Rules, practices and narratives: Why and how do non-profits co-produce services with community members?

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Co-production of public services has become a popular buzzword, particularly in Europe, to describe innovative arrangements where professional service providers involve service users and/or community members in both designing and delivering the services they benefit from. At the same time, non-profits are beginning to play an increasingly important role in delivering social services in many countries. While research since the early 2000s has helped us to better understand the various types of co-production, the barriers to engaging in this process, and the motivations for citizens and professionals to take part, comparatively little research has been conducted to better understand whether – and why – co-production is undertaken differently in different contexts. This paper discusses evidence from research conducted in Sheffield, England, and Lyon, France, regarding non-profits’ conceptualizations of participation and their motivations for co-producing services. Using a framework of rules (government policy and funding mechanisms), practices (day-to-day routines and norms) and narratives (ways of describing values, beliefs and ideas) helps us to better conceptualize co-production by non-profits in these two countries, and opens the door for further research into co-production in other contexts.

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