Pathways to alternative public services: The role of Public-Public Partnerships

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Abstract

This paper engages with strategies towards alternative public services. Starting from the notion that alternative visions of public services need to be grounded in existing initiatives and experiments, the paper establishes a 'dialogue' between the 'publicness' framework and Public-Public Partnerships (PuPs). It shows that depending on the actors involved, PuPs can contribute to strengthening different dimensions of the 'publicness' framework. In particular, *participatory PuPs* characterised by transformative forms of participation, represent 'actually existing' forms of resistance, which by enhancing the 'publicness' of public services may create spaces for the emergence of alternative ways of organising public services and work.

The future of public services: Visions and pathways

Expanding public services in the era of public budgets austerity is not a mainstream argument. Concerns over growing inequality and environmental crises, however, have brought public services at the centre of police debates. For one, public services can play an important equalising role: funded by taxation, public services are available regardless of individual purchasing power (Beer cited in EPSU and ETUI 2012: 11). Public services designed to achieve and preserve public goods – social and environmental objectives – help to move away from a paradigm of economic growth to one of collective well-being (Jany-Catrice cited in EPSU and ETUI 2012: 7) and life satisfaction[2]. They also have the potential to set in motion changes in the world of work and our societies that can help transform social, economic and political relations.

Public sector can be utilised to develop production technologies and services which can address environmental concerns. One obvious example would be the expansion of public mass transport, given that public transport is responsible for only 5-10 per cent of the greenhouse emissions produced by cars (The Bullet 2012). Due to its bargaining power "as contractor, as employer, and as trend-setter and creator of new communicative infrastructure" (Wainwright 2012b: 4), the expansion of employment in the public sector has an impact on the in quality of jobs the private sector (Hermann and Mahnkopf 2010: 323). The planning and coordination involved in building a strong public sector can bring more stability into market-mediated economies and contribute in transcending these economies (Hermann and Mahnkopf 2010: 323). The development of new participatory mechanisms in public services can spread to other spheres of economy and society and can challenge the limits of representative democracy (ibid: 325). Finally, framing access to public services as social rights enables the development of citizen's personal capacities in terms of "democratic consciousness and social and political commitment" to face "collective challenges" of society rather than pursuing individual interests as market players (ibid: 325).

The expansion of public services, however, necessitates going beyond 'more of the same' and calls for "a new distribution of socially necessary work not through ever extension of the commodity-form of wage labour, but through an extension of collective publicly financed activities oriented to efficiency for the contribution of human development" (Candeias 2007: 11). Debates on alternative ways of organising public services and work in the public sector are now more timely than ever.

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[2] Evidence from the European Quality of Life periodic surveys point to a close relationship between the perceived quality of public services and life satisfaction (EPSU and ETUI, 2012: 9-10).

Visions and pathways

In the struggle to resist the commodification and commercialisation of public services, labour and people's movements are experimenting on 'new' forms of organising public services. Underpinned by a critique of both state-owned and privatised public services utilities[3], such experiments have built on the strength of, and indeed have helped bridge, the "northern past" public-sector models and "southern future" models of participatory democracy (Hall 2005: 15, 21). In this way, workers' and peoples' struggles have become spaces of 'transformative resistance' which provide "a practical (and sometimes theoretical) vision of state-owned public services that are often very different from the status quo, involving, for example, new forms of worker and citizen participation" (Wainwright 2012a: 72).

The concept of 'publicness' has emerged out of these struggles not only as a strategy to mobilise resistance to commercialisation and privatisation of public services, but also as a redefinition of the vision of public services in terms of broader "societal objectives, including democracy, environmental sustainability and human security" (Balanyá et al. 2005: 260). A multi-dimensional concept, 'publicness' goes beyond state-ownership or management by public employees[4] and implies taking pride in one's work (workers), valuing staff (management and users), transparency and accountability (policy makers), and community participation (Cann 2007, cited in McDonald and Ruiters 2012b: 38). Underpinned by values of 'public ethos', i.e. a commitment to serve the population (TNI & CEO 2006: 9); 'publicness' redefines work as having "some intrinsic meaning" (Huws 2012: 78), oriented towards serving people, responsive and accountable to communities, and overcoming bureaucratic and technocratic tendencies of public organisation (TNI & CEO: 2006: 5).

Among the various experiments, Public-Public Partnerships (PuPs) have received more attention in the last decades. The term PuPs has been used mainly to suggest the existence of alternatives to privatisation and failed state operators (Hall 2000, cited in Boag and McDonald 2010: 3). It has also seen as a way of supporting capacity building, restructuring and democratization of public utilities (PSI n.d.; Boag and McDonald 2010).

Can PuPs serve as pathways to alternative public services?

Scope and limitations of the research

This paper aims to establish a 'dialogue' between the 'publicness' vision and PuPs and analyse the role of PuPs as a strategy for enhancing the 'publicness' of public services and for creating the conditions for the emergence of new ways of organizing public services and work in the public sector.

With the exception of a general consensus that PuPs exclude any partnership with the private sector, the term remains somewhat loose. PuPs definitions vary from *narrow partnerships* , i.e. partnerships "between public authorities of the same type and level (usually inter-municipal consortia)" or "between different types or levels of public authorities" (provincial and local authorities) to *broader partnerships* which include also "partnerships between public authorities (government) and any part or member of the general public",

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[3] On the one hand, there is a clear analysis of the limitations of traditional public sector institutions: bureaucratic, hierarchical, at times inefficient, exclusive and corrupted, and hardly 'designed to realise the creativity of labour in the process of serving their fellow citizens' (Wainwright 2012: 83). On the other hand, for-profit models of delivering public services have often benefited private operators at the expense of access, quality, transparency and accountability of services, and quality of jobs and employment for public sector workers.

[4] Whereas 'public' in the global North usually implies 'state' forms of ownership, in the South, the fact that utilities may be state-owned and operated does not necessarily mean they are accessible to the poor. In many countries in the South, public services "are limited to the elite", or that subset of population "identified as full citizens, with the full set of rights and entitlements that one might expect" (Bakker 2008: 239).

such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and trade unions, but also international partnerships between authorities across borders (Hall et al. 2005: 4).

This paper uses the definition of broader PuPs, that is all those partnerships which exclude any private-for-profit operator[5] and includes at least one state-owned utility (for a discussion on the merits of using the concept of broader PuPs, see Xhafa 2013). Two categories of PuPs are distinguished here: 1) *twinning PuPs* referring strictly to partnerships between public utilities, including international partnerships between authorities across borders; and 2) *participatory PuPs* referring to partnerships which involve one or more public utilities, workers and/or communities and citizens' groups, including cross-border cooperation.

This paper bases it analysis on a review of literature on PuPs and other initiatives and experiments which may not describe themselves as PuPs, but are based on partnerships with communities and/or workers to resist privatisation and/or reclaim public services. The focus (and at times the depth of analyses) of the studies covered in this paper are not sufficient to provide conclusive evidence of the way PuPs can enhance the 'publicness' of public services and/or transform public services. Nevertheless, they offer important insights on the potential of PuPs to enhance various dimensions of 'publicness' paving the way for alternative public services. Conditioned by the dominance of PuPs in the water sector[6], this paper draws insights mainly from the analysis of water PuPs.

The paper continues with an introduction to the 'publicness' framework (Part 2), followed by an assessment of the way the two main categories of PuPs – twinning partnerships and participatory partnerships - perform in relation to these indicators (Parts 3 and 4). A discussion on some of the new forms of organising public services and work emerging through PuPs is provided in Part 5. Finally, the conclusions highlight some of the key findings of the paper.

1. The 'publicness' framework

Despite pressure for the commercialisation of vital services to the society, elements of 'publicness' have persevered. Thus, 'publicness' is not a vision entirely alien to the organisation of public services. Instead, 'publicness' is better understood both as a vision and a framework within which public utilities can be transformed to alternative model of providing public services and organising work in the public sector.

The operationalisation of the 'publicness' framework makes use of 'positive indicators of success', namely: equity, participation, efficiency, quality of service, accountability, transparency, quality of the workplace, sustainability, solidarity, public ethos and transferability (McDonald and Ruiters 2012b: 18). These indicators, which "are the polar opposite of what has been seen to be wrong with privatisation", go beyond reaction to privatisation to embrace universal objectives of alternative public services (ibid: 39, 24). Although they are not meant to provide "comprehensive assessments", these indicators can serve as "an important screening tool" "against which alternative service delivery models can be evaluated" (ibid: 18). These indicators represent the building stones of the 'publicness' framework within which the various initiatives may introduce changes in the way public services operate which can lead to radical transformations - an alternative way(s) of organising public services and work in the public sector.

The following section elaborates on some of the key issues to be considered in using some of these indicators, namely: efficiency and equity; participation and accountability; sustainability and solidarity.

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[5] This definition excludes the Water Operator Partnerships (WOPs) launched by the UN's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB), which include also private water operators.
[6] In their 2009 paper, Hall et al. identified more than 130 water PuPs operating in around 70 countries.

1.1. Quality, efficiency and equity

Issues of quality of service and efficiency of state-owned utilities and organisations have been part of the rhetoric pushing for the privatisation of public services. Defined in narrow terms, private sector efficiency is often presented as "neutral, technical and opaque" (Wainwright 2012a: 94) and it disregards the impact that efficiency gains of a specific service have on other sectors or levels of government (McDonald and Ruiters 2012b: 32). Hence, efficiency increases of the private sector are achieved by reducing the number of workers per connection[7] and/or making services cost-effective by, for example, introducing/increasing fees on access to services, effectively excluding those who are not able to pay. Such a narrow framing of efficiency "fails to adequately address the social goals of service delivery such as quality of life and dignity" (Spronk 2010, cited in McDonald and Ruiters 2012b: 32).

The *indicator of social efficiency* put forward by the literature on alternatives to privatisation, encompasses a range of issues: the financial efficiency of delivering services; resource-efficiency (water/electricity losses, administration costs, environmental impact and others); the level of investment needed to ensure long-term maintenance; the impact of efficiency gains of a service on other sectors or levels of government, on workers' wages and working conditions, affordability, environment, health and safety; quality etc. (ibid: 32, 25). The concept places efficiency in a framework of broader societal goals which have been either unsatisfactory pursued under traditional state-owned utilities or undermined under processes of commercialisation and privatisation of public services. The *quality indicator* – a concept shaped by cultural perceptions and market pressure – covers acceptability by users and observances of improved quality.

The indicator of equity is broadened to include an assessment of: accessibility in terms of class, location, gender, ethnicity; reliability of the service (issues of power and water shortage); the extent to which people are able to overcome physical, economic and cultural barriers to assess services and participate in decision-making; equitable quality and quantity; adequacy of services for effective citizenship; equitable pricing system; and institutionalisation, legalisation and formalisation of equity (ibid: 28, 25). Countries may pursue different strategies in addressing inequities in accessing public services. Some countries pursue vertical equity, i.e. "distribution of resources according to the need and policies that reduce inequality by treating unequals unequally"; others may go for providing horizontal equity, i.e. providing a "basic minimum package of benefits for all or for "target groups" ensuring that nobody falls below a certain level' (ibid: 28).

1.2. Participation and accountability

The indicator of participation in decision making and accountability are closely linked and are central to the 'publicness' framework. The participation of citizens, community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in decision-making position PuPs "as intrinsically more democratic than PPPs" (Hall et al., 2005: 8). Such participation also challenges the approach of bureaucrats and experts to determine what is best for citizens; increases transparency and accountability; empowers users; develops additional political and technical capacities in the sector (Boag and McDonald 2010: 15); and increases the sense of ownership among citizens, contributing to utilities efficiency, as well as to greater possibilities for investment and maintenance (Balanyá et al. 2005: 249).

In the water sector, social movements have gone beyond issues of access and have engaged with broader issues of participatory democracy, social justice, ecological sustainability and even far-reaching

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[7] World Bank, for example, recommends that water and sanitation utilities employ two to three workers per thousand connections, using this number politically to discipline managers to reduce the number of permanent staff (Spronk et al. 2012: 446).

transformation of the society and economy (Spronk and Terhorst 2012: 140). In the health sector, social movements have articulated broader goals of social determinants of health: access to water, food and housing, environmental issues and others (ibid: 141). The struggles against privatisation in the electricity sector have been marked by lesser involvement of social movements and by electricity workers taking the lead in forming coalitions and pursuing issues of public interest such as prices and accountability (ibid: 143).

Participation of communities and citizens, however, does not automatically translate in enhanced 'publicness'. White (1996) distinguishes between four categories of participation: 1) *Nominal participation* is for display, with 'top-down' interests wanting legitimation for decisions, while 'bottom-up' interests seek inclusion; 2) *Instrumental participation* is to achieve a particular end. 'Top-down' interests may consult local people as an efficient and cost-saving exercise; for the local people, such consultation is a demand or cost on them; 3) *Representative participation* can provide 'bottom-up' interests with voice in decision-making. For 'top-down' interests, this can lead to better decision-making and thus more sustainable and effective results; and 4) *Transformative participation* is both a means and an end. For both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' interests, the aim is empowerment (Tisdall 2013: 185). White's idea of participation as empowerment was "that the practical experience of being involved in considering options, making decisions, and taking collective action to fight injustice is itself transformative. It leads on to greater consciousness of what makes and keeps people poor, and greater confidence in their ability to make a difference" (ibid).

Literature shows that participation reduced to consultation, in combination with moves for decentralisation, have been used to "legitimate or disguise the dismantling of public services" (Wainwright 2012: 92) and, at times, open the way to privatisation (Balanyá et al. 2005: 254). The advocacy for community involvement may turn out to be a way of freeing the state from the responsibility of providing services to all citizens. Community participation may mask power asymmetries within communities and CBOs along lines of race, class, gender, geography and ethnicity (Bakker 2008; Boag and McDonald 2010; Spronk and Terhorst 2012). Finally, the capacity of community members to participate meaningfully in decision-making may be undermined by unequal financial and human resources and access to technical expertise (McDonald and Ruiters 2012b: 30).

While communities have taken central stage in the debates about reforming public services, the role of labour in democratising public decision-making has been missing even in the discourse inside the social movements (Wainwright 2012a: 83). This is partly due to the reluctance of public sector unions to move beyond an agenda of protecting their jobs and partly because social movements themselves have unintentionally internalised a mainstream discourse which puts the blame for the inefficiencies and corruption of public sector on public sector workers and sees unions as "vested interests' organisations" (ibid). Proponents of privatisation, including global institutions such as the World Bank, have portrayed public sector workers and trade unions as a barrier to public service reform (Spronk and Terhorst 2012: 144) and have made public sector workers one of their main target of market reforms, seriously affecting the nature of public sector jobs and the 'publicness' of services[8].

In resisting the pressure for marketization of public services, public sector workers and their trade unions have shifted their struggle beyond issues of ownership[9] to demand more control over the labour process

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[8] Despite the bureaucracy, public sector workers were able to exercise a degree of autonomy and embody a high level of expertise and ethical standards, which in combination with stability of employment defined to a great extent the quality of services (Huws 2012: 76).

[9] In analysing this shift in the struggle, Wainwright builds on Marx's twofold nature of labour: "creative, purposeful activity is subordinated to labour disciplined for the maximisation of profit" (2012a: 82). The constant tension between self-determining activity and alienated labour (Elson 1979), becomes "the source of agency and the transformative potential of labour" which helps understand the shift in labour's strategies in resisting

and over the purpose of labour allowing workers "to express themselves through their labour, in the delivery of services to fellow citizens, as knowing, feeling people, rather than simply as workers selling their labour power" (Wainwright 2012a: 83). Realising "the creativity of workers for the benefit of, and in collaboration with, their fellow citizens" requires replacing the "bureaucratic version of the discipline and divisions of the capitalist market" with a worker-management relationship based on collaboration and motivation as well as greater worker involvement in decision-making processes (ibid: 83-4).

1.3. Sustainability and solidarity

The sustainability indicator involves a number of interrelated dimensions: *political sustainability,* i.e. political support for the model at various levels and the robustness of the system to resist the global context of neoliberal policies; *social sustainability,* i.e. strengthening social engagement mechanisms; *financial sustainability* in terms adequate financial support for the new models; and *environmental sustainability* i.e. the most appropriate scale of using resources and technologies (McDonald and Ruiters 2012b).

The role of the the state is critical to the *political, social* and *financial sustainability* dimensions (McDonald and Ruiters 2012b). On the one hand, there is a recognition of the fundamental importance of the state involvement in sustaining experiments such as those in Porto Alegre, Kerala and Caracas. On the other, despite legitimate concerns[10] over the impact of the devolution of responsibilities in delivering services, decentralisation is seen as providing these initiatives with greater autonomy and higher community participation. Rather than excluding each other, these arguments emphasise the need for a "supportive state, to help facilitate and oversee the objectives of the public alternative"; a strong (and not domineering) state which can "act 'with' society, not in replacement of it" (Reynoso 2000 cited in ibid).

The survival of these initiatives depends on their ability to construct a supportive state, i.e. transforming institutional structures to "dismantle old forms of the state with a much broader set of actors and innovative forms of governance, opening up new vistas for thinking about how the 'public' can operate" (McDonald and Ruiters 2012a: 6). This requires organising services in a way that helps build solidarity among workers, communities, public sectors managers, politicians, NGOs, end users etc.; other service sectors (health, water and others); and various levels of service delivery (regional international) (PSI 2003: 27). It also requires combining the building of alternative public services with the development of "new, broader policy capacities, and corresponding means and sources of finance" (Fine and Hall 2012: 65). State financial support to ensure continuity of the new models of services is fundamental given that donor funding is not always reliable (McDonald and Ruiters 2012b: 35), or it may come with political conditions which can contradict the goals of 'publicness' (Balanyá et al. 2005: 266).

Discussions about *environmental sustainability* have developed in recognition of the fact that some public utilities may have pollution records themselves[11]. Critical issues to be considered here are alternative sources and forms of resources, consumption rates, choices of technology (e.g. coal fired vs. solar electricity) and others (McDonald and Ruiters 2012b: 37). Whether it is about tapping into regional watersheds or about procuring health products from overseas producers, there is a need to consider the most appropriate and sustainable scale of resource procurement and distribution (ibid).

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privatisation: from defensive strategies to broad alliances with communities and citizens mobilising around the nature, organisation and future of public services (ibid).

[10] Local authorities find themselves locked in a situation where they are given the responsibility to deliver more services with less financial resources available and with few options to raise money locally because they may not be allowed by national authorities or because of inter-municipality competition to attract investors and hence keep taxes low (McDonald and Ruiters 2012b).

[11] In 2007, the carbon footprint of NHS England rose to 21 million of tonnes of carbon dioxide emission, which represents 25 per cent of total emissions of England's public sector (Sander and Reynolds 2011: 3).

Finally, the *solidarity* indicator refers to the solidarity among public service systems, similar to the model of financial solidarity developed in the context of the 'European Social Model' aiming at reducing inequalities between member states through financing for infrastructure, workers retraining and anti-discrimination measures (McDonald and Ruiters 2012b). Despite important breakthroughs and progress, sustaining initiatives of alternative public services necessitate an enabling environment at the global level, "one that facilitates progressive public solutions rather than hindering them" (Balanyá et al. 2005: 259).

2. The 'publicness' framework: How do the PuPs score?

The PuPs literature shows that by focusing on the municipal workers and the development of technical capacities in a country, these partnerships contribute in reducing the dependency of public utilities and governments on expensive international consultants; in increasing pride and confidence among workers in delivering public water; and in finding new ways of being more responsive to users' needs (Boag and McDonald 2010). PuPs enable a virtuous circle of capacity building as more public utilities are enabled to share their expertise with others, a process which helps empower workers and strengthen public utilities (ibid). These partnerships can lead to improvements of water infrastructure and service delivery capacity at a lower cost than PPPs or public utilities working on their own (Hall et al., 2005, Boag and McDonald, 2010, Food and Water Watch 2012). This challenges the myth of efficiency advantage of private sector over the public sector (Boag and McDonald, 2010: 11).

The objectives pursued by PuPs may vary widely depending on a number of factors, such as context, partners involved, scale of involvement and others (Hall et al. 2005, 2009; Boag and McDonald 2010). The four categories of goals and objectives of water PuPs proposed by Boag and McDonald (2010) are helpful in illustrating the range of objectives manifested in various partnerships across sectors.

a) *Socio-political objectives*, which refers to: empowering and strengthening public utility(ies) and non-governmental partners; protecting services against privatisation; providing accountability and transparency for citizens; democratising the services; and making them more equitable.
b) *Infra-structure objectives*, which refers to: improving and expanding public services quality and/or quantity; and introducing new technologies.
c) *Capacity-building objectives,* which refers to: developing human resources in the utility(ies) and non-governmental bodies; improve operator administration and management.
d) *Financial objectives*, which refers to: improving system financing; and determining appropriate cost/revenue structures for public services as a public good.

While a partnership be oriented towards one more goals at the same time, the literature review suggests that depending on the actors involved, the partnership may be more likely to engage in a particular set of goals. For example, twining PuPs are more likely to pursue infrastructural and capacity goals whereas participatory PuPs may be more concerned with financial, social and/or political goals (Boag and McDonald 2010).

2.1. Twinning PuPs through the 'publicness' framework

Partnerships between two or more public authorities in the same country or across borders – twinning PuPs – have been established in a number of public services such as water, energy and health services.

Examples of twinning PuPs

Inter-municipal partnerships in the water supply and sanitation have aimed at improving efficiency and quality of services. The Harrismith municipality and Rand Water (parastatal bulk water supply) company partnership in South Africa aimed at making water services "efficient, equitable, cost effective and sustainable" (Hall et al. 2005). Partnerships between municipalities and local public sector companies, usually municipally-owned, in China have enabled municipalities to access investment finance and expertise (Hall et al. 2009). The Amrta Institute for Water Literacy and the PDAM Tirtanadi water utility in Solo in Indonesia has achieved strong social and environmental performance and responsible financial management (TNI and CEO 2006: 9). In the health sector, too, the partnership between the Centre for Disease Control and public health agencies at state and municipal level in the US focused on capacity building (Hall et al. 2005). Similarly, the energy sector partnership between the central government National Hydro Power Corporation and state governments in India has combined the central expertise with state's understanding of local issues to develop hydro-electric power schemes in a number of states (Hall et al. 2009).

International partnerships in the water sector have also aimed at improving the efficiency of these services by building the institutional and human resources capacities of these services. The Baltic Sea partnerships between municipal water companies in Sweden and Finland and those of cities in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which was initiated with the goal of improving the environmental impact of public utilities, focused on capacity building and investment for the public sector water companies in the region (Hall et al. 2005). The partnership consisted of a number of major projects developing wastewater plants and also supporting capacity building of municipal water and sewerage companies in the Baltic States to enable them to manage the environmental impact of their cities on the marine environment. For example, the partnership between Tallinn, Estonia and Helsinki Water, Finland included, among others, the construction of new wastewater treatment facilities; operational and maintenance cost savings; sustainable water resource utilisation; improvement of water quality; prevention of pollution; and protection of jobs. The Tallinn utility was restructured into a 'self-managed, self-financed water utility enterprise, independent of any state or municipal subsidies' (EBRD 2002, cited in ibid).

By providing technical assistance and training programmes for workers and managers, Netherlands water companies have built partnerships with a number of public water utilities in Egypt, Romania, Sudan and Indonesia to reduce leakage by introducing quality management and preventive maintenance systems, protecting groundwater resources, improving relations with users, managing of information systems, and in wastewater treatment technology (Hall et al. 2009). The efficiency gains achieved by the water partnership between Finland and Vietnam were to some extent due to the fact that all workers got trained (ibid). Since 1987, Japanese municipalities have run training courses in water sanitation, quality management and water quality for public authorities in various Asian countries (ibid). The partnership between public water companies in Uruguay (OSE) and Paraguay (ESSAP) was based on the exchange of technical expertise and support for management improvement of ESSAP (ibid). The Amsterdam Water Company has partnered with Beheira Water Company in Egypt in a PuP which includes certification of the company's laboratories and environmental activities (ibid: 9-10). Alas, in both cases, the literature does not provide further discussion on the concrete changes in environmental performance.

International partnerships aiming at capacity building are found also in other sectors, such as the energy sector in Ecuador receiving technical support and advice from Cuban and Colombian public electricity companies Hall et al. 2005). Most health partnerships between public sector health agencies in high income countries and those in low income countries contained a training component (ibid). The UK's NHS has partnered with hospitals in low-income countries to provide access to new skills and up-to-date research through regular exchange of healthcare staff (ibid).

The 'publicness' framework: Insights, challenges and limitations

The examples of twinning PuPs provided above show that these partnerships can be used to restructure and improve the quality and efficiency of public services by developing the expertise of the internal providers, capacity building and transferring of skills, providing technical support and advice, and exchanging expertise and information (Hall et al. 2005). Training and regular exchange of staff between public authorities are some of the main strategies used during these types of partnerships.

Despite achievements in terms of increased efficiency and equity, PuPs face a number of challenges. Hall et al. have observed that capacity building "has not been extensive enough" to sustain the achievements made during a partnership (2005: 24 & 28). At the same time, although PuPs may subscribe to a concept of 'social efficiency', their practices are marked by contradictions. For example, Rand Water in South Africa made remarkable improvements in cost recovery by cutting-off thousands for non-payment and by installing trickler valves, which are considered to "stripping people of their dignity" (Hall et al. 2005: 28). Similarly, while the World Bank praised the partnership[12] between Lilongwe in Malawi and a UK water authority for the improvements in water and sanitation services, and its "successful institutional building", the company did not involve workers in the process of restructuring and it even dismissed workers striking for pay rise and those who criticised the management for financial mismanagement and excessive spending on expensive vehicles and huge allowances (Hall et al. 2005: 29). In the same way, the Colombian water utility EAAB (*Empresa de Acueducto y Alcantarillado de Bogotá)* achieved economic efficiency and quality of service by putting the burden of efficiency gains on workers[13] (Spronk et al. 2012: 442). Social efficiency goals, and indeed the future of partnerships, are further undermined when these companies enter into partnerships across borders. The partnership between two South African parastatals and the Brazilian water companies was rescinded because of the conflicting goals of the partners: The South African companies saw the partnership as an opportunity to pursue a PPP, whereas to Brazilians it was 'a global vehicle for promoting public ownership and operation of water services' (Hall et al. 2005: 10). In some cases, state agencies supporting PuPs have done so motivated by commercial interests. The Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs (and quasi-governmental agencies such as 'Partners for Water') have engaged in projects abroad on a more commercial basis (TNI and CEO 2006).

In some cases, certain achievements made by PuPs have even paved the way for privatisation. Hall et al., argue that despite PuPs achievements in terms of strengthening capacities of public utilities, after the partnerships the utilities were strongly influenced by political changes (2005: 24). The corporatisation of the Tallinn utility paved the way for privatisation in 2001, which led to cuts of 200 jobs, price increases, demands for surcharges on water drainage, and enormous dividend payments and remuneration of the supervisory council.

The review of twinning PuPs, although limited, shows that they can make an important contribution to strengthening the capacities of public utilities, enhancing their efficiency and the quality of public services. The analysis of some of the twinning PuPs show, however, that achieving goals of social efficiency, participation and accountability, and solidarity and sustainability can be problematic. Social efficiency (i.e. aligning goals of efficiency with those of equity) is not mainly, and perhaps not primarily, a question of capacities. It is a political issue contested by the logic of commercialisation sneaking in the operation of public services and as such it requires political pressure. The participation of workers and communities in PuPs is therefore critical.

3. Participatory PuPs through the 'publicness' framework

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[12] Eventually, the World Bank policies encouraged the privatisation of the water utility (Hall et al. 2005)

[13] Spronk et. al. observe that EAAB has pursued an aggressive policy of subcontracting as a way to reduce the costs of pensions (2012: 442).

Participatory PuPs include a wide variety of arrangements which include workers and/or communities and their organisations in the management and administration of public services. Participatory PuPs may also include twinning PuPs with community and/or workers' participation. Similar to twinning PuPs, participatory Pups are found in several sectors although they are more dominant in the water sector.

Examples of participatory PuPs

In Savelugu, Ghana, a public-community partnership between the national public water company (Ghana Water Company) and communities has been successful in improving water supply and reducing water-borne illnesses through a decentralised system (TNI and CEO 2006: 15). While the national company delivers bulk water to rural communities, the latter are responsible for water delivery, planning and tariff setting, new connections and maintenance to billing the users (ibid). SEMAPA (*Servicio Municipal de Agua Potable de Cochabamba*), in Bolivia, is working on a public-collective partnership with pre-existing water committees in peri-urban areas to expand access to piped water (ibid). Examples of such national-level PuPs, in which state water companies send technicians to provide assistance to community-based bodies and NGOs which administer water systems in rural areas are also found in Honduras, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Brazil (Spronk et al. 2012: 432). The Honduran national water corporation SANAA provided community-based bodies in Honduras with capacity building through training and assistance which led to important improvements in water conservation and reliability of water services. In the health sector, too, the community-partnership with Health Professional Education Initiative in South Africa brought together health professionals and isolated rural communities to increase access to health services, particularly for young people, through the development of health clinics, youth desks, and teenage pregnancy projects. The involvement of communities through PuPs has led to increased the effectiveness and the accountability of public health projects. A transport project in Canada, has sought to involve communities through a process of active participation of neighbourhood groups, transit advocacy and user groups.

PuPs are also seen as important tools for remunicipalisation (Pigeon et al., 2012). When time to renew contracts made with private operators during the 1980s[14] came up, the winning left-wing coalition pushed for the municipalisation by undertaking legal, economic and technical studies in consultation with personnel working on the organisational side of the service (Le Strat 2010). The new publicly-owned and controlled utility *Eau de Paris*[15], transformed the management of city's water system "from opaque, fragmented and short-term to a more integrated, transparent, longer-term and progressive" one. The utility is led by a board which includes members of the City Council, staff representatives, water sanitation experts, one environmental NGO and one consumer organisation and one representative from the City Water Observatory (Pigeon 2012). Besides their participation on the Board of Directors, citizens have the possibility to evaluate the provision of services via a mechanism for social control City Water Observatory, which provides a space for all stakeholders to discuss and put forward ideas regarding various issues facing the water utility (Le Strat 2010). The reforms undertaken have ended the overlaps among jobs and has led to greater synergy in the production sector, more comprehensive quality control, enhanced efficiency in distribution, total traceability of water from the source to the tap and increased responsiveness to citizens' demands through newly developed services (ibid). As part of its policy to ensure full access to water services and address issues of unpaid bills, the utility has also lowered the water tariffs and introduced a series of social subsidies for the disadvantaged members of community, particularly homeless people. The new utility has launched campaigns promoting the use of tap water as

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[14] During 1985-1987, Jacques Chirac, then-mayor of Paris, ceded control over production and distribution of water to three private companies for a period of 25 years.

[15] The old public-private company has been transformed into a public body, whose mission is to produce, transport, distribute and bill for water. All the various professions and operational aspects of the service have been brought together, which means that consumers now deal with a single structure. It is an independent legal entity which has its own budget, and reports to the municipality (Le Strat, 2010: 3).

more ecological and cheaper than bottled water and has engaged in initiatives to protect water resources and tackle water pollution such as partnership with farmers to transition toward more environment-friendly farming (Pigeon 2012). It has also increased its contribution to the housing solidarity fund of the city. The transformation of the utility has also been marked by tensions as workers "seem unconvinced about the remunicipalisation idea", with some fearing the impact of lowered tariffs on wages and working conditions (ibid: 37). Ultimately, the sustainability of the initiative will depend on the "development of a lively public service culture within the organisation" (ibid).

The Kerala's People's Plan policy in India and the Brazilian scheme of participatory budgeting are widely recognised as a potential model for democratising local governance and for "strengthening the control of communities over the financing and delivery of their public services" (Hall et al. 2005: 8). Kerala's People's Plan policy delegates decision making for 40 per cent of state budget to village councils, p*anchayats.* Such scheme was supplemented by financial contributions from the community, giving rise to participatory water delivery schemes in Olavanna and other rural communities in which people are "directly involved in planning, management, construction and maintenance" leading to major cost-savings (ibid: 17).

The Brazilian scheme represents a model of 'social control' which combines "participatory budgeting with strong civil society participation in management of the water utility" (TNI and CEO 2006: 4) and shows that participation does not need to be confined to small communities. More than just dialogue with users and communities, social control entails, among others, "transparency of the utility's operation, democratic control over key financial decisions and citizen's participation in priority-setting during planning phases" (ibid). The partnership between the municipal government, the independent municipally-owned public water company DMAE[16] (*Departamento Municipal de Água e Esgotos*) and a citizens' organisation has led to remarkable transformations of the public utility. After embarking on 'participatory budget planning' in 1989, DMAE moved away from serving primarily downtown and affluent areas of the city to establish a 'deliberative council' which practices 'social control' by society and ensures full transparency of the department's work. This has resulted in the improvement of services; the establishment of a progressive tariff structure based on strong cross-subsidies and a social tariff for low-income people who have the right to use 10 cubic meters per month and pay only for four; a nearly 100 per cent coverage rate; a low non-payment ratio; high rates of approval for its service; accountability in terms of safe water and environmental protection; and sustainability related to financing and technology (European Parliament 2010; Bakker 2008; Maltz 2005). The utility has invested in workers' education, managerial and technical training, healthcare, insurance and transport (Maltz, 2005). DMAE technicians and activists have also provided advice and solidarity to water struggles in other countries (Spronk et al. 2012). With the defeat of the Workers' Party (PT), the utility has adopted more commercial practices, including higher rates and service cut-offs (ibid).

After massive citizen protests against water concessions of Suez in El Alto, Bolivia, FEJUVE (*Federación de Juntas Vecinales de El Alto)* representing 600 neighbourhood councils, has put forward a model of democratised public utility called 'public-social company' which excludes "private sector participation". The model replaces top-down decision making with "full transparency and bottom-up decision-making through people's participation" (TNI and CEO 2006: 6). It envisages the participation of community representatives in a general assembly responsible for overall policies and election of the water company's board. Communities are also represented in the Control and Monitoring Commission tasked to guarantee collective control and a corruption free operation of public utility (ibid).

Institutionalising the participation of communities has transformed Hidrocapital, in Caracas, Venezuela into one of the most innovative public utility in the country (Spronk et al. 2012: 434). It is a model of

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[16] The separation of DMAE was made under loan requirements from the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) (Maltz, 2005: 29).

cooperation between local communities, the water utility and elected officials to "identify needs and priorities for improvements, allocate available funds and develop joint work plans" (TNI and CEO 2006: 16). Established in Caracas by a progressive mayor in the early 1990s as "local forums to hear citizens' concerns about problems with water supply and sanitation" they developed into "a citywide communal water council" and later on to Technical Water Committees (*Mesas Técnicas de Agua* – MTAs)[17] (Spronk et al. 2012: 434). Users are able to democratically control and hold accountable these councils and in areas needing substantial improvements, such as urban slums, they are heavily involved in planning, decision-making, construction and maintenance work (TNI and CEO 2006). MTAs are "a way of coordinating all the knowledge the community [has] about their water network with human, technical and financial resources that [belong] to them through their public water company" (Spronk et al., 2012: 434). They are considered to score high in participation, solidarity, public ethos, equity, sustainability, transferability and even in gender equality (ibid). Concerns have been raised, however, over the high dependency of the model on local politics and the lack of a more comprehensive plan of urban development (Chavez 2012).

Objectives of democratisation, efficiency and equity have, at times, been reached by reviving traditional structures of participation. When a water crisis hit the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, questions over the relevance of the Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board (TWAD) prompted the management of the utility to begin a process of democratisation based on principles of community involvement and water conservation and to rehabilitate the traditional water bodies (Hall et al. 2009; TNI and CEO 2006). The transformation of TWAD "into a more people focused, community responsive and publicly accountable organisation" necessitated a change of the "mind-set of the technical staff, which involved overcoming bureaucratic and technocratic tendencies" (TNI and CEO 2006: 5). Reviving the Indian traditional concept of *Koodam*[18], the interaction among water specialists and communities "as equal persons, without distinction of rank, position or privilege and engage in the common task of learning from and with one another" has resulted in "new roles and relationships between technicians and communities" and in "a renewed public service ethos" (ibid). The democratisation process was complemented with a (Total Community Water Management) education programme (in 427 villages across 29 districts) to create an approach to water focused on the community and has resulted in detailed village water master plans prepared by the community with the assistance of engineers. Within a span of three years (2004-2007), the scheme resulted in a 60 per cent reduction of capital costs per household, 33 per cent savings in budgeted schemes, and in 84 per cent of women surveyed seeing water engineers as members of the community, all of which contributed to a sense of involvement and ownership (Hall et al., 2009: 6).

Threats to privatisation of public utilities has, in some cases, ignited an active engagement of workers and communities not only to resist privatisation but also to push for bottom-up PuPs. Terhorst (2008: 2-6) provides an analysis of the crucial role played by the Peruvian trade unions (*Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de Agua Potable* - FENTAP and its local affiliate *Sindicato Único de Trabajadores de Agua Potable de Huancayo* - SUTAPAH) and a range of social movements under *Frente de Defensa del Agua de la Region Junín (*FREDEAJU) in building a bottom-up alternative to privatisation of the water utility SEDAM in Huancayo. The union adopted a multi-scalar strategy: national level collaboration to block legislation that promoted liberalisation and commercialisation of water resources and services; alliances with civil society groups to "build defensive fronts for water" and "to create alternative proposal for modernisation without privatisation"; collaboration between national and international organisations to develop "a common knowledge base about the problems of SEDAM and options for modernising and democratising the utility" with transnational networks of the water movement (ibid: 2-3). The "Basic Outline

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[17] The concept of water MTAs has expanded to the telecommunications and electricity sectors with the establishment of the *Mesas Técnicas de Telecomunicaciones*, and the *Mesas Técnicas de Energía* (2012b: 471-2).
18 *Koodam* is a traditional, cultural and social space within which all persons are treated equally; without distinction based on age, status, hierarchy; in which sharing is transparent, experiential, and self critical; and is based on values of democracy, consensual decision making, and collective ownership (Suresh, 2011).

for the Sustainable, Participatory and Depoliticised Modernisation Modernisation without Privatisation", which was released in 2006, detailed "plans for managerial and institutional reforms that included the proposal for a PuP" (public-participatory utility) (ibid: 4). When plans to implement the reforms through the Social-Technical Council[19] did not materialise, the trade unions and the front pushed for a South-South PuPs partnership with ABSA, a union-owned and run public water operator from Buenos Aires, Argentina. The 2007 partnership, initiated during the Blue October events[20] in 2006, developed detailed plans for a utility reform to reduce costs, improve maintenance and increase investment, orient service delivery to the needs of the population, as well as to make the utility more democratic and accountable. Local politics have placed barriers to the implementation of reforms which would enact transparent procurement procedures, thus reducing possibilities for corruption, and "would destroy the decades old systems of clientelism, nepotism and undue political control" (ibid: 6).

In Uruguay, in response to plans for constructing an environmentally damaging waste treatment and further privatisation of some parts of the public utility *Obras Sanitarias del Estate (OSE)*, the national water movement *Comisión Nacional en Defensa del Agua y la Vida (CNDAV)* – a coalition of the water utility workers' union and various environmental and human rights NGOs – moved beyond local mobilisation and developed a "far-reaching constitutional reform proposal" (Spronk and Terhorst, 2012: 147). The reform included substantial changes, such as 'the human right to water, direct public control, participation of citizens in all areas and steps of water resource management, and an ecosystems approach' (ibid). The OSE trade union (*Federación de Funcionarios de Obras Sanitarias del Estado*, FFOSE), which had a high degree of legitimacy due to its role in the struggle against dictatorship, saw the "struggle for water as a human right and public good ... as a continuation of the struggle for democracy" (Wainwright 2012a: 76). Feeling strongly about the struggles of farmers and rural populations whose livelihood depended on access to water, FFOSE moved beyond demands for jobs. In 2004, while transforming OSE into a model utility, it also campaigned for constitutional changes (ibid: 77). It held numerous assemblies to draft proposals for restructuring the company and it was able to transform OSE "from a corrupt and inefficient institution to a public water company that runs a surplus budget and may be now considered a model public utility" without compromising on working conditions (Spronk et al. 2012: 431). After the success of the referendum, the model included a formal requirement for an effective role of citizens and staff in the running of the company (Wainwright 2012a). In addition, OSE became one of the main organisers of a regional utilities forum to support the establishment of a regional network of non-commercialised public utilities through the promotion of PuPs, and in 2010 it signed a PuP pre-agreement with the municipal utility SEDACUSCO in Peru (Spronk and Terhorst 2012).

In a different context, the Norwegian public sector trade unions have also sought to pursue a multi-pronged strategy to resist privatisation, which included a comprehensive analysis of the context; building broad social alliances between the unions and farmers, pensioners, women, student and users and organising the campaign for the Welfare State (initiated by the Norwegian Union of Municipal and General Employees) and later on the Popular Movement for Public Services; building a more politically independent trade union movement; and proposing an alternative to privatisation. The latter consisted in a three-year agreement between the union and a number of municipalities to work together in modernising public services, without privatising. The Model Municipality Project, analysed by Abjørn Wahl (2004), emerged both as a response to privatisation, but also to problems of bureaucratisation, quality and

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19 The Social-Technical Council, which was supposed to be staffed by representatives of local civil society, the church, the university and other relevant actors, was started by the Huancayo Mayor Freddy Arana under the name 'concertation table' (mesa de concertación) as a way of opening and giving certain power over the decisions of the future of SEDAM to the community. However, when it became clear that the front was going to have a strong voice within that Council, the political will of Arana and other groups of civil society dwindled as they did not want to allow the social movements to control SEDAM's future (Terhorst, 2008).

20 The Blue October events were a networked initiative across the world where water movements commemorated common struggles and organised a month of action for water in their respective localities (Terhorst 2008).

accessibility of public services. The trade union entered in a three-year partnership with a number of municipalities to reorganise public services "to further develop and improve the quality of the public services" through "a bottom-up process, where the experiences, the competence and the qualifications of the employees should reform the basis, together with the experiences and needs of the users of the services" (ibid: 5). The project has resulted in "higher user satisfaction, better working conditions for employees and better financial situation for the municipality" (ibid). Given its success, the centre-left government adopted the model as a government policy and launched in 2006 the so-called Quality Municipality Project.

The Newcastle City Council branch of UNISON in the UK, facing privatisation of its IT services, embarked on a five-year programme of IT (and other) services modernisation through a multi-pronged strategy: 1) membership involvement in every step of the programme (mass meetings, election of worker representatives, industrial action against privatisation, and direct involvement of reps in both scrutinising the private bid and strengthening the 'in-house' bid; 2) intervention in the procurement process and campaign for an 'in-house' bid; 3) building popular support for an anti-privatisation campaign (Our city is not for sale) which involved communities, trade unions and dissident Labour councillors; 4) making the City Council "genuinely 'democracy'-led"; 5) grounding the campaign on strategic research; and 6) trade union leadership treating members "as skilled people who cared about their work" (Wainwright 2009). The programme has provided the space for real engagement of workers in the process of change: "from selecting new managers to discussing every significant change" and ensuring accountability for the services (ibid). By 2008, the modernisation has led to enormous savings, significant improvements in services in terms of the speed and accuracy of benefit payments, and a high level of user satisfaction by introducing new services, such as a new call centre and 'one-stop shop' for all services of the council. The modernisation has also led to significant changes in the management and work organisation of the department. Reflecting these changes, the new department that brought all the reformed services together was named City Service.

The 'publicness' framework: Insights, challenges and limitations

The examples of participatory partnerships provided above put participatory PuPs in a more favourable position than twinning PuPs in relation to the 'publicness' framework. They go beyond capacity-building, knowledge and skills sharing to pursue objectives of "greater sense of 'ownership' of services; greater accountability of managers and politicians; improved responsiveness to community and labour needs; overcoming resistance to reforms; greater inclusion of community voice and priorities in decision making; strengthened leadership, planning and co-ordination in service provision; greater trust between providers, clients, communities and financers of services; and strengthened capacities for public interest regulation" (Hall et al., 2005: 8-9).

The participation of workers and communities provides important feedback which helps improve the quality of services, access, reliability of service, social efficiency gains, transparency and accountability. These improvements were present in most of the partnerships: public-community partnerships in Ghana, public collective partnerships in Bolivia, health partnership in South Africa, Kerala's People's Plan, *Eau de Paris*, SEDAM in Brazil, MTAs in Venezuela, OSE in Uruguay, Model Municipality Project in Norway, and Newcastle City Service in the UK.

Participatory partnerships are also able to score better in terms of sustainability. The participation of communities and workers helps embed the partnership initiatives in the operation of utilities and thus increase their political sustainability. Hall et al. argue that 'the most effective PuPs had the longest lead-in times and had the community as a partner" (2005: 24). The deep participation of workers and communities can have a positive effect on financial sustainability as shown in the case of *Eau de Paris* in

France, DMAE in Brazil, *Koodam* scheme in India, OSE in Uruguay, Model Municipality in Norway and Newcastle City Service in the UK.

Participatory PuPs are in a unique position in terms of engaging with environmental issues. The participation of communities and environmental organisations helps bring environmental concerns in the agenda of reforms of public utilities. Workers' participation may provide the required knowledge and expertise for addressing the environmental issues. Examples of public utilities incorporating an environmental component to participatory partnerships include Eau de Paris in France, DMAE in Brazil and OSE in Uruguay. The revival of traditional schemes of water management (Tamil's *Koodam* scheme) may also have the effect of addressing environmental concerns.

The example of OSE in Uruguay indicates the emergence of a new category of PuPs – bottom-up twinning PuPs – which goes beyond either partnerships among two public utilities initiated by authorities, or partnerships among a public utility and workers and communities. These innovative proposals have emerged from the politicised participation of water movements in concrete policy and management decisions (Spronk and Terhorst 2012). They reflect a "shift in norms towards equal, not-for-profit strengthening of the public sector" (ibid: 150), based "on the principles of accountability and participation … developed locally" (Wainwright 2012a: 87). The also indicate a realisation that struggles around public services are connected across borders and that there is a real need to support public utilities everywhere. Indeed, bottom-up partnerships, such as those initiated by workers' unions in Uruguay and Argentina, are considered as the most outstanding PuPs in Latin America (Spronk et al. 2012).

Participatory PuPs provide the space for knowledge sharing and solidarity among different actors involved in these partnerships. There are differences, however, in the quality of participation of workers and/or communities. Their participation varies from formal modalities which allow for consultation and/or representation of communities and/or workers to deeper participation where the communities and workers influence the policies and the implementation of new ways of delivering public services. While the analysis of the reviewed literature does not allow for a conclusive classification of the participatory partnerships according to the four categories identified by White (1996), elements of these categories are found in the partnership examples discussed in this section. Thus, in some partnerships the participation may appear of a more *nominal* or *instrumental* nature (the public-community partnership in Ghana, the partnership of the water corporation with community-based bodies in Honduras, the community partnership with Health Professional Education Initiative in South Africa) and in some others more of a *representative* nature (Eau de Paris, MTAs in Caracas, Venezuela,). Other partnerships (OSE in Uruguay, Model Municipality Project in Norway, and Newcastle experiment of modernising IT services) seem to display elements of a more *transformative participation.* These also happen to be partnerships initiated by workers.

The participation of workers and communities has an impact on both the outcomes of the initiative, but also its sustainability. Some of the examples discussed in this paper show that participatory PuPs have emerged in a context of strong political commitment by the national or local government (participatory budgeting in Brazil, MTAs in Venezuela, Eau de Paris) and powerful social movements and well-organised and democratic trade unions (OSE in Uruguay, Municipality Model Project in Norway, Newcastle City Council in the UK). This also suggests that local politics can also undermine the reforms undertaken/proposed through PuPs. Weakening of social efficiency schemes (DMAE, Brazil), change of plans depending on the officers in charge (MTAs, Venezuela), and blocking of the implementation of PuPs plans (SEDAM, Peru) illustrate such dynamics. The limited involvement of workers in the management of the services, which meant the failure to embed democracy in the internal administration of the municipality could be one important factor behind the weakening of the participatory model of Porto Alegre after political change (Wainwright 2012a). Similarly, barriers to the implementation of reforms in SEDAM (Huancayo, Peru) highlight the importance of communicating the 'basic outline' to all the members of the front not only to further develop the outline, but also to challenge membership's inertia, vested interests

and fear (Terhorst 2012). In contrast, Newcastle's UNISON local sought to have members involved in every step of the modernising process, while working closer with community groups (Wainwright 2009). Similarly, the transformation of OSE utility in Uruguay, saw the deep involvement of union members and citizens' organisations through several assemblies to draft proposals for reforming the utility and to eventually institutionalise the participation of workers and communities in running the company. In addition, the union sought to generalise its through the promotion of PuPs among non-commercialised public utilities in the region.

4. New ways of organising public services and work

Participatory PuPs are able to enhance the 'publicness' of public services and set in motion significant changes in the operation of public services. Despite limited studies on the topic, the examples summarised in this paper shed some light on the spaces for transformation provided by the participatory partnerships.

The spaces created by participatory PuPs empower workers and communities to articulate visions of public services which are inspired by universal goals of 'publicness' and yet reflecting the historical, political, social, economic and cultural conditions of a particular context. Community-utility partnership, public-worker partnership, communitarian water delivery, public-social company, public-community partnership, city service, model municipality and public participatory utility are terms used to capture visions of restructuring public services 'into a more people focused, community responsive and publicly accountable organisation' (TNI & CEO, 2006: 5). In pursing these visions, broad coalition of workers and communities have used participatory PuPs to push (in many cases successful for the establishment of structures and processes which have led to significant changes in the operation of public services.

Evidence of these changes can be found in the various examples of participatory PuPs discussed in this paper: the Brazil's DMAE 'deliberative council' allowing citizens to determine budget allocations of the municipality, ensuring social control and the transparency of public utilities, and applying a cross-subsidies scheme to increase equity and access; Kerala's People's Plan policy delegating the responsibility for 40 percent of state budget to communities councils and providing spaces for these communities to participate in the planning and management of utilities; the revived *Koodam* (Tamil Nadu, India) providing the space for villagers and public sector employees to discuss and make decisions about water management as equals resulting in new roles and relationships between them and in a community-focused water approach; the technical water councils (MTAs) in Caracas allowing users to democratically control and hold the councils accountable, and, at times, to be involved in planning and decision-making; the Social-Technical Council (albeit only a proposal) for the modernisation of SEDAM (Huancayo, Peru) with the participation of representatives from local communities, the church, the university and other relevant actors; in El Alto's (Bolivia) general assembly for bottom-up decision-making and Control and Monitoring Commission to ensure collective control and free of corruption operations; France's *Eau de Paris* establishing a mechanism for social control (Municipality Water Watch) to promote citizen's participation and transparency and introducing policy social subsidies to make water accessible for all; the emergence of the Model Municipality Project in Norway consisting in a bottom-up process of rethinking modernisation of municipality services among workers and citizens; Uruguay's OSE institutionalising the participation of workers and communities in the operation of the utility and creating a Social Office responsible for implementing a social tariff policy; and the UK's City Service department modernised through a process of real engagement of workers in all the operations transforming the utility.

These structures and processes have further embedded the participation of workers and/or communities into the organisation of public services. By bringing together sources of practical, expert and investigative

expertise, they have set in motion of process of collective learning which is crucial to the transformation of public services (Wainwright 2012a, Balanyá et al. 2005). In this way, participatory PuPs have become spaces of producing counter-knowledge and counter-power to the dominant discourse and forces shaping public services (ibid). They are providing workers and communities with "technical though political tools … to engage in utility transformation" (Terhorst 2008). Bottom-up twinning PuPs, in particular, are able to transfer beyond borders these local models of politicised participation.

Public partnerships, however, may face problems in implementing the reforms and/or in sustaining changes introduced through participatory processes and structures. The backslide of participatory budgeting of Porto Alegre in Brazil or the impossibility of establishing the Social Technical Council of SEDAM in Peru show that local politics may undo or prevent potential transformation of public utility.

The analyses of the available studies indicate that the degree to which the structures and processes introduced through participatory PuPs can bring changes, which pave the way for the transformation of public utilities and which can be sustained over time, is influenced by the ability of workers and communities to politicise issues of access to public services (Model Municipality Project in Norway, SEDAM in Huancayo, Peru). Most importantly, it is influenced by the quality of participation. Forms of transformative participation which empower workers to alter "the structures and institutions that lead to marginalisation and exclusion" (White 1996) may have a more solid effect on the depth and sustainability of the transformations of public services. Indeed, "as long as the internal organisations of the public sector are top-down, fragmented and semi-oblivious to the real potential of their staff, all the participatory democracy in the world can be soaked up and defused or blocked by hierarchical structures and bureaucratic procedure" (Wainwright 2009).

Regrettably, the literature on PuPs has paid little attention to one critical factor determining the effectiveness and sustainability of PuPs as political and technical tools to transform public utilities: creation of venues and processes for workers' voice and participation which can challenge the structural conditions alienating or excluding workers from the operation of public services.

While most of narrow PuPs contain a component of training and capacity building, assessing their impact on managerial change is challenging given the limited empirical evidence[21]. Moreover, examples of narrow PuPs discussed earlier show that in some cases training is not even intended to give workers more voice over work organisation. Participatory PuPs, on the other hand, seem to provide the space for a more central role for workers in transforming the organisation of work in public services. The framework of goals established through community's participation in structures such as the MTAs in Caracas, or the 'deliberative council' in the case of DMAE in Brazil, or the *Koodam* in the case of Tamil Nadu water utility, empowers workers to reflect on the way public services are organised, identify limitations and bottlenecks and propose strategies for restructuring these services to make them more democratic and responsive to the communities.

The existing literature, albeit limited, provides some insights on PuPs' potential to introduce managerial changes which enhance worker participation in the transformation of public utilities. Examples of *Eau de Paris* ending overlaps among sectors and jobs as a measure to improve efficiency or DMAE providing workers with scholarships to pursue further studies fall short of altering managerial structures to ensure worker participation in the transformation of public utilities. The analysis of water struggles in

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18 Marra's analysis of capacity building through development and the transfer of knowledge in the case of the training partnership between the World Bank and University of São Paulo are of interest for the discussion here (Hall et al. 2005: 7). Marra argues that the empirical knowledge and methodological basis for assessing the knowledge transfer is limited. Therefore, despite partnership's objectives of efficiency, effectiveness, and organisational and managerial change 'there is scant empirical evidence on how partnerships work and on whether they bring about the desired outcomes.

Cochabamba, Bolivia, may be of relevance here: "without an internal dynamic of reforms, gathering inside knowledge through the workers about the working of the company across the traditional division of labour and petty departmental empires, and collaborating with the community to work out practical alternatives, attempts to transform the company would invariably falter" (Wainwright 2012a: 88).

The potential of participatory PuPs to develop venues and processes giving workers a more central role in the operation of public services appears to be more pronounced in those partnerships initiated by workers. In the case of the partnership involving SEDAM, in Huancayo Peru, workers were involved in making detailed diagnoses of water utilities, fighting corruption and planning democratisation and institutional reform of the utility (TNI & CEO 2006: 7). Instead of the management deciding on the reforms to be introduced in the utility, workers have engaged with users in a wide process of (re)thinking the goals and means of organising public services. The work is transformed to challenge the disconnect between thinking and doing in providing public services. Similarly, the unions in Norway embarked in a bottom-up process of transforming municipality services based on workers' experiences, competencies and qualifications.

The most comprehensive account of new venues for workers' participation emerging through partnerships is observed in the case of Newcastle City Service in the US. By recognising workers' capacities as "assets to be realised, not costs to be cut", the City Service sought to involve workers at every step of the plan to modernise services (Wainwright 2009). Based on the principle of "coaching, no commanding", the management is transformed,

> *… initiative and responsibility has been pushed away from the centre, layers of supervision have been eliminated and replaced by support. The dynamism of the department lies in working across its different sections through project groups involving all those with a relevant angle on a problem to come together to resolve it…. All in all, City Service transformed the centre of its organisation from a traditional model of local government management into a hub from which management supports numerous, largely autonomous projects and activities. A new kind of public sector organisation has emerged, with a leadership role that is more about facilitation and developing a shared direction than it is about exercising control. (ibid)*

The examples from Uruguay, Norway and the UK, show that participatory partnerships provide spaces for workers to express their creativity in aligning people's expectations with their knowledge and expertise, thus providing services in ways which challenge patterns of alienated labour. Although confined to few cases, they represent experiments in industrial democracy (Wainwright 2009) which can serve as inspiring examples of transforming the economy. As such they need to be supported in a more strategic and consistent way. Global networks, such as Public Services International, La Red Vida and Reclaiming Public Water Network, can help facilitate the process of building bottom-up PuPs (Spronk et al. 2012) and "build forms of international power and knowledge with which to counter and, if possible, pre-empt corporate capital's attempts to commodify public services" (Keck and Sikkink 1998, cited in ibid).

Conclusions

Public-public partnerships can play an important role in enhancing the 'publicness' of public services along dimensions of efficiency and equity, participation and accountability, and sustainability and solidarity. The contribution of PuPs varies according to the actors involved. Twinning PuPs tend to contribute more on the improvement of efficiency and quality. The contribution of participatory partnerships is more pronounced in dimensions of quality, equity and social efficiency, participation and accountability, political, financial and environmental sustainability.

Participatory partnerships provide workers and communities with technical, yet political tools to enhance the 'publicness' of public services. The structures and processes introduced through participatory PuPs

can lead to changes significant changes in public utilities. By bringing decision-making into the public sphere, participatory PuPs contribute to the struggle for the democratisation and "the popular control of state institutions" (McDonald and Ruiters 2012a: 14). Because they can connect to experiences across countries with very different models of public services, these partnerships can spread democratic practices of managing public (water) utilities in European countries, "where many public water operators have lost their sense of 'publicness'" (TNI & CEO 2006: 12). In particular, partnerships characterised by transformative participation provides a unique space for building counter-knowledge and counter-power to forces pushing the commercialisation of public services. In this way, PuPs characterised by transformative participation can pave the way for the emergence of alternative forms of public services and ways of organising work.

The examples in this paper also show, however, that despite their potential, PuPs face enormous challenges in countering changes in local politics, clientelism, corruption and political control over public services. For participatory PuPs to be able to bring transformations of public utilities and sustain those transformations, workers and communities would have to turn these initiatives into a political project. The structures and processes for the participation of workers and communities have to become spaces for transforming labour processes and the hierarchical structures of public sector organisations. Setting in motion these processes will be critical to the construction of alternative public services.

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