

7 Unravelling the Co-Producers

Who are They and What Motivations do They Have?

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Introduction

All over the world new initiatives emerge in which citizens play an active role in public service delivery processes. Sometimes governments create opportunities for citizens to take up responsibilities; in other instances, citizens themselves request a more active role. But regardless of who the initiator is, for public service employees it means they collaborate with these citizens: the so-called “co-producers”. As a result, they need to share tasks, power, and responsibilities. In this chapter, we focus on the *co-production* of public services: the process in which citizens and public employees collaborate to, among other things, secure the quality and continuity of public services (Ewert and Evers, 2012; Brandsen, Pestoff and Verschuere, 2012; Brandsen and Honingh, 2016).

In co-production, co-producers co-design, co-prioritize, co-finance, co-deliver, and/or co-assess public services alongside public employees (Bovaird and Loffler, 2012). But who are these co-producers? The co-production literature presents a wide range of engaged co-producers, including local community members participating in neighbourhood watch schemes (van Eijk, Steen and Verschuere, 2017), vulnerable people taking part in activation programs (Fledderus and Honingh, 2016), parents involved in childcare services (Pestoff, 2008; Thomsen and Jakobsen, 2015), social housing residents discussing improvement of service delivery with frontline housing officers (Needham, 2008), voluntary caregivers involved in elderly care (Wilson, 1994), and citizens involved in participatory budgeting with their local government (Barbera, Sicilia and Steccolini, 2016). These examples show that co-producers can have different relations with the services produced: in some cases they are the direct service recipients (like the mentioned activation programs) while in other cases the co-producers’ efforts are directed at the production of social benefits (like the example on participatory budgeting).

In order to optimize co-production processes, it is important that the public employees have an idea of who the co-producers are, what expectations of the collaboration they have, and what motivates them to engage (cf. OECD 2001). Insight about the co-producers’ motivations may also help to

better understand the barriers and opportunities hindering or stimulating potential co-producers from engaging. The goal of our chapter is thus to review the current co-production literature in order to answer the following two questions about co-producers: *Who are the co-producers? And what different motivations do co-producers have?* In the following sections we address these two questions in this specific order and finish with concluding remarks that include implications for practitioners and suggestions for further research.

On Co-Producers

Over time, scholars have approached co-production in various ways (see also chapters 1 and 2 in this volume). One of them is related to who the co-producer is, resulting in several definitions that range from “people or organizations other than the producing unit” (as such even including other public sector organizations; Alford, 1993) to “(groups of) individual citizens” (Brandsen and Honingh, 2016). Although for the co-production process, it certainly makes a difference whether lay citizens or highly professionalized organizations are involved, in this chapter we focus on individual *citizen* co-producers, that is, lay actors who are members of the public serving voluntarily as citizens, clients, and/or customers (Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017). We therefore exclude third sector organizations (cf. Pestoff’s (2012) distinction between co-production, co-management and co-governance). But even when we narrow down our focus to citizen co-production, actual co-production processes vary widely as does the “position” of co-producers herein (cf. Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2015; Nabatchi et al., 2017; Alford and Yates, 2016). We identify three important elements, namely different co-producers’ roles, the level of co-production, and the activities performed. Below we give further detail of each of these elements.

Co-Producers’ Role

According to Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers (2015), co-producers can be co-implementers, co-designers, and initiators. The authors show that most co-producers are involved as *co-implementers* of public services: the co-production process is initiated and designed by the public organizations, and citizens’ input is restricted to certain specific tasks. An example is the collaboration between patients, their families, and healthcare professionals: the families rely on professionals’ accurate information on what activities to perform to ensure seamless care at home and in clinical settings (Sabadosa and Batalden, 2014).

Co-designers can also be frequently found. In these cases, the initiative for co-production is taken by the public organizations, but citizens have an important say in how the service will be delivered. An example is the

initiative of an English regional transportation department to collaborate with disabled people to better understand the barriers they face in their everyday lives, with the ultimate aim to improve current service delivery (Copestake, Sheikh, Johnston and Bollen, 2014). Finally, the less frequent role is that of the *initiator*: citizens initiate the service being delivered and governments become actors that follow. Examples include picking up litter from an adjacent street (Brudney and England, 1983) or a residents' project in a Flemish neighbourhood with the aim to cancel a planned parking space and improve the green area (Vanleene, Verschueren and Voets, 2016).

Back in 2002, Alford (2002) took a different approach and distinguished among three types of co-producers: clients, citizens, and volunteers. Clients are service-recipient individuals or service users, with a direct, individual, and private interest in the services produced. Volunteers provide input to the organization, but do not individually consume the services. With their efforts they contribute to the production of services (which is of public value), but they do not directly benefit from them. Citizens do receive value, but collectively instead of individually. As such, there is no direct nexus between their co-production efforts and the values received from the regular service provider (Alford, 2002, 33–34). Alford and Yates (2016) refine this distinction and refer to citizens as collective consumers of public value and service users (or clients) as individual consumers of private value. They further differentiate between clients and volunteers and state that the latter contribute to co-production but do not receive any service from the public organization. More recently, Nabatchi et al. (2017) have adopted similar terms and distinguish among citizens, clients, and customers. Citizens are members of a specific geographic or political community. Clients are recipients of public services to which they are legally entitled and for which they are not required to directly pay the providing organization. Finally, customers are recipients of public services for which they must directly pay the providing organization. The authors state that the roles of citizen and client are more common than those of customer, and that actors may simultaneously serve in multiple roles.

Level of Co-Production

Another element that provides more insight into who the co-producers are has to do with the level of co-production, referring to whether activities are performed by a group of citizens or rather on an individual basis. The literature distinguishes among co-production at the individual level, co-production in groups, and co-production at a collective level (cf. Brudney and England, 1983). In *individual co-production*, co-producers and regular producers work directly with each other. Often, co-producers are the clients or consumers of the service being produced, or they produce the service for a loved-one who directly and on a personal basis benefits. An example are voluntary caregivers (Wilson, 1994).

In *group co-production*, the regular producer works “directly and simultaneously with a specific cluster or category of lay actors who share common characteristics or interests” (Nabatchi et al., 2017, 5). The group members benefit from the services produced themselves, while spillover effects are beneficial to society at large; although equal distribution might be problematic (Brudney and England, 1983). Examples studied include different types of patient fora in health and social care (Allen et al., 2010; Fotaki, 2011) and parents’ involvement in childcare (Prentice, 2006).

Finally, *collective co-production* is about the collaboration between public organizations and citizens with the aim to produce services that are beneficial to society at large. So, the ultimate goal is the production of social benefits rather than personal benefits. A classic example is neighbourhood watch, aimed at the improvement of safety and livability (van Eijk et al. 2017).

Activities Performed

Among the different cases that have been studied, a wide variety of activities performed by the co-producers can be identified. Brandsen and Honingh (2016), for instance, divide among complementary and non-complementary tasks. With non-complementary tasks they refer to citizens providing input to the core (primary) process of the organization and the service delivery process. Citizens’ complementary tasks, on the contrary, do have an impact on the effectiveness of the delivery process, yet citizens do not come inside the organizational context (Brandsen and Honingh, 2016). The case of co-production of community safety is useful to understand both types of activities (cf. Renauer, Duffee and Scott, 2003): witness assistance or participation in “learning how not to be victimized” educational programs (Layne, 1989, 16) can be perceived as complementary tasks, while neighbourhood watch police programs are non-complementary.

An alternative way to look at co-producers’ activities is to analyze the extent to which co-producers are able to produce the service themselves, without the regular producers’ input. Consider parents’ contributions to Christmas celebrations or school gardens at primary schools; the parents are able to organize similar activities on their own. Yet, the added value of co-production is in the “legitimization” of the activities conducted and the input provided by the professionals (e.g., money, knowledge) (Van Kleef and van Eijk, 2016). In contrast, citizens’ co-producing probation services can only do so effectively and safely when professionals are also highly involved in prisoners’ return to society (Surva, Tönurist and Lember, 2016).

Co-Producers’ Motivations

During the 1980s, both scholars and governments made popular the idea of co-production (cf. Parks et al. 1981; Osborne, 2010; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992), therefore, starting to wonder about the motivations of citizens to

contribute efforts to the co-production of public services. Stemming from the dominant economic approach on the concept of co-production (particularly in the 1980s), it was just commonly assumed that citizens co-produce because of the direct benefits they acquire. As co-production was defined as the collaboration between regular service providers and those members of the public who directly benefit from these services (Parks et al., 1981; Whitaker, 1980), the argument was that citizens are willing to co-produce because of the opportunity to increase the amount and/or quality of services they enjoy (Kiser and Percy, 1980, as referred to by Brudney and England, 1983, 60). This approach started to change after Alford's 2002 article in which the author, following a contingency theory, shows that citizens are not simple utility maximizers but are also motivated by a complex mixture of nonmaterial incentives. In this section we address this transition in the literature.

The Early 2000s: The Contribution of Different Disciplines

Alford's (2002) contribution to understanding co-producers' motivations originates in the distinction among clients, citizens, and volunteers and the expectations regarding each of these roles. In general, all types of co-producers are expected to ensure the service is produced, and that this is done as efficiently as possible and with the highest quality (cf. definitions and aims of co-production provided by Parks et al. 1981; Brandsen et al. 2012; Brandsen and Honingh, 2016). Yet, specific roles entail specific expectations. Clients' connection is expected to be primarily based on material interests, because of the private value they receive. They feel responsible for the services they consume themselves and are less concerned with the public value of these services. Volunteers do not receive services in exchange, and so they are assumed to feel responsible for others (similar to other voluntary activities like being active in the local football club). Citizens do receive public value on a collective basis, causing them to feel responsible for both the service itself and their fellow citizens (cf. Alford, 2002).

If co-producers are not necessarily the direct consumers of the services produced, maximizing benefits may not be their sole motivation. In addition, citizens may be willing to co-produce because they simply perceive co-production as an interesting, enjoyable, or worthwhile activity (Pestoff, 2006). Thus, motivations may be the result of both material and nonmaterial incentives (Alford, 2002), of both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards (Deci, 1972). Co-producers may also be driven by other values, such as altruism or sociality (Verschuere, Brandsen and Pestoff, 2012), following the literature on volunteering and citizen participation (cf. Alford, 2002; Pestoff, 2012).

Integrating the insights of additional fields of research, such as volunteering and political participation, resulted in the identification of a wide variety of factors that might have an impact on co-producers' decision to engage in the co-production of public services. The literature on volunteering, for

example, supports the view that people might want to take responsibility for their community (Reed and Selbee, 2003). As “active citizens”, people do not only stress their rights but also the responsibilities they have for society (Clarke et al., 2007). Such altruistic motivations stem from fellow-feeling with other citizens or identification with public purposes (Alford, 2014), while willingness to initiate reciprocity is stimulated by social norms and feelings of trust (Ostrom, 2009). Additionally, literature on volunteering mentions the importance of social interaction—people volunteer for enjoyment purposes or to meet new people (Dunn, Chambers and Hyde, 2016)—and status—the possibility to prove their capabilities to oneself and others (Taylor and Shanka, 2008).

The literature on political participation also adds to the understanding of co-producers’ motivation. Saliency, for example, can be taken as a determinant of motivation. It refers to the importance of the issue at hand for a citizen: only when the issue is perceived as relevant enough, participation is considered (Pestoff, 2012). Perceptions on one’s competencies also result in increasing motivations to participate. The literature on political participation refers to this factor as “efficacy”, and distinguishes between internal and external efficacy. The former refers to “beliefs about one’s own competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics”, while the latter can be defined as “beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands” (Craig, Niemi and Silver, 1990, 290). In co-production, we might expect that co-producers only decide to co-produce if they perceive themselves capable to do so and when they consider the public organization provides enough room for their interaction (so, they are convinced their interaction will matter in the service delivery process) (van Eijk and Steen, 2016).

The literature on political participation also stresses the importance of networks and the social capital stemming from these networks—for instance church attendance, group membership, and marital status impact on citizens’ decisions (Amnå, 2010; Putnam, 1993; Svendsen and Svendsen, 2000). Finally, according to the literature on both political participation (Timpone, 1998) and volunteering (Dekker and Halman, 2003), socio-economic variables like education, income, and jobs are found to have an impact on citizens’ decision to participate/volunteer. Table 7.1 summarizes the above contributions.

The 2010s: Co-Production from a Public Administration/Public Management Perspective

Although scholars’ broader perspective provided useful additional insights, substantive progress in answering the question why people co-produce was limited, as the question was only answered by putting forward theoretical assumptions (cf. Verschuere et al., 2012) and during the 2000s even faded to the background. Moreover, ascribing motivations derived from the

Table 7.1 Summary of the Contribution of Different Fields to the Study of Co-Producers' Motivation

<i>Stream of research</i>	<i>Citizens' motivations to co-produce</i>
Economics	Extrinsic motivations: material self-interest, maximizing benefit (quantity and/or quality of public services)
Public management	Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations: dependent on the specific role (i.e., clients, citizens, volunteers) in the co-production process and the expectations regarding each of these roles
Volunteerism	Intrinsic motivations: taking responsibility for the community, altruism, social interaction, status
Political participation	Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations: salience, internal and external efficacy, networks and social capital, socioeconomic variables

volunteering and citizen participation literature leaves the question aside of whether the *context* of political participation and volunteering is comparable to that of co-production. That is, co-producing public services might be a process that is distinct from taking part in political processes or volunteering; just like one can hardly compare participation in a political process such as commenting on a zoning plan with volunteering activities in a sport club. Another difference concerns the interaction (or lack thereof) with public employees: the interaction between co-producers and public employees is inherent to co-production, while volunteering often does not take place in a professionalized service delivery process (Verschuere et al., 2012). Thus, although a multidisciplinary approach is helpful to develop new theories explaining co-producers' engagement, it can only be so when the insights are tested in or added with insight from the specific co-production context (van Eijk, 2017).

A renewed interest for what motivates the individual co-producer to co-produce public services and the acknowledgement of the need for empirical knowledge resulted in a new wave of studies during the 2010s. Pestoff (2012) put the issue of co-producers' motivations on the research agenda again. He argued that citizens' involvement is the result of two elements. First, the regular service provider (i.e., the public organization involved) needs to encourage citizens by making co-production easier for them; for instance by reducing transaction costs and by removing obstacles. Second, there is the individual motivation necessary to let someone decide s/he wants to become active as a co-producer. According to Pestoff (2012, 24–25), this is linked with the idea of *salience*: the more important the service provided is for the individual, his/her family, loved ones, or friends, the more likely (s)he will participate.

Although useful, Pestoff's work still does not address what specific motivations these individuals have, as the range of motivations probably includes

more than the salience of the service provided alone. In their study, van Eijk and Steen (2014) take a different approach to answer this question. While Alford (2002) argued that when co-producers are involved as citizens or volunteers their motivations might be similar to those identified for citizen participation or volunteering respectively, van Eijk and Steen (2014) take one step back by questioning whether citizen participation and volunteering can indeed be perceived as similar to co-production. They investigate what self-reported motivations can be identified in a particular co-production process (i.e., client councils at health care organizations) and conclude that different viewpoints can be identified, each reflecting a different set of motivations. For example, some co-producers hold a more professionalized viewpoint: they are motivated out of desire to contribute something to the health care organization and feel capable to do so because of the competencies they have. Other co-producers value the idea of doing good for the benefits of all users in general (instead of contributing to the organization) or contrarily are motivated to take part because this allows them the opportunity to build “cozy” relationships with other co-producers (van Eijk and Steen, 2014).

Following van Eijk and Steen (2014), different scholars have become interested in the issue of co-producers’ motivations. Yet, studies have been conducted in a limited number of countries and policy domains, the latter including health care (e.g., Bovaird, Stoker, Jones, Loeffler and Roncancio, 2016), community safety (van Eijk et al., 2017), care of the local environment (Vanleene, Voets and Verschuere, 2017), and activation programs for unemployed people (Fledderus and Honingh, 2016). Based on the different studies, three conclusions can be drawn.

First, co-producers’ motivations turn out to be rather nuanced, complex, and sometimes even inconsistent (cf. van Eijk and Steen, 2014; Blakely and Evans, 2009). The empirical studies list a number of factors that explain co-producers’ engagement, and these factors prove to different extents the theoretical assumptions mentioned above; we will elaborate on this further below. Moreover, research findings indicate that it is hard to develop just one theory explaining the engagement of *all* co-producers, as it seems that (even within one co-production initiative) different groups of co-producers are differently motivated (cf. van Eijk et al. 2017). Some co-producers might be more driven by altruistic motivations, while others get motivated by the opportunity to master new competencies.

Second, co-producers’ engagement can partly be explained by factors at the individual level. Vanleene et al. (2017) refer to this as “personal motivations”. A factor that is often mentioned is internal efficacy. In line with the theoretical assumptions derived from the literature on political participation, a number of studies conclude that co-producers’ perceptions on their capabilities to engage in co-production are an important motivating factor (e.g., Bovaird, Van Ryzin, Loeffler and Parrado, 2015; Thomsen, 2015; Thomsen and Jakobsen, 2015). Thus, the belief that one can actually make a difference increases the likelihood of co-producers’ willingness to engage

(Bovaird et al., 2016; Parrado, Van Ryzin, Bovaird and Löffler, 2013). This relation between internal efficacy and engagement might be mediated, however, by age: younger people often report lower levels of efficacy, negatively influencing their decision to engage (Thijssen and Van Dooren, 2016).

Empirical studies, furthermore, prove Pestoff's (2012) arguments on the importance of ease and salience for co-producers' decision to engage in co-production of public services (e.g., Vanleene et al. 2017; van Eijk, 2017). Further, empirical results show that personal (material) incentives or self-interest are far less relevant for many co-producers (Vanleene et al. 2017; van Eijk et al. 2017): in line with the literature on the motivations of volunteers (cf. Perry, Brudney, Coursey and Littlepage, 2008; Clerkin, Paynter and Taylor, 2009), co-producers seem to be motivated by a drive to take responsibility for society and fellow citizens (Vanleene et al., 2017).

Third, and finally, co-producers' engagement may be explained by additional factors. Socio-demographic variables have been studied by Bovaird et al. (2015), who show that older citizens, women, and higher educated citizens engage more often in individual forms of co-production compared to younger citizens, men, or lower educated citizens. Also, contextual factors, such as the level of social capital, seem to have an impact on co-production: according to Thijssen and Van Dooren (2016), living in a specific neighbourhood impacts co-producers' engagement because of the social capital present in the neighbourhood.¹ Thus, social capital can be understood as an important accelerator of co-production processes (Bovaird et al., 2016; Voorberg et al., 2015; Ostrom, 1996): it is easier to mobilize people when they are involved in neighbourhood associations that are directly involved with the neighbourhood or when they have a large stockpile of other contacts (Thijssen and Van Dooren, 2016). When social ties are strong, people are more willing to share their resources and abilities in favour of the community (Voorberg et al. 2015).

However, the literature shows mixed results when it comes to the effects of encouragement by public employees. Theoretically, it is often assumed that they should encourage citizens to co-produce, for instance by providing the necessary information and advice via booklets and training programs (e.g., Alford, 2002; Percy, 1984). Some empirical studies support the idea that public employees can encourage citizens to co-produce by offering training programs (van Eijk and Steen, 2013) and by providing the necessary resources (defined in terms of knowledge and basic tools) for the co-production process to happen (Jakobsen, 2013). However, there are also contradictory results. For example, Thomsen and Jakobsen's (2015) study on parents' involvement in the development of their children's reading skills showed that distributing information material did not affect parents' level of contribution. Finally, the literature makes reference to public employees' attitude and how this is perceived by the co-producers: public employees' signs of appreciation are found to positively impact co-producers' motivations (van Eijk, 2017), and when (potential) co-producers trust public

employees, this increases their willingness to participate in co-production processes (Fledderus and Honingh, 2016).

Some Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, we summarized what is known about co-producers and their motivations. The review shows that there are different perspectives to understanding the *role of co-producers* (e.g., co-implementer/co-designer/initiator vs client/volunteer/citizen), that there are different *levels of co-production* (individual, group, and collective co-production), and that there is a wide range of *co-production activities* (dividing among complementary/non-complementary tasks and the extent to which co-producers are able to produce the services themselves). Regarding co-producers' motivations, our review shows that in the early years of co-production literature, co-producers' motivations were mostly addressed from an economic point of view, and therefore only considering extrinsic motivations. Over time, this perspective has changed, and has incorporated new insights from other disciplines, such as volunteerism, political participation, and even public management, showing that co-producers' motivations are both extrinsic and intrinsic and that context matters. In sum, our review shows that different groups of co-producers can be differently motivated, even within one co-production process.

Based on the insights gathered in this literature review, we conclude that the context of the specific co-production process (including among others the cultural setting of the country, the particular policy domain, the public organization involved, and the type of services produced) has a major impact on co-producers' motivations. Although the relevance of context could explain why current co-production literature is dominated by single case studies (cf. Voorberg et al., 2015), it also exposes a need for more comparative studies to better explain the role of context. This is an important avenue for further research. Another suggestion for further research concerns public organizations' role in encouraging citizens to co-produce. Given the importance of individual motivation factors, public organizations' efforts should be better directed at influencing citizens' *ability* to co-produce, providing them with relevant resources and/or training programs. Further, public organizations should invest more in understanding citizens' expectations and, particularly, managing external efficacy. New research is therefore needed to further investigate the theoretical and practical implications of public organizations' role in motivating citizens.

Note

- 1 Social capital is about the social networks and connections among individuals, and includes norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness (Putnam, 1993).

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