

Environmental management

Evidence of co-production in public service provision: the case of the administrative arbitration centre in Portugal

Evidências da coprodução na prestação de serviços públicos: o caso do centro de arbitragem administrativa em Portugal

Evidencias de la coproducción en la prestación de servicios públicos: el caso del Centro de Arbitraje Administrativo en Portugal

Hugo Consciência Silvestre^{a,*}, João Ricardo Catarino^b, Joaquim Filipe Ferraz Esteves de Araújo^c

^a Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira, Núcleo de Políticas e Administração Pública, CE, Brazil

^b Universidade de Lisboa, Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Políticas, Centro de Administração e Políticas Públicas, Lisboa, Portugal

^c Universidade do Minho, Centro de Investigação em Ciência Política, Braga, Portugal

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Abstract

Co-production includes all actions where citizens assist, as volunteers, in the provision of services by public agencies in order to increase the efficiency and efficacy of the public services provided. This practice, known as co-production, is being adopted by governments in the resolution of conflicts, particularly those regarding administrative and fiscal matters. However, *is co-production a more efficient and effective way of settling disputes in administrative and tax areas than the traditional administrative model? And why?* In Portugal, the Administrative Arbitration Centre was created in 2009 with the aim of resolving disputes between public administration and taxpayers/service users by means of co-production. The available data support the thesis that efficiency and efficacy are higher under the co-production model. Nevertheless, users are not totally satisfied since the costs associated with the use of this service provision model are also higher.

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Keywords: Co-production; Public services; Efficiency; Effectiveness; Portugal

Resumo

A coprodução compreende todas as ações em que os cidadãos auxiliam, numa base voluntária, a prestação de serviços pelas agências públicas de modo a melhorar a eficiência e eficácia dos serviços públicos prestados. Esta prática, denominada coprodução, é um modelo que muitos governos estão a adotar para a resolução de conflitos, nomeadamente em matéria administrativa e fiscal. Mas será *a coprodução, comparada com o modelo administrativo tradicional, um modo mais eficiente e eficaz de resolução de litígios no campo administrativo e tributário? E por quê?* Em Portugal foi criado o Centro de Arbitragem Administrativa, em 2009, com o intuito de resolver os litígios entre a Administração Pública no

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* Corresponding author.

E-mail: hmcstilvestre@gmail.com (H.C. Silvestre).

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campo administrativo e tributário e os seus utilizadores, numa lógica de coprodução. Os dados disponíveis suportam a tese de que a eficiência e eficácia são maiores sob a lógica da coprodução. Contudo, os usuários não estão totalmente satisfeitos devido aos custos associados à utilização deste modelo de prestação de serviços.

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Palavras-chave: Coprodução; Serviços públicos; Eficiência; Eficácia; Portugal

Resumen

La coproducción comprende todas las acciones en las que los ciudadanos ayudan de forma voluntaria a los organismos públicos con el fin de mejorar la eficiencia y la eficacia de la prestación de servicios públicos. Esta práctica es una alternativa que muchos gobiernos están adoptando para solucionar conflictos en ámbito administrativo y fiscal. ¿Pero será la coproducción, en comparación con el modelo tradicional, una alternativa más eficiente y eficaz para resolver dichos conflictos? ¿Y por qué? En Portugal se creó el Centro de Arbitraje Administrativo en 2009, con el fin de resolver los conflictos entre la Administración Pública y los usuarios de sus servicios, en las esferas administrativa y tributaria, a partir de una lógica de coproducción. Los datos analizados refuerzan la opinión de que la eficiencia y la eficacia son mayores en una lógica de coproducción. Sin embargo, los usuarios no están plenamente satisfechos respecto a los costos relacionados con el uso de este modelo de prestación de servicios. © 2016 Departamento de Administração, Faculdade de Economia, Administração e Contabilidade da Universidade de São Paulo – FEA/USP. Publicado por Elsevier Editora Ltda. Este es un artículo Open Access bajo la licencia CC BY (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Palabras clave: Coproducción; Servicios públicos; Eficiencia; Eficacia; Portugal

Introduction

The engagement of citizens in the production of public services has recently become an important topic in the study of public policy and public management (Eijk & Steen, 2014). This engagement has taken on the concept of co-production, which here we assume to be all *actions in which citizens assist public agencies on a voluntary basis in order to improve public service provision* (*ibid*, p. 2). These actions on the part of the citizens include any contribution in terms of time, effort and information to provide public services or produce goods (Alford, 2009). The term co-production first appeared in the work of Oström and her colleagues in the 1970s. This concept was first used to describe the possible relationship between those who deliver services (civil servants) and the users of these services. These users thus contributed their knowledge to improve the services they used. In this sequence, “by co-production, (. . .) (we mean) the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not ‘in’ the same organization” (Oström, 1996, p. 1073).

The current situation results after the influence of New Public Management which promoted privatization and contracting of public services to the private sector (Silvestre, 2010). Although there are several criticisms of this movement, its ideas still find a lot of support nowadays among the governments of various countries and their defenders (Joshi & Moore, 2004). Originally, this approach promoted power in professional management; the use of explicit measures of performance; greater emphasis on controlling the product; the breakdown of units; increased competition; emphasis on management styles practiced by the private sector; and greater discipline and parsimony in the use of inputs (Hood, 1991). What is certain, however, is that no one knows specifically which organizational arrangements are best suited to providing high-quality, efficiently devised public services whose results can be substantiated (Alford & O’Flynn,

2012; Hodge, 2000). In general it can be stated that “the general belief of the experts is that most countries are agnostic” (Joshi & Moore, 2004, p. 31) regarding the rights and wrongs of this approach.

The approach proposed earlier was based on the susceptibility of choice of service users who, by their action in selecting which goods and services they would like to use, would increase competition among public organizations operating in the same sector of activity (Araújo, 2013). With greater competition, one could then make better use of scarce public resources and thereby reduce organizations’ costs while increasing services quality. At the same time, there would be even more effectiveness when users evaluated the performance and measured the quality of organizations that provide public service. These organizations would theoretically be committed to a comprehensive reform both in terms of their structure and of their culture, as is the case in the private sector (Jung, 2010) where customer satisfaction is paramount. Citizen thus became citizen-consumers, or clients, exercising their choice in the consumer society (Clarke, Newman, Smith, Vidler, & Westmarland, 2007).

One of the major criticisms of New Public Management concerns its theoretical basis, i.e., it is badly defined and built (Araújo, 2004). According to Radnor and Osborne (2013) the movement’s theoretical influence was based on the experience of a generic management theory whose contributions essentially resulted from the experiences of the private sector and whose activity, in turn, was placed at the manufacturing level, where the product was considered crucial (Radnor & Osborne, 2013). According to the authors, public services deal primarily with services rather than products, so the theoretical support employed in public sector reform is, under this theoretical perspective, poorly considered. They also claim that while products are tangible, services are intangible; hence the observed inconsistency, because the main judges of services should be their users not those who produce them.

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