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Structural elements for the co-production of public goods: an integrative approach

Arlindo Carvalho Rocha [1]
Paula Chies Schommer [1]
Emiliana Debetir [1]
Daniel Moraes Pinheiro [1]

[1] Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC) / Centro de Ciências da Administração e Socioeconômicas (ESAG), Florianópolis – SC, Brazil

Abstract

This article discusses the co-production of public goods and services from an integrative view. It starts from the proposition that transparency, information, trust, participation, and accountability are structural elements of co-production to suggest an integrative view of this phenomenon based on the approach of Mary Parker Follett, considering the interrelationships of these elements to support the necessary understanding of a complex, multifaceted, and deliberate process. This is a theoretical-analytical study, combining inductive and deductive elements, with a qualitative approach, through narrative review and systematic review of the national and international academic production. The results emphasize that the co-production of public goods and services is a complex task based on the systemic perspective of the association of individuals in groups, pointing to the presence of interrelated elements, and demanding social cohesion that can be consequential and catalyst of these elements.

Keywords: Co-production. Integrative view. Structuring elements.

Elementos estruturantes para a realização da coprodução do bem público: uma visão integrativa

Resumo

Neste artigo discute-se a realização da coprodução de bens e serviços público a partir de uma visão integrativa. Parte-se da proposição de que transparência, informação, confiança, participação e *accountability* são elementos estruturantes da coprodução. Sugere-se, a partir daí, uma visão integrativa desse fenômeno com base na abordagem de Mary Parker Follett, considerando as inter-relações desses elementos para fundamentar a necessária compreensão de um processo complexo, multifacetado e deliberado. Trata-se de um estudo teórico-analítico, combinando elementos indutivos e dedutivos, com abordagem qualitativa, por meio de revisão narrativa e revisão sistemática da produção acadêmica nacional e internacional. Como resultado, destaca-se que a coprodução de bens e serviços públicos é uma tarefa complexa assentada na perspectiva sistêmica da associação de indivíduos em grupo. Aponta-se, ainda, a presença de elementos inter-relacionados e demanda por coesão social, a qual pode ser tanto consequência como catalisadora desses elementos nos processos de coprodução.

Palavras-chave: Coprodução. Visão integrativa. Elementos estruturantes.

Elementos estructurantes para la realización de la coproducción del bien público: una visión integradora

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la realización de la coproducción de bienes y servicios públicos desde una visión integradora. Se parte de la proposición de que la transparencia, la información, la confianza, la participación y la rendición de cuentas son elementos estructurantes de la coproducción para sugerir una visión integradora de este fenómeno a partir del enfoque de Mary Parker Follett, considerando las interrelaciones de estos elementos para fundamentar la comprensión necesaria de un proceso complejo, multifacético y deliberado. Sin embargo, no se avanza en proponer un modelo de análisis. Es un estudio teórico-analítico, que combina elementos inductivos y deductivos, con un enfoque cualitativo, mediante revisión narrativa y revisión sistemática de la producción académica nacional e internacional. Como resultado, se destaca que la coproducción de bienes y servicios públicos es una tarea compleja que se fundamenta en la perspectiva sistémica de la asociación de individuos en grupo y que señala la presencia de elementos interrelacionados y demanda cohesión social, que puede ser tanto consecuencia como catalizadora de estos elementos.

Palabras clave: Coproducción. Visión integradora. Elementos estructurantes.

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INTRODUCTION

The co-production of public goods can be defined as the mutual engagement between governments and citizens, who mobilize available resources in society and share responsibilities and power to produce public goods and services (Brudney & England, 1983; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007; Marschall, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Salm & Menegasso, 2010; Verschuere, Brandsen & Pestoff, 2012).

Interest in co-production has grown since the start of the global financial crisis in 2008, which increased the need for austerity and budget cuts in the public sector in several countries (Bovaird, Flemig, Loeffler & Osborne, 2017). Brandsen and Honingh (2016, p. 431) explain this interest, saying that the co-production of public goods and services can constitute a means of accessing society's resources that would otherwise be unavailable to governments and, therefore, serve as a response to the scarcity of government resources and legitimacy. Furthermore, "it is seen as part of a drive to reinvigorate voluntary participation and strengthen social cohesion in an increasingly fragmented and individualized society."

However, co-production is a complex task. Studies that explore and analyze co-production processes in national and international empirical experiences show that these processes demand and depend on integrating elements such as transparency, information, trust, participation, and accountability. These elements enable the mutual engagement of regular users and providers (or citizens and rulers) to carry out co-production (Alford, 2009; Bovaird, 2007; Bovaird & Loefler, 2013; Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007; Doin, Dahmer, Schommer & Spaniol, 2012; Guerzovich & Schommer, 2016; Pestoff, 2009, 2018a; Rocha, Schommer, Debetir & Pinheiro, 2019; Rocha, Schommer, Spaniol & Sousa, 2012; Scharff, 2011; Schommer, Rocha, Spaniol, Dahmer & Sousa, 2015).

Such elements are presented either as necessary conditions – a starting point – or as a result of co-production, which can be reinforced, transformed, expanded, or destroyed in the process. However, there is a gap in understanding the roles of these elements and their interrelationships, even though it is possible to say that co-production demands and depends on these elements' integration to develop.

The study is based on a body of research that demonstrates connections among the elements and of studies exploring the interface between co-production and accountability (Doin et al., 2012; Guerzovich & Schommer, 2016; Rocha et al., 2012; Rocha et al., 2019; Schommer et al., 2015).

This theoretical-analytical research sought to combine inductive and deductive factors to build interrelationships among the elements examined. A bibliographic review (Rother, 2007) of national and international literature was conducted, in which the main authors of the themes were selected based on the researchers' knowledge (Paré, Trudel, Jaana & Kitsiou, 2015) and the referenced studies. From this review, the study considered the interrelations among the elements of co-production. Then, a systematic review was carried out (Rother, 2007) of each of these concepts and the connections between them were identified. Adopting the integrative vision defended by Mary Parker Follett, as gathered and analyzed in the work of Stout and Love (2017), the necessary bases for understanding these interrelations and the paths for the development of an analysis model for co-production based on social cohesion was formed. Social cohesion is understood here in the most common sociological sense, regarding the integration of individuals in a social group based on some type of motivation.

Therefore, elements thought to structure the co-production of public services are discussed, seeking to study and broadly understand them amid complex processes. This is based on the ontological assumptions and the integrative elements that enshrine the systemic perspective of the association and performance of human beings in groups (Follett, 1998 [1918]; Stout & Love, 2017).

In this sense, Ostrom's (1996) analysis on the synergy potentially generated by co-production is mentioned in Follett's work, which emphasizes co-creation as a process resulting from human creativity and the need that human beings have, in order to be complete, to co-create, and actively participate in community life.

Follettian governance, therefore, is aligned with the current perspectives of collaborative governance (Emerson, Nabatchi & Balogh, 2012), democratic network governance (Denhardt, 2012), co-creation, and co-production (Brandsen, Steen & Verschuere, 2018). However, in addition to an instrumental perspective that studies on these themes eventually

assume, the particular feature of Follett's work is the emphasis on the integration and ontology of the relational process, based on knowledge from various fields of science. According to Follett, for humanity to act (co-act) and interact in a more cohesive and harmonious way, transforming aspects of ethics, politics, and economics, it is essential to recognize and reflect on the principles that underpin any human activity (Stout & Love, 2017).

Once understood and practiced, the integrative perspective constitutes Follett's answer (or guess), even in conflict contexts. Therefore, even if the characteristics of the context do not favor joint action between citizens and government officials, trust, collaboration, and shared knowledge would be possible (or necessary) forms of avoiding social collapse and the waste of human capacities, justifying and emphasizing the discussion about the interrelationships among these elements and their integration in these processes.

This study is guided by Follet's perspective, which is consistent with the notion of social cohesion as an essential element supporting co-production. This perspective facilitates the analysis of the elements that form the social processes involved in each of the structuring elements discussed. This reflection can improve future models of co-production analysis and find strategies for coping with the practical problems resulting from its implementation, including the role of public managers in facilitating associations through relational processes.

This study adopts an integrative approach to discuss the structuring elements of co-production such as transparency, information, trust, participation, and accountability, which are also at the base of social cohesion. They are examined in an attempt to understand co-production as a complex, multifaceted, and deliberate process. In addition, this research envisions paths to develop an analysis model. However, this work does not intend to propose a model since this task would require a detailed examination based on structured empirical research of each constitutive element and its interrelations with the others. Such construction would demand answering objective questions that are not addressed in this study.

The article is organized into four sections, including this introduction. The second section is a brief explanation of the integrative process, based on Mary Parker Follett's management theory. The interrelationships of the elements present in the co-production are discussed and analyzed throughout the third section. The fourth section presents the final considerations.

THE INTEGRATIVE PROCESS

Co-production is a complex phenomenon, and its understanding goes back to the basis of Mary Parker Follett's theory and her conception of management of organizations and social systems based on integrative processes. Follett's work responded to the social conditions in her historical context but is still pertinent since today's conditions are quite similar and the challenges perhaps more urgent.

Reflecting on the historical context in which she worked (last decade of the nineteenth century until 1933, the year of her death), Follett stated that society's greatest needs were born from the growing exploitation of natural resources; intense and sometimes predatory competition; the lack of work given the growing supply of labor; the development of a broader conception of the ethics of human relations; the expansion of a vision of companies as a public service (which expands the enterprises' responsibilities toward efficient conduct). Stout and Love (2017) affirm the relevance and interest of different areas of management in Follett's work:

> If we reread Follett with this understanding of a relational ontology of becoming that embraces difference and seeks harmony, then her prescriptions for political and administrative practice are not only quite logical but necessary. [...] We need not enforce relatedness through order; it already exists. These concepts are the basics of what can be called Follettian governance facilitation of a way of living together through a relational process of becoming unique individuals, collectively engaged in an ongoing process of harmonizing differences through interlocking networks, to progress as both individuals and a society (Stout & Love, 2017, pp. 356-357).

Although here reproduced in a restricted way, Follett's thought allows us to foresee the importance of her work to understand the foundations of co-production. For the authors, the integrative process is, in summary, "the basic law of life [...] supports all life's structure and guides every activity" (Stout & Love, 2017, p. 359).

The perspective of the integrative process applied to co-production brings the idea of a continuous, interactive, and creative process, instead of a product to be achieved, because "Integration is arguably Follett's foundational concept, which she applies equally to physical existence, the individual psyche, and groups of human beings in all social contexts." (Stout & Love, 2017, p. 359). As already emphasized, observing the current scenario of worsening extremism and competition that have contributed to the growth of social tensions and to the questioning of institutions of national and global governance or the intensification of the conflict, Follett's answer is pertinent. She does not ignore the conflict but sees it as a stage in an integrative, creative, and collaborative process through which alternatives and solutions to collective challenges are sought (Stout & Love, 2017).

In this sense, the elements that compose and structure co-production are not only interrelated but dynamically and mutually influential.

Thus, the process demands and induces the public manager to play a proactive role in the search for co-production: coordinating an integrative process of converging elements, functions, and interests.

STRUCTURING ELEMENTS: INTER-RELATIONS

After exposing this theoretical background, each of the structuring elements for the co-production of public goods is discussed below.

Transparency

Society's demand for public transparency, understood as the open flow of information created by the government and oriented toward citizens, has grown in several countries and is determined by laws in more than 100 nations (Angélico, 2015). According to Park and Blenkinsopp (2011, p. 256), this demand originates from three main factors: "First, transparency is one of the fundamental moral claims in democratic societies [...]. Second, transparency is one of the practical measures taken to curtail corruption [...]. Third, transparency has a positive effect on trust and accountability.

Promoting co-production is, at the very least, challenging where opacity, disinformation, and lack of mutual trust between citizens and government, and between them in relation to the political system, stand out. In unfavorable contexts like this, transparency can be a strategy to overcome these issues. Rocha et al. (2019, p. 19 our translation) analyzed a program that promotes citizen participation in different stages of providing road paving services, with transparency as a key feature of local government management. The authors affirm that "Transparency in the process favored trust and mutual engagement between government officials and citizens, balancing their expectations in the face of the municipal reality and promoting knowledge about the production of public services."

In other words, considering its potential for establishing trust bases, transparency can be an effective government strategy to stimulate shared courses of action, promoting accountability, and contributing to improve service delivery (Bovaird & Loefler, 2013). In addition, transparency potentially invigorates legitimacy and trust in the government and the political system (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016).

However, there are risks to consider. Pressure may arise (albeit in disguise) from groups that have no interest in the transparency of government acts (in addition to the risk that the government will be challenged if there are complaints or reasons to believe that it disclosed incorrect information. The distance between citizens and governments, the few opportunities for participation, selective transparency regarding sensitive items such as resources, criteria, and procedures, the perception that there is a distance from the decision-making process or, yet, if there is no capacity to enforce the strategy itself, they can compromise the process, leading to widespread discredit.

Even if transparency is necessary, that is not enough. Its contribution to the process is to disseminate information, which is the foundation for knowledge. Transparency also provides bases for communication processes, building consensus and dialogue on shared values, leading to the expansion of mutual trust.

Information for knowledge

Information is immaterial and related to knowledge. According to Robredo (2011, p. 18, our translation), "when perceived, compared to existing knowledge, and accepted (consciously or unconsciously), [information] is incorporated into existing knowledge that, when structured, becomes know-how".

Obtaining and absorbing information and, consequently, knowledge, depends on individual will and derives from the interest of society. Information is the active element in the development of co-production, allowing citizens to build a referential framework on public problems and government action and, from there, act to find solutions, and demand explanations from representatives on their actions, to change how they act or even the objectives of public policies. "Publicizing what is done, how it is done, and creating channels for contesting, integrate an indispensable dimension so that the mechanisms of social control of the administration can be effective" (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada [Ipea], 2010, p. 194 our translation). The citizens' knowledge and governments' knowledge of citizens, in turn, is relevant to the governmental action.

The availability of qualified information by governments, the press, and citizens and their organizations is essential for policies' planning, management, and evaluation. It is necessary for combating corruption and for the effectiveness of institutional control (checks and balances) between state powers and bodies and social accountability (citizens control over the government) (O'Donnell, 1998, 2004).

Furthermore, new information and knowledge are produced in the interaction between public agents and citizens, contributing to improving public processes, policies, and services. The mutual engagement of citizens and governments in the co-production of information and control (Schommer et al., 2015) also allows citizens to know the limits that governments face to produce public goods and, from that, can redefine expectations and be willing to collaborate more. On the other hand, government officials come to know more about the expectations, points of view, and citizens' capacities, which are resources that can be mobilized.

The importance of information is evidenced in a study by Bertolin, Santos, Lima and Braga (2008, p. 63 our translation) on cooperativism. The authors state that information "constitutes an essential ingredient in building members' trust in their transactions with the organization." For them, this importance encompasses the "structuring of the individual's relations with the organization, emerging as a vital substance to the positioning of the latter as a social, productive, and knowledge-generating being."

English philosopher Francis Bacon is famous for the Latin expression *Scientia potentia est* "knowledge is power." This saying is further objectified in the currently named "information and knowledge society" that, in fact, knowledge and power are interlinked. Michel Foucault highlighted and analyzed the relationship between power and knowledge: "there is no power relationship without a correlated constitution of a field of knowledge, nor knowledge that does not suppose and does not constitute power relations at the same time" (Foucault, 2010, p. 30, our translation).

These are phrases and analyses that emphasize the close relationship between knowledge and the power that derives from it. In contemporary society, citizenship is constituted by having the power to participate and direct the community's political life. However, "citizens without information about decision-making processes and the implementation of policies cannot satisfactorily claim changes in their procedures and objectives" (Ipea, 2010, p. 194, our translation). Without information, citizens are also distant from the possibility of contributing to solving public problems.

Therefore, the existence of broad and reliable information provides knowledge and expands the possibilities for citizenship. If used in discussion, deliberation, and action, they increase trust in the political-administrative system and improve the conditions for citizen participation and engagement.

Trust

Trust is an ambiguous concept (Greiling, 2014, p. 618) that challenges public administration scholars (Kim, 2005, p. 617). But, "trust in people is quite different from trust in institutions and political authorities" (Putnam, 2000, p. 137).

With regard to public administration, trust is seen as an element that facilitates good governance and broadens respect for institutions, increasing citizen cooperation and understanding toward government decisions (Greiling, 2014; Kim, 2005).

The concern with the lack of trust in the government and in the political system and the harmful effects that this has on the government itself and on the cohesion of society is present in different times and contexts. Depending on the presence or absence of trust, there will be cooperation or polarization. Hence, "participation can create trust because it identifies and eventually harmonizes interests and makes actions predictable" (Bouckaert & van de Walle, 2003, pp. 329-335).

When it comes to interpersonal trust in community interactions, the concept of social capital – here referring to the nature and extent of an individual's involvement in various informal networks and formal civic organizations, i.e., "as a conceptual term to characterize the many and varied ways in which a given community's members interact" (Grootaert, Narayan, Nyhan & Woolcok, 2004, p. 3). It is fundamental to understand the capacity that trust and community interactions have to promote the production of collective goods (Grootaert et al., 2004; Serafim et al., 2012).

Therefore, social capital refers to people's ability to form a community, subordinate individual interests to collective interests, work together for mutual benefits, and share values and norms (Franco, 2001). This ability presupposes social interactions that promote mutual recognition, trust, reciprocity, and solidarity. It does not concern personal virtues but social virtues established from horizontal ties of interdependence among individuals in a community.

Rennó (2003, p. 36, our translation) states that "Trust is built over a long period and, once established, tends to continue over time, even though it requires constant exercise."

Trust encourages mobilization around collective issues because it generates positive expectations about the behavior of others, including the government and its institutions, because "in the essence of the concept of trust, according to several authors, is the idea of reciprocity," that is, "one person trusts another because they expect a certain type of attitude from them" (Rennó, 2003, p. 73, our translation).

Mutual trust allows the prevalence of common interests over individual interests. When there is no trust, individuals prefer to act in isolation and not collectively, which gives social importance to both cooperation and political mobilization, "precisely because of their indirect effects of 'dispelling isolation and mutual distrust'" (Putnam, 2006, p. 103). When citizens abandon their feelings of mutual trust, they end up undermining horizontal solidarity, showing less solidarity and participation in the community's life, solely interested in their well-being and that of their family (Putnam, 2006, p. 154).

In a study that tested the willingness of individuals to engage in collective actions, it was found that the more an individual understands that their participation requires a lot of their time and effort, the more interpersonal trust represents a positive differential. This trust results in encouraging the formation of groups of citizens with common interests, conditioned by the individual expectations of costs and benefits of collective action (Freire, 2014).

However, there are risks. "Trust is a fragile asset – especially in the government" (Behn, 1998, p. 28, our translation), and lack of results or not valuing citizens may lead to distrust.

Kang and Ryzin (2019) investigate how co-production can influence trust in the government. They concluded that trust is a precondition for initiating a co-production process, even though they found little causal effect of co-production on trust.

Trust is related to evaluating the service delivery process, and satisfaction is correlated with the evaluation of results. When the process is perceived as inclusive, participatory, and impartial, trust tends to be promoted (Fledderus, 2015).

Therefore, trust is the result of successful relational processes, built over time, and a requirement for political participation as well as an element that allows the consolidation of participation and citizen engagement.

Participation

Follett's contribution to the discussion of citizen participation in the community can be traced to one of her nicknames, "participation prophet," as she foreshadowed the need for a more democratic public administration by engaging citizens (Stout & Love, 2017, p. 372).

When restricted to the forms defined by the literature as conventional or citizen-oriented participation, the concept of participation refers to the inclusion of citizens in the political process, electing and delegating power to their representatives or involved in public policies' decision-making processes. It represents the preliminary level of engagement, which has the same nature as participation but exercised more profoundly and directly, so the citizen is personally and directly involved in the actions and shares responsibility for the process and its results (Stout & Love, 2017).

Participation and engagement are treated here as different levels of the same phenomenon in which citizens share power with public officials in "substantive decision-making" and in the development of actions related to the community (Roberts, 2004, p. 320). Participation presupposes the combination of an enabling political environment and individual will.

One of the first efforts to systematize issues related to citizen participation in political life was by Milbrath (1965). The author, reviewing empirical studies, distinguished a series of participation forms, which showed a wide variety of possibilities for their occurrence.

Research carried out by Verba and Almond (1963) led to a typology of the different gradations of individuals' explicit willingness to participate, which they called "civic culture." The authors identified three pure types of civic culture, and only members of the type related to participation feel motivated to engage in community actions, giving stability to democracies. In Follett's view, as cited by Stout and Love (2017, p. 71), "The activity of co-creating is the core of democracy, the essence of citizenship, the condition of world citizenship".

Milbrath's (1965) and Verba and Almond's (1963) studies were criticized for disregarding unconventional forms of engagement, such as the political activism of protest movements.

Another classic typology of participation is Arnstein's (1969) Ladder of Citizen Participation, structured based on the variable citizens' degree of power over decisions and actions of government programs, in different empirical situations. Pretty (1995) distinguishes seven types of participation, considering motivations and incentives to participate and roles played by citizens in initiatives aimed at common interests. As for White (1996), two main forms of planning and developing participation must be distinguished, considering who participates and the participation level.

Axworthy (2004, p. 3), when discussing the accountability deficit in the Canadian elections, affirms that there are clear relations between participation and accountability because for citizens to get involved in the political process, they must have enough information to assess the performance of the elected and assign responsibilities. The author concludes: "to encourage citizen involvement we must fix the accountability framework".

Marques (2009, p. 126, our translation), when studying the relationship between communication, the media, and the processes of building democracy in the city of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, corroborates the position of the Canadian study by stating that "people only engage in participatory processes when motivated by the certainty that their specific contribution can change the course and the formulation of policies and norms that directly affect them".

However, when participation is not valued, and the citizen does not see results, there is a risk of generating disengagement and distrust, undermining the process (Fledderus, 2015; Freire, 2014; Marques, 2009; Putnam, 2006). There is also the risk of using the notion of participation to put on a false governmental promise, of integrating the citizen into the processes of debate and decision-making; and, to qualify or validate formalistic deliberative processes (Marques, 2009).

In any case, participation and engagement, both of which rely on trust as a catalyst, are also active and fundamental elements for accountability.

Accountability

Accountability can be understood as a strategy to meet a set of expectations (Heidemann, 2009). In the scope of public administration, accountability refers to a complex process of control of public activity that seeks to promote public agents' permanent responsibility due to the power society grants them (Mainwaring & Welna, 2005; O'Donnell, 1998, 2004; Rocha, 2011).

The accountability process requires information, knowledge, and social participation (Axworthy, 2004; Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007), especially from the perspective of social accountability (Hernandez & Cuadros, 2014) or the co-production of information and control (Schommer et al., 2015), which emphasizes the relationship between citizens and government.

Hernandez and Cuadros (2014 p. 230, our translation) emphasize that accountability is not voluntary and presupposes who demands and applies it. It can be considered an element of well-being and socio-economic development: "being unable to demand accountability is a condition of poverty and a reason to remain in poverty." Citizens are, therefore, co-responsible for accountability, demanding it from government officials and collaborating for its realization while seeking a solution to specific problems in each context (Guerzovich, 2020; Thindwa, 2019). This is in line with what Follett pointed out, suggesting going beyond accountability based on hierarchy, in favor of accountability as responsiveness, assuming shared responsibility among the various people involved in a certain problem. It is not enough that each person fulfills their role or part well. It is necessary to be concerned with the performance of the other parts of the system (Stout & Love, 2017).

Greiling (2013, p. 40) notes that many authors consider accountability an essential factor in building and increasing citizen's trust in the government and its institutions. Kim (2005, p. 630) argues that "An institutional arrangement designed to ensure accountability byempowering citizens is likely to increase voluntary acceptance of the decisions and rules of government authority to the extent that government and citizens widen their shared values and interests".

Axworthy (2004, p. 2) observes that "A clearly defined accountability system is crucial to our system of representative democracy because citizens through their vote legitimize or give authority to leaders to act".

It is interesting to note the necessary synergy between institutional and social accountability, which arises from the need for a broad and open flow of information, able to subsidize and encourage discussion and debate around public issues.

Thus, the production and dissemination of high-quality public information, which government officials and citizens can use to analyze and define courses of action, is a necessary condition, although not sufficient, for effective accountability by society (Rocha, 2013). Such a need leads society to demand the production and dissemination of information through institutional systems, which empowers and legitimizes them. Citizens can contribute to the production of information based on and complementing data produced by institutional control bodies. Ideally, citizens should have, according to the possibilities, similar conditions to exercise social accountability as found within the state apparatus, counting on structure, technical capacity, access to specialized personnel, and legal competence (Rocha et al., 2012).

Therefore, institutional control systems must work well so that social accountability processes can develop satisfactorily. Both are interdependent (Schommer et al., 2015) and share responsibility for the system's performance as a whole (Stout & Love, 2017).

Accountability is even more challenging in co-production than in traditional public administration or in models of provision via the market, as it goes through more subjective criteria: the same actors play more than one role – those who control are also involved in decisions and execution (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007; Rocha, 2011). Furthermore, it is not limited to the electoral cycle or the moment of the elections, including the daily exercise of mandates and the cycles of public policies.

In an article that discussed accountability in governance arrangements when a public service – conciliation services – is carried out through co-production, Tuurnas, Stenvall and Rannisto (2016, p. 131) conclude that "co-production between volunteers and professionals increases accountability ties. [...] co-production as a governance arrangement affects the working conditions of public service professionals". In the case studied, professional accountability, social accountability, and peer review may be necessary "to avoid making policies based on the mutual professional interests of one group"

(Tuurnas et al., 2016, p. 141). The same authors emphasize "that governance arrangements change the logic of professional service provision, having implications especially for accountability relationships" (Tuurnas et al., 2016, p. 145).

In the same sense, Schommer et al. (2015) analyzed collaboration experiences between civil society organizations and institutional control bodies in Brazilian municipalities. The authors concluded that such connection contributes to activating the local and national accountability system, providing better information, justification, rewards, and punishments to public agents.

Thus, accountability composes and synthesizes the systemic perspective of the integrative process of the structuring elements of co-production.

Co-production – The Integrative Perspective

Several authors define typologies of co-production, considering the roles, degrees of power-sharing, and the stages of the co-production process in which the actors' engagement takes place (Bovaird, 2007; Brandsen & Hoeningh, 2016; Nabatchi, Sancino & Sicilia, 2017; Pestoff, 2018b; Salm & Menegasso, 2010).

Salm and Menegasso (2010, pp. 13-14, our translation), for example, consider different forms and degrees of power in participation to distinguish five models of co-production of public services: *nominal co-production*, in which the intention is the efficiency of public services, and there is no effective citizen participation and power over the state; *symbolic co-production*, a model marked by its manipulative nature, aiming to demonstrate the presence and effectiveness of the state; *functional co-production*, which occurs through the request for services, assistance to the state, or through a mutual adjustment with the state, and aims at the efficient implementation of public policies; *representative co-production with sustainability*, which results from the interaction of the citizen with the state apparatus and the delegation of power by the state. "In this model, empowerment and accountability are essential, since the model requires civic engagement by the citizen and the community"; and *co-production for community mobilization*, where public services are co-produced as a strategy for the permanent mobilization of the community and for overcoming the bureaucratic organization. "The model aims to transform the community and the public apparatus of the state," based on ethical and democratic principles.

Pestoff (2018b) discusses the roles of public servants, citizens, and private providers in four different public administration models. In the traditional model, citizens are only beneficiaries, without voice, choice, control, and effective participation. In the community model, citizens produce public goods and services they need on their own, usually due to the absence of the state and the lack of alternatives for citizens, i.e., there is no authentic co-production. In the new public management model, private providers gain prominence, and the user's role is one of choice, more as a consumer than as an active citizen, with a voice and action on the direction of the good or service. In the new public governance, in which co-production occurs, citizens participate and have a voice and political influence. They also have the option to disengage if they do not want to participate.

Although there are other types of co-production, the focus here is to show that co-production is a process of interactions between individuals and groups, shaped by motivations and attitudes. Unlike the interactions that occur in formal organizations, the motivations for co-production are diverse – through functional links, in the case of public agents; and out of self-interest, in the case of the citizen, even if such interest concerns only the individual or the community – because such interactions occur in relational and not contractual terms.

Thus, understanding co-production as an integrative process through Follett's point of view allows us "to transform our understanding of conflict as a social problem into conflict as an opportunity for a self-organizing, constructive, unifying, harmonizing, synthesizing process that generates shared power and progress" (Stout & Love, 2017, p. 356). The co-production processes abandon the perspective of a formal, hierarchical, and imposing administration, for a "fluid social function of facilitating the harmonization of differences, " i.e., "collaborative governance" (Stout & Love, 2017, p. 357).

Therefore, if there are no formal employment links in co-production that compel the citizen to co-produce, their adherence to the process will only occur for as long as they believe in the process, its benefits, and when they feel part of it. The public manager, in turn, is demanded and induced to coordinate an integrative process of converging elements, functions, and interests, valuing the contribution of all involved and committed to the results. These conditions will be reached when the nature of the process is understood, and the elements that give them social support are present. Only then the social cohesion necessary to support co-production will be present and persist as long as the co-production structural elements subsist.

However, co-production, even when it occurs effectively, sharing power, and achieving results, presents risks. Bovaird and Loefler (2013, p. 9) warn that many initiatives focus on *needs* instead of *needs and capacities*. This can mean a great variation in terms of results from one place to another and compromises the trust that the citizen, and the government itself, invest in the process. It is also possible that this is the type of relationship that can end up destroying transparency, trust, participation, and accountability due to citizens' distrust in the state's capacity to fulfill its promises and obligations toward co-production (Steen, Brandsen & Verschuere, 2018). In addition, under certain conditions, co-production is expected to generate synergy (Ostrom, 1996). Depending on how the process is conducted, co-production can decrease synergy (Kang & Ryzin, 2019), destroying public value instead of adding to it (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2013). Furthermore, co-production will be impractical if there is no effective redistribution of power, as discussed by Follets, *power with* instead of *power over* (Stout & Love, 2017) so that citizens feel included and influence public policies. In this sense, the redistribution of power must be understood categorically because only then will citizens excluded from the political process feel encouraged to participate (Arnstein, 1969).

In short, co-production can respond to the imbalance and the unproductive conflict (Stout & Love, 2017) and be useful in the face of the scarcity of government resources and legitimacy (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016). Although it naturally involves risks (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2014; Brandsen et al., 2018; Kang & Ryzin, 2019), as the central element and final objective of a complex, multifaceted, and deliberate process, co-production depends on and influences the elements that support it. It also demands and implements transparency in relation to production processes and their results. It qualifies information and knowledge since the existence of broad and reliable information provides knowledge and expands the possibilities of citizenship, increasing trust in the political-administrative system and improving the conditions of participation and citizen engagement. Increasing trust, which relates to the assessment of service delivery processes and the achievement of results, connects citizen and community participation and engagement to public service production and promotes accountability, which, in turn, expands, reinforces, and feeds back into the entire process, strengthening and improving it.

However, it should be noted that the discussion proposed here has just begun. It is not intended as a definitive conclusion about the elements and their relations but suggests ways to move forward in proposing the theoretical model of integrative analysis of co-production. This requires a detailed examination and in different orders and levels of analysis in progressive empirical research, per element and as a whole, in order to answer basic questions, such as: what is the intensity of these relationships? To what extent are the elements' preconditions for co-production? Is there a hierarchy between them? Are they necessary and/or an effective response to make co-production possible in contexts of conflict? And in contexts of harmony (not conflict)? These and other defining questions for future research will allow us to arrive at the structuring of a model.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the current political and economic crisis, the complexity of the challenges and the collective needs are greater than government responsiveness. The aggravation of conflicts and social tensions requires counterpoints to find a new balance through collaboration and coordination. The rising costs and the growing demand jeopardize the provision of more and better public services. Against this backdrop, the solution lies in adopting differentiated and creative strategies to deliver these services, involving the mobilization and coordination of the resources available in society.

In addition to the financial aspects, the rapprochement between government and citizens can contribute to recover the political legitimacy of governments, considering the moment of skepticism and perplexity generated by investigations of corruption, misuse of public resources, and new global challenges. The context requires participatory and creative responses that strengthen citizenship and democracy instead of authoritarian and simplistic solutions.

According to what has already been observed by Follett (1998), progress depends not only on economic, physical, or biological conditions but on the capacity for genuine cooperation, or the continuous expansion of people's capacity to work together and build a co-creative democracy in all spheres of society (Stout & Love, 2017).

In this scenario, co-production appears as a way to balance expectations, justify the lack of resources, mobilize other types and sources of resources, promote accountability, and engage civil servants and citizens in the provision of services and in facing public challenges.

However, co-production does not happen by chance. It is a complex process that, approached from an integrative view, can be studied, understood, and structured more broadly. As a government action strategy to produce public goods and services together with citizens, co-production presupposes – and requires – the authorities' proactivity, translated into the necessary sharing of power and action with the citizen, and a responsive posture of the citizen, whose participation goes beyond ordinary and punctual actions, expressing an awareness of belonging and being part of a production process, democratic in essence, but in continuous transformation. Public managers, who are also citizens "with special responsibilities" (Stout & Love, 2017, p. 374), have the special task of coordinating an integrative process of converging elements, functions, and interests. As such, the adhesion of public servants and citizens to the co-production of public goods and services will only happen as long as they believe in the process and will only continue as long as they feel part of it and perceive the elements that reinforce and reinvigorate the social cohesion necessary for the process and its sustainability.

However, it is crucial to realize that fiscal limitations (or any other pertinent reasons), while being an incentive for co-production and enhancing citizens' capacity, can also represent a possible reduction (or withdrawal) of the state's presence providing services and guaranteeing rights.

Finally, it is important to reinforce that this is an initial work, proposing that transparency, information, trust, participation, and accountability are structuring elements of co-production. Based on a vision of ontological and cultural assumptions, elements of the integrative process that enshrines the systemic perspective of the association and performance of human beings in groups, as defended by Mary Parker Follett, it is possible to envision paths for the development of an analysis model. This model would be based on social cohesion supported by the systemic perspective of association and performance of individuals in groups, acting from their personal motivations and attitudes. However, advancing the proposal of the model itself is an ongoing task that requires, in addition to the discussion of theoretical aspects, empirical research that consolidates and details the interrelations presented here.

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Arlindo Carvalho Rocha
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1193-2244
Ph.D. in administration; Professor and researcher of the research group Politeia at the School of Administration and Socioeconomic Sciences of the Santa Catarina State University (UDESC ESAG). E-mail: arlindo.rocha@udesc.br

Paula Chies Schommer
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9919-0809
DoPh.D. in business administration; Professor of public administration and researcher of the research group Politeia – Co-production of public goods: accountability and management at the School of Administration and Socioeconomic Sciences of the Santa Catarina State University (UDESC ESAG); Collaborating professor in the Development and Social Management Program at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA). E-mail: paulacs3@gmail.com

Emiliana Debetir
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0998-1226
Ph.D. in civil engineering; Master in administration; Professor of public administration and researcher of the research group Politeia – Co-production of public goods: accountability and management at the School of Administration and Socioeconomic Sciences of the Santa Catarina State University (UDESC ESAG). E-mail: emilianadebetir@gmail.com

Daniel Moraes Pinheiro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7731-8178
Ph.D. in Administration from the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC); Professor of the Graduate Program in Administration and the Department of Public Administration at the Santa Catarina State University (UDESC); Researcher at the Center for Social Innovations in the Public Sphere (NISP). E-mail: daniel.pinheiro@udesc.br