Track: Planning Theory and Methods

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CO-PRODUCTION AND COLLABORATIVE PLANNING – THE DIFFERENCE

ABSTRACT

The concept of collaborative planning has had a long and fruitful lifespan in planning theory. Like other central ideas it has now been tested, assessed, critiqued and refined. One conclusion is that in those contexts where conflict and deep difference make collaboration a difficult or impossible ideal (Watson 2009), planners should search for alternative ways to think about how planning processes could still find ways to be inclusive. The idea of co-production, from other disciplinary fields, is potentially emerging as contender for this position. However, co-production itself has a complex lineage, with different interpretations of the term having evolved in different parts of the world, and important differences as well between the idea and its practice. A regional divide may be emerging in the use of the term: from that originating in the work of political economist Elinor Ostrom to the practices of Slum Dwellers International (SDI) in cities of India and Africa.

There is always a danger, when concepts 'hop' disciplines and contexts, that they are simplified and misinterpreted. It would be particularly problematic if co-production was simply to be seen as a new term for collaborative planning. If it is the case that the term co-production is beginning to raise interest in the planning field, then it is critical that the nuanced differences between it and collaborative planning are understood. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the varied roots of co-production and how it is framing practices in informal settlement upgrade projects through SDI.

The methodology employed in constructing this paper uses discourse analysis of published literature and web-based material to understand the varied meanings of these terms. The conclusions are of relevance to planning theory where there is a history of debate on the term collaborative planning, as well as discussions on how it might differ in different socio-economic and institutional contexts.

Keywords: collaborative planning, co-production, inclusive planning/action

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to do some conceptual 'ground-clearing' in the area of state-civil society engagement, as well as to encourage planning theorists to take note of certain new forms of engagement which are happening in some parts of what might be called the global South. Innovative tactics and strategies adopted by global South urban communities and NGOs as they attempt to improve living environments might be equally useful in these kinds of struggles in the global North, but to date there has been little attention paid to these movements by planning theorists who have been primarily concerned with forms and variations of collaborative and communicative planning.

These new forms of state-society engagement have been labelled as 'co-production' – following a term introduced some time ago by political economist Elinor Ostrom. Old and new co-production do have elements in common, yet in other ways they are significantly different, and the appropriation of the term in this way can give rise to confusion, given different interpretations in time and place. The first aim of this paper is to examine the differences between these two interpretations and manifestations of the word co-production, with a focus on an explanation of its current use in relation to the work of Slum Dwellers International. The second aim is to consider some of the more interesting and positive strategies and tactics taken up by new co-production, as well as its limitations.

If Brownhill and Parker (2010) are correct in suggesting that we are now in a 'post-collaborative' era, and with growing attention to planning issues in the global South, then new co-production could be of interest to globally-inclined planning theorists. A major limitation with much of recent planning theory on state-society engagement is that it has drawn on ideas and experiences from a very limited part of the globe: the Euro-American territories. While transplanting any such ideas out of their context of origin needs to be considered with great caution, it still holds that at the level of principle different regions can productively learn from each other where concerns are common.

Regional differences offer fertile ground for comparative, in depth, case study research following the recent lines of thinking on this kind of research method (see McFarlane, 2010; Robinson, 2011). With little of this yet in evidence to support this paper, it relies on what secondary sources are available to point to areas in which the terms and practices have commonalities or differences. I am not suggesting that new co-production is the only form of state-society engagement emerging in cities of the global South nor am I suggesting that the practice is unproblematic – self-interest, exclusion and corruption are as likely in these forms as they are in any other, and it is important not to romanticise them. At the level of *principle*, however, new co-production deserves closer attention as a way in which poor urban residents try to improve their access to services and possibly a more secure foothold in the city. As significantly, for this paper, it is a process in which planning expertise (of a particular kind) sometimes plays a role.

2. DEMOCRACY DEBATES IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

In the past decade or so there has been a steadily increasing interest in supporting democracy and civil society in countries of the global South. From the 'good governance' agenda of the World Bank to more recent (considerable) donor support for NGOs committed to social mobilization,

there has been growing faith in the ability of poor communities (rather than governments) to create inclusive and more equitable societies and cities by claiming their 'rights as citizens'. Chatterjee's (2004) argument (in a book entitled subtitled: *Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*) that there is a deep divide between 'civil society' consisting of a formal political elite and 'political society' – made up of the majority who have to rely on alternative and informal ways in their relationship with the state – certainly has relevance, both in and beyond the global South.

Experiments in different forms of local citizen engagement, such as Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting, have been labelled 'best practice', available to be tried out anywhere else in the world (Cabannes, 2004). NGOs able to upscale these 'good practices' through global networks have attracted particular attention and support: Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) has been prominent here, although not the only example of such networking. Arjun Appadurai (2001) has suggested that these local groupings, as they link up through transnational advocacy networks, are instruments of 'deep democracy', and are redefining concepts of governance. Emerging issue-based global networks, Appadurai argues, present a post-Marxist and post-developmentalist vision of new forms of democracy, networks being a mechanism through which the poor show that they are better able to provide for basic needs than 'the usual candidates' – the market, the state and global development agencies (p 41).

At the same time there has been a growing critique of what is seen as a naïve and simplistic faith in notions of 'community', 'citizenship' and participation, and above-all, an assumption that Western liberal democracy can be easily transplanted into any context, where communities will 'see the light' and mobilize to secure their rights from the state. Roy (2009) uses the term 'civic governmentality' to describe the strategies of SDI-linked SPARC in Mumbai as well as Hezbollah in Beirut. She sees these organizations, not as a zone of contact or mediation between state and community, but as engaged in the process of constructing and managing a 'civic realm' while both resisting and complying with top-down rule. This involves a 'civilizing' of political society (P 161), fostering civic identity and broader civic commitment. But Roy (2009) provocatively asks if SPARC and Hezbollah can also be seen as agents in/of urban redevelopment (p 168) in that their engagement with land redevelopment inevitably leads to new processes of inclusion and exclusion of the poor.

A further body of literature now points to ways in which power and patronage routinely infuse participation processes in development projects. In a useful review of this work, Robins *et al* (2008) argue that donor or agency driven community empowerment programmes frequently run up against entrenched political cultures of patronage and paternalism which are commonplace in everyday political life in many parts of the global South. They suggest that there is a logic to such practices: they are essential components of strategies of survival, creating conditions of access to vital resources and cannot be wished away by introducing political models from elsewhere. Hence poor communities will often shift between clientelism and rights-based citizenship claims, using apparently contradictory discourses opportunistically (a strategy of 'tactical bricolage'). It is important, therefore, not to confuse the emergence of organizations 'giving voice' and the actual processes in which marginalized groups engage in order to secure political and material gains.

It is within this context of debate over new forms of democracy that the paper turns to the use of the term co-production to describe current NGO work in parts of the global South.

3. 'NEW' CO-PRODUCTION:

In a 2008 article Diana Mitlin explains the work of the NGO federation known as SDI, as co-production. She defines this as a political strategy used by citizen groups and social movement organizations to '…enable individual members and their associations to secure effective relations with state institutions that address both immediate basic needs and enable them to negotiate for greater benefits' (Mitlin, 2008, pp. 339).

Mitlin (2008, pp. 340) explains the usual, or prior, understanding of co-production as initiated by Ostrom as '… the joint production of public services between citizen and state, with any one or more element of the production process being shared'. However, she argues, this approach is increasingly being used (in a different way) by the urban poor as a way of politically consolidating their base and extracting gains from the state. Acknowledging that accessing services is often reliant on large scale capital investments (for example in waste-water treatment) which can only be undertaken by the state, poor communities choose to engage with local government on these issues. Mitlin (2008) argues that (new) co-production is different from standard 'participation' or 'partnership' arrangements. It is more effective than 'lobbying' or 'protesting' in terms of actually gaining benefits, and the non-confrontational nature of the process allows greater participation from women, and better chances of securing political gains.

The (new) political strategy of co-production described by Mitlin and Appadurai involves a particular set and sequence of practices (now termed SDI 'rituals') which were tried and tested in the context of urban India over the last several decades, and have since been internationalized through the global work of SDI. Appadurai (2001) explains the broad approach of the Indian Alliance as populist and wary of experts and professionals. Rather, any 'outside' involvement (NGO appointees who may have technical expertise) aims to organize and mobilize the poor and set up a network of mutual learning opportunities. The argument is that the poor know best about how to survive in poverty. The approach is highly political but specifically non-party political. It is therefore a position of accommodation and negotiation rather than confrontation, and of slow learning and accumulation of gains, or 'a strategy of patience'.

Small scale savings schemes are of central importance to the organizations having (following Appadurai, 2001) ideological status in the organization: they are an entry point for relationship building between individuals and groups, they express a moral discipline in the organizations and a commitment to the public good, and they highlight the role of women as prime savers. A further ritual is 'precedent setting', a term used to describe the collective building of shack and toilet models (often in central public places and events) but, argues Appadurai (2001: 34), at the same time the attachment of the legal term 'precedent' to such models '…moves the poor into the horizon of legality on their own terms'. There are thus tactics of language but also of material and organizational action, in particular, self-surveys and enumerations, toilet festivals and housing exhibitions.

The tactic of self-enumeration and mapping was originally developed by the SDI-affiliated Indian NGO, SPARC (Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres), amongst pavement

dwellers in India. Over the last ten or so years, but with examples dating back as far as the 1980s (Patel et al., 2009), poor urban communities in informal settlements have increasingly adopted these tactics in order to reinforce and specify their demands for land and services and to increase their 'visibility' to the state. Sometimes these strategies have been followed by 're-blocking' in which shelters have been re-organized by their occupants to make more orderly spaces for the insertion of claimed basic services. Appadurai refers to this as creating 'governmentality from below'.

Chatterji and Mehta (2007), in theorizing the self-enumeration movement, have argued that the articulation of power and knowledge in practices of government manifest in technologies of mapping and enumeration by which the state makes society visible to itself, and these can end up creating new types of social collectivities. Populations generated by these governmental practices, which mark and categorize them in particular ways (as 'slum dwellers' or 'pavement dwellers') can end up seeing themselves as communities capable of resisting these technologies (P. 131). As a result, slum dwellers have used the survey like government does, to transform themselves into a quantifiable population, and to create documentary proof that they exist as a collective that can speak back to government in its own language (P. 143). In India, NGOs have used the surveys specifically for mobilization and to make slum dwellers aware of a new identity based on abstract citizenship rather than on caste or religion (P 159). NGOs therefore see the survey as an ongoing activity and not a once-off event.

The scaling up of SDI has spread these tactics from their origin in India to informal settlements in other parts of the world and the SDI website now lists 34 countries where self-enumeration processes have been undertaken. In what could be described as a growing global self-survey 'movement' amongst poor urban communities, these traditional tools of planning and governance – the survey, the map and the plan – have been appropriated and used as a mechanism to further the claims of marginalized groups to urban space.

Similarly toilet festivals and housing (shack) exhibitions have political purpose: to demonstrate that the poor have the knowledge and expertise to construct their own housing and facilities, and that the standard flow of expert knowledge can be reversed (Appadurai, 2001). In fact it has been these learning strategies between communities that has been a central feature of their work. 'Horizontal exchanges' involve groups of poor moving between sites to share knowledge and gains in savings, construction and engagement with authorities. They also help to indicate to those in authority that the poor also travel and have wider linkages, giving an element of authority and legitimation. McFarlane (2011, pp. 69) refers to these exchanges as 'translocal urban learning assemblages' of materials, practices, designs, knowledge, personal stories and local histories, with the notion of assemblage placing an emphasis on urban learning and alignment between the social and material at different sites.

The next section compares and contrasts earlier uses of the term co-production, making the point that there are some similarities but also some significant differences between the ways in which this term has been used previously and more recently.

4. OSTROM'S COPRODUCTION

Political economist Elinor Ostrom defined coproduction as '…a process through which inputs from individuals who are not "in" the same organization are transformed into goods and services' (1996, pp. 1073). The focus in this literature is on the provision of public services (sanitation systems, schools etc) where involvement of the state with communities can create synergies through parties contributing in different but complementary ways: communities (she suggests) have local information, time, skills etc and the state has resources and technical expertise. Moreover, state and society have different production capacities: for example, states can produce trunk services while citizens can produce related feeder services. The suggestion here is that state and citizens (service beneficiaries) have different but complementary forms of knowledge which together can improve the final outcome. Where citizens can substitute for the state in service provision then it is simply a case of working out which can operate most cost-effectively at a given scale (Mitlin, 2008).

Ostrom's work has strong links to social capital thinking and theories of urban governance in the US from the late 1970s, where her position was one of encouraging decentralization to bring government closer to citizens. Co-production, she argues, fosters social capital as communities organize around service provision and management. There is no direct mention of mediating social movements or NGOs here: the relationship is a direct one between communities and officials. There are important assumptions here that were at the same time being explored in the parallel 'public participation in development' literature in the development studies field. These assumptions (in both Ostrom's and participation debates) were that all community members and households would gain equal access to these services, that exclusion on the grounds of income, gender, ethnicity etc would not play a role, and that the relationship between state and citizens would be fair, consensual, and not corrupt or politicized. In other words power did not play a role in Ostrom's co-production, or if it did, then it could be contained.

Since Ostrom's 1996 article there has been further work[2] aimed at refining the term, primarily from the public administration literature[3]. Joshi and Moore (2004) argue that co-production emerges in the context of weak states, where governments are unable to provide services or lack information about need variation. Brandsen and Pestoff (2006) point to a difference between co-governance (planning and delivery), co-management (joint production) and co-production (citizen production). Hints that co-production could contribute to political change and could deepen democracy did not appear in this literature until later (Bovaird, 2007) but Miltin (2008) suggests the cases cited here are all strongly top-down.

These explorations of co-production do not specifically concern themselves with public participation (other than to suggest that officials working in co-productive mode would act rather differently). In fact there appear to be few linkages between this largely Northern public administration/economics literature and the rapidly growing body of literature from the 1970s on participation and development in global South contexts, where direct involvement of service beneficiaries (sometimes termed 'self-help') became standard and where the participation processes that accompanied these ('community participation') came to be regarded as very important. Within this literature there were opposing strands of thought as to why participation should be important – from 'project efficiency' reasons to 'community empowerment' positions,

[2] Also see New Economics Foundation www.neweconomics.org
[3] See Mitlin (2008)

and later (1990s) to World Bank and USAID interpretations of involvement as a way of securing 'customer satisfaction'. With donor interest focusing on 'civil society' from the 1990s, the role of NGOs as intermediaries between state and civil society as a way of achieving development became increasingly prominent, with a growing emphasis from the early 2000s in participation as a 'right', due to every citizen. It was within this context of a growing move to community mobilization that the social movements such as those affiliated to SDI have emerged.

5. STATE-SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT: WHAT CAN PLANNING LEARN FROM CO-PRODUCTION?

Ideas about social action have dominated the field of planning for at least as long as they have in the public administration and development disciplines. There is no one consolidated position or theory here – rather a set of differing ideas and debates informed by different (although primarily global North) contexts, and drawing on a range of different intellectual traditions. The questions driving this theorizing have, however, been similar to those behind co-production in all its variants: how should state and society engage in order to improve the quality of life of populations (sometimes with an emphasis on the poor and marginalized); how can professionals act to promote social justice and more equitable outcomes of state intervention? Both, as well, have tended to draw on case studies of practice as strong informants of theory as well as broader social theory which has offered a social constructivist perspective. The value of social networks (social capital for Ostrom) and communicative rationality (for planners) have elements in common although are not always closely connected.

Communicative / collaborative planning approaches and co-production (in older and newer forms) would find common ground in that neither takes a radical approach to social change. Both take an incremental, evolutionary and social learning approach to shifting actions of the state in particular directions. SDI takes this approach as it argues that there are certain roles and functions (such as trunk infrastructure) that the state can carry out and communities cannot, and that confrontation strategies (particularly protests and violence) tend to exclude women. The strategy of patience and slow gains is an accepted part of SDI work, although this has often attracted criticism both from communities and other NGOs wanting quicker wins. Building and sharing local knowledge and resources (through micro-savings) is also a central part of SDI strategy, given the starting assumption that the poor know best how to live in poverty. Here SDI co-production is significantly different from the tactics of current 'right to the city' movements which (frequently) take the approach that it is the duty of the state to deliver on constitutional rights such as housing and services, and that either overt protest and/or legal challenges are the best ways of securing gains for the poor. The SDI counter to this is that protest may secure delivery, but the product is unlikely to be appropriate to need unless the poor have been directly involved in shaping outcomes.

Both older and newer co-production also assume a context of democracy, where 'active citizens' are prepared to engage collectively and individually to improve their material and political conditions. Appadurai (2001) sees SDI co-production as a way of deepening existing forms of democracy. However, this is an assumption which may not hold in many parts of the world, particularly in some of the regions where SDI operates. It is useful to return to the arguments of Robins *et al.* (2008) who suggest that everyday political practices are often very different from

those anticipated by NGOs, international agencies or governments and professionals, hence '…civil society organisations do not automatically possess the democratising properties associated with the public sphere under liberal democracies' (Robins *et al*, 2008, pp. 1072). In Africa, for example (where SDI now has affiliates in 17 countries), political cultures are significantly hybridised, with elements of Western liberal democracy co-existing with (and interpenetrated by) politics of patronage and clientelism. Where day to day survival is a priority, people adapt plural strategies, often simultaneously: in some cases this may mean acting like a citizen in a liberal democratic state, in other instances it may imply establishing and exercising personal and possibly corrupt relationships in order to secure gains (also see Watson, 2003). Such relationships go against the grain of both collaborative planning and co-production, yet they cannot be either wished away or policed in situations where societal ethics have been stretched to accommodate such practices as acceptable.

In other respects however, participatory planning approaches and co-production (both old and new) have different objectives. An obvious difference is that in both Ostrom's view of co-production and SDI partnerships, engagement with the state has the purpose of achieving both planning and delivery of outcomes (land, housing, services and facilities) and as well, for SDI, their community-based management thereafter. Older and newer co-production have very different reasons for wanting to push state-civil society engagement through both planning and delivery stages. Newer co-production is far less concerned with achieving cost-efficient projects and effective local government (although these may be important preconditions) and far more with skilling and empowering marginalized communities to manage their own living environments, to deal effectively with state structures, to structurally advance citizen control over state resources and to pass on tactics for achieving this to other communities through global networks.

Differing as well from Ostrom's co-production is the way in which SDI affiliates regard their relationship with the state, described by Mitlin (2008) as a partnership, but a highly political one. The immediate goal may be to secure outcomes in terms of service and land delivery, but such initiatives also aim to shift forms of democratic practice and power, to create an alternative form of governmentality – Roy's (2009) 'civic realm' which both complies with and resists top down rule, and Appadurai's (2001) 'counter-governmentality'. Understanding the role of knowledge and power is central to these processes, and hence the need to exercise power through self-enumerations and mapping and to control the production and interpretation of this critical information.

There are two further areas in which new co-production techniques depart significantly from Ostrom's co-production and much of what is usually included in the scope of participatory planning and development. The first is less reliance on talk and debate and more on showing and learning by doing (Mc Farlane, 2011). Engagement with the state and other agencies thus has strong material and tangible expressions. Community built demonstration models – of houses or toilets – are an important element of SDI and Federation 'rituals' to physically demonstrate outcomes to the state and other communities which may be learning from the process. Similarly the acquisition of knowledge by communities is not from texts or consultants, but from learning exchanges with communities in similar circumstances to see first-hand what they have built. The

philosophy here is one of experiential learning: that direct experience is the most effective way to gain knowledge.

The second innovation is the intention to upscale local practices through networks. The global networks of SDI now span three continents, with a focus on India and Africa. Learning exchanges focus on local experiences but then these are distributed rapidly through the network. In reverse, collective global learning experiences (a global 'portfolio' of experiences and successes) can be mobilized by local affiliates giving them significant additional clout when negotiating with their own local or even national governments. The number and type of social movements have also been organizing globally (also see WIEGO – Women in Informal Economies Globalizing and Organizing, and GPEAN in the planning education field). Being networked globally gives organizations authority to respond to and pronounce on global issues; to be rapidly informed on local issues across a wide range of contexts; and they also give status to organizational statements and claims, and presence at global events. Their power lies in their information, their ideas and their flexibility.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been twofold. The first is to draw distinctions between various forms and concepts of state-citizen engagement which have emerged at various points in time, from various parts of the world and from a range of disciplinary backgrounds. Planning theory frequently draws on ideas and theories from other disciplines and clarification of the origin of these concepts is important. Hence there is a significant difference between the idea of co-production developed by Ostrom within an economics and public administration field from the 1970s and the way in which the term is being used more recently by social movements in the global South. There are also important differences to draw between co-production (old and new) and planning's interests in state-citizen engagement.

The second purpose of the paper has been to suggest that, particularly with regard to new co-production, there may be a great deal in these practices and ideas that could be of interest in planning theory. Much planning thought on state-citizen engagement to date has emerged from thinkers and practices in the Euro-American regions, where these relationships take on particular forms shaped by the political histories of these countries. With some of the most intractable urban problems now located in cities of the global South, along with a host of new and innovative ideas in these cities on how to explain and respond to them, it seems that new co-production may be of particular interest to planning theorists.

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