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Introduction: Co-production as a Maturing Concept

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Introduction

The concept of co-production has been around for decades, but has in recent years experienced a revival. Public management research in a variety of disciplines has paid increasing attention to the role of citizens and the third sector in the provision of public services. The growth of interest in co-production during the past ten years provides important insights into, and at the same time poses important challenges for, public management.

Following previous work in this field, particularly in the tradition of Ostrom, we will define co-production as

'...the mix of activities that both public service agents and citizens contribute to the provision of public services. The former are involved as professionals, or 'regular producers', while 'citizen production' is based on voluntary efforts by individuals and groups to enhance the quality and/or quantity of the services they use' (Parks, et al., 1981 & 1999).

This understanding has been referred to as a possible bridge over the great academic divide between the consumption and provision of public services (Ostrom, 1999). More recently, exploring co-production has become increasingly topical for a broad range of academics with a focus on, and/or practitioners working with, public services and management. These include the issues of the nature of co-production (Alford, 2002); how it has developed in recent decades (Pestoff & Brandsen, 2008 & 2009); the relationship between individual and group participation in the provision of public services (Bovaird & Löffler, 2003); how co-production can contribute to the development of service

quality in public services (Bouchard, et al., 2006); how it can promote participative democracy (Ostrom, 2000; Fung, 2004); and how ownership and institutional set-ups are related to co-production (Vamstad, 2007; Pestoff, 2009).

However, although there is a growing body of work describing, or claiming to describe, co-production, we still lack a comprehensive theoretical and systematic empirically orientated understanding of what happens when citizens and/or the third sector are drawn into public service provision and of the various aspects of co-production. This book takes a step forward in developing a better understanding of this phenomenon.

Background

Co-production can potentially be traced to various traditions, which will be addressed in the various chapters of this volume. Here we will specifically refer to the 2009 Nobel Laureate in Economics, Elinor Ostrom (Ostrom 1999). In the early 1970s, she and her colleagues studied urban reform in major cities in the USA (Ostrom, 1975). After completing their research on urban services and summarizing their results, they concluded that most public services are not delivered by a single public authority, but rather by several different actors, both public and private. Moreover, many public services depend heavily on the contribution of time and effort by the same persons who consume these services, i.e., the clients and citizens.

They coined the term *co-production* to describe the potential relationship that could exist between ‘regular producers’, like street-level police, schoolteachers or health workers, and their ‘clients’ who want to be transformed by the services into safer, better educated and/or healthier persons. It later spread to Europe, Asia, Australia and elsewhere, and is now used by researchers in many parts of the world to analyze citizen participation in the provision of publicly financed services, regardless of the provider. This is of course not to say that there was no empirical or theoretical work on the issue prior to the concept of co-production. Indeed, many studies focusing

on citizen participation have addressed it, albeit with different terms and with a different focus. What is new is that it is addressed as a cross-cutting phenomenon in the context of public management research.

In this sense, research on the topic came together at the beginning of the new century, in networks then assembled around the study of nonprofit or third sector organisation in the public sector. In particular, much of the work focusing on co-production as a cross-cutting phenomenon came together under the auspices of the European Group for Public Administration (EGPA) and the International Research Society for Public Management (IRSPM). Several conference papers presented at the annual sessions of the EGPA's Third Sector Study Group and at Third Sector Panels of the IRSPM focused on various aspects of co-production. This has led to the further refinement of the concept. In particular, it led to the distinction between the original concept of co-production, which focuses on the relationship between individual citizens and producers, and 'co-management', which centres around relationships at the organisational level (see Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006). Both are addressed in this volume.

In 2006 the *Public Management Review* published a special issue on co-production, called *Co-Production. The Third Sector and the Delivery of Public Services*, vol. 8/4. It was later reprinted by Routledge and made available in paperback (Pestoff & Brandsen, 2008 & 2009). The present book is a second collection of papers that aims to go further by systematizing the growing body of academic papers and reports that focus on various aspects of co-production and its potential contribution to new public governance (Osborne, 2010).

Focus of this book

The book addresses the nexus of issues and disciplines interested in co-production, and through them it makes a contribution to public management research. The concept of co-production sits at the crossroads of a number of disciplines - including business administration, policy studies, political science, public management, sociology and third sector studies. They all have important

perspectives on this topic and all of them are important for the development of public management and public services. Bringing them together in this volume both allows for comparing and contrasting these different perspectives and for potential theoretical collaboration and development.

More particularly, this volume addresses the following concerns:

- *Conceptual issues*: What is the nature of co-production and what different conceptualizations exist, especially in the context of public management?
- *Empirical issues*: How does co-production in public service delivery work in practice? Is it as successful as some of its proponents have claimed? Given that we know how it works in practice: can co-production contribute to improved quality in public services?
- *Comparative issues*: How does the practice of co-production differ between countries and sectors?
- *Methodological issues*: What methods and theoretical approaches are most suitable for the examination of the topic?

Contents

In this collection, we bring together a wide range of authors. Inevitably, we have had to strike a balance between capturing the diversity of approaches that exist in the field and achieving a systematic framework for the study of the concept.

The *first part* of the book addresses the question '*what is co-production*', and discusses the concept of co-production theoretically. In the first chapter *Pestoff* argues that co-production is the mix of public service agents and citizens who contribute to the provision of a public service. This chapter addresses some crucial conceptual issues for co-production, including definitions and level of analysis; relations between the professional staff and their clients; motives for citizens to engage in co-production and collective action; and co-production as individual acts, collective action or both, etc.

Bovaird & Löffler argue that user and community co-production can be conceptualised as a movement from ‘public services FOR the public’ towards ‘public services BY the public’ within the framework of a public sector that represents the public interest and publicly-valued outcomes, not simply the interests of public service ‘consumers’. However, it is not a panacea for all public sector issues, as the case studies clearly demonstrate. They show that, while co-production can achieve major improvements in outcomes and service quality and also cost savings, it is not resource-free. Co-production may be ‘value for money’ but it usually cannot produce value without money.

Ewert & Evers argue that co-production lacks a fixed meaning both on the level of interactions between organisations and the level of providing services to users. Different meanings unfold once one looks at the impact of narratives such as consumerism, managerialism or participatory governance. Together with the traditions of state-welfare they simultaneously influence the modes and meanings of co-production in personal services. Taking up the example of modern healthcare systems in Germany, they show that uncertainty and ambiguity is normal rather than an exception when it comes to defining co-production. Role-expectations such as the ‘expert-patient’ or the ‘citizen-consumer’ may have a liberating potential but likewise they can marginalize crucial issues such as trust and the need for protection. Moreover, user organisations face challenges in their roles beyond helping users to cope with making as good as possible choice with some models of co-production.

In the chapter by *Vaillancourt* the participation of the third sector in the development of public policy in Canada is examined, on two levels: the Canadian federal state level, and the provincial state level (Quebec). He concludes that third sector participation in public policy can take two forms: co-production, or the participation in the application of policy, and co-construction, or the participation in the design of policy. From this conceptual angle, two federal and six provincial policy initiatives are analysed and compared.

Ackerman discusses co-production and co-governance in terms of accountability. Through an exploration of case studies from a wide variety of contexts (Brazil, Mexico, United States, India) and policy areas (poverty reduction, infrastructure provision, school reform, electoral administration, police reform), his chapter shows that state reformers should move beyond strategies based on 'exit' and even 'voice' to establish spaces of full 'co-governance' with society. Instead of sending sections of the state off to society, Ackerman argues that it is often more fruitful to invite society into the inner chambers of the state, in order to strengthen government accountability.

Parts two and three contain chapters on the practice of two related concepts: co-production and co-management. In both parts, chapters deal with the question '*how do co-production and/or co-management work*'.

Cahn & Gray note that citizen co-production in the advancement of public goods and services has a rich history in the United States. The concept embraces a wide range of volunteering but it also can lay claim to distinctive progeny stemming from the civil rights movement and the Johnson Administration's War on Poverty. The statutory mandate 'maximum feasible participation' in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 sought to enfranchise the poor with both a voice and a role in the implementation of the programs initiated as part of that effort. The chapter provides numerous examples of co-production generated by TimeBanking. The TimeBank movement developed its own version of co-production as a catalytic vehicle that takes 'maximum feasible participation' as a source of citizen empowerment to a new level.

Porter's chapter demonstrates advantages of applying the concept of co-production to a specific government service, basic education. The co-production function for education services combines input from students, teachers, parents and community institutions. Input from these regular and consumer producers are required in some cases and discretionary or contingent in others. At the student/teacher nexus co-production is required. No learning can take place without

voluntary, active involvement by a student. In addition, a large body of research has found parents, student peers and community institutions contribute vital, but contingent, input. His chapter explores how the presence of these network structures constrains organizational arrangements used to coordinate and administer the co-production of education services.

*Brandsen and Helderma*n note that co-production in housing could be of crucial importance, since housing is an area in which the involvement of citizens in the provision of services has the potential to enrich individual lifestyles, local communities and the organizations providing housing, regardless of whether public, private for-profit or nonprofit. However, in current housing markets, housing tends to be purely individual, either self-organised (through home ownership) or collectively managed (through social housing). The chapter explores the conditions under which co-production in this area could be successful, as an alternative model. The analysis, is based on empirical fieldwork carried out among German housing cooperatives. As it turns out, successful co-production depends primarily on the long-term maintenance of group boundaries and specific trajectories of organisational development. Established public and nonprofit housing providers could play a crucial role in fostering co-production by providing essential support to groups of citizens.

Meijer discusses the meaning of co-production in an information age. The core of his message is that technology is able to facilitate new practices of co-production: costs of large scale and dispersed action can be lowered, and new media can make co-production more ‘social’ and ‘playful’. The essential question, however, is what these changes mean for government. Meijer argues that in the information age, government needs to reassess the need, opportunities and forms of co-production: new connections between government and citizens can be developed, but the challenge remains to develop forms of co-production that appeal to citizens’ motives to co-produce.

Brown and her colleagues maintain that while governments are engaged in developing social policy responses to address wicked issues such as poverty, homelessness, drug addiction and crime,

long term resolution of these issues has remained elusive. Joint action and partnership between government and the community sector such as co-management is seen as a way of harnessing productive capability and innovative capacity of both these sectors to resolve these complex problems. However, models for actually undertaking this joint action are not well understood and have not been fully developed or evaluated. Their chapter examines new approaches to resolving the wicked issue of homelessness. It analyses a new horizontal 'hub-based' model of service delivery that seeks to integrate actors across many different service areas and organizations. The role of the third sector in co-managing public services is examined through the in-depth case studies and the results are presented together with an assessment of how co-management can contribute to service quality and service management in public services.

Schlappa discusses three cases of urban regeneration in which third sector organizations (TSO) are engaged. Two cases are examples of co-management, where staff members of local development partnerships (LDP) produce new services in collaboration with third sector organisations. In the third case, the local development partnership contracts and commissions services with third sector organizations, a practice that leaves not much scope for real collaboration. The analysis shows that co-management can occur in very different institutional contexts, and that TSOs and LDPs can both derive significant benefits from co-managing the development and delivery of new services. A number of variables can be identified which support the co-management process specifically in urban regeneration contexts. These include a high degree of organizational flexibility in participating organizations; workers who together share responsibility for the provision of a new service; and senior managers who are able to navigate regulatory, institutional and political barriers which stand in the way of collaborative cross-organizational working.

De Rynck and Dezeure examine citizen participation in the realm of local service delivery, addressing two fundamental questions: How does local government cope with the private initiatives

set up by groups of citizens in several policy domains over time? And do these arrangements evolve to governance in terms of co-management or partnerships? They address these questions by merging two distinct strands of research – the theory of local participation and studies of local governance – and conduct an empirical analysis based on in-depth cases in several policy domains in the city of Ghent (Belgium). The main conclusion is that each nonprofit organization has its own story and line of development over time, embedded in its own institutional setting, mixed with the different balance between rules-in-form and rules-in-use. The findings underline the fact that local government is interfering in ongoing particular processes, as they attempt to ‘manage’ and ‘get a grip’ on the citizen organizations. Over time, ‘particular’ organizations are losing their autonomy, although they do not always perceive it that way, as some very government-like instruments tend to have a very governance-like impact in daily practice.

Freise discusses thirteen case studies of communal regulation partnerships in the field of traffic safety in North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany). He questions whether these partnerships can be considered as examples of co-production, and which strategies and methods these partnerships develop. But perhaps more importantly, *Freise* addresses the question whether regulation partnerships between municipal police departments and civil society organisations increase input and output-legitimacy, or whether they are an imposed cooperation from top down with the purpose of a democratic window dressing instead.

Tsukamoto examines the potential and limitations of nonprofit governmental partnerships for promoting citizen engagement in Japan. Increasing attention is paid to the involvement of nonprofit organizations in the provision of public services and to their partnership with local governments. Under local partnership frameworks, local nonprofit organizations become providers of services in different fields. They are also expected to promote civic engagement and to improve the quality of services. However, current public service reforms are primarily market driven by a New Public Management regime, through the introduction of the ‘Designated Manager’ System. This subjects

them to 'institutional isomorphic' pressure. Tsukamoto's chapter examines the potential of local nonprofits to actively promote civic participation as co-production and to manage their inter-organizational relationships with local governments.

In the *fourth part*, we take a look at what effects co-production may yield. In several chapters, *the effects of co-production* on issues like service quality, accountability and democracy are addressed.

The chapter by *Vamstad* presents results from a study of service quality in co-produced childcare in Swedish parent cooperatives. The results are compared to those of municipal childcare, where there is little participation by the users of the services. The parent cooperative and the municipal childcare represent two different schools of thought with regard to service quality. The municipal services have a strong tradition of professionalism in which user participation is not allowed to interfere with the qualified work performed by trained professionals. The parent cooperatives have another tradition in which service quality is developed in a dialogue between users and staff while they co-produce the services together. The former tradition is the dominant one in the Swedish welfare state and this paper provides a historical background to both professionalism and co-production in Sweden. The main conclusion of the chapter is that service quality is better in the parent cooperative childcare in spite of the widespread assumption in Sweden that service quality is close to synonymous with professionalism.

Calabro notes that the privatization process has characterized and changed the public sector in many European countries in recent decades. However, it often ended with inefficiencies in public services especially due to the incompleteness of privatization processes that usually ended-up with providers still controlled by the State. In this debate co-production of public services and goods seems to be a reasonable alternative to partial privatization processes. Stemming from different theoretical perspectives the chapter highlights some problematic issues related to the lack of accountability characterizing many public service providers and suggests some main reasons in

favour of co-production as a reasonable alternative. Through a multiple case study analysis this chapter gives some insights of the Italian and the Norwegian situations. In spite of their institutional differences, the Ministries are still the major owners of service providers in both countries and a common pattern appears to exist in relation to accountability problems. Finally, the chapter concludes that co-production provides a reasonable alternative for improving accountability to citizens and to cope with the problematic issues generated by partial privatization processes in such widely different contexts.

Vancoppenolle and *Verschuere* address the question whether co-management, here conceptualized as the involvement of private organizations in public service provision, is threatening public accountability. Evidence collected from a case study of Flemish childcare shows that the service delivery in Flemish childcare is dysfunctional, in at least two ways. Firstly, the search process of parents for childcare is very complex and difficult. Secondly, service providers do not always adhere to the admission-policy regulations that apply, when they decide upon accepting a child in their facility. It is argued that these problems at least partly stem from the complexity of the network of Flemish childcare, characterized by many actors with multiple and fragmented accountability relations.

Finally, *Pestoff* shows that New Public Governance (NPG) puts much greater emphasis on citizen participation and third sector provision of social services than either traditional public administration or New Public Management. Co-production is a core element of NPG that promotes the mix of public service agents and citizens who contribute to the provision of a public service. However, client participation and influence in public services varies greatly and can range from manipulation to client control. This chapter explores the implications of two comparative studies of parent participation in preschool services in Europe. The first notes that co-production involves different dimensions: economic, social, political and service specific participation. The second observes that citizen participation clearly varies between different providers of social services, as

too does client and staff influence. This empirical overview concludes that some third sector providers can facilitate greater citizen participation, while a 'glass ceiling' for participation exists in municipal and for-profit preschool services. These findings can contribute to a better understanding of the emerging paradigm of New Public Governance.

To *conclude* the book, the final chapter by *Brandesen, Verschuere and Pestoff* aims to draw together the main insights emerging from this collection, and tries to raise some issues for further discussion and research.

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