

Preface

This book is the result of a scholarly discussion started during the Workshop “Co-production and public services” organized by the ICONA research centre at the University of Milan (Italy) in mid-2014. It aims at presenting a short but up-to-date analysis of what co-production is and the different forms in which it manifests in the planning, design and delivery of public services.

Co-production has always existed in public services, but its theoretical relevance was lately recognized, thanks also to the change of paradigm in public management. Indeed, the traditional Public Administration (PA) and the New Public Management (NPM) paradigms do not foresee any particular role of citizens and communities in the public service policy and management. On the contrary, the Public Governance (PG) paradigm started to contend PA and NPM, in considering citizens, non-profit organizations and communities having a relevant, if not an equal, role in designing and delivering public services.

Despite the development in the literature and among practitioners, co-production is far from being a clear and undebated phenomenon, but it is rather a dynamic and magmatic matter. However, the austerity policies and post-NPM reforms are changing heavily the role of public agencies. Nowadays, public services are not only delivered by professional and managerial staff in public sector organizations but are also co-produced, to some extent, by citizens (individuals and groups), non-profit organizations and communities.

Co-production is considered a form of public service management in order to increase the level of effectiveness and efficacy, with stable or even reduced public resources. In order to achieve these promises, several aspects need to be taken into account, some of which can be problematic.

The contributions of this book present and discuss some of these elements in an essential and direct manner, giving an overview of the literature in some paradigmatic areas, and leveraging best practices and/or case studies. Some of the explored fields are social care, health care, employment services and smart cities. Moreover, we debate how technology can support a clearer definition of co-production and encourage its adoption.

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This volume is dedicated to our families and ... to the “world of services”.

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Experiences and Challenges

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