

Co — Perspectives,
forms of practices
and contexts
production and
creation



Guest Editors

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Different understandings of co-production and co-creation

Co-production / co-creation is one of the biggest trends of our times, particularly in public organizational contexts. The term and the phenomenon require a foundational participatory ethos, which entails internal, as well as external, organizational actors (such as users, clients, citizens, and employees) becoming increasingly involved in co-productive or co-creative processes. These co-creative / co-productive processes can be related to the development of new welfare solutions or the development of new services and products in general, as well as to matters of internal organization.

There is agreement that the terms co-production and co-creation (in Danish: *Samskabelse*) can be used interchangeably (Ulrich 2016; Torfing, Sørensen, and Røiseland 2016, Krogstrup 2017; Tortzen 2019). The concept can be seen as an umbrella concept, and is associated with a series of related terms, such as: democratic involvement, co-management, co-learning, co-evaluation, co-service, co-governance, co-design, social innovation, user-driven innovation, network management, and active citizenship. It spans a wide range of methodological approaches derived from various fields of re-

search and practice. The choice of term(s) and method(s) often depends on the context in which the co-production/co-creation is expected to take place, on which ideologies and discourses are being drawn on, and on what the purposes of the co-productive/co-creative processes are.

The field is therefore diverse and multidisciplinary, and carries great potential for the development of new knowledge, as well as experimentation with new forms of practice and production together with new ways of learning. Moreover, the field is complex and exciting, as it covers many different normative positions and opinions. Thus, there is no common definition or consensus of what co-production/co-creation means and signifies in practice. Co-productive/co-creative practices therefore also occur in many forms in varying contexts; they can take place at different organizational levels and involve varying degrees of co-production/co-creation.

Co-production/co-creation as part of the new forms of cooperation between private and public actors

We see that the new and increased focus on co-production/co-creation can mainly be justified because it has become an essential part of the new guidelines for public governance and the development of welfare solutions in the Nordic countries, as well as in a number of other European countries. This trend is increasingly demanding closer partnerships and more collaboration between stakeholder groups that were previously separated more sharply.

Several researchers have pointed out that these new collaborative constellations are part of the efforts to find new solutions to complex problems and challenges – sometimes termed “wicked problems” (Ansell & Torfing 2014; Andersen et al. 2017). As examples of wicked problems, Andersen et al. (2017) point to climate change, gang-related crime, anxiety among young people, and traffic challenges in and around major cities. In trying to solve complex societal challenges, network-based collaboration is considered as an opportunity to work with many different perspectives, different stakeholder groups and different forms of knowledge.

Some scholars argue that co-production/co-creation, as a new welfare strategy and technology, is a necessity for the survival of the public sector as a result of increasing economic pressure. Part of this argument is that the participation of the public sector in co-

production/co-creation initiatives should no longer be considered optional (Parrado et al. 2013). Likewise, proponents of co-production/co-creation argue that there is the potential for public and private actors to learn from each other and mutually benefit from developing new networks for collaboration (Durose, Justice, and Skelcher 2013).

Other, more critical voices, argue that, behind all the fine buzzwords, there is (still) a neoliberal trend that puts cost savings and privatization in the foreground, with welfare services that were previously provided by professionals now being handed over to volunteers and other civil society actors (Van Houdt, Suvarierol, and Schinkel 2011). Thus, it is important to examine the “dark sides” of co-creation, such as whether co-creation, contrary to all intentions, can lead to increased social inequalities (Steen, Brandsen, and Verschuere 2018; Williams et al. 2020).

The participatory ethos has, and will most likely continue to have, far-reaching consequences for public and private organizations as well as for citizens in general. Co-production/co-creation as an approach and working method for the public sector has a profound effect on how, now and in the future, we organize and develop our societies, communities, and organizational cultures, and the new participatory and administrative positions that follow in its wake. Co-creation involves new forms of relationship and more fluid boundaries between public, private, and voluntary actors, which in turn calls for new forms of co-operation.

Clashes between diverse paradigms and rationales in the public sector

Co-production/co-creation will inevitably have an impact on the ways in which civil servants (and, in particular, frontline workers) are expected to act and carry out their work. A number of researchers have pointed out that today’s public employees must navigate a mix of co-existing management paradigms that often collide and create tensions and dilemmas (Majgaard 2014; Torfing, Sørensen, and Røiseland 2016; Andersen et al. 2017). The various management paradigms are often in competition with each other, and the accompanying sets of rules and declarations of intent create both opportunities and limitations for employees, managers, and citizens. These various management paradigms are referred to by

terms such as Old Public Administration (the Weberian bureaucracy/traditional public administration), New Public Management (NPM), New Public Governance (NPG), Collaborative Governance, etc. Likewise, the goal of increased network management and collaboration in cross-cutting networks gives rise to a number of new challenges. Therefore, we consider that it is important to address the phenomenon in its diversity and complexity and also to examine its consequences.

A relatively new research field, or old wine in new bottles?

Agger and Tortzen (2015) point out that co-production/co-creation is a relatively new area of research. At the same time, it can be argued that it is an old phenomenon. The participatory ethos is a long and well-established aspect within participatory research approaches, for instance in action research, nexus analysis, design thinking, and others.

Also, in cross-aesthetic art forms – for instance “devised theater” as practiced among a number of group theaters – co-creation has been consistently practiced for decades; the word “co-creation” has not necessarily been used explicitly, but, rather, terms such as collective creation and collaborative creativity have been taken into use. During recent decades, we have also seen an increasing tendency towards co-creation within media production, where it is often referred to as co-production. On the one hand, this may be viewed as an opportunity to create works that more easily find a broader, international audience. On the other hand, it may be evaluated as a necessity at a time of precipitous increases in production costs and when so-called “shared risk” is a way to secure safe investment and, in practice, to obtain more than one’s money’s worth, since additional players invest in the co-creation (Hammett-Jamart, Mitric, and Redvall 2018). In media production, co-creation is usually an implied part of the production process in, for example, writers’ rooms and among film crews, but co-creation as a method does not only relate to professional media production. From a wider perspective, co-creation and collective production processes are part of many digital phenomena within the Web 2.0 concept.

The question therefore is what we can learn from past experience and the rich research literature that has already dealt extensively with such participatory issues. In this themed issue, we first and

foremost wish to invite contributions from across disciplines and practices and thereby create insights into the diversity and width of the field of co-production/co-creation. In addition, we hope to broaden the perspectives on the phenomenon, as well as shedding light on, and discussing, practice-oriented approaches, to better understand what co-production/co-creation can be, how it is carried out and performed, and its impacts. The co-production/co-creation wave as a whole raises a wide range of questions and sub-themes on which we would like to invite contributions for critical discussion in this themed issue, such as:

- Different understandings of, and approaches to, co-creation and co-production
- Concrete suggestions for how we can practice and theorize about co-creation and co-production
- Discussion of the implications and ethical issues associated with co-creation and co-production in practice
- Tensions and power in co-creative and co-productive processes
- Co-creation, co-production and gender equality issues (e.g., implications and consequences of the involvement of relatives as volunteers)
- Co-creation and co-production when using aesthetically-based and creative approaches

In this respect, we also invite critical reflections on the unintended effects and consequences of co-creation and co-production initiatives that can occur in practice, for example, tendencies that can be described as “counter-productive” (Kleinhans 2017), or artificial trials without real and serious involvement of the participants in the co-creative processes. When can we speak of genuine co-creation and co-production in which participants’ voices are heard and considered? When is it, perhaps, more a matter of monological participation (Barge & Little 2002; Bager 2015) or pseudo-involvement, where participants are involved, at most, in qualifying or supporting decisions and strategies that have already been fixed? It is also important to discuss whether and how co-creational practices potentially include or exclude certain voices or certain types of participant (see also Phillips 2011; Phillips et al. 2012; Bager 2015; Oles-

en, Phillips, and Johansen 2018). This gives rise to the following questions (and many more):

- What kind of new positions and interactions can arise from co-creative and co-productive processes?
- What kind of consequences do these new co-creative positions and forms of collaboration have for the private and public sector, employees, leaders, citizens, users, and relatives, and for our way of organizing society?
- Which co-productive/co-creative inquiries and approaches can fit different contexts, situations, and target groups?
- What kind of co-productive/co-creative inquiries and approaches can contribute to increased social justice – regarding both process and outcome?

Other ideas for contributions with a focus on co-creation and co-production

Another, and hitherto underexplored, aspect is the vital importance of digitalization for the field of co-creation and co-production. We invite contributions that examine the potential of integrating co-creation/co-production with digital media and platforms and that discuss the opportunities, limitations, and ethical aspects of these developments.

In relation to the development of welfare solutions, it is obvious that the potential of citizen involvement (in co-creation and co-production) should be taken into consideration in relation, for instance, to the global green transition discourse and the development of new and more sustainable initiatives at global, national, regional, and municipal levels. One question could center on how we can succeed in working with co-creation and co-production in relation to the UN's sustainability goals.

In addition, contributions that reflect co-creative approaches involving art and culture are also of interest for this themed issue, such as analyses of processes of co-creation and co-production within theater and film production, digital art production, etc.

Furthermore, we invite contributions on dialogically-based approaches to management that build on processes of co-creation and co-production. The questions could, among other things, be related to:

- What kind of new challenges do co-creative practices pose in relation to management or leadership?
- Which forms of management or leadership can support a co-creative practice, and in which contexts?
- How can successful co-creative leadership be developed?

The purpose of this themed issue of *Academic Quarter* is thus to help illuminate and discuss co-creation and co-production as a vibrant and multifaceted research area, and also to present advanced suggestions about how to work with ethical and critical perspectives on the phenomenon of co-creation and co-production.

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