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Exploring how Institutional Factors and Contexts Determine Cooperation between Volunteer Organisations and Municipalities in Norway

Håkon Solbu Trætteberg - Institute for Social Research, Oslo | Bernard Enjolras - Institute for Social Research, Oslo

This paper is relevant to the voluntary sector as it discusses the factors impacting co-production between volunteer organisations and municipalities and explores which policy areas are more appropriate for co-production.

What factors impact the usage and success of co-production with volunteer organisations, in different policy areas at the municipal level?

The authors posit that co-production is not a one-size-fits-all solution, and the institutional features and context of a policy area should be considered before co-production is adopted. The illustrative example of Norwegian municipalities has demonstrated some of the areas where co-production may be more or less appropriate.

[#Cross-Sector](#) [#Co-Production](#) [#Volunteering](#) [#LocalGovernment](#) [#Norway](#)

Background & Context



- Co-production is often defined as **public service organisations & citizens, individual or collectively, engage on equal footing to produce some form of public value**. There is often a lack of distinction between co-production with the joint efforts of individual citizens & the public sector, and co-production including formalised Volunteer Organisations & public institutions.
- Co-production between Volunteer Organisations and Municipalities is **widely recognised as beneficial within literature, but less focus is given to how the factors contributing towards co-production vary**, and how this impacts the appropriateness of co-production. This can lead to a **prescriptive embrace of co-production, which may not be appropriate in all areas**.
- This paper builds upon existing literature which developed the framework of **factors impacting co-production, including A) Laws and Regulations, B) Formalisation of interaction patterns, C) Resource dependencies**. These are applied to **four policy areas, 1) Services for Children & Adults, 2) Integration of Immigrants, 3) Health and Care, 4) Culture and Leisure**.
- Norway was chosen as an illustrative case for a few factors, including the fact that **regions/municipalities have a degree of autonomy**, the presence of a **strong welfare state** and high degree of state involvement, and the presence of a **strong civil society sector** in Norway. **12 municipalities were explored through 89 interviews**.

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Take aways & Learnings



- Co-Production was found to be **more likely**, and have more room for impact, in **policy areas which are not core municipality services mandated by national law**, and where municipalities have more autonomy & policy discretion.
- Co-Production being more likely in cases where relationships are formalised with cooperative or co-production agreements **was not wholly supported by the data**, however this factor does show **more relevance in the policy design stage rather than in implementation**.
- Co-Production is **more likely in fields where volunteer organisations have a critical resource, such as skilled volunteers**. This is often a **mutual dependency**, however, as municipalities often have the critical resources of funding, a venue, and publication for activities while volunteer organisations bring crucial skilled implementers.
- In terms of **policy design** more specifically, it was found that co-production was **more likely to take place in the design stage, if volunteer organisations are to be involved in the implementation**. It was also more likely to occur in areas where the **municipality has more discretionary power**. Co-production on design was also found to be more likely **when volunteer organisations control critical resources**.
- **Consistent patterns of co-production were found across the municipalities studied, irrespective of their size and geographical features**.
- Co-production was found to be **extremely prevalent in the culture and leisure area**, and in culture/leisure aspects of other policy areas. Co-production is **less found in immigrant integration and health and care, and very low in child and adolescent services**. This highlights co-production's role in the **gaps where professionalised, mandated municipality services don't meet**.

Table 4. Overview of the Levels of Co-Production and Analytic Dimensions in Policy Formulation in the Four Policy Fields.

Policy field	Laws and regulations	Formalization	Resource dependency	Co-production
Culture and leisure	Much local discretion	High	Mutual dependence	High
Integration of immigrants	Some local discretion	Limited	Little dependence both ways, except following the arrival of asylum seekers in 2015	Low, but higher during the arrival of asylum seekers in 2015
Health and care	Little local discretion	Limited	Voluntary organizations highly dependent on municipalities	Low
Children and adolescents	Little local discretion	Limited	Voluntary organizations dependent on municipalities, except in disadvantaged districts in Oslo, where there is mutual dependence	Low, except in disadvantaged districts in Oslo

ERNOP Research Notes provide easy-to-read, practice-oriented summaries of academic articles on philanthropy and are written by practitioner experts. This ERNOP Research Note 2025/8 is published in March 2025 and has been written by Connor Audsley from the Centre for European Volunteering. More information can be found at www.ernop.eu.