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What makes urban governance co-productive? Contradictions in the current debate on co-production

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What makes Urban Governance Co-productive? Contradictions in the Current Debate on Co-production.

Abstract

Following a number of prominent concepts in urban planning, like participatory planning or self- help housing, co-production has started to gain momentum in the global South context. While it has been long discussed as a means of service provision, the term is more and more often used in the broader sense of urban governance and policy planning. This understanding goes beyond the aspect of scaling-up successful co-productive infrastructure focused projects; rather, it indicates a different format of engagement for prompting urban stakeholders into planning citywide urban solutions. This article discusses the distinction between the different levels of co- production and their inter-linkages, and it investigates the relevance of positioning co-production as a factor framing urban governance. This includes a discussion on three main contradictions that can be identified within the current discussion on co-production. Finally, it identifies a set of arguments for elaborating the role of co-production in a policy and urban governance setting.

Keywords

civil society, co-production, institutionalisation, the urban poor, urban governance, urban planning

Introduction

The flow of urban discourses, originating in the power centres, has for decades impacted planning practices in the global South. Probably one of the most influential shifts in the way planning was done in the twentieth century in the South came with Turner's notion of self-help housing, which celebrated the role of the urban poor as autonomous stakeholders with the capacity to steer the development of urban settlements (Turner and Fitcher, 1972; Turner, 1977). This salient framework supported the establishment of approaches that resulted in greater involvement of communities in the planning, construction and evaluation of urban development

projects. Over the following decades, major international agencies promoted a series of landmark approaches, including state-aided self-help housing, participatory slum upgrading or community driven development. At a project level, the effects of this participatory turn in planning in the South were considered to have generally been beneficial and to have helped to empower particular groups. Nevertheless, in retrospect it is doubtful whether this impulse resulted in real and meaningful advances, in particular in terms of power-relations – a factor identified as an important motor of urban spatial change (Watson, 2009). The classic model in which external stakeholders consult the local population has proven to be susceptible to misuse by a wide array of urban actors, starting with public administrations and ending with the community members themselves (Cooke and Khotari, 2001). Rather than bettering the position of the urban poor, the de-politicization of the housing question (Burgess, 1978) and the creation of sanctioned spaces of participation have been often used to extend the state's control over society (Miraftab, 2009). Consequently, in spite of the participatory turn in planning, true citizen participation in the core functions of government remains extremely rare (Ackerman, 2004).

Moreover, regardless of the solutions applied by formal agencies, the huge population segment of unprivileged urban dwellers continues to grow and their informal and precarious settlements still constitute a dominant feature of many cities in the South. As a result, this sustained prevalence has more recently led to a re-formulation of the focal question, namely is it the urban poor who need to participate in formal planning processes, or is it not the planning systems themselves that need to understand and take account of the dominant characteristics of Southern cities? Consequently, many scholars have come to recognise the inadequacy of analysing squatting and informality using investigative models developed by conventional planning agencies, which have proven to be contextually divorced from urban realities, and instead now emphasise the need to analyse how squatting practices constitute cities *per se* (Pieterse, 2008; Vasudevan, 2015).

One of the prominent concepts currently discussed within planning theory to address these challenges, and that is seen as 'structuring planning and urban development processes in certain global South contexts' (Watson, 2014: 63), is that of co-production. It is considered to be inclusive of developmental logic and a knowledge

of these urban actors, which do not typically fit into state-led and ‘professional’ planning schemes, and as such represents the dominant nature of the urban realm in the South (Watson, 2009).

However, similar to other popular buzzwords like ‘self-help’ in the 1970s or ‘community development’ in the 1980s (Sihlongonyane, 2009), the concept can acquire different meanings that are not necessarily mutually compatible. The term co-production is used interchangeably with other concepts, for instance co-creation (Voorberg, *et al.*, 2015), and some of its definitions ‘are vague and unhelpful’ (Joshi and Moore, 2004: 39). Furthermore, along with the classic distinction of co-production as a service-delivery strategy (Albrechts, 2012), the concept is more and more often discussed as a form of engagement by different stakeholders at a policy and planning level, in particular as embedded via various bodies established within the sphere of formal governance. Similarly, co-production and co-design are increasingly identified as a distinct approach to knowledge building and research (Moser, 2016).

In 2017 alone the term of co-production was discussed in variety of different contexts, demonstrating both the popularity of the concept as well as its growing ambiguity. This is illustrated by a number of conferences and panels,ⁱ the start of a PhD programmeⁱⁱ and planning of a special issue by a major journal,ⁱⁱⁱ all revolving around the theme of co-production.

Based on a review of the literature to date and the author’s own research experiences, this article deals with a specific grey area in which co-production is increasingly discussed as an instrument of urban governance and policy framing. It examines how the concept of co-production overlaps with that of participatory planning, thus debating the relevance of positioning it within institutionalised forms of urban governance in the global South. In essence, the article argues that the concept requires sharper theoretical frames if it is intended to be reflective of the basic strategies of the urban poor, to represent the view from the South, or to be influential in the sphere of planning (Bovaird, 2007; Watson, 2014). The ultimate aim is to assist in distinguishing between governance-oriented formats that enable the development of new urban solutions and those that do not. On the one hand, this is motivated by a belief in the need to delink the debate from the notion of participatory urban governance, rooted in development discourses and practices in ‘Northern’ cities and mainstreamed through global development agencies such as the UN or the Cities Alliance (Pieterse,

2008). As such, the article is intended as a contribution to the formulation of new theoretical perspectives on the major urban processes occurring in the South, but which have to date largely been perceived as 'alternative' or 'innovative' vis-à-vis approaches originating from the power centres. On the other hand, the goal is to further the distinction between those formats that truly represent approaches by informal urban actors from those that subject them to an external developmental logic.

The discussion below takes its cue from the conceptualisation of co-production as a deliberate engagement between the grassroots and the state, and characterised by a dynamic that encourages it to move beyond a local orientation towards more sustainable change (Mitlin, 2008: 353). It looks at both a range of new institutional possibilities that can affect urban governance in real terms (Watson, 2014, 74) and – as has already been widely described in the case of the Asian Coalition of Housing Rights (ACHR) – the specific movements able to capitalise on their own knowledge and a finance base in order to develop formats of engagement with urban politics. As such, the discussion links back to the argument that cities in the South are predominantly built by the urban dwellers themselves, and that a proper recognition of this sphere of activities at a governance level can result in the production of better urban solutions. The argument is based on a review of three main visible contradictions in the discussion on co-production: institutionalisation versus flexibility, conflict versus cooperation, and process versus outputs.

Co-production in policy settings and the participatory governance spectrum

The co-production debate commenced in 1970, and although initially a marginal concept it gradually became prominent in public management and economic studies. One of the research pioneers in the field, Elinor Ostrom (1996: 1073), defined it as 'the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not "in" the same organisation.' Almost from the point it was first analysed, co-production was identified as extending the meaning of classic participatory models and as a case of citizens exercising a potential effect on policy formulation (Whitaker, 1980). Typically though, these earlier conceptualisations concerned micro-level co-productive interventions (Brandsen and Pestoff, 2006), with numerous case

studies illustrating how small-scale projects impacted on particular power relations in specific contexts. Usually this was not identified as a critical movement towards larger changes in urban-governance structures, although further studies did link co-production to different types of activities, including the involvement of citizens in the co-planning, co-design, co-prioritising, co-management, co-financing and co-assessment of interventions (Bovaird and Löffler, 2013). This focus on the planning and design aspect of co-production is reflected in the literature, Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers (2015) having established that of 107 articles and books published between 1987 and 2013 in public management literature, 30 of them identified citizens as the co-designers of initiatives and 10 as their initiators.

A number of these conceptualisations, largely based on case studies from the North, differentiate between various state/citizen cooperative formats,^{iv} including co-production, co-management and co-governance. The latter is defined as an 'arrangement in which the third sector participates in the planning and delivery of public services' (Bransend and Pestoff, 2006: 497). In this sense, co-governance is distinguished from co-production and co-management to the extent that it focuses on policy formulation as opposed to implementation. A similar distinction is proposed by Ackerman (2004), for whom 'co-governance for accountability' assumes a direct participation of societal actors in the core functions of government. A separation between the different actors assuming specific roles in the delivery and planning of urban interventions is also present in Bovaird's categorisation (2007), whereby he makes a distinction between the various types of professional/user relationships in the separate stages of a project. The community may, for instance, be only involved in service delivery, in co-planning, or indeed in both, but importantly, co-productive categorisation also includes arrangements through which communities deal exclusively with policy planning and have no role in actual service delivery. As such, there is no explicit continuity between project-level activities and broader policy-planning activities. Consequently, co-production is not identified as mezzo-level political engagement and a broader struggle for choice (Mitlin, 2008: 347), although it is seen as a potential strategy for the negotiation of norms and regulations (Bovaird, 2007).

Overall, although these conceptualisations vary on a case-to-case basis, their shared premise is that citizens can have a significant impact on policy making. They also

have common denominators, including the idea that the institutionalisation and consensual character of participatory space is key to its success. With these characteristics, the scheme resembles the communicative or collaborative processes that are an important idea in the formulation of planning frameworks in the North, although they nevertheless may not be entirely reflective of the transformations in urban contexts in the South (Watson, 2009). Further, the understanding of co-production or co-governance as a participatory scheme that places the state or the public sector as its main facilitator poses similar risks. Rather than providing remedies for local problems, endeavours positioned as state-initiated participatory urban-governance processes may become a vehicle for the institutionalisation of inequalities (Lemansky, 2017) and ‘may appear as innovations, but are often fashioned out of existing forms through a process of institutional bricolage, using whatever is at hand and re-inscribing existing relationships, hierarchies and rules of the game’ (Cornwall, 2004: 2). These issues are, for instance, common in stakeholder forums – a growing form of agency designed to deal with strategic planning issues. While formally inclusive, involving urban stakeholders from across the public and private sectors and civil society, they also entail the risk of depoliticising the agendas of urban movements, instead catering for well-resourced groups in urban governance. Therefore, rather than being inscribed in their set-up, the progressive potential of such forums is best extraneously anchored via the activism and autonomy of the civil society movements involved (Pieterse, 2008: 94). When linked to the concept of co-production, this translates to movements that are well-networked and actively involved in large-scale bottom-up work, rather than in minor on-the-ground programmes and participation in deliberative spaces set up by the public sector. While either group may be characterised as progressive, their ability to deliver their aims within the spectrum of formal governance is undoubtedly linked to the degree of mobilisation they command and the power they represent. In line with this perspective, co-governance, as described in the previous paragraph, may not differ significantly from a number of public-sector-led participatory governance schemes, as long as it is not strongly rooted in an urban movement.

What is here subsequently discussed is the distinction between the different levels of co-production and their inter-linkages, investigating the relevance of positioning co-production as a factor in framing urban governance. The ambiguity in the

understanding of the concept is captured through a consideration of the three main paradoxes resonating in the current discussion on co-production.

Contradiction one: institutionalisation vs. flexibility

Joshi and Moore (2004: 40) define institutionalised co-production as the provision of public services 'through regular, long-term relationships between state agencies and organised groups of citizens, where both make substantial resource contributions', with the two main types of co-production identified as being logistical and governance driven. The latter includes situations in which organised groups of citizens become involved in governance in response to an institutional capacity deficit at either a local or national public level. In this sense, the institutionalisation of participation is viewed as one of the best steps to assure the sustainability of participatory schemes (Ackerman, 2004). In the context of settlement development, this has been shown to be true at a project level in cases where a variety of incremental solutions were supported by government measures, either through subsidies or technical assistance, and then successfully implemented (Greene and Rojas, 2008). Moreover, the examples of co-governance discussed by Ackerman suggest that the 'absence of a clear legal framework left participation up to the whims of individual bureaucrats, leading to the eventual overturning of participatory schemes once there was a change of heart on the part of the government' (2004: 459). Similarly, a lack of full engagement by the government bears the risk of reinforcing intra-community power relations and clientelistic networks (ibid.). This concurs with the opinion that in risk-adverse administrative cultures, public officials require organisational tools for active citizen involvement. According to this line of thought, if a sustainable relationship between the organisations representing the public sector and citizens is absent, this relationship needs to be structured in order to build a long-lasting platform of cooperation (Voorberg, *et al.*, 2015). In their analysis of public-management publications, Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers (2015) identify the fact that actions facilitating a relationship can originate from both sides of the equation - either an organisation initiated by the public sector, or for that matter by the citizens. However, as pointed out by authors, all such initiatives are referred to in the publications they reviewed as something that the public sector (organisations) should

undertake (Voorberg, Bekkers and Tummers, 2015). Seen from this perspective, the majority of co-productive projects fit the definition of invited spaces of participation rather than invented ones (Cornwall, 2004).

In its ideal sense, the goal of co-production is to strengthen the position of citizens, and their institutionalisation via formal governance structures may indeed reflect the achievement of this goal. However, it is by no means simple to transfer this fairly obvious assumption about co-production to conditions and processes in the South.

Firstly, the strength of co-production in the South is that it operates outside of existing norms and regulations (Mitlin, 2008; Watson, 2014). In the reality of informal and precarious settlements, imposed building codes or institutional arrangements are simply counter-productive. Indeed, here the urge to sustain everyday living needs or to improve personal habitat involves not adhering to but creatively overcoming external regulations. If systematised through collective action, these approaches have a chance to become a form of development practice, counterbalancing official development paradigms. As underscored by Pieterse (2008: 99), 'state bureaucracies tend to be rigid, hierarchical and conformist institutions' – in other words are unlikely to adopt innovative solutions unless confronted by external pressures resulting in new alternatives. Whilst these situations are reported to be very rare, co-production in its true sense remains a channel that can best leverage the aspirations of the urban poor. When it does occur, however, it is typically achieved outside of fixed regulatory situations in long-term relationships between local government and local communities, entailing continuous programme support, the funding of experimental activities and responding flexibly to emerging opportunities (Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 2004: 295). In essence, project-level innovations happen in spite of regulations not because of them, and co-production is realised because 'formal channels of engagement do not exist or are not satisfactory' (Watson, 2014: 71).

Secondly, the fact that the urban poor in the South operate in an informal sphere also defines their realm of expertise, thus constituting their resources. While a lack of institutionalisation exposes them to political vulnerabilities, becoming meshed in the domain of rules and regulations equally potentially poses the risk of submission to an alien language of conventional planning procedures and institutions. The danger, therefore, is two-fold. On the one hand, engaging with authority can entail cooperation

with more powerful actors who merely ‘purport to be concerned with poverty and with citizenship’ (Appadurai, 2001: 42). These counterparts may try to instrumentalize the urban poor through the formation of a dependency based on a lack of preparedness to navigate the rigid environment of hierarchical public bureaucracy. On the other hand, this also relates to the positioning and identity of the urban poor as actors in a development process to the extent that participation in governance impacts on the participants’ sense of themselves (Healey, 2003).

In these types of contexts, for some groups the threats embodied in institutionalisation may outweigh the beneficial protective factor. Since the processes ‘that underpin “real” governance often reflect informal bargaining power much more than formal institutionalised frameworks’ (Siame, 2016: 6), it is precisely in this sphere that the urban poor need to exercise their power and safeguard their independence. Consequently, for many civil society groups the ideal starting point is to engage in governance through informal channels rather than via an external actor who ‘gives’ them access to governance. Vice versa, when initiated by the public sector the process of formalisation brings with it a high risk of regulatory frameworks being imposed, which in turn undermines community-based approaches. Although involving the citizens in participatory schemes at the earliest possible stage (Ackerman, 2004) can be one way of facilitating engagement by the public sector, responding to pre-existing arrangements outside formal planning processes, or indeed deliberately leaving a scope open for the development of such, may be more interesting solutions.

Thirdly, much of the success of project-level activities by the urban poor lies in collective organisation rather than individual endeavours (Banana, *et al.*, 2015). In the Southern context there are convincing reasons to believe that the key to the creation of a significant role of the poor in urban governance is the formation of some sort of collective power. There is, however, a caveat to this. Thus while classic representative democracy has been found to be ineffective in this respect, for instance in failing to facilitate popular political involvement or guarantee redistributive mechanisms (Fung and Wright, 2003: 3), some of the more elaborate participatory schemes can also suffer from similar drawbacks, resulting in a fragmentation of the civil society agenda. This risk is visible even in the widely praised case of participatory budgeting in Puerto Alegre in Brazil. In its initial stages, politicians tried to impose an individualised voting mechanism, as opposed to an arrangement where neighbourhood associations had

decision-making power – a proposal that was actively opposed by civil society actors. (Mitlin, 2008: 355). Currently, as replicated in other countries, this participatory budgeting ‘best practice’ lacks its crucial component, namely it suffers from the lack of large deliberative spaces for local committees to debate before the voting process begins (Sześciło, 2015). Therefore, the transplanting of an ‘innovation’ such as participatory budgeting to situations characterised by weak civil society structures can potentially act as an enticement for the public sector to choose less ‘messy’ frameworks that lack spaces of deliberation. For example, one argument is that co-production can be facilitated by lowering the threshold for citizen participation, for instance by offering plebiscitary choices rather than providing opportunities to debate complicated policy issues (Voorberg, *et al.*, 2015). As much as this can be helpful in the context of project-level interventions and from the perspective of public sector implementers, its effects are not ultimately beneficial to the urban-poor counterparties involved in the process. Instead, on the whole such mechanisms may in fact undermine the building of a collective group agenda, in turn weakening their relative negotiating position. A further key factor is that these practices do not translate into changes in governance if the whole process involved is one of deciding about pre-defined solutions.

What these examples generally show is that even when postulated as a proper solution to the problems of the poor, positioning institutionalised co-production in the global South remains difficult and fraught with ambiguities. Whereas the instrument of institutionalised co-production undoubtedly has the potential to increase service delivery at a project level, nevertheless the framework may also be counter-productive if co-production is understood as a continuum of actions by the urban poor with the objective of affecting urban governance and policies. Having said this, there is arguably a necessity to safeguard the role of the urban poor in urban governance and decision making through institutionalisation in situations of a weak and unorganised civil society.^{vi} Because many regulatory frameworks are opportunistically exploited by those who hold political or economic power, rather than simply following the prescribed routes of contributing to the execution of existing policies, stronger, well-established movements may opt for flexible arrangements with governments so as to allow them to shape actual policies and laws (Watson, 2009).

Consequently, the term co-production of governance may better reflect urban transition in the South than the concept of co-governance discussed above. Since direct societal participation in governmental functions is extremely rare, fragile 'co-governance' arrangements should not be treated as a given fact but as a process that is steered via social-movement-initiated co-production (Mitlin, 2008) and safeguarded by active movements operating outside of the formal governmental sphere. Rather than only being a form of institutionalised deliberation, the co-production of governance can be defined as an open-ended process that enables the urban poor to continuously affect, review and update policies within or outside of formally recognised bodies. Ideally, their impact should mirror their own protocols and safeguard principles of flexibility and collective action.

Contradiction two: cooperation vs. conflict

The issue of institutionalisation closely relates to the role of conflict in co-productive planning arrangements. Overall, co-production requires cooperation between different groups of stakeholders and assumes long-term relationships, substantial resource contributions, as well as a sharing in the range of decision-making power. A variety of case studies discussed in the literature underscore the equality between civil society and public sector, although it is often considered to result from the 'good will' of the latter (Voorberg, *et al.*, 2015: 1344) and not as something that is achieved by the actions of the former. As such, equality is confined only to the deliberative space and as a factor safeguarded by more powerful actors, which in itself positions them in a more privileged negotiation position. The principle of excluding local power holders from specific governance arrangements, as described by Joshi and Moore (2004) in the case of the Citizen Police Liaison Committee in Karachi, may be a more promising way to ensure equality within decision-making. However, unless self-regulated by civil society, it simultaneously places the public sector in a privileged position. This similarly applies to the principle of the consensual character of the arrangement, which can potentially fail to reflect urban transition in the South. This includes the example of participatory budgeting in Puerto Alegre, which thanks to its set-up included an in-built pro-poor bias as a form of counterbalancing powerful interests (Ackerman, 2004). Nevertheless,

the participatory budgeting in this case was shaped with significant input from civil society and faced resistance from power holders. Rather than being an exception, this type of situation should be treated as the norm, representing the approach of development agencies and governments who do not want the urban poor to attain a status equal to theirs (Papeleras, *et al.*, 2012). This in turns links to Watson's argument concerning the difficulty of sustaining consensus-based planning-process practices, which involves different sets of values and beliefs (Watson, 2006), as well as concerning the role of power and conflict in planning in the South (Watson, 2014). This is crucial for two reasons.

Firstly, in the planning sphere in the South it can be expected that conflict will occur within the planning process in situations that involve both the mutual realities of the inhabitants of precarious settlements as well as the planning authorities. The former need to build their living with scarce resources, land invasions, etcetera. The latter are engaged in heavily politicised activities, and are subjected to lobbying by various interest groups and the pressures of political cycles. In rapidly urbanising areas, conflicts occur on a daily basis. They may range from soft, discursive struggles, which can be managed via consensus-oriented means, to violent confrontations in which different authorities try to achieve their goals. One example of such rapid eruptions of violence – which will undoubtedly increase in coming years due to climate change and expanding urbanisation – are the land-related clashes in Juba, South Sudan. This is a case of the complex reality in everyday struggles, where urban stakeholders assume new roles, including public officials, traditional authorities and military actors simultaneously engage in grabbing land and in perpetuating a spiral of ethnic violence and inequality (McMichael, 2014). In these types of contexts, the practice of urban development exceeds the control of professional planners (Odendal, 2012). In these cases, the traditional and consensual planning instruments that are largely effective in the European context become ineffectual, the urban policies involved being more strongly determined by an entire set of factors that differ from the familiar procedures informed by systematic and evidence-based data (Galuszka, 2017). To this extent, planners in the South are faced with new challenges that oblige them to act in a more politically conscious manner, prompting them to sometimes enter into politics themselves in order to achieve better working results (Karki, 2017).

Analogously, the ability of the urban poor to engage in confrontational and politicised spaces may be a clear manifestation of their ability to contribute to the planning process, as opposed to participating in stakeholder structures that lack this dynamic. In his notion of radical strategic planning as driven by the co-production approach, Albrechts (2012: 57) notes that ‘as it aims to secure political influence it is certainly confrontational and directed at a change by means of specific outputs (plans, policies, projects).’ For this reason, in the South the co-production of governance is rarely an outcome of public-sector-driven activities in those cases where a group is nominated as the representative of the urban poor without being recognised as a stakeholder with the capacity to operate in the conflict spaces. Instead, such recognition needs to derive from independent mobilisation in civil society, involving a real encroachment into the governance spectrum. In the majority of cases, this includes not only formal or informal negotiations with the public sector, but also the ability to navigate those spheres which influence policy making: media, global opinion makers, donors or the academic sector. The key factor here is the framing of an input with which the urban poor can contribute to the co-productive process and which translates into power. This includes knowledge produced through community enumeration, money generated within saving schemes, or networking, all of which enable the urban poor to counterbalance different planning paradigms using their own approaches (Boonyabancha and Kerr, 2015).^{vii} Indirectly, these activities also translate into the building-up of social capital, which is one of the key pre-conditions for the success of co-production (Voorberg, *et al.*, 2015). The ability of the urban poor to directly enhance their own financial and networking bases challenges the power relations between the public sector, donors and communities and is making politicians take notice of them as an important voting force. These tangible and intangible resources allow them to engage in complicated negotiations with powerful actors who operate within a different developmental logic and with their own agendas. At the same time, these resources reverse the dominant rationale whereby urban dwellers learn from professionals, the former instead taking on the role of educators themselves (Lipietz and Newton, 2015: 233).

The effective conclusion is that the ability of groups of urban poor to engage in conflict situations may be more productive than their operating within a planning arena

that involves rigid regulatory decision-making mechanisms, even if these mechanisms to some extent support the principle of protecting weaker stakeholders.

Secondly, these groups require the capacity to generate a critical numerical mass that can then engage in more radical forms of conflict in order to push their agenda forwards. This ability becomes especially relevant when the issue of distribution of space is at stake – a question that cannot be tackled without the factors of conflict and struggle (Castells, 1983). These types of activities are encapsulated within one of the five^{viii} interconnected domains of urban politics described by Pieterse (2008: 95), namely that of direct action, in that the ‘street conflicts, clashes and destabilisation that spark off direct action are prerequisites for political agreements to address urban inequalities.’^{ix} Although most successful national and international federations of groups of urban poor, for instance the Slum Dwellers International or the ACHR, achieved their status largely thanks to their consensus orientation (Herrle, *et al.*, 2015), their strategies in fact range from cooperation to contestation (Bradlow, 2013). Conflict-oriented measures such as protests can forge an equilibrium between the urban poor on the one side and the power of public stakeholders and the private sector on the other, as illustrated in the example of the anti-eviction campaign in South Africa’s Cape Town (see Miraftab, 2009).

Overall, while the protests and knowledge or resources generated by the urban poor represent the ‘stick and carrot’, both factors are interlinked and tend, in the context of the global South, to be more reflective of planning practices than the principles and benefits of collaboration as understood in the participatory-planning literature set in the context of the global North (Siame, 2016).

Contradiction three: process vs. output

To date there is a noticeable lack of empirical data showing the tangible effects of co-production (Voorberg, *et al.*, 2015), especially when discussed in the context of policy and urban governance. What has been documented is that co-production at a project level can result in changes of governance, ranging from small-scale institutional change (Shand, 2015) and the empowerment of specific groups (Banana, *et al.*, 2015) to a more substantial recognition of the urban poor (Mitlin, 2008). However, it is less clear how

the groups of urban poor that have attained sufficient power to frame urban governance have exercised this power. Likewise, transformations in urban politics happen as a result of multiply factors, rather than only a bottom up activism. These processes typically occur as a result of socio-political mobilisations that advance the idea of inclusive citizenship, as in the case of the Brazilian City Statute from 2001 (Fernandes, 2007). Nevertheless, the ways in which social movements manage to leverage their approaches also depends largely on the nature of the state in which they operate (Mitlin, 2006).

Indeed, much of the work of the urban-poor movements in the South concentrates on two interlinked objectives: the recognition of basic rights (such as the right to live in a specific location or to build one's own house) and a redistribution of wealth. Project-level co-production clearly addresses the first of the aspirations through the construction of adequate shelter, the provision of infrastructure or the securing of land for development, and through helping achieve the recognition of the urban poor as an active counterpart in planning and service delivery. In this context, by definition co-production is intended to address the shortcomings of the classic Weberian model of service delivery (Mitlin, 2008).

On the other hand, institutionalised participatory spaces are seen by some scholars as a mechanism that increasingly puts the onus for service provision on the private sector, citizens and civil society, correspondingly negating it as a state duty. Rather than being isolated cases, this can be perceived as part of a general trend originating in the 1980s and 1990s when in some countries, as Pieterse comments (2008: 64), 'neoliberalism flourished under the drive for state withdrawal from services delivery to counteract the perceived inefficiency and corruption of these machineries.'

Simultaneously, thanks to the role of co-production, civil society is able to affect governance and, arguably, contribute to the realisation of the second objective, namely the calls for a redistribution of wealth (Mitlin, 2006).^x Although this can potentially involve any number of different solutions, including value-capture mechanisms in land ownership or securing a basic income for unprivileged segments of society, in the urban realm in the South it is very often linked to a reintroduction of the state as a service provider. Paradoxically, this entails a risk of reversing project-level co-production and losing the already volatile control over some aspects of the development process.

In the recent years there has been a visible trend of diminishing self-help approaches in favour of reverting to large-scale state-controlled or private-sector housing initiatives and subsidies programmes, such as Housing for All by 2020 in India, Minha Casa Minha Vida in Brazil or the Reconstruction and Development Programme in South Africa, many of which are characterised by peripheral locations, and which in effect fail to substantially benefit the urban poor (Huchzermeyer and Misselwitz, 2016). Although these types of projects are not always a result of civil society pressures, the pitfall of deliberative processes becoming manipulated appears to be extremely high when promises of a redistribution of wealth to the advantage of the urban poor is at stake.

The case of the South African housing sector over the last 25 years illustrates the third contradiction discussed in this article. In what was a unique development in Africa in the 1990s, following the fall of the apartheid regime a huge Reconstruction and Development housing programme provided one million 'free' housing opportunities during the first six years of operations. It was preceded by a supposedly deliberative process in the form of a participatory space – the National Housing Forum – that brought together representatives of civil society, the state and developers. In spite of the initial civil society interest in co-productive housing approaches, pressures from developers resulted in the authorisation of the delivery of uniform neighbourhoods by the state and the private sector (Huchzermeyer, 2003). Even though the programme perpetuated the urban socio-spatial divisions of the apartheid era, its product (single storey houses with a small 'garden') outlasted the programme and continued to be viewed as an ideal housing model (Galuszka, 2017) and a citizen's right. Consequently, the process of shifting the housing approach in South Africa to more co-productive and incremental formats remained contested for years, confronting the advocates of change with numerous obstacles. Although many non-governmental organisations and citizens groups have advocated a more co-productive approach,^{xi} service-delivery protests agitating for the receipt of conventional housing or other services are still very common (Pithouse, 2010). In this case, therefore, co-productive approaches are positioned – at least perceptually – in opposition to the principle of wealth redistribution.

This contradiction is likewise potentially visible in contexts where co-production is more firmly embedded in the local urban-development paradigm than in the case of South Africa. One intriguing achievement illustrating the process by which civil society

has succeeded in securing funding for the housing strategy of their choice, and to a large degree one that is driven by the co-production of governance, comes from the Philippines. It involves the Urban Poor Alliance (UP-ALL), who involved themselves with long-term groundwork by local organisations, building up a relationship with the government both outside of institutionalised bodies, as well as within existing programmes. As a result of this lengthy effort, elements of the 'People's Plans' were incorporated by President Benigno 'Noynoy' Aquino's administration into the Oplan LIKAS programme which commenced in in 2011 (Karaos and Porio, 2015). One of the modalities of the programme responds to the agenda of the urban poor by supporting in-city development and high-density, medium-rise housing, simultaneously enabling communities to retain a reasonable degree of control over the processes involved. Its key component, the High Density Housing Programme, was supported by the administration with circa 10 billion Philippine Pesos. However, the new multi-storey housing format has required a sub-contracting of construction companies, which has increased the project costs (Ballesteros, *et al.*, 2015) and to some degree negates community control over the construction process. Although the community organisations remain the supervisors of the process, they are no longer the main constructors.^{xiii} As such, the example shows that although the urban poor in the Philippines have used co-production to engage in service delivery, in terms of governance involvement they have also opted for different housing types and upgrading solutions in order to obtain a balance between the variety of priorities present in informal settlements. The sustainability of this approach and the impact of the programme still require evaluation, including the progress of the housing process. Nevertheless, the ability of the urban poor in this case to secure additional funding for their preferred housing strategy illustrates their ability to successfully engage with governance at the programme's formulation stage. This is particularly relevant because of the reported impossibility of achieving a similar goal over the preceding decades (Hutchison, 2007).

It can be argued that co-productive governance provides a flexibility to change, adapt and update proposed solutions. In contrast to classic participatory spaces, this can mean that civil society actors are not merely consulted regarding specific decisions, but are active implementers of them too. In line with the arguments discussed above regarding the first contradiction (institutionalisation vs. flexibility), this implies an

ability to act outside of existing regulations, as well as a continuous involvement in governing the delivery of specific strategies and playing a monitoring role. In this respect, one strong indicator of the success of this model would be that institutionalised and non-institutionalised governance relations outlive the span of a specific political leadership and its clientelistic aspects, which is often the motor behind these types of relations in the context of the South (Anciano, 2017). In other words, successful and ideal models of co-produced urban governance should attain a balance between the two goals of the urban poor in the South – the securing of greater control over the development process and the securing of access to resources – regardless of the changes in the political leadership in a country.

Evaluating co-productive governance bodies – focus area and methodological considerations

In line with the contradictions discussed above, the concept of the co-production of urban governance calls for a set of refined methodological considerations that can assist in understanding the characteristics of co-productive bodies operating on a policy level in the South. This requires moving beyond the analytical categories used for the evaluation of participatory governance schemes. While these undoubtedly provide a set of valuable insights into the participation formats or the levels of authority of different stakeholders (Fung, 2006; Cornwall, 2008), the innovative aspect of the co-production of governance, as laid out previously, lies beyond the set-up of an institution, its governing rules and its immediate outcomes. Instead, the argument is that urban movements need to secure their political influence outside of the existing institutional formats. Consequently, any evaluation of co-productive governance arrangements requires an additional analysis of the process of its formation and the external strategies that affect its functioning. While this broadly fits both the dimension of governance cultures and the focus on interaction relations discussed within the collaborative planning approach (Healey, 1997), its differences from the co-productive processes located beyond the Western context (Watson, 2014; Healey, 2003) call for an augmentation of the analytical framework to include considerations relevant in the South.

Following from the first contradiction (institutionalisation vs. flexibility), these potential areas of interest concern how issues of flexibility are treated. This includes inquiring if and how the counterparts amongst the urban poor in a process engage in setting up specific governance arrangements. Likewise, it requires reflection on how flexible the frameworks of co-productive processes are, and to what degree they enable the integration of those approaches formulated by the urban poor that are positioned extraneously to the legal machinery in a specific context. Lastly, it is relevant in what way collective action is treated, and whether the dominant factors favour either a tendency for the individualisation of decision-making through voting mechanisms and the offering of plebiscitary choices on the one hand, or for that matter the possibility of deep negotiations on the other.

The discussion of the second contradiction (cooperation vs. conflict) suggests that research should also focus on what kind of tangible and intangible resources are added by the counterparts to the process, and how these resources affect power relations and decisions within a specific context. This should also include an examination of how the counterparts to the process use conflict-oriented means located outside of a specific governance arrangement or institution, and how these actions affect the work of these counterparts. These means may range from protests by the urban poor and the use of public-sector law enforcement to private-sector pressure mechanisms, often manifested in relation to large-scale projects driven by real-estate interests.

Lastly, when evaluating the impacts of co-production at a policy level, it is important to analyse the ways in which it contributes to the realisation of the objectives of the urban poor, in other words control over the development process and the redistribution of resources. Based on the examples discussed, these two objectives often become mutually exclusive and the latter can become an instrument of political patronage and the co-optation of independent movements. In true co-productive arrangements the urban poor should arguably be able to navigate between these objectives, and if they opt for one over the other should have the ability to monitor, review and update their decisions in negotiation with their public-sector partners

Conclusions

Based on the increased use of the term co-production in multiple contexts, as well as the review of three contradictions visible in the current discussion on the phenomenon, the argument is that the concept of co-production in the South requires sharper theoretical frames, particularly by delinking it from some of the assumptions based on case studies originating from the North.

This in turn links to the outlined overlap between the notion of co-governance and classic participatory governance schemes conceived as invited spaces of participation and facilitated by global institutions positioned in the power centres. What emerges is that the term co-production of governance, which encompasses activities by civil-society actors both inside and outside of formalised institutions, may be more relevant in the context of the South than that of co-governance. The inclusion of activities beyond the purview of formal bodies is crucial, due to the fact that the assumption is that institutional change is highly unlikely to take place without an active civil-society sector that is able to build up its own knowledge and resource bases, which includes a capacity to operate in conflict spaces. As such, maintaining a degree of independence from a specific legal frameworks or institutional settings is considered to be advantageous to civil-society actors and plays a supportive role in steering collective actions, as reinforced through networking activities. The latter is associated with a need for the urban poor to participate in the creation of urban governance bodies and institutions, rather than in formats set up exclusively by the state. The capacity to operate in the informal sphere is also considered to be another key component in the co-production of governance, rooted in the flexibility and innovations generated on the interface between different planning systems. Additionally, in keeping with contradiction three (process vs. output), a true engagement of the urban poor in the co-production of governance would mean that retaining reasonable control over project-level co-production does not become mutually exclusive with the other objective of the urban poor, namely a redistribution of resources.

Lastly, the specifics of the co-production of governance in the South elaborated above require the development of analytical frameworks that enable an exploration of the nature of the phenomena from a local perspective, which in turn relates to a broad

set of activities by the urban poor that shape the process outside of the established regulatory frameworks.

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ⁱ Session on co-producing knowledge, RC21 conference in Leeds, 2017.

ⁱⁱ Wits-TUB Urban Lab PhD project initiated by the University of Witwatersrand and the Technical University of Berlin.

ⁱⁱⁱ An issue of the Environment and Urbanization planned for 2018.

^{iv} Non-public sector counterparts of the process are named differently in literature: civil society, end-user, citizens etc. Based on the focus of the paper on the governance, the term the urban poor and civil society will be used in this paper, unless directly referring to the works of an author using a different name. When the term civil society is used it is acknowledged that its nature in the South is not the same as in the wealthiest democratic countries located in the North.

^v Later rephrased by Bovaird (2007) as ‘feasibility driven’.

^{vi} As suggested by Ackerman (2004: 459) this may involve three levels of actions: reflecting participatory mechanism in strategic documents of government, setting up new agencies which assure societal participation and inscribing participatory mechanism into law.

^{vii} It is worth pointing out that these community-level activities may also serve as a tool for reinforcing the power of specific groups, implying that local leadership is also largely formulated through conflict, as opposed to more innocuous means (Rigon, 2017).

^{viii} The other categories are: representative politics, neo-corporatist-stakeholder forums, grass-root development action and symbolic politics.

^{ix} This types of activism is, of course, not free from vulnerabilities, mainly the potential to be hijacked by populist forces that then potentially transform protest-oriented actions to their own purposes.

^x To a certain extent this can be a differing factor when compared to Western examples of co-production where the projects concerned are often not necessarily a mechanism for changes in governance or the redistribution of wealth. In welfare-state contexts, these aims are sometimes more vigorously expressed via the platform of representative democracy (cf. the recent rise of populism in various European states) or direct contestation (cf. the Occupy Movement).

^{xi} This applies in particular in situations where communities are threatened with relocation.