Embedded and exterior practices of cross-sector co-production: the impact of fields*

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Abstract

Cross-sector co-production involving voluntary organisations in the production and delivery of social services has been adopted across many welfare states. Economic and demographic changes have led to increased involvement of volunteer initiatives in different welfare policy fields. How different field properties enable, constrain, and shape co-production practices remains, however, under researched. In this article, we address this shortcoming in a comparative case design exploring the practices of co-production within the two fields of elderly services and refugee services. We develop a conceptual framework and demonstrate that differential distribution of resources leads to diverging outcomes and perspectives for co-production. Based on a two-year in-depth study of one large Danish municipality, we find two forms of co-production practices, which reflect different field conditions. In the field of elderly services, co-production takes the form of 'embedded' practices, and in the field of refugee services co-production takes the form of 'exterior' practices. We demonstrate that each of these co-production forms entail ambiguous outcomes and antagonistic positions for voluntary and public sector actors, depending on the policy field.

Keywords: co-production; fields; voluntary sector; welfare state; elderly services; refugee services

Introduction

Cross-sector co-production involving volunteers in the production and delivery of public services has come to the forefront of many advanced welfare states across Europe and elsewhere (Voorberg et al., 2015; Brandsen & Verschuere, 2018; Connolly et al., 2022). Increasing pressure on public welfare economies has led to a new agenda of increased nonprofit and voluntary involvement in welfare policy fields, such as elderly care, childcare, labour market activation, and integration of

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refugees and immigrants (Christensen et al., 2009). In response, these policy fields have become more open to cross-sector collaboration, and sectorial boundaries have become more fluid (Heins & Bennett, 2016). However, there is a lack of systematic knowledge on how differences between welfare policy fields enable, constrain, and shape co-production into different forms and practices. This study seeks to contribute both empirical knowledge and a conceptual framework for analysing these field-specific differences.

Within individual policy fields, the co-production agenda involves strong mutual awareness among public, nonprofit, and for-profit actors of involvement in a common enterprise (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Stone & Sandfort, 2009, p.1060). Simultaneously, this expands the legitimate terrain for volunteer and nonprofit involvement in service production and delivery (Shachar et al., 2019). This blurring of the boundaries of legitimate participation creates opportunities for new cross-sectorial forms of collaboration and practices (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p.36). Policy makers see co-production between public actors and voluntary, non-profit actors as a key element in the future welfare architecture across a range of social issues (Bovaird et al., 2015; Grønbjerg & Smith, 2021; Ibsen et al., 2021). However, co-production activities are set within different fields with varying degrees of structuration, different power constellations, dissimilar degrees of contestation, and various distributional logics and conflicts over resources and recognition (Krause, 2018). Existing research shows that different field structures can enable or constrain the development of new organisational forms (Rao et al., 2000; Hustinx et al., 2014, p.249), and can impact the space available to negotiate and enact new and innovative practices (Battilana, 2006).

How different field characteristics enable, constrain, and shape co-production between public sector and voluntary sector actors are of growing concern. A major review of some 120 co-creation and co-production studies concludes that we know too little about 'to what extent the policy field in which co-creation is implemented is influential with respect to the type and effects of these processes' (Voorberg et al., 2015, p.1350), suggesting that the challenges, opportunities, and practices of co-production depend on the specificities of the service in question. One key comparative study suggests that both regime and social policy domains may have a critical impact on the shape of organisational hybridity (Hustinx et al., 2014). Similarly, comparative studies of the geographical and institutional contexts of co-production indicate that field effects may be very real and tangible (Milligan & Fyfe, 2004; Christensen et al., 2009; Hardill & Dwyer, 2011). A recent comparative study across Norwegian municipalities likewise demonstrates the correlation between the institutional context of different fields and variation in co-production patterns (Trætteberg & Enjolras, 2023). How co-production of service delivery at the front line in everyday practices is shaped by field properties, however, remains less researched.

To address this gap, we investigate how different field-level conditions enable, constrain, and shape co-production practices in cross-sector collaborations within a comparative case study of two different welfare policy fields at the local municipal level. The fields investigated in this study are elderly care and welfare services for refugees. The two case fields are similar in terms of the increased involvement of non-public actors who work alongside or with public welfare providers to meet new

and increasing demands for services. The fields differ, however, in the broader political and public attitudes towards the two groups of welfare recipients, which manifests as differential access to and distribution of human resources and organisational resources. These differences may have a significant impact on the conditions and opportunities for cross-sector collaboration. Based on extensive qualitative data from one large Danish municipality, we compare how particular ways of organising and practicing cross-sector co-production were shaped, enabled, and constrained by the structures of the two policy fields.

We find that differences in field properties resulted in two different forms of co-production practices, which we term 'embedded' and 'exterior'. In the field of elderly services, co-production practices take the form of embedded co-production. In this field, cross-sector co-production typically received more support from the top management of the municipality, more human resources were invested in co-production projects, and more investments in spatio-material infrastructure were made to facilitate co-production. Moreover, there was relatively open access to locales for cross-sector collaboration, and volunteers were welcomed within public sector facilities. In the field of refugee services, co-production practices take the form of exterior co-production. In this field, co-production received less or no support from municipal top management and primarily remained outside of the physical and symbolic spaces of the public sector and instead took place in fragmented, short-term collaborations.

Our research demonstrates that different field conditions for co-production resulted in different opportunities for and openness to cross-sector collaboration. Moreover, each form of co-production casts public and voluntary actors in different positions, leading to different tension fields, conflicts, and boundary struggles over public and voluntary responsibility and terrain. Within the elderly field, voluntary actors were frequently forced into defensive positions in an effort to guard their autonomy, whereas voluntary actors often pushed for a more ambitious co-production agenda within the field of refugee services against a cautious public sector. In both cases, considerable tensions and ambiguities resulted from these field-specific positions and oppositions.

In what follows, we first review relevant field theory and develop an analytical approach to fields helpful in understanding the unfolding of co-production practices within policy fields. Second, we present the data and methodology of our study, and we briefly outline the arguments for our selection of policy fields as cases. Third, we describe and analyse the different distributions of support and resources across the two fields at the municipal level and demonstrate how these shape, constrain, and enable different forms of co-production practices across fields. Lastly, we discuss the implications of the embeddedness of local co-production practices within different policy fields.

Policy fields and co-production

Our study concerns how different field-level conditions shape, enable, and constrain cross-sector co-production of social services as specific organisational practices. For this purpose, we consider a field as an institutional environment of symbolic, legal, regulatory, and spatio-material affordances and relationships that can shape actors'

opportunities and constrain action (Stone & Sandfort, 2009; Rodner et al., 2020). A field is characterised by a certain constellation of identifiable elements, such as national rules and regulation, political priorities, different public and private service providers, and different professional norms (Stone & Sandfort, 2009, p.1056). Consequently, different policy fields provide differential access to key resources for different actors, which shape service production and practices. Moreover, given the different allocation of resources, positions and relationships between actors from different sectors also depend on field specific characteristics (Krause, 2018, p.5).

Within the extensive literature on fields, one dominant approach primarily focuses on shared norms and practices, emphasising the structuring and constraining power of fields. The institutional logics approach, for example, perceives fields as arenas containing 'logics' or organising principles that govern which actors are considered legitimate participants and which kinds of technologies, organisational goals, and managerial practices are authorised (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton et al., 2012). Other approaches, such as the theory of strategic action fields, instead conceive of fields as arenas of conflict and strategic action aiming to create and contest field rules. This approach focuses on the differentials of power emanating from the unequal distribution of resources and positions and social skills among actors (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, p.5). For our purpose, we follow Monika Krause´s (2018, p.6) argument that whether specific fields are characterised by shared norms and consensus rather than conflict and struggle is an empirical question.

A field approach allows us to observe how field-related differences in specific actors' access to various kinds of resources and support help shape field-specific cross-sector co-production practices. Moreover, the focus on the practices at the concrete frontline of service delivery enables an appreciation of the implications of the various forms of support for co-production outcomes and the positions available to co-producing actors.

Based on a review of research on fields and cross-sector collaboration, we propose a framework sensitive to the impact of field context on how co-production practices unfold across the public and voluntary sectors. Field context involves both immaterial elements, such as ideology or political visions, organisational resources, and the spatio-material resources, such as buildings and locales made available to co-production. We identify three key dimensions of the field context:

1) Overall *ideological legitimacy of* co-production as a collaborative practice
2) Distribution of *formal support* and access to human and organisational resources
3) Distribution *of spatio-material resources* (physical and virtual spaces and infrastructures)

Below we elaborate how these field dimensions all play a critical role in shaping, enabling, or constraining cross-sector organisational practices into field-specific forms.

The first dimension, *ideological legitimacy*, is important because co-production is not only a model for organising collaborative initiatives across the public and voluntary sectors but also – and perhaps primarily – a normative ideal for the pursuit of shared public and private responsibility (Nath, 2019). Institutional

research on cross-sector collaboration shows that participating partners depend on ideological backing to legitimise investment in resources and infrastructure and to support general guidelines for collaborative experiments (Gray & Purdy, 2018, p.27). Typically, this kind of general ideological legitimacy manifests in favourable discourse production, such as government strategies or governance models (Stone & Sandfort, 2009, p.1064), which promote particular understandings and models for the best practice of co-production. Specific role interpretations are also promoted and may guide negotiations and practices between public and voluntary sector actors. These models for best practice and collaborative roles may permeate local field discourse and perceptions among co-production participants, helping to stabilise mutually accepted practices and social rules as common ground (Fayard & Pache, 2021, p.4) among partners navigating new terrain.

Our second analytical dimension, *formal support*, concerns the access to and mobilisation of human and organisational resources and support for co-production as pivotal field conditions (Stone & Sandfort, 2009; Hwang & Suárez, 2019; Krause, 2018, p.12; Gray & Purdy, 2018, p.121). Individual actors and organisations operating in different welfare policy fields depend on local top leaders and managers' support for co-production initiatives and projects for two main reasons. First, it connects co-producing actors to political and administrative authority, which strengthens the positions of actors seeking to advance new collaborative initiatives and coalitions (Stone & Sandfort, 2009, p.1069; Hwang & Suárez, 2019, p.93; Fligstein, 2013, p.42). Second, formal support also eases access to organisational and human resources, such as professional competencies and funds (Hwang & Suárez, 2019, p.92), which may help actors establish and sustain collaboration and become attractive co-production partners.

The third dimension, *spatio-material resources,* concerns access to physical or virtual spaces and infrastructures for co-production (Jones et al., 2017; Rodner et al., 2020). By including a focus on spatial resources, we follow Rodner et al., who posited that 'Spatial aspects of institutions help enact or constrain said social interactions' (Rodner et al., 2020, p.2). As with any other organisational practice, cross-sector co-production depends on a mixture of digital and physical meeting places for coordination, planning, and everyday practice. Conversely, the absence of stable physical and virtual meeting places or an excessively frequent change in locations may constrain cross-sector interaction and trust-building (Rodner et al., 2020; Grubb & Vitus, 2022). Even though the literature on fields and institutional transformation rarely pays much attention to space and materiality in general (Jones et al., 2017), a growing body of research in organisation studies emphasises the importance of space in shaping and contesting fields (Brandtner & Dunning, 2020; Rodner et al., 2020). According to this work, spatial resources may cover the access to – or ownership of – buildings, premises, or websites sustaining the organising or practicing of co-production (Rodner et al., 2020), or they may manifest as geographic nearness to key field institutions, or as the density of organisations (Brandtner & Dunning, 2020).

In our analysis, we focus on how these three mutually dependent dimensions of policy fields provide a complex web of ideological, political, formal, and spatio-material conditions for public and voluntary actors that underpin the local manifestations of field-specific practices of cross-sector co-production, and we

demonstrate how these different co-production practices affect the openness and support for co-production as a legitimate collaborative effort across the public and the voluntary sector.

Study design, methodology, and data

We selected the two welfare policy fields of elderly care and welfare services for refugees for comparison because they both enjoy a high level of ideological legitimacy of co-production. State actors, local municipalities, and voluntary organisations within both fields all work to address important public concerns and recognise that cross-sector collaborations are essential in this endeavour. Elderly care is of interest because of the growing elderly population and demands for rehabilitation measures, and refugee services because of increasing global migration. The purpose of this selection is to limit our investigation to policy fields where co-production should be expected to occur in practice and, consequently, to provide access to data on co-production where it is actually taking place. Next, the two policy fields were selected because they represent different political attitudes towards the deservingness of the recipients, which on a local level may spill over into different distributions of resources on the two remaining dimensions: formal support and spatio-material support. Whereas elderly people enjoy a high degree of deservingness, the opposite is the case within the field of refugee services (Milman, 2022). This research design suggests that if policy fields play a role in forming co-production practices and structuring actor positions, such differences should emerge in this study.

We analysed co-production practices within the two fields on a local scale (Krause, 2018) within the Aalborg Municipality, one of Denmark's largest, with approximately 200,000 inhabitants in mainly urban and suburban residential areas. The Aalborg Municipality explicitly supports co-production in the two fields (Frederiksen et al., 2021), making it similar to most Danish municipalities. We collected data on all activities and projects involving voluntary organisations or volunteer initiatives targeting vulnerable elderly people and refugees that were defined by the local public or voluntary actors as co-production. The empirical material focused on the type of co-production concerning social service production such as community development, social support activities and leisure activities for vulnerable groups (Røiseland, 2023; Strokosch & Osborne, 2021). The major part of the activities in our material further could be characterised as community co-production (Bovaird, 2007), in which voluntary organisations and volunteer initiatives make supplementary contributions to the provision of social services.

The case study combines several qualitative methods: two years of participant observation of meetings and everyday organisational life; thirty-five interviews with volunteers, public managers, public employees, and users; five focus group interviews with elderly people, the next of kin of the elderly people, and refugees; and document analysis of project descriptions, municipal policy documents, and organisational publications, such as newsletters and strategy papers. The analysis in this paper is based on material from the entire empirical archive. All data were managed according to ethical standards. We illustrate main findings with quotes from interviews and with examples of co-production initiatives and projects from

our observations and field work. In the analysis we have a particular focus on differences across the two policy fields on the three analytical dimensions.

Our analytical strategy starts by looking into how the ideological legitimacy of co-production as a practice for local actors materialised in widespread positive attitudes towards local partners and projects engaging in solving complex tasks and services across the municipal and the voluntary sector. However, despite strong ideological support across both the elderly field and the field of refugee services, the resources available to co-producing partners differed significantly across the two fields. In two consecutive sections, we demonstrate how the elderly field was characterised by strong formal support and substantial access to spatio-material resources, whereas the opposite was the case for the field of refugee services. The next analytical step offers a conceptual characterisation of each of the two organisational forms of practicing co-production, labelled 'embedded' and 'exterior', which resulted from the differential distribution of key resources within each of our fields. Lastly, we analyse how these two field-specific forms of practicing co-production each impact the space and positions available to public and voluntary actors, and we analyse the ambivalent field-specific tensions and conflicts that arise as a consequence.

There are limitations to a single municipality study such as ours. There may be variations in local municipality and civil society regimes we do not capture (Arvidson et al., 2018). There may also be differences related to the size of fields or the traditions of collaboration that would demand a more encompassing comparative design. The aim of the field comparative case design, however, is not to generalise in a statistical sense, but to arrive at analytical generalisations that can advance our conceptual understanding of different patterns of co-production.

Local ideological legitimacy of co-production

In our case municipality, a high degree of openness towards cross-sector collaborations existed within both the elderly field and the field of refugee services. Key municipal and voluntary sector actors were keen to work in different partnership constellations, describing co-production as an activity in which citizens, voluntary organisations, and municipal organisations engaged in identifying and addressing unmet social needs through collaboration. Thus, we found a positive attitude and a shared understanding of 'co-production' among representatives from public and voluntary organisations across both fields, and interviewees illustrated ideal co-production practices by referring to concrete 'model projects'.

One example of such a model project, which was mentioned by several interviewees, included one of the local churches that arranged relocations of refugees from temporary housing to permanent residence. The problem for the municipality in this case was a lack of legal authority to support and finance relocation. In many cases, the refugees were left without means and networks to help them, and in this case, church volunteers offered practical assistance and even provided used furniture for the refugees. Another example from the elderly field involved a request from the municipality, which could no longer find resources to accompany elderly people to the dentist. With fewer elderly people having artificial teeth, this was a growing problem, since a lack of attention to oral hygiene could develop into more serious health problems. In this case, volunteers stepped in to

accompany the elderly to the dentist. As a token of the open attitude and as concrete support for the idea of cross-sector collaboration, the municipality employed 'volunteer-coordinators' within both elderly services and refugee services. In both fields, the intended role of the volunteer coordinators as boundary spanners (Needham et al., 2017) was to cultivate and sustain fruitful cross-sector partnerships across municipal and voluntary actors.

Thus, at the local level, we found a high degree of ideological legitimacy of co-production and a high degree of openness towards cross-sector collaborations within both the elderly field and the field of refugee services. Furthermore, within both fields, local actors highlight particular projects as models for successful co-production practices. However, there were also considerable differences between the two fields, and successful co-production typically depended on the municipality formally initiating or endorsing co-production projects and supporting them through the allocation of staff and access to municipal institutions, physical spaces, and/or digital platforms.

In the following two sections, we describe the different distribution of formal support from municipal management and the different distribution of spatio-material resources within the two fields.

Formal and spatio-material support in the elderly field

Within the elderly field, the *formal support* from municipal management and policy makers stood out distinctly. As an example, the top management of the elderly administration were present at the launch of a large cross-sector co-production project to counter loneliness among socially at-risk elderly people, an experience we did not observe within the field of refugee services. Furthermore, formal support involved staff allocated to the project, entrenching the project as an important collaborative effort. The high level of formal support also meant that volunteer involvement was perceived as non-controversial. While voluntary associations recruited some of the volunteers involved in co-production in the elderly field, others were recruited directly through local public institutions, through word of mouth, or via a website designed to support the recruiting of stand-alone volunteers. On the municipality's website, local citizens could post their interest in volunteering, after which municipal staff, typically the municipal volunteer coordinator, would match individual volunteers with municipal activities for the elderly. In this field, the volunteer coordinator employed by the municipality had a mandate to promote and facilitate co-production initiatives and enjoyed wide degrees of freedom from top management to initiate new cross-sectoral collaborations or employ stand-alone volunteers as she saw fit. During an interview, the volunteer coordinator put it like this:

'Well, we have a "freedom charter" in the elderly administration. So, we should dare break boundaries and limits, and we do that, definitely.'

Furthermore, the formal support at the local level was supplemented with plenty of stable *spatio-material resources* that were allocated to co-production in the elderly field. Volunteers were welcomed in the local elderly homes and activity centres as active providers of supplementary activities, such as tandem cycling, sing-along cafés, or personal visitors for the elderly. In other words, cross-sector co-production and volunteers in general were welcomed and actively invited into municipal spaces

through buildings and virtual infrastructures. Volunteers, either organised or stand-alone, were treated as trustworthy, complementary, and highly desired resources. Consequently, co-production in the field of elderly services was often practiced within municipal institutions and spaces.

One illustrative example of the high formal support and spatio-material integration of co-production within the elderly field was the project called Active Young Patients with Dementia (AYPD). The co-production project targeted citizens recently diagnosed with dementia and was initiated and organised as a cross-sector collaboration, in which the municipality and the involved voluntary organisations collectively defined the needs of the elderly in focus and agreed on how to organise activities responding to these needs. The project manager was a former municipal employee, and the project was physically located in a municipal administration building, reflecting the important formal municipal support for – and influence on – the project. The municipality provided formal support and spatial resources for the AYPD project, and the project manager emphasised on several occasions how the AYPD from the beginning was endorsed by key actors within the municipal elderly department. During an interview she said:

'I have been employed by the municipality before, and there, for many years, people had been saying: "We would like such a service for citizens suffering from dementia, where you could walk in from the street. We could have some employees to sit there, providing advice and guidance". And the voluntary association said: "We would also like such an option. Could we do this together?" So we [the municipality] had meetings with the voluntary association about how we could join forces in this project'.

Thus, in terms of both formal support and spatio-material resources, the field of elderly services provided an institutional environment with resources and opportunities that could support actors from the municipality and the voluntary sector in co-production efforts.

Formal and spatio-material support within the field of refugee services

The ideological legitimacy of co-production in the refugee services field matched that of the elderly field. However, in terms of putting ideals into practice, we found significant differences compared to the elderly field, and it was apparent that the field of refugee services constituted a significantly different institutional environment, with less formal support and spatio-material resources at disposal.

In terms of *formal support*, the municipality similarly allocated resources to a volunteer coordinator in charge of cultivating and sustaining cross-sector collaborations. However, whereas the coordinator in the field of elderly services was expected to actively encourage, initiate, and support collaboration with volunteers within municipal spaces, the volunteer coordinator in the field of refugee services performed the role of boundary spanner in a more reluctant manner. In fact, we observed several instances in which voluntary organisations tried to initiate new co-production projects to address specific refugee needs but were met with resistance from the volunteer coordinator and other municipal staff.

One example was an initiative from a large non-profit organisation to launch a co-production project escorting refugee children to voluntary leisure activities,

which was dismissed by the municipal administration. The municipal employees justified the rejection by arguing that the project would cater to a certain group of children, contrary to the goal of integration within existing services. Moreover, as the municipal volunteer coordinator added during a conversation, even though the project was framed as an initiative to strengthen the inclusion and integration of refugee children and their families into local communities, the projects could inadvertently contribute to pacifying and thus marginalising this group.

The general reluctance towards certain forms of volunteer iniated co-production projects was explained by a team manager from the refugee services field in the municipality during an interview:

'We also have a strategy in the Aalborg Municipality concerning the reception of newly arrived refugees. We want refugees to be integrated into the existing social systems that are already present in the municipality.'

Consequently, the municipal actors worked to make immigrants self-reliant as soon as possible after their arrival. This policy made it illegitimate to provide services that seemed to help refugees with problems that they, in principle, should address by themselves. The lower level of formal support was grounded in a local policy, mirroring broader national political discourses for justifying the treatment of immigrants as 'ordinary citizens' (Milman, 2022) and, consequently, not gaining access to 'extra-ordinary' public or voluntary co-produced services. Consequently, fewer co-production initiatives and projects were met with support from the top management of the municipality, and fewer resources in the form of staff were allocated to this field.

In terms of *spatio-material support*, we also found that the field of refugee services provided significantly different conditions for co-production compared to the elderly field. In contrast to the elderly services field, there were no spaces or public premises where potential co-production could take place. Consequently, cross-sector projects typically took place off public premises or in temporarily available locales. With no permanent spaces available for joint co-production activities, the cross-sector collaboration was typically organised in a form in which actors from each sector worked in separate locales spread over the town.

One example of this distant form of practicing co-production was a project called 'The Job Club'. After a series of cross-sector meetings where the volunteers had argued for closer functional and spatial integration between municipal and volunteer support activities for refugees looking for jobs, the project ended up in a format in which the municipal staff would define tasks that volunteers could assist in solving. The volunteers would then attempt to provide assistance for the refugees as defined by the municipality in their own temporarily rented venues.

Thus, in terms of both formal support from municipal management and access to public premises, the field of refugee services provided voluntary and municipal actors with fewer resources and opportunities for co-producing services.

Field-specific forms of co-production practices

We have demonstrated that municipal formal support and access to spatio-material resources differed widely between the elderly field and the field of refugee services. In this section, we argue that the predominant forms of practicing co-production

within the two fields were shaped by field properties and structures that enabled and constrained co-producing actors differently within each field. Based on two criteria: 1) the availability of municipal access points, and 2) the degree of integration of co-produced services into municipal institutions, we theorise that the practice of co-production takes two distinct forms that emanate from the different structuring of the two policy fields.

Within the elderly field, we found several municipal access points, most notably in the form of elderly centres and local activity centres, where volunteers and voluntary organisations could engage in services for the elderly and promote ideas for co-production. Furthermore, a digital infrastructure provided citizens with plenty of opportunities for volunteering, and the volunteer coordinator enjoyed a status in which new avenues for co-production could be legitimately promoted. The high number of municipal access points further paved the way for the volunteers and the voluntary organisations to operate in close proximity to elderly citizens and municipal staff on the inside of municipal welfare institutions. Thus, several co-production projects took place within public premises, which 'blended' public and voluntary resources.

By contrast, within the field of refugee services, there were few municipal access points for co-production, and in many instances, such as in the case of the job centres, volunteers and voluntary organisations were denied access. Instead, co-production projects and initiatives had to be practiced outside and away from the municipal realm and without the same supply of formal and material resources that characterised the elderly field. Thus, co-production typically unfolded in temporary locales, made available to volunteers by the municipality, with volunteers as visitors and the municipality as the distant host. Due to their temporary and distant nature, services initiated in the field of refugee services typically lacked the stability and continuity needed for solving complex problems, such as integration of refugees living under temporary and uncertain conditions.

To capture the combination of a high degree of municipal access points and a high degree of integration of co-produced services within municipal institutions, we suggest the term 'embedded co-production'. The opposite combination of a low degree of municipal access points and a low degree of integration of co-produced services into municipal institutions can be captured by the term 'exterior co-production'.

In the next section, we scrutinise the consequences of these two distinct forms of co-production practices for the tensions and ambivalence of local actors operating within the two policy fields.

Local tension fields and ambivalence

The two different forms of practicing co-production within the two policy fields did not simply enable co-production within the elderly field or constrain co-production within the field of refugee services. Rather, the two forms of practicing co-production produced complex and ambivalent tension fields, resulting in different forms of conflicts and contestations that cast municipal and voluntary actors in opposing boundary struggles.

Within the elderly field, the practice of *embedded co-production* sustained a high level of experimentation in the service provision for the elderly and an openness towards co-production. The different kinds of formal and spatial support that we documented, and which underpinned the field-specific ways of practicing co-production, provided key actors, such as the municipal volunteer coordinator and leaders from voluntary organisations, with formal support and spatial resources and opportunities for advancing and influencing co-production in the service provision towards closer and extended collaborations. However, the embeddedness also entailed, among municipal staff, a sense of fertile ground for pushing a co-production agenda that implicated a potential instrumentalisation of volunteers. As an illustration the volunteer coordinator from the elderly field said:

'We have plenty of volunteers, and a couple of times I have had to, how should I put it, "sack" volunteers. [. . .] Because, they should support our core tasks.'

The municipal volunteer coordinator, as a key agent in promoting cross-sector co-production in this field, felt that she acted on a solid mandate for expanding the use of volunteers as long as it aligned with the municipality's core tasks.

In the case of embedded co-production, it would thus seem that institutional disruption (Rodner et al., 2020) was primarily pursued by public sector employees, who tried to expand the legitimate set of tasks provided by volunteers. In response, volunteers and their organisations took on the role of 'institutional defenders' (Rodner et al., 2020), who attempted to protect the boundaries of the voluntary sector. In interviews with volunteers and voluntary leaders in the field, a recurring point of concern was how to prevent volunteers from taking over municipal core tasks. Volunteers, as one volunteer leader put it, should be 'the icing on the cake', and not cheap labour. A leading volunteer from one of the larger organisations serving elderly people put the concern for boundary transgression as follows:

'In my opinion, it is like this: if the municipality thinks that the volunteers need education resembling that of professionals [front line staff], then we are on the wrong track.'

From a public sector point of view, the embedded form of co-production seemed attractive for several reasons. First, the embedded form helped sustain the institutionalisation of an instrumentalised and individualised conception of volunteering (Lo & Eliasoph, 2012). This was attractive because it opened up municipal elderly institutions and activities for additional voluntary resources that could be accessed and put to use in a flexible manner. Second, the open attitude secured a permanent willingness to invest in new experiments and ways of practicing co-production, which expanded the terrain of possible and legitimate collaborative partnerships.

In the field of refugee services, *the exterior form of co-production* was prone to ambivalence as well. On the one hand, the ad hoc, temporary, and exterior form of practicing cross-sector co-production meant that many cross-sector activities faced opposition from the municipality and dried up. Unlike the field of elderly services, municipal staff within the refugee service field, such as the volunteer coordinator, took a defensive approach, maintaining that the municipality should only respond to universal problems or address particular problems through existing services. Against this backdrop, the voluntary organisations took the ambitious position and tried to expand the municipal responsibility to include more of the specialised needs

of the heterogeneous refugee population. In the face of such attempts to redefine the boundaries between private and public problems and expand local government's services and responsibilities, municipal leaders would act as institutional defenders (Rodner et al., 2020), resisting volunteer initiatives, often with reference to legal matters or municipal policy. For example one municipality leader within the refugee field said:

'Some volunteers are prone to think, you know, if you put a little more pressure on the municipality, then things will go their way. But it will not. And it is mega frustrating.'

From a local public sector perspective, the exterior form of co-production had the advantage of legitimising and sustaining a distance between the volunteers and the public frontline service providers. The contested boundaries over which tasks belong to which sector made the exterior form of co-production a welcome format – from a public sector point of view – for keeping critical volunteers at arm's length. The absence of shared spaces further constrained volunteers from performing frontline advocacy and challenging public practices and sectorial boundaries. In the field of refugee services, public sector agents became institutional defenders, working to maintain sectorial boundaries and avoid expansion of the economic and legal public territory.

Conversely, the volunteers, particularly those from the larger NGOs, on the one hand attempted to expand the responsibility of the municipality to encompass more problems relevant to different groups of refugees. However, the lack of general political consensus and legitimacy and the lack of formal support and spatio-material resources placed volunteers in an outsider position, which made it difficult for these actors to access and persuade public partners to engage in co-produced activities. Instead, the defensive municipal attitude seemed to retain and emphasise the distant advocacy role of voluntary organisations. On the other hand, while impeding cross-sector co-production from materialising in any durable forms of practice, the exterior form of co-production prevented volunteers in this field from being instrumentalised and exploited as cheap labour, to the same extent we observed in the field of elderly service.

Conclusion

Recent reviews of cross-sector co-production research reveal a lack of knowledge on how different policy fields shape, enable, and constrain the practice of co-production. To address these shortcomings, this study used a comparative case design and compared the practice of co-production across the fields of elderly services and refugee services. The two fields were chosen as cases because they both faced complex social problems combined with a high degree of openness towards supplementary voluntary services. However, the two fields differed with respect to formal support from municipal management and the availability of spatio-material resources.

Within a local municipal setting, which in general was supportive of the idea of co-production, we first asked how different field-level conditions enable different organisational practices of co-production. Second, we explored how

these field-specific ways of practicing co-production further influenced the spaces of co-production and the tension fields and oppositions between co-producing actors from the local public sector and the voluntary sector.

This paper contributes to the study of co-production and broader cross-sector collaboration research in two main ways.

First, we show the importance of the embeddedness of cross-sector co-production between voluntary and public actors within different policy field structures. By focusing on how co-production unfolded within a local context, we outlined how the unequal distribution of formal support and disparate access to spatio-material resources led not only to different practices but also to diverging outcomes and perspectives for co-production. Whereas the embedded practice of co-production within the elderly field in general sustained an integrated and close form of collaboration between public and voluntary actors on the inside of public institutions, the exterior practice within the refugee service field in many cases blocked opportunities for co-production or relegated co-producing initiatives into detached and segmented services.

Our results point to the importance of studying how co-production as an organisational practice is rooted in different policy fields. The practice of co-production on the ground by volunteers, voluntary organisations, public managers, and front-line staff does not necessarily lead to the political visions of pooled resources and shared responsibilities. Instead, co-production should be perceived as a practice that is created, shaped, and made concrete in interdependence with local-level conditions that are heavily entrenched in specific policy fields. In particular, we found that formal and spatial support mattered to how co-production materialised in a local context, and further that such local support structures are manifestations of wider national conditions.

Second, we show how each of the two ways of practicing co-production (embedded and exterior) entail ambiguous outcomes and antagonistic positions for voluntary and public actors, depending on the policy field. Importantly, we argue that neither of these practices is unequivocally beneficial or detrimental to the co-production of welfare services.

Within the elderly field, we found that the supportive spaces, as well as instrumental and individualised perceptions of volunteers as co-producers, entailed a tension in which public actors pushed for expanding the legitimate tasks and territories of volunteers and their organisations. In reaction, leaders and members of voluntary organisations raised concern that public ambitions compromised organisational autonomy and pressed for 'mandated' voluntary services. In this case, co-production in practice did not result in a shared sense of responsibility but instead increased attention to the risks of boundary transgression.

Within the field of refugee services, we found that public caution and reluctance towards initiatives to work more closely across the public and the voluntary sector on the grounds of compromising universal welfare state values confined voluntary organisations to their classic roles of community building and advocacy. In this case, a tension arose in which co-production in practice did not promote new and innovative services but instead reinforced the classic opposition between public authority and voluntary advocacy. Table 1 summarises our findings.

Table 1. Field dimensions, forms of co-production practices, and implications

Policy fields	Elderly services	Refugee services
Field dimensions		
Ideological legitimacy of co-production	Strong	Strong
Formal support	High	Low
Spatio-material support	High	Low
Forms of co-production practices	Embedded	Exterior
Implications		
Positions for key actors	Ambitious public entrepreneurs	Ambitious voluntary entrepreneurs
	Defensive voluntary leaders	Defensive public managers
Boundary conflicts	Public push for expansion of volunteer terrain	Voluntary push for expansion of public responsibility

Our research also has implications for policymakers. We believe that two lessons are particularly relevant. First, instead of being attracted to co-production as a model, which can be governed by way of abstract governance principles, public and nonprofit managers should direct attention to concrete practices. Second, rather than thinking in terms of general recommendations for co-production independently of policy fields, policy advisers should be sensitive to how different conditions for practicing co-production are embedded within broader field structures.

Our study bears the limitations of a local field study, a design which is not well suited for generalising beyond the one municipality in any statistical sense. However, guided by a strong comparative design, we believe that our results contribute a conceptual understanding of how policy fields impact co-production practices and how the oppositions between public and voluntary actors vary systematically with field properties. With the growing popularity and need for cross sector collaboration to tackle complex social problems, more research is warranted to understand how field properties enable or constrain the potentials of co-production.

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