SANNA TUURNAS

The Professional Side of Co-Production

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UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

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Acknowledgements

In November 2012, our research project team took part in a co-production seminar in Budapest. I found the concept of co-production academically intriguing and relevant for the development of current public services. Yet, having interviewed many public service professionals in my earlier projects, I noticed that their perspective gained little attention in the research on co-production. I wanted to examine this theme more profoundly. Through this focus, I consider my research mission to contribute to the necessary task of transforming the public services to meet the changing society. In a nutshell, these components guided me to this point, where I have the pleasure to express my great gratitude to all the people and institutions who have supported me in my research process.

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On April 14th, Mäntykatu, Tampere

Sanna Tuurnas

Abstract

Public service producers face increasing pressures to transform due to austerity, increased public expectations and fragmented public service infrastructure. Here, co-production of public services is considered a desirable way for tackling these challenges especially during the latest reform wave, emphasising active citizenship and partnerships. As a concept, co-production refers to processes, where professionals as 'regular producers' and citizens in their different roles contribute to the service development and/or production. For instance, Finnish municipalities across the country have started co-production pilots as ways to update their public-service systems to be more effective and responsive. Nevertheless, although co-production offers great potential for transforming public service systems, it also puts pressure on public organisations to transform the procedures both organisationally and culturally. Indeed, the general understanding is that co-production changes the roles played by the co-producing actors—both the citizens and the professionals as 'regular producers'.

To continue, a variety of research can be found on the citizen side, dealing with their motives and capacities to co-produce. Yet, in-depth research concerning the professional's perspective of co-production has so far been limited. My aim is to fill this gap in research by examining co-production through the lens of public service professionals. In this research, I ask, *how does co-production change the practices of public service professionals?* My research concentrates on understanding how pressures to change the operational logic of public service delivery are actualised in different professional practices and what these practices indicate for the management and organisation of public services. This way, the research shifts from bottom-up processes to the system level.

The research consists of four sub-studies and a summary. The sub-studies focus on different co-production relations in different contexts as ways to gain in-depth understanding of the professionals' perspective on co-production process. The research show that co-production changes the professionals' practices in many ways. The network settings, in which the professionals operate, make co-production a complex issue, as the network actors may understand production in different ways. Co-production also challenges professionals to learn new ways of working,

transforming their professionally oriented culture and their established ways of interacting. Moreover, co-production makes demands on the professionals' capacities in terms of motivating the citizens in their different roles. Finally, co-production brings experiential knowledge in service production processes, with implications for broadening the understanding of expertise and the role of professionals as coordinators rather than sole experts. Thus, the research results present an environment in which co-production relations take place beyond the citizen–public service professional nexus.

These interfaces exist in different governance relations and they embed distinctive causal powers. The interfaces take place between citizen, client or community and professional, horizontal professional networks and on the vertical nexus, between management and professionals. The results of my research disclose that the professional side of co-production includes different dimensions, all interlinked, consisting of managerial, organisational, processual and cultural aspects. The different interfaces and causal powers are embedded within those dimensions. By recognising the different interfaces, dimensions and the embedded causal powers of the professional side of co-production, my research demonstrates the complexity of co-production processes. My findings also suggest that it is not only the process but also the concept of co-production itself that is complex in nature. As realisers of co-production policies and activities, the professionals need to understand the diversity of meanings given to co-production in order to meet the different challenges and expectations entailed in them.

My research indicates that co-production has two institutional implications: on the cultural level and on the system level. On the cultural level, co-production as a policy calls for learning and reflection throughout public service organisations. On the system level, co-production puts pressure to public service organisations to be better prepared to change their operational logics in order to move from ad hoc co-production experiments towards more sustainable solutions to co-produce services. Finally, co-production is also an ideological question. Equality as a basic value of public service delivery will unavoidably be challenged if co-production is the core model to deliver public services. This is a matter of finding a balance between the traditional professional-oriented public service ideals and pressure to open up toward collaborative and client-focused service systems. In this sense, the anchoring of co-production in organizational practices in a sustainable way is still in its infancy.

Tiivistelmä

Julkisia palveluja tuottavilla organisaatioilla on yhä lisääntyviä paineita selviytyä palvelutehtävistään tehokkaasti ja vaikuttavasti. Resurssit niukkenevat ja palveluinfrastruktuuri on hajanainen. Samanaikaisesti palveluiden käyttäjät ja asiakkaat odottavat parempia ja laadukkaampia palveluita. Tässä paineiden ristiaallokossa palvelujen yhteistuotanto (engl. co-production) on noussut maailmanlaajuisesti yhdeksi keskeiseksi periaatteeksi julkisten palvelujen kehittämisessä. Yhteistuotannolla tarkoitetaan toimintoja, joissa palveluprosessien kehittämiseen ja tuottamiseen osallistuvat sekä perinteiset palveluntuottajat että kansalaiset erilaisissa rooleissa. Esimerkiksi Suomessa monet kunnat ovat luoneet erilaisia yhteistuotantopilotteja tehokkaampien ja vaikuttavampien palvelujärjestelmien aikaansaamiseksi. Vaikka yhteistuotanto tarjoaa hyvän mahdollisuuden palvelujärjestelmien kehittämiseen, luo se samalla paineen muuttaa julkisten organisaatioiden toimintatapoja, organisointia ja kulttuuria.

Kansalaisten muuttuvia rooleja ja motivaatiotekijöitä yhteistuotannossa on tutkittu paljon, mutta tähän saakka ammattilaisten roolin tarkastelu on jäänyt vähäisemmälle huomiolle. Tämä tutkimus tuottaa uutta tietoa tästä vähemmän tutkitusta näkökulmasta. Tutkimuskysymykseni on, miten palvelujen yhteistuotanto muuttaa ammattilaisten käytäntöjä? Tavoitteena on ymmärtää, miten yhteistuotannon suuntaan toimintoja vievä uudistamispaine näkyy ammattilaisten käytännöissä ja edelleen, mitä nämä käytännöt tarkoittavat palveluiden johtamisen ja organisoinnin kannalta. Tällä tavoin tämä tutkimus liikkuu alhaalta ylös, mikrotason prosesseista systeemitason ymmärtämiseen.

Tutkimus perustuu neljään osatutkimukseen sekä yhteenveto-osioon. Kokonaisvaltaisen ymmärryksen saamiseksi tarkastelen osatutkimuksissa erilaisia yhteistuotannon tapoja erilaisissa konteksteissa. Osatutkimuksia yhdistää ilmiön lähestyminen ammattilaisten näkökulmasta. Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että yhteistuotanto muuttaa ammattilaisten käytäntöjä monin tavoin. Yhteistuotanto moniammatillisissa verkostosuhteissa luo kompleksisuutta, etenkin jos ja kun verkoston toimijat ymmärtävät yhteistuotannon eri tavoin. Yhteistuotanto myös kyseenalaistaa professiolähtöisen toimintakulttuurin, haastaen ammattilaiset lähestymään kehittämistä erilaisesta roolista käsin. Esimerkiksi kansalaisten ja

asukkaiden motivointi edellyttää ammattilaisilta uudenlaisen roolin omaksumisesta kehittämistyössä. Toisinaan motivointiroolissa toimiminen edellyttää myös täysin uudenlaisia kykyjä ja kapasiteettia ammatilliseen tietoon perustuvan osaamisen lisäksi. Kansalaisten kokemukseen perustuva tieto myös laajentaa käsitystä asiantuntijuudesta. Yhteistuotantoprosesseissa ammattilainen ei välttämättä toimi ainoana asiantuntijana, vaan tilanteesta riippuen esimerkiksi toimintojen koordinoijana.

Osatutkimukset osoittavat, että yhteistuotanto perustuu erilaisiin hallintasuhteisiin ja se tapahtuu erilaisilla rajapinnoilla. Näillä rajapinnoilla esiintyy kausaalisia voimia, jotka vaikuttavat prosessin lopputuloksiin. Ammattilaisen näkökulmasta vuorovaikutukseen perustuvat rajapinnat ulottuvat kansalaisen, asukkaiden ja yhteisöjen sekä ammattilaisen välisen rajapinnan lisäksi myös ammattilaisten väliselle, horisontaaliselle rajapinnalle, sekä ammattilaisten ja johdon väliselle, vertikaaliselle rajapinnalle. Tämän lisäksi tutkimuksessa tunnistetaan neljä ulottuvuutta (johtaminen, organisaatio, prosessi ja kulttuuri), joista ammattilaisten näkökulma yhteistuotantoprosesseihin koostuu.

Tutkimukseni osoittaa, että yhteistuotanto on käsitteenä monitulkintainen, ja sillä voidaan tarkoittaa erilaisia asioita kontekstista riippuen. Tämä on tärkeä havainto ammattilaisten näkökulmasta: toimiessaan yhteistuotantoprosessien toimeenpanijoina käsitteen erilaisten tarkoitusperien ymmärtäminen on olennaista, jotta niiden sisältämiin erilaisiin haasteisiin on mahdollista vastata.

Yhteistuotanto merkitsee institutionaalista muutosta. Järjestelmätasolla muutos tarkoittaa siirtymistä erilaisista ad hoc -piloteista kestäviin toimintamalleihin, joissa yhteistuotanto eri ulottuvuuksineen on sisäänrakennettu osa palvelujärjestelmiä. Toisaalta yhteistuotannon toimintalogiikka haastaa palvelujärjestelmien toimintakulttuurin eri tasoja läpileikkaavana ilmiönä. Oppiminen ja reflektointi ovat tässä suhteessa avainasioita. Yhteistuotanto on myös ideologinen valinta, kun pohditaan, millä keinoin ja missä mittakaavassa yhteistuotanto muodostuu tavaksi tuottaa ja kehittää julkisia palveluita. Tasa-arvo julkisten palvelujen tuottamisen ydinarvona joutuu väistämättä koetukselle yhteistuotannon toimintatapojen myötä. Tässä suhteessa on olennaista löytää tasapaino ammattilaisuuteen perustuvien julkisten palvelujen lähtökohdan sekä avoimuutta, asiakaslähtöisyyttä ja kumppanuutta tavoittelevien toimintamallien välillä. Voidaankin todeta, että yhteistuotannon sulauttaminen kestävällä tavalla osaksi palvelujärjestelmien toimintoja on vielä varsin aikaisessa kehitysvaiheessa.

List of original publications

I   Tuurnas, S., Stenvall, J., Rannisto, P-H., Harisalo, R. & Hakari, K. (2015). Coordinating co-production in complex network settings. *European Journal of Social Work* 18(3), 370–382, doi: 10.1080/13691457.2014.930730

II   Tuurnas, S. (2015). Learning to co-produce? The perspective of public service professionals. *International Journal of Public Sector Management, 28*(7), 583–598, doi: http://dx.doi:.org/10.1108/IJPSM-04-2015-0073

III   Tuurnas, S. (2016, forthcoming). Looking beyond the simplistic ideals of participatory projects: Fostering effective co-production. *International Journal of Public Administration.* Accepted for Publication (11.4.2016).

IV   Tuurnas, S., Stenvall, J. & Rannisto, P-H. (2016). The impact of co-production on frontline accountability: The case of the conciliation service. Special issue on Co-production of Public Services. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 28 (1), 131-149, doi: 10.1177/0020852314566010

Contents

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1 Introduction

Over the last decade, co-production of public services has become a desirable way to deliver public services in many countries around the world (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD, 2011). Co-production of public services is seen as way to tackle austerity measures, to meet increased public expectations and as a tool to transform fragmented public service infrastructures (Durose et al., 2013; Parrado et al., 2013). In the post-NPM phase of public sector reform, the idea of citizenship has been broadened from seeing the citizens not as objects of care, but as active co-producers (Ryan, 2012). In Finland, the idea of partnerships with citizens, service users and communities is regarded as a cultural reform for the whole public-service system. Municipalities across the country have started co-production pilots as ways to update their public-service systems to be more effective and responsive (Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, 2015; City of Tampere, 2013, 2015). At the national level, the Ministry of Finance considers co-production a key tool for future public services (The Finnish Ministry of Finance, 2015).

Although co-production offers huge potential for transforming service systems, it also challenges the current public sector organisations both organisationally and culturally. Against this backdrop, co-production is a relevant and suitable concept to understand the current public sector reform. This way, the research contributes to the debates on the future of public service systems, which currently face pressure to change in many different ways.

Conceptually, co-production refers to a process in which actors 'who are not in the same organization' contribute input for the production of a good or a service (Ostrom, 1996, p. 1073). This concept draws attention to the interactive and multisided nature of such a process. On one side of the process, there is a client, a citizen or a group of citizens. On the other side, there is a 'regular producer' as a representative of a public organisation (Ostrom, 1996). The regular producer can be a single, public-service professional or, in a networked environment, a group of professionals (Tuurnas, 2015; Tuurnas, 2016; Tuurnas, Stenvall, Rannisto, Harisalo & Hakari, 2015). A variety of research can be found on the citizen side, dealing with their motives and the methods to induce citizens to co-produce (see e.g., Alford,

2002; Fledderus, Brandsen & Honingh, 2014, 2015; Jakobsen & Andersen, 2013; Meier, 2012; van Eijk & Steen, 2014). The professionals' perspective of the process has, then again, gained less academic attention so far.

The necessity to examine the changing role of public-service professionals has, indeed, been acknowledged in the stream of literature concerning co-production (Bovaird & Löffler, 2012; Boyle & Harris, 2009; Ryan, 2012; Verschuere et al., 2012). This is a notable gap in the literature; after all, professionals are powerful actors in the realisation of public policies, and their willingness and capacities to co-produce serve major functions in the process (Lipsky, 1980; Ostrom, 1996).

Professional work intrinsically includes negotiations and interactions with clients and citizens in their different roles. On one hand, public-service professionals are expected to negotiate both the process and its outcomes with client co-producers as part of their work routines. On the other hand, strategic processes, such as neighbourhood development activities, include negotiations among many different stakeholders, such as citizens, communities and private sector actors (Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003). Typically for human interactions, these negotiations include a lot of complexity.

Traditionally, professionals use their professional expertise as a way to solve such complex situations (Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003; Lipsky, 1980). Yet, the current governance reform, highlighting co-production, has challenged the position of professions in different way, for instance by decreasing professional discretion and challenging the sole position of professional expertise (Sehested, 2002; Taylor & Kelly, 2006, Tuurnas et al., 2016). This situation calls for a redefinition of the respective roles of society and professional service producers (Sullivan, 2000).

The change can be described as a shift from 'public services FOR the public' towards 'public services BY the public' (Osborne, 2009, 2010; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013; Pestoff, 2012). On one hand, the citizens as clients offer their unique experiences for the development and production of public services (Alford, 1998; Needham, 2008; Osborne, 2009, 2010; Parks et al., 1981). On the other hand, citizens as voluntary actors, individually or in different communities, complement the public-service system because it has been weakened by austerity measures. Here, co-production can be examined as part of broader societal changes and policy programmes that re-evaluate the relations between the state and society (Bailey, 2011; Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Eriksson & Vogt, 2013; Fotaki, 2011; Perry, 2007; Pestoff et al., 2006; Pestoff, 2012).

Furthermore, the concept of co-production has been connected to citizen participation, co-creation and user-driven innovation, for instance (Marschall, 2004;

Osborne & Strokosch, 2013; Pestoff, 2014; Voorberg et al., 2014). Nonetheless, for the sake of clarity and coherence, I have focused on co-production as a conceptual basis for this dissertation for two reasons. First, co-production has a long tradition in the field of public management; therefore, it can be contextualised within the broader framework of public sector reform.

The concept of co-production was first developed in the 1970s by Elinor Ostrom and her research group in Indiana, USA as part of their study on metropolitan reform (see e.g., Ostrom et al., 1978). In subsequent decades, researchers of public management have continued to develop the concept. In the 1990s, John Alford viewed co-production primarily as an alternative to marketisation and the 'contract state' (1998, p. 129). In the 2000s, co-production has emerged again especially as an essential aspect of the new public governance (NPG) literature, which emphasises open government, active citizenship, networks and partnerships as core ideas for public administration. (Osborne, 2010; Pestoff, 2012; Verschuere et al., 2012).

The conceptual development thus offers a window into public sector reform. From a broader perspective, it has significance for the development of public-administration and public-management theories. The general approach in this research can be described as 'bottom-up'. In the same way as the co-production concept exemplifies the broader governance reform, I focus on the micro-level processes that shed light on the changing role of professionals. I consider the bottom-up approach essential to understanding the system level; the incentives and limitations offered by the organisational and managerial systems are directly reflected in frontline processes.

The second reason for focusing on co-production is its emphasis on *services.* The interest in public-services has emerged in recent years among researchers of public management (Osborne et al., 2015; Virtanen & Stenvall, 2014). As opposed to formal procedures of interaction between public actors and citizens, co-production draws attention to the mundane forms of interaction occurring at the micro-level of service production (Brudney & England, 1983; Marschall, 2004). This very point of interaction is vital not only for effective public services; according to some authors, it is also valuable from the democratic perspective (Marschall, 2004; Pestoff, 2009; 2014). As the idea goes, the mundane forms of participation can potentially lead to more formal level activation, as well (Marschall, 2004).

Finally, the quotation below leads us to elaborate on the challenges embedded in co-production from the viewpoint of professionals. Here, the first challenge is related to the difficulty in finding 'the most appropriate' form to carry out co-production activities. As demonstrated in this research, the variety of ways to approach and

understand co-production causes uncertainty among the implementers of co-production policies. Finding the right method requires an in-depth knowledge of all the perspectives of co-production and their fundamental value bases. The second, generally recognised challenge concerns the cultural transformation underlying co-production that especially resonates with the future role of public-service professionals. Indeed, Whitaker's (1980, p. 246) statement is to the point:

> By overlooking coproduction, we have been misled into an over-reliance on service agents and bureaucratic organization of human services. We need to examine the ways in which agencies can organize to facilitate the types of coproduction most appropriate to the services they seek to deliver. We have too often come to expect that agencies can change people and forgotten that people must change themselves.

1.1   The context of the Finnish public service system

In general, Finland is a country with a high degree of trust in its government (see Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). As is noted in the report of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2010), the core value underlying the Finnish administration is openness. Moreover, Finland's quality of life is high, according to the indicators of the OECD (2010). Then again, the main challenges, alongside the global economic crisis, are related to an ageing population and other demographic changes. The geography of Finland poses challenges for the public service systems as the country's population density is sparse. Public managers and politicians, especially in rural areas, are faced with conflict between fiscal pressures and citizens' rising expectations concerning the quality and quantity of services (OECD, 2010).

The Nordic model of the strong welfare state is based on universalism. In the Finnish model, public bodies are, to a wide extent, responsible for the financing and production of public services. The core public services, such as education, health care and social services, cover the whole citizenry and are financed from taxes (Anttonen, Häikiö & Valokivi, 2012). Yet, despite the strong public sector orientation, civil society has played and still plays an important role in, for instance, the production of public services, especially in institutional care and housing services and substance abuse services (Anttonen et al., 2012; Haveri, 2012). However, currently the role of the third sector seems ambiguous: although the importance of its role has been wide emphasised, in recent years, the third sector has seemed to be growing at a slower pace than it used to (Haveri, 2012).

Like many other countries in Europe, Finland has enacted several major reforms in the public sector since the late 1980s. The reforms have included implementation of NPM elements, especially through privatization, development of quasi-markets and introduction of purchaser-provider models in public service provision (Anttonen et al., 2012; Jäppinen, 2011; Kallio et al., 2006; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011, pp. 112–113). Anttonen et al. (2012) note that the reform is especially pronounced in services. In general, the current trend has been towards active participation and freedom of choice. The idea of citizens as customers has been strengthened by, for example, the implementation of service vouchers (Anttonen et al., 2012). Overall, the rhetoric around client-orientation and partnership as a core for future public service systems is strong (Anttonen et al., 2012; Raitakari et al., 2012; Stenvall & Virtanen, 2012). At the same time, the social and health care service system has been described as fragmented and production-oriented (Stenvall & Virtanen, 2012; Tuurnas et al., 2015).

Finnish public service provision has so far relied on autonomous municipalities protected by the Finnish constitution (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). As Haveri (2012) explains, municipalities are the cornerstones of the welfare state, being the units that actually built schools and hospitals. Most services are currently provided by the municipalities, including the legally regulated basic services like education, social and health care and technical services. Moreover, the autonomy of municipalities is based on citizen participation, active citizenship and democracy (Haveri & Airaksinen, 2011). As a part of the autonomous position, municipalities are also able to voluntarily organise tasks related to the quality of residential environments, employment enhancement and regional competitiveness (Rönkkö, 2003).

Although municipalities have gone through many reforms during recent decades, in the 2000s, the central government pushed forward its biggest reform so far, concerning the municipality administration and social and health care structures. The reform, which is still in process, has challenged the traditional role of strong, independent municipalities as service providers (Jäppinen, 2011). Here, Paananen, Haveri and Airaksinen (2014) sketch the future role of municipalities as bodies maintaining and developing local 'vitality'. The authors (Ibid., p. 13) highlight that municipalities have a central role in the realisation of activities situated between the state, market and civil society.

Finland makes an interesting context for studying co-production. First of all, the strong welfare state tradition and reliance on the public sector as the main producer of public services may present challenges to introducing co-production models.

On the other hand, due to the autonomy of municipalities, the initiatives and practices of co-production are dispersed and multifold. Concerning co-production initiatives, municipalities have played a major role in introducing different participatory and citizen engagement practices. However, co-production practices still remain on the experimental level. For instance, the co-operation models concerning neighbourhood and community development have been mainly pilots and experiments (OECD, 2010; OECD, 2011).

Indeed, the OECD report (2010) stresses the weakness of citizen engagement policies in Finland. This is especially the case at the state level. Depending on the level of administration, there seem to be many different administrative cultures and attitudes. The OECD report points out the following:

> [B]oth municipalities and CSOs have suggested that neither the state administration nor government are in tune with the needs of citizens and are not taking these into account when developing national policies and legislation. (2010, p. 13)

Finally, the Finnish welfare system relies strongly on trained professionals; traditionally citizen-initiated bottom-up reforms have not been common (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Yet, there are signs that this is changing. There are now many citizen-driven initiatives, especially concerning urban planning and peer-to-peer services (Botero, Paterson & Saad-Sulonen, 2012; Van der Vekken, 2012). Mokka and Neuvonen (2006) emphasise in their think-tank-minded publication that the Finnish welfare state model is at crossroads: it can either support or hinder the rise of civil society. These authors, like the OECD report (2010), stress the need for collaborative solutions, meaning the integration of public bodies, business and civil society.

However, as tempting as this sounds, there are still many issues to be tackled. Activation of individual citizens is a difficult task, and network governance poses challenges to traditional, representative democracy. Yet, the expectations concerning active citizenship and the third sector remain high in Finland (Haveri, 2012).

1.2   Objectives and research questions

The aim of this research is to increase our understanding of the understudied viewpoint of public service professionals in the co-production process. Precisely, my aim is to examine the complexity of co-production policies and processes in practice through the lens of public service professionals. The research objective is the public service professional in co-production. To limit the study, I focus on professionals as actors in the co-production process, rather than explicitly researching the potential shifts in professionalism or professions *per se.*

The changing practices are seen as a window through which one can understand and explain what actually happens in social activities such as the co-production process. To specify, I refer to practices following the definition of Schatzki (2001, 58), who outlines practice as 'a set of doings and sayings organised by a pool of understandings, a set of rules, and a teleoaffective structure'. In research related to practices, the how-question is essential: the central objective is to explain *how* social activities are put into practice (Jensen & Halkier, 2011). This is also a relevant point in this research, which addresses the following question:

How does co-production change the practices of public service professionals?

The research can be considered exploratory in the sense that no comprehensive framework was available for studying the professional side of co-production. Yet, the main approach of the research is explanatory; my aim is not only to describe the events but also to explain their outcomes. In order to find the explanatory mechanisms, I seek implications from the micro-level processes in different contexts of public service provision. In the Sub-studies, I concentrate on the viewpoint of the public service professionals in different contexts and different co-production relationships in order to gain a coherent understanding of the professional side of co-production.

The research is positioned as a part of wider discussions on our changing society. Here, the research explicitly contributes to the discussions on the future of public service systems, which currently face pressure to change their operation logic in many different ways. As a way to contribute to this discussion, the research concentrates on how these pressures are actualised in different professional practices and on what these practices indicate for the management and organisation of public services. Against this background, the research shifts from bottom-up processes to the system level. Finally, as new knowledge concerning the understudied perspective of the

professional side of co-production is provided, the research contributes to the further understanding of co-production as a concept.

1.3   Structure and scope of the research

This academic dissertation is a compilation based on four articles and a summary. The articles are referred to here as Sub-studies. The Sub-studies offer different contexts and co-production relationships to examine co-production from the perspective of professionals. The Sub-study I looks at client co-production in multi-professional networks in the context of social and health care services for youth. Here, client co-production is viewed as part of the everyday practices of the professionals. The Sub-study II explores co-production as a shared process in the context of a neighbourhood community development project. The project is considered as a co-production experiment, including an innovative aspect. The potential co-production relations exist between the residents, the local non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and the professionals as realisers of the project. The Sub-study III examines the same neighbourhood project through its outcomes, and searches for mechanisms that can explain those outcomes. The Sub-study IV concentrates on expanding accountability relations between citizen volunteers and public service professionals in the context of conciliation service that is considered an established co-production model.

In the summary, the theoretical and conceptual framework take place in three main parts. Chapter 2 looks into the concept of co-production, observing it in the context of public sector reform and in its current conceptualisations. Chapter 3 forms a theoretical basis to examine the public service professional. Here, the first section consists of the definition of a public service professional, and the second section concentrates on their role in public sector reform. Finally, the research gap concerning the professional's viewpoint on co-production is demonstrated at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 4 covers the main ontological and epistemological choices of the research, establishing the critical realist approach as way to explain the events and their outcomes in this qualitative research.

As for the results, Chapter 5 introduces and sums up the main results of the Sub-studies. In Chapter 6, I discuss the results and reflect on them in the context of the theoretical and methodological framework presented in the research. The discussion includes two parts. The first discusses the professional side of co-production; the

second reflects the implications for the evolving co-production concept. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the outcomes of the dissertation as a whole, and outlines avenues for future research.

To sum up the research framework, the phenomenon of co-production is analysed on multiple levels. The macro-context is the changing society that is reflected in public sector reform. Here, co-production can be seen a key solution in the latest governance-minded wave of reform, as a way to strengthen open governance and active citizenship. The general frame of reform influences the way public service systems are organized and managed on the meso-level of analysis. Finally, the change is put in practice in the micro-level co-production processes.

To conclude, these micro-level processes, and the ways that public service professionals carry them out in practice, are the core of the research. I consider the micro-level processes essential as they reveal important aspects of the dynamics of public sector change. They also reveal the tensions taking place between the organisational framework on the system level and the frontline practices on the micro-level. These tensions, then, can be reflected on the societal level. In the concluding section, I unify the core findings of the dissertation. I discuss the findings as a way to contribute in the task to better understand the societal changes taking place in many countries across the world, including Finland.

2   Conceptualisation of Co-Production

2.1   The evolution of co-production as a concept

As will be demonstrated in this chapter, the concept of co-production has been evolving in pursuance of public sector reform. Here, the concept of co-production has evolved and gained new interpretative perspectives amid waves of reform. Therefore, by positioning co-production in the setting of public sector reform, it is possible to gain insight into societal change and its main drivers. Such insight is vital to understand the current state of reform and the position of co-production in it.

Conceptually, the basic idea underlying public sector reform (also referred to as public management reform) is to improve structures and processes in order to have a more efficient public sector. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004, p. 8) define public management reform as 'deliberate changes to the structures and processes of public sector organisations with the objective of getting them (in some sense) to run better'. In recent decades, the focus has been on the NPM models (Ferlie, Lynn & Pollitt, 2005; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). However, I will begin with metropolitan reform in the USA as it provides a context for the development of the co-production concept.

The concept of co-production was originally established in the 1970s by Elinor Ostrom and her research team at Indiana University in the US (see, Ostrom, 1972; Ostrom et al., 1978). The research group took part in the debates on the effectiveness and efficiency of large bureaucracies, which were, at the time, a chief target for reform. Their evaluative study of organisational arrangements concentrated on the effects of the size of governmental agencies and their relations to outputs. Ostrom and her colleagues found out that small and medium-sized departments had higher levels of output than larger units; thus, they offered an alternative approach to metropolitan reform (Ostrom et al., 1972; Ostrom, 1996).

The research group also emphasised the active role of citizens in the production of urban services. The idea was that citizens contribute to public service delivery in different ways, for instance, by calling the police after noticing something unusual. This way, as Ostrom et al. (1978, p. 383) put it, citizens 'become coproducers with the police'. They point out that 'citizen activities may affect both the output and

outcomes of public agencies' (Ostrom et al., 1978, p. 383). In the same way, the research group acknowledged the importance of street-level workers for carrying out effective co-production. Later, in the 1990s, Ostrom (1996, p. 1079) explained the 'birth' of the co-production concept as follows:

> We developed the term 'coproduction' to describe the potential relationships that could exist between the 'regular' producer (street-level police officers, school teachers, or health workers) and 'clients' who want to be transformed into safer, better educated, or healthier persons.

Originally, the model of co-production was linked with citizen participation, following the ideas of, for instance, Sherry Arnstein (1969). Yet, the research group in Indiana developed these ideas further as they did not consider the literature of citizen participation adequate to explain all the interaction that takes place between government agencies and citizens. To demonstrate, Whitaker (1980) criticised citizen participation programs for their ineffectiveness, saying that they consisted of 'nothing more than a few public hearings' (Ibid., p. 241). The author (Ibid.) underlined that participation should reach *administration* as an *enforcing institution* alongside *government* as a *decision-making institution*. In the same way, Brudney and England (1983) positioned co-production in the *implementation* phase of service delivery.

Consequently, the model of co-production took, and still takes, into account the role of the citizens in the execution and formulation of public policies in the delivery phase. As Sharp(1980, p. 115) emphasises, the co-production model 'goes beyond conflict over decisions, offers the potential for cooperative linkages between citizens and urban service bureaucrats, and highlights the value of many everyday commonplace, yet important citizen activities'. Similarly, Whitaker (1980) stresses the need to include the execution phase in the models of citizen participation through co-production. Whitaker (1980) underlines that it is possible for citizens to influence policies, but in the execution of those policies, the citizens have been merely passive subjects. The idea of co-production was seen as necessary, especially in human services that 'seek to change the client'. These include services such as teaching and health care but also services related to safety (Ibid., p. 241).

Thus, the core contribution of the 'model of co-production' was the recognition of the active role of citizens in the implementation of public services. Moreover, co-production was seen as a way to tackle current challenges facing local authorities. Brudney and England (1983, p. 59) emphasise that co-production offers an alternative to answer the pressures that many local authorities face; it allows them to offer better services for citizens and, at the same time, helping to cope with the fiscal

constraints. As these authors note, through 'coproduction' of municipal services, the authorities can find an alternative to cutbacks of services (Ibid., p. 59).

Later on, in the eighties, the 'Indiana group', along with other researchers, continued to further investigate and develop the concept of co-production (see e.g., Brudney & England, 1983; Percy, 1984; Sharp, 1980; Whitaker, 1980). Yet, although the model of co-production offered an alternative way to tackle fiscal pressures and rising expectations from the citizenry, the trend of marketisation of public sector activities became stronger in the eighties. At the same time, the academic interest in co-production started to abate (Alford, 1998). Alford (Ibid., p. 129) argued that the main explanation for decreased interest in co-production was the emphasis on volunteering rather than clients as co-producers:

> It [co-production based on voluntarism] is seen as being much too dependent on altruism which, in a climate where market incentives are the dominant currency, seems far too unreliable a motivation on which to base important public functions.

Indeed, NPM reform started in the 1970s and has since revolutionised the operation logic of public administration across the world. Managerialism, market orientation, privatisation and evaluation are key concepts of NPM reform. The purpose of the reform has been to improve the effectiveness of public sector functions and to increase citizens' ability to influence the services they use (Alford, 1998; Osborne, 2010; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). In spite of these good intentions, the critics of NPM have questioned some of its features.

In particular, critics have argued that the reform have not been sufficient in allowing citizens to have the needed influence. Firstly, the NPM logic that considers the citizens 'only' as consumers is not comprehensive. Consumerism and managerialism may give the service users the opportunity to vote with their feet, but it does not necessarily give them the opportunity to influence the development of services. In the same way, the community element is missing in NPM; citizens should be seen not only as selfish consumers but also as members of the community who strive for their public interest as citizens (Bovaird, 2006; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2002; Osborne, 2010). And, where public services are concerned, an essential element of the market will be missing: the producer's ability to decide whether a certain service is produced or not. From this point of view, the citizen and the service provider are not able to affect the market as, in reality, the decisions belong to political decision-makers and to purchasers of public services (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2002; Greve & Jespersen, 1999). This viewpoint also stresses the lack of opportunities for co-production in the NPM environment.

Consequently, Alford brought co-production back to public management discussions as an alternative to marketisation and the 'contract state' (Alford, 1998, p. 129; see also 2002, 2014; Alford & Speed, 2006). He emphasised the importance of client co-production in public service delivery and connected this idea with public sector reform. Alford also underlined that public sector reform as well as traditional public administration have been based on logic by which public managers control the production of public services based on their authority. He notes that reform 'prescriptions', like the purchaser-provider model or performance management, are based on this logic. However, there are services whereby the logic of 'direct authority' is insufficient. Thus, the public sector workers as well as their managers need active contribution from the clients and must use 'indirect influence' instead of authority in these situations. This logic, then again, is not compatible with management based on control and straightforward, measurable outcomes (Alford, 1998).

Ostrom (1996) continued her work with co-production in the 1990s. In her widely cited article, Ostrom (1996, p. 1073) aims to 'bridge the great divide' between government and the private sector or government and civil society by demonstrating that many public activities consist of public, market and citizen contributions. Ostrom also declines to use the term 'client' because of its passive connotations. Instead, she refers to 'citizens': 'Coproduction implies that citizens can play an active role in producing public goods and services of consequence to them' (Ibid.).

Ostrom (Ibid.) positions co-production within a wider institutional framework. She highlights polycentric political systems[1] as a driving institutional arrangement for co-production. Polycentricism is linked to the size of governmental units: in polycentric systems, the general rules are decided in larger units whereas 'smaller' issues are tailored and decided in local settings. The monocentric system, then again, tries to create uniform rules that cover all settings. Due to their complexity, monocentric systems are often not successful. Here, Ostrom (1996, p. 1082) notes that polycentric systems leave more room for creating successful co-production as these arrangements help to create meaningful interactions between public authorities and citizens.

NPM reform has been followed by the ideology or paradigm of NPG, 'the third wave' of public administration reform (Osborne, 2010). As Osborne (2010, p. 9) puts it: 'NPG is both a product of and a response to the increasingly complex, plural

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[1] The concept of polycentrism was developed by Vincent Ostrom (see V. Ostrom, Tiebout & Warren, 1961).

and fragmented nature of public policy implementation and service delivery in the twenty-first century'. As a *paradigm*, NPG is based on institutional and network theory, stating that, as a new approach to governance, it entails a pluralistic philosophy of the state. The *plural state* consists of interdependent actors contributing to public services, whereas the *pluralist state* emphasises the various multidimensional policy-making processes.

Thus, co-production has become an essential element of NPG discussions in the 2000s; NPG as an *ideology* emphasises partnerships and networks between the service users, the third sector and private and public organisations (Osborne, 2010; Pestoff, 2012; Verschuere et al., 2012).

Yet, the whole idea of the 'third wave' is debatable. In fact, as Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, pp. 18–19) point out, there is really no shortage of alternative models to NPM. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) themselves have used the term 'Neo-Weberian State', highlighting efficiency and citizen-orientated government as principles in the reform of Western- and North-European democracies. Also, Alford and Hughes (2008) argue that NPG, alongside other related concepts, is too simplistic, offering 'one best way' solutions (Ibid., p. 131). These authors stress that the 'post-NPM literature' explains the shifts of governance too simplistically, as the literature does not take into account all the different modes of government underlying public services. As the authors explain, bureaucratic and managerialist implications often exist alongside governance models in service production (Ibid.).

Torfing and Triantafillou (2014, p. 10) point out that NPG is still 'an empirical [rather] than an analytical concept'. These authors, too, underline the importance of active citizenship and co-production in service production and policy-making process as core elements of NPG. However, NPG poses various challenges for political systems. These challenges are noteworthy with regard to this study. The first challenge has to do with offering opportunities for participation: neither possible stakeholders nor responsible civil servants will necessarily be prepared to change their habits or procedures. Torfing and Triantafillou (Ibid.) also stress the challenges related to equality and power: participatory policies should be equally determined by the stakeholders, not solely by public organisations or local power elites. The question of determining the problem, for a start, is a part of the participatory process. Torfing and Triantafillou (2014, pp. 18–19) also emphasise the knowledge of frontline workers as a source of functioning solutions. These authors stress that the increased forms of accountability involved in NPG might burden the government extensively.

Yet, as a key author in NPG literature, Osborne (2010) stresses that NPG is not a normative alternative to NPM and public administration. Rather, NPG is a 'conceptual model' with which is possible to analyse and identify the key challenges in public sector management in the 2010s (Ibid., p. 413; see also Torfing & Triantafillou, 2014).

Furthermore, there are plenty of alternatives for those trying to find 'the next big thing' in the post-NPM phase (Pollitt & Bouackert, 2011, p. 19). Many authors have tried to describe the complex and interrelated public sector environment, which is based on networks and partnerships in the age of digitalisation (Greve, 2015; Pollitt & Bouackert, 2011).

For instance, Greve (2015, p. 50) posits NPG as a synonym of 'collaborative governance'. He presents *public value management, digital era-governance* and *collaborative governance* as core ideas for public management and public sector reform in the 2010s. Although these concepts offer different viewpoints with which to analyse the directions of public sector reform in the 2010s, they converge in highlighting active citizenship and responsiveness as well as bottom-up legitimacy (Ibid., p. 60). As the author notes, collaborative governance is needed to 'borrow' from public value management regarding the objectives of (public) value creation and recognition of new accountability ties. Collaborative governance also needs to learn to apply digital solutions in order to create and enhance collaborative arrangements (Ibid.).

Public value management is considered an important perspective on the challenges of public management in the 2010s, especially in the Anglo-American context (Ibid.). Principally, public value is seen as a way to restore democracy, legitimacy and efficiency in the post-NPM era (Alford & O'Flynn, 2009). In general, as a concept that strongly relies on input from citizens and clients, public value is connected with co-production (Needham, 2008). Yet, the linkage has a problematic nature: co-production may create complexity for public value creation. Here, private value creation can be at odds with public value: the organisation or person creating value and the system or person who will benefit can be different (Osborne et al., 2015; Alford, 2014).

During the last years, the influence of service management literature have been increasing in the field of public management (Osborne & Strokosch, 2013; Osborne et al., 2015; Virtanen & Kaivo-oja, 2015; Virtanen & Stenvall, 2014). The key principle for public service reform is the service-dominant logic in the production of public services. The core of the service framework is the 'missing product' in service production. Therefore, the logic of goods production does not apply to services that

are intangible in nature (see e.g., Grönroos & Voima, 2011; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013; Osborne et al., 2015). Moreover, the focus of analysis is on *the totality of the public service system,* and it concentrates on the interactive nature of public service production (Osborne et al., 2015, p. 3). This stream of literature also emphasises (user-driven/open) *innovation* as a key to more effective public services (Brown & Osborne, 2013; Moore & Hartley, 2008; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013; Osborne & Brown, 2011; Strokosch, 2013).

Nonetheless, Alford (2014) raises an important limitation in the approach of service management: it fits well in individual forms of co-production, but problems may arise when the focus is on wider citizenry and its often-conflicting viewpoints. Alford (Ibid.) suggests that it is possible to mix the individual service user experience with voice of larger citizen groups with emerging participation techniques. Yet, this is not an easy task.

Then again, when co-production is observed in light of the more hands-on reform in the 2010s, it is seen as a principal element of 'Big Society' policies, which stem originally from the UK. The main idea of the policy agenda is to strengthen community empowerment, self-help and third sector input in public service production and to increase localized solutions for public services. For instance, the concepts of *neighbourhood governance* and *neighbourhood approach* arise from the 'new localism agenda' that is, again, linked to the 'Big Society' programme (Davies & Pill, 2012; Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008).

In general, the aim of 'Big Society' is to patch up the impoverished public service system under austerity by increasing community empowerment and voluntarism (see Perry, 2007; N. Bailey, 2008; S. Bailey, 2011). According to critical views, 'Big Society' policies are connected with cutting down government and, at the same time, increasing the self-help ideology of societies (Bailey & Pill, 2011; Davies & Pill, 2012; Ludwig & Ludwig, 2014; Jacobs & Manzi, 2013).

In the same way, co-production as a principle for future public services has also been contested by many authors. Co-production has been problematised, especially from the viewpoint of democracy. One of the main concerns is how disadvantaged citizens can be changed into active co-producers (Eriksson & Vogt, 2013; Jakobsen & Andersen, 2013). Here, Eriksson and Vogt (2013) stress that, despite good intentions, there is a risk that the society will only rely on the opinions of the citizens who already are well-off in their own lives. How to integrate disadvantaged citizens into the processes is a problem that is not easily solved.

Correspondingly, Jakobsen and Andersen (2013) argue that equity should be a key focus of co-production research. Their field experiment in educational service

revealed that the disadvantaged service users lack the resources and knowledge to co-produce. However, their research also indicated that if these issues are taken into account in the design of co-production programmes and policies, co-production can, indeed, increase both efficiency and equity (Jakobsen & Andersen, 2013, p. 712). Moreover, the idea of active citizenship or, as Brannan, John and Stoker (2006) call it, the 'civic renewal' has been seen as means and outcomes in the process of improving public services. Therefore, the evaluation of such programmes has proven to be very challenging.

As Bovaird (2007, p. 856) rightly notes, co-production should not be considered a panacea for curing all the problems related to public services. Contingencies should be taken into account. For instance, Ostrom (2009) stressed in her Nobel Prize-winning lecture that solutions for governance dilemmas are always socially and environmentally contingent and, when and because they disregard complexity, panaceas usually fail (Ibid.). Also Alford (2014) notes that co-production, with its different, embedded forms and roles, is a good example of a policy in which panaceas should be avoided. Thus, co-production with a 'multi-faceted nature' poses a challenge to public sector reformers as well as academics.

To sum up the review on co-production in the context of public sector reform, it can be said that reform set an analytical basis for understanding the roles given both to citizens and public service providers in different temporal dimensions. The review also helps to capture the main features on the organisational and institutional environment, which is the backbone of the co-production activities taking place on the more mundane level of service provision. In the 1970s, centralisation and professionalisation were seen as ways to serve the citizens and public service users. Back then, the evolving co-production model offered an alternative to utilizing the citizen inputs in the service delivery phase. Then again, NPM approaches emphasised the logic of the private sector and highlighted freedom of choice for the clients/customers; the idea of co-production was pushed aside as it was considered too abstract and unreliable (Alford, 2002). In the post-NPM phase of reform, the idea of active citizenship has become a key to developing and producing public services and has since remained in the focus of many public management and public administration researchers. The whole idea of citizenship has broadened from seeing the citizens not as objects of care but as active co-producers (Ryan, 2012).

Finally, the purpose of presenting co-production as a chronological story and a historical review is the fact that the concept of co-production has been used quite extensively in current discussions. Against this viewpoint, it has been demonstrated here that there are underlying explanations for the wide variety of conceptualisations

concerning co-production. This notion indicates that current conceptualisations of co-production should be examined in a more in-depth manner.

2.2   Co-production: Current approaches

A widely referenced conceptual outline of co-production has been formed by Parks et al. (1981). Drawn from their original conceptualisation, Verschuere et al. (2012, p. 1085) delineate co-production as

> [T]he mix of activities that both public service agents and citizens contribute to the provision of public services. The former are involved as professionals, or 'regular producers', while 'citizen production' is based on voluntary efforts by individuals and groups to enhance the quality/quantity of the services they use.

In the conceptual definitions above, it is possible to recognise that the main focus of the concept is in *public services* and that the defining feature is *active contribution*. What is also noteworthy is that in this definition, the 'citizen co-producers' can be individuals or larger groups. Brudney and England (1983, p. 63) categorise co-production as *individual co-production*, *group co-production* and *collective co-production*. Since then, Durose et al. (2013, p. 7) have presented the same categorisation between different forms of co-production. According to these authors (Ibid.), the individual forms include, for instance, expert patient programmes. Meanwhile, group forms of co-production entail activities like neighbourhood watches. Then again, collective forms of co-production can feature time banks or community ownership of parks.

In the same way, Strokosch (2013, p. 378) has suggested a typology between individual and organisational forms of co-production. She links the participative and enhanced forms of co-production to the planning phase of service processes; here, the co-production takes place between an individual and a public service organisation. Consumer co-production takes place more in the delivery phase of the service process. Then again, co-governance and co-management, concepts created by Brandsen and Pestoff (2006), are more related to the inter-organisational forms of co-production as they involve third-sector organisations and public actors.

Indeed, following this definition, distinctions can be found between *co-production*, *co-management* and *co-governance*. In this typology, co-production refers to citizens producing public services with public partners or autonomously with public funding and regulation. Co-production may also refer to an arrangement by which public services are produced through voluntary and community organisations

(Vidal 2006, p. 584). Co-management refers to third-sector and public sector (or other partners) cooperation in the provision of public services. Finally, co-governance is about arrangements where the third sector, public agencies and for-profit organisations participate in the planning of public services as well as decision-making (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Pestoff et al., 2006; Pestoff, 2012).

Pestoff (2012, 2014) has also distinguished individual and collective acts of co-production. He (Pestoff, 2012) explains the differences in these two forms through *formality* and *salience*. The individual forms are more *ad hoc* in nature, and they are of lower salience. Then again, the collective forms entail more formal and institutionalised activities, and they include more enduring service processes than the individual forms. However, Pestoff (Ibid.) notes that many co-production activities are a mix of the two forms, especially in the field of social services.

Yet, it makes a difference whether the analysis concerns individuals, groups or organisations. On one hand, at the individual and group levels, co-production can be understood as a *mechanism* that is applied to boost citizen influence to the services they use. On the other hand, when the analysis takes place at the organisational level, co-production refers to arrangements between different kinds of organisations (Pestoff, 2012).

Furthermore, concerning the distinctions of the co-production concept, co-production can be observed as a process or as an outcome. For instance, Pestoff (2012) notes that greater citizen involvement in public services is itself an innovation. Also, Voorberg et al. (2014) point out in their literature review that sometimes the purpose of co-production is simply citizen involvement (Voorberg et al., 2014, p. 9). This perspective holds co-production as a value in itself. This can be considered as a normative view of the concept.

There are many similar concepts related to co-production as is the case with *citizen participation*. These concepts have been used synonymously (see e.g., Pestoff, 2014; Voorberg et al., 2014). Yet, there are differences in the connotations of these concepts. One difference can be found on the basis of values. Originally, the focus of citizen participation is on power relations and democracy (see e.g., Arnstein, 1969). Then again, the core aim of co-production can be understood, first and foremost, as the effectiveness and improved quality of public services (e.g., Bovaird & Löffler, 2012; Ostrom & Ostrom, 1971; Pestoff, 2012).

Marschall (2004) has linked the concept of co-production in the literature on political behaviour. The author (Ibid.) show a the gap in the literature on participation: the 'how' and 'why' questions have been less focused upon by participation researchers. Rather, the focus of participation literature is on the

improvement of communication skills for enhancing political participation and involvement. Thus, the policy implementation phase as a part of every-day life has remained a less-studied angle. However, as Marschall (2004) notes, co-production can be seen as value-adding also from the democratic point of view activation in mundane forms of participation can potentially lead to political activation as well.

To continue, the concepts of co-production and co-creation have also been used interchangeably (Needham, 2008; Voorberg et al., 2014). The overlap between these two concepts occurs especially when the analysis covers participation in the creation of the service though, for instance, co-design (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). Yet, co-creation literature is less concerned with the *co-production* dimension, meaning the forms in which citizens contribute their resources to actually produce a service. Rather, co-creation deals with value creation as an intangible part of the service process (Lusch & Vargo, 2006).

Co-production has also been linked with the volunteering research (Brandsen & Honigh, 2015; Pestoff, 2012). In fact, voluntarism has been seen as a defining element of co-production (Verschuere et al., 2012), highlighting that citizen co-production is founded upon the *voluntary efforts*. Yet, this element of the concept has been problematised among the co-production researchers.

For instance, Alford (2002) distinguishes between co-production and volunteering by stating that co-production also entails the consuming phase of the service process. In a strict sense, this is not always the case in volunteering. Moreover, Alford (Ibid.) underlines that it is important to distinguish clients, citizens and volunteering citizens. They all have different motivations and potential relationships with public organisations and, depending on their role, they receive different kinds of value from the services. Despite this viewpoint, the concept of co-production has traditionally been applied in research concerning third sector involvement in public service production (Osborne & McLaughlin, 2004; Pestoff, 2009).

Pestoff (2012) also emphasises that volunteering and co-production are, in many ways, overlapping with regard to the motivations of the stakeholders. According to Pestoff (ibid.) co-production can be understood both as citizens contributing to the provision of public services alongside public service agents as well as partnerships between public service providers and citizens. The variances in the interpretations may be explained by differences in culture or in focus (Ibid.).

The context of analysis matters in the definition of co-production. The motives and effects of co-production vary depending on whether it takes place on an individual or collective level (Alford, 2014; Bovaird, 2007; Pestoff, 2014). Moreover,

users, volunteers and community groups, as co-producers, all have different interests in the co-production process (Bovaird, 2007).

When co-production is understood as an elementary part of service delivery in the tradition of service science (see Osborne & Strokosch, 2013), the question of voluntarism becomes unnecessary. The ideal service system along the service science tradition concentrates on the client-service provider nexus, and the role of co-production is to become 'an inalienable component of public service delivery that places the experiences and knowledge of the service user at the heart of the effective public service design and delivery' (Osborne & Strokosch, 2013, p. 146). The core challenge to overcome in this setting is to recognise the driving mechanisms that foster the utilisation of user knowledge (Osborne & Strokosch, 2013, p. 40).

Yet, in models where supportive or supplementary activities are in focus, the question of voluntarism becomes essential. For instance, there have been critical notions concerning the rise of self-help ideology in public services, meaning that citizens are forced to co-produce their services (see e.g., Eriksson & Vogt, 2013).

In this research, the cases of formal partnerships with the third sector are excluded, but one of the Sub-studies (Tuurnas et al., 2016) concerns a model that could be interpreted both as co-production or as volunteering. In the case of conciliation service, citizens as mediators are producing a public service together with the professional staff hired in the mediation office. According to the classical conceptualisation of Parks et al. (1981), this can be considered a clear case of co-production of a public service. Moreover, the case of conciliation is a good example of the 'mix' of different forms of co-production as it entails a formal partnership between an individual citizen (versus a third sector cooperation) and a public service organisation. This way, the case illustrates the diversity of manifestations of the concept of co-production.

Furthermore, the focus varies depending on the level of contribution needed (Verschuere et al., 2012). More *enduring services* can include forms such as neighbourhood watch or parental participation in education. As for more *mundane forms*, these authors refer to classical example of Alford (2002) where writing postal codes into letters is considered co-production. Although the efforts here can be considered small, by using the right codes they make a difference in the *effectivity* of the service delivery. This notion draws attention to the outcomes. For instance, Bovaird and Löffler (2012, p. 1121) consider the outcomes to be a core issue in their definition of user and community co-production: '[T]he public sector and citizens make better use of each other's assets and resources to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency'.

Then again, some authors have preferred to define the co-production concept typologically rather than conceptualizing it unambiguously. Osborne and Strokosch (2013) tie together the traditions of public administration and service science. These authors (Ibid., pp. 37–42) introduce different modes of co-production as a continuum. Here, the first mode is consumer co-production stemming from the ideas in service management literature. The core point is that the element of co-production is embedded in services, regardless of the willingness of the co-producing parties. The outcomes of the service process are outlined by both the client and the service provider. The emphasis of consumer co-production is on the operational level of service provision.

Participative co-production aims to enhance the quality of services. This mode of co-production applies to different participatory mechanisms, such as citizen consultation and co-planning. The expected outcomes entail improved user participation in the planning of the services, particularly at the strategic level of service production. This mode of co-production has roots in the public administrative tradition, and it is aimed at a strategic rather than an operational mode of service development. It should be noted, though, that this mode of co-production may remain on a superficial level. Therefore, it is vital to avoid applying co-production as a normative good—as a value-adding component of service production. The critics also question the real opportunities for influence; the public authorities may still be the ones to dictate when and how the service users or residents are allowed to take part (Osborne & Strokosch, 2013).

The third mode in the continuum is enhanced co-production, which connects the former two modes at the operational and strategic levels. The core idea of enhanced co-production is to challenge the whole paradigm of public service production by focusing on user-led innovation. Ideally, enhanced co-production rests on real partnerships between the service providers and service users based on 'the use of knowledge to transform service delivery' (Osborne & Strokosch, 2013, p. 40).

To sum up the review, it is possible to see a 'conceptual chaos' where others emphasise outcomes, and some emphasise the involvement in itself. Furthermore, some stress the intangibility of co-production whereas the classic definition entails voluntarism and active contribution. As a means to make sense of this chaos, I have outlined a typological framework consisting of four different interpretative perspectives on co-production, based on their different theoretical and aims as well as their understanding of who the co-producers are (e.g., groups, collective, individuals as clients/citizens). The typological framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

The presented perspectives are, naturally, only one more viewpoint in the long list of conceptualisations of co-production. Yet, I consider it important to bring out the different interpretative perspectives as a way to indicate how co-production is perceived in this study. Thus, I aim to position my own understanding of the concept and frame the different perspectives on co-production that have been on focus of this study.

The first perspective, 'co-production as a model for institutional design based on networks and partnerships', illustrates the ideal of the polycentric public service environment. Here, co-production is reflected in a wider governance framework. In this interpretative perspective, the value basis is a plural and pluralist society. The role of co-production is to exemplify the shifts in governance, and it is referred to as a model of governance comprising different forms of co-production, from individual and group forms to collective models (see Osborne, 2010; Ostrom, 1996; Pestoff, 2014). This perspective has been used as general framework for the study.

The second perspective presents co-production as changing state-society relations (Brannan et al., 2006). As a concrete example of such an approach, the 'Big Society' programme in the UK takes a stance on this very perspective. Yet, there are signs that similar programmes arise in other societies, including Finland (Hyyryläinen, 2015). In general, the underlying idea is to challenge the traditional welfare state models and professionalism as the main principles of public service systems and to give power to the communities and citizens (Bailey, 2011; Botero et al., 2012). This perspective also underlines the need to re-vitalise communities in order to strengthen social capital (Brannan et al., 2006; Putnam, 2000). From a more critical viewpoint, the underlying motives can be understood as economic rather than social: the aim is to patch up the service systems facing fiscal pressures and austerity and hand the responsibility from the state to the citizens (Eriksson & Vogt, 2013; Bailey, 2011). However, an important notion related to downsizing government and increasing co-production comes from Putnam (2000): co-production is more common in societies with an extensive welfare state than in those with smaller governments. Therefore, an either-or proposition is not necessarily needed. Finally, the core motives and value bases especially in this perspective can be considered ideological. For others, the main motive can be understood as 'maintaining' whereas for others the changing state-society relations can be seen as a way to run down the traditional, state-supported welfare state.

The third perspective stresses the importance of co-production as a way to enhance deliberative democracy and participation. From this perspective, co-production can be used as a synonym for citizen participation. The main aim is to

foster participation as way to empower citizens and utilise the innovative power of citizens (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008; Marschall, 2004; Pestoff, 2009, 2014; Voorberg et al., 2014; Sørensen, & Torfing, 2012). The fourth perspective stresses the interactive nature of service production; it takes the active contribution from both sides, the provider and the client or service user, as a predetermined feature of the service process (Alford, 2002; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013).

In the third and fourth perspectives, co-production can be understood as a mechanism that aims for collaborative innovation (e.g., Bommert, 2010;). Yet, the mechanisms to release the potential can vary significantly depending on whether the focus is on citizens or clients (Tuurnas, 2015). In fact, as Alford and Speed (2006) point out, these two perspectives conflict from the value perspective: private value gained by clients can be at odds with public value gained by wider citizenry.
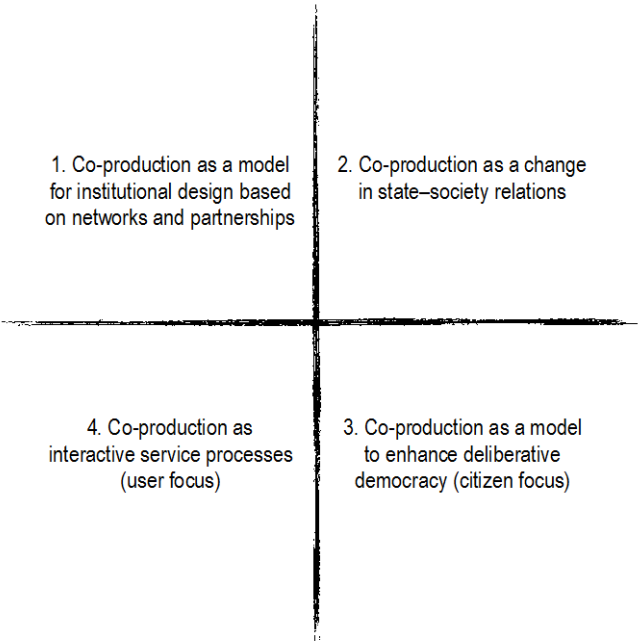
Figure 1. Interpretative perspectives on the co-production concept

To conclude this section, I explain my definition and understanding of the co-production concept by discussing two core issues. Here, the conceptualisation offered by Verschuere et al. (2012, 1085) is a fruitful basis for the discussion. They assert that co-production 'is based on voluntary efforts by individuals and groups to enhance the quality/quantity of the services they use'.

First, it is essential to look at the potential value of co-production and to identify the expectations of co-production. However, given the equivocal nature of the concept, it is difficult to formulate an unambiguous statement about it. To demonstrate, the differences in the aims and value basis are particularly important in explaining the variations of perspectives 2 and 3. Perspective 2 sees co-production as a change in state-society relations whereas perspective 3 sees it as a model to enhance deliberative democracy. Perspective 3 holds citizen participation as a valuable outcome of co-production in itself. Notwithstanding, the main expectation in perspective 2 is the enhancement and maintenance of the quality and quantity of services. My own understanding is that the core feature that conceptually differentiates co-production from citizen participation is, indeed, the point that the primary aim of co-production is to enhance the quality and quantity of the services citizens use. With this aim as a main rationale, democracy is not necessarily always at the core of the process. This is certainly not to say that democracy is not important in discussions on co-production. Actually, finding the balance between equity and representativeness in user-centred service models is one of the core challenges faced by service organisations operating in the public sphere. Moreover, co-production can strengthen inclusion, which consequently empowers citizens. This discussion is further elaborated in Chapter 6.

Second, Verschuere et al. (2012) use the phrase 'voluntary efforts' in their conceptualisation. This is arguably a matter for debate, leading us to examine the other essential point in the conceptualisation of co-production – voluntarism. Here, the willingness to co-produce has been a defining element of co-production. To demonstrate, Ostrom's (1996, p. 1079) account of the novel conceptualisation of co-production includes ''clients' who want to be transformed into safer, better educated, or healthier persons'.

Yet, due to the ambiguous nature of the concept in current discussions, voluntarism becomes a tricky question (see also Brandsen & Honingh, 2015). As discussed earlier, in austerity-driven self-service democracy (Eriksson & Vogt, 2012), citizens are potentially forced to co-produce the services they want or need. However, by observing co-production as interactive service processes (see Figure 1), the question of voluntarism becomes irrelevant. This is due to the ontological principle that services always entail co-production despite the willingness of the parties (see also Brandsen & Honingh, 2015; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013). Thus, I consider voluntarism as a contingent element of co-production. Here, contingency depends on the level of analysis: the closer the analysis is to the system level (as opposed to

micro-scale service processes), the more contingent voluntarism becomes in co-production.

Consequently, I define co-production as a contingent process involving a set of different actors (see Alford, 2014). Moreover, my approach to the concept of co-production is ambiguous. Rather than an attempt to frame co-production strictly (by what it is or is not), my aim is to find the mechanisms that produce certain outcomes in selected contexts. Against this backdrop, I am interested in both successful and less successful cases of co-production. Examining the different cases, one can likely encounter tensions between rhetoric and practice of co-production, and find mechanisms that can be used as way to explain the outcomes, successful or not.

3   Public Service Professionals in Complex Governance Settings

3.1   Defining the public service professional

Professionals play an important part in providing public services—they both arrange the practices on the middle management level and interact with clients on the frontline of public service provision (Ferlie & Geraghty, 2005). In this research, the focus is on the processual nature of public service provision, observing the co-production process from the viewpoint of the professionals.

First, in order to define what is meant by *professionals*, I refer to the notion of Abma and Noordegraaf (2003, p. 293): Here, the authors highlight autonomy-based identity as defining element of a professional:

> 'Professionals, in the classical sense of the word, are individuals who have followed a professional education and training, who are members of professional associations, who read professional journals, and who are subject to professional codes and legal procedures. […] The private and confidential character of knowledge about clients gives professionals a discretionary space to act without the interference of third parties'.

It is important to understand the nature of professional work. Abma and Noordegraaf (2003) have identified four different settings for public management, observing them, especially, from the viewpoint of evaluative practices. These settings are helpful in framing the different conditions of professional public service provision. First, the authors (Ibid.) classify the settings based on *one-sided interaction* and *two-sided interaction*. Two-sided interaction means *professional processes*, such as health care, and *strategic processes*, developing physical or social infrastructure, where the outcomes are negotiated with clients and other stakeholders. Due to the interactive nature of these processes, the work includes uncertainty and complexity. In these processes, the outcomes cannot be easily predicted beforehand. This is especially the case in strategic processes as they are based on 'weighting on values' (Ibid., p. 295).

As opposed to these settings, one-sided interaction means *industrial processes*, such as welfare benefits or public transport, and *enforcing processes*, like defence and

policing. In these settings, the outcomes can be considered more predictable. Moreover, the settings based on interaction include a variating amount of routine and, thus, ambiguity and complexity. The authors (ibid.) distinguish the production of public services into *routine production* and *non-routine production*. To demonstrate, the setting of one-sided interaction, exemplified as delivery of welfare benefits, for instance, include more routine than activities included in police services.

Then again, in the setting of two-sided interaction with a 'negotiated product', as Abma and Noordegraaf (2003, p. 293) put it, the professional processes include more routine than the strategic processes. This is due to the idea of professional services as standardised and repetitive processes (see also Mintzberg, 1973). Then again, strategic processes are certainly non-routine; expected outcomes are created during the process as negotiations between different stakeholders.

The professional work is based on the 'intangibility' of the product. In professional processes, both the process and its outcomes are negotiated with clients as co-producers. Due to the intangibility of professional work, their effects are often visible only in the long run. This makes the assessment of professional work a challenging task. Strategic processes, on the other hand, are difficult to measure as the outcomes are defined in the process negotiated between different stakeholders. Therefore, the are no simple ways to define success or failure (Abma & Noordegraaf, 2003).

In conclusion, professionals have to deal with ambiguities and complex interaction situations in their work. Their *profession* helps them to tackle these situations, offering a framework to make decisions. Abma and Noordegraaf (2003, p. 295) use health care, and the protocols that are used to handle some illnesses, as examples.

To continue, there is a wide spectrum of academic literature on professions and professionalism in the field of social sciences, especially in sociology (see e.g., Freidson, 1994, 2001; Evetts, 2003, 2011; Kirkpatrick, Ackroyd & Walker, 2005).

Ferlie and Geraghty (2005, p. 423) discuss at least three ways to analyse and classify public service professions. The first way is to analyse professions through their location (for instance, local versus central government) or through their role as 'elite professions and para-professions'. Another analytical interest could be 'tracking the evolution of professionalization projects'. Finally, the authors suggest an analytical lens to observe the focus on 'changing relations between the public service professions and more demanding clients'. Out of these typological and analytical suggestions, the last one is most appropriate to this research as it includes the idea of co-production as a part of the work of public service professionals.

Furthermore, the term *professional culture* has been used in this research to illustrate the shared norms and values of public service professionals. Professional culture can also be seen as a defining element of professionalism. Yet, as Evans (2008, p. 6) points out, professionalism goes 'beyond' professional culture:

> Whilst professional culture may be interpreted as shared ideologies, values and general ways of and attitudes to working, professionalism seems generally to be seen as the identification and expression of what is required and expected of members of a profession.

Evans thus suggests that professional culture is more attitudinal than behavioural whereas the focus of professionalism is functional rather than attitudinal.

Furthermore, the concept of civic professionalism help to illustrate, what it means for the professionals to work in the public sector explicitly. This concept has especially been used in research related to education (Boyte, 2015; Wilkinson, 2007) and medicine (Sullivan, 2000). According to Sullivan (2000), civic professionalism refers to a relationship between the professional and the surrounding society. The relationship from the professionals' perspective means that their conduct should be ethical to serve the public good. Here, Sullivan (2000) expresses his concern about the abilities of strong professions, such as medicine and law, to meet the expectations of modern society. In these settings, the sole professional expertise and self-regulation seem to be threatened. Sullivan (2000) emphasises the need to redefine the role of professionals from technical to civic-minded ones in the medical field. The author calls for a broader understanding of the profession through moral and social rather than technical expertise. This is an essential notion for the professional side of co-production, exemplifying the need to transform professions intrinsically.

> What is missing from these ways [here, expertise provided by the profession] responding to contemporary challenges is precisely the moral core of professionalism: the contract between professional and society in which physician and patient are bound together within a larger "body politic. (Sullivan, 2000, 673).

Civic professionalism has been viewed as a way to answer the decreasing public trust in professions (Kreber, 2016; Sullivan, 2000). Especially in the 21st century, professional reform emphasises the civic or democratic aspect of professionalism (Kreber, 2016). The need for reform stems from the public in the form of 'empowered customers' (see Fournier, 2000; Kreber, 2016). Co-production is at the core of this discussion. Kreber (2016) notes that other explanations underlying the decrease in public trust have been searched in the ideology of liberalism, highlighting market values, such as freedom of choice in the public sphere. Indeed, the ideological liberal values, like marketization, also challenge on civic professionalism. The case of

the commercialisation of schools is a good example (Wilkinson, 2007). As civic professionals, teachers play a key role in ascertaining and protecting the ideals of civic education. Similarly, other professionals are significant actors in balancing between social or public value and shareholder value (see e.g., Hill, Lorenz, Dent & Lützkendorf, 2013). The increase in accountability has also been considered to influence the decrease in public trust (Kreber, 2016). Accountability certainly plays an essential role in the work of a professional, and it is thus further discussed in section 3.1.2.

The role of changing professionalism is an interesting focus for future studies to examine the professional side of co-production. So far, as Brandsen and Honigh (2013) indicate, this stream of research has been explored mainly in sociology and business studies. Obviously, there is a need to develop a distinctive theoretical discussion on professionalism in the context of public-management literature, alongside sociological and business literature. Despite this notion, I frame further in-depth discussions on these streams of literature from this research; the study is committed to study the professional as actors in the co-production process, rather than examining the professions or professionalism *per se*.

However, as it has been discussed here, the public-sector reforms change the core ideas of professionalism and professions. From this viewpoint, the research can indeed contribute to discussions about changing professionalism, especially in the field of public services, by illustrating the implications of co-production processes for public-service professionals.

3.1.1   The legacy of Michael Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy

Michael Lipsky's classic study of 'street-level bureaucracy' (1980) provides a perceptive analysis of frontline power in public organizations, highlighting the importance of micro-level processes in public service systems. In this research, the concept of the *public service professional* is defined as public sector workforce operating on the street level and middle management. Although the work of Lipsky provides a basis for examining street-level processes, I chose to use a term that is less value-laden: in the current understanding, the term 'bureaucrat' is often used in a negative manner. In any case, Lipsky's theory on street-level bureaucracy offers valuable insights on the world of public service professionals as key players in public service processes.

Street-level bureaucrats 'are the people who make decisions about other people' (Lipsky, 1980, p. 161). They can be seen as important and powerful actors in the

policy-making processes. Despite the formal rules and vertical control over their work, the street-level bureaucrats apply the rules and create their own ethical codes in order to tackle their work tasks. Lipsky points out the following:

> [T]he decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures effectively *become* the public policies they carry out. (1980, p. xii)

In one of the more current works based on Lipsky's thinking, Hupe and Hill (2007) add an important viewpoint to Lipsky's idea of the relative autonomy of professionals. The authors (Ibid.) emphasise that in present public service settings, professionals are working in a micro-network of relations in different contexts. *Governance* brings a special feature to the autonomy of public service professionals through the multi-dimensional character of policy systems. In the context of services, this multi-dimensionality is particularly visible in co-production models (see e.g., Bovaird, 2007; Osborne, 2010; Pestoff, 2006).

Furthermore, it is possible to recognise three main perspectives that have been applied to study and analyse street-level bureaucracy, following Lipsky's theory: the so-called policy perspective, the perspective of work practices and the perspective of professionals and professional groups (Tuurnas et al., 2016).

The first perspective is based on policy implementations (Bergen & While, 2005; Meyers & Vorsanger, 2003; Scourfield, 2013) in which street-level bureaucrats are seen as the resource of reforms (Hill 2003) and as powerful actors who influence policy implementations (May & Winter, 2007). The second perspective of work practices includes the studies based on the working methods and values of professionals. Here, Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy has offered a particularly perceptive analysis of discretion, freedom and self-interest of frontline workers in public organizations. A key notion is that street-level bureaucrats use discretion and autonomy mainly to cope with their work tasks (Buchanan et al., 2007; Ellis, Davis & Rummery, 1999; Evans & Harris, 2004; Foldy & Buckey, 2010; Taylor & Kelly, 2006). The third perspective concentrates on the issues of street level bureaucrats' roles and possessions as a part of administration and the service delivery system. According to May and Winter (2007), many studies have examined control over street-level bureaucrats and their ability to influence the frontline behaviour of service delivery. This viewpoint can be linked especially with professionalism.

Although there have been many changes in the field of public administration since the 1980s, many of Lipsky's ideas are still relevant. As pointed out by Hupe and Hill (2007), the role of public sector reforms (here, especially governance) has brought new insight to Lipsky's theory.

Indeed, in governance models where different stakeholders from the public sector, the third sector and the private sector contribute to public service provision, the definition of a 'professional' becomes especially difficult to determine unambiguously. Hupe and Hill (2007) apply a distinction between the characteristics of a certain kind of occupation and the way a person exercising a certain occupation appears to the surrounding society. The authors (Ibid.) also refer to the status of *working* as a defining element in their definition of a public professional. They highlight the idea that the actors of the civil society as well as the traditional public service professionals can be considered public officials if they work in the *public domain*. This conceptualisation leaves the room for further discussion on the definition of a public official.

Hupe and Hill (2007) point out that in different interactive encounters with the clients and citizens, street-level bureaucrats can be considered 'public officials'. The position of 'public official' is not defined by the employer or professional status but by their *public accountability*. As the authors (Ibid.) note,

> Street-level bureaucrats may be either formal government employees or work in organizations that are seen as part of civil society. Despite differences in their formal positions, anchored in constitutional law and democracy and their institutions within the labour division, street-level bureaucrats are public officials. As public actors in the public domain, they are held publicly accountable for the results of their work. (p. 283)[2]

3.1.2   Accountability as a defining element of the professional's work

Accountability plays an important role in the definition of the public official. Therefore, it can also be seen as one of the core questions related to the work of public service professionals. Indeed, public service professionals are attached to different accountability ties (Hupe & Hill, 2007; Tuurnas et al., 2016). In addition to the traditional forms of *public-administrative* accountability, *professional accountability* also exists between different workers, both in the intra- and inter-dimensions of public service delivery. Here, the nature of professional accountability is often horizontal, and its basis is expertise. Then again, *participatory accountability*

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[2] The discussion about defining a public official especially in volunteer-professional co-production has been further reflected upon in Tuurnas et al. (2016).

emphasises the accountability ties with the service users or, as Hupe and Hill (2007) put it, the participatory citizenship.

It has been generally noticed that the simple principal-agent approach lacks the power to explain hybrid governance properly. In collaborative governance models, the roles may vary contingently: here, the positions of 'accountors' and 'accountees' might not be simple (Bovens, Schillemans & Hart, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjaan, 2004; Laegreid & Mattei, 2013; Willems & Van Dooren, 2011).

In the same way, Considine (2002) examined accountability in the context of partnerships and networks. The author (Ibid.) classifies accountability ties as vertical, horizontal or process-centred accountability. Vertical accountability, following legal and economic traditions, could be seen as a rather simple accountability tie. Yet, in the framework of managerialism, especially through managerial and performance-based budgets, accountability gaps may appear.

Horizontal accountability can be 'fuzzy', complex and conflict-driven as the principle-agent setting is missing (Considine, 2002; Schillemans, 2011). Then again, in the age of partnerships and networks, horizontal accountability can 'invite and authorise the contributions of social partners, community interests, other levels of government and other autonomous contributors' (Considine, 2002, p. 28).

Finally, process-centred accountability can be recognised especially in networks, clusters and co-production systems. As Considine (Ibid.) stresses,

> In these cases the question of accountability goes beyond being a matter of compliance (legal strategy) or performance (economic strategy) and becomes a matter of organizational converge (cultural strategy).

The process is thus an instrument for organisational learning and feedback. However, these cultural processes are difficult to define and measure, and there is still a shortage of tools and techniques with which to do so. Despite its limitations concerning the measurability, process-centred accountability can be considered as a important way to prevent the accountability gaps in co-production processes (Tuurnas et al., 2016).

To sum up, in Lipsky's theory on street-level bureaucracy, linked with discussions on accountability, it is possible to understand the complex environment in which public professionals work. Despite management systems and performance indicators, the professionals are, to a large extent, in charge of the street-level processes and their success. In this sense, professionals are truly central to public sector reforms.

3.2   Professionals as core actors in public sector reform

The creation of welfare state models, especially in the Continental and Scandinavian contexts, went hand in hand with 'professionalisation' of core welfare state activities. Although the period of large bureaucratisation of public sector organisation was seen as the end of professionalism, it proved to be quite the opposite. The educated professionals became the driving force of those bureaucracies (see Evetts, 2011; Ferlie & Geraghty, 2005; Sehested, 2002). As Sehested (2002, p. 1515) notes, 'The public bureaucracies became dependent on the professionals and their expert knowledge to perform the specialised work'. This provoked criticism towards professionalism as it was seen to restrain attempts to create a model that was user-driven as opposed to producer-centred (Broadbent & Laughlin, 2001; Sehested, 2002).

Following the large bureaucracies, the NPM policies has since affected professionals in various ways. First, privatisation and contracting out in the 1980s and 1990s had an impact on different public sector professionals from the manual workforce to middle management. However, human service professionals, located in the heart of the Welfare State services, have been more challenging to privatise (Ferlie & Geraghty, 2005). Then again, these professionals have had to face significant changes, especially concerning their professional autonomy: their discretion has been challenged, particularly by the rise of performance management systems and managerial control over their work (Broadbent & Laughlin, 2001; Ferlie & Geraghty, 2005; Freidson, 2001; Jespersen, Nielsen & Sognstrup, 2002; Sehested, 2002).

Sehested (2002) has studied, in the context of Denmark, how NPM reforms have influenced the roles of public service professionals. The author points out that the trend in NPM reform has been the change of the governing principle from professionalism to managerialism. Sehested (Ibid.) also explicates that NPM reform can be understood in different ways depending on the administrative context. In the Nordic model, such as in Denmark, the finances, regulation and control have remained the responsibility of public sector organisations. Then again, the NPM reform has increased out-sourcing and contracting out as ways to increase competition (Sehested, 2002, p. 1519; see also Farneti, Padovani & Young, 2010).

As for the professionals, Sehested (2006, p. 1519) specifically mentions changes in the internal organisation of the professional's work, especially through the loss of their traditional autonomy. The author (Ibid.) recognises changes in the monopoly of the professional's working arenas through the emergence of new administrative units as well as changes in their ideological controls through user influence.

Taylor and Kelly (2006) have examined the impacts of public sector reform (especially NPM processes) based on Lipsky's theory of professional discretion in rule, task and value dimensions. The authors examine school teachers and social workers in the context of the UK. According to Taylor and Kelly (Ibid.), rule discretion as the policy making element has decreased as a result of the increased quantity of rules and increased accountability. Furthermore, the authors (Ibid.) point out that the emphasis of service users as co-producers, the pressures to fulfil the goals set and managerial pressures all serve to increase task-based discretion. As their argument goes, the professionals are obliged to think about the implications of their tasks from different angles—from the top down and from the bottom up.

To continue, the bottom-up pressure comes not only from the individual service users but also from a wider community. Taylor and Kelly (Ibid.) emphasise that localism and other forms of community governance affect professional discretion in additional ways, forcing them to position themselves into new structures and processes. As these authors (Ibid., p. 639) indicate,

> '[T]his will put more pressure on professionals to familiarise themselves with the structures of governance and their impact on service delivery at street-level and the relationship between their own established statutory agencies and parish or neighbourhood governance'.

The work of Sehested (2002) emphasises the 'double' pressure on professionals, coming from the top through administrative and political leadership and the bottom through service users and citizens. The position of expert knowledge, possessed by professionals, is greatly influenced and changed in the reforms. The governance reform calls for responsiveness and equal dialogue with the service users, and it expects professionals to build services based on shared knowledge. As Sehested (2002, p. 1526) notes, this is a vital theme for research on reforms.

Moreover, Ferlie and Geraghty (2005, pp. 430–434) have sketched narratives on public sector reforms and their implications for public service professionals. The narrative of 'hard' NPM emphasises accountability, performance management and control of professional work. Then again, the narrative of 'soft' NPM rather highlights user and client orientation, quality and organisational learning. As an alternative, the authors (Ibid.) introduce the governance narrative with an emphasis on hybrids and win-win partnerships. Here, networks and partnerships are seen as steering models alongside the 'traditional hierarchies fragmented by NPM reforms' (Ferlie & Geraghty, 2005, p. 433). For the professionals, this narrative means a more inclusive approach to public services where users are seen as partners. Yet, as the authors (Ibid., p. 438) note, this narrative leaves many questions unanswered. For

instance, Ferlie and Geraghty contemplate the question of the training and development needs of professionals in their new roles in these hybrids and partnerships, and consider how able and willing the professionals are to accept the new roles. This is an essential point to consider. As it has been pointed out several times, public service professionals are not passive realisers of top-down policies; they themselves form those policies on different organisational levels.

Indeed, the academic discussions of public service professionals or professionalism in the public sector have taken place in the context of managerialism and NPM. Yet, the 'shift' from managerialism towards governance is often mentioned especially in connection with the increased user or customer influence and its implications for the autonomy of professionals. Moreover, the pressure created by increased performance management seems to be a significant question in the field of research on professionals and professionalism.

Brandsen and Honigh (2013) offer a good way to conclude the discussion on the changing position of public service professionals in the context of reforms, as presented in Table 1. They have typologised the main features of professional work in classic public administration models, in the NPM and, finally, in NPG. In these types of governance, as the authors (Ibid.) formulate it, the features are examined and summarised in the typologies of expertise, community, the basis of legitimacy and autonomy. In the Table 1, summarising the changes, it is possible to recognise fragmentation on the basis of legitimacy in the NPG type of governance. This is a notion that is crucial in this research.

Table 1. Professionals and three subsequent types of governance (drawn from Brandsen & Honigh, 2013, 882)

	Classic Public Administration	New Public Management	New Public Governance
Expertise	Mystical knowledge	Rationalised knowledge	Dispersed knowledge
Community	Dominant professional community	Dominant organisational community	Dominant inter-organisational community
Basis of legitimacy	Professional standards, clients	Organisational output and professional standards; customers	Organisational output; Professional standards; Inter-organisational networking; Citizens and clients as co-producers
Autonomy	Structured by professional community	Contested within professional bureaucracy and managerialism	Contested within collaborative network and co-production stakeholders

It has been noted that the research concerning the influence of collaborative governance models over professional practices still remains rather limited (Brandsen & Honingh, 2013). This especially concerns the models where the cooperation is based on partnerships, including the interaction with the service users. Yet, this perspective is can be considered crucial in the current environment of public service systems, which relies on multi-professional cooperation and co-production between different stakeholders (Brandsen & Honingh, 2013; Tuurnas et al., 2015). The changing position of sole professional knowledge as a basis for public service production has already been acknowledged in the literature. Then again, the question of how this cultural change actually happens in a polycentric and networked environment has not yet been studied to a wide extent. Brandsen and Honingh (2013, p. 876) emphasize the need for further investigation on the role of professionals in pluralistic governance: 'Less attention has so far been devoted to the newer trends in governance, which place the professional in the context of inter-organizational networks'.

Finally, although there is no extensive theory on the role of professionals in current collaborative governance models, it is possible to identify some essential points from the different streams of literature discussed here. First, the role of professionals in policy implementation has been widely acknowledged. From Lipsky's street-level bureaucracy (1980) to the more recent discussions on the role of

professionals in public-sector reform, the professionals are regarded as powerful agents in the formulation of public policies. However, the roles of professionalism and professions seem to be undergoing changes as public trust is decreasing (Sullivan, 2000). Second, the position of professionals seems to be shaped alongside the reform waves. The NPM policies have affected the work of professionals, especially through managerialism and increased accountability obligations. Professions have faced situations where their self-regulation and discretion have been weakened in many ways due to these measures. Based on the literature review, the key challenge of NPM for professionalism has been in how the relations between professionals and management are redefined (e.g., Brandsen & Honigh, 2013).

To reiterate, the current governance reform draws attention towards the relations between professionals and the surrounding society. The growing interest in civic professionalism puts pressure on professions to be transformed from within. Professional expertise is contested, not just by professional communities or managers, but by citizens and other stakeholders. In this environment, the underlying idea of professional expertise based on technical skills is questioned (see Brandsen & Honingh, 2013; Kreber, 2016; Sullivan, 2000). Finally, as pointed out several times, the accountability relations have increased and become more complex in governance settings. As Sehested (2002) demonstrates, professionals are faced with double pressure, stemming from managers and politicians, as well as from citizens. As the working environment becomes more open, professionals and professions face the pressure to include actors outside their professional communities in the formulation of (street-level) policies. Based on this proposition, the need to examine the professional perspective of co-production is well justified.

3.3   The professional side of co-production—a missing link?

The perspective of the public service professionals has, so far, not been focused upon in the literature on co-production (Verschuere et al., 2012). Generally, a widely accepted formulation of the future role of public service professionals states that they should give up their role as the sole experts and move towards a role as coordinators, facilitators and enablers in the production of the public services (Bovaird, 2007; Boyle & Harris, 2009; Osborne, 2010; Ryan, 2012; Verschuere et al., 2012). To demonstrate, in their role as coordinators, professionals can be considered as bridging and bonding forces between different individuals and communities, for example, in

neighbourhood activities (Jones & Ormston, 2013; Kearns & Parkinson, 2001; Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008; Marschall, 2004; Scott, 2002; Tuurnas, 2015).

Furthermore, in co-production, professionals should be able utilise and operationalise the assets that their clients and the citizens possess. Here, Bovaird and Löffler (2012, p. 1130) have recognised the 'need to develop the professional skills to mainstream co-production'. The authors state that co-production calls for revised training and development of public service professionals. In the same way, Osborne and Strokosch (2013) underline the importance of finding the right mechanisms for releasing the potential of user knowledge. As the authors note, the co-production parties need to have the necessary skills to make use of these mechanisms in order to utilise this potential (Ibid., p. 40). These skills are needed, above all, by the professionals working on the micro-level of service production.

To continue, the implementation of co-production ultimately seems to rely on the professionals' willingness to co-produce (Ostrom, 1996; Vamstad, 2012). This makes professionals an essential object of research concerning the co-production process. There is an understanding in the literature on co-production that public service professionals resist co-production because it involves the ceding of power (see Bovaird, 2007; Bovaird & Löffler, 2012; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013; Verschuere et al., 2012). Although this is surely true in many cases, I argue that there is more to it. Against this background, the questions of willingness or resistance invites one to elaborate what exactly makes co-production so difficult for professionals, and how partnerships with citizen co-producers are created in practice. Indeed, bringing together the diversity of actors with their different desires, skills and motivations can be considered as a key challenge of co-production (Bovaird, 2007). This complexity is reflected especially upon the public service professionals as they must balance their own emerging role with those of other co-producers (Bovaird, 2007; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013). This is an essential point to which this research contributes.

Finally, there a need to gain in-depth understanding of conditions in which professionals face in co-production. In the same way, we need to understand the challenges of the professionals in the polycentric governance relations taking place in different contexts. Thus, the theoretical framework raises a critical question concerning the viewpoint of public service professionals in polycentric service systems, encouraging us to explore this topic more thoroughly.

4 Research Methodology and Methods

4.1 Critical realism as methodology in the study

Ontologically, this research relies on critical realism as a philosophy of science, being in the middle field between the constructionist and positivist perspectives. In critical realism, the world is based on a double recognition: the objective world exists independently of social constructs, but the subjectivity of some parts of that world affects the world that we objectively observe and study (Bhaskar, 1989; Sayer, 2000).

Another way to describe the ontology of critical realism is the division between the real, the actual and the empirical. *The real* refers to structures and (causal) powers of objects or, as some researchers call them, the entities (Easton, 2009; O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Sayer, 2000). Sayer (2000, p. 11–12) demonstrates the real and causal powers embedded in it through an example: bureaucracies' command to process routine information promptly can be explained by suitable organisational solutions, such as hierarchical organisational structures and specialisation of its staff. According to critical realism, the real also exists despite our understanding of it.

Then again, *the actual* is a domain that is related to the activation of those powers underlying the real. In the actual domain, the key question is, what happens when and if the causal powers in the domain of the real are activated? Finally, *the empirical* refers to the 'domain of experience', based on our own interpretations (Sayer, 2000). Critical realism recognises 'epistemological constructivism and relativism' as ways to underline the subjectiveness of our understanding of the world (Maxwell, 2012, p. 5).

According to critical realism, human society, or an organisation, for instance, take place in open systems (compared to closed systems, such as laboratories). An open system is a complex and emergent environment (Danermark, Ekström, Jakobsen & Karlsson, 1997). Here, the reality is seen as a 'stratified, open system of emergent entities' (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014, p. 6). Critical realism research views the entities or objectives as hierarchically organised systems existing on different levels, all levels being interlinked and related (Ibid.). Stratification is identified through distinctions between the empirical (phenomena as human sensory perceptions and experiences), the actual (phenomena in space and time, possibly different depending

on the empirical ideas of the case) and the real (linking the two together though mechanisms and structures) (Ibid., p. 9). As a way to recognise these different levels and their structural relations, critical realism differs from reductionist approaches like empiricism (Danermark et al., 1997). Critical realism also emphasises the importance of context: the studied entities, such as organisations or individuals, cannot be isolated from their environment (e.g., Sayer, 2000).

Furthermore, concerning the main principles of critical realism, Bhaskar (1975) differentiates between intransitive and transitive knowledge. Here, intransitive knowledge concerns the objects (social or physical) of the research, whereas transitive dimension consists of theories as a medium to study those objects or phenomena (Bhaskar, 1975). In the field of the social world, theories and discourses can also be considered objects of study and as intransitive knowledge. As Sayer (2000, p. 10) points out, the competing theories have their own 'transitive objects' as theories about the world. The world in itself does not change according to the changing transitive objects. This is yet another notion that differentiates critical realism from empiricism or empirical realism, where 'real' is empirical, consisting of observable qualities (Sayer, 2000, p. 11).

The division between transitive and intransitive knowledge is a point that also separates critical realism and (defeatist forms of) post-modernism. Namely, post-modernism considers observable knowledge to be based on discourse, and objective knowledge based on observation cannot, thus, be reached. Critical realism, then again, starts with the assumption that the world as we *experience* it is not the same as world as it is (Sayer, 2000).

Critical realism is distinct from interpretive social science from the standpoint of causal explanations of social phenomena; it states that causes may not be only physical actions but also social actions and reasons. An example is given by Sayer (2000, p. 18): crossing a name on a ballot paper as an action explains our reasoning considering the candidates and politics. In other words, a reason underlying the activity (as a reason to vote for a certain candidate) causes the activity (here, the action of crossing the name on the paper).

Epistemologically, critical realism is committed to truth but also to 'thick' explanation, as opposed to positivism (Bhaskar, 1989; Sayer, 2000). The main element of critical realism is its aim to understand but also explain events (Easton, 2000; Sayer, 2000). What makes critical realism critical is taking a step beyond falsification, applying possibility to 'identification and retardation of those mechanisms that create false beliefs [which] can contribute to emancipation' (O´Mahoney & Vincent, 2014, p. 19). In contrast to the positivist views, critical

realists emphasise the potential not only to describe through 'thin' descriptions of the studied phenomenon but also to explain the events (Ibid.).

As for alternative or supplementary principles in the study, hermeneutics can be considered a relevant approach in the research. This is due to my aim of increasing *understanding* of the studied phenomenon. Based on a qualitative approach, the study uses interpretation as way to explain events. Indeed, social science always includes an interpretative dimension. In the study linked to human behaviour, an element of 'double-hermeneutic' is constantly present: researchers interpret the interpretations of other people (Danermark et al., 1997). As way to differentiate from natural sciences, social science uses 'verstehen' and interpretative understanding (Sayer, 2000, p. 17).

In emergent, open systems, the theory has a contingent nature. As Sayer (2000, p. 5) explains, 'Realists *expect* concrete open systems and discourses to be much more messy and ambiguous than our theories of them and do not consider that differentiation poses a threat to social science'. Moreover, the truth is not seen as 'foundational'; in critical realism, knowledge is fallible and imperfect (Sayer, 2000). Critical realism also recognises the political nature of science. In the same way, the approach of critical realism applied in this research accepts the constructionist view of claims to objectivity and their possible negative consequences, depending on the interests of the parties involved in the research processes (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Sayer, 1992, 2000).

Epistemologically, I find the explanation of Niiniluoto (1999, p. 10) comprehensive in explaining the meaning of theory: we can assume that theory, as a directing force of human activities, is close to truth. Consequently, it would be rational to assume that theory as self-constructing practice improves in the long run and continues to further improve in the future. This way, critical realism considers science as the best way to explain the object in the light of current understanding. However, theories as products of science are meant to be challenged and developed, and that is what makes critical realism *critical* (Ibid.). I am committed to the critical realist understanding of the meaning of theory: it is a tool to transform and generate knowledge into better explanations of social phenomena (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014, p. 6).

To conclude, critical realism as an ontological and epistemological approach offers a suitable and robust methodology for the study. Ontologically, I consider the idea of layered domains, entailing causal powers as a plausible way to explain the reality. Here, I consider reducing the world to only the level of experience to be inadequate and, therefore, I view the critical realist idea of different domains

reasonable and fitting to my own ontological understanding. This is linked to epistemological questions concerning theory as well. As pointed out earlier, I value theory as the best way to offer explanations for social phenomena. Theory should be approached critically, constantly looking for new approaches and developing them. Thus, the critical realist approach fits well with my aim of searching for a new perspective on the concept of co-production.

The study is committed to explaining how co-production changes the practices of public service professionals. This way, the critical realist approach supports the explanatory focus of the study. In the same way, I consider the idea of stratification essential: in the study related to social activities, the explanatory mechanism should not be reduced to the merely empirical level. Rather, explanations should be searched for also among structures and mechanisms that go beyond the interpretations of studied actors. Here, I acknowledge the importance of empirical experience and the idea of double-interpretation in the attempt to form an understanding of the studied subject (Sayer, 2000). Finally, I recognize the importance of contingency and context in this research. The objects and the mechanisms cannot be segregated from their environment. This is essential in the critical realist approach of explanation, and it is further discussed in the next section.

4.2   Critical realism as explanatory approach

This research has an explanatory focus, although the Sub-studies also possess explorative and even descriptive features[3]. As a way to explain what the explanatory focus means in the study, a review of causality and generalisability is necessary.

Critical realism differs from positivist and constructivist research in that it acknowledges causal mechanisms as a way to explain events that go beyond empirical evidence (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). According to critical realist logic, causal powers exist in the domain of real. As, and if, the powers are activated, they might produce patterns of events in the actual domain. Finally, as they are investigated, these powers turn to experiences of human agents taking place in the empirical domain. Then again, whether causal powers are activated, and whether they are expressed in the actual or empirical domain, is dependent on contingent conditions (Sayer, 2000; Tsoukas, 2000).

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[3] This discussion is continued in the next section, which concentrates on the case study approach

An important feature to explain causality in critical realism is emergence. First of all, emergence means that social events are interlinked with physical events. Second, in the social world, emergence means that an individual and organisation is defined in relation to others and the context. This follows the ontological notion of the world as an open, laminated system in which different domains are related (Sayer, 2000, p. 13; Bhaskar, 1975).

Thus, it is vital to understand what *cause* is in critical realism. As the argument goes, causes go beyond empirical regularities and statistical correlation (Danermark et al., 1997, p. 53). Research concentrating on regularities cannot directly answer questions of what produces or enables the outcomes. Rather, the focus is on correlation between different objects (Sayer, 1992). Here, the critical realist idea of causal powers and the mechanisms are used as a way to explain how and why events occur (Danermark et al., 1997; Sayer, 1992). For researchers studying social affairs, it's important to note that these powers exist in structures and relationships constructed by people. What is more, Danermark et al. (1997, pp. 54–55) highlight that causal powers exist beyond the domain of the empirical as they underlie the domain of the real. In the same way, mechanisms are attached to the structures. As way to describe causation in critical realism, it concentrates on relations between structures, mechanisms and events. Sayer (2000, p. 14) explains it in a nutshell:

> [C]ausation is *not* understood on the model of regular successions of events, and hence explanation need not depend on finding them, or searching for putative laws […]. What causes something to happen has nothing to do with number of times we have observed it happening. Explanation depends instead on identifying causal mechanisms and how they work, and discovering if they have been activated and under what conditions.

Furthermore, it should be noted that, as the events occur in emergent systems, the context plays an important role. Therefore, critical realism accepts that causal processes can lead to different outcomes depending on the context. This also underlines the concentration on necessities and contingencies rather than generalisability.

As a way to gather and analyse data, the critical realist approach focuses on the questions and issues recognised in the 'domain-specific' theoretical framework. Thus, critical realism highlights the importance of theory, despite it being imperfect and fallible, as a way to offer explanations of observed phenomena. As explanatory logic, critical realism refers to abduction and retroduction. Concerning abduction, O'Mahoney and Vincent (2014, p. 17) explain the relation between data and theory:

[A]bduction re-describes the observable everyday objects of social science (usually provided by interviewees or observational data) in an abstracted and more general sense in order to describe the sequence of causation that gives rise to observed regularities in the pattern of events. It involves combing observations, often in tandem with theory identified in the literature review, to produce the most plausible explanation of the mechanisms that caused the events.

Following the example by O'Mahoney and Vincent (Ibid.), I illustrate the logic of abduction connected with the framework of my study in Table 2.

Table 2. Research framework following abductive logic (drawn from O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014, p. 17)

Empirical observation	Potential generalised explanation	Potential 1) entities 2) mechanisms 3) structures
Co-production has become a popular policy in the public sector Co-production policies concern public service professionals	Co-production has implications for traditional, professional-oriented service processes	1. Public service professionals, citizens, service users 2. Interaction, co-production process, accountability relations, professional practices 3. Governance relations, norms, public service systems

Committed to *theoretical pluralism*, retroduction seeks to offer explanations to stratified phenomena through multifold theoretical lenses, especially in the beginning of the research process. Retroduction is also 'backward-looking' in the way that it aims to recognise 'prerequisites or the basic conditions for the existence of the phenomenon studied' (Danermark et al., 1997, p. 1). Retroduction also seeks to find counterfactual explanations in order to form a robust framework to study 'transfactual conditions' that cannot be directly noticed as empirical observations. In order to explain what is meant by transfactual conditions, Danermark et al. (1997, p. 96) refers to abstract observations as a result of retroduction as 'advancing from one thing (empirical observation of events) and arriving at something different (a conceptualization of transfactual conditions)'.

Retroduction, as a way to connect different streams of literature in the Sub-studies, to take into account the chorological development of the co-production concept and to offer an exhaustive review of the current conceptualisation of co-production, are all features of retroduction applied in the study.

4.3   Qualitative case study as research strategy

In general, a case study is empirical research that applies different data sources and methods to study an activity or a phenomenon in a defined and limited environment (Yin, 1993). There are different ways to design case studies. A *descriptive case study* relies more on descriptive theory; having a theory-driven focus (Tobin, 2010; Yin, 1993, 1994). In *exploratory case studies*, the research process starts with the data gathering, after which the conceptual and theoretical framework is built upon the case (Streb, 2010; Yin, 2003). Finally, an *explanatory case study* not only describes and explores but also searches for causalities (Harder, 2010; Yin, 1993, 1994). Stake (1995) classifies case studies as instrumental, intrinsic or collective. Instrumental refers to studies in which the case is applied as an instrument to investigate something other than the case itself. Then again, an intrinsic case study is in itself interesting. And, as the name suggests, collective case studies draw from several cases that concern a same theme.

Furthermore, what makes the research *qualitative* is its aim of gaining in-depth understanding of the studied subject located in a certain context. The method of purposive sampling has been used to gather detailed information from people who have detailed information about the studied subject (Jupp, 2006). The aim is to interpret the interpretations of the informants. This was referred to earlier as double-hermeneutics (Danermark et al., 1997).

As pointed out, the research strategy in this dissertation has been both exploratory and explanatory. The exploratory approach was necessary because no coherent theoretical framework was readily available for the study. Therefore, I have applied retroduction and theoretical pluralism to build a theoretical basis to explain the studied phenomenon. The Sub-studies combining the literature on co-production with other streams of literature that help to form an adequate theoretical framework for researching co-production in given interpretive perspectives, contexts and relations. Despite the variety in streams of literature, some central elements tie the different theoretical and conceptual discussions together. These elements are discussed in section 5.5.

As the different research questions of the Sub-studies (illustrated in Table 3) imply, the aim has been to offer explanations concerning the studied subject by mainly asking *how*; the exception was the Sub-study IV, in which the aim was to undercover the meanings underlying street-level accountability in a co-production model. The main idea is not only to understand what the phenomenon is about but to understand what makes the events appear as they do. This, again, is done by

examining the co-production process in the selected contexts, including both similar and different structures. The Sub-Studies present both intrinsic and instrumental cases of co-production. In the cases, there are also differences in the co-production relations between the professionals and the citizens (as clients, citizens, groups of citizens as NGOs, or as volunteers). The different governance relations influence the way co-production is approached and presented in each case (see Table 4, the interpretative perspectives on co-production). Then again, similarities between the cases can be found in the service sector they touch upon: all the cases focus on welfare services (in wider sense, covering not just social and health care services but also education and culture services), and the level of analysis in in the micro-scale. Naturally, the perspective of the public service professional in the co-production process is the core thread that tie the different Sub-studies together.

The first case of complex networks revealed the tensions between co-production as rhetoric and practice by researching the meanings the frontline workers give to co-production in social and health care services for youth. The case can be described as instrumental as it was selected to offer understanding on co-production in a complex network environment from the viewpoint of the professionals who operate in those networks. The case in itself is not a case of co-production, but it helps to understand the meanings the professionals five to co-production as their everyday practice. The value of the case is in the way it demonstrates the importance of complex interaction between professionals for the service processes and its outcomes. The Sub-study I, being my first case in chronological order of the research process, paved the way for further analysis of grassroots practices of co-production, observed from the viewpoint of the professionals.

The second case, a neighbourhood community development project, was chosen to study the co-production process in-depth. The case selection could be described as intrinsic. The case was interesting for the study as it presented a co-production pilot put into practice by a network of public service professionals. The project can be understood as a co-production experiment. The initial idea was to research, how co-production changes the roles played by both citizens and professionals. Yet, due to the long observation period of 18 months, the focus of the research changed to some extent. As it will be explained in Chapter 5, the process remained in the hands of the professionals, and therefore I focused on studying, why it was so. This way, the process shaped the research questions. Consequently, Sub-study II has an exploratory research design: the data collection was an iterative process that later defined focus and the theoretical framework on learning in polycentric service environment. In the Sub-study II, I focused on the shared process of the pilot.

Following the second Sub-study, the Sub-study III focused on the outcomes, as the aim was to find explanatory mechanisms that led to certain results.

The fourth case presents a one more angle to examine co-production from the viewpoint of the professionals. The case of conciliation service presents co-production as an established practice, focusing on a legally regulated service of conciliation that is founded upon co-production. In completes the research by focusing on an essential viewpoint of accountability. The case, presenting co-production as an established practice could shed light in the changing accountability ties in the way that the other cases could not. The case in itself is interesting and can be described as an intrinsic case study.

The use of a critical realist approach in a case study is a way to identify the sequences of causal mechanisms in selected contexts. Moreover, the scope of analysis in case studies is finding mechanisms that cause outcomes when they are activated. As Ackroyd and Karlsson (2014, p. 24) put it,

> 'the aim of the [case study] research is to bring to light formative processes which cause particular outcomes, when they operate […]. Rather than observing the mechanism *per se*, the researcher follows the operation of the mechanisms'.

Here, the study follows the critical realist logic, as focus is the operation of the mechanisms that were analysed in the selected case studies of co-production (see, Table 3 and 4).

4.4 Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis was selected as the analytical method. Some authors (e.g. Boyatzis, 1998) call it 'thematic coding'. The aim of qualitative content analysis is to reduce and re-order data by focusing on 'selected aspects of meaning' guided by the research question (Schreier, 2014, p. 3). A further aim is to extract information from its original source, categorise it, seek patterns in the data and, then, build typologies based on the analysis (Gläser & Laudel, 2013). Qualitative content analysis is a flexible way of analysing rich qualitative data. The steps in qualitative content analysis typically include the formulation of research questions, a step-by-step formulation of inductive and/or concept-driven categories, building and defining the coding frame, testing the frame, modifying the frame and building typologies and, finally, presenting and interpreting the findings (Gläser & Laudel, 2013; Schreier, 2014).

The coding process can be data- or concept-driven. In the Sub-studies, I applied an ex ante approach of analysis as opposed to the open coding approach usually applied in grounded theory approaches (Gläser & Laudel, 2013). However, the Sub-studies differ in the way that theory guided and determined the focus of analysis on the basis of their different data collection procedures.

The analysis of the Sub-study I was conducted using abductive logic, and the data was collected through expert interviews. The coding process began by building categories from the key theoretical concepts and constructing sub-categories based on the meanings given by the interviewed professionals. Patterns were formed from the coding process to describe the conditions (in the Sub-study, this was the fragmented service system) and the mechanisms (the complexity of interaction between the professionals) to demonstrate the possibilities for client co-production in youth services. In this way, the Sub-study contributed to the conceptual development of co-production, highlighting the importance of the complex network settings for the potential outcomes of the client co-production process.

The second data set, which was used in the Sub-Study II and III, was composed of rich data. Here, the data included participatory observation and interviews as well as project documents, resident surveys and informal discussions. This variety in the data is typical of case studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1993). Due to the exploratory approach and the long period of data collection, the first phase of the data analysis can be described as data driven. The data collection and analysis followed an iterative logic. After defining the focus of the shared process, I formed an analytical framework based on the literature as a way of conducting theory-driven content analysis. The theoretical framing was used as a foundation for structuring the data by categories. The Sub-study thus followed an abductive logic.

The Sub-study III adopted an explanatory approach as I focused on finding mechanisms that produced certain outcomes. Conducted at the end of the observation period, I already had an in-depth understanding of the case. I applied an explanatory approach by seeking mechanisms that could explain the outcomes of the project. I analysed the data according to both the theory-driven categories and those emerging from the data. Based on the analysis, I created a typology as a guide in the presentation of the results.

Finally, the Sub-study IV had a descriptive focus as the analysis was based on key concepts identified in the theoretical framework. The analysis focused on different forms of accountability in the case of conciliation. It was conducted by exploring the meanings that the informants gave to accountability and then seeking patterns that revealed how the different forms of accountability were presented. The analysis

revealed how the mechanism of accountability was manifested in the selected case of conciliation (Danermark et al., 1997). Table 3 summarises the main methodological features of the Sub-studies.

Table 3.   Methodological features of the sub-studies

	Sub-study I	Sub-study II	Sub-study III	Sub-study IV
Selection of the case	A presentation of client co-production in everyday practices of the professionals; instrumental case of co-production	A co-production experiment (the pilot project) intrinsic case of co-production; studying the process	A co-production experiment (the pilots project) intrinsic case of co-production; studying the outcomes	A case of an established co-production model in service delivery; intrinsic case of co-production
Research question	How do complex network structures meet the client co-production process, and how, if at all, can they be managed in social services?	How do public-service professionals learn to cope with co-production as a means to develop and produce public services?	How, if at all, can participation be fostered by publicly-led initiatives in the neighbourhood context?	What does accountability mean on the street level when a public service is carried out through co-production?
Data collection	Expert interviews of frontline social and health care professionals(N=19); stories written by social and health care professionals	Participatory observation (project meetings and activities over an 18-month period); expert interviews (N=13); meeting protocols	Interviews of the project group and other key actors (N=20); participatory observation (project meetings and activities over an 18-month period); resident surveys and meeting protocols	Individual interviews and focus group discussions: the mediation office personnel, volunteer conciliators, mediation expert and police (N=15)
Data analysis	Abduction; qualitative content analysis as a way to find meanings and search for differences and similarities to form patterns	Abduction; exploratory approach; iteration and data triangulation as way to form an analytical framework for final, theory-driven analysis	Explanatory approach; building a typology to analyse key mechanisms that produce certain outcomes	Theory-driven content analysis; finding meanings; pattern seeking to demonstrate the manifestation of the identified mechanism in the case

4.5 Reflection of the research strategy

In the field of co-production, case study has been a common design. Therefore, there have been critical voices calling for more comparative, large-sample research design (Verschuere et al., 2012; Voorberg, 2014). Indeed, case studies are always context-dependent; it is difficult to find a universal determinant for testing theory or making generalisations concerning population (Verschuere et al., 2012). Yet, as Flyvbjerg (2006, p. 224) points out, predictive theories and universals are hard to accomplish in studies related to human affairs—the context is difficult to dissipate from the research frameworks and results. Consequently, the value of a case study lies in gaining in-depth understanding and, though that, developing theory (Flyvbjerk, 2006). A case study as a research strategy with a rich set of data allows the researcher to go beyond the descriptive features of the studied subject and explains *how* and *why* phenomena are explained the way they are (Danermark et al., 1997). Easton (2000, 214) explains a way to support the explanatory focus in a case study:

> [R]esearch should be aimed at understanding and explaining the reality underlying any event or set of events (i.e. case) by unpacking and describing the contingent causal powers of the objects that brought them about. One case can create and/or test a theory to the extent that it uncovers reality.

To continue, generalisability is an issue that is often raised in the case studies. It can be said that the main limitation to a case study approach is narrow generalizability given its context-dependent nature. Observing case studies from this angle, their value to the researcher community could be questioned. However, the aim of a case study is "not to represent the world, but to represent the case" (Stake, 1994, 245). Through the representation of the case, it is possible to gain in-depth understanding that would not otherwise be possible to achieve. Thus, the aim is rather to understand and learn about the specific phenomenon than offer universal explanations (see, Flyvbjerk, 2006). The value of case studies stems from the in-depth comprehension of a phenomenon. Through that, case studies can refine theories and reveal limits for generalisation and complexities for further studies (Stake, 1994). The explanation in a case study refers to explanation in the context of the case, but it does include predictability of the results in other contexts (O´Mahoney & Vincent, 2014).

I found case study to be the most suitable strategy to achieve an in-depth understanding of what the professional side of co-production entails and how co-production changes their practices. As a way to secure validity, the empirical part of the research includes three different data sets, all focusing on different co-production

relations in different contexts. Constructing the research on more than one case secured the robustness of the research results. Concerning the validity of the cases themselves, the question is whether the cases are suitable to answer the research questions positioned. Here, I have explained the different focuses of the selected cases as a way to gain a holistic understanding of the object of the study. Of course, an alternative strategy could have been to focus on one case only and search for different viewpoints in that context. The validity of the case selection is, finally, a question to which there are no simple right or wrong answers. As Flyvbjerk (2006, p. 233) points out,

> Like other good craftspeople, all that researchers can do is use their experience and intuition to assess whether they believe a given case is interesting in a paradigmatic context and whether they can provide collectively acceptable reasons for the choice of case.

Moreover, concerns about validity raise the question of how the case study has been conducted, how the data sources were selected and how they were analysed. The examined cases have been focused enough to ensure that the essential informants have been interviewed. I also used the snowball method to ensure that the key informants were heard. Flyvbjerk (Ibid.) suggests that the reactions of the academic community and other communities also matter in the validation of research. The peer-review process, which all the Sub-studies have gone through, has strengthened the validation of the research as well.

As a way to secure the reliability or trustworthiness of the studies, a detailed description of the research process has been provided in each Sub-study. Reliability has also been strengthened using multiple sources of data and data triangulation (Maxwell, 2004).

5   Results of the Study

5.1   Sub-study I: Coordinating co-production in complex network settings

The purpose and research question: The research draws together the concepts of network management and co-production with complexity sciences, offering new insights for analysing the challenges of co-production. The aim of the Sub-study is to examine client co-production in the multi-professional network settings. The research question is: *how do complex network structures meet the client co-production process, and how, if at all, can co-production be managed in social services?*

   The case: Empirically, the article examines client co-production among an inter-professional social and health care network in the city of Tampere, Finland. The context for the study is the multiple-provider model of service production. The key idea is to separate the purchaser from the provider. Here, the most important managerial steering instrument is the contract between the purchaser and the provider. The interviews were conducted among different social and health service providers: school health care workers, youth workers and social workers as well as doctors and nurses working in a youth welfare clinic and in the hospital, sharing the same clientship of youth and their families. Additionally, stories written by professionals about successful and failed service processes were used in the analysis.

   Results: Normatively, co-production is seen a way increase client value creation and, thus, improves the service outcomes. The research results indicate that this is an overly optimistic view, observed from the perspective of professional frontline practices. Based on the study, it is possible to recognise at least three consequences that prevent co-production in complex network contexts. First, the so-called 'structural holes' in networks create a competitive advantage for actors whose relationships span the holes (Burt, 2001; Ahuja, 2000). In the context of the studied case, this means it is possible that the wrong service providers are involved in co-production from the perspective of client value creation.

   Second, in the fragmented service system, the different frontline professionals become powerful actors in the formulation of frontline policies. The results of the study illustrate that complex human interaction plays too strong a role in service

delivery systems. Consequently, there are also numerous ways to understand and implement co-production within the network. In this situation, different kinds of professional groups are able to make decisions by themselves on the ways co-production will take place in service delivery. Third, complexity creates managerial systems of which nobody is in charge. Avoidance and hiding behind organisation structures occurs in this kind of environment. When nobody is in charge of co-production process, there is a lot of diversity and randomness in the service process.

Implications: When co-production is considered as a policy intended to improve the quality and effectiveness of public services, the complexity of interaction among the street-level workers and the detached professional frameworks is a vital point to consider. A possible way to solve the problems stemming from complexity in multi-professional cooperation is to strengthen the service dominant framework. In this Sub-study, the service management perspective on co-production means that, in principle, value creation occurs in the customers' sphere whereas organisations in the providers' sphere facilitate value creation by providing resources and processes, which represent potential value or value-in-use for their customers (Grönroos & Voima, 2011). Thus, new ways to organise services are needed. These ways include contracting service packages (instead of contracting services one by one) as well as using an outcome-based commissioning model to gain an increased understanding of the impact of interventions.

5.2   Sub-study II: Learning to co-produce? The perspective of public service professionals

The purpose and research question: In this study, the concept of co-production refers both to a model and a process that takes place in a polycentric environment. The starting point for the study is that although co-production offers huge potential to transform public service systems, it also challenges public service organisations in many ways. Inherently, this has consequences for the working culture of public service professionals, who need to adapt to new ways of producing and developing services. The theoretical framework of this study draws on the literatures of co-production and collaborative public service innovation. The aim of this Sub-study is to examine *how public-service professionals cope with co-production as a means to develop and produce public services.* Here, I investigate how professionals carry out co-production in practice through a formulation of new partnerships with the community, residents and service users.

The case: The Sub-study investigates a qualitative case study of a pilot neighbourhood project in the city of Tampere in Finland. The project, aimed at increasing the quantity and quality of the neighbourhood services through co-production, follows the strategic aims of the city of Tampere. Professionals from various fields of welfare service production, such as social work, health care, early education and day care services, youth work and school personnel, took part in the project's planning and realisation. The examined project was also initiated by the public service professionals working in the neighbourhood. The focus on this Sub-study is on the collaborative process.

Results: The research emphasises co-production as a process wherein public service professionals play a vital role. Yet, co-production is not an easy issue for the professionals. When moving from rhetoric to practice, there seems to be a lack of tools and methods for applying and utilising the possibilities of co-production. This is essential when we try to understand the world of public service professionals as initiators and realisers of co-production in practice. The different applications of co-production as means to foster participatory democracy, and client co-production as a means to transform and develop public service production, are used simultaneously in the rhetoric of the co-production activities. As the results of the study show, this produces uncertainty and confusion among the professionals as initiators of co-production practices.

In the networked environment, professionals with different backgrounds face these challenges. Based on the results, increased interaction between professionals can encourage them to carry out co-production in practice; they can learn from each other, and adapt and adopt the learned methods in their own fields of service. In order to increase such interaction, cross-sectorial co-operation should be encouraged and sectorial barriers diminished. However, the professional networks can also hamper co-production when they become too introverted. Opening up the processes is, thus, essential. Yet, opening up the professional processes seems to partly clash with their traditional values, such as equality, representativeness, accountability and the neutrality of the co-produced activities taking place in the public domain. In addition, the professional ideal of having ready-made solutions for the residents and service users can be at odds with the idea of co-production.

Implications: Co-production is, foremost, a learning process that touches not just a single public service professional or a network of professionals but the whole public service organisation. The main argument of the Sub-study is that co-production is a holistic process, which takes place in a polycentric environment. Yet,

as the professionals are the ones who carry out co-production in different service encounters and through partnerships, organisational support for them is necessary.

Thus, I have made a typology that includes focal points to support the professional co-production from managerial, organisational, cultural and processual points of view. The managerial dimension includes supporting performance management, for instance, suitable evaluation tools. The organisational dimension highlights the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation as a precondition for co-production. Then again, the processual dimension draws attention to the importance of finding suitable platforms and methods to utilise the information to support co-production. In the cultural dimension, the key issues include the cultural shift as *from for the citizens to with the citizens*. The cultural dimension also brings out that the professionals need to learn to navigate through their professional values. Finally, the idea of risk governance can help professionals in this cultural shift: negotiations on the accepted levels of risk could encourage the professionals to utilise non-professional knowledge and partnerships in new ways.

5.3 Sub-study III: Looking beyond the simplistic ideals of participatory projects: Fostering effective co-production?

The purpose and research question: It is important to look beyond the normative ideals of participation models and co-production initiatives and to view them as ways to achieve the outcomes, not as a policy outcome *per se*. The Sub-study examines the activities in a participatory neighbourhood project and searches for mechanisms that explain the outcomes of the activities. In this Sub-study I ask *how public service professionals can effectively foster co-production in a neighbourhood context*.

The case: The case description is the same as in Sub-study II. In this Sub-study, the (explanatory) focus is on outcomes and on mechanisms that explain these outcomes.

Results: The neighbourhood projects often have a holistic focus as they are targeted at both individual residents and local communities. This way, the examined project offers valuable insights to better understand the complex, multidimensional nature of co-production that included both individual and collective forms. As a result of the analysis, two mechanisms seem to be crucial to explaining the outcomes of the examined project: the capacity of the key actors in relation to motivation. Yet, these mechanisms lead to different outcomes in individual and collective forms of co-production. In the activities targeted at increasing co-production between the

individual residents and professionals, the mode of co-production remained rather superficial in the examined project. The lacking capacities (concerning time, finances and knowledge) of the professionals to motivate the residents was essential for the outcome. Therefore, the activities should be planned keeping the expected outcomes in mind: what do we want to achieve through co-production, and how is it related to our own capacity to achieve the expected outcome? Neither overly broad agendas nor a focus on increasing participation as an outcome *per se* will lead to effective outcomes.

Despite this notion, the residents considered the project valuable for increasing the sense of community in the neighbourhood. From the perspective of the residents, the project succeeded well as a 'community' project but not as a co-production project. Then again, when the project was observed from the perspective of partnership building with the local non-governmental actors, the outcomes were promising. In these collective forms of co-production, there were motivated actors in the neighbourhood; the communities and NGOs wholeheartedly welcomed new initiatives to increase co-operation in the neighbourhood. However, the results illustrated that the scope of the activities in these partnerships should also be considered from the viewpoint of the capacities of the actors in order to gain effective results and maintain motivation.

Here, the role of the professional is to coordinate those activities so that the scope and form will be in line with the capacities. By doing this, the professionals also carry out the role that has been planned for them in the literature on co-production (see e.g., Bovaird, 2007). Indeed, the value of a participatory project in the neighbourhood context seems to be especially in bridging and bonding activities. The role of public service professionals in these activities is to bring together communities and residents, increasing the sense of community.

Implications: The study stresses the need to look beyond the simple ideals of the participatory project and to maintain realistic expectations concerning co-production. In the same way, those who carry out participatory projects should understand the complexity of co-production in order to find the right scope for activities in given contexts. The research results are in line with Brannan, John and Stoker (2006, p. 1005), who point out that 'civic renewal', meaning different forms of active citizenship, has been handled 'as both a solution to problems (a means) and as policy objective (and end in itself)'. Therefore, co-production should be implemented only when it is expected to bring additional value for the issue or service in case. This is valuable for the citizens who sacrifice their time to make a contribution but from the viewpoint of gaining effective outcomes.

5.4 Sub-study IV: The impact of co-production on frontline accountability—the case of conciliation service

The purpose and research question: The Sub-study focuses on accountability in a co-production process that is considered an exemplary model of governance. The main hypothesis is that, in multi-dimensional governance models, different actors in different forms and scales use public power and, thus, are affected by public accountability (Hupe & Hill, 2007). The Sub-study draws together the concept of citizen co-production with the literature on street-level bureaucracy and accountability. The different aspects of accountability are essential as a way to understand the complex co-production process. The research question in the study is: *what does accountability mean on the street level when a public service is carried out through co-production?*

The case: Empirically, the Sub-study studies the use of conciliation (also known as victim-offender mediation), a process wherein volunteer mediators offer criminal offenders and their victims the opportunity to determine restitution and compensation without court proceedings. The case of conciliation service is an interesting context for the research on co-production: it is a legally regulated public service where volunteers and professional social workers as partners offer the parties of conciliation the possibility of voluntarily reconciling without heavy court proceedings. This way, the whole service relies on citizen co-production. Conciliation is a free and voluntary service; it offers a possibility for the parties to reconcile. Conciliation can be considered a unique service in the Finnish public service system from the following perspectives: first, the service binds together legal and social services since it occupies the middle ground between two different fields of public services. Second, and more importantly from the perspective of the Sub-study, the service is based on the ideas of a civil society; the whole service relies on active citizens and community thinking.

Results: The research indicates that co-production as a governance model changes the logic of traditional public service provision, having implications especially for accountability relationships. Co-production between citizen volunteers and professionals increase both accountability ties and the meaning of process-centred accountability, especially in horizontal accountability relations. Moreover, process-centred accountability helps to prevent accountability gaps or deficits. The case indicates that, in hybrid service models, the actors are committed to doing their part of the process. Yet, concerning the idea of equal partnerships, the volunteers cannot be seen as new professionals in the original sense of the word. Rather, they

complement professional knowledge by offering their life experience and through that, enrich the service offered to the clients. This is essential to the professional side of co-production.

Implications: Having a variety of different kinds of service providers, citizen volunteers and professionals enrich the service system and might ease co-production with the service users. Volunteers offer their experiences and their personas as providers of *experiential knowledge* alongside professional expertise. Volunteers, as opposed to public service professionals, might be more approachable for the clients, who might distrust authorities. This is significant especially in social services, where the clients are not necessarily motivated to co-produce. In the new partnerships, though they are not entirely horizontal, we can see a seed for cultural change for professionalised public sector organisations. However, it remains to be seen how these models continue to develop in societies with a highly professionalised service system, or whether conciliation endures as an exception in the system.

5.5   Summary of the Sub-studies

The research question in this dissertation is as follows:

How does co-production change the practices of public-service professionals?

I apply critical realist logic to illustrate and summarise the key findings and thus integrate the main results of the Sub-studies. The idea is to bring out the core mechanisms that – in the light of the Sub-studies' results – cause and explain certain outcomes. The case studies as contexts shed light on the different perspectives on co-production and on the different co-production relations included in those perspectives (see Table 4). Together, they help form an understanding of how co-production changes the practices of public-service professionals, and in this way, answer the research question. Furthermore, as noted previously in this research, the idea is not just to observe the micro-level processes but to apply the bottom-up insights to bring to light their significance to the system level. In studies related to organisations, the micro-level activities produce certain outcomes on the macro-level ones and the other way around. DeLanda (2006) refers to them as micro–macro mechanisms. Consequently, these mechanisms cannot be separated from each other when explaining the events and outcomes. This core composition has also been the key thread in this dissertation.

Observing all the contexts of the Sub-studies, they illustrate the polycentric and networked environment in which public-service professionals operate. In this complex environment, different goals, values and operation logics co-exist and compete. This draws attention to the complex human interaction that can be considered an intrinsic part of all activities related to social phenomena. Different streams of literature have been used to illustrate this environment. Yet, due to the exploratory nature of the research, the theories and concepts used in the Sub-studies do not form a coherent framework. The overall framework is presented in the summary part of the dissertation.

Nonetheless, it is possible to recognise some central elements that are repeated in the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of Sub-studies. Complexity sciences, network management and studies on collaborative innovation and neighbourhood governance all deal with the complex processes of human interaction. In the same way, the theoretical framework in Sub-study IV, also approaches the theory of street-level bureaucracy and the literature concerning especially from the viewpoint of the networked governance settings where public-service professionals operate. These different streams of literature have been connected with the literature on co-production. The underlying assumption in all the theoretical and conceptual discussions is that in the networked environment, the focus is necessarily on interdependencies rather than on decisions and actions of individual 'sovereign' actors. Here, the role of interaction is a source of not only creativity and innovation but also conflicts and contradictions.

To elaborate, all the Sub-studies focus on processes when interactions occur among different governance relations in various contexts. The cases present co-production as potentially existing relations between clients and a network of professionals, between residents and a network of professionals, among communities and NGOs and professionals or between citizen volunteers and professionals.

Sub-study I concentrates on complex network structures as forming a context of co-production and on the potential co-production relation existing between the network of professionals and the client. The perspective on co-production is the interactive service process, focusing on client co-production. Sub-study II examines the co-production process in the context of a participatory neighbourhood project. As pointed out, the potential co-production relations are more manifold than in Sub-study I as they take place among the public-service professionals, residents, clients, NGOs and communities in the context of neighbourhood. Co-production is understood as an institutional design that is based on networks and partnerships, stemming from the NPG ideology.

Sub-study III has the same context as that of the second one – the participative neighbourhood project. Likewise, potential co-production relations exist among the professionals, residents (individual co-production), communities and NGOs (collective co-production). Sub-study IV focuses on the relations between citizen volunteers and public-service professionals. The context of the study is the conciliation service that can be regarded as an established form of co-production. Here, co-production is primarily considered the changing relationship between society and the (welfare) state although it also fits well into the NPG ideology, promoting partnerships. These various relations can be positioned in the different perspectives on co-production presented in Figure 1 (see also Table 4).

Furthermore, the mechanisms play essential roles in this dissertation as ways to explain events. Sub-study I considers the complex human interaction on the frontline as a key mechanism to explain the difficulty of realising client co-production. Sub-study II recognises learning as an explanatory mechanism. Sub-study III principally concentrates on finding the mechanisms that explain the outcomes of the examined project. Here, the professionals' capacities seem to be related to the motivations of residents and communities. The key mechanisms in Sub-study IV are recognised as operation of different forms of accountability in the hybrid service model. The study emphasises the importance of process-centred accountability as a way to avoid accountability gaps and to promote the partnership between citizen volunteers and professionals. Based on the results, in this kind of hybrid service model, actors become accountable towards the process along with horizontal and vertical horizontal accountability ties.

Based on these notions, it is possible understand the ways co-production changes the practices of professionals. Sub-study I draws attention to complex, multi-professional networks as settings for the co-production processes. The different professionals acting in those networks understand co-production in diverse ways, causing complexity and interruptions in the service processes. Again, Sub-study II emphasises the role of learning in co-production. As the results show, co-production challenges the professionally oriented culture and the established ways in which the professionals are used to operate and interact. Next, the results of Sub-study III elucidate that co-production makes demands on the professionals' capacities in terms of motivating the citizens in their different roles. The findings also highlight the role of professionals as bridging and bonding forces in neighbourhood community development, carrying out their coordinating function as sketched in the co-production literature. This means that the role of active agency should be handed over to the non-professional actors. Similarly, Sub-study IV illustrates a service

model that promotes the experiential knowledge of the citizen volunteers. Here, co-production brings experiential knowledge in service production processes, with implications for broadening the understanding of expertise. The results of Sub-Study IV thus exemplify the idea of the professionals' new role as coordinators rather than sole sources of expertise.

What does all this mean for public-service systems? The implication of Sub-study I for the system level is to take the complexity of professional interaction seriously. According to the study, the structures play a notable function in diminishing power games between professionals and professions. Therefore, in designing service systems, it is important to avoid structures that encourage power games between professionals at the expense of service users' possibilities to co-produce. Regarding the system level, Sub-study II underlines the need for managerial and organisational support for the professionals who carry out co-production. To demonstrate this point, co-production means risks. For instance, in the examined neighbourhood pilot project, the professionals had to ponder the accountability questions as they formed informal partnerships with the local communities. Thus, to encourage professionals, the risks should be shared and negotiated among the different stakeholders involved in the co-production process. To continue, Sub-study III points out that in planning co-production initiatives and policies, it is important to take into account the professionals' capacities in order to promote effective outcomes. Sub-study III suggests co-production strategies to link the actors' capacities with the expected outcomes. Finally, Sub-study IV suggests that in collaborative governance models, the careful consideration of accountability ties is essential. Based on the study's results, clear processes and roles in the hybrid service models can help tackle accountability gaps. Table 4 sums up the research findings from the perspectives discussed above.

Table 4.   Summary of the results

The case as context	I. Complex network settings, social and healthcare services for youth	II. Neighbourhood community development project; focus on the process	III. Neighbourhood community development project; focus on the outcomes	IV. Conciliation service as an established coproduction model
Theoretical and conceptual framework	Complexity sciences, network management, co-production	Co-production and collaborative innovation	Co-production in neighbourhood governance	Street-level bureaucracy, accountability, citizen co-production
Potential co-production relations (entities)	The client and the network of professionals in the service delivery	Professionals, residents and NGOs	Professionals, residents and NGOs	Professionals and citizen volunteers
Interpretative perspectives on co-production	Co-production as an interactive service process (user focus)	Co-production as a model for institutional design based on networks and partnerships	Co-production as a model for institutional design based on networks and partnerships	Co-production as a change in state–society relations
Identified key mechanisms to explain the outcomes	Complex human interaction among the professionals operating in the service network	Learning across different levels of organisation	Professionals' capacities related to motivating the participants	Operation of different accountability relations in the hybrid service model
Meaning for the professionals	The network settings make co-production a complex issue as professionals operating in the network understand production in different ways.	Co-production challenges professionals to learn new ways to operate, transforming their professionally oriented culture and the established ways of interacting.	Co-production makes demands on the professionals' capacities in terms of motivating the citizens in their different roles.	Co-production brings experiential alongside professional knowledge, with implications for broadening the understanding of expertise and the role of professionals as coordinators rather than sole experts.

Meaning for the system level	The complexity of frontline network cooperation should be taken into account in the organisation and management of services to secure fluent service paths for the clients.	Realising co-production calls for support in terms of management and organisation, as well as encouraging processual and cultural conditions. Co-production requires learning throughout the organisation.	Effective co-production includes that its ambiguous nature as embedded, conflicting rationales and motivations is considered on the strategic level. Capacities of key actors should be in line with the expected outcomes.	Co-production increases accountability relations. Clear processes and roles in hybrid governance models can tackle accountability gaps though process-centred accountability.

6   Discussion

6.1   Discussing the professional side of co-production

Based on the results of the research, it is easy to agree with Brandsen and Honingh (2015), who underline that the core of professionalism is changing through the evolving relationships between clients, citizens and non-governmental partnerships. Collaborative processes challenge professional communities to open up in many different ways. The aim of the research is to understand and explain what the professional side of the co-production process entails and to demonstrate, through the Sub-studies, how it changes the practices of the professionals.

The results present an environment in which co-production relations take place beyond the nexus of the citizen-public service professional interface. Instead, interfaces take place in a 'task environment' that can be exemplified through education (see Verschuere et al., 2012). In addition to the student-teacher nexus, many other actors also influence the co-production process, such as parents, friends and the surrounding community, thus representing actors from the 'citizen side of the co-production process'. Continuing from this example, this dissertation explains what the task environment looks like from the professional side of the co-production process.

Furthermore, we know that organisational factors influence the co-production process. Voorberg et al. (2014) judiciously sum up these factors in their systematic literature review. First, 'inviting' organisational structures and sufficient infrastructure to communicate with citizens promotes co-production. From an organisational viewpoint, the absence of these elements will hinder co-production. Second, and based on the literature review, attitudes towards citizens as equal partners, as well as the traditional organisational culture, seem to hinder co-production. In addition, there should be incentives to co-produce, for instance, by explaining the efficiency gains of co-production (pp. 10–11). In a similar vein, Verschuere et al. (2012) underline the importance of organisational culture in institutionalising co-production. These authors also refer to relations between professional staff and clients; they note that professionals may feel superior to their clients because of their professional knowledge and expertise. As the authors note,

skills are needed on both sides of the co-production process. Based on the Sub-studies, it is easy to agree with all these notions.

However, there seems to be more to it: professionals are more than agents of service organisations. As Lipsky (1980) underlines, professionals are powerful players in the formulation and implementation of public policies, operating on different governance relations. Therefore, it is essential to understand their viewpoint.

Thus, to conceptualise the professional side of co-production, the findings are discussed from the following three different viewpoints.

First, attention is drawn to the different interfaces of public service professionals. These interfaces can be described as governance relations existing between A) citizen/client/community, B) horizontal professional network and C), on the vertical nexus, between management and professionals. In the complex governance environment, it is crucial to take into account all these interfaces in the presentation of co-production models. Here, professionals play a vital role in the co-production process as intermediaries between management and the client or citizen. The horizontal professional network also influences the process either as a driving or hindering force. The managerial ability to foster the power and potential of horizontal networks also matters. Indeed, in the theoretical framework, it is noted that professionals face a 'double' pressure that comes both from the top down – from managers and politicians – and from the bottom up – from service users and citizens (Sehested, 2002). In light of the results, the professional side of co-production takes place on three interfaces, creating a 'triple' pressure.

Second, it is essential to recognise the key causal mechanisms and powers as a way to illustrate the professional side of production. For instance, Osborne and Strokosch (2013) have expressed the need to identify the mechanisms that either foster or hinder co-production. The key explanatory mechanisms are recognised in the Sub-studies as *complex human interaction among the professionals operating in service networks, learning across different levels of organisation, professionals' capacities related to motivating the participants* as well as *different accountability relations in the hybrid service model.* (see, Table 4).

Furthermore, based on the findings presented in Table 4, it is possible to identify causal powers that help to understand the professional side of co-production. Whereas mechanisms explain the process in the 'domain of actual', as actions, causal powers are observed in structures and relationships constructed by people. The activation of causal powers, then again, depend on contingent conditions (Danermark et al., 1997; Sayer, 2000; Tsoukas, 2000).

On interface A between citizens and professionals, causal powers exist especially in knowledge structures that can, when activated, foster effective co-production. In order to activate the knowledge structures, the professional capacity to utilise them as well as suitable platforms to create knowledge exchange, are needed. To continue, causal powers are also embedded in accountability structures between citizen co-producers and professionals. This interface also embodies the reformulation of the role of citizens. As knowledge structures change, the role of the citizen (or client) also changes. In the same way, in collaborative governance models related to co-production as partnerships, the shifts in accountability relations further redefine the positions of citizens in the process. Here, the process-centred accountability structures and relations are especially important.

The results highlight the complex network relations between the different professionals in the interface B. In light of the research, this interface appears as a defining element of the professional side of co-production. According to the results, professionals work in multiple, varying network settings. In particular, the interface of horizontal professional networks concerns questions relating to professional practices – how do we integrate non-professional stakeholders, clients and citizens into these complex professional network structures? Indeed, collaborative processes challenge professional communities and their 'theories in use' (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Based on the results that take place in the network context, a causal power hindering co-production can be identified as introverted professional culture. Another form of causal power is the organisational structures: the fragmented organisational structures give space to power games between different professions/professionals. There will be less room for co-production if all resources are used to fight over the workload or expertise.

However, as noted in Sub-Study IV, carefully planned and informed horizontal accountability structures can be seen as a driving force in solving issues concerning power games or battles over expertise. Likewise, professionals coming from different backgrounds can encourage each other to utilise co-production in new ways. For instance, due to different established working cultures in the backgrounds of different professionals, youth workers may be more familiar with co-production than social workers. Thus, the horizontal network are essential, and the horizontal accountability structures as a causal power play an essential role in the professional side of co-production.

The interface C takes place on the vertical nexus. Based on the results of the research, organisational and managerial conditions and procedures entail causal powers on the professional side of co-production. Specifically, they include

connective or separating organisational structures, as well as supporting management procedures, such as performance management and risk governance.

The third viewpoint concerns different dimensions that represent the professional side of co-production. These dimensions (modified from Sub-study II, presented in Figure 2), which are all interlinked, consist of managerial, organisational, processual and cultural aspects, and the different interfaces and causal powers are embedded within them.

In the managerial dimension, the professional side of co-production can be supported through appropriate managerial procedures with which to meet the co-production process. In the organisational dimension, cross-sectorial cooperation is considered as a precondition for effective co-production. Here, causal powers entail connecting organisational structures and horizontal accountability structures. In a networked environment, especially in the field of welfare services, energy should be directed at the creation of new forms of partnerships instead of seeking to cope with the fragmented organisational structures of professional organisations. Therefore, connecting structures matter.

The processual dimension specifically concerns the interface between citizens and professionals. Professionals should be encouraged to try out new channels and platforms for co-production. Digitalisation offers significant potential. However, in terms of partnerships, accountability relations should be negotiated in order to smooth the 'opening up' of professional processes. Concerning the expanding knowledge structure, the utilisation of new knowledge assets is essential. In the processual dimension, the utilisation of new knowledge assets provided by citizens and clients relates to questions of capacity and learning. Last, in the cultural dimension, the question is the kind of value that the user knowledge has in the minds of professionals. Here, it is essential to learn to see both the possibilities and the limitations of co-production and to learn to fit these models into their professional norms, culture and practices. As Sullivan (2000) emphasises, this calls for redefining the contract between society and professionals.
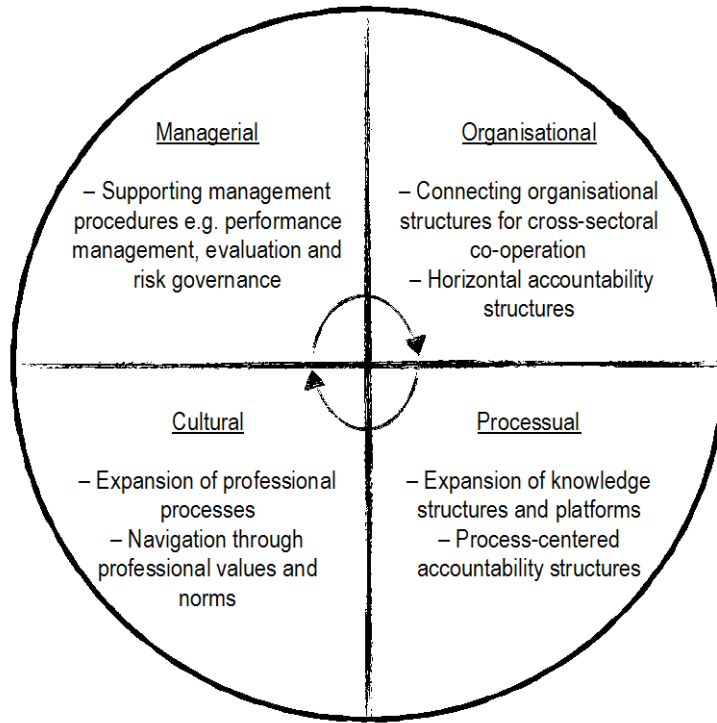
Figure 2. The professional side of co-production: different dimensions and their embedded causal powers

In order to unify the findings concerning the professional side of co-production, I draw following conclusions:

1.   The professional side of co-production includes interfaces that go beyond a simple nexus of professional-citizen/client. These interfaces are described as governance relations. They exist as A) citizen/client/community, B) horizontal professional network and C), on the vertical nexus, between management and professionals. These interfaces illustrate the task environment of the professional.

2.   Causal powers are embedded in these interfaces. When activated, causal powers can lead to different outcomes due to their contingent nature.

3.   The professional side of co-production consists of four dimensions (managerial, organisational, processual and cultural), which incorporate both the different interfaces and the causal powers entailed in them.

Finally, co-production seems to a determining factor for the future role of professionals in many ways. As the working environment becomes more open, professionals and professions face increasing pressure to include actors from outside

their professional communities in their practices and processes. This discussion could lead to a proposition that professionals have become less powerful agents in the formulation and implementation of public policies. This has also been used as an argument for explicating the resistance of professionals towards co-production. Yet, this research indicates quite the opposite. According to the findings, professionals seem to be key actors in the co-production process, operating as nodes between top-management, politicians and citizens in their different roles. Indeed, the division of power and the modification of the idea of validating knowledge require cultural transformation. The pressure stemming from the public and the current reform highlighting active citizenship indicate that this transformation is underway.

6.2   Discussing the emerging co-production concept

The main contribution of this dissertation is to strengthen our understanding of the position of the public service professional in the conceptual models of co-production. As I have demonstrated in the theoretical framework of this dissertation, the general understanding is that co-production changes the roles played by the co-producing actors; furthermore, the role of professionals is to coordinate, not to dictate the process (Bovaird, 2007; Boyle & Harris, 2009; Osborne, 2010; Ryan, 2012; Verschuere et al., 2012). However, the research has not yet studied the professional side of co-production in depth. Examining this topic thus fills the gap in the co-production literature.

As an outcome of the research, I have created a model that illustrates the dimensions of professional side of co-production. Furthermore, the research helps to understand the complexity of co-production policies and processes in practice through the lens of public service professionals. By recognising of the different interfaces, dimensions and the embedded causal powers of the professional side of co-production, the research demonstrates the complexity of co-production processes.

Indeed, this research suggests that it is not just the process but also the concept of co-production itself that is complex in nature. Concerning this notion, section 2.2. discusses the current approaches of co-production. I conclude the section with an illustration of four different interpretative perspectives on co-production (Figure 1). Figure 1, concluding the theoretical discussion on co-production, has been used as a way to demonstrate the complexity of the co-production on the conceptual and ideological level.

In short, I have formed a typology of co-production bearing in mind the different underlying ideologies, theories and related concepts in the conceptualisation of co-production. The typology first posits co-production as a model for institutional design based on networks and partnerships. Here, the concept of co-production is seen as part collaborative governance in plural and pluralist society. Second, co-production can be considered as a change in state-society relations, following the ideas of strong civil society. Here, co-production can be understood as peer-support, volunteering, self-help and 'Big Society'. The third perspective considers co-production as a way to enhance deliberative democracy by having a citizen focus rather than a client focus. Here, the underlying motive is to increase participation as a way to empower citizens. Finally, co-production can be understood as interactive service processes that have, above all, a client focus. This perspective is linked to the concepts of co-creation and a service-dominant system. These different ways to approach co-production were also represented in the Sub-studies (see, Table 4).

My main argument related to these different interpretative perspectives is that it makes a difference whether we refer to co-production as changing relations between the state and the society, or if the focus is on client co-production. This is an essential point for professionals realising co-production, and it positions the citizens, groups of citizens and clients in different roles as well.

As discussed in section 2.2., the different perspectives on co-production, and the roles of citizens embedded in those perspectives, determine the level of voluntarism. I drew the conclusion that voluntarism is a contingent element in co-production, depending on the level of analysis. Co-production as an interactive service process includes an assumption that services are always co-produced, despite the willingness of the parties (Osborne & Strokosch, 2013). Observing the co-production policies on the system level may or may not include voluntarism. To demonstrate, the Big Society policies may force citizens to actively engage in co-production, or else, the might have to manage without. Then again, many co-production activities are based on the volunteering efforts of citizens, clients or groups of citizens.

Overall, I define co-production as a contingent process involving a set of different actors (see Alford, 2014). Therefore, I find it difficult to unambiguously limit what co-production is and what it is not. Rather, I view it as a concept with different modes and perspectives.

Brandsen and Honigh (2015, p. 22) note that 'by recognising that we must depart from a single usage of the term co-production and start using conceptually more distinct varieties, it becomes easier to address blanks in our knowledge'. Based on the research, I fully agree with the authors. The univocal usage of the co-

production concept seems to cause confusion, not just within academia but also in practice. Based on the Sub-studies, the difficulties in the realisation of co-production activities were in many ways connected to the complexity of the co-production with its different perspectives. The different perspectives of co-production entail diverse rationales and expectations and thus, dissimilar challenges to tackle.

To demonstrate, co-production as means to foster deliberative democracy and citizen empowerment on one hand, and client co-production as a means to seek innovative solutions for improving the quality and effectiveness of services, on the other hand, include different assumptions about the role of representativeness. When the aspiration is to strengthen deliberative democracy in neighbourhood improvement, for instance, the questions of representativeness and equity are essential. As was discussed in the conceptual framework, the core challenge here is, how the disadvantaged citizens, who are more unlikely to participate, can be changed into active co-producers to secure representativeness (see, e.g. Eriksson & Vogt, 2013; Jakobsen & Andersen, 2013). Then again, when seeking user-driven innovations, the target group is easier to define and approach. Here, core challenges are related to the question, how to integrate the single user's knowledge into the service process as a way to achieve effective outcomes and similarly secure sustainability of co-production (see, e.g. Osborne & Strokosch, 2013). In the same way, collective co-production seems to include different challenges than those found in the individual forms concerning motivation and capacity (see, Sub-study III).

This discussion draws the attention to the expectations towards co-production. I consider democracy's position as a core value basis critical in this discussion. As a concluding remark in section 2.2., I put forth a hypothesis that the primary aim of co-production is to enhance the effectivity of services through increasing the service quality and quantity. In my understanding of the concept of co-production, the aim of increased effectivity can at times surpass democracy as a core value basis. I consider that this value basis is also a feature that conceptually differentiates co-production from citizen participation. This is certainly a matter of debate, given that co-production is sometimes used as a synonym for citizen participation, and that co-production can undoubtedly enhance a power shift and the empowerment of citizens.

This discussion can be reflected back to the professional side of co-production. As realisers of co-production policies and activities, the professionals need to be able understand the multiplicity of co-production perspectives to meet the different challenges and expectations entailed in them. Based on the findings of Sub-studies

II and III especially, this is crucial for the effective utilisation of the possibilities of co-production and as a way to face the challenges embedded in them.

Finally, I find the concept of the task environment (Verschuere et al., 2012) essential for future co-production research as a way to acknowledge the contingent nature of co-production. When researching co-production, the objects should be positioned in their environment in order to understand the underlying motives and obstacles of co-production processes. In the light of the research results, the task environment from the professional side of co-production can reveal a lot about the process of co-production. Therefore, in an analysis that aims to understand and explain co-production processes, the focus on co-production should be broadened to further include the professional side.

7   Conclusions

The dissertation has offered valuable knowledge about the professional side of co-production; this is crucial to gaining a better understanding of how the co-production process looks like from this less-studied angle.

At the same time, the research is built upon the framework of public sector reform and the wider societal change embedded in the reform. The changing practices on the micro-level can tell us a lot about the system level as well as about broader society-level changes. As I have pointed out, the role of the professional is critical in the re-definition of the welfare state models. In the same way, co-production has been considered one of the main tools to change the operation logic of service provision in the latest shift of governance reform. Thus, the dissertation has taken a double bottom-up approach in looking at the public service systems that are facing pressure to develop in accordance with wider societal change.

Concerning the system level, the main feature in the post-NPM period of reform is the active citizenship and the ideal of an open public service system entailing networks and partnerships. This question follows: what is actually happening?

When evaluating the 'state of co-production' in the Finnish context, it seems to be an unfinished task. I argue that co-production has two institutional implications: on the system level and on the cultural level.

On the system level, co-production puts pressure to public service organisations to be better prepared to change their operational logics in order to move from ad hoc co-production experiments towards more sustainable solutions to entrench co-produce as a part of the public service systems. Here, I want to underline the importance of a co-production strategy over co-production hype: the organisations and the people carrying out co-production activities should carefully consider what they want to achieve by co-production and, even more significantly, what they are willing and able to change accordingly. This is a question of values and motivation, but also a question of using scarce resources in a sustainable manner.

On the cultural level, co-production as a policy calls for learning and reflection throughout public service organisations. I consider that there is a strong will among both managers and professionals to better utilize the potential of clients and citizens through co-production. The professionals, in my view, do not resist co-production

merely because they fear to lose their superior position as experts. It is, rather, that the way and the extent of utilisation of co-production still require the suitable mode and form. This way, co-production becomes an ideological question. Indeed, it is not yet clear how the stable and equal ideas of public services, provided by trained professionals, will have to be transformed in order to be open, client focused and innovative. Partnerships that cross the line between public, private and the society have great potential, but the risks related to potential accountability gaps should also be considered. The experiential knowledge is valuable, but the professionals also possess a crucial knowledge due to their professional training and experience.

This is not to say that co-production is not important. Rather, it is a matter of finding a balance between the traditional, professionally oriented service systems, active citizenship and the user-dominant logic in open environment. Against this backdrop, the core value basis of public service systems will unavoidably be modified if co-production becomes a general model of public service production. Yet, the research results show that the anchoring co-production in organisational practices is still in its infancy.

This research has shed light on the world of professionals as co-producers, conducted in the context of the strong welfare state model in Finland. Reflecting the different levels of analysis, the societal-level discussion may be limited to the Finnish context. However, this does not limit researchers and practitioners from other societies from learning from this study. The research is not aimed at offering general determinants or generalisations about populations but to gain an in-depth understanding of the studied phenomenon and learn from it. The four sub-studies have helped to expound the professional side of co-production both as a micro-level and system-level question. Although the findings of this research are context-dependent, they can foster predictability in future studies on co-production and in other societal contexts (see, O´Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). The model of the professional side of co-production abstracted from the research results can be used as an analytical framework for future studies concerning both professional and organisational perspectives on the co-production process. In general, these findings will help incorporate the professional side into future studies on co-production.

Consequently, the study opens up many avenues for future research. To start, it would be critical to study how different professions cope with co-production in the networked service environment. This is essential reflecting the results of the study that emphasise the horizontal interface as an indispensable part of professional side of co-production. Moreover, the changing ideas of professionalism, due to the rise of active citizens and citizenship, is another potential avenue for future research. The

concept of civic professionalism could be a way to approach the research theme. For instance, the perceptions of different professionals or professions towards civic professionalism could help to further analyse the position of professionals in co-production.

Furthermore, the different perspectives on co-production presented in Figure 1, and the various roles given to professionals, citizens, citizen volunteers or clients on those perspectives still need further elaboration. Here, connecting the task environments of both citizens and professional co-producers, for instance in social services, could help to understand the multiplicity of the components affecting the co-production process. In-depth studies across service sectors could be a suitable way to approach the research theme. To continue, I consider accountability relations and structures an interesting avenue for future co-production research. As we have seen in the research results, clear accountability structures are important in co-production processes. The different accountability relations could also be examined in the different perspectives on co-production. Studies concerning public value and public value creation are essential; fostering public value is important for sustainability of co-production models. In the light of the growing interest in co-production, they also entail practical importance for public managers and decision-makers.

Finally, the Sub-studies of this research have not covered the 'dark side of co-production' in a sense where co-production is a consequence of austerity measures, used as a solution to replace the services produced by trained professionals with volunteering efforts. In the re-definition of welfare state models, it would be critical to study cases where communities or individual citizens have taken over the former responsibilities of professionals to understand and elaborate the consequences. Comparative analyses between different welfare state models could offer crucial information for academics as well as managers and decision-makers for understanding and making choices about the desired directions of the societies.

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Original articles

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Coordinating co-production in complex network settings

Yhteistuotannon koordinointi kompleksisissa verkostoissa

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This article draws together the concepts of network management and co-production with complexity sciences. So far, these approaches have rarely been connected in research literature. We suggest that this conceptual framework offers new insights for analyzing the challenges of co-production in complex network settings in the local public services. The aim of the article is to find out how complex network structures meet the co-production process in the context of social and health care services. The empirical part of the article presents a Finnish case study of a multiprofessional service network producing social and health care services for youth. Here, the clients, in this case children and young people with a need for social services, often need multiple services from different service providers simultaneously. Our research findings suggest that the outcomes of the service process are not only dependent on the client's needs, but rather on organizational and professional interests. Our research gives new insights for the discussion on co-production; when it is applied as an intended policy to improve and deliver public services, the complexity of interaction among the street-level workers and the detached professional frameworks should be kept in mind.

Keywords: co-production; network; complexity; service system; social work; clients

Artikkelin teoreettisessa viitekehyksessä yhdistetään verkoston ja yhteistuotannon käsitteet kompleksisuusteoriaan. Tällaista viitekehystä ei ole aiemmin juurikaan hyödynnetty tutkimuksissa. Viitekehyksen avulla on mahdollista löytää uusia käsityksiä yhteistuotantoon liittyvistä haasteista kompleksisessa verkostoympäristössä, jossa sosiaali- ja terveyspalveluja palveluja tuotetaan. Artikkelin tavoitteena on selvittää, kuinka kompleksiset verkostorakenteet yhdistyvät yhteistuotannon prosesseihin sosiaali- ja terveyspalveluissa. Tutkimuksen empiirinen osio koostuu suomalaisesta case -tutkimuksesta, jonka kohteena on moniammatillinen, lasten ja nuorten sosiaali- ja terveyspalveluja tuottava verkosto. Sosiaali- ja terveyspalveluiden asiakkaina lapset ja nuoret tarvitsevat usein monen eri palveluntuottajan palveluita samanaikaisesti. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että palveluprosessin tulokset eivät ole riippuvaisia vain asiakkaiden tarpeista, vaan myös verkostossa toimivien organisaatioiden ja ammattilaisten erilaisista intresseistä. Tutkimustulokset tuovat myös uusia näkökulmia yhteistuotantoon liittyvään keskusteluun: tähdättäessä palvelujen kehittämiseen yhteistuotannon avulla, on syytä huomioida asiakasrajapinnassa työskentelevien ammattilaisten vuorovaikutuksen kompleksisuus. Esimerkiksi erilaiset, irralliset ammatilliset toimintakehikot verkostotyön taustalla vaikuttavat yhteistuotannon toimivuuteen.

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Introduction

Social services are seen progressively as complex systems that cannot be separated from their environment. Because of the complex structures of public service systems, the field of social services has also become more and more fragmented. Consequently, the conditions of work experienced by street-level workers have been characterized by inadequate levels of resources and agency goals that are often vague, conflicting, and ambiguous and therefore difficult to specify and measure. As a result, social workers work with high caseloads in a context of uncertainty (Evans & Harris, 2004; Lipsky, 1980).

A stream of literature documents changes in the nature of social work, under the impact of managerialism, governance, and service-dominant doctrine (see e.g. Banks, 2013; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Furthermore, the role of service users and clients of public services has been reconsidered: users and their own social networks are vital in the production of services as well as for the outcomes of the service processes. It is not about offering and receiving services, but rather about co-producing those in cooperation between professionals and clients (see Bovaird, 2005, 2007; Osborne, 2009; Stenvall, Laitinen, Kindler, & Osborne, 2013). We understand co-production as an essential feature of producing public services, like social services. As Bovaird (2005, p. 222) puts it: 'where users and other citizens play key roles in the definition and delivery of services, it is pointless for agencies to work closer together unless they also work more closely with the co-producers of the services'.

The value of co-produced services by two or more actors also invites us to rethink organizational life and human interaction within it. There are more and more discussions on the complexity of interaction between different stakeholders as services are produced more and more in networks and partnerships. Networks can be seen as one of the models to organize and implement services. Networks are needed to address all aspects of problems because they tend to cross public organization boundaries and their hierarchical levels (see, for instance, Klijn, 2010; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2002; Pierre & Peters, 2000; Rhodes, 1997).

In this article, we concentrate on the challenges of network-based cooperation in the context of co-production of social and health care services. Thus, our research question is to find out how complex network structures meet the co-production process, and how, if at all, can it be managed in social services? Theoretically, our intention is to draw together the concepts of network management, co-production, and complexity sciences. So far, these approaches have rarely been connected in research literature especially concerning social services. We suggest that together these three concepts help us to see the challenges of co-production in the social service delivery system.

Main concepts

Co-production can be described as a potential relationship that exists between the producer and the client in the production of a service (see Pestoff & Brandsen, 2010, pp. 229–230). The concept of co-production has been discussed by several researchers (Bovaird & Löffler, 2011; Brudney & England, 1983; Needham, 2008; Osborne & McLaughlin, 2004; Pestoff, Osborne, & Brandsen, 2006). In this article, we approach

co-production from the perspective of service management. We think that the key purpose of co-production is to create value for clients (see, for instance, Grönroos & Ravald, 2011; Holbrook, 1999; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Ramírez, 1999). From the basics of Grönroos and Voima (2011), we argue that value creation is best defined as 'customer creation of value-in-use in co-production'. Quality in services often occurs during service delivery, usually in the interaction between the client and the service provider, rather than only at the end of the process (Bovaird & Löffler, 2012).

The term *network* is used here as an indication of more or less stable patterns of social relationships (interactions, cognitions, and rules) between actors that arise and build up around complex policy issues or policy programs (see Klijn, 2010; O'Toole & Meier, 2010; Stoker, 2004). Networks can be seen as vertical or horizontal. Here, in the case of social service professionals working on the 'street level', we study the horizontal networks formed by different street-level social workers. The policies made by the street-level workers are formed in 'micro-networks' consisting of multidimensional 'webs' of relations. In these complex constructs, the individual workers are accountable not only vertically to their superiors but also to their colleagues functioning as their policy co-makers on the street level (Hupe & Hill, 2007, p. 7.)

Coordination and management are key elements for a functioning network. The network coordinator has to deal with a group of different, individual actors representing different professions, as well as other interest groups. Finally, the key challenge of network management is to orchestrate complex interaction in the delivery of services (Kickert, Klijn, & Koppenjan, 1997; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2002). Complexity is about social processes, and human interaction creates complexity (Marion, 2008; McMillan, 2004; Stacey, 2001, 2010, 2007; Stenvall & Laitinen, 2012).

Thus, our conceptual framework of complexity is based on Norbert Elias' process sociology, which is one of the root theories in complexity sciences. According to Elias, social processes can be unplanned and have a structure of their own. Process sociology seeks to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behavior of individuals are influenced by their interaction with other humans (see, for instance, Wouters, 2011). Humans are social by nature and therefore they tend to form groups and identify themselves with a particular group of people.

There are several discussions on the key aspects of Elias' theory (see, for instance, Kilminster, 2007; Stenvall & Laitinen, 2012). In this article, we concentrate on the concept of figuration, which is the key issue for understanding complex social processes. According to Elias, figuration can be used as a generic concept for the pattern that independent human beings form with each other as groups or as individuals (Elias, 1987, p. 85). Elias (2000, p. 482) defines figuration as 'a structure of mutually orientated and dependent people'. It is a fluid, dynamic social network, which changes in unplanned ways (though specific individuals make plans within the context of the developing figuration). According to Elias 'figurations are constructed by numerous interdependent individuals' (Elias, 2000, p. 14).

Figurations may become dilemmas by means of uncontrollable dynamics (Stenvall & Laitinen, 2012). In this case, they may have unplanned and undesired consequences for those involved in them, as well as produce catastrophic trajectories. From this perspective, figurations are, in general, very plastic; they consist of continuous flows or, better said, processes whose transformation potential varies and may end up producing structural changes of an evolutionary nature.

Figurations are more or less formal social forms within the network context, which design and deliver services in co-production. This means that in understanding power and human agency, the focus is necessarily on interdependencies, rather than on the decisions and actions of individual 'sovereign' actors. Each of the network players (such as clients and professionals) must make decisions about his/her moves in interdependence with the others. In the end, the following things could happen to the configuration: disintegration, reorganization in small groups, or the formation of a more complex configuration, endowed with more levels and where new opportunities of strategic planning, influence, and observation present themselves.

The case

In the city of Tampere, services are produced using a multiple-provider model. This means that companies and communities can provide services alongside the city's own service provision. The responsibility for the availability and quality of services remains with the city, but the multiple-provider model separates the service purchaser from the provider. The purchaser evaluates the service needs and selects an appropriate means of production from case to case. The most important instrument for steering and managing the co-operation is the service contract between the purchaser and the provider (City of Tampere; Tynkkynen, Miettinen, & Lehto, 2012). In other words, the model is a form of contracting out. It differs from privatization, as no public-owned assets are sold (see e.g. Domberger & Jensen, 1997).

However, as the model is still developing, some problems can be identified. The main challenge has to do with the position of the service users. For example, it is not always quite clear who has the responsibility of communication with the users in the model (Kallio, Martikainen, Meklin, Rajala, & Tammi, 2006). Furthermore, when the purchasing and the provision of services are differentiated, the service system becomes fragmented as different service providers with their different professional and organizational (public, private or non-governmental organizations [NGOs]) viewpoints produce services, forming formal or informal partnerships and networks. Thus, both the service providers and the clients shuttle in a complex service jungle, where there are no clear coordination and rules. Simultaneously, the fluency of the service process would require seamless cooperation of the producers of the services. However, it has been noticed in different studies that the cooperation between the producers is yet partly defective (see Junnila et al., 2012; Kallio et al., 2006).

Against this background, the context of social services is an interesting field for our study, as the clients, in this case youngsters and their families, often need multiple services from various service providers simultaneously. The service providers from health and social service organizations form formal and informal networks around the client. Meanwhile the different service providers all have their own contracts with the city, the purchaser of the services.

Data and methods

The empirical part of the article presents a case study of an inter-professional service network co-producing social and health care services in the city of Tampere, Finland. We chose the informants from the producer side. The essential question for choosing the informants was that they all share the same clientship—the youth and their families. The

interviews were conducted among different social and health service providers: school health care workers, youth workers, and social workers as well as doctors and nurses working in a youth welfare clinic and in the hospital. Thus, the interviewed had different backgrounds. The idea was to give a voice to professionals working on the frontline services, as we wanted to gain an understanding of their everyday practices of interaction and their views of co-producing the services with the clients. Because of the emphasis on frontline practices in the study, we excluded the purchasers (the city administration) as well as the clients from the data gathering.

We got a draft of the possible informants from the purchaser of social and health care services for children and youth. However, snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) was used in the data collection, meaning that each interviewed frontline professional made suggestions about his/her most important network partners. This way we could secure that all important network actors of the social and health care provision for youth were covered. Finally, 19 workers from 12 different organizations were interviewed.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted during spring 2012. Using a semi-structured interview as the method made it possible to hear the informants' own interpretations with little direction from the interviewer (McNabb, 2002; Myers, 2009). In the interviews, issues of coordination and interaction of network cooperation were discussed and clarified. Another theme of the interviews was co-production; the professionals were asked to reflect upon the clients' possibilities to take part in planning and managing the service process. Finally, the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed.

In addition to interviews, we used reality-based stories written by social service and health care professionals. The stories were written for a network session where the aim was to talk about the poor and good experiences in network-based cooperation in the service provision of youth services. There were altogether 10 stories written by different service providers. The stories were used as background material for the data gathering. The stories led us to the topic of complexity of network cooperation, and helped us to form the research settings for the study.

The empirical results presented here were analyzed by using content analysis, as the aim was to find meanings and their similarities and differences from the interviews. After that, the data were classified and organized by themes in order to gain a compact description of the phenomenon (McNabb, 2002; Myers, 2009).

Analysis

Phrases like *fragmented*, *scattered*, *service jungle*, *overlapping*, and *specialized services* were used to describe the field of social services by the interviewees in Tampere. It was said that the incoming client may turn to many different professionals for help. At the same time the professionals can refer the client to take various different paths for treatment, depending on one's professional preferences. Therefore, it is impossible to draw simple models of the course of the service process. Moreover, the diversity of the problems might be so complex that the course of the process has in many cases various different paths to take. Finally, the course of the service process also has a lot to do with the co-production partner, the client, and his/her commitment to the process.

We divided the analysis into three sections. First, we analyze the coordination of the co-production process in the fragmented service system. Second, we interpret the

complexity of the interaction between the different professionals in the network. Third, we analyze and evaluate the client's possibilities to take part in the planning and managing the service process.

Fragmented service system and the challenge of coordination

The informants explained they did not have a comprehensible overview of all the different service providers. The scattering of service providers might create situations where different professionals have a possibility to form figurations based on their own personal ideals. The figurations seem to be based on previous experiences of cooperation.

> There are <u>so</u> many actors, so the cooperation is most fruitful when there is a contact person from <u>whom</u> you can ask questions and get consultation. And I think that the better the personal relationship with the other actor, the better the cooperation. (Youth work)

It can be said that it is quite easy to start the service process, but what follows after that can be quite coincidental. The kicking off of the service process might be slow and tangled, as finding the right service providers for the clients may take a long time. The biggest problem is that there are no fixed practices of how and when the service network should be called up and when the service should be carried out in co-production with different professionals and the client. The network of different professionals usually convened in cases when there was a need for multiple services such as mental, health, and social services at the same time or if the service providers heard from the client that he/she was also involved in some other service process. The informants said that the network was quite often called up too late. Sometimes the reason behind this was the lack of network coordination.

Yet it is possible to recognize some *funnel organizations*, such as schools, colleges, and youth work stations, which are all places with easy access—where it is easy to call or walk in without an appointment. Child welfare services can also be seen as an important funnel organization, but the incoming process is much heavier in that case than having the first contact with, for example, the school nurse or a youth worker.

Based on the interviews, there are key actors in the service network in social services for young people in need of social services, who often have the overall picture of what is going on in the service process. These key persons are mostly working in the funnel organizations, in the schools, or in the child welfare services. Often the key persons themselves talked about their role as being nodes of the network, but some of them underrated their role in the process. That can be said to be because of the fear of ending up with even more work. Consequently, social workers as well as the other nodes are under an extreme workload and therefore have no possibility to take that role.

> Of course the social worker is the one who is in charge, but the social workers, at least in Tampere, cannot, in my opinion, be the kind of […] who would be so close to the client that they would have such an intimate relationship with the client so that she /he would be present in the everyday life of the client. (Child welfare services)

Accordingly, another challenge has to do with client orientation in the service process, or lack of it. Rather, it seems that the service process is organization-oriented, as some of the services are planned so that there are clients who do not necessarily *fit in into the service process*. It means that it is possible that there is no service provider who could be

responsible for these 'problematic' clients. Quite clearly this is a problem partly created by the fragmented and specialized service system. Also because of this, the risk of nobody being in charge becomes a reality. As there may not necessarily be any coordination of the network, it is possible that the clients slip through the net or get inefficient treatment.

The situation of nobody being in charge is problematic for creating value for clients, obviously, but it also creates a schism between the network actors and makes the actors frustrated.

> It is quite emotional, there is easily finger pointing in the game. The school blames us and says that this is your case, we have done everything we can here at the school, now you can continue, we have nothing to give, this is your case now. Then we note that there is nothing we can do as the client refuses to come here to us. Then we send the client forward … After all this, when we gather for a network meeting, I hope we are all well rested before the meeting, as everyone has such a negative experience of the actions of the others, and all had expectations for the others. And we all failed. (Health care services)

To sum up, it seems that the fragmented structures may hinder the possibilities to efficiently carry out network cooperation. Rules and coordination are called for. However, one cannot just blame the structures: some of the problems in the service process seem to be caused by the complexity of interaction between different professionals.

Complexity of interaction among different professionals

There are some special issues related to the complexity that strongly emerged from the data: *avoidance* and *hiding behind the organization structures* caused by the professional's own insecurity and *fear* caused by the workload, *flexibility* of actors, and *knowledge structures* that can either integrate actors into the service process or separate them from it.

Avoiding by 'forwarding' the client to other service providers was presented as the number one problem in the service process. Forwarding clients was explained to be common because the individual frontline workers did not know what to do with the client and felt unqualified to take care of the client's problems. Lacking special skills and know-how, e.g. with substance abuse, was said to be the reason to send the client away.

> The phenomenon of avoiding appears when one thinks that this may possibly be the wrong option, and then you don't do anything. (Health care services)

The interviewees also talked about protecting one's workload; it is easier to say that one does not have professional skills for treating the client and to send him/her away to be diagnosed further. Some of the organizations were said not to advertise their services as openly as possible as they are afraid that the whole situation would fall apart, and that they would not be able to take care of all the clients who would then come in.

> We need quite good knowledge of the network and the contents of each other's work, so that we can avoid overlapping work. There is also the point that [this way] we can avoid taking on [the workload of] other authorities if there is a lack of employees or time. It catches up with you quite easily. You notice quite soon that if you don't keep up with the content of your own work, and you see that the other authority cannot handle the case, you start taking charge. Suddenly you might see that you answer for something that you are not eligible to do. (Special health care services)

In this context, the expression *flexibility* emerged from the data. The co-production process was said to be dependent on the flexibility of the network actors. It can be simple things: e.g. when calling up the network meeting, some of the network members really make an effort to re-organize their calendars if possible to be able to organize the meeting with the others. On the other hand, it can also be fundamental issues, such as denying clientship by setting strict conditions for accepting clients. At worst, it is a nerve game; some actors are forced to be more flexible in order to make the co-production process work. Based on the interviews, the members of the network know the degree of flexibility of the cultures in different organizations.

> The services are so divided, and then there are these rules where one just cannot be flexible. If someone has to be flexible, then it's us here: 'you are here for all the families with children'. (Child welfare services)

In the case of network-based cooperation, *trust* was an essential feature of interaction between the different actors. As we talked about trust between different service providers in the interview, the informants constantly talked about trust in the professional context. It had occurred more than once that the client moving back and forth between the different service producers was diagnosed all over again by different professionals. Obviously this is not economically effective but neither does it create value for the client. Multiple diagnoses existed, according to the interviews, because of a lack of trust between different professionals.

Functioning knowledge structures are vital for the value creation for the client. Privacy protection creates restrictions for the sharing of information, but what is possible to share should be shared among the network members. It is also a question of co-production. If the client is committed to the service process, and there is a mutual trust between the service providers and the client, there should be no obstacles to sharing information. Finally, one more issue that was caused by information gaps was prejudices against some other actors of the service network. In some cases the prejudices quite soon affected the clients, as we see in the following quote:

> Well, there is this tiny fear that all our clients are labeled according to the previous experiences of clients [who were sent forward from certain service providers] … So that they are all considered addicts, although there might be ones that are not using anything, or are very frightful and shy. (Youth work)

Accordingly, network cooperation has many challenges as different professional interests collide. The problems seem ambiguous as, on the one hand, the informants talked about insecurity and self-doubt regarding the clients' care, and on the other hand, there were strong professionals who did not trust other professionals' diagnoses. It raises the question, what are the possibilities for the client to co-produce the service in this kind of environment?

Possibilities for the clients to take part in the service process—co-production in social service network?

A quite descriptive phrase was used for the client's role in the service process: *surviving in the service jungle*. What kind of role do the clients have in the co-production of the service?

As the field of different service providers is so nebulous, it might diminish the client's possibilities to take part in the co-production process, as it can be difficult to understand which organizations offer what, and whether the services are available and on what basis. According to the informants, in order to have a say, the client needs to be quite strong and well informed. Naturally, many of the social service clients are not.

> The client has to be quite active [in order to influence the service process]. (Child welfare services)

However, although not always willing, the clients do have a chance to have an influence on the network of service providers that co-produce the services. In cases where solutions to the client's problems were approached by utilizing the network, the client did have a say in which organizations and even which professionals should or should not be there. The client was also able to bring his or her own network, e.g. family members or other support groups, to the co-production process. This way, the clients act as co-managers of the service process rather than as co-producers.

Yet in network meetings, it is not always easy to get one's voice heard, especially if there are dozens of different authorities surrounding the client. The question of expertise is quite interesting in this sense. It was said that professionals often feel that they are experts on the client's needs in the end, and the experience and wishes of the client might be ignored.

> Sometimes [professionals] think they are the experts and authorities who know what to do, and then they kind of ignore the expertise and the experiences of the youngster him/herself and his/her expertise of his own life. (Youth work)

However, there were other channels for the client to influence the service process. There were 'informants' among the network members who would support the client in network meetings or even pass the message from the client to other professionals. It was said that one trusted person can have a positive effect on the co-production process.

Moreover, it was said that the client should say when the network should act. We consider this a very important issue in the co-production process. In order to truly create value for the client, the network of different professionals should stand by, but the spark to start the service process should arise from the client him/herself.

As a summary, the problems of the service processes reflected on the client. It can be said that the randomness in the quality of the services is an obstacle for co-production. Also from the public service system's point of view, it is not enough that there are some random hands-on people who possibly take the lead. There should be clear processes also from the point of view of the client so that they have the possibility to contribute and co-produce the best solutions together with the network of professionals.

Discussion

On the stream of literature, co-production is seen as a way to enhance public services, as it increases customer value creation, and thus improves the service outcomes (see e.g. Osborne & Strokosh, 2013; Pestoff, 2006, 2012; Vamstad, 2012). However, our research has shown that this view might be too optimistic from the perspective of actual frontline practices. Based on the data, it is possible to recognize at least three consequences caused

by complex network practices and the complexity of interaction between different professions on the frontline services that prevent co-production.

First, the lack of coordination and the problems with figuring out the right service paths for the clients were caused by the fragmented service system. In the literature of network management, the problem is called *a structural hole* (see Ahuja, 2000). Structural holes in networks create a competitive advantage for actors whose relationships span the holes. The structural holes between actors in networks do not mean that people are unaware of one another. Rather, it means that people are focused solely on their own activities. The people on either side of a structural hole circulate in different flows of information (Ahuja, 2000; Burt, 2001). According to our data, there are structural holes both between and within figurations in the service process. This means that it is possible that wrong service providers are involved in co-production from the perspective of client value creation.

Second, it seems that in the complex and fragmented system, the different frontline professionals become powerful actors in the formulation of frontline policies (see e.g. Hupe & Hill, 2007; Lipsky, 1980; Lymbery, 2006). We consider that the different professions with their different professional views might even be a source of complexity. In our view, the importance of complex human interaction plays too strong a role in the service delivery systems.

Due to complexity, different kinds of service providers are involved in the professional framework of their own rather than in a shared and detached framework based on co-production. Here, the concepts of detachment and involvement are interesting, as they refer to different ways in which human beings regulate themselves. Social standards of individual self-regulation can represent a higher detachment or a higher involvement (Elias, 1987). Due to complexity there are also numerous ways to understand co-production within the network. In this situation, different kinds of professional groups are able to make decisions by themselves on the ways co-production will take place on the practical level.

The outcomes of the service process are not only dependent on the client's needs, but rather on organizational and professional interests. Thus, in the field of co-production research, especially in the field of social and health care service systems, more attention should be paid to complex network practices and the interaction between different professions on the frontline services. The public fragmented service delivery system, as described in the article, hinders co-production in the cases where multiple public service professionals are involved. The responsibility for carrying out co-production cannot be based on good personal contacts, not to mention that it would lie solely on the shoulders of the clients.

Third, complexity in co-production creates managerial systems of which nobody is in charge (see Buchanan, Addicott, Fitzgerald, Ferlie, & Baeza, 2007). Thus, avoidance and hiding behind the organization structures occur in this kind of environment. The co-ordination of actions happens by mutual adjustments. When nobody is in charge of co-production process, it means that there is a lot of diversity and randomness in the services, as we have seen in the results of our study. This is in connection with asymmetrical power relationships (see Stacey, 2010).

To sum up, our research gives new insights for the discussion on co-production of public services in the complex service environment. The lesson for practitioners is that when co-production is applied as an intended policy to improve and deliver public services, the complexity of interaction among the street-level workers and the detached professional frameworks should be kept in mind.

A possible way to solve the problems of complexity is to strengthen the service-dominant framework. The service-management perspective means that, in principle, value

creation occurs in the customers' sphere, whereas organizations in the providers' sphere facilitate value creation by providing resources and processes which represent potential value or value-in-use for their customers (Grönroos & Voima, 2011).

Our research also strengthens the notions made by researchers, such as Farneti, Padovani, and Young (2010). They have argued that in order to achieve value for money to the service users, local governments must move toward the direction of service packages when contracting, instead of contracting services one by one (Farneti et al., 2010, p. 259). One can call it outcome-based commissioning. The outcome-based commissioning model values the wider social, environmental, and economic impacts that providers claim they can create, in addition to the agreed service-level outcomes. These outcomes are set out at the tendering stage and are tracked over the course of the contract so that decisions can be made on more than the price alone and to gain an increased understanding of the impact of interventions.

Concerning future research, there is still need for further empirical research on co-production in the network settings. Both a macro-level analysis of co-production in the framework of public service system and research concerning clients' experiences of co-production in the social and health care service systems are called for.

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Learning to co-produce?

The perspective of public service professionals

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to report on how public service professionals cope with co-production as a way to produce and develop public services.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper draws on the literature of co-production and collaborative public service innovation. The research approach was an explorative case study, presenting a pilot neighbourhood co-production project.

Findings – Conflicting approaches to co-production with various implications are used simultaneously, causing uncertainly among the professional co-producers. When moving from rhetoric to practice there seems to be a lack of tools and methods for applying and utilising the possibilities of co-production. The processes of co-production and their implications should be thoroughly understood and managed throughout public service organisations, from politicians to frontline workers.

Practical implications – The paper demonstrates that co-production calls for renewed organisational structures and managerial tools, especially concerning the evaluation of co-production. Focal managerial, organisational, cultural and processual notions for supporting professional co-production are provided.

Originality/value – This paper makes an important contribution to the discussion of co-production, examining an important, yet understudied, perspective on public service professionals as co-producers.

Keywords: Innovation, Co-production, Learning, Professional, Public service system

Paper type: Research paper

Introduction

Co-production has become an eligible and desired tool for developing and delivering public services in many countries around the world (OECD, 2011). Co-production of public services is seen as way to tackle austerity measures, to meet increased public expectations and as a tool to transform outdated public service infrastructure (Durose et al., 2013; Parrado et al., 2013). Although co-production offers huge potential towards transforming service systems, it also challenges the current public sector organisations both organisationally and culturally.

This naturally has implications for the work of public service professionals. For instance, Bovaird and Löffler (2012, p. 1130) recognise the "need to develop the professional skills to mainstream co-production". The authors state that co-production calls for revised training and development of public service professionals. The professionals need to be able to make use of the assets that clients and citizens offer. Yet there seems to be room for further in-depth investigation of the role of public service professionals as realisers of this new role, analysing this cultural reform from empirical and theoretical stances alike.

Thus, my aim is to examine how public service professionals cope with co-production as a means to develop and produce public services. I also investigate how professionals realise co-production in practice through a formulation of new partnerships with the community, residents and service users.

Moreover, the concept of co-production refers both to an arrangement and to a process that takes place in a polycentric and complex environment (Bovaird, 2007; Osborne, 2010; Tuurnas et al., 2015b). In a wider frame of (new public) governance, interorganisational processes are at the very heart of the research theme. Here, co-production can be linked with the concepts of collaborative and public sector innovation, highlighting the open innovation environment and the innovation assets of different stakeholders (Hartley, 2005, 2013; von Hippel, 2005). In fact, as Pestoff (2012) put it, greater citizen involvement in public services is already in itself an innovation. The conceptual framework of the paper draws on the literature of co-production and collaborative public service innovation. Rather than being the core of the paper, the literature on innovation highlights the importance of the shared process, positioning the locus of learning within a networked environment (Hartley, 2013; Rashman et al., 2009; Sørensen and Torfing, 2012; Osborne and Brown, 2013).

The empirical part of the paper presents a qualitative case study of a pilot neighbourhood project. Here, a network of public service professionals attempted by various means of co-production to enhance the service offerings and the sense of community. As a result, I argue that the role of learning is vital in in the practical level of co-production initiatives. Moreover, the public sector framework with its professional culture and managerial environment seems to hamper the realisation of co-production in practice. Thus, there is a need for all levels of public sector organisations to learn more about co-production.

The concept of co-production

The concept of co-production was established originally in the 1970s by Elinor Ostrom and her colleagues (see Ostrom, 1972; Ostrom et al., 1978). In the 1980s, other researchers have continued to further investigate and develop the concept (see for instance Brudney and England, 1983; Percy; 1984; Sharp, 1980; Whitaker, 1980). Yet, because of marketization of public sector activities in the mid-1980s, the interest on co-production decreased (Alford, 1998). In the following decade, seminal authors, such as Alford (1998, 2002, 2014), brought co-production back to the forefront of the public management discussions as an alternative to marketization and the "contract state" (Alford, 1998, p. 129). Alford emphasised the importance of client co-production alongside volunteer co-production in the public service provision (Alford, 1998, 2002; Alford and Speed, 2006). Moreover, the concept of co-production has resurfaced again as an essential part of New Public Governance discussions emphasising partnerships and networks between the service users, the third sector, as well as private and public organisations (Osborne, 2009, 2010; Pestoff, 2012; Verschuere et al., 2012).

Osborne et al. (2013) offer an interesting viewpoint to the discussions of co-production, binding together the traditions of public administration and the service sciences. They sketch a public service system in which co-production becomes an inalienable component of public service delivery that places the experiences and knowledge of the service user at the heart of the effective public service design and delivery (Osborne et al., 2013, p. 146). The key challenges in these partnerships are to find the right mechanisms for releasing the potential of user knowledge and to ascertain that the co-production parties have necessary skills to make use of these mechanisms (Osborne and Strokosch, 2013).

Furthermore, Osborne and Strokosch (2013, pp. 37-42) have classified different modes of co-production as a continuum. The first mode is consumer co-production, based on the ideas of service management literature. The idea is that services are always co-produced; regardless the willingness of the co-producing parties. The outcomes of the process are defined by the service user and the provider. Here, the focus is on the operational level of service provision, and the aim is to empower their users.

Second, the objective of participative co-production is to improve the quality of existing services. The aims are to be achieved by various participation mechanisms, such as consultation and participating in planning. The desired outcome is to increase user participation especially at the strategic level of service design, rather than at the individual level of service production. This mode of co-production stems from public administrative discourse, and it has an emphasis on strategic rather than operational service development.

In the mode of participative co-production, there is a risk that the activities remain superficial. Osborne and Strokosch (2013, p. 35) point out that co-production might be seen as a normative good, as a value-adding component to service design and production. Additionally, in participative co-production, the public service professionals may still be the ones to dictate when and how the service users or residents are allowed to take part (Osborne and Strokosch, 2013).

The latest mode in the continuum is enhanced co-production, which connects the previous modes of co-production at the operational and strategic levels. The purpose of enhanced co-production is to challenge the whole paradigm of public service production by focusing on user-led innovation. Enhanced co-production rests on real partnerships between the service providers and the service users, based on "the use of knowledge to transform service delivery" (Osborne and Strokosch, 2013, p. 40).

Moreover, co-production can be observed from multiple perspectives. The motives and effects of co-production vary depending on whether it takes place on an individual or collective level (Alford, 2014; Bovaird, 2007; Pestoff, 2014). Users, volunteers and community groups as co-producers have divergent interests, and they have individual roles to play in the co-production process (Bovaird, 2007). Naturally, this also has implications for the professional service providers; they, too, have various roles to play, depending on the mode of co-produced service (Bovaird, 2007; Osborne and Strokosch, 2013).

Finally, the realisation of co-production in practice requires changes in the service arrangements, whether taking place in the planning, delivery or in the evaluation phases. In the same way, the consequence of co-production process can be either incremental change (incremental innovation) or radical change (service innovation) (Osborne and Brown, 2011). Thus, co-production, especially when seen as a multi-actor process, has natural linkages with the literature on public service and collaborative innovation (Boyle and Harris, 2009; Osborne and Strokosch, 2013; Pestoff, 2012).

Innovation in the polycentric service environment

Various conceptualisations have been developed to describe the polycentric innovation environment in the public services. The concepts of collaborative innovation and governance innovation, applied especially in the context of the public sector, underline the multi-actor nature of innovation processes. Governance innovations also highlight the interaction between the service provider and the service user. Here, the exclusive power and discretion of public actors is shared in new ways (Moore and Hartley, 2008). As a main approach in this paper, I refer to public service innovation as a process, rather than as public service as a product (see, e.g. Hartley, 2013).

In the same way, collaborative innovation refers to an open process in which professionals from different organisations, and citizens, private companies and NGOs, are integrated into the innovation process from the beginning (Bommert, 2010; Eggers and Singh, 2009; Moore, 1997). Bommert (2010) refers to this process as an "innovation cycle", meaning idea generation, selection, implementation and diffusion. The idea behind collaborative innovation is to increase the quality and quantity of services through the wide range of the participants' innovation assets (Bommert, 2010). Edquist (2005) also notes that innovations are created in an interaction between different organisations, where multiple actors use their skills and knowledge to set the direction of development and influence the other parties in various ways.

Yet, innovation should not be observed only from the normative stance. The change or development itself should not become a target of activities, especially when the change is not necessary in terms of the efficiency and functionality of the services (Osborne, 2009; Pestoff and

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Brandsen, 2010). As with all public activities, co-production involves a certain amount of risk (Bovaird and Löffler, 2012). Osborne and Brown (2011) introduce the idea of risk governance, based on the participation of and the negotiation between the key parties. According to the authors, the participative approach could be useful when coping with risk. Indeed, Renn (2008; referred by Osborne and Brown, 2011) points out that risk is a socially constructed phenomenon. Thus, the acceptable level of risk is a matter of negotiation, highlighting again the polycentric nature of the public service processes.

Innovation processes are always learning processes (Edquist, 2005; Pavitt, 2005). Here, learning occurs through a new understanding of a subject, a service or a process, and often through trial and error (Sørensen and Torfing, 2012). Rashman et al. (2009) observed organisational learning especially from the perspective of public service organisations. In the networked public sector environment, the communities of practice are platforms where the actors share information and experience (Brown and Duguid, 1991; Feldman and Khademian, 2007; Maiello et al., 2013). Trust, face-to-face interaction and reciprocity are important elements for learning in the context of networks (Rashman et al., 2009). Further, innovation processes are usually not linear. Rather, innovation can be seen as an "intentional, learning-based practice that incorporates occasional change discoveries" (Sørensen and Torfing, 2012, p. 4).

Thus, we can sketch an interorganisational environment where innovations can best occur through co-production among professionals from various fields of service, service users, citizens, private companies and non-governmental actors in different settings. Moreover, interaction, shared processes and mutual learning can be identified as mechanisms that drive collaborative innovations.

Yet, Brown and Osborne (2013) point out that so far neither co-production nor any other related concepts, such as co-creation, citizen involvement or user-centred innovation, have been able to address issues such as: *"how [to] best involve service users, who to involve, the degree of involvement that is appropriate and the form this should take"* (Brown and Osborne, 2013, p. 565). These are all issues that face the public service professional in practice. This lead us to think about the realisation of co-production from the viewpoint of public actors.

Thus, the theoretical framework raises a critical question concerning the viewpoint of public service professionals in polycentric service systems, stipulating an exploratory approach on the analysis. There is a need to have more profound understanding on what it means for the professionals to open up their processes in order to form partnerships with different stakeholders?

The examined case study, concerning a pilot neighbourhood project conducted in the Finnish City of Tampere, is an interesting opportunity in which to seek answers to those questions. What makes the case especially interesting is: first, that the project was initiated and designed by the professionals working in the area; and second, their bottom-up approach to the planning and implementation of the activities.

The project as platform forming new partnerships can offer valuable understanding of the world of professional co-producer. In the examined project, a network of neighbourhood public service

professionals planned and realised the project to enhance the service offer and seek service innovations through co-production in a socially challenging neighbourhood.

The case of co-production pilot in neighbourhood context

In Finland, the idea of co-production of public services has emerged in the last few years. For instance, the Finnish Ministry of Finance refers to the idea of co-production as a key tool for future public services (Ministry of Finance, NN). The City of Tampere, among many other cities, has also started co-production pilots as a "way forward", from the rather traditional ways of enhancing citizen participation, such as organising citizen forums or conducting user surveys. New ways include service design, workshops and e-tools such as chats and social media pilots. The idea of partnerships with the users and communities is seen as cultural reform for the whole public service system. Neighbourhood projects especially have been introduced as pilots for applying this framework (City of Tampere, 2013, 2015).

The examined project was one of the co-production pilots following the strategy of the City of Tampere (2013).The project targeted the creation of innovative solutions for the public service offer in a socially challenging neighbourhood of the City of Tampere, Finland. The neighbourhood project was especially targeted to families with children. Professionals from various fields of service production, such as social work, health care, early education and day care services, youth work and school personnel, took part in the project.

The aims of the project can be summed up in three scopes: the first was to intensify the co-operation among the public service providers in the neighbourhood to make the local public services more effective and user friendly. The second scope was to apply co-production and co-design as empowering tools in the development of the neighbourhood services. The third scope was to strengthen the sense of community in the neighbourhood by motivating the local residents to participate as volunteers.

The starting point for the activities was to determine the key local needs. To do so, the project group conducted a citizen survey in the neighbourhood. The members of the project group distributed the survey at local events. They also distributed the survey through such various other channels, such as the school-home e-communication system, the library and other service points in the area. Similarly, to understand the children's ideas about the neighbourhood, art workshops were organised with the help of the cultural affairs of the city. The later activities were planned on the basis of the survey results. Generally, the inhabitants called for more local activities, more parks and more cosiness to the area. Furthermore, the project network organised happenings with the non-public communities of the neighbourhood. Many small-scale pilots, neighbourhood chats and various events were attempted along the way. The project team also developed a new form of service in course of the project. The idea of the new service was to offer easy-access activities for families at risk, taking a multi-professional approach by combining cultural and social services. In addition, various neighbourhood NGOs took part in these activities as partners with the professionals.

Research strategy and methodology

As a research strategy, I applied a case study, emphasising the importance of gaining in-depth understanding of the process of co-production from the viewpoint of professional co-producer. Indeed, according to Ackroyd and Karlsson (2014, p. 24):

"the aim of the [case study] research is to bring to light formative processes which cause particular outcomes, when they operate [...]. Rather than observing the mechanism per se, the researcher follows the operation of the mechanisms.

Naturally, case study offers only limited generalizability. Yet, it is possible to learn through case studies, and accordingly, offer valuable scientific knowledge for theory development" (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

The "rich data" that is typical in case studies allow the researcher to go beyond the descriptive features of the studied subject. In this research, the data consists of various types of materials, such as participant observations and interviews, but also project documents, resident surveys and informal discussions. This variety of data are typical in case studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1993, 1994) and the aim of data triangulation from difference sources was to enhance the validity of the analysis by reducing the risk of biases (Maxwell, 2004). As we shall see later in the study analysis, the data triangulation was vital for securing the validity of the results. To demonstrate, the rhetoric used in the project planning as well as in the individual interviews revealed conflicts with the observation notes that I as a participant observer noted. Thus, participatory observation helped to shed light into the "life world" of the professionals as realisers of the co-production process.

Moreover, focusing on the less studied perspective of professional co-producer into account, the exploratory case study approach was applied (Streb, 2010). The data collection and analysis were an iterative process, as the findings and the data collection defined the research protocol (Yin, 1994). To give a specific overview of the various data, Table I describes and demonstrates the different data sources and their applications.

Table 1. Data sources and their application

Data source	The aim	Detailed description
The semi-structured interviews Fully transcribed, N = 13	Understanding the different public actor´s interpretations about the project and its outcomes	8 individual interviews and a focus group of middle managers 4 frontline workers An interview with a top manager of the city
Participant observation (partly transcribed)	Gaining a profound	Field notes gathered in the project meetings for 18 months

Duration: beginning of the project 3/2013 until 9/2014	understanding of the process	Participation in different project events as an observer
Project plans and meeting protocols	To compare the official documents with the field notes and interview data	I used the data to find tensions between the official plans and the actual implementation

Following the iterative process of data gathering and preliminary analysis, I formed an analytical framework based on the literature as a way to conduct a theory-driven content analysis. I used the theoretical framing as basis for structuring the data by categories. The framework consists of two main themes of professional framework and their tensions towards the collaborative process. The framework is displayed in Figure 1.

The professional/organisational framework

Collaborative process
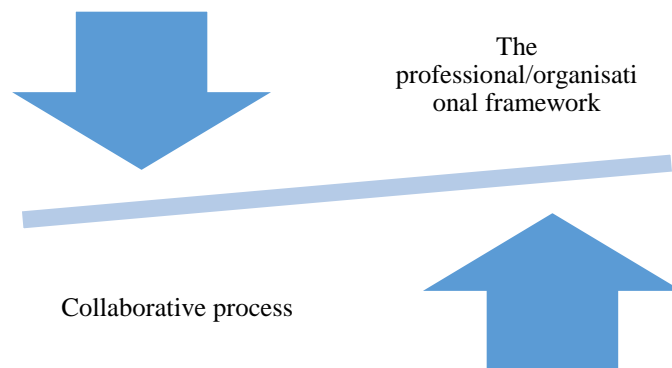
Figure 1. Framework for analysis

The categories, containing different dimensions and values were: *culture, risk, new roles, trust, idea generation, network* as well as *professional* and *resident knowledge*. The categories were then used to building typologies and finding patterns. Especially the pattern of learning linked the categories together and was thus vital for the analysis. The units of analysis were speech turns (Gläser and Laudel, 2013; Krippendorf, 2013).

Results of the study

Professional culture as a precondition

The professional culture was challenged in many ways in the examined co-production project. To begin with, there were many very profound discussions about citizen participation, co-production and the role of the public service professionals in the project meetings during my observation period of circa 18 months. Yet, the project members highlighted especially the meaning of increased interaction with various professionals of different backgrounds as a key achievement of the project. In the interviews it was pointed out that the organisational barriers were somewhat diminished due to the new co-operation taking place in the project. The professionals also highlighted the opportunity to gain ideas for their own fields of service, and thus, to learn collectively. Indeed, a notion stemmed from the participatory observation was that the residents and service users were observed from a distance.

Likewise, it was pointed out in the interviews, that the professionals in their role as public officials felt that they were expected to have ready-made solutions for the residents and the client. In fact, the members of the project group identified the "premise" that the culture of public professionals was problem-oriented. Accordingly, the professionals said that they tend to ask, what kinds of services should be increased, what is lacking? These notions could be found in the realisation of the project in various phases and ways:

> *It is quite funny – why do we have to turn on our professional brains? We might as well position ourselves as residents: What would I want? Would I really participate in such and such? (Interview 10).*

Moreover, it could be noted that the issues of equality and representativeness as crucial values for the professionals were challenged in the project. This caused uncertainty and confusion among the interviewed:

> *Whom will we contact in which cases? Whom will we torment? Whom are we offering opportunities? (Focus group interview).*

Also the questions of accountability and sharing responsibility were discussed and debated among the professionals taking part in the project. To demonstrate, the professionals brought out some accountability dilemmas concerning a potential new partnerships with a local NGOs. In their role as public officials the project members problematised the possibility of this co-operation, as the NGOs in case could have had some religious or ideological agendas that would be at odds with the values of neutrality in the provision of public service.

Organisational and managerial preconditions

As for the managerial preconditions, the question of performance management was frequently discussed in the network meetings. For instance, the professionals discussed the difficulty the measuring the outcomes of the various activities of the project. Yet being accountable to the

politicians and purchasers of the services meant that the achievements needed to become visible in figures and numbers, and the outcomes must be explainable in the project reports. In such a project where the aim was to activate the local residents through co-production and increase the sense of community, it proved to be difficult to demonstrate the outcomes as numeral values, at least in a time span of one or two years. Still, the managerial procedures required such reports:

> *R1. Is the evaluation [of the project] something else than the evaluation survey or the citizen survey? Do we have other indicators? [….] (Focus group, participant 8).*

> *R10. Could it be that focus is rather not the question, whether the amount of child welfare notifications have decreased etc. […] Isn't it rather that we have started something new that might eventually lead to that? (Focus group, participant 10).*

The organisational preconditions also influenced the implementation of the project. In the interviews, the professional project members "justified" the lacking resident and client co-production so that increasing and improving the services in the area, and offering the clients smooth service paths created by increased interaction among the professionals, were acceptable and adequate outcomes for the project. Furthermore, the emergence of cross-sectoral co-operation between different professionals was highlighted as the main outcome of the project.

> *I don't think we have reached the point where we would really try to think about the services in a new way […] We have tried to solve this problem in so many projects. So far we have not succeeded, and I don't think we will in this project, either. But here we had a chance to try out how the school, childcare, social work and school health care sit at the same table, and discuss the problems of their clients. So that they actually do it together, not so that one tries to solve one problem and another one the second problem while the third professional has engaged himself with the third problem (Interview 15).*

To continue, the interviewed professionals talked about the project meetings as platforms for learning. The project members truly highlighted the possibility of sharing knowledge and experiences with each other, and considered it as useful in a wider organisational framework as well:

> *I think that [the new knowledge, new understanding] has flown to my own organisation, too. We have found new ways to do things. Just to understand the meaning of working against the creation of welfare gaps and working for increasing welfare in the area […] Finally, it helps not just the neighborhood, but also the whole city as a [better] place to live (Interview 11).*

Consequently, there was clearly room for increased interaction among the professionals, who according to the interviews did not have in enough possibilities to get to know the other professionals and other service providers in their every-day work. Yet because of the project plan and the admitted special project funding, the professionals were "obliged" to also create innovative

pilots with a citizen co-production dimension. In the next section, I present results from the perspective of the project as shared process.

Towards collaborative innovation? – The project as shared process

Analysing the collaborative process, creating interaction through the right platforms proved to be a very challenging task: to demonstrate; the project group offered the residents a possibility to take part in the planning meetings. Yet, finding participants for the project meetings did not succeed, as not many residents took part in these events. The project worker also organised online chats as a novel way to create interaction with the residents, but the turnout of participants remained limited:

> *Now what we have done here is to organize meetings where most participants were officials or representatives of organizations. Everyone was meaning well, but the meetings just weren't interesting enough for the local residents to take part (Interview 1).*

As it was pointed out in the previous section, the idea of developing the services together with the service users and residents did not proceed as planned. On the contrary, to the first project plans, the different project pilots were mostly planned and implemented by the professional project members, for the residents of the neighbourhood. The project members themselves also recognised and talked about the situation in the interviews:

> *It is that we get too excited in these things, and then we start thinking on behalf of the residents; they will surely like this […] it is subconscious [for us professionals] (Interview 10).*

Eventually, the development and the idea of planning the services together with the residents was said to be a very challenging. In the light of the data, it seemed that the loose conceptualization of different participation approaches partly caused this confusion. The rhetoric was the same for service development and citizen participation, even though the aims of these two approaches were, indeed, different. They also call for different actions, and have different challenges to overcome:

> *Participation is one thing, but how to really involve the inhabitants in developing and planning the services is another […]. Not like, "what do you think about this plan that we made?", but to really equally discuss with some limited group […] because we can't discuss with every citizen in this city. I have to admit that it is all confusing for me […] how do I want to involve the residents' knowledge in the development of the services I provide, compared to the idea of really thinking about reorganizing the services. […] I don't think we are there yet (Interview 8).*

Discussion

There is a general understanding in the literature on co-production that public service professionals resist co-production because it involves the ceding of power (see Bovaird, 2007; Osborne and Strokosch, 2013; Verschuere et al., 2012). Although this is surely true in many cases, based on the analysis it can be said that the role of learning is also essential; the professionals do not necessarily know what they are supposed to do differently as they apply their familiar professional framework in the new ways of planning and producing the services. Especially the different applications of co-production as means to foster participatory democracy, and client co-production as a means to transform and develop public service production, are used simultaneously in the rhetoric of the co-production initiatives. Based on the research, this causes uncertainty and confusion to the professionals as initiators of co-production.

Moreover, as it has been demonstrated in the analysis, the professional introversion can be seen as a hampering factor. "Opening up" is essential to avoid the path-dependency: if the aim is to find transformative solutions instead of organising superficial opportunities to participate; it crucial to find meaningful and effective ways; and platforms for the interaction. Yet, opening up the process clashed with the traditional values, like equality, representativeness and the neutrality of the public service activities. In addition, the professional ideal of having ready-made solutions for the residents and service users was at odds with the idea of co-production. The difficulty of creating interesting platforms for resident interaction and, related to that, utilising the opportunities of co-production also demonstrates the need for learning more about the practical implications of co-production.

Furthermore, in the networked environment, these challenges exist not just for single public sector employees but also for professionals from many different backgrounds (Tuurnas et al., 2015b). Based on the analysis, increased interaction among various professionals encourages the professionals to apply co-production in practice, as they can learn from each other, and adapt and adopt the learned methods in the their own fields of service. In order to increase such interaction, cross-sectorial co-operation should be encouraged and sectorial barriers diminished. Finally, the evaluation of the outcomes of co-production requires new managerial tools. As a result of the analysis, it can be said that the process of co-production should be thoroughly understood, organised and managed throughout public service organisations, from politicians to the frontline workers.

Conclusions

The key aspect of this paper has been the polycentric service delivery arrangements of public services (Alford, 2014; Osborne and Strokosch, 2013) and the perspective of professionals in those arrangements. The examined case helps us to better understand the world of the public service professional as co-producer and highlights the importance of learning.

To conclude, it can be said that co-production was not an easy issue for the professionals. When moving from rhetoric to practice there seems to be a lack of tools and methods for applying and utilising the possibilities of co-production. This is essential when we try to understand the world of the public service professionals as initiators and implementers of co-production practices.

The research highlights the importance of renewed professional culture. Above all, this means accepting and acknowledging experiential knowledge alongside their professional knowledge in the service development (see Tuurnas et al., 2015a, b). Here, it should be noted that the cultural transformation concerning co-production has a special importance in Northern European context, where the roles of citizens as customers and public service providers as public or private bodies have so far been quite traditional due to a strong welfare state model (Pestoff, 2006). A public service system that is strongly professionalised might create limitations on co-production, as it is difficult for the professionals to view the service users and residents as equal partners instead of objects of care.

Against this context, I consider the idea of risk governance (see Osborne and Brown, 2011) noteworthy in the support of renewing the professional culture. Negotiations on the accepted levels of risk on all levels of public service organisational and non-public stakeholders could encourage the professionals to approach the non-professional knowledge and partnerships in new ways.

As for the managerial and organisational conditions, it seems that the NPM-based environment hampers the innovativeness of professionals as co-production initiators. The sectorial barriers in the current public service system seemed to cause professional introversion, as the professionals concentrated on increasing cross-sectoral co-operation instead of looking out for new partnerships with the non-public actors.

A notion stemming from the theoretical framework highlights the importance of the shared process as source for much need innovations in the public services. In the examined case, finding the right platforms for interaction, instead of offering superficial opportunities to take part in the development meetings, proved to be a key point for learning for the professional co-producers.

To sum up, I display a typology of professional co-production in polycentric environment in the Figure 2. The typology includes focal points that can support the professional co-production from managerial, organisational, cultural and processual points of view.

Finally, the explorative approach on the less examined topic on professional co-producer opens up many further questions and hypotheses for future research. Here, suggestions concerning venues for future research are introduced from the four viewpoints recognised and presented in the Figure 2.

In order to study the managerial conditions for professional co-production, the contextual factors should be studied further. In this study it has been noted that the relation between the autonomy of the professionals and the (performance) management systems is linked to the "leeway" in the realisation of co-production initiatives. Thus, the innovation potential of professional co-producers could be researched further in different administrative cultures and managerial systems, for example through cross-case studies.
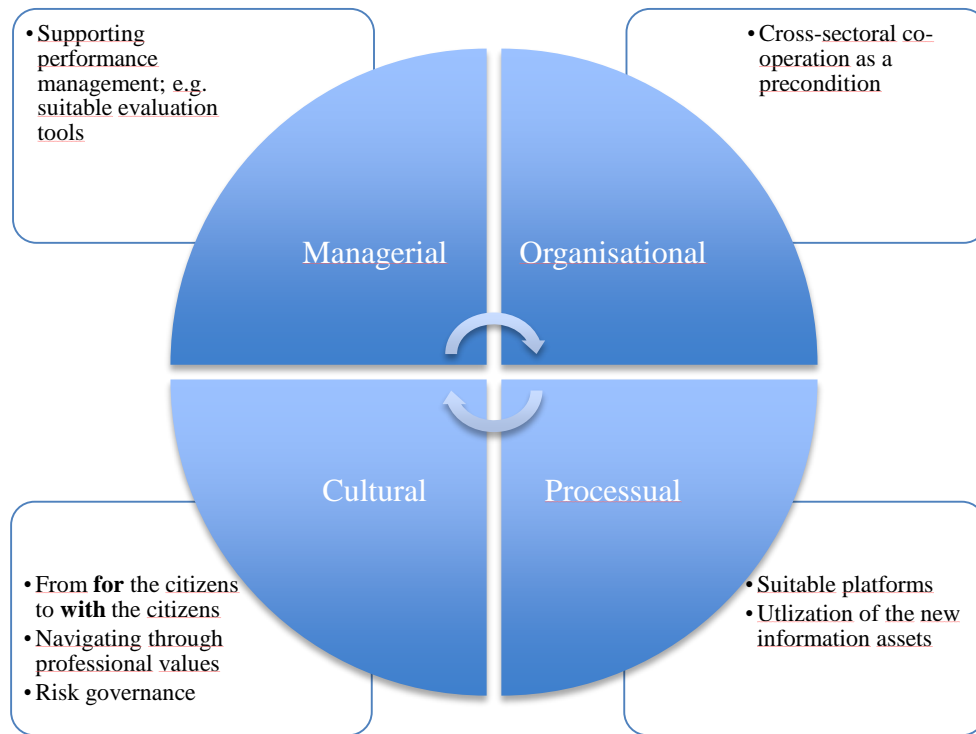
Figure 2. Focal points for supporting professional side of co-production

The viewpoint of professional culture offers many other opportunities for examination of the professionals as co-producers. Concerning the possible sectorial differences influencing the capacity and willingness to co-produce, the examined study did not take a stance on the different professions taking part in the multi-professional co-operation in the analysis. Yet, linked to the literature on professionalism, new insights could be found for instance by investigating differences between the "elite-professions", and "para-professions" (see, e.g. Ferlie and Geraghty, 2005).

Moreover, the examined case took place in the context of a strong northern Welfare State model with a high degree of professionalism. Therefore, a hypothesised importance of the dominant Welfare State model for the professional co-production could be studied especially through comparative studies.

Moreover, the individual characteristics of the professional co-producers, despite their professional background, could increase our understanding on factors linked to the professionals as co-producers. The different characters of individual professionals or possible differences between professions could be examined in the context of services in which multi-professional co-operation is typical, such as in social and health care services (see also Tuurnas et al., 2015b) or, as in this study, in neighbourhood services. Indeed, the context of multi-professional co-operation for co-production processes is relevant, as such a wide variety of public services is currently provided through cross-sectorial arrangements.

To continue, as the case showed, co-production often takes place in polycentric environment with many conflicting interests. In the study, tensions and imbalance on the definitions of the outcomes could be found, for instance, between the project plans and the actual outcomes that were defined

by the professionals (see also Tuurnas, 2015). Thus, further study could include critical examination on the co-production processes from the viewpoint of (public) value creation and the role of professionals in those processes.

Finally, observing the processual viewpoint, the study highlighted the professional challenge of opening up their processes, and then again, finding the right platforms for creating interaction with non-professional stakeholders. Here, the limiting element was the lack of understanding of the world of the "resident co-producer". Thus, the notion invites us to examine, what is actually the nature of "public sphere", and how different actors taking part in the co-production process define and understand it, especially in the age of digitalisation.

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Looking beyond the Simplistic Ideals of Participatory Projects:

Fostering Effective Co-production?

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Abstract

The article examines co-production in the neighborhood community development context. The research question in the article is, how public service professionals can foster effective co-production. The article presents an explanatory case study of a participatory neighborhood project where the project activities, the outcomes and the mechanisms that explain their outcomes are examined. In the analysis, capacities of the actors and motivation are identified as key explanatory mechanisms. As a result, the article argues that understanding the expected outcomes and the complexity of the co-production are essential for effective participatory projects. Co-production should be viewed as a way to achieve outcomes, not as a policy outcome *per se*.

KEYWORDS: Co-production, participation, neighborhood governance, outcome

Introduction

 Neighborhoods have been the focus of attention in the formulation of urban regeneration policies across Western societies. Neighborhoods are seen as new components of an entirely reorganized local government, offering a locus for (re-)empowering citizens (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008; Stoker, 2005). As broader underlying policies, introduced especially in the United Kingdom (UK), the Big Society and localism agendas emphasize the shift of power from the state to local and community levels (N. Bailey, 2008; S. Bailey, 2011; Bailey & Pill, 2011; Eriksson & Vogt, 2012; Ludwig & Ludwig, 2014; Williams, Goodwin, & Gloke, 2014). Similarly, as an element of neighborhood governance, co-production examines partnerships between citizens, communities, and public actors (Durose, Mangan, Needham, Rees, & Hilton, 2013). Co-production has been described both as an arrangement and as a process, wherein communities, NGOs, and individual citizens, participate in the planning, production, and evaluation of public services (S. Bailey, 2011; Bovaird, 2005, 2007; Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Marschall, 2004; Perry, 2007; Verschuere, Brandsen, & Pestoff, 2013).

Furthermore, there is generally a need for an in-depth understanding of mechanisms that foster effective outcomes in participatory activities. For instance, Osborne and Strokosch (2013) stress that the key challenge in co-production is to find the right mechanisms to free the potential underlying the process. Moreover, it is important to look beyond the normative ideals of participation models and initiatives. It is vital to see participation and co-production as a means of *achieving the outcomes*, not just as a policy outcome in and of itself (Brannan, John, & Stoker 2006). Therefore, Brannan, John, and Stoker (2006) call for studies that also take into account the complex processes of engagement, reflection on both the practices, and the outcomes. This call is important given the lack of evidence about involvement and outcomes observed in the micro-level interactions. Thus, the aim of this article is to find mechanisms that can explain the outcomes, observed through theoretical and empirical lenses in a neighborhood context. In the article, the research question is, how co-production can be fostered effectively by initiatives led by public service professionals in the neighborhood context.

Theoretically, the framework of the study is built on two streams of literature: co-production and neighborhood governance. Both of these streams emphasize the idea of partnerships and participation. In this study, studies related to neighborhood governance policies help us to identify the conditions and challenges of the neighborhood as a *locus* for participatory activities. Indeed, as a policy, neighborhood governance highlights "local" (versus regional or national) as an institutional arena for shared activities and partnerships. Then again, the concept of co-production discusses the *different forms* and *modes* of these partnerships. From these two streams of literature, mechanisms related to fostering co-production are detected. These mechanisms are used in the analysis.

In the empirical part of the article, the article presents an explanatory case study of a participatory neighborhood project in the midsized Finnish city of Tampere. Through the analysis, the study demonstrates that understanding the expected outcomes and the complexity of co-

production are essential for reaching effective outcomes in participatory projects.

Conceptual Framework

Neighborhoods are socially constructed and cannot be defined by geographical borders alone, which makes a "neighborhood" a relative concept (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008; Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). Moreover, the experience of connectedness can be either positive or negative. In fact, neighborhoods present urban living with its actual pros and cons: neighborhoods *per se* are natural spaces for strengthening the sense of community, but many neighborhoods are socially weak, embodying many social problems. Thus, neighborhoods do not automatically strengthen social capital and participation. As Kearns and Parkinson (2001, p. 2, p. 104) assert, the key is meaningful human interaction:

> *Neighborhood does not bring about 'nearness' but rather it is the other way around. In other words, sharing space does not always bring about the proximity of residence that constitutes places. The reciprocity of 'nearness' can vary for different people from regular, low-level acquaintance to strong interpersonal intimacy and commitment; both can be important to people according to their needs.*

Neighborhood governance can be seen as one strand of governance that focuses on the neighborhood as an appropriate locus for planning and delivering services to the residents and offering them chances to participate. Neighborhood governance is also a policy, stemming from the UK. There, neighborhoods are linked with participation and responsiveness, as opposed to efficiency and the equity in large-scale governance. Accordingly, neighborhood governance is also seen as a way to strengthen social capital (Durose & Lowndes, 2010; Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008; Newton, 1982; Purdue, 2001).

Sometimes, neighborhood agendas link democratic approaches with service (co-)design (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008). Large-scale governance is seen as effective and promoting equity across the polity, but the neighborhood as a policy agenda is seen as participative and close to the people or residents. Neighborhoods are also connected with direct citizen participation and community involvement, thereby acting as suitable arenas for building holistic models for public services, and utilizing co-production approaches (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008). Finally, neighborhood governance has also provoked criticism, as it is seen as a way to reduce the tasks of the government and increase the self-help ideology and Big Society policies within societies (Davies & Pill, 2012; Jacobs & Manzi, 2013).

Co-production is an essential part of neighborhood programs (Durose et al., 2013). Like neighborhood governance policies, co-production can also be examined as part of societal change. In co-production, communities and individual citizens take on some of the tasks of the public sector by participating in the planning and production of public services (S. Bailey, 2011; Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Eriksson & Vogt, 2012; Perry, 2007; Pestoff, Osborne, & Brandsen, 2006). This movement as a whole can be described as a shift from "public services FOR

the public" toward "public services BY the public" (Osborne, 2009, 2010; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013; Pestoff, 2012). In this article, I refer to co-production following a widely accepted conceptual outline by Verschuere, Brandsen, and Pestoff (2012, p. 1085), who define co-production as

> *[T]he mix of activities that both public service agents and citizens contribute to the provision of public services. The former are involved as professionals, or 'regular producers', while 'citizen production' is based on voluntary efforts by individuals and groups to enhance the quality and/or quantity of the services they use.*

Durose et al. (2013) identify different forms of co-production, including *individual forms* such as expert-patient programs, *group forms* such as neighborhood watch activities, and *collective forms* such as time banks or community ownership of parks. The factors defining each form includes who the actual co-producers are (individual citizens, family, groups of citizens) and who the beneficiaries are (individual citizens, groups of citizens, wider community). Pestoff (2012) recognizes that the individual forms of co-production are more ad hoc and usually have a lower salience, whereas collective forms are more formal.

Moreover, Osborne and Strokosch (2013) classify different modes of co-production along a continuum. The first mode is *consumer co-production*, based on the ideas of service management literature, which views the production and consumption of services as simultaneous processes. Here, the focus is on the operational level of the service provision. When the service user commits him- or herself to the co-production process, the service outcomes and the service experience will be satisfying. The purpose of consumer co-production is user empowerment.

A second mode is *participative co-production*, the purpose of which is to improve the quality of existing services. This mode has different participation mechanisms, such as consultation and participation in planning. The purpose is to increase user or citizen participation at the strategic level of service design, rather than at the individual level of service production. This mode of co-production stems from public administrative discourse and has more of a strategic than an operational emphasis on service development.

The last mode in the continuum is *enhanced co-production*, which connects the previous modes of co-production. The purpose of enhanced co-production is to challenge the whole paradigm of the production public services by focusing on user-led innovations. According to Osborne and Strokosch (2013, p. 40), "the key challenge in these partnerships is to find the right mechanisms to release the potential of the partnerships, and to make certain that the parties have essential skills to make use of these mechanisms," and thus lead us to further examine the mechanisms.

Mechanisms of Co-production and Participation in the Neighborhood Context

Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) define four rationales for neighborhood governance as an institutional arrangement and, based on the definitions, identify four ideal types of neighborhood governance: 1) neighborhood empowerment, 2) neighborhood partnership, 3) neighborhood government, and 4) neighborhood management. In these different types, the role of the citizens, the leadership, and the key objectives vary (Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008).

Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) also recognize four challenges in the different forms of neighborhood governance. *Capacity* can be problematic in the trade-off between the extent of participation and the scope of control. The issues and the services at the local level are naturally less "high" than on a larger scale. Thus, the motivation to take part in solving the "lower" questions might be smaller than in the larger scale of governance. However, as Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) demonstrate, while this might be true in the electoral forms of participation, the non-electoral forms of participation that influence the everyday life of the residents seem to be more relevant and useful at the local level. The questions of *competence* and *diversity* are related, especially in terms of representativeness. On a smaller scale, it might not be easy to find competent and diverse participants who would represent the views of the whole community. Finally, *equity* is especially tricky from the public service provider's perspective, as it might require making choices about the diversity in service volumes or quality. Moreover, the complex question is also to find a trade-off between participation and equity: whose voice is heard, and which interests are pushed forward? This is a challenge, especially in neighborhoods where the residents live "parallel lives."

According to Lowndes and Sullivan (2008), the key to tackling these challenges is to offer different opportunities to participate on different scales. Referring especially to the question of diversity of neighborhood governance, interaction between the residents and different community groups is essential. Public actors are key players here, as they can bridge the different actors by creating cohesion strategies.

Other authors have also noted the importance of public actors as stimulating forces. Their abilities to interact with the local residents play a key role in fostering participation and co-production. For instance, Marschall (2004) examines why individuals take part in local (public) activities, such as fighting crime or developing the local schools, and demonstrates the importance of governmental actors in the mobilization of the local citizens, noting in particular their ability to formally contact the citizens to stimulate participation. Moreover, simply the presence of public actors seems to strengthen the sense of community (Kearns & Parkinson 2001; Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004; Scott, 2002). Finally, Jones and Ormston (2014) have noted that a great deal depends on the local authorities' willingness to foster cooperation; they need to move away from top-down service provision, which requires skills and the development of trust.

In the creation of partnerships between residents, communities, and public actors in the neighborhood context, it is important to look more closely at questions of interaction. Indeed, *trust* is an essential element for making co-production work: professional service providers must trust that they get essential information from the user, whereas the users must trust that their input will

be realized in action (Osborne & Strokosch, 2013; Pestoff, 2014). However, the reality of co-production can look different than its theory: the professionals might have difficulties seeing the citizens as partners, and the citizens are not necessarily willing to co-produce, as they do not trust the authorities or generally lack interest (Osborne, 2009, 2010; Fledderus, Brandsen, & Honingh, 2013). Likewise, the element of trust also applies to voluntary organizations. They, too, have to gain trust, both from the public actors and from the citizens, and vice versa. As Vidal (2006) points out, to gain trust, the voluntary organizations have to become transparent and professional in their activities.

Moreover, in co-production, the citizens have a new role to play. The key question is, what motivates citizens to contribute? In their examination of this question, Alford and O'Flynn (2012) identify two factors behind citizen motivations for co-production: their *willingness* and their *ability* to contribute. There are three motivators for willingness: sanctions, material rewards, and non-material rewards. For ability, the motivators are related to the capacities needed for the co-produced tasks. Alford and O'Flynn (2012) also note that the motives for public service professionals are quite similar; however, the mechanisms of those motives are a bit different.

In another study about the motivation to co-produce, Van Eijk and Steen (2015) assert that *ease*, *internal efficacy*, and *external efficacy* are socio-psychological factors are important for motivating and engaging the citizens to co-produce public services. Ease has to do with the expected workload of taking part. Internal efficacy is the personal feeling of being competent to co-produce, whereas external efficacy refers to perception about the responsiveness of public actors and the trust that it makes a difference to co-produce. Put a bit differently, the *salience* of the subject of the co-production activities is important; Pestoff (2012) notes that the services people are mostly likely to produce are those that are most important to self or family members.

To conclude, the theoretical framework brings out different mechanisms that are related to the implementation of participatory projects. These factors include the motivational side as salience, ease, trust, and internal and external efficacy. The organizational side draws attention to the capacities and competence of the actors (see, Alford & O'Flynn, 2012; Jones & Ormston, 2013; Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013; Parrado, van Ryzin, Bovaird, & Loeffler, 2013; Pestoff, 2012; Van Eijk & Steen, 2015.). Then again, the previous chapter discussed the different forms of co-production, indicating the multi-dimensional nature of the concept. Thus, the research framework raises the question of how to motivate citizens on forms of co-production, keeping in mind the questions of representativeness and equality. These challenges are met by the professional as realizers of the participatory activities. Therefore, the focus of the research is on the question of how public service professionals can effectively foster co-production. The case of the neighborhood pilot project as a context for the study offers valuable insights into the different forms of co-production between individual residents and public service professionals, as well as through partnerships with local non-public actors.

The Case of a Neighborhood Community Development Project

The case presents a participatory neighborhood community development project. The initiative for the project arose from public service professionals working in the area. They had identified problems typical of the area, such as the increasing amount of child welfare notifications, problems with substance abuse, a limited amount of meaningful leisure activities, fragmented service structures, and a high percentage of immigrants who have problems receiving services due to their lack of language skills. Thus, the idea was to activate people and create more activities in the neighborhood. There was also an aim to create a greater sense of community in the neighborhood.

The examined case takes place in a socially challenging and divergent neighborhood in the city of Tampere, Finland. In the case neighborhood, there are approximately 11,800 inhabitants, of which 22% are families with children (generally in Tampere, the percentage is 8%) (LähiVoimala – project, NN). The project was especially targeted at families with children. The project received special development funding from the city as a part of the city's strategic emphasis on strengthening co-production in the planning and delivery of public services in the neighborhood context. The socio-economic structure of the neighborhood is diverse. For instance, there is a typical middle-class suburban part in the neighborhood with detached houses and owner-occupied flats, whereas another part of the neighborhood consists mostly of rental flats and apartment buildings. Moreover, there is a high usage rate for social services in the neighborhood. In addition, the percentage of immigrants is high in the area.

Research Strategy and Methods

The research strategy is an explanatory case study, which is appropriate as the aim is to find explanations about the linkages between implementation and outcomes (Yin, 1994). As is typical for a case study, the data consists of several forms of materials, such as participant observation and interviews, project documentation, resident surveys, and informal discussions (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1993, 1994). Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the data, including its source, aim, and a description.[1]

The main limitation to a case study approach is narrow generalizability given its context-dependent nature; however, the aim here is to understand and learn about the specific phenomenon rather than offer universal explanations (see, Flyvbjerk, 2006). Thus, explanation in a case study refers to explanation in the context of the case, but it does include predictability of the results in other contexts (O´Mahoney & Vincent, 2014).

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[1] The dataset has also been used in Tuurnas (2015).

Table 1. Overview of the Data

Data Source	Aim	Description
Semi-structured interviews, fully transcribed (N = 20), interviews gathered using purposive sampling = The key actors of the project were considered to be able to provide detailed knowledge relevant for answering the research question (Jupp, 2006).	Understanding the participants' interpretations about the project and its outcomes	8 individual interviews and a focus group of middle managers 4 frontline workers 3 interviews of the representatives of NGOs 3 citizen participants 1 top manager in the city
Participant observation (partly transcribed) Duration: Beginning of the project 3/2013 until 9/2014	Gaining a profound understanding of the process	Field notes gathered in the project meetings for 18 months Participation in different project events as an observer
Survey 1 for the residents (N = 385) was conducted by the project workers	Gathering ideas for the project and understanding the key problems of the area	A qualitative use of the data: The open answers were used as data for the analysis
Survey 2 for the residents (N = 131) and neighborhood actors (N = 22)	Getting feedback on the projects outcomes from the participants	A qualitative use of the data: The open answers were used as data for the analysis
Project plans and meeting protocols	To compare the official documents with the field notes and interview data	The data was used to find tensions between the official plans and the actual implementation

Analysis

The analysis was conducted using NVivo. Specifically, I conducted content analysis, analyzing the data according both to the categories built upon the mechanisms identified in the theoretical framework and to those emerging from the data (Gläser & Laudel, 2013; Krippendorf, 2013; McNabb, 2002; Myers, 2009). The key idea of content analysis is to detach from its original context and reduce data (Gläser & Laudel, 2013). In order to do that, I organized data into content categories. The first set of categories was the different pilot activities of the project. Another set of categories consisted of mechanisms recognized in the theoretical framework: motivational side as salience, ease, and internal as well as external efficacy, and the organizational side as capacities and competence of the actors. The first set of categories was reduced to "individual forms of co-production" and "collective forms of co-production." On the basis of the analysis, the key mechanisms that were seen as the most plausible way to explain the outcomes were capacity and its relation motivation. Thus, on the basis of the analysis, I formed a typology that is used as guide in presentation of the result (see, Figure 1).
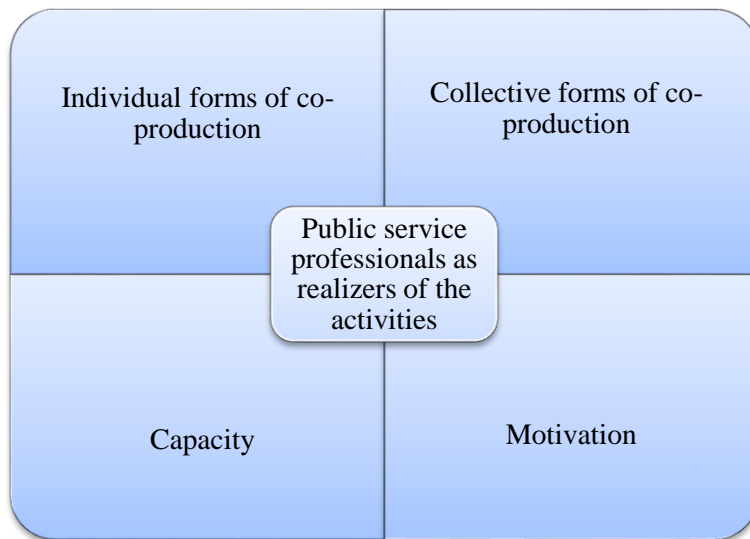
Figure 1. Typology of the analysis.

Results

The capacity of professionals to motivate individual residents

At the beginning of the project, the project group made efforts to inform and map the neighborhood needs and gather ideas from the residents. In order to gain a better understanding of the residents' perceptions of the local needs, the project group conducted a resident survey, targeting the families living in the area. The survey also served as a channel to inform the residents about the project that had just started, and motivate them to take part in it. Similarly, in order to also hear the children's ideas, art workshops were organized. Later, an art exhibition was arranged, presenting the children's views of their dream neighborhood. The exhibition took place in the local grocery store, supporting the idea of building new kinds of partnerships between the different local actors.

The interviewed public professionals considered the surveys and workshops valuable for planning the project activities. However, the project group soon had to face the "consequences" of the surveys and workshops, as they had a variety of different ideas about how to improve the neighborhood and, thus, felt pressured to act accordingly. However, the question of (lacking) capacity emerged: The project group had only limited financial means to realize the ideas offered by the residents. Even the smallest suggestions, such as increasing colorfulness in the neighborhood, proved difficult to realize, not to mention the wider questions of improving safety, for instance. To tackle the larger dilemmas, the commitment of the public actors on a wider scale was needed. As one professional interviewee remarked,

> *We have asked the children what they want, and now they have made some 500 drawings expressing their thoughts and wishes. And then, suddenly we realize that*

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we don't have what it takes to carry out those wishes. That is horrible. It might be the question of money, but also the other service sectors, like infrastructure, should be involved.

In the course of the project, some of the ideas were eventually realized, like installing a graffiti wall and improving the playgrounds for the children. Nonetheless, the capacity of the project team to meet the expectations of the residents was raised frequently in project meetings and in the interviews. In the same way as lacking financial capacity, the invocation "raw data" proved to be challenging for the professionals.

As a way to enhance participation and interaction with the residents, the project meetings were opened up for the residents and communities to attend. The participation opportunities were communicated, for instance, through the e-mail lists gathered from the resident survey, and meetings were organized in the local schools in the evening hours. However, only a few residents attended these meetings. It seemed that the scope of the meetings were too broad to motivate citizens to take part. To demonstrate, on the feedback survey, one resident wrote,

There have been good results, the graffiti wall and park for youngsters. In addition, the events were very nice. Otherwise, I can't say anything about the outcomes. I wish I could have had the opportunity to participate more. It was a bit difficult in the planning meetings to get to the point, as there was not a ready-made model for the activities [. . .] The meetings were professionally-oriented. As for the knowledge basis, the residents are 'underdogs' in these situations. The professionals surely know what kind of support is needed in the neighborhood, but the residents need more concrete ways to develop the area. What those ways are, I don't know.

To continue, online channels were tested as a new way to communicate with the residents. Specifically, the project staff organized a weekly online neighborhood chat about various current local issues. The first chat appeared to be a promising start with 15 participants; later attempts were not as successful and had only a few participants. However, although only a few residents took part in the neighborhood chats, the project group considered it an innovative way to foster interaction between the residents and different public actors. The biggest obstacle to further developing the chat further was, again, capacity. In addition to lacking time and financial resources, the limited capacity to understand how to motivate the residents was seen as problematic in this pilot.

Overall, the project members considered the task of activating and engaging the individual residents very challenging. The interviewed professionals emphasized that having a simple and clear agenda was one way to overcome this big challenge. This view was shared not just by the project members but also by the residents who were engaged in the project. The ways to create interaction were professionally orientated and thus they left the residents feeling incompetent.

To sum up, the professionals lacked capacity to motivate the residents. Therefore, the outcomes of the project as a way to increase participation and interaction remained rather superficial. Consequently, the individual residents did not become partners with the project group.

Rather, they were objects of the project, as their main contribution was to give ideas by answering the survey.

Strengthening Collective Co-Production: Finding a Balance between Motivation and Capacity

Another objective of the project was to build partnerships with the local NGOs and communities in order to enrich local activities and service offer. This scope of the project thus demonstrates the collective forms of co-production. According to the project members, the most successful new pilot was formed around a novel service concept, where the idea was to organize easy access activities, such as a family circus, for the local families at risk. The service pilot brought together different frontline workers representing different sectors, along with local NGOs. The actors from different backgrounds all highlighted the high motivation of different actors and, subsequently, the increased sense of community between them, as well as the possibility to learn from each other's expertise. Thus, all the actors had their own role to play in the cooperation.

Furthermore, ad hoc cooperation with the different NGOs was realized through co-production of neighborhood events. According to the interviews, the events served as good arenas for the NGOs to inform residents about their activities. The events were also seen as valuable platforms for getting to know other actors. Moreover, planning the activities together helped the different actors avoid overlapping activities and combine their forces. Thus, the actors were highly motivated, as they realized the benefits stemming from the project. For the housing foundation, for instance, the project offered a platform on which to improve and increase their own activities. During an interview, a representative of the housing foundation remarked,

> *The project is a flexible model of organizing local services according to the local needs. Like combining a circus with other activities. It's great . . . it's close. You don't have to go anywhere else to do something. If you have a child, you may not have the energy to go anywhere in the evenings. The activities have to be arranged close by. [. . .] Some may see it only as a circus, but it is a way to get the people together. The people go there and they take part, and at the same time, they'll get a chance to talk about their difficult situation and get peer-support also. The people also get to know each other and start building.*

However, not all partnerships emerging in the course of the project were successful. To demonstrate, a local charity organization had an idea to contribute to the fight against social exclusion of the youth. As neighborhood actors trying to expand their activities, they were highly motivated to join the project. However, as said in an interview with the representative of the NGO, they had not yet figured out their "position" among the neighborhood actors, the professional service providers, and other NGOs. Ultimately, they were worried about invading someone else's territory with their new activities.

Motivated by the possibilities offered in the project, the charity organization members decided to develop activities for a group of youngsters and organize a support group for youths at

risk of being socially excluded. The NGO, together with an active resident-volunteer, decided to offer a few local youngsters a chance to participate in their "preventative" activities. The idea was to hinder the course of social exclusion by organizing events with different themes so that the youngsters themselves could plan the activities, make their own rules, and accordingly, be empowered. However, it was challenging to get the work going, as they had problems finding interested and motivated youngsters. The project coordinators offered them advice, but eventually, they gave up on the idea. Thus, despite the great motivation, the scope of the activity was not in line with the capacities of the actors. As the interviewed representative of the charity organization noted, more capable actors (such as trained social workers) would had been needed to plan the activities with them. In the same way, the project group members noted in the interviews that the actual realization was difficult because they lacked the capacity to approach the issue of social exclusion, which is highly complex in nature. Although the motivation and even adequate resources were available, successful outcomes were not achieved because the actors lacked the specific competence needed.

To sum up the results, Table 2 illustrates the forms of co-production and the key mechanisms that on the basis of the analysis explain the outcomes. Furthermore, Table 2 also summarizes the key implications stemming from the results. These implications are further considered in the discussion section.

Table 2. *The Summary of the Results*

The form of co-production activity	Explanatory mechanisms	Outcome of the activity	Implications on the public service professionals
Individual activities targeted to activate the residents of the neighborhood	Capacity of the professionals to motivate the residents	Due to the lacking capacities (concerning time, finances and knowledge) of the professionals, the aim is to activate the individual residents remained on a superficial level.	The scope of the activities should be concrete enough to motivate the residents to participate. Therefore, the professionals as realizers, of participatory activities, should carefully consider the expected outcomes (what we want to achieve and what are the possible costs that are needed)
Collective, activities targeted to build partnerships with local communities and NGOs.	The motivation of the NGOs reflected to their capacities	New partnerships with NGOs and communities emerged in the project, leading to different results based on the scope of the activities.	The capacity of the NGOs and communities should be in line with scope of the activities. In suitable settings, partnerships can add value to the participants, but also to the surrounding neighborhood in general. Public service professionals play an important role as initiators and coordinators in such partnerships.

Discussion

In this project, the "mode" of co-production (see Osborne & Strokosch, 2013) in individual forms of co-production remained rather superficial. As pointed out in the interviews, the aim of increasing resident engagement and participation proved more difficult than expected: the interaction created in the project was more of a one-way information process rather than a real co-production process. Although the project members tried to offer different forms and scopes for increasing interaction, the general scope of the activities was too professionally oriented or too abstract to motivate the residents in the end. This, again, was related to the capacity of the professionals to realize activities on the right scope and platforms.

However, as pointed out in the resident interviews and surveys, the residents still considered the project valuable for increasing a sense of community in the neighborhood. Thus, the project succeeded well as a "community" project, but not as a participatory project. For example, on a survey, one resident wrote,

> *I cannot say anything about the outcomes in a long run, but the project felt nice: it was visible and audible in the local facilities. I think it increased the sense of community [. . .] and offered a possibility to visit places I would otherwise not have visited.*

Moreover, from the perspective of building partnerships with the local non-governmental actors, and thus strengthening collective co-production, the outcomes were promising. There were motivated and eager actors in the neighborhood, and the project managed to link the different neighborhood actors through the events and pilots. Clearly, there was room for more co-operation in the area, as the neighborhood actors evaluated the project, especially from the perspective of increased cooperation and shared activities. On the basis on the analysis, it can be said that NGOs and communities, representing the collective forms of co-production, were easier to motivate to participate than the individual residents were. Partnerships and networks in the neighborhood context can increase the quality and quantity of services when taking into account the capacities of the actors. Here, the professionals play an important role as coordinators. By doing this, they also put in practice the role that has been planned for them in the literature on co-production (see, e.g., Bovaird, 2007). Furthermore, the case demonstrates the difficulty of realizing co-production in practice. As the analysis revealed, the success of the project relies in many ways on the capacity of the professionals as realizers of the project. Especially in the individual forms of co-production, these capacities go hand in hand with the motivation of the residents to participate.

Indeed, the key finding of the analysis is that the capacities of professional co-producers are vital for fostering motivation to participate among the residents. Here, the study supports the notions of Verschuere, Brandsen, and Pestoff (2012, p. 7) who emphasize that "co-production strategies can only be developed effectively when the ultimate outcomes are defined (and understood) clearly." According to the authors, this means "drawing a chain of causality" by recognizing the mechanisms that seem most plausible to cause an outcome. In the same way, the actors should carefully consider the possible bottlenecks and additional costs that may occur during

the process.

The results of the analysis are also in line with other notions of Verschuere, Brandsen, and Pestoff (2012). The authors underline that in planning a co-production process, it is essential to understand and respond to the needs of the clients (or, as in the context of the examined case, the residents) and to find suitable ways to motivate them. Finally, these needs should be evaluated in the wider frame of the surrounding environment, leading to the complex task of finding balance between private value and public value (Verschuere et al., 2012). Thus, realizing co-production is complex task where the target group of the activities, the capacities of the actors, and motivation form the key components on which to build the process. This process, taking place on the public domain, should constantly be reflected in the surrounding environment, taking into account the value it produces.

Conclusion

Neighborhood projects and programs often have a holistic focus, instead of concentrating on a one specific group of residents. Moreover, as is the case in the examined project, the neighborhood activities approach both individuals as well as local communities. This way, the case of a neighborhood project has offered valuable insights to study the multidimensional and complex nature of co-production.

In light of the theoretical framework and the analysis, it seems that the value and strength of such projects lies in bridging and bonding activities. The role of the public service professionals in these settings is to unify forces on the neighborhood level by bringing together different communities and residents and acting as facilitators of community activities (Jones & Ormston, 2013; Kearns & Parkinson, 2001; Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008; Marschall, 2004; Michels & De Graaf, 2010; Scott, 2002). Thus, the research strengthens the notions of earlier neighborhood governance studies (Kearns & Parkinson, 2001; Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008; Marschall, 2004).

The study also raises a question: What are the underlying motives for participatory neighborhood projects? Is it ultimately about austerity and decreasing the need for the public services by empowering and activating residents and voluntary organizations? Is it to move toward partnerships as a way to innovate to meet the rising expectations for public services? Or, is the aim to restore trust to the local government? Based on this case, it is easy to agree with Brannan, John, and Stoker (2006, p. 1005), who point out that 'civic renewal,' meaning different forms of active citizenship, has been handled "as both a solution to problems (a means) and as policy objective (and end in itself)."

Indeed, this "double-rationale" draws attention to the implementation of the activities. A key argument of the article is that the multidimensional and thus complex nature of the co-production activities with different underlying rationales should be understood by the actors who put them in practice. As pointed out in the results, increasing individual co-production and collective co-production comprise different rationales and challenges, related to capacities and motives. Concerning effectivity, it does not seem sufficient to offer possibilities to participate and

consider it as an outcome. Instead, co-production should be used in the point when it is expected to bring additional value for the issue or service in case. This is valuable for the citizens and communities who sacrifice their time to make a contribution but also to gain effective outcomes.

Thus, in line with earlier notions of Verschuere, Brandsen and Pestoff (2012), the article stresses the need for public service professionals to carefully consider what the core aims are, and to pay particular attention to their own capacities as well as those of the potential partners. It is vital to define the outcomes so that the activities are in line with expected outcomes and resources. Therefore, it is vital to look beyond the simplified ideals of participatory projects.

In future research related to participatory projects in the neighborhood context, it would be valuable to study outcomes longitudinally. For instance, as noted, professionals play an important role as coordinators of partnerships. Here, it would be vital to gain more knowledge of how these partnerships continue to operate when the project ends. The locus of public value creation and the management of public value in the neighborhood should also be studied further. For example, by whom is value truly created in these projects, and how could it better present the views of as many different groups as possible?

While we have growing knowledge about the motivations of different actors to contribute, several questions remain (cf. Brannan et al., 2006): What works in the long run? How do these initiatives and pilot projects shape the local services and the well-being of its citizens? And will some unexpected outcomes appear as a consequence of such projects? Finally, learning from the experience, and using that knowledge to enhance the skills of the key actors, is critical for the realization of participatory projects. These key actors include public service professionals in particular (see, Tuurnas, 2015). The opportunities to learn and improve skills are increasingly available in the Finnish context, as well as in many other Western countries, given the growth of participatory, co-production, partnerships, and other similar processes.

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The impact of co-production on frontline accountability: the case of the conciliation service

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Abstract

Mixing of roles between professionals, volunteers and service users creates a new, complex environment in which to produce and deliver public services. In this kind of environment, the issues of accountability become ever more important. This article presents a qualitative case study of co-production between volunteers and professionals in the legally regulated restorative justice services in Finland. Theoretically, we draw together the concept of citizen co-production with the literature on street-level bureaucracy and accountability. As a result of the study, we can say that co-production between volunteers and professionals increases accountability ties. In particular, the meaning of process-centred accountability is salient in horizontal accountability relations. Thus, co-production as a governance arrangement changes the working culture of public service professionals. In the new partnerships, although not entirely horizontal, we can recognize a seed for cultural change for professionalized public service organizations.

Points for practitioners

In this article we have researched co-production between professionals and volunteers in a legally regulated public service, the conciliation service, examining the perceptions of accountability in the frontline practices. The results show that the process-centred nature of the co-produced services leaves less room for discretion and the application of rules by individual street-level workers. Furthermore, as the service users do not consider volunteers to be part of the authority, co-production might be smoother.

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This is significant especially in the social services, where the clients per se are not necessarily motivated to co-produce, but where co-production would be essential for achieving effective service outcomes.

Keywords

accountability, citizen co-production, governance, professional, street-level bureaucracy

Introduction

Citizen co-production has been seen as a way of patching up the public service system following the austerity measures and structural changes in societies (see Bailey, 2011; Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen et al., 2006; Eriksson and Vogt, 2013; Fotaki, 2011; Perry, 2007; Pestoff et al., 2006). Generally, in co-production the roles of citizens and professional service producers are being reconsidered. This shift in roles can be described as 'public services *for* the public' moving toward 'public services *by* the public' (Osborne, 2009, 2010; Osborne and Strokosch, 2013; Pestoff, 2006, 2012).

It will be clear that the structural changes in societies and the mixing of the roles of different actors, professionals, volunteers and users create a new, more complex environment in which to produce and deliver public services. In this kind of environment, the issues of accountability become ever more important (see Bovaird, 2007; Fotaki, 2011; Hupe and Hill, 2007; Osborne, 2010; Rhodes, 1996, 1997; Romzek et al., 2012). As Hupe and Hill (2007) point out, in multi-dimensional governance, public power and public accountability are exercised by various actors on various scales, including the street level.

Michael Lipsky's (1980) concept of street-level bureaucracy offers us interesting insights into an individual public worker's work practices. Although there have been many changes in the field of public administration since the 1980s, many of Lipsky's ideas are still relevant. The current discussion about accountability simply considers new aspects through governance and partnership arrangements (see Barberis, 1998; Considine, 2002; Hupe and Hill, 2007; Jantz and Jann, 2013; Romzek, 2000; Tapscott and Thompson, 2013; Willems and Van Dooren, 2011).

Theoretically, our intention is to draw together the concept of co-production with the literature on street-level bureaucracy and accountability. These discussions have rarely been connected in the literature on co-production. We argue that it is essential to consider the different aspects of accountability when we try to understand the frontline practices of co-produced public services. It is possible that the new arrangements change the logic of professional public service provision, having implications especially for accountability relationships. The main question in our study is: *what does accountability mean on the street level when a public service is carried out through co-production?*

The article provides a case study of the use of co-production in restorative justice services in Finland. Specifically, it examines the use of conciliation

(also known as victim–offender mediation), a process wherein volunteer mediators offer criminal offenders and their victims the opportunity to determine restitution and compensation without court proceedings. The case provides insights into how co-production changes the roles played by professionals and citizens, and specifically highlights issues of street-level accountability.

Street-level bureaucracy and the emerging idea of 'professional'

Michael Lipsky's classic study of 'street-level bureaucracy' (1980) provided a perceptive analysis of frontline practices in public organizations. Street-level bureaucrats 'are the people who make decisions about other people' (Lipsky, 1980: 161). Theoretically it is possible to recognize three main perspectives concerning street-level bureaucracy: the so-called policy perspective, the perspective of work practices, and the perspective of professionals and professional groups. All these perspectives overlap in some ways, and they all can be found in Lipsky's theory as well.

The first perspective is based on policy implementations (Bergen and While, 2005; Meyers and Vorsanger, 2003; Riccucci, 2005; Scourfield, 2013). Here, street-level bureaucrats should be understood as the resource of reforms (Hill, 2003) and as powerful actors who exercise influence over policy implementation (May and Winter, 2007). Although there are formal rules and vertical control over their work, the street-level bureaucrats apply the rules and create their own ethical codes in order to tackle their work tasks (Lipsky, 1980).

The second perspective of street-level bureaucrats' working methods, values, and practices has been analysed in a variety of studies. Lipsky's classic study, in particular, has provided a perceptive analysis of the discretion, freedom and self-interest of frontline workers in public organizations (Ellis et al., 1999; Evans and Harris, 2004; Foldy and Buckey, 2010; Taylor and Kelly, 2006).

The third perspective concentrates on the issues of street level bureaucrats' roles and possessions as part of administration and the service delivery system. As Mayer and Winter (2007) have noticed, a variety of studies have examined control over street-level bureaucrats and their ability to influence the frontline behaviour of service delivery. This perspective highlights professionalism, in particular.

Defining 'a professional', Hupe and Hill (2007) apply a distinction between the characteristics of a certain kind of occupation and the way a person exercising a certain occupation appears to the surrounding society. Furthermore, professions can be self-perceived or established. According to Hupe and Hill (2007: 5), the position of 'public official' is not defined by the employer or their status, but by their public accountability:

> Street-level bureaucrats may be either formal government employees or work in organizations that are seen as part of civil society. Despite differences in their formal positions, anchored in constitutional law and democracy and their institutions

within the labour division, street-level bureaucrats are public officials. As public actors in the public domain, they are held publicly accountable for the results of their work.

As Hupe and Hill (2007) have pointed out, Lipsky's idea of the relative autonomy of professionals can be complemented by the insight that they are working in a micro-network of relations, in varying contexts. The concept of 'governance' adds a particular aspect to this: the multi-dimensional character of a policy system as a nested sequence of decisions. Here, public service delivery is not about simply offering and receiving services, but rather about co-producing the services between professional public service providers, service users and citizens (see Bovaird, 2005, 2007; Osborne, 2009, 2010; Pestoff, 2012; Stenvall et al., 2013).

Furthermore, in the research concerning co-production, the different roles of professionals and citizen co-producers can be seen as the basis for discussion. For instance, as a widely accepted conceptual outline of co-production, Verschuere et al. (2012: 1085) refer to it as:

> the mix of activities that both public service agents and citizens contribute to the provision of public services. The former are involved as professionals, or 'regular producers', while 'citizen production' is based on voluntary efforts by individuals and groups to enhance the quality and/or quantity of the services they use.

Moreover, Verschuere et al. (2012) note that services are no longer delivered solely by the 'professional and managerial staff in public agencies, but they are co-produced by users and communities'.

What, then, makes a professional? Hupe and Hill (2007) refer to the status of *working* as a defining element in their definition of a public professional. They highlight the idea that the actors in civil society as well as traditional public service professionals can be considered public officials if they *work* in the public domain. It is not clear, though, what this means in an arrangement where voluntary, non-paid citizens co-produce a public service with traditional public service professionals. There seems to be room for further research on what it means to be a public service professional in a hybrid service delivery system, where citizens and communities also play an important role in the service delivery. In our case study research, we aim to shed light on this understudied subject. Thus, the discussion leads us to questions of accountability in the context of governance arrangements, such as co-production of public services.

Defining accountability in the context of governance

There has been much research on accountability in recent decades (Barberis, 1998; Considine, 2002; Fimreite and Laegreid, 2009; Hupe and Hill, 2007; Jantz and Jann, 2013; Kaldor, 2003; Laegreid and Mattei, 2013; Willems and Van Dooren, 2011). The main question is, how does governance affect accountability and accountability relations? The core assumption underlying the accountability

discussion is that the simple principal–agent approach is inadequate for explaining hybrid governance thoroughly. In governance, there may be changing roles depending on the project or the process of the service at hand. In these complex arrangements, the 'accountors' and the 'accountees' might not be as clearly defined as they are in the ideal models of governance (Bovens et al., 2008; Klijn and Koppenjaan, 2004; Laegreid and Mattei, 2013).

Moreover, accountability has become a concept with many meanings in recent decades. As the literature is vast, we concentrate on the public administrative perspectives on accountability, rather than the political perspectives. Here one can distinguish, for instance, political and managerial accountability. Of these two concepts, political accountability could be described as a more traditional one. However, due to the increased professional power in societies, managerial accountability has become ever more important (Laegreid and Mattei, 2013).

Accountability can be described through 'forums for accountability' and 'functions' or 'mechanisms' of accountability (Bovens, 2010; Willems and Van Dooren, 2011). In other words, it can be said that the forums describe the interaction between different account holders (complementary rights) and the accountees (obligations). The mechanisms or functions, on the other hand, portray the accountability rather as a tool to control the accountees (Bovens, 2010; Mulgan, 2003; Willems and Van Dooren, 2011). There are also many ways to classify dimensions or typologies of accountability. For instance, Willems and Van Dooren (2000; 2011) have made an extensive classification of typologies based on the literature of accountability. To gain an idea, the classifications include legal or judicial, political, market, professional or peer and social accountability.

Lindberg (2013) has also made a thorough analysis of the concept in order to clarify the core idea of accountability. According to him, some forms of accountability can be seen as sub-types of accountability, meaning that they stem from the root concept but are not accountability in a classical sense. These sub-types include professional accountability, audit accountability or client–patron accountability, for instance. The different types vary in the strength of control, the source (internal–external) of control and the spatial direction of accountability relationships (Lindberg, 2013). Yet, this does not necessarily mean that these types of accountability are less meaningful. Especially in governance arrangements, more informal forms of accountability become significant for inter-organizational and interpersonal cooperation. That is to say, they may become even more important than the more traditional forms of accountability (Romzek et al., 2012).

Accountability in street-level practices

Thus, as we want to examine accountability in frontline practices we find the conceptualization of Hupe and Hill (2007) useful, as they highlight the multi-dimensionality of accountability in governance arrangements. In order to define and discuss the horizontal and vertical character of public

accountability, we present the typology of public accountability created by Hupe and Hill (2007).

First, the political, legal and managerial accountability can be described as public-administrative accountability. This type of accountability has a vertical orientation. Second, there is *professional accountability*: workers are held accountable by their peers, and they practise collective self-management. Professional accountability exists in intra- and inter-dimensions, as also different professionals exercise collective self-management. The nature of professional accountability is often horizontal, and its basis is expertise. Third, *participatory accountability* highlights the role of the service user, or as Hupe and Hill put it, participatory citizenship (Hupe and Hill, 2007). We consider that participatory accountability could also be seen as a mode of co-production.

The classification of accountability used by Considine (2002) is also quite interesting from the perspective of street-level practices. He, too, has researched frontline accountability in the context of networks and partnerships. He uses vertical accountability together with the legal and economic traditions as a conceptual framework in his study. Although this axis might seem quite simple, managerial and performance-based budgets create gaps in accountability, and the lines between citizens and legislature, as well as the line between the shareholder and the customer, are complex and elliptical.

Moreover, horizontal accountability appears to be even more complex as there are interdependencies between the account holders. According to Considine (2002: 27):

> Where co-responsibility and overlap prevail, accountability becomes a structural contingency problem; accountability codes and rules must then constantly be adjusted to reflect actual conditions in the environment. Interdependence in achieving shared outcomes should therefore lead to willingness to share accountability.

Lastly in Considine's framework, there is the axis of process-centred accountability. In this axis, he takes into account network theory with strategic partnerships and co-production systems, for instance. Here, the accountability issues in the network context move from legal and economic strategies toward cultural strategies. The process is more than just a means – it is a tool for organizational learning and feedback. However, it is problematic from the point of view of accountability to make the cultural processes measurable (Considine, 2002).

To sum up the theoretical framework, we can first say that there is still room for further discussion on the emerging idea of public service professionals in the hybrid service system. In our article, we aim to shed light on this understudied subject.

Second, observing co-produced service delivery from the perspective of frontline practices, questions of accountability are essential. Here, the simple principal–agent approach has been seen as inadequate for explaining hybrid governance arrangements. Thus, if we observe co-production as such an arrangement, the unit of the

analysis related to accountability should move toward wider, inter-relational dimensions of accountability (Osborne, 2010). As Osborne (2010: 414–415) put it, one of the key questions in future research on public service delivery is to find out what is the 'nature of accountability in fragmented plural and pluralist systems'.

This article provides a case study of the use of co-production in restorative justice services in Finland. Specifically, it examines the use of conciliation (also known as victim–offender mediation), a process wherein voluntary mediators, together with the professional staff of the regional mediation office, offer criminal offenders and their victims the opportunity to determine restitution and compensation without weighty court proceedings.

The case of conciliation

The case of the conciliation service provides an interesting field for our research as it illustrates citizen co-production: conciliation is a legally regulated public service where volunteers and professional social workers as partners offer the parties to conciliation the chance to voluntarily reconcile without weighty court proceedings. Conciliation is a free and voluntary service; it creates the possibility for the parties to reconcile. Conciliation can be considered a unique service in the Finnish public service system from the following perspectives: first of all, the service binds together legal and social services, since it occupies the middle ground between the two different fields of public services. Second, and more importantly from our perspective, the service is based on the ideas of civil society; the whole service relies on active citizens and community thinking.[1] Mediation in Finland is regulated by the Act on Conciliation in Criminal and Certain Civil Cases (1015/2005), which came into force on 1 June 2006.

According to the act, the general supervision, management and monitoring of mediation services falls within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. Mediation is supervised and guided by regional state authorities. A regional mediation office organizes conciliation activities; they train and coordinate the voluntary mediators for their tasks. The office cooperates with, among others, the local police authorities, prosecuting authorities and social welfare authorities. The initiative for conciliation may come from the police, the prosecution, social workers or even from the parties to conciliation, the offender or the victim.

Finally, the court decides whether a conciliation process should be started. After the decision is made, the mediation office staff contact the volunteers, who, for their part, contact the parties to the conciliation. The professional staff of the mediation office also take part in the conciliation process with the voluntary actors. After the conciliation process has finished in the mediation office, the case returns to the district court for final resolution.

To give an overview of the service, in 2012 more than half (53.5 percent) of the criminal cases and civil actions that were directed to conciliation were offences against the person. The share of grievous bodily harm out of the ones that were directed to conciliation of criminal cases and civil actions was less than 1 percent

(0.6 percent). The share of domestic violence cases was 17 percent. Furthermore, 14 percent of the cases directed to conciliation were vandalism, and 12 percent were thefts. The share of unanalysed crime cases was 5 percent (National Institute for Health and Welfare [hereafter NIHW], 2013).

The mediation service is targeted, in particular, to prevent recidivism of young people. The service has, indeed, proved to be an effective way to stop the undesired path of criminal activity among the young. Especially in the case of young offenders, the idea is to give them a chance to face the consequences of their actions, and thus to understand the harm caused to the other party. Here, the function of mediation is also social and educative. The mediation service is used more often with the youngest age groups from 'under 15 years' and '15–20 years' than with the age group of 'over 20 years' (NIHW, 2013).

Research design

The interviews were conducted in the Middle Finland Mediation Office located in the city of Jyväskylä. In the study, 15 persons were interviewed altogether. Rather than using massive quantitative data, we wanted to gain new insights and outlines for definitions of accountability, using the internal perspective of one organization. Therefore we chose to concentrate on a single mediation office: its volunteers, staff and most important stakeholders. Of course, it should be kept in mind that the limited nature of the data prevents us from making general assumptions about the accountability issues in the context of co-production. Nevertheless, the most important actors for this study were covered. We secured this by using the snowball method of sampling. We asked for referrals from the staff of the mediation office in order to find natural interactional units (Biernacki and Waldord, 1981).

We conducted interviews with all the staff of the mediation office (four employees and their director). Moreover, all the volunteers at the mediation office were given a chance to participate. We interviewed the voluntary mediators using focus group discussions (two focus groups with three participants each). In addition, we conducted two individual interviews with those volunteers who wanted to participate but who could not attend the focus groups at the set time. In order to gain a stakeholder view of conciliation, we interviewed two local police officers. This was because the police are an important part of the conciliation process, as most of the initiatives to begin the conciliation process come from them.[2] We also conducted an interview with a specialist in conciliation at the NIHW in order to better understand the phenomena underlying the conciliation service. All the interviews were fully transcribed.

The focus groups and semi-structured interviews were conducted during April and May 2013. We used focus group discussions to allow the informants to debate and analyse the topics with one another, having the interviewer as the coordinator of the discussion (Bloor and Wood, 2006). The individual interviews were also conducted using a semi-structured interview method.

The themes of the interviews were similar for all parties, with a little variation depending on the interviewee's position. In the interviews, we discussed different roles and the questions of accountability. Rather than reflecting the process from the inside, the police and the expert of mediation were asked to analyse the conciliation service from a stakeholder point of view.

Data analysis

The data were analysed using content analysis. This is a suitable method for analysis of this kind, as it provides tools to form replicable and valid conclusions from data in a specific context (Krippendorf, 2013). We used theory-driven content analysis in the categorization of the data. The units of our analysis were the sentences and word groups formed by the interviewees. The meaning units of the analysis were the perceptions of the roles, responsibilities and strengths of volunteers and professionals as co-producers. Here, we were seeking patterns in order to explain the data in light of the theoretical framing.

In the analysis we used the three types of accountability proposed by Hupe and Hill (2007): public-administrative accountability, professional accountability and participatory accountability as the basis for our analysis. We also used the three 'axes' of accountability of Considine (2002), vertical, horizontal and process-centred accountability, as the groundwork for the analysis. The context and the basis in the analysis is the conciliation service as a co-produced public service, where both public agents and citizens contribute to the provision and delivery of the service. The former are involved as professionals, or as 'regular producers', while 'citizen production' is based on the voluntary efforts of individuals and groups to enhance the quality and/or quantity of the services they use' (Verschuere et al., 2012).

Defining public-administrative accountability in the case of conciliation

Political, legal and managerial accountability can be described as public-administrative accountability, being mostly of vertical orientation. In the case of the conciliation service, it is interesting how the different actors, the volunteers and professionals, picture themselves within the legal framework. After all, these perceptions do tell us quite a lot about the nature of these partnerships.

From the volunteers' point of view, conciliation is a fairly professional type of voluntary work. Compared to some other types of volunteer work, conciliation is a judicial service.

> We are considered state authorities here, a bit like the lay members of a court. We are bound by absolute confidentiality, and the agreement between the parties of

> conciliation is binding...In other types of voluntary work, you are not acting as an authority, like in an amateur theatre, for example, it is different. (Volunteer)

Furthermore, the volunteers are trained to assimilate their responsibilities into the larger process. Although the conciliators might not actually make decisions about other people's lives, as street-level bureaucrats are traditionally seen to be doing, they are obliged to do their best to help the parties reach a solution and are obliged to undergo training for their work.

> They [the volunteers] are obliged to receive training, advice, education and guidance. They are not allowed to act in the conciliation without education and without receiving any training given by the professionals. They also have to accept that the professional staff are controlling their actions. (Expert interview)

Professionals as authorities are naturally bound by public-administrative accountability. They are held accountable to the municipal authorities and to the regional council who are the supervisors of the conciliation. In this way, there is a strong political-administrative accountability in the service. The regular producers, meaning here the mediation office staff, are responsible for their part for the quality of the process, and they are the ones held accountable if the process is not working well.

> In the end, *we* are accountable. If a client lets us know that the conciliator has been acting improperly, it is our duty to solve the problem. (Professional)

Considered from the point of view of public-administrative accountability, the volunteers are vertically accountable to the professionals working in the mediation office. There also seemed to be some different emphases on the strength of public-administrative accountability between the volunteers. Some of the interviewed held themselves strongly accountable, as they described themselves as kind of ombudsmen, whereas other interviewees emphasized that in the end it is the professional staff who are accountable if something goes wrong.

> If an agreement ends up in court, it won't be the conciliators who go there because they have accepted the agreement. So there is this small difference [between the volunteers and the professionals] that if something like that happens, it is the professional staff, so someone other than us. (Volunteer)

However, as the focus groups discussed the subject, those volunteers who considered themselves less public-administratively accountable also agreed that they have juridical accountability in the process. It seemed that the discussion about accountability and having responsibility made the interviewees thoughtful. It was said that the question was not at all easy.

The question is, indeed, rather complex in this kind of service. Volunteers are public officials in the sense of juridical accountability, but in the end they cannot

easily be held accountable in their role as conciliators. From the stakeholder perspective, the use of volunteers as partners seem to lower the expectations of professional service quality, when asked about accountability.

> If a service in our society is based on volunteering, it means that they [the actors] are accountable to themselves for their success. Basing something on voluntary work means that we cannot set or expect very high quality standards there. (Police officer)

In summary, public-administrative accountability, especially legal accountability, seems to be quite a complex issue, and it is not easy to explain it unambiguously. Although the volunteers can be considered to act as public officials, working in the public domain, they still act with weaker public-administrative accountability ties compared to the public professionals. This could be seen as problematic from the perspective of being equal partners. Finally, relationships between the volunteers and professionals and the different roles played in the process lead us to the following question: what is co-production in the case of conciliation about?

Observing co-production through process-centred accountability on the street level

In this section we examine process-centred accountability through professional accountability and the different roles and strategies in the co-production of the service. Professional accountability means that workers are held accountable by their peers and they practise collective self-management. Also the different professionals exercise collective self-management. The nature of professional accountability is often horizontal, and its basis is expertise. Process-centredness, on the other hand, highlights cultural strategies as a tool of organizational learning (Considine, 2002; Hupe and Hill, 2007).

First, professional accountability seemed to be quite intensely experienced in the case of conciliation. Social control and peer evaluation seemed to be quite strong. This might be necessary in order to avoid making policies based on the mutual professional interests of one group. As explained in the interviews the professionals and volunteers have regular feedback sessions, but the voluntary conciliators also give feedback to one another. Furthermore, from the perspective of street-level bureaucracy, the work habits and organizational system of conciliation make professional accountability stronger: the conciliation is always established by pairs, not individually.

> We always work in pairs. If the one behaves somehow inappropriately, the other conciliator will quite surely report it. And we also make written reports. (Volunteer)

Our analysis shows that the different actors in the process of conciliation seemed aware of their own roles. It was said that the volunteers offer their own personas and therefore they might find quite creative solutions, whereas the professionals

might have established patterns and routines of doing their work through their profession. Defining the different roles that the volunteers and professional social workers take on, it was said that professionals offer their skills learned through their professional work, the expertise gained through their education, whereas the volunteers offer their persona with their different backgrounds, life experiences and worldviews for the service.

The interviewees emphasized that the relationship between volunteers and professionals is not of a director–subordinate type, but the professionals were seen as mentors and support groups for volunteers. Yet the process needs to be led. It was said that leading a process based on a partnership requires skills such that the volunteers feel that they are led rather than directed.

> It is like everyone has his/her own role, we [volunteers] cannot be bossed around. It requires some sort of professional skills in order to lead us volunteers. Because we *are* led . . . (Volunteer)

Being a co-producer of a public service also requires a particular attitude from voluntary actors. In order to create a culture based on partnership thinking, they should not take the role of subordinates, but rather be experts in their own way.

> [Seeing us as directors] definitely holds things back. It can make the voluntary conciliator withdrawn, so that he/she leans on us too much [in the conciliation process] . . . because it is when the conciliators are strong and independent, it is the best that they can offer to the clients. (professional)

The multi-actor nature of the service might also put pressure on the actors to create a well-organized public service as part of the system: the service bridges social and legal services, as it includes different professionals such as social workers, police, and lawyers, as well as volunteers. The knowledge of being part of something bigger creates pressure to do one's best. Thus, both the professionals and volunteers felt strongly horizontally accountable.

> Accountability exists in different stages: we can go back to the first telephone call, how you act there, and how the whole process starts – of course one should hold oneself accountable for one's actions, feel responsibility toward the mission and the process. (Volunteer)

There are also different starting points for being in the process. The professionals have chosen their career and they get paid for doing it. The volunteers, for their part, have different reasons for taking part as they do not receive a salary for their work. This does not mean, however, that the voluntary actors are not rewarded. The volunteers get compensation: the feeling of doing something for

society and the community, or the feeling of giving back. As we discussed the possibility of being paid, the volunteers were against the idea. They explained that then they would lose the feeling of helping and the feeling of doing things out of free will, which both seem to play an important part in voluntary work.

These perceptions of different roles and the processual nature of the service thinking support previous notions on co-production. As Ostrom (1996: 1082) puts it, for creating co-production, both parties need to have inter-dependency: both should have something the others need. Here, volunteers are a resource for the professionals whereas the volunteers find meaning from contributing to the community. To continue, the professionals lead and coordinate the whole process, whereas the volunteers act on the micro level of service delivery, facing the parties to conciliation with their own personas.

Participative accountability in conciliation

The volunteers and professionals who were interviewed emphasized that they are, above all, accountable to their clients, or as they put it, the parties of the conciliation. The core idea of conciliation is to create interaction between the conciliating parties, and also between the clients and the conciliators. Although the voluntary conciliators are held as public officials in the sense of public-administrative accountability, here the differences between the volunteers and public authorities emerged. It was said that the clients feel that they are not facing a public authority but another citizen.

This is interesting from the point of view of co-production. As we search for ways to make the interaction between the service provider and the client better as a way to enhance co-production, we can see that there is room for citizen-to-citizen services. The professionals, no matter how well and emphatically they encounter their clients, might still experience distrust because of their role as authorities.

> It makes a difference whether we introduce ourselves as volunteers or as authorities: just think about the first contact, and how we present ourselves. We have to use our own personalities . . . I think many have taken part because of the non-authoritarian nature of this. It is not top-down . . . (Volunteer)

Moreover, the clients as parties of conciliation are also accountable actors in the process of conciliation. Finally, it is up to them whether they reach an agreement. If they do reach an agreement, they are legally accountable to act accordingly. It can be said that in the conciliation service, participatory accountability exists, not just between the professionals and volunteers but also between the conciliators and the parties to conciliation. Thus, accountability is exercised in many different

directions, from volunteer to professional and vice versa, and also from conciliator to the parties to conciliation, and vice versa.

> V1: Yes, it is them [the parties to conciliation] who reach the agreement or not. We [conciliators] don't interfere, and we are not accountable for carrying it out, or at least we don't take responsibility for it.
> V2: . . . But [we are accountable for] creating such conditions . . . if we went there with an attitude like 'it's never going to work out', then what?
> V1: Yes, of course. Responsibility is a difficult question. (Focus group, volunteers)

To conclude this analysis, sticking to the agreement, coordinating the process or acting ethically are all important aspects of accountability. They can be observed from different angles, and they give us an idea of the complex accountability relationships in co-production arrangements.

Summary of the analysis

First, observing the accountability relationships in the case examined, we recognize some traces of the traditional role division between professional public sector workers and volunteers. The roles still exist especially within the public-administrative accountability. Among the volunteers, there seemed to be some confusion about legal accountability as they were balancing at the interface between being volunteers and public officials in their roles as conciliators. However, the volunteers emphasized some other types of accountability, such as professional accountability, as strongly as the public service professionals who were interviewed.

Second, if we take a look at the case through the lens of co-production, we can see a model example of the new role of public service professionals. As Bovaird (2007) notes, there is a need for a new public service ethos where the professionals' role is to motivate, support and manage the services co-produced by the community and the service users. In the case of conciliation, it is noteworthy that volunteers seem to have their own special place and role in the service process, and they are a fundamental resource for the delivery of the service. Yet the volunteers cannot be seen as new professionals in the original sense of the word. Rather, they complement the professional knowledge by offering their life experience and, thus, enrich the service offered to the clients. This is a key notion in this study from the perspective of co-production, observed from the viewpoint of the 'new roles', highlighted in the literature (see e.g. Bovaird, 2007; Verschuere et al., 2012).

Third, the professionals also face new roles when they are expected to be *equal* partners with the volunteers and give them space to act according to their own views. In this case the process seemed to be working out well, but it does not mean that giving up professional superiority would always be easy. We can say that in this kind of hybrid service arrangement the actors are committed to doing their part of the process.

Here, process-centred accountability plays an important role, as it helps to prevent accountability gaps or deficits (see e.g. Schillemans, 2011). The more there are actors and stages in the process, the more there are accountability relations. As Willems and Van Dooren (2000: 524) point out, 'the more account-holders are involved in diverse accountability forums, the higher the chance that an actor is being called to account to some authority for one's actions'.

Discussion

In this article, we have concentrated on the discussions about accountability in co-produced governance arrangements observed from the street-level practices. The aim of the article was to answer the research question: *what does accountability mean on the street level when a public service is carried out through co-production?*

Based on our research, we can say that governance arrangements change the logic of professional service provision, having implications especially for accountability relationships. The case examined offers an interesting field for researching citizen co-production, as in conciliation; the volunteers and professionals are considered equal partners in the production of a legally regulated public service. This is, indeed, unique in the Northern or European context, where the roles of citizens as customers and public service providers as public or private bodies have so far been quite traditional (Pestoff, 2006).

To sum up, we can see some new directions in the delivery of public services through the case considered. First, our research has shown that co-production between volunteers and professionals increases accountability ties, and increases the meaning of process-centred accountability, especially in horizontal accountability relations.

Second, we argue that co-production as a governance arrangement affects the working conditions of public service professionals. In the new partnerships, although not entirely horizontal, we can see a seed for cultural change for professionalized public sector organizations.

Finally, the case of conciliation is interesting from the point of view of a wider, societal context: how do the voluntary actors shape the service system and how do they find their place there? And, in the future, is there room for voluntary actors *within* the public service system, or are they just supplementary resources to tackle the austerity measures of society?

Having a variety of different kinds of actors, volunteers and professionals, enriches the service system and might ease co-production with the service users. Volunteers offer their experiences and their personas as 'experiental knowledge' alongside professional expertise. Volunteers, as opposed to the public service professionals, might be more approachable for the clients, who might distrust authorities per se. We consider this to be significant, especially in social services where the clients per se are not necessarily motivated to co-produce (see e.g. Vamstad, 2012). However, it remains to be seen how these arrangements continue to develop and

shape in societies with a highly professionalized service system, or whether concili-
ation endures as an exception in the system.

Notes

1. The views are based on an interview with a specialist in conciliation at the National
   Institute for Health and Welfare (interviewed 8 May 2013).
2. NIHW (2013): In 2012, as many as 81 percent of the initiatives to begin the conciliation
   process came from the police.

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