

THE BENEFITS AND RISKS OF EXPERIMENTAL CO-PRODUCTION: THE CASE OF URBAN REDESIGN IN VIENNA

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Building on the literature on co-production and the (pragmatist) literature on experimentalist policy-making we introduce and evaluate a novel form of co-production: experimental co-production. We propose a model of this specific form including a list of not only potential benefits but also possible risks and costs. We illustrate and examine this model of experimental co-production by drawing on the case study of a major urban planning initiative in Vienna, Austria that included an experimental co-testing phase. We find that while the expected benefits of experimental co-production were partly realized for the citizens involved, the city government faced major political costs.

INTRODUCTION

Co-production has recently gained the status of one of the leading approaches to reshaping public service delivery. Its expansion is applauded by numerous scholars (Bovaird and Löffler 2005; Bovaird 2007; Löffler *et al.* 2008; Needham 2008a; Halpern 2010; Calabrò 2011) and international organizations such as OECD (2011). According to this dominant view, co-production as the key element of participatory governance has the potential to create win–win situations that are beneficial for both citizens and the government. On the one hand, co-production offers the opportunity to ensure high-quality public service via direct and significant engagement of citizens as service users (Bovaird and Löffler 2012, p. 36). Their participation is expected to raise the allocative efficiency of service delivery as co-produced services are better tailored to citizens' needs (Needham 2008b, p. 12; Thomas 2015, p. 99) and providers may economize on their internal resources thanks to citizens' input (Andrews and Entwistle 2014, p. 30). For the government, on the other hand, it also contributes to establishing a more trust-based relationship with citizens as well as increasing legitimacy of policies and actions undertaken in a participatory way (Fledderus *et al.* 2014; Johnston Miller and McTavish 2014, p. 192).

In general, co-production has been primarily associated with the delivery of public services but at its core it remains a concept that refers to all phases of service delivery processes: co-planning (co-design), co-financing and co-evaluation. This article aims to expand our understanding of co-production by adding yet another dimension: co-testing. We find this additional phase in cases where co-production is used in an experimental manner. In introducing and evaluating this novel form of experimental co-production we follow the suggestion of Brandsen *et al.* (2012, p. 1) and aim for a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse effects of co-production, including its potential risks and problems. By exploring an experimental form of co-productive urban policy-making we highlight the risks that such an approach entails, especially for decision-makers in the government (Pestoff 2014). Challenging the dominant thesis of co-production as a win–win situation, we argue that developing co-productive experiments creates

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numerous governance challenges and significant risks which might turn co-production into a win–lose situation in which the government is faced with substantial political costs.

Building not only on the literature on co-production but also on the literature on (pragmatist) experimentalism (Dorf and Sabel 1998; Hlebowitsh 2006; Sabel and Zeitlin 2012; Ansell 2012b; Ansell and Bartenberger 2014) we develop a comprehensive model of experimental co-production that includes a list of both potential benefits and possible risks and costs. We evaluate this model of experimental co-production by drawing on the case study of a major co-production initiative in Vienna, Austria that included an experimental co-testing phase. The Viennese case has been chosen because of its wider relevance. Mariahilferstrasse is the main shopping street in Austria and one of the most important shopping areas in Europe. In addition, the main objective of the redesign, namely traffic reduction, is one of the key issues in current debates on urban policies across Europe. Therefore, the results of this case study might be of particular relevance for broader debates on urban governance.

Based on semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and the examination of secondary sources and survey results, we investigate the question whether the benefits and costs predicted by our model also ensued in reality. In short, we find that while the expected benefits for citizens (quality, participation) were partly realized, the process failed to deliver the expected benefits for the city government (trust, acceptance). On the contrary, the political costs for the government were significantly higher than predicted by our literature-based model.

The article is structured as follows. In the first part we briefly review the paradigm evolution in public service delivery that has resulted in the current expansion of co-production. We show how co-production is expected to offer a more efficient, effective, democratic and trust-building approach to designing and delivering public services. Subsequently, we use the case study of a co-productive redesign of a major shopping street in Vienna to illustrate how the expected benefits of co-productive policy-making might be undermined, particularly from the government's perspective, when co-production is combined with an experimental approach to address policy issues in a highly politicized context. In the concluding remarks, we provide preliminary thoughts on the key factors that influence the outcome of experimental co-production.

THE EVOLUTION TOWARDS CO-PRODUCTION: CO-PRODUCTIVE POLICY-MAKING

Co-production is not as new an idea as it seems to be, if we consider its rapidly growing presence in theoretical debates of recent years. Originally developed in the 1970s by Elinor Ostrom's team at the University of Indiana (Cahn and Gray 2012, p. 129; McGinnis and Aligica 2013, p. 91), the idea of co-production was further conceptualized by Brudney and England (1983), but was then muffled by the dominant market-oriented approach to public services based on New Public Management (NPM). Following the NPM agenda, citizens' involvement was marginalized and limited to control over the quality of services (Ackerman 2012, p. 101). Instead, the NPM-driven, 'technocratic' public administration relied on autonomous public managers pursuing their own interpretations of citizens' needs (Denhardt and Denhardt 2011, p. 93). Citizens as customers were supposed to let public administration serve them properly without direct input on how to do this ('let the managers manage'). Public–private collaboration was admittedly widely promoted, yet only in the form of contractual or quasi-contractual arrangements (Joshi and

Moore 2004, p. 40). Apart from this, there was little room for less formal or non-commercial joint activities of citizens and public administration.

Following this development, the growing scepticism towards market-oriented approaches created a fertile ground for a revival of the idea of co-production, yet in a modified form. Co-production evolved into an umbrella concept covering a broad range of initiatives aiming to increase the role of citizens in all aspects of public service delivery. According to our definition, co-production relies on the direct and voluntary engagement of citizens (as service users) in the process of public services design and delivery. Unlike the market model, co-production is not usually based on a contractual relationship between the state and private providers. Instead it opens up the possibility of non-commercial cooperation. Co-production requires a significant contribution from citizens to perform tasks that are primarily assigned to public agencies. It goes beyond mere communication with citizens; instead, it claims to build synergies between citizens and the administration (Bovaird and Löffler 2005; Brandsen and Pestoff 2006; Alford 2009; OECD 2011; Pestoff 2012; Jakobsen 2013; Fledderus *et al.* 2014) and has been regarded as the most far-reaching form of partnership (Fotaki 2011, p. 950).

What should be particularly underlined in the context of this article is the fact that co-production refers not only to co-delivery, but also to co-planning, co-design and the co-evaluation of public services and policies in this area (OECD 2011, p. 37; Bovaird and Löffler 2012, pp. 38–39). As Snellen notes, co-production in the area of policy-making ‘may be seen as the common preparation (together with the directly concerned parties) of the operational implementation or the “filling-in” of a chosen policy framework’ (Snellen 2005, p. 411). Although the original concept of co-production was limited to the direct delivery of services, it has been extended in order to reflect this complexity and multi-step character of public service delivery processes.

Such extended definitions of co-production have revealed the natural linkage between co-production and other concepts representing post-NPM, i.e. inclusive, citizen-centric and participatory approaches. The map of theoretical associations includes particularly New Public Governance (Osborne 2006, 2010), New Public Service (Denhardt and Denhardt 2011), and collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash 2008; Ansell 2012a; Emerson *et al.* 2012). Sirianni, for example, put co-production at the top of the list of principles of collaborative governance and policy design, arguing that ‘citizens should have roles that go well beyond simply advocating for public goods, paying for them through taxes, and then consuming them as services and benefits’ (Sirianni 2009, p. 43).

Co-production translates these general shifts towards collaboration into a set of specific tools and methods of citizens’ engagement to design and implement policies of service delivery. The common denominator of these arrangements is the meaningful impact of citizens, which needs to exceed consultation and the acquisition of feedback by public bodies. We argue that such an extended understanding of co-production as a practical dimension of collaborative governance enables us to perceive co-production as an overarching and comprehensive model for public services. The case discussed in this article considers this understanding of co-production in the context of urban planning.

THE CASE: REDESIGN OF A SHOPPING STREET IN VIENNA

When the city government of Vienna announced its plans to redesign the shopping street Mariahilferstrasse in 2010 it did not come as a surprise. Being not only one of the most important shopping streets but also a major traffic route through the city, various ideas for reducing car traffic in Mariahilferstrasse had been around for years. What was different in

2010 was that the city government openly approved of these ideas for the first time and promised to put them into practice. This about-turn was a result of the city elections that had taken place only a few weeks earlier and had led to the loss of the Social Democratic Party's absolute majority, who eventually had to form a coalition with the Green Party for the first time in the city's history. In the new city government the Green Party secured the office for urban planning, traffic and transport, indicating that this would be a major focus of its political work for the upcoming years. The plans to redesign Mariahilferstrasse were therefore quickly regarded as one of the hallmark projects of the new coalition, especially of the Green Party. This strong public interest was further promoted by the fact that Mariahilferstrasse is the largest shopping street in Austria, employing around 9,000 people and generating a yearly revenue of more than one billion euros (Gantner and Reibenwein 2012).

After initial studies by urban planners, the city government selected and presented three possible alternatives for the redesign in the autumn of 2011. The three alternatives suggested either (a) pedestrianizing the whole shopping street, (b) defining it as shared space for pedestrians, cars and cyclists or (c) combining these two approaches. During what was called a 'dialogue process' citizens were then invited to share their ideas on the planned redesign and provide feedback on the suggested variants. Additional stakeholders such as the chamber of commerce were included via separate meetings.

The results of this 'dialogue' were included in the detailed planning process which started in January 2012. It was during this phase of the process that the first political conflicts erupted more openly. The conservative Austrian People's Party polled the residents in the two neighbouring districts and found that more than 60 per cent preferred to keep the shopping street the way it was.¹ The city government nevertheless presented its final plan for the redesign in the autumn of 2012, proposing a mix of pedestrian areas and shared space where cars could still pass through. Some adjustments to this final plan were made after an official poll of the residents of the neighbouring districts called for the closure of two traffic passages that ran through the pedestrian area.

What followed then was called the 'test phase'. Starting in August 2013 the intended redesign plan was put into practice for a couple of months. During the test phase, traffic was regulated according to the new pedestrian area/shared space scheme but included only minor road works. When explaining the idea of the test phase, vice-mayor and chairman of the Green Party, Maria Vassilakou, stated: 'I think it is wise, especially when it comes to transport policy issues, that the population can experience the difference. If the change proves to be successful we can keep it and if it doesn't we should be also able to say "this wasn't a good idea" and change it back to the way it was' (Wiener Gemeinderat 2013a, p. 15). The test phase ran from August 2013 until February 2014 and brought further adaptations to the redesign. For instance, a bus route that was running right through the pedestrian area was changed after protests by the bus drivers. The question whether and at what speed cyclists should be allowed to pass through the pedestrian area also led to heated debate.

Building on the experience from the test phase, a final referendum took place in February 2014. Residents of the two neighbouring districts were asked whether they supported the redesign (pedestrian area plus shared spaces) as it had been tested and adapted over recent months or if Mariahilferstrasse should be changed back to its original state (normal street with car traffic and pavements for pedestrians). When the results of this final referendum were published on 7 March 2014, 53.2 per cent of the population had voted *for* the redesign with 46.8 per cent opposing it. In May 2014, the construction work to fully realize the intended redesign began and was completed in July 2015.

METHODS

When analysing the case study introduced in the preceding section, we followed Riccucci's (2010) line of argument about the benefits of mixed-method research in public administration and built on a diverse set of sources and data. In the first research phase we systematically collected and analysed media reports, press releases and the minutes from debates in the city council and the state parliament of Vienna. We also examined and worked through the studies and reports released by the City of Vienna and its various agencies and talked to journalists and researchers familiar with the Mariahilferstrasse case and the inner workings of the city administration. In addition, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 of the main political and administrative actors in the two neighbouring districts, the city government and the various city agencies involved. As is often the case in public administration research, the main purpose of these interviews was to gather additional information. Accordingly, we primarily used them to 'fill in pieces of a puzzle or confirm the proper alignment of pieces already in place' (Aberbach and Rockman 2002, p. 673) rather than analysing them in an interpretative way. These interviews also enabled us to identify the main factors that thwarted the expected benefits of the redesign and instead increased the political and managerial costs.

Finally, we built on a set of quantitative surveys that were commissioned during the redesign process and that allowed us to track the changing degree of support for the redesign project in the Viennese population. While many of these surveys are confidential, we managed to get access to most of them (for details see table 2). Given the different survey designs, question formats and sampling techniques, however, they do not allow for a systematic comparison but nevertheless provide important insights. As table 1 shows, this survey material was especially crucial to explore how trust in the government and acceptance of the redesign were affected by experimental co-production. The table also summarizes our multi-method approach and how the various sources were used to explore the different dimensions of the case.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EXPERIMENTAL CO-PRODUCTION

This brief description of the redesign process of Mariahilferstrasse reveals how it was both a co-productive and an experimental approach that was used to decide on a significant issue of urban governance. The co-productive character of the project is reflected by the wide spectrum of deliberative innovations applied at the design and evaluation stages of the policy solution. This included: providing three alternative policy solutions for open deliberation instead of one fixed scenario; a special 'dialogue box' that was placed in the centre of the street in order to provide comprehensive information on the project and enable discussion; open online surveys; forums of debate and negotiation with key stakeholders; and ultimately a referendum offering citizens direct and binding impact on the final decision.

TABLE 1 *Use of different sources for the case study*

Risks and benefits	Sources
Quality	Studies on reduced air pollution and social quality (Stadt Wien 2014; Gungl <i>et al.</i> 2011)
Participation	Surveys (SORA 2014), reports, interviews
Trust	Surveys and media reports (Mandl 2014; Kittner 2013; <i>Oesterreich</i> 2013), interviews
Acceptance	Surveys (see table 2), interviews
Perception of chaos	Interviews, media reports, press releases (Mandl 2014)

During the whole process, feedback from stakeholders and citizens was collected and led to the incremental refinement of the redesign solution. In our interviews with urban planners and decision-makers in the city government we found evidence that this citizen feedback influenced the final policy solution (e.g. special design elements, traffic signals for visually impaired people, non-commercial areas). Throughout the project these co-productive arrangements were accompanied by dedicated information channels, including a special website, email enquiries and a telephone line.

Yet, the Mariahilferstrasse redesign project also reveals how a co-productive (collaborative) approach can include a distinct form of experimentation. This experimental character of co-production in our shopping street example is most obvious in the use of a 'testing phase' which was intended to try out the suggested redesign and to gather feedback and ideas for improvement from relevant stakeholders. Our example of co-production therefore resembles a form of experimentation that has been labelled 'generative experimentation' (Ansell and Bartenberger 2014) or 'design experimentation' (Stoker and John 2009). Contrary to the use of randomized control trials (RCTs) for policy evaluation, such generative experiments can be considered as a way of policy-making. They can be thought of 'as a process of generating and iteratively refining a solution concept ... based on continuous feedback and with the goal of addressing a particular problem' (Ansell and Bartenberger 2014, p. 12).

While the literature on public management has recently begun to embrace the notion of experimentation (Hood 2011; Margetts 2011), it has only considered the significance of classical scientific experiments that control the environment as much as possible in order to test hypotheses through different interventions. One distinctive feature of generative experiments that sets them apart from this controlled form of experimentation is the role of the intervention. While in science the experimental method has been widely distinguished from observational approaches through its use of controlled interventions (e.g. Gerber and Green 2008; Bonell *et al.* 2012; Franklin 2012), generative experimentation puts a special angle on this. In classical randomized control trials the intervention takes place at the beginning. A generative experiment, on the other hand, 'manipulates an intervention and observes it over an extended time period, usually in one location, until acceptable results emerge. The experiment progresses through a series of design-redesign cycles' (Stoker and John 2009, p. 356). Accordingly, the intervention is continuously adapted and improved until it succeeds.

In our case the intervention was the transformation of a shopping street with significant car traffic into a combination of pedestrian areas and shared space. This intervention was designed not only to assess the significant reduction of car traffic on Mariahilferstrasse and how it would affect the neighbouring areas, but also to give the stakeholders involved (business owners, customers, residents, bus drivers, etc.) the opportunity to experience the intended changes and provide feedback and ideas for improvement. As one of those involved in the city administration put it in an interview: 'In the beginning there were a lot of proposals and objections. And the city government just reacted to what people wanted and tried out, to a certain extent, what happens when we do what the citizens say they want. Then we found out that this or that is not the best solution and then we did something else. So in the first phase Mariahilferstrasse was actually a laboratory.'

Eventually, a generative experiment is intended to be successful, i.e. to reach a point where the solution it has developed is regarded as 'working' and is accepted by a wide range of stakeholders. Figuring out when this point is reached and measuring the rate of acceptance is of course not a trivial question and a crucial step in generative

'Classic' co-production**Experimental co-production**

FIGURE 1 *Classic and experimental co-production*

experimentation. Different actors and stakeholders may not agree whether a solution is 'working' or is a 'success' based on their different values and beliefs. In our case, as we have seen, the city government conducted a referendum in the two city districts in the neighbourhood of the shopping street to evaluate whether the redesign was widely accepted and bring an end to the experiment. While this provided the redesign project with democratic legitimacy and a majoritarian form of agreement, the question of 'success' remains one that can never be fully resolved in (experimental) co-production. This difficulty further raises the potential risks for governments.

In summary, we argue that this urban redesign project represents an example of an arrangement that is both co-productive and experimental. This arrangement includes all elements of typical policy co-production, yet it is enriched with the additional element of a collaborative and participatory testing/refinement phase that might be labelled 'co-testing' (see figure 1).

In our analysis we focus on exploring the policy outcomes of this *prima facie* more advanced and sophisticated form of co-production. By policy outcomes we primarily mean benefits and risks for two major actors in the policy process – the government and the citizens. Figure 2, based on the review of literature on co-production and experimentalism, illustrates key elements of our model of experimental co-production that will be examined with regard to our case study.

BENEFITS AND RISKS OF EXPERIMENTAL CO-PRODUCTION

As illustrated in the model, the perception of policy outcomes for both co-productive and experimental arrangements is relatively coherent and uniform. A literature review involving both concepts demonstrates the strong belief that co-productive as well as experimental approaches to policy-making offer multiple and significant benefits for government and citizens.

In the literature on co-production (and other collaborative arrangements) the need for a comprehensive understanding of its diverse effects has been increasingly recognized (Brandson *et al.* 2012, p. 1). Dickinson and Sullivan (2014, p. 161) add that the lack of critical analysis is a major weakness of much of the public policy collaboration literature. Instead, the dominant strand in the theoretical discourse on co-production focuses primarily on emphasizing the necessity of co-production (Alford 1998, pp. 130–32), considering stimulants and motivators for co-production (Alford and O'Flynn 2012, pp. 182–91) and its benefits. Advocates of collaborative/participatory arrangements in public services have especially highlighted its potential to increase service quality (Needham 2008a, p. 222; Bovaird and Löffler 2012, p. 36; Vamstad 2012). Co-production is also expected to increase

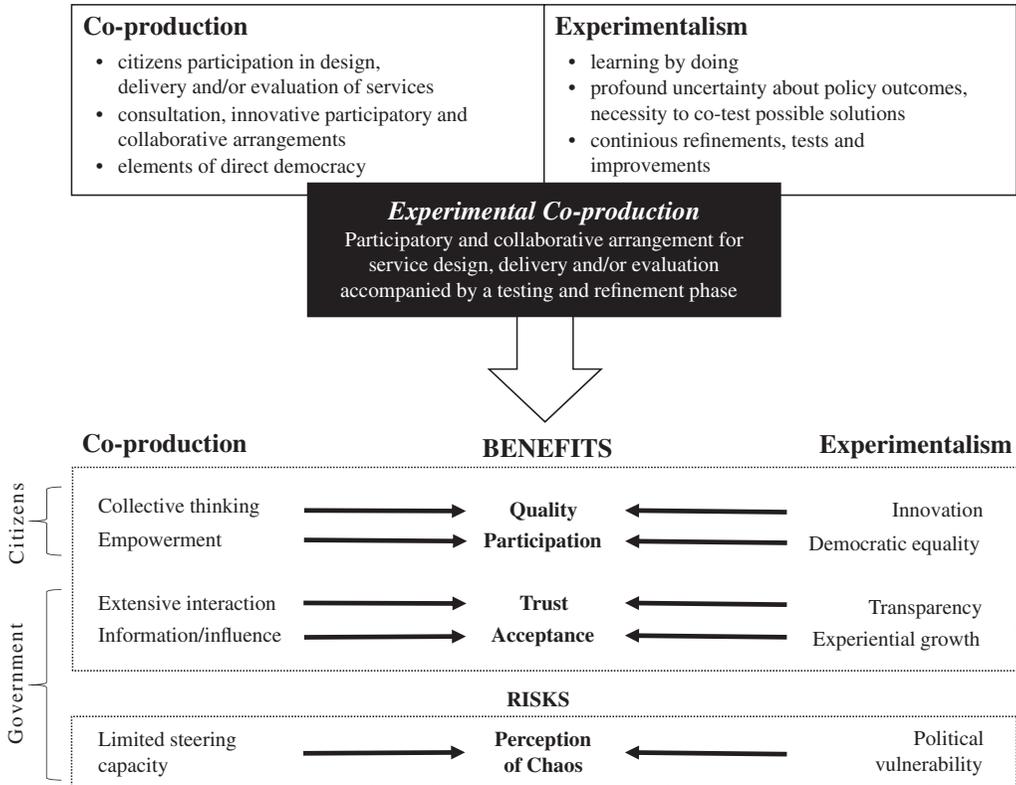


FIGURE 2 Core elements of experimental co-production

citizens’ participation and engagement. As Needham noted, ‘It may be that positive experiences of co-production encourage individuals to become more civically minded in other areas of their lives’ (Needham 2008a, p. 223). Co-production works also as ‘therapeutic tool’, enhancing more constructive interactions between citizens and bureaucrats based on trust (Levine 1984; Needham 2008a, p. 223; Alter 2013, p. 54; Fledderus *et al.* 2014; Conner *et al.* 2015). Likewise the literature also underlines that involving stakeholders contributes to a greater acceptance (legitimacy) and more effective implementation of policies (Papadopoulos and Warrin 2007, p. 449).

The experimentalist literature, on the other hand, emphasizes benefits that are similar to the ones claimed by co-production, most notably innovation (Stoker and John 2009; Ansell and Torfing 2014), increased democratic quality (Dorf and Sabel 1998; Ansell 2012b), transparency (Sabel and Zeitlin 2012), and experiential growth (Hlebowitsh 2006). While using slightly different terms, these concepts refer to the same set of core benefits that we found in the literature on co-production: increased quality and participation plus a higher level of trust and acceptance.

The perception of risks associated with both co-productive and experimental arrangements in policy development is also coherent in both strands of literature. In both, the debate on possible risks in the context of policy-making is still at an early stage of development. While key limitations and potential adverse effects of co-productive delivery have

already been identified (Alford 2009, pp. 24–25; Brewer and Grabosky 2014), the ‘dark side’ of co-productive policy-making still lacks more in-depth examination. The literature on collaborative governance recognizes the problem that the policy process might be dominated by selected stakeholders who have more financial and information resources (Bevir 2009, pp. 48–49; Papadopoulos 2012, pp. 512–24). Accordingly, managing co-production requires careful planning and takes substantial time and effort (Thomas 2015, pp. 99–100). This raises the issue of limited steering capacity within collaborative arrangements. On the side of experimentalism, Campbell (1969, p. 410) highlighted the aspect of political vulnerability. By openly embracing experimentalist policy-making, decision-makers may be denounced as clueless and can become increasingly politically vulnerable. Proceeding in an experimental manner when developing policy solutions can therefore be an extremely risky endeavour for governments.

As a result, experimental co-production might be particularly affected by the perception of chaos stemming from the lack of clear steering arrangements for this multi-stakeholder process and the low acceptance of failures inevitably associated with experimentation. This risk might be defined as the citizens’ perception that the policy process is not properly managed by the government and lacks rules of engagement, well-defined lines of accountability and a clear perspective on reaching a final decision. We label this risk ‘perception of chaos’ to highlight that even if the policy process is well steered and controlled by the government, it might be perceived rather differently by the public.

Building on this double literature review, we have synthesized the corresponding sets of benefits and risks into a list of expected benefits and costs of experimental co-production. We argue that since experimental co-production is a specific arrangement that combines the elements of both co-production and experimentation, we can also hypothesize that it will lead to an increased level of shared benefits. The discussion that follows will evaluate the benefits and risks predicted by our model along the lines of the two main actors in the process: the citizens and the government. Our assessment is informed by a broad set of sources as introduced earlier (see table 1).

DISCUSSION

Applying the theoretical model of experimental co-production to our case study we analyse the question whether the predicted benefits and costs ensued in reality. We discuss the identified benefits and costs for citizens and the government separately. We show that while the expected benefits were partly achieved for citizens they were not achieved for the government. At the same time we find the costs for the government to be higher than expected.

Expected benefits for citizens

Quality of service is a concept that is notoriously hard to measure, a fact that the literature on both co-production and experimentalism is well aware of (Ansell and Torfing 2014). Yet, as has been shown, it is nevertheless a benefit that both strands of literature implicitly assume and that has been put forward as one of the main arguments for both the co-production and the experimental approaches. The plea for increasing quality was also at the core of the political rationale for redesigning the shopping street *Mariahilferstrasse*. Vice-mayor Vassilakou, for example, justified the redesign as follows: ‘It is a matter of how we deal with our city. And mobility and transport policy are crucial parts of a policy that concentrates on everyday life and its quality’ (Wiener Gemeinderat 2013b, p. 6).

In setting out to assess whether this benefit of increasing quality was met in our case there are a few indicators that we can consider. Studies conducted by the city administration, for example, have found that both air pollution and car traffic were reduced in the area surrounding Mariahilferstrasse after the shopping street was remodelled into a pedestrian area and shared space (Stuhlpfarrer 2013; Stadt Wien 2014) during the test phase. Yet, besides these technical indicators it is hard to provide a final verdict on the question of whether redesigning Mariahilferstrasse has increased its general 'quality'. This is especially true for social and economic aspects. An initial study commissioned by the City of Vienna, for instance, provided the following guidelines for increasing the social quality of the shopping street: 'The vitality, diversity and sectoral mix of Mariahilferstrasse should be retained in order to continue to appeal to the widest possible group of people and function as an integrative urban space. ... The design of the Mariahilferstrasse should be novel and attractive in order to offer variety. The vision is a street with no or little traffic, a less noisy and emission-free space with benefits for pedestrians and cyclists along the entire length of Mariahilferstrasse. ... Highlighting quality of experience also points to the importance of non-consumerist areas and a diversity in services that benefit all groups of people' (Gungl *et al.* 2011, p. 38).

While these recommendations are quite specific and provide a concrete definition of 'social quality', it is hard to evaluate whether these benefits were fully realized. While many of the people in the city government and administration that we interviewed highlighted how these recommendations were put into practice and how the redesigned Mariahilferstrasse is a place of higher quality, it is hard to verify these claims at this point in time. Since the complete redesign (levelling the street, installation of additional benches and trees, etc.) was only finished in summer 2015 our assessment is largely limited to the results from the test phase. We expect, however, that there will be better data regarding this question in the future, as further studies will analyse how people actually use the redesigned shopping street and if the reported reduction in air pollution and car traffic is permanent. From the current perspective, however, we find the benefit of increased quality to be present in our case.

The second benefit we have derived from our model of experimental co-production regards public participation. As has been briefly described in the previous sections, the redesign of the shopping street Mariahilferstrasse was accompanied by a diverse set of participation opportunities for interested citizens and residents, ranging from newsletters, online surveys and discussion events to a dialogue box and interactive exhibitions. This participation of the broader public was complemented by meetings with targeted stakeholder groups such as business owners or visually impaired people. Given the enormous public interest in the project, wide use was made of different participation opportunities. According to numbers provided by the City of Vienna, more than 50,000 people received the regular newsletters, 800 took part in the online survey, 1,300 provided specific feedback in the dialogue box, over 600 attended the discussion events and 1,800 visited the exhibition that showcased the intended redesign ideas (Ingenieurbuero Pistecky 2011; Stadtentwicklung Wien 2014).

Yet, in a survey conducted as late as November 2013, 58 per cent of the residents of the two districts bordering the shopping street reported that they had not actively used any of the opportunities for participation on offer (SORA 2013). And one of the main political proponents of the redesign project on the district level openly criticized the process in our interview: 'The public participation process that was carried out was not a real one. Because in reality it was clear what was to come, there were no alternatives.' Indeed, this

was a widespread criticism of the project that was taken up repeatedly by the media and political opposition parties. While citizens had various ways of providing feedback and to make their voices heard during the process, the city government had made clear very early on in which direction the redesign process should go: reducing car traffic on Mariahilferstrasse either by creating a pedestrian area, a shared space, or a combination of both.

Eventually, as the public pressure grew stronger during the testing phase the idea of a final referendum was launched. From the perspective of participation this referendum was a game changer. By means of this referendum the residents of the two neighbouring districts were finally given the opportunity to reject the whole idea of a redesign as such. This step finally lifted the process of public participation to a significantly higher level, from consultation and co-design to co-evaluation and co-deciding (Arnstein 1969; Fung 2006). While providing an increased level of participation, the decision for a final referendum also raised the political risks. A rejection of this flagship project would have been a serious defeat for the new city government.

Overall, we find significant influence of citizens and stakeholder groups in our example of experimental co-production on three different levels: (1) through a diverse set of participation formats and opportunities (discussion events, online survey, dialogue box, etc.), (2) the direct feedback provided during the testing phase and (3) the final referendum which allowed citizens to accept or reject the ultimately suggested redesign solution. While the benefit of participation – similar to service quality – remains contested, we argue that both of these benefits for citizens ensued at least partly. As the following section shows, the picture looks quite different from the perspective of the government, though.

Expected benefits and costs for the government

The fact that an increased level of citizen participation will not automatically lead to a higher level of trust in the government is a well-known insight in political science. Fiorina (1999, p. 396), for instance, highlighted the ironic development ‘that Americans have grown increasingly unhappy with government at the same time that government has grown ever more open to their influence’. Yet, the literature on co-production largely assumes that collaborative and participatory arrangements are ultimately beneficial for governments by raising the general level of trust and the acceptance of a specific policy (Levine 1984; Papadopoulos and Warrin 2007; Needham 2008a, p. 223; Alter 2013, p. 54; Fledderus *et al.* 2014). For our case study, however, we find this assumption to be flawed.

Since the case we have analysed is an example of a specifically enriched form of co-production, i.e. experimental co-production, we cannot fully determine whether the reasons for this are to be found in the co-productive or the experimental character of the process. The effects themselves, however, are quite substantial and speak to both strands of literature.

The debate around Mariahilferstrasse reached its peak in the autumn of 2013 during the test phase of the redesigned street. As the discourse analysis by Mandl (2014) shows, the numbers of press releases referring to the redesign process tripled in this period, most of them authored by the political opposition and many of a defamatory character.

The impact of this exploding interest by the political opposition and the media on the Viennese city government was largely negative. Surveys found that during this phase, public trust in the government fell significantly and affected two people associated with the redesign process in particular: mayor Michael Häupl (Social Democratic Party) and vice-mayor Maria Vassilakou (Green Party). Surprisingly, public trust in the Viennese mayor Häupl fell even more on the national level than in Vienna alone and dropped

by ten points compared to 2010. Pollsters linked this sharp decline to the controversial debate on the redesign process that preoccupied not only Vienna but the whole country (Kittner 2013). In September 2013, a newspaper also reported (based on a Gallup survey) that a majority of citizens demanded the resignation of vice-mayor Vassilakou, who was identified as one of the main drivers behind the redesign process (*Oesterreich* 2013). While the results of these surveys should be treated with caution they point to a development that was highly problematic for the city government. Even a rigorous study commissioned by the city government itself found that 46 per cent of the people in the two districts surrounding the shopping street agreed with the statement that the people responsible for the redesign process should be held to account (SORA 2013).

We find even more evidence for our thesis that proceeding in an experimental and co-productive way created significant costs for the city government when it comes to the acceptance of the concrete redesign project. Contrary to the general assumption in the literature that such a procedure can increase public support for a project (Papadopoulos and Warrin 2007), we found a decreased level of acceptance in our case. While the surveys that were conducted during the process (December 2011–February 2014) employed a diverse set of sampling techniques, question formats and frames and cannot be systematically compared, the general picture they provide is that public support for a redesign of the shopping street was higher in the early phase of the project but dropped as it proceeded (see table 2).

Once again, the time around the testing phase is decisive. While public support seemed to have dropped even below 50 per cent during this time (winter 2013) it eventually recovered and brought a close victory for the city government in the final referendum in February/March 2014 when 53.2 per cent voted for the redesign. It is vital to note that the average

TABLE 2 *Survey results and final referendum*

Date	Polling institute	n	Population	Interview	Supporting redesign	Rejecting redesign
Dec 2011	UNIQUE	323	Vienna	Passers-by*	71%	29%
Feb 2013	Marketagent	572	Vienna	Online	59%	21%
Aug 2013	OGM	408	Vienna	Passers-by*	69%	27%
Sept 2013	Gallup	300	Vienna	Phone	52%	48%
Sept 2013	Meinungsraum	300	Larger Vienna Area	Online	47%	37%
Nov 2013	Gallup	400	Vienna	Phone	38%	53%
Nov 2013	SORA	805	Districts 6 and 7	Phone	57%	39%
Jan 2014	Gallup	200	Districts 6 and 7	Phone	43%	54%
Jan 2014	SORA	529	Districts 6 and 7	Phone	42%	50%
Feb 2014	Gallup	200	Districts 6 and 7	Phone	40%	55%

Final Referendum

Date	Electorate (Districts 6 and 7)	Voter turnout	Supporting redesign	Rejecting redesign
Mar 2014	48,642	68.1%	53.2%	46.8%

*Gender and age quotas were used to ensure representativeness.

Source: The studies listed were commissioned by either the City of Vienna or different media outlets. We had access to the detailed summary reports of all the studies except the ones conducted by Gallup. For the Gallup studies we had to rely on the results as published in the media. The results of the final referendum are based on the official numbers published by the City of Vienna.

support for the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party (who formed the city government) in the two polled districts was also around 53 per cent during the national elections in September 2013. Roughly speaking, one could argue that the city government was not able to expand the level of support for their redesign project beyond their loyal voters and only barely managed to get a majority in the final referendum. In our interviews with key decision-makers, political experts and pollsters, this close victory – despite the generally low level of support – was largely attributed to a last-minute advertising campaign and significant canvassing efforts especially by the Green Party.²

The redesign of Mariahilferstrasse was therefore only a near-failure for the city government of Vienna. Yet, the costs it entailed in this process were high, on both the political and the managerial levels. The process therefore brought not only failure in terms of expected benefits but also much greater costs than we expected based on the literature on both co-production and experimentalism. The city officials we interviewed repeatedly stressed this point and admitted that the high temperature of the political and media debate forced them to deploy several crisis management tools, e.g. involving additional departments of the city administration, bringing in external expertise and strengthening campaigning activities. This ‘all hands on deck’ approach presumably rescued the process and led to an affirmative vote in the final referendum, yet it also created high transactional costs and delayed the implementation of other policy initiatives by the city government.

CONCLUSION

Departing from two separate strands of literature, this article advances the conception of experimental co-production as a specific form of co-production. Formulating a theoretical model it contributes to the debate on co-production by showing that we need to think more about the different types and facets of co-production in order to study its benefits and costs. Applying this model to the case study of the redesign of a major shopping street in Vienna, the article demonstrates how the predicted benefits (quality, participation, trust and acceptance) only partly ensued while the costs were significantly higher than expected and led to the near-failure of the whole redesign project. These results challenge the dominant assumption of co-production being a win–win situation. Instead, we argue that experimental co-production might produce unexpected governance challenges and significant risks which can lead to a win–lose situation. As our case study shows, even if there are some wins for citizens in the process (better quality, increased participation) the government might still suffer costs and losses (decreased trust in the government, reduced acceptance of the project and increased political opposition).

We conclude by briefly shedding some light on the factors that have undermined these expected benefits of experimental co-production building on observations and assessments made by the stakeholders we interviewed.

The first lesson to be drawn is that the *immense politicization of the process* has prevented the cool-headed problem orientation that is indispensable for all forms of collaborative governance (Brändström and Kuipers 2003; Ansell and Gash 2008). As our interviewees put it, the project quickly transformed from a limited debate on traffic organization into a political conflict that affected the whole country and the national elections that took place in the autumn of 2013. In this highly politicized climate, discussing the most suitable traffic arrangement quickly became a conflict along the lines of partisan polarization. Traffic policy further proved to be a policy area especially prone to such heated and partisan debates

with the perceived differences between car drivers, cyclists and pedestrians playing a central role (Vasconcellos 2001; Hamilton-Baillie 2008).

In the end, the adverse effects of this heightened politicization have not been effectively mitigated, despite resource-intensive crisis management strategies implemented by the city government and the Green Party. In the long run, the political results of this nearly failed project will certainly affect other redesign projects in the city and force the decision-makers to rethink their approach to managing such processes. For now it remains an open question, however, whether the experience of the Mariahilferstrasse redesign will discourage the city government from using participatory innovations and result in the implementation of more top-down arrangements.

The second factor that played a role was the *scale and complexity of the project*. Co-productive innovations in public services appear to be more 'governable' if they are applied to small-scale, local projects where the number of stakeholders is relatively low and the scope of issues to be decided upon is clear and limited (Brandsen and Helderma 2012). Our case study *prima facie* falls under these criteria, as it concerned the redesign of only one shopping street in the city of Vienna. However, the specific function of Mariahilferstrasse, being well known and of symbolic character not only for the whole city but the whole country, made the process extremely difficult to manage. The general complexity of the project, which touched upon not only traffic management but also had an impact on the organization of public transport, business activities and tourism, further increased these difficulties. The considerable effects of these factors in thwarting the benefits of (experimental) co-production in our example remind us that we need to continue exploring the specifics of the different arrangements of collaborative governance. By introducing the novel form of experimental co-production and evaluating its benefits and risks, this article provides a further step in this direction.

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NOTES

¹ As they were initiated by a political party and had only a very low and selective response rate (around 10 per cent) the results of the poll were highly controversial. These are also the reasons why we did not include this study in our list of surveys (see table 2).

² This trend is also visible in the surveys we analysed. All three surveys conducted by SORA and Gallup in January and February 2014, only weeks before the final referendum, show a combined rate of support of only around 42 per cent (using a simple weighted average according to the different sample sizes; see Steel and Clark 2010, p. 10). In the final referendum this rate had increased to 53 per cent.

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