5 Public administration into the wild: grappling with co-production and social innovation

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Public administration's long march to new governance concepts

Public administration research has taken small steps towards the edge of its comfort zone. Traditionally, public administration research followed a top-down planning logic. Public administration developed evidence-based policies to implement externally given political preferences. New Public Management did not fundamentally change this. It did alter perceptions of the public sector to a more decentred, pluralist one, but in the end government remained the puppet master. Its plans might fail, be resisted, but they were still the government's plans, its targets. Network-based approaches continued the interest in a more pluralist approach to public administration and introduced a more fluid, contingent perception of outcomes: rather than one party setting targets, there was the mingling of several interests and positions that led to an indeterminate outcome. But even here, the government often retained a privileged position, as initiator or arbiter of collaboration. This was especially as collaboration was often mingled with contracting-out or subsidization. It was also a world that public administration still recognized: one of predominantly organizational interests reaching a joint conclusion. Citizens and voluntary organizations, if they ever figured at all, were weaker parties that were consulted largely for intrinsic reasons, or perhaps to prevent resistance at the implementation stage of policies. But the latest trend has even challenged this.

New approaches not only challenge the government's direction, but even place it in the back seat, or in the boot of the car. Implementation comes to take primacy over planning, as key decisions are taken during the delivery of services. Significant changes are initiated, not by governments, but by a shapeless and multifarious movement that cannot be easily captured or channelled. The changes are not necessarily instrumental to government policy, but part of a movement to counter it. Policy, politics, up and down: everything becomes one. Concepts such as scaling and experimentation attempt to re-establish partial control: government will let others run amok for a while, but will again take charge after a proper selection. However, ultimately, they cannot hide the fundamental transition taking place in perceptions of the state's role. In this chapter, we discuss two concepts that are

associated with this development: co-production and social innovation (accepting that there are others that we lack the space to discuss).

They bring public administration research into new, wilder territory. Its concepts were not developed with this in mind and there is a serious risk that it will become less relevant, or confined to a shrinking, internally focused part of the public sector. As we will argue, only a more interdisciplinary approach can prevent this. Public administration research will have to collaborate with other disciplines to face the mounting challenge of a society unleashed.

Reasons for the shift

There are several reasons for the shift. Governments are confronted with a financial context that pressures to save costs, increase efficiency, downsize its workforce, and pursue market approaches. At the same time citizens demand high quality services and responsiveness. Especially at the local level, government's role as a pivotal actor in community building, regaining citizens' trust, and sustaining quality of life is reassessed (Warner 2010). Next to austerity, wicked issues such as demographic changes, global warming, migration and dislocation have pervasive implications for the public sector, as they typically comprise multiple subsets of problems that traverse policy domains, cutting across authority structures within and between government organizations (Weber and Khademian 2008). The increasingly elderly population in Western societies, as just one example, demands changes in strategies, practices, resources, instruments and institutions in health and social care, labour and retirement arrangements, urban planning, building regulations, and so on (Pollitt 2017).

Acknowledging the limits to efficiency gains and the extent to which public organizations can address these societal challenges on their own or through traditional policy responses, governments increasingly engage in innovative and collaborative processes of public service delivery. In these, they seek to enhance problem-solving capacity through collaboration with other government actors, businesses and non-profit organizations. Additionally, citizens are being rediscovered as important actors who work together with regular service producers to co-create and co-produce services in diverse policy fields such as health and social care, education, poverty reduction, safety, or climate measures. Such collaborations enable governments not only to work across boundaries, they also enhance innovation as they mobilize knowledge, ideas, experiences, resources and entrepreneurship of different stakeholders. Collaboration advances new and more nuanced understandings of a policy problem; creates new visions for society and problem-solving strategies; and enables and motivates relevant audiences to test, adapt, implement and diffuse these policy ideas and services (Sørensen and Waldorff 2014). Moreover, new ideas initiated by citizens alongside professionals enable bottom-up innovation that is complementary to – although it is feared, potentially also substituting – government policies and services.

However, there is also a less instrumental aspect about the changes. This is more than a government tinkering with new tools that work better. It is also a development driven by a more individualized, better educated and more assertive citizenry. It is spurred on by increasing discontent, inequality and division in society. It is supported by new technologies that make it easier to collect information and self-organize (Lember 2018). Initiatives are not necessarily invited, nor are they always harmonious. To many, the state is a powerful actor that is out there, to be reckoned with, but one whose presence is neither indispensable nor particularly welcome. In debates on social innovation especially, there is friction between those that stress collaboration with the state and those that regard it as a reaction to the state.

A currently popular approach is to organize policy trials, in which different methods are tested within a confined space and evaluated. Successful methods are then diffused towards the public sector at large. Likewise, successful innovations emerging bottom-up can be 'scaled' by governments and their proxies, systematizing them and spreading them across a larger population. These can be regarded as genuine attempts to reinvent the state's approach to reform and reconciling bottom-up innovation with the more traditional characteristics of statehood. They can also be seen as efforts to create a revisionist history, in which all initiatives ultimately come back to government; as attempts to colonize society at a deeper level; or as pathetic attempts to regain control that is slipping away. It is not for us to judge, but it is important to acknowledge this less comfortable interpretation of contemporary public administration.

Concepts that capture the new trends

We will here discuss two concepts that capture the trend, co-production and social innovation. The point of our description is not to privilege these two particular concepts – but to use them to exemplify key issues and tensions within this new trend in public administration research.

Co-production is the active involvement of (groups of) individual citizens next to professionals in the initiation, planning, design, delivery/implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the public services they receive. In contrast to classical citizen participation, it focuses on the output side of the policy cycle: the involvement of (groups of) individual citizens in the provision of public services, rather than in policymaking. A related term is co-creation, a broader concept that is often used to encompass almost any type of participation by citizens. There have been attempts to define the concept more clearly in relation to co-production (Brandsen and Honingh 2016; Voorberg et al. 2015). Here, for practical reasons, we will stick to the older term, but there is considerable overlap in the research focus and findings.

There are various interpretations of co-production under the same label, which has limited the comparability of research findings. Elinor Ostrom (1996) defined it as 'the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are

contributed by individuals who are not "in" the same organization'. As the research community studying co-production has over time become more multidisciplinary – in itself a good thing – the confusion has only increased. Ostrom's economically inspired definition contrasts with subsequent definitions that came from within policy and public administration studies, such as Bovaird's (2007) definition. There were also differences over scope. In response to what they regarded as overly broad interpretations of co-production, Brandsen and Honingh (2016) narrowed it down to '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'. Despite these differences, the discussions of co-production researchers are actually beginning to show a measure of convergence. While there are disagreements over scope and expectations, there are neither radical breaks with past research, nor fundamental ruptures within the community of scholars. It is partly because of this that co-production research, despite a perspective that is in some ways anomalous to traditional public administration, has gradually grown into the broader public administration research community.

Social innovation is a much more contested and fuzzier term. In its broadest sense it is used to denote anything new that is not primarily technological. Jenson and Harrison have referred to it as a 'quasi-concept', a 'hybrid, making use of empirical analysis and thereby benefiting from the legitimising aura of the scientific method, but simultaneously characterised by an indeterminate quality that makes it adaptable to a variety of situations and flexible enough to follow the twists and turns of policy, that everyday politics sometimes make necessary' (European Commission 2013, p. 16). It achieved the status of a buzzword in national and European policy circles during the 2010s. US President Obama established no less than two offices for social innovation.

Academically, however, there have been wildly varying interpretations of what social innovation entails (for a recent overview, see Moulaert et al. 2017). Some posit simply that it must constitute a new approach to a particular kind of problem. The Stanford Center for Social Innovation, for example, describes it as 'the process of inventing, securing support for, and implementing novel solutions to social needs and problems' (Phillis et al. 2008, p. 34). This is a conveniently flexible interpretation, yet one could argue that, according to this definition, there is little that does not qualify as a social innovation. More sophisticated, but still optimistic interpretations see it as a means to 'raise the hope and expectations of progress towards something "better" (a more socially sustainable/democratic/effective society)' (Brandsen et al. 2016) and that builds on 'fundamentally changing the relationships, positions and rules between the involved stakeholders, through an open process of participation, exchange and collaboration with relevant stakeholders' (Voorberg et al. 2015). But others have defined it as 'the satisfaction of alienated human needs through the transformation of social relations: transformations which "improve" the governance systems that guide and regulate the allocation of goods and services meant to satisfy those needs, and which establish new governance structures and organizations (discussion forums, political decision-making systems, etc.)'

(Moulaert 2010; Moulaert et al. 2013). This implies not only that an innovation must be radical (transformative), but also that it changes the power structure within the system where it is introduced. It is a type of definition that sees the origin of innovations in social movements and civil society. So the disagreement over what social innovation is goes beyond simply scope: it concerns its very purpose (and, by implication, the role of the state). Only one slice of social innovation research has attached itself to public administration research, whereas a major part of social innovation is on a completely different track.

Key issues in current research

Neither concept can be considered mainstream in public administration, but both have gained traction in recent years. Governments' increased focus on organizing collaboration with citizens and picking up bottom-up initiated citizens' projects has gone hand in hand with an expansion of public administration research into citizen co-production.

Both areas of research are traditionally characterized by single case studies, but in both the methods applied for gathering and analysing empirical evidence have expanded – including cross-national comparative studies building on qualitative and quantitative data (e.g. Bovaird et al. 2016), Q-method studies (e.g. Van Eijk and Steen 2014; Barbera et al. 2016; Van Eijk et al. 2017), experiments (e.g. Jakobsen 2013, Voorberg et al. 2018) and longitudinal studies (e.g. Fledderus 2015).

Assessment of the state of co-production research (e.g. Verschuere et al. 2012; Voorberg et al. 2015; Brandsen et al. 2018a: pp. 5–7) identifies efforts to make research more systematic and rigorous. The concept of public service co-production emerged first in the 1970s. Nobel Prize winner Elinor Ostrom (1976) showed that actual service delivery in municipalities took place by both professional providers and service users. Early explorations of co-production in public services (e.g. Brudney and England 1983; Pestoff 1998; Alford 2002) built further on this work by Ostrom. Yet, in the 1980s and 1990s, co-production largely moved to the background, as the New Public Management doctrine put emphasis on the role of citizens as consumers, and on separate interests of producers and consumers rather than on the value of collaboration. A number of developments led to a renewed interest in active engagement of citizens in the production of public services. These included the call to strengthen local democracy, growing awareness of the usefulness of users' knowledge and skills, new technologies increasing potential to personalize services, financial concerns, and crisis of faith in market-oriented models of service delivery (Needham and Carr 2009).

With respect to public administration research, the renewed interest in co-production and social innovation ties in with developments such as the New Public Governance paradigm stressing the need for collaboration between public, private and non-profit organizations (Osborne 2010), research addressing the

multi-dimensionality of accountability in governance arrangements (Hupe and Hill 2007) or literature on public value stating that citizens are to assess the extent to which public value is attained (Moore 2013). Since the beginning of the 21st century, the public administration research community studying such topics has become much more coherent, with the emergence of stable platforms for research (e.g. through the European Group of Public Administration, International Institute of Administrative Sciences, Interdisciplinary Social Innovation Research Conference and International Research Society for Public Management networks); the publication of journal special issues (e.g. *Public Management Review*, 2006, 2014, 2016; *Voluntas*, 2012; *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 2016) and edited volumes (e.g. Pestoff and Brandsen 2008; Pestoff et al. 2012; Fugini et al. 2016; Brandsen et al. 2018); and the efforts to move beyond conceptual confusion on the nature of co-production (e.g. Nabatchi et al. 2017; Bracci et al. 2016; Brandsen and Honingh 2016) and social innovation (Moulaert et al. 2017).

The state of the art in current research by public administration and management scholars can be classified in terms of their focus, which roughly speaking covers processes ('how does it work') and effects ('benefits and risks').

Of these, by far the most research has focused on the internal dynamics of the phenomena. In co-production research, a lot of scholarly attention has been directed to the implications of co-production for government's and citizens' roles and relations. The more active role of *service users* in designing and delivering public services, as implied by co-production, impacts on the notion of citizenship. Recent research has focused on the motives and capability of citizens to engage in co-production (e.g. Alford 2002; Van Eijk and Steen 2014; Barbera et al. 2016; Van Eijk et al. 2017). As Pestoff (2018) explains, public service users can be seen as passive beneficiaries, consumers with some limited choice, active co-producers and even providers of services carrying full responsibility for their own service provision. Yet, this distinction points at the need for more in-depth consideration of rights and responsibilities of citizen co-producers in future research, and, despite some recent research, also for a better and more comprehensive understanding about motivations of citizens to co-produce. A wide variety of *professionals* are involved in co-production, including healthcare workers, police officers, community development workers, teachers, and so on. Successful co-production presumes openness on the side of policymakers and professionals to work more closely together with, rather than for, service users. Yet despite the recognition that these professionals are crucial actors in making co-production effective and durable (e.g. Ostrom 1996; Vamstad 2012; Vanleene et al. 2017; Tuurnas 2016), empirical research into professionals' willingness and skills for co-producing public services, and their responsibilities as coordinators, facilitators and enablers, is still rare (cf. Steen and Tuurnas 2018). In addition to the working conditions of regular producers and co-producers, crucial to understanding effective co-production is insight into the *organizational and institutional conditions* under which they take place; in co-production, for instance, the level of organizational flexibility needed from government organizations (Schlappa 2012) or the new technologies

that facilitate participatory practices (Meijer 2012; Lember 2018); in social innovation, the role of different urban regimes (Cattacin and Zimmer 2016) and welfare systems (Evers and Brandsen 2016). Moving beyond the micro- (individual) and meso- (organizational) level, understanding these phenomena also entails consideration of factors at macro-level related to the changing roles and functioning of government, market, civil society, as exemplified in Pestoff's (2018) discussion on public administration regimes.

There is also some research on effects, though it is far more limited and mostly theoretical. Current research suggests a broad range of *potential benefits*. These benefits relate to the potential to access more of society's resources and therefore to result in better service quality, to bring about services that are more responsive to users' needs. Also, both co-production and social innovation have been suggested as means to provide a solution to the public sector's decreased legitimacy, by strengthening the democratic quality of the public sector through empowerment of citizens and service users, ensuring equal access to services and greater inclusiveness of vulnerable groups especially, and strengthening social cohesion in an increasingly individualized society (e.g. Vanleene et al. 2017; Jo and Nabatchi 2018). In short, expectations are high, even if effects often are assumed rather than actually evidenced by empirical research.

However, increasingly concerns are raised about the *potential dark sides of co-production and social innovation* (e.g. Williams et al. 2016; Steen et al. 2018; Larsson and Brandsen 2016). Major concerns relate to exclusion of citizens who are affected by the co-production processes, yet lack social or cultural capital to fully participate, and the extent to which benefits of co-production are evenly and fairly distributed. Issues such as a blurring of government's and citizens' roles might have a much 'darker' side to consider when it comes to co-producing safety and respecting state's monopoly on the use of physical force (Williams et al. 2016), compared to citizens' initiatives of small-scale urban renewal projects (e.g. Tuurnas 2016). Another relevant question is whether user engagement and calling upon the responsibilities of citizens is a strategy to cut public service delivery, and a cover for minimizing responsibilities of the state. Other critical questions relate to ensuring supervision of, and accountability for, quality of services in a context of co-production. When professionals were solely in charge of offering services to supposedly passive consumers, the situation was relatively straightforward. But who can users hold accountable for the services if they (partly) design and produce these services themselves? Finally, high expectations and self-selection by co-producers may risk co-production efforts destructing rather than increasing citizens' trust in government (Fledderus 2015). In this respect, Brandsen et al. (2018b: p. 300) point at the importance of defining expectations, also taking into account differences in the role played by, and thus also the behaviour and expectations of, citizens and professionals in the co-production process.

The Tower of Babel: the need for a more interdisciplinary approach

Even if academic interest in these trends has grown rapidly in recent years, the evidence basis in public administration research is still quite limited. Both co-production and social innovation research have suffered from conceptual confusion and methodological weaknesses. However, given the nature of both concepts, it is certain that there is already considerable evidence out there. Beyond public administration research, many disciplines have studied similar phenomena, albeit with different terms. As Verschuere et al. (2012) indicate: 'The concept of co-production is at the crossroads between several academic disciplines, which makes it an increasingly targeted object of study by many scholars.' For example, health-care sciences provide attention to patient and family engagement (Carman et al. 2013) or communication science scholars analyse the impact of clinician-patient communication on health outcomes (Street et al. 2009). Likewise, social innovation research can find much inspiration in urban studies, research on social movements and civil society studies. For instance, where tenants have organized to protest against the demolition of their neighbourhood, this cuts across several fields of research.

Unfortunately, such fields all too often remain disconnected from each other. Insights derived from other disciplines are not regularly picked up in public administration research (and vice versa). What is straightforward from one discipline's perspective is not so from another. And, to confuse matters even more, distinct disciplines adhere to separate vocabularies with various terms denoting similar practices, co-production returning as community involvement, participation or engagement, social innovation as urban movements, citizens' initiatives or co-creation. What we – as public administration scholars – call co-production or social innovation is often called something else in other disciplines, although we are actually talking about the same phenomena.

Moreover, in addition to not always using the same conceptual vocabulary, cumulative research across research fields is hindered by different communication outlets (e.g. disciplinary journals). Therefore, a major challenge for future public administration research is to cross disciplinary borders. As public administration treads into uncharted territories, it will find peoples already living there – and it would do well to learn from them.

Our call for more interdisciplinary research does not imply that currently there is a total lack of looking across disciplinary boundaries. Public administration researchers increasingly recognize that relying only on public administration paradigms and theories will not be sufficient to understand the potential and challenges of co-production. In topics such as co-production and social innovation, at the crossroads of disciplines, insights from disciplines such as business administration, political science, sociology and voluntary sector studies already infuse public administration scholars' studies of citizens' participation in designing and delivering public services.

An example is how research into the co-production of public services has successfully built upon insights from *service management* and picked up the idea that, in order to fully understand public service delivery processes, public services need to be understood as 'services' rather than being forced into an inappropriate product-dominant logic (Osborne and Strokosch 2013). Co-production involves services with varying degrees of tangibility, ranging from the creation of a public garden, to more abstract services like 'health' or 'safety'. A service-dominant approach helps to understand service delivery as a process, for which a different production logic applies than for manufactured products. A service-dominant logic recognizes the inbuilt role of service users as co-producers of public services, going beyond a role merely as purchasers or consumers. Co-production is seen as an inherent characteristic of public service delivery as many public services '. . . simply cannot function without client co-production' (Alford 2002: p. 33). Yet, the latter also evidences that, even if co-production is seen as a response to current challenges government is faced with, at the same time, co-production is already long existing. Many public services inherently build on close interaction between professionals and service users, such as between teachers and students, healthcare providers and patients, or community workers and neighbourhood inhabitants. Yet, public administration research can include still more insights from service management or related research communities such as *marketing research*. Their study of involvement of customers or 'customer engagement behaviors' (Van Doorn et al. 2010), for example, is closely related to what is called co-production in the public administration research literature. Insights in developing a more effective and efficient management of customer engagement behaviour in social profit organizations (Verleye et al. 2014) especially could provide useful inputs for public administration research in understanding citizens' willingness and capacities to co-produce.

A second field of study that can contribute to a better understanding of co-production and social innovation is that of *voluntary sector studies*. Co-production differs from classical volunteering in that it engages citizens to work alongside professionals and co-deliver services they themselves (or close relatives or friends) use, thus not solely for the benefit of others (Verschuere et al. 2012); nonetheless, it is based on voluntary efforts by individuals and groups (Parks et al. 1981 in Verschuere et al. 2012). Likewise, though social innovation is not exclusively based on voluntary efforts and though it differs from many of the classical voluntary activities related to leisure or charity, it is to a large extent founded on the voluntary efforts of individuals and groups. There is much to learn from voluntary studies on why people engage, or do not, and how they come together. The gap between research on the voluntary sector and public administration research has recently been decreasing, but the two research fields are still, to a great extent, going their own way. This is illustrated by the very small overlap only between members of public administration or public management networks and scholars active in networks studying the volunteering sector, such as the International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTSR) or the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), even if these networks explicitly define themselves as inter- or multidisciplinary in character. In an effort to bridge research on co-production of

public services and volunteering, Benjamin and Brudney (2018) find that especially when it comes to understanding citizens' motivations for co-production, capacity for co-production, and organizational conditions supporting co-production, voluntary sector studies can inform research on co-production. Securing the voluntary participation of citizens is a principal concern of non-profit organizations. Not surprisingly, then, studying motivations of individuals to volunteer holds a long tradition in voluntary sector studies. In turn, public administration scholars (e.g. Alford 2002; Van Eijk and Steen 2014; Barbera et al. 2016; Van Eijk et al. 2017) are testing whether alongside salience and ease of the service at hand (cf. Pestoff 2012), motivations that help explain volunteering – such as altruistic motivations, feelings of obligation and self-centred motivations – can also help understand citizens' willingness to take on a greater responsibility in providing services they directly benefit from themselves. Furthermore, Benjamin and Brudney (2018) suggest that voluntary organizations might function as 'laboratories' not only of service outcomes but also of citizenship development. Yet, they also wonder if government funding, regulation and evaluation of voluntary/non-profit organizations affects co-production processes, since such extrinsic interest by government in co-production mediated through these organizations might distract or even displace them from their presumably intrinsic interest in and commitment to client participation.

Another example of the need for interdisciplinarity in order to fully understand the challenges that governments and societal actors face in co-producing public services relates to the use of new technologies to support citizen–government interactions. Digitization of society provides opportunities for a transformative change in the functioning of government. Information technology-enabled interaction with citizens and service users provides opportunities for government to enhance its capacity for co-designing and co-delivering new services. Increasingly, public administration scholars seek to understand the impact of information and communication technology on collaboration between government and citizens (e.g. Meijer 2012; Lember 2018). Indeed, much social innovation is seen as related to technological innovation. In order, however, to fully understand government's potential, but also the practical difficulties of building upon the widespread use of social media and apps on mobile devices, or the increased capacity to process and analyse (big) data, public administration research needs to step beyond what Homburg (2018) indicates as an 'interdisciplinary negligence' (Homburg 2018: p. 348) in which both the public administration and the *information systems discipline* largely neglect each other's writings. An increased understanding of technological changes can boost public administration scholars' understanding of opportunities for technological innovations while, vice versa, public administration research can point out the non-technical barriers that governments and citizens are confronted with in seizing technological opportunities. Sadly, interest in technologies in public administration research remains limited and engineers have even less interest in the insights from public administration research.

Authors such as Szescilo (2018) incorporate a *legal perspective* into the study of co-production. The legal determination of the functions of different government tiers

impact the potential of citizens and users to be actively involved in the provision of public services. Constitutional law may provide the scope and a legal liability for, but also set legal limitations for co-production. Accountability for services co-produced, for example, needs consideration not only from an organizational perspective, seeking to understand how changed interactions affect accountability ties between professionals and citizens (e.g. Tuurnas et al. 2015), but also from a legal perspective.

Finally, interdisciplinary efforts are exemplified in the study of co-production as a means to manage common pool resources such as water or energy (e.g. Ranzato and Moretto 2018). Acknowledging that an integrated understanding of both the institutional (e.g. social, economic and governance conditions) and the physical context (e.g. environmental, technical and spatial conditions) is fundamental for understanding the potential social, economic and environmental effects coming from co-production, this line of work especially calls attention to the need to build bridges across social sciences and humanities, on the one hand, and *natural sciences* on the other hand.

Closer bonds between academia and practice

Besides the need to bring the state of the art in research further by crossing disciplinary boundaries, the research community could also benefit by reaching out more to practice than is currently the case; which implies treating practice not only as an empirical research object, but as a partner in the development of future policy-relevant research avenues. A co-production of research topics and research designs between academics and experts by experience, so to say.

Additional experimenting with new policies and practices seems to be justified, as only in this way will we achieve a better understanding of the pathways to making them effective (Brandsen et al. 2018). As noted earlier, policy trials can potentially be a way of reconciling traditional approaches to public administration with the new realities. However, when experimenting, expectations should be managed carefully. Many are the policymakers who took these to be laboratory experiments that could be administratively 'contained'. A realistic risk is that in designing co-production projects too high hopes are set: better outcomes, outputs, quality of services, efficiency, empowerment and inclusion of people, and so forth. Attempts to achieve all these set hopes might fail dramatically. Likewise, efforts to scale may founder upon differences between administrative regimes and domains. Social innovations tend to be complex, as they deal with difficult social problems and difficult people.

Similarly, how co-production functions in practice will vary from one place to another. Co-production practices are shaped not only in different countries, but also in different policy domains, entailing a distinct characterization of the citizen as service user and co-producer, for example, as a patient or relative, as a student or

parent, as a concerned inhabitant and so on. This makes it even harder to draw any encompassing conclusions from specific cases. To what extent do research insights about conditions for or effects of parents' engagement in schools (e.g. Honingh et al. 2018), for example, uphold when discussing (mandatory) collaboration of clients in activation programmes for the long-term unemployed (e.g. Fledderus 2015)? Or also, seeing the international diversity of cases, studies into citizens co-producing access to clean water and building capacity to demand for and co-deliver quality education in rural areas in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Mangai 2017; Wenene et al. 2016), experiences of community healthcare workers in North Ethiopia (e.g. Cepiku and Giordano 2014), engagement of both new immigrants and concerned community members in immigrant services in Hong Kong (e.g. Tu 2018) or collaboration between volunteers and professionals in the legally regulated restorative justice services in Finland (e.g. Tuurnas et al. 2015) provide much valued, yet hardly comparable insights.

It is therefore rare for a certain approach to be copied from one place to another unchanged. If so, this usually concerns simple schemes that can be implemented more or less independently from regulations or policies and which require only limited collaboration and few resources. As things get more complicated, however, this no longer works. Innovations will in some way need to be adapted to the context into which they are adopted. For instance, what is originally a project to keep young people socially active may elsewhere be 'sold' under the discourse of unemployment or crime prevention. The shape of a collaborative arrangement may have to be altered, for example, because responsibilities for a certain policy area are distributed differently over governments at different levels, or because services are provided privately in the country and publicly in the other. The approach will need to be reshaped. The adaptation may concern the structure of an innovation, for example its formal organizational shape, but also the regulation that supports it, the instruments through which it is implemented, or the discourse with which it is described and justified. Innovations are therefore usually hybrids of different ideas and inspirations. It is important in this process of adaptation to bring in all relevant stakeholders and to consider the incentives to keep them on board.

Conclusion

New developments have fundamentally challenged the role of the state and the tenets of public administration research. The research of recent years has provided us with a mire of evidence, but it has also painfully shown up the gaps in our knowledge and our lack of critical assessment of these developments. Having identified promising streams of research and remaining knowledge gaps, our main suggestion for the scientific agenda for the years to come is to move further on the route of interdisciplinary collaboration and learning. This not only requires us to identify connections across disciplines, but also to develop (insofar as feasible) a common conceptual vocabulary, or at least a shared understanding of what each can bring to the solution of real problems. Cross-fertilization across disciplines will only happen

if we disseminate research findings across disciplinary boundaries to scholars and practitioners, and thus also learn to persuade others of the contribution that public administration research focus may provide. More intense co-production between academics and practitioners (who are experts by experience) in designing policy-relevant research agendas is also a necessary step to further our knowledge on the engagement and self-organization of citizens. None of this will be easy. Arguably, it would be easier to stick to the traditional topics and approaches of our discipline. But to remain true to the original mission of public administration research, to bring evidence to the solution of society's problems, we will have to move out and beyond.

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