers in order to reduce the waste of water. Importantly, the JAPOE has promoted an integrated system of environmental management to take care of the watershed. It monitors a protected area of around 3 000 hectares, preventing deforestation and agricultural pollution, which affects the volume and quality of water.

The *acueducto comunal* of Costa Rica is another example of a communal water system that has been strengthened by state support (author interview with Marco Mellín). First created in 1961, the system today provides water and sewerage services to 1 600 inhabitants of the town of Concepción. It has been estimated that there are over 1 700 communal water systems in Costa Rica that provide water to about 26% of the population.

An association is responsible for capturing and distributing water to the community, constructing and maintaining the necessary infrastructure, charging for the services and managing the budget. The association has a quarterly newsletter that updates the members about activities, and once a year there is a general assembly at which members are informed about the status of the aqueduct. This example may be included as a "successful" model of communal service delivery that has also received state support.

Community-run[3] systems in peri-urban areas

Given the high rates of rural poverty, rural-urban migration has kept state water companies in Latin America scrambling to keep up with growing demand as cities have spread outwards. One of the major problems related to unplanned urban growth in many of these cities is that migrant populations have settled on increasingly precarious land, often establishing informal settlements climbing up the hillsides or next to rivers that are prone to flooding. In many of these areas, residents have come up with their own solutions to the urban water problem, establishing independent systems with little or no help from the state. There are at least two factors that appear to explain the emergence of communal water systems in peri-urban areas: a weak/absent state, and indigenous/campesino knowledge about water systems that is transferred from rural to urban areas. In both rural and peri-urban areas, these systems often serve a dual purpose, providing water for production (e.g. irrigation of crops, often for household consumption) and reproduction (e.g. drinking water for the household).

Peri-urban community water systems such as La Sirena in Cali, Colombia, and *Asociación de Producción y Administración de Agua y Saneamiento de Sebastián Pagador* (APAAS) in Cochabamba, Bolivia, provide high-quality services for relatively low cost (author interview with Fabian Condori). On a tour of the system's installations in May 2009, the president of the association in La Sirena, José Hoé Gareia Carreño, emphasised how the construction of their water tanks cost less than half what it would have cost the state water company to build, since the state water company must pay taxes and has higher staffing costs (author interview). La Sirena relies on local knowledge rather than hiring expensive consultants and engineers.

The other impressive aspect of these two systems is the democratic nature of management. The transparency of operations is facilitated by the small scale of operations, since these systems employ only two to three staff, including technical operators and administrators. In the case of Cali, bank account statements and information about the association's financial status are printed and posted on a bulletin board in the office where every user coming to pay their water bill can see it. In the case of APAAS in Cochabamba, the participatory structure of the water committee is mapped onto the neighbourhood councils that are institutionalised under the 1994 Law of Popular Participation. In both cases, the water systems are

run by democratically elected, voluntary boards, which organise regular general assemblies to inform and consult users about the financial status and activities of the association.

The organisers and users of these independent systems express a strong sense of patrimony over the collective property that has been built and owned by local residents with little help from the state. In general, the system administrators tend to be highly suspicious of state attempts to regulate or absorb the system. These suspicions are linked to a fear that state involvement will mean higher water tariffs but also to the residents' general mistrust of the bureaucratic state for its inefficiency and corruption and a desire for self-governance.

UTOPIAN/PROPOSED MODELS

One of the difficulties associated with investigating proposed or "utopian" models of water delivery is that once the historical moment in which they were tried or discussed has passed, these dreams fade into memory unless there is written documentation about them. Thanks to the global attention paid to the Cochabamba "Water War" by both academics and activists, however, we know much more about the struggles there than have taken place elsewhere. For this reason, the Cochabamba struggles have served as key reference points within the global movement for water justice, including one of the most important aftermaths of the "War", the creation of the Association of Communal Potable Water Systems of the South (*Asociación de Sistemas Comunitarios de Agua Potable del Sur*, ASICA-Sur). While ASICA-Sur may appear to be an "actually existing" alternative, it is also a "utopian alternative" because it strives to attain and maintain community control over the day-to-day operations of the water system, while only depending on the state for the provision of bulk water at a fair price.

ASICA-Sur is an association of independent water communities in the poor, southern zone of Cochabamba. Its main objective is to strengthen local water committees, which deliver water and sanitation services in a poor, peri-urban area of the city. It negotiates with the government and the local municipal water company (SEMAPA) on behalf of its members and provides several technical, juridical, and political-organisational services.

The idea for ASICA-Sur emerged during the "Water War" of 2000. One of the main spokespersons, Abraham Grandydier, explained in an interview with one of the current authors in 2004 that they learned a lot from the example of FEDECOR (the Federation of Irrigators in the Department of Cochabamba), which played an active role in organising the protests. In its early days, the *Centro Vicente Cañas* (the director of which was a Jesuit priest, Luis Sanchez) also facilitated the creation of ASICA-Sur (its first office was housed there) as well as the *Coordinadora de Defensa del Agua y de la Vida* (Sánchez Gómez 2004, Sánchez Gómez and Olivera 2004, Sánchez

Gómez and Terhorst 2005). More recently, ASICA-Sur has received financial support from NGOs such as the foundation *France Libertés* and donor organisations such as the European Union. The central government is also channelling funds to ASICA-Sur through the programme *Bolivia cambia, Evo cumple*. These projects aim to build the infrastructure necessary to expand the amount of water available for distribution by the small water committees.

The experience of ASICA-Sur provides an interesting contrast with the technical water committees in Venezuela. Activists in both organisations promote an ideology of co-responsibility or co-management, but this concept in Venezuela has been introduced from top-down, while the notion of co-management in Bolivia is bottom-up. The water committees in Cochabamba have resisted the idea of surrendering control over management of their community water systems to any government entity since there is a general mistrust of the state (Zibechi 2009b). This mistrust is related to fears about losing control over water rates and a general notion that the systems are community, not state, patrimony. Given the long history of authoritarianism and racial exclusion, in poor communities in Bolivia "the state" is not viewed as an entity which has collective interests at heart.

SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF ALTERNATIVES

What, then, have been the overall successes and failures of "alternatives to privatisation" in the water sector in Latin America? Judged in terms of service coverage, the most successful municipal water utilities are located in larger cities, such as Bogotá (Colombia), Quito (Ecuador), and Montevideo (Uruguay). These municipal water utilities represent the "old public" form of service delivery and management. That is, they are managed by highly professional staff, and the expansion of urban water and sanitation networks has been financed by large loans from IFIs such as the World Bank and IDB. But with the exception of the national utility in Uruguay, decision-making structures are very hierarchal, providing few spaces for participation by civil society and trade unions. By contrast, the bulk of alternatives that score highly for participation and equity are non-profit, non-state alternatives, which range from large cooperatives in urban areas of Bolivia and Argentina to community-run systems that provide low-cost, high-quality water services in rural areas of Costa Rica and Colombia. Alternatives that emphasise participatory forms of decision making tend to dominate in smaller cities and rural areas, although there are some noteworthy exceptions in urban metropolises of Venezuela and Brazil, such as Caracas and Porto Alegre, respectively.

Our research also reveals that some alternative forms of service delivery in large urban centres that have been heralded as successful – such as EAAB in Bogota and EMAAP-Q in Quito – are not all that positive when

applying the evaluative criteria developed for this project. It should come as no surprise that corporatised utilities such EMAAP-Q of Quito, Ecuador, and EAAB of Bogota, Colombia, are weak on a number of important indicators, including public ethos, participation and quality of the workplace. Whereas these companies perform well in terms of economic efficiency and quality of service, workers have been expected to shoulder the burden of these efficiency gains. To illustrate, the EAAB pursued an aggressive policy of subcontracting as a way to reduce the costs of pensions, which at one point totalled approximately 20% of water tariffs (Gilbert 2007). Indeed, subcontracting is one of the pernicious trends in the large utilities throughout the region, both private and public.

Despite their supposed commitments to building "socialism of the 21st century", public utilities in Bolivia, Venezuela, and Ecuador are also not immune to these trends. In the case of renationalised enterprises such as Cantv, Venezuela's largest telecommunications provider, which was recuperated in 2007, local activists recognise that the government's promotion of cooperatives is a way to try to alleviate the worst situations of employer-employee abuse without raising the costs associated with absorbing the workers previously hired under subcontract by the privatised company. Instead of working for a private employer, workers in the renationalised companies in Venezuela have been encouraged to form cooperatives. Critical research on similar phenomena in the recuperated enterprises in Argentina and elsewhere, however, has suggested that workers must intensify their own self-exploitation in order to compete in the market (Kasmir 1996, Atzeni and Ghigliani 2007). In short, while cooperatives provide useful learning experiences for workers seeking to expand control over their working lives, they do not necessarily represent an alternative to capitalism because they fail to transform the meaning of the market, which is predicated on the alienation of labour and dependence of workers on the market for their own self-reproduction and subsistence (Marx 1993, McNally 1993).

Within the context of the battle against subcontracting, the public water company in Uruguay, OSE, represents one of the most successful public water companies in a large urban centre. Under the *Frente Amplio* government, the trade union is actively participating in a process to restructure the company, transforming a deficit into a surplus within a short period of time. The trade union has put forward proposals to reabsorb contract workers as full-time employees with benefits. While FFOSE leader Adriana Marquisio (author interview) acknowledges that "there is still a lot of work to be done", the OSE has maintained a high level of service coverage without sacrificing conditions of work.

The general acceptance by governments that promote "socialism of the 21st century" of the desirability of subcontracting suggests that there is the need for a public debate about the broader meaning of "efficiency". IFIs have waged a successful campaign in the region to encourage public managers to break strong unions and reduce the labour force. For example, the

World Bank recommends that water and sanitation utilities employ two to three workers per thousand connections and uses this number politically to discipline managers into reducing the number of permanent staff. OSE (Uruguay) has four to five workers per connection, while ABSA under the management of SOSBA has two to three. While ASBA may be judged to be more efficient in this regard, contextual factors such as social and geographical considerations must also be considered. After all, it is much easier to achieve lower numbers of workers in a system in which there is one point of water capture and no sewerage treatment, because each physical installation requires staff to monitor.

Two other innovative public companies that may be considered amongst the most successful according to our research criteria are the public utilities of Caracas, Venezuela, and Porto Alegre, Brazil. In both cases state-owned and state-operated utilities have made dramatic improvements to service coverage by introducing institutional mechanisms to encourage the participation of citizens who lack services. Importantly, both of these experiments are unfolding in a context in which there is a strong state commitment to investment in infrastructure and long histories of democracy building at both the local and national levels, which are two important factors in understanding their success. Indeed, in the absence of adequate public funds for infrastructure expansion and the democratisation of larger power structures, including municipal and national governments, isolated participatory initiatives such as that in Cochabamba cannot be expected to succeed.

There are further questions to be asked, however, about the sustainability of these participatory initiatives. While one group of independent investigators in Venezuela notes that "[d]espite being a government initiative, the [MTAs] are fairly autonomous" (Allen et al., 2006, 348), it is unclear if the initiative would continue if Hugo Chávez was to be replaced, particularly at the national level where the initiative was more recently launched.

There may be lessons in this regard from Brazil. According to many observers, the participatory budgeting process in Porto Alegre is not what it once was since the Workers' Party lost local elections in 2004 (Chávez 2006). Fernanda Levenzon (author interview) of the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), an international NGO based in Porto Alegre, reports that her organisation has received increased complaints from residents about the DMAE, which has allegedly adopted more commercial practices such as imposing a stricter policy on payment including higher water rates and more service cut-offs since the change in municipal administration.

Compared to water service delivery institutions in large urban areas, our survey suggests that with a couple of exceptions, smaller water systems run by committees and associations in rural and peri-urban areas score higher on the criteria of participation, transparency, and solidarity than public water providers in large urban settings. Indeed, the two main advantages of community-run systems such as JAPOE (Honduras), the *acueductos comunales* of Costa Rica, and the water committees in Cochabamba (Bolivia)

and Cali (Colombia) are that they tend to be highly participatory, involving community members in decision making, and provide low-cost services to their members. In the absence of sophisticated monitoring systems and water-purification technology, however, service quality tends to vary and often depends on the quality of the crude water available in a given region.[4]

The main weaknesses of these small, community-run systems in rural and peri-urban areas relate to their environmental impact and the quality of services offered. First, sanitary sewerage is usually a lower priority in household budgets than potable water, so few of these communal systems provide sanitary sewerage. As a result, untreated waste water tends to be dumped directly into the ground and water supplies, creating potential health hazards for the community and those downstream. Second, the emergence of these fragmented and isolated systems makes it difficult to monitor and regulate water takings, which would ideally be part of an integrated watershed management scheme.

The question of service quality is an even larger ideological concern given the temptation of scholars and social movement actors alike to romanticise "indigenous" and "artisanal" forms of service delivery. In the context of deeply divided societies in which racial and class inequalities are expressed in the differential and unequal access to public services, improvements to social equity will require that a greater proportion of future investment be channelled to expansion and improvement of infrastructure in previously neglected areas, such as poor urban neighbourhoods and rural areas. Such public policy reform is even more badly needed in the aftermath of the decentralisation mandated by neoliberal structural adjustment policies, by which governments transferred responsibility for service provision without transferring adequate resources to pay for these services. Given this recent historical legacy, the unwitting decision to endorse *different* solutions for urban and rural and economically advantaged and disadvantaged areas risks lending ideological legitimacy for the entrenchment of two-tiered service delivery systems that establish technologically sophisticated, formal water systems for the wealthy populations and piecemeal, informal solutions that provide inferior services to the poor (Crespo Flores 2001, Laurie and Crespo 2007, Spronk 2009a). Future research thus should specify ways to build on the experience of these artisanal systems without sacrificing environmental sustainability and service quality, especially for the poor.

WAYS FORWARD

In the debates about alternatives to privatisation, particularly in the global North where public utilities have generally managed to extend public services to all urban citizens, "public" usually means "state" forms of ownership and control. And while this debate about "public versus private" is of fundamental importance, it tends to obscure the principal problem in countries in the South of systematic failure of water companies to connect

the poorest of the poor, no matter who owns and operates them. As Swyngedouw argues in his book on the political economy of urban water infrastructure in Guayaquil, Ecuador, "[T]he water problem is not merely a question of management and technology, but rather, and perhaps in the first instance, a question of social power" (2004, 175). Indeed, the barriers that limit poor people's access to water – such as poverty and political powerlessness – are likely to persist whether the provider is publicly or privately owned and operated (Budds and McGranahan 2003).

Water activists in Latin America therefore recognise the limitations of public water authorities given the systematic failure of public utilities in the region to respond to the needs of the poor. These activists emphasise the need for "social" rather than simply public forms of management. While these activists who argue for social forms of management in order to "reclaim the commons" from corporate control agree that most forms of state ownership and control are preferable to private (profit-seeking) forms, they also share a common disdain for bureaucratic, centralised state control, which represents the "old public". The goal of initiatives such as the formation of PuPs that involve community organisations is therefore to democratise public forms of water delivery.

From a historical-sociological perspective, the emphasis on non-state solutions in Latin America is also coloured by the experience of the dictatorships that ruled 18 out of 21 nations from 1964 until the early 1990s. Amongst other effects, the history of corporatism has created a highly co-opted trade union movement, particularly in the larger industrialised countries such as Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico. Given the historical dominance of corporatist forms of relationships between workers and the state in the Latin American context, created under import substitution industrialisation, workers in the most industrialised countries of the region have tended not to pursue "class conscious" trade unionism (Collier and Collier 1991). Municipal workers in these countries are even less likely to take on the state insofar as they depend on the state as their employers. Previous research on the topic suggests that with some exceptions, such as teachers and telephone and electrical workers in Mexico (Garza Toledo and Valdivia 1991), corporatist relations have dominated public sector trade unionism, even in countries in which the trade union is otherwise fiercely independent and even revolutionary (at least in the past), such as Bolivia (Spronk 2009b).

Since the 1990s, this situation has started to change. Neoliberal policies of privatisation and austerity have reduced the amount of the "political goods" which are distributed through clientelist networks which formerly tied trade unions to the state. As a result, workers have increasingly found themselves in opposition to governments, defending their jobs against privatisation. There are progressive trade unions in Peru, Uruguay, and Colombia that have placed themselves at the front of struggles for public services, building alliances with social movements, such as the environmental and indigenous movements, and NGOs. While these alliances are not

without their tensions, the formation of coalitions has proven to be a successful strategy to fend off privatisation and to build popular support for democratic reform of public utilities (Novelli 2004, Santos and Villarreal 2005, Spronk 2009b). As noted above, trade unions have also been the lead organisations in the formation of PuPs, which aim to improve the operations of public companies by sharing "best practices".

In the context of the emergence of self-defined "left" governments – some of which have pledged their allegiance to an abstractly defined "socialism of the 21st century" – the relationship between labour, social movements, and the state is a theme being actively debated amongst academics, activists, and practitioners. As the Argentine, Bolivian, and Brazilian case studies demonstrate, there is a danger that when social movements ally themselves too closely to the state, left governments in power attempt to divide and co-opt them, which diminishes the social movement capacity for collective action and the possibility of putting forward proposals in their own interests. As Raquel Gutiérrez Aguilar has observed:

> These governments were born from Latin American societies' attempts to limit the brutality of neoliberalism. Yet they are governments which, nevertheless, lack direction and advance with an exasperating slowness, producing a frustration in their own societies that increases by the minute and that furthermore serve as the base on which the right wing reconstructs itself. (2008, 38)

As the *coup d'état* in Honduras in 2009 has demonstrated, even mildly reformist governments can be toppled by conservative reactionary forces when they are not supported by dense civil society networks.

The role of trade unions in public service delivery also deserves further exploration, as labour studies have largely fallen off the agenda in Latin America. As argued above, the subcontracting of public services remains a weakness of all formal water systems, whether they are owned and operated by the state or private capital, and whether or not the government in office embraces the value of the "New Left". As the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE 1998) stated more than a decade ago, subcontracting is a form of "privatisation by stealth" and presents the next barrier in the struggle against privatisation and commercialisation of public services. To date, there is very little information about the effects of subcontracting on workers and service quality in the water sector in Latin America, although trade union organisations such as the PSI have begun research on the question.[5]

Another research agenda that requires further attention relates to environmental questions – a pressing public issue in light of rapidly accelerating global climate change. Large urban centres in the Andes that are dependent on glacial meltwaters are particularly vulnerable. In cities such as Quito, Ecuador, and La Paz, Bolivia, it is predicted that urban populations will have to rely on new sources of water within the next 15 years. Public

companies, just like private companies, have seldom prioritised the environment in their planning and development of water catchment systems. This lack of planning is evident in service indicators that allow companies to claim that they have met their goals in terms of "efficiency" and "sustainability" even though many of their practices will cost dearly in the long run, such as contaminating crude water sources with untreated waste. The promotion of small, uncoordinated community water systems is not necessarily a solution either, since these systems can just as easily contribute to environmental degradation in the absence of regulation or coordination at the level of the watershed.

Finally, it is necessary to critically investigate the strengths and weaknesses of our own "alternative" movements. Certain social movements and social movement organisations have manifested a tendency to *caudillismo* and centralisation, which is expressed in the precariousness of democratic practices and the failure of leaders to be accountable to the rank and file in trade unions and issue- or territorially based organisations. Such critical self-reflection will make for better social activism as well as better "alternatives to privatisation".

NOTES

1. Our connections with Red Vida (the largest anti-privatisation network in Latin America) were particularly important in this regard, while Ricardo Buitrón of Public Services International provided critical feedback on the project and facilitated contact with trade unions.
2. Although there is no Red Vida affiliate organisation from Venezuela, we were able to make contact with Robin de la Motte, a PSI-affiliated researcher who has conducted extensive fieldwork on the water sector in Venezuela, and to conduct personal interviews with an activist and a government representative who were invited to a Red Vida workshop on public-public partnerships in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in August 2008.
3. The systems are termed "community systems" rather than cooperatives due to differences in their legal status. In Bolivia, for example, cooperatives and community systems are regulated by different laws and regulations.
4. There is a role for affordable appropriate technology that must be adapted to local conditions. See, for example, the study of solar purification technology in the Gualberto Villarroel province of Bolivia (Younger 2007).
5. For more information, see the website of PSI–Andean region, www.municipalesandinosisp.org/.

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