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Distinguishing Different Types of Coproduction: A Conceptual Analysis Based on the Classical Definitions

Abstract: *Coproduction of public services means that services are not only delivered by professional and managerial staff in public agencies but also coproduced by citizens and communities. Although recent research on this topic has advanced the debate considerably, there is still no consensus on precisely what coproduction means. This article argues that rather than trying to determine one encompassing definition of the concept, several different types of coproduction can be distinguished. Starting from the classical definitions of Elinor Ostrom and Roger Parks, the article draws on the literature on professionalism, volunteering, and public management to identify the distinctive nature of coproduction and identify basic dimensions on which a typology of coproduction can be constructed. Recognizing different types of coproduction more systematically is a critical step in making research on this phenomenon more comparable and more cumulative.*

Practitioner Points

- For some services, coproduction is an inherent feature that is not a matter of choice.
- Even when coproduction is inherent, there is variation in the extent to which citizens are invited to be actively involved.
- It is somewhat misleading to speak of coproduction as a single phenomenon; there are, in fact, many different types of coproduction.
- Types of coproduction can be distinguished based on the extent to which citizens are involved in the design of services that they individually receive and whether the coproduction concerns core services of the organization or complementary activities.
- Clearly differentiation of coproduction types helps improve our understanding of how design of a coproduction process is linked to specific outcomes and can support evidence-based design principles.

Coproduction of public services means that services are not only delivered by professional and managerial staff in public agencies but also coproduced by citizens and communities. This phenomenon has always existed, even before the term was coined, yet it is also a manifestation of an emerging governance paradigm in which collaboration and participation are more central (Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg 2014). Our knowledge of coproduction has progressed rapidly in recent years, following the initial conceptualization by Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom (1996) and later research by, among others, John Alford (2009, 2014), Tony Bovaird (2007), and Victor Pestoff (2006, 2009). This research has come from several disciplines, notably, economics, political science, public administration, and voluntary/third sector research.

In parallel with these academic debates, coproduction has increasingly come onto the agenda of policy makers as interest in citizen participation has soared.

Expectations are high. Coproduction, according to one report, could deliver “greater ability to get to the root of issues and develop tailored solutions; increased innovation and efficiency of services when they are built around the users’ needs; greater user satisfaction; creation of more cohesive communities with greater sense of local ownership; building confidence and capacity of individuals and communities; better use of public resources” (Trades Union Congress 2013, 7). It is regarded as a possible solution to the public sector’s decreased legitimacy and dwindling resources by accessing more of society’s resources. In addition, it is seen as part of a drive to reinvigorate voluntary participation and strengthen social cohesion in an increasingly fragmented and individualized society.

Initial research tried to position coproduction in relation to state and market delivery as a viable alternative. It was often based on a single or a small number of case studies and was focused mainly on

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conceptual and theoretical development. This early research was followed by empirical studies that examined aspects of coproduction in the practice of services such as health, education, waste recycling, security, and neighborhood safety. Although these studies deepened our empiric knowledge about coproduction, they had only limited potential for generalization. In recent years, a number of publications have examined multiple case studies and occasionally have employed new methods such as experiments (Jakobsen 2013; Jakobsen and Andersen 2013), surveys (Eijk and Steen 2014), and longitudinal studies (Cepiku and Giordano 2014; Fledderus 2014). This has resulted in a more diverse and robust evidence base.

However, there are also grounds to be less optimistic about the linearity of progress (Alford 2014; Verschuere, Brandsen, and Pestoff 2012). The cumulative effect of past research still remains relatively weak. Although scholars have inspired each other, they have not been able to link their findings systematically. Moreover, methods other than case studies are still rarely used (Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers 2014). Some, such as international comparative research, are almost nonexistent. We believe that this is attributable at least in part to conceptual confusion (Ewert and Evers 2012). As different studies use varying interpretations of coproduction under the same label, the comparability of findings comes into question. In addition, the research community studying coproduction has become more multidisciplinary over time, which has made the original formulations less suitable and, on some points, less clear. The aim of this article is to create more conceptual clarity, an important precondition for taking coproduction research forward.

First, we will conduct a meta-analysis of the classical definitions by Elinor Ostrom and Roger Parks, moving toward one definition that captures the essence of both and is less ambiguous in its key terms. Next, we will demonstrate that the ambiguities point to underlying variation, which can be used to identify different types of coproduction. We will then construct a basic typology of four types of coproduction. This typology opens up the possibility of empirically comparing and contrasting different types of coproduction and examining the dynamics that come with these different types of coproduction.

What Is (Not) Coproduction: The Classical Definitions

Most current publications on coproduction in public services refer to Ostrom's article or her joint publication with Parks. In the former, Ostrom defines coproduction as "the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not 'in' the same organization" (1996, 1073).

The widely used definition of Parks, who belonged to the same school of research, describes coproduction as "the mix of activities that both public service agents and citizens contribute to the provision of public services. The former are involved as professionals, or 'regular producers,' while 'citizen production' is based on voluntary efforts by individuals and groups to enhance the quality and/or quantity of the services they use" (Parks et al. 1981, as paraphrased in Pestoff 2006, 506).

Although still fairly broad, these definitions already imply a number of choices. To begin with, an explicit point is that coproduction is about collaboration between public agencies and citizens. Whether this refers to citizens individually (as in Ostrom's definition) or individually as well as collectively (as suggested by Parks) remains an open question, but the definition clearly does not refer to organizations. This excludes the research on coproduction that focuses on interorganizational collaboration, which Pestoff and Brandsen (2006) refer to as "co-management" or "co-governance." Indeed, the term "coproduction" with reference to interorganizational links appears to have originated in a different tradition of research, and the terminological similarity appears to be accidental, although some scholars have merged the different approaches and used coproduction as a more encompassing label (Bovaird and Loeffler 2015). We are not suggesting that these definitions are mistaken or irrelevant, but they are not part of the types of coproduction that we are discussing here.

Second, the definitions mention an active input by individual citizens in shaping the service that they personally receive. This distinguishes coproduction from passive clientelism or consumerism: it is not enough simply to receive or use a product. The citizen can be a direct recipient of a service, but not necessarily so. For instance, the participation of family members of children has been an often-studied topic.

Finally, the definitions refer to the production or provision of public services. The literature disagrees on whether this should include participation through advocacy (for example, on representative councils) or inputs by citizens that occur outside an organizational context (for example, citizens contributing to public safety by keeping an eye on their neighbors' houses).

We will use a relatively narrow interpretation here, for two reasons.

The first is that when we include advocacy or inputs outside an organization, coproduction becomes virtually synonymous with participation in a broader sense. The public value of such contributions by citizens is undeniable, but as an academic concept, coproduction has little value unless it is clearly demarcated. Another consideration is that the activities, experiences, and skills involved in advocacy

differ quite strongly from those involved in the direct production of a service. For instance, if mental health care clients consult with their therapists to jointly shape their personal treatment, this requires skills other than the representation of mental health care clients on the boards of treatment centers.

In other words, we do not include all inputs by citizens that may affect the overall design and delivery of a service, but rather focus on the direct input of citizens in the individual design and delivery of a service during the production phase. "Direct" here means that the input by a citizen affects the service individually provided to her or him. This need not be restricted to face-to-face contacts. Indeed, some interesting developments in coproduction are occurring through the Internet (for example, guided online self-treatment in mental health care). However, it does exclude advocacy (voice) or the shift to an alternative provider (exit), both of which rely on

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indirect mechanisms to affect the services provided to the individual in question and only at a future point.

Let us illustrate these choices using the example of housing (Brandsen and Helderma 2012):

- If individual tenants or groups of tenants work with the staff of the association, this is coproduction. If the association collaborates with a local council, it is not.
- If tenants actively collaborate in the maintenance or design of the housing, it is coproduction. If they only passively receive what they pay for, it is not.
- If tenants actively collaborate in the maintenance or design of their own housing, collectively or individually, it is coproduction. If they sit on a representative council, it is not.

Basic Elements of Coproduction

There remain a number of points on which the classical definitions are unclear. This is not so much a criticism of the original authors as a reflection of the progress of the debate. Ostrom and Parks came from a specific branch of economics, which informed how they framed their definitions. As scholars from more disciplines have become involved in the debate, some of the original formulations have become problematic and need to be revisited. This paves the way for a richer understanding of coproduction.

The terms in the definitions that are most problematic are the following:

- “Voluntary efforts” (Parks)
- “Professionals” (Parks)
- “In the same organization” (Ostrom)

We will discuss each of these in turn.

Voluntary Input

First, let us further explore the nature of “voluntary” efforts or input. This touches on the fundamental question of how coproduction must be positioned in relation to volunteering (see also Alford 2009). What is typical of voluntary input in a coproducing relationship compared with a non-coproducing one? Is it a subset of volunteering, or are there elements of coproduction that fall outside volunteering?

The International Labour Organization defines volunteering as “unpaid noncompulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organization or directly for others outside their own household.” That definition, devised for statistical purposes, contains a number of elements that are relevant to our discussion:

- It interprets “voluntary” as meaning that activities for which (substantial) financial compensation is given should be excluded.
- It defines “voluntary” as noncompulsory, that is, freely given or withheld. Earlier, we raised the possibility that it is sometimes compulsory.

The first element means that the labor market value of the work is compensated well below market rates or not at all. Empirically, there

is a gray area where some form of compensation is given—in which case one could argue it is regular production that is underpaid—but conceptually, the gap between the labor market value of activities and the monetary compensation of that value is relatively straightforward and easy to measure.

The noncompulsory element, as in freely given or withheld, implies a rational choice on the part of the citizen to coproduce or not. Yet some authors have pointed out that coproduction is an inherent part of the delivery of certain services and therefore not a question of choice. This is more than saying that coproduction is necessary for effective service delivery because producer and citizen inputs are interdependent; rather, that it is impossible to have a situation without coproduction. “From a service-dominant approach, there is no way to avoid the coproduction of public services because it is an inalienable element of such services. The question thus is not how to ‘add-in’ coproduction to public services but rather how to manage and work with its implications for effective public service delivery” (Osborne and Strokosch 2013, 46). This clearly demonstrates how the study of coproduction has become more multidisciplinary: the assumption of free, rational choice that is central to the economic perspective is challenged by insights from disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and the services management literature. In that sense, Parks’s “voluntary” contribution must be seen as too restrictive, if voluntary is read in the sense of a conscious choice. If services have inherent coproduction, then free will does not enter into it:

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to make use of the service is to coproduce. This distinction between chosen and non-chosen coproduction is a source of variation in processes of coproduction, which makes it a highly relevant variable in studying the phenomenon but not a suitable element for a basic definition.

Professionals

A second source of confusion in the classical definitions of coproduction concerns the role of the professional in coproduction. This is an understudied aspect of the process, as most attention usually is given to the role of citizens. In this respect, the difference between the definitions of Ostrom and Parks is telling. In the latter, the relationship with professionals is a key characteristic of coproduction, whereas in the former, they do not figure at all. What exactly do they contribute to the relationship, theoretically, and what is the nature of the relationship?

The literature tends to tell us about the role of the professional in coproduction by default: it stresses the more active role of the citizen or client, in contrast to a passive role under normal circumstances, in which professionals have a greater role. Yet this conceptualization may have remained stuck in preconceptions from the 1970s and 1980s, which must be questioned on the basis of recent literature on professionalism.

Usually in the coproduction literature, professionals are placed in the role of the losing party: through coproduction, citizens take something away (or back) from them (Joshi and Moore 2004). In turn, that puts them in the position of barrier or obstruction to coproduction. Indeed, conceptualized in this way, it is hard to see why any professional would willingly engage in coproduction.

This approach can be traced back to the historical origins of coproduction research in the 1970s, a time of fundamental criticism of the closed nature of professional communities and their paternalistic attitude and behavior toward clients (Illich, Zola, and McKnight 1977).

However, although professionalism has remained a contested concept, one can observe some major differences in the position of professionals since then (see Brante 2011; Saks 2012). To begin with, the organizing principles of professional occupations have changed. Traditionally, professional communities had a monopoly in controlling and organizing professional work. Yet professionals are now often staff members of organizations and, as such, subject to the processes of rationalization and formalization that have occurred in the public sector more widely (Clarke and Newman 1997; Freidson 2001; Tummers 2012). Jurisdictions, norms, and accountability processes are no longer dictated (only) by professional communities (Tuurnas, Stenvall, and Rannisto 2015). Like other elements of public services, the position of professionals, too, has been influenced by shifts in governance. Perry (2007) argues that it is conceivable that privatization has shifted influence from professionals to others, including political appointees, ministers, many who are not classically trained as clergy, and ideologues. This coincides with a cultural development that has led to a reduced status and legitimacy for professionals more generally (Crook 2008; Evetts 2003).

One implication for professionals is that their orientation has shifted away from the professional community and toward engagement with other actors and the formation of new networks and communities (Brandsen and Honingh 2013). Consequently, professionals have been challenged to find new ways to position themselves in collaborative networks and to debate the nature of professional standards and quality.

This can be illustrated with the example of doctors, often seen as the quintessential examples of professionals (Bourgeault, Benoit, and Hirschkorn 2009). Over the last 40 years, demands for patients to be more actively involved in the delivery of health care have grown strongly, as there has been more recognition of the interdependency of the relationship. The gap between professional medical competence and patient knowledge has narrowed as patients have been assisted in making informed choices (Hibbard 2003). In response, the scope of active contributions by patients to medical consultations has increased. This has led to a growing acceptance of the notion that patient and doctor can both contribute to the quality of care through a process of mutual participation based on shared responsibilities, complementing the knowledge of professionals with the knowledge of patients (Buetow 1998). Recent studies have shown that the number of patients wishing to participate in decision making has increased over the past three decades, now making up a majority (Chewning et al. 2012).

The world has changed, and the original conception of the professional in coproduction literature seems, although not irrelevant, at

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least one-sided. Modern-day interpretations of professionalism are theoretically closer to the process of coproduction than previously supposed and provide some relevant insights, especially on knowledge creation within professional–citizen relationships. It is increasingly recognized that the knowledge to solve problems is dispersed and that the process of defining the relevant professional knowledge is itself part of the interaction. It is not a question of one person having the supreme knowledge and applying it to the other. To

return to the example of medical practice, people tend to be experts on their own bodies, minds, and family members. Professionals should then be defined less in terms of traditional closed occupations and more in terms of a specific type of knowledge that they bring to the interaction with the citizen. This is also relevant to coproduction in that the professional and his or her standards cannot only be seen as an external, possibly distortive factor in relation to citizens' contributions. Rather, the process becomes an interactive one: in the course of coproduction, the citizen and the professional bring different types of knowledge—the one general knowledge of the core (primary) process of the organization and the production of service, and the other situational or local knowledge (cf. Scott 1998). The youth worker best knows the general principles of dealing with difficult children; parents best know their difficult child.

There are, in other words, elements of the rich literature on professionalism that could inspire research on coproduction. Having said that, the question is whether the refined conceptual machinery of the sociology of professions is really necessary for our purpose, when a simpler concept of the professional would in this case suffice. Also, if professionalism in this specific sense were a criterion for defining coproduction, then a significant number of cases that have previously been studied under the label of coproduction would drop out. This concerns, for instance, all studies on child care (Vamstad 2012) or safety (Meijer 2012). Child minders and police officers are professionals in the sense of paid employees, but their labor is rarely regarded as professional in the same sense as the practice of medicine.

Indeed, there is no logical or practical reason why the term “professionals” as used in Parks’s definition should be conflated with the theoretically laden concept of the professional as discussed in the literature on professionalism. This brings us to an alternative interpretation of the professional, a simpler one that interprets the professional as a member of the organization, inside, whereas the citizen is not—an understanding articulated by Elinor Ostrom in particular. It is less confusing to define the “regular producers” in Parks’s definition as “employees” rather than “professionals.” This is basically the mirror image of the statistical volunteer: one who does get a formal contract and gets paid.

Inside the Organization

Of course, the element of being “in the organization” is itself not watertight. This is again because the original meaning rested on a specific disciplinary understanding of the organization that is less evident in a multidisciplinary debate. In economic terms, an

organization is a solution to interdependence problems: it brings producers of different inputs within a single hierarchy, with monitoring that prevents them from withholding their inputs (Alchian and Demsetz 1972). The notion that coproducing citizens are outside the organization is based on an economic (or legal) understanding of what an organization is. This sets clear boundaries with reference to contracts and payments. But there are at least two major criticisms of such a perspective.

First, from a sociological perspective of the organization as a social entity with a collective purpose, the boundaries of the organization are more fluid, as coproducing citizens are part of the process of producing services, which is the central purpose of the organization. They have one foot inside, so to speak. The service operations and marketing literatures describe customer socialization processes that train consumers to engage in organizationally specific coproduction efforts (for example, how to bank electronically). These socialization processes are similar in many respects to those used by organizations to socialize employees (Oyedele and Simpson 2011).

A second major criticism is that citizens deliver many inputs that have an impact on the effectiveness of the core services of an organization, yet without ever coming inside an organizational context (Marschall 2004). If people peep through their curtains at night and call the police when they see signs of trouble, or if they request government services electronically, are they not effectively coproducing public services? (Clark, Brudney, and Jang 2013). That calls into question the sense of limiting coproduction to organizations at all. Citizens could coproduce safety without the aid of the police.

Although these are valid points, we nevertheless defend the narrower interpretation. Research on coproduction has incorporated many of these insights, and they are valuable. Yet there is a difference between recognizing phenomena as relevant context and accepting them as part of the production process (the unit of analysis). Expanding the concept to cover all these inputs would make it less distinct and would make systematic research much harder—whereas our starting point is that we should be heading in the opposite direction, given the state of the art in coproduction research. As Agarwal notes, “would my printing a boarding pass at an airline kiosk or using the Internet to buy an airline ticket make me a coproducer in the transportation business? I hardly think so. However, in public service, beginning in public safety in the 1970s, we have taken a rather expansive view of the term” (2013, 702).

With all its flaws, a strict definition is likely to be much more useful for the purpose of comparative research, demarcating the boundaries of coproduction relationships and clearly separating the two principal categories of actors mentioned in the classical definitions, even if it does not tell us much about the relationship itself.

A Revised Definition: Core Elements

We have identified a number of elements that must be seen as belonging to the core of the concept. These basic elements of coproduction include the following:

- Coproduction is a relationship between the employees of an organization and (groups of) individual citizens.

- It requires direct and active inputs from these citizens to the work of the organization.
- The professional is a paid employee of the organization, whereas the citizen receives compensation below market value or no compensation at all.

A revised definition would then read as follows: *Coproduction is a relationship between a paid employee of an organization and (groups of) individual citizens that requires a direct and active contribution from these citizens to the work of the organization.*

Variations in Coproduction

As we noted, some terms in the classical definitions potentially give rise to different interpretations. That does not make them well suited for a clear, unambiguous conceptual definition, but they do point the way toward differentiation in the understanding of coproduction. Accordingly, in addition to the basic elements of the definition, we distinguish two variable elements of coproduction that allow us to construct a typology: (1) the extent to which citizens design services delivered to them and (2) the proximity of coproduction to the primary process.

Our typology differs markedly from the one proposed by Brudney and England (1983) in their classic article, which uses the categories of individual, group, and collective coproduction. Although the difference in levels of analysis is certainly significant, we believe that a typology along other dimensions would be more useful. As we described earlier, coproduction research has changed, and this has led to the emergence of new fault lines. The categories of coproduction need to be reconsidered to fit this new, more multidisciplinary debate. Moreover, linking Brudney and England’s typology to the outcomes of coproduction (in their words, “the nature of the benefits received”; 1983, 62) has made it conceptually less useful for studying the effects of coproduction, which is one of the great challenges of coproduction for the coming time (see the conclusion). Therefore, we propose a typology based on how coproduction is linked to the design of the service, without assuming what it should or does achieve.

Voluntary Input: Inherent Coproduction and Choices in Service Design

One of the first sources of variation is the voluntary element introduced in Parks’s definition. In our revised definition, we reduced this to unpaid compensation for labor. If we explore other interpretations of what “voluntary” means, the analysis of coproduction becomes more complex and more interesting.

Earlier, we recognized that coproduction is, to some extent, inherent in a service and that in that sense, there may not have to be a conscious choice to engage in it. Yet even if coproduction is inherent, citizens can design services with different degrees of active input. As Porter notes,

The differences between these two uses of the concept are not trivial. In the first, co-production is associated with a specific good or service where inputs from both producer and consumer are combined . . . [and] in which if co-production is omitted the service will not be created. Inputs from the consumer producer are required to create a public service in

the first usage; but in the second usage, inputs from consumers may be contingently added to enhance qualities and quantities of a public service. (2012, 148–49)

The challenge, therefore, is to separate those elements that are inherent from those that are merely possible or desirable. Following this distinction, the question is whether a contribution to coproduction must always be voluntary (as mentioned in Parks’s definition) in the sense of freely given. If coproduction is an inherent part of the production relationship, one could imagine situations in which coproduction is not freely given (Fledderus, Brandsen, and Honingh 2014). By extension, while coproduction is to a large extent a subset of volunteering, it is not wholly so. It is possible to coerce citizens to coproduce, even if doing so is counterintuitive.¹

Consider the example of a high school class: students may not have chosen to be physically present, but they determine the nature of the lessons nonetheless, even if they freely choose to withhold their attention. In the words of Parks et al. (1981), there is always some level of interdependency, but to some extent, inputs are substitutable. Although learning is essential to an effective lesson (Porter 2012), it is possible to design lessons in any number of ways. Pupils can sit back and listen to a talk, with learning being a one-way street; the teacher can prepare questions and exercises to encourage interaction; or he or she can actively engage students in designing the lesson, jointly choosing what to address and how to shape the interaction.² Which is the best method from a didactic perspective is a question for the experts, but the point for coproduction research is that the lessons have both an inherent and a chosen element. One can have the former without the latter. This is a crucial conceptual distinction between different types of coproduction.

The example shows that in addition to the inherent technical qualities of a service that compel users to coproduce, there may be regulatory mechanisms to force it. Students under a certain age are obliged to take part in classes, and absence is sanctioned. Yet even within such a system of obligations, different approaches to coproduction will coexist, as teachers and students always have at least some leeway to shape the nature of their interaction. The variety in types of coproduction becomes even greater when we compare different public services, as the extent to which coproduction is inherent differs along with the type of activity (for instance, in healing a broken leg compared with supervising an undergraduate).

This implies that in cases such as teaching, the extent of coproduction is the result of a combination of technical characteristics, legal rules, and voluntary choices (which, to add to the complexity, may be shaped at the individual, group, and organizational level).

Summing up, the extent to which citizens are allowed to design the production of the service delivered to them is a dimension along which to distinguish different types.

Core and Complementary Tasks

Earlier, we noted (1) that coproduction concerns the joint production of public services and (2) that coproduction concerns the interaction between citizens and employees of the organization in the production of services. Yet there is an ambiguity in this notion of a cross-boundary relationship, specifically, when it comes to the level of analysis. When citizens “contribute to the provision of public services” (Parks) or provide “inputs used to produce a good or service” (Ostrom), should that be read as applying to the individual or to the organizational level? It is possible that the coproduction in question does not directly produce public services, but it does contribute inputs to an organization that supports the production process indirectly. This is more than a theoretical possibility, as various activities described in the coproduction literature arguably do not relate directly to the organization’s core services, even if they undoubtedly contribute to them. When university alumni give guest lectures as part of regular courses, they directly contribute to the teaching process. When they speak at publicity events for the university’s programs, this ultimately contributes to the goals of the organization, but it is not a direct contribution to teaching. It does involve a joint process with the organization’s employees, but it is not a part of the core (primary) process, which makes it coproduction of a different sort.

Of course, the question of what is the core process of an organization is open to different interpretations, which may shift over time. It cannot be determined a priori and should be clearly defined on a case-by-case basis.

In other words, there is variation in the extent to which coproduction involves tasks that are part of the organization’s core services. Accordingly, the proximity to core services will become a second dimension for distinguishing different types of coproduction.

Varieties of Coproduction

Summing up, in addition to basic elements of coproduction, we have now identified the following variable elements:

- The extent to which citizens are involved, not only in the implementation but also in the design of professionally produced services
- The proximity of the tasks that citizens perform to the core services of the organization

The combination of these dimensions leads to four potential types of coproduction, outlined in table 1.³

Complementary coproduction in service design and implementation occurs when citizens are engaged in coproduction, but in tasks that are complementary to the core process rather than part of it. This happens, for instance, when parents help plan and organize extracurricular activities such as school excursions or design and plant a school garden. These activities are part of the professional

Table 1. Types of Coproduction

	Implementation	Design and Implementation
Complementary	Complementary coproduction in implementation	Complementary coproduction in service design and implementation
Noncomplementary	Coproduction in the implementation of core services	Coproduction in the design and implementation of core services

organization's mission, but they do not directly involve citizens in the core activities of teaching.

Complementary coproduction in implementation occurs when citizens are actively engaged in the implementation, but not the design, of a complementary task. Examples are students assisting the university in organizing welcome days and parents helping prepare school plays. These activities are undoubtedly necessary and important, but they do not directly contribute to the core activity of teaching, and the participants usually do not have the opportunity to design or redesign the events.

Coproduction in the design and implementation of core services is a situation in which citizens are directly involved in producing core services of an organization and directly involved in both the design and implementation of the individual service provided to them. Examples are postgraduate training modules in which entrants, together with instructors, define their own learning objectives and learning activities; participative building projects in which (future) tenants of a housing cooperative work with architects and builders in the design, construction, and maintenance of their homes; and patients working with dietitians to modify their lifestyle.

Coproduction in the implementation of core services occurs when citizens are actively engaged in the implementation, but not the design, of an individual service that is at the core of the organization. For instance, as discussed earlier, coproduction may be inherent in the production process ("inherent" meaning that active engagement by the client is essential to its successful implementation), but it is institutionally designed so that citizens do not have direct influence on how it is designed in their individual case. Examples are children's education in which students follow strictly defined lessons, yet their input is still crucial to effective learning, and enforced services, such as mandatory employment reintegration. Alternatively, coproduction may not be inherent, but deliberately included as part of the design.

Public policies can encourage coproduction in different ways, but usually they aim to give citizens more control over the design of the services they personally receive, as organizational resistance is likely to be highest and top-down intervention most needed. Legislation to protect patients' autonomy and provide for informed consent to medical interventions is an example of this. Also, policies are more likely to be directed at core services, as these are most likely to trigger interventions and enhance service quality. Examples of policies meant to encourage complementary coproduction include efforts to give parents a greater role in after-school programs. Depending on the extent to which they can shape the after-school activities, this involves design and/or implementation.

Conclusion

Coproduction is a topic invested with high hopes, both academically and practically. Although our knowledge has increased in recent years, progress has been hampered by conceptual fuzziness and a lack of comparability between existing data on coproduction.

We have tried to address the confusion by revisiting the classical definitions of coproduction and using them to clarify actual and potential sources of confusion.

In the course of the analysis, we arrived at a distinction between two types of variables. The first are the core variables of the concept: what should be covered by the term coproduction? This led to the revised definition of coproduction as a relationship between a paid employee of an organization and (groups of) individual citizens that requires a direct and active contribution from these citizens to the activities of the organization. In addition, we identified two variables along which different types of coproduction can be distinguished: the extent to which citizens design services delivered to them and the proximity of coproduction to the primary process. Although, of course, the conceptual discussion is far from over, making the distinctions between different types more explicit is a necessary first step toward a firmer evidence base.

In adopting an organization-centered perspective, there is the risk of focusing too strongly on institutionalized types of coproduction that involve structured and regular inputs by citizens. More informal, incidental inputs by citizens may receive less attention, as may new initiatives to coproduce. These can be important in reshaping an organization's work and providing more tailor-made services. However, putting up a garden fence does not necessarily mean we can no longer look beyond the garden—it depends on what kind of fence we choose to build. Given a sufficiently open research approach, the significance of other types of activities for an organization's work will still show up in an analysis of coproduction. A clearer conceptual framework will help us better understand how such informal and incidental activities relate to more structured types of coproduction.

The advantage of the new definition over the original formulations is that it maintains the essence of the original concept while removing ambiguous terms that cause confusion in a research context that, over time, has become more multidisciplinary. At the same time, by recognizing that we must depart from a single usage of the term "coproduction" and start using conceptually more distinct varieties, it becomes easier to address blanks in our knowledge.

Public policies can encourage coproduction in different ways, but usually they aim to give citizens more control over the design of the services they personally receive.

These blanks are still many. In some areas, past work has given us a good sense of which variables matter. This concerns, for instance, the motives that drive citizens to engage in coproduction (Alford 2009; Eijk and Steen 2015; Fledderus and Honingh 2015) or the characteristics of citizens who coproduce (Parrado et al. 2013). Unfortunately, we have only incidental or circumstantial evidence

when it comes to the coproduction process and its consequences, on which systematic proof of these benefits still eludes us. Addressing this gap will require two steps in future coproduction research: (1) it will need to be more precise with respect to the types of coproduction that are compared, and (2) it will need to become methodologically more diverse and test effects more directly. Especially when studying the interaction between citizens and professionals in the coproduction process, the intraorganizational consequences of coproducing (for instance, how working methods need to be adjusted to ensure successful coproduction) and the effects of government efforts

to encourage coproduction, it is of great importance to depart from a single usage of the term “coproduction.”

To illustrate this need for a more diversified and structured comparative approach, let us review recent attempts to measure the distributional effects of coproduction. Are there biases with respect to which citizens engage in coproduction? Previous evidence suggests that coproduction replicates the biases found for other types of participation and therefore strengthens existing disparities. “Although studies may vary on specifics, most scholars agree that disadvantaged populations such as racial minorities, those with less formal education, and those in lower socioeconomic circumstances tend to participate less in coproduction activities, which will diminish the benefits they can derive from the model” (Clark, Brudney, and Jang 2013, 690). Recent cross-country comparative research seems to confirm this (Voorberg et al. 2014). Yet other recent studies suggest that the links with demographic characteristics (perhaps with the exception of age) are weak and that there is no significant socioeconomic difference between those who are very active in coproduction and those who are not (Alford and Yates 2015; Bovaird and Loeffler 2015), whereas yet others conclude that there is some variation, but this is largely geographically determined (Clark, Brudney, and Jang 2013). A problem in comparing these studies is that they use different methods: qualitative case studies, surveys, and analysis of big data sets, respectively. A bigger problem is that they seem to concern different types of coproduction: coproduction in the design and implementation of core services, (mostly) complementary coproduction in implementation, and coproduction in the implementation of core services, respectively. Perhaps the studies actually are in disagreement, but an alternative interpretation is that they show how distributional effects change along with the nature of activities. One could hypothesize, for instance, that distributional biases increase as coproduction gives citizens a more substantial role and the contribution becomes more demanding in terms of time and skills. However, it will take a more directly comparative study to determine effects of coproduction with certainty. To achieve this, different categories of coproduction should be incorporated and clearly distinguished in an international survey or an experimental design. Existing evidence on motivations and personal characteristics could then be related more precisely to the nature of the activities.

Using a clearer definition and a typology of coproduction as a benchmark will contribute to the comparability of different studies on this phenomenon, ultimately allowing a better understanding of the process and its outcomes. Recognizing variety is the key to greater coherence and consistency.

Notes

1. This is a point on which we disagree with Brudney and England (1983), who argue that compliance runs counter to the meaning of coproduction. Although that may be intuitively correct, we do not understand the theoretical reason for excluding the possibility (or for restricting coproduction to “positive” contributions).
2. Here the distinction between design and advocacy may become blurred. In the former, users engage in the design of services delivered to themselves, whereas in the latter, they represent other users and discuss design at a more abstract level, without reference to individual cases. Especially when coproduction occurs at the level of groups, the difference will be gradual rather than absolute. Also, as Brudney and England (1983) note, organized advocacy may act as an institutional condition that encourages and enables coproduction.

3. Theoretically, it would be possible to have design of the individual service without coproduction in actual delivery, but because this is very unlikely to occur empirically, we have not included it in our typology.

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