Intended Involvement –
How Public Organizations Struggle to Become Co-producers of New Public Values

Magnus Hoppe[1], Mattias Berglund[2], Jacob Annerfors[3], Victoria Bodén[4], Emma Mossberg[5], Malin Sturk[6], Åsa Sundgren Häggberg[7], Jonas Welander[8]

Abstract

The paper is guided by the question of how public organizations can adapt to include citizens as co-producers of public values. To answer it, eleven researchers and civil servants, all involved in the transformation of a collaborative platform encompassing a university and four different public organizations, formed a collaborative and boundary-spanning author. Building on personal expertise and situated organizational experiences we conclude that public organizations do not adapt except for specific confined areas where they can still control and command outcomes important to them. Hence, public organizations struggle to become co-producers of new public values. From the process, we also conclude that academics and civil servants together writing an academic article cannot be viewed as a fertile common ground for equal collaboration and co-production. Nevertheless, it might still work as an interesting boundary-spanning activity for arriving at shared understandings and important insights on for instance why organizational moves from intended to actual involvement appear difficult.

Practical Relevance

> ➢ Involving citizens as co-producers of public values appears more as an interesting idea for public organisations than something they are designed to act upon, given their overall problem of even adapting to their formal collaborative partners. New value-creation collaborations demand new complementary public designs.

> ➢ Agreements at the strategic level in public organizations must be followed by organizational support to the situated practices of individual employees for securing a move from intended involvement to actual involvement at the operational level. If not, trust in expressed intentions risks diminishing, not to say trust between organizational hierarchical levels.

> ➢ Supporting employees to engage in boundary-spanning activities will drive new personal insights, but that does not mean that their host organizations automatically will welcome and use any insights gained outside their own boundaries. Public organizations are encouraged to redesign or create processes to secure this end.

[1]*Corresponding author:* **Magnus Hoppe** (Ph.D.), is an associate professor in business administration at Mälardalen University in Sweden. His research concerns both private and public organizations and spans intelligence, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

[2]**Mattias Berglund** is a PhD Candidate at Mälardalen University and a strategist for social sustainability at Eskilstuna municipality. His research concerns innovation in public organizations.

[3]**Jacob Annerfors** is a business developer at the finance department of the Sörmland Region.

[4]**Victoria Bodén** is a regional innovation strategist at Västmanland Region.

[5]**Emma Mossberg** is the process manager of The Social Contract.

[6]**Malin Sturk** works as a coordinator in the culture and recreation administration at Eskilstuna Municipality.

[7]**Åsa Sundgren Häggberg** is a retired middle manager and former head of operations for recreation activities and prevention at Västerås Municipality.

[8]**Jonas Welander** holds a PhD from Mälardalen University and belongs to the Sustainable Working Life research group. His research concerns primarily working conditions and wellbeing at work for public employees.

Introduction

Public organizations are pressed between adapting to changing and increasing social demands while working with limited funds. The demographic development in particular is a cause for concern. In the region of Sörmland, Sweden, the number of people older than 80 will increase by approximately 60-70 % by the year 2030, and in some municipalities within the region, by as much as 140 %. At the same time, the number of people between the ages of 20 and 64 will not increase. Hence, in the healthcare sector, there will be a lot more people who will need care and very few people tending to them. This is a problem that money will not solve; instead, new ways of working must be applied. The situation is similar in all Swedish regions (Statistics Sweden, 2022; Sveriges kommuner och regioner, 2023a, 2023b).

To handle pressing situations like this, there is a general call for innovation in both democratic systems and democratic institutions (Osborne & Brown, 2005; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013). Public innovation, with new forms of collaboration, is encouraged to meet these demands (Bommert, 2010; Crosby, 't Hart, & Torfing, 2017; Hoppe, 2017b; Lindberg, Sturk, & Zeidlitz, 2020; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). Networked or collaborative governance appears to be an inspiring idea (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Fels, 2008), although costly and hard to lead (Zachrisson, Bjärstig, & Eckerberg, 2018). The only viable solution to meet the unfolding situation seems to be to organize societal services in new ways, involving citizens, civil society and other stakeholders both to explore wants and needs and to meet these wants and needs through the co-production of public value (Moore, 1995) and public good (Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014; Bryson, Sancino, Benington, & Sørensen, 2017; Moore, 2013). There are also plentiful examples of increased stakeholder involvement in public organization services (Lindberg et al., 2020; Shergold, 2008; Zachrisson et al., 2018).

At the same time, participatory processes, as a move from government to governance, constitute a threat to representative democracy and current power balances in municipalities and regional authorities (Fleischer & Carstens, 2022; Sørensen, 2006; Sørensen, Hendriks, Hertting, & Edelenbos, 2020). If public services are organized in new ways, the democratic influence through elected institutions is no longer a given. Benington (2010), with reference to Dewey (1937), stresses that neither is *the public* a given, but must be continuously constructed. Most importantly, the people that build society need to feel a sense of belonging, meaning, purpose and continuity, Benington writes. Similarly, Moore (2014) emphasizes that public servants sometimes need to call the public into being, e.g. in participatory processes. Initiatives to enhance fertile links between citizens and local governments thus appear to be a pressing need for creating public value and securing a democratic society but with possibly less influence from democratic institutions as we have come to know them.

In line with this public sector development, Samhällskontraktet (The Social Contract/TSC) started a transformation process in 2020. TSC was founded in 2009 with the mission to promote collaboration between a core of public organizations consisting of Mälardalen University, Eskilstuna and Västerås municipalities, and up until 2021 also Västmanland and Sörmland regions. Through the transformation process, the overall aim of TSC has changed to explore and through collaboration with any stakeholder find solutions to complex social challenges (Samhällskontraktet, 2023). The aim has become to move from a position for mainly funding research into public issues concerning only the parties involved to a position for facilitating collaborative research in pressing and complex societal issues with any party. It is a move from enclosed and divided collaboration, with clear and separated collaborative roles, to more open and integrated collaborations where the roles are less clear and different actors within and outside each organization can be active and influence parts of the research project throughout its entire extent. This move will allow academic and practical knowledge to be developed simultaneously where the funding public organization will also be responsible for the knowledge they develop and thus can act more easily upon insights reached. The rationale behind this change was that collaborating municipalities and regions generally found it hard to act on the research findings they were presented with, which also tended to be presented too late for them, with not enough value created for them to justify the continuation of the present TSC design and their financial support. Our analysis also concluded that public organization representatives did not feel they were particularly involved in the knowledge creation presented or that they owned

that very knowledge, or that this knowledge could be deployed to promote change. It was simply "not invented here" and could thus be dismissed for several reasons (Hallin, Guziana, Hoppe, & Mörndal, 2014; Hallin, Hoppe, Guziana, Mörndal, & Åberg, 2017; Hoppe, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Mörndal & Hoppe, 2022).

As already briefly mentioned, the complementary goal for the renewal was to expand the collaboration to other actors besides the university and public organizations. Specifically, private organizations and interest groups were seen as important for mustering new and other resources for the common good. However, the most important groups to reach out to were the citizens concerned, the target groups that experienced problems or those in need of new or better services, for instance, lonely elderly people. These should also be engaged in the research process from the start, where design thinking and different kinds of mutual processes involving all sorts of stakeholders along with researchers hosted by living labs, open labs and social labs (Fleischer & Carstens, 2022; Nählinder & Fogelberg Eriksson, 2017; Timmermans, Blok, Braun, Wesselink, & Nielsen, 2020) were used as inspiration (Mörndal & Hoppe, 2022). The intent was to engage as many stakeholders as possible as co-producers or co-creators of public values, specifically including citizens, as Moore (1995) proposes. The new approach was to do research and development work *with* people, which contrasts with more traditional research that is done *on* people, while simultaneously generating actionable knowledge in participating organizations based on people's needs (Lindhult & Axelsson, 2021).

In this transformed approach, several different representatives from participating organizations have been involved from the vice-chancellor and directors to project leaders and a variety of civil servants, all with different individual tasks and agendas, building their own knowledge and ideas along with their own kind of reflection and data preservation (if any). Through this process, several persons were formally appointed in boundary-spanning roles (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981; Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2018, 2021; Williams, 2002), whose task was to align their knowledge with that of the other parties and promote the interests of TSC within their own organization.

It occurred to one of the researchers that in this process it would be interesting to investigate whether researchers and civil servants could write an academic article together, thus also building their own action competence on how to collaborate more directly on a specific task. To achieve this, researchers engaged in the renewal persuaded a few civil servants involved in TSC to be part of a boundary-spanning participatory process centred around forming a collective author in the creation of this article. The article in turn was initially guided by a key question in the transformation process, which is: how can public organizations adapt to include citizens as co-producers of public values? However, as part of the participatory design, all the participants were also encouraged to interpret and adapt the question to make it work for them in their immediate situation. This meant that the research question evolved through the writing process and ended up being quite personal, revolving around a core question that can be interpreted as: How do I perceive the intended transformation of TSC in relation to my own experiences and position within my organization? This more personal question guided the initial inductive analysis, but we moved back to the original question of how public organizations can adapt to include citizens as co-producers of public values in our discussions that form the basis of this article.

Research Design, Method, and Material

The article is the result of a participative co-production, co-creation and co-writing process, initiated in 2019, involving eleven people as follows: five practitioners from four different public organizations, four academics from a local university, a municipal PhD Candidate upholding positions at both the university and one of the municipalities and a process manager responsible for the collaboration within TSC. The mutual writing was based on an ongoing discussion about a key aim of TSC which doubled as the initiating aim for this article, where our writing also worked as a catalyst for deepening both our common discussion and analysis as well as most personal and situated insights, not to say personal bonds and trust that build boundary-spanning potential (Högberg & Sköld, 2023). Our approach can be described as an

evolving pragmatic participatory design within the field of action research (e.g. Coghlan, 2011; Coghlan & Shani, 2014; Shani & Pasmore, 1985).

As described in the introduction, our method encompasses using practitioner participation to understand citizen participation in new ways and creating a common voice that speaks of not just academic insights but practical ones as well. The main contribution lies in this design where we have strived to combine and balance academic perspectives and needs with practical ones. As a result, the analysis is strongly inductive, mainly based on practitioner experiences and the patterns that we could derive from them. We also share some theoretical insights, mainly as described as a point of departure in the introduction, but interestingly so also as theoretical echoes and ideas that have stayed with us, or developed, through the discussion and writing process. As the practitioners' main concern has been to address the stated problem from a practical and situated perspective, we chose to keep the theoretical section of this paper short, focusing on a few central theoretical concepts that emerge as especially relevant for understanding the overall aim of TSC, the present order and the intended path ahead. Later in the process, theoretical references concerning boundary-spanning were added, giving us complementary insights into the organization of the renewal of TSC and the article writing process.

The collective author design challenges the normal divide between theorists and practitioners with regard to the production of academic texts, which according to Bartunek and Rynes (2014) is derived from tensions concerning differing logics in defining and tackling problems, different time dimensions and communication practices as well as different interests and incentives. To remedy these tensions, in a coordinated arrangement (cf. Kiser & Percy, 1980) all authors have been encouraged to contribute to all parts of the paper in a manner that suits them and hence to experience co-production in the making. The approach can be viewed as an attempt to counter previous issues of a lack of collaboration between practitioners and researchers in knowledge creation which motivated the renewal of TSC. Still, it became obvious through the process that, although a common problem was identified, it was understood individually and had to be reworked by each participating civil servant to fit their personal situation right there and then to make it relevant for them, quite in line with the participative research tradition. We can thus conclude that our chosen design, albeit creating an atmosphere of working together on a common problem where trust was reached (Högberg & Sköld, 2023) and interdependence became obvious over time (cf. Ansell & Gash, 2008) did not remedy existing tensions, as mentioned by Bartunek and Rynes (2014).

With this situation in mind, the academic authors have taken greater responsibility for writing up the introduction, the method section, and the theoretical base for the paper, whereas the practitioners' main contribution has been their accounts. The analysis, discussion and initial conclusions are the results of dialogue and shared understandings to which everyone has contributed, alas with different engagement and depth. Notably, all accounts have been encouraged to be personal and written in either Swedish or English, so as not to hinder personal reflection or streamline thoughts. Swedish text has later been translated into English and the whole text edited to fit the format of an article. It was also noticeable that the academics among us work in an environment where we are expected to not just make our own interpretations but also to put these in print for official publication. For the civil servants, it was rather the exact opposite as they worked in organizations where officially published documents should mirror the official view and not any individual's interpretations. When their written interpretations became more critical of their own organization (cf. Sørensen & Torfing, 2011), we also had to find ways around some self-censorship, for instance by finding more neutral ways of describing the situation experienced.

It should also be made explicit that academics are more used to the academic article format as well as the publishing process. As time passed, the day-to-day dialogue that was present at the beginning of this writing project was exchanged for more sporadic contact over e-mail. When the article was finally ready for submission, the engagement from the civil servants was practically gone. They had simply turned their attention elsewhere, adhering to their own time dimension and priorities (cf. Bartunek & Rynes, 2014; Mörndal, 2018). From this point onward, the corresponding author along with a PhD Candidate did all the work, including all the changes

after review, as well as additions of boundary-spanning perspectives. When a new version was ready, the other authors were contacted and asked whether they wanted to change anything but also whether they wanted to remain as authors. No changes were suggested, and we also sensed some disinterest and one academic who had retired asked to be removed as an author, while not being able to contribute any more.

From the process, we conclude that it is hard to create a common voice. Even though we share an interest and a language to handle it with, we speak different tongues and use our voices for different purposes. In a secluded room, we all share the joy of speaking and use dialogue for mutual analysis and reflection, and in some sense become boundary-spanners (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981; Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2018; Williams, 2002) in the language we use and the ideas we share. However, knowledge is something to be used here and now by civil servants, where a positive constructive attitude is an advantage for gaining influence through trust in whatever one wants to change in one's home organization (Webb, 1991; Williams, 2002). By contrast, knowledge for academics is something to be created with a critical attitude while striving for something interesting to publish (Weick, 1989) and then within as short time span as possible, if at all. A year is nothing for an academic but close to an eternity for a civil servant. Our time dimensions and priorities are indeed different.

The design has also created problems in the review process where not all authors have been available to adjust the manuscript. Those of us who remain active authors have therefore mostly reworked the manuscript for clarity but have restrained ourselves from developing new aspects of the manuscript that we judge have not been part of our common discussion, except for the boundary-spanning parts of the text. There is thus most likely much more to say theoretically about what we cover in this article, and we hope experienced gaps or flaws can spur further reflection, analysis, and possibly other interpretations.

From this experience, academics and civil servants together writing an academic article cannot be viewed as a fertile common ground for equal collaboration and co-production. Nevertheless, it can still work as an interesting boundary-spanning activity for arriving at shared views and important insights and forcing people to leave their comfort zones and question the normality of their working lives. Van Meerkerk and Edelenbos (2021) might even argue that it could be one way of many in the training for becoming a competent boundary-spanning public servant. Still, compared to what is usually officially aired about the smooth working of public collaborations, the article offers stories that shed some light on the intricacies of making collaboration actually work on the individual level (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011).

Citizens as Co-producers of Public Values

Many different sorts of public values are created within the public sphere or public realm and they encompass both what can be considered as good for the public or valued by the public (Benington, 2010; Bryson et al., 2014; Stoker, 2006). The question of how citizens can be involved as co-producers of the interest of public services in mutual value creation arose within the public administration (PA) discourse in the 1960s, according to Levine and Fisher (1984). Alford (1998), on the other hand, traces the interest in mutual value creation back to the 1970s. Much of the early academic interest in the 1970s revolved around volunteers and altruism, according to Alford, who argues that these types of public co-production are far too unreliable for the construction of public services and systems. Instead, Alford suggests that we focus on citizens as co-producing clients.

Theory development surged in the early 1980s after which the interest fell into decline as initiatives for marketization and privatization gained momentum (Alford, 1998) in what was to become the central ideas of New Public Management (NPM) (Hood, 1991). This shift in attention was indeed unfortunate for the co-production of public value. For instance, Lundquist (2001, 2013) describes NPM combined with neoliberalism, as *economism* where the primacy of economic values in public management displaced fundamental democratic values. What was lost with this change, Lundquist argues, were the absolute values of equality, freedom and justice, and democracy as well as procedural values such as openness, verbal exchange,

reciprocity, and responsibility. Through NPM, the public (cf. Benington, 2010) were reconstructed into customers, detached from their governing bodies, weakening the democratic bond upheld by PA. However, a possible re-emergence of a tighter bond between the public and public services came after the year 2000 with the emergence of the New Public Governance (NPG) discourse (Osborne, 2006).

In later years, co-production ideas have surfaced that go beyond NPG where the possible organization for public value creation transcends the interests and jurisdiction of local governments and their bodies (e.g. Bryson et al., 2014; Hartley, Alford, Knies, & Douglas, 2017; Hofstad, Sørensen, Torfing, & Vedeld, 2023; Hoppe, 2017a, 2017b; Moore, 1995; O'Flynn, 2007). To describe how these new forms are organized and led, Stoker (2006) advocates the term Public Value Management (PVM) and Crosby et al. (2017) Public Value Governance (PVG). The creation of public values differs from the mere consumption of public services and is about the social benefits of organizing resources in complementary ways. Public activities thus become something possibly detached from existing democratic structures, where PVM and PVG are terms that allow this leap of mind.

Recent public value ideas emphasize citizenship and individual involvement in the production of democratic outcomes, for example by motivating citizens to actively contribute to public value creation by participating in various forms of collaboration such as networks and partnerships (Bryson et al., 2014; Stoker, 2006), that is, possibly without the interference of public organizations. Through this change of perspective, governing bodies receive a new role as supporters of public value creation and are expected to lead in collaboration with citizens and other organizations (Fels, 2008). Bryson et al. (2014) emphasize that a focus on public value will turn the public interest towards managing in collaboration. In PVM, *governors* and *managers* act as conveners, encourage collaboration, and sometimes control but also step aside at other times (Bryson et al., 2014; Shergold, 2008). In PVG, *leaders* must work as sponsors, champions, catalysts, and implementers, according to Crosby et al. (2017). These changed ways of looking at governance and citizenship also create a need to develop new forms of collaboration between citizens and the public sector on what is good and/or valued by the public.

Modes of Citizen Involvement

In citizen co-production, two quite different lines of thought can be identified: natural and coordinated. As discussed in a seminal article by Brudney and England (1983), citizen involvement can be viewed as a natural part of all service delivery (e.g. Whitaker, 1980). On the other hand, Kiser and Percy (1980, p. 20) suggest a more restricted definition of co-production to those instances where "regular and consumer producers directly mix inputs under *coordinated* arrangements" (our italics).

Brudney and England (1983) also point to the quite common practice of local governments, which, when experiencing fiscal constraints, ask citizens to pitch in and help ensure the quality of life in their city. In this perspective, co-production can be seen as quite natural, whereas citizen co-production is a voluntary effort of individuals, groups, or collectives to support or enhance the quality and/or quantity of services they receive. Notably, co-production not only involves what citizens choose to do but also what they refrain from doing to enhance public values (e.g., dampening the demand for certain public services). The concept of co-production also encompasses direct citizen involvement in both the design and the delivery of city services, Brudney and England write. Based on their review, we find that a rather flexible definition of co-production is appropriate with regard to the involvement of citizens, clients, consumers, volunteers and/or community organizations in designing and producing public services as well as consuming or otherwise benefitting from them.

More contemporarily, Osborne and Strokosch (2013) suggest that despite the concerns expressed by e.g. Jung (2010) we can build on ideas from service management and the service-dominant logic (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008), where public organizations mainly deal with services, not products, and therefore must be organized around this main task. Osborne and Strokosch also mention that in the private sector, the enhanced mode is often termed "co-creation", a concept now quite assimilated into the public sector discourse, according to Hofstad

et al. (2023). Taking this view, we can differentiate between three different modes of co-production within the public realm depending on the level of engagement, which Osborne and Strokosch denote as *consumer co-production*, *strategic co-production* and *enhanced modes of co-production* respectively. Similarly, co-production can be said to span three different aims, from "user empowerment" over "user participation" to "user-led innovation of new forms of public service" (p. 37). Complementarily, we need to recognize that services can also be coordinated with other stakeholders, where Shergold (2008) differentiates the public stance from *command*, over *coordination* and *cooperation*, to *collaboration*, where the public for each step moves away from formally controlling governance towards other types of influence in networked governance (Crosby et al., 2017; Fels, 2008; Shergold, 2008).

If we envision these three aspects in a simple 3D graph, it will look something like this:

Figure 1: The power dynamics of co-production, Mark 1
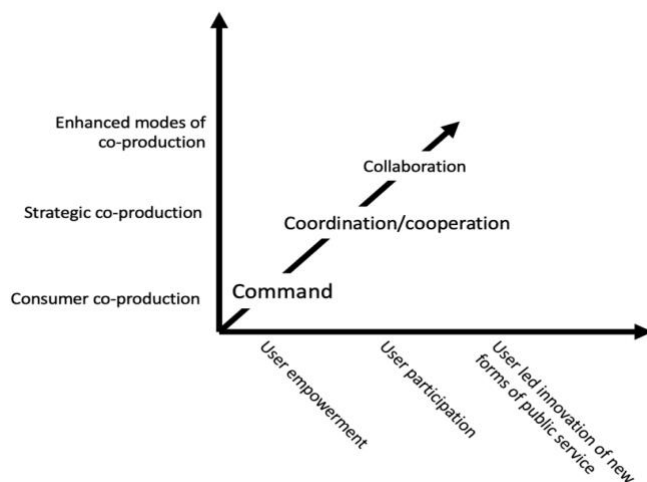
In the lower left, we have a situation where the public organization has control and can command the design, benevolently giving away power to consumers in co-production. However, any move from this position means that the public organization can no longer command the design. Instead, it will need to find a position for participating through coordination or in more enhanced modes led by users, public organizations must submit to other logics and find alternative ways to collaborate. For each move towards the upper right, the weaker the public organization and the stronger other involved parties, including the citizens. In a complementary line of thought, Levine and Fisher (1984, p. 186) advocate a revitalization of a *communitarian spirit* through co-production where citizens will "experience the satisfaction of jointly solving problems", that is, without the involvement of a local government. In a Swedish context, many of the public services of today have started as civil society initiatives which have been absorbed into the welfare state services (Lindberg, Hvenmark, Nahnfeldt, & Hill, 2022). This indicates that public organizations have the ability not only to spot outside initiatives but also to organize themselves for new services initiated outside their control and later incorporate them into the public organizations' structures. It is not clear, however, if this also means that they would have the ability to co-produce these services with less control.

In all, a quite diverse set of perspectives can be applied to co-production and public value creation, where the context and situation open the way for different solutions depending on the particularities of each specific public problem addressed. From this situation, Alford (1998, p. 135) concludes:

> This suggests a broader conception of government – not only as producer, purchaser, regulator and subsidiser, but also as organiser, enabler, and catalyst of the efforts of individuals and groups. It also suggests a more intricate notion of citizenship - not only as voting, exercising rights, and taking part in public deliberation but also as assisting in the production of public services.

These ideas are expanded by de Souza Briggs (2008), who in an NPG perspective expresses (in Bryson et al., 2014, p. 446):

> Citizens (…) move beyond their roles as voters, clients, constituents, customers, or poll responders to becoming problem-solvers, co-creators, and governors actively engaged in producing what is valued by the public and good for the public.

Bryson et al. (2014, p. 448) also add that "In the new approach, government agencies can be a convener, catalyst, and collaborator—sometimes steering, sometimes rowing, sometimes partnering, and sometimes staying out of the way", which resonates well with the collegial view expressed in Kiser and Percy (1980) emphasizing the need for coordinated arrangements, but without a predefined role for local governments.

Summing up, what this literature review reveals is that there are plenty of roles for local governments to take and ways to involve citizens as co-producers of public value. There is also an increasing interest in how this can be done. In co-production and public value creation, it is quite possible for the local government to take a less prominent role and even take a step aside, letting others do the work. However, the uncertainty surrounding these new opportunities will make few public organizations embrace them, where Crosby et al. (2017) remind us that public organizations by default are risk-averse and will possibly need solid proof that any alternative presented to them will work before acting upon it.

The Civil Servants' Point of View

In this section, we turn to the empirical grounding of this paper through the conceptions held by those civil servants who are set to explore new ways of co-producing with what Brudney and England (1983) describe as citizens, clients, consumers, volunteers and/or community organizations. Temporarily we leave the collective author behind to find out what each individual public participant in this paper wants to bring forward while reflecting on how public organizations can adapt to include citizens as co-producers of public values. Or, as conceptualized at a later stage: How do I perceive the intended transformation of TSC in relation to my own experiences and position within my organization?

All authors in this section were involved early in assessing how to tackle problems experienced with the old TSC organization and have also jointly studied different live cases of living labs. They have all had different positions and roles within their host organization and the only common denominator is that by appointment or interest they have been engaged in the analysis and renewal of TSC. Thinking and writing styles thus differ and they all have different interpretations of what is expected. This has also been encouraged by the academics who sometimes had to refrain from giving too much guidance on how and what to write in order not to lose the genuineness of the accounts. In their variety, the accounts also hint at what might happen in a common writing project when we refrain from disciplining, and resist using academic seniority and power to achieve a possibly false cohesive text. We also chose to use descriptive subheadings to further mark the originality of each account.

It should be noted that these accounts were given at a rather late stage in a mutual discussion about the issue at hand, which is why we dare to say that the opinions given are well-reflected and contain analytical depth as well.

Great hopes for Västerås Municipality

The author is a middle manager and head of operations for recreation activities and preventive social work in the municipality.

Civil servant account

There are many examples of good municipal collaborations with citizens. For example, adult and parent street patrols. Being able to do good things for others is super important for people to feel good. That driving force is with us all, so the possibilities are endless. From another perspective, the possibilities also appear as plenty. New ways of collaborating and taking responsibility for various services are emerging, such as Uber. This may well spread to at least certain parts of the public sector.

Society has, for good and for bad, taken over the responsibility for a variety of tasks that were previously located to the family. At the same time, politically there are great hopes for non-profit forces to help out, but I don't think this is going to happen. Challenges that not even professional actors can handle will not be possible for non-profit forces to handle either. In addition, many non-profit organizations have employees who perform their tasks already funded through various governmental grants, and thus so to say do not bring any extra resources to the table. Aligned with this, there is a risk of professionalization of voluntary work, changing how we perceive this actor along with new demands on their organization. There are several potential conflicts hidden in the development, and we may ask ourselves questions like:

- How much power are the politicians prepared to hand over to the citizens? And in consequence, what will then become of the politician's role in society as we have come to know it?
- Will professionals accept that the non-profit work might not be able to deliver services at the same quality level? What will be good enough?
- Prioritizations – who will do them and on what grounds when services are not funded and controlled through our democratic institutions?
- Not all non-profit forces are good, so how do we separate the bad from the good?

For an example of the complexity, we can turn to different initiatives involving youth. As expected, there are both successful and unsuccessful experiences that we need to build on.

Open meeting places for all ages are very good from a socially sustainable perspective. To succeed with these kinds of initiatives a lot of planning and a great measure of knowledge and experience are required. Otherwise, the meeting place risks contributing to exclusion, increased racism, increased crime, and more unrest in a district. Activities conducted for children and adolescents are often physically located near these open meeting places, and it is therefore important that they function in a good and positive way. To succeed with an open meeting place that is for everyone, the experience is that:

- There must be a clear assignment/description of the activities conducted in the meeting place.
- The staff must be professional adults with a high degree of experience and authority.
- The activities should appeal to adults so they can be role models for the young.
- The rules as well as the consequences must be clear when they are not followed.
- Visitors should be involved in the meeting place and take responsibility for it.
- Common approaches and routines with other actors are important.

For instance, leisure clubs work a lot with role models, but giving young people the task of leading other youths who are heading towards criminality or abuse towards a healthier lifestyle is putting too much responsibility on them. We have tried this previously, but our experience is that it has never succeeded. Instead, we have experienced that it has mostly led to a complete muddle with adults working in different directions, and increased distrust in the police, the school, and our social activities, but above all, the young people who have been assigned the task of helping others have not reached their goals. We conclude that we should not allow untrained youth to take responsibility for and help other lost youth. Instead, adults with the right skills and knowledge must take responsibility for this. However, young people may complement professional experienced adults.

Stressing the systems of Eskilstuna Municipality

The account is jointly written by two authors, a strategist for social sustainability and a coordinator in the culture and recreation administration.

Civil servant account

From our point of view, there is a growing feeling that the municipality is insufficient, not just concerning expectations but also in relation to resources. During the coming 10 years, we have a growing population of elderly and schoolchildren in relation to the working population. This stresses the systems and conflicts about resources are increasing. Employees in different parts of the organization see problems in cost reduction when they also experience a need for more resources.

The idea of involving citizens and various stakeholders in solving problems is shared amongst both high-level managers and elected officials. What that entails differs a lot between civil servants and politicians but also between individuals in each group. Co-creation, co-design, dialogue, and other conceptions are talked about a lot but not practised to the same extent.

Citizen involvement is mostly contained in different dialogues whose goals, forms and outcomes vary depending on which part of the organization is responsible. The purpose is often to either develop existing services with existing clients or gather feedback on predefined proposals. The organization tends to listen to the wants of the public but then do what fits the framework and goals of the organization, financially and culture-wise. Stakeholder involvement is often late in the process where the possibility to influence outcomes is rather small. If dialogue is early in a process, it is usually hard to handle feedback to participants in a way that pinpoints where their opinion had an impact on the service or policy. Thus, dialogue has mostly an instrumental value to the municipality.

One important note is that dialogues, regardless of form, rarely include elected officials, which is a shame because of the potential to build, and in some cases, regain trust in democratic institutions, especially in low-income neighbourhoods. Participation as a method is important both to increase self-esteem and for us to become relevant to the people we target. To build trust and create change we must listen and work together with the people who have the trust of, and relationship with, the people in the communities we need to reach.

To solve tomorrow's challenges, we need to involve more perspectives in defining both issues and possible solutions. This requires a better understanding of citizen involvement from elected officials in their role as "producers of democracy". A shift is most likely coming, but the idea that participation means challenging the representative system is still present. One reason behind this comes from a fear of losing control. If elected officials and high-level managers cannot see the value in the participative process it will be hard to systematize it.

The municipality needs better coordination, strategic decisions, and better (and probably fewer) methods regarding stakeholder involvement. We nurture a growing understanding that projects that pop up and then disappear a few years later are damaging to the municipality, especially projects that target low-income communities. We need methods and working principles that create more value, the right value and are sustainable over time. The decrease in tax incomes in relation to the needs of the population is pressing; to do things in new and different ways to produce value is necessary. How to achieve this is as yet hidden.

Quite a distance in the Sörmland Region

The author works at the strategic level with business development in the finance department.

Civil servant account

There is a problem within the public sector that there is a race for development to meet the challenges of society. One thing is certain - the development needed is not coming from bureaucrats employed within the public sector, because of the top-down perspective. The different and inconstant needs of a developing society we are trying to meet are not known well enough by the ordinary representatives of the public sector while the knowledge is out there amongst ordinary people, and for the public sector to grasp. So how should society's institutions pinpoint the issues at hand and turn them into fruitful solutions for society as a whole?

From a helicopter perspective, the answer is kind of easy and upfront but hard to achieve in organizations with little or no experience in meeting the citizens. Organizations must build

structures to support the interception between bureaucracy and citizens' knowledge, that is, to turn top-down into bottom-up. This may not be much of a struggle in a private company or in a non-governmental organization that was built up from the needs that created the idea of forming the company or the organization in the first place. But for an administrative organization formed out of other needs, centuries ago, with different, changed or added tasks, it is very hard to reach down to the grassroots level and put an ear to the ground to achieve collaboration. The obstacles are several:

- Representatives must have the right skills.
- Representatives must be interested in meeting the society at a time and place which is suitable for those who have the information they need. Citizens have their day jobs and may be uninterested in meeting representatives on their terms. At the same time, those citizens willing to meet civil servants in their spare time are not usually good representatives of common people and might have an agenda of their own.
- Representatives must be at the right level of the public organization and have organizational influence.
- Representatives must own the appropriate talent to speak to those concerned.
- Representatives must have enough time to work through the entire process they initiate.
- The public organization expects a (predefined) result once a process is initiated.

All these obstacles often seem too hard to overcome for representatives of an organization not used to interacting directly with society, even just to start thinking in these terms. Other organizations that are flatter and closer to their business may not experience these obstacles.

Technology leads the way in Västmanland Region

The author is a regional innovation strategist.

Civil servant account

In the region, we have high-quality healthcare that encompasses everyone and a tradition of collaboration that needs to increase to solve the societal challenges that exist around health and medical care. Collaboration between healthcare, research, business, and academia is needed for new innovative medicines, healthcare methods, working methods and medical technology to benefit society and healthcare. Technology, innovation, and digitalization offer great opportunities for future healthcare. Modern information and communication technology can make it easier for individuals to be more involved in their care whereas public care supports the contact between the individual and the service provider, along with upholding effective support systems for the employees involved in the services.

But technology does not only affect how we can deliver welfare and care. Citizens and patients are becoming more and more informed, and their demands increase on welfare and health care and patient attendance. The market for healthcare-related services for consumers is growing and we will need to strengthen the cooperation between citizens, patients, and new types of actors. Most of the population has access to computers and internet access is possible almost everywhere. Following this development, the Internet of Things (IoT) has the potential to change our everyday lives and our living habits.

Hence, there is a transformation of health care through increased opportunities for individualized care, so-called *precision medicine*. Utilizing health and care data for research and innovation but also utilizing patients' knowledge, experience, and willingness to participate in clinical research and seeing patients as co-creators, are important prerequisites for continued development.

In parallel with the trend towards precision medicine, structural changes are underway in Swedish health care. The focus is to develop modern, equal, accessible, and effective health care with a focus on primary care and local care. Digitization and e-services are a priority issue in all regional authorities and will transform both supply and working methods in Swedish health care where the needs of the inhabitants become more explicit along with an adaptation to a user-centred perspective in the organization of health care. For example, digital solutions and apps with image management features can increase self-care advice and decrease uncalled visits to

the hospital, saving time for both healthcare and patients. However, opinions differ as to the quality and patient safety of present-day solutions.

E-services can also mean that patients themselves can book times for health care visits, order prescriptions etc. and that digital patient records make health information more accessible and facilitate communication with caregivers. The aim for the region is that technology and digitalization will make our processes more efficient and help reduce administration and save time for patients and healthcare personnel. Regions, however, do not fully share systems and routines, which is why the full impact of these changes will be delayed on a national level.

Healthcare is facing major challenges and increased demands for rapid change, more efficient use of resources and a changed view of the individual's needs. We know that future health care will be more person-centred, but it must be combined with resource efficiency and higher-value delivery. To cope with the challenges that welfare faces, greater focus is needed on preventive measures against decreased health and illness. We need to quickly introduce new ways of working, techniques and treatments for increased efficiency and quality in healthcare and welfare. We can achieve this through research and internationally outstanding quality in innovation, good conditions for business and a well-functioning ecosystem for collaborations. At the centre of this challenge is to get management, professionals, and staff to agree on the necessity of this development where we must all contribute to achieving it.

The system is the challenge, the process manager says

The author is the process manager of The Social Contract.

Civil servant account

Our public organizations, and society at large, are facing great societal challenges that are complex by their very nature. In the context of TSC, these challenges encompass for example a healthcare crisis that the present system is not built to handle, declining school results and far too many young people not finishing high school and citizens experiencing a lack of security in their neighbourhoods.

As these challenges are complex, they are best understood from a system perspective. I believe that we in TSC need to adopt this approach of a system perspective where we embrace complex system thinking rather than perceiving separate problems. We can also conceptualize these complex societal challenges as adaptive challenges in contrast to technical ones. A technical challenge is a clearly defined problem that has a solution. For adaptive challenges, it is the opposite, where we need to understand, define, and refine what the problems are.

Our targeted challenges in TSC are intertwined but our disciplines and organizations are not. An arena like ours, where we collaborate to create knowledge in order to solve shared challenges, in some sense fails due to the lack of a shared interdisciplinary dimension. The strategic management of TSC has remained within the paradigm of planning and predicting with clearly defined expertise and disciplines and thus borders. When asking questions of whether and how citizens could be involved as co-producers of public services, in my view, we need to redirect from collaboration to co-creation. Co-creation as an approach puts the challenge in the centre, with all its complexity, which opens an interdisciplinary way of tackling the challenges. With an interdisciplinary approach, relevant stakeholders can be identified and thereafter included.

Back to the main question, how can TSC involve citizens as co-producers of public values? As stated, we need to transform the arena from collaboration to co-creation. And while entering this new paradigm of working together to solve societal challenges and deliver relevant public services we need to include those who are affected, be it a citizen not feeling secure in the city, an older multi-sick person in need of care at home or a youth dropping out of school. Nevertheless, the process of meeting the needs of this citizen cannot be handled within silos, the normal division of responsibilities within a public organization. Nor can it be addressed without including the perspective of affected citizens.

My strong belief is that each citizen holds a perspective and a knowledge that beneficially could be involved in understanding and defining problems as well as in prototyping and testing different solutions. By understanding the challenge from different angles and perspectives we

can unravel links to the overarching systemic level and then move towards sustainable development. As a spin-off, by including citizens in our process, the trust in public organizations will increase.

Our municipalities and regional authorities express a will to focus on our citizens and create a methodology that builds on citizen involvement. There is an understanding and encouragement to open new forms of collaboration and to team up with other stakeholders. Within TSC, we attend to developing new interdisciplinary processes and methods for co-creation. This leads directly towards involving citizens as co-producers; the question of how this best is done remains. However, we are willing to start the process of developing or applying a methodology that will involve our citizens as co-producers in our joined co-producing arena.

Empirical Patterns and Reflections

The empirical accounts are quite different, which is to be expected as each is written with diverging positions within each organization. Nonetheless, there are similarities. Maybe most striking is the tension between, on the one hand, the expressed possibilities that lie in new arrangements for co-productions for public value, and on the other, all the aired hindrances that even question other types of arrangements than those in use today. As the Sörmland region representative describes it, they are an organization not used to interacting. Organizational borders are at work everywhere and it is not in the public organization's tradition to transcend them. One might also speculate that the current order is so ingrained in the minds of those giving the accounts, that the idea of envisioning something else is quite impossible for anyone who has learned the ropes of a public organization.

Public and stakeholder involvement appears to be something we should do because it is right to do, and we need to do it because this is the solution that we can and should think of right now, stressing a normative and symbolic value. This is especially pronounced in what is voiced by the process manager. Combined with expressed challenges, the voiced concern creates a sense of urgency; we not only have to do this, we must also hurry up to do it. Involvement expectations include increased efficiency, quality, and adaptation to citizens' wants and needs, that is, public value enhancement.

The existence of organizational levels, hierarchies and silos emerges as most important in a situation that appears locked in many ways. Elected politicians are detached or disinterested, according to the accounts. The strategic level is called out to organize for a new situation and new needs but without any traces in the accounts of initiatives for more than cosmetic changes in the structures of current organizations, except for the redesign of TSC (which lies outside the juridical boundaries of all participating organizations, except the university). Actual collaborative work, however, must be handled in a situated relationship between individual civil servants and individual citizens. And these might actually work, according to the Västerås account. Still, no movement towards a more fundamental change for supporting this on a more structural level can be traced, even though, for instance, the representative of Region Västmanland voices several necessary and possible steps when new technology is integrated into their services. We also note expressed needs for new methods, arenas, political support, and involvement to name a few, all of which fall back on changes needed on the political and strategic level.

Notably, all examples given are within the present missions of the organizations studied. Citizens are involved *after* a problem for a host organization has been acknowledged. Other problems, that might concern citizens more and public organizations less, are not accounted for, which is something to bear in mind. Maybe any new order will have its origin outside already known but strained publicly financed and politically governed organizations. Speaking for this development is the potent view of citizens' capabilities. None of the accounts views citizens as simple receivers or customers as in NPM. Instead, they stand out as resourceful stakeholders with an agenda.

Discussion

The reflections from practitioners suggest an important discrepancy between expressed intentions at the political and strategic levels as they come forward in their commitment to TSC, and what is possible to do as a practitioner in the same organizations (cf. Sørensen & Torfing, 2011; Williams, 2002). There are commitments (Ansell & Gash, 2008) to collaborate at the strategic level but no agreement on how to do this on the operational level, except for using TSC for this purpose. This disparity is most clearly highlighted in the account from Västerås. Here, strategic missions promote citizen involvement but fail to deploy this into change at the operational levels. The accounts thus indicate a difference between officially expressed far-reaching *intended involvement* for co-production at the strategic level, and present-day more limited *actual involvement* at the operational level, respectively (cf. Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). This difference poses a challenge, especially for political and strategic levels as for the latter they must, for lack of a better formulation, give up power and in some respect redefine their roles, as indicated in Figure 1. It is not enough to adopt a hands-off strategy, as Sørensen et al. (2020) suggest. It is more of an insight that current political and strategic positions can be irrelevant to public value creation and democratic action. It is even a possible step away from *collaborative governance* (Ansell & Gash, 2008) to *collaborative public value creation*, where the governance aspect is given a more subordinate role. TSC can still be designed for this purpose, but then financing institutions cannot expect to control what their return on their investment will be. However, by engaging in *meta-governance* (Sørensen & Torfing, 2011) some control and influence can still be maintained.

How the redesign of TSC was organized also provides us with insights into the role of boundary-spanners, as to who was appointed to represent the different organizations in the transformation and their tasks. Those in formal power placed themselves on the semi-outside of TSC 's actions, being parts of the board and steering committees, thus constituting a top layer of possible boundary spanners. The authors of this paper, representing all sides, were all asked to be part of a pre-study for the redesign. However, none were particularly chosen for having excelled in boundary-spanning or co-creation, nor as part of a specific network of change makers or the like with the potential of taking initiatives to change. What marked all of us in this more secluded group was instead an expressed interest in the redesign, but what had caused that interest was less clear. Our titles, functions and organizational placements were quite different, which interestingly more relates to creativity (Grzelec, 2019) than boundary-spanning.

The boundary-spanning potential of the group was thus limited and quite different to how e.g. Van Meerkerk and Edelenbos (2018, 2021) describe boundary-spanning abilities. For instance, we had no clear empowered tasks and were not expected to coordinate any activities across boundaries. This role was instead formally handled by the directors and other managers on the board and steering committees. They, on the other hand, did not use their positions to involve the group with other processes of change, actors or the like within their organizations (Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2021). From the situation, it can be argued that the two different groups formed two different "pockets of trust" upholding conflicting institutional logics (Högberg & Sköld, 2023) but lacking common ground and a process for building mutual trust. Thus, it lacked a more neutral space for interpersonal rather than identity group-based social interaction, which would have been more productive from a boundary-spanning perspective, as Hofstad et al. (2023) argue.

In this situation, knowledge through study, not action through interaction, and an inquest was the sought end for the group. The most co-created action and explicit boundary-spanning activity was symptomatic to be found in this article writing initiative that emerged from within the group. It might have looked like it, but it is to question if there ever was much genuine boundary-spanning taking place at all in the redesign of TSC, except for what possibly was achieved through the board and steering committees, of what we know little. Tweaking the terms, one might say that the organization of the redesign lacked a clear idea and process for *actual internal involvement* and *internal boundary-spanning*.

As our case above indicates, unless organizations are successful in the operationalization of strategic ambitions into assignments to be creatively deployed and specified, the move from intended to actual involvement appears difficult. It is possible that the intended changes of TSC,

as they might be understood at the strategic level, also revolve around big and grand solutions, equal to all, whereas the change into actual involvement instead is a change in perspective from the big and grand to an evolving mass of small actions designed and performed in a network between individual employees, individual citizens and other parties (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Van Meerkerk & Edelenbos, 2018, 2021). There appears to exist a tension between an orderly and democratically organized planned society and an evolving and dynamic networked organization for public good, where democratic organizations still must find their role (Sørensen et al., 2020). Ultimately, the co-productive ideas brought up here challenge the current dominating logic, based on planning and control. This latter approach seems incompatible with sustained participation by multiple agencies (cf. Sørensen & Torfing, 2011).

The concern for a given demographic pressure, which is the overarching concern driving the problem discussed in this article, appears true from a tax-funded perspective from which studied public organizations derive their raison d'être. The situation is similar to what Brudney and England (1983) describe, but where for some reason expressed ambitions go beyond voluntarism. There is an expressed understanding that people in society can create public value and can be regarded as a resource for solving common needs. The question is more about how these resources should be organized for the common good and who should be guiding this process, where theory opens up several different roles for public organizations (Alford, 1998; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson et al., 2017; de Souza Briggs, 2008; Sørensen & Torfing, 2011). There are, however, no indications that the organizations studied are taking a step back letting others coordinate necessary arrangements, as Kiser and Percy (1980) suggest. Even in TSC the founding organizations take the lead themselves and TSC is expected to follow the founders' needs and orders instead of the opposite, which would be appropriate if one truly wanted to organize for tackling grand challenges through collaboration.

From what has been covered, the TSC goal appears to be the establishment of new types of networks and partnerships for the co-production of public value, as described by Bryson et al. (2014); Fels (2008); and Stoker (2006), where TSC is supposed to probe the way forward, moving engaged parties from *command*, via *coordination* and *cooperation*, to *collaboration* (Shergold, 2008) but also *co-production* and *co-creation*, which indicate some possible additions to Figure 1, visible in an updated version as below.

Figure 2: The power dynamics of co-production, Mark 2
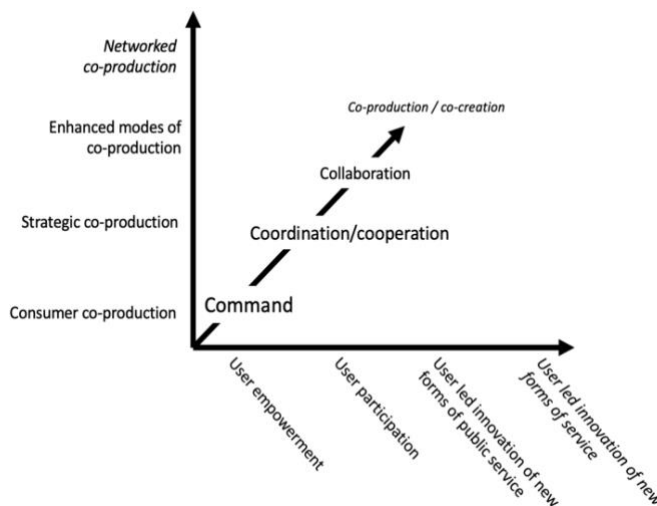
Our own interpretation of the tension visible in the figure is down to our historical dependence on the production of public services as something organized through a planned society with explicit rules and prescriptions. This is contrasted by ideas of other orders, where practically anyone can take the lead regardless of existing order, which to us has a common denominator

in ideas of a networked society. It can also be described as a tension between what can be formally organized through existing democratic orders and what might be possible to achieve through intertwined formal and informal connections and thus a possibly complementary democratic order (Ansell & Gash, 2008). What seems to be needed for actual involvement to evolve is to take away the idea that the public must be organized through existing democratic institutions and that these institutions must have a central role in this transformation. By letting public institutions really take at least one step back (Kiser & Percy, 1980), and scrap the idea that the public as we have come to know it must be visible in the ideas we pursue, we open up for a variety of networked co-production/co-creation in user-led innovation of new forms of public value, as outlined in Figure 2.

Public innovation to achieve this move is lacking, as discussed in the introduction. The public organizations studied also appear to have fundamental problems in taking the lead themselves in this development. A reason for this might be not so much the cost, as suggested by Zachrisson et al. (2018), but that tax-funded institutions, and the democratic structures they support, may be at risk (Sørensen, 2006). It is possible that current democratic institutions, designed for specific historical purposes, should not take part, or at least not take the lead, in this restructuring of society. This concern is aired in the accounts, although not as a pronounced possibility which e.g. Stoker (2006) suggests. Other institutions might need to be designed or evolved into being, that is, institutions fitter to handle today's (complex) societal problems and what we can foresee will come tomorrow.

The accounts indirectly give support to Lundquist (2013) with notions of the need to reinstitute fundamental democratic values into society, which is mentioned as possible through engaging citizens as co-producers of public values (Benington, 2010; Moore, 2014). However, the public values expressed in the accounts are mainly instrumental as solutions to problems experienced by public organizations where the engagement itself appears to be the key ingredient, possibly overshadowing the intended created value. The tendency, in the Osborne and Strokosch (2013) division, is a current emphasis on *consumer co-production* although at least *strategic co-production* is expressed as a goal and *enhanced modes of co-production* can be understood as desirable, whereas our suggested addition of *networked co-production* is not even part of the discourse yet.

As noted by the process manager, TSC is about engagement in *adaptive challenges*, and thus in processes without any clear ends. By this engagement, hopefully, new relationships will be built and in time new public values created, the argument goes. This sought profile of the public goes far beyond co-production as part of existing public service deliveries, as described by Alford (1998). Instead, several remarks in the empirical accounts challenge the normal divide between server and served, where we now might speak of an aspiration for different actors to take adaptive roles in the design, creation and delivery of public values, where they have or take the mandate to call a public into being (cf. Moore, 2014). It is not evidently so that, as Brudney and England (1983) write, it is the public organization that asks the citizen to pitch in when needed. The public could so much more be an actor and initiator than a passive party that is satisfied with the current state of things or a submissive partner that does what a public organization tells it to do. We just need to get used to the idea that the public in *networked co-production* can be organized for the common good through a variety of other means than existing public organizations.

Still, it is a backwards-looking perspective of the public organizations that dominate the accounts, and we do not get close to the citizen as an initiator and actor in providing new public values and goods, which in itself is an indication of the problem of letting the public influence transformation processes like the one reported in this study. Nevertheless, with situated differences (cf. Lindberg et al., 2020) the accounts express a need and a space for mainly user-led innovation of new forms of public service and thus *networked* or *enhanced modes of co-production* (Osborne & Strokosch, 2013), notable in expressions about for instance co-creation and co-production. As described by Alford (1998); Bryson et al. (2014); and de Souza Briggs (2008), for instance, there appears to be no exact limit to the different roles and positions citizens, civil servants and public organizations can take in the new types of value deliveries described both in theory and practice. The wish list is long, but the current practice is a bit

disappointing. A fascinating thought is that to make these wishes come true, and to gain a more diverse palette of public value creation, the clarity of today's societal systems built on present democratic institutions will possibly have to decrease. In our accounts though, there is still mostly a dual, but unequal, relationship that emerges; the public organization serves, and the public is served. The implied necessary shift (or redistribution even?) in power and control of *actual involvement* can be viewed as potentially hazardous, as we do not know how to keep it democratic and good for the public (Sørensen, 2006). *The enhanced mode* (Osborne & Strokosch, 2013), not to say *networked co-production*, which is characterized by user-led innovation of new forms of public service, is followed by this risk. Change entails not just intended ends but also unintended consequences. *Actual involvement* without a clear process that controls public risks might for this reason, from a public point of view, be seen as opening Pandora's box of conflicting interests, ideas and wants and thus cater for chaos instead of a new order and new public value co-production. No wonder we sense hesitation when public organizations are to go from words to action.

Conclusions

The paper and project have been guided by the question of how public organizations can adapt to include citizens as co-producers of public values. A bit disappointingly, we conclude that they do not adapt except for specific confined areas where they can still control and command outcomes important to them. Terms like co-production and co-creation are used rhetorically but are not acted upon more than symbolically. Therefore, we also conclude that public organizations struggle to become co-producers of new public values.

From what has been covered, local governments' public organizations appear to be willing but quite unable to adapt to a situation where citizens are treated as equal (sic!) partners in the co-production of public values. In a planned society, public organizations are used to leading and controlling, and it is from this position that co-production is understood, described, and practised in the realms of TSC and the public organizations studied. However, the ideas surrounding co-production and co-creation are paradigmatically different to the planned normality of public organizations and can instead be said to belong to a networked society, which must still present itself as a viable alternative to the present order.

In some dimensions, collaboration has increased in recent years and is set for further expansion when the studied public organizations themselves (not primarily the public) directly benefit from it and to some extent can command the execution. Others should help existing public organizations to deliver more public value and thereby help them deal with challenges they have defined as their responsibility, and the question guiding them is how this is to be done with as little change to their own design as possible. Collaboration for, and even less co-production of, public values is not at the centre of present processes and experienced problems. Instead, it is the structure and function of existing organizations. The dominating theme in the accounts concerns already-defined public organizations, including their present design, missions, and governance. This means that public organizations emerge as being in a struggle to renew themselves but at the same time appear restrained in this process, dampening their ability to lead the co-production of new public values. Public sector organizations might thus need help to take the lead in the change they claim to be striving for. If not, their intended involvement may not be realized as actual involvement.

The democratic aspects of the co-production of public values are difficult to assess from the study. Existing democratic institutions are described as given, and the development of other types of orders and processes appear more as threats to these institutions than possibilities for reinvigorating democracy in society. At the same time, the public appears as an idea with potential, but anonymous and without special characteristics. There is no sign of a purposeful public being called into being or constructed in new ways yet. Therefore, the public itself appears to be not only the greatest and most promising unexplored source for generating public value in the times to come but also an unexplored source for securing democracy as such.

Public organizations are interested in themselves, and existing public missions govern their approach to the co-production of new public values. Other parties are of less interest and the

possible necessary subordination of the public organization to other interests appears unthinkable given their democratically enforced societal position as part of a local government. This creates an imbalance between expressed *intended involvement* at the strategic level, which dominates the discourse and contrasts with achieved *actual involvement* at the operational level, where not much is registered. Appropriately, we suggest the latter concept be used as a guiding idea for a more genuine aspiration of changing societal processes, establishing new value co-production and possibly reinvigorating democracy. The lack of genuine boundary-spanning activities concerning TSC also leaves us in the dark if and how more potent boundary-spanners can be engaged in forming more productive co-creation with citizens.

Closing Comments

The accounts in this article make us question the transformative ability of traditional public organizations. We ask ourselves whether or not the described problems all have a common denominator in the friction that arises when public organizations nurture aspirations to act in ways they were not designed for. There is speculation, but also consensus, on what needs to be changed to transform, and that is a deeper involvement of citizens in the co-production of public good and public values. There are also concerns that there must be a coordinating regime, but that regime has still to present itself.

The research has been done in a participative tradition, which stresses actual involvement, which of course has influenced the accounts and ideas expressed in this article. There are other lenses for understanding the research conducted, like collaborative research or co-production of research, which we encouraged engaged readers to use for a more thorough reflection on the applied method.

To end, it has become obvious that we lack an important perspective in this paper, the citizen's perspective. We ask ourselves, what would have happened to this text, but also our reasoning and understanding, if the co-producing collective authors also included citizens? Would that make it possible to distance ourselves further from current organizations of public good and values? We believe so, at least it would supply us with a necessary critique of what we take for granted.

Acknowledgement

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that they all are, or have been, employed by, or have significant ties to, one or more of the studied organizations, but have not experienced any specific pressure to align the text with the interests of those organizations that this paper concerns.

References

Alford, J. (1998). A public management road less travelled: Clients as co-producers of public services. *Australian Journal of Public Administration, 57*(4), 128-137. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8500.1998.tb01568.x

Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2008). Collaborative governance in theory and practice. *Journal of public administration research and theory, 18*(4), 543-571. doi:https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum032

Bartunek, J. M., & Rynes, S. L. (2014). Academics and practitioners are alike and unlike: The paradoxes of academic–practitioner relationships. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206314529160

Benington, J. (2010). From Private Choice to Public Value? In J. Benington & M. H. Moore (Eds.), *Public Value: Theory and Practice* (pp. 31–49): Macmillan International Higher Education.

Bommert, B. (2010). Collaborative innovation in the public sector. *International public management review, 11*(1), 15-33. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2018.1430248

Brudney, J. L., & England, R. E. (1983). Toward a definition of the coproduction concept. *Public Administration Review*, 59-65. doi:https://doi.org/10.2307/975300

Bryson, J., Crosby, B., & Bloomberg, L. (2014). Public value governance: Moving beyond traditional public administration and the new public management. *Public Administration Review, 74*(4), 445-456. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12238

Bryson, J., Sancino, A., Benington, J., & Sørensen, E. (2017). Towards a multi-actor theory of public value co-creation. *Public Management Review, 19*(5), 640-654. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2016.1192164

Coghlan, D. (2011). Action research: Exploring perspectives on a philosophy of practical knowing. *The Academy of Management Annals, 5*(1), 53-87. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/19416520.2011.571520

Coghlan, D., & Shani, A. (2014). Creating action research quality in organization development: Rigorous, reflective and relevant. *Systemic Practice and Action Research, 27*(6), 523-536. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s11213-013-9311-y

Crosby, B. C., 't Hart, P., & Torfing, J. (2017). Public value creation through collaborative innovation. *Public Management Review, 19*(5), 655-669. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2016.1192165

de Souza Briggs, X. (2008). *Democracy as problem solving: Civic capacity in communities across the globe*: MIT Press.

Dewey, J. (1937). Education and social change. *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors (1915-1955), 23*(6), 472-474. doi:https://doi.org/10.2307/40219908

Fels, A. (2008). Preface. In J. O'Flynn & J. Wanna (Eds.), *Collaborative Governance: A new era of public policy in Australia?* (pp. xi-xiii). Canberra: ANU E Press.

Fleischer, J., & Carstens, N. (2022). Policy labs as arenas for boundary spanning: inside the digital transformation in Germany. *Public Management Review, 24*(8), 1208-1225. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.1893803

Grzelec, A. (2019). *Organizing Creativity and Creative Organizing at a high tech company.*

Hallin, A., Guziana, B., Hoppe, M., & Mörndal, M. (2014). Styrning och samverkan för hållbar stadsutveckling – förstudierapport In. Västerås: Mälardalens Högskola.

Hallin, A., Hoppe, M., Guziana, B., Mörndal, M., & Åberg, M. (2017). *Mind the gap – understanding organisational collaboration* Paper presented at the Nordic Academy of Management, Bodø, Norway.

Hartley, J., Alford, J., Knies, E., & Douglas, S. (2017). Towards an empirical research agenda for public value theory. *Public Management Review, 19*(5), 670-685. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2016.1192166

Hofstad, H., Sørensen, E., Torfing, J., & Vedeld, T. (2023). Leading co-creation for the green shift. *Public Money & Management, 43*(4), 357-366.

Hood, C. (1991). A public management for all seasons. *Public administration, 69*(1), 3-19. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.1991.tb00779.x

Hoppe, M. (2017a). *Local coordination across structures*. Paper presented at the IRSPM, Budapest, Hungary.

Hoppe, M. (2017b). *New Public Organizing - Towards collaborative innovation in the public sector*. Paper presented at the Nordic Academy of Management, Bodø, Norway.

Hoppe, M. (2018). *First, we take Manhattan – creating value by changing the system from within.* Paper presented at the IRSPM Conference, Edinburg, Scotland.

Högberg, L., & Sköld, B. (2023). Pockets of Trust in a Landscape of Distrust: Interorganisational Trust and the Challenge of Conflicting Institutional Logics. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration, 27*(3), 7-23.

Jung, T. (2010). Citizens, co-producers, customers, clients, captives? A critical review of consumerism and public services. *Public Management Review, 12*(3), 439-446. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14719031003787940

Kiser, L. L., & Percy, S. L. (1980). *The concept of coproduction and its implications for public service delivery.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Society for Public Administration, San Francisco.

Levine, C. H., & Fisher, G. (1984). Citizenship and service delivery: The promise of coproduction. *Public Administration Review, 44*, 178-189. doi:https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429501036-19

Lindberg, M., Hvenmark, J., Nahnfeldt, C., & Hill, N. (2022). *Social innovation för arbetslivsinkludering: Insatser och insikter från Sveriges civilsamhälle*. Retrieved from Luleå: http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:ltu:diva-91984

Lindberg, M., Sturk, M., & Zeidlitz, J. (2020). Municipal social innovation in a rural region. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration, 24*(4), 51-69. doi:https://doi.org/10.58235/sjpa.v24i4.8587

Lindhult, E., & Axelsson, K. (2021). The logic and integration of coproductive research approaches. *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business, 14*(1), 13-35. doi:https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMPB-07-2020-0215

Lundquist, L. (2001). Tystnadens förvaltning. In *Utan fast punkt. Om förvaltning, kunskap, språk och etik i socialt arbete*: Socialstyrelsen: Stockholm.

Lundquist, L. (2013). NPM and Democracy. *Futuriblerne, 41*(3-4), 53-61. Retrieved from http://artikelbibliotek.fremtidsforskning.dk/wp-content/uploads/Futuriblerne-dec-2013.pdf

Moore, M. H. (1995). *Creating public value*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Moore, M. H. (2013). *Recognizing public value*: Harvard University Press.

Moore, M. H. (2014). Public value accounting: Establishing the philosophical basis. *Public Administration Review, 74*(4), 465-477. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12198

Mörndal, M. (2018). *"Vi måste takta!": En studie av organisering för samverka.* Mälardalen University, Stockholm. Retrieved from https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1197267/FULLTEXT01.pdf

Mörndal, M., & Hoppe, M. (2022). Labbet - en skyddad plats för välfärdens utveckling. In Å. H. Rundgren, C. Klinga, M. Löfström, & L. Mossberg (Eds.), *Perspektiv på samverkan - om utmaningar och möjligheter i välfärdens praktik*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Nählinder, J., & Fogelberg Eriksson, A. (2017). The MIO Model: a guide for innovation support in public sector organisations. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration, 21*(2), 23-47. doi:https://doi.org/10.58235/sjpa.v21i2.11581

O'Flynn, J. (2007). From new public management to public value: Paradigmatic change and managerial implications. *Australian Journal of Public Administration, 66*(3), 353-366. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8500.2007.00545.x

Osborne, S. P. (2006). The new public governance? *Public Management Review, 8*, 377-387. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14719030600853022

Osborne, S. P., & Brown, K. (2005). *Managing Change and Innovation in Public Service Organizations*. London: Psychology Press.

Osborne, S. P., & Strokosch, K. (2013). It takes Two to Tango? Understanding the Co-production of Public Sector Services by Integrating the Services Management and Public Administration Perspectives. *British Journal of Management, 24*, S31-S47. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12010

Payne, A. F., Storbacka, K., & Frow, P. (2008). Managing the co-creation of value. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 36*(1), 83-96. doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-007-0070-0

Samhällskontraktet. (2023). Det här är Samhällskontraktet. Retrieved from https://www.samhallskontraktet.se/

Shani, A. B., & Pasmore, W. A. (1985). Organization inquiry: Towards a new model of the action research process. In D. D. Warrick (Ed.), *Contemporary Organization development: Current Thinking and Aplications* (pp. 438-448). Glenview, Ill: Scott, Foresman.

Shergold, P. (2008). Governing through collaboration. In J. O'Flynn & J. Wanna (Eds.), *Collaborative Governance* (Vol. 13, pp. 13-22): ANU E Press.

Statistics Sweden. (2022). *After age 60. A description of older people in Sweden* Retrieved from Solna: https://scb.se/contentassets/c4ac9fb5ad10451aab0885b7160de9b0/be0701_2022a01_br_be51br2202.pdf

Stoker, G. (2006). Public value management: a new narrative for networked governance? *The American review of public administration, 36*(1), 41-57. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074005282583

Sveriges kommuner och regioner. (2023a). *Ekonomirapporten, maj 2023 – om kommunernas och regionernas ekonomi*. Retrieved from https://rapporter.skr.se/ekonomirapporten-maj-2023.html

Sveriges kommuner och regioner. (2023b, 2023-01-17). Äldreomsorg, personal- och kompetensförsörjning. Retrieved from https://skr.se/skr/arbetsgivarekollektivavtal/personalochkompetensforsorjning/aldreomsorg.35046.html

Sørensen, E. (2006). Metagovernance: The changing role of politicians in processes of democratic governance. *The American review of public administration, 36*(1), 98-114. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074005282584

Sørensen, E., Hendriks, C. M., Hertting, N., & Edelenbos, J. (2020). Political boundary spanning: politicians at the interface between collaborative governance and representative democracy. *Policy and Society, 39*(4), 530-569. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2020.1743526

Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2011). Enhancing Collaborative Innovation in the Public Sector. *Administration & Society, 43*(8), 842-868. doi:https://doi.org/10.1177/00953997114187

Timmermans, J., Blok, V., Braun, R., Wesselink, R., & Nielsen, R. Ø. (2020). Social labs as an inclusive methodology to implement and study social change: the case of responsible research and innovation. *Journal of Responsible Innovation, 7*(3), 410-426. doi:https://doi.org/10.1080/23299460.2020.1787751

Tushman, M. L., & Scanlan, T. J. (1981). Boundary spanning individuals: Their role in information transfer and their antecedents. *Academy of Management Journal, 24*(2), 289-305. doi:https://doi.org/10.5465/255842

Van Meerkerk, I., & Edelenbos, J. (2018). *Boundary spanners in public management and governance: An interdisciplinary assessment*: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Van Meerkerk, I., & Edelenbos, J. (2021). Becoming a competent boundary spanning public servant. In *The Palgrave handbook of the public servant* (pp. 1437-1452): Springer.

Webb, A. (1991). Coordination: A problem in public sector management. *Policy & Politics, 19*(4), 229-241. doi:https://doi.org/10.1332/030557391782454188

Weick, K. E. (1989). Theory construction as disciplined imagination. *Academy of management review, 14*(4), 516-531. doi:https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1989.4308376

Whitaker, G. P. (1980). Coproduction: Citizen participation in service delivery. *Public Administration Review*, 240-246. doi:https://doi.org/10.2307/975377

Williams, P. (2002). The competent boundary spanner. *Public administration, 80*(1), 103-124. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00296

Zachrisson, A., Bjärstig, T., & Eckerberg, K. (2018). When Public Officers Take the Lead in Collaborative Governance. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration, 22*(4), 21-44. doi:https://doi.org/10.58235/sjpa.v22i4.8695