

Access to quality local public services for all: a precondition to beat inequality

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In particular, the present paper has contributed to Chapter 4 on 'Commoning', which focuses on the trends and pathways in relation to the governance, planning and provision of access to housing, land and basic services. Through the lens of 'commoning', the chapter explores how local and regional governments can promote approaches focused on collective action that contribute to urban equality.

Abstract

Looking at the intersection between various dimensions of inequality and the lack of equitable access to public services (PS), this paper explores emerging trends in local PS delivery, including public, public-community and commoning approaches. It especially focuses on (re)municipalisation as a viable policy option for local and regional governments, highlighting the need for adequate public investment; recal-ling the primary role of public institutions at all levels to ensure equitable PS access for all; and alerting about the risks that privatization entails in terms of deepening inequalities.

1. The connection between public services and equality

Universal access to quality public services¹ is critical to achieve equality, to realize social justice in communities and societies, to promote democracy and to enable people to live a safe, meaningful, and dignified life.²

By providing the physical and social infrastructure to enjoy many public goods, PS are a precondition for the full enjoyment of human rights such as healthcare, education, and social security. They allow to meet fundamental, shared needs (e.g., access to water and sanitation, energy and housing) or services that enable the full participation in society and in the economy (e.g., transport and telecommunication).³ PS include the provision of water, sewerage, electricity, waste services, roads, bridges, rail, transport, schools, hospitals and care facilities; the protection of common resources (e.g., the environment, public spaces and cultural heritage); and social protection⁴ (e.g., unemployment and disability benefits, old-age pensions).⁵ PS are cornerstones of the realisation of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and of the New Urban Agenda (NUA).⁶

Universal access to quality PS can reduce and mitigate inequality under its many dimensions. PS access provided by governments at low or no cost at point of use is a de facto collective form of income transfer ('social wage' or 'virtual income'), which alleviates income inequality by lifting living standards for all. PS also are a form of collective action to pool, share and redistribute resources - through progressive taxation or insurance, or via redistributive user fees - within all members of a community or society who would be otherwise unable (or less able) to access them individually.⁷ By providing free or affordable access to those who cannot earn (or earn less), PS ultimately work as a redistribution and income solidarity mechanism that makes the wealthier (individual households or companies) support the poorer,⁸ and is based on public policy choices that must be democratically accountable, not on charitable or philanthropic endeavours.



Source: School support worker, USA, PSI/Creative Commons

1. Definitions of PS underpinning this paper: "public services are systems that are collectively determined and developed by societies, organised through the subnational or central state, to produce or deliver common goods". Hall, David. Definition of Public Services for the GI-ERSC Public Service Narrative Working Group, unpublished, 31 March 2021. "Public services are forms of collective provision to meet shared needs. Coote, Anna; Percy, Andrew. The Case for Universal Basic Services. Polity. Cambridge, UK, 2020.

2. 'Geneva Charter on Quality Public Services', Council of Global Unions. 24 January 2011. https://www.eosu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/EN_QPS_Charter_Final_2011_.pdf.

3. Hall, David. Definition of Public Services for the GI-ERSC Public Service Narrative Working Group. Unpublished, 22 March 2021.

4. "Well-designed social protection systems contribute to reducing poverty and inequality, while enhancing social cohesion and political stability", p. vi, ILO, World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Geneva, Switzerland. 29 November 2017. <https://bit.ly/3sg0Jy3>

5. For a full list of public services as functions of government see the 1999 OECD's COFOG Classification published by the UN Statistical Division and adopted by Eurostat as a standard classifying the purposes of government activities. Glossary: Classification of the functions of government (COFOG) - Statistics Explained (europa.eu)

6. Artt. 55, 88, 96, New Urban Agenda, Habitat III, UN Habitat, UN, 2017. <https://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/NUA-English.pdf>; PSI website, 'What is in and what is not for workers in the final text of the New Urban Agenda: a trade union assessment of the outcome document of Habitat III', 26 May 2017. <https://bit.ly/3thin68>

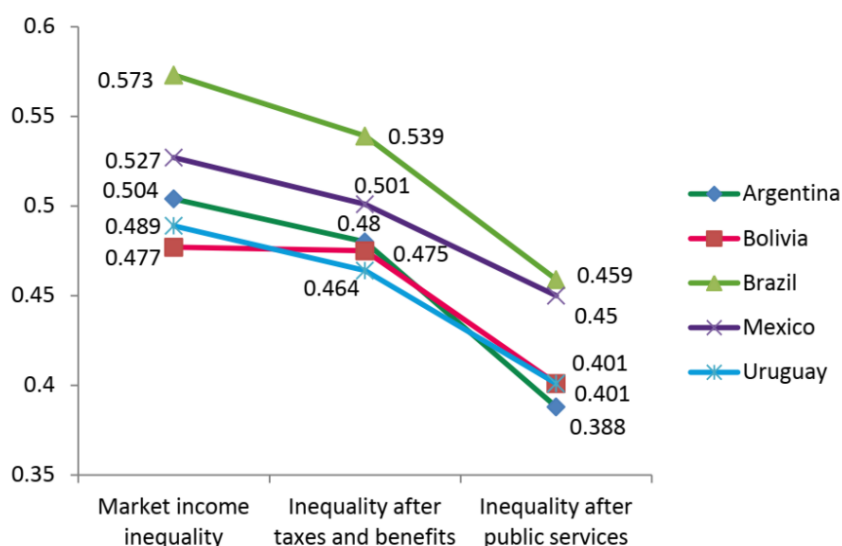
7. Coote, Anna; Percy, Andrew. 'The Case for Universal Basic Services'. Polity. Cambridge, UK, 2020; and Cibrario, D., Definition of Public Services for the GI-ERSC Public Service Narrative Working Group. Unpublished, 31 March 2021.

8 Kenworthy, L. 'Reducing inequality: expand and improve public service.' 16 April 2009. <https://lanekenworthy.net/2009/04/16/reducing-inequality-expand-and-improve-public-services/>

BOX 1: Free public service access for all reduces inequality, provides the greatest benefits to the poor

Various studies show that public services reduce economic inequality.⁹ Free, universal access to public health and education alone has a greater equalising effect than progressive taxation and social benefit systems combined because they are available to everyone, not only to those who can afford them.¹⁰ Universal access to PS was found to reduce income inequality by an average 20 percent in OECD countries and by 10-20 percent in five Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico and Uruguay).¹¹ Evidence from an International Monetary Fund (IMF) study on healthcare systems in Asia, and from an analysis of over 70 developing and transition countries confirms this pattern, showing that the more public spending in healthcare and the more progressive the taxation system, the stronger the decline in inequality. The equalizing effect of PS is further multiplied for the poor: on average, PS (especially health and education) are worth 76 percent of the post-tax income of the poorest group compared to 14 percent of the richest. PS are particularly beneficial to those who need them the most: in India it is the 60 percent of the poorest women who benefit the most from public health facilities to give birth.¹² A World Bank (WB) study conducted in 146 countries found that the best way to lower the out-of-pocket spending on health care is not only to increase national health budgets, but also to channel health spending through social health insurance and other universal government schemes like the UK's National Health Service (NHS).¹³

While this sample demonstrates a clear equalizing impact of PS within and between countries, there is an urgent need to develop a comprehensive, systematic and cross-benchmarkable data analysis on the equalizing impact of public services to inform public policies to invest and strengthen PS for all.



Source: Adapted from Oxfam 2014, p. 3, based on OECD 2012 data¹⁴

Besides, when the service is publicly run, surplus revenues can be invested in the service to expand access and reduce the user price for poorer households instead of being paid out to shareholders. Also, when utilities, such as water and energy, are publicly run, cross-subsidies can be used to make the services accessible and affordable for all.¹⁵ This financing mechanism is possible only when PS are public, which enables authorities to shift surplus from one service to another generating no or little income so that even poor communities, scarcely populated areas and unprofitable transport routes are equally serviced. **Cross-subsidies can therefore be a powerful tool to address territorial inequalities and to invest in long-term infrastructure to provide service coverage for everyone.**

9. Verbist, G., Förster, M. F. and Vaalavuo, M. 'The Impact of Publicly Provided Services on the Distribution of Resources: Review of New Results and Methods'. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 130, OECD Publishing (2012): 35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k9h363c5szq-en>

10. Hall, David. 'Equality and public services – beyond consumer spending'. Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU), University of Greenwich, 2014.

11. 'Working for the Many. Public Services Fight Inequality'. Oxfam Briefing Paper 182 (3 April 2014): 2. https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp182-public-services-fight-inequality-030414-en_1.pdf referring to N. Lustig. 'Taxes, Transfers, and Income Redistribution in Latin America'. Inequality in Focus, Volume 1(2). July 2012. World Bank. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTPOVERTY/Resources/InequalityInFocusJuly2012FINAL.pdf>

12. Working for the Many. Public Services Fight Inequality'. Oxfam Briefing Paper 182 (3 April 2014): 2. https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp182-public-services-fight-inequality-030414-en_1.pdf referring to N. Lustig. 'Taxes, Transfers, and Income Redistribution in Latin America'. Inequality in Focus, Volume 1(2). July 2012. World Bank.; and to L. Chakraborty, Y. Singh and J.F. Jacob. 'Analyzing Public Expenditure Benefit Incidence in Health Care: Evidence from India'. Levy Economics Institute, Working Papers Series No. 748, 2012. <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2202817>

13. Wagstaff, A. et al. 'Out-of-Pocket Expenditures on Health: A Global Stocktake'. The World Bank Research Observer 35(2). 2020. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339742246_Out-of-Pocket_Expenditures_on_Health_A_Global_Stocktake

14. Verbist, G., Förster, M. F. and Vaalavuo, M. 'The Impact of Publicly Provided Services on the Distribution of Resources: Review of New Results and Methods'. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 130, OECD Publishing (2012): 35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k9h363c5szq-en>

15. WB researchers acknowledged 20 years ago already that 'implementing welfare programs through a transparent cross-subsidy in the utility rates, especially if undertaken such that only fixed charges are affected, may well be more efficient than a general poverty alleviation program undertaken with general tax funds'. Estache, Antonio; Gomez-Lobo, Andres; Leipziger, Danny. 'Utilities Privatization and the Poor: Lessons and Evidence from Latin America'. World Development 29 (7). July 2001: 1179–1198 <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X01000341>

BOX 2: Cross-subsidies across Munich PS ensure green public transport for all

In Germany, municipal cross-financing of public services provides a common form of PS funding public services that cannot be covered by user fees alone. For example, Munich's transport system is partly financed through revenues of its by its electricity sector. Like many other cities in Germany over the last decades, Munich experienced a decrease in national funding for public transport, causing an increasing deficit in the Munich Transport Company (MVG). Its parent company, Munich's public utility (*Stadtwerke Muenchen-SWM*), balanced this debt with the surplus achieved in its electricity sector. The two municipal public services are also connected in another innovative way: Munich's public energy utility, provides renewable energy for all of Munich's metro, trams and electric buses, so that Munich's public transport system is run entirely on green energy.¹⁶

PS are also a precondition to realize gender equality. Where households have direct access to water, sanitation and electricity and professionalized public care system exist for all, women and girls are especially liberated from chores such as water and wood fetching, and from looking after children, the elderly and disabled.¹⁷ The free provision of services such as education, healthcare, child and elderly care, and access to safe, gender-responsive public transport, adequate urban street-lighting and a gender-sensitive police and judicial systems are fundamental for women and girls to fully exercise their right to education.¹⁸ They are equally a precondition to enable them to enter the labour market maximizing their chances to obtain decent employment opportunities¹⁹ and meaningfully participate in social, civic, political and cultural life. **When care for the elderly and children is not provided through PS, instead, the burden of care falls disproportionately on women and girls.**²⁰ Besides, there is consistent evidence that free education is very effective in tackling gender inequality, as fees for education result in more exclusion from school for girls than for boys.

Because the most vulnerable in communities tend to endure multiple layers of PS inequality (e.g. the disabled, the young, the elderly, LGBTQI+ persons, specific ethnic groups and indigenous people, as well as migrants and refugees), **an intersectional approach to PS delivery is crucial to avert an inequality and exclusion multiplier effect.**²¹ Besides, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has shone a spotlight on the funding disparity of specific PS within certain socio-cultural contexts with entrenched systemic bias, where priority is given to police and prisons rather than education, youth employment programmes, health

services and arts.²² Such bias highlights how proper funding, democratic participation and public accountability are key when it comes to building an equitable PS system, which can be enhanced when delivery is designed in an inclusive manner and with a holistic vision, looking at local PS nexus from the standpoint of the specific needs of users, communities and territories to create cross-synergies and facilitate cross-subsidisation rather than conceiving and delivering them in isolation from each other. Hence, **investment in quality PS can effectively break the boundaries of structural, social and economic inequalities embedded in patriarchal, racial and colonial systems.** By triggering income redistribution and access to equal opportunities, PS can open uplifting paths for social mobility yielding significant social, economic and environmental returns in the mid- and long term, including resilience to crises.²³

Although this is far from being consistently the case for PS employment at a subnational level PS jobs in the public sector tend on average to be of better quality, more stable, formal and with better union representation and collective agreement coverage than those in the private sector.²⁴ Such features are among the most powerful equalizing and redistributive mechanisms available in society,²⁵ especially when fundamental labour and trade union rights as set by the International Labour Organization (ILO) are upheld. The **multiplier effect of having PS delivered by staff that is directly employed, in adequate numbers, well trained, paid a living wage and in decent employment conditions** to deliver quality services, benefits not only users and their communities, but also businesses, the private sector, and the economy as a whole.²⁶

16. Wegmann, Vera. 'Public Financing. Peoples Public Transport Policy'. International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF). London, 2019: 24-25. <https://www.itfglobal.org/sites/default/files/node/page/files/031119%20PUBLIC%20FINANCING.pdf>

17. UN Water. <https://www.unwater.org/water-facts/gender/>

18. Actionaid, 'Gender-responsive public services.' Framework 2018. Johannesburg, July 2018. <https://actionaid.org/publications/2018/framework-2018-gender-responsive-public-services>

19. "The provision of high-quality public services and infrastructure is essential for increasing women's participation in the labour market". In: 'Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals'. ILO World Social Protection Report 2017-19. Geneva [29 November 2017]: 76. <https://bit.ly/3sg0Jy3>

20. 'Care Manifesto: Rebuilding the social organization of care'. Public Services International (PSI), 2021. <https://publicservices.international/campaigns/manifesto-rebuilding-the-social-organization-of-care?id=11655&lang=en>

21. Castan Broto, V and Neves Alves, S. 'Intersectionality challenges for the co-production of urban services: notes for a theoretical and methodological agenda'. *Environment & Urbanization*. Vol. 30, Iss. 2. [2018]: 367-386.

22. Elliott-Cooper, A. 'Defund the police' is not nonsense. Here is what it really means'. *The Guardian*, 2 July 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/02/britain-defund-the-police-black-lives-matter>

23. 'Access to essential public services is key for effective COVID-19 response, recovery and building resilience to future crises in cities. COVID in an Urban World'. UN Policy Brief. New York (July 2020): 12. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid_urban_world_july_2020.pdf

24. Pavanelli, Rosa. 'Municipal workers: the invisible, underpaid people who run our cities'. *The Guardian*, 31 October 2017

25. Hall, David. 'Why we need public spending'. PSIRU, University of Greenwich, 2014. <http://www.psiru.org/sites/default/files/2014-05-WWNPS2.pdf> and Hall, David. 'Why public-private partnerships don't work: the many advantages of the public alternative'. PSIRU, University of Greenwich, 2015. https://www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/rapport_eng_56pages_a4_lr.pdf

26. Mazzucato, M. *The entrepreneurial state*. London, Penguin, 2017.

PS are also conducive to inclusive economic development, as they boost equitable economic growth: for instance, education provides a skilled workforce; physical infrastructures enable the production and delivery of goods and services; and long-term unemployment benefits and public employment support consumer demand.²⁷ Besides, once fundamental needs are provided for collectively and efficiently through PS, communities and individuals can shift their time, energy and resources away from fulfilling their basic needs into productive, meaningful work, innovation and creativity.

Since all PS require local delivery at point of use, they necessarily require to be located within territories, communities, and close to users. Therefore, **Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) have played a fundamental role in PS provision since the establishment of modern PS systems.**²⁸ As part of the state and as public institutions, LRGs carry a 'duty of stewardship' towards the territories they are responsible for.²⁹ They also traditionally seek to respond to the immediate needs and expectations of their communities with solution-oriented approaches and are active laboratories of innovation in local PS delivery and governance.

2. The root causes of PS access inequality worldwide

Regardless of their equalizing power, PS access and quality remain inequitable and patchy within most countries. Multiple root causes account for jeopardized PS access, including colonial legacies, the capture of the state by elites, the reproduction of systems of inequality (e.g., cast, racism), deeds of non-democratic and/or authoritarian governments, debt and lack of investment, and deliberate public policy choices.³⁰

BOX 3: OVERVIEW OF PS ACCESS INEQUALITY WORLDWIDE

Healthcare

Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, over three billion people did not have access to healthcare.³¹ In 2017, 56 per cent of the global rural population lacked health coverage, compared to 22 per cent in urban areas.³²

Water and sanitation

In 2017, 2.2 billion people lacked safely managed drinking water and 4.2 billion lack sanitation systems that protect them from disease. Today, three billion worldwide lack basic handwashing facilities at home, the most effective barrier to COVID-19.³³

Energy

In 2018, 789 million people lacked electricity, as did one out of four hospitals in some developing countries.³⁴ Globally ten per cent of the population, an estimated 840 million people, are still living without access to electricity. In Africa the access to electricity is substantially lower than in other regions. In 2018, 53% of Africa's population had not been electrified.³⁵

Housing

More than 1.8 billion people worldwide lack adequate housing, over one billion live in informal settlements, 150 million are homeless and millions

more suffer from insecurity of tenure (2019).³⁶ In 2018, the share of urban population living in slums and informal settlements rose to 24 per cent (2018).³⁷

Public transport

Only half of the world's population has convenient access to public transport (2019).³⁸

Social protection

In 2017, 71 per cent of the global population (5.2 billion people worldwide) did not benefit from any form of social protection or were only partially covered. Such gaps are associated with significant underinvestment in social protection, especially in Africa, Asia and the Arab Countries.³⁹

Public space

Only 47 per cent live within 400 meters walking distance to open public spaces.⁴⁰

Broadband internet access

Less than one in five people have access to the internet in least developed countries.⁴¹ Two thirds of the world's school-age children have no internet access at home, with those living in rural areas having less access (25 per cent) than their urban peers (41 per cent).⁴²

27. Fournier, Jean-Marc, and Johansson, Asa. 'The effect of the size and mix of public spending on growth and inequality'. OECD Economics Department Working Paper No. 1344, 25. November 2016. <https://bit.ly/3fHhQqH>

28. Hall, David. 'Public Services Work! Information, insights and ideas for our future'. PSIRU-PSI. September 2003.

29. Coote, Anna, and Yazici, Edanur. 'Universal Quality Public Services. Union Policy Brief. PSI (February 2020): 29. Universal Quality Public Services: Union Policy Brief - PSI - The global union federation of workers in public services

30. "Higher poverty and inequality are the results not only of the severity of the global recession and low employment rates, but also of specific policy decisions targeting universal policies, curtailing social transfers and limiting access to quality public services" and "in countries with wider access to quality public services, poverty among older persons is also significantly lower". Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. ILO, Geneva (29 November 2017): 158 and 76. <https://bit.ly/3sg0Jy3>

31. 'The Inequality Virus. Bringing together a world torn apart by coronavirus through a fair, just and sustainable economy'. Oxfam, January 2021. <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621149/bp-the-inequality-virus-250121-en.pdf>; p. 11.

32. World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. ILO, Geneva, 29 November 2017. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/presentation/wcms_607273.pdf

33. Clean Water and Sanitation. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. UNDESA, SDG 6. <https://www.globalgoals.org/6-clean-water-and-sanitation>

34. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. UNDESA, SDG 7. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal7>

35. This inequality is exacerbated by the definition of access to energy, calculated as 50 kilowatt-hours (kWh) per person per year in rural settings. Yet this is not nearly enough, as it is insufficient power to run lights for a few hours per day and to charge a cell phone, it is also not enough to power a fridge or a stove. An average American will use 50 kWh in less than a day and a half, but this amount is supposed to be enough for a person in Africa in a whole year. Tracking SDG7. [https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/results?p=Access_to_Electricity&i=Electricity_access_rate,_Total_\(%\)](https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/results?p=Access_to_Electricity&i=Electricity_access_rate,_Total_(%))

36. Guidelines for the Implementation of the Right to Adequate Housing. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing. UN General Assembly. A/HRC/43/43, 26 December 2019. http://www.unhousingrapp.org/user/pages/04.resources/A_HRC_43_43_E-2.pdf

37. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. UNDESA, SDG11. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11>

38. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. UNDESA, SDG11. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11>

39. World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. ILO, Geneva, 29 November 2017. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/presentation/wcms_607273.pdf

40. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. UNDESA, SDG11. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11>

41. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. SDG9. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal9>

42. How many children and young people have internet access at home? Estimating digital connectivity during the COVID-19 pandemic. ITU-UNICEF. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-and-young-people-internet-access-at-home-during-covid19/>, New York, November 2020.

Today's social and spatial exclusion of a large share of the world population from PS access in many countries must be placed within the historical contexts that have shaped current geopolitical and class power dynamics. For example, public utilities infrastructures in many African countries are largely based on the relics of the British, French, Dutch, German, Italian and Portuguese colonial rule.⁴³ In former colonies, PS were designed by and

for the European settlers, not for the entire population. Even social PS infrastructure such as the education systems have left a deep mark on the way schools were run in African societies when they were shaped by colonial powers.⁴⁴ Indeed, here schools' primary purpose was to train a class of white-collar clerks and middle level managers to staff the colonial administration.⁴⁵

BOX 4: Jakarta Water: neoliberal PS inequality with colonial roots

The Jakarta water system illustrates how current PS inequalities must be understood within the context of colonial legacy and policy choices. Jakarta's water connections are concentrated in middle-high income areas, making access to water in Jakarta spatially fragmented and socially unequitable.⁴⁶ In 2018 only 35 per cent of the city's population had access to functioning water connections. Those with no access buy water in jerry cans at a price that can be 40–60 times more expensive than subsidized piped water.⁴⁷ In 2019, low-income households spent on average 36 per cent of their income on water, as well as considerable time travelling to collect it.⁴⁸ The alternative is to dig wells to access Jakarta's groundwater, which is significantly polluted.⁴⁹ Yet, even those connected to the piped water network receive water of bad quality and must endure frequent water cuts for hours and sometimes days. Those who can afford it, resort to deep water drilling and consume the cleaner deep-level groundwater instead of piped water. As a result, Jakarta is sinking and the poor district of North Jakarta could be under water within a decade.⁵⁰

The roots of this highly unequal water system lie in the Dutch colonial era. However, they were deepened under the Suharto dictatorship, and exacerbated by water privatization in the 90s.⁵¹ The

Dutch built the city's water system in 1870 making access unequitable since the beginning. Fifty years later, seven per cent of the European colonial residents used 78 per cent of the city's piped water supply.⁵² Unequal water access worsened in post-colonial Jakarta under the Suharto regime, which established a perverse regressive cross-subsidy system through which poor city dwellers harvesting water from road hydrants were charged higher tariffs than those paid by the individual connected households.⁵³ In 1991, the WB pushed for water privatization with a 92 USD million loan for infrastructure improvements tied to privatization conditionalities. Two multinationals, Thames Water and Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux bought political protection establishing joint ventures with the Suharto regime's oligarchs. As a result, Suez obtained a 25-year concession for West Jakarta and Thames Water for East Jakarta. Private water providers started operating in 1998. User tariffs were set to provide a guaranteed return on capital of 22 per cent to the two companies.⁵⁴ Jakarta's water service inequality has led to resistance. Civil society groups and trade unions opposed water privatization since its onset and since 2011 the 'Coalition of Jakarta Residents Opposing Water Privatization' (KMMSAJ) has demanded the remunicipalization of the water utilities.

43. Manton, J. and Gorsky, M. 'Health Planning in 1960s Africa: International Health Organisations and the Post-Colonial State'. Cambridge University Press. Vol. 62. Issue 4 (2018): 425–448.

44. Cogneau, D. 'Colonisation, School and Development in Africa. An empirical analysis'. Unité de Recherche CIPRE, 2003. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/39844211.pdf>

45. Yamada, S. 'Educational borrowing as negotiation: Re-examining the influence of the American Black industrial education model on British colonial education in Africa'. *Comparative Education*. Vol. 44 (2020): 21–37.

46. Marwa, M. 'A double-edged sword? Covid-19 and Water remunicipalization in Jakarta'. In: McDonald, D; Spronk, S.; Chavez, D. (eds.) 'Public Water and Covid-19. Dark Clouds and Silver Linings'. Transnational Institute (TNI). Amsterdam, 2020.

47. Marwa, M. 'A double-edged sword? Covid-19 and Water remunicipalization in Jakarta'. In: McDonald, D; Spronk, S.; Chavez, D. (eds.) 'Public Water and Covid-19. Dark Clouds and Silver Linings'. Transnational Institute (TNI). Amsterdam, 2020.

48. Marwa, M. 'A double-edged sword? Covid-19 and Water remunicipalization in Jakarta'. In: McDonald, D; Spronk, S.; Chavez, D. (eds.) 'Public Water and Covid-19. Dark Clouds and Silver Linings'. Transnational Institute (TNI). Amsterdam, 2020.

49. Lobina, E., Wegmann, V. and Marwa, M. 'Water Justice Will Not Be Televised: Moral Advocacy and the Struggle for Transformative Remunicipalisation in Jakarta'. *Water Alternatives*. Vol. 12, Issue 2 (2019): 725–748.

50. Lobina, E., Wegmann, V. and Marwa, M. (2019) *Water Justice Will Not Be Televised: Moral Advocacy and the Struggle for Transformative Remunicipalisation in Jakarta*. *Water Alternatives*. Vol. 12, Issue 2 (2019): 725–748.

51. Kooy, M. and Bakker, K. 'Technologies of Government: Constituting Subjectivities, Spaces, and Infrastructures in Colonial and Contemporary Jakarta'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. Vol. 32, Issue 2 (2008): 375–391.

52. Kooy, M. and Bakker, K. (Post)Colonial Pipes: Urban Water Supply in Colonial and Contemporary Jakarta. In: Colombijn, F. and Cote, J. (eds.) *Cars, Conduits, and Kampongs*, pp.63–86. Brill, Leiden, 2015.

53. Kooy, M. and Bakker, K. (Post)Colonial Pipes: Urban Water Supply in Colonial and Contemporary Jakarta. In: Colombijn, F. and Cote, J. (eds.) *Cars, Conduits, and Kampongs*, pp.63–86. Brill, Leiden, 2015.

54. Lobina, E., Wegmann, V. and Marwa, M. 'Water Justice Will Not Be Televised: Moral Advocacy and the Struggle for Transformative Remunicipalisation in Jakarta'. *Water Alternatives*. Vol. 12, Issue 2 (2019): 725–748.

Neoliberal privatisation (e.g., through sales, public-private-partnerships and concessions) and austerity policies have been aggressively promoted since the 70s by conservative governments and business lobbies in the US and the UK first, then exported to the rest of the world by the academic and financial institutions embracing the Chicago School of Economics doctrine.⁵⁵ Enshrined in structural adjustment plans of the IMF and the WB and embraced by EU Commission policies, neoliberal principles have had a devastating effect under an equality standpoint, especially in those countries that were in the process of consolidating (or establishing) national and local PS infrastructure after independence, and have seen their public-led policy 'ladder' to development 'kicked away'.⁵⁶ Over the last decades, neoliberal policy champions have also developed a dogmatic narrative that consistently associates publicly-run PS with inefficiency and corruption.⁵⁷

Pushed by the EU Commission and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) through accession conditionalities, the countries of the Soviet bloc transitioning away from a planned PS system to a one based on competition were forced to break, dismantle, and privatize their existing public infrastructure in a very short timeframe, triggering major social hardship and PS access disparities⁵⁸, and achieving very mixed results.⁵⁹ The world debt and financial crises of 1990, 2003 and 2008 pushed privatisation further, as the IMF, the WB and regional financial banks required brutal cuts in public service employment to grant loans, slashing the public sector workforce to the bone, traditionally highly unionised in countries where labour rights were observed, undermining public service trade union strength and bargaining power, ultimately jeopardizing one the most effective socio-economicequalizing mechanisms for PS sector workers.⁶⁰

Overall, the worldwide results have been austerity, drastic cuts in public spending and borrowing and regressive tax breaks that have largely de-funded PS and promoted their commercialisation through the introduction of for-profit private operators via privatizations, concessions, public-private-

partnerships (PPPs) and outsourcing. At odds with common beliefs, **PS privatization often did not result in more competition, lower prices and better quality, but often favoured the rise of private cartels and oligopolies.**

The systematic introduction of user fees in vital services such as healthcare and education has excluded millions. These policies have reduced the resources available to establish, maintain and run PS systems accessible to all, transferring the PS 'social-wage' from the pockets of the main beneficiaries (the poor) into those of the winners of neoliberal globalisation, ultimately having a disproportionate impact on low-income households⁶¹ and increasing inequality.⁶² The austerity measures adopted by most Western countries in the 2008 global financial crisis aftermath have negatively affected the most vulnerable in society, notably people with disabilities, the young, ethnic groups and minorities.⁶³

Only public, not for profit, PS delivery systems enable redistributive outcomes.

Privatization increases inequality as the private sector can neither deliver public goods, nor provide PS in a universal and stable fashion that is needed to curb inequality.⁶⁴ Privately owned and/or run services have an intrinsic market incentive that leads them to supply users, communities and routes where they can make a profit, disregarding unprofitable ones. Corporations are bound by a fiduciary duty that inevitably leads to the extraction of profit from the PS (e.g. by increasing prices, reducing service quality, restructuring, and eroding workers' pay and conditions) to reward corporate owners and shareholders.⁶⁵ When PS become a commodity and profitability (rather than universal access and quality) becomes the main goal of provision, what follows is unequal access and marginalization of those who cannot afford to pay.

PS are a lucrative market for private providers. As access to water, healthcare or energy is a life necessity, the demand for these services is inelastic: anyone would be ready to pay everything they own or get indebted to save one's life. Besides, there is no evidence that private sector delivery is superior to public sector delivery. In fact, major failures (higher costs, poor quality and scant access) are found in the private delivery of PS,⁶⁶ while

55. Hess, David. Chicago School of Economics. Encyclopaedia Britannica online. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chicago-school-of-economics>

56. Chang, Ha-Joon. Kicking Away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective. Athem Press, New York, 2003.

57. "The influential US conservative strategist Grover Norquist said in an interview with US National Public Radio (NPR) in 2001 'I don't want to abolish government. I simply want to reduce it to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub'". Bertossa, D., "Building Back Better requires the courage to recognise the value of public services", in Bartmann, Y., and Lienert, S. Building Back Better: A Call for Courage, FES, October 2020. <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/16868.pdf>

58. Martin, B. 'Social and Employment consequences of privatization in transition economies: evidence and guidelines', Working Paper IPPRED-4, ILO Geneva. September 1997. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/--emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_126672.pdf

59. Pretty on paper, poor in practice: Infrastructure PPPs a struggle for governments in Eastern Europe and the CIS. EBRD, 18 July 2013. <https://www.ebrd.com/news/2013/pretty-on-paper,-poor-in-practice-infrastructure-ppps-a-struggle-for-governments-in-eastern-europe-and-the-cis.html>

60. Martin, B. In the Public Interest? Privatisation and Public Sector Reform. Zed Books/PSI. London and Ferney-Voltaire, 1993.

61. Hall, David. Equality and public services – beyond consumer spending. PSIRU, University of Greenwich, 2014.

62. Krugman, Paul. End this depression now! W.W Norton & Company, New York, 2012.

63. Allen, K. 'Whose crisis counts? Intersectionality, austerity and the politics of survival'. Ethnic and Racial Studies. Vol. 41, No. 13 (2018): 2301-2309.

64. Hall, David. Definition of Public Services for the GI-ERSC Public Service Narrative Working Group. Unpublished, 22 March 2021.

65. "Conclusions that PPPs are proving to be poor value for money have also been reached by – among others – by the European Court of Auditors (ECA), the French audit court, the UK National Audit Office, the Albanian audit court, the German Audit court, national parliamentary commissions, a UK consortium of investigators, civil society networks such as CEE Bankwatch, Counter Balance and Eurodad and numerous academics". EPSU-Eurodad. Why public-private-partnerships (PPPs) are still not delivering, December 2020. https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/PPPs_EN.pdf

66. Jomo KS, Anis Chowdhury, Krishnan Sharma, Daniel Platz. 'Public-Private Partnerships and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Fit for purpose?' UN DESA Working Paper No. 148 ST/ESA/2016/DWP/148. New York, February 2016. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2288desaworkingpaper148.pdf>; European Court of Auditors. Public Private Partnerships in the EU: Widespread shortcomings and limited benefits. Special Report n.9. Brussels, 2018. <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/ppp-9-2018/en/>

transaction costs are largely found in PPPs arrangements (e.g. corruption, kinship relations, poor management, lack of resources and capacity etc.).⁶⁷ Therefore, to achieve more equality and ensure equitable PS access, mechanisms other than the market are necessary and PS ought to be decommodified.

PS privatization also strains resilience and social peace. Societal anger over cuts in public spending, unaffordable public services and growing inequality has been on the rise. In 2019, the austerity cuts imposed by the IMF on Ecuador over debt negotiations sparked mass protests.⁶⁸ Similarly, increases in the price of public transport and electricity bills in Chile led to social upheaval.⁶⁹ The protests came on the back of decades of privatization in Chile – one of the most inequitable countries in the world, cradle to neoliberalism – that created an unsustainable two tier system in health and education.⁷⁰ These protests led to a referendum that approved the establishment of an assembly to draft a new constitution for the country.⁷¹

The PS urban-rural inequality split is often exacerbated by privatization as private providers will attend areas where users can afford to pay and where profits can be made. Poorer urban and rural areas will be left behind. This is well illustrated by inequality in waste service access in Africa. For example, Tunisia has a long history of privatized waste services, strongly promoted by the WB and other development institutions. In 2010, Tunisia was praised by UN-Habitat for its “successful experience with [waste management] privatization”.⁷² However,

while the service worked well in the city of Sousse with a collection rate over 90 per cent in 2018, only 10 per cent of Tunisia’s rural areas’ waste was collected.⁷³ In contrast, in neighbouring Algeria, a country which is more than 15 times the size of Tunisia and where waste services remain overwhelmingly public, has one of the highest waste collection rates in Africa, ranging from roughly 90 per cent in urban areas to 65–70 per cent in rural areas.⁷⁴

A 2006 WB assessment on the impact of private funding of urban infrastructure concluded that this is “inherently limited in scope for financing urban infrastructure for the wide array of non-commercial infrastructure services cities need” and concluded that “Local governments need good sources of public finance to fund those services, and some form of government borrowing is needed for major investments in these areas to avoid inter-generational inequities”.⁷⁵ In 2014 the Director of the IMF at the time, Christine Lagarde, said that “making taxation more progressive” and “improving access to health and education” have a key role to play in tackling inequality. Despite this reckoning, the institutions continue to promote the same neoliberal policies.⁷⁶ Finally, the former UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights concluded in 2018 that “Privatization often involves the systematic elimination of human rights protections and further marginalization of the interests of low-income earners and those living in poverty”.⁷⁷ Regardless, **there is a consistent, continued failure to acknowledge the impact public services have on reducing inequality in international policy recommendations.**



Source: Community health worker, Nepal, PSI/Creative Commons

67. Hall, David. Why Public-Private Partnerships don't work. The many advantages of the public alternative. PSIRU-PSI. Greenwich-Ferney-Voltaire, 2014. https://www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/rapport_eng_56pages_a4_lr.pdf

68. Salgado, Wilma. Ecuador: Society's Reaction to IMF Austerity Package. 14 October 2019. <https://nacla.org/news/2019/10/14/ecuador-societys-reaction-imf-austerity-package-indigenous>

69. Rojas-Sasse, Emilia. Deutsche Welle. South America's protests fuelled by 'extreme' social inequality. 26 October 2019. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/resistencias-desde-el-hemisferio-sur-ecuador-y-chile-frente-a-un-orden-econ%C3%B3mico-insostenible-en/>. Saavedra Martínez, Beatriz. Protests in the global south: Ecuador and Chile facing an uncertain economic order. Open Democracy. 19 November 2019. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/democraciaabierta/resistencias-desde-el-hemisferio-sur-ecuador-y-chile-frente-a-un-orden-econ%C3%B3mico-insostenible-en>

70. Méndez, C. et al. 'The 2019 crisis in Chile: fundamental change needed, not just technical fixes to the health system.' Journal of Public Health Policy. Vol. 41 (2020): 535–543.

71. Arciniegas, Yurany. 'Chile aprueba redactar una nueva Constitución tras un plebiscito histórico.' France 24. 25 October 2020. <https://www.france24.com/es/am%C3%A9rica-latina/20201025-chile-jornada-plebiscito-cambio-constitucion>

72. Solid Waste Management in the World's Cities. UN-Habitat. 2010. <https://unhabitat.org/solid-waste-management-in-the-worlds-cities-water-and-sanitation-in-the-worlds-cities-2010-2>

73. Van Niekerk, S. and Wegmann, V. 'Municipal Solid Waste Management Services in Africa and Arab Countries.' PSI. 2019. <http://www.world-psi.org/en/municipal-solid-waste-management-services-africa-and-arab-countries>

74. Wegmann, V. Africa: Private waste service failure and alternative vision. In: Kishimoto, S. et al. (eds.) The Future is Public. The Transnational Institute. 2020. <https://www.tni.org/en/futureispublic>

75. The Report refers to 'urban infrastructure' primarily as physical urban PS infrastructure, such as water and sanitation, waste management and disposal, transport systems. Annez, Patricia Clarke, 2006. 'Urban Infrastructure Finance from Private Operators: What Have We Learned from Recent Experience?' World Bank Policy Research Working Paper 4045 (November 2006): 22. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=940511

76. 'The Inequality Virus. Bringing together a world torn apart by coronavirus through a fair, just and sustainable economy.' Oxfam, January 2021. <https://oxfamlibrary.org/openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621149/bp-the-inequality-virus-250121-en.pdf>

77. Alston, Philip. Extreme poverty and human rights. Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. Seventy-third session Agenda item 74 (b) Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms, A/73/396, page 2. <https://undocs.org/A/73/396>

Health care

In Africa, PPPs rather finance high-tech hospitals in a few urban centres where there are enough wealthy people to pay, but not the universal networks of clinics or the salaries of staff needed to provide healthcare for the poor”.⁷⁸ In Chile, where health was radically privatized in the 70s, medicine prices are unregulated and three pharmaceutical companies dominate 90 per cent of the market making them unaffordable to the poorest share of the population.⁷⁹

Education

The privatization and commercialization of education increases inequality and is a major threat to achieving quality free public education for all, primarily as fees exclude those who cannot pay.⁸⁰ Yet the privatization of education has been aggressively advanced worldwide over the past two decades. Over a quarter of all secondary school pupils are now educated in private schools.⁸¹ In India, user fees for education exacerbate inequality and lead to more social stratification.⁸² In Lagos, Nigeria, 85% of schools operate as private businesses.⁸³ In the informal settlements of Nairobi, up to 63 per cent of children attend non-government schools.⁸⁴

Health

In Europe, a EUROFOUND study found that private hospitals offer fewer types of treatment, that patients “in private hospitals usually have conditions requiring treatments that are more profitable than those provided in public hospitals”, and, that patients “in private hospitals with complications tend to be transferred to public hospitals”.⁸⁵

Elderly care

Canada has the worst record of COVID-19 deaths in long-term care homes among wealthy nations: the proportion of fatalities in nursing homes represented 69 per cent of Canada’s overall COVID-19 deaths, well above the international average of 41 per cent.⁸⁶ These have overwhelmingly occurred in privately-owned, profit-oriented long-term care facilities (54% of all facilities), where there is overwhelming evidence of lower-quality care in the privately owned

facilities, including under-training and poor treatment of workers, substandard and ageing facilities, overcrowding, and poor infection control capabilities.⁸⁷ At the same time, Revera, the second largest private care home operator in Canada, seems engaging in aggressive tax avoidance practices.⁸⁸

Public transport

Bogotá’s TransMilenio, a privately operated Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), opened in 2000 had a daily ridership of about 2.5 million passengers before the pandemic. While it is seen “as the gold standard of BRT”,⁸⁹ TransMilenio runs at near recovery cost and has led to high levels of transport poverty.⁹⁰ In 2011, 66 per cent of the households in Bogotá belonged to the lowest income households earning less than 680/year USD spending between 20-28 per cent of their small income on transport depending on their area of residence.⁹¹ Also, in Delhi, India, the privatization of busses in 1992 not only led to complete chaos and low quality services (long waiting times, unreliable service, extreme overcrowding, unqualified drivers and even fights among competing companies), but bus lines only operated areas deemed profitable, while public companies had to pick up the lightly travelled routes.⁹²

Waste services

Dar es Salaam is an example of a city where the privatization of waste services has led to good coverage in the city area, while poorer neighbourhoods are left out, as private providers only service areas where they receive a return, in other words in areas where residents can afford to pay a fee for their waste collection.⁹³ As a result, 70 per cent of Dar es Salaam waste is either disposed informally or illegally dumped into waterways and fields, or burned.⁹⁴

Housing

“Housing has become financialized and a favourite target of large private and corporate investors, banks, private equity and pension funds. In 2016, the global worth of residential real estate was valued at 163 trillion USD, more than half the value of all global assets and more than twice

78. Jomo KS, Anis Chowdhury, Krishnan Sharma, Daniel Platz. ‘Public-Private Partnerships and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Fit for purpose?’ UN DESA Working Paper No. 148 ST/ESA/2016/DWP/148. New York, February 2016. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2288desaworkingpaper148.pdf>

79. Panez Pinto, Alexander. Re-building public ownership in Chile: social practices of the Recoleta commune and challenges to overcoming neoliberalism. In: Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., Petitjean, O., 2020, endnote 1. https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/futureispublic_online_def.pdf

80. Curtis M. ‘In Whose Interest? The UK’s role in privatising education around the world’. Global Justice Now and National Education Union. UK. 2019. https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/sites/default/files/files/resources/in_whose_interest_-_neu_-_global_justice_now_0.pdf

81. School enrollment, secondary, private [% of total secondary]. The World Bank website. 2019. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.SEC.PRIV.ZS>

82. S. Kamat et al. ‘Profiting from the Poor: The Emergence of Multinational Education Businesses in Hyderabad, India’. Education International. 2016. https://download.ei-ie.org/Docs/WebDepot/ei-ie_edu_privatization_final_corrected.pdf

83. H. Abdul-Hamid et al. ‘The Role of the Private Sector in Lagos, Nigeria’. The World Bank. 2015. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/661951505979440541/pdf/119784-WP-PUBLIC-SABER-EPS-Nigeria-in-Depth.pdf>

84. M. Ngware et al. ‘Quality and Access to Education in Urban Informal Settlements in Kenya’. African Population and Health Research Center. (2013): 21. <https://aphrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ERP-III-Report.pdf>

85. ‘When the Market Becomes Deadly. How pressures towards privatization of health and long-term care put Europe on a poor footing for a pandemic’. Corporate Observatory. Brussels (January 2021): 8. https://www.eipsu.org/article/new-report-when-market-becomes-deadly_-_quotes-from-Molinuevo, D., Fóti, K., Kruse, F. Delivering hospital services: A greater role for the private sector? EUROFOUND, 2017. https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1653en.pdf

86. Ireton, J. Canada’s nursing homes have worst record for COVID-19 deaths among wealthy nations: report. 30 March 2021. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/canada-record-covid-19-deaths-wealthy-countries-cihi-1.5968749>

87. Webster, P. ‘COVID-19 highlights Canada’s care home crisis’. The Lancet. 16 January 2021. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)00083-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)00083-0/fulltext)

88. ‘Tax Dodging by a Canadian Crown Corporation: Revera Living Making a Killing’. CICTAR, January 2021. https://www.cictar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Revera_Report_7-1.pdf

89. ‘The Value of Sustainable Urbanisation’. World Cities Report 2020. UN Habitat. Page 106. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/10/wcr_2020_report.pdf

90. Wegmann, Vera. ‘Public Financing. Peoples Public Transport Policy’. International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF), London (2019): 24-25. <https://www.itfglobal.org/sites/default/files/node/page/files/031119%20PUBLIC%20FINANCING.pdf>

91. ‘Bogotá’s Bus Reform Process: Accessibility & Affordability Effects: Lessons Learnt And Alternatives To Tackle Informal Services’. The World Bank. 2016.

92. Pucher et al. ‘The Crisis Of Public Transport: Overwhelming Needs But Limited Resources’. Journal of Public Transportation, vol. 7, no. 4. 2004.

93. Van Niekerk, Sandra, and Wegmann, Vera. ‘Municipal solid waste management services in Africa and the Arab countries’. Working Paper. PSI-PSIRU, University of Greenwich. South Africa/Geneva. March 2018. https://www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/documents/research/en_af_waste_report_lrgm_layout_1.pdf

94. Wegmann, Vera. ‘Africa: Private waste service failure and alternative vision’. In: Kishimoto, S. et al. (eds.) The Future is Public. The Transnational Institute. 2020. <https://www.tni.org/en/futureispublic>

the world's total GDP¹⁹. Conversely, public investment in the sector keeps falling. In the EU alone, the investment gap in social housing stands at 57€ billion per year. Where they existed, public and social housing services have been scaled down or liquidated. In 52 countries out of 102, workers on an average salary must save their entire income for 10 years to be able to purchase accommodation in the country where they live".⁹⁵

Water

The lack of adequate water and sanitation services for the largest share of Jakarta's population (see Box 5) has worsened with the COVID-19 crisis, as the low-income communities bear a disproportionate risk of catching and spreading the virus.⁹⁶

Telecommunications

Inequality of access to hi-speed broadband internet across the USA is a reality for 159.3 millions of Americans largely concentrated in rural areas, small towns and low-income communities, contributing to a downwards spiral of poor economic development opportunities and decent jobs, lower tax revenue, and depopulation. Two private duopolies dominate the US telecom market: Comcast and Time Warner for wired transmission, and Verizon and AT&T for wireless. They have little incentive to invest in stronger infrastructure in sparsely populated areas, while their dominant position enables them to extract high margins from users, hence excluding a part of the population or forcing it to rely on unreliable and expensive satellite services.⁹⁷

COVID-19 has brutally exposed the connection between PS and inequality.

It has unveiled and further jeopardized PS access worsening existing inequalities and adding new ones. The same groups that benefit the most from universal access to PS - the poor, women and girls, LGBTQI+, low-income and precarious workers, migrants and refugees, Black, Afro-descendants and indigenous people - are also those who are hit hardest by the pandemic and risk suffering even more inequality and exclusion, if privatization, regressive taxation and user fee schemes, and public funding cuts are not urgently halted and reversed.⁹⁸

The UN estimates that 71 million people have been pushed into extreme poverty in 2020 only: this is the first time since records began that inequality rose in virtually every country on earth at the same time. Conversely, according to Oxfam, the total global billionaires' wealth increased by 3.9 trillion USD and currently stands at 11.95 trillion, matching G20 governments' expenditure in response to the pandemic. Thanks to the profits of pharmaceutical corporations with monopolies on COVID-19 vaccines, at least nine people have become new billionaires since the beginning of the pandemic: their combined net wealth amounts to \$19.3 billion, enough to fully vaccinate 1.3 times the whole populations of low-income countries.⁹⁹

In such a context of stark, widening inequalities, PS funding – including for adequate staffing levels – must be prioritized by all levels of governments and encompassed in the design and implementation strategies of COVID-19 recovery packages. National governments need to support LRGs which had to advance extraordinary expenses to ensure PS continuation - through emergency packages, debt guarantees, flexible budgetary rules and ensuring liquidity.¹⁰⁰ Beyond COVID-19, it is more than ever urgent to make adequate, long-term investment in PS to avoid a further polarisation of communities and society and the exacerbation of existing inequalities.

95. Cibrario, Daria. 'Strong Public and Social Housing Services: A Key Asset in halting Global Pandemics'. PSI, Ferney-Voltaire (August 2020): 4-5. <https://bit.ly/2ROQchr>

96. Marwa, M. 'A double-edged sword? Covid-19 and Water remunicipalization in Jakarta'. In: McDonald, D; Spronk, S.; Chavez, D. (eds.) 'Public Water and Covid-19. Dark Clouds and Silver Linings'. Transnational Institute (TNI). Amsterdam, 2020.

97. Hanna, T. M., and Mitchell, C. 'United States: communities providing affordable, fast broadband internet'. In: Kishimoto, S., Steinfort, L., Petitjean, O. 2020. https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/futureispublic_online_def.pdf

98. 'The Inequality Virus. Bringing together a world torn apart by coronavirus through a fair, just and sustainable economy'. Oxfam, January 2021. <https://webassets.oxfamamerica.org/media/documents/The-Inequality-Virus-English.pdf>

99. 'The Inequality Virus. Bringing together a world torn apart by coronavirus through a fair, just and sustainable economy'. Oxfam, January 2021. <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621149/bp-the-inequality-virus-250121-en.pdf>

100. 'Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future'. UN Habitat. May 2021. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/03/cities_and_pandemics-towards_a_more_just_green_and_healthy_future_un-habitat_2021.pdf

3. Taking back control of local public services to tackle inequality: (re)municipalization, de-privatization and commoning

The poor record of privatized services in delivering inclusive social, environmental and development outcomes for communities; their unfulfilled promises of cost-effectiveness, investment and modernisation to local authorities; and the ensuing inequality in access and quality, penalizing the most vulnerable in communities, have fuelled a societal demand for a comeback of public and community ownership at the local level. **Local authorities, citizens, service users, inhabitants and workers are therefore increasingly de-privatising public services and common resources**, returning them under public ownership and control, often encompassing and experimenting mechanisms of democratic governance, accountability and participation through the process. They are doing so in various ways, including the non-renewal of multi-year concessions and outsourcing contracts; taking over after private operators' withdrawal or bankruptcy; via local government authorities' decisions; or by democratic referenda.¹⁰¹

This global trend has come to be commonly referred to as 'remunicipalization' or 'municipalisation', the latter meaning the establishment of a new public service by subnational governments.¹⁰² The terms 'de-privatization' and 'in-sourcing' cover a broader scope as they include the significantly rarer occurrences of service (re)nationalizations.¹⁰³

As of February 2021, the Public Futures database counted 1,451 verified cases since 2000, of which 974 de-privatizations and 477 municipalizations, covering a wide array of public services from water, energy, waste, transport, education, healthcare and social services, telecommunications to local government services (housing, building cleaning, public space and infrastructure maintenance, canteens, funeral services, municipal parking and sport infrastructures, etc.).¹⁰⁴

Most recorded remunicipalizations are found in the Global North. However, remunicipalization is undeniably a trend

across the Global South, too, especially in the water sector, among the first public service in which privatization has been promoted through IMF and WB structural adjustment and debt conditionalities, and a favourite of private conglomerates and investment funds, given its natural monopoly nature.¹⁰⁵ Since the 2000s, Chile - where health care was radically privatized in the 70s - has seen a surge in the number of municipally-owned pharmacies nation-wide.¹⁰⁶

In the absence of systematic data collection, this geographic imbalance can be explained by historical patterns of privatization; shifting societal expectations; political and legal frameworks facilitating the process; the presence of local democratic decision-making mechanisms and public scrutiny over both public and private services, as well as an underreporting issue related to the decline and/or underdevelopment of local press in many countries.¹⁰⁷

Finally, the de-privatization trend is more noticeable in countries with a certain degree of decentralized governance and devolution that enables municipalities to de-privatize and take back control of the service.

Of the 1,451 verified cases of in-sourcing worldwide, 64 per cent are at a municipal level, 23 per cent at an inter-municipal level (with a marked increase over the past 10 years), 13 per cent at a regional level, and less than 1 per cent at a national level.

Finally, 49 per cent are directly owned by government, 28 per cent by public companies (with the municipality as the majority shareholder) and 5.5 per cent co-owned, while community-based ownership via cooperatives accounts for 4 per cent.¹⁰⁸

In countries where public institutions are weak, not trusted by the population and/or inadequate, (re)municipalization may not be an immediately viable option. In these cases, 'commoning' is regarded as an alternative means to fulfil social needs and deliver vital PS in a non-for-profit manner. The term 'commons' suggests alternative,

101. Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., Petitjean, O. 'The Future is Public: towards democratic ownership of public services'. TNI, Multinational Observatory. Amsterdam, May 2020. <https://www.tni.org/en/futureispublic>

102. "Remunicipalisation is the return of public services from private control and/or ownership in any form to full public ownership, management and democratic control. Remunicipalisation means that municipalities and regional governments take back privately owned and/or managed services that are commissioned, under concession or funded by public bodies. The term emphasises the subnational dimension of bringing public services back into public ownership in territories and communities. In some cases, this can include people and community-led public bodies such as public cooperatives remunicipalised service must fulfil the principle of universal access, meaning that all inhabitants can benefit from the service". Wegmann, V. 'Taking Our Public Services Back In-House'. PSIRU-PSI, Greenwich, and Ferney-Voltaire (September 2020): 10. <https://bit.ly/3fCricB>

103. Wegmann, Vera. 'Taking Our Public Services Back In-House'. PSIRU-PSI, Greenwich and Ferney-Voltaire (September 2020): 10. <https://bit.ly/3fCricB> and Pearson, B., Paul, F., Cumbers, A., Stegemann, L. 'Public Futures Database Report'. University of Glasgow and European Research Council (ERC), Transnational Institute (TNI), March 2021. https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_782991_smxx.pdf

104. Launched in 2021, the Public Futures Database <https://publicfutures.org/> is the first attempt to try to capture the global remunicipalization/remunicipalisation process. In the absence of official data connected by authorities, it builds on the initial work carried out and published by the Transnational Institute (TNI) Kishimoto, S., Petitjean, O., 'Reclaiming Public Services: How cities and citizens are turning back privatization', TNI, Amsterdam, 2017. https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/reclaiming_public_services.pdf and is constructed by a network of activists under the supervision of Prof. Andrew Cumbers, University of Glasgow. Anyone can report a case through the website whose accuracy is verified and documented by Prof. Cumbers' team.

105. Lobina, E. 'Water Remunicipalisation: Between Pendulum Swings and Paradigm Advocacy'. PSIRU, University of Greenwich, 2017.

106. Pearson, B., Paul, F., Cumbers, A., Stegemann, L. 'Public Futures Database Report'. University of Glasgow and European Research Council (ERC), Transnational Institute (TNI), March 2021. https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_782991_smxx.pdf

107. Remunicipalization tends to stay under the radar. Rarely making it in the national and international news, it is typically reported in the local press, which is progressively disappearing in many countries under the competition of global digital platforms. For instance, in the USA, see: 'LOSING THE NEWS: The Decimation of Local Journalism and the Search for Solutions'. PEN America, 20 November 2019. <https://pen.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Losing-the-News-The-Decimation-of-Local-Journalism-and-the-Search-for-Solutions-Report.pdf>; and in the UK, see: Adams, T. 'Final editions: why no local news is bad news'. The Guardian, 29 September 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/sep/29/local-news-papers-closing-down-communities-withering>

108. Pearson, B., Paul, F., Cumbers, A., Stegemann, L. 'Public Futures Database Report'. University of Glasgow and European Research Council (ERC), Transnational Institute (TNI), March 2021. Page 4. https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_782991_smxx.pdf

non-commodified means to fulfil social needs (e.g. to generate social wealth and to organize social production).¹⁰⁹ Commons are necessarily created and sustained by 'communities' such as social networks of mutual aid, solidarity groups, and practices of human exchange that are not based on a market form.¹¹⁰ While PS are primarily run and/or regulated by the state, 'commons' tend to be run by communities. **'Commoning' therefore usually refers to forms of PS co-production and provision that rely on community groups and civil society organizations**, hence neither the state nor private companies.¹¹¹ Access to the commons (e.g., water) typically implies some form of work and devoting personal energy and time to the collective.¹¹² Co-production, commons and cooperatives have played a key role in PS delivery, where the state and the private sector have been absent or have failed; where service delivery has been inadequate; or where the state and public institutions are unreliable or authoritarian.¹¹³

However, when it comes to PS provision, commoning can entail important pitfalls: firstly, the 'scale problem' as it cannot be assumed that small-scale good practices and experiences in local PS delivery (e.g., municipal energy cooperatives) automatically translate into global or national solutions.¹¹⁴ Second, commoning does not necessarily embrace an ethos of universal access to PS delivery of comparable quality, and can be riddled by power dynamics within the communities and groups that deliver the service. For instance, the analysis of a successful community-based water management project in Kathmandu found that commoning practices of water services were shaped by local power relations which prevented equal access to the service for all residents.¹¹⁵

Also, in Europe the popularization of local energy systems through municipal and community ownership has helped create initial space for community and/or worker-run cooperatives. Yet it also bears the risk that cooperatives turn into gated energy communities with affluent citizens generating and supplying their own electricity for their neighbourhood only, leaving poorer communities excluded and disconnecting from a national grid

where that exists.¹¹⁶ Third, community-based PS management and delivery can be (mis)used as a vehicle to open up previously unserved areas, especially in informal settlements, to privatizations, with companies being able to piggyback on the efforts of the communities.¹¹⁷ Finally, **where possible, commoning systems should reinforce rather than undermine the local, regional or national PS infrastructure and facilitate its establishment as a universal PS.**

While sensitivities and some suspicion can understandably dwell vis-à-vis the concept of 'public' when narrowly associated with a traditional conceptualisation of 'the state', evocative of a history of warfare, dispossession, autocracy, centralisation and colonialism,¹¹⁸ the way it is intended here is primarily about serving the general interest of the many over the few interests.¹¹⁹ Remunicipalization is therefore not necessarily about centralized, top-down, fully owned and direct state delivery. Rather, it embraces a diversity of public delivery models, ecosystems of collective ownership,¹²⁰ including public-community, public-public partnerships (PuPs),¹²¹ and forms of worker and civil society organisations,¹²² provided these guarantee: i) universal access; ii) view PS as common goods in everyone's interest; iii) are rooted in a principle of cooperation, solidarity and mutual support (as opposed to individualism and competition); iv) operate within a democratically regulated framework; v) are devolved at the closest point of use that does not impinge on PS quality and consistency (subsidiarity); and (vi) abide by human rights including decent work. Regardless of the form public ownership takes, the principles of PS non-commodification and universal access must be fulfilled.

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117. Wegmann, V. 'Going Public: A Decarbonised, Affordable and Democratic Energy System for Europe. The failure of energy liberalisation'. *European Public Services Union (EPSU)*, 2019. <https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/Oab-CBN5Vhl4mVlirUdgK?domain=epsu.org>

118. See Panes Pinto, A. Re-building public ownership in Chile: social practices of the Recoleta commune and challenges to overcoming neoliberalism. In: Kishimoto, S., Steinfort, L., Petitjean, O., 2020, endnote 1. https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/futureispublic_online_def.pdf

119. 'Geneva Charter on Quality Public Services'. Council of Global Unions. 24 January 2011. https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/EN_QPS_Charter_Final_2011_.pdf

120. Cumbers, A., *Reclaiming public ownership. Making space for economic democracy*. Zed Books. London-New York, 2012.

121. "A public-public partnership (PUP) is a collaboration between two or more public authorities or organizations, based on solidarity, to improve the capacity and effectiveness of one partner in providing public water or sanitation services". For a full definition, see TNI, *Public public partnerships - PuPs*. <https://www.tni.org/en/collection/public-public-partnerships>. Also see Global Water Operators' Partnerships Alliance (GWOPA)'s concept of Water Operators' Partnerships (WOPs), that is PuPs in the water sector: *GWOPA Strategy 2019-2023*. Barcelona, 2019. <https://gwopa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/1.-Strategy-Report-2019-2023-01.pdf>

122. "Beyond direct state ownership, there is a wide range of organisations providing services, including social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals, user-led organisations, registered charities and community groups organised around neighbourhoods or shared needs and interests. Many of these occupy the space described as 'the social and solidarity economy' [...]. Partnerships are often formed between public bodies and NGOs for the purpose of delivering services". In: Coote, A. and Yazici, E. 'Universal Quality Public Services. A Policy Briefing for Trade Unions', PSI (February 2020): 12. *Universal Quality Public Services: Union Policy Brief - PSI - The global union federation of workers in public services*

From Recoleta to 80 Chilean cities: municipal pharmacies help the poorest access medicines and health services.

The radical neoliberal policies launched in Chile in 1973 following the military coup have resulted into the privatisation of all PS sectors and the commercialisation of the country's natural resources leading to a substantial increase in PS prices.¹²³ Four decades afterwards, Chile is one of the countries with the highest levels of inequality among high-income countries, with more than an eight-fold income gap between the richest and the poorest 20% of the population, who can afford paying for vital PS.¹²⁴ Against the backdrop of this situation, since 2015 the municipality of Recoleta has prioritised the creation of local PS in the areas where the needs of the population – 14 percent of which lives in poverty – were greatest. Following a participatory consultative process with the local population, Recoleta opened the first 'popular pharmacy' of the country, making the local government a direct purchaser and provider of affordable medicines to the population and of an accessible social security scheme to cover low-income dwellers. In 2020 residents' monthly savings on medication were up to 70 percent, while 80 municipalities across Chile had established their own popular pharmacies now reunited in a national association.¹²⁵

Communities in 800 US cities, towns and counties establish their public local telecommunication services.

In the absence of state and federal government action to tackle the access inequality caused by market power concentration in four corporations, 800 US municipalities have setup high-speed broadband networks via fiber optic cables often powering them with local, publicly owned multi-utilities and in some cases cooperating through inter-municipal consortiums and PuPs to benefit from synergies and economies of scale, especially significant for the smallest and poorest centers. Thomasville, Georgia; Tullahoma and Chattanooga, Tennessee; Wilson, North Carolina; Mount Washington, Massachusetts; are some among the municipalities where local authorities, local communities organised in co-operative networks and public utilities together established their own telecommunication infrastructure in the common interest,

not without having to overcome the hurdles of 'pre-emption' laws pushed for by corporate lobbyists passed in 19 states (2020) to prevent the establishment or to make it impossible for municipal authorities to operate their own local public broadband service. Out of the 800, 500 are publicly owned. This approach has rapidly paid out: in Tullahoma job growth doubled Tennessee's statewide rate and in Chattanooga the network was deemed responsible for the creation of 2,800 new jobs and for adding 1 USD billion to the local economy.¹²⁶

Public community Health Services in Rwanda help beat COVID-19:

Rwanda introduced a public community based health insurance scheme (mutuelles de santé) which achieved a coverage of 81.6 percent population covered aside other public and private health insurance schemes. Rwanda is seen to be ahead of all African countries when it comes to universal health coverage.¹²⁷ The impact of which has been two-thirds drop in infant mortality and almost universal coverage of primary school enrolment.¹²⁸ Due to its public and universal health care system Rwanda handled the COVID-19 pandemic very successfully – the country has one of the lowest incidence rates of COVID-19 on the African continent.¹²⁹

In **Bogotá, Colombia** in 2012 the then mayor Gustavo Petro remunicipalised half of the city's waste collection services in 2012 and simultaneously formalised and incorporated the informal waste workers (recicladores) as part of the municipal waste management service, which approximately doubled their income to US\$ 200 a month.¹³⁰

In **Dar es Salaam, Tanzania** water services were privatised in 2003 as part of an IMF and World Bank condition for debt relief. The World Bank spearheaded a US\$164.6 million fund to carry out the privatisation. However, the privatisation failed with the private companies not being able to deliver the service in line with the contractual agreement. The city therefore remunicipalised the service only two years after the privatisation. The public company managed to extend coverage and improve water service delivery in the city. However, large portions of the population in Dar es Salaam still lack access to piped water.¹³¹

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124. 'Chile protests: Is inequality becoming worse?'. BBC News. 21 October 2019. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-50123494> - also '(Chile's) Gini coefficient—the most widely used measure of income inequality—fell from 0.57 in 1990 to 0.47 in 2017. Nonetheless, it still has the second highest Gini coefficient among OECD members, well above the rich country group's average of 0.32'. UN Habitat. World Cities Report 2020. Nairobi, 2020. P. 23. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/10/wcr_2020_report.pdf

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126. Hanna, T. M., and Mitchell, C. United States: communities providing affordable, fast broadband internet. In: Kishimoto, S., Steinfert, L., Petitjean, O., 2020. https://www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/futureispublic_online_def.pdf

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129. Karim, N. et al. 'Lessons Learned from Rwanda: Innovative Strategies for Prevention and Containment of COVID-19'. Annals of Global Health. Vol. 87, Iss.1. 2021.

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Recognizing there is no one-fits-all model of public PS delivery - as systems vary and evolve across countries, constitutional systems, legal frameworks, societal expectations, cultures, communities, and generations - the concept of remunicipalization primarily encompasses forms of reclaiming PS through state and civil society-based alternatives that deliver universal quality PS for all, as opposed to the market-based and for-profit approach. Regardless of the specific 'public' shape it takes, PS remunicipalization is ultimately about reclaiming PS rooted in the values of universality, quality, equality, solidarity, collective responsibility, protection and preservation of the common resources, and aiming at (re)building the social wage for the millions who live in insecurity and poverty.¹³²

Working in complementarity with remunicipalization, community-based solutions can pave the way towards building a solid foundation to quality local PS in communities and territories that are lacking them

and can also provide opportunities for PS innovation in terms of funding, and democratic management and governance of local PS, encouraging forms of PS provision that involve constructive dialogue and cooperation between local authorities and civil society. However, although recognizing that an ideal state is yet to be born, remunicipalization is about securing equitable access to quality PS for all. Therefore, it acknowledges a central role for the state, here aspirationally intended as the democratic institutions

through which people and communities exercise their collective responsibilities. Public authorities under the collective democratic scrutiny need to secure a PS delivery, which is at all times aligned with the common interest, at the very least providing adequate resources and infrastructure, developing effective regulation, and ensuring diligent control over providers.¹³³ Thus we must collectively hold the state accountable for its role of primary duty bearer, to uphold and protect human rights, and to fulfil its responsibility to ensure universal PS provision to those under its jurisdiction enshrined in international human rights covenants and treaties, ratified by most countries and reflected in many national constitutions.¹³⁴

Lastly, recalling that only formal, productive and protected work can be "decent"¹³⁵ and remembering the New Urban Agenda (NUA) commitment to ensure a "progressive transition of workers and economic units to the formal economy"¹³⁶, **community-based and commoning approaches - as well as the involvement of civil society organisations and cooperatives - should not be used to ultimately externalize the state responsibility to provide equitable access to quality PS to all their population and to cut PS delivery costs** saving on the back of cheap and unpaid workers, be them informal (such as in the case of municipal waste management services)¹³⁷ - or 'volunteers' (as in the case of community health workers in South Asia).¹³⁸



Source: Bus driver, India, PSI/ITF/Creative

132. Coote, Anna. and Yazici, Edanur. Universal Quality Public Services. Union Policy Brief. PSI (February 2020): 29. Universal Quality Public Services: Union Policy Brief - PSI - The global union federation of workers in public services

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Conclusion

Universal access to equitable, quality public services is an extraordinarily powerful antidote to structural and conjunctural forms of inequalities. Decades of privatization, austerity, de-funding, and failures by public institutions to ensure adequate investment in vital PS had already exposed the connection between lack of access to PS and inequality that the COVID-19 pandemic has brutally uncovered.

The magnifying effect the pandemic has cast light on existing inequalities has emboldened and strengthened societal demands to bring services back under public control and democratic ownership, and to provide public and collective solutions to pressing social and ecological problems. It is creating momentum for progressive institutions, civil society and communities to step in to collectively redress inequitable PS access, including where public policies have been missing and where private delivery has failed. It equally points at opportunities to establish a way for citizens and communities to have a

direct voice, participation, and democratic ownership on how 'their' PS should be delivered and governed. Most remunicipalization experiences are overwhelmingly occurring at a subnational government level. If inequalities are to be seriously addressed in the long term, central governments and international institutions must take responsibility and (re)build their people's 'social wage' by investing in equitable PS access for all. In the meantime, remunicipalization is a viable and legitimate policy option for LRGs to attend to the immediate needs of their communities and territories and to experiment new forms of PS delivery and participation. Be them in a public, public-community or public-public partnership form, every remunicipalization is unique and needs to find its territory- and community-specific footprint. In the absence of public solutions, commoning can provide an important, immediate, community-based answer in terms of service provision and protection of the commons.



Source: Sanitation worker, France, PSI/Creative Commons

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