

How can service users best be involved in provision and production of a community-based development program? A preliminary literature review in co-production and community development.

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#### **Abstract**

This literature review is a first exploration into methods to involve services users into the provision and production process of the community-based development programs “The Peaceable Neighborhood”. The research explores the research areas of “co-production” and “community development”. The term co-production can be used to focus on the processes involved with service user participation and the paradigm of community development provides a closer look at the identity of the community based interventions. This research shows that, still, lot is unknown about the methods to involve the target population. However, this research concludes with some recommendations for the program.

## **Introduction**

In the past few years participation has become a well-known concept in the public sector (Pestoff, 2014). Previously, public services, like health promotion and social care, were developed by knowledge and research from scientist and professionals (Lindsey, Stadjuhar & McGuinness, 2000). However, in recent years studies have shown that the role of the target population in developing methods is of vital importance (o.a. Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006). If the target audience plays no part in the provision and production process of public services, chances are that the interventions do not suit the needs of the target audience. Furthermore, there may not be enough funds or means to perform the services (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). Participation should eliminate the fore mentioned problems and bring about other beneficial effects, such as community and citizen empowerment (e.g. Perkins, Brown & Taylor, 1996) and a better founded democracy (e.g. Verschuere, Brandsen & Pestoff, 2012).

Despite the increased focus on citizen participation in recent years, a lot is still unknown about the methods to involve the target population in the provision and production of public services. This is mainly because research into the subject is still relatively new and so far does not show many significant outcomes (Verschuere et al., 2013). On top of that interventions still struggle to involve participants and give them a proper place in the provision and production (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). This lack of scientific research makes that little guidance exists for interventions to incorporate their service users as co-producers. Nonetheless, there are a lot of interventions trying to work with service users as a part of their intervention. One example of such an intervention is “The Peaceable Neighborhood”. This is an intervention that pursues the development of social skills and democratic citizenship of youth by influencing their environment (Horjus, Van Dijken & De Winter, 2012). In earlier versions of the intervention service users did not play a significant role in the provision and production of the service. However, the intervention now involves active participation of it users.

This article is a first exploration into methods to involve services users into interventions. This will be done by conducting a preliminary literature review. The research will focus on research that involves co-production of public services to get a clear image of the process involved with service user participation. In addition, the research will also focus on community development which provides a closer look at the identity of the community based interventions and the implications this entails for involving service users. Both areas of research will be combined to develop a first outline of guidelines to use as a development strategy for The Peaceable Neighborhood.

## **The Peaceable Neighborhood**

The Peaceable Neighborhood is a community-based youth development program which aims to promote democratic citizenship and social skills of youth (Horjus, Van Dijken & De Winter, 2012). The program is an extension of the Peaceable School, a primary school program which aims to teach children to become democratic citizens. In the program children are taught to be open to differences between people and solve possible conflicts by constructive conversation. They also learn to handle responsibilities and to contribute actively to the public interest (Pauw, 2012). To reach these goals, the Peaceable Method suggests that not only the children get lessons but that the whole environment should convey these values. When children are located in an environment of social cohesion; i.e. an environment in which they are respected, heard and actively invited to participate, they will feel more connected to their environment and be more open to learning social skills and democratic values ([www.vreedzameschool.nl](http://www.vreedzameschool.nl)). Research indicates that the approach of the Peaceable School is successful. After having experienced the Peaceable School program, children are more calm and responsible, have more respect for their peers, are better at keeping their appointments and have fewer conflicts with others. In addition, there is a significant difference in the school climate and student behavior according to teachers and school management (Pauw, 2012).

The Peaceable Neighborhood wants to extend this success and values from the schools into the neighborhood in the hopes of utilizing the skills the children developed in a bigger environment (De Winter, Horjus, & Van Dijken, 2010). Using the same approach in different life domains (school, leisure, sports and home) will make it clear to children what they can expect and what is expected from them. In 2008 the first Peaceable Neighborhood started in Utrecht, the Netherlands. The first results of the research of Horjus, Van Dijken & De Winter (2012) indicate that practices of the Peaceable Neighborhood are promising: when certain features of the Peaceable Neighborhood were present, children show more of their 'Peaceable' skills. Furthermore, parents thought the neighborhood was significantly safer and were convinced of the benefits of The Peaceable Neighborhood. The uniform educational approach initiated by the program, helped professionals to communicate positively with children and each other. However, the program did not reach the parents, resulting in scarce participation of parents in the execution and management of the program. This result initiated a new version of The Peaceable Neighborhood with a focus on increasing the engagement of parents and other citizens.

As of September 2013, a pilot on four primary schools in two neighborhoods in the Netherlands have started. In these schools, parent groups were founded in which parents

organize activities that are in line with the vision and values of the Peaceable Neighborhood. The parents in these groups are supported by someone from the school and a professional from the Peaceable Neighborhood. The idea is that these professionals will take the lead in the beginning but will gradually become less involved so that the parent group will become self-sufficient.

### **Co-production**

Co-production is the process in which service users become part of the provision- and production process of public services (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006). Elinor Ostrom originally developed the term co-production to describe the relationship between the “regular producer” (e.g. professionals, health worker) and their service users (Pestoff, 2012). At present, the term represents not only the relationship between regular producer and service users but also the relationship between government and citizens (Brudney & England, 1983; Osborne & Strokosch, 2013). Co-production is seen as a method to achieve a more equal relationship based on cooperation (Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006). This process of co-production may be viewed as a step towards a civil society which is based on citizen participation (Verschuere et al., 2012).

In the beginning, co-operation of the client was also considered as co-production (Alford, 1998). However, at present consensus has shifted more towards the view that service users should be involved in a more systematic and profound way (Pestoff, 2014). Despite this shift there is still much heterogeneity in use of the term. This can be explained by the fact that the term is still vague about the way in which service users should participate in the provision and production. Because of this there are many different ways in which involvement of service users can be viewed as co-production. This makes the subject a research topic in many different fields (Verschuere et al., 2012).

This study defines user and community co-production as: “*the provision of services through regular, long-term relationships between professionalized service providers (in any sector) and service users and or other members of the community, where all parties make substantial resource contributions.*” (Bovaird (2007, pp. 847). In addition, this article also focuses on active participation of service users. Within the Peaceable Neighborhood service users take up an important independent role in organizing activities. It is clear that this does not involve passive form of participation..

### **Community development**

Community development is defined as a “*process of voluntary cooperation and self-help/mutual aid among residents of a locale aimed at the improved physical, social and*

*economical conditions*” (Chavis & Florin, 1990, as cited in Lindsey, Stajduhar, McGuinness, 2001, pp. 829). These cooperations between community members can be organized by community members themselves, but more frequently are initiated and channeled by community development projects (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). Within these community development projects, two varieties exist: community-based and community-driven development. *Community-based development* aims to actively involve service users in their design and management. *Community-driven development* is characterized by more direct control of communities in key decisions, like planning or investment resources (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). The main goal of both varieties is to mobilize the community. This is thought to be essential for gaining profound social change (Lindsey et al., 2001).

Community development sees greater value in emphasizing beliefs, values, assumptions and attitudes than models, theories or “best practices”. Thereby, community development is viewed as a social movement or philosophical orientation rather than an applied social science or method (Florin & Wandersman, 1990). A fundamental principle in the paradigm of community development is that projects connect to the conditions and terms of the community (Eversol, 2010). Thereby, they use a bottom up approach. Community development states that it is important to strengthen the community by giving them support in making their own decisions and providing them resources and responsibilities. Hereby, the likelihood increases that communities will become self-managed and less independent from government (Babajanian, 2005). It is believed that, only when the community become the agents of change, social change will be profound and sustainable (Lindsey et al., 2001).

### **Methods**

In this study, literature about co-production and community development will be researched in order to offer support to the intervention Peaceable Neighborhood. Keywords include: participation, citizen participation, co-production, empowerment, community participation, community, community-based, community development. “Web of Science” is used for finding the relevant articles. When full versions of articles were not available on Web of Science, other search engines connected to Utrecht University were used to find the readable copies.

The criteria for inclusion of an article are if: it seems to have implications for the practice of involving service users in production of provision; it is within the research areas of co-production or community development; it concerns public services; it fits within the theoretical framework outlined.

The decision to read an article was based on the title and abstract. In total, 268 articles were found, but only 44 articles were included. It should, however, be taken into account that many articles were found using a combination of these words and that the keywords have a wide range in meaning which causes many articles to fall outside of the scope of this review. After reading all selected articles, thirteen articles were excluded from the research because they were not covered by the criteria.

### **Results**

The results are discussed using four categories. The first is involving citizens in co-production; it is important to know whether people will likely or not participate and how to stimulate this participation. The second is giving participants a place in the organization, this gives them room to operate within the organization. Third, is the relationship between professionals and citizens, because a good relationship naturally influences participation. Last, it is important to keep in mind the knowledge and skills of the service users and their community, these can influence the outlay of the intervention. The differences of opinion within both fields of research will be taken into account while displaying the results. The goal is to give a differentiated image of all options.

### **Motives and drives**

The first task a professional has when they want to start co-production is involving the service users. To accomplish this, it is important to know what stimulates or determines service users to take up a co-producing role within the organization. Researchers have determined that it is important to know which needs, drives and benefits service users find while participating and which barriers and costs (Prestby, Wandersman, Florin, Rich & Chavis, 1990; Pestoff, 2012, 2014; Verschuere et al., 2012). Research of Prestby et al. (1996) indicates that it is important that participant receive “specific” or “private” benefits in addition to the collective benefits they obtain through services. If selective benefits are not or not sufficiently present, participants will feel less responsible to take on a co-producing role. When they feel others will fulfill this role, they are likely to withdraw and enjoy a “free ride”. Pestoff (2012) further submits that the combination of these individual motivations and the ease of involvement influences whether or not a service user will become involved in the provision and production process. When a service user highly values a service, he or she will be more motivated to take on a role as co-producer. If it is easy for users to become involved with the provision of the service, the will to participate will likely be turned into real participation. However, when it is hard for a user to gain a role in the provision of service, this will form a barrier between wanting to and actually participating. This barrier might arise

because transaction costs for participation are high. Transaction costs may be as simple as users having to put in more time and effort. Pestoff (2012) therefore concludes it is important to try to lower the transaction costs in order to achieve more participation for service users.

Apart from the ease of involvement and the importance of the service supplied, there are many more theoretical perspectives which define and classify the benefits and costs of participation (Prestby et al., 1990). In general, it is thought that participants will be more willing to participate when the benefits outweigh the costs (Verschuere et al., 2012). There has been research in the field of management of volunteers, and other areas, about the benefits volunteers, citizen, participants or co-produces experience. Despite the different classifications, there is consensus about the fact that people will co-produce because of material interest (Prestby et al., 1990; Verschuere et al., 2012). These material interests involve tangible, extrinsic rewards: the service users will get something in return for their trouble. These can be financially but also non-financial things, like a safer neighborhood or a sustainable solution (Alford, 2002; Verschuere et al., 2012). There is also consensus about that, in addition to material rewards, other factors will motivate citizens (Prestby et al., 1990). Research of Alford (2002) indicates that, apart from material rewards, there are three more categories in which to categorize benefits. These are *intrinsic motivation*, which includes the sense of self-determination and competence of service users; *solidarity incentives*, which includes motivation for group affiliation and belonging; *normative appeal*, which includes motivation based on norms and commitments about moral and social issues. According to researchers (Alford, 2002; Prestby et al., 1990; Verschuere et al., 2012) raising the benefits in these categories has a positive relationship with the level of participation.

Research into community development found that, apart from the general categories Alford (2002) found, there are more factors involved in the participation of an individual in a neighborhood (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Perkins, Brown, & Taylor, 1996). Perception of the environment, social relations and control are found to be important factors as well. *Perception of the environment* involves judgments about the environment (e.g. perceived qualities, satisfaction, problems). When citizens experience moderate problems in the neighborhood, the likelihood of participation in a neighborhood-level organization will be largest. When there will be less problems, citizens will be less motivated to become involved in collective action because they have less stress and problems to solve. When the problems are too big, citizens will feel solving the problems will be out of their reach and are more likely to use other strategies, like moving (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). *Social relationships* refers to the interaction between neighbors such as asking for help and informal visiting.

Research of Perkins et al. (1996) shows that the likelihood of citizens to participate in a neighborhood-level organization increases when individuals and blocks were more involved in helping their neighbors. *Perceived control* indicates the control individuals think they have over problems. When citizens feel their effort for trying to solve the problems will be meaningful, they are more likely to participate (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988; Florin & Wandersman, 1990). All three of these concepts are influenced by a sense of community. This is the measure in which an individual can identify with its neighborhood and feel connected to the neighborhood and the people living there. When individuals have a higher sense of community, they will be more inclined to involve in neighborhood organizations or initiate collective action than use other strategies, like exit or avoidance (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990).

After defining some motives and drives, the question is how these can be enhanced to stimulate long term participation. Although there is a general agreement on the motives and drives of co-producers, both remain context specific (Cepiku & Giordano, 2014). A way to adapt to this is by doing a needs assessment on the potential service users (Prestby et al., 1990). This assessment would include questions about the motivation to participate and the effort they would be willing to put into anticipating. When the drives and motives have been made clear the organization can apply this knowledge to improving the co-operation process (Alford, 2002; Pestoff, 2012, 2014; Prestby et al., 1990). For example, if participants highly value being part of a group, the organization can try to schedule more group sessions. When there is a good fit between participant needs and what participants obtain, they will be more inclined to participate and the participation will be more sustainable (Prestby et al., 1990).

### **Managing co-production**

After service users have shown to be prepared to become co-producer, it is important to find a good way to manage co-producers within an organization. For this, it is important to give service users a fitting role within the organization. Verschuere et al. (2012) argues that, to determine a fitting role, it is necessary to determine the aim of the organization and how to accomplish this aim. He calls this the “Chain of Causality”. The chain of causality means that the organization determines the exact steps and action between their current position and their goal. In this way, not only the need and requirements of the client are defined but also the needs and requirements of the organization. This may help in giving the service users a fitting part in the organization (Verschuere et al., 2010). In addition, there can be an estimate of which skills or characteristics a service user should possess and which have to be learned within the organization, in order to be a valuable co-producer (Cornish, 2006).

There are multiple visions on which role is best for a co-producer to take up in an organization. Studies about co-production show that a way to give co-producers a fitting role in the production process is limiting their input to tasks that do not require advanced professional skills (Pestoff, 2014). Especially research in child care has confirmed this (Pestoff, 2006; Vamstad, 2012). These studies show that parent involvement is often limited to non-professionals tasks, like administration or cleaning. This clear division of labor will reduce the worries of professionals that parents will permanently substitute them (Pestoff, 2006). Thereby, it will reduce possible tensions between professionals and service users. However, research from the field of community development suggests that it is better to give the user a more prominent role in the provision and production process and to intertwine the community participation with the culture of the organization (Gutiérrez, GlenMaye & DeLois, 1995). When service users participate in more phases of the provision and production, the intervention will better connect the needs and priorities of the target audience (Heritage & Dooris, 2009).

### **Professional-client relations**

Where service users obtain a more prominent place in the organizational structure, the organizational culture is likely to change too. Previously, professionals and management staff were the only people shaping production and provision, but now the service users and other members of the community play a large role in shaping these decisions and outcomes. Research shows that not every professional or member of the management staff is pleased with this new position of service users (e.g. Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). Some professionals feel it is their job to provide services to the users and feel service users are intruding this process (Parrado, Van Ryzin & Löffler, 2013). Other professionals still find it difficult to share their rights and responsibilities with service users, because they are concerned with the possible lack of skill in users for dealing with public and social problems (Heritage & Dooris, 2009). In addition, when the behavior of co-producers is seen as more unpredictable than passive users, professionals are becoming reluctant to involve them (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). This mistrust and resistance of professionals can be explained by the belief of some professionals that they “know best” (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000). This belief can lead to a situation in which the professionals retain all control, the knowledge of service users is undermined and service users don't get any real “participatory space” (Christens, 2012).

To prevent these negative outcomes, researchers suggest it is important to focus on the power and the distribution of power within an organization (e.g. Christens, 2012; Florin & Wandersman, 1990). Some do this by including the term “empowerment” into their research.

Empowerment means the process in which “*individuals gain mastery or control over their own lives and democratic participation in the life of their community*” (Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988, pp. 726). Although this definition can be interpreted in different ways, research can use the term as the amount of control a community member or service user had within an organization (Cornish, 2006). Thus, more empowerment in service users means more control for service users and a more equal division of power between professionals and service users. More empowerment for service users can be achieved by teaching them new skills and having professionals give up power (Gutiérrez et al., 1995).

When professionals and scientists are more aware of the influence they can exert on the service users and the power balance, they can find ways to counteract them (Christens, 2012). However, some scientists say that including the term empowerment into the research is not enough to counteract an unequal power balance (e.g. Eversol, 2010). Lindsey et al. (2000) finds that students who have been taught to interact in an empowered and bottom-up way with their community, still struggle to be equal partners within this community and take up the role of leader or expert almost instinctively. She therefore questions if it is enough to be aware of terms like empowerment, equality, partnership and collaboration to restore the power balance between service users and professionals. Lindsey et al. (2000) believes that the imbalances revolve around deep-seated beliefs, values, assumptions and attitudes, that cannot be taught to just anyone. Eversol (2010) also finds that there is more needed to balance the power between service users and professionals. She thinks it is necessary to “reframe” the interaction between the two. Public services, programs and interventions are professional institutions who not only dictate the formal organizational structure, but also the informal “rules of the game” guiding the interaction between people (Eversol, 2010).

When communities are invited to participate in these professional institutions it means that the social change an intervention intended is happening on the terms of the professional. Communities have to adapt to the language, structure, values and assumptions of professionals, while the professionals do little or no adapting. This makes participation an unobtainable cause. Eversol (2010), therefore, suggests that it is important that the professionals acknowledge the knowledge and institution from the community. The community can contain a great deal of knowledge. This knowledge can contribute much to an intervention, because the members of the community are most likely familiar with the problems and solutions within that community (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000). It is important for professionals to acknowledge this and the communities’ culture in order to

succeed. Someone who is comfortable within both worlds, that of the community and the organization, could play a big part in making an intervention succeed (Eversol, 2010).

### **Characteristics of service users and community**

As can be seen in previous paragraphs, it is important that service users and their community play a big part in the provision and production process. Campbell and Jovchelovitch (2000) found that when service user characteristics were not taken into account, the participation process had little or no effect on the outcome of the intervention

First of all, it is important to look at the characteristics of the service users. An important theme in this seems to be the representativeness of the service users. Every community is shaped differently and can either be homogenic or heterogenic by nature. Mansuri & Rao (2004) point out that the homo- or heterogeneity of a community can have a significant impact on the success of a participation-based community intervention. If service users are not representatives of the community the local differences may be only enlarged instead of diminished. The cause for this is that mostly the local elite volunteers to participate. This elite has more time, money and skills to do this because they are more educated, have less burdens when they participate and can really reap the benefits of participating because of this. A lack of representation can be a danger for co-produced services, because if only the elite participate, the needs and voices of the rest might not be heard. Often, the ones who don't voluntarily participate need it the most (Mansuri & Rao, 2004).

Secondly, it is important to look at the characteristics of the community. Studies have shown that the social cohesion or the social funds within the community can have big implications for the effectiveness of the service (e.g. Perkins et al., 1995). When there is more cohesion in the community, they will have a greater ability to take collective action and accomplish more. The social cohesion also ensures that the gains and benefits from the intervention are more easily transferred over the whole community (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). Also, Perkins et al. (1995) shows that the more individuals in neighborhood connect with each other, the more likely it is they will become involved in neighborhood organizations. This can be explained by the fact that this way they will be confronted more with problems others have.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

In this article, we have discussed which methods are available to include services users in the provision and production of public services. The research has shown that the motives and drives of potential service users are important factors which influence the participation of the user. Different categories of motives and drives have been discussed.

Because the motives and drives can differ in every situation and organization, it is important, as an organization, to focus on the needs of the participants connected to your organization. When these are known, the organization can take them into account and create situations in which the participants experience even more benefits.

Secondly, this article looked at the management of the new roles service users can take in organizations. Research that focused on co-production found that a clear division in labor can help to solve and potential conflicts between professionals and service users. However, research that focused on community development showed that it is important to include service users in the whole provision and production process. A combination of these two views will probably be the best solution: an organization where everyone's responsibilities and rights are clear but still tries to include services users in every step.

Thirdly, the power balance and incomprehension between professionals and service users are discussed. Because professionals do not have much faith in services users or because they find it hard to share the control within the organization, they have a tendency to leave service users little or no participatory space. This effect can be mitigated by awareness of the power processes between professionals and services users and recognition from professionals for the knowledge and skills of the community. If professionals are more aware of any cultural differences between them and the community, they may be able to overcome these differences resulting in more understanding and less friction. Someone who is involved in the community as well as a professional can play an important part in this.

Lastly, the article looked at the how characteristics of service users and the community can influence the effectiveness of the participation in projects and what to look out for. First of all, it is important to look at the representation of the service users. In general the elite of a community will volunteer to participate. This can have a negative effect on the community if it is heterogeneous. Local differences can become highlighted and power inequalities within the community can cause the aims of the participatory methods to fail. Secondly, it is important to look at the characteristics of the community. Social cohesion can cause participation to become more or less effective. The community culture also has a big influence on the success of participation. It is, therefore, important to connect closely to the local knowledge and first solve any big problems (such as a whole street not participating or a differentiated community) before participation can have an effect on the organization of intervention.

What do these findings mean for the Peaceable Neighborhood? To answer this question, first the limitations of this study have to be pointed out. As shown earlier the

literature in the review is only a first exploration. It has been made clear that there are many different visions on co-production and community development. This review only focused on these two areas of research and the research in co-production is only written from a public administration point of view. Although this review is not thorough enough to give precise guidelines to the Peaceable Neighborhood and more research must be done in which this review can function as a base to start from. There are, nonetheless, a few recommendations for the program. First, a needs assessment would be helpful to determinate the motives and drives of the service users and respond to this. Second, for determining the right place of service users, it is helpful if to determine a chain of causality to decide which needs and requirements the production process asks. Thereby, it is important to involve service users in more phases of the production process and make clear their rights and responsibilities. Third, if professionals are more aware of power relations any cultural differences between them and the community, they may be able to overcome these differences. Last, it is important to take into account the service user and community characteristics. If this will be done sufficiently, public services which incorporates service users in their provision and production, will be more likely to become a success.

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