

## Service co-production and co-creation and civil society activism

### Abstract

The participation in co-production and co-creation feeds back with the activism providing the civil society's capability of generating and sustaining change, i.e. carry out social agency by promoting social resilience. Activism facilitates also co-production and co-creation by focusing on service quality and creation of 'value in use'. It can affect such new trends in PAR as NPG and Communitarian regime by contributing to withstand austerity pressures pushing for efficiency and budgetary savings.

The study discusses civil activism by analysing community clusters deploying hybrid approach combining structuration and organization theories. It enables to explore the interplay between (i) association-prone patterns of structuration and (ii) continuous self-organizing enabling to "organize without organization", which creates the civil society's dynamism. It (i) possesses transformational effect and character and (ii) facilitates life quality improvements. This is the outcome of the institutional shift to dual primacy of non-zero-sum approach and interdependence replacing the twin-dominance of zero-sum paradigm and resource scarcity view. Association-prone institutional settings which the volunteers' self-communication enacts operate simultaneously as active organizing platforms and social capital re-generating trust and settling its radius. The enhanced autonomy which self-communication provides facilitates communicative interactions and their aggregation into sustained collaboration. It enables to bring about, maintain and enhance cooperation in competitive environments often with enabling technologies as Finnish cases demonstrate. Caring TV users co-produce innovative services for elderly, and the Lopukkiri community facilitates mutual care among members co-creating new model of elderly mutual self-care.

The volunteers tend to minimize particular tasks. Such 'modularity of contributions' enables to enact and share due resources locally through parallel and distributed interactions - without centralization and redistribution through organizational hierarchies. It improves the effectiveness of collective resourcing and extends the resource base. Furthermore, asymmetric and asynchronous patterns of open-ended multi-party reciprocity allow unilateral contributions to collective efforts. The volunteers perceive and exercise power as shared and sharing, non-hierarchical and non-zero-sum what enables mutual empowerment. This constellation interplays with multi-dimensional feed backing alterations affecting value creation, work, competition, and also the nature and dialectics of cooperation. These changes have impact simultaneously on individuals, their interactions and commons.

The transformational dynamism is source and also outcome of the civil society's activism aiming to implement freedom, equality and fraternity (currently coined as solidarity). Historically this activism emerged together with the industrial society. Their interplay enabled to enact the potential provided by growing social productivity: to enforce new standards on

declining worktime, redistribute value and wealth, and spend more time and resources on voluntary activities. These trends are constitutive and generative of the “long process” of the civil society’s self-(re-)creation and also its self-empowerment. The self-empowerment unfolds through mutual approximation with the market and public sectors - interplaying with (the resultant pattern of) digitalization. The civil activism can (i) promote liberating time and resources from wage work what digitization potentially enables. It also (ii) can facilitate to re-enact liberated human creativity through voluntary participation among others in co-creation and co-production of new services contributing to improved life quality. These services can facilitate to overcome and prevent also social and environmental tendencies constitutive of the emerging Anthropocene.

The literature points out at a global participative revolution where voluntary activities often unfold through innovative ways. For example in frame of urban civic activism the voluntary cooperation takes place without creating and maintaining sustained organizations. The individuals can participate in multiple self-organizing actions, including diverse co-creation and co-production attempts aiming to provide solution for concrete problems. Whether voluntary contributions to initiate and design, deliver and assess public services can capitalize on and facilitate the self-empowerment of the civil society unfolding through its mutual approximation with public and market sectors - remains to be seen...

## Introduction

Attempts to decouple value creation and democratic control (Streeck 2014) went as far as to initiate systematic “deconstruction of the administrative state”(Rucker 2017)<sup>1</sup>. “The great dialectic in our time is not ...between capital and labor; it is between economic enterprise and the state. Labor and labor unions are no longer the primary enemies of the business enterprise and of those who direct its operations. The enemy, the wonderfully and dangerously rewarding role of military production apart, is government” - pointed out in 1991 at long term trends Galbraith (1991:285)<sup>2</sup>. The new, market focused public administration regime coined as New Public Management (Pestoff, 2018) replaced the traditional public administration. It reflected the Washington Consensus which promoted globally the ‘wholly trinity’ of liberalization - privatization - deregulation. With increasingly focal role of powerful global networks and the growing dominance of austerity in public administration led to emergence of New Public Governance and after the 2008 crisis to a Communitarian regime operating as dominant pattern (Pestoff, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> Rucker (2017) “Bannon vows a daily fight for ‘deconstruction of the administrative state’” [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/top-wh-strategist-vows-a-daily-fight-for-deconstruction-of-the-administrative-state/2017/02/23/03f6b8da-f9ea-11e6-bf01-d47f8cf9b643\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.9fdce11b8ca9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/top-wh-strategist-vows-a-daily-fight-for-deconstruction-of-the-administrative-state/2017/02/23/03f6b8da-f9ea-11e6-bf01-d47f8cf9b643_story.html?utm_term=.9fdce11b8ca9)

<sup>2</sup> “It is government that reflects the concerns of a constituency that goes far beyond the workers – a constituency of the old, the urban and rural poor, minorities, consumers, farmers, those who seek the protection of the environment, advocates of public action in such areas of private default as housing, mass transportation healthcare, those pressing the case for education and public services in general. Some of the activities thus urged impair the authority or autonomy of the private enterprise; others replace private with public operation; all or lesser measure, are at cost either to the private enterprise or to its participants. Thus the modern conflict between business and government”(Galbraith 1991:285-286).

Both of these Public Administration Regimes (PAR) put emphasize on the new role of (citizen) users acting growingly as co-producers of services. In "...a communitarian type ...PAR ...efficiency and cutback in public spending will provide the main motive for promoting greater community and volunteer responsibility for service provision. It is natural, therefore, to expect that co-production will develop both in an individual or collective fashion and that it will involve more or less citizen participation, depending on the public administration regime. However, the mix of these two variables will be regime specific and service specific"(Pestoff :34).

In most fields trends are rarely unidirectional! On the contrary, the dominant tendencies are resultants of colliding, conflicting and frequently confronting trends. The observable increase of service coproduction in public administration is the resultant of multiple, occasionally diametrically opposite tendencies and phenomena operating simultaneously - as negative and positive - drivers. The established (permanency of) austerity decreases the volume of public services through their financing - facilitates their marketization and financialization, promotes the privatization of the service delivery, and aims to - consequently (and relentlessly) - decrease financing also of the remaining activities. At the same time the new primarily digital technologies provide tools which become important carriers of growingly robust commercial, market driven efforts promoting the citizens' role as service coproducers. Actually the very same technologies can interplay also with tendencies such as open innovation or open sourcing by enabling and facilitating self-organizing coproduction initiatives and efforts. There are attempts of public service professional's oriented to engaging citizens into service (related) planning, delivery, quality control as well as into initiation of new services. In other cases citizens can also initiate, produce and provide broad range of service driven by despair because they perceive the challenging situation as hopeless. These tendencies are arguably rather diverse, even may seem contradicting each other, nevertheless all of them provide catalytic effects facilitating user coproduction of services through various ways, through contacts with diverse public administration players.

This paper explores two Finnish cases of self-organizing service initiation, co-design and delivery which represent a much broader set of phenomena connected to voluntary activities carried out by members of various civil society entities. "Co-production concerns the design and implementation of a service, whereas co-creation is about the initiation and/or strategic planning of a service" - as Brandsen and Honingh (2018:14) indicate. Self-organizing (teams of) volunteers are willing and capable to co-create and co-produce - rather sophisticated "clusters" - of services following and implementing in practice (the principle of) reciprocity rather than exchange or redistribution (Polányi 1944) as the explored cases demonstrate. Both groups, users of the caring TV and members of the Active Seniors (Lopukkiri) community, co-create and co-produce innovative services for elderly which allow significant improvements in their shared life quality. Moreover, the Active Seniors consciously aim to cocreate and coproduce a new model of elderly care driven by the users' mutual self-care. The analysis of the (aggregated) services which these groups elaborated and delivered was part of broader research attempts aiming to explore sources and wider transformational effects of the civil society organizations' dynamism (Veress 2016). This paper aims to discuss various aspects of

service co-production and co-creation in this broader context provided by activism of diverse civil society players.

In this vein the study first proposes a short presentation of the two cases discussing them from service co-production and co-creation angle. It is followed by a brief summary of findings of the research exploring sources and transformational effects of the civil society entities' dynamism. The third section discusses emerging feedbacks among (i) service co-production and co-creation, (ii) patterns enabling self-organizing generation and sharing of 'value in use' frequently by enacting new, mainly digital technologies, and (iii) transformational potential of the dynamism characteristic for the civil society, its members and entities. The closing part proposes conclusions emerging from the exploratory efforts carried out in the study.

## Care giving through service co-creation and co-production

### The "care TV gives dignity for life"

The community of care-TV users emerged with the help of students from the Helsinki-based Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The University, where 'learning by developing' serves as teaching philosophy, established also a Living Laboratory<sup>3</sup> to link teaching and delivery of solutions for practical problems of the districts' residents. Since many elderly people living in the district complained about insomnia a group of students looking for disentanglement. Their consultations with experts indicated that often loneliness is the underlying problem. In cooperation with experts and volunteering senior citizens the students started to develop dedicated services by using digital TV equipment as a communication platform. The relationships among students, future "users" and experts became growingly emphatic during co-creative efforts. The acquaintance and close relationships established during (co-)working with future users generated intrinsic motivation for students and participating experts to find truly 'personal' solutions.

The users initiated to use caring TV as "open channel" for contacting each other by enabling elderly people living alone to come together as a virtual group for vivid "video chatting". During holidays and weekends it allowed escaping long hours of devastating loneliness. The ability to meet each other in virtual space especially during Christmas - instead of spending time alone and lonely - was probably the most valuable, perhaps priceless "present" for members of the user group. The relationships among 'random' members of test users strengthened and increasingly transformed. They met each other more frequently also in 'physical space', their relationships became mutually caring, and the group of accidental users became increasingly a true community. The "care TV gives dignity for life" (100-20-2-5) - pointed out the "users" at the most important effect of their creative collaboration. They became more active and innovative, initiated new programs and services, and offered altered ways of using enabling technology. Their collaborative relationships and efforts facilitated mutual (self-

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<sup>3</sup> The Living Laboratories facilitate open innovation by offering simultaneously (i) the concept of real life laboratory as combined physical and virtual space, (ii) a pattern enabling extended collaboration among large number of potential stakeholders, (iii) a methodology of catalysing open, user driven innovation, and (iv.) growingly global networking among volunteer partners.

) empowerment. The platform which the caring TV provided improved the life quality of the members' of the user community, as well as of students and experts in multiple ways. The cooperative efforts catalysed self-fulfilment and self-activation contributing to (re-)establish their holistic personality and autonomous self by bringing about their empowering individuation (Grenier, 2006)<sup>4</sup>.

### To “become the subject of our life”

The community of *Active seniors* aimed to ensure meaningful and dignified elderly life for their members. They criticized the pore quality of the state run care services and aimed to provide an alternative driven by mutual care through cooperation in a community.

“Our aim was to encourage people to live an active life as long as possible; to keep up their hobbies, to continue their contacts with relatives and friends and to share the work and activities of the community life as well. ...Many old people fear, that they will not get good care in old age. When people get too feeble to manage alone, the idea of having only a bed in an institution, instead a home of one's own, was frightening. ... Many elderly people feel useless and solitary. ...We wanted to build a storey house with 58 flats and about 400 sq.meters of common area and to create a community” – described their motivation the community members in an EU questionnaire on creative and innovative best practice projects by adding: “Loppukiri is the first senior house in Finland where every inhabitant belongs to a working group and has the feeling of being important to the community. Because there is no employed staff we really work for the benefit of the community instead of busying ourselves with unnecessary little things. This leads to empowerment and activation of the individuals and they start to make independent initiatives.”

Upon the plausible expression of Active Seniors' coordinator they wanted to “become the subject of their life” instead of involuntary objects of care-taking. The initiators capitalised on lessons of similar efforts in Stockholm and harmonized the model with local and legal conditions in Finland. Their association carried out simultaneously the construction of their multistore house and systematic community building. To tackle challenges required patience and determination: they had to solve planning and construction of personalized apartments; cover ballooning costs of a project finally reaching 9 million euros; start to live in a community in elderly age; participate in daily work of task groups. The community members, through successfully tackling daily problems, simultaneously created a new, self-organizing and cooperative model of elderly care-taking that raised broad interest in Finland and abroad. Their example, the experience gained through project management and community building, led the Helsinki city council, as well as the Finnish government and parliament to consider multiple regulatory, including legislative changes. These could facilitate to implement at national level the practical experience proposed by Active Seniors as a new, community-framed model of self-organizing caretaking of elderly people.

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<sup>4</sup> “...There is an important distinction between...- what could be called selfish individualism - and what is sometimes referred to as individuation ...Beck and Giddens...argue. Individuation is the freeing up of people from their traditional roles and deference to hierarchical authority, and their growing capacity to draw on wider pools of information and expertise and actively chose what sort of life they lead. Individuation is...as Beck points out... about the politicization of day-to-day life; the hard choices people face ...in crafting personal identities and choosing how to relate to issues such as race, gender, the environment, local culture, and diversity” (Grenier, 2006:124-125).

The Active Seniors started to receive daily requests to visit their premises and consult about their experience. They continued to work on upgrading the model in order to meet challenges that flying years and changing health conditions could create. The residents established work groups in frame of a new project coined as “the last sprint” and started to systematically identify challenges, and find effective solutions. Their association worked on construction of a second building since the existing one offers home for half of members.

The Active Seniors also initiated the “second grandparents” movement that created acquaintances and very close relationships also with families of “second grandchildren”. The proposal contributed to the (Arabianranta) district’s “big project” aiming to safeguard good relationships between kids becoming teenagers and their parents. The youngsters appreciated a lot mutually caring relationships with their “volunteering” second grandparents, who helped them to tackle challenges of transformations connected to their teenage and young adult life. The improved relationships could contribute to changes; generate trust and mutual care among all generations living in Arabianranta. The Active Seniors’ efforts could contribute in multiple ways to improve life quality in their community as well as in the district and also beyond its boundaries. Describing the potential broader impacts of their collaborative efforts and innovative model by answering an EU questionnaire the Active Seniors stated:

“We wanted to create a housing community, where elderly people could live an active and a meaningful life, where privacy at home and community life in the house could be combined and where people could decide and rule their own living...(100-20-27-8:1). “...Living in a safe and peaceful environment with friends as long as possible will support sustainable economic and social development in Europe”(100-20-27-8:7).

### **Sources and effects of the civil society entities’ transformational dynamism**

Members of both observed community actively participated in co-production and co-creation of multiple cooperative services which were constitutive and generative of their daily life. These self-organizing collaborative efforts aimed to improve their shared life quality in multiple ways. The service co-production and co-creation unfolded as aggregation of the users’ voluntary contributions which in turn generated and interplayed with changes affecting multiple aspects of their personal, community-related and social life. The exploration of the communities of care TV users and Active seniors was carried out in frame of a research on sources and broader effects of the civil society organizations’ transformational dynamism (Veress 2016). The research followed methodological pluralism (Van de Ven and Pool, 2005) deploying hybrid approach which allowed exploring the interplay between (i) association-prone patterns of structuration and (ii) continuous self-organizing enabling to “organize without organization”, which creates the civil society’s dynamism. The combination of the process ontology and approach with a realist view (Bhaskar 1987, Tsoukas 1989) facilitate to explore multi-dimensional changes in actual domain operating as drivers of community emergence and its dynamism possessing robust transformational capability (Table 1).

The participants volunteered to cocreate and coproduce growing set of innovative services for elderly which in case of Active Seniors served as components of a new model driven by mutual self-care. These services aimed to improve shared life quality through enabling meaningful

daily activities. Such cocreation and coproduction through volunteering was intertwined with the institutional shift to dual primacy of non-zero-sum approach and interdependence replacing the twin-dominance of zero-sum paradigm and resource scarcity view. The volunteers’ self-communication (Castells 2009) enacts association-prone institutional settings operating simultaneously as active organizing platforms and social capital re-generating trust and settling its radius (Fukuyama 1999). The volunteers’ self-communication provides enhanced autonomy (Castells 2009) by facilitating communicative interactions (Habermas 1995) and their aggregation into sustained collaboration. This setup enables to bring about, maintain and enhance cooperation in competitive environments partly due to improved effectiveness of resourcing.

In personal context:	Empowerment Individuation
Relationships:	Institutional changes ->cooperation Power relations
Activities:	Work Competition Value creation Resourcing Social agency
Communities' self-transformation:	Networking self-upgrading New dialectics of cooperation

Table 1 Transformational impacts observed in the case communities

The volunteers’ tend to minimize particular tasks what facilitates participation and the aggregation of the individual contributions into self-organizing mass collaboration (Tapscott and Williams 2006). Such ‘modularity of contributions’ enables to enact and share locally available distributed resources through the volunteers’ parallel and distributed interactions. This pattern makes redundant resource intensive processes of centralization and redistribution through organizational hierarchies as well as to establish and maintain ownership (Ostrom 1990). The intense mobilization of soft resources similar to knowledge, information, creativity and psychological energies which are non-depletable and non-rivalrous (Bollier, 2007:28) enables their multiplication. These altered patterns facilitate to increase the effectiveness of resourcing and extend the collective resource base. The communicative interactions’ capacity to improve resourcing can serve as evolutionary selective factor which increases the probability

of their repetition. In longer term this mechanism promotes their institutionalization as pattern perceived as taken for granted and characteristic for everyday life (Perez 2002).

These institutional changes interplay with asymmetric and asynchronous patterns of open-ended multi-party reciprocity allowing to unilateral contributions to collective efforts. Since the participation simultaneously re-generates the motivation to contribute to cooperative efforts it creates mechanisms of extended reproduction of (the readiness of) volunteering, to “participate for the sake of participation”. The feed backing alterations in institutional context and in resourcing are intertwined with changes in perception and exercising of power as shared and sharing, non-hierarchical and non-zero-sum what enables mutual empowerment. This constellation interplays with multi-dimensional feed backing alterations affecting value creation, work, competition, and also the nature and dialectics of cooperation. These changes have impact simultaneously on individuals, their interactions and commons (Table 1 – above). These multi-dimensional alterations interplay with and are constitutive of the robust dynamism of the civil society organizations, generate the capability to affect and shape their broader environment – to carry out social agency.

### **Co-production and co-creation as alternative patterns of value creation**

The civil society organizations’ transformational dynamism is simultaneously source and outcome of the activism aiming to implement freedom, equality and fraternity (currently coined as solidarity). Historically this activism emerged together with the industrial society and their interplay enabled to enact the potential provided by growing social productivity. Such activism enforced in the long run new standards on declining worktime, facilitated to redistribute value and wealth, and allowed spending more time and resources on voluntary activities. These trends were and remain constitutive and generative of the “long process” of the civil society’s self-(re-)generation and enhanced its self-empowerment. Such self-empowerment unfolds through mutual approximation among the market and public sectors and the civil society currently which interplays with is affected by and in turn also shapes the resultant pattern of digitalization driving accelerating technological changes.

The digitalization generates - as Arthur (2011:6-7) points out - the emergence of a virtual second economy which “...will certainly be the engine of growth and the provider of prosperity for the rest of this century and beyond ...[however since] it may not provide jobs, so there may be prosperity without full access for many. ...the main challenge of the economy is shifting from *producing* prosperity to *distributing* prosperity. The second economy will produce wealth no matter what we do; distributing that wealth has become the main problem [italics in the original]”.

The (growing volume of) voluntary work carried out in civil society organizations provides alternative, cooperative and sharing patterns of value creation. The volunteer co-operators’ sharing and passionate co-creation carried out as non-wage work is “nonmarket and non-proprietary”(Kreiss et al., 2010) and unfolds through various forms of self-organising mass collaboration (Tapscott and Williams, 2006). Its diverse variants, including common based peer production enable extended, large-scale patterns of collaboration that “transforms markets and

human freedom” (Benkler, 2002). Due to such transformational potential the “...large-scale cooperation, such as free and open-source software or Wikipedia [is] not a bizarre side story of the Net, but a core vector through which the transition to a networked society and economy [is] happening”(Benkler, 2011:Acknowledgments). The civil activism simultaneously capitalizes on and shapes digitalization while connecting it with voluntary activities. Such activism promotes “...civil work [which] may create the ‘culture of creativity’ [and] the horizontal democracy...[of] new socio-cultural movements and communities (Beck, 1992, 2000)...”(Vitányi, 2007:177). It can promote to link (i) the (patterns of) digitalization preferring social to economic value creation with (ii) the transformation of wage work into passionate and sharing voluntary co-creation, and (iii) the facilitation of participative democratic tendencies into emerging patterns of social division of labour enhancing non-wage work.

These transformational trends are connected with the ongoing global participative revolution (Salamon et al. 2003) intertwined with enhanced potential of civil activism (Salamon et al. 2017). The individuals can participate in multiple self-organizing actions and projects, including diverse co-creation and co-production attempts. The coproduction of services frequently unfolds through voluntary participation in projects covering multi-coloured (fields of) challenges. The coproducers can create “value in use” and facilitate mutual (self-) empowerment in multiple ways. They can contribute to handle personal health issues enabling digital technologies while also contribute to improved effectiveness and efficiency of the national healthcare system (Gábor and Gauss 2018) as well as to provide public safety and order (Williams et al. 2018). The coproduction frequently unfolds through innovative patterns similar to urban civic activism (Maenpaa and Faehnle 2017) where voluntary cooperation aims to provide solution for concrete often global problems by acting locally. The participants often act even without spending resources on creating and maintaining sustained organizations.

The innovative patterns of coproduction and cocreation simultaneously contribute to enhanced social resilience. It has growing significance since externalities that the dominant patterns of production generate destructive social and environmental tendencies aggregate into emerging Anthropocene (Heikkurinen et al. 2017) in the long run endangering the mere survival of the human species. The civil activism facilitates to (re-)shape resultant patterns of digitalization and of convergence among the civil society, the market and public sectors by promoting association-prone dynamics across social fields. These tendencies interplay with the civil society’s dynamism possessing robust transformational potential which simultaneously capitalizes on and enhances the tendency to volunteer, generate (primarily social) value through participating among others in service cocreation and coproduction.

## **Conclusions**

Changes in public administration regimes tend to facilitate and capitalize on service coproduction and cocreation. This trend is promoted by multiple feed backing tendencies. The permanency of austerity (measures) forces the users to participate in provision of (public) services, the new, primarily digital technologies provide enabling tools (push effect); the

professionals' attempt to engage citizens; tendencies similar to open source and open innovation provide among (others institutional-organizational) patterns (pull effect).

The civil activism can (i) promote liberating time and resources from wage work that digitization potentially enables. It can also (ii) facilitate to re-enact the liberated human creativity through voluntary participation among others in co-creation and co-production of new services contributing to improved life quality. These services can also contribute to efforts aiming to overcome and prevent destructive social and environmental tendencies by enabling to exit emerging Anthropocene. Consequently, the participation in cocreation and coproduction in turn enhances the ongoing global participative revolution and strengthens the civil society's capability to promote carry out and enhance the effectiveness of the civil activism. The stronger is the civil activism the higher the degree of the social resilience can become, the more cooperative can be the resulting pattern of digitalization and the convergence among the market and public sectors and the civil society. This interplay can facilitate the self-empowerment of civil society by increasing its capacity to provide solutions for growing variety of challenges among other through carrying out cocreation and coproduction of an increasing range of services.

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