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Leading co-production: Three leadership styles and how they affect the quality and public value of co-production processes

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to contribute to the scholarly debate on co-production by advancing our understanding of the role played by leadership in co-production processes both conceptually and empirically. The key question raised in the paper is: How do different leadership styles executed by public managers affect the quality and public value of co-production processes? Leadership in co-production processes is explored through a lens of historical institutionalism perceiving co-production initiatives as an attempt to introduce a temporary collaborative arena in a context of hierarchical governance. Thus, co-production initiatives are seen as operating in a 'hybrid democracy' being subject to governance and institutional tensions. This places public actors in an institutional cross pressure coped with by developing different leadership styles.

Drawing on three qualitative case studies of 'most likely' co-production cases in Danish municipalities, the study identifies three different leadership styles applied by the public managers in coping with the conflicting governance logic i.e. a 'selective', a 'divided' and a 'linking' strategy respectively. It demonstrates how the different strategies enacted by the managers affect the quality and consequently the value creation and innovation potential of the co-production process. Whereas the 'selective' and 'divided' strategies are shown to hamper co-production, the 'linking' strategy applied by public managers is shown to enhance collaboration, resulting in a relatively higher quality of the co-production process and a better public value.

Introduction

Currently, co-production is 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, enhance innovation and increase public value (Bovaird & Löffler, 2012; Osborne, 2010), thus aiming at innovating – and potentially transforming - western welfare systems.

The paper contributes empirically to the literature on co-production by analyzing three co-production cases set in a Danish context, i.e. a universalistic welfare state characterized by an extensive degree of decentralization, a relatively big, well-functioning public sector and a strong well-organized civil society (Sørensen & Torfing, 2009; Voorberg, Tummers, et al., 2015). It hereby adds to the empirical literature on co-production, the majority of which draws on an Anglo-Saxon and North European (Dutch, Belgian and German) context. The study analyzes three Danish co-production cases at the municipal level selected on the basis of a positive extreme logic as they are launched as part of an ambitious strategy in municipalities that may be considered 'frontrunners' within this field.

The paper offers an analysis of co-production from a governance perspective, thereby

conceptualizing co-production as a form 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).

This development challenges managers in public organizations and underlines the need for leadership styles that facilitate collaboration and cooperative problem solving (Ansell & Gash, 2012; Van Wart, 2013). Current research underlines the central role of leadership in supporting interaction in governance processes involving a wide range of different actors (Ansell & Gash, 2007; de Jongh, 2013; Keast & Mandell, 2014; Klijn, Steijn, & Edelenbos, 2010; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). Thus, the leadership dimension is pivotal in co-production processes. This paper argues that leadership is essential for the quality and public value of co-production processes and sets out to identify different leadership styles and examine how they influence co-production processes.

Research in the field of co-production is characterized by a range of different approaches and research traditions (Brandsen & Honig, 2016) focusing primarily on the motives for co-production, the organizational prerequisites for effective co-production, and the impact of co-production (Verschuere, Brandsen, & Pestoff, 2012). However, with a few exceptions (Pestoff, 2016; Schlappa & Imani, 2013, 2016; Tortzen, 2016) research within this field has not given much attention to leadership of co-production, leaving a gap to be explored by this study.

Leadership in co-production processes is explored through a lens of historical institutionalism perceiving co-production initiatives as an attempt to introduce a temporary collaborative arena in a context of hierarchical governance, i.e. introducing elements of network governance 'in the shadow of hierarchy' (Scharpf, 1997; Torfing & Triantafillou, 2011). The argument here is, that co-production initiatives – like other forms of collaborative governance - operate in a 'hybrid democracy' (Edelenbos, Van Buuren, & Klijn, 2013; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004; van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2013) and are thus subject to governance and institutional tensions. This places public actors in an institutional cross pressure (Barnes, Newman, & Sullivan, 2007) which they cope with through different leadership styles. Leadership styles that in turn affect the quality and public value of the co-production process. The paper identifies three different leadership styles, i.e. a *divided*, a *linking* and a *selective* leadership style and raises the following questions: *What characterizes the different leadership styles executed by public actors in co-production processes? And how do they affect the quality and public value of co-production processes?*

The paper is divided into five main sections. The first section outlines the theoretical concepts for the analysis defining co-production and leadership and conceptualizing quality and public value of co-production processes. The paper then briefly presents the strategy for case selection and presents the three Danish municipal co-production cases. The third section describes and

characterizes three different leadership styles identified in the co-production processes. While the following section discusses how these leadership styles influence the quality - and thus the value creation and innovation potential of the co-production processes. Finally, in the last paragraph, the paper draws conclusions and suggestions for further research.

Theorizing co-production quality, public value and leadership

This section outlines the conceptual framework for the analysis, defining the concepts of co-production and leadership and conceptualizing the quality and public value of co-production processes.

Defining co-production

In this paper I apply the term **co-production** to designate collaboration between a variety of public and civil society actors on both the input and output side of the policy circle (Andersen & Espersen, 2017; Bovaird & Löffler, 2012; Pestoff, 2012). In line with the New Public Governance approach (which I will unfold in the next paragraph) I perceive 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 (Boyle, Coote, Sherwood, & Slay, 2010; 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, possibly resulting in social innovation. These dimensions will be further elaborated later in this section and applied in the analysis of the quality of co-production processes.

The paper assumes that leadership of co-production processes will be characterized by conflicting notions of co-production stemming from different governance logics. It will examine how public actors cope with these governance tensions by developing different leadership styles. In the following I will unfold two conflicting notions of co-production stemming from two conflicting approaches to governance.

Two different notions of co-production

Through time scholars have ascribed the concept of co-production different and sometimes

conflicting meanings. This can be understood in the light of the different governance paradigms, which have influenced the term since it was first developed by Ostrom et al. (2012; 1981). The claim here is that public managers leading co-production processes are acting in a cross pressure between different approaches to governance and thus to co-production. For the purpose of this study, I will focus solely on two of the three dominant governance paradigms identified in public administration research (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011), i.e. the New Public Management (NPM) and the New Public Governance (NPG) paradigms, as co-production takes up only a marginal role in the third paradigm, Traditional Public Administration (Pestoff, 2016).

These two governance paradigms build on different principles for coordination and organization of public governance and are based on different views concerning the relation between the state, the market and the civil society. They also spring from profoundly different assumptions about the roles of public administrators, politicians and citizens and what the relation should be between the public sphere and the civil society (Moynihan & Thomas, 2013). While NPM is based on the notion of hierarchy and separation (unicentric governance), NPG stresses collaboration and equality (pluricentric governance). Empirically, the different governance paradigms exist as 'sedimented layers' in public governance (Greve & Ejersbo, 2013; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). The two governance approaches may be understood as mental models or 'institutional logics' with inherent norms on sense-making, leadership and decision making that influence the role perception and behavior of the actors in governance processes (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011; Torfing, 2013; Waldorff, Kristensen, & Ebbesen, 2014).

The NPM approach to co-production

NPM constitutes a variety of reforms and governance initiatives introduced since the 1980's as a reaction to the static governance ideal of TPA (Hood, 1991), that sees the market as the central governance principle. An important endeavor is to make governance more efficient and user-friendly by introducing methods from private enterprises. In this approach co-production is seen as a way to enhance the quality and effectiveness/efficiency of the public sector through targeting public services better and possibly achieve innovation. Thus, co-production is perceived as a possible answer to austerity in the production of welfare services. The NPM notion of co-production takes place at the output side of the public policy circle, i.e. between professionals and service users. The traditional division between policy and administration is thus maintained. This notion of co-production is characterized by economic rationality and a functional perspective that perceive citizens and users as rational, benefit maximizing actors (Jakobsen & Andersen, 2013; van Eijk & Steen, 2014). The value of co-production is measured in terms of specific, measurable results (output), related to formulated goals (Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2014).

The NPG approach to co-production

NPG designates 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). In this approach network is the central principle of governance, and the state is considered an open system collaborating with external actors on solving concrete governance tasks through co-governance (Osborne, 2006, 2010; Wagenaar, 2007). Co-production understood as a form of co-governance between public actors and citizens/civil society is at the center of this governance approach. Co-production may take place both on the output and input-side of the political circle and include a wide range of public as well as private actors, i.e. individual citizens, local communities and civil society organizations. Civil society and citizens are perceived as active partners in network governance and development of the welfare society (Osborne, 2010; Pestoff, 2008). This notion focusses on the social and political dimensions of co-production and stresses the democratic and empowerment potentials as a form of 'public value' (Bovaird & Löffler, 2012; Richardson & Durose, 2013). 'Soft' outcomes such as enhancing social capital, networks and relations between actors are seen as valuable in this understanding, which also stresses the possibility of redefining the roles and power relations among the actors, thereby achieving innovation (Boyle & Harris, 2010; Cahn & Gray, 2012).

The table below summarizes the main points in the two conflicting notions of co-production:

Different notions of co-production

Governance paradigme	New Public Management	New Public Governance
Central governance principle	The market	Network
Co-production	A means to obtain efficiency and effectiveness	A central governing mechanism
Purpose	Tangible results: Efficiency, quality, user satisfaction	Intangible results: Outcomes and public value in terms of social capital, trust, empowerment, social innovation
Domain	Output: Service	Input and output: Policy, prioritizing, service
Discourse	Economic, administrative	Social, political

Defining the quality of co-production

The notion of 'co-production quality' is derived from the definition of co-production applied here. It comprises on the one hand the '**democratic quality**' of the co-production processes (Vanleene, Verschuere, & Voets, 2016) in terms of inclusion of civil society actors and their possibility of exerting influence. Researchers highlight a 'sense giving' leadership style that helps the actors develop a common understanding of challenges and possible solutions as pivotal to the quality of collaborative processes (Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Page, 2010).

And on the other hand the quality of the collaboration designated by the degree of '**collaborative advantage**' in terms of synergy achieved in the co-production process (Huxham, 1996). The notion of synergy is central to co-production comprising two dimensions: A product dimension and a relational dimension. Co-production processes are supposed to integrate the resources and contributions offered by different actors and thus to accomplish innovative results that could not have been reached by one actor alone. This constitutes the production dimension of synergy. 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. I will thus measure the quality of the co-processes according to the following three criteria: 1. The role and influence given to society actors in the co-production process 2. The degree of product synergy in terms of integration of resources and 3. The degree of relational synergy, i.e. transformation of roles and redistribution of power among actors.

Defining the public value of co-production

Co-production researchers point to the fact that the value of co-production processes is difficult to evidence and that, consequently, the evidence base for co-production is relatively weak (Durose, Needham, Mangan, & Rees, 2015). Empirical research in co-production shows that the value of co-production is primarily to be found in different forms of 'public value' (Bovaird, 2007; Bovaird & Löffler, 2012; Needham & Carr, 2009; OECD, 2011), which according to Bovaird & Löffler (2012) may contain several dimensions, i.e. value to the user and a wider group (network, family) as well as social, environmental and political value.

To conduct a robust assessment of the 'public value' created in the three empirical co-production processes I will combine the following three evaluation parameters: 1. A traditional evaluation: To which extend did the co-production process fulfill the objectives formulated by the public actors? (Dahler-Larsen, 2016), 2. A participatory evaluation: How did the different stakeholders evaluate the benefits of the initiative? (Durose et al., 2015; Glasby & Beresford, 2006) and 3. A 'theory of change' type evaluation: To which extend did the co-production initiative contribute to the type of societal change and value anticipated in the 'transformation discourse'? (Dahler-Larsen, 2016; Durose et al., 2015). Taken together, these three parameters will measure the degree of 'public

value' of each of the three co-production initiatives. Before jumping to the analysis, however, I will present the paper's definition of leadership.

Defining leadership

The study explores leadership executed by public actors in publicly initiated co-production processes. 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; Nye, 2008; Van Wart, 2013).

In line with historic institutionalism (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013) the paper perceives public actors as 'situated agents', i.e. actors whose identity and rationality is shaped by the social and political institutions and communities they are part of and take for granted. Institutions condition and limit the actions of leaders, but not in a deterministic way (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). According to this view, public actors – including managers - act according to a 'logic of appropriateness' in terms of a perception of what is 'the right thing to do' in different situations (March & Olsen, 1995) and develop strategies to cope with the clashes, contradictions and complexities of governance (Waldorff et al., 2014). The claim of this paper is that these coping strategies result in different leadership styles executed by public actors in co-production processes. Before jumping to the analysis, however, I will present the cases and method applied in the empirical analysis.

Three Danish co-production cases: Case selection and method

This study draws on three empirical co-production initiatives from three Danish municipalities, i.e. Holbæk, Roskilde and Ikast-Brande. 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 (Klausen, 2014; 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 three municipalities have also 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 three municipalities included here can be described as 'front runners', as they have all 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', as they represent a 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; Neergaard, 2010).

The three co-production cases

The three cases have all been initiated, framed and facilitated by the municipality as part of a strategic ambition, 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 strategy '*Holbæk I Fællesskab*' ('*Together in Holbæk*') to strengthen and innovate local democracy. All in all, four so called 'change groups' including a variety of public and private actors were established with the task of pointing to possible savings in their specific sector. In this paper I focus on the 'change group' working with children and youth and discussing economic priorities within the field of schools and kindergartens. This 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 Roskilde case is a community initiative labelled '*Zebra City*' based in a vulnerable public housing community in the City of Roskilde. It is framed by the municipality as a way to develop stronger networks and social capital among the local inhabitants. The initiative springs from an innovation strategy developed by the city council. The Zebra City case may be considered a relatively 'mature' initiative, as two rounds of Zebra City projects have already been carried out in other local areas in the municipality of Roskilde. It is organized as a cross-sectorial project managed by a project manager. The initiative can be depicted as a 'co-management' initiative aiming at developing a local community through co-production (Pestoff et al., 2012).

The case from Ikast-Brande 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 '*Mental*

Frikommune ('*Mentally free municipality*') strategy formulated by the municipality that aimed at 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, i.e. the Creative Idea Solutions concept (CIS) involving professionals from a range of different departments within the elder sector. This initiative is a case of co-production framing individual citizens as co-producers of their own welfare service (Pestoff et al., 2012).

The three case initiatives included in this study have all been organized as projects and limited in time. While the initiatives in Holbæk and Ikast-Brande lasted 4-6 months, the Roskilde case extended over two years. The first two cases were studied – as far as possible - from beginning to end, while the Roskilde case was studied for a period of approx. one year. 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. In total 62 policy documents, 43 interviews and 42 hours of observation have been analyzed. All citations from interviews, documents and observations in the analysis stem from my PhD thesis (Tortzen, 2016).

Identifying three leadership styles:

Divided, linking and selective leadership

In the following I will unfold an analysis of the three different leadership styles executed in the three co-production cases. The leadership styles should not be understood as conscious strategies applied by the public managers. Rather, they describe the (more or less unconscious) strategies applied by the public managers to cope with the governance and institutional cross pressure which I have described as inherent in co-production processes. The three leadership styles are based on the analysis of three central leadership interventions performed by public actors in the three cases, i.e. framing of the co-production initiative, setting the objectives and including and mobilizing stakeholders in the co-production processes. The level of management involved varies among the three cases. Top management plays a central role in two of the cases, while the project leader is central to the leadership style in the third case.

The case of Holbæk: A divided leadership style

In the Holbæk case a so called 'change group' was established with an ambition of involving the relevant stakeholders in co-producing innovative solutions to the challenge of austerity in the children's sector. I will characterize the leadership style of the public actors in the Holbæk case as *divided*, as the leadership interventions executed in this case were simultaneously drawing on a NPM logic and a NPG logic. Leadership of the co-production process was characterized by an ambiguous framing, conflicting objectives and an approach to selecting and mobilizing stakeholders drawing both on a representative and consultative NPM logic and a systemic and

collaborative NPG logic.

Ambiguous framing of the ‘change group’

The Holbæk case was from the outset characterized by an ambiguous framing on the part of the top management. Two different storylines were presented, i.e. a ‘co-production’ storyline drawing on the NPG governance logic and an ‘austerity’ storyline drawing on the NPM governance logic. The ‘co-production’ storyline framed the change group as an example of co-production and as a collaborative innovation initiative (Document, 19.12.13) that would enable organizational learning. This storyline depicted the initiative as part of an ambitious project to develop local democracy in Holbæk. This ‘co-production’ storyline underlined innovation and new forms of collaboration between politicians, citizens and other stakeholders. So the change group was framed as an initiative that depicts a whole new way of governing. Expressed in the following by the mayor of Holbæk welcoming the change group: *(this initiative) must produce something more than just a better bottom line – it will help change the way we work as a municipality...we will join forces on the most important areas and develop a shared understanding of challenges and main tasks..*” (Tortzen, 2016).

Whereas the ‘austerity’ storyline which was also applied by the public actors framed the ‘change group’ in the light of the economic challenge and depicts the challenges and possible solutions in traditional, administrative terms pointing to existing policies, forecasts and data produced by the municipality (Tortzen, 2016). In this storyline challenges were depicted as ‘well known’ and ‘possible solutions’ were described in terms of a range of ‘political choices’ prescribed by the administration. In line with this framing, the public administrators applied economic calculations which highlighted the saving potential in structural changes of the schools: *“..we have been drawing and calculating – and have arrived at a plan, which makes it possible to save 21,5 mio d.kr. without lowering the level of service, through structural changes alone”* (Tortzen, 2016). In this storyline, thus, the agenda was predefined by the public administrators, leaving only little room for the stakeholders to contribute their views of challenges and solutions. The economic agenda was predominant, focusing on the possible economic gains from the co-production process and downplaying the innovation and democratic agenda.

Torn between competing objectives

The divided leadership style was mirrored also in the public managers and politicians formulating two competing objectives of the change groups, one aimed at producing a tangible result (output) in line with the NPM logic, the other aimed at developing a new type of process and collaboration (outcome) in line with the NPG logic. 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" (Tortzen, 2016).

The output objective was formulated in line with the framing of the change group as part of a 'budget challenge' and placing it within an 'austerity' discourse. Here, the main task of the group 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"* (Tortzen, 2016). This leadership style was characterized by a focus on 'delivery' on the one hand and on the other hand a focus on 'deliberation' (Skelcher, Mathur, & Smith, 2005). In the design of the process and the framing of challenges, tasks and objectives of the change group the public managers acted controlling and hierarchical in line with the NPM logic. Whereas their leadership style in facilitating meetings and dialogues between participants was aimed at developing trust and relations among the participants in line with an NPG logic.

Inclusion of stakeholders: Systemic and representative logic

The change group consisted of approximately 25 participants who were handpicked by the municipality and personally invited to join the group. The selection of participants was described by the municipality as based on 'systems thinking' in line with the NPG approach, the logic being *"to include all groups of actors with an interest in or knowledge about the working theme of the group"* (Tortzen, 2016). At the same time however, participants were selected on the basis of a 'representative, consultative' logic in line with a NPM logic. Parents, municipal employees and pupils were selected from among representatives in existing democratic organs in the involved institutions, e.g. parent councils of the schools and kindergartens and other existing consultative organs such as Holbæk Youth City Council and the Council of the Disabled. The civil servants did not succeed, however, in mobilizing representatives from local enterprises and leisure organizations to strengthen the diversity and creativity of the group.

Conclusively, this co-production process was characterized by the public actors executing a divided *leadership style* drawing simultaneously on a NPM and a NPG logic resulting in a certain degree of ambiguity in the framing and goal setting as well as inclusion of stakeholders.

The case of Roskilde: A linking leadership style

The Zebra City initiative took place in a 'vulnerable' public housing community in Roskilde characterized by social problems. It was aimed at empowering the local citizens and strengthening the social networks between local actors in the area by bringing them together in a range of activities. The 'Zebra City' initiative was characterized by a *linking* leadership style, which handled the inherent governance tensions in terms of conflicting frames and a multiplicity of goals by seeking to link the different actors, interest and resources. The project manager, who played a central leadership role in this initiative, was aware of the different interests and objectives to be

handled in the process. Perceiving the complexity and multiplicity of logics as a condition for co-production, this actor took on a role as 'catalyst' aiming at linking citizens and public administrators from different sectors with different interests, goals and resources through outreach and mapping and linking existing initiatives.

Conflicting framings of Zebra City

The framing of the 'Zebra City' by the top managers was characterized by two partly conflicting storylines i.e. a 'network' storyline drawing on the NPG logic and an 'active citizen' storyline drawing on the NPM logic. The 'network' storyline framed the initiative according to a New Public Governance logic giving the municipality a role of facilitating 'network- and community-building' and the 'creation of synergy among local resources'. According to this 'network' storyline the role of the municipality was to help build strong local communities and networks: *"The local communities must be strengthened, so that challenges can be solved locally and with the resources that are at hand"* (Tortzen, 2016).

However, a competing 'active citizen' framing was introduced. Rather than focusing on the resources of local citizens and communities, this storyline focused on the active participation of citizens. It aimed at gaining legitimacy among local citizens for existing and future municipal welfare services and at developing active citizenship among the inhabitants. This storyline was influenced by the politicians, who were interested in strengthening the representative democratic institutions. It was expressed in the following way by the welfare director: *"The aim of Zebra City is to support active local communities.. and at the same time to create a forum and a proximity between the city council and the local citizens.."* (Tortzen, 2016). Based on this 'active citizen' storyline the public administrators formulated a range of specific output objectives of the initiative, drawing on a NPM understanding of governance.

Linking a multiplicity of goals

In spite of the Zebra City initiative being framed in terms of an NPG storyline focusing on 'local networks' the public managers decided on a number of performance targets measuring the output of the initiative in terms of specific activities and the number of citizens mobilized. Project targets were set in terms of a certain number of activities initiated locally, a certain number of citizens engaged in these activities and a wish to increase the number of citizens participating in existing local voluntary organizations: *"The objective of the Zebra City project is to support local communities, develop the quality of life and accomplish at least three citizen-driven activities"* (Tortzen, 2016).

The Zebra City project was characterized by a complexity of goals expressed by different actors. At least three political objectives were expressed for the 'Zebra City' project: Firstly the initiative should serve as a platform for the politicians' meetings in person with local citizens. Secondly, it

should help tie the many different local communities of the municipality together. And thirdly, the politicians hoped that this particular Zebra project would reduce the social vulnerability of the neighborhood and help getting it off the so called 'ghetto list'. Applying a linking leadership style, the project manager sought consciously to link and prioritize the different goals: "*I was left with a multiplicity of goals, which I have elaborated on in an ongoing process.. by prioritizing objectives that are meaningful in this context*" (Tortzen, 2016). The linking leadership style consisted in facilitating collaboration among stakeholders on local activities and aimed at simultaneously meeting the municipal performance targets and contributing to the strengthening of local networks.

Mobilization of stakeholders: Reach-out and linking existing initiatives

Mobilization of stakeholders in this co-production process was executed through a linking leadership style characterized by mapping and linking existing initiatives, resources and actors in the local area and reaching out to key actors and marginalized groups in the area. Also, the Zebra City project was characterized by meetings open to everybody in the area.

The public administrators in Zebra City sought to link actors and resources in the area by reaching out to public institutions such as the local school and kindergarten, the nursing home and health center. This was considered a way of linking existing initiatives in the area such as health initiatives, a project of garbage sorting and plans for an urban garden. Other reach out activities included collaborating with employees of the local housing company and with local citizens engaged in other initiatives. Furthermore, a range of reach-out activities were executed aiming at including marginalized or vulnerable citizens such as ethnic groups and mentally vulnerable inhabitants from a local institution. In spite of this, a certain degree of 'self-selection' took place among the local actors, resulting in a relatively biased participation in the project. Citizens of other ethnic origin than Danish were clearly underrepresented in the Zebra City project.

Conclusively, the *linking* leadership style practiced by public servants in the Zebra City case was characterized by attempting to link together different actors, interests and goals through outreach activities and collaboration activities.

The case of Ikast-Brande: A selective leadership style

In Ikast-Brande the co-production initiative was aimed at budget savings in the administration of elderly care. Public managers in the municipality of Ikast-Brande applied a *selective* leadership style in coping with the conflicting governance logics. This strategy favored a NPM logic and was selective in that it ignored competing governance logics. It was executed by the top managers in spite of widespread disagreement and opposition among leaders in the organization arguing for other governance logics and notions of co-production. The selective leadership style was expressed through the top managements' framing of the initiative and furthermore by their hiring

a team of external consultants working according to an understanding of innovation focusing on economic savings and the introduction of new technology in line with the NPM logic. Finally, it was executed through selective inclusion of stakeholders and through the execution of hands-on facilitation that built on distrust in the participants' everyday experiences and 'disturbance' of their mental assumptions as a way to create innovation.

NPM framing with a 'twist'

The co-production initiative in Ikast-Brande was part of a strategic project initiated by the municipality to redefine and develop the local welfare, which was framed by top management. Drawing on an NPM logic framing the major welfare challenges were framed as austerity and scarcity of labor. Thus, the aim of the initiative was expressed as *"developing radically different, innovative solutions for the welfare of the future"* (Tortzen, 2016). In line with this vision, this specific co-production initiative was framed by the public actors in terms of achieving radically different welfare solutions with less public spending. A central aim was to make the citizens 'take over' some of the work previously done by the municipality. The city manager framed the initiative as follows: *"..we are shifting the welfare production ...trying to make the citizens produce welfare themselves to a larger degree.. We are actually aiming at making the citizens do it themselves – to get rid of them as customers"* (Tortzen, 2016).

The co-production initiative was at the same time, however, tinted by a competing, but subordinate framing describing the citizens as 'resourceful and engaged' and casting the active citizens as drivers of the welfare development. This frame underlined initiatives that aim at developing networks and social relations among citizens stressing 'active citizenship' and 'social responsibility': *"you have arrived at the municipality, where engaged citizens drive the development through initiatives and focus on the interests of the community.."* (Tortzen, 2016). Thus, the framing of the co-production initiative applied by public managers was dominated by an NPM logic spiced up with a 'twist' of NPG storytelling.

Selective leadership focusing on 'radical innovation'

The selective leadership style was executed by the top managers of the municipality in a simple way, i.e. by applying a specific project concept, i.e. the so-called Creative Idea Solution (CIS-concept) executed by a team of external consultants that in practice came to execute leadership in this process.

The objective of the co-production initiative was set by the top managers in advance: To achieve savings of 20 % on the administration of elderly care through 'radical innovation'. The specific 'delivery' of the co-production process would be a catalogue of innovation projects/ideas. The priority of the top managers 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. According to the city manager: *“We need to create a radically different welfare – maybe for less money.. we need to do something different – something dramatically different”* (Tortzen, 2016).

This selective leadership style gave priority to the NPM approach focusing on streamlining, innovation and technological opportunities. At the same time framing professionals and citizens as benefit maximizing actors that need to be ‘disturbed’ to be able to come up with innovative solutions. The top managers of the municipality thus ignored widespread skepticism among managers and public servants in the organization towards this NPM logic. They chose to proceed with the initiative following the CIS concept attempting to achieve innovation primarily through the introduction of new technology and self-service solutions.

Excluding and distrusting stakeholders

Mobilization and inclusion of stakeholders in the selective leadership style was characterized by the exclusion of central stakeholder groups. The elderly citizens that may be considered a central stakeholder group were assigned a weak and marginal role in the co-production initiative. The managers expressed doubt that the elderly citizens would be able to contribute to the objective of ‘radical innovation’ and the top managers saw ‘disturbance’ of the stakeholders mental pictures as a prerequisite for obtaining results.

The selective leadership style also resulted in another group of stakeholders, i.e. the professionals that work with the elderly on a daily basis, being partly excluded from 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 external 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”* (Tortzen, 2016). Thus the selective leadership style resulted in de facto exclusion 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.

Conclusively, this co-production process was characterized by a *selective* leadership style giving priority to a NPM understanding of governance and co-production, which framed the initiative in terms of austerity and radical innovation and which excluded central stakeholder groups from the process.

Discussion: How do different leadership styles affect the quality and public value of co-production processes?

The analysis of the three co-production cases has identified three different leadership styles applied by public administrators in different levels in the organization, i.e. a *divided* leadership style in Holbæk, a *linking* style in Roskilde and a *selective* leadership style in Ikast-Brande. A central question, now, is: How do these leadership styles applied by public actors influence the quality and the public value of co-production processes? In the following I will discuss the 'co-production quality' of the three co-production processes characterized by different leadership styles. For each of the three cases I will focus on the 'democratic quality' in terms of inclusion and influence and on the 'collaborative advantage' in terms of synergy. For each case, I will subsequently discuss the extent of public value created.

Holbæk: Consultative co-production with limited public value

The *divided* leadership style applied by the public managers in Holbæk meant that leadership in this case was exercised in an ambiguous way, drawing on both NPM and NPG approaches without reconciling them. This affected the quality of the co-production process in several ways. Although some groups (the young and community actors) were only marginally included in the process, the civil society actors were offered relatively good opportunities to participate and to speak, thanks to the facilitative leadership of the process inspired by a NPG logic. However, the possibility of the civil society actors to influence the definition of challenges and possible solutions in the co-production process was relatively limited.

The public managers reacted to the inherent pressure from the NPM approach to 'deliver' output (savings) within a relatively short time span by exercising a form of defining leadership which prevented the civil sector actors from taking a role of co-designers (Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2015) of innovative solutions. The divided leadership style exercised in this initiative also prevented the resources of civil society actors from being taken into account, as the economic agenda was predominant. All in all the divided leadership style lead to a co-production process which I will characterize as scoring relatively low in both in 'democratic quality' and in the degree 'collaborative advantage' affecting both the value creation and innovation potential of the process. 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.

Limited public value

The co-production process characterized by a divided leadership style created a limited public value. The output objective formulated by the municipality, i.e. innovative ideas for saving 22 mio d.kr. on schools and kindergartens, was not accomplished by the 'change group'. The group

instead formulated a list of principles to be used in the political prioritization of the field. The outcome objective in terms of developing new forms of collaboration between the municipality and the stakeholders was met partly – and most successfully within the municipality itself, as the initiative succeeded in bringing employees, municipal leaders and politicians together in a dialogue on a specific welfare area.

This value is also reflected in the fact that the initiative scores relatively high in terms of participatory value, as the opportunity to discuss challenges and priorities with other stakeholder groups is valued by the participants. Particularly, the employees value the possibility of meeting up with parents and politicians to discuss. As one head of school says: *“I believe in working in a more open and democratic form.. which gives more legitimacy than lying to the employees and the parents”* (head of school). Generally, the stakeholders value the symbolic gesture of the municipality inviting them to participate in a dialogue – even if they are not given much influence on decision. So the co-production process does produce some value in terms of legitimacy.

However, in terms of the third assessment parameter, i.e. ‘transformational value’, this co-production process scores relatively low. There is no sign that the roles and power relations of stakeholders will be changing as a result of this initiative. 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.

Roskilde: Transformative co-production with some public value

The *linking* leadership style applied in this co-production initiative resulted in the co-production process being open to all kinds of civil society actors. In spite of some challenges with mobilizing citizens of other ethnic origin, this co-production initiative managed to include a wide variety of civil society actors. Also, civil society actors were invited to participate early in the process and thus granted a role as ‘co-initiators’ (Voorberg, Bekkers, et al., 2015) of specific initiatives, although within the framing set by the municipality in terms of citizen driven activities.

An important linking leadership intervention in this initiative was to focus on ‘the common third’, i.e. specific and visible initiatives such as setting up a local choir, establishing an urban garden and a ‘fleemarket for nerds’. Through facilitating collaborative activities among citizens the initiative succeeded in simultaneously meeting the municipal performance targets and contributing to the strengthening of local networks and of individual citizens by serving as an opportunity for vulnerable citizens to take the role as co-initiators and - designers in co-production supported and facilitated by the municipality. All in all the linking leadership style lead to a relatively high score in both the ‘democratic quality’ and the ‘collaborative advantage’ of the co-production process, making it an – at least to some degree - transformative (Needham & Carr, 2009) co-production

process.

Some public value

In terms of public value this initiative came out with a relative high score on public value. The objectives set by the municipality in terms of number of participants, activities etc. were fulfilled, mainly through initiating specific local collaborative activities among the inhabitants in the area. The 'Zebra City' co-production initiative was evaluated mainly positively by the participants, stressing the development of stronger relations among the inhabitants across ethnic groups as well as among the public servants working in the local area. By facilitating collaborative activities among local citizens, voluntary organizations and public administrators, this initiative succeeded in linking different actors, goals and interests and enhancing social innovation. The urban garden is an example of a citizen-initiated and –driven project which according to one of the initiators, a woman with a severe stress diagnosis, would not have been realized without the 'Zebra City' initiative: *"I would not have been able to do this on my own. Many of us have scratches, cracks and dents, but we give what we have."* (Tortzen, 2016).

When evaluated in terms of the contribution to societal changes, this project, like the other two initiatives assessed here, scores relatively low. This is due to the relative isolation of the initiative as well as the scope, which has created value in a relatively limited area for a relatively limited group of people. Also, the initiative has succeeded only to some degree to build bridges between inhabitants of Danish origin and inhabitants with other ethnic backgrounds. The initiative was relatively successful, but at the same time unfolded relatively isolated from the practice of the municipality as a whole, i.e. in a 'safe area' (Aagaard, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2014). Therefore, it is not likely to fundamentally influence or change the roles or relations of public servants in general.

Ikast-Brande: Enforced co-production with little public value

The *selective* leadership style exercised in the Ikast-Brande case resulted in a co-production process characterized by the NPM governance logic. In this case the co-production framing was used by top management to sugar-coate an initiative aimed at achieving budget savings through radical innovation such as digitalization and the introduction of welfare technology. The top managers applied a selective leadership style, not intending to co-produce with citizens and other actors, but rather to co-opt these actors into an agenda decided by the municipal top management.

The affected and relevant civil society actors such as the elderly citizens 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 competing governance logics and notions of co-production advanced by other actors which resulted in a low degree of ownership and anchorage of the initiative among the public servants. Thus, the 'democratic quality' of this process scores very low.

In terms of 'collaborative advantage' this initiative also scores low. A catalogue of innovation ideas was produced, but it lacked anchorage among the relevant actors inside and outside the organization thus having very little chances of being implemented. Also, the leadership style did not aim at achieving synergy by empowering civil society actors or changing relations or roles among the participants. Instead, the selective leadership style was rooted in a notion of co-production that corresponds with what Pestoff calls 'enforced' co-production (Pestoff, 2016) and Ulrich (2016) depicts as co-production 'making the citizens accountable'. This approach sees co-production as a possible way of substituting public welfare services. All in all, the selective leadership style based on a NPM governance logic did not support the quality of the co-production process in terms of democratic quality, synergy and sustainable social innovation.

Low score on public value

In terms of public value, the Ikast-Brande case scored low on fulfilling the objectives set by the municipality. The goal to save 20 % of the administrative budget was not fulfilled through the co-production initiative. An idea catalogue with a range of innovation projects was produced in the process, but owing to a low degree of ownership and anchoring in the organization, these ideas were not implemented. Also, further investments were needed to realize these radically innovative project suggestions.

The participant value of the process can be described as relatively low, as several of the participants both among employees and leaders express doubts at the value of the innovation ideas and particularly at the possibility of them being implemented in the organization. Expressed by one of the participating civil servants: *"I wonder, how much benefit will come from this – and if we will take it further. We are a busy department, you know, with many ongoing tasks..."*. Some participants, however, point to value created by 'disturbing' the mental pictures of the employees and developing their understanding of feasible innovative changes in the field of elderly care. Finally, this initiative scores very low on the transformative dimension of contribution to changing the roles and power relations of actors, as co-opting citizens rather than empowering them was the focus of this NPM inspired leadership style.

Conclusion

The three case studies analyzed here offer a number of insights into the relation between leadership and co-production. As the three 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 link between leadership and co-production. Based on the current 'transformative' discourse applied by public managers and researchers on co-production, the study sets out to investigate, how the leadership styles

exercised by public actors influence the quality and thus the 'transformative' potential of co-production processes. A main assumption of the study is, that co-production can be understood as 'hybrid' governance processes attempting at introducing collaborative elements in the shadow of hierarchy.

Examining three top-down co-production initiatives from Danish municipalities, this study has shown how different notions of governance and co-production are inherent in co-production initiatives placing the public actors exercising leadership in an institutional cross pressure.

The study has identified three different leadership styles applied by public actors in coping with the institutional cross pressure, i.e. a *divided*, a *linking* and a *selective* leadership style. While the divided leadership style is torn between a NPM and a NPG governance logic, the linking style attempts at linking the two logics, and the selective leadership style prefers one logic, i.e. the NPM approach, oppressing other governance approaches.

The aim of the study has been to examine the effect of the three different leadership styles on the quality and public value created in the three different co-production initiatives. To this end, notions of quality and public value has been developed and operationalized. The quality of co-production processes are assessed on the basis of 'democratic quality' and 'collaborative advantage' in terms of product and relational synergy. While public value of co-production processes has assessed applying the following three parameters: goal fulfillment, participant benefit and degree of transformation.

Based on the analysis of the three co-production initiatives, the study concluded that the leadership style exercised by public actors in the co-production process is pivotal to the quality public value and innovation potential of co-production processes. The exercise of leadership interventions rooted in a New Public Management regime, i.e. strict deadlines, measurable deliveries and mistrust in employees and civil society actors, does 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' inherent in the NPM approach influences the leadership style of civil servants in terms of exercise '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 public value of the co-production process.

On the other hand leadership interventions rooted in a New Public Governance regime, i.e. building trust and relations between the participants and focusing on resources and on sense-

giving leadership, do seem to support co-production processes. The study concludes that the best results in terms of quality and public value are obtained through a linking strategy applied by the civil servants, which reflexively copes with the pressure by linking interests, actors and governance logics in co-production processes. This is in line with other research in the field of network governance and collaborative governance which points to 'linking leadership' as conducive for collaboration between autonomous actors (Bekkers, Tummers, & Voorberg, 2014; Klijn et al., 2010; van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2013).

The paper has highlighted the importance of focusing on the leadership dimension of co-production. A further research agenda should include further elaboration of the concepts of quality and public value of co-production as well and the relation between them. Also a further elaboration is needed of different leadership styles exercised in different kinds of co-production processes (levels, sectors, different actors), more in-depth analysis of leadership interventions by different actors involved in such processes, e.g. politicians, top civil servants, street-level employees and citizens and other stakeholders, respectively.

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