BEYOND ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION
User and Community Co-production of services

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a radical reinterpretation of the role of 'policy making' and 'service delivery' in the public domain. Policymaking is no longer seen as a purely 'top down' process but rather as a negotiation between many interacting policy systems. Similarly, services are no longer simply delivered by professional and managerial staff in public agencies, but rather co-produced by users and their communities. This paper presents a conceptual framework for understanding the emerging role of user and community co-production and then illustrates how different forms of co-production have played out in practice in a number of case studies of radical improvement of local public services. It suggests that traditional conceptions of service planning and management are now out-dated and need to be revised to take into account the potential of co-production as an integrating mechanism and incentive for resource mobilization, a potential which is still greatly underestimated in its potential to raise the effectiveness of public policy. However, co-production in a context of multi-purpose, multi-stakeholder networks raises a number of important public governance issues, which have implications for public services reform.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a radical reinterpretation of the role of 'policy making' and 'service delivery' in the public domain. No longer are these seen as 'one way' processes. Policy is now seen as the negotiated outcome of many interacting policy systems, not simply the preserve of 'policy planners' and 'top decision makers'. Similarly, delivery and management of services is no longer just the preserve of professionals and managers - users and other members of the community play a large role in shaping decisions and outcomes.

This article explores the wide range of ways in users and communities now contribute to both policymaking and service delivery. Whereas traditional public administration saw public servants acting 'in the public interest' and New Public Management (NPM) suggested ways in which service providers could be made more responsive to the needs of users and communities, the co-production approach assumes that service users and their communities can, and often should, be <u>part</u> of service planning and delivery. This is a potentially revolutionary concept in public service. It has major implications for democratic practices beyond representative government, by locating users and communities more centrally in the decision-making process. Moreover, it throws light on how emergent strategies are developed at the front-line in public services. Finally, it demands that politicians and professionals find new ways to interface with service users and their communities.

The article presents a conceptual framework for understanding the range of user and community co-production roles in local public services, illustrating different forms of co-production in a set of case studies of radical local service improvement. These case studies are then used to exemplify the potential benefits and limitations of co-production. The paper concludes by suggesting that traditional conceptions of public service planning and management are now out-dated and need to be revised to take more account of the potential for co-production relationships between multiple stakeholders.

Beyond engagement and participation – the emerging paradigm of co-production

By the 1980s, the limitations of traditional 'provider-centric' models of the welfare state had become obvious. This prompted many public sector initiatives the world, designed either to give a larger role to *customer service*, including user research, quality assurance, and choice between providers, or to *competition* between providers for contracts commissioned by public agencies, both approaches being core elements of the NPM (Gunn, 1988; Pollitt, 1990; Hood, 1991; Barzelay, 2001). The role given to service users and communities varied greatly in these initiatives but continued to be decided by managers and professionals.

However, the limitations of both the traditional 'provider-centric' service model and its NPM variants are vividly exposed when we consider the potential role of users in services. The most widely cited typology for characterizing this role is the Arnstein (1971) 'ladder of participation'. On the lower rungs are *manipulation, therapy* and *placation* of the public, then the more positive activities of *informing* and *consultation*; on the higher rungs we find *partnership* and eventually even *delegated power* and *citizen control*. However, this ladder disguises the complexity of provider-user relationships. Normann (1984) suggests that in service systems the client appears twice, once as a customer and again as part of the service delivery system. Sometimes, service professionals 'do the service for the customer' (e.g. a surgeon

performs an operation on a patient), which Normann labels the 'relieving logic'. However, service professionals often play solely an 'enabling' role, so the client actually performs the service task (e.g. a student finds appropriate material and writes an essay on a topic). Here the client becomes a co-producer of the service. Typical private sector examples include the self-service supermarket or bank ATMs. In a world of increasingly competent service users, Normann predicted that enabling relationships would become more prominent and that 'relievers' would experience tough competition from 'enablers'.

While Normann's analysis was particularly influential, other authors too from the late 1970s realized the potential of co-production (Zeleny, 1978; Lovelock and Young, 1979; Whitaker, 1980; Sharp, 1980; Parks *et al.*, 1981; Warren *et al.*, 1982; Brudney and England, 1983; Percy, 1984). Indeed, it was quickly realized that co-production already had a long history, e.g. in citizen militias (Hood, 1998) or jurors. By the 1990s the 'enabling' logic of provision was well established in parts of the private sector (Wikström, 1996; Ramirez, 1999) – not only in service delivery but also in service design and testing, e.g. of computer software. While Alford (1998) suggests that from the mid-1980s attention switched from co-production to marketisation in the public sector, since the mid-1990s there has been renewed interest. In the US, co-production became a key platform within the communitarian movement (Etzioni, 1995), which favours direct forms of participation in services (such as self-help groups and social support networks). The increasing exploration of trends in social capital (Putnam, 2000) highlighted that co-production is often most common in countries with large welfare states, so that one is not necessarily a substitute for the other. Meanwhile, advocates of asset-based community development (Kretzman and Knight, 1993) drew attention to the widespread role of community groups in the self-management of community centres, play areas, sports facilities, etc. User- and community-led evaluation of services has become systematized in such approaches as participatory rural appraisal (Chambers, 1997). Kelly *et al* (2002) suggest a recent reawakening of interest in co-production in UK public services and the current Lyons inquiry into local government functions and financing in the UK has suggested a major future role for co-production (Lyons, 2006).

Taken together, these references from recent literature in Europe and the US illustrate that the concept of co-production is now relevant not only to the service delivery phase of services management (where it was first discovered in the 1970s) but can extend across the full 'value chain' of service planning, design, commissioning, managing, delivering, monitoring and evaluation activities. In this paper, we shall focus mainly on co-production in service planning and service delivery activities. However, several of the service planning examples will also include elements of service design and commissioning, while some of the service delivery examples will similarly include elements of service management.

Ostrom (1996: 1073) defined co-production as: 'the process through which inputs used to provide a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not in the same organisation' - a definition close to that of Ramirez (1999: 49) 'value co-produced by two or more actors, with and for each other, with and for yet other actors'). However, partnership working is now so normal in services as to render such definitions trivial. Therefore Joshi and Moore (2003: 1) define a narrower form of co-production ('institutionalised co-production'): "provision of public services (broadly defined, to include regulation) through regular, long-term relationships between state agencies and organized groups of citizens, where both make substantial resource contributions". However, this definition goes too far in the other direction, confining itself to co-production with state agencies.

In this article, we therefore define user and community co-production as 'the provision of services through regular, long-term relationships between professionalized service providers (in any sector) and service users or other members of the community, where all parties make substantial resource contributions'. This definition is not intended to preclude considering the different interests that various types of co-producers might have in respect of their co-producing roles. Here we will focus particularly on 'users', 'volunteers' and 'community groups' as co-producers, recognising that each of these groups have quite different relationships to public sector organisations and that other stakeholders, too, may play co-production roles. In some cases, particularly in relation to service planning and commissioning, we will consider how citizens more generally can act as co-producers, where their relationships to public sector organisations are often more distant than those of service users and community groups (although, of course, many citizens also belong to these groups).

There has so far been no convincing estimate of the level of co-production of public services. Joshi and Moore (2003) suggest that 'institutionalised co-production' is probably common in poor countries but is often ignored because not looked for. This echoes Ciborra (1995), who suggests that industrial-based concepts of value creation have obscured the extent of co-production in industrialized countries, due to the arbitrary categories into which the inter-connected dynamic elements of organizational life have been divided. One proxy is the number of active volunteers: in the UK the Active Community Unit (2000) has estimated that 170,000 volunteers work in the NHS, befriending and counselling patients, driving people to hospital, fund raising, running shops and cafes etc.; 1.85m people are regular blood donors; 750,000 people volunteer in schools; 10m people are involved in 155,000 Neighbourhood Watch schemes. At a higher level of governance responsibility, 350,000 serve on schools Boards of Governors (Birchall and Simmons, 2004). However, this is a huge underestimate – e.g. it largely omits the role of service users as co-producers. From the provider side, about a quarter of UK local authorities in 1997 reported initiatives where citizens had some direct control over service management, usually in social housing (Crawford *et al.*, 2004).

Co-production does not simply involve managing relationships between one provider and a set of service users. In the public sector a client such as a heart attack patient may co-produce welfare increases with health carers (e.g. by adopting an improved diet and exercise regime to assure rehabilitation) and, at the same time, co-produce welfare in the community – e.g. by serving as an 'expert patient', counselling and encouraging other sufferers to make similar changes. Once clients and community activists become engaged in the co-planning and co-delivery of services alongside professional staff, the networks created may behave as complex adaptive systems, with very different dynamics from provider-centric services.

Forms of user and community relationships with professionalised public services

In this section, a conceptual framework is developed which allows a more detailed characterisation of relationships between users and communities and professionalized public services than in the traditional public management literature, which typically consists of a relatively unstructured assembly of evidence of co-production in various unrelated contexts.

Table 1 shows a set of scenarios, based on whether service professionals act alone or together with users and communities to plan and deliver public services. While traditional professional service provision involves no external parties (top left cell), the other cells involve significant co-working, either with users or other members of the community, or both. Working through the other cells, we find a range of types of co-production. Each of these different types will in practice evolve along path-dependent lines from different antecedents and will be shaped by different motivations on behalf of both professionalized service providers and the users and communities involved. However, the value of this typology for the current discussion is that it opens up the range of ways in which we can envision how professionals, service users and their communities may interact. (For purposes of clarity, this table collapses the key arenas for interaction into 'service planning' and 'service delivery' – in practice, these should be considered as including the full range of potential decision making arenas, including, planning, commissioning, design, managing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating).

Table 1. Range of professional – user relationships

	Professionals as sole service planner	*Service user and/or community as co-planners*	*No professional input into service planning*
Professionals as sole service deliverer	Traditional professional service provision	Traditional professional service provision with users and communities involved in planning and design *(Participatory budgeting, Porto Alegre, Brazil)*	(Not applicable)
Professionals and users/ communities as co-deliverers	User co-delivery of professionally-designed services *(Sure Start, UK)*	Full user/professional co-production *(Caterham Barracks Community Trust, UK)*	User/community co-delivery of services with professionals, with little formal planning or design *(Beacon Regeneration Partnership, UK)*
Users/ Communities as sole deliverers	User/community delivery of professionally-planned services *(Villa Family, France)*	User/community delivery of co-planned or co-designed services *(Tackley Village Shop, UK)*	Traditional self-organised community provision

Traditional professional service provision with user/community consultation on service planning and design issues – here services are delivered by professionals but the planning and/or design stage has closely involved users and community members. Examples include:

- *Planning for real* exercises in which communities are involved in interactive simulations of major changes to services and can suggest priorities (Taylor, 1995).

- *User consultation committees* in which users give feedback on a service and can influence proposals for change in the service over time (Birchall and Simmons, 2004).

- *Parent governors of schools,* with power over strategy (Birchall and Simmons, 2004).

- *Participatory budgeting exercises* in which community members can influence the annual budget preparation cycle of a public service or agency (see case study below).

- *Distributed commissioning* - here a public sector purchaser enables many smaller commissioning bodies, e.g. at neighbourhood level, to choose the public services to be provided (from the purchaser's budget) according to their own priorities. This has long been a feature of 'community chest' schemes in UK rural governance. In the 1990s it spread to the neighbourhood renewal areas of cities with high concentrations of deprivation, funded through Community Empowerment Networks (NRU, 2003) and EU schemes such as URBAN (Bache, 2001). Along the same lines, a group of the most innovative UK local authorities has proposed setting up Local Public Service Boards, which would operate along 'distributed commissioning' lines (Innovation Forum, 2004). Similarly, a recent UK government document (ODPM, 2005) suggests Neighbourhood Improvement Districts, which could act as commissioning bodies.

User co-delivery of professionally designed services – here professionals dictate service design/ planning but users and community members deliver the service. Examples include:

- *Expert patients*, who are current or ex-users of the service (Mayo and Moore, 2002).

- *'Health-Promoting Hospitals',* which attempt to empower the community for health-promoting lifestyle changes and management of chronic illness (Pelikan, 2003).

- *Volunteers (including families, neighbours and friends)* in care services, which supplement the resources of professional staff.

- *Direct payments to users* in care services, who can then purchase professional care.

- *'Sure Start',* where trained mothers give support to new mothers (see case below).

- *Self-reporting and self-assessment tax regimes,* in which citizens compile and return the relevant forms, maintaining appropriate records to support claims (Alford, 1998).

Full user/professional co-production – here users and professionals fully share the task of planning and designing the service, then delivering it. Examples include:

- *Community trusts*, which work with professional services to plan and design relevant services, deliver them through volunteers and often do fundraising (Taylor, 2003).

- *Community-based housing associations or companies and tenant-run co-operatives,* which plan and manage social housing in deprived areas, with other public agencies.

- *Faith-based social services*, usually employing professionals but managed by community representatives, often using volunteers (Joshi and Moore, 2003).

- *Rural environmental improvement schemes*, jointly funded by national and local agencies, delivered by local community groups, advised by professional staff.

- *Neighbourhood watch schemes*, where local residents work with police and local authorities to raise vigilance against crime and tackle anti-social behaviour.

User/community co-delivery of services with professionals, without formal planning or design processes – here, users and community groups take responsibility for undertaking activities but call upon professional service expertise when needed. Examples include:

- *Community resource centres*, which provide a range of activities for local residents but call in professional staff for expertise not available locally.

- *Local associations which specialize in leisure activities*, such as music, sports, culture trips, etc. and which only call on professional help when organizing special events.

User/community sole delivery of professionally planned services – here, users and other community members take responsibility for delivering services planned by professionals:

- *'Villa Family' project*, in which host families live with and look after elderly people (usually with disabilities) and deliver home-care services (see case study below).

- *'Smart houses'*, where technological aids allow residents to carry out many functions for themselves, for which they would otherwise needed skilled support or home care.

- *'Samaritans'*, who are volunteers trained to deliver professionally designed counselling services on an anonymous basis to potential suicides.

- *Community-based recycling programmes,* e.g. in Denver (USA) where appointing 'block leaders' in neighbourhoods doubling recycling of waste (Kelly *et al,* 2002).

- *Community credit unions*, staffed by volunteers but operating according to the standard practices laid out in national codes of practice (Jones, 1999).

- *Youth sports leagues*, run by volunteers, according to nationally formulated codes.

User/community sole delivery of co-planned or co-designed services – here, users or other community members deliver services that they partly also plan and design. Examples include:

- *Rural multi-function service points*, staffed by volunteers (see case study below).

- *'Time Dollar' youth courts,* in which first offenders are sentenced to community work by juries of other young people, whose input also earns 'time dollars' (Walker, 2002).

- *Contract services*, undertaken by local community groups under contract to public agencies (e.g. maintenance of housing estates or cleaning of community centres).

Traditional self-organised community provision - finally, where professional staff have no direct involvement in services, we have traditional self-organised community provision, e.g. children's playgroups, school breakfast clubs, food cooperatives, Local Enterprise Trading Schemes, local festivals, etc. Joshi and Moore (2003) suggest that in the South this is usually the way the poor arrange their own basic education, funerals or small-scale savings. Warren et al (1982) call this 'parallel production', as it does not explicitly involve public sector professionals. Nevertheless, professionals often have at least an indirect role, e.g. advice, informal quality checks, etc. Importantly, these initiatives still qualify as 'co-production' between service providers and users, even though the providers are non-professional, and can mobilize community resources very successfully, e.g. volunteers and fundraising. Lack of professional inputs can, however, result in low quality or even legal problems (e.g. where adults work with children). Some initiatives focus on linking self-organised projects to public resources – e.g. 'Time Dollars' (Cahn, 2000). More fundamentally, the traditional conceptualization of professional roles vis-à-vis users is challenged by recent research, which suggests that the future role of professionals will be to support universal self-organised service provision by individuals and communities, through advice, training, reassurance, quality assurance and, only as a last resort, intervention at key moments (Finkelstein and Stuart, 1996; Shakespeare, 2000). This may help to tackle the problem that "The public character of the services automatically generates relationships of unequal power and influence. Service users are still reliant on 'expert' providers … They … often have no way of escape from the relationship of dependency" (Birchall and Simmons, 2004: 5).

Case studies of different types of professional/user/community co-production

Some case studies will now be presented to illustrate key aspects of the working of these different types of relationships between service professionals, users and their communities. Each case study represents one type of relationship highlighted in Figure 1:

- *Traditional professional service provision with user/community consultation on planning and design issues* – participatory budgeting process in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

- *User co-delivery of professionally designed services* – the 'Sure Start' initiative.

- *Full user/professional co-production* – the Caterham Barracks Community Trust, UK.

- *User/community co-delivery of services with professionals, without formal planning or design processes* – the Beacon Council Regeneration Partnership in Falmouth, UK.

- *User/community delivery of professionally-planned services* –'Villa Family' in France

- *User/community sole delivery of co-planned or co-designed services* – Tackley Village Shop in rural Oxfordshire, UK.

Methods

These case studies have been selected on the basis of theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt, 1989), i.e. they were chosen for theoretical, not statistical, reasons, in order to highlight some of the key characteristics of each of these types of co-production relationship. Each case study has been chosen to illustrate how each cell in Table 1 can yield a successful co-production relationship, in line with the theoretical arguments advanced in the literature, with particular emphasis on how co-production can allow both improved information flows and greater resource mobilization. However, some limitations of co-production emerge in each of the case studies, the implications of which are explored later in the paper.

In two cases (Caterham Barracks Community Trust and Beacon Community Resource Centre), a full case study methodology was followed - documentation was studied, key players were interviewed and site visits were made (at which a wider range of stakeholders was interviewed). Later, follow-up discussions were undertaken after at least a year, to probe further details and to explore how outputs and outcomes were changing over time.

In two of the case studies (Participatory Budgeting and the Sure Start initiative), a visit was made, discussions were held with key staff in the process and access was given to documentation. The remaining two case studies (Villa Families and Tackley Village Shop) have been constructed from documentation and correspondence with key players in the initiatives, including a range of stakeholders to ensure validity of case information.

Participatory Budgeting in Porto Alegre

In 1989, the city of Porto Alegre, capital of Rio Grande de Sur in south Brazil, started a participatory budgeting process, *Orçamento Participativo* (OP) which takes place annually, involves a large number of citizens and has a major influence on city council fiscal decisions. It illustrates the potential for citizens to become involved in service planning and design, within a system where services are delivered largely by traditional, professionalized methods.

When the *Partido dos Trabelhadores* (PT) came to power in Porto Alegre in 1989, it sought not simply to consult citizens but to involve them in decision-making. The top priority at first was improved infrastructure – especially transport, clean water, and sewage treatment. With strong citizen support, resources were raised from national and state budgets and local taxes. Over time, citizen priorities naturally changed to improvements in education, health and social care. The *OP* became an integral part of city decision-making, with the active support of the council's governing administration (Fisher, 2006), which always accepted *OP* proposals, working them up with the *Conselho* of the *OP* into detailed action plans. While the council sometimes voted out specific proposals, basically everything which <u>was</u> implemented was in line with the decisions in the *OP*. Moreover, the city government believed that the *OP* actually speeded up consultation processes rather than slowing down decision-making.

Because citizens appreciate being involved by the OP, people now have confidence to challenge the design of city services in their area, a further example of co-production. For example, one *OP* initiative was for new housing in a shanty town (*favella)*. Technical staff proposed small family houses, in line with *favella* tradition. However, local residents wanted more dwellings and insisted on densely-packed two-storey houses. Eventually a compromise was agreed, with high density but

respecting technical norms. This was so successful that now a huge housing scheme is being developed near the airport, along the same lines.

A survey estimated that about 50,000 people participated in the *OP* in 2002 (with some double counting), including over 1000 community associations and NGOs. Given the long-term nature of this initiative, and the resource contributions made by those involved, this form of participatory budgeting conforms to the definition of 'co-production' used here. A 2003 opinion poll of over 600 people found that 64% agreed "The *OP* is a great achievement for the city that cannot be lost". While better-off groups are very positive about the OP, a large majority of participants come from poorest groups, partly because they have most to gain, and partly because the council has focused on getting *favella* residents to attend.

In the elections for mayor of the *Prefeitura* in 2000, only the *PT* candidate was in favour of *OP* but, as its popularity became clearer, all candidates in the 2004 elections were committed to it and its future appears secure, although the *PT* lost these elections. There have, however, been some arenas of opposition to the *OP*. Many elected politicians, who before 1989 were involved in negotiations over all major decisions in the city (giving rise to opportunities for clientalism) felt that the *OP* process gave them little room for manoeuvre.. Another problem has been the attitude of professional and technical staff to the *OP*, which often challenges their expertise. Some groups of staff have not welcomed this 'interference' and have even put up spirited internal resistance.

The Sure Start initiative in Gateshead

Sure Start is a UK Government scheme to support children, families and communities by integrating all relevant policies, including early education, childcare, health and family support. Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs) provide one strand, focusing on disadvantaged areas, to improve health and well being of children under 4 and their families, so that children do better when they start school (NESS, 2004). In terms of co-production, it illustrates the major role parents can play in co-delivering a service largely designed by professionals.

The Gateshead Sure Start Programme started in 2001 and has now been rolled out to five deprived areas in the borough. From the start, there was high parent representation in all initiatives, helping to set local targets within local delivery plans, and this has proved very successful. For example, nearly 50 local mothers have been trained in counseling on breast feeding, one of whom has broadcast advice on local radio (a peer support model sponsored internationally by the La Leche League). Counsellors make the initial contact by visiting all new mothers in hospital maternity wards. Publicity campaigns also raise public awareness of the advantages of breastfeeding. There are now four support groups around Gateshead (where there were none before) and new mothers typically access them once a month or more. All new mothers are also visited after 20 weeks to discuss actual and potential problems. Moreover, peer counsellors are always available on a phone helpline. More recently, Sure Start has trained peer counsellors as course organisers, to provide more local courses.

The greatest advantage of this peer support approach is that new mothers are much more willing to talk to other mothers who have had similar problems, rather than professional midwives or health visitors. These regular contacts at an early stage in motherhood have also convinced mothers to use all local child-oriented services, bringing much higher take-up.

The National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS, 2004) found that the level of parental involvement in SSLPs was generally high, although varying across programmes, with parents (primarily mothers but also fathers and grandparents) being involved in a wide range of tasks, including planning, management, service delivery and evaluation. This very involvement, of course, has posed a challenge for staff in SSLPs, in dealing with the professional/non-professional interface, particularly how best to work alongside one another in a way that deploys professional input appropriately, but also embraces the skills which support staff have in working with the local community and gaining the trust of parents.

Looking at the effects of Sure Start nationally, the National Evaluation found that mothers in SSLP areas were more likely to treat their child in a warm and accepting manner than in comparison areas (NESS, 2004), consistent with the overarching principle of Sure Start that better parenting and family behaviour will subsequently affect child development.

Caterham Barracks Community Trust

This case study illustrates the potential for the community to play a major role in both co-planning and co-delivering a project. In 1990 the army declared redundant its barracks in Caterham, leaving a set of attractive and well-constructed buildings on a large site in the middle of the small village of Caterham, in a rural area within London commuting distance. The site was declared a conservation area in 1995 after active lobbying by local residents, precluding the most profitable commercial use of the site, namely site clearance and building a standard estate of expensive houses. An 'urban village' was subsequently developed with 400 houses and flats, business premises and a range of community facilities (Allen, 2002).

Most unusually, the site developers were willing, admittedly under pressure from local politicians and residents, to work closely with the community on how to redevelop the site (Moran, 2002). When planning permission was granted in 1998, it included a section 106 agreement under which the developers released £2.5m to a newly-formed local community trust for the building and maintenance of community facilities (rather than paying the monies to the local authority or spending them directly on public facilities, as in normal practice).

The Caterham Barracks Community Trust, established in 1999, has 12 members from the surrounding community, including one local politician. It acts on behalf of new residents in the development but also local residents in the village. It also acts as a sounding board for the developer's proposals, preserving the character of the site, insisting on affordable housing, designing a cricket pitch and providing alternative parking for existing villagers. It funds a range of economic, social, educational, cultural and sports facilities on the site and manages them in line with wider community needs. For example, the Trust built a high quality indoor roller-skate park, with 5000 members, up to 570 users weekly and a turnover of more than £100,000 p.a. (Moran, 2002) – and, more importantly, providing a highly successful and safe meeting place for young people locally, something previously missing. Similarly, the Trust has sponsored a community theatre group, craft workshops, sports teams and many other activities, in line with local priorities as expressed by Board members.

The Community Trust now plays a major role in the co-production of a higher quality of life, in its own neighbourhood but also in the surrounding area. As a direct commissioner of services which meet local needs and an influence on the site

developers and the council, it has a major influence on decisions affecting local residents. While not directly elected, it can claim to understand local needs more clearly and to pursue them more systematically than the district council, which necessarily seems remote from a small rural village such as Caterham. Moreover, its way of working has emphasised partnership – with the developer, planners, and local public service providers and, above all, with the local community. In this way, projects supported have emerged through dialogue, rather than planned top-down. Co-production is central to this model - not only have the investment decisions been planned with the community but all the facilities funded by the Trust are managed by local community groups.

The Beacon Council Community Regeneration Partnership

The Beacon housing estate in Falmouth (in the South West of England) originally suffered from severe multiple deprivation and was regarded as Cornwall's most concentrated area of social and economic problems, and housing in disrepair. In terms of co-production, this project has run through a variety of modes, from traditional top-down planning and professional service delivery (start-up phase), to co-planning and co-delivery of a range of public services between community groups and professional staff (intermediate stage) through to the current position, where local people play a major role in generating and co-delivering initiatives with service professionals, often through informal mechanisms.

The project started with a funding bid by the local council for a major programme of energy efficiency measures for the estate. This brought quick improvements in family welfare, health and school attendance. A small core of staff in health services and the council played a key role in catalyzing these changes and provided effective community leadership. However, as one resident commented: 'The key to unlocking the potential within the community … was to change the prevailing atmosphere of isolation and despair".

The Beacon Community Regeneration Partnership (BCRP) was formed to help all the statutory and other agencies to work together with residents' groups. Its constitution states that 'residents will be at the centre of all decisions that the area in which they live'. To achieve this, it opened lines of communication between local residents themselves (to end the feeling of isolation and impotence), created dialogue between tenants, residents and statutory bodies (ending a growing sense of apathy and mistrust), and tried to turn anger and frustration into positive action by channelling energies effectively and appropriately (ending the initial 'headless chicken' syndrome, as one participant observed). Residents always had a majority on the project management committee, and active members could always be found, even though they occasionally faced reprisals from other residents for the actions of the committee.

The Partnership set up an office on the estate, focusing on getting people in as often as possible, for as many reasons as possible, and engaging them in dialogue. In 2001 a bigger office was needed and the role of the Partnership Project Co-ordinator became full-time (filled by a former active tenant). The office housed several Partnership staff (mainly part-time) and hosted visiting professionals giving advice on a wide range of topics. Residents generated further initiatives, e.g. housing repairs, crime watch, youth training schemes, a skateboard park, a garden task force, tree planting schemes, street furniture schemes and an internet café (in the office), all largely led and managed by residents. As involvement grew, some residents became

politically active, e.g. as councillors. Partnership Committee members were trained in budgeting and project planning and courses offered to all residents on running associations. Some improvements were easy – e.g. previously drab blocks of flats were painted in vibrant colours. However, residents also tackled some 'wicked issues' of local governance, e.g. neighbourhood nuisance and anti-social behaviour, both informally and, after consultation, through new conditions of tenancy and estate management policies.

Most impressively of all, these initiatives have dramatically improved local quality of life, e.g. in *health* (88% drop in post-natal depression, large falls in visits to doctors, 50% drop in child accidents), *education* (major improvements in school attendance and exam results), *living costs* (energy savings to residents of £180,000 p.a), *social care* (60% fewer children covered by child protection orders) and *crime* (87% of residents now report feeling safe on the estate). Overall, requests for rehousing out of the estate have fallen hugely.

The 'Villa Family' Project

In France, elderly people who cannot stay at home because of a disability normally must enter a nursing home, often in a distant town. The Villa Family was developed to allow them to live in their village, close to relatives and friends, in a family atmosphere (Perrette, 2005). The first project opened in 1990 and there are now 20 in France, with another 60 planned. In terms of co-production, this project shows how a professionally designed service can be delivered almost entirely by service users and other community members.

A Villa Family provides separate flats in a large house for two families, who each host three elderly people, usually over 80 years old. The concept of the host family already has a long history in France but the architecture of the Villa Family is specially designed to overcome typical problems in these arrangements and helped to professionalize the job. The host family has a large flat upstairs, while the ground floor has a large living room where everybody has their main meal together and shares leisure activities, next to the private bedrooms of the elderly – this allows a mix of social life and privacy, both for the elderly and the host family. Both young and elderly benefit from contact with each other. With two host families under the same roof, hosts can stand in for each other briefly, e.g. annual holidays.

In the Villa Family concept, the elderly people employ the hosts and can fire them, if not satisfied with the service, so they remain in control of their lives, in spite of their age and disability. The State pays them a disability allowance, which covers most of the salary of the Villa Family host, and a further sum for those on low income. It also sets the salary of the host and a limit to food and housing expenses. This means that the elderly are not financially dependent on their families and can chose freely whether or not to live in a Villa Family.

The job of host (normally a woman) is demanding, having to be available 24 hours and qualified in elderly care. Initially, hosts have three months training in an existing Villa Family. The *Department* (county council) registers the host's qualifications and suitability of her household and monitors the project. A key part of the job of the host is listening to and talking with the elderly and knowing how to enforce the family rules calmly, which, in turn, the elderly have to respect. However these jobs have proved attractive – they offer hosts the possibility of responsible work while still bringing up children, and the salary is attractive.

Essentially, the Villa Family is a public-private partnership. The firm which founded the concept, *Ages&Vie*, finds a private investor to fund the building of the house. (Small municipalities in France usually do not have the finance for such projects and are rather slow as project leaders – using private funds, a Villa Family can be built in under a year). The investor receives the rental income but is not otherwise involved in the project. *Ages&Vie* expects municipalities to donate the lease of a plot of land on which to build the Villa Family. In return, it guarantees that elderly people from the municipality have priority allocation. The free land allows affordable rents to be set, in line with social housing. The municipality also acts as a mediator. When a Villa Family is created, a trust is set up, including the Mayor, local doctor, host families, the elderly and their families. It only intervenes in case of a conflict and not in daily affairs. If an elderly person becomes severely ill and cannot remain in the Villa Family, the trust can agree a transfer to specialized care. It also has the role of keeping the family and elderly in touch with the community and local services.

Tackley Village Shop

The final case study looks at an initiative started and implemented by the community but involving service planning jointly with staff from a variety of public services. Tackley is a small village of just over 1000 people, socially and demographically mixed, not far from Oxford (UK) but rather remote, with infrequent train and bus services. Some years ago, two shops, the Post Office and a pub closed down in quick succession. Villagers came together to avoid the danger of the "heart of the village" being lost. A small market research exercise established what services currently missing in the village were most needed. The 'Tackley Top Ten' included: a Post Office, basic groceries, newspapers and magazines, fresh and home-made produce, pharmacy, lottery tickets, dry cleaning and an off licence. Not all of these were immediately practical. After extensive consultation over four years, the final proposal involved extension and upgrading of the village hall, to include a shop, Post Office, café, meeting room, IT access, a delivery point, and improved sport and leisure facilities.

The new facility opened in 2004. It involved total costs of £415,000, 20% raised from the village, and 80% externally from 14 organisations. The facility was popular from the start – in the first year, shop turnover was £160,000. Furthermore, it has had a major impact in the village, not only by providing a wider range of services but also providing a new central point, with a wide range of activities, and with new groups and activities quickly spinning out. Because all profits from activities go to the community, the project has become more sustainable. As one local people person said: *"I didn't believe it would work. Now I use the shop every day and am a volunteer once a week. Sorry for being a doubter."*

This success has been largely founded on self-organisation in the village. There are now over 50 volunteers who help to keep the facility running in a variety of ways, and many more people in the village who have provided free expertise of some kind. Throughout the development of the project many villagers helped in its design and in local fundraising. Furthermore, villagers have been keen to buy in the shop and participate in the other activities in the facility, on the principle 'use it or lose it'. While two people were initially the key 'drivers', there is now widespread ownership of the project in the village.

The initiative is essentially driven by the villagers themselves, both in terms of commissioning the services they most wanted, negotiating their design and delivery

with relevant organizations, and taking responsibility for delivery of most of these services themselves. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the external support received from a range of other bodies, both in planning and funding the services involved. These included parish, district and county councils, the Rural Community Council, the Post Office, the Regional Economic Development Agency, EU Leader Plus, DEFRA, the Countryside Agency, the Carnegie UK Trust and several other trusts and foundations.

Emerging lessons

Clearly, six case studies cannot provide conclusive evidence on all aspects of the role of co-production. However, these case studies do illustrate some of the most salient ways in which co-production is impacting on public services, from planning and design stages through to service delivery and evaluation. They also suggest some of the factors determining the relative importance of user as compared to community co-production.

Joshi and Moore (2003) suggest two kinds of organizational motivation for promoting co-production, both deriving from imperfections of the state - *governance drivers,* responding to declines in governance capacity locally or nationally, and *logistical drivers,* arising when some services cannot effectively be delivered because the environment is too complex or too variable or where the cost of interacting with large numbers of needy households is too great (e.g. in rural areas). (The term 'feasibility drivers' might be better than 'logistical drivers', to cover situations in which some personal services simply cannot be delivered at all without co-production – e.g. fitness training programmes for obese children). In terms of Figure 1, governance drivers are more likely to result in service users and communities playing a role in service planning, design and management, while logistical drivers are likely to result in users and communities playing a direct role in service delivery. This distinction also helps to pinpoint situations in which co-production is a genuine solution, and not just government attempting to 'dump' its difficult problems upon users and communities. In our case studies, participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre clearly exemplifies governance drivers, Caterham Community Trust, Sure Start, Villa Families and Tackley Village Shop are clearly motivated by logistical drivers, and both are important to the Beacons Partnership.

Where stakeholders exist beyond the direct user (e.g. people with altruistic motives, or directly affected by the user's welfare, or wishing to ensure a service remains available for their future use), community co-production is needed as well as user co-production. However, the ability of community members to engage in co-production is not simply a given - as Taylor (2003) points out, individual empowerment must be rooted in the basic economic, political and social rights that underpin citizenship. Where these are weakly developed, community involvement in co-production will be difficult – although the Porto Alegre case shows it is not impossible. In practice, of course, public sector organizations have rather different relationships with service users than with community groups. Specifically, leaders of community groups often play a mediating role between public organisations and individual co-producers, and thus acquire position power, which they may – or may not – use to amplify the views of individual co-producers within the service system. Due to the transactions costs involved, it may be inevitable that user co-production will appear more efficient to professionals when confined to the service delivery sphere, while co-production in service planning, design, commissioning and management may appear more attractive when routed through community representatives.

The case studies also illustrate a number of benefits from user and community co-production. First, the practical choices open to users are widened, by exploring mechanisms for active experience of services, rather than simply assuming that professionals should *perform* a service *upon* users (Normann, 1984). Secondly, co-production may transfer some power from professionals to users, as it means that both parties contribute resources and have legitimate voice. Moreover, co-production may mobilize community resources not otherwise available to deal with public issues. Examples include the word-of-mouth pressure by fellow citizens to encourage reluctant parents to participate in immunization campaigns (Moore, 1995) and the peer pressure of other residents to cooperate and comply with regulation (Alford, 2002) e.g. land use planning controls. Mayo and Moore (2002: 6) suggest that in this way co-production allows social capital to be more thoroughly exploited. The Tackley Village shop exemplifies this resource mobilization and intensive utilization.

Co-production means that both service users and professionals must develop mutual relationships in which both parties take risks – the service user has to trust professional advice and support, but the professional also has to be prepared to trust the decisions and behaviours of service users, and the communities in which they live, rather than dictate them. For example, classes are redesigned to give pupils a more central role in their own learning; patients are allowed to make key decisions about their desired lifestyles and the medical regimes appropriate to these (Hyde and Davies, 2004); and carers are advised on how best to provide support in ways which help both service users and carers (Prestoff, 2004 and the Villa Family case study). This new division of risk brings benefits for both parties, and it also forces the welfare state to admit that not all risks to service users can actually be eliminated.

Limitations

Co-production is not a panacea. Problems arising include conflicts arising from differences in the values of co-producers (Taylor, 2003), incompatible incentives to different co-producers, unclear divisions of roles, free-riders (Mayo and Moore, 2002), 'burn-out' of users or community members (Birchall and Simmons, 2004), and undermining the capacity of the 'third sector' to lobby for change (Ilcan and Basok, 2004). These problems have the potential to undermine the benefits of co-production, although governance mechanisms exist which can (at least partly) deal with most of them, as the above case studies showed.

The strongest concern about co-production is that it may potentially dilute public accountability, blurring boundaries between the roles of public, private and voluntary sectors. As Joshi and Moore (2003: 15**)** suggest: "Where co-production occurs, power, authority and control of resources are likely to be divided … between the state and groups of citizens in an interdependent and ambiguous fashion. … [Although] sharp, clear boundaries between public and private spheres are indicators and components of effective, accountable polities … some blurring of those boundaries may in some circumstances be the price of service delivery arrangements that actually work." Yet there is a paradox here - the very act of participation in governance can clarify lines of accountability and responsibility (Mayo and Moore, 2002). Indeed, Sullivan *et al.* (2004) found that parent representatives on one Sure Start initiative felt very strongly that it gave an opportunity for their views to be taken account of by service providers. Moreover, as co-production almost always means redistribution of power between stakeholders, the very process of moving to greater co-production is necessarily highly political and calls into question the

balance of representative democracy, participative democracy and professional expertise – as clearly shown in Porto Alegre (Baiocchi, 2003).

A second major concern is who participates in co-production and why should they have to do so? There is much evidence that command over community resources and social capital is disproportionately in the hands of better-off members of the community (Taylor, 2003). Nevertheless, a major survey in the UK by Birchall and Simmons (2004: 2) suggests that "in contrast to more general civic participation, … public service participation engages the less well off in society". This was also illustrated in the Porto Alegre case study.

The issue of why citizens should have to become co-producers is more complex. Mulgan (1991: 45) remarks: "It is hardly progressive to distribute responsibilities to the powerless" and Taylor (2003: 165) makes the point that: "Excluded communities should not have to 'participate' in order to have the same claim on service quality and provision as other members of society have." Goetz and Gaventa (2001) point out that communities do not always want to run their own services. Indeed, Alford (1998) discusses a number of 'clients' (e.g. prisoners and taxpayers) whose compliance with regulatory bodies is essential to their functioning but who largely think they receive 'bads' rather than 'goods' in return. Hyde and Davies (2004: 1424) also suggest that the "ritual of co-production may very well perpetuate regimes of control/containment for mental health patients that have little efficacy". Running counter to this analysis, however, Gustafson and Driver (2005) suggest that participation in Sure Start by parents in deprived areas had beneficial effects in helping them to exercise power over themselves. Such parents fit well into the category of 'everyday makers' identified by Bang (2005) – people who want to deal with common concerns at the 'small politics' level, concretely and personally, but who distrust political parties and the old grass roots organizations and do not wish to become 'expert activists' – they are determined to be publicly 'active' only in ways which help to improve, not interfere with, their everyday lives. This discussion highlights the need to explore the balance of the costs and benefits experienced by co-producing users and communities. This balance may mean that, for many users and citizens, co-production will not be appealing. Nevertheless, there is great power in the analysis by Joshi and Moore (2003) of how co-production may offer the only realistic hope of improved quality of life in many poor communities around the world.

Finally, each of above case studies evidenced initial professional resistance to co-production. Many professional groups assumed that gains in status by co-producing clients might be at their expense (Crawford *et al.*, 2004). They were often reluctant to hand over discretion to service users and their support networks, not trusting them to behave 'responsibly' (Barnes *et al.*, 1999). In many cases they also lacked the skills to work closely with users and communities (Schachter and Aliaga, 2003). There was clear evidence of 'provider-centric' behaviour in several case studies, often alongside a rhetoric of 'user orientation' (e.g. in the case of technical staff resisting the *OP* in Porto Alegre). Interestingly, however, the professionals groups eventually were prepared to work in partnership with other professions, other sectors and with local communities, accepting that their expertise was only one input into decision-making. Of course, this may partly have been due to a competitive environment, in which alternative sources of expertise might otherwise have been sought.

Co-production within complex adaptive systems

As stated earlier, co-production does not simply involve bilateral relationships - usually there are multiple relationships between public service clients and other stakeholders. In the health service, Hyde and Davies (2004: 1424) found a "… complex interplay between organizational design and staff-client interactions that co-produce care through a series of relationships". Once service clients and community activists become engaged in co-planning and co-delivery of services alongside professional staff, there are many possibilities for positive returns to scale (Arthur, 1996) and the networks created may behave as complex adaptive systems (Stacey, 1996). Relationship-building in multi-purpose, multi-agency, multi-level partnerships is likely to be relatively self-organised and less amenable to linear 'social engineering' interventions. These tendencies are illustrated in the case studies above.

The Caterham barracks case study provides the fullest example of how a complex adaptive system can develop in the context of community governance. The interactions between the private developer, local authority, local community and other public service providers were complex and their outcomes were difficult to predict. The private developer and council were, finally, satisfied with the outcomes, although very different from what they had first intended. The community achieved a much higher quality of (affordable) housing and public service provision than it had expected. A small number of local activists triggered the move to a community-oriented process, but relied on high participation by local residents to convince the developer and council that this approach would work. Here we see a key characteristic of complex adaptive systems: without a master plan for the area, developments were agreed piecemeal as desirable compromises between the players, and each of the actors believed that it was able to exert a significant beneficial influence on the outcomes.

The Caterham Barracks, Beacon Regeneration Partnership, Sure Start and Tackley Village Shop examples illustrate another lesson. The motivational effects of co-production can help to mobilize the resources of users, carers, and their communities. This may be more important in public service improvement than any 'efficiency' gains through purely technical or organizational reconfigurations. Currently there are no models of the service procurement process which are sufficiently dynamic to complement 'efficiency' arguments and the 'resource activation' effects which emerge from the above case studies.

This analysis of the complex and dynamic context of co-production emphasizes that public service planning and delivery are socially-constructed processes in which multiple stakeholders agree to commit resources in exchange for commitments from others, within (at least partially) self-organised systems for negotiating appropriate rules and norms (Bovaird, 2006). While we cannot predict the outcomes of these complex adaptive co-production processes, they clearly extend the 'opportunity space' of available solutions for social problems. Of course, as the case studies show, some stakeholders have conflicting values and differential levels of power, so outcomes of self-organising processes around co-production are not always socially desirable – there remains a rationale for reserve powers of state regulation. However, this does not mean that all co-production is necessarily exercised 'in the shadow of government' (Jessop, 2004) – as the case studies show, user and community co-producers sometimes drive the decisions of professional service providers, rather than *vice-versa*. However, more important is the interdependence

of decision-making in such systems – typically, no one actor has power to dominate outcomes, while all have significant influence.

Conclusion

The fragmentation of public sector organizations in recent decades has been widely remarked (Rhodes, 1997; Skelcher, 2005). However, this paper suggests that co-production by users and communities has provided an important integrating mechanism, which brings together a wide variety of stakeholders in the public domain, although it is often hidden, frequently ignored and usually underestimated in its potential to raise the effectiveness of public policy. The conceptual framework in this paper maps how co-production between public service professionals and service users, and their communities, can take place through the stages of service planning, design, commissioning, management, delivery, monitoring and evaluation. This framework suggests the need to reconceptualise service provision as a process of social construction, in which actors in self-organising systems negotiate rules, norms and institutional frameworks, rather than taking the 'rules of the game' as given.

The case studies presented here illustrate a variety of forms of co-production in local public services but cannot, of course, prove the existence of a trend. Moreover, they are still relatively recent, so that it may be premature to conclude that their benefit-cost balances are unambiguously positive. They are also specific to particular contexts, which may not be widely generalisable. Moreover, some of the governance implications of user and community co-production were seen to be problematic, and these issues were not always resolved in the case studies in ways which would be appropriate in other settings. This suggests that co-production is more likely to be acceptable where there is some flexibility in the templates which are socially and politically seen as appropriate for 'good governance'.

This raises two further concerns, about the political and practical feasibility of greater co-production. Firstly, there must be significant doubt about the willingness of politicians to contest the role of professionals, to place more trust in decisions by users and communities, and to rebut media criticism when things go wrong. Essentially, politicians would need to support users in co-constructing their own identity rather than accepting one constructed by 'experts'. Secondly, the practical feasibility of greater co-production cannot be gauged from a small set of case studies, even though those above cover a wide range of service sectors (e.g. housing, health, social care) and of planning, commissioning and delivery activities. Only further experimentation will show the practical scope for co-production in other contexts.

In spite of these limitations, the above case studies suggest strongly that traditional conceptions of professional service planning and delivery in the public domain are out-dated, whether the professional is working in a monolithic bureaucracy, an arms-length agency or an outsourced unit, and need to be revised to account for the potential of co-production by users and communities. What is needed is a new public service ethos or compact, in which a central role of professionals is to support, encourage and co-ordinate the co-production capabilities of service users, and the communities in which they live. Moreover, there is a need for a new type of public service professional – the 'co-production' development officer, who can help to overcome the reluctance of many professionals to share power with users and their communities and who can act internally in organizations (and partnerships) to broker new roles for co-production between traditional service professionals, service

managers and the political decision-makers who shape the strategic direction of the service system.

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