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The ‘glass ceiling’ of collaboration: How invisible forms of power challenge co-production

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Abstract: *This paper aims to fill a gap in research on co-production by exploring how co-productive processes can be analyzed in terms of leadership and power. Drawing on data from two Danish municipal co-production cases the paper examines how indirect and discursive forms of power are executed through leadership interventions of public actors creating a 'glass ceiling' that inhibits participation and influence of citizens and other external stakeholders in co-production processes as discovered by Pestoff (2012a). The paper unfolds the forms of discursive power executed by public actors that contribute to create this 'glass ceiling' of co-production. Finally, it discusses how the democratic and collaborative quality of co-production processes is affected by the 'glass ceiling' in co-production.*

1. Introduction

Currently, a range of collaborative structures are being introduced in the governance of Western welfare states (Torfing, Peters, Pierre, & Sørensen, 2012). As part of this general development, the notion of **co-production** is high on the public governance agenda in a range of European countries. Establishing collaboration and partnerships with citizens by engaging local communities and civil society in developing, designing and producing welfare services is seen by public sector actors as a way to generate better outcomes and public value by innovating and improving the welfare systems (Bovaird & Löffler, 2012). Currently, a range of initiatives are being launched in Danish municipalities labelled 'co-production' that aim to engage local communities and civil society actors in developing welfare services. The paper draws on data from two co-production initiatives that have been initiated, framed and facilitated by the municipality as part of a strategic ambition to develop collaborative governance, categorizing them as cases of 'top-down' co-production. As the public actors in terms of both managers and civil servants play a central role in shaping and facilitating the collaboration process, their execution of power is the focus of this paper.

From a governance perspective, co-production can be understood as one form among others of pluricentric governance (Hughes, 2010; Rhodes, 1996). Central to this understanding is the notion that the state no longer monopolizes societal governance in the way it used to do, but must rely upon, and cooperate with, other actors, organizations and powers in order to 'get things done' (Torfing, 2006) for instance through establishing so-called interactive governance arenas (Torfing, 2006; Torfing et al., 2012). The notion of co-production implies boundary spanning collaboration between the civic and the public sector and underlines the need for leadership that facilitates collaboration and cooperative problem solving among a multitude of stake holders (Ansell & Gash, 2012; Van Wart, 2013) and governs through sharing power and influence (Durose & Richardson, 2016). This underlines the importance of exploring the ways in which leadership is executed in co-production processes. However, the leadership- and power-dimensions of co-production processes have hitherto largely been neglected by researchers in the field of co-production. The paper aims at filling this gap by offering a critical analysis of the leadership- and power-dimension of coproduction processes by posing the following questions: *In which ways do public actors*

exercise power through leadership in co-production processes? And how does this affect the quality of the collaboration process?

The paper is divided into five main sections. The first section outlines the theoretical concepts for the analysis by conceptualizing co-production, leadership and power. It argues that indirect and discursive forms of power are of importance in co-production processes. The paper then briefly presents the strategy for case selection and describes the two Danish municipal co-production cases. The third section analyses how the 'glass ceiling' in co-production is created, unfolding three specific forms of power applied in the two empirical cases. This is followed by a section discussing how the 'glass ceiling' affects the quality and outcome of co-production processes. Finally, in the last paragraph, the paper concludes on the main findings and discusses the consequences for the governance of co-production and other collaborative forms of governance.

2. Theorizing co-production, leadership and power

This section outlines the conceptual framework for the analysis, defining the concepts of co-production, leadership and power.

2.1. Co-production as a form of co-governance

In this paper I apply the term **co-production** to designate collaboration between a variety of public and civil society actors to develop, design and produce welfare on both the input and output side of the policy circle (Andersen & Espersen, 2017; Bovaird & Löffler, 2012; Pestoff, 2012b). Co-production, thus, is seen as constituting a movement away from a hierarchical form of governance evolving around the state, towards a more pluricentric form of governance where a diversity of other societal actors contribute to governance (Hughes, 2010; Rhodes, 1996). This development has been conceptualized by researchers as 'interactive' (Torfing et al., 2012), 'collaborative' (Ansell & Gash, 2012) or 'network' (Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004) governance. In this understanding, the state is considered an open system collaborating with external actors on solving concrete governance tasks through co-governance (Osborne, 2006, 2010; Wagenaar, 2007). Civil society and citizens are perceived as active partners in network governance and development of the welfare society (Osborne, 2010; Pestoff, 2008).

This notion of co-production stresses the democratic and empowerment potentials (Bovaird & Löffler, 2012; Richardson & Durose, 2013) perceiving co-production as a potential transformation of the roles of both civil society and public sector actors and the distribution of power and influence among them. This 'transformation' discourse on co-production is present among researchers and practitioners framing co-production as a 'shift of paradigms' in public governance (Durose, Mangan, Needham, Rees, & Hilton, 2013; Needham & Carr, 2009; Torfing, Sørensen, & Røiseland, 2016).

I define co-production in the following way based on a definition by Bovaird & Löffler (2014, p. 2): **public actors and citizens collaborate to make better use of each other's assets, resources and contributions to achieve empowerment, better outcomes or improved efficiency.** In line with central definitions of co-production (Brudney & England, 1983; Ostrom, 1996) this approach stresses the democratic and relational elements of co-production and includes the following three constitutive elements of co-production as practice: 1. Active participation by relevant and affected actors, 2. A degree of collaboration and 3. A degree of synergy. These dimensions will be applied in section 5 discussing how the 'glass ceiling' affects the quality of co-production processes.

2.2. Leadership and power in co-production

Co-production understood as boundary spanning collaboration does not match well with traditional leadership characterized by the execution of formal, hierarchical and direct forms of power and control. Instead, these processes require leadership that supports autonomous actors collaborating across organizations. Current research underlines the central role of leadership in supporting interaction in governance processes involving a wide range of stakeholders (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Keast & Mandell, 2014; Klijn; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). 'Collaborative' or 'distributed' leadership of co-production processes should ideally aim at distributing power and influence among a multitude of stakeholders to obtain innovative and effective solutions to wicked societal challenges. Drawing on Hartley & Bennington (2011, p. 5), I define leadership as *"a set of processes concerned with mobilizing action by many people towards common goals, and the framing of those goals"*. This understanding of leadership encompasses leadership of inter-organizational groups and networks that may be enacted not only by formal leaders, i.e. public managers, but possibly by a range of different actors (Hartley & Bennington, 2011; Van Wart, 2013).

This study explores the leadership interventions executed by public actors in publicly initiated co-production processes. In the analysis of the leadership interventions enacted by public actors in the two co-production cases, I will employ a notion of leadership as consisting of on the one hand **hands-off** interventions often executed by the top management in terms of framing and conditioning the co-production process by excluding or including participants and setting the rules and goals for the collaboration. And on the other hand **hands-on** interventions often executed by public servants aimed at facilitating collaboration among the participants through building trust and enhancing mutual learning processes. Researchers underline the importance of executing sense-giving leadership by facilitating 'cognitive integration' of the stakeholders' points of view, interests and ways of knowing (Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Page, 2010).

Uncovering the 'glass ceiling'

The aim of focusing on leadership is to uncover in more detail how power is executed by public actors in co-production processes and how it affects the quality of the collaborative process. More

specifically, the paper aims at exploring in further depth, how leadership and power executed by public actors in co-production processes create a 'glass ceiling' in co-production. The concept of a 'glass ceiling' was launched by Pestoff (2012a) to depict the invisible barrier inhibiting the influence and participation of parents as co-producers in Swedish kindergartens: *"we find traces of a 'glass ceiling' for citizen participation in public services that limits citizens to playing a more passive role as service users who can perhaps make some demands on the public sector, but who have little influence, make few, if any, decisions and take little responsibility for implementing public policy"* (2012a, p. 1115). Pestoff discovered the 'glass ceiling', but did not elaborate further on the mechanisms creating it. That leaves a gap for this paper to fill by focusing on the power mechanisms that bring about a 'glass ceiling' restricting the role of citizens in co-production.

The power-dimension of co-production processes has largely been neglected by researchers, thereby mirroring a general tendency to underplay the power-dimension of collaborative arrangements (Barnes, Newman, & Sullivan, 2007; Torfing et al., 2012). Torfing et al. (2012, p. 51) point out that interactive governance processes tend to be depicted as pragmatic 'problem-solving' processes devoid of politics and power among researchers as well of practitioners. They warn that *"preoccupation with the normative promises of interactive governance hides the real-life experiences of conflict, disruptive power struggle and governance failures.."* of these processes. Research in the field of co-production is tinted by this normative understanding of power, resulting in the power-dimension largely being overlooked.

Researchers who do discuss the exertion of power in co-production seem to apply a rather general – and sometimes naïve conceptualization of power. For instance Durose & Richardson (2016, p. 15) argue that co-production is connected to a concept of 'power with' rather than 'power over' and that power must be seen as a *'positive sum resource'*. While others (Durose et al., 2013; Needham & Carr, 2009) stress the potential of co-production to 'transform' the public sector by transferring power and influence to citizens and civil society, thereby enhancing empowerment. Needham & Carr (2009, p. 6) underline that: *"The transformative level of co-production requires a relocation of power and control, through the development of new user-led mechanisms of planning, delivery, management and governance"*. These normative approaches to power in co-production do not, however, match well with empirical research on citizen participation and collaborative governance which show that public actors are generally unwilling to share influence and power and that they seek to limit the influence of external parties through a number of indirect and discursive power strategies (Barnes, Skelcher, Beirens, & Dalziel, 2008; Durose & Richardson, 2016; Edelenbos, van Buuren, & van Schie, 2011; Newman, Barnes, Sullivan, & Knops, 2004)

'Invisible' forms of power

In order to explore the power-dimension of co-production processes, the paper will focus on

'invisible', i.e. **indirect** and **discursive** forms of power exercised by the public actors. According to Torfing et al. (Torfing et al., 2012, p. 57) the exercise of power in interactive governance arenas is often indirect and ideological as *"the agenda in interactive policy arenas is often quite open, and indirect power strategies seeking to control it therefore become crucial for securing particular outcomes... The search for cognitive consonance tends to make the actors susceptible to the propagation of storylines aiming to provide a common and simplifying understanding of problems and solutions"*. Also, empirical research points to these forms of power as pivotal in structuring and shaping the interactive governance arenas (Barnes et al., 2007; Newman et al., 2004; Torfing et al., 2012). For instance research points to discursive power being exerted by public administrators in collaborative and participatory processes to shape the 'political opportunity structure'. By shaping the arena discursively, blocking or including certain actors, forms of knowledge and possible solutions public administrators seek to protect their realm of power and influence against external stakeholders (Barnes et al., 2007; Hajer & Versteeg, 2005; Newman et al., 2004).

The analysis of the two co-production processes, thus, will focus on public actors' subtle and indirect attempts to structure and shape the interactive governance arenas through the **framing** of problem-definitions and possible solutions as well as legitimization and de-legitimization of actors, resources and knowledge. The way the public actors choose to articulate and frame a certain co-production initiative may thus be considered a way of exercising discursive power. The framing contributes to the creation of meaning and may be used to realize certain strategies. In line with the thinking of Foucault language is perceived as a way to exercise power in that it *"shapes what can and cannot be thought, delimit the range of policy options and thereby serve as precursors to policy outcomes"* (Hajer & Versteeg, 2005, p. 178).

Research points to the fact that in collaborative processes characterized by competing interpretations and interests, there will also exist competing frames among the stakeholders i.e. in terms of defining the challenge and range of possible solutions. Framing of the challenge at hand is often an important battle field for the actors in collaborative processes (Hargrave & Van De Ven, 2006; Ingerslev, 2014). So the collaboration process will evolve as an ongoing process of framing and re-framing the challenge to be solved through collaboration. The frame that 'wins' this battle may become sedimented and taken for granted by the other actors, thereby granting certain actors 'interpretative dominance' in a process of co-production (Sullivan, Williams, Marchington, & Knight, 2013; Williams, 2002).

The analysis of the two co-production cases will thus explore the framing and re-framing process and examine the leadership interventions applied by public actors to establish a dominant framing. Before jumping to the analysis however, I will present the cases and the method applied in the

empirical analysis.

3. Two Danish co-production cases: Case selection and method

This study draws on two empirical co-production initiatives from two Danish municipalities, i.e. Holbæk and Ikast-Brande using the cases to illustrate the power-dimension of co-production processes. The cases have been selected according to strategic considerations permitting logical deduction (Flyvbjerg, 2010). The strategy for case selection is described in the following.

Denmark has been selected as an expected positively extreme case on co-production based on three characteristics of the Danish welfare society: Firstly, the Danish welfare system is characterized by an extensive degree of decentralization, as the municipalities count for 65 % of the welfare expenditure. Public administrators and politicians at the municipal level, thus, have strong influence on the distribution of welfare resources and thereby a possibility to 'deliver' and to respond to the needs and citizens and other actors (Voorberg, Tummers, et al., 2015). Secondly, governance in Denmark is characterized by a relatively big, well-functioning public sector as well as a strong well-organized civil society organizations and a long tradition for citizen and user involvement. Thirdly, in an international perspective the Danish society is characterized by a relatively high degree of trust (Svendsen, 2012) as well as a low power distance and a low level of inequality. Based on these institutional and cultural characteristics I expect to find conditions favorable to co-production in the Danish welfare governance.

The two municipalities have been selected based on the logic of 'positively extreme' cases. Currently, the co-production agenda is strongly expressed at the local government level, as many Danish municipalities are active in realizing the ambition of co-production through strategies and initiatives. The two municipalities included here can be described as 'front runners', as they have both launched strategic and ambitious initiatives under the heading of 'co-production'. The specific co-production initiatives included have been selected according to the logic of 'maximum variation' in terms of welfare sectors and the institutional and leadership set-up of the co-production initiatives. This case selection strategy strengthens both the reliability and transferability of the results (Merriam, 2009).

3.1. Presenting the cases of Holbæk and Ikast-Brande

The two cases have been initiated, framed and facilitated by the municipality as part of a strategic ambition to develop collaborative governance, categorizing them as cases of 'top-down' co-production.

The Holbæk case unfolds in the area of children and youth and is framed by the municipality as developing a new democratic dialogue between public actors and citizens/civil society about political and economic priorities. The initiative was launched as part of the political strategy

'Together in Holbæk' to strengthen and innovate local democracy. Here, I focus on the collaborative process unfolding in a so-called 'change group' encompassing a wide variety of stakeholders in the field of children and youth (ie. parents, youth, teachers and pedagogues, heads of schools and kindergartens and politicians). The group was set up to work with the area of children and youth, discuss economic priorities and come up with innovative saving proposals within the field of schools and kindergartens. The case can be perceived as a case of co-governance (Pestoff, Brandsen, & Vershuere, 2012) involving citizens and other stakeholders in the decision making and planning of public services, i.e. on the input-side of the political circle.

The case from Ikast-Brandø unfolds in the area of elderly care and is framed by the municipality as an innovation initiative that aims at saving 20 % on the administration of elderly services by getting the elderly citizens to do more of the work themselves. The case springs from the strategy of developing a *'Mentally free municipality'* preparing the municipality for welfare challenges of the future through 'radical innovation'. The initiative was designed and facilitated by a team of external consultants according to a predefined concept and involved professionals from a range of different departments within the municipality's elder sector as well as a number of other stakeholders. This initiative is a case of co-production framing individual citizens as co-producers of their own welfare service (Pestoff et al., 2012).

The two case initiatives have both been organized as projects with a duration of 4-6 months and have been studied - as far as possible - from beginning to end. During the data collection period observation studies were conducted of selected events and meetings, interviews were carried out with all groups of actors involved and policy documents were collected and analyzed. All citations from interviews, documents and observations in the analysis stem from my PhD thesis (Tortzen, 2016).

4. Constructing a 'glass ceiling' through invisible forms of power

The aim here is to explore how the so-called 'glass ceiling' is created by exploring the power-dynamics in play in co-production processes. This section presents three examples that illustrate how the glass ceiling inhibiting participation and influence of citizens and other stakeholders in co-production was constructed through specific leadership interventions exerted in the two co-production cases. The examples illustrate the forms of indirect and discursive power executed by public actors in the governance of collaborative processes in terms of exerting power to frame and to define: What is the task/challenge and possible solutions worked with in the co-production process? Who are the legitimate participants? What is the objective and timeframe of the collaboration? and What kinds of resources and knowledge are considered 'valid' in this context?

The three examples to be unfolded in this section focus on a range of 'invisible' ways of exercising power, i.e.: By framing the challenges, through establishing a 'pressure to deliver' and a monopoly

of knowledge. As will be obvious from the examples, hands-off leadership interventions are of great importance in shaping the collaborative arena of co-production both directly and indirectly, as they often affect the ways, hands-on interventions are carried out.

4.1. Exercising power through framing the challenge

Problem definition in terms of dominant framing of the challenge(s) to be solved through co-production is central in the public actors' exercise of power in the two co-production processes. This leadership intervention consists in 'constructing' a challenge or a task in such a way as to be acted upon (Hargrave & Van De Ven, 2006; Ingerslev, 2014). The following example from the Ikast-Brande case illustrates how the public actors' dominant framing of the challenge was executed and how it came to affect the inclusion and exclusion of stakeholders in the co-production process.

The co-production initiative from the municipality of Ikast-Brande was part of a strategic project initiated by the top managers to redefine and develop local welfare. The collaborative initiative was framed by top management depicting the major welfare challenges as austerity and scarcity of labor. Thus, the ambition of the co-production initiative was expressed as *"developing radically different, innovative solutions for the welfare of the future"*. In line with this vision, the co-production initiative studied here was framed by the public actors in terms of achieving radically different welfare solutions with less public spending. The objective of the co-production initiative was formulated by the top managers in advance: To achieve savings of 20 % on the administration of elderly care through 'radical innovation'.

The priority of the top managers, therefore, was to launch a process that would result in a range of innovative ideas within a relatively short time span. Radical innovation was the driving ambition of the initiative. As a result the top management chose to design the initiative following a predefined concept, the so called CIS concept (Creative Ideas Solutions) attempting to achieve innovation primarily through the introduction of new technology and self-service solutions. This framing of the challenges gave priority to an approach focusing on streamlining, innovation and technological opportunities and thus focusing on resources outside the group of stakeholders. During the process attempts were made from front line professionals as well as managers in Ikast-Brande to challenge the dominant problem-definition and offer alternative frames, f. inst. by questioning the use of welfare technology in training the elderly. The top management and the external consultants, however, chose to hold on to the 'radical innovation' framing of the initiative and succeeded in establishing a dominant framing.

Excluding and de-legitimizing stakeholders

The dominant 'austerity' and 'radical innovation' framing of the collaboration initiative resulted in de-legitimization and exclusion of central stakeholder groups, as professionals and citizens were

framed by the public managers as benefit maximizing actors that would not be able to come up with innovative solutions. Consequently, the elderly citizens that may be considered a central stakeholder group in developing new ways of working with welfare for the elderly citizens, were assigned a weak and marginal role in the co-production initiative. The public actors expressed doubt that the elderly citizens would be able to contribute to the challenge of 'radical innovation', citing a member of the project team: *"If you set out to develop radically new ideas, you will often encounter resistance.. maybe we should have included more elderly citizens, but it is somewhat difficult, because – where do we think the ideas are going to come from?"*

The framing of the challenge also resulted in another central stakeholder group, the professionals that work with the elderly on a daily basis, in practice being excluded and de-legitimized in the co-production process. Once again the argument was that these stakeholders were too closely involved in caring for the elderly and should thus be expected to oppose radically new solutions. The consultant facilitating the process argued: *".. we know from experience that when technology substitutes human beings, we are in for beating. From the industrial field we have learned, that those who work there cannot be the ones to introduce new technologies – it has to be someone external.* Thus this dominant framing of the challenges to be solved by the collaborative process in terms of 'austerity' and 'radical innovation' resulted in de facto exclusion and de-legitimizing of two central groups of stakeholders, i.e. the elderly and the front line professionals, who were given a marginal role in the co-production process.

4.2. Exercising power through a pressure to deliver

Another leadership intervention that proved to be of importance in the two coproduction cases was exercising power through the shaping of output goals and the timeframe for collaborative process – this corresponds well with research on collaborative processes in general (Ansell & Gash, 2012; van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2013) showing that exercise of power by setting timeframes and a pressure 'to deliver' in terms of output goals is often executed by public actors to shape the arena informally (Barnes et al., 2008; Bekkers, Tummers, & Voorberg, 2014; Newman et al., 2004). The following example from the Holbæk case illustrates how this affected the co-production process.

The Holbæk case was characterized by two competing objectives being formulated by top management for the co-production process. One was aimed at producing a tangible result (output), the other aimed at an intangible result in terms of developing a new type of process and collaboration (outcome) to improve and develop local democracy. The outcome objective was formulated as follows: *"..to create a framework for a constructive collaboration among politicians, citizens, companies and other external stakeholders in establishing economic priorities and to strengthen political leadership".* Whereas the output objective was described as: *"To produce a final output consisting of one or more possible scenarios/models for the City Council to be used in*

the 2015-18 budget". So in this co-production case the leadership intervention was characterized by a on the one hand focusing on 'delivery' and on the other hand a focus on 'deliberation' (Skelcher, Mathur, & Smith, 2005). This divided hands-off leadership intervention by the top management caught the public administrators facilitating the collaboration process in a cross pressure: Deliberate or deliver? Furthermore, this co-production initiative was characterized by a certain degree of time pressure originating from the design of the process laying out four meetings of the change group over a period of 4-5 months designated to result in a 'delivery' in terms of suggestions for cut-backs to be included in the budget process of the municipal council. Considering the complexity of the task and the diversity of the stakeholders involved in the collaborative process this may be considered a tight time-frame.

Public actors stick to the role as expert

In practice, the pressure to 'deliver' as well as a built-in time pressure came to shape the way hands-on leadership was enacted by the public actors. The public administrators assigned as facilitators facilitated open discussions among the participants during the first meetings, but ended up tightening their grip towards the end to secure a tangible output being produced. In designing and facilitating the collaboration they thus chose to downscale the outcome goal of 'constructive collaboration' in favor of the output goal of 'delivering' cut-backs in the field of children and youth. During the meetings of the 'change group' the participants were invited to share their understandings of the challenges and possible solutions in the field of children and youth, but their inputs were not used by the public actors to re-frame the challenges. On the contrary, in the course of the process, the public actors increasingly left the role as 'facilitators', instead taking a role as 'experts' in order to secure an output which they considered professionally sound. The director of Children and Youth argued as follows: *"It is our responsibility (as public servants) to present and specify the data. We need to say: It is not a question, if we should be closing down some schools, but how many..It is obvious, when looking at the data. Who apart from us would be able to show that picture – nobody else!"*

The public actors coped with the cross pressure of competing goals and the time-pressure by executing defining power in the process. This was done seeking to define the output of the collaboration process by introducing municipal data and also by presenting saving proposals prepared earlier by the administration into the process disguised as 'possible solutions'. The project leaders formulates the cross pressure and the leadership intervention of the public actors as follows: *"It is a challenge to be in a process like this.. because underneath the whole thing there is this demand that we must find the money – and at the same time we know very well how to find them, generally speaking"*. Thus, the pressure on the co-production process to 'deliver' tangible output within a tight timeframe affected the facilitation of the public actors, inhibiting the external stakeholders from contributing with their solutions and resources in the collaboration process. The

next section will elaborate further on these dynamics.

4.3. Exercising power through monopoly of knowledge

Leadership is exercised by public actors through hands-on interventions that may either enhance or inhibit the development of common understandings and knowledge among stakeholders central to co-production (Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Page, 2010). Empirical research points to the fact that facilitating joint learning and production of knowledge may be a difficult point for public actors who tend to favor certain forms of knowledge at the expense of joint development of knowledge among stakeholders. This may take the form of introducing dominant framing of the challenges and possible solutions dealt with by the collaboration (Barnes, Newman, Knops, & Sullivan, 2003; Edelenbos et al., 2011) – a dominant framing that may well result in de-legitimization and exclusion of the knowledge and resources brought to the collaborative process by citizens and other external stakeholders.

The following two examples from the cases of Ikast-Brande and Holbæk illustrates how a lack of sense-giving/integrative leadership (Ospina & Foldy, 2010) may contribute to the creation of a glass ceiling in collaborative processes, thereby possibly inhibiting external stakeholders from contributing to the co-production process with their knowledge and resources through internal exclusion (Young, 2000).

Inhibiting the knowledge and resources of stakeholders

In the co-production case of Ikast-Brande the framing of the co-production initiative as 'radical innovation' came to affect the way the facilitative leadership was executed by the public actors. Frontline workers in the municipality working closely with the elderly were invited to participate in the collaborative process, but their potential resources and contributions were excluded by the process de facto de-legitimizing them as participants in the collaboration. Inherent in the top managers framing of the initiative as 'radical innovation' was a notion, that 'disturbance' of the stakeholders' mental pictures was a prerequisite for obtaining results. Thus the external consultants facilitating the collaborative process came to see it as their task to 'disturb' the mental images of the stakeholders. This 'disturbance-framing', however, inhibited the professionals from applying their professional knowledge in the collaboration process by taking a critical position towards the ideas being launched in the process, as criticism may be interpreted as a lack of 'willingness to be disturbed' or as 'resistance' against innovation and new ways of thinking. Thus, the 'disturbance' framing was used to de-legitimize the professional knowledge and experience of the frontline workers as they were considered illegitimate in the context of this 'radical innovation process'.

A similar process of de-legitimizing certain stakeholders and certain interpretations and arguments took place in the Holbæk case, excluding the potential knowledge and resources contributed by

some of the external stakeholders. The top management framed the co-production process of 'Together in Holbæk' as an initiative to develop the entire municipality as opposed to focusing on the smaller, local communities within the municipality. This framing was used by public actors facilitating the co-production process to de-legitimize the knowledge and interpretations of stakeholders arguing from a community point of view. For instance, parents living in smaller rural communities in the municipality, who underlined the significance of local schools for the sustainability of their local area and the thriving of their children, were rejected by the facilitators as representing 'illegitimate' special interests. Another significant intervention by the public actors was framing the task of the change group as developing (new and cheaper) ideas for 'sustainable schools and kindergartens'. According to the public actors only professional and economic sustainability were valuable arguments in this context. Thus, the public actors facilitating the collaborative process were not inclined to re-frame their dominant framing of challenges and possible solutions or to let the external stakeholders challenge their knowledge monopoly. This resulted in a collaborative process dominated by municipal knowledge and only to a limited degree resulting in joint learning and joint development of knowledge.

The 'defining' leadership interventions executed by public actors in the two co-production processes are in line with research pointing to a tendency of public administrators to protect their realm of power and influence against external stakeholders (Barnes et al., 2007; Hajer & Versteeg, 2005; Newman et al., 2004). It may also be seen as public actors seeking to take responsibility for the output of co-production processes, thus acting according to a 'logic of appropriateness', i.e. an institutionalized perception of 'the right thing to do' in a certain situation (March & Olsen, 1995).

5. How does the glass ceiling affect the quality of co-production processes?

The previous section illustrated how public actors in the two co-production initiatives exercise indirect and discursive power that contribute to constructing an invisible barrier to the participation and influence of external stakeholders. The aim of this section is to discuss the consequences for co-production processes.

How to understand quality of co-production processes?

In the following I will discuss and elaborate on the ways in which the 'glass ceiling' may affect the quality of the co-production processes – and thus the expected positive outcome and 'transformational' potential of co-production argued by scholars and practitioners alike (Boyle & Harris, 2010; Durose et al., 2013; Needham & Carr, 2009). The notion of 'co-production quality' is derived from the definition of co-production presented earlier underlining active participation, collaboration and synergy as constituting factors in co-production.

Thus, discussing and assessing the quality of co-production processes comprises on the one hand the **'democratic quality'** of the co-production processes (Vanleene, Verschuere, & Voets, 2016) in terms of inclusion of citizens and other relevant and affected external stakeholders and their possibility of exerting influence. And on the other hand the quality of the collaboration taking place among the stakeholders designated by the degree of **'collaborative advantage'** in terms of synergy achieved in the co-production process (Huxham, 1996). Co-production processes are supposed to integrate the resources and contributions offered by different actors and thus to accomplish results that could not have been reached by one actor alone. At the same time co-production aims at developing qualitatively different relations between public bodies and civil society/citizens. Thus, the relational synergy in co-production stems from the potential transformation of roles and changes in the distribution of power between actors in the co-production process.

What can we learn from the two cases?

The question now is: In which ways may the 'glass ceiling' affect the quality of co-production processes, i.e. on the one hand the 'democratic quality' in terms of inclusion and influence and on the other hand 'collaborative advantage' in terms of synergy?

My claim here is that the leadership interventions undertaken by public actors in the two co-production cases seem to be counterproductive, as they tend to exercise power in ways that diminish rather than build up the quality of co-productive processes. In other words, the 'glass ceiling' contributes to reducing the quality of co-production in several ways.

The Ikast-Brande case illustrated how the quality of co-production can be affected negatively by de facto exclusion and de-legitimization of affected and relevant stakeholders from the co-production process – in this case elderly citizens and professionals in the field of elderly care. The affected and relevant actors were given a marginal role in the process and thus were not granted the opportunity to influence the co-production process. Also, the top managers chose to ignore the alternative framings advanced by other actors which resulted in a low degree of ownership and anchorage of the initiative among employees as well as citizens. These factors all reduced the 'democratic quality' of this co-production process.

Also – and more importantly – the 'collaborative advantage' of the co-production process was affected negatively by the leadership interventions. A catalogue of innovation ideas was produced in the co-production process, but it lacked anchorage among the relevant actors inside and outside the organization, thus having very little chances of being implemented. Also, the leadership interventions exerted by the public actors did not aim at achieving synergy by empowering civil society actors or changing relations or roles among the participants. Instead, exerting leadership

based on mistrust and the need to 'disturb' the mental images of the participants resulted in disempowerment and de-legitimization of central stakeholders thereby preventing them from taking an active role as 'co-designers' or co-producers' in the process. The leadership interventions executed by the public actors supported a notion of co-production that corresponds with what Pestoff calls 'enforced' co-production aiming at 'making the citizens accountable', i.e. coopting them in the municipal welfare agenda (Pestoff, 2016; Ulrich, 2016).

In the case from **Holbæk** the public actors reacted to an ambiguous formulation of objectives and an inherent pressure to 'deliver' output within a relatively short time span by exercising a form of defining leadership which prevented the civil sector actors from taking an active and influential role of co-designers (Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2015) of innovative solutions. Rather, the pressure to 'deliver' resulted in the public actors exercising defining leadership which in practice blocked the way for the framing and resources of other stakeholders to unfold in the co-production process, thereby limiting the collaborative and innovative potential of the process.

The discursive power exercised in this initiative thereby prevented the resources of civil society actors from being taken into account, as the municipal framing of challenges and possible solutions was predominant. This in turn affected the 'collaborative advantage' created in the process, as the everyday experiences and other forms of knowledge contributed by the local citizens were de-legitimized. Thus, the output objective formulated by the municipality, i.e. developing innovative ideas for savings on schools and kindergartens, was not accomplished by the 'change group', as the 'glass ceiling' inhibited potential innovation and synergy to spring from the collaboration. This co-production case may be labelled 'consultative' (Needham & Carr, 2009), as the civil society participants were given a possibility to voice their needs and preferences, but no transformation occurred in the relations or distribution of power among the actors.

Conclusion

The two case studies analyzed here offer a number of insights into the relation between leadership, power and co-production. As the two co-production cases have been selected according to an 'extreme positive case' and a 'maximum variation' logic, the conclusions drawn may be generalized analytically to other top-down co-production cases. The study aims at contributing to the research field by exploring the leadership- and power-dimension, which is under researched in co-production as well as collaborative governance. Based on the current 'transformative' discourse applied by public managers and researchers to co-production, the study set out to investigate, how hands-off and hands-on leadership interventions executed by public actors to shape the interactive governance arena of co-production, end up affecting the quality of the co-production process – and thus the possible outcomes in terms of innovative new solutions to welfare challenges. The study has been inspired by the notion of the 'glass ceiling' of co-production discovered by Pestoff (2012a) as placing an invisible barrier to the participation and

influence of external stakeholders in co-production processes.

Examining two top-down co-production initiatives from Danish municipalities, this study has shown how power is executed in by public actors in indirect and discursive ways that in turn result in inclusion and exclusion of challenges and possible solutions, stakeholders and their ideas and resources. The study has identified three specific leadership interventions applied by public actors in the two co-production cases, that contribute to building a 'glass ceiling', i.e. framing the challenge, setting goals that exert a pressure to 'deliver' and establishing a municipal monopoly of knowledge. Furthermore, it has demonstrated that not only citizens, but also professionals working within the municipality, may be affected by the 'glass ceiling'.

Another aim of the study has been to examine the effect of the glass ceiling on the quality of the co-production initiatives. To this end a notion of co-production quality has been developed comprising on the one hand the 'democratic quality' and on the other hand the 'collaborative advantage' in terms of product and relational synergy. Based on the analysis of the two co-production initiatives, the study concluded that the 'glass ceiling' constructed through execution of framing and defining power affects both the democratic quality and the collaborative advantage of co-production processes. Leadership interventions such as strict deadlines, measurable deliveries and mistrust in stakeholders, do not support collaboration between autonomous actors. These interventions, to the contrary, influence the collaboration negatively, causing a low quality of co-production to unfold. A 'pressure to deliver' influences the leadership interventions of public actors in terms of exercising 'defining' leadership by establishing and maintaining the public agencies' framing of the challenge, the legitimate actors and possible themes and solutions to be included in the co-production process. This lack of 'sense-giving' leadership exercised by the civil servants tends to reduce the quality and thus the public value of the co-production process in terms of innovative solutions to welfare challenges.

The paper has highlighted the importance of exploring the power-dimension of co-production and of challenging the normative implications communicated by practitioners and researchers alike that co-production implies 'collaboration among equal parties' and 'the sharing of power and influence'. By considering co-production as unpolitical and devoid of power, there is a risk of avoiding central questions such as the democratic quality of co-production processes and their de facto contributions to 'transforming' the welfare system.

By examining these kinds of questions this study has pointed to the risk of 'a narrative of co-production' applied by public actors and researchers alike. A narrative that conceals the existence of 'invisible' power being executed, possibly resulting either in the cooptation of citizens and other stakeholders into the agenda of the municipality or in co-production processes that lack the 'transformative' quality formulated by researchers and practitioners.

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