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THE FUTURE OF LOCAL  
PUBLIC SERVICES

## **Public Services 2.0:** **DEMOCRATIC Governance** **and PARTICIPATION** **in Local Public Services**

**Brief #6**

**PSI Local & Regional  
Government Workers'  
Network Series**



# LRG NEXT2021

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## 1. BACKGROUND

Public ownership of vital public services provides an opportunity to build a new generation of local quality public services that are innovative, participatory, accountable, democratic, and work for the workers, the people, and their communities. Also, when services are publicly owned and include forms of democratic governance and meaningful workers participation, they have the potential to provide a unique space to pioneer new, progressive management practices that do not necessarily or solely rely on the same performance indicators used by privately-run public services (e.g., return on investment, productivity, cost-effectiveness, working time, etc.). They can introduce new, qualitative and quantitative performance indicators (e.g., social and environmental impact, service quality and outreach, revenue reinvestment in service, worker and citizen participation, user fee reductions, etc.) while ensuring long-term service viability, decent employment, and quality service with equitable access. PSI refers to this vision of the local public services we need as “Public Services 2.0”.

While workers’ participation and the democratic ownership of public services may sound like an abstract and utopian objective in many contexts where democracy and the respect for human and labour rights are a challenge, or where industrial relations are heavily confrontational, it has been an item on workers’ and trade unions’ agendas since they came into existence. The vision of different forms of workers’ participation,

workplace democracy, and democratic ownership is embedded in trade union history and social experiments have been carried out with mixed results since the onset of the first industrial revolution.<sup>1</sup>

Various forms of workers and trade union participation exist in the industrial relations systems in countries such as Germany, Austria France, the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries. Also, systems of citizen and community participation in the provision and stewardship of public goods and resources such as water, energy, food and the environment have been for centuries the only options for communities where modern public service infrastructure and governance has been poor or lacking. Worker, users and consumer cooperatives, as well as community groups play key roles in the local collective provision of vital services in rural, island and remote areas, as is the case in Colombia (e.g., water)<sup>2</sup> and in the Philippines (e.g., electricity) among others.

A wide spectrum of worker, public and community participation models exists: many are yet to be developed or tested. The following sections aim to provide some framing to the topic, basic definitions and a concise review some of the options in a view to feed the debate within PSI. The paper is far from exhaustive. PSI affiliates’ sharing of direct experiences and contributions to the debate in this field are especially precious and warmly encouraged.<sup>3</sup>



## 2. WORKERS' PARTICIPATION AND WORKPLACE DEMOCRACY

To explore the role of LRG workers and trade unions in the participation and democratic ownership of local public services and its wider implications on democracy at a local and national level, it is necessary to evoke and review first some key concepts underpinning “*worker participation*” and “*workplace democracy*” (sometimes referred to as “*industrial democracy*”). These can be largely summarised as the meaningful opportunities and processes (both informal and formal processes underpinned by collective agreement and/or by law) that exist to enable various degrees of worker participation in the organisation, decision making and management of their workplaces, and in shaping workplace relations, either through the workers themselves and/or through elected trade union representatives.

While the primordial and irreplaceable forms of worker participation and workplace democracy express themselves through the exercise of the fundamental trade union rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining, as well as with collective action, additional forms of worker participation and workplace democracy include the following (in increasing order of worker empowerment):

- **Information:** implies access to relevant, meaningful information for workers and their trade unions about their company (or organisation) that is strategic to the future of the workplace and susceptible to have a direct or indirect impact on jobs, working conditions and

workplace organisation (e.g., financial situation, ownership/administration change, restructuring, outsourcing/in-sourcing, occupational health and safety, automation and digitalisation, investment strategies etc.). The information needs to be provided timely and in good faith to enable workers and their unions to properly review it and to form an informed opinion prior to consultation and/or collective bargaining negotiations with the employer.

- **Consultation:** refers to the right for worker representatives to express an informed opinion and to make proposals in useful time, prior to decision-making (“*meaningful consultation*”). The opinion must be considered but can be disregarded in the final decision made by the employer. Consultation processes can be formally structured into specific procedures and can include the presence of permanent bi-partite consultative bodies.
- **Participation:** worker representatives’ opinions cannot be disregarded. Worker representatives sit in bi-partite works council with voting rights. Participation can involve various forms of control such as the review of the legitimacy of individual dismissals, contribute to working time arrangements, and decisions over restructuring. In return, this model can imply the limitation of some trade union prerogatives (e.g., right to strike).



## The German system of employee participation in works councils

An example of this model is the **German** “*betriebliche Mitbestimmung*” system of employee participation in works councils, called “*Betriebsräte*” in the private sector, “*Personalrat*” or “staff council” in the public sector<sup>4</sup>. The works council has to represent the interests of the employees towards the employer and ensure that legal obligations - such as labour laws and regulations, health and safety rules, as well as collective agreements - and are duly upheld and implemented in the company/organisation, including the mandate of the works council itself. In Germany, participation is especially common to define working time arrangements; leave and holidays; and occupational safety and health (OSH). If the works council and the employer cannot find an agreement, then a bi-partite arbitration committee is setup to rule on the matter. The arbitration committee is composed by half of worker representatives and by half of employer representative plus a neutral chair. Besides, either side can decide to go to the administrative court to uphold participation rights. In the public sector, the participation rights of the works council are limited in certain cases by the “duty of reserve” (see p.5 of this brief).<sup>5</sup>

- **Co-determination (or co-management):** workers’ representatives are elected to the company supervisory board with full rights up to 50% of the board representation (symmetric co-determination). This system implies that elected workers representatives can contribute to the company/organisation’s management on an equal footing as the other administrators. They can therefore oversee the work of executives and decide over strategic, economic and employee issues including by vote.

## The German system of employee participation in supervisory boards

In **Germany** a system of co-determination (“*Unternehmensmitbestimmung*”) exists and applies to both public and private companies. Under this system, elected workers’ representatives can make between one third of the company board of directors (companies with 500–2,000 employees) and 50% (“*Paritätische Mitbestimmung im Aufsichtsrat*” for companies with 2,000+ employees in the steel and coal industry).<sup>6</sup> The worker representatives can elect members of the board, appoint management, oversee their work, and decide over economic issues like major investments and reporting. In public companies classified as public establishments (with no private capital participation) such as is often the case in Germany for transport, water and sanitation, energy, waste services or scientific research – specific laws apply that define the modalities of employee participation in the supervisory board. While some replicate the process that applies to the private sector, other public establishments have their specific system. For instance, although Berlin’s “Charity” hospital - the largest public hospital in the country - counts 15,000 employees, only a third of the supervisory board representatives are from the employee side. In France, a similar system exists where elected workers representatives can make up to a third of the board of directors of public enterprises with 5,000+ workers provided they are under private (not public) employment law.

In private sector companies, the concept of worker control, participation and ownership can go further than decision-making and mean “workers economic participation” in the company shares and profits. Further down the line, direct “worker ownership and control” implies direct worker ownership of the capital and



the means of production of a company; as well as its collective, self-organised control over production choices and management processes. Although never implemented, the “Lukas Plan” provides an interesting example. Developed by the Lukas Aerospace workers in 1976 to save their UK company from mass restructuring, the plan actively used not only workers’ expertise and insider knowledge of production process, but also their social and political consciousness providing a viable industrial and financial plan that envisaged moving the company’s production away from weapons to goods of social utility, while saving thousands of jobs.<sup>7</sup>

Also, in the private sector, there are two main historical, structural obstacles to workers’ access to forms of workplace participation and democracy, both rooted in an intrinsic imbalance of power between capital and labour. The first one is the concept of private property and its legal protection under the capitalist system, as the means of production and the company capital are held by a private owner (or a consortium of associates). For companies on the stock market, such exclusive ownership is fragmented among shareholders. When the company capital is held by shareholders, the fiduciary duty to maximize shareholders returns represents an additional barrier. The second is the subordinate relationship between management and employees enshrined in the employment contract, that gives the employer authority over the employee and requires compliance and obedience in return for a salary. In addition, the employment relationship – particularly in the public sector – can imply hierarchical obedience that limits workers’ freedom of expression.<sup>8</sup> In the absence of human and labour rights safeguards and of trade union

representation “the workplace can well be a true lawless enclave” where employees give up their time and freedom against remuneration.<sup>9</sup>

As for the public sector, if the latter structural hurdle to worker participation and workplace democracy applies to all employment relationships in the public administration; and if the former applies to public companies, too - as long as there is a form of dividend payment system among public and/or private shareholders - an additional impediment specific to the public sector appears. That is the so-called duty of reserve that applies to civil servants, who must be neutral in the execution of policies and measures mandated by democratically elected authorities; and must not adopt behaviours liable of jeopardising the public service. This duty rightfully seeks to protect the public institutions, public services, democracy and the good fulfilment of the laws and public policies. It is integral to professionalised public service systems, where these are shielded from individual and vested interests and political cycles. The rule is usually recognizes that when public service workers are elected as trade union representatives or receive political mandates they can exercise more freedom because of their mission.<sup>10</sup>





© ETUC

Notwithstanding, neither private companies nor public services and institutions are abstract entities. Workers are their fabric, often offering the largest share of their time, energy, skills, and expertise daily to their jobs. If humanity is to collectively realize, nurture and protect democracy, enhance accountability and participation there is no way to separate social, economic and workplace democracy, accountability and participation from one another, as they all form part of a same continuum and are interdependent.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, any worker is also a citizen with voting rights, a member of society, a public service user and a consumer. In the public sector, too, forms of meaningful worker participation and workplace democracy can be enabled and enhanced not only by preserving the rightful intents of the duty of reserve, but benefitting public service quality by fully valuing public workers as whole people – not only as workers; and acknowledging and empowering their expertise, professionalism and dedication to the service, a characterising feature of public service workers who are in continued, direct contact with users and local communities.<sup>12</sup>

In its 2020 Strategy, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) declared 2021 the Year for More Democracy at work. In its Strategy and Resolution the ETUC says: “As voters can influence the organisation of their communities, workers should have a greater say regarding the organisation and the choices of their companies. Public employees should be effectively involved as well in the decision-making process on how public services are organised and delivered [...] The need to empower workers in private companies and in public services to express their views, influence decisions and enforce their rights collectively is all too often ignored in current debates. Workers’ participation should however represent a key question in the 21st century. Stronger involvement of workers within their organisations can directly improve working conditions, levels of pay, labour rights, social and economic inclusion and sustainability. It also contributes to a more balanced and effective corporate governance and to higher quality for public services”.<sup>13</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic has elevated the evidence of the need for more meaningful worker participation and workplace democracy as a pre-condition to achieve the systemic shift needed to move





away from the extractivist paradigm that has caused the concurrent inequality, health and environmental crises that are now threaten not only our economies, public health systems and societies, but life on Earth as a whole. Within this context, researchers Julie Battilana (Harvard University), Isabelle Ferreras (UC Louvain) et Dominique Méda (Université Paris Dauphine) regrouped a worldwide collective of women academic and scientists to envision the systemic shift that is needed to provide de-commodified, public good-based alternative socio-economic paradigm where people and the planet are at the centre, not profit extraction.

On 16 May 2020, in the mist of the first wave of the pandemic, they simultaneously published worldwide a [Manifesto to democratise work, de-commodify the economy de-pollute the planet](#) on 42 newspapers in 28 languages. The Manifesto is signed by over 6,000 researchers and it puts worker participation and workplace democracy at the heart of the transformative vision for a post-Covid order.<sup>14</sup> Extracts of the Manifesto read as follow: “working humans are so much more than ‘resources’. This is one of the central lessons of the current crisis. Caring for the sick; delivering food, medication and other essentials; clearing away our waste; stocking the shelves and running the registers in our grocery stores – the people who have kept life

going through the Covid-19 pandemic are living proof that work cannot be reduced to a mere commodity. Human health and the care of the most vulnerable cannot be governed by market forces alone. (...) How to avoid this unacceptable situation? By involving employees in decisions relating to their lives and futures in the workplace – by democratising (...) by de-commodifying work – by collectively guaranteeing useful employment to all. (...) To those who believe that employees cannot be trusted to do their jobs without supervision, that workers require surveillance and external discipline, these men and women are proving the contrary. (...) how society as a whole might recognise the contributions of their employees in times of crisis, democracy is the answer. (...) top management could be required to obtain double majority approval, from chambers representing workers as well as shareholders. (...) This crisis also shows that work must not be treated as a commodity, that market mechanisms alone cannot be left in charge of the choices that affect our communities most deeply. (...) Certain strategic and collective needs must simply be made immune to such considerations.(...) Decommodifying work means preserving certain sectors from the laws of the so-called free market; (...) Democratise firms; decommodify work; stop treating human beings as resources so that we can focus together on sustaining life on this planet”.<sup>15</sup>



### 3. DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC OWNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICES

While workers and trade unions are key actors of local public services entrenched in their fabric, when the concepts of “*participation and democratic ownership*” expands beyond the boundaries of the workplace, all the main affected groups and individuals the public service has an impact on (“the stakeholders”) need to be involved in the governance of the public service. “*Participation in local public services*” can therefore be largely intended as an array of possibilities and configurations spanning from forms of *consultation* (e.g., through a consultative body), to *co-decision* (through the participation of e.g., workers and/or users,

citizens, inhabitants in public service management boards), to *co-creation, co-management and co-delivery* of the service and related public policies. Finally, public ownership and control are not necessarily democratic, accountable and participative. The addition of “*democratic*” or “*democratic ownership*” to public ownership and participation describes public services where decision-making is made in a collective, democratic and accountable form.<sup>16</sup>

For Andrew Cumbers (University of Glasgow) and Thomas Hanna (Democracy Collaborative) the democracy check list for the public enterprise of the future implies the following:

#### Principles and components of the democratic public enterprise

- 1. Subsidiarity and decentralisation:** decisions should be taken at the lowest possible level of governance and public enterprises should be established at the lowest possible scale, all while preserving public service quality, as well as universal, equitable provision;.
- 2. Higher-level coordination:** local autonomy should not be disconnected from broader societal goals (e.g., social and environmental objectives). Besides, strategic coordination across levels of government as well as larger scale organisation is necessary for the efficiency and coordination of certain services (e.g., electricity services).
- 3. Stakeholder participation:** groups and individuals affected by the public enterprise should have a chance to participate and have a say in its governance, including users and residents. Workers should participate in its governance in various forms, including through collective bargaining, works councils and the operational board via their elected representatives.
- 4. Democratic and participatory planning:** stakeholders should have an opportunity to actively contribute to the public company’s goals, methods and practices for instance through a deliberative body that assesses whether it is on track with its long-term strategies (e.g., expanding water access, reducing user prices, supporting vulnerable households, protecting common resources and the environment, etc.).





5. **Professional, expertise-based management:** the service should be ran by the people who have the experience, skills and knowledge to do so and should be insulated from political cycles. Strong respect of workers and trade union rights, upholding collective agreements and solid training & skill development policies for workers and manager are integral to this point.
6. **Transparency and accountability:** the public should be able to exercise democratic scrutiny and oversight over the service. Meetings should be open and their records easily accessible, also taking advantage of new technologies that enable citizen participation. And deliberative democracy
7. **Values and wider objective setting:** the service should not identify its values and objectives in isolation but in consultation with stakeholders and in connection with wider societal goes (e.g., fighting climate change, inequality, the SDGs etc.)

*Source: own elaboration of Cumbers and Hanna 2019<sup>17</sup>, p11.*

An interesting experiment is provided by the case of the public water utility of Terrassa (Spain), where the 2014 remunicipalisation and the subsequent creation of the public water utility

“Taigua” enabled the establishment of an experimental form of community participation and policy co-creation in the local public service.

### The Terrassa Water Observatory (“Observatorio del Agua de Terrassa” – OAT)

In Catalonia's third-largest city, Terrassa (218,535 inhabitants), the citizen platform Taula de l'Aigua de Terrassa began to campaign for a return to public water management in 2014. Their Social Pact for Public Water, which aims to ensure the public, integrated and participatory management of the entire water cycle, gained support from municipal election candidates in 2015. The following year, the newly elected city council passed a motion in favour of direct water management, and the public water company Taigua was ultimately created as a public enterprise in 2018. Soon afterward, the by-laws were approved for the Terrassa Water Observatory ([Observatorio del Agua de Terrassa](#), OAT). The OAT was set up as an [autonomous organisation](#) affiliated with the Terrassa City Council. It abides by the [Social Pact for Public Water](#) and it is mandated to facilitate citizen participation in order to define policies and guide strategic decisions affecting the municipal water supply service. This means that the OAT can carry out studies and produce reports and recommendations on water management. It also has the power to draft agreements that must be studied by the municipal government. The OAT has taken up the challenge to co-produce public policies and water services together with its users, and it should be seen as a work-in-progress experiment. According to its website, the OAT is composed of [37 members](#) representing [local stakeholders](#) as follows: management ex officio (4); government (1); political parties (5); social groups – including consumers and citizenship groups (9); economic groups – local employers groups and the local chamber of commerce (5), two workers from the service and one representative for each of the three trade union federations CCOO, UGT and CGT (5); universities (3); schools (3); one technical services representative from Taigua and one from the municipality (2).

*Source: Extract from TNI 2021<sup>18</sup>, p.18 and [OAT website](#) 2021.*



Ambrogio Lorenzetti - Effects of Good Government in the city, Public Palace - Siena

## 4. PUBLIC-COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS

For the purpose of this policy brief, we refer to “public ownership” in an expansive way as to forms of collective ownership of local services that are collectively owned – therefore “public” either through the state (intended as the democratic institutions that should be a fair reflection of the people and communities aiming to serve the general interest); or through a mix of the state and forms of community-based organisations, such as social networks of mutual aid, cooperatives, solidarity groups.

When local public services are delivered and governed by a mix of public institutions and community-based organisations, they can be referred to as “Public-Community Collaborations” (PUCs).<sup>19</sup> PUCs have the potential of bringing together the political power, mandate and resources of local authorities and administration with the energy and innovation that citizen and community participation – including workers - can provide towards effectively addressing their own local needs and issues. Provided public service quality and universal access are not impaired and they are not run on a for-profit basis, PUCs can represent

an innovative and participative way of delivering local public services, with the potential of generating additional social value among the different participating local actors (e.g., creating social bonds among neighbours, or synergies among local public service workers and service users).

However, caveats related to PUCs include the fact that they can represent a form of outsourcing of the responsibility of public institutions to provide equitable access to vital public services, or cost-cutting measures by local authorities under budgetary constraints enabling to offload on citizens and local communities the burden of providing for local public services. Such cases can include the use of volunteers or token-paid workers to provide elderly and childcare; or to help breaking the isolation and deliver food through the Covid-19 pandemic; or to fund, maintain and operate public infrastructure (e.g., municipal sport centres, swimming pools, libraries, etc.). Hence, the availability of adequate funding and strong political engagement by local institutions are pre-conditions for progressive, successful PUCs.<sup>20</sup>





### Box 1: Energy PUCs in Europe: opportunities and caveats<sup>21</sup>

Public ownership and control of public services can be combined with cooperative and community ownership. This is especially evident in the energy sector in Europe, where there has been a trend towards local participation in energy systems on a municipal and community level. A successful way of combining public and cooperative ownerships was piloted in **Wolfhagen, Germany**, a small town among the first to remunicipalise its electricity grid after 20 years of privatisation. In 2010 – four years after the remunicipalisation of the grid - the municipality aimed to widen citizen participation and to increase the resources invested in renewable energy by establishing a local cooperative that would partly own the municipal utility. In 2012 the cooperative, *Bürgerenergiegenossenschaft Wolfhagen* (BEG), was founded with 264 members and capital of over €800,000. The BEG attained ownership of 25 per cent of the municipal utility. Only electricity users could become a member of the BEG cooperative by buying a share of €500, capped to 40 shares per member. This model enabled the municipal utility to have more resources available for renewable energy projects, while it also functioned as a stable investment for the members. Moreover, it strengthened the democratic governance of the municipal utility, as cooperative members could directly participate in the decision-making. The BEG is represented in the governing body of the municipal authority, which consists of nine people, of which two are representatives of the BEG, one of the work council and six of the municipality. In March 2018 the BEG had 850 members and managed about four million euros for its members.

However, while decentralisation can create initial space for community and/or workers' run cooperatives, there is also a danger that cooperatives turn into gated, members only energy communities, leaving part of the population excluded. It is therefore crucial that no matter what form public ownership takes, the principle of universal access must be enshrined. While the participation of communities and cooperatives in electricity production should be encouraged, it is important to ensure that their participation does not involve for-profit energy sale at the expense of other community residents who are not members of the cooperative. Otherwise, there is a real danger of increased corporate involvement in the public utility and privatisation. The individualisation of the energy production has already become a profit opportunity for multi-national data companies like Amazon and Google, which are moving into the energy sector through home energy automation.

Source: Wegmann, V., [Taking our public services back in house – A remunicipalisation guide for workers and trade unions](#), PSI-PSIRU 2020, p.51

PUCs seem particularly promising in areas of local public service competence where the role of the state has waned or where there are high levels of financialization that makes it impossible for vulnerable inhabitants to access that vital service. This is the case of social housing cooperatives and land co-ownership; the co-ownership of public utilities (e.g., water and energy) and local infrastructure; and local governments' public procurement, that can be strategically used to re-inject public resources into

local communities to foster inclusive local economic development, decent employment, and shorten supply chains for vital goods such as food and medicines. From cities and town in Spain to Chile, from the USA to Kenya, in 2021 the Transnational Institute (TNI) has identified and reviewed [80 PUCs across a large variety of local public services worldwide](#) encompassing local public services such as water, energy, waste, care, housing as well as food growing.



## Forms of democratic and collective ownership of public goods and services



Source: TNI 2021, p. 5



## 5. COMMONING

When local public services are neither delivered by the state nor by private companies, but by community-based organisations only – yet to fulfil collective needs in a non-profit seeking manner - we refer to those as forms of “*commoning*”.<sup>22</sup> These forms of basic service delivery and stewardship of common resources (the “commons”) have played a key role where public institutions have been absent or have failed; where they are unreliable or authoritarian; or where the services they delivered has been inadequate or inaccessible.<sup>23</sup> However, community-based

approaches can represent an issue for universal equitable access when they cannot be scaled-up to or when they become a gate-keepers when they opt for servicing their members or specific communities, only. Considering the specific rights of indigenous and traditional communities, and holding respect for the different traditions and societal expectations related to public service provisions, commoning systems should work, as much as possible, as steppingstones – not as a replacement - towards equitable, universal access to public services.<sup>24</sup>

## 6. PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Participatory budgeting (PB) is a democratic process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget.<sup>25</sup> The practice of PB was first introduced in Puerto Alegre, Brazil, over 30 years ago. The aim is to enable local people to have democratic control over municipal budgets, ensuring public spending is in line with the interests of the community. Since then it has been adopted by many municipalities across the world. It is estimated that there are currently over 20,000 PB projects globally, involving at least 1,700 local governments in over 40 countries.

Research has shown that PB has led to improvements in the provision of basic public services. A study that reviewed the experience in 20 locations across the world showed that the most prioritised public services with PB are infrastructures, specifically roads and paths, followed by water and wastewater management and treatment, as well as energy and public lighting. In Scotland, £500,000 has been allocated via PB to bus transport in the Western Isles. In Yaoundé, Cameroon, a project approved through PB led to a water tap serving a community of 50,000 inhabitants, and in Porto Alegre, Brazil it approved the creation of a water treatment plant.

PB typically involves a small share of the local authority budget. Among the local communities with the largest PB resources are Ilo, Peru, and Porto Alegre and Guarulhos in Brazil. Here residents through PB have a say on a budget equivalent to more than US\$ 120 per inhabitant per year. Most PB projects fall into the US\$ 2–35 per inhabitant per year range. Although PB is often applied to a small part of local government budgets, it has led to considerable improvements in basic public service access and residents' quality of life, enabling the community to collectively allocate resources to meet specific local situations and needs.

PB can also increase transparency and accountability, and can enhance democratic governance within communities, local government, and in the interaction between the two. Interestingly, there are indications that PB can even boost municipal budgets, as it correlates with higher tax revenues and lower tax evasion. Presumably, this is because the PB process raises awareness among the population about the level of municipal resources, their source and constraints.<sup>26</sup>





## 7. REMUNICIPALISATION AND PUBLIC SERVICES 2.0

Remunicipalisation provides a unique opportunity to pilot new approaches in this field by enshrining forms of democratic governance and participation in local public services as they are re-shaped and re-set in that narrow, time-bound space that private-to-public transitions provide. This is especially possible when the return under public ownership and/or control is the result of pro-public coalitions uniting different actors, from civil society organisations, community and grassroots organisations, to social and civic movements, trade unions and environmental activists. When they act together with largely shared objectives, these social forces can hold the power to (re)shape public services as a public good, funded by progressive taxation and underpinned by the principles of

universal user access, quality, sustainable financing via public banks and revenue reinvestment, decent employment and participatory democratic control.

When municipalities and local authorities are also keen on supporting such approaches or drive them proactively in a view to enhance local public service access, quality, resilience and accountability to their communities, the chances to “reset” local public services towards forms of democratic and participatory governance can be maximised. Local governments motives may also include equipping themselves to best confront the social and environmental challenges lying ahead, fostering public service innovation, and strengthening subsidiarity and local democracy.<sup>27</sup>

### Box 2: Embedding workers and public participation in a remunicipalisation campaign strategy

In its “remunicipalisation check-list”, PSI’s [Remunicipalisation Guide for Workers and Trade Unions](#) recommends to consider the following questions as planning a public service remunicipalisation campaign:

- What form(s) of democratic governance, worker and user participation, transparency and accountability will be embedded in the remunicipalised service?
- How will the public service effectively and better address social issues (e.g., boosting the local economy, creating quality employment, responsible public procurement, gender responsiveness, occupational health and safety measures)?
- How will the public service effectively and better address environmental issues?
- How will the public service effectively ensure worker participation and pilot progressive, innovative human resources practices?

Source: Weghmann, V., [Taking our public services back in house – A remunicipalisation guide for workers and trade unions](#), PSI-PSIRU 2020, p.57





## 8. CONCLUSIONS

As LRG workers and trade unions are increasingly aware that remunicipalisation not only possible but it is happening globally; and as they are increasingly proactive actors driving in-sourcing and de-privatisation in local public services, public service workers participation in the democratic governance of local public services – both through the workplace and more widely

as key stakeholders in local communities and society - needs to be part of the discussion and requires exploration. This is especially as the Covid-19 pandemic has opened a short-lived window of opportunity through which to imagine and sow the seeds of a de-commodified, democratic, inclusive local public service future.<sup>28</sup>





## Endnotes

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3. Should PSI affiliates wish to add/contribute to this brief or wish to share their experiences of worker and community participation in local public services, they are invited to contact PSI LRG and Municipal Services at: [lrg-municipal@world-psi.org](mailto:lrg-municipal@world-psi.org)
4. Müller, A., Schmidt, W., “Staff councils – Workplace representation in German municipalities”, 9th ILERA World Congress, Lund, Sweden, 21–24 June 2021
5. Exchange with A. Duttine, ver.di union. October 2021.
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