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Understanding Co-Production as a Policy Tool: Integrating New Public Governance and Comparative Policy Theory

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ABSTRACT *Co-production is an area of policy making in many countries which has received little treatment in the policy studies literature. It has been studied in the field of public administration and public management however, albeit mainly in the case of education-related activities in Scandinavian countries. Using the cases of co-production of support services for the disabled and the elderly in the little-studied programs found in Croatia and Thailand as illustrative examples, this article examines how the concept of co-production can be viewed as an example of the use of a new policy tool, bringing together the insights of both policy and management theory in order to understand its origins and evolution. The article highlights the importance of viewing co-production using an integrated lens if studies of co-production are to advance.*

Keywords: co-production; public management; policy instruments; comparative public policy; case study method

Introduction: What Is Co-Production and How Do We Analyze It?

At the core of much New Public Governance (NPG) thinking about contemporary government is the idea and phenomenon of “co-production”. Co-production is intimately linked with the idea of “self-service” provision (Mizrahi 2012) or the use of combinations

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of state and non-state actors to produce or inform public service delivery (Alford 1998; Osborne 2006; Pestoff 2006; Voorberg et al. 2014).

Although the use of both state and societal actors in the provision of services has a very long history in practice, such as the filing of tax information by citizens in government revenue-raising efforts and the use of volunteer nurses and doctors in health care activities such as the Red Cross or the Victoria Order of Nurses, the idea of co-production as a subject of academic interest can be traced back to Ostrom and Parks' (1973) study of citizen–state interactions in the Chicago police force. Her theory of polycentric governance situates this type of activity in between societally centered efforts such as family services and state-centered ones such as welfare payments (Ostrom 1996).

The idea of enhancing co-production of public services in order to both gain legitimacy and save money generated continued interest in the subject among public administration scholars in the 1970s and 1980s (Parks et al. 1981; Brandsen and Pestoff 2006). It experienced a revival after the turn of the millennium as government budget deficits bloomed and alternative mechanisms of social service delivery, especially, were sought (Ostrom 1996; Alford 2002; Brandsen and Pestoff 2006; Prentice 2006; Bovaird 2007; Pestoff and Brandsen 2010; Pestoff et al. 2012; Whitaker 1980; Parks et al. 1981).

Originally, co-production was narrowly defined as the “involvement of citizens, clients, consumers, volunteers and/or community organizations in producing public services” in addition to consuming or otherwise benefiting from them (Alford 1998, p. 128). In early studies of activities such as parent–teacher interactions in childhood education in Scandinavia, this involvement in co-production activity was typically voluntary, meaning it existed as a positive externality, reducing production and delivery costs of public services. This made it very attractive to governments seeking cost reductions in public service delivery, especially ones favorable to notions of “social enterprise” and enhanced community participation as an end or good in itself, promoting enhanced social capital and cohesion (Parks et al. 1981; Salamon 1981, 1987).

Although co-production emerged and developed as a concept that emphasized citizens' engagement in policy delivery, however, its meaning has evolved in recent years to include both individuals (i.e. citizens and quasi-professionals) and organizations (citizen groups, associations, non-profit organizations) collaborating with government agencies in both the design and management of services as well as their delivery (Alford 1998; Poocharoen and Ting 2015). Including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in policy design can act as an effective facilitator of participation by individual citizens while co-managerial reliance on trust and shared responsibility is expected to discourage competitiveness and foster knowledge sharing among participating organizations (Pestoff and Brandsen 2010; Poocharoen and Ting 2015).

Co-Production and Policy Studies: Building on Public Management Insights

The growing complexity of modern societies, the emergence of pro-market ideologies in government and politics, recurring fiscal crises and a host of other factors have in recent decades placed public management concerns high on government agendas (Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Aucoin 1995; Lane 2000). Waves of reform have focused on the creation of new policy tools and the development of new arrangements of older instruments as means of improving administrative practices and policy outcomes (O'Flynn 2007; Howlett 2011). Studies in these fields over the last three decades have demonstrated how implementation

practices have shifted between traditional preferences for hierarchical or government-based governance practices, towards a New Public Management (NPM)-inspired market-based orientation and finally, in the present era, towards New Public Governance civil society reforms and choices.

These movements in management and administrative practices and theories have induced shifts in patterns of tool choices across many sectors and countries. These changes have affected both procedural policy tools that are designed mainly to affect or alter managerial aspects of policy processes (Howlett et al. 2009) as well as policy tools intended to directly affect the nature, types, quantities and distribution of the goods and services provided in society (Salamon 2002). While in the case of procedural tools two reform waves induced rather comprehensive changes from bureaucracy-based toward soft steering network management logics, transformation of substantive instruments preferences has mainly affected the use of organization-based subtypes and expanded the range of policy tools to include private entities, third sector organizations and citizens (see Table 1).

New Public Management thinking placed the focus of public administration and policy making on monitoring market-based service delivery performance and serving clients while importing businesslike ideas and techniques into the functioning of public bureaucracy. Envisioning effective, efficient and better-quality public service, management reform in this era emphasized managerial reliance on competitive contracts and the specialization (disaggregation), decentralization and privatization of service provision (Kettl 2000; Lane 2000; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011).¹

In recent years, continual problems with both state- and market-delivered services have generated a substantial amount of academic inquiry around the use of new or alternative policy tools in the articulation of New Public Governance efforts to move beyond the 1990–2000 emphasis on marketization of public services (Kettl 2000; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011).²

Table 1. Policy tools and waves of public management reforms

	Traditional public administration	New Public Management	New Public Governance
To whom	Subjects	Customers	Citizens
Main goal	Legitimacy and compliance	More effective, efficient and better-quality public service	More legitimate, inclusive, flexible and effective government
Characteristic	Bureaucratic	Post-bureaucratic, competitive styles	Post-competitive, collaborative styles
Dominant substantive policy tool	Direct provision by government	Contract out to private entities	Co-production <i>with</i> non-governmental actors and citizens
Key procedural management and policy tool	Rules and input-based management tools	Benchmarking and other output-based tools	Public participation and trust as key management tool
Accountability	Hierarchies	Market-driven	Multifaceted
Role of government	Rowing	Steering	Facilitating

Source: By authors with some adaptation from O'Flynn (2007).

Many of these NPG efforts involve co-production in some way. These new ways of thinking involve an extension of public administration studies not only into the realms of public and private management but also into that of public policy studies. But the insights and approaches of each in helping to better understand and design co-production arrangements are poorly integrated. While the enhanced use of market-based tools promoted and advocated in NPM thinking involved policy tools which were reasonably well known and understood, those associated with NPG are much less so.

While in some situations, like policing and tax collection, the policy and managerial implications of promoting co-produced activities are few, when efforts are made on a larger scale to work with organizations and actors to deliver a wide range of government services, including such large-scale activities as elderly care, the management and policy challenges increase dramatically as careful planning and design activities are required. Simply allowing enough “space” outside traditional hierarchical state service delivery relationships for new co-productive arrangements to flourish is inadequate to ensure these will in fact be delivered, or delivered in a satisfactory fashion.

This is where existing studies of co-production can benefit from the insights of policy studies into policy tool use and implementation. This latter field has a rich tradition of studies of policy instrument use in policy implementation (Hood 1986; Salamon 1989, 2002; Hood and Margetts 2007; Howlett 2011; Hill and Hupe 2014) which is germane to both NPM and NPG innovations; and studying co-production as a policy tool, on a par with other tools such as regulation or public enterprises, is very helpful in aiding understanding of how it can be used to organize and deliver public services and when, and how, it cannot (Hood 1986, 2007; Salamon 1989, 2002; Howlett 2011).

This article explores these linkages between disciplines and approaches. First, it provides a multi-level understanding of policy tools that conceives of co-production not only as a managerial but also as a substantive policy tool and provides analyses of two cases of co-production of social services in Croatia and Thailand in order to illustrate the issues involved in successful and unsuccessful co-production program design. The cases confirm two aspects of the use of co-production as a policy tool which program designers must take into account. First, at the macro-level, the cases show that governance arrangements, actors and their interaction matter for co-production success, highlighting the need to combine policy and public management thinking in order to account for these outcomes.

Second, at the meso- and micro-level, the cases show how mixed instruments can be used to implement co-produced services and how the strengths and weaknesses of different mixes are also an important component of program and policy design and implementation (Howlett 2000, 2004).

Analyzing Co-Production as a Policy Tool

Policy tools are techniques of governance which, one way or another, involve the utilization of state authority or its conscious limitation in the provision of goods and services in society (Dahl and Lindblom 1953; Edelman 1964; Kirschen et al. 1964; Anderson 1977). Co-production can be thought of and empirically traced as both a managerial device that enriches provision of public or private services, and as a set of policy tools. These can offset or replace the use of other means such as public organizations (i.e. the state) or private contracts (i.e. the market) in good and service delivery through enhancing and facilitating citizen-based provision of goods and services.

Public policy theory has a lot to say about the nature of policy tools and their selection and operation which equally applies to co-production. Like any other policy, one utilizing co-production is composed of several elements, distinguishing between abstract or theoretical/conceptual goals, specific program content or objectives and operational settings that affect which public tools are selected for these purposes (Howlett and Cashore 2007, 2009).

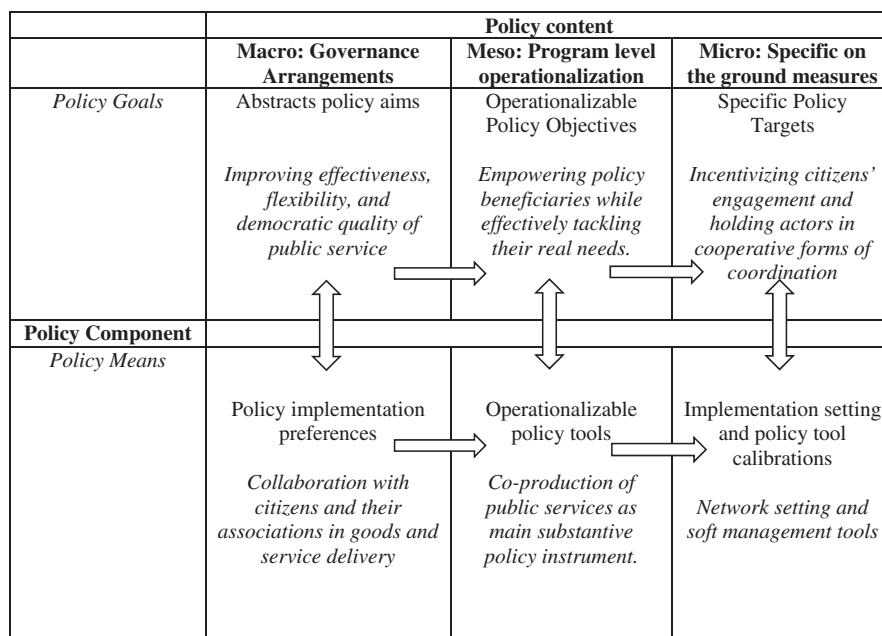
While abstract policy goals for instrument selection function as a more or less stable macro-level framework for policy design, policy studies have also indicated that the operationalization and calibration of specific tools on a meso- and micro-level is tied to variations in program objectives and the nature of the specific targets they are expected to address (Howlett 2009). These variations are heavily influenced by structured modes of interaction between major policy actors (Grin and Graaf 1996; Spicker 2005), their interests, ideas and resources, as well as perceptions of what is feasible to accomplish in policy-making interactions and relationships (Bressers and O'Toole 1998, 2005).

Understanding who the actors are in any tool use or decision-making context is thus a critical component of instrument analysis and understanding how they act and react is a critical aspect of policy tool selection and policy design including that of co-production.. Much attention has been paid in policy studies, for example, to how policy tool choices and behavior are affected by the nature of the institutional structures and governance arrangements or rules within which actors operate, as these define the conditions of the rationality of actors (Ostrom 1996; Scharpf 2000) and affect the types of resources and ideas they possess.³

It is in understanding the nature, origins and operation of these longer-term preferences that public management studies can be very informative and usefully augment the findings of policy studies into the general nature of policy tools and tool choices. From such a perspective, co-production can be seen as a substantive tool utilized by governments demonstrating a preference for the use of collaborative forms of governance to implement policy goals (see Figure 1). These preferences can be motivated internally (i.e. programmatic decision by political executive) or externally (i.e. reaction to pressure from citizens) but in each case they follow NPG's vision of enhanced effectiveness, flexibility and democratic quality of public service.

At the meso-level this involves the selection and development of co-productive services guided with the objectives of empowering users and successfully addressing their needs. Achievement of these objectives is only possible if individual or groups of users act as subjects instead objects of policy intervention. At the level of specific on-the-ground measures this implies that collaborative delivery of services and goods is to a large extent dependent on the successful furtherance of collaborative interactions between governmental and social actors, be they individual citizens or their associations.

As Table 1 showed, co-production was not a major facet of NPM thinking or practice. However, this has changed with the development of NPG thinking (Osborne 2010; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). New Public Governance theory and practice has focused managerial attention on activities such as collaborative or "network" governance (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004; Ansell and Gash 2008), and emphasized "democratic governance" (Sorensen and Torfing 2005; Bevir 2007; Levi-Faur 2012) or much less hierarchical and market-driven co-production, co-design and co-creation (Koliba et al. 2010; Voorberg et al. 2015). By including a wider range of social actors in both policy making and implementation, NPG aimed to reduce the reliance of governments on market-based tools and make

Figure 1. Co-production in a model of nested policy instrument design

Source: Adapted from Howlett (2009).

government activities more legitimate, flexible and effective but without returning to more traditional bureaucratic practices and routines (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011).

Viewed in policy instrument terms, NPG can be seen to involve an effort to replace hierarchies and markets as central coordination institutions with tools built around networks of multiple actors engaged in “co-production” (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011).

But exactly which tools can attain those goals and in what manner is unclear in NPG theory. Policy theory, however, can help clarify what is needed if these goals are to be attained. For example, many of the tools required to attain NPG goals are procedural in nature and designed to promote more bottom-up involvement in all aspects of policy making, from agenda setting to policy evaluation (Rhodes 1994; Howlett 2000; Milward and Provan 2000). Advisory committees, public participation, stakeholder consultations and other similar procedural instruments, for example, can be used to create more space for the engagement of social actors in different stages of the policy process, and indeed much public management thinking has treated co-production in this fashion. Incentivizing citizen’s engagement and holding actors in cooperative forms of coordination is possible only if implementation of co-production is based in an appropriate setting in which government acts as a facilitator and creates space for discretion of other actors while evoking joint responsibility (Klijn 2010; Rhodes 2012; Hill and Hupe 2014). Policy theory again helps to show how and when this is possible and, equally importantly, when it is not.

The Value of a Policy Tools Approach: Case Studies of Co-Production in Croatia and Thailand

In order to illustrate the benefits of analyzing co-production from a policy tools perspective, in what follows we examine the macro, meso and micro aspects of policy design and managerial practices involved in co-production through case studies into the origins and fate of two co-production initiatives dealing with elderly and disability care in Croatia and Thailand.

The cases were selected based on their strong co-production strategy, their nationwide efforts, and their similar goal to provide services for vulnerable segments of society through soft-steering of local citizen service provision. The choice of Croatia and Thailand was based on the researchers' familiarity with the countries' systems and policy landscapes as well as due to their little-studied status and ability to extend existing research beyond the Western European, Australian and North American cases usually examined (Voorberg et al. 2015). The cases are not meant to be explicitly comparative but rather to serve as two illustrative examples of how co-production benefits from being examined using a policy studies lens in combination with a public management one rather than simply through a NPG one.

One case concerns a top-down initiative, Thailand, while the other is an example of a more bottom-up process of policy development and tool choice. Data on both cases was collected between July 2013 to June 2014 and triangulated using three sources: in-depth interviews, direct observation and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with 30–40 stakeholders for each case. Interview subjects ranged from clients or beneficiaries, local government officials, national government officials, local political leaders, civil society groups, community members, local government administrators, to non-profit organizations.

Co-Production Initiated by Organized Users: Disability Support Services in Croatia

Co-production of personal assistance for persons with disability (PWD) in Croatia emerged in the course of public sector reforms surrounding the democratic consolidation process that, after a decade of cumbersome transition from state-directed central planning, started in the dawn of new millennium. While most social policy reforms were aimed, NPM-style, at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery through decentralization, diversification of service providers and community-based social planning (Stubbs and Zrinščak 2007), in disability policy a reformist government went a step further and envisioned social inclusion of empowered policy beneficiaries through co-production. This goal was to be achieved not through market-based reforms of bureaucratized social care institutions in NPM fashion but via the establishment of more collaborative arrangements between state and community actors.

Adopting a policy perspective helps us understand how these reforms came about. At the macro-level, both international and domestic organizations were involved in pursuing the transformation of disability policy objectives and instruments from a medical to a human rights model in which PWD are not just recipients of help but empowered citizens (Petek 2011). Attaining such an implementation preference in the disability policy sector was possible due to the fact that during the 2000s many associations of (and for) persons with disabilities had transformed themselves from providers of mainly recreational

services for PWD into advocates of their rights. Their efforts were complemented by international organizations such as United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank and the EU, which also acted as promoters of PWD's interests and rights.

The human rights policy model was officially adopted in 2007 with the National Strategy for Equalizing Opportunities for People with Disability, by which the government embraced collaborative arrangements with PWD and their associations while advocating policy tools that fostered their independence, effective participation and inclusion in society. On the initiative of the Croatian Union of Associations of Persons with Disabilities and other non-governmental organizations, personal assistance services were included in the Strategy and selected as one of the most important instruments for the achievement of new policy goals. Accordingly, in designing personal assistance, government was keen to develop a network consisting of disabled persons' NGOs. In that way, persons with disability simultaneously became users and managers of the new services.

The specific tool which allowed this to happen was a grant scheme in which NGOs were invited to propose projects to provide personal assistance services. When designing this scheme, the government followed NPG practices in primarily acting as facilitator and evoker of joint responsibility for the social inclusion of PWD. In order to foster shared values, public managers abandoned strict regulatory practices aimed at accountability for public funds and produced quality standards that, among others, emphasized accessibility and appropriateness of services, cooperation and networking of providers and stressed the importance of enhancing users' engagement in service provision. These standards all had a voluntary character, but the approval of projects within this grant scheme was attached to expectations of the willingness and ability of associations to integrate these principles into their service provision plans and tools.

Adopting a public management perspective helps drill down and see how these tools and relationships were calibrated and how they operated in practice. In order to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility, the government invited NGOs to propose their own design of personal assistance program, to establish their own network of local partners, and to create an implementation structure that would be sustainable after the grant expired. Application assessment criteria reflected this focus. Thus, of a maximum of 100 points, an association could score 25 for management capacities, 25 for relevance of proposed program, 25 for quality of implementation structure, 15 for sustainability, and 15 for budget and efficiency of their project proposals.

Even though the grant arrangement did not mean the complete weakening of the vertical connections, in this service the government relinquished a substantial part of its control and focused on practicing and fostering partnerships. Civil servants who took over the task of nurturing implementation partnerships fulfilled this task by giving NGOs substantial discretion in managing service provision. Such autonomy in running the service, interviewed actors noted, gave service providers a sense of equality and, more importantly, it made them feel equally responsible for achieving outcomes. Using trust as an important management tool, civil servants limited formal control to reports in which associations stated their expenditures, outputs and progress in the achievement of results. They visit grant recipients on an annual basis, but, as interviewed actors emphasized, these visits have more of a coaching nature than an oversight one.

The actual services delivered are provided in partnership with beneficiaries. According to the Code of Ethics specially designed for this service, the beneficiary of personal

assistance autonomously decides on the content of the service while respecting the integrity and rights of his/her assistant. With users acting as real experiential experts, the service has developed into an exemplary case of co-production which from a pilot program with 78 beneficiaries has gradually grown into a nationwide program. Throughout its implementation it proved not only to foster empowerment and social inclusion of PWD but also became widely accepted by a wide spectrum of social policy actors. This has significantly increased the prospects for its sustainability and continuity independent of changes in government.

Co-Production Designed by the Government: Elderly Care Services in Thailand

The Croatian case helps illustrate the utility of a multi-disciplinary and multi-level approach in describing and analyzing co-production arrangements which emerged in a bottom-up fashion through the initiative of users and their associations. A second case – that of elderly care in Thailand – shows how this approach is also useful in examining the specifics of co-productive initiatives steered by the government in a more top-down fashion.

In 2014 the Thai government issued a new policy to tackle the country's rapidly aging population problem which stressed the use of co-production. Using aging population data for the first time, the government explicitly inserted the concept of co-production into the National Economic and Social Development Plan for 2012–2017 by stating that social welfare for elderly Thais was to be provided *jointly* by their families and the community at large.

Based on the broad macro-goals stated in the National Development Plan, the government issued a three-year Strategic Elderly Policy for 2014–2017. The policy is meant to empower able elderly citizens to meaningfully contribute by providing a variety of public services to fellow elderly people and other citizens. In other words, to co-produce elderly care services.

The policy aimed for every province in Thailand to set up elderly care services co-produced by the elders themselves. The main vehicle for so doing was to create elderly centers or clubs with elders as members. In these centers elders who are capable are selected to head different sub-committees. They also take part in committees that run the elderly care centers in collaboration with the local government, provincial health offices, other public agencies, interested private organizations and non-profits. The services available to seniors in these programs rely on unpaid volunteers, who are themselves elderly, to provide services to others. For example, a 65-year-old might be assigned to visit a 90-year-old on a weekly basis or a capable 70-year-old woman might teach other women how to cook traditional dishes. Other activities include nutritional talks, basic exercise regimes and cultural celebrations. Like most co-production efforts, this means using altruistic volunteerism to incentivize co-produced service delivery. Citizens who participate gain by feeling valuable, in that they are doing something for others, and the community as a whole gains as well.

A managerial perspective on these events is very useful and revealing. As of 2014 many municipalities and sub-districts in 12 pilot provinces (out of 77) had their own elderly clubs; each with 300–500 members. The local government has the mandate to sign off on the constitution of the committee that runs the center and the national government provides the funding needed to build the center and run some projects. However, a policy

sciences perspective is also needed to understand the actual mechanics and politics of this kind of co-production arrangement.

Rather than being a strictly “bottom-up” exercise, state steering was present at each step in the policy process. Centers were highly encouraged to find additional funding and to generate revenues from their own activities. These projects range from computer classes, cooking, sewing, weaving and music classes to demonstration farming, drawing and other types of activities suitable for the age group. Some of the projects are conducted outside the center, such as visiting other elderly homes and helping abandoned aged persons. There are also managerial activities for the center, such as maintaining the membership database and the local elderly population database, which involve co-production by residents and members.

Ubol Rachatani province’s experience provides a good example of many of these co-production arrangements, their results and implications, as well as the utility of using a multi-disciplinary lens to examine them. In that province, as elsewhere in the country, elderly clubs act as the dynamic cells of a large provincial network of elderly care fostered by the central and provincial governments. In Ubol Rachatani, anyone can start an elderly club if they have more than 30 members. These clubs are formally registered with the local government and as of 2012 there were 2,816 elderly clubs, the highest among all the provinces in Thailand.

Using a network approach, the municipalities fostered collaboration between the local government and the related provincial departments, such as the mental health department, the social and human security department, the disease control department, together with community-level public health volunteers, local hospitals, village heads, the elderly clubs and other community groups, with the elderly center acting as the central node for each jurisdiction. In addition, Ubol Rachatani province also encouraged all municipalities and sub-districts to collaborate with the private sector where possible.

Some market-based tools are also used and some programs do generate profits. For example, some groups are able to sell products from cooking and weaving classes and the local government is mandated to help brand and market these products. This is a source of supplementary income for a number of elderly persons. The Last House Project is another example of co-production that relies on the market. An elderly person must pay about 200,000 baht (about US\$5,900) for a house built on land that is provided by the government. Once the elderly person no longer needs the house it will then belong to the government. Many families save money by building such houses and the government also saves money in the long run, because it can provide these houses to others for a lower cost after the initial period of use. Volunteer groups visit these houses to provide basic health and sanitation care. Aside from the elderly person feeling better in their own home, the cost to the government for this service is much lower than if a citizen was to enter a privately run seniors’ home, for example.

In addition to relying on altruistic volunteers and market-based incentives, there is another program, initiated by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, that began in 2005, which uses hierarchical control via contracts with paid volunteers in each village. Five volunteers from the community are trained in each sub-district specifically to take care of elderly persons who do not have relatives and live alone. These volunteers are often the same people who already served as paid volunteers of the Ministry of Health involved in other programs.

Many of the members of elderly clubs who are healthy and active are also health volunteers for the community. These volunteers help patients in the community to connect to doctors, do regular basic check-ups, provide training to raise awareness on health issues for the community. They co-produce the health services with doctors and nurses, who are professionals based in hospitals. Some of them, with many years of experience, become health quasi-professionals. This approach relies on hierarchical control, as the Ministry of Health provides clear performance indicators for the local government, the collaborating hospitals and the community-based health volunteers. Reports must be made to the Ministry at all levels to show results and challenges in the chain of service delivery. While the Ministry standardizes the accountability system, the communities can organize health volunteer groups, as they wish. Some communities set up hierarchical structures to manage volunteers, with superiors and subordinates, while others keep the relationship informal and work as equals.

Overall, this policy in Ubol Rachatani has been fairly successful. Based on interviews with health officials, it is clear that many seniors are provided with adequate information to prevent many illnesses. And in turn, the elderly who are volunteers feel useful and respected by others. Doctors, nurses and local government officials can better focus their work on other important issues. In addition, interviews reveal that the additional income that some volunteers receive also helps them cope better. Lastly, the elderly volunteers become very resourceful people to the benefit of the community in other respects. For example, when there was a flood in 2013, these volunteers knew exactly which households needed help and the kind of help they needed. Many interviewees agreed that the community as a whole had become stronger and closer as a result of the co-production.

Conclusion: Understanding Co-Production

The two case studies set out above show how a multi-level policy science-centered focus on policy tools and actor relationships, in addition to a public management perspective on modern governance and program design and implementation is needed in order to analyze co-production. Bringing important insights from the theory and practice of managerial reforms to the design of strategies for effective tool design also helps achieve better understanding of the way co-production works and of the conditions enabling its success.

The analysis has shown how NPG thinking set the macro-level context for both the co-production initiatives detailed here. Both the Croatian and Thai governments demonstrated collaborative implementation preferences which are in line with NPG's vision of enhanced effectiveness, flexibility and democratic quality of public service. Seen from a policy perspective, however, the case studies are also revealing in showing how co-production can arise through either a top-down or bottom-up effort, and how the success of design and implementation requires an active or empowered population of beneficiaries. The key role of the policy target group can be, as was the case of Croatian PWD, stipulated by the group itself due to the access the group has to various sources of political power including votes, money or the propensity of the group to mobilize and act (Schneider and Ingram 1993), or it can be designated from above as was the case in Thailand.

From the meso-level policy design perspective this implies that empowered beneficiaries are, along with the government, co-creators of policy objectives which then have a good chance to be implemented in line with users' real needs. On the other hand, the empowerment of a target group can also be, as shown in the Thai case, fostered by the government and formulated as a main policy objective whose fulfillment then leads to the meaningful contribution of citizens to service provision.

A policy tools perspective helps underscore that for NPG-related policy goals, co-production functions as a central policy instrument but does so in combination with other collaborative and also state- or market-based policy tools. In the actual micro-level calibration of co-productive arrangements, local government regulation, national grant schemes as well as market-based activities (such as the opportunity to earn money) can be used to incentivize and organize different types of citizens to participate and help achieve policy goals.

At the micro-level, periodic reports on expenditures and outputs accompanied with annual visits of civil servants can also be seen to have contributed to the Croatian associations' effective provision of personal assistance.

Christensen and Laegreid and others have warned that reliance on NPG thinking has the potential to blur accountability, alleviate inequality and divisiveness in the policy process and enable local elite and partisan domination of deliberations (Rouban 1999; Eikenberry 2007; Christensen and Laegreid 2012; Lynn 2012). Intrinsic cooperation relies on trust and reciprocity as well as on shared values and norms that function as the glue that holds actors in cooperative forms of coordination (Rhodes 2012). But a policy sciences perspective shows how the effectiveness of co-production is also dependent on skillful top-down governance, or metagovernance (Peters 2010; Sorensen 2012), that frames concerted action among different types of actors and interests in ways that balance accountability and flexibility.

Viewing co-production through a policy tool lens provides insights which complement purely public management ones. Utilizing theory and methods from the two disciplines focused on here – public management and public policy – helps bring the complex picture surrounding co-production into better focus, enabling better analysis and practice than reliance on a single field alone.

Notes

1. Even though NPM's reformist ideas encompassed primarily substantive instruments, such as the increased use of subsidies and market forms of organization, its focus on performance and serving clients induced supplementation of input-based control typical of traditional public administration through enhanced use of benchmarking and other output-based procedural control and steering tools (Pierre 2012).
2. As is well known, NPM inspired waves of reforms in many sectors and areas of activity while relying on the replacement of traditional hierarchical or bureaucratic policy tools such as regulations and public enterprises by market-based ones (Dunleavy and Hood 1994; Ferlie et al. 1996). More recently, however, a second NPG wave of study and practice has looked to find solutions to policy problems based on the inclusion of a wider spectrum of actors in governing processes, especially the provision of public services by civil society, social enterprises and network-based tools in addition, or instead of, public and private sector ones (Osborne 2006; Bryson et al. 2014).
3. The prevalence or the lack of strong hierarchical bureaucratic institutions and governing norms in one society, for example, has been found to help determine the overall level of government capacity and frame its preferences toward or away from the state-based organizational devices to be used in the implementation of public policies. In line with that, the question of policy tool choice and usage are circumscribed not only by embeddedness of decisions within the general and specific policy goals, but also by implementation preferences governments develop over the course of their governance practice (Howlett 2009).

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