

THE FUTURE IS PUBLIC

TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC OWNERSHIP OF PUBLIC SERVICES

Resistance to privatisation has turned into a powerful force for change: (re)municipalisation. The term (re)municipalisation refers to the reclaiming of public ownership of services as well as the creation of new public services. In recent years, the Transnational Institute and partner organisations have identified more than 1,400 successful (re)municipalisation cases involving more than 2,400 cities in 58 countries around the world.

But this publication is about more than just numbers. It shows that public services are more important than ever in the face of the climate catastrophe, mounting inequalities and growing political unrest. The COVID-19 crisis too has made painfully clear the disastrous effects of austerity, social security cuts and privatised health care systems, but it has also demonstrated that public services and the people who operate them are truly the foundation of healthy and resilient societies. Years of privatisation and austerity have choked off democratic control and sufficient funding to this foundation. As privatisation fails, a growing international movement is choosing (re)municipalisation as a key tool for redefining public ownership for the 21st century.

The stories in this book take us to new countries and introduce us to new sectors to illustrate the diversity of (re)municipalisation efforts. Each (re)municipalisation has its own specific challenges: from waste management in Egypt to the new public pharmacies in Chile, and to the many remote US municipalities that have delivered jobs and improved quality of life by developing broadband internet.

Together, civil society organisations, trade unions and local authorities are shaping a new template for how to expand democratic public ownership to all levels of society and opening up new routes to community-led and climate conscious public services.



tni.org/futureispublic

Download the entire book

This is the executive summary of the book 'The Future is Public: Towards Democratic Ownership of Public Services'. The 15 chapters that make up this book provide insights into the diverse struggles for (re)municipalisation around the world, including obstacles, opportunities and results.

TNI.ORG/FUTUREISPUBLIC

The global survey of (re)municipalisation consisted of 1408 cases at the end of October 2019. The data that has been gathered is the result of concerted efforts by all publishers and 22 researchers did desktop research to verify the collected data. For more information about our research methodology, please see the book's introduction and appendix.

The database is available at: <https://publicfutures.org>. This interactive database is developed in collaboration with the University of Glasgow. Additional cases and information will be added to this new database as they are collected.

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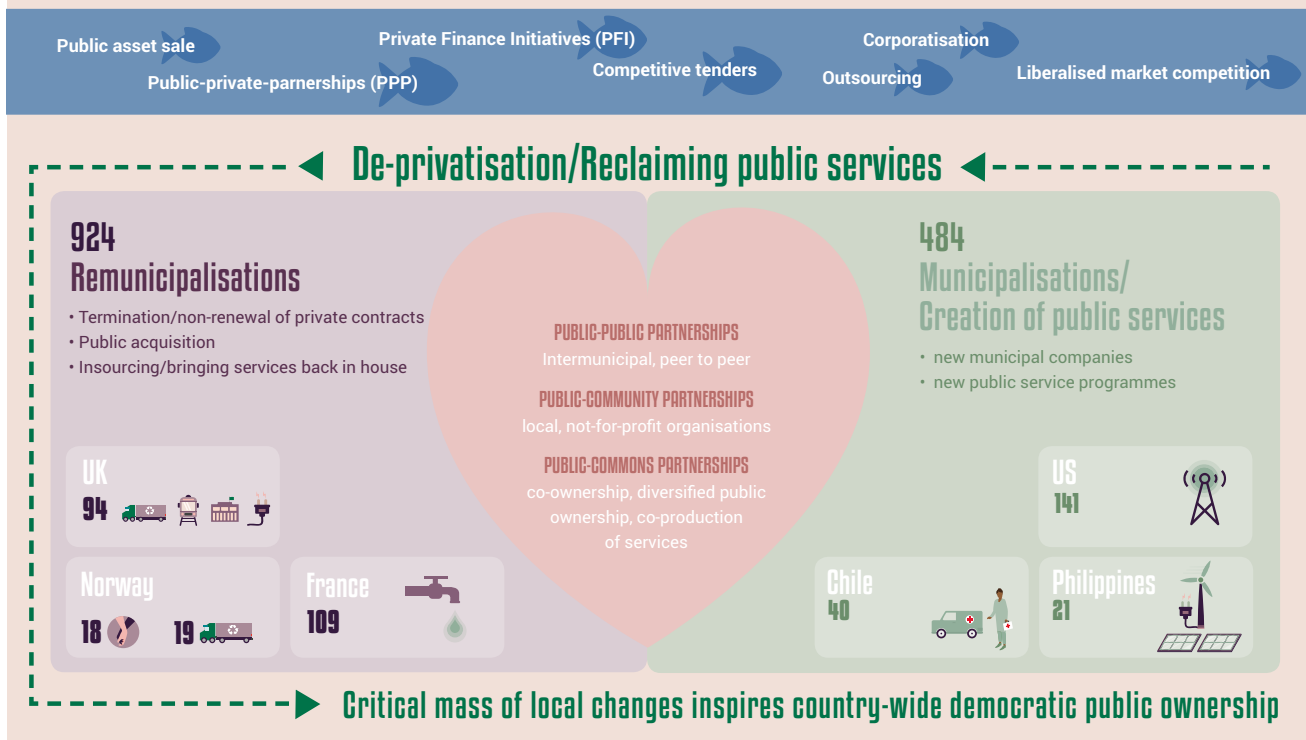
The Transnational Institute (TNI) is an international research and advocacy institute committed to building a just, democratic and sustainable planet. For more than 40 years, TNI has served as a unique nexus between social movements, engaged scholars and policy makers.

PUBLISHED BY



Fighting privatisation of public services

The neoliberal current is powerful ...



The future is public. Across the world today, people are building better, more democratic and more inclusive public services. In the context of the climate crisis, mounting inequalities and growing political unrest, these public services are more important than ever. This report shows that another world is possible; and what's more, that people have already started building it together.

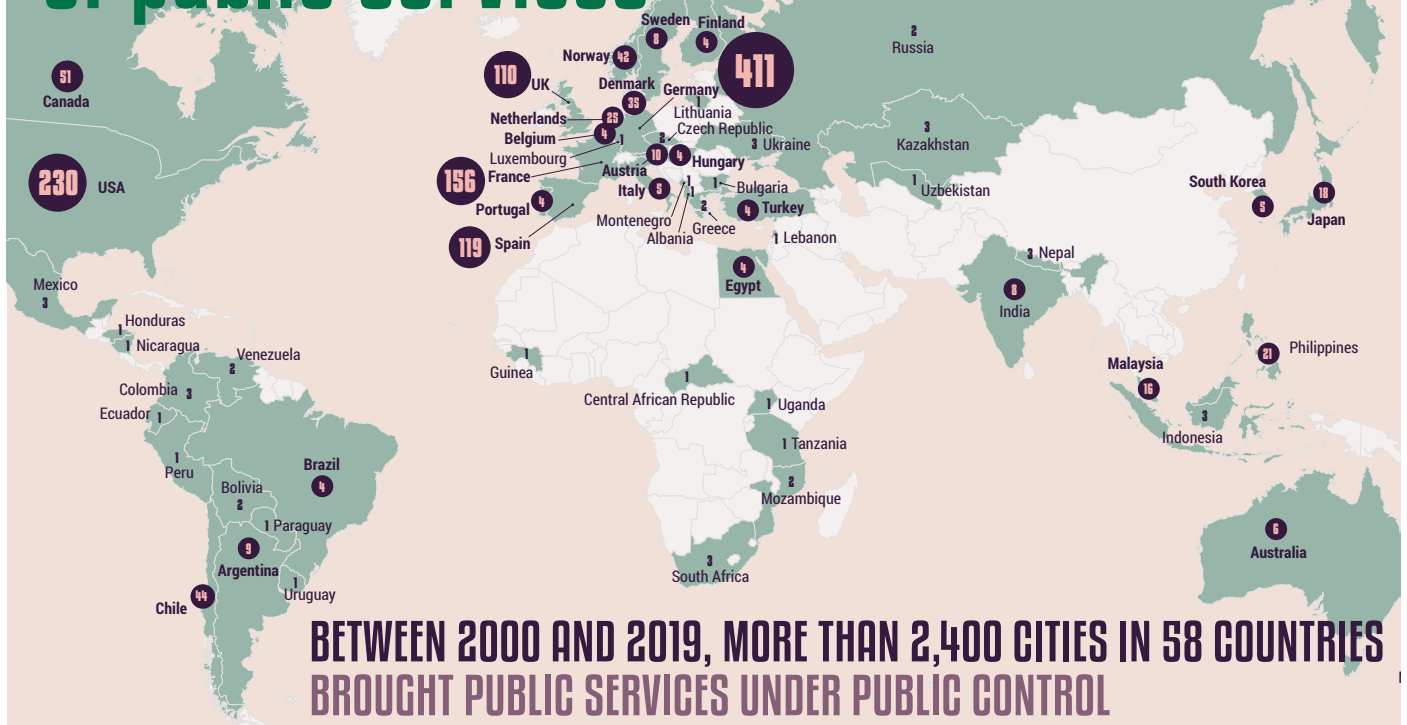
This is the executive summary of the book *The Future is Public: Towards Democratic Ownership of Public Services*. Many of the organisations and contributors behind this publication first joined forces several years ago to oppose the tide of water privatisation that was sweeping the world and to support the accompanying resistance that was directed at private corporations. This opposition to privatisation quickly turned into a global alliance for a positive cause: (re) municipalisation. This term captures both the idea of reversing privatisation as well as the development of new public services that can help us to meet the social, ecological and democratic challenges of our time. Our 2017 publication *Reclaiming Public Services*¹ featured more than 800 cases of (re)municipalisation happening across all sectors and continents. Even back then we knew that this was probably just the tip of the iceberg.

This report builds on our initial research. We have now identified more than 1,400 cases of remunicipalisation or municipalisation involving over 2,400 cities in 58 countries. The data and case studies illustrate the diversity of (re)municipalisation efforts, and include additional countries and new sectors with their specific challenges, such as the waste sector in many African countries.

Our research also shows that the pressures opposing remunicipalisation have not abated. Privatisation is still high on the agenda for private corporations and financial markets, as well as for many national governments and international institutions. There are multiple forms of privatisation and various names that disguise this process, including 'public-private partnerships' (PPPs), 'private finance initiatives' (PFIs), outsourcing, corporatisation, 'right to choice', forced competition and market liberalisation.

Given the powerful forces² lined up to counter remunicipalisation, it's all the more remarkable that so many services and facilities are being returned to public ownership and control. This demonstrates that people embrace the value of public services, and highlights the determination of communities, trade unions and elected officials to defend them.

1408 (Re)municipalisations of public services



(Re)municipalisation sectors

311
Water

Country	N°cases
France	109
US	71
Spain	38
Germany	17
Canada	8
Argentina	8
Philippines	7
Italy	4
Hungary	4
South Africa	3
México	3
Kazakhstan	3
Indonesia	3
Colombia	3
Venezuela	2
Ukraine	2
UK	2
Turkey	2
Mozambique	2
Malaysia	2
India	2
Brazil	2
Bolivia	2
Uzbekistan	1
Uruguay	1
Uganda	1
Tanzania	1
Sweden	1
Russia	1
Portugal	1
Lebanon	1
Guinea	1
Ecuador	1
Central African Republic	1
Belgium	1
Albania	1

223
Local government

Country	N°cases
UK	55
Spain	40
Germany	34
France	21
Canada	15
Denmark	12
Netherlands	8
Austria	7
Philippines	6
Norway	5
South Korea	5
Chile	3
Finland	3
Australia	2
Malaysia	2
India	1
Italy	1
New Zealand	1
Turkey	1
US	1

374
Energy

Country	N°cases
Germany	305
Spain	18
UK	13
US	11
Japan	4
Netherlands	4
Australia	2
Belgium	2
Denmark	2
France	2
Greece	2
India	2
Argentina	1
Bulgaria	1
Czech Republic	1
Honduras	1
Lithuania	1
Philippines	1
Ukraine	1

192
Telecommunications

Country	N°cases
US	145
Germany	35
Netherlands	7
Canada	3
Malaysia	1

138

Health care + Social services

38
Education

Country	N°cases
Japan	12
Malaysia	6
Germany	5
UK	4
Philippines	3
Canada	2
Spain	2
Brazil	1
Chile	1
India	1
Nicaragua	1

85
Waste

Country	N°cases
Norway	19
UK	15
Denmark	13
Germany	13
Canada	7
Spain	6
Egypt	4
France	3
Netherlands	3
Paraguay	1
Peru	1

47
Transport

Country	N°cases
France	21
UK	12
Austria	3
Netherlands	3
Canada	2
Portugal	2
Czech Republic	1
India	1
Malaysia	1
Turkey	1

Our research shows that remunicipalisation is still going strong in sectors like energy and water. We also discovered vibrant remunicipalisation and municipalisation trends in unanticipated sectors like telecommunications, which was beyond the scope of our previous publications. In today's world, high-speed internet access is essential for households and businesses. We found that regional and municipal governments are stepping in to bridge the digital divide by offering affordable high-speed internet service, ensuring accessibility, and revitalising local economies in small towns and rural areas where private telecom companies are reluctant to invest due to lack of profitability. The UK Labour Party took this trend a step further in its 2019 election manifesto with a plan to partially nationalise British Telecom and offer free universal broadband. This goes to show that even an economic sector that is usually seen as the domain of corporate giants can be transformed to deliver a universal public service.

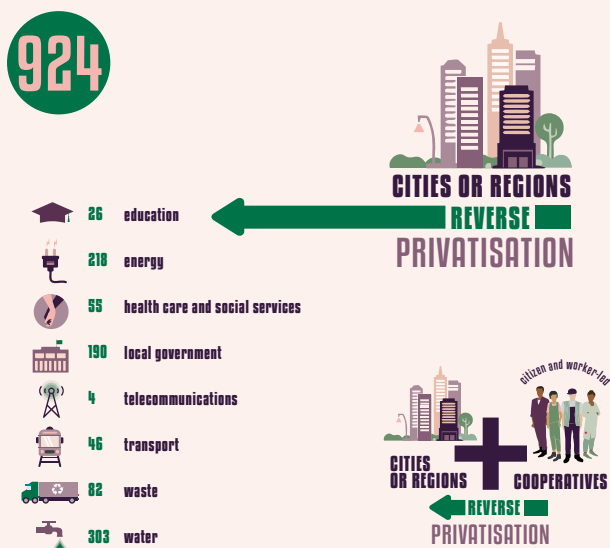
While this publication showcases many examples of the (re)municipalisation of public services—touching virtually every country and every sector—new cases of privatisation continue to emerge. This report is about more than just the numbers: it's about a growing global movement. In many ways, privatisation is the easy option for local and national authorities: it is

pushed by powerful players, accompanied by plenty of international funding, enabled by favourable legal conditions, and it allows politicians wary of election cycles to pass the costs on to the next municipal government. Yet on the other hand, (re)municipalisation is fuelled by the aspirations of communities and local governments to pursue social and environmental goals, to foster local democracy and participation, and ultimately to reclaim democratic control over public services and local resources in order to protect their common futures. As this report shows, these aspirations are so strong that they have successfully led to 924 remunicipalisations and 484 municipalisations between 2000 and 2019.

This wave of (re)municipalisations is taking place at a critical moment. The COVID-19 crisis has made painfully clear the disastrous effects of austerity, social security cuts and privatised health care systems all over the world. In addition, far-right political movements continue to seek to capitalise on people's insecurity and anger, and are using racism, fascism and xenophobia to further divide populations. Progressive forces must offer solidarity and concrete solutions: decent jobs, public services for all, and resilient local economies. We must provide viable public alternatives that strengthen both communities and the democratic fabric of society.

Reclaiming and creating public services: (Re)municipalisation

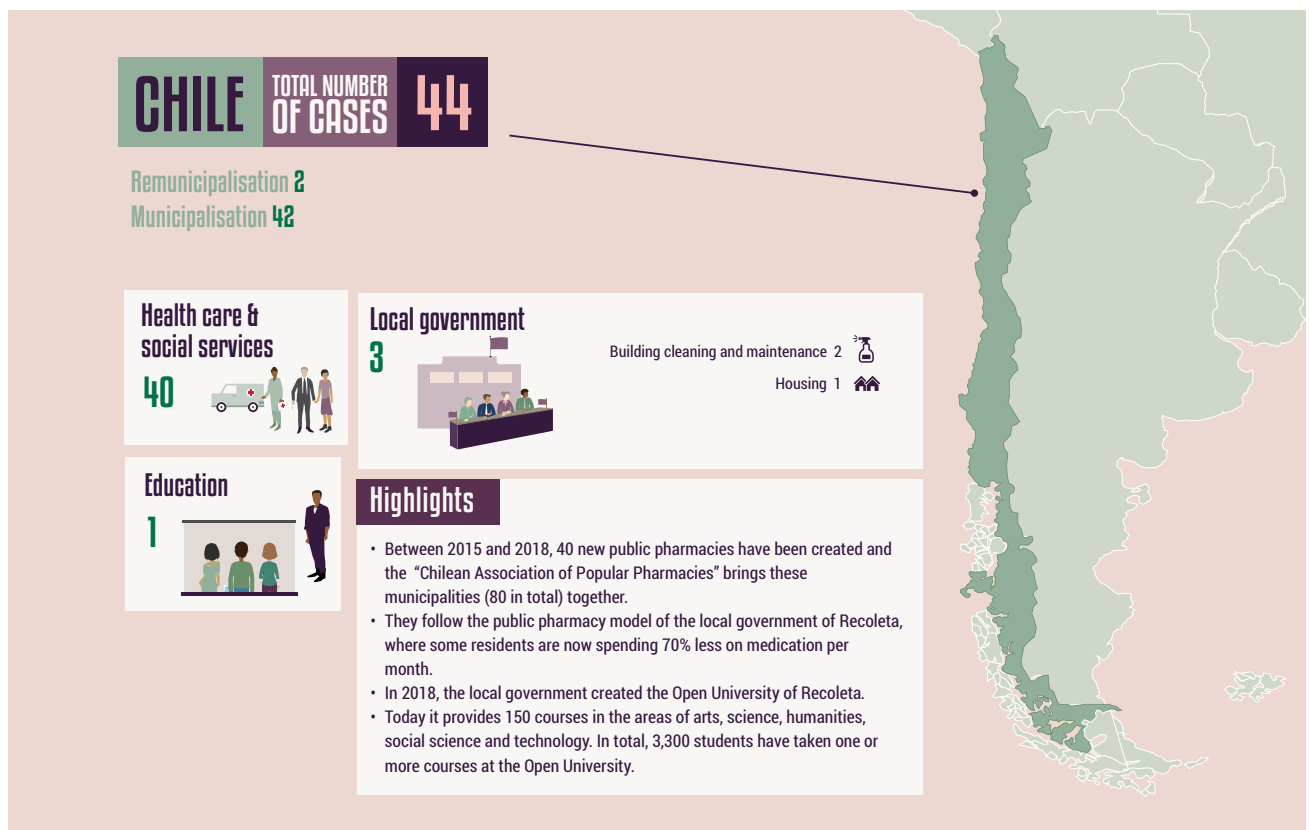
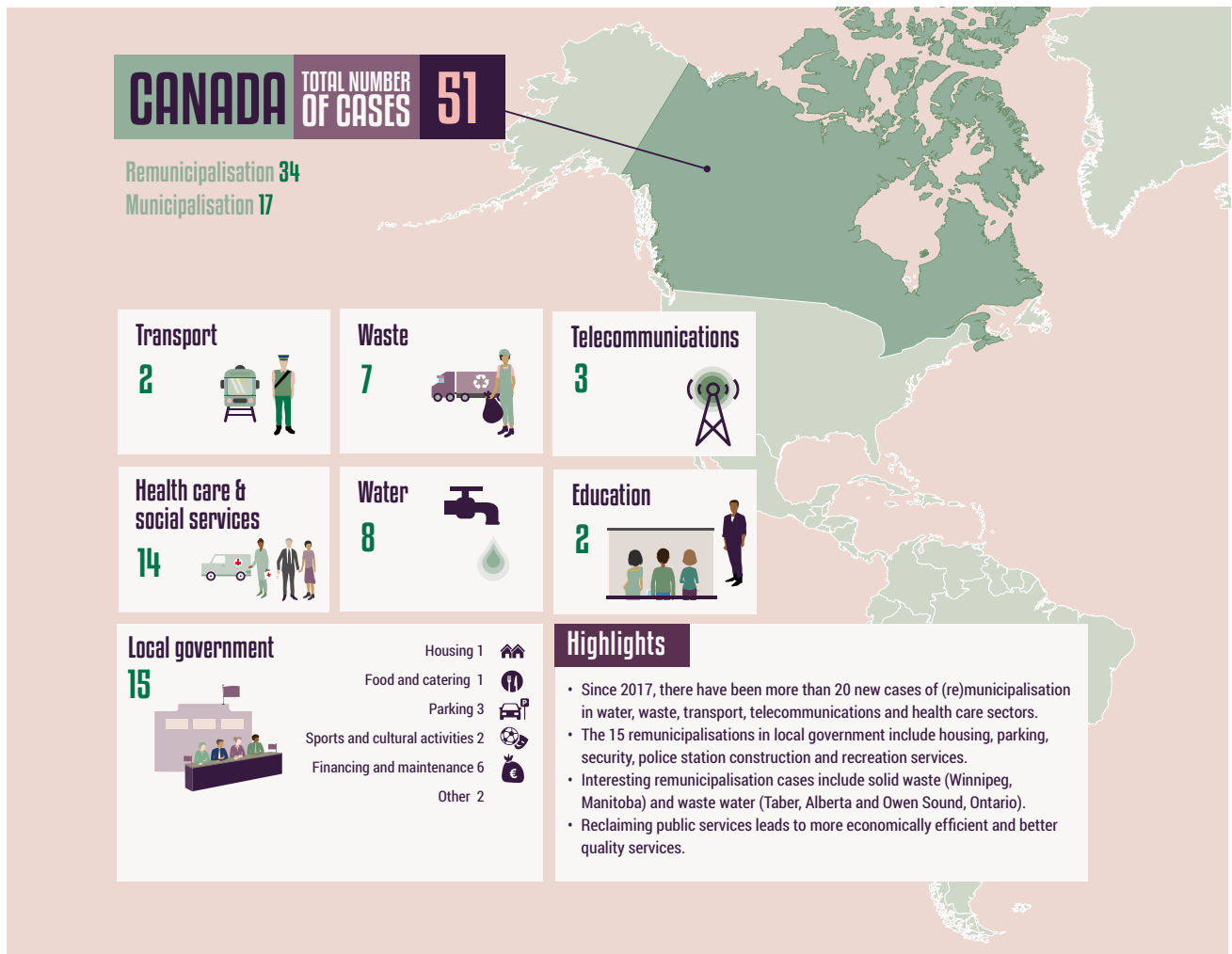
Remunicipalisation



Municipalisation



Country profiles



DENMARK

TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES **35**

Remunicipalisation **29**

Municipalisation **6**

Health care & social services

8



Waste

13



Energy

2



Local government

12



Building cleaning and maintenance **7**

Construction **1**

Human resources **3**

Other **1**

Highlights

- Privatisation in the elderly care sector, imposed by flawed "free choice" policies, has proved uneconomical, with 54 cases of bankruptcy of private providers since 2013.
- The municipality of Frederiksberg (part of Copenhagen) saved even more money than it expected when it decided to collect and manage its waste through its own, employee-led company in 2011.
- Several examples of remunicipalisation and insourcing of cleaning services by local governments and hospitals because of quality problems and labour standards.

FRANCE

TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES **156**

Remunicipalisation **155**

Municipalisation **1**

Transport

21



Waste

3



Energy

2



Water

109



Local government

21



Food and catering **4**

Sports **1**

Parking **3**

Highlights

- Around 70% of all cases took place in the water sector, which has seen a wave of remunicipalisation since 2000, including large cities such as Paris, Rennes, Grenoble, Nice and Montpellier.
- Paris is a significant model for remunicipalisation, with the introduction of groundbreaking democratic accountability mechanisms, an emphasis on access to water for all, including homeless people and migrants, and adaptation to climate change - while keeping prices lower than they were before remunicipalisation.
- Access to organic, local food in school restaurants and childcare is another sector where progressive cities and local authorities are reinventing public services, with the creation of municipal farms and innovative procurement policies.
- Several cities like Paris and Rennes have introduced innovative partnerships with the farming sector to protect water catchments, encourage a shift to organic production and create new markets for them through procurement and public labels.

GERMANY

TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES **411**

Remunicipalisation **255**
Municipalisation **156**

Health care & social services

2



Waste

12



Telecommunications

35



Energy

305



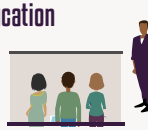
Water

18



Education

5



Local government

34



Housing 4

Food and catering 2

Public (green) space maintenance 3

Security and emergency services 11

Building cleaning and maintenance 6

Sports 5

Cultural activities 3

Highlights

- With financial support from the federal government, new municipal and intermunicipal partnerships have provided broadband services in more than 200 municipalities over the last ten years.
- As part of the German Energiewende (energy transition), municipalities reclaimed more than 300 energy services and networks.
- In Berlin, the district government of Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg brought back apartment blocks in an attempt to prevent rising rents in 2018. In Spandau and Reinickendorf, the local government brought back 6,000 formerly privatised apartments in 2019.

MALAYSIA

TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES **16**

Remunicipalisation **1**
Municipalisation **15**

Health care & social services

4



Telecommunications

1



Education

6



Transport

1



Water

2



Local government

2



Housing 1

Food and catering 1

Highlights

- The state of Selangor successfully remunicipalised water services in 2018 after a 20-year-long costly conflict.
- The state of Selangor's People's Care Initiative (IPR) started in 2008, as an integrated social protection program which covers education, health care, housing and food. They focus on low income families being able to access all these services.
- Free water (20 cubic meters/a month/a family), free bus transportation and 300 free internet Wifi spots are also part of the program.

NORWAY

TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES 42

Remunicipalisation 39
Municipalisation 3

Health care & social services

18



Waste

19



Local government

5



Building cleaning and maintenance 4



Security and emergency services 1



Highlights

- In 2017, more than 100 municipalities took public control over their waste collection after RenoNorden's bankruptcy.
- Merging small towns into one municipality provided an opportunity for inter-municipal remunicipalisation or creation of an integrated municipal company with public sector solidarity and capacity building.
- Remunicipalisation of care services (nursing homes, elderly care) and local government services (staffing agency) are significant.
- Strong and strategic role of workers' unions in the process of remunicipalisation.

PHILIPPINES

TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES 21

Municipalisation 21

Health care & social services

4



Energy

1



Education

3



Local government

6



Public (green) space maintenance 1



Food and catering 4



Security and emergency services 1



Water

7



Highlights

- Philippine municipalities are creating new public services to increase welfare-based social protection.
- Binalonan started delivering effective health care services to residents, including care centres and financial support for health services. The municipality reduced chronic child malnutrition by 17% and increased use of contraceptives by 51%.
- The municipality of Cainta Rizal launched its "One Cainta" program in 2016, providing free education through the establishment of a college, enrolling 800 students per year, and additional health care facilities, improving access to medical services for economically disadvantaged groups.
- Philippine municipalities are taking on an important role in increasing the country's climate resilience, by establishing integrative approaches to farming and fishing, ecosystem protection, and energy generation (Del Carmen and Lanuza).

SPAIN

TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES

119

Remunicipalisation 105

Municipalisation 14

Health care & social services

14



Waste

6



Energy

18



Water

38



Education

2



Local government

41



Housing 2

Food and catering 1

Public (green) space maintenance 12

Parking 6

Building cleaning and maintenance 10

Sports 2

Cultural activities 2

Construction 1

Funeral services 2

Other 3

Highlights

- The number of (re)municipalisations has more than doubled since 2017.
- A very strong social and municipalist movement has pushed for the 38 water remunicipalisations.
- Water remunicipalisation in Terrassa is leading to new forms of democratic decision-making. With the support of civil society, the city created a Water Observatory so users can participate in public management.
- Valladolid has saved €13.3 million since water remunicipalisation in 2017, almost 4% of the municipal budget for 2018.
- In total, 41 local government services were remunicipalised, such as school canteens, green spaces, parking, cleaning and funeral services.

USA

TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES

230

Remunicipalisation 81

Municipalisation 149

Energy

11



Telecommunications

145



Health care & social services

2



Water

71



Local government

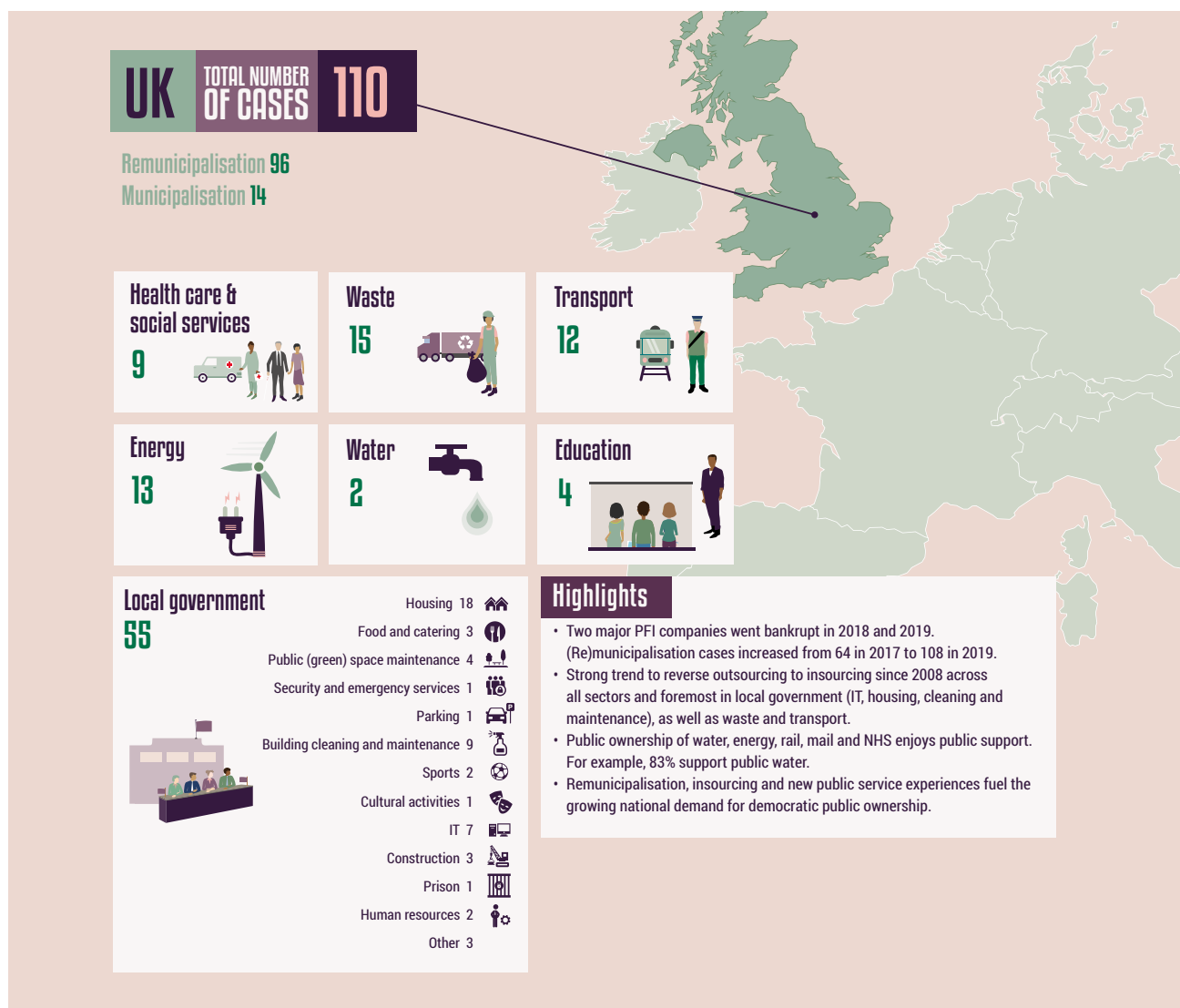
1



Prison 1

Highlights

- A total of 11 energy (re)municipalisations occurred, aimed at tackling the climate crisis, building community wealth and increasing democratic (user) control.
- Since 2002, there have been 71 water remunicipalisations. The busiest year was 2010, with 10 reclaimed water services, leading to reduced user fees.
- Flagship water remunicipalisations took place in Atlanta, Missoula, Montana and Pittsburgh.
- At least 141 new public telecommunication services were created to improve access and democratic control, to deliver jobs and stimulate economic activity (Tullahoma and Chattanooga), improve quality of life and to advance health and education (EC Fiber in Vermont).
- Interesting public-public partnership models involving local authorities in Washington State (Northwest Open Access Network), Skagit County and Thomasville.



Key findings

1. Remunicipalisation and municipalisation are redefining public ownership

The research highlights how remunicipalisation and municipalisation are redefining public ownership and advancing a 21st century vision that centres on democratic participation and control. A growing network of progressive green municipalities is tackling climate change and rising inequality using strategies that feature (re)municipalisation. Cities are perfectly positioned to explore direct democracy, as well as to advance innovative economic models that build community wealth and create decent employment. Motivations for remunicipalisation are diverse, but often involve a failed privatisation. This foregrounds our emerging findings as well as the many positive

changes that are resulting from (re)municipalisation. The most direct positive impact of (re)municipalisation has been the lower costs of operating the services: this is anticipated or has already been achieved in a total of 245 cases. In some cases, a reduction in the operation of the service has meant lower user fees: this is expected or has already happened in 188 cases. In at least 264 cases, investment in the improvement of the service and environmental protection has either risen or is forecasted to do so.

The workers that provide public services are key, and their working conditions inevitably reflect their ability to deliver quality services. Throughout the studied (re)municipalisation processes, overall employment conditions were maintained. In 158 cases, they were even likely to be enhanced or markedly improved when workers – especially those in vulnerable

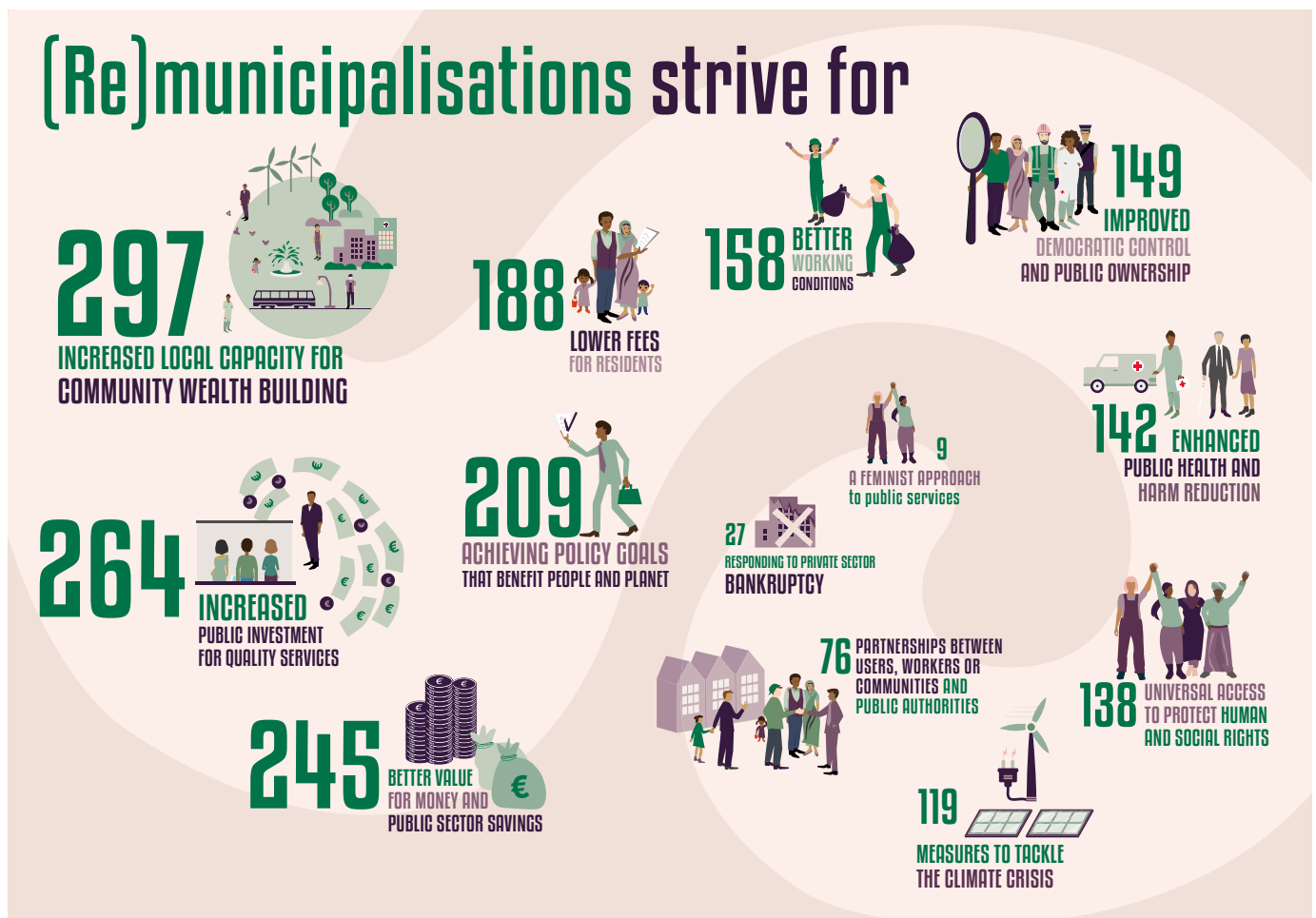
circumstances – were able to achieve better protections and conditions. The involvement of trade unions was critical in attaining these results.

For the sake of future generations, it is our collective duty to develop integrated climate and energy policies that decarbonise society. A significant number of de-privatisations are making a positive impact on local economies by delivering secure employment and attracting new business and research centres. Ecological sustainability and social empowerment also play a key role in building shared community wealth in the local economy (as seen in 297 of the studied cases), and municipal moves away from privatisation are intended to or in fact already have contributed to an ecological transition in at least 119 cases. Efforts towards integrated public policy coordination to protect the environment in the areas of energy, waste, housing, water, food and transport have also been clearly observed (209 cases). Pioneering cities and public companies that strategically invest

to protect the environment far into the future are showing their strength as public actors.

To various degrees in all of the 1,400 cases, we observed that public actors (re)established values that serve public and planetary interests as they returned to or created public services. Together, these key elements for reclaiming and expanding public services provide a solid definition of 21st century public ownership. This trend must continue.

Our research posed the question of whether (re) municipalisation has resulted in improved democratic control under public ownership. The answer in many cases was affirmative; we managed to find clear references to the introduction or improvement of democratic mechanisms in at least 149 cases. Measures and results range from increased accountability, transparency and information disclosure to the establishment of participatory governance in public corporations.



2. Remunicipalisation reduces costs and improves services

Although cost is not the only consideration when deciding to remunicipalise a public service, it is obviously one of the most important factors. Public services provide the best value for money, contrary to neoliberal claims that privatisation, PPPs and outsourcing put less pressure on the public treasury. In 2014, the Auditor General in the Canadian province of Ontario reviewed 74 PPP projects and concluded that they had cost the public CAN\$ 8 billion more than if the province had used public procurement. Similarly, the provincial Auditor General in Canada's British Columbia reviewed 16 PPP projects in 2014 and reported that the province had paid approximately twice as much for private sector financing as it would have if it had borrowed the money itself.³ In the UK, a 2018 National Audit Office report found that the private financing of public projects can cost up to 40 per cent more than relying solely on government borrowing.⁴ To illustrate, a report by the UK Treasury Committee estimated that a privately financed hospital would cost 70 per cent more than a publicly financed one⁵

There are five main reasons why privatised services generally cost more:

1. Corporations must generate profits and pay dividends to their shareholders and any parent companies.
2. Privatisation brings extra layers of complexity and costs, including the payment of substantial fees to the consultants and lawyers who design the contracts.
3. Public authorities lose control over the costs of running the service, as private operators tend to outsource some of the work to other companies and this often comes at high cost.
4. Private operators lack a long-term vision when it comes to financial management.
5. Public bodies typically pay lower interest rates than private entities, hence their borrowing costs are lower.

There is solid evidence that privatisation costs more. Stories of remunicipalisation help us to build our

collective case that services that are publicly owned and directly provided by public sector workers make good economic sense. As previously mentioned, we found at least 245 cases in which (re)municipalisation either aims to or has already managed to reduce the cost of providing services as well as a minimum of at least 264 cases in which municipal companies foresee or have already succeeded in increasing public investment in services and infrastructure. When services return to public ownership, tax revenues and any revenue generated from user fees can be directly invested into improving services and ensuring their sustainability.

Case study A – Valladolid, Spain: Water supply

In 2016, the Valladolid City Council decided to remunicipalise the water supply in the metropolitan area as its contract with a private provider was due to expire the following year. Over the previous 20 years, the private company had raised prices for consumers by 37.28 per cent. This made drinking water almost unaffordable for poorer households, especially after the 2008–2009 economic crisis. An additional incentive was the lack of investment in the water network under private ownership, although the company had consistently reaped high profits.

In 2015, municipal elections brought in a new government and the opportunity to terminate private water management in Valladolid. An absolute majority in the City Council approved the remunicipalisation of water services in December 2016, and the newly established public water company Aquavall went on to employ the entire workforce of the previously private business. After two years in operation, Aquavall had already saved the city €13.3 million, equivalent to 4 per cent of its total budget in 2018 (€337.2 million).⁶ So far, the new public company has had a total turnover of €26.4 million. Much of the profits are now used to maintain and improve the city's sanitation and distribution grids, which in turn has helped to stabilise the maintenance fees paid by consumers. In addition, the remaining revenue is being used to build community wealth through investments in photovoltaic panels, which are expected to lower the cost of electricity production in the future.

3. Private management and ownership of public services risks bankruptcy

The story behind remunicipalisation is often about residents, workers and public officials achieving social and environmental objectives by reclaiming control over public services. But there are also stories of failed privatisations. We counted at least 27 cases involving bankruptcies of private operators while compiling our (re)municipalisation survey. The 2018 collapse of Carillion, a UK company specialised in outsourcing contracts and privatised infrastructure, jeopardised 420 private finance initiative projects as well as the future of 18,000 employees. In Denmark, after so-called ‘free choice’ policies introduced mandatory competition in elderly care, a large number of private companies collapsed. In Norway, the bankruptcy of waste management company RenoNorden would have impacted more than 137 municipalities if the union had not anticipated its economic difficulties and worked with local officials to prepare for the remunicipalisation of services.

Bankruptcies and corporate collapses reveal the truth behind privatisation’s false promises of efficiency and innovation; many privatisation deals are economically unviable. Outsourcing contracts and public-private partnerships are often designed to prioritise profits and dividends over service quality. When profits dry up or fail to materialise, corporations and investors walk away, abandoning the service as well as the workers and people who rely on it for survival. Another illustration of privatisation’s economic failures is the unwillingness of private operators to deliver services to areas, communities or user groups that are not profitable enough, cannot afford to pay or are more expensive to serve. For example, major telecommunications companies in the US have not been interested in serving rural areas, smaller municipalities and low-income communities. Local governments and community-owned companies have stepped in to fill the gap by developing high-speed broadband internet infrastructure in many areas where corporations had failed to deliver.

In most African countries, private waste operators operate only in the wealthiest neighbourhoods of large cities, thus excluding the vast majority of the population. In the city of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania,

the privatisation of waste services has led to unequal coverage: affluent city areas receive good service and poorer neighbourhoods are neglected. Consequently, 70 per cent of Dar es Salaam’s waste is either disposed of informally, illegally dumped in waterways or fields, or burned.⁷

Case study B – Kragerø, Norway: Waste management

In Kragerø, employees and the works council of the private waste collection company RenoNorden alerted the municipal administration in 2017 that the firm was no longer fulfilling its duties. Following a thorough analysis, the municipality concurred and decided to bring waste collection back in-house. It managed to end the contract with RenoNorden before the company went bankrupt and succeeded in keeping on its employees. As a consequence of this remunicipalisation, waste collection fees for residents have been reduced by 14 per cent, while wages and pensions for the employees have increased. The municipality continues to save money by avoiding expensive tendering processes, and also benefits from the increase in full-time staff who are able to help out with other municipal services.

In addition to better pay, former RenoNorden employees also report other improvements. For example, the municipality offers educational support to workers without formal vocational training so that they can obtain official diplomas, and more staff are receiving permanent contracts with increased hours or full-time positions.⁸

Case study C – Region of Southern Denmark: Ambulance services

Until the summer of 2016, the Region of Southern Denmark outsourced its ambulance service to private companies. Soon after winning the last public tender, however, the Danish arm of Dutch ambulance company BIOS not only struggled to recruit enough drivers, but also failed to reimburse an accidental double payment made by the Region. As a result, BIOS Denmark went bankrupt in

July 2016. The Region took the opportunity to remunicipalise the rescue service, hiring 657 former BIOS employees and an additional 100 emergency medical technicians. In comparison with the operational costs under BIOS' predecessor FALCK, the Region managed to reduce the cost of ambulance services by 15 per cent, while simultaneously improving the quality through hiring extra staff. A political majority in the Region of Southern Denmark has since decided to exclude private companies from handling ambulance operations in Southern Jutland and on the island of Funen.⁹

4. (Re)municipalisation helps to uphold and promote human and social rights

The 2018 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights¹⁰ says that the widespread privatisation of public services and infrastructure is systematically eliminating human rights protections and further marginalising people who live in poverty. The report looks at the human rights implications of privatisation in the criminal justice system, social services, water, sanitation, electricity, healthcare, transportation and education. Special Rapporteur Philip Alston criticises the lack of human rights criteria in most privatisation agreements; these deals rarely include any monitoring of the impact on poor people.

(Re)municipalisation is an antidote to this erosion of human rights. Our study discovered 138 cases in which the defence of human and social rights was a clear policy objective of (re)municipalisation, as well as many concrete measures to achieve this goal. For example, the Parisian public water company Eau de Paris was established in 2010, ending a long period of privatisation that had begun in the mid-1980s. The company states that its mission goes beyond connecting pipes; it is committed to defending the human right to water for all people in Paris regardless of their legal status. Eau de Paris is maintaining and expanding a network of public water fountains across the city that provide access to water for the most vulnerable populations. This is an essential service for the refugees who arrive in the city each day, as well as for people experiencing homelessness.¹¹

Case study D – Selangor State, Malaysia: Health and social care

Following a change of government in 2008, Selangor introduced an integrated social protection program called *Inisiatif Peduli Rakyat* ('People's Care Initiative'). Funded through state revenues, the programme aims to improve the welfare of various vulnerable groups in the areas of education, social care, water provision, transportation, housing and food. Improving social care plays a particularly important role in this initiative; since 2008, the Skim Mesra Usia Emas ('Golden Age Friendly') scheme has been offering a funeral payment of RM2,500 (€538) for registered senior citizens looking to help relatives cover their burial expenses. In addition, a women's health scheme launched in 2010 provides free mammograms to women aged 35 and above. Yet another initiative launched in 2017 subsidises primary healthcare provision for low-income households, with the state providing RM500 (equivalent to €108) per year for medical expenses.¹²

Case study E – Berlin, Germany: Housing

The German capital city Berlin has seen a doubling of the average rent in just five years.¹³ Local governments have responded to residents' resulting outcry with decisive measures, such as the public acquisition of privatised housing units and a policy to halt rising rents. In the Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg borough, for example, the district senate supported residents in stopping the sale of 675 apartments to real estate holding Deutsche Wohnen. Tenants had feared disproportionate rent increases due to the unnecessary renovation projects imposed by the company.¹⁴

The federal state of Berlin called upon the district court to prevent the sales, but its request was rejected in 2018. Circumventing legal restrictions, the senate then enabled tenants to make use of their pre-emption rights by means of a so-called 'stretched acquisition': residents could 'buy' their apartments and then sell them on to the public Berlin Housing Association. In late 2019, the Housing Association bought back an

additional 6,000 apartments in the districts of Spandau and Reinickendorf¹⁵ – the largest act of remunicipalisation in German history. In October 2019, the Berlin state passed a rent control law that froze rents at the June 2019 level for the next five years, and also capped rental payments at a set maximum.¹⁶

The tenants of 1.5 million Berlin homes will benefit from these changes. Against the backdrop of this powerful municipal activity, the tenant movement is growing fast: demands for a referendum to transfer around 240,000 apartments currently in the hands of Deutsche Wohnen and other big property companies into public ownership are gaining traction.

5. (Re)municipalisation can reverse precarious work

Privatisation, outsourcing, PPPs, austerity measures and similar policies are often justified with claims that the private sector is more efficient and will save public funds. In reality however, if private operators do reduce costs, it is often at the expense of public service workers. By cutting jobs, eroding working conditions and undermining collective bargaining, privatisation is a powerful driver of precarious work. This is a problem not only for workers, their families and local communities, but also for users as the quality and accessibility of the service decline.

In contrast, there are many examples of remunicipalisation and insourcing in which local councils have saved money while improving working conditions and/or pay. Since 2011, London's Islington Council has taken back contracts worth about £380 million in cleaning, building and grounds maintenance as well as waste management services. The move has meant better pay and improved working conditions for 1,200 frontline employees, and has generated savings of about £14 million.¹⁷ In Kragerø, Norway, the remunicipalisation of waste management has led to a 14 per cent reduction in fees for residents, while delivering an increase in workers' wages and pensions.

This report documents at least 158 cases of municipalisation and remunicipalisation that aim to improve or that have already bettered conditions for workers. Improvements include pay, occupational health and safety, freedom of association, collective bargaining, freedom of speech and worker participation in decision making. These cases demonstrate that providing quality employment and improving workers' conditions – while valuing their knowledge and experience about how services should be organised and operated – goes hand in hand with building accessible and economically efficient public services. It is no coincidence that workers and their unions are often at the forefront of (re)municipalisation efforts.

Case study F – Seoul, South Korea: Cleaning in urban transport

A capital city with nearly 10 million residents, Seoul has undergone a comprehensive labour policy reform under the leadership of the current mayor Park Won-soon. Between 2013 and 2017, the city regularised the employment status of 7,296 public sector workers, 70 per cent of whom are cleaners. Many of them are now directly employed by the two new public corporations, Seoul Metro Environment and Seoul Urban Rail Green Environment. Previously, they had worked for subcontractors who provided no social or health protections and did not pay them properly. Their salaries have since gone up by an average of 7.3 per cent, and their welfare rights have become standardised. Despite increased labour costs, the city's balance sheet has also improved, as the elimination of management fees and 10 per cent VAT payments to subcontractors have significantly reduced operational costs.¹⁸

6. (Re)municipalisation can improve public health and reduce harm

The health care sector faces ever-increasing privatisation pressures, for example from outsourcing and competitive tenders. Profit-making service providers and facilities enjoy a growing market thanks to liberalisation, which is driven largely by international trade and investment agreements.

It is clear however that remunicipalisation and municipalisation in the health sector benefits public health, especially for the most vulnerable families. Examples from the publication include a regional hospital complex in Helsinki, Finland and new public pharmacies in 40 Chilean municipalities. These cases highlight how public authorities have established solid commitments to protect public health by investing in and directly providing services.

Our study counted at least 142 cases of newly created or remunicipalised public services that did or are expected to enhance public health or provide harm reduction services. Harm reduction services, which include a range of health and social policies and programmes, are often overlooked although they are vital for improving public health. These services lessen the stigma and physical consequences associated with drug use by supporting rather than excluding and criminalising users.

Supervised drug consumption rooms, where people can safely and hygienically use drugs under staffed and controlled conditions, have emerged in 29 cities across Europe as well as in Canada, Brazil and Australia. These initiatives, which have points of contact for help and support, have significantly contributed to harm reduction among people experiencing addiction and have decreased social exclusion and alienation.

Case study G – Recoleta (Santiago Metropolitan Region), Chile: Access to medicines

In a country characterised by deeply embedded neoliberalism, the commune of Recoleta in Chile has been swimming against the current. In this area to the north of Santiago, nearly 14 per cent of the population lives in poverty; more than double the regional average. Mayor Daniel Jadue, who won the 2012 elections, has started to recover public ownership of healthcare services and has created new public programmes in education and housing to better support local residents.

Many Chileans still depend on privately owned pharmacies for their medication, and are vulnerable to unregulated price setting by the three companies that monopolise the operation of 90 per cent of the

country's dispensaries. With the goal of providing affordable medicine for the population, the local government of Recoleta created the country's first 'popular pharmacy' in 2015. Restoring the role of the state as a direct supplier of goods, this model has also revived the solidarity aspect of social security by facilitating equal access for people with lower incomes through subsidies. Now in its fifth year of operation, the model has proven to be highly effective. Calculations by the municipality show a significant cut in the cost of medicine for residents; some people's monthly medical bills have seen reductions of up to 70 per cent.¹⁹

Case study H – São Paulo, Brazil: Harm reduction

Over the past 20 years, the São Paulo neighbourhood of Luz has been known for its high number of residents struggling with homelessness and addiction to crack cocaine. Many public initiatives tried to address this situation during the 1990s and 2000s with a focus on neighbourhood security and the criminalisation of addicts. However, in January 2014, then Mayor Fernando Haddad adopted a new approach: working with community leaders and local NGOs to negotiate the removal of 147 tents and starting a dialogue with crack cocaine users.

Among the new projects is the publicly funded Open Arms programme, which reaches out to drug users with the offer of accommodation, three meals per day, a job at the municipality and access to health services – all of this without forcing the clients to stop using drugs. Since its creation, 73 per cent of those helped by Open Arms have stopped using crack cocaine, saving the state R\$68 million (€11.8 million).²⁰

7. (Re)municipalisation can enable democratic public ownership

Public ownership is not always democratic or efficient. The public sector may be bogged down by bureaucracy and inefficiency, or captured by vested interests, corruption and authoritarian rulers. However, these same problems can similarly affect private sector companies and organisations.

Building strong, high-quality public services requires new forms of public ownership that allow residents to participate in democratic decision making, both directly and indirectly. Many forms exist. Changes brought about by (re)municipalisation range from strengthened mechanisms for accountability, transparency and information disclosure to the establishment of participatory governance in public corporations. A (re)municipalised or new municipal company can democratise its governance by ensuring that user representatives are on the board, as is the case for water services in Grenoble and Paris. In Denmark, the law enables public companies to reserve one-third of their board seats for worker representatives.

Including worker and user representatives on the decision-making bodies of public entities is one of the most important ways to improve governance and expand the meaning of public ownership. This representation can be enhanced by the creation of meaningful spaces for users, such as peoples' observatories and assemblies. Cities including Paris, Barcelona and Terrassa in Spain include worker and citizen representatives on the advisory boards of their public utilities. In Terrassa, an autonomous body called the Terrassa Water Observatory was created with the mandate to facilitate citizen participation in the co-creation of policies and in decisions affecting the municipal water supply.

Our research identified clear references to increased democratic control as the confirmed or expected result of (re)municipalisation in at least 149 cases. The Mexican city of Ramos Arizpe stopped a PPP for water services and successfully remunicipalised the service in 2014. The mayor announced that the new public company, COMPARA, would open up participation in order to transform the relationship between the service provider and users. The technical council, one of the company's main governance bodies, is composed of the mayor, two representatives from the state government water operator, the manager of COMPARA, experts from a research centre, and activists from the users' association.²¹ Examples like these from Ramos Arizpe and Terrassa show that the democratic level of any public enterprise depends on the social struggle, i.e. the extent to which residents are organised in the demand for popular control and meaningful participation in the governance of a public service.

Public ownership can take the form of collaboration with grassroots citizens' and workers' cooperatives, or of co-ownership shared between a public authority and a not-for-profit association. In the German town of Wolfhagen, the cooperative that helped fund the local wind turbines owns a quarter of the public energy company and has two seats on its board.²² This co-ownership, which happened after the remunicipalisation of the local electricity grid, resulted in lower power bills, investments in the cooperative's kindergarten and a near doubling of the number of staff.

Interestingly, collaborations and partnerships with community-based organisations tend to reinvent the culture of public institutions and encourage deeper democratic practice. They reshape relations between governments, the economy and a people in a way that enables social and environmental goals to come first. There are many examples of public authorities working with nonprofits and cooperatives. For instance, various Dutch municipalities support the nonprofit association Wireless Leiden in providing free internet in some parts of the city of Leiden as well as in surrounding towns. Across Spain, proactive cities are choosing cooperative energy retailers such as Som Energia, GoiEner and Energética over large private companies.

Case study I – Terrassa, Spain: Water supply

In Catalonia's third largest city, Terrassa, the citizen platform *Taula de l'Aigua de Terrassa* began to campaign for a return to public water management in 2014. Their Social Pact for Public Water, which aims to ensure the public, integrated and participatory management of the entire water cycle, gained support from municipal election candidates in 2015. The following year, the recently elected city council passed a motion in favour of direct water management, and *Taigua* was ultimately created as a public enterprise in 2018. Soon afterwards, Terrassa's citizens' forum, whose positions are taken into account by local authorities, approved the establishment of the Terrassa Water Observatory (*Observatorio del Agua de Terrassa, OAT*).

This observatory works independently from the

municipality. It abides by the Social Pact for Public Water and holds decision-making power over public water management. Designed to facilitate citizen participation and strategic decision making, the OAT's highest governing body is composed of a representative of each political group, the municipal government, technical service staff, businesses, community groups, unions and local university researchers. As it has taken up the challenge to govern and co-produce water services together with its users, the collaborative public water model of the OAT has become a point of reference for many other municipalities in Catalonia and throughout Spain.²³

Case study J – Plymouth, UK: Energy transition

In 2013, the City of Plymouth and its residents established the Plymouth Energy Community (PEC), a member-owned community benefit organisation whose profits are reinvested into the community. The city provided a grant, loans and staff expertise to the organisation in order to boost its capacity to “create a fair, affordable, low-carbon energy system with local people at its heart”. In 2014, the PEC developed its own green energy arm, PEC Renewables, which funds, installs and manages local schemes for the generation of renewable energy. By 2019, PEC had helped more than 20,000 households to save over £1 million on energy bills and had cleared a total of over £26,000 in small debt. PEC has also built a solar farm on a plot of contaminated land, which combined with rooftop panels on schools and community buildings has enabled the city to produce enough clean electricity to supply 2,000 homes. Revenue, which is expected to amount to £1.5 million over the project's 20-year lifetime, will be reinvested in initiatives to reduce carbon emissions and energy poverty in Plymouth. As the municipality continues to work alongside PEC, this public-community partnership has become the democratic driving force behind the city's localised energy transition.²⁴

8. Remunicipalisation must engage with and learn from workers

Alliances of trade unions and civil society organisations have led numerous fights against privatisation to victory. In Lagos, Nigeria, an alliance of unions, communities and NGOs created a citizens' vision and strategies to reform the state water company as an alternative to privatisation. On the subject of de-privatisation, Public Services International (PSI) has worked with affiliated trade unions to identify lessons about how to prepare for the remunicipalisation of public services.²⁵

The remunicipalisation of public services both involves and affects workers, as they are the ones operating services and entrenched in their structures. The labour dimension exemplifies that every remunicipalisation case is unique due to the local and national regulations that affect the terms and conditions of workers' employment. Important recommendations include reaching out at an early stage to all affected workers and supporting them through the process; ensuring regular communication and cooperation between national union federations and their local branches; and seeking to open a negotiation table with local authorities as soon as possible in order to ensure a fair private-to-public transition for all service workers.

The Norwegian municipal workers' union deployed successful strategies following the massive bankruptcy of RenoNorden in 2017, which affected waste collection services in 137 municipalities.²⁶ The union's national head office teamed up with the local branch in order to influence city councils in the affected municipalities to vote against the new tender so as to bring waste services back in-house. The Oslo branch of Fagforbundet, the Norwegian public services union, turned a vulnerable transition period into an opportunity by growing its membership with inclusive recruitment strategies. The Fagforbundet teams recruited workers from the private company – many of them migrants with temporary contracts – prior to remunicipalisation. They successfully built up solidarity with non-union workers during the transition, ultimately securing permanent employment and improved working conditions for the remunicipalised workers.

Local tripartite cooperation is exercised in more than half of Norway's municipalities. Politicians, administrative leaders and trade unions work constructively to create a culture of collaboration that promotes the collective finding of the best local solutions for the specific challenges facing the municipality. Employees and other voices normally not heard by municipal management are given a platform through the creation of a forum to share ideas and suggestions, and these are in turn handled systematically. Fagforbundet argues that tripartite cooperation following remunicipalisation is a useful tool for improving services from the workers' point of view, and that it also helps to counter further outsourcing and privatisation forces in the public sector.²⁷

9. Transforming public ownership for ecofeminist public services

Ecofeminist public services put care for people and the planet, rather than private profit, at the centre. Taking an ecofeminist approach to public services forces us to recognise that we as human beings are deeply interdependent on each other as well as on the biospace that we inhabit. Consequently, this viewpoint advocates for a transformation of how public services are owned and organised.

Privatisation, public-private partnerships and outsourcing are focused on short-term financial gain. These models of service delivery tend to amplify existing injustices and destroy ecosystems. They are also likely to harm vulnerable people who are more reliant on public services, a disproportionate number of whom are women. Furthermore, the pursuit of profit often leads to rate hikes, compromising access to services.

When subsidies are cut as part of austerity measures and privatisations, care for children, the elderly and others becomes unaffordable. Care work tends to fall to women, as the division of labour that underpins our economic model is deeply gendered and racialised. Not only do women still carry out the majority of care and domestic work – which pays poorly or not at all – but much of this work is outsourced to women of colour. In addition, the high concentration of women working in public care, cleaning and

education jobs bears the brunt of the burden when these sectors are privatised. Together, the impacts of privatisation hit groups that are already marginalised the hardest, especially those who face discrimination in the labour market and have lower incomes. As a result, women of colour, indigenous women, migrant women and LGBTQI+ persons, among others, pay the highest price for privatisation. Gender justice and privatisation are therefore fundamentally opposed. And whereas reversing privatisation and rebuilding public services increases accessibility, public ownership is unfortunately no guarantee for gender justice.

While it is essential that women are equally represented in leadership positions, this alone will not ensure that a public service meets the essential needs of poorer women and that it operates within planetary boundaries. An ecofeminist approach would enable deeper levels of democratisation, in which public services are run from the bottom up and care for both human and non-human life is incorporated. Ultimately, we need to feminise how politics are done.²⁸ This would mean that politicians and public administrations would not only listen to residents but would include them on a permanent basis in policy and decision-making processes. In turn, this would require new mechanisms through which marginalised groups are given the real power to ensure that public services improve the everyday lives of the many, instead of just the elite few. This is because, as COVID-19 has taught us, our societies are only as safe, healthy and resilient as the most oppressed among us.²⁹

Some Philippine cities are at the forefront of providing women-focused services. The Bagong Silang Cooperative, located in Caloocan, was created by local women to supply residents of this poor urban community with bulk water. Profits are paid back to members of the cooperative and reinvested in public services, such as childcare. In 2019, Bagong Silang was serving 742 households. In another example, the municipality of Binalonan in the Philippines has been providing financial assistance to women, children, single parents and senior citizens, as well as childcare and free primary health care since 2015.³⁰

10. (Re)municipalisation can strengthen community wealth and local economies

Reclaiming and creating publicly owned services such as waste collection, food, cleaning and telecommunications can transform entire communities. When a utility company is democratically controlled, it is far more likely to reinvest its profits back into the community and in that way localise the economy. Community wealth building, a term coined by the US-based Democracy Collaborative, refers to engaging so-called ‘anchor institutions’ whose procurement, employment and investment decisions can bring ecological and equitable economic development.

These anchor institutions, which range from the municipality itself to hospitals, universities, public telecoms companies and community-owned waste facilities, are locally rooted and have the capacity to improve people’s quality of life. For example, local governments are using public procurement to contract with worker cooperatives in order to keep their cities clean (for example in Valparaíso, Chile). They are also partnering with local farmers to protect groundwater and to sell organic food to school restaurants (as is the case in Rennes, France). Localising the economy can also take the form of municipalities removing public services from the market and reducing user fees. For example, Islington in the UK brought 35,000 council homes back in-house in 2011. Six years later, the municipality created Angelic Energy, a new public energy company. These decisions enable the council to provide fairer priced housing, power and gas, in particular for lower-income households.

Our research counted 297 such cases of (re)municipalisation that did or were expected to contribute to community wealth building and to sustaining a resilient local economy. Some of these examples involve the wiser use of locally abundant natural resources, while others create meaningful jobs for residents and new sustainable business activities. The preservation and build-up of local ecological knowledge and practices are pivotal to building future-proof public services.

Case study K – Cities across the United States: Telecommunications

A total of 141 new public telecommunications services have been created by local authorities in the United States over the past few years. Aimed at improving access and democratic control, municipalities have come up with schemes to deliver jobs and increase economic activity (for example in Tullahoma, Chattanooga and Thomasville, Tennessee); to improve quality of life (in Wilson, North Carolina and Mount Washington, Massachusetts); and to advance access to health care and education (for instance with the ECFiber internet nonprofit in Vermont).

In Thomasville, Georgia, the publicly owned Community Network Services (CNS) have been credited with helping to support small businesses and a thriving downtown area. The local government of Scott County, Minnesota, created a public fibre network by first connecting anchor institutions, such as schools and municipal facilities. The network has created more than 1,000 jobs and has tremendously improved internet access for the area’s educational institutions. Public ownership has also resulted in major savings for the local school district, whose telecoms expenses went down from \$58 to \$7 per megabit. In Morristown, Tennessee, the newly created and publicly owned FiberNET provides excellent and affordable internet services to families, businesses and public institutions. Furthermore, the fibre network has delivered major savings, created employment and prompted companies to relocate to Morristown due to the area’s faster internet speed.³¹

Case study L – Zabaleen community in Cairo, Egypt: Waste management

The Zabaleen community consists of around 70,000 residents who have traditionally sorted about two-thirds of Cairo’s mostly organic waste – up to 15,000 tons each day. Their door-to-door waste collection and management system enables recycling rates of 85 per cent in the city and relies heavily on pigs, which feed on the food waste.

Cairo's waste management was privatised in early 2000, and the companies that took over from the Zabaleen workers only achieved recycling rates of around 25 per cent. They even failed to collect the waste from certain parts of the city, requiring residents to bring their own rubbish to central collection points and charging them for this poor service via their electricity bills. What's more, the Zabaleen workers who had been recruited to help the companies with sorting were now earning 75 per cent less than previously.

Following hundreds of lawsuits on the inclusion of waste management costs in electricity bills, the Cairo government decided to remunicipalise the system in 2017 and to partner again with the Zabaleen community. The waste management system run by the Zabaleen community demonstrates that creating a circular economy is possible – even in mega cities like Cairo, which is home to 18 million inhabitants.³²

11. (Re)municipalisation is a strategy to tackle the climate emergency

It will be very challenging to tackle the climate crisis as long as private operators are running energy services and infrastructure for profit. Maximising sales and returns on investment are at odds with a dramatic reduction in energy use. Yet this transition towards a low-carbon economy that is no longer obsessed with the extractive 'growth' that continues to fuel catastrophic climate change is urgently needed.

Municipalities and public authorities are better positioned than multinationals to prioritise long-term ecological concerns over short-term financial considerations. While international and country-wide coordination is clearly vital for achieving a global energy transition, many communities, citizens and cities are already reacting to the climate crisis by retrofitting the housing stock, generating renewable energy in their regions, localising food systems and addressing the risks of extreme weather events.

Our research found that tackling the climate crisis, for example by switching to renewable energy and reducing CO₂ emissions, was a key reason for (re)

municipalising a public service in at least 119 cases. The majority of these cases were in the energy sector. According to our study, the number of energy (re)municipalisations around the world increased by almost 20 per cent between 2017 and 2019 to reach a total of 374.

In many countries, a small number of large private corporations monopolise the energy market. And despite decades of pressure from civil society, most energy corporations continue to extract ever-more fossil fuels. This is a key reason for communities and cities to reverse energy privatisation or, like Nottingham in the UK, to create new municipal energy companies. In a liberalised energy market, where competition favours the big players, most municipalities do not have the ability to expropriate a private company. However, they may be able to create new public energy companies that invest in energy efficiency projects and generate local solar and wind energy. Furthermore, by retrofitting public and residential buildings, municipalities can significantly reduce their energy use and make energy more affordable for everyone.³³

In 2018, the Bulgarian city of Dobrich remunicipalised its street lighting. As of late 2019, the city had replaced 1,500 old light bulbs with energy-efficient LED units. This has cut electricity use for street lighting by a total of 47 per cent. The city also retrofitted 71 municipal buildings and 41 residential apartment blocks, resulting in heating bills that were between 30 and 60 per cent lower for thousands of families.³⁴

Ending privatisation allows municipalities to coordinate public policy in order to meet today's biggest challenges, which include tackling the climate crisis and poverty. Our research identified at least 209 cases of (re)municipalisation that strive for better policy coordination to improve equality, sustainability and social cohesion. They do this by interlinking emissions reductions and energy poverty, for example. Privatised power companies on the other hand generally continue to rely on fossil fuels, and their price hikes may result in unbearable conditions for residents living in energy poverty.³⁵

Both the impacts of the climate crisis and municipal responses differ widely from one geographical context to another. As many communities in the global South have been at the frontline of the climate crisis for a long time, local authorities have needed to mitigate against the impacts of so-called climate disasters. In the Philippines, for example, municipalities are developing services to support not only farmers but also the more vulnerable people in society.

Reclaiming transport and waste services can also help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The recent remunicipalisation of public transport in the Dutch cities of Rotterdam and The Hague for example has enabled both cities to partially replace their fleets with electric buses. In another case, the French city of Briançon committed to achieving 'zero waste' when it remunicipalised its waste services in 2013, and has already reduced the amount of waste produced by 33 per cent.

Case study M – Cities across the Philippines: Addressing the impacts of extreme weather events

In the Philippine cities of Dumangas, Gerona, and Siargao, the local governments have created climate schools to help farmers and fishing communities to better address the impacts of extreme weather events and other climate-related hazards that are threatening their incomes and livelihoods. By learning how to monitor weather changes and adjust agricultural practices accordingly, students of the Dumangas climate school have already managed to improve local rice production.³⁶

Case study O – Lanuza, Philippines: Disaster risk reduction and rehabilitation

The surfing town of Lanuza has created a Disaster Risk Reduction and Rehabilitation unit to improve the resilience of the municipality in the face of the worsening climate crisis. As the local economy is highly dependent upon its forests, watersheds and mangroves, it is using a comprehensive framework that takes into account the interdependence between people's livelihoods and the entire ecosystem. In order to enhance the

town's resilience, the unit is specifically prioritising the needs of women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities.³⁷

Case study N – Rennes, France: Water management, organic agriculture and quality food for school children

Rennes, in the Brittany region of France, remunicipalised its water service in 2014. In a region known for its polluting industrial agriculture, protecting water sources was a key long-term concern for the remunicipalised operator. The city's Terre de Sources ('Land of Springs') programme, launched in 2015, has been helping farmers with the switch to a pesticide-free agro-ecological mode of production as a way to prevent water pollution at the source. Simultaneously, the initiative has increased local demand for the farmers' produce by linking up with school canteens in the wider Rennes area and by creating a new label under the Terre de Sources name that facilitates commercial sales of their local, sustainably produced foods in supermarkets. Other French cities, including Paris, have developed similar programmes to protect their catchment areas as well as to provide quality food for school children and avoid expensive water treatment.³⁸

12. Public-public cooperation can counter corporate power

Remunicipalisation can be a very uneven battle. Local public authorities and communities have far fewer resources than big corporations. Local, national and international cooperation between public operators is key to shifting the balance of power. Whether informal or institutionally formalised, public-public cooperation has often been critical to the growth of the (re)municipalisation movement. In the case of the French water sector, where Suez and Veolia initially controlled all levers of power – policy, research, technology and advice to local authorities – pioneering public authorities such as Grenoble and Paris played a key role in initiating and fostering this kind of active collaboration. Without such synergy at the municipal level, (re)municipalisation would not have been possible.³⁹

Public-public cooperation also remains essential in the period following remunicipalisation. This is especially true when it comes to research and development; new public services must be solidified and able to respond to new challenges. Partnerships between public operators, along with alliances with academic institutions, can offer effective responses to this end. This type of knowledge creation and management is not done for commercial reasons, with the intent of developing and selling patented technological solutions. It is carried out with the public interest in mind, and in such a way that allows for flexibility in the adaptation of knowledge to local conditions.

Such forms of public cooperation are also key in extending public services to countries or areas where the private sector has been unwilling or unable to provide coverage, including rural regions, low-income neighbourhoods and disinvested communities. It was critical in extending community-owned broadband internet infrastructure to small and rural towns in the United States. In the water sector, not-for-profit public-public partnerships with established operators have helped newly created or fragile operators (for instance in the global South) to consolidate their operations and become more efficient.

Often, the consolidation of public services in rural regions and urban areas – in other words, the merging of small local public services into larger ones – is seen as being favourable to privatisation, as it creates larger markets that are more desirable for private companies. Interestingly however, harnessing the force of public-public cooperation can turn this situation upside down and make consolidation an opportunity for remunicipalisation and democratisation on a larger scale.

Case study P – Nice metropolitan area, France: Water

Councillors from Nice and its surrounding communes announced in 2013 that the city's water services would gradually shift towards public management. The private company that had been in charge of water management in this fifth largest city in France had been in operation ever since the metropole's water system was first set up in 1864.

Nice's Côte d'Azur was the country's first 'metropolitan area' when it was created in 2012. The area is unique in that the great majority of the vast extent of its land is located in rural or mountainous areas, ranging from the alpine peaks of the Mercantour National Park all the way to the Mediterranean Sea. The main reason that the city chose the path of remunicipalisation was its aim to establish "territorial solidarity" across this very large and incredibly varied area; private management had become "unsuitable" for an area of this size. Today, 33 of Nice's 49 municipalities – roughly 80 per cent of the population – depend on the newly created public company *Eau d'Azur*.

Only public management was thought to be capable of promoting solidarity-based relationships and the necessary 'pooling of resources' between the metropolitan area's municipalities. *Eau d'Azur* is now planning to further standardise the quality of its service and its water prices throughout the Nice metropolitan area.⁴⁰

Case study Q – Nottingham, UK: Energy supply

Robin Hood Energy is a municipal energy supplier (and a 'Living Wage Employer') in Nottingham. It was created in 2015 to fight energy poverty and challenge the country's Big Six energy companies by offering guaranteed price transparency, banning director bonuses and excluding private shareholders.

Today, this not-for-profit company assists and partners with nine other UK cities that have set up their own 'white label' enterprises to offer the same affordable tariff to all of their residents. Through these public partnerships, Robin Hood Energy is already serving a total of over 130,000 users across the country. The company is reinvesting all of its surplus (£200,000 pounds in 2019) in more renewable and affordable energy services: for example by offering a 'warm home' discount. It also partners with a number of social housing associations and supports municipalities in the provision of energy efficiency services.⁴¹

Conclusion: Moving forward

Remunicipalisation and municipalisation are powerful political strategies to fight against privatisation and the extractive economy at large. Whereas most national governments are failing to address extreme inequality and the ecological crisis, many cities are stepping up to tackle these challenges and improve the livelihoods of their residents. Local people and workers have much to gain from pushing their local governments to reverse privatisation and democratise their public services.

Some very progressive municipalities are recentering their policies and public services to prioritise the needs of the most marginalised people in our society, including undocumented migrants, people with disabilities and low-income families. More democratic local authorities even dare to share decision-making powers and open up ownership models to representatives of users, workers, civil society and research institutions. Public ownership sometimes has the reputation of being top-down, discarding the realities on the ground. But many of the cases that we have presented here demonstrate that the delivered democratic innovation puts the 'public' back into public services. These are vital contributions to the building of public ownership in the 21st century.

Municipalities are at the forefront of creating democratic public ownership. Municipal practices – from the participatory mechanisms of citizens' observatories to diversified public ownership and worker engagement – can inspire a broader, country-wide vision of democratic public ownership. Not only are these bottom-up initiatives to build collective ownership urgently needed, but they are also a powerful basis to push for public ownership on all levels and in all regions.

However, we have a big battle to fight against the huge corporate forces that are teaming up for even greater market dominance, competition and privatisation. The EU Services Directive (also known as the Bolkestein Directive) has already pushed liberalisation in a wide range of services over the past decade. In 2018, powerful business lobbies craving even more hard-core liberalisation nearly succeeded in pressuring the EU to pass the Services

Notification Directive. Thanks to concerted efforts by civil society groups across Europe, this Directive was put on hold for over a year. But in March 2020, European Commissioners gave a new push for the Directive by launching the Single Market Enforcement Action Plan. If this initiative gets through, the notification procedure could curtail the democratic right of municipalities to regulate corporate giants like Airbnb and Carrefour.⁴²

Countless trade and investment agreements provide transnational corporations with the legal tools to sue national governments for hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars when the democratic decisions of municipalities potentially curb future profits. Some of these agreements, such as the EU's Energy Charter Treaty, are explicitly used to thwart environmental policy.⁴³ Moreover, as long as municipal and cooperative enterprises have to compete with big business, the majority of small-scale solutions will have a hard time surviving. The painful proof of this reality is the many Danish as well as a few German energy cooperatives that have disappeared due to increased competition.⁴⁴

Since austerity measures following the 2008 financial crisis have slashed municipal public sector budgets, it is of the utmost importance to transform the way in which public resources are spent. As demonstrated by the COVID-19 outbreak, public services are the backbone of our society. But sufficient funding is needed before societies can rely on these services, especially in times of crisis. And although some governments have already pledged to increase public spending in the health sector, we need to be careful that this money actually benefits public services and is not used to promote further PPPs and other forms of private sector involvement.

In the current model, public finance is used to absorb risk by guaranteeing the profits of private investors. This comes at a very high public cost. As Thomas Marois points out, public finance institutions have US\$73 trillion in assets worldwide, with over half of that in the hands of public banks.⁴⁵ In total, this is equivalent to 93 per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product. Hence, it would be much more effective if national and municipal governments were to cut

out the big private middlemen and invest these public funds directly into society. Combining direct public investment with a much-needed progressive tax system could nurture territorial solidarity by writing universal public services into reality. If quality public services were universal, spanning the local to the national and the urban to the rural, they could redistribute wealth and battle geographical inequalities. If social movements act together in demanding democratic public ownership on the regional and country levels, we could actually change the design for how our economies and public services are run. In the United States, numerous cities are advocating for locally owned and controlled energy and banking services. Since 2019, the youth-led Sunrise Movement, various trade unions and presidential candidate Bernie Sanders have been calling for a national Green New Deal that centres around the public ownership of energy, housing and finance. The COVID-19 outbreak has further increased the urgency and necessity of these calls. When municipalities team up with social movements, they can reset a country's political agenda.⁴⁶

Inspiration also comes from the trade unions and civil society organisations that are challenging the South African government to rebuild Eskom, one of the biggest electricity companies in the world, into a fully public and people-serving utility.⁴⁷ And in the UK, despite its electoral loss, the Labour Party's 2019 manifesto was a good example of the type of national support and policy framework that would allow local governments to reclaim public services and rebuild their capacity to directly provide local services.

This research demonstrates that when essential services are publicly owned and democratically organised they can effectively strengthen community wealth, localise the economy and fulfil people's collective needs. Let's extend the demand for democratic public ownership to the highest levels and start calling for universal access to each and every public service so that all residents can lead dignified and prosperous lives.

As racism, fascism and the far right are on the rise, offering viable systemic solutions that work for both people and the planet can significantly help to rebuild our democracies, societies and economies on the basis of solidarity and cooperation so that they work for the many, and not just the few. Our public future lies in the hands of communities – not corporations.

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