CHAPTER 7

The Future of Co-production: Policies, Strategies and Research Needs

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This book has so far focused on the development of co-production as an idea and vision from the 1980s onwards, and on the current situation in relation to co-commissioning, co-design, co-delivery and co-assessment. This has been a fascinating journey, marked by some rapid spurts and then some slow periods of consolidation. So now the time has come to consider the future—what might be the role of co-production over the next decade and longer? And how can we ensure that this role makes good use of the potential of the concept, while not being blind to its limitations?

In this chapter, we first consider the potential role of co-production in future public services and improving public outcomes, then the kinds of policies and strategies which are likely to support the mainstreaming of effective co-production. Finally, we make some recommendations on a research agenda which can help to grow the evidence-base for co-production.

7.2 THE FUTURE ROLE OF CO-PRODUCTION

We presented in Fig. 6.1 our public value model, which highlights the potential role of co-production, both in making public services more effective and in directly affecting publicly desired outcomes.
This is not only a model—it also encapsulates a vision of the future, in which intensive co-production does not happen simply by accident, or because of the commitment of a small number of enthusiastic frontline staff, or because of the pushiness of some switched-on service users or community groups. Rather we believe that, in the future, effective user and community co-production of public services and outcomes needs to be mainstreamed by integration into the public value chain instead of ‘project-managed’ in a partial and sporadic way.

This does not imply ‘co-production by default’ in the sense that every public decision, public service and every outcome needs to be co-produced or that public service organisations need to implement all the four Co’s in all services simultaneously. However, it does have three implications:

- First, citizen co-production should be the assumed starting point for social and digital innovation in the public domain. At present, the decision whether or not to seek intensive co-production is often left to public managers and staff. This is not good enough—they have too many reasons to rush this decision or take a negative view of it (or even ignore it completely). In social and digital innovation processes citizens should be involved as active partners with opportunities to contribute to the commissioning, design, delivery and assessment of social and digital innovation and not just as an end-user. It may turn out that, after consideration, more intensive co-production is not the best way forward—but that consideration should be undertaken by multiple stakeholders, including citizens, and not simply by those in a position of power in public service organisations.

- Second, co-production needs to be implemented as a holistic transformation approach instead of an add-on project to specific services. This will raise awareness of how different public services and communities contribute to public value. In other words, co-production could become a powerful driver of the public services integration agenda, not just in health and social care. Moreover, a holistic approach means considering service users and members of communities as ‘whole people’, not simply as one-dimensional objects of public policy or public service intervention. Since citizens are obviously much more ‘experts in their own lives’ than professionals can be, this immediately makes co-production a central
method of considering how best to design and implement public interventions.

- Third, public service organisations need to pursue more the ‘outside-in’ pathway to co-production. So far, many co-production initiatives have started as co-production projects within public service organisations which have sought to bring in citizens to contribute to existing activities by professionals, rather than looking at people’s everyday lives and asking what public services can contribute to raise the quality of those lives. We will elaborate on each of these perspectives in turn.

**Co-production as the assumed starting point for social and digital innovation in the public domain:** Even though there is now more talk about ‘user-driven design’ of public services, service users or communities are still often brought in at the end of change management processes or simply perceived as ‘research objects’ rather than co-producers of social or digital innovation. However, achieving effective behaviour change and digitisation of public services requires a different approach to public service transformation—a new paradigm is needed, which embeds co-production from the start.

In Mergel et al. (2018, 3) it is suggested that, “previous efforts have left public administrations with problems of non-adoption or even rejection of public services, so that citizens opted to use analogue services instead of online services”. At the same time, many citizens are eager users of online services provided by Amazon and other new players in the gig economy. The public sector clearly needs to find a way of making its digital public services as attractive to users as the private sector already has. Digital transformation in the public domain therefore implies a shift towards an external, open and co-productive logic of improving public services and outcomes.

Similarly, social innovation generally requires behaviour change, as innovation means changing old attitudes and behaviours. Co-production is a key way of achieving behaviour change, as the Public Value Model in Sect. 6.2 suggests. Moreover, given the current challenges of climate change, the ageing society, migration and the gig economy, behaviour change is likely to figure even more strongly on the policy agenda in the next decade and co-production will be essential in identifying, implementing and disseminating effective social and digital innovation
to cope with these wicked issues. Of course, just because more intensive co-production should be the assumed starting point of social and digital innovation does not mean that it will, in the end, be the only way to develop and improve public services. There will be times when other approaches—nested more in hierarchical or market modes of governance—will be more appropriate. Furthermore, co-production with citizens may be even more effective when combined with organisational partnership arrangements, as highlighted in a Scottish case study on employability services (Lindsay et al. 2018). The role of co-production in public services must always be subject to challenge, as with any other approach to service commissioning and provision. However, the current practice of considering co-production as ‘an extra’ makes no sense, when new ideas are needed urgently and when citizens’ knowledge, skills and resources are being wasted so flagrantly.

**Co-production as a holistic approach to public services:** We have stressed in Chapters 4 and 6 that co-production must, in the end, be judged by its effect on the quality of life of citizens and public governance principles. We have also discussed the wide range of quality of life outcomes which are likely to be valued by citizens (see Fig. 6.2). This means that many different public service organisations are likely to be involved in helping to achieve these outcomes. However, outcomes are not experienced separately—the quality of life which people experience is holistic. Furthermore, many public governance principles are experienced collectively. A central benefit of co-production is that the holistic understanding which service users have about their own lives is automatically embedded in moves to more intensive co-production of public services. So if service users add their tacit knowledge to service planning, the results are likely to be a great deal better (‘people know more than they can tell’). Similarly, community members are aware of what assets the neighbourhood has available and what capabilities are embedded in community members, so their contribution also adds to a holistic understanding of how service outcomes can be improved. It is essential that public services staff in the future get a better understanding of what users and their networks already contribute and could contribute more to improving individual and collective quality of life outcomes. This means that co-production can become a real driver of service integration by providing a holistic perspective.

**More ‘outside-in’ pathways to co-production:** So far, most co-production initiatives have been launched by public service organisations by bringing citizen voice and action into public services. In the future, public service
organisations need to at least try more the ‘outside-in’ pathway to co-production by mapping what users and communities are already doing and co-designing ways of supporting these activities to improve their outcomes. So far, service user and community asset mapping has only scratched the surface in most areas, as the modern welfare state is culturally biased towards a dependency culture and still thinks in a paternalistic way. This needs to change, as current ways of providing public services are clearly not coping with the challenges facing public policy around the world. In these circumstances, appealing to citizens to come and contribute to these services naturally constitutes an unattractive offer.

Fortunately, digital technologies can now enable public service organisations to gather and analyse more data on what citizens are doing to help themselves and others—and where the gaps are. This has to play a much larger role in the future. Of course, this does not mean that governments need to get involved in everything citizens are doing. Nor does it imply that governments should monitor (‘spy on’) everything that citizens are saying and doing. However, government data which is already collected can be used in more effective ways while respecting privacy and data security. The enormous opportunities for governments to support and enhance the activities in daily life of citizens, particularly the most vulnerable citizens, will require a major shift in public service systems towards an enabling role.

In the rest of this chapter, we therefore look at how the promise of much more effective public services which co-production offers might be made real. In the next section, we consider how more intensive co-production might be promoted through medium of public policies and the strategies of public service organisations, both commissioners and providers.

### 7.3 Policies for Mainstreaming Effective Co-production

So which policies need to be put in place in order to mainstream effective user and community co-production initiatives? Based on the evidence identified in previous chapters, we develop here a set of recommendations for key stakeholders involved in co-production, including policy-makers, public sector organisations, third sector organisations and citizens (in their roles both as service users and members of local communities). We classify most of these recommendations under the specific headings
of the Four Co’s of co-commissioning, co-design, co-delivery and co-assessment of public services and outcomes but we start with a number of recommendations which apply to all four modes of co-production,

**Recommended co-production policies applying to all Four Co’s**

There are three families of policies and strategies which are needed to make co-production more successful:

- making more favourable the context and external environment in which co-production happens;
- improving the drivers which make co-production successful; and
- removing the barriers which impede co-production.

First, shaping the context and the external environment of user and community co-production is a responsibility of policymakers across different levels of government, both at the political level (making policy and exercising scrutiny) and at the managerial level (formulating strategy).

This context-shaping lies directly within the remit of the organisations which are responsible for policymaking and commissioning—both at the political and official level. However, it is also subject to influence even by individual public service providers (whatever sector they may be in). Moreover, regulators, auditors and inspectors also have a significant influence on commissioning. The views of all these stakeholders therefore need to be taken into account in policymaking and strategy, so that all stakeholders need to form a view about the benefits which potentially accrue to co-producers but also the possible organisational, community and user risks involved.

There is a range of policy changes in the external environment of public service organisations which have been highlighted in previous chapters, each of which is likely to help co-production to become more successful:

- Policy reforms strengthening network governance in public services, for example, through a new welfare mix in social services, which give space to co-production as an alternative to the purely in-house provision of public services which was characteristic of traditional public administration or the full privatisation of public services which was often associated with New Public Management.
- Legislating that public procurement processes should enable service commissioners and providers to involve service users and/or
communities in each of the Four Co’s—or have to demonstrate why this may not be appropriate.

- Development of national quality of life outcome frameworks for all levels of government and all sectors, so that national agencies and public service organisations focus not only on services but also on politically important priority quality of life outcomes, determined in conjunction with citizens.
- Institutionalise seed funding for experimentation with innovative co-production initiatives in order to develop capacity for social innovation in public services and local communities, in particular at the local level of government.
- Creation of digital and non-digital learning platforms at all levels of government which facilitate social learning processes and the dissemination of effective co-production initiatives.
- Changing the risk appetite in the public sector, so that risk aversion is less common—in particular, auditors and inspectors have an important role to play in encouraging experimentation and system-wide learning from new co-production initiatives.
- Developing an insurance framework for co-producing citizens, so that public service providers can access public insurance cover for citizen co-producers more easily.

Second, promoting the drivers of co-production can be undertaken at all levels—national and local, in commissioning and providing organisations, by service users and local communities. Furthermore, professional associations and organisations involved in education and learning have a particularly important role to play in skilling up the current and future workforce in co-production. Some of the key policy changes which have been highlighted in previous chapters as being needed here include:

- **Policy-makers at all levels of government** need to adopt more enablement approaches to help citizens (particularly vulnerable citizens) to help themselves and to mobilise leadership for co-production across the public, non-profit and private sectors and local communities.
- **Local commissioning organisations** need to enable and encourage service providers to experiment with co-production (in all four Co’s), in particular in prevention and rehabilitation, by shifting
toward outcome-based commissioning. This may also imply recommissioning of public service contracts, and in some cases, even decommissioning, so that appropriate service providers are in place to respond to this shift.

- **Local providing organisations** need to invest in training and action learning to skill up staff in co-production (in all 4 Co’s) and to recruit staff with co-production skills or at least commitment to co-production.
- **Local public service organisations** need to develop greater trust and a greater sense of self-efficacy in service users and communities, so that they are more willing to become co-producers.
- **Professional associations** need to develop new competency frameworks for co-production and to ensure that co-production is embedded within the training programmes for new and existing professionals.
- **Universities and other education providers** need to integrate co-production into their curricula (e.g. in human resource management and public administration modules), so that all those involved in public services are more aware of the potential value of co-production.
- **Local communities** need to spread the news about how their contributions to collective co-production initiatives have made a difference to the quality of life in their communities (e.g. through blogs, vlogs, local newsletters, hyperlocal websites and storytelling generally).
- **Service users** need to tell other service users how their contributions to individual co-production have improved their own quality of life—and platforms for this dialogue need to be put in place by many of the other stakeholders in this list.

Third, while some of the above drivers may become barriers when they are absent, there are a number of specific co-production barriers which have been suggested in the literature (see Sect. 5.2). Policies and strategies for removing barriers to all four Co’s should consider the following set of actions at different levels:

- **Policy-makers in all public service organisations**—mapping both the contributions currently being made to all their activities by service users and communities, with a view to understanding how
widespread these contributions are, and also the barriers which reduce the volume or effectiveness of the most valuable of these contributions, and also mapping approaches which have been taken successfully to eliminate situations where citizens’ time and effort is being wasted in unnecessary or ineffective co-production activities.

- **National level (including government and research funding bodies)**—sponsoring research and dissemination of knowledge on co-production barriers and how to overcome them across a wide range of outcomes and services.

- **Local commissioning and providing organisations**—shifting from risk minimisation towards risk enablement. This also implies a change from single loop toward double-loop and triple-loop learning.

- **In all public service organisations**, stopping the communications department having a monopoly on external communication but rather training at all levels to engage in effective conversations with citizens (with appropriate safeguarding policies).

- **Local providing organisations**—making use of ‘inside-out’ pathways to co-production but also ‘outside-in’ pathways by adding their resources to those of community self-organisation and user self-help.

- **Service users**—communicating barriers experienced in user co-production and making proposals on how to remove them.

- **Communities**—communicating barriers experienced in community co-production and making proposals on how to remove them.

However, there is still very little empirical evidence as to which co-production barriers are significant in specific contexts and how they might be overcome—this needs much closer attention from co-production researchers.

Other recommendations for mainstreaming effective co-production policies and strategies are more specific to each of the Four Co’s.

**Recommendations for policies to mainstream co-commissioning**

- Legislating that public sector organisations don’t have to put all public services out to competitive tendering but are able to develop alliances with service providers (Bovaird 2016), so that service users and communities can be more easily treated as potential co-producers of public services.
Legislation on public procurement needs to include provisions which enable commissioners to focus tenders on public value and not just on value for money, with a clear role for service users and communities in helping to decide what constitutes public value. This would build on the social value provisions of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 in the UK, which calls for all public sector commissioning to factor economic, social and environmental well-being into public services contracts but which, in many public service commissioning processes, still does not result in clear public value policies, nor significant weightings to public value in evaluation of contract tenders (Battle 2019).

Policy-makers need to trust in the ability of citizens to co-commission public services and/or outcomes, giving them much more extensive roles in planning, prioritisation and procurement decisions with respect to outcomes, services and budgets. In order to build trust, positive experience is usually needed. To ensure that such experiences occur, even in the face of reluctance on the part of one or other side, it might be made mandatory for all public service commissioners to undertake a certain quota of all public service commissions (constituting perhaps just 1% of expenditure in the first phase) through co-commissioning mechanisms. Indeed, the Scottish Government has already agreed with its local authorities that 1% of all local government budgets will be allocated by participatory budgeting by 2021 (Escobar 2020). (Of course, this means that if the experience does not turn out to be positive, trust will not be successfully established and co-production is likely to be that much harder in the future—but at least this will be based on evidence from experience, and not just on ignorance or prejudice).

Public service commissioners and providers need to engage closely with each other during all phases of the commissioning process (except during the procurement process where this might constitute anti-competitive conduct) in order to learn how to commission co-production effectively.
Recommendations for policies to mainstream co-design

- Social innovation requires some slack. In particular, busy front-line staff need to be provided with some time for reflection and discussion with other staff and citizens to develop new ideas for improving public services and outcomes.
- In highly regulated services policy-makers and auditors may need to grant waivers to create space for experimentation and learning in co-design.
- Local commissioning and providing organisations need to become more agile and to set up mechanisms to enhance creativity in the process of designing public services and outcomes—this could involve, for example, imaginative suggestion schemes, ideas competitions, online platforms for citizens (and staff) to discuss new ideas or the creation of spaces in local communities such as informal breakfast clubs where staff can meet with citizens to identify new ideas.
- As experimentation involves the possibility of failure, policy-makers need to ensure that resilience mechanisms are co-designed to be in place to reduce the harm done by failure when it occurs.
- Policy-makers need to balance the interests of ‘experts by experience’, who are engaged in the co-design of new solutions, with the interests of the wider public, so that important public governance principles are respected.

Recommendations for policies to mainstream co-delivery

- Policy-makers and all public service organisations need to identify ways in which behaviour change (from macro-shifts in conscious attitudes to micro-changes to unconscious behaviours) can be encouraged so that co-production becomes more natural and acceptable to service users and communities.
- Policy-makers and all public service organisations need to sponsor a public insurance scheme to cover the risk for citizens co-delivering public services and outcomes.
- Policy-makers and public service organisations need to agree a governance framework with citizen co-producers (for example, a co-production charter) which specifies mutual responsibilities in co-delivery and accountability when co-delivery goes wrong.
Public sector commissioners need to recognise that third sector organisations have a key role to play in mobilising service users and communities to make a bigger contribution to co-delivery.

**Recommendations for policies to mainstream co-assessment**

- Policy-makers need to make it mandatory for public service organisations operating under regulatory frameworks to gather citizen feedback and make it public.
- Public service organisations need to make it both easier and more fun for citizens to provide feedback by using communication tools which are appropriate to specific groups and by building in attractive elements, such as gaming, competitions, online voting, etc. In particular, this is likely to involve increased use of user-friendly digital technologies.
- Policy-makers, local commissioners and provider organisations need to build co-assessment into their organisational reporting and performance management systems, so that the effectiveness of co-production initiatives is discussed at both strategic and operational levels.

### 7.3.1 Strategies to Mainstream Co-production

The purpose of mainstreaming co-production is, of course, to bring about bigger improvements of outcomes and/or efficiency savings. However, there is a danger that this may also involve a loss of flexibility and creativity compared to small-scale co-production initiatives. As discussed in Sect. 6.4, if co-production initiatives are to be scaled more widely, it is essential that the co-producers involved agree on a set of rules and quality manuals, so that new co-producers understand what they can expect from others and what is expected of them. This is also reflected in a number of the above recommendations. However, if standardisation and formalisation are overdone there is the risk of creating a new bureaucracy, which may squeeze the creativity out of co-production.

In a co-production context, the Mintzberg (1994) differentiation between deliberate and emerging but also opportunistic and unrealised strategies may offer a useful framework. This provides space for some degree of structured planning, which is inherent in traditional change
management models such as the eight step model of Kotter (1996). At the same time, Mintzberg’s emergent strategies sit well with conceptualisation of co-production as a social innovation process which does not progress neatly through successive stages, given that it challenges established institutions and pathways of development (Evers and Ewert 2020). Of course, these four very different sources of strategy need to be balanced within any given organisation; in our current state of knowledge about strategic management, this is an art, rather than a science. Moreover, we know from Chapter 5 that, if we are working in the complex knowledge domain, as is more likely when we are using multi-stakeholder approaches such as co-production, then pre-planning of how we are going to deal with every eventuality is not possible. In these circumstances, mainstreaming of co-production means ensuring that co-production is a feature of all the experimental ways in which we try to navigate the complex environment to get closer to desired outcomes, rather than being a single approach to which we rigidly hold constant during the change process. A change process almost always means constant change in the way we change, so a co-produced change process means changing together the way we change together.

There is also an obvious tension between the requirements of small-scale, locally-tailored co-production initiatives and initiatives which are meant to be rolled out more widely. Ostrom (1996) suggests the need “to keep rules general”. Based on Ostrom’s ‘polycentric’ governance paradigm, Durose et al. (2013, 30–31) recommend adopting a ‘scaling-out’ rather than a vertical ‘scaling-up’ strategy to mainstreaming co-production. This involves adapting co-production initiatives to local contexts, which makes them more likely to be effective in each locality but does, of course, mean more work—and more uncertainty—in applying the lessons in other contexts. In some situations, the question for commissioners is how much scope there is for local variation when buying licensed co-production schemes such as the Family-Nurse-Partnership Programme (Loeffler and Trotter 2012), which have been validated by a number of external evaluations. The decision will typically rest on how successful these ‘scaled-up’ programmes have been elsewhere and how different is the context in which we now want to apply it.

A similar question about flexibility versus standardisation applies in administrative law countries, such as Germany, where legislators may be considering mandating co-production by law in specific services or situations. A solution which sits between a purely laissez-faire approach
(‘let them co-produce if they want’) and legislative fiat (‘co-produce or face the courts’) has been applied in health services in Ireland, where co-production has been made one of the four principles of a more recovery-oriented framework for mental health, with more detailed guidance provided through a ‘Co-Production in Practice Guidance Document 2018-2020’ (Advancing Recovery in Ireland et al. 2017) which supports the implementation of ‘A National Framework for Recovery in Mental Health 2018 – 2020’. Something similar has been embedded in Welsh legislation in the Social Services And Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014, which highlights co-production (defined as “encouraging individuals to become more involved in the design and delivery of services”) as one of the main principles underlying the Act (Social Care Wales 2017).

Most of the recommendations for policy and strategy change in this section build on existing research presented earlier in this book. However, the research base is still relatively new and quite fragmentary. It would be wrong to place too much confidence in it for the moment. In the next section we explore some of the directions in which it would be particularly valuable to push the research agenda on co-production.

7.4 GROWING THE EVIDENCE-BASE FOR CO-PRODUCTION: A RESEARCH AGENDA

Even though we have witnessed an almost exponential increase in the amount of co-production research in recent years, there are still important research gaps on user and community co-production of public services and outcomes. For example, the fast digitalisation of public services throws up new research issues for co-production but so far this research area has been rather neglected. Again, scholarship on public administration has in recent years witnessed a very fast growth in the area of ‘behavioural public administration’ (Kang and Van Ryzin 2020)—but this, too, has not yet been reflected in most of the co-production research published in recent years.

These disjunctions between research trends in different areas are typical of fast-growing fields. In this section we therefore suggest a research agenda for growing the evidence-base for co-production and propose research questions and themes based on research gaps identified in each of the chapters in this book (Table 7.1).
Table 7.1  A research agenda for co-production from the chapters of this book

| Content of chapter | Further research suggested |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Why co-producing public services and public outcomes with citizens is timely—political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legislative macro-drivers of co-production in policy and practice | There has been limited research on most macro-level factors in the PESTEL framework:  
P: The important role of elected politicians in co-production has received little attention. More analysis is needed of their motivation for co-production, the political risks it brings, and how politicians can avoid public governance pitfalls of co-production. Furthermore, does this differ between different politicians (e.g. by party or by role played) or between different political systems (in terms of centralisation)? Finally, does co-production strengthen local democracy, though both citizen voice and citizen action, or does citizen voice challenge traditional structures and relations of representative democracy (Pestoff 2019)?  
E: There has been little co-production research from an economics perspective, even though co-production is often criticised on the grounds that it is used by public service organisations to cut costs and dump responsibilities on citizens. More research is urgently needed on the costs of co-production to citizens and on the economic value of improved outcomes resulting from co-production  
S: There has been considerable research on the social drivers of co-production with a focus on citizen motivation (for example, Alford 2009; Van Eijk and Steen 2016). However, there is still a need for more research which explores how the level of social capital influences citizens’ willingness and ability to co-produce, distinguishing its effect on each of the Four Co’s separately  
T: There has also been recent research on how digital public services impact on co-production—this is discussed below in relation to Chapter 3  
E: As far as environmental and ecological factors are concerned, there is an urgent need to research the potential of co-production to address climate change, which will require a multi-level governance perspective |

(continued)
Table 7.1 (continued)

| Content of chapter | Further research suggested |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| L: Legal and legislative impulses for co-production have been relatively few to date, but some research has probed how different governance modes have impacted on co-production, e.g. Voorberg et al. (2017) and Loeffler and Timm-Arnold (2020) on how co-production is treated in hierarchical, market and network governance modes. More detailed comparison of co-production across services would allow this analysis to be taken further. In particular, comparisons of co-production within private and public services (e.g. in the health sector) would be timely. Furthermore, international comparative research would shed more light on the role of legislative frameworks in contexts of co-production, contrasting, for example, administrative law countries and Westminster-type countries. This research needs to distinguish the impacts of governance mode and administrative tradition on each of the Four Co’s, as Loeffler and Timm-Arnold (2020) have illustrated. Finally, research is needed into the potential role of co-production in tackling ‘wicked problems’, which usually derive from multiple sources of the PESTEL framework and involve multiple stakeholders with multiple objectives. |
| 2. Distinguishing types and levels of co-production Concepts, definitions and disciplinary roots of co-production | As the body of co-production research grows, so does also the opportunity for inter-disciplinary perspectives, taking us beyond current research approaches which have been, at best, multi-disciplinary. Depending on the specific research focus, co-production definitions may be either rather narrow, with a focus on public service co-production or broader, with a focus on outcomes. It is unlikely that the academic research on co-production will converge towards one agreed definition. Indeed, ideally, any definition of co-production should be co-defined by the stakeholders involved in a co-production initiative to ensure ownership and sensemaking and these different definitions should therefore give rise to differing approaches within their associated research programmes. |
| Content of chapter | Further research suggested |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Differences and overlap between co-production from public participation and consultation | Since both co-production and public participation are a form of citizen engagement, more research is needed on how both forms of citizen engagement differ—and on how they may reinforce each other. How can public service organisations make better use of citizen voice and action, either through co-production or public participation, and which citizens are more likely to engage in one way or the other? Can user and community co-production be used to engage those citizens who are not considered as the ‘usual suspects’ in public participation? And vice versa, will those who often shout the loudest in public participation exercises change their views if they are incentivised to co-produce effectively, e.g. by playing more of a role in co-delivery? |
| Governance implications of co-production | More research is needed on how co-production impacts on the achievement of important public governance principles such as the equalities agenda, following up recent explorations into ‘governance pitfalls’ (Loeffler and Bovaird 2019) or ‘dark sides’ of co-production Steen et al. (2018). To do this, there is a need for research on how these governance principles can be operationalised so that the degree of their implementation can be assessed. |
| Pathways to outcomes through co-production | There has already been substantial research into how public service organisations can more effectively bring citizens into public services and get them to contribute to public sector pathways to outcomes—the ‘inside-out’ pathway (Loeffler 2020). However, the ‘outside-in’ pathways towards co-production, whereby public service organisations seek to add value to activities already being undertaken by service users and communities, is currently seriously under-researched. More empirical research is required on how to improve the quality of co-production. In particular, quality management models need to take into account that service quality not only depends on how well service provider organisations are managed but also on the contributions of service users and communities and their collaboration with service providers. As an aid in this research, in Sect. 2.5 we proposed a dynamic quality framework for user and community co-production. |

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### Table 7.1 (continued)

| **Content of chapter**                                                                 | **Further research suggested**                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3. Key co-production approaches:                                                       | While the Four Co’s (co-commissioning, co-design, co-delivery and co-assessment) are generally rather different in their intentions, mode of operation, range of stakeholders involved and results achieved, they have some important inter-relationships but these have so far been under-researched. More research is needed on the interactions between politicians and citizens in co-commissioning processes and their impact on public value. In particular, the question arises why some elected politicians are willing to share power with citizen co-producers and have even gained a reputation as citizen engagement champions while others are reluctant to let citizens influence commissioning. Empirical co-production research on the extent of co-production in social services for younger and older people and public safety at the local level in Germany showed that co-commissioning may be viewed as a threat to the budgetary rights of local councillors (Löffler et al. 2015, 28). These issues concern the fuzzy relationship between representative and participatory democracy, which remains problematic both in theory and practice. |
| Co-commissioning                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Co-design                                                                              | As Robert et al. (2020) point out, more rigorous research into the implementation and impact of design thinking in the public sector is needed. This reinforces the suggestion by Torfing (2016, 94) that “design thinking has yet to establish itself as an academic field of research with a clear set of research questions, theoretical underpinning, and a methodological toolbox that facilitates empirical studies of design processes.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
### Content of chapter | Further research suggested
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Co-delivery | The academic literature on co-delivery is woefully thin. Further research is needed on the benefits and costs of co-delivery and its impact on governance principles in order to improve the evidence base. At the same time, we need more empirical research on drivers and obstacles of co-delivery. This needs to take into account socio-economic factors such as the role of gender and education but also organisational and contextual factors as discussed in Sect. 3.5. While there is some empirical evidence on the motivations of citizens to co-deliver (for example, the Dutch neighbourhood watches in Van Eijk and Steen (2016) we still do not have much knowledge on staff motivations for taking joint actions with citizens. As Wenene et al. (2016)’s study on staff perspectives on the actual and potential role of citizens in service delivery in Uganda shows that context matters. The challenges to co-delivery are likely to be different in political systems where a large part of a population lacks access to public services, compared to highly developed welfare states where many service users have become dependent on receiving state support.

Co-assessment | Table 6.4 provides a theoretical framework for co-assessment. It shows that if quality is complex to specify but privately experienced—as is often the case in relational services—both professionals and service users know about quality, so that co-assessment is clearly necessary. While UK regulators of social care have been recommending that service users should be brought into assessment, and this practice has become more common, such ‘peer reviews’ remain largely unevaluated. Moreover, as a literature review undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Trust states, there is still very little research on the assessment of risk by service users, in particular, from different groups of service users, such as those from Black and Minority Ethnic communities (Mitchell et al. 2012), although this might seem an area particularly likely to benefit from user insights.

Digital | As Lember et al. (2019) suggest, there is a lack of hard evidence on how digital technologies impact on co-production. Given the increasing interest of public service organisations in the use of digital technologies in a range of sectors, it will be important to consider their impact on the quality of life of citizens as well as on the achievement of important public governance principles such as accountability, social inclusion, privacy and security. In particular, there is a need for critical analysis of the risks and distribution of costs and benefits of digital innovation among stakeholders. This also concerns the use of data generated from or by citizens which is not always used to increase public value.

(continued)
| Content of chapter | Further research suggested |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 4. Co-production in health, social care, public safety | In spite of the burgeoning literature on the ‘social model for health’, the medical model of health is still dominant in the UK. Further theoretical and empirical underpinnings are needed for how co-production can improve public and individual health. Given that personalisation in health means that professionals have to accept that their service users have legitimate knowledge and the capability to make important health care decisions on their own behalf, more research is needed into how this influences professional attitudes and behaviours with regard to co-production and which aspects of personalisation are most effective for specific patient groups (Musekiwa and Needham 2020). |
| Social care | There is a need for more empirical evidence on the effectiveness of co-production in prevention and rehabilitation, which are still underused pathways to improve social care (and wellbeing) outcomes. In particular, given the seriously debilitating effects of loneliness and isolation on many people, the lack of evidence on the overall picture of how many lonely and socially people are benefitting from public service initiatives remains a serious gap in the literature—and research into co-production approaches, in particular, is urgently needed. German research (Löffler et al. 2015) has highlighted the very large gap between, on the one hand, the current levels of citizen co-production with public services, and on the other hand, the overall levels of support which people give to older and young people outside their families in self-organised activities, suggesting major scope for the public sector to tap more successfully the energy and commitment of citizens to improve the social life of the more needy of their fellow citizens. Research needs to explore whether there is similar potential for further co-production in other countries. |
Content of chapter | Further research suggested
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Public safety | While the literature contains some evidence that co-production may often be effective in achieving high level outcomes in community safety, the relevant number of studies remains too small for full confidence and needs to be increased. Moreover, only a narrow range of outcomes are typically addressed in much of the research into community safety production—in particular, much research has focused on crime reduction while the effect of co-production on the collective outcomes of justice in the community and on quality of life outcomes is still under-researched (Loeffler and Bovaird 2019). In addition, many research studies to date have been purely qualitative, illustrating the potential of co-production but giving only weak indications of the strength of its drivers and impacts. There have also been few studies on whether co-production can reduce police costs.

There has been relatively little research to date on the potentially undesirable consequences of co-production of community safety, including the potential neglect of public governance principles or illegal practices (often referred to as ‘the dark side’ of co-production) and more research here will be important.

5. Challenges to effective co-production of public services and outcomes

Barriers to co-production | The longstanding emphasis on individual case study analysis in co-production research means that there has been no systematic identification of barriers to effective co-production. Such a systematic model was presented in Chapter 5 but it needs to be turned into a dynamic model in order to identify relationships between drivers and barriers to co-production, sensitive to different contexts, and consistent with the motivations and perspectives of multiple stakeholders. In particular, there is a need for systematic empirical testing of how important the barriers are in practice to each stage of the initiation, implementation and/or scaling of both user and community co-production of public services and outcomes and what strategies have been successful in overcoming these barriers.

More research is also needed to analyse the circumstances in which co-production with citizens is likely to be promoted by increased staff commitment and capability, as compared to increased citizen commitment and capability.

(continued)
| Content of chapter | Further research suggested |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Risks and co-production | It is striking that the academic literature on co-production has not focussed much on the issue of risks involved with co-production and how to address them. Furthermore, research is required on how commissioners and service providers may develop effective co-production with vulnerable groups through risk enablement strategies. In particular, third sector organisations may have a new role to play as ‘resilience builders’. |
| Change management for co-production | There is not one single model for the change management of co-production. As Sørensen and Torfing (2011) suggest, change management for co-production needs to draw on different theoretical frameworks, depending on the context and the scale of the desired change. Research needs to highlight how change management is likely to be different for deepening and widening existing (small-scale) co-production initiatives and putting new co-production initiatives in practice. To what extent do new co-production initiatives imply incremental change or require ‘disruptive’ change, which may be difficult to achieve in a public service context where reliability of public services is a core administrative value? What is the motivation of all co-producing stakeholders involved (not just that of citizens, whose motivation has now been quite widely studied)? |
| Leadership of co-production | In a system defined by complex interactions, given that no single person knows the answer to emerging problems, understanding can only come by observing the consequences of leadership actions, so leadership for co-production typically involves collective learning processes. Crosby and Bryson (2018, 1277) point out that there is a paucity of leadership theorising and research on intersectionality and that “more explorations are needed of how particular systems and technologies help produce collective leadership”. Moreover, leadership for co-production typically takes place in a political context. More research is needed on what kind of leadership is required ‘from the top’ in order to support co-production between front-line staff and citizens. On the other hand, how much leadership from ‘the bottom’ by front-line staff and community representatives is possible in a representative political system where local councillors are accountable for public governance and results? |
Further research suggested

Methodologically, we identify three important directions for further research on leadership for co-production:

- More studies with a mix of qualitative and quantitative research which untangle causal relations between the contextual factors, power relations and motivation factors that influence leadership of co-production initiatives, building on the conceptual framework developed by Schlappa et al. (2020).
- More longitudinal studies which take into account different public service contexts with co-producers, change during the different stages of the co-production process, and the implications for leadership.
- More comparative studies which take into account different public service contexts with different modes of governance and their implications for the extent to which leadership for different co-production is possible.

Negative sides of co-production

More evaluations of co-production are needed which focus on unintended negative side effects and the public governance pitfalls of co-production, not just on quality of life outcomes and governance improvements. In particular, since co-production is a dynamic transformation process which will benefit some stakeholders but may make other stakeholders worse off, the equity implications need to be explored (Clark 2020). Research is also needed on the effects of co-production on accountability, transparency, the process, social inclusion and sustainability—and on how co-production can contribute to the achievement of these public governance principles.

More research is also required to identify factors and contexts which trigger rent-seeking behaviour by one stakeholder at the expense of other stakeholders involved in co-production. Future research will also have to consider to what extent digital co-production not only generates economic and social benefits but also enables rent-seeking behaviour by private sector companies, for example, by using big data from citizens and/or government for commercial purposes.
Table 7.1 (continued)

| Content of chapter | Further research suggested |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 6. Evaluating the outcomes and public governance of co-production | In this book, the public value model proposed provides researchers with a framework which positions co-production as a key option for making public services more effective and which demonstrates that co-production can impact directly on quality of life outcomes, without necessarily working through the medium of public services. The concept of public value allows researchers to consider both impacts and the trade-offs involved. In particular, more empirical research is required to identify pathways to improved outcomes and public governance through specific co-production interventions. Of course, contexts matter and some parts of outcomes pathways may depend on context-specific variables. However, such empirical evidence of HOW to improve public value through co-production (or other types of public interventions) would be invaluable for practitioners. In mapping pathways to outcomes, it will be important to consider how co-production improves collective outcomes, not just individual outcomes, and its potential effects on developmental outcomes, which promise transformational improvements to wellbeing but imply higher risk, and not just on incremental improvements to wellbeing, with lower risks (Loeffler and Bovaird 2018, 272). Furthermore, our Public Value Model also raises the question of how to improve the resilience of involved co-producers, particularly vulnerable people, in order to ensure that limited harms occur from unsuccessful co-production initiatives. There is still little evidence on whether improved service quality results from user co-production, particularly in relation to objective, as opposed to subjective dimensions of quality. Further qualitative research is needed to unpack the relationship between co-production and citizen satisfaction (Loeffler and Bovaird 2018, 273). We also need to identify how forms of relational co-production impact on service quality as ‘passionate emotional involvement’ and to explore the quality of enablement which is core to relational forms of co-production, for which the dynamic quality framework for user and community co-production in Sect. 2.6 should prove useful. |

More research is needed on the costs of co-production, including not just the inputs of service commissioners and providers but also the inputs of citizens (Loeffler and Bovaird 2018, 274–275). Where substitutive co-production is taking place, how much staff time can be saved when co-production is effective and how can the value of this be compared to the extra inputs needed from citizens? Where additive co-production is taking place, how many extra resources from public service organisations are needed to achieve significant outcome improvements?

While more asset mapping is clearly needed, more research is also needed on the effectiveness of existing mapping tools and how to balance the need for asset mapping with the respect of citizens’ privacy and confidentiality.

Last but not least, more research is needed to evaluate the impact of co-production on governance principles (Loeffler and Bovaird 2018, 275), including public governance pitfalls and the ‘dark side’ of co-production (Steen et al. 2018). The digitalisation of public services and digital co-production will raise new public governance issues such as privacy and security issues.
7.4.1 Research Methodologies

Finally, it is clear that research into co-production has so far been based on a rather narrow set of research methodologies, particularly on qualitative case studies. While a number of studies have used quantitative methods, based on general surveys of citizens (Loeffler et al. 2008; Parrado et al. 2013; Bovaird et al. 2015, 2016) or surveys of users of digital platforms (Clark 2020), further research using these approaches still seem to offer great opportunities for deeper insights.

Ideally, research on co-production initiatives should consider both quantitative and qualitative evidence, as some stakeholders such as citizens may be more influenced by stories and other qualitative evidence, whereas commissioners will be keen on some numbers so that they can justify increased spending of taxpayers’ money on effective co-production initiatives.

Moreover, comparative studies such as the research of Pestoff (2020) into co-produced and traditional models of health care in Japan has combined staff surveys with patient surveys across multiple hospitals in a mixed approach which appears highly promising. Furthermore, internationally comparative research helps to explore the role of contextual variables such as administrative traditions and the wider public governance framework.

Other aspects of research methodology also seem likely to play a greater role in the future, including longitudinal studies, experimental research, co-produced research and digital co-production research.

**Longitudinal studies** would offer particularly valuable insights into causal mechanisms and the longer-term effects of co-production—up to the present there have been few such research studies. In particular, longitudinal studies would allow exploration of how in the long-run, public governance structures are changed through co-production processes.

**Experimental research** designs are similarly valuable in distinguishing causal mechanism and may also identify the extent to which different drivers (at macro- and micro-levels) are necessary and which drivers are sufficient to promote co-production. Early examples have recently been summarised by Kang and van Ryzin (2020) but much more research can be anticipated along these lines, as experimental research into behavioural public administration is one of the areas of explosive growth in the discipline.
Co-produced co-production research is still in its infancy but important contributions have already been made, for example by Durose et al. (2017) and the potential for such research is explored by Durose et al. (2020). Such research is especially strong in allowing vivid story-telling methods to be employed.

Digital co-production may also require new epistemological approaches. As Schnapp and Blätte (2018) suggest, the availability of big data may challenge traditional approaches to the development of hypotheses, as big data enable relationships to be uncovered based on quantitative analysis, even though it may be difficult to explain these relationships theoretically.

Finally, there is the issue of timeliness in policy relevance research, which affects research into co-production as much (or even more) than research into other public governance themes. The recent Covid-19 crisis has once again revealed the importance of co-production but, more than this, it has also demonstrated the need for academic research to deliver helpful insights (if not ‘solutions’) much faster than through traditional peer reviewed research.

In particular, there is a need for truly inter-disciplinary research, with medical and health scientists working together with social scientists. This also suggests the need for a new format of academic conferences, through which researchers can be enabled to step out of their silos to co-produce much needed co-production research with colleagues from other disciplines but also with interested citizen co-producers, who bring in their tacit knowledge. It is likely that the potential for such interdisciplinary co-produced research will be much higher in the future, given the new availability of much more interactive communication tools driven by digital technologies. However, the supply of such opportunities will need to be matched by a corresponding demand from willing academics.

7.5 AND FINALLY—THE FUTURE OF CO-PRODUCTION PRACTICE AND RESEARCH POST-COVID-19

This book has taken the reader (and the author!) on a journey through the highways and bye-ways of co-production. This territory was largely unexplored until around 40 years ago, so it is remarkable how much has already been discovered and systematically mapped, as the references to the literature throughout this book testify.
However, we should not forget that this territory was never uninhabited, nor were those who lived there unaware of the value and power of their contribution to making their world a better place. The fact that researchers took so long to find out and understand what was everyday practice for millions of public servants and many more citizens makes the point very forcibly that citizens know more and do more than they tell researchers—as do many public servants.

With the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic, our world has changed and thrown up new issues for co-production research—both in terms of the research agenda and also research methods. While it is clearly too early to predict the impact of Covid-19 on the state of citizen co-production, two interesting and contradictory trends can already be identified. On the one hand, the response to the crisis requires both contributions from public service organisations and citizens. In many OECD countries, governments have called on citizens to volunteer to provide support for vulnerable people who have to self-isolate. In the UK over 750,000 citizens have responded to the call for volunteers—so many more than the 250,000 expected by central government that a halt had to be called to the registration of new volunteers (Royal Voluntary Service 2020). Local authorities and third sector organisations, in particular, will be in charge of matching supply and demand for help at the local level. Research is required on how these new forms of co-production can be implemented and scaled effectively. Moreover, digital technologies such as apps for matching volunteers to people who need help are likely to play a key role in supporting such new co-production approaches. This huge extension of co-production but also of community self-help at the micro-level may have a lasting impact on modes of public governance and may even conceivably support the development of a more collaborative state.

On the other hand, we are also witnessing the emergence of a more coercive state, which constrains human rights for the sake of collective health outcomes and expects compliance of citizens with unprecedentedly restrictive regulations on social and economic behaviour. Compliance is enforced through a mix of nudges, such as public campaigns to stay at home, and sanctions which are enforced by the police. This trend has reawakened the old debate on the extent to which co-production has to be voluntary. In the Covid-19 context, this debate needs to be framed by consideration of governance principles such as solidarity. However, it also raises the question of the role of voluntary co-production (rather than coercion) to generate behaviour change on an unprecedented scale—e.g.
to what extent can governments encourage shoppers to maintain physical distancing (and to ask others to do so), and public transport passengers to wear masks and keep sufficiently distant from each other?

Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis also requires researchers to reconsider traditional research methods, given that we’re dealing with a truly complex issue, and this is clearly an example of a complex adaptive system. As Astill and Cairney (2015, 141) suggest, new methodological tools may be required, which “understand data not as dry observations but as emergent from systems of agents interacting with each other and the rules that follow”. In particular, they emphasize the need to learn more, through qualitative inquiry, about systems and how they interact. Finally, researchers may have to question their epistemological stance and recognize that “complexity research may not be about definitive explanation or maximising ‘explanatory power’” (Astill and Cairney 2015, 137). Indeed, research on behaviour change has recently embarked on much more extensive use of experimental methods (Kang and Van Ryzin 2020).

Research can help to disseminate what is being done and to support practitioners in the honing of practice to make it more effective. Given the young age of co-production studies within the discipline of public administration, we may expect that current and future research into co-production will greatly increase its potential benefits (and reduce its costs). And this, in turn, suggests that the contribution of co-production to the improvement of public services and publicly-desired outcomes has, as yet, only scratched the surface.

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