Dilemmas of Co-production: How Street Waste Pickers Became Excluded from Inclusive Recycling in São Paulo

Manuel Rosaldo

ABSTRACT

Under what conditions do collaborations between informal workers and the state in public service provision lead to socially beneficial synergies, and when might they intensify inequalities? This article, based on 14 months of ethnographic research, addresses this question through a comparative case study of two attempts to co-produce recycling services in São Paulo. The first, a grassroots organizing effort in the 1980s and 1990s, improved the incomes and conditions of hundreds of waste pickers and inspired a national upsurge of waste picker organizing. The second, an ambitious overhaul of waste management in the early 2000s, generated about 1,500 jobs but functionally excluded the very population of street waste pickers it was designed to benefit. The findings suggest that co-production is most likely to lead to pro-poor outcomes if concerted efforts are made to level inequalities between poor constituents and more powerful stakeholders during processes of policy design and implementation.

Keywords: Co-production, waste pickers, informal worker movements, Brazil

In 1982, a group of nuns from a Catholic NGO in São Paulo began working with eight homeless men who eked out a living by salvaging cardboard, paper, and scrap metal from garbage on streets and in buildings. Through an iterative, multiyear process of grassroots experiments and reflection, the men developed strategies to defend and gradually improve their work. They began sharing work space and tools, collectively selling materials, hosting social events, and organizing protests against municipal authorities who sought to criminalize their trade. In 1989, they founded Coopamare, Brazil's first *catador* (waste picker) cooperative and subsequently negotiated with the city to provide them with space, equipment, technical support, and service contracts.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that this initiative moderately elevated the incomes and conditions of hundreds of waste pickers and boosted recycling rates. Over the

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next decade, Coopamare helped inspire the creation of 70 more waste picker organizations across the city and hundreds more across the country (Grimberg 2007). This was a relatively small-scale initiative, but it marked a paradigm shift in a country that historically treated waste pickers as criminals and treated trash merely as a sanitary problem, rather than as a social, environmental, and cultural one.

In the early 2000s, state officials embarked on a more ambitious waste picker rights initiative. By this time, many state officials and NGO workers had come to see waste picking as a degrading and degraded form of work and an anarchic way to organize a modern recycling service. City officials therefore created a formal recycling route, run by private waste management firms, to take over waste pickers' traditional role of collecting and transporting recyclables. New jobs were created for waste pickers in *cooperativas de triagem* (sorter cooperatives), where members worked on assembly lines in warehouses, sorting and bailing recyclables.

Such policies are widely celebrated for improving both recycling rates and waste pickers' livelihoods, but the research for this article reveals a more complex reality. By 2017, after 15 years of effort, less than 1 percent of the city's street waste pickers had been integrated into formal waste management. Two problems accounted for this low inclusion rate. First, the sorter cooperatives produced only about 1,500 jobs, not nearly enough to absorb the city's estimated 20,000 waste pickers.[1] Second, 93 percent of the jobs in the formal sorter cooperatives were occupied by people who had not previously worked as waste pickers. To be sure, creating jobs for these workers—the plurality of whom were black, women, and heads of households—was an immensely worthy project. Meanwhile, however, thousands of waste pickers continued to work informally on the streets, where they collected the lion's share of the city's recyclables with no official recognition. Perversely, many claimed that their incomes had declined, due to competition with the very recycling route designed to benefit them.

Both of these waste picker rights initiatives could be considered attempts at "co-production"; that is, collaboration between ordinary citizens, the state, and other stakeholders to provide public services (Mitlin and Bartlett 2018). But why did the co-production of recycling services in the 1980s and 1990s elevate the incomes and conditions of hundreds of street waste pickers, whereas better-resourced efforts in the 2000s failed? And what does this reveal about the conditions in which co-production is most likely to promote social justice and urban sustainability?

The first section of this article reviews literature on co-production, which suggests that pro-poor outcomes are likely only if concerted efforts are made to level inequalities between poor constituents and more powerful stakeholders. It then discusses case selection and research methods. The next sections argue that differential outcomes between co-production policies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were a consequence of waste pickers' relative levels of voice and power during policy design and implementation. During the 1980s and 1990s, policy proposals were designed through a multiyear process of grassroots experiments and implemented by a mayor who treated popular movements as her most important constituents. During the early 2000s, in contrast, policy proposals were designed through multistakeholder forums, which sought to include waste pickers' voices but actually favored the technical expertise of professional consultants. This power discrepancy was amplified by municipal officials who prioritized interests of waste management firms and private developers. The article concludes by reflecting on how co-production processes were structured not only by the choices of local actors but by the national and global contexts in which they operated.

THE ANTINOMIES OF CO-PRODUCTION

Co-production is described as "the joint production of public services between citizen and state, with any one or more elements of the production process being shared" (Mitlin 2008, 340). The term was coined in the 1970s but did not achieve prominence in development circles until the 1990s and 2000s. Its newfound buzzword status reflected a trend away from state-centered policymaking and toward multistakeholder partnership and civil society participation.

Classic studies of co-production focused on arrangements in which citizens take an active role in producing public services that they use, such as health, education, and infrastructure (Joshi and Moore 2004; Ostrom 1996). More recent literature examines other types of collaboration, such as those with social movements, emphasizing "the importance of civil society in not only making demands, but also participating in all stages of the policy process" (Tarlau 2013, 17). Recent literature also analyzes co-production with organized groups of informal workers (Meagher 2013), such as vendors (Song 2016), transportation workers (Song 2016), and waste pickers (Gutberlet et al. 2020; Navarrete-Hernández and Navarrete-Hernández 2018).

Proponents of co-production laud its egalitarian and participatory potential, particularly in the context of the Global South, where many states lack capacity to deliver services to low-income residents. They argue that well-designed co-production processes can lower the cost, expand the breadth, and improve the design of public services (Ostrom 1996). Nonetheless, critics see co-production, at best, as an insufficient technocratic fix to deep-seated structural inequalities, and at worst as a cost-cutting ploy to pass off responsibilities from the state to its most marginalized subjects.[2] Even most proponents of co-production recognize that improved services and renewed citizenship are hardly inevitable outcomes (Joshi and Moore 2004). In some cases, co-production has led to "poor quality services, corruption, human rights abuses, and the exclusion of the most marginal actors" (Meagher 2013, 14).

Watson (2014) identifies two camps of scholars who study and advocate for distinct approaches to co-production and consequently differ in their analysis of factors that shape outcomes. First, the "state-initiated co-production" (SIC) camp focuses on cases of co-production led by state officials, who directly engage with their constituents with little apparent intermediating role for social movements or NGOs. They identify institutional practices that enable state agencies and ordinary citizens to pool distinct yet complimentary resources, thereby generating synergies. This approach was developed by early scholars of co-production, primarily from the fields of public administration and development studies (Ostrom 1996; Joshi and Moore 2004).

In a foundational work, Ostrom (1996) identifies four critical conditions that heighten the likelihood of synergies. First, both state agencies and ordinary citizens must contribute needed resources, with neither side attempting to supplant the role of the other. Second, legal structures must be created to support local actors. Third, participants must use enforceable contracts to build a credible commitment to one another. And fourth, incentives should be created to encourage participation from all actors.

A second camp of scholars favors an approach to co-production that has alternatively been termed social movement–initiated (SMIC), radical, or bottom-up (Mitlin 2008; Watson 2014; King and Kasaija 2018). These scholars focus on cases in which low-income residents organize into social movements, which use co-production to organize new members, mobilize resources, and build alliances. The aim of such processes is not merely to improve service delivery for poor residents but to transform the power relations that undergird inequitable investments in public services. These scholars do not question the wisdom of Ostrom's policy recommendations from a technical standpoint but argue that they are unlikely to produce their intended outcomes without a shift in underlying power relations (King and Kasaija 2018). Thus, Watson warns that Ostrom's lack of power analysis leads her to speciously assume

> that all community members and households would gain equal access to these services, that exclusion on the grounds of income, gender, ethnicity, for example, would not play a role, and that the relationship between state and citizens would be fair, consensual, and not corrupt or politicized. (Watson 2014, 65)

Two Pivotal Relationships in Social Movement–Initiated Co-production

This article analyzes two co-production processes involving workers of the same profession in the same city under mayors from the same party. The first process approximated the bottom-up ideals of SMIC, whereas the second progressively drifted toward the top-down orientation of SIC. As Mitlin and Barlett (2018) argue, the SMIC approach implies a "relational" understanding of poverty (Mosse 2010). That is, persistent poverty is seen as a consequence of historically developed political and economic relationships, rather than of endogenous traits of the poor. Thus, instead of prescribing specific policy interventions, this literature emphasizes the importance of leveling power asymmetries, particularly in two sets of relationships.

The first is between poor constituents and the NGOs that support them. NGOs may provide technical, financial, political, and symbolic backing to poor peoples' organizations and help broker relationships with state and private sector actors. Some scholars warn, however, that NGOs often prioritize donors' desires over those of the community, and may become co-opted by state officials to serve their own needs.

How, then, can elite benefactors avoid deepening power hierarchies? Scholars emphasize the need for benefactors to embed themselves in poor communities, assist local people in assessing their own needs and priorities, and recognize that "the poor know best how to survive in poverty" (Watson 2014, 69). This approach is sometimes described as "co-producing knowledge" (Mitlin and Bartlett 2018). In a much-cited case study, Archer et al. (2012) describe how NGO professionals work with low-income members of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR). Together, they map slums, diagnose problems, design innovative pilot programs, and negotiate with state officials to expand these programs. As Archer et al. explain, "rather than providing all the answers, professionals should be asking the right types of questions, which will lead to the community finding the answers themselves and learning in the process" (2012, 127).

A second key relationship is between poor constituents and state officials. Literature on SIC encourages devolving decisionmaking power from the national to the local level (e.g., Ostrom 1996). Scholars of SMIC emphasize the importance of an additional level of devolution: that from state officials to popular movements. The existence of well-organized movements that skillfully combine contentious and collaborative actions is a necessary precondition for such devolution, but outcomes also hinge on the nature of state regimes. For example, Tarlau (2013) finds that leftist administrations are most likely to enter into cogovernance arrangements in schools with Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement. Even low-capacity rightwing administrations, however, may support school co-production as a means to provide needed services and minimize conflict.

SÃO PAULO'S WASTE PICKERS AND CO-PRODUCTION

A central argument of this article, in alignment with SMIC literature, is that outcomes of co-production processes hinge on waste pickers' levels of voice and power relative to influential civil society, state, and private sector actors. Drawing on a relational understanding of poverty (Mosse 2010), I conceive of voice and power not as endogenous traits of the waste pickers but as dynamic interactions between the waste pickers and influential actors (e.g., NGOs, municipal administrations, waste management companies). Thus, by voice, I refer to waste pickers' ability to collectively articulate demands and to have them heard by influential actors. A key indicator of voice is waste pickers' ability to contribute meaningfully to the design of policy proposals. By power, I refer to waste pickers' capacity to make influential actors accede to their demands. A key indicator of power is waste pickers' ability to implement their policy proposals, especially in the face of political resistance.

Waste pickers could be considered a "least likely" case for successful labor rights organizing and policy, due to their extreme marginality and atomization (Rosaldo 2016). Nevertheless, since the 1980s, waste pickers in hundreds of cities across Latin America, Asia, and Africa have mobilized to increase their economic leverage and political voice. Neighborhood-level organizations have been linked through regional, national, and transnational waste picker networks, which have formed partnerships with NGOs, state agencies, universities, development funds, and the philanthropic arms of waste-producing industries (Samson 2009). These actors have successfully pushed for “inclusive recycling” policies, which expand official recycling services and contract with previously informal waste pickers to provide them. Such policies are often celebrated as a “triple win,” benefiting waste pickers, the environment, and the economy.

In practice, however, the co-production of recycling is a contradictory, creative, and contested process, which may improve waste pickers’ conditions and voice but may also result in perverse outcomes. Waste pickers face three key challenges. First, their interests may conflict with those of other stakeholders. For example, state officials may aim to remove waste pickers from wealthy neighborhoods, where they are considered an impediment to the production of modern, “green and clean” cityscapes. Private waste companies may seek to usurp control of the increasingly lucrative recycling industry. And industrial manufacturers have little incentive to pay higher prices to waste pickers for recyclables, much less to provide benefits and protections (Parra 2016).

Second, waste pickers face barriers to exercising a powerful collective voice, including their lack of centralized worksites, recognized employers, legal protections, time, and money. More powerful stakeholders may exploit these weaknesses to advance their own interests (Rosaldo 2019). Third, even if all stakeholders act in good faith, institutional logics may clash. Formal recycling services typically require centralized planning and administration, hierarchical accountability, and standardization of work shifts and conduct. Yet many waste pickers lack the capacity or desire to follow rigid rules and schedules (Millar 2018).

São Paulo is an ideal case for studying the challenges and opportunities of recycling co-production. It is home to the headquarters of the world’s largest national waste picker movement, and the Economist Intelligence Unit (2017) ranks its inclusive recycling policies among the best in Latin America. Waste pickers are estimated to collect nearly 90 percent of the material that is recycled in Brazil and have helped Brazil achieve a world record 98.2 percent recovery rate for cans (Silva et al. 2013, 19). Nevertheless, street waste pickers are systematically excluded from official statistics. Existing estimates of the quantity of street waste pickers in São Paulo range from 10,000 (CIPMRS 2014, 105) to 38,000 (Burgos 2008, 193).

This study uses the estimate of 20,000 street waste pickers (Grimberg 2007, 14), which I consider to be conservative—the actual number is probably higher. Nevertheless, it is the most commonly cited estimate in scholarship, and the one favored by the National Movement of Waste pickers (MNCR) and allied NGOs. According to the same dataset, the informal recycling system recycled 15 percent of the total waste produced by the city in the early 2000s.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is a political ethnography (Tilly 2007) on recycling policy and politics in São Paulo. From 2014 to 2017, I conducted 14 months of survey, participant observation, interview, and archival research. A full explanation of São Paulo's waste management policy process would require analysis of interactions between a broad constellation of actors, laws, and norms on the local, national, and supranational levels. The present account, in contrast, focuses on three sets of municipal-level actors in order to understand relations between street waste pickers and the cooperatives designed to benefit them.

First, I sought to understand the dynamics of the sorter cooperatives. From November 2016 to March 2017, I visited all 21 of São Paulo's formalized cooperatives and conducted a 75-question survey, which lasted 50 to 80 minutes. During these visits, I conducted 10 brief interviews and held many informal conversations with other cooperative members, which helped confirm information in the survey. I conducted follow-up visits to 6 cooperatives for additional interviews. Also, to deepen my understanding of waste pickers' practices and perspectives, I spent 5 days working in the cooperatives.

Second, I sought to study the practices and perspectives of street waste pickers, a more challenging population to study, due to their dispersed worksites and lack of organization. During my time of study, only two semiformalized street waste picker organizations operated in São Paulo, both of which were served eviction notices by the city in March 2017. I spent 6 days working alongside street waste pickers from these organizations and conducted 10 interviews with members. I also interviewed 8 people who previously worked as street waste pickers and now worked in sorter cooperatives or for the MNCR. To get a better sense of the perspectives of nonorganized street waste pickers, I conducted a brief survey (approximately 8 minutes) with a convenience sample of 40 waste pickers working in the city center.

Third, I sought to understand the broader ecosystem of protagonists in inclusive recycling policy. To this end, I attended 8 internal meetings, 6 conferences, and 5 protests by the MNCR. Additionally, I conducted 15 interviews with São Paulo–based MNCR leaders, 12 interviews with staff members of allied NGOs, and 8 interviews with relevant government officials. Finally, I conducted archival research on court rulings, municipal reports, and newspapers. I use pseudonyms for interviewees who are not public figures.

THE WASTE PICKER RECOGNITION PARADIGM

In the 1980s and 1990s, an approach to SMIC was developed in São Paulo that I term waste picker recognition (henceforth, recognition). It sought to recognize waste pickers legally, economically, and socially for their environmental services, even as they continued to work autonomously on the streets. This approach treated waste picking as a source of resilience and resistance for oppressed populations. It therefore aimed to defend and iteratively improve waste pickers' work on the streets, rather than to supplant it. The paradigmatic organizing model of recognition was the *cooperativa de carroceiro* (cart pusher cooperative), which combined the logics of autonomy and collectivity. It enabled each member to decide when, where, and how they worked, while engaging in collective sales, entrepreneurial projects, political actions, and *formação* (skills, leadership, and political education).

The recognition approach was created through a multiyear, grassroots process of field experiments that prioritized waste pickers' lived experiences and practical knowledge. This process had two phases. In the first, a group of nuns from a Catholic NGO embedded themselves in the work and lives of homeless waste pickers in order to help them develop strategies for empowerment. In the second, Mayor Luiza Erundina (1989–92, PT) implemented policies proposed by the waste pickers and their allies, despite backlash from wealthy constituents. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this social experiment moderately improved the incomes and conditions of hundreds of street waste pickers, boosted recycling rates, and inspired the creation of parallel organizations and policies across Brazil. Critics would contend nonetheless that street waste picking—even in cart pusher cooperatives—was an exploitative, haphazard, and premodern way to provide recycling services.

Designing an Organizing Model Through Bottom-up Collaboration

The creation of Brazil's first waste picker cooperative in 1989 was the unanticipated fruit of a radical social experiment initiated by a small group of nuns 12 years earlier. The nuns helped lead São Paulo's most prominent Catholic charity, the Organization of Fraternal Assistance (OAF). Over time, they grew critical of the charity model, which left the homeless "feeling, on some level, at fault for their circumstances, alone, and impotent" (Grimberg 1994, 4).

In 1978, the nuns embarked on a controversial new approach, which would require staff and volunteers to embed themselves in the everyday lives of homeless people. Ninety percent of OAF's staff quit. The remaining 12 staff members spent 2 months living on the streets in order "to gain an understanding of homelessness from up close, from beneath" (Manuel 2017). To sustain themselves, they sold blood, solicited social services, collected recyclables, and hawked odds and ends salvaged from the garbage. It was during this period that staff members came to see waste picking not as a source of vulnerability but as a resource that vulnerable people used to survive structural oppression and sometimes even salvage a measure of dignity (Manuel 2017).

The nuns then rented five houses in an area of concentrated poverty in the city center, where they hosted social events and discussions among local homeless people and community volunteers. The idea to build a waste picker cooperative developed iteratively through these conversations and a series of practical experiments. Waste pickers traditionally carried materials in sacks on their heads, but in 1982, a homeless man suggested that they could transport materials more efficiently with carts. The nuns raised money to build the first cart, which was initially shared among ten waste pickers until they could pool enough money to build more carts. Every month, the men set aside some materials to sell at the year's end to raise funds for a street festival. They learned that they could command higher prices for their goods by selling collectively and cutting out middlemen. One of the men, Amado Teodoro, would recall in a 1993 newspaper interview, "we saw that it was much better to work as a collective than to sell our little goods individually to the scrap shops."[3]

In 1985, the waste pickers occupied an abandoned building, where they collectively stored and sorted materials. The nuns later negotiated with the building's owners to allow the waste pickers to stay and pay rent. The waste pickers began referring to themselves as an "association," a title meant to convey that theirs was a serious profession, not just a *bico* (informal gig). By 1989, the association had grown to more than 50 members. That year, a volunteer lawyer helped the waste pickers formalize as the Cooperative of Autonomous Paper, Scrap, and Recyclables Collectors (Coopamare), Brazil's first waste picker cooperative (Carvalhaes 2017).

Translating the Recognition Paradigm into State Policy

In the mid-1980s, the waste pickers began engaging in political activities, defending their right to work against authorities who saw them as sources of crime and disorder. For example, the association organized street protests in 1986, after right-wing mayor Jânio Quadros instructed police to arrest waste pickers on the grounds that their trade promoted litter, public drunkenness, and other forms of immorality. The association also published a letter in a local newspaper that asserted their identity and rights as workers: "The difficulties and injustices of our work are great, but we can't allow the mayor to keep us from working to feed our families. . . . We are workers and we want to work and live in dignity."[4]

In 1988, the upset election of Luiza Erundina as mayor of São Paulo created an opportunity to push for the city's first waste picker rights policies. Erundina was a founding member of the Workers' Party (PT), which was created in 1980 through a confluence of union, social movement, and church-based activism. The 54-year-old social worker and longtime grassroots activist hailed from a humble family in the famine-stricken Northeast and ran on an unabashedly pro-poor platform. Erundina's victory was described at the time as "the greatest electoral advance for the Latin

American Left since Salvador Allende became president of Chile in 1970" (Hinchberger 1989, 4).

Coopamare had an inside line with Erundina, who, as a city council member, had collaborated with OAF on campaigns to expand public housing. Soon after her election, leaders of OAF and Coopamare began proposing waste picker rights initiatives, the most urgent of which was to create a permanent site for Coopamare. They suggested that the city cede them unused spaces in the affluent neighborhoods of Pinheiros and Vila Mariana. Regional representatives of these neighborhoods in Erundina's administration protested, however, fearing backlash from middle-class constituents who scorned waste pickers. Undaunted, Erundina pressured the regional administrations to cede two large spaces under aqueducts for Coopamare to use with OAF's supervision (Grimberg 1994). The city and OAF collaborated to build stalls for waste pickers to store their carts and sort materials, bathrooms, leisure spaces, offices, and meeting rooms, and provided equipment such as scales, presses, forklifts, and computers.

Over the next two years, Erundina created four other pioneering waste picker rights policies, the first of their type in Brazilian history. First, Erundina issued a decree that recognized waste picking as a legitimate profession and outlined terms for partnerships between cooperatives and the municipal government. Second, Erundina began to remunerate Coopamare for its services, helping cover administrative and maintenance costs. Third, the city funded courses for Coopamare members on themes such as recycling value chains, workplace safety, cooperative management, and human rights. And fourth, the city created a census of waste pickers in Coopamare's neighborhood who might one day be integrated into cooperatives (Grimberg 1994). Importantly, these policies aimed to defend and improve waste pickers' rights on the streets, unlike those of the 2000s, which would attempt to transition waste pickers off the streets.

Outcomes of the Recognition Policies

In their symbolic dimensions, Erundina's policies were paradigm breaking: they socially and legally reclassified waste pickers from criminal outcasts to public service providers. In their material dimensions, however, they were modest. Her administration worked with one waste picker organization to gradually improve its members' conditions, rather than to radically transform them. As Erundina would recall in a 2007 interview,

> Our policies were the bare minimum that you could expect from an administration of the people . . . we attempted to start from the conditions that waste pickers found themselves in at the time, and help them rise to slightly better conditions, with the hope of further gains in the future (Scarpinatti 2008, 38).

Accounts from scholars, NGO workers, and waste picker leaders suggest that these policies were nonetheless resoundingly successful, helping hundreds of waste pickers improve their incomes, conditions, and social status (Grimberg 1994).

Coopamare's organizing model struck a balance between two seemingly contradictory goals: recognizing and accommodating waste pickers as they traditionally worked, according to individualistic, informal logics; and gradually incentivizing them to act as an economic and political collective. Coopamare's members thus gathered and sorted their materials individually but participated in collective sales, training, political action, and decisionmaking. As one Coopamare leader explained, "In the Cooperative, everyone makes their own schedule and there is no boss. The rules are created by the group" (Scarpinatti 2008, 59).

By the end of Erundina's term in 1992, about 200 waste pickers participated in the Pinheiros branch of Coopamare, processing some 8 tons of materials daily (Scarpinatti 2008, 56). Multiple tiers of participation evolved in order to accommodate their heterogeneous needs and capacities. Fifty cooperative members rented space inside the cooperative to store their carts and materials, and approximately 15 of them held leadership positions. Beyond this, about 150 waste pickers sold their goods to Coopamare, which paid higher prices than did scrap shops. Coopamare gradually integrated many of these waste pickers into core activities (Ferreira de Paula 2017).

Two OAF staff members continued to work at the new spaces with Coopamare to help with administrative tasks and strategic planning, but as an OAF staff member recalled,

> the waste pickers did the sales, accounting, budgeting. Our role, at most, was to store money for safekeeping if they asked us to. . . . The perspective that we adopted was that waste pickers knew how to do everything, and we just participated in discussions with the group about *formaçao*. (Manuel 2017)

Such devolution of responsibilities increased members' sense of agency and competence. Coopamare sought to maintain autonomy from the government, even under the sympathetic administration of Erundina. Thus, in 1989, when Erundina launched pilot recycling routes and offered to deliver recyclables to Coopamare, its members declined, preferring to collect their own materials. In this way, Coopamare differed from the cooperatives that were created after 2000, which largely relied on deliveries from the city's official recycling route.

Such autonomy would prove critical over the subsequent eight years, when two right-wing mayors who succeeded Erundina terminated the pilot recycling route, discontinued support to Coopamare, and attempted to evict the cooperative. Coopamare weathered these blows thanks to its autonomy from the state and support from civil society allies. Indeed, not only did Coopamare survive this persecution, but it grew, with 350 waste pickers participating by 2000 (Grimberg 2006). Moreover, Coopamare's model helped inspire the creation of 70 more cart pusher organizations in São Paulo by the decade's end, ranging from formalized cooperatives to small and informal groups. Drawing inspiration from São Paulo, Catholic NGOs began organizing waste pickers in cities such as Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte, where PT mayors created waste picker rights policies that surpassed those of Erundina in scope and depth (Dias 2006).

THE INCLUSIVE RECYCLING PARADIGM

> *The way I think about how we should treat waste pickers has changed since I started working with them, 15 or 20 years ago. We thought that it was simple. We thought that we could just tell them, "we have a warehouse for you. Come on, let's build a cooperative inside. We'll train you and equip you.". . . But we didn't understand how to serve that population. . . . We thought, naturally, inside of the warehouses, they are going to earn more and be in a more secure place. But then we saw that the waste pickers would leave the sorter cooperatives, or they wouldn't even enter.*
>
> —Enrique Ribeiro (2017), NGO staff member who worked as a consultant in the creation of sorter cooperatives during the administration of Marta Suplicy

In the early 2000s, a new paradigm for co-producing recycling was developed in São Paulo, which city officials would refer to as inclusive recycling. Whereas the recognition paradigm of the 1980s and 1990s sought legally, economically, and socially to recognize waste pickers' work on the streets, the new approach aimed to create a modern recycling system in which to include previously informal waste pickers. During this period, many city officials came to see waste picking as a degraded and degrading form of work and an anarchic and unsightly way to provide recycling services. They thus designed a formal recycling route, modeled after those of the Global North, and contracted private waste management firms to take over waste pickers' traditional role of collecting and transporting recyclables. New jobs were created for waste pickers in "sorter cooperatives," where members worked along assembly lines inside industrial warehouses, sorting and bailing recyclables that had been collected by the official route.

By engaging in collective work and training, the cooperatives sought to increase waste pickers' political and economic agency—a process that some public officials referred to as "recycling lives." This co-production among state agencies, NGOs, businesses, waste pickers, and residents has won international accolades. For example, in an assessment of inclusive recycling regulatory frameworks in 17 large cities in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Economist Intelligence Unit gave its number 1 ranking to São Paulo, where it claimed that "the interaction between users [waste pickers] and privately owned waste management companies has been perfected due to [15] years of implementing selective collection routes with the participation of cooperatives" (2017, 64).

Such fanfare, however, belies a more complex reality that is rarely discussed in scholarship. By 2017, less than 1 percent of São Paulo's street waste pickers had been integrated into formal waste management. Two issues accounted for the low inclusion rate. First was the quantity of jobs produced. Only about 1,500 jobs were created in the sorter cooperatives—not nearly enough to absorb the city's estimated 20,000 waste pickers. Second, and more vexing still, was the quality of the jobs, which clashed with street waste pickers' needs, capacities, and logics. Contrary to the expectations of state officials and NGO staff such as Ribeiro, street waste pickers overwhelmingly rejected invitations to work in the cooperatives, and most of those who joined quit within weeks. In their place, cooperatives hired other precarious workers who had never previously worked in the sector but were officially classified as waste pickers. According to my survey of São Paulo's 21 official waste picker cooperatives, 93 percent of members had never worked previously as waste pickers, and most did not identify as such. Meanwhile, thousands of waste pickers continued to work on the streets, where they collected several times more materials than did the official route but received no state recognition. In interviews, several street waste pickers claimed that competition from the official recycling route had reduced their earning capacity.

Why did inclusive recycling policies of the 2000s largely fail to benefit the population they were designed for? This conundrum becomes even more puzzling when we consider that these policies were initiated under seemingly favorable conditions: during the administration of Marta Suplicy (2001–4) of the leftist PT, in the midst of an economic boom that enabled the Brazilian state to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in inclusive recycling initiatives, and through participatory processes that aimed to include waste pickers and their civil society allies.

I find that this perverse outcome was the consequence of street waste pickers' lack of voice and power during two key phases of the policy creation process. First, during the design phase in 2000 and 2001, NGOs convened multistakeholder forums for creating policy proposals. These forums were intended to elevate waste pickers' voices but wound up favoring the technical expertise of NGO staff, consultants, and state officials. Second, during the implementation phase, Suplicy—who represented a centrist wing of the PT—prioritized the interests of waste corporations and private developers. Thus, although this co-production process was intended to adhere to the bottom-up ideals of SMIC, it progressively drifted toward the top-down orientation of SIC.

Designing Policy Proposals Through Multistakeholder Forums

Latin American social movements have long received support from NGOs, but the nature of this support shifted in the late twentieth century. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s scrappy NGOs focusing on grassroots organizing predominated, in subsequent decades, they were increasingly superseded by more formal and professional NGOs (Markowitz and Tice 2002). The new class of NGOs focused on political advocacy, expert knowledge production, and project delivery in order to help translate popular demands for sociocultural transformation into measurable deliverables and concrete policy gains. The shift was in part a strategic response to opportunities created by democratization and new funding sources. Yet some detractors contend nonetheless that the new class of NGOs depoliticized social movements by funding only nonthreatening activities and demobilized social movements by deprioritizing grassroots organizing (e.g., Petras 1997).

The case of São Paulo's waste picker movement broadly fits into the "professionalization" trend but contradicts the depoliticization and demobilization theses—at least in their narrowest forms. In the early 2000s, more professionalized NGOs began coordinating multistakeholder forums to design and advocate for state-supported waste picker cooperatives. This was an explicitly political strategy that sought to increase the movement's mobilizing capacity. Nevertheless, although the forums were designed to include street waste pickers, in practice they favored the technical expertise of NGO staff, consultants, and state officials. This case thus highlights another risk of professionalization: the creation of formalized spaces of policy design that functionally impede poor constituents' participation.

At the turn of the century, new political possibilities were opened by the ascent of the leftist PT and shifting global norms around environmentalism and participatory citizenship. NGOs that focused on social and environmental justice used this opportunity to push for radical overhauls of waste management aimed at vastly expanding formal recycling services and contracting waste picker cooperatives to provide them. Given the complexity and magnitude of this project, the NGOs sought to win input and buy-in from an array of state, private sector, and civil society actors. A watershed moment in this development came in 1998, with the launch of the National Waste and Citizenship Forum, which would convene 56 major institutions, including state agencies, waste picker organizations, NGOs, and business associations (Dias 2006, 5). Soon thereafter, 23 state-level and 100 municipal-level Waste and Citizenship Forums were created. This period also saw the inauguration of two other pivotal waste picker rights institutions: the National Movement of Waste Pickers (MNCR) in 2001 and the Inter-ministerial Committee for Waste Picker Inclusion in 2003.

São Paulo's Municipal Waste and Citizenship Forum (henceforth the Forum) was founded in 2000. That year, São Paulo also saw the launch of two other cross-sectoral alliances to promote inclusive recycling and a municipal network of waste picker organizations. This study focuses on the Forum, which played the most central role in coordinating these actors and negotiating with the municipal administration. The Forum was organized by Pólis, a São Paulo–based think and action tank, which worked to democratize public administration and to promote socially inclusive public policies. In 2000, Pólis helped organize a series of workshops, summits, and strategic planning meetings, with representatives from more than 85 organizations, including state agencies, businesses, waste picker organizations, NGOs, and universities. According to Elisabeth Grimberg, Pólis's waste management coordinator, who has written the most comprehensive histories of this period, the Forum used a "methodology of moderation, which promoted collective construction of proposals, the esteeming of everyone's voice without hierarchy, and the registering of consensus and dissensus" (2007, 29).

The Forum developed two central policy objectives: the launch of a massive public education campaign to teach residents how "to separate recyclables and donate them to waste pickers," and "the creation of a system of recyclables collection, sorting, and sales that integrated the estimated 20,000 waste pickers who worked on the city's streets" (Grimberg 2007, 36). To meet the latter goal, forum leaders proposed that state officials oversee a comprehensive census of the city's street waste pickers. These waste pickers would then be organized through a two-tier model, which combined elements of what I term the waste picker recognition (cart pusher organizations) and inclusive recycling (sorter cooperatives) paradigms.

On the first tier, formalized waste picker cooperatives would help waste management firms collect recyclables along an official route and deliver them to industrial warehouses, where cooperative members would sort, bail, and sell them. The Municipal Department of Public Works would pay rent and utilities and purchase equipment for the cooperatives. Forum leaders anticipated, however, that street waste pickers might have difficulty adjusting to fixed schedules, rigid rules, professional norms, collective work, and democratic decisionmaking. Therefore they called for a second tier, an intermediary organizational form called a nucleus (*nucleo*)—that is, an informal group of about three to ten street waste pickers. The city would offer the nuclei training, equipment, spaces to sort recyclables, social services, and the opportunity for their members to join formal recycling cooperatives. In exchange, the nuclei would recruit waste pickers off of the street, train them, and direct them to work in the cooperatives. Forum organizers referred to this as the "picker-to-picker" strategy.

Forum leaders were right to anticipate that waste pickers' transition from the streets to the cooperatives would be challenging. But, as I argue, they underestimated the political and logistical magnitude of this challenge and overestimated street waste pickers' desire and capacity to work in sorter cooperatives. During my fieldwork, some street waste pickers who were active at the time complained of a lack of consultation in this process. For example, Marco Bastos, a street waste picker in the Eastern Zone of São Paulo, said,

> These policies were ideas of the rich that had nothing to do with our reality. . . . They got together a bunch of *técnicos* (technical experts) who had never worked on the street, who didn't know what it was to push a cart, and never did a *real* study of the *real* waste pickers. They just thought in their own heads that waste pickers are suffering and can't continue to live in such a terrible way. But they never came to ask us if we were happy or what our needs were. (Bastos 2017)

Although Bastos's frustration is understandable, Forum leaders did reach out to groups of organized street waste pickers, some of whom participated regularly in the Forum. So why were such misconceptions not clarified through dialogue? In hindsight, some Forum organizers questioned the quality and quantity of street waste pickers' representation. For example, Ribeiro recalls that

> [E]nvironmental organizations, academic institutions—that was the universe of the Waste and Citizenship Forum. . . . There was only a small contingent of waste pickers. And those of them who stayed over time had already been organized into cooperatives, so they were already immersed in that way of thinking. . . . I think autonomous street waste pickers had difficulty representing themselves. (Ribeiro 2017)

Grimberg agrees that unorganized waste pickers had difficulty participating in such "formal political spaces." Due to their absence, she admits, "we overestimated their readiness to leave the streets and work in sorter cooperatives." But Grimberg notes that this oversight was also a consequence of the structural constraints within which the Forum operated.

> We were just a group of civil society institutions and waste picker organizations pushing for a radical transformation in waste management in the largest city in the Southern Hemisphere. The difficulty of setting up a new waste management system combined with the provision of services in a cooperative way, something totally new, absorbed almost all of our energies. So, we called on the municipal government to carry out a census and create the conditions for appropriately engaging street waste pickers. (Grimberg 2020)

Grimberg went on to explain that by the early 2000s, São Paulo was likely to create a formal recycling system no matter what. The Forum sought to ensure that waste pickers were included in this process. Yet it did not have the internal capacity to identify, consult with, and organize thousands of street waste pickers, so it called for state support for these tasks. But such support never materialized.

Challenges in Implementing the Forum's Proposals in State Policy

The timing of the launch of the Forum appeared fortuitous when, just six months later, in October 2000, the mayoral election was won by a candidate from the democratic socialist PT—the same party as Erundina. Yet the waste pickers' relationship with Suplicy would prove nonetheless fraught, due in part to a shift in the party's programmatic agenda. In the late 1990s, the PT began forging alliances with centrist political parties and powerful business lobbies in order to win national power. This led to a complex class compromise that combined business-friendly macroeconomic policy, pro-poor redistributive programs, and institutionalized platforms for social movement participation (Tarlau 2019). Under this arrangement, popular movements experienced unprecedented state access but constrained capacity to advance policies that conflicted with business interests.

Suplicy, who hailed from one of Brazil's wealthiest families, embodied the party's emerging centrist face. Thus, at a time when PT mayors in cities such as Porto Alegre were gaining global accolades for bold participatory democratic policies, Suplicy centralized decisionmaking in her office, delegating little power to participatory platforms and popular movements (Wampler 2007).

As a candidate, Suplicy had pledged to uphold the Forum's platform and principles. But in Suplicy's second month as mayor, February 2001, her administration presented a model for a recycling route that was run exclusively by private management firms, with no waste picker participation. Grimberg recalls,

> the Department of Public Services presented a recycling route model that used sophisticated technologies, but did not contemplate the participation of waste pickers . . . who had worked for decades in the city and country with practically no government support. (Grimberg 2007, 32)

Over the next months, several public assemblies were held to discuss waste management tenders, and battle lines emerged between Forum activists and waste management firms. Forum activists argued that the city should not contract waste management firms to provide recycling services without clearly delineating a central role for waste picker organizations. Representatives from waste management firms questioned the efficiency and efficacy of the Forum's proposals (Manetti 2016).

Officials in the municipal administration took opposing, often contradictory stances in this debate. Then, in October 2002, the municipal administration blindsided Forum activists by announcing a secretly developed law that threatened to hand over the recycling industry to waste management firms with only a marginal role for waste pickers. It extended the contract period for waste management tenders from 4 to 20 years, which city officials claimed would help incentivize long-term infrastructure investments. The law, however, gave waste picker cooperatives no role in recycling routes and stipulated that their "permission" to work in recycling sorting warehouses could be revoked at any time for any reason.

In the following months, the municipal administration held a tender for waste and recyclables collection and awarded 20-year concessions to two waste management firms. The city launched a public education campaign to teach residents how to separate recyclables, which were collected by waste management firms along designated routes. The recyclables were then delivered to sorter cooperatives to be sorted and bailed. Suplicy's administration aimed to build 31 such cooperatives but wound up constructing only 15, where some 814 members worked (Jacobi and Besen 2011). Whereas Erundina's administration had ceded space for Coopamare in a central neighborhood with many street waste pickers, Suplicy's administration built the sorter cooperatives largely in peripheral neighborhoods, where rent was cheaper and neighbors were less likely to complain. The municipal government paid the rent and utilities for the cooperatives' warehouses and provided equipment, technical support, training, and regular deliveries of materials. The city did not remunerate cooperative members for their environmental service, however, forcing them to eke out a living from sales of recyclables alone.

In sum, the biggest winners from Suplicy's inclusive recycling policies were private waste management firms, which earned lucrative 20-year contracts and won control of the recycling collection market. For members of the sorter cooperatives, this period was a mixed bag. Suplicy's administration constructed the city's first 15 sorter cooperatives and provided infrastructure and technical assistance, but it rejected the Forum's demands that cooperatives be granted long-term contracts, a role in the recycling route, and remuneration for environmental services.[5] This would leave the cooperatives in a permanent state of insecurity and dependency, relying on deliveries from waste management firms and the goodwill of mayors for survival. Incomes varied widely across sorter cooperatives and over time, but most paid about the minimum wage, a difficult sum to get by on in Latin America's most expensive city. And the biggest losers were organized street waste pickers.

Outcomes: Political Marginalization of Street Waste Pickers

By 2017, after 15 years of inclusive recycling policies, less than 1 percent of street waste pickers had been included in formal waste management. Indeed, the number of organized street waste pickers had declined significantly since the early 2000s. To be sure, the new policies had achieved other important goals: producing about 1,500 cooperative jobs, educating millions of residents on how to sort recyclables, moderately raising recycling rates. But the informal recycling system continued to dwarf the formal one in terms of quantity of materials recycled, greenhouse gases reduced, number of jobs produced, and cost efficiency to the public. Yet the thousands of street waste pickers who performed this labor received no official recognition or remuneration.

Two factors led to the functional exclusion of street waste pickers from inclusive recycling policies. The first was the neglect and persecution of street waste picker organizations. At the onset of the inclusive recycling policies in 2003, the city worked with the 30 nuclei, representing nearly 1,000 street waste pickers. But in 2004, once the initial 15 sorter cooperatives were installed, the city cut ties with the nuclei altogether. Grimberg describes this perceived betrayal.

> In the many meetings organized by the Forums, members of the nuclei increasingly expressed their despair over the abandonment that they had experienced, especially after the creation of the sorter cooperatives. With great angst, the street waste pickers pointed out that the municipal administration had prioritized the construction of public recycling infrastructure, the recycling routes, and empowerment of the sorter cooperatives . . . but the nuclei had been excluded from this process. (Grimberg 2007, 89)

Without public support, most nuclei soon disbanded.

Suplicy was succeeded by two conservative mayors, who would continue to support and gradually expand the sorter cooperatives but would evict most street waste picker organizations from their headquarters. Such evictions were typically justified on the grounds that cart pusher organizations were unsanitary and posed fire hazards. Members of these organizations, however, argued that the true motive was *higienizacão*; that is, the social cleansing of unwanted populations from public space. Not coincidentally, the conservative mayors also mounted "a full-blown, well-planned, administratively airtight offensive" against street vendors (Cuvi 2016, 396), cracked down on graffiti artists, and evicted homeless encampments.

During this period, most street waste picker organizations were forced to close down or shift to a sorter cooperative model. For example, in 2005, Coopamare worked with about 300 street waste pickers, who were either regular members or sold materials there. But that year, the city pressured the cooperative to stop buying materials from street waste pickers and shift to a sorter model, under threat of eviction. By 2017, only 23 members remained at Coopamare, most of whom had never worked as street waste pickers. At that time, only two cart pusher organizations remained in São Paulo, both of which were undergoing eviction processes.

The second factor was street waste pickers' rejection of the sorter cooperatives. The vast majority of the 814 members in the 15 original cooperatives were street waste pickers, but most of them soon quit. A small group of street waste pickers stayed on, often occupying leadership positions. But their efforts to recruit more street waste pickers failed. Instead, they hired other precarious workers who were officially classified as waste pickers, despite never having worked previously in the sector.

In the years following Suplicy's mandate, only one more large-scale effort to recruit street waste pickers into sorter cooperatives was undertaken. From 2012 to 2014, the MNCR ran a federally funded program called *CataRua* (Pick the Street), in which a team of three MNCR leaders—all former street waste pickers—and three *técnicos* combed the streets of São Paulo looking for waste pickers. They created a registry of 815 street waste pickers and invited them to join cooperatives. Only 6 of them accepted the invitation, however, and no follow-up was conducted to see if they stayed in the cooperatives (Manetti 2016).

In 2016 and 2017, my survey of the leaders of São Paulo's 21 formalized sorter cooperatives found that only 7 percent of members had previously worked as street waste pickers. Most cooperative leaders had given up recruiting street waste pickers altogether. They now saw the social mission of their cooperatives as creating jobs for unemployed people, rather than improving the livelihoods of street waste pickers. Seventeen of the leaders said that they made no special effort to recruit street waste pickers. The other four claimed that on an ad hoc basis, they invited street waste pickers to join, but the invitations were nearly always rejected. As one cooperative leader who had previously worked as a street waste picker explained, "The street waste picker, he works when he wants, where he wants. He doesn't have to answer to anyone. He does things however he pleases. And then suddenly, you try to put him in a collective job. Well, the waste picker doesn't see himself in that picture, so he leaves" (Pedro 2016).

Discussion: Street Waste Pickers' Rejection of the Sorter Cooperatives

> *The dude who says you have to get rid of waste pickers is a damn idiot who doesn't know what it means to push a cart through the street, to experience the freedom of working without having to kiss your boss's butt, without having someone talking down to you all the time . . . busting your balls (*enchando o saco*) to follow a schedule, surveilling your every step. That's why street waste pickers become street waste pickers—they are free. A real waste picker doesn't accept being ordered, not just because he wants to do things the way he thinks they should be done, but because he really knows how to work, you understand? And his income is a lot more than the person who works in a sorter cooperative, that's for sure!*
>
> —Marco Bastos (2017), Street Waste Picker, São Paulo Eastern Zone

Why did street waste pickers reject opportunities to work in the sorter cooperatives time and time again? Marco Bastos highlights two reasons, which were echoed by many waste pickers and cooperative leaders in interviews. First, although many street waste pickers had a more critical view of their trade than did Bastos, most agreed that it offered a distinct advantage over other available jobs: a measure of control over when, where, and how they worked. As anthropologist Kathleen Millar (2018) argues, such "relational autonomy" helps waste pickers adjust to life's daily urgencies. For example, one street waste picker explained to me that if her son became sick, she could take a day off to care for him, or work extra hours to pay for medicine. Importantly, relational autonomy facilitates not only waste pickers' survival but also their quest for meaning. Although bourgeois ideals of success were beyond Bastos's grasp, he pursued his own vision of what Millar (2018) terms "the good life," focused on values of independence, courage, and enjoyment of the present.

Second, as Bastos suggests, street waste pickers earned moderately higher average incomes than did members of sorter cooperatives. According to my survey, nearly half of the 21 cooperatives paid equal or less than the federal minimum wage (US$220 per month) at some point during 2016, and some forwent paying members for months on end, due to budget deficits. Most cooperatives offered social security and health insurance. Street waste pickers did not receive such benefits, but many reported earning between 1.5 and 2 times the minimum wage from recyclables sales, which they supplemented by working odd jobs on the street and salvaging items from the trash for reuse or resale. A key cause for the relatively lower incomes in the cooperatives was the unreliable quantity and poor quality of materials delivered by the official recycling route, over half of which had to be thrown away. Street waste pickers, in contrast, collected only valuable materials. As one street waste picker said, "The government is suffocating the cooperatives, forcing them to beg for more materials. We street waste pickers earn more because we don't depend on the government" (Soares 2017).

When I asked NGO staff members and MNCR leaders about street waste pickers' low participation rates in sorter cooperatives, some blamed the municipal government for its ongoing failure to fully implement the proposals that the Forum had made 15 years earlier. After all, they argued, had the government offered more support to the nuclei, the nuclei could have recruited waste pickers off the street and prepared them for work in the cooperatives. Had the government dedicated resources to improving incomes and conditions in the sorter cooperatives, street waste pickers would have had more incentive to join. And had the government constructed more sorter cooperatives, they could have employed a larger portion of the city's twenty thousand waste pickers.

My own research, in contrast, suggests that although such policies would probably have generated significant social and environmental benefits, they would probably have led only to marginal increases in waste picker inclusion in sorter cooperatives. This is because the design of the sorter cooperatives clashed with the needs, capacities, and logics of most street waste pickers. After all, in 2003, at the height of government support for the nuclei, street waste pickers still overwhelmingly rejected positions in sorter cooperatives.

My survey research also found that cooperatives that offered the best conditions and incomes had lower average rates of street waste picker inclusion—probably because they attracted more competition for jobs. Moreover, street waste pickers' rejection of sorter cooperatives did not appear limited to São Paulo. I conducted a small set of interviews in other large Brazilian cities, such as Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte, and Porto Alegre, with NGO staff and cooperative leaders, who reported similarly low rates of street waste picker participation. Dumpsite waste pickers, who were accustomed to working collectively in more confined spaces, in contrast, appeared to transition more readily to the sorter cooperatives. More systematic follow-up research is needed to test the generalizability of this finding across Brazilian cities.

CONCLUSIONS

Under what conditions are collaborations between precarious informal workers and the state in public service delivery likely to produce socially beneficial synergies, and when might they intensify inequalities? This article has addressed this question through a comparative case study of two efforts to co-produce recycling services in São Paulo with starkly different outcomes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the first, a grassroots organizing effort in the 1980s and 1990s, elevated the incomes, conditions, and voices of hundreds of waste pickers and sparked a national movement. The second, an ambitious overhaul of waste management in the early 2000s, generated about 1,500 new jobs for low-income residents but functionally excluded the very population of street waste pickers that it was designed to benefit. The analysis of these differential outcomes confirms a central tenant of scholarship on social movement–initiated co-production (SMIC): pro-poor outcomes are more likely when concerted efforts are made to level asymmetrical power relations between poor constituents and more powerful stakeholders, such as NGO staff and state officials. I extend this insight by identifying specific strategies and contexts in which co-production appears most likely to promote social justice and urban sustainability.

First, pro-poor outcomes are more likely to emerge from policy design processes that are supported by NGOs but prioritize poor constituents' practical knowledge and lived experience. In the 1980s and 1990s, nuns from a Catholic NGO did this by embedding themselves in the lives and work of waste pickers and cocreating an organizing model through a yearslong process of field experiments and collective reflection. In the early 2000s, by contrast, NGO staff convened multistakeholder forums and workshops to design abstract policy proposals for a radical overhaul of the recycling industry. This process was intended to include the voices of waste pickers but wound up favoring the technical expertise of NGO staff, academics, and state officials—all of whom overestimated waste pickers' desire and capacity to work in industrial cooperatives.

Importantly, this outcome also reflected a broad shift in the nature of Latin American NGOs. Whereas scrappy NGOs that focused on grassroots organizing predominated in the 1970s and 1980s, professionalized NGOs that focused on policy advocacy, knowledge production, and project delivery played an increasingly salient role in the 1990s and 2000s (Markowitz and Tice 2002). This case thus highlights a risk that the professionalization of NGOs poses for SMIC: the creation of formalized spaces of policy design that impede participation from poor constituents. Second, concerted efforts must be made to elevate the voice and power of the poor, not only in the design of policy proposals but in their implementation. In this regard, São Paulo's waste pickers relied heavily on the goodwill of elected officials, as they had little external political leverage. Therefore it is not surprising that both of the co-production initiatives discussed in this article were implemented by mayors from the democratic socialist PT.

The mayors, however, represented very different currents within the party. Mayor Erundina (1989–92) belonged to a leftist flank of the PT that became increasingly marginalized, leading her to leave the party in 1997. As mayor, Erundina treated popular movements as her most important constituent, ceding land to Brazil's first waste picker cooperative in an affluent neighborhood, despite NIMBY backlash. Mayor Suplicy (2001–4), in contrast, represented the party's new, more centrist face, which sought to marry business-friendly macroeconomic policies with redistributive social programs. She conceded to some waste picker movement demands but prioritized the interests of private waste firms and largely abandoned support for street waste picker organizations—most of which were persecuted and evicted by subsequent right-wing mayors. This case thus illustrates the danger that state officials' alliances with business lobbies may undermine co-production's pro-poor potential.

Third, this case demonstrates how co-production strategies are shaped not only by the choices of local actors but by the national and global contexts in which they operate. In addition to the professionalization of NGOs and the PT's class compromise, a third structural shift that constrained co-production strategies in the 2000s was the formalization of recycling collection. In the 1980s and 1990s, the recycling industry was still small and informal, and this relative obscurity gave waste pickers and their allies leeway to experiment with grassroots pilot projects. Such strategies may not have been viable in the 2000s, when increased waste production, industrial demand, and environmental consciousness led cities across Latin America to begin formalizing recycling services.

Formal recycling routes and processing plants were likely to be implemented no matter what, as they were markers of "world class city" status and represented lucrative business opportunities for waste management firms. Forum organizers thus sought to ensure that the formal recycling system included street waste pickers. Because of the complexity and magnitude of this project, they believed that it was necessary to win input and buy-in from an array of state, private sector, and civil society actors through multistakeholder forums. This process did not succeed in formalizing large numbers of street waste pickers, but it is not clear what alternative strategies would have produced superior results.

Although structural constraints contributed to the political marginalization of São Paulo's street waste pickers, agentic action is now needed to reverse this trend. A first step would be a more candid discussion of the shortcomings of the city's current co-production policies. In academic literature, popular media, and NGO publications, the prevailing impression is that many street waste pickers are successfully transitioning from the street to sorter cooperatives, where they experience superior conditions and incomes. Such claims should be tested through rigorous empirical research.

Second, we must question assumptions that undergird the current model of waste picker inclusion. Many government officials continue to view street waste picking as a profession of last resort, and assume that waste pickers therefore will flock to the opportunity to work in sorter cooperatives. My research, in contrast, suggests that most street waste pickers have access to other low-income jobs but lack the desire or capacity to follow rigid schedules and rules. Such findings should not lead us to romanticize street waste picking—a poorly remunerated, hazardous, and stigmatized form of work. Instead, we should become more critical of available forms of low-income employment, whether in cooperatives or otherwise. As MNCR staff member Isabella Vallin (2017) told me, "Insecurity, danger, and humiliation are not characteristics of waste pickers, but of the precarious working class under capitalism."

Third, organized waste pickers and their allies must identify policy models that aim to recognize and fortify waste pickers' work on the streets, rather than to erase and replace it. There are many compelling international examples of such approaches, from Bogotá to Pune. But the most promising starting point for thinking about a model for the future of waste picker inclusion in São Paulo may lie in the city's own past.

NOTES

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1. According to the survey for this research, São Paulo's 21 formalized (*conveniados*) sorter cooperatives had 10,020 members in 2016. Additionally, 16 semiformal (*não conveniados*) sorter organizations received materials, equipment, and support from the city on a more limited basis. State officials estimated that semiformal organizations had 450 members, and anecdotal evidence suggested that rates of street waste picker inclusion were similar to those in the formalized cooperatives. These numbers to not include members of São Paulo's two remaining cart pusher organizations and one electronics recycling cooperative.

2. For a summary of critiques and defenses of the co-production with informal workers, see Meagher 2013.

3. *Jornal Comunitário*, São Paulo, September 1993, 12, as cited in Scarpinatti 2008.

4. *Folha de São Paulo*, São Paulo, March 29, 1986, as cited in Scarpinatti 2008, 37.

5. In 2015, São Paulo's municipal government began contracting cooperatives to collect recyclables in neighborhoods that were not already covered by the official route.

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