Engagement of citizens and public professionals in the co-production of public services
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CHAPTER 7

Conclusions and discussion

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation's central aim was to provide insight into the question why citizens and professionals are engaged in co-production, and to better understand the role of mutual perceptions on this engagement in the collaborative process. Co-production is increasingly introduced in public service delivery processes, as such requiring (more or less intensive) interaction between individual citizens ('*co-producers*') and public professionals ('*regular producers*'). Yet, as outlined in the introductory chapter of this dissertation, an important knowledge gap in current co-production research concerns how these individual citizens and professionals involved perceive their co-production. Questions remained, such as what drives citizens to engage in co-production, and why do citizens sometimes become disappointed and professionals feel constrained in the collaboration?

Therefore, this study attempted to answer the following research question: ***What are the motivations for individual citizens and public professionals to engage in the co-production of public services, and how do mutual perceptions of the co-production partners' engagement influence the collaboration?*** In order to provide an answer to this main research question, three sub research questions were formulated:

1. Why do individual citizens engage in the co-production of public services?

2. Why do individual public professionals engage in the co-production of public services?

3. How do mutual perceptions of the co-production partners' engagement influence the collaboration?

In the previous chapters, a variety of studies were conducted to empirically unravel citizens' and professionals' engagement in the collaborative process of co-producing public services. In this final chapter of the dissertation I will synthesize the empirical chapters and systematically answer the sub research questions in order to provide an answer to the main research question. Based on that answer, I will discuss what contributions are made to the literature, evaluate the study's limitations and provide suggestions for future research. The chapter concludes with

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a discussion of the practical implications of the research.

7.2 ANSWERS TO THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This section will first summarize the research findings concerning the three sub research questions and subsequently provide an overall answer to the main research question.

7.2.1 Why do individual citizens engage in the co-production of public services?

In the last couple of years especially, the number of studies in the field of co-production has boomed (Osborne, Radnor and Strokosch 2016). However, at the time this dissertation's study started insights into what factors might explain citizens' engagement were highly limited. For that reason, the first sub research question is concerned with unraveling citizens' engagement (see above). Taking up the challenge to formulate an answer to that sub research question, first a Q-methodology study was conducted to systematically study citizens' viewpoints and distinguish the different perspectives citizens have on their engagement in co-production (reported in *chapter 2*). Specifically, citizens' perceptions on co-planning were investigated in the case of client councils in Dutch organizations for elderly care.

The study identified four groups of citizen co-producers involved in client councils, which were labelled the semi-professional, the socializer, the network professional and the aware co-producer. *Semi-professionals* deliberately choose to engage. Their engagement appears to be strictly instrumental, and they are very concerned with the impact they can make on the organization's policies. *Socializers* are concerned with building trust relations between the client council and (the management of) the organization for elderly care. They have a rather passive attitude. Socializers perceive their involvement does not require certain competencies; is neither time-consuming nor can impact on the organization. *Network professionals* deliberately take part in client councils with the aim to have an impact for the patient. Interest representation is a major concern and more egoistic-based motivations (such as standing-up for yourself and a concern for their

own future as potential clients) are opposed. *Aware co-producers*, finally, report even stronger feelings of aversion to egoistic-based motivations. They consider their involvement in client councils very consciously. Aware co-producers are convinced of the client councils' importance: clients should have a voice, and client councils are important for the well-functioning and well-being of elderly care organizations and residents.

An important initial answer to the first sub research question is, therefore, that co-producers in client councils for elderly care engage for different purposes, and thus that co-producers cannot be perceived as a 'single group' or 'entity'. Nevertheless, among the four groups of co-producers some similarities can also be identified. To start with, generally the respondents themselves attached little importance to competencies. This is interesting from a theoretical point of view, as literature on government-citizen relations, citizen participation and active citizenship focuses on individuals' capacities to act, and Alford (2002b) suggests that for co-production, enhancing one's sense of competence and self-efficacy is an important motivation for co-producers to get involved as well. Furthermore, each type of co-producer adheres more to community-centered than self-centered motivations. This is also striking, because in co-production research it is assumed that co-producers are (mainly) driven by material incentives and intrinsic rewards, since they also directly benefit from the services produced (Alford 2002b; 2009). This differentiates co-producers from volunteers: contrarily to volunteers, co-producers are expected to be (solely) motivated by the benefits they (or their relatives) acquire (Verschuere, Brandsen and Pestoff 2012). The research findings of chapter 2 show, however, this assumption can be questioned, as for the respondents involved in the study, material incentives and intrinsic rewards seem not to be a deciding factor. A cautious conclusion, therefore, is that deducing co-productions' motivations from the differences between co-producing and volunteering is not sufficient to explain co-producers' motivations.

The identified complexity in co-producers' motivations to engage in client councils in organizations for elderly care stresses the need to further investigate why co-producers engage in co-production, and also in other policy fields. In order to make a step in that direction and to further increase our insights, the dissertation

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continued by building and demonstrating the usefulness of a theoretical model explaining citizens' engagement. The theoretical model developed (presented in *chapter 3*) shows that the citizens' decision on whether to engage in co-production can be seen as different steps on a 'decision-ladder'. It explains citizens' engagement referring to 1) citizens' perceptions of the co-production task, and their competency to contribute to the public service delivery process, 2) citizens' individual characteristics, and 3) their self-interested and community-focused motivations. These factors underlying citizens' engagement are derived from the motivations and incentives identified in chapter 2 and by integrating insights from different, yet related streams of literature such as political participation, volunteerism and self-organized collective action. Although these related streams of literature provide useful insights, one should be aware that the typical profile of co-producers might differ from that of the active citizen engaged in political participation or volunteering.

For that reason, a first explorative application and test of the model was provided using empirical evidence collected through focus group interviews in four cases, as reported in chapter 3. In the Netherlands, co-producers' drivers to engage were investigated in the context of client councils for elderly care, representative advisory councils at primary schools and neighborhood watch schemes; in Belgium co-producers were questioned on their involvement in user councils in health care organizations for disabled people. Based on the empirical data, it was concluded that the theoretical model provided a satisfactory explanation for co-producers' engagement, but also that some variables are differently interpreted by respondents, some new insights could be added to the model, and that some differences existed among cases. Ease – referring to the effort required to become active – is, for example, not explicitly mentioned by respondents in the four cases. Although the necessity of having enough time to participate is mentioned and can be perceived as a 'transaction cost', this would make the definition of the concept 'ease' rather limited. A possible explanation for the limited attention given to ease lies in the nature of the cases studied: the mandatory nature of all cases studied except for the case on neighborhood watch schemes might imply the collaborative process in these cases is institutionalized and facilitated in such a way that ease becomes less of a question. Additionally, the empirical data could not entirely validate the

theoretical expectations regarding trust. Instead of considering the level of trust in the organization or professionals *before* deciding to engage, respondents indicate they started to consider trust *after* they had become involved as a co-producer. New elements that popped up from the analysis of the empirical case studies included the presence of actual problems (citizens facing troubles or things 'going wrong' and thus becoming aware they can contribute to the solution), the wish to know what is going on in the public organization, and feelings of anxiety ('you should not complain but do something yourself').

The research method applied to test the theoretical model (i.e., focus groups) explicitly aimed to keep an open mind for additional explanatory variables and to keep the discussion as closely as possible tied to citizens' perceptions. However, due to the limited scale, the research findings cannot necessarily be generalized to the larger population of co-producers in the selected cases. Neither can it automatically be assumed that the identified variables also explain co-producers' engagement in other policy domains, other types of co-production or other countries. This stresses the need to further investigate citizens' motivations to engage in the co-production of public services.

Therefore, the empirical study to unravel co-producers' engagement was continued. Specifically, the dissertation addressed a cross-national comparison of citizens' engagement in co-production, holding constant the type of co-production (see *chapter 4*). In the policy domain of safety, citizens' engagement in Dutch and Belgian (Flemish) neighborhood watch schemes was compared. Neighborhood watch schemes are a classical example of co-production (Brudney and England 1983; Pestoff 2012). Even though recently the idea of neighborhood watch schemes experienced a growing popularity in several European countries, to date most studies on co-production of community safety are conducted in the Anglo-Saxon context. In the study presented in chapter 4, the focus was therefore put on the European context instead of the American, thereby selecting countries (i.e., Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands) from a politico-administrative regime (i.e., the Germanic tradition) distinct from the Anglo-Saxon countries.

With the specific aim to increase the insights into citizens' engagement in co-production of community safety, a more grounded approach was taken by

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conducting a Q-methodology study. The study presented in the previous chapter (chapter 3) identified some differences among citizens' motivations to engage in the co-production processes in the cases selected, resulting in the cautious conclusion that citizens' drivers might be dependent on the context of the specific co-production process. Since the current co-production literature is mainly focused on explaining co-producers' motivations in other policy domains, one might be careful with simply applying these insights to the field of community safety. Bovaird, Van Ryzin, Loeffler and Parrado (2015) also make a case for more in-depth and contextualized research. Moreover, the study presented in chapter 4 sought to compare citizens' motivations across two countries, and based on current co-production literature it is hard to identify what factors are of importance in specific cultural or politico-administrative systems.

Thus, as a next step to answer the first sub research question of why citizens engage in the co-production of public services, again Q-methodology was applied; this time in the domain of safety. Actually, two Q-methodology studies were conducted (for Belgium and the Netherlands, respectively) to stay as close as possible to respondents' perceptions, take the specific context into account and ensure no country specific factors were lost. Both in Belgium and the Netherlands, the study identified three groups of co-producers.

Starting with Belgium, the study identified task-bounded altruists, protective rationalists and normative rationalists. *Task-bounded altruists* stress the importance of their task: producing safety in collaboration with the police is a valuable contribution to society. They are driven by societal-altruistic reasons and do not have personal feelings of unsafety. *Protective rationalists*, on the other hand, believe their co-productive efforts can increase their own safety as well as the safety of the neighborhood they are living in. Recent experiences of unsafety often form an important drive. The rational element in the label of this group of co-producers stems from the calculation of costs (time/effort) and rewards (safety) made by respondents belonging to this group. *Normative rationalists*, finally, also consider costs and rewards, yet the rewards are not defined in terms of past or current feelings of unsafety but in terms of preventing future crime. They hold the normative belief that future crime can only be prevented when as many residents

as possible take responsibility.

In the Netherlands, the three groups of co-producers were labelled normative partners, pragmatic collaborators and rationalizers. *Normative partners* are convinced their engagement helps protect the common interest. Yet, at the same time they stress that they do not intend to take over police tasks: in collaboration with the police they want to pick up their responsibility for community safety. *Pragmatic collaborators* similarly feel morally obliged to engage. Yet, their view on co-production is less idealized. They are more concerned with collaboration *in* the neighborhood watch scheme and emphasize their distance from the police. *Rationalizers*, finally, are driven by the positive results of their engagement. Nevertheless, they are not committed to improving safety per se: if they would not have engaged in the neighborhood watch scheme they would have done some other kind of volunteering, and personal development is highly valued.

Comparing the empirical results across countries with extant theoretical explanations from the co-production literature yielded three interesting observations. The first observation is that the identified profiles are not unidimensional, implying that citizens' engagement in co-production of community safety is triggered by a combination of factors. Self-interest and community-focus can coincide actually. This finding would contradict Meijer's (2014) claim that people collaborate with the police for *either* individual *or* collective interests. The second observation is that in almost all of the profiles perceptions of the co-production task are considered (very) important and that in a number of profiles the own personal rewards are considered. Hence, one needs to be careful with arguing that co-producers engage for purely self-centered or rational reasons: this reasoning is often more complex and nuanced as the benefits of personal rewards often expand to the community as well (for instance when personal rewards include learning processes). The third and final observation concerns some differences identified between Dutch and Belgian members of neighborhood watch schemes. In the Netherlands, for example, self-centered motivations are somewhat less prominent while personal attributes (like salience and efficacy) are more frequent and explicitly mentioned. However, as the main conclusion of the study presented in chapter 4 is that both in Belgium and the Netherlands groups of co-producers are differently motivated, it is hard to identify

the typical profile of Belgian or Dutch members of neighborhood watch schemes.

To conclude, the partial answers given to the first sub research question suggest that citizens engage in co-production of public services for a number of reasons, and that no single, unidimensional explanation covers the empirical observations. In this dissertation different profiles of citizen co-producers in the domains of health, safety and education were identified, each combining and emphasizing different factors. Thus, citizens are driven to co-produce by different factors: not only across countries and policy domains, but even in the same co-production process. Nevertheless, the dissertation provided a theoretical model that offers a satisfactory starting point to explain citizens' engagement in co-production. This model shows that although some important differences exist between the typical co-producer and the citizen involved in for example political participation and volunteering, the co-production literature can benefit from insights of these related streams of literature. Yet, co-production scholars need to complement the ideas derived from related streams of literature with insights gathered in the specified co-production context to build their own theories.

7.2.2 Why do individual public professionals engage in the co-production of public services?

With the introduction of co-production in public service delivery processes, public professionals and citizens collaborate in order to ensure the continuity and quality of public services. As such, professionals are required to share their power, tasks and responsibilities with co-producers. Only recently, scholars like Brandsen and Honingh (2013) and Moynihan and Thomas (2013), argued that co-production impacts professionals' work environment. However, empirical insights into professionals' attitudes towards co-production remain scarce. Hence, even when professionals' discretion in the co-production process is limited, it is assumed that their engagement is a crucial condition for co-production to be successful: professionals who are willing to listen to co-producers' ideas and actively want to share information can, for example, motivate citizens and stimulate feelings of reciprocity among participants (cf. Fledderus 2015a).

This dissertation, therefore, aimed to further our understanding of

public professionals' engagement in co-production, as specified in the second sub research question. This engagement is empirically found to consist of three dimensions: perceived importance of co-production, perceived impact of co-production, and personal (self-reported) involvement in co-production (as reported in *chapter* 5). Based on broader insights from public administration literature, three characteristics of professionals' work environment were identified as antecedents of their engagement, namely work-autonomy (in general and related to co-production), perceived organizational support and red tape (in general and associated with co-production). This resulted in five hypotheses on the relationship between these three work environment characteristics and professionals' self-reported engagement in co-production.

The study presented in chapter 5 tested the theoretical model using survey data collected in the context of Dutch organizations for elderly care, where location managers (i.e., the professionals) are legally obliged to collaborate with client councils. So, more specifically, public professionals' engagement in co-production is studied in the context of co-planning activities in the domain of health care. Testing the relation between work environment characteristics and each of the three dimensions of engagement (i.e., perceived importance, perceived impact and personal involvement), it was concluded that work-autonomy and red tape do not relate with professionals' self-reported engagement in collaboration with client councils. However, the perceived levels of both autonomy and red tape associated with co-production are related: autonomy in co-production positively and red tape associated with co-production negatively affects professionals' engagement in co-production. Regarding organizational support results were mixed: the higher the levels of organizational support perceived by location managers, the higher their scores were on perceived importance of and personal involvement in co-production. Yet, no significant relation was found between organizational support and perceived impact of the client council. Finally, an interaction effect was identified between organizational support and work-autonomy in co-production: organizational support was found to significantly reinforce the positive effect of work-autonomy on the perceived importance of collaboration with client councils.

To sum up, based on the study conducted in chapter 5, one can conclude

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that public professionals' engagement cannot be taken for granted: even in a mandatory type of co-production individual professionals' levels of engagement were found to vary. Furthermore, professionals' engagement builds upon different aspects, namely their perceptions on the importance and impact of co-production, and their (self-reported) personal involvement in co-production. In the context of client councils in organizations for elderly care, it became visible that work environmental characteristics emerging in the specific co-production context impact on professionals' self-reported levels of engagement. General work-autonomy is of positive influence only when the professionals perceive high levels of organizational support.

7.2.3 How do mutual perceptions of the co-production partners' engagement influence the collaboration?

The answers to sub research questions 1 and 2 provided deeper insight in the engagement of individual citizens and public professionals in co-production of public services. However, these sub research questions did not address the question how citizens and professionals perceive each other's engagement, and how these perceptions are reflected in the collaboration. The studies answering the first and second sub research question shows that both citizens' and professionals' engagement cannot be taken for granted. Based on existing literature it is known that differences in purposes for and/or levels of engagement matter: the willingness and ability to co-produce are assumed to impact on citizens' and professionals' contribution to the co-production process, and these contributions will sequentially influence co-production's outcomes (cf. Alford 2009; Ostrom 1996; Loeffler and Hine-Hughes 2013). Nevertheless, as existing co-production literature is mainly concerned with either the citizens or public professionals involved in co-production, the question how co-producers' and professionals' perceptions of their co-production partners' level of and purposes for engaging influence the collaboration remains unanswered.

The last sub research question probed into these issues; addressed by an explorative, in-depth case study on neighborhood watch schemes in a Dutch municipality (as presented in *chapter 6*). Data was collected through various

sources, including individual/group interviews with members of neighborhood watch schemes and public professionals from the municipality and the police, participant observations, policy documents, newspaper articles and Twitter messages. While existing co-production studies on citizens' engagement mainly focus on the purposes behind this engagement (cf. Thijssen and Van Dooren 2016; Bovaird, Van Ryzin, Loeffler and Parrado 2015), the results of the study presented in this dissertation suggest that citizens are not only engaged for different reasons but also to different extents. The citizens being interviewed differ in how they perceive their co-producing role and how much effort they are willing to make to investigate. This is interesting, since these citizens all voluntarily decided to get involved in neighborhood watch schemes. In the literature, one can already find references to professionals having different levels of engagement (see for example Tuurnas 2015); hence, as these professionals often have no option but to be involved in co-production, this is less surprising.

Another important finding is that even when neighborhood watch schemes can act more independently from the police/municipality after some time, professional support from police officers and local civil servants is needed and appreciated. Citizens and professionals, in other words, commit themselves to the collaboration and need the resources (e.g., time and means) to live up to the expectations their co-production partner holds. Furthermore, feelings of appreciation are important to keep both citizens *and* professionals motivated. For both actors it was found that they felt less inspired to contribute efforts to the collaboration when these efforts are not (explicitly) valued and/or when no useful output is produced.

Thus, based on the answers to the third sub research question (presented in chapter 6), the conclusion is that in order to establish and continue a co-productive relationship over time, it is crucial that both citizens and professionals are truly engaged. Only when actors themselves are motivated, feel committed with co-production and are convinced of the added value of the collaboration, can they inspire their co-production partner. So, citizens and professionals not only need to be engaged in co-production but also should make this engagement visible to their co-production partners.

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7.2.4 Wrapping up: an adjusted theoretical model of individual citizens' and public professionals' engagement in the co-production of public services

After answering the three sub research questions, now a brief answer to the main research question can be formulated. The main research question of the dissertation asked what are the motivations for individual citizens and public professionals to engage in the co-production of public services, and how mutual perceptions of the co-production partners' engagement influence the collaboration between citizens and professionals.
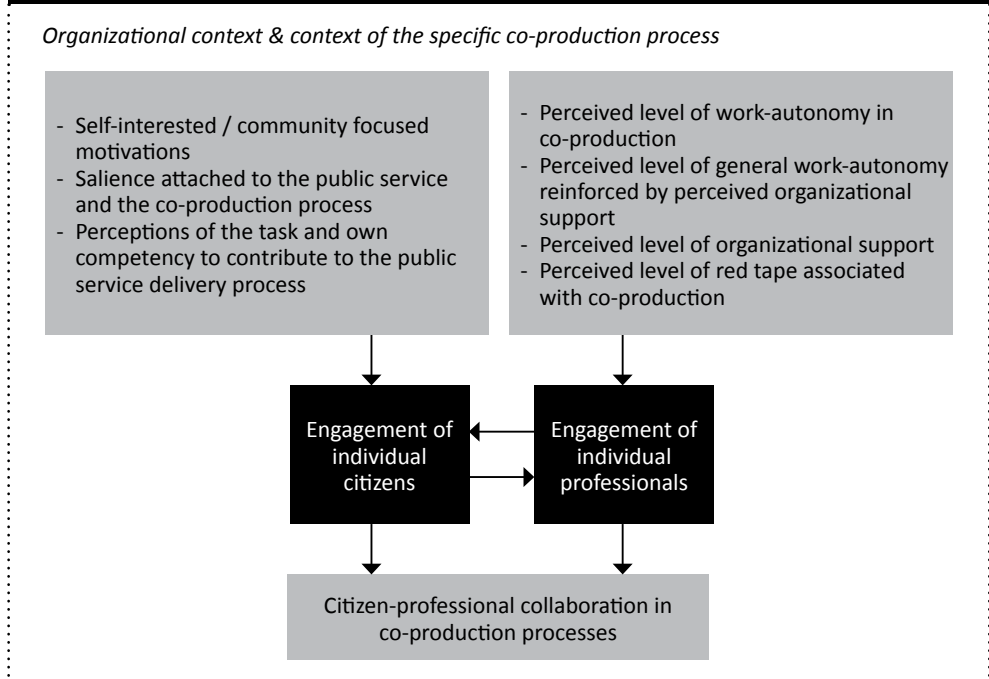
The answer to the main research question is threefold. First, *individual citizens engage* for different purposes, combining different rationales for engaging in co-production of public services. Consequently, no typical profile of the citizen co-producer can be identified. Generally, however, individual citizens consider the following factors when deciding whether or not to engage: 1) perceptions of the co-production task and their competency to contribute to the public service delivery process, 2) individual characteristics, and 3) self-interested and community-focused motivations. Second, *individual professionals engage* themselves to various extents in co-production based on their perceptions on a number of work environment characteristics, namely work-autonomy related to co-production activities, perceived organizational support and red tape associated with co-production. Perceptions on general work-autonomy only impact on the level of engagement when high levels of organizational support are perceived. Furthermore, professionals' engagement is found to consist of three dimensions: perceptions on the importance and impact of co-production, and (self-reported) personal involvement in co-production. Third, *mutual perceptions of the co-production partners' engagement* do influence the collaboration, as these perceptions impact on the efforts actors are willing to invest. True engagement that is also made visible to the co-production partners is crucial to establish and continue a co-productive relation over time. When citizens or professionals feel that they are unvalued and not taken seriously, they will reconsider their efforts.

Figure 7.1 schematizes the main research findings in a new model of individual citizens' and public professionals' engagement in the co-production of

public services. This model is an adjusted version of the theoretical model presented in the introductory chapter of this dissertation. That preliminary model (presented in Figure 1.1) showed the link between 'individual characteristics' of citizens and professionals with their levels of engagement, and between this engagement and the collaborative co-production process. Taking the research findings of the separate empirical chapters in mind, the initial model can now be specified further. That is, the individual characteristics can be specified to the factors that have been identified in the answers provided to the first and second sub research questions; the factors identified in chapters 2, 3 and 4 for the co-producers and chapter 5 for the professionals respectively. For matters of simplification, the interactions between the different factors underlying citizens' and professionals' engagement are not included in the model; here I would like to refer to chapters 3 and 5 in particular.

Figure 7.1 Theoretical model derived from the dissertation's research findings

Organizational context & context of the specific co-production process

- Self-interested / community focused motivations
- Salience attached to the public service and the co-production process
- Perceptions of the task and own competency to contribute to the public service delivery process

- Perceived level of work-autonomy in co-production
- Perceived level of general work-autonomy reinforced by perceived organizational support
- Perceived level of organizational support
- Perceived level of red tape associated with co-production

Engagement of individual citizens

Engagement of individual professionals

Citizen-professional collaboration in co-production processes

Because the answer on the third sub research question (presented in chapter 6) showed that citizens' and professionals' levels of engagement can reinforce or weaken each other, in Figure 7.1 two arrows are added between the boxes of citizens' and professionals' engagement. A more thorough understanding of these interactions can be found in chapter 6. Furthermore, especially in the chapters on citizens' engagement (chapters 2, 3 and 4) some differences were identified among co-production cases and countries. For that reason, the final model presented in Figure 7.1 not only shows that the individuals involved in co-production behave in the *organizational* context but also in the context of the *specific co-production process* (among others the cultural setting of the country and the particular policy domain). The (potential) influence of context (e.g., national, political, organizational) on various public management processes is under growing attention (cf. Meier, Rutherford and Avellaneda 2017; Bozeman and Su 2015).

7.3 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Having answered the main research question and schematized the theoretical model, this section continues with a discussion of the research findings. What are the contributions of the overall dissertation? What limitations of the study should be taken into account? What new questions and suggestions for further research arise? And what are the practical implications of the research? This section will answer these questions sequentially.

7.3.1 Major contributions of the overall dissertation

This dissertation contributes to the co-production specifically and the public administration literature more in general in several ways. In each of the empirical chapters, the contributions made are discussed. In this section, I will not replicate these contributions but instead compile all research findings and discuss the main contributions to the literature in the light of the overall research question. These major contributions can best be formulated as propositions, as this makes clear what direction for co-production literature I propose. Four propositions are distinguished, namely that co-production research benefits from 1) holding an analytical focus on

the individual level, 2) integrating insights from different disciplines, 3) integrating the specific context in the research design and conducting more comparative studies, and 4) putting more emphasis on the professionals involved in co-production and on the challenges they have to deal with.

Proposition 1: Co-production research benefits from holding an analytical focus on the individual level

At the rise of the co-production concept in the 1980s, co-production was predicted to have a glorious future. Levine (1984: 186), for example, wrote: "[t]he strategy of coproduction promises to be a powerful tool for resolving fiscal stress and an auspicious start on the road to restoring the trust and support of citizens for their public institutions." After more than twenty years, many co-production processes have been initiated, but it seems co-production does not fulfil all promises. Citizens sometimes feel disappointed in co-production, professionals feel constrained in interacting with citizens or even strongly resist to the idea of co-production, and often only a small number of citizens are involved (WRR 2012; Voorberg et al. 2015; Löffler 2010).

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, I explained that existing co-production literature is not able to solve these issues. More specifically, I argued that existing co-production literature is not able to provide such answers due to its main focus on the collaborative networks, processes and organizations in which co-production occurs. In the time period the dissertation's study started, much attention was paid to issues like how third sector organizations adapt to the network context of co-production and how they cope with the tensions this context brings (Brandsen and Van Hout 2006), the influence of the institutional context on the co-production design (Joshi and Moore 2004), and how to organize co-management between (local) government and third sector organizations or civil society (Freise 2012). Other authors explained how the co-production process can be optimized, for example by making more appropriate use of ICT (Meijer 2011) and by providing lessons on how to implement a co-production design in such a way that the government systems become supportive towards co-production (Isett and Miranda 2015).

Due to this focus on the aggregate level, co-production literature mostly disregarded the micro level of the individuals involved in co-production (see reviews by Verschuere, Brandsen and Pestoff 2012; Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers 2015). Yet, in the end co-production is about collaboration between individuals. This was clearly illustrated at the beginning of this dissertation in chapter 1. The introductory chapter started with the exemplary case of a Dutch citizen (named Suzan) who, triggered by some concrete troubles in her local environment, wanted to establish a neighborhood watch scheme. This case shows that such co-production initiatives bring many challenges: for the citizens involved, the public organizations originally producing the public services, and for the public professionals in these organizations who now (are forced to) collaborate with these citizens.

Therefore, this study takes an innovative approach by bringing the individual citizens and professionals to the core of the analytical framework. The new insights that are derived show that studying co-production from the individual level is worthwhile. The usefulness of focusing on the individual level has been recognized before in other, related streams of literature, such as on cross-boundary organizational relations or on the introduction of market elements in public service delivery. Nowadays, public services are often delivered in collaboration with other (non-)profit organizations, and to better understand the contemporary institutional context of cross-boundary collaboration it is relevant to gather more insights on the *individuals* working in this cross-boundary environment (Breathnach 2007; as referred to by Schappla 2012). Schappla (2012), for example, concluded in a study on local development partnerships in urban regeneration policies, that a focus on the individual workers in local government and third sector organizations has many advantages: it helps to better understand the challenges resulting from concrete (practical) actions taken by service providers. Stoker and Mosely (2010: 8) express this aptly:

> "Understanding what motivates people and what drives their behaviour is self-evidently central to policy making. If you are trying to change human society for the better then you are likely to have some theory of what it is that makes humans 'tick'."

Proposition 2: Co-production research benefits from integrating insights from different disciplines

The underestimation of the level of individuals involved in co-production resulted in three specific knowledge gaps that were identified in the introduction of this dissertation: 1) co-producers' motivations are scarcely taken into account, 2) the perspective of the individual professionals is scarcely taken into account, and 3) in existing literature there is a dominant focus on either co-producers or professionals instead of on the collaboration between them. In this dissertation I contributed to solving these gaps, not only by studying co-production from the individual level, but also by integrating insights from different disciplines.

Because the current co-production literature has no solid answer for why citizens and professionals engage, and how differences in perceptions on engagement impact the collaboration, I broadened my views. That is, in order to provide a more comprehensive answer, insights were integrated from streams of literature on for instance political participation, volunteering, self-organized collective action, community policing, public service motivation, public management and organizational psychology. In the last decades, the concept of co-production has been studied from a variety of disciplines, most notably economics, political science and public administration (Brandsen and Honingh 2016: 427). This dissertation shows that taking a multidisciplinary approach in one, single study is useful and can help us to solve some knowledge gaps.

When integrating insights of different streams of literature, of course one has to be aware of the differences between pure co-production processes on the one hand and citizen initiatives in for instance political participation and volunteering on the other hand. Co-production, for example, is not solely about contributing to the benefits of others – like in volunteering – as co-producers often are also users of the services produced. Moreover, co-production is about the interaction between citizens and professionals, while volunteering does not take place in similar professionalized service delivery processes. However, the empirical data show that insights derived from these related streams of literature are helpful to better understand citizens' and professionals' engagement in co-production, and the role of engagement in co-production collaboration. Combined with insights

gathered in the specific co-production context, a multidisciplinary approach can be helpful to develop new theories.

Proposition 3: Co-production research benefits from integrating the specific context in the research design and from conducting more comparative studies

In chapters 2, 3 and 4 some differences can be observed in citizens' engagement, dependent on the specific co-production process under scrutiny. To illustrate, in the profiles identified among citizen co-producers involved in client councils in organizations for elderly care, issues like being involved in order to have a hobby, making social contacts or finding a pleasant environment are in general neutrally valued or even (strongly) opposed. In the case of neighborhood watch schemes, to the contrary, groups of citizens were triggered by the social aspect of getting involved in such neighborhood watch schemes: they emphasize the social contacts with fellow members, the contact with youth or the possibility to get in touch with fellow residents of their neighborhood. So, the social component of being involved in the co-production of public services seems to apply more to co-production in the context of community safety than in the domain of elderly care. Furthermore, the findings derived from Q-methodology and focus groups show that competencies and perceptions on whether one is capable of participating ('internal efficacy') are almost solely mentioned by co-producers involved in client councils in organizations for elderly care and representative advisory councils at primary schools, but not by members of neighborhood watch schemes.

These findings indicate that the specific context matters if one wants to better understand citizens' engagement. The three cases – client councils, advisory councils and neighborhood watch schemes – represent different types of co-production. The co-production processes differ, for example, in the extent to which the process is institutionalized and regulated by law, and in the extent to which co-producers are dependent on the regular producer to produce the services delivered. This last element in particular can explain why a concept like trust is differently interpreted by respondents in different cases: members of client councils interpret trust in relation to external efficacy ('is the management willing to listen to our concerns?') while members of neighborhood watch schemes relate feelings of

especially *dis*trust with the salience of becoming active (having no or little trust that the police can solve safety and livability issues alone). In the latter case there is a strong link between dissatisfaction with the service currently delivered and feelings of trust in the local government and the police (cf. Kampen, Van de Walle and Bouckaert 2006).

Thus, regarding citizens' and public professionals' engagement in co-production, differences occur between various co-production processes in different types of co-production processes, different policy domains and different countries. This conclusion is in line with Pestoff's (2008) findings: in a comparative study on childcare services in eight countries, he identified some differences between levels of parent participation and the form of service provision (i.e., public, private or a hybrid form) in these countries (Pestoff 2008). The context dependency of co-production – or the impact of the specific public administration regime – has been hinted upon before by Verschuere, Brandsen and Pestoff (2012), and might be considered as one of the explanations why current co-production literature is dominated by qualitative, single case studies (Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers 2015).

However, although contextualized research is valuable – also in light of the findings of this dissertation – co-production literature will benefit even more from comparative research: despite the explosive growth of co-production research, progress in the field remains limited. This is partly due to conceptual confusion (Brandsen and Honingh 2016) and to a limited understanding of the generalizability of contextual factors to other policy processes (Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers 2015). This dissertation intends to be a useful leg up to more comparative research, by identifying some differences between co-production in different policy domains (health care, education, community safety) and countries (the Netherlands, Belgium).

This dissertation's findings are promising regarding the usefulness and possibilities of comparative research while keeping the contextual aspect of the specific co-production processes in mind. At first sight, a paradox seems to exist between putting more attention on contextualized research and conducting more comparative research. However, both aims can be combined and simultaneously

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reached. An example is given in chapter 4 of this dissertation, were a comparative Q-methodology study is conducted. However, more quantitative approaches are also useful, for instance to identify to what extent contextual factors are influential (Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers 2015). Designating the context of any given study, scholars can for example integrate a context matrix or set of variables conditioning the context in their comparative large-*N* studies (O'Toole and Meier 2015), or specify their survey question in such a way that "(…)it can measure the theoretical construct of a model variable in the new research setting in order to be able to compare it with the same theoretical construct from the original context" (Torenvlied and Akkerman 2017: 103).

Proposition 4: Co-production research benefits from putting more emphasis on the professionals involved in co-production and on the challenges they have to deal with
In this dissertation the perspectives of the individuals involved in co-production are central. The study shows that the collaborative process is dependent on the attitudes and motivations of both individual citizens and public professionals. However, because the individual level has scarcely been integrated in the analytical framework of most co-production studies, also the actors involved in co-production have scarcely been taken into account. Recently, one can observe a gradually growing interest for understanding the role and position of citizens in co-production, for instance by studying what makes the role as co-producer distinct from the role of citizen or consumer/customer (Fotaki 2011; Moynihan and Thomas 2013). However, knowledge on the public professionals involved remains limited. In line with studies by for instance Tuurnas (2015), in this dissertation some important first steps are taken to increase our insights on the public professionals involved in co-production. Yet, I would encourage further research on this topic.

Co-production is about government *by* instead of *for* the people (Bovaird and Löffler 2012b); nevertheless, the citizens' growing role in the public service delivery process does not mean professionals become less important or no longer have a role to play. Indeed, co-producers will always be "second-class experts" (Ewert and Evers 2014: 440) and will be in need of professional input. Through co-production, citizens become a part of the professional *process*, but they are

not professionals themselves. Recently, some scholars have acknowledged co-production has implications for professionals' work environment and position in the service delivery process (e.g., Ewert and Evers 2012; Brandsen and Honingh 2013; Moynihan and Thomas 2013). Because professionals' tasks change, other knowledge will be required and new skills are needed. Technical or substantive knowledge on the subject at hand must be complemented with an ability to segment between client groups, have diplomatic and enabling skills to bring co-producers and regular producers together for a common cause, and interpersonal skills like being a good communicator and excellent listener (Alford and O'Flynn 2012; Salamon 2002; O'Leary, Gerard and Choi 2013).

How public professionals cope with the challenges co-production brings to their work environment or how they perceive citizens' increasing role in public service delivery processes remain unclear, however. This is a serious flaw, since this dissertation's study shows that even though professionals often have no choice other than to participate in co-production, their levels of engagement differ and this impacts on the collaboration with co-producers. By expressing the relevance of giving professionals a more prominent place in co-production research, this dissertation contributes to Tuurnas' (2015) statement that scholars need to better understand how professionals realize co-production in practice. So, co-production research will benefit from more emphasis on the public professionals involved in co-production of public services.

7.3.2 Limitations of the current study and suggestions for the future research agenda

The last section already proposed some themes that could (or perhaps should) be added to the future research agenda. In this section I will provide some more specific suggestions for further research. Some of these stem from the study's limitations; others arise as a result of the research findings.

Suggestions for further research stemming from the study's limitations
Considering the overall dissertation, the empirical chapters reflect a mixed method design in which different research methods are applied and the research findings of

one chapter are elaborated on in another (cf. Creswell and Clark 2011). Needless to note, all single research methods (Q-methodology, survey research, focus groups / individual interviews) have their own strengths and weaknesses. These weaknesses might create certain biases or limitations that are not only important to take into account when interpreting the research findings, but also result in some suggestions for further research.

One of the dissertation's limitations concerns its generalizability. Given the context dependency of co-production and the research designs applied, we must be careful when generalizing the conclusions to other (groups of) co-producers, types of co-production, policy domains or countries. To identify citizens' viewpoints on their engagement in co-production and to gather factors explaining this engagement, the dissertation's study conducted Q-methodology and gathered data through focus groups. The biggest advantage of both techniques is that the researcher stays close to respondents' viewpoints and that the respondents are allowed to freely bring in new, relevant insights that would have otherwise been ignored when survey research was conducted. Q-methodology and focus groups are very suitable for studying personal viewpoints, attitudes and perceptions. Yet, the insights should be further replicated in other contexts.

Moreover, although Q-methodology can assure that the discourses found actually exist, it cannot eliminate the possibility that other, additional discourses that have not been identified in the underlying study exist outside the sample. In the cases studied in chapters 2 and 4, a diverse set of respondents was included in order to ensure that as many viewpoints as possible were considered. Yet, the possibility that other co-producers in similar co-production processes in health care / community safety or other policy domains hold other viewpoints on their engagement cannot be eliminated. Furthermore, both Q-methodology and focus groups are less useful in gathering information on socioeconomic variables (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, levels of income and education) and in achieving a full insight into the way in which these and other variables are related. That is, the mechanisms or causal links cannot easily be established. Further research will therefore be needed to test the theoretical model developed in chapter 2 in a more extensive way and to see whether the mentioned explanations and conclusions drawn in the

other empirical chapters are also valid in other contexts. Survey research will be an appropriate method in this respect, and I would especially encourage scholars to conduct comparative large-*N* studies as this allows the opportunity to control for the type of co-production process or policy domain.

Two other important limitations of the dissertation's study concern the issues of causality – or rather the potential of reversed causality – and the risk of common method bias. Both issues are especially relevant for chapter 5, in which a theoretical model was tested to explain individual public professionals' engagement in co-production on the basis of certain work environmental characteristics. Since this study made use of cross-sectional, self-reported data, the design bears the risk of common method bias. Even though correlations between dimensions and between independent variables are generally low, the results of the study must be carefully interpreted. To deal with this potential risk, further research can focus on the development of instrumental variables or even more 'objective' measurements of engagement.

The issue of reversed causality implies, to put it bluntly, that one cannot definitely conclude that a variable is a response to or a cause of another variable (Van de Walle and Bouckaert 2003). Based on the cross-sectional data it was possible to observe associations among variables, but testing causality in the direction of this relation was not possible. The possibility of reversed causality cannot be ruled out for that reason. For example, it might be possible that low levels of engagement induce perceptions of red tape, instead of the other way around. However, the theoretical arguments provided in chapter 5 make it plausible that the relations are directed in the way they are tested and therefore are not reversed. Nevertheless, further research could pay attention to the issue of causality, for example by conducting a longitudinal study and Granger causality tests. Granger causality testing determines whether variable A at time 1 is correlated with variable B at time 2, when controlling for variable B at time 1. When there are no other plausible causes, then this test provides good evidence for causality between the two variables (Brandt and Williams 2007).

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More general suggestions for the further research agenda

Additional suggestions for further research are inspired by the dissertation's research findings and conclusions. For instance, this dissertation is based on citizens' and public professionals' perceptions on engagement in co-production of public services. Another interesting question then relates to what are the consequences of these different perspectives: how do the different perspectives affect the actual behavior of co-producers and professionals, or ultimately the effectiveness of co-production? Do levels of citizens' and public professionals' engagement matter for the quality of the services delivered? This dissertation's study can serve as a stepping stone for these kinds of questions. The study presented in chapter 6 showed, for example, how perceptions on co-production partners' engagement are reflected in the collaboration. However, in that particular study no connection was made with different types of co-producers in terms of the discourses identified in chapter 4, nor was it possible to determine for example professionals' level of engagement in more objective terms or to say something about the effectiveness of the co-production. Developing more objective measurements of engagement and investigating the link between engagement and effectiveness will be two of the challenges for further research.

Another interesting question relates to the environmental setting in which co-production occurs. Here, one could for example think of neighborhood variables. In chapter 6 on neighborhood watch schemes in a Dutch municipality code-named Stadszicht, an interesting factor came up that has not yet been discussed in the dissertation. Some of the professionals from the police and municipality mentioned that certain characteristics of the neighborhood impact on the neighborhood watch scheme and the way it functions. They refer especially to the level of social coherence present in the neighborhood. They argue that without a certain level of social coherence it is not possible to start a neighborhood watch scheme or to make it successful in the longer term: when citizens do not feel connected with each other and their neighborhood, they do not want to invest any efforts in improving safety and livability. So, while in the literature it is assumed that co-production is a tool to increase social coherence or results in the growth of social networks (Boyle and Harris 2009; Needham 2008; Cepiku and Giordano 2014), it might be that for

co-production to be successful over a longer period of time a minimum level of coherence also needs to be present beforehand. Further research will be needed to investigate whether this claim holds true.

Some other suggestions for further research are about the consequences of co-production for the public professionals, particularly for their daily-work environment and personal attitudes. How does, for instance, the interactive nature of the relationship between public professional and co-producer affect personal attitudes such as job satisfaction and the meaning individual professionals give to their work? How can individual professionals be supported to accomplish the new tasks required for co-production, and what is the role of (managerial) leadership herein? The survey research among managers in organizations for elderly care (chapter 5) pointed at the importance of organizational culture for managers' levels of engagement in collaboration with client councils. But what does this culture entails exactly? And how can such a supportive culture be established? Moreover, it will be interesting to investigate what is the role of (managerial) leadership herein. In the explorative case study on the collaboration between the police/ municipality and neighborhood watch schemes in a Dutch municipality (chapter 6), it was mentioned that co-producers highly appreciated the mayor's interest in neighborhood watch schemes. During the interviews, some of the professionals of the municipality and the police suggested that because the mayor is in favor of the idea behind neighborhood watch schemes, a certain atmosphere was created in the municipal and police organization. The mayor has, for example, an important role in establishing the priorities for the coming period. Spiegel (1987) also illustrates the importance of the mayor's sympathy with co-production for the process to succeed. Literature on leadership states that network leadership is different from leadership in a single-agency structure (Silvia and McGuire 2010). Further research can investigate whether leadership also changes in a co-production context.

Furthermore, due to co-production, public professionals might increasingly be confronted with goal ambiguity or perceived conflicts of interest. Co-production is, somewhat paradoxically, simultaneously an instrument to ensure public services are in line with citizen demands (i.e., the collective entity) and a process in which the interests of (a select group of) individual co-producers become more prominent.

Situations might occur in which the interests of the broader group of service users conflict with the (private) interests addressed by co-producers. Focusing on the public professional who has to deal with these potential conflicts or tensions, it is interesting to investigate how s/he deals with this. It is important to note that such conflicts are not necessarily the result of pure self-interest of co-producers in the negative sense of the word. Conflicts or tensions can also stem from co-producers' motives or convictions that are potentially restricting their viewpoints and as such cause a bias towards what might be in the interest of the other service users. To illustrate, at an initial stage of this dissertation's research, some pilot interviews were held.[15] A location manager in an organization for elderly care said that some members of the client council are strongly driven by 'personal preferences', for example representing their own relative who is a resident of the organization whereby these members are focused on the experiences and interests of this relative. In other words, the experiences and preferences of relatives are laid down as a standard. That is not to say that the co-producers' intentions are 'bad', but for the manager this could be difficult to deal with as the co-producers' viewpoints are restricted to partial and specific interests and the manager wants to serve the interests of all users and of the organization.

Finally, some possible directions for further research are not directly linked with the dissertation's findings but instead are concerned with the general idea of co-production. In this dissertation I have shown the relevance of holding an analytical focus on the individual level. However, this does not imply other analytical levels are less relevant to study. One of the important streams in current co-production research is focused on the question if co-production does reach some of the assumed effects, and I would encourage scholars to continue this search. The current dissertation does not provide insights on this topic, but given the growing popularity of co-production it is an important avenue for further research. It is interesting to get a better grip on what is the role of co-production in public service delivery and society more broadly, and to increase our understanding of what are the consequences of delivering public services through co-production for the general public. For instance, what are the consequences of co-production

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15 See chapter 5, footnote 11.

for the continuity and quality of public services? Not all citizens might be willing or capable to co-produce or to continue their efforts over a longer period of time. And, as already elaborated on above, citizens are not professional experts. How can public organizations ensure public services are also delivered in the (near) future and are of good quality? And what are the dark sides of co-production, for example regarding the broader issues of accountability, legitimacy and representativeness?

From these latter questions, it is a small step to ask a more normative question: how desirable is it to introduce co-production in public service delivery, especially when more compulsory elements for the individual co-producers are integrated? This links to the more fundamental issue of what is the responsibility of individual citizens for public services and what role is expected of governments. Co-production is often introduced in delivery processes of vital public services, such as health, education and safety. Citizens are often dependent of these services; can governments ensure all citizens have equal access when these services are co-produced? Does co-production really meet the standards of 'good governance'? That is, good governance cannot be defined in strictly economic terms but also includes elements concerned with democracy (cf. Rouban 1999b). At first sight, the idea of citizens *participating* in service delivery seems to perfectly fit into this idea. Yet, modern democracies also hold the requirement of solidarity; apart from the requirement of responsibility. When equal access cannot be guaranteed or when a small – and perhaps not representative – group of co-producers contributes, one can wonder whether this indeed is in line with issues like solidarity and (representative) democracy.

This latter set of more normative questions show how closely tied the academic debate on co-production and the political debates in society are. In the introductory chapter, I already indicated this briefly. Given the growing popularity of co-production in society and among politicians, in the coming years one might expect public organizations will continue to strive to co-produce public services. In the end, the decision whether or not to co-produce is a political decision. However, future academic research could contribute further to the co-production endeavor by investigating how and in which way co-production can best be implemented.

7.3.3 Implications for practice

Finally, the dissertation has some implications for practice: for the citizens, public professionals and public organizations involved in co-production. Co-production is often presented as the go-to solution for the challenges (local) governments are confronted with, such as the ageing population, a legitimacy crisis of both the government and the market, and austerity in public finances. As such, co-production has become the subject of many ideological and political debates (see for instance Ishkanian and Szreter 2012; Boyle and Harris 2009). Despite the pitfalls that are addressed in the literature – for example with regard to the issue of equity or the difficulty of involving citizens in public service delivery processes – many governments seem to remain in favor of co-production (OECD 2011). This dissertation does not claim to be a handbook for (local) governments of how to organize co-production in the best way or to provide 'the' guideline for how to co-produce. However, in addition to the practical implications already listed in the separate empirical chapters, some guidelines and remarks that are worthwhile considering are provided below.

First, *understanding and being aware that co-producers are no unitary group* is perhaps the most important lesson here for public organizations. Although at first sight this seems not to be a very special finding, it definitely has some important implications for practice. The chapters that provided an answer to the first sub research question in particular (i.e., chapters 2, 3 and 4), demonstrate that different groups of co-producers hold different perspectives on their involvement. To illustrate, some co-producers see their involvement mainly as a way to make social contacts ('it is cozy'), while others are really concerned with improving the public services delivered, and some others take part due to having a normative belief they 'have to do something for society'. Public organizations need to be aware of this when designing co-production processes and communicating with potential co-producers.

When designing co-production processes they must, for example, be careful with introducing compulsory elements for individual co-producers. That is, although it can be mandatory for public organizations to deliver public services through co-production (as for instance in the case of client councils in organizations for elderly

care), enforcing individual citizens to get involved as a co-producer is more risky. Public organizations might better give potential co-producers an voluntary option whether or not to involve. To give just one example, a couple of years ago a Dutch nursing home introduced compulsory involvements for relatives of residents. The organization initiated the idea of 'mandatory informal care', because – according to the organization's management view – all relatives have a moral obligation to be involved and to spend a minimum number of hours per week with the residents. An association representing informal care givers was not in favor of this initiative: they were afraid informal care givers would feel cornered and would no longer want to be involved (NOS 2013). This reaction can be explained with the conclusions drawn in this dissertation. Co-producers with a sincere interest in the care process could feel offended if they are expected to, to put it bluntly, have some coffee with the residents for a couple of hours per week. People with such motivational profiles believe that their co-production entails much more than such mundane tasks. Co-producers that are motivated from a normative framework do not need to be obliged to take up societal responsibilities they consider as 'normal', and may be offended by such compulsory policies. A framework that makes their involvement in co-production 'compulsory' may be perceived as a framework that wants to 'sanction'. Only the co-producers motivated more or less by the conviction that the financial basis of public service delivery (like subsidized care) is under pressure, in times in which the public sector is faced with financial austerity, may be charmed by frameworks that make co-production 'compulsory' to individual co-producers.

Furthermore, public organizations need to design co-production in such a way that it allows for a made-to-measure approach. As not all co-producers perceive their tasks, role and relation *vis-à-vis* the professional in a similar way, a standardized and uniform 'protocol' will not be satisfying to them. This can be illustrated with the neighborhood watch schemes studied in chapters 4 and 6. Some co-producers want to improve safety and livability in close collaboration with the police. If they are not regularly updated on what has been done with the information they sent to the police, they feel not valued and will reconsider their involvement. Other co-producers get motivated if they have the opportunity to learn new skills. Offering training programs will be a helpful 'tool' to keep these

citizens in the neighborhood watch schemes. However, co-producers who combine their involvement with paid jobs or have busy lives in another way might perceive excessively high levels of required efforts when all these training programs are mandatory. Public organizations, then, have to keep the balance steady between organizing a couple of mandatory training programs to teach the citizens the skills needed to safely perform their tasks, and offering some additional courses to motivate the citizens who want to develop themselves. Although this might bring additional costs for public organizations, this is no waste of money as in the end the public organizations and society also get something in return of highly engaged co-producers.

Such a 'made-to-measure' approach is closely linked with two out of Ostrom's eight 'Principles for Managing a Commons'. Elinor Ostrom developed these eight principles based on her studies on how the commons can be governed sustainably and equitably in a community. Principle two specifies to "match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions", while according to principle three it is important to "ensure that those affected by the rules can participate in modifying the rules" (On the Commons 2017).

When communicating with potential co-producers to encourage them to also get involved in co-production, public organizations also need to be aware of the differences between potential co-producers. That is, most likely the same kinds of differences that are observed in this study among co-producers will also exist among the potential co-producers. To mobilize citizens to pick up social responsibilities and to join co-production, strong, motivating and attracting words are crucial (Van Zuydam, Van de Velde and Kuiper 2013). Communication strategies might be specified to different groups of potential co-producers, emphasizing different elements of co-production, like the social element, opportunities to learn and the ability to do good for the community.

Second, for both citizens and public professionals it applies that *their participation arouse certain expectations on their co-production partner's side*. Introducing co-production in the public service delivery process does not only change the citizens' role but also the professionals' role. It brings some duties for public professionals, such as being in touch with citizens regularly, providing citizens the

means needed and sharing information. Entering or starting a co-production process implies the professional commits her/himself to these duties. Public organizations need to be aware of this: is it doable to live up to the expectations, and can they enable and support the professionals involved to meet their commitments? This organizational support can take different forms, such as formal procedures or an organizational culture that is in favor of citizen collaboration. Furthermore, public organizations have to provide their professionals sufficient levels of autonomy to perform the co-production activities. Professionals, for example, need some discretion to balance between on the one hand staying in close contact with citizens to collaborate with and stimulate them, and on the other hand keeping enough distance to allow citizens to pick up their responsibilities in the service delivery process. Depending on the individual characteristics of both co-producers and public professionals, different professionals will interpret this balance differently.

Third, and related, *individual professionals' engagement has a crucial role in the collaborative process of co-production, yet it cannot be taken for granted*. The case presented in chapter 6 on the involvement of special investigating officers in neighborhood watch schemes showed that professionals are not spontaneously convinced of the added value of (their involvement in) co-production. Public organizations cannot simply force their professional employees to engage. That is, they can do so, but high levels of engagement will not automatically ensue. Public organizations can best involve their professionals in the decision to initiate co-production, as this can stimulate awareness of its usefulness for the organization and their own daily work activities. An open organizational culture and (managerial) leadership might contribute to this as well.

Fourth, and finally, even when public organizations and public professionals put as many efforts as possible into motivating and stimulating citizens to co-produce, *co-production is likely to depend on a small group of citizens*. It is not realistic to expect all citizens are willing or capable to engage. Often, citizens' involvement is based on voluntary efforts, implying public organizations can only determine and influence this involvement to a certain degree. Public organizations can encourage citizens, emphasize the salience of the co-production process and/ or the public service delivered, and provide support. But sanctions or compulsion

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are often counterproductive, as illustrated above. Thus, the notion that public organizations are dependent on a small group of engaged co-producers seems unavoidable to a certain extent.

However, it also brings a potential risk for the continuation of the service delivery process and public organizations need to be aware of this. In all three cases studied – involving health care, education and community safety – it was observed that citizens' commitment to co-production is often dependent on concrete incidents or family members / children being part of the organization for elderly care / primary school. Even though especially in the health care and education cases more self-interested or egocentric motivations are (strongly) opposed, it seems that co-producers need something that is close to themselves to trigger their engagement. In other words, co-producers consider participation in service delivery as important because it is close to themselves, but once they have decided to engage they want to broaden their viewpoint and are mainly motivated by community-centered motivations. The consequence is that once this connection with the organization loosens or the 'triggering incident' is 'solved', commitment is likely to decline: citizens' perceptions on the salience of the collaboration and/ or public service delivered change, and – in the case of health care especially – given the larger distance between co-producer and public organization it is more difficult to involve these citizens in and inform them about all relevant issues. Thus, it might be difficult for public organizations to continue co-production over a longer period of time, especially when new, potential co-producers are hard to engage. Public organizations have to anticipate this and ensure the public services can also be delivered when citizens' input in co-production declines.

To conclude…

This dissertation started with the challenges of some ordinary, yet exemplary citizens and public professionals: Suzan who wanted to start-up a neighborhood watch scheme in a Dutch municipality; Peter who worked as a civil servant in the municipal organization and provided Suzan the necessary support; and Tina who, as a police officer, wanted to be of help to Suzan and her team, yet who at the same time felt constrained by the local police chief (her supervisor) (see Text box

1.1). The separate studies in the dissertation have shown that this fictitious case is not unrealistic or unlikely to occur, and that both individual citizens and public professionals have to deal with the challenges of co-production almost on a daily basis. In this dissertation I have attempted to better understand the engagement of the individual citizens and public professionals involved in co-production, and what is the role of this engagement in the collaborative process. With the answer formulated to the research question and the practical implications outlined above, I hope that I have contributed to the co-production debate in both academia and society. Hopefully, people like Suzan, Peter, Tina and the local police chief can make an advantage of it to ensure they can collaborate in a worthwhile way to produce a safe and livable neighborhood or any other relevant public service. Let the dissertation be an inspiration also for others to happily and fruitfully co-produce!