

The co-production ecosystem – factors favoring the co-production of social services

What role should a modern state play and which functions and tasks should remain in the hands of citizens? What is the right balance between state authority and civil society? Over the decades, many forms of the state have been developed, referring to different interpretations of its desirable roles and responsibilities as well as its relationship with society. One of them is the welfare state, in which state interventionism is positively assessed and state duties are extended to promote social well-being among citizens. It means that citizens of those countries enjoy a wide range of public services, including social. Due to macro and microeconomic conditions, the provision of social services is becoming more and more complicated nowadays. Currently observed socio-economic, political and demographic changes force public organizations to search for the new ways to provide social services that meet the growing social needs and expectations. At the same time, the limited budgetary resources mean that increasing effectiveness of the public sector is one of the fundamental challenges faced by modern European countries.

In the postmodern societies, in which relations between the state and citizens are constantly changing, new forms of providing social services appear and challenge traditional production patterns. The model of providing those services and the role of citizens in this process are being transformed. Finding the answer to the question of how to provide social services to better manage limited resources and more effectively meet the growing needs and expectations of citizens becomes crucial. One of the proposed solutions is the co-production of social services.

Co-production is defined as the voluntary or involuntary involvement of public – including social – service users in any of the design, management, delivery and/or evaluation of those services. Co-production is characterized by regular, long-term relationships between state agencies and organized groups of citizens, where both make substantial resource contributions. This concept for public administration and management has been proposed by Elinor Ostrom and her research team in the 1970s, but co-production has not immediately become a desirable and fashionable management practice in the local environment. The renewed interest in the participatory role of citizens in public service production took place at the beginning of the XXI century. One of the reasons is the fact that theoretical considerations and interests of practitioners in the public sector have been dominated by public governance model which creates favorable conditions for co-production. The renewed interest and appreciation of the co-production are illustrated by the Nobel Prize in Economics awarded in 2009 to the late Elinor Ostrom.

Contemporary research clearly underlines the importance of the role of citizens and the third sector in the effective delivery of public social and co-production is currently one of cornerstones of public policy reform across the globe aimed at improving the efficiency and quality of public, including social, services. Co-production of social services is seen as a tool to transform outdated public service infrastructure and a way of engaging service users in provision of the social services which allows to meet increased public expectations. Additionally, the co-production is seen as a response to the democratic deficit, a route to active citizenship and active communities, and as a means by which to lever in additional resources to social services delivery. The benefits of co-production include also improvements to the quality of social services and increased social capital. Co-production as a new way of thinking about social services has the potential to deliver a major shift in the way of providing those services, in ways that make them much more effective, more efficient, and more sustainable.

The literature review carried out so far by the applicant shows that the phenomenon of co-production is not precisely defined and the list of co-production determinants is incomplete, dispersed and insufficiently justified by the results of empirical research. Moreover the previous theoretical analyzes and empirical studies on conditions conducive to the implementation of co-production focused on the factors on the citizens and the public organizations sides. Lack of the research regarding factors favoring the implementation of co-production with emphasis on the environment conditions while political, economic, social, and technological characteristics are important factors favoring or constraining the social services co-production. The planned research will fill the identified research gap and provide knowledge on the antecedence of the social service co-production process. Hereby the research will contribute to creating the ecosystem of conditions enhancing the co-production – foundations for the delivery of effective social services.

The main goal of the presented research project is is theoretical analysis and empirical evaluation of the conditions enhancing the initiation of co-production of social services in the local environment, with particular emphasis on environment (external) factors. In other words: proposing an ecosystem of conditions enhancing the co-production of social services between a public organization and civil society. To achieve the assumed goal, research will be carried out using such techniques as: (1) desk research; (2) comparative analysis; (3) systematic literature review; (4) Gioia methodology; (5) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with European co-production researchers; (6) Delphi technique.