Chapter 12
Water and the (All Too Easy) Promised City: A Critique of Urban Water Governance

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Abstract The reform of urban water services, and the related reorganisation of environmental conservation, has been influenced by novel approaches focused on flexibility, adaptability and partnership that are commonly described as the agenda of water governance. This new agenda, widely accepted worldwide in the last three decades, entails a convergence of de-regulation and re-regulation policies, including incentives for decentralisation and market-based solutions. The chapter specifically examines the influence of urban water governance reforming public services and environmental conservation in Glasgow (UK) and in Lima (Peru). These two case studies, despite their idiosyncratic complexities, are highly emblematic of the controversies surrounding water governance. Glasgow is an intriguing example of a post-industrial European conurbation and Lima is a paradigmatic case of an emerging megacity at the intersection of post-colonial legacies and market globalisation. In both metropolitan areas, recent projects and policy adjustments reveal the achievements, but also the shortcomings of water governance. One main problem is that public participation has been appropriated by the same agencies that in the past promoted highly centralised, disjointed and politically asymmetric administration. Furthermore, positive results from increased investments and rationalisation of water services have been undermined by the discriminatory and short-term basis of the discourse and practice of urban water governance.

12.1 Introduction

The need to improve urban water systems has been the object of wide-ranging institutional reforms and considerable investment programmes, particularly in the last three decades, when it became increasingly evident the convergence of systemic problems such as growing water pollution, deficient supply and worrying levels of inefficiency. Regulators, experts and the general public have explicitly recognised the socio-ecological complexity of urban water management and called for a better

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integration of multiple and historically disconnected demands (United Nations 2004). Most of these recent and ongoing responses have been highlighted in the principles and instruments of the water governance agenda, which has entailed a transition to more adaptable practices, beyond the traditional forms of government interventions, aiming to include the action of both the state and a myriad of organisations and movements that constitute the non-state (Conca 2006). Urban water governance is now a central pillar of the promise for enhanced life and better cities through gradual changes in existing policies and mainstream procedures (Gunawansa and Bhullar 2013).

Considering the vast literature on the subject, it can be easily observed that governance has several definitions, but it is essentially a synthesis of de-regulation and re-regulation approaches that are more market-oriented and include incentives for decentralised institutional changes (Ioris 2014a). The term has been described as combined reactions to the previous focus on government as the prime actor in shaping society and managing resources and ecosystems (Olsson and Head 2015) and its replacement with a new emphasis on the alliance between public agencies, community organisations and business groups (Tretter 2008). The pursuit of governance, instead of conventional state interventions that prevailed during most of the twentieth century, has involved a range of flexible strategies and innovative mechanisms of public administration. These are designed to accomplish complex policy objectives, realise values, manage risks and recover negative impacts. In addition, governance has important synergies with calls for neoliberal state reforms, ecological modernisation and market-based conservation and the use of natural resources.

The urban water governance's specific agenda aims to foster integration across disciplines and bring together the natural, social and economic aspects of the sustainability of water services (Morinville and Harris 2014). Water management approaches have mainly moved towards cost-effective investments in infra-structure, containing environmental impacts and providing flexible water and sanitation services, often with an active or indirect involvement of the private sector. Such association between business and water governance was vividly demonstrated at the 2015 World Economic Forum held in Davos, when the 'water crisis' was considered the highest source of risk presently haunting the international community. However, treating water as a policy priority under the influence of water governance ideas has not prevented management problems from worsening and the controversy around water rights increasing, particularly in the context of fast growing cities and metropolitan regions.

The uneven results and tensions associated with urban water governance provide a remarkable example of the important junction between improved national policies on public services and environmental conservation, on one side, and the persistence of localised impacts and unfulfilled demands for social inclusion and political recognition, on the other. The experience of water governance, so far, betrays a reductionist, conservative concept of the city, which denies the fundamental role of political disputes and socio-spatial inequalities in producing problems and perpetuating failures (Roberts 2008). That is a serious conceptual and practical problem, given that the city, as any other lived and constantly reshaped space, cannot be

properly understood without reference to the political struggles and alliances that play a critical part in its own organisation (Ioris 2012a). The urban should be regarded as a process of socio-ecological change, urbanisation must be seen as the driving-force behind many environmental issues and the field where those problems are experienced more acutely – especially in a global society that is increasingly living in urban areas (Heynen et al. 2006).

In that challenging context, the goal of this chapter is to investigate the intricacy of mainstream urban policies under the influence of the multifaceted water governance agenda. Despite much literature on governance, specific discussions on the connections between past and present conditions are still largely missing and need to be properly analysed as much as between local and general trends of urban policies affected by water governance. The present discussion is situated in the field of urban political ecology (UPE), encapsulating theoretical and investigative efforts employed to explain socio-natural phenomena mediated by political power and part of producing long-term urban spaces. UPE's subject matter is the inescapable interplay between ecology and politics in the sense that urban ecology is inherently political while politics is necessarily ecological. In contrast with the political neutrality, often advocated by governance scholars, a UPE perspective reveals a fundamental connection between water, power and the state apparatus in using and appropriating water in urban areas (particularly considering the genesis of public policies, the criteria for water allocation and the political use of investments in water infra-structure).

The task at hand – here and beyond – is to creatively combine a critique of the prevailing techno-bureaucratic paradigms with formulating alternative models of socio-spatial organisation and economic production. Given the restricted space available, the chapter focuses on the comparable influences of urban water governance agendas in reforming public services and the evolution of environmental conservation approaches in Glasgow (UK) and in Lima (Peru). The two case studies, regardless of obvious idiosyncratic differences, highly illustrate the controversies surrounding market-based water reforms and are also clearly complementary. Glasgow is an intriguing example of a post-industrial European conurbation and Lima is a paradigmatic case of an emerging megacity at the intersection of post-colonial legacies and market globalisation. This chapter will lay bare how recent projects and policy adjustments in the two cities condense the shortcomings of the latest approach to water governance and how public participation has been appropriated by the same agencies that in the past promoted highly centralised, disjointed and politically asymmetric approaches.

12.2 The Urban Water Dilemmas of Glasgow (Scotland)

This section will examine the evolving waterscape of Glasgow, the largest urban conurbation in Scotland, and evaluate the direction of recent initiatives launched to improve public services and foster environmental conservation. The achievements

and failures of water-related projects there constitute an illustrative example of the controversies around supposedly innovative solutions and the influence of past legacies and socio-spatial inequalities. The city is located within the floodplain of the River Clyde, in the west coast of Great Britain, with most of the metropolitan area extending onto a steeper relief. The socio-ecological disputes and urban development strategies onsite can only be properly understood in relation to the long transition from an industrial past characterised by mining and manufacturing into a post-industrial, service-based economy. The metropolis grew considerably during Victorian industrialisation, particularly due to iron and steel steamships being built along the banks of the Clyde after 1860. Glasgow then became an important locus of violent proletarian struggles in the first decades of the last century, a movement famously known as the 'Red Clydeside'. However, due to changes in global trade and the redistribution of labour worldwide, manufacturing activity declined dramatically in the post-World War II decades. Since the 1950s, the region underwent a period of economic deterioration and developed into one of the most deprived localities in the United Kingdom. Mounting urban problems triggered the adoption of various redevelopment approaches and, since the 1980s, Glasgow has become fertile ground for neoliberal experimentation, which has impacted urban renovation plans (MacLeod 2002).

Water management issues became an integral, but frequently neglected, element of those intricate, but highly contested, trends. Due to economic expansion, the river had to be modified to satisfy the needs of burgeoning commerce and industry from the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Trade began to improve in Scotland, particularly after the Act of Union in 1707, when Scottish merchants were given rights to trade freely with English colonies in America. Trade demands forced a succession of efforts to make the river more accessible for ships ever increasing in size and, since the start of industrialisation in the region, there was a constant concern about the geographic limits imposed by the river on navigation and trade. However, the relationship between the city and its main river in a context of fast industrialisation and sustained urbanisation was never easy. Munro (1907, p. 8), more than a century ago, pointed out that 'the Clyde (…), when one comes to think of it, is not one river, but three, so wholly different are her character and destiny at different parts.' This observation related to the fact that the upstream section of the river was relatively well preserved, while the middle and lower sections were significantly impaired because of the intensification of economic activities, which produced not only negative social consequences in terms of inequalities and labour exploitation, but also affected the river's geomorphological and ecological condition and impacted domestic and industrial water uses.

The Clyde and its many tributaries had become so polluted that, since 1834, the City of Glasgow started to look for alternative sources of public supply. In 1859, drinking water for the larger urban areas in the Clyde came from Loch Katrine, a neighbouring catchment in the southern section of the Scottish Highlands. The Loch Katrine project was the largest public water supply system in Scotland from when the analogous Loch Lomond was constructed to its opening in 1975. Interestingly, throughout the years, it had been recurrently declared that water was

abundant in Scotland and the existing sources were sufficient to satisfy a rising demand. The belief in the abundance of water resources led to a highly overstretched supply system and mounting levels of water pollution within the Glasgow conurbation (Ioris et al. 2006). Although more alarmist projections of water scarcity never materialised, developed water resources were clearly adequate to meet demands, although local problems in terms of quantity and quality still persisted (SDD 1984). On the one hand, the Clyde region's economy faced a dramatic transformation with the aforementioned decrease in the shipbuilding industry since the 1950s. From being a river lined with shipyards, only a handful remained and the Clyde lost its international position in the global manufacturing market. On the other hand, metropolitan Glasgow became associated with the social ills (which actually predated deindustrialisation) of an appalling housing environment, chronic overcrowding, unemployment and deficient public services, including inefficient water distribution systems, lack of wastewater treatment, contaminated waters and poor flood defence (Ioris 2014b).

The metropolis' difficult socio-economic situation and the risk of a return to radical grassroots protests (inspired by the example of the Red Clydeside movement between the 1910s and 1930s), paved the road for introducing specific policy reforms aimed at addressing the pending problems. However, instead of conventional solutions centred on the state, the emphasis was on the neoliberal platform of urban redevelopment and water governance according to an entrepreneurial ethos and an anti-welfare ideology (directly attached to the neoliberal policies introduced by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s). This ultimately resulted in escalating contradictions, sharpening inequalities and entrenched social exclusion (MacLeod 2002). The process of selective and conservative urban modernisation, which privileged market-based strategies, continued in the following decades and, despite some localised or sectoral improvements, metropolitan Glasgow is still a hotspot of multiple forms of deprivation.[1] As in many other British regions, those disadvantaged by urban development are more likely to live in areas impacted by the effects of economic restructuring, deindustrialisation and defective public policies (Pacione 2004).

Such socio-economic and socio-ecological deficiencies have important synergies with the insufficiencies of recent plans to improve urban water management according to water governance ideas. In the eyes of politicians and corporate groups, the water sector needed to experience a transition from the previous focus on hydraulic infra-structure works to a new phase based on the adaptive, co-evolutionary coordination of improved responses that should be implemented at multi-actor and multi-scale levels. A more sustainable way of managing aquatic systems was expected to emerge from integrating multiple needs and interests, as in the case of the European Union Water Framework Directive (WFD), which commands that the public should help to define the rationale, framework, outcomes and validity of the decision-making needed to achieve and maintain the good ecological status of all water

[1] More at http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SIMD/SIMDInteractive. Accessed 20 January 2015.

bodies. The influence of governance-informed strategies was evident with the launch of the joint venture Scottish Water Solutions between the public water utility (Scottish Water) and two consortia of private water companies invited to deliver thousands of engineering projects (Ioris 2008). Following the same rationale of outsourcing to the private sector, in 2014 the Scottish government announced significant investments to upgrade water mains and the wastewater network in the Greater Glasgow area (part of £3.5 billion investments nationwide).

However, both infra-structure constructions and environmental management initiatives have exposed a highly technocratic interpretation of water problems and the prioritisation of solutions biased towards certain groups of interest, which directly reflect the asymmetries of power behind water management. The most evident element of the socio-ecological tensions is that the Glasgow metropolitan area continues to negate its formative, defining river and marginalise significant proportions of its people. Still a quarter of Glasgow's total population live in the 5 % most deprived neighbourhoods of Scotland (half in the 15 % most deprived), where there are the highest rates of suicide and child mortality in the country and where often more than 50 % of the population receive incapacity benefits (Centre for Social Justice 2008). It must be noted that, after a century of deterioration of water quality due to domestic and industrial pollution, and the subsequent loss of many species of fish and invertebrates, the situation has been improving since the 1960s (to a large extent, due to the dramatic reduction of industrial production). The River Clyde, which had lost its entire migratory fish population in the 1860s and was virtually fishless in the lower reaches, has recovered to the point that salmon and other migratory species are now returning. The migratory fish first reappeared in the 1980s, but only in 2002 the survey was sufficient to show that salmon had come back in healthy numbers. Nonetheless, Moss (2003) affirms that present management approaches only represent the solution to the largely nineteenth century problem of gross organic pollution and ignore much greater current problems, such as diffuse pollution, contaminated land and rapid land use change.

Despite the colourful language of European and Scottish policies, the susceptibility of marginalised social groups to uncertain public services (such as the regular failures of Scottish Water) and poverty-related hazards remain a central element of their daily life. Morisson et al. (2014) demonstrate a significant correlation between economic deprivation and environmental contamination in post-industrial areas of Glasgow, despite numerous regeneration programmes carried out in recent decades. An assessment published by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) in 2008 estimated that only 39 % of surface and groundwater bodies have good or better ecological status and the main pressures were related to urban drainage, diffuse sources of pollution and impacts from the industrial past. It is no surprise that, ahead of the 2014 Commonwealth Games, the pollution of the popular Strathclyde Loch (in the municipality of North Lanarkshire) was a matter of serious apprehension due to the risks of poisoning or infecting athletes during the open-air swim (Herald Scotland 2012).

The complexity of water management issues in Glasgow, as a hotspot of Scottish and British socio-ecological questions, demonstrates that the politics of urban

ecologies is an integral phenomenon shaped both by moments of concerted action or social upheaval, as in the case of repeated protests against incinerators and landfill sites in North Lanarkshire (Dunion 2003). Glasgow's politico-ecological problems continue to be predicated upon the long trajectory of industrial and post-industrial expansion that continuously reproduces mechanisms of ecological disturbance and forge new arenas of confrontation. Especially in a context with such sharp socio-spatial and socio-ecological inequalities, particularly across low and high income households and between privileged and deprived neighbourhoods, the water's urban political ecology represents an important entry point into the complexity of city problems, past legacies and uncertain futures. Most interventions on hydrological systems in recent decades tended to generate costs, benefits and risks that are distributed unevenly across spatial, temporal scales and social groups. Nonetheless, those social and spatial inequalities seldom considered when formulating and implementing new water regulation may be an indication of the geometries of power behind the ongoing institutional reforms offered by the governance agenda. On the contrary, the pursuit of water governance in Glasgow was profoundly connected to state reforms and the primacy of business-friendly policies. That is an important connection with the trajectory of water governance reforms in Lima, one of the emerging Latin American megacities.

12.3 The Steady Advance of Neoliberalism Over Public Water Services in Lima (Peru)

The attainment of universal and reliable public services constitutes an old promise of all Latin American governments since the early years of independence (though with some interruptions throughout the national history). After nearly two centuries, however, the situation is still one of marked inequalities, patchy coverage and controversy. The circumstances of Lima are not uncommon in other parts of Latin America, but service failures are even more acute here due to extremely limited water reserves and new settlements fast spreading over hills and sandy areas. The consequences of very low rainfall rates (less than 20 mm per year) and short rainfall periods (June to August) are aggravated by the extensive degradation of the three urban catchment areas and aquifers contaminated by salt water and diffuse pollution, as well as a high percentage of leakage and only around 9 % of sewage treatment. The result is that, notwithstanding the recent initiatives (see below), more than 16 % of the population (almost 1.5 million people) still don't have a safe supply of water (Hordijk et al. 2014). According to the statistics published by the national statistical agency INEI in 2012, 8.5 % of the population rely on water trucks, 3.9 % on public fountains and 4.3 % on extracted water from boreholes or watercourses.

To be sure, local water services have been improving in the last 20 years under the influence of broader macroeconomic and legislative reforms informed by urban water governance. Investments were urgently needed to cope with the Peruvian

capital's dramatic growth since the middle of last century. Internal migration led to a 'demographic explosion' and Lima grew from 645,000 inhabitants in 1940 (10.4 % of the national population) to more than 9.0 million in 2013 (about 30 % of the Peruvian population and almost half of its gross domestic product or GDP). The city's main period of expansion was between the 1950s and 1970s, when demographic growth was sustained above 5 % per year. What happened in the water sector of metropolitan Lima in the recent past has been strongly influenced by the national state's reconfiguration and the introduction of urban policies influenced by the water governance ideas (comparable to the experience in Glasgow discussed before) after the failure of heterodox economic experiments in the 1980s.

Rather than a straightforward process, the conservative modernisation of Lima's water industry epitomised a range of intricate and polymorphic transformations that attempted, directly or indirectly, to incorporate water use and conservation into market-like transactions. With the election of Alberto Fujimori in 1990, the time was ripe for a novel alliance between national and international business groups according to the neoliberal recipe advanced by multilateral agencies. The country became one of the main 'laboratories' for experimenting with neoliberal policies, including market deregulation and delegation to the private sector of activities previously undertaken exclusively by the state. Such changes did not spare the public water services, but reconfiguring the local water company (SEDAPAL) and introducing a new regulatory framework (managed by the newly created agency SUNASS) were unquestionable evidences neoliberal policies were spreading. In the end, the neoliberalisation of Lima's water sector – essentially, the adoption of market-based institutions of water management and the commercial-like operation of public utilities – became a key feature of the expanding business environment in the country. Water neoliberalisation comprises of a fluid, and highly contingent, combination of ideological constructions, disguised interests, technocratic rationality and, at best, circumstantial improvements. Lima now has a large contingent of low-income residents living in slums and sandy hills, but at the same time significant sums of money circulate through household water tariffs, local water vendors (around 1000 water lorries still in operation) and the contracts with private companies operating with the public utility.

Interestingly, the institutional water reforms implemented in the 1990s (when privatisation was the ultimate, but unfulfilled, goal) can be compared with the more recent phase in the 2000s (marked by other ingenious mechanisms of private sector involvement). When water utility privatisation was abandoned due to operational and political risks, the emphasis shifted to mechanisms that were more palatable to the general population, such as selling stock market shares, privatised construction works and expanding local commercial transactions. After the initial neoliberal reforms of Fujimori (1990–2000), the governments of Alejandro Toledo (2001–2006) and Alan García (2006–2011) specifically adopted the discourse of water governance as a main political platform. Despite differences in strategies, there was a clear line of continuity between the two phases, which indicates the persistence and growing pervasiveness of water neoliberalisation in the metropolitan area of Lima. There have been constant announcements of new projects and construction

works, increasingly embracing private sector partners, but the bulk of the money for new investments continues to be apportioned by the state at the expense of a larger public debt.

Technological dependency and more frequent stakeholder complaints, together with the structural difficulty of the water authorities to engage with local residents, seem to be another untold side of the reforms (although those problems certainly predated introducing neoliberalising policies). For instance, the appealing rhetoric of economic development and social inclusion articulated by President García, combined with a solid parliamentarian majority and firm international support, provided the political legitimacy for a new phase of water neoliberalisation in Peru. Since the early days of the García administration, it was strongly reaffirmed that SEDAPAL will remain open to the opportunities to involve private investors and to increase profitability. The president launched the programme Water for All (APT) in 2007, which created growing space for foreign companies interested in participating in Lima water services through a series of so-called 'megaprojects' (Ioris 2012b).

The intensification of business transactions involving water goes much further than large infra-structure projects, but has permeated large parts of the public policies aimed to improve water services in Lima. At the same time that the authorities claimed that APT was a programme of social inclusion, there is a growing space for market-like solutions, such as paying for ecosystem services, increasingly seen as a promising management strategy for the Peru's water companies. Examples of affirming commodifying rationalities include forming local water markets in the periphery of Lima. Some of the poorest areas, such as Pachacútec, have become the testing ground for micro-credit schemes described as the 'new paradigm' of sanitation in Peru. The experiment involved creating so-called 'small sanitation markets' and was sponsored by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government and international agencies. Local shops were encouraged to sell sanitation equipment and toilet units to the residents, making use of financial assistance provided by five intervening banks. Although on paper it may have seemed an interesting idea, in practice promoting the micro-credit by international agencies was met with scepticism from the locals, as the project struggled to make progress, local residents complained that the equipment and technology were not appropriate to their wooden houses and, ultimately, only the better-off part of the community could really benefit from the micro-credit conditions.

The result of the reforms has been an odd mixture of pro-market initiatives under strong state control, deeply marked by the long tradition of authoritarianism and private appropriation of public matters that permeated Peruvian history. The experience in reality has been a combination of neoliberalism and neostatism, which means a convergence of regulated market competition and state-sponsored flexibility. At the same time, institutional adjustments were fraught with path-dependent trends that often produce inconsistencies between senior politicians' discourse and their practice. Altogether, with more than 3 billion US dollars of estimated investments in the last 20 years, the expansion of the hydraulic infra-structure is undeniable, although it also meant a deeper exploitation of wage-labour, higher tariffs, and

significantly higher number of complaints. A comparable situation existed under the presidency of Ollanta Humala, in office since 2011, who introduced another anti-scarcity plan along similar lines and with comparable promises of universal water supply in Lima by 2017. The Strategic Plan 2013–2017 of SEDAPAL contains five main goals, including service improvement, financial stability and the universalisation of public services, to be achieved through flexible, governance-informed management approaches.

At least three fundamental trends continued to challenge the overall direction of the recent reforms and the promise of better water services in Lima. First, the metropolis still experiences unplanned and unchecked territorial expansion, as well as a densification of the consolidated *barriadas*. Because of the uncontrolled occupation of hilly areas above the maximum reference altitude of the existing system, water distribution permanently requires additional and uncertain infra-structure. That represents a vicious circle of social exclusion, reactive action of the state and opportunities for a new round of populism. A related issue is the emphasis on a lack of attention to water demand management (something that has little political visibility) and an almost entire reliance on the more visible engineering constructions and supply augmentation (regardless of the social and environmental impacts of the new projects in the source areas). Second, because of the low fiscal capacity of the national state and the very limited revenues from those employed in the informal sector (i.e. the majority of the clients of SEDAPAL), the expensive investments on water services continue to depend, for the most part, on foreign loans. The willingness and ability to contract loans and other credit facilities varies between one administration and the next, which reduces the opportunities for long-term planning. Third, the declining availability of water reserves around Lima and in the Andean mountains is a serious threat to achieving higher standards of living and socio-economic development in the metropolitan region. Sadly, the initiatives introduced in Peru since 1990 have not been able to interrupt the trend of growing risks and rising uncertainty.

12.4 Conclusions: Beyond Simplistic, Politically Eroded Responses

The brief commentaries included in the preceding sections demonstrate that the improved urban condition promised through the pursuit of a range of initiatives informed by ideas around water governance has been in fact negated by the simplistic and technocratic basis of most policies and responses. The failures of recently introduced policies and management strategies reveal the troubling gap between the ambition of contemporary urban planning and the lived reality of many urban spaces suffering from water scarcity, flooding and environmental degradation. In theory, instead of the conventional exercise of authority, the search for governance was supposed to create lasting and positive changes according to targets such as openness

accountability, effectiveness and participation (Batterbury and Fernando 2006). The water industry of those two cities was therefore seen as a strategic economic sector with the ability to attract commercial partners and help to convey the message that the countries are 'open for business', as in the case of public-private partnerships and construction contracts. That was to be achieved through an increasing monetisation of water and the interpretation of multiple values according to money figures attached to the natural resources, infra-structure investments and public services. At the same time, the engagement of multiple environmental stakeholders was expected to be coordinated, non-confrontational, facilitate regulatory efficiency and improve the performance of public services. In practice, however, there is growing evidence of persistent inadequacies and mounting risks in both metropolises. A large proportion of the water management problems remains not only unresolved, but is being presently reinforced by the priorities of an exclusionary pattern of regional and national development. Claims about the need to pursue higher levels of operational achievement have essentially helped to hide a business-friendly environment and techno-bureaucratic rationality that systematically denies the underlying socio-economic causes of the water problems of Glasgow and Lima.

In politico-economic terms, it is difficult to deny that water governance has been broadly influenced by the material and discursive attention of neoliberal policies to economic growth and capital accumulation above social, political and environmental considerations. Imposing market-based responses to long-standing problems (e.g. uneven coverage, insufficient services and declining stocks of water) has been an integral component of managing the reorganisation and institutional reforms of public water services. Governance can be read as an adjunct of the neoliberalisation of public policies, within which the state is circumscribed and contained by a mesh of organisations that originates from outside the democratic arena (Gandy 2006). Governance-informed policies adopted in Lima and Glasgow also reveal that water neoliberalisation not only happens through the formal delegation of services and utilities to the private sector. On the contrary, one of the main lessons learned from these two metropolitan areas is that the success of neoliberalising strategies depends much more on the intensification and manipulation of investments, contracts and revenues in a way that allows the flexible involvement of national and international companies, although the apparatus of the state remains firmly in control of any new initiative and plays a very important role in the legitimisation of new agendas.

Contemporary water governance approaches have both attempted to respond to environmental degradation and expand the penetration of capital into areas formerly beyond the reach of the market (such as environmental conservation and public water utilities). One particular aspect of mainstream urban water strategies is that these have not only changed the interrelations between state, people and nature, but have forced alterations in the role of the national state as the ultimate responsible for the success of flexible, market-friendly approaches. To overcome difficulties and maintain the direction of the reforms, the state had to adjust its own configuration (e.g. create new regulatory agencies) and its strategies in relation to the public and the business partners (e.g. more aggressive communication campaigns and legislation on public-private partnerships). At the same time, the state has remained

responsible for the more expensive procurement of raw water sources and recovering degraded river catchments.

One of the most perverse and unfortunate consequences of the, overt and covert, emphasis on strategies informed by the contemporary agenda of governance (as much as by related concepts such as ecological modernisation, sustainability and smart regulation), is that the hegemony of mechanisms informed by governance has helped to hide the maelstrom of inherently limited water management reforms and prevented the emergence of a creative thinking about urban water. The loose vocabulary of governance – which instinctively incorporates expressions such as subsidiarity, empowerment, public participation and eco-efficiency – has served as justification for adopting narrow water management methodologies that in practice correspond to the interests of the stronger political and economic sectors. It is often the case that water governance theorists neglect the politicised dimension of both the causes and the solutions to water management problems. Likewise, public policies and official texts frequently minimise the fact that managing urban water systems is embedded in multiple power disputes that evolve from the household, neighbourhood and catchment level to the urban, region and international scales. Most interventions related to urban water governance consider stakeholders as disconnected, atomistic participants whose opinions can be easily plugged into pre-established decisions and managerial structures, whilst the legacy of social inequalities and institutional distortions continues to receive only scant attention. Instead of those ideological assertions, the evolution and present configuration of urban water management thus constitutes a synthesis of long-standing socio-natural interactions and state-society relationships that are certainly not politically neutral. The small, microscale manifestations of the politicised urban landscape – as in the case of water management problems and attempted solutions introduced in the periphery of Glasgow and Lima – are not simply the residue of macro, intense political clashes, but the metropolitan and the household are interconnected spheres of activity that interact and potentialise each other.

The ultimate conclusion is that genuine alternatives to that long tendency of urban inequalities require not only a critical understanding of the connections between past and present, but also between personal and interpersonal attitudes with national and international scales of interaction. It is necessary to develop conceptual and methodological approaches able to reconcile urban processes with wider development pressures, sectoral demands and socio-spatial relations. This should start with recognising that the multiscale and intertemporal sources of water politics is the first step towards resolving problems, given that the current situation is the combination of past legacies and pending demands, as well as place-based interactions and national and international pressures. The resolution of water dilemmas also requires going beyond simplistic, pre-defined frameworks – as in the case of urban governance – but actually depends on how citizens perceive their claims and, more importantly, how they are able to collectivise and negotiate their demands through identity, economic activity and spatial location. It is only through questioning and contesting mainstream water management reforms that genuine, really democratic, alternatives could emerge. Crucially, calls for social and environmental justice

cannot only be about redistributive action (i.e. removing the inequitable distribution of goods and bads that notably affect low-income, disadvantaged communities), but are also related to recognising the politicised complexity of socio-ecological systems and the meaningful involvement of wider sections of society in making decisions that inevitably affect their own lives and the collective urban future.

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