Introduction

All over the world, cities and local communities have been claiming back public services or reinventing them to serve the needs and realise the rights of people, and to tackle social and environmental issues collectively. This wave of (re)municipalisation is taking place at a critical moment. In spite of mounting challenges and social revolts, neoliberal ideas still hold sway over many national governments and international organisations, pushing an agenda of privatisation and austerity and a trade regime favourable to transnational corporations. Far-right political movements seek to capitalise on people's insecurity and anger, and are using racism and xenophobia to divide us. Progressive forces can counteract by offering a vision for alternatives rooted in solidarity and cooperation, but also by delivering concrete solutions such as decent jobs, access to public services for all and resilient local economies.

The Covid-19 crisis clearly demonstrates the disastrous effects of years of austerity, social security cuts and public service privatisation. The most glaring effect is on health systems. In developed countries, these have undergone 'optimisation' and new public management reforms, as well as public staff hiring and investment freezes often pushed through post-2008 crisis fiscal consolidation measures. As consequences, both public and privatised healthcare services are now primarily run to minimise cost and generate profits. In developing countries, donor conditionalities have imposed sharp reductions in public spending, going as far as targeting public health workers' wages. The net result unveiled by the Covid-19 pandemic is the inability of healthcare systems run this way to deal with a health crisis, where the severe shortages of medical equipment and staff have visibly translated into many more dead, especially among the most vulnerable and among health personnel.
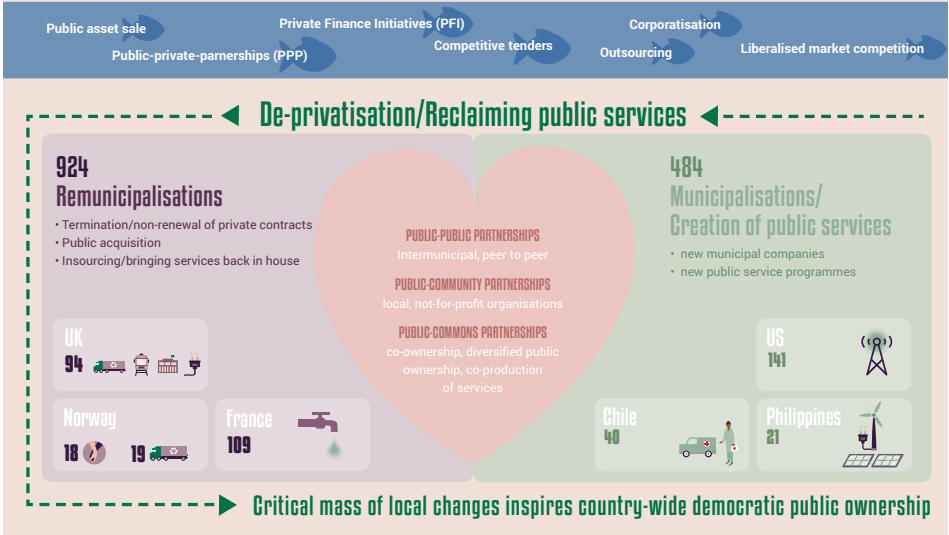
The same holds for the rest of public services, which have been weakened by decades of cuts, chronic underinvestment and privatisation. The global pandemic exposes that market dynamics should not apply to social priorities and public services. Water and sanitation workers are essential to sanitise, providing the first line of defence to break the contamination chain. Energy staff ensures that hospitals can operate life-saving devices, while people can cook, heat homes, work remotely and keep in touch with their loved ones during lockdown. Waste services safely collect and dispose of contaminated medical and household refuse, while disinfecting public space even as employees risk their own health and safety. And the list goes on. These vital public services should be run with the primary objective of delivering universal access and keeping everyone alive and safe.

As the world prepares for a post–Covid-19 order, there is more than ever an opportunity to reclaim a central role for substantial investment and rebuilding in quality public services for all worldwide, and remunicipal-isation is a fully legitimate, key option governments have in their policy toolkit to make that happen. Progressive forces and civil society actors must confidently promote this approach as market actors and neoliberal forces will oppose significant resistance as they seek to return to business as usual.

Privatisation of public services now stands more discredited than ever before. Nevertheless, it remains high on the agenda of private corpo-rations and financial markets, as well as that of many national govern-ments and international institutions. Privatisation takes many forms and disguise names, including public-private partnerships (PPPs), private finance initiatives, outsourcing, corporatisation, 'right to choice', forced competition and market liberalisation. While privatisation has been pushed on the basis of its alleged 'efficiency' for more than three decades, study after study researchers have revealed how little evidence there is to support this policy option over public ownership. What they

Fighting privatisation of **public services**

The neoliberal current is powerful ...

Public asset sale

Private Finance Initiatives (PFI)

Public-private-parnerships (PPP)

Competitive tenders

Corporatisation

Outsourcing

Liberalised market competition

◄ **De-privatisation/Reclaiming public services** ◄----------

924 Remunicipalisations
• Termination/non-renewal of private contracts
• Public acquisition
• Insourcing/bringing services back in house

PUBLIC-PUBLIC PARTNERSHIPS
Intermunicipal, peer to peer

PUBLIC-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS
local, not-for-profit organisations

PUBLIC-COMMONS PARTNERSHIPS
co-ownership, diversified public ownership, co-production of services

484 Municipalisations/ Creation of public services
• new municipal companies
• new public service programmes

UK
94

Norway
18   19

France
109

US
141

Chile
40

Philippines
21

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have found, instead, are increasing costs and declining quality for service users, worsening conditions for workers and virtually non-existent accountability, transparency and democratic control. The chapters in this book bring more evidence of all these failings while also offering insight into public alternatives under development on the ground. Given the powerful forces lined up against public management of services, it is all the more remarkable that so many services and facilities are being de-privatised, that is, returned to public ownership and control. This global trend shows that people embrace the value of public services, and highlights the determination of communities, workers and elected officials to defend the commons.

(Re)municipalisation understood as the creation of a new public service – municipalisation – or reversals from a period of private management – remunicipalisation – is a sound response to the experience of failed

privatisations from a political and financial standpoint, but also from an environmental and human rights perspective. Worse than not delivering on promises of economic efficiency for local authorities and citizens, this neoliberal policy has utterly failed to deliver on its promises of universal access to basic services and of environmental sustainability.

These failures of privatisation contrast with the achievements of (re) municipalisation – or de–privatisation. Around the world, citizens and their elected representatives are building better performing, more dem– ocratic and inclusive public services at the local level. The stories be– hind these efforts and the results are diverse, but they illustrate a com– mon purpose. In a context of climate emergency, mounting inequalities and growing democratic unrest, (re)municipalised services are showing how they can help preserve the social fabric of democracy. The Covid–19 pandemic provides yet one more example of how public services and the people who operate them are truly at the heart of a healthy and resilient society and that these services need public control and sufficient fund– ing to be most effective. Universal public services have proven to be one of the foundations of democratic societies, past and present. They re– main one of our few alternatives to a dystopian future (already a reality in many countries) in which good quality services, heavy on technology, would be reserved for the wealthy few, and in which access would not be considered a universal human right anymore. Fortunately, as this book shows, another world is possible; what is more, it is actually taking shape in front of our eyes.

Collaboration on a colossal undertaking

This book is the result of the collaboration of civil society organisations, trade unions, academics, local authorities and public enterprise officials from across the globe. It is the latest stage in a common journey. In 2014, under the title *Here to Stay: Water remunicipalisation as a global trend*, we published a first landmark survey of more than 180 cases of

remunicipalisation in the water sector worldwide. A few months later, with the publication *Our Public Water Future: The global experience with remunicipalisation*, this updated list totalled 235 cases and delved into the concrete challenges of making water remunicipalisation work. At the same time, more and more reports kept coming in of remunicipalisation and similar developments happening in other sectors, starting with the impressive creation of local, renewables-based public energy operators in Germany. Undeterred by the immensity of the task, we decided to extend our scope to (re)municipalisation in multiple sectors with our 2017 publication *Reclaiming Public Services: How cities and citizens are turning back privatisation.* We were rewarded with 835 cases from virtually all sectors of public service and from every continent. Still it was obviously only the tip of the iceberg.

1408 (Re)municipalisations
of public services

BETWEEN 2000 AND 2019, MORE THAN 2,400 CITIES IN 58 COUNTRIES BROUGHT PUBLIC SERVICES UNDER PUBLIC CONTROL
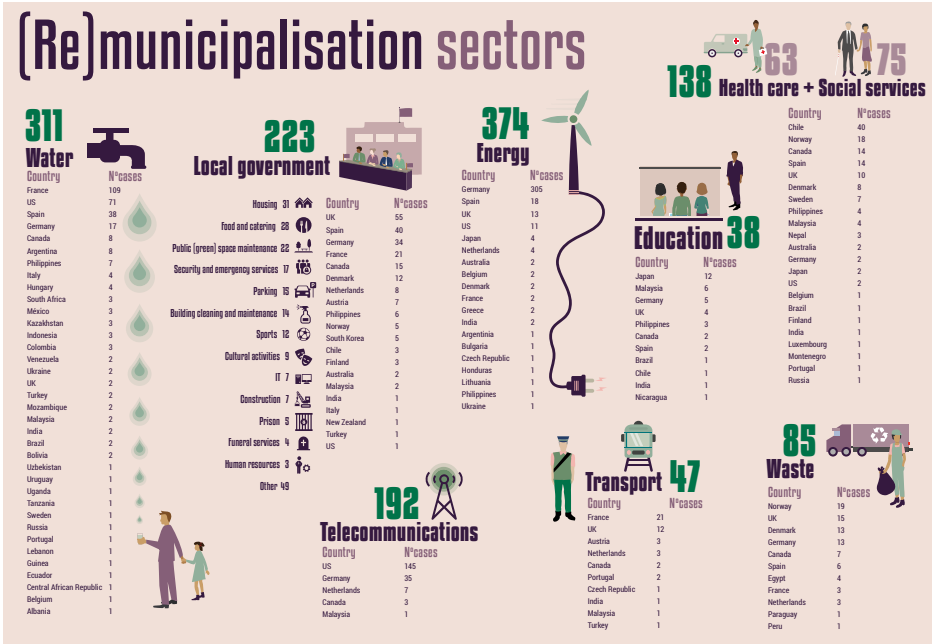
By the end of 2019, we identified a global list of 1,408 cases when considering both remunicipalisation (924 cases of services returning to public hands) and municipalisation (484 cases of newly public services), involving more than 2,400 municipalities in 58 countries. We are still very far from uncovering every single case of cities or local authorities reclaiming public services, but this book continues to deepen our understanding of (re)municipalisation efforts in all their diversity, taking us to new countries and opening up new sectors. Research shows that (re)municipalisation is still going strong in sectors such as energy (374 cases) and water (311 cases). Building on findings from previous publications, we were able to gather more information about many cases, especially in terms of concrete, favourable outcomes for communities and the environment.

We also found vibrant (re)municipalisation trends in sectors that we had not anticipated, such as health care and telecommunications. The latter fell completely outside the scope of our previous publications, yet we found regional and municipal governments 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 because it is not profitable. This serves to show that even an economic sector usually seen as the exclusive domain of corporate giants can be municipalised for the purpose of delivering a universal public service.

## New evidence of the positive impacts of (re)municipalisation

The global survey of (re)municipalisation[1] conducted for this book counted 1,408 cases by the end of October 2019. While capacity and language limitations did not allow for analysing the impacts for 47 per cent of these cases, researchers could identify 12 categories of positive impacts for the other 53 per cent. This means that we can confidently

(Re)municipalisation sectors

138 = **63** ⚕ **Health care** + **75** 👥 **Social services**

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

Sector	N°
Housing	31
Food and catering	28
Public (green) space maintenance	22
Security and emergency services	17
Parking	15
Building cleaning and maintenance	14
Sports	12
Cultural activities	9
IT	7
Construction	7
Prison	5
Funeral services	4
Human resources	3
Other	49

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

Health care + Social services

Country	N°cases
Chile	40
Norway	18
Canada	14
Spain	14
UK	10
Denmark	8
Sweden	7
Philippines	4
Malaysia	4
Nepal	3
Australia	2
Germany	2
Japan	2
US	2
Belgium	1
Brazil	1
Finland	1
India	1
Luxembourg	1
Montenegro	1
Portugal	1
Russia	1

Education 38

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

192 Telecommunications

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

Transport 47

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

85 Waste

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

say that at least 744 (re)municipalisations are expected to or did result in one or more positive impacts. Yet due to this research gap, the numbers introduced below are rather conservative. Indicators on costs and working conditions are mainly compared with performance under previous private management, but not exclusively. More details on methodology are presented in Appendix 1.

The most direct and obvious impacts of public service (re)municipalisation are related to operating costs and infrastructure financing. In 245 cases identified, local authorities intended or had already managed to save costs by bringing a service back in house. At times, the aim or result was lower user fees (188 cases). In at least 264 cases, public investment by either new public companies or local authorities was expected to increase or had already risen after de-privatisation to improve services and protect the environment. In other words, public management of services yields

better value for money. Pioneering cities and public companies have demonstrated the strength of the public sector in this area; they are able to make long-term investments to protect the environment.
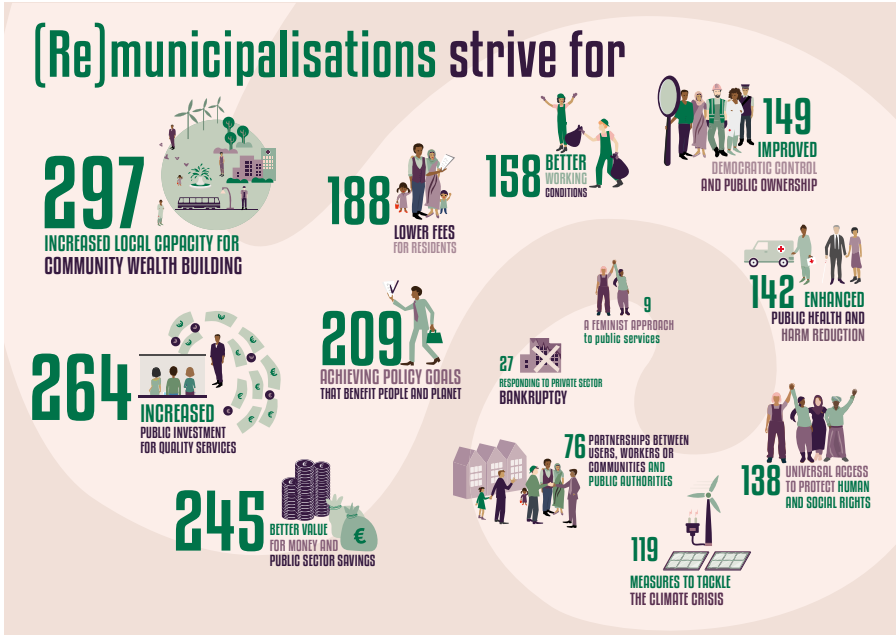
Workers providing public services are key as their conditions inevitably reflect onto their ability to deliver quality services. Overall, employment conditions were maintained after (re)municipalisation and even markedly improved in 158 cases. Workers achieved more protection and better conditions than in the private sector – especially the most vulnerable. The involvement of trade unions was critical on that front. A significant number of de-privatisations have had a positive impact on the local economy, from creating decent employment to attracting new business and research centres in local communities.

Ecological sustainability and social empowerment were enhanced or were expected to be enhanced in 297 cases, both of which play a key role in building community wealth. It is our duty to develop integrated climate and energy policies focused on de-carbonisation – for the sake of future generations – and municipal moves away from privatisation or new municipal services did or were foreseen to contribute to the ecological transition in at least 119 cases. When it comes to protecting the environment, integrated public policy coordination across different departments within local government is key, and (re)municipalisation in the areas of energy, waste, housing, water, food and transport have had or are very likely to have a clear positive impact (209 cases).

Public services should be accessible to everyone, regardless of households' purchasing power. Because water, energy, education, medical and social care are essential for all, universal access and affordability should be the starting point of public services design. Public services have proven to be fundamental social determinants of public health and well-being (142 cases). They also advance equality, as illustrated by (re)municipalisations that have (re-)established public commitments to protect social and human rights in many communities (138 cases).

To varying degrees, the global list of 1,408 cases collected for this book demonstrates how public actors can (re)establish public values and the role of governments to serve the interests of the people and the planet by reclaiming or creating public services. All of the elements referred to above are key ingredients for progressive public ownership in the twenty-first century. The promise of (re)municipalisation lies beyond the traditional concept of 'public' to embrace stronger, and in some cases novel, forms of democratic governance and control. We found clear evidence of the introduction or improvement of democratic mechanisms in at least 149 cases, ranging from increased accountability, transparency and information disclosure to establishing participatory governance in public corporations.

What does (re)municipalisation mean?

From a research standpoint, one of the criticisms of remunicipalisation is that the term lacks conceptual clarity, confusing municipal with other administrative levels, new service delivery with reversals from private management, and encompassing varied governance forms, from mixed ownership systems to full public management. In this book, the authors have deliberately and explicitly only included actions by subnational levels of governments (municipal, inter-municipal, regional and state/province). This explains why 'renationalisations' are excluded, putting local actions front stage.

‘Remunicipalisation’ refers to the process of bringing previously private or privatised services under public ownership and control at the local level. ‘Municipalisation’ refers to the creation of brand new public services. (Re)municipalisation refers to both the creation of new public services and reversals from private management.
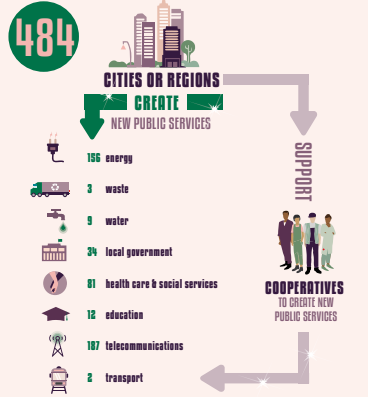
While in principle the focus is on the cases of services returning to full public ownership or those built as such, the list presented here also includes a small number of cases of predominantly public-owned (typically more than 50 per cent) services when this mixed model is based on clear public values, public interest objectives and when it includes a form of democratic accountability. Similarly, the development of new co-ownership models, in which local authorities collaborate with grassroots not-for-profit organisations and share ownership, are also considered.

Reclaiming and creating public services: (Re)municipalisation

Remunicipalisation

924

CITIES OR REGIONS
REVERSE PRIVATISATION

- 26 education
- 218 energy
- 55 health care and social services
- 190 local government
- 4 telecommunications
- 46 transport
- 82 waste
- 303 water

CITIES OR REGIONS **+** COOPERATIVES
citizen and worker-led
REVERSE PRIVATISATION

Municipalisation

484

CITIES OR REGIONS CREATE NEW PUBLIC SERVICES

- 156 energy
- 3 waste
- 9 water
- 34 local government
- 81 health care & social services
- 12 education
- 187 telecommunications
- 2 transport

SUPPORT

COOPERATIVES
TO CREATE NEW PUBLIC SERVICES

Although these cases are few, they bear a huge democratic potential when it comes to co-managing local resources – and are thus directly connected to the overall purpose of (re)municipalisation. More details on the research methodology used for this book can be found in Appendix 1.

How de-privatisation happened

586 contracts expired	**197** contracts terminated
40 shares sold by private operators	**34** decisions to remunicipalise
33 private operators withdrew	**19** N/A
15 public acquisition	

While this book showcases numerous examples of (re)municipalisation of public services, new cases of privatisation continue to emerge in parallel. But this book is about more than just comparing numbers. It is about a growing movement. In many ways, privatisation is the easy option for government authorities: it is pushed by powerful players, comes with plenty of international funding, and is enabled by favourable legal conditions. This state of affairs enables politicians who are wary of the electoral cycle to hide the real cost of privatisation by keeping it out of the current public balance sheet and deferring expenditure to a future government.

Overview of the book

Remunicipalisation is fuelled by the aspiration of communities and local governments to reclaim democratic control over public services and local resources, in order to pursue social and environmental goals and to foster local democracy and participation. It is not solely a change of ownership or a technical matter. It is a political and collective endeavour, which comes to life in diverse socio-economic and political contexts, involving many different actors. From water to health care, from energy to transport, each sector has its specificities. The 15 chapters assembled in this book help understand these dynamics. They were written by researchers, activists, trade union leaders and professionals who have long worked on de-privatisation of public services in their respective countries and sectors.

Part 1 offers in-depth and contemporary stories from (re)municipalisation hot spots around the planet, illustrating the breadth of the movement. It tells of more than 20 new cases of remunicipalisation in the water, waste, transport, telecommunication and health care sectors in Canada since 2017; of how, in Denmark, 54 privately run elder care centres went bankrupt since 2013 and many local governments reassessed the market-driven, competitive tender policies on 'free choice'; or of how, in 2017,

more than 100 municipalities took public control over refuse collection after RenoNorden's bankruptcy in Norway.[2]

This first section of the book also recounts the successes of the flagship Paris water remunicipalisation, 10 years on. At the same time, it veers into new territories, such as the waste sector in Africa, where private management has a record of neglecting poor neighbourhoods and rural areas and disregarding the basic rights of informal waste-pickers. Experiences from Egypt to Zanzibar demonstrate the potential of public service to address these issues while achieving 'zero waste' objectives. Another chapter looks at (re)municipalisation in the UK, offering an overview of recent de-privatisations in many sectors, from the local to the national level, in a country that has long been a pioneer of privatisation and PPPs. The author explains how this has fed into the policy commitment of the UK Labour Party since 2016 to bring energy, water, mail and rail back into public control. Despite the defeat of the Labour Party in the general election of December 2019, and in the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak, one Conservative Party minister admitted that their government will end up implementing most of their rival's programme to prevent an economic crash from happening.[3]

What remunicipalisation and municipalisation have in common is their contribution to a renewal of public values and commitments, and their putting users, workers, communities and sustainability front and centre. In that regard, some of the chapters offer precious insights into the adventure of establishing new public services. For example, the commune of Recoleta in Chile created a municipal university providing free high education and the country's first popular pharmacy to offer affordable medicines, with a subsidised price representing savings of up to 70 per cent. In a similar show of deeply held public ethos, regional and municipal governments in Malaysia and the Philippines initiated integrated social protection programmes to ensure low-income families have access to education (from day care to university) and basic health

care. In a high-income country context, there is the story of at least 141 new public telecommunication services that were created recently in the US to improve access to and democratic control of broadband Internet, delivering jobs, improving the quality of life and stimulating economic activity.

Part 2 entitled 'From (re)municipalisation to democratic public owner-ship' looks at key remunicipalisation actors, cross-cutting issues and partnership strategies, all with a focus on enhancing democratic control. It tells of how corporations have responded to remunicipalisation in the French water sector, by trying to dismiss it, undermine it, and finally undercut it by offering steep price cuts that will impact the quality of public services in many cities. This price dumping tactic is undermining the public sector elsewhere and local authorities should avoid this trap; instead, service quality for all and long-term sustainability should be prioritised. Another chapter examines the challenges of ownership transition for workers globally, shedding light on the growing union experience in this field, drawing lessons learned and identifying critical factors for success. This section also emphasises the importance and potential of collaboration between public enterprises for knowledge creation and sharing as public-public partnerships. Finally, a few chapters explore what democratic public ownership looks like. There are experiences such as that of Terrassa, in Spain, where co-management and co-ownership of water is being put in place; or initiatives at both the local and national level to achieve a transition to de-carbonised energy systems; or efforts at integrating workers' and citizens' knowledge for democratic public management.

All of these topics were at the centre of discussions at the international conference 'The Future is Public: Democratic Ownership of the Economy' held in December 2019 in Amsterdam. The conference was co-organised by the sponsors of this book (17 organisations that have been working together on remunicipalisation research and advocacy) in collaboration

with a new think tank, 99 van Amsterdam, created and supported by that city government. The conference was attended by 400 people including dozens of politicians, unionists, academics and activists from around the world. It was also an opportunity to present the preliminary results and findings of this research. It demonstrated how (re)municipalisation is one of the beating pulses and rallying points of a wider movement that includes public services unionism, efforts to democratise the state and public ownership, the growing municipalist movement, or cities seeking to initiate a radical climate transition.

The conference ended with a note of caution: Endeavours to build economic democracy must bear in mind the need to inculcate democratic forms of ownership at all levels, not only cities. At the same time, experiments at the local level such as (re)municipalisation prefigure and contribute to broader scale changes. Transformations at the municipal level can be a starting point – not necessarily an end in itself. In contexts where the political opportunities for radical change at the municipal level are more open than at the national level, taking advantage of this political space can translate into much-needed gains and engage local populations at the grassroots, while simultaneously building capacity and experience in ways that can be transferred in national and international politics when chances arise.

This book seeks to expand dialogue and collaborations among communities to achieve the critical mass that is needed to make that quantum leap.

Endnotes

1   The global list of (re)municipalisation consisted of 1,408 cases by the end of October 2019. The database is available at: *https://futureispublic.org/remunicipalisation-global-database/*. An inter-active database is under construction in collaboration with the University of Glasgow. It will be accessible through the above link in the near future. Additional cases and information will be added to this new database as they are collected.

2   19 cases of remunicipalisation were reported since several municipalities acted together as an inter-municipal arrangement and took over the bankrupt private company.

3   Peston, R. (2020) 'Boris must borrow from Corbyn's playbook to prevent a coronavirus crash', The Spectator, 17 March. *https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/boris-must-borrow-from-corbyn-s-playbook-to-prevent-a-coronavirus-crash*