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The Problem and Promise of Coproduction

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Abstract

Interest in 'coproduction' has continued to grow since Elinor Ostrom introduced the concept to the development scholarship two decades ago. The idea that multiple actors often interact to coproduce public goods and services helped shift development thinking away from one-size-fits-all policy prescriptions based on free market principles to a more nuanced position that recognises organizational and institutional diversity. However, while Ostrom's approach to coproduction provides a useful starting point to think about how states and societies interact to produce public goods and services, it fails to capture important dimensions of the process. The diverse scholarship that has extended and critiqued her work has provided a fuller picture. Yet, important gaps remain. The aim of this paper is to fill some of these holes and push the boundaries of coproduction analysis. Drawing on the case of water coproduction in Ecuador, it highlights three issues that are overlooked or undeveloped in the existing literature: a) the history and ubiquity of coproduction b) the form of state-society relations that emerge through the process and c) the relationship between coproduction, commodification and accumulation. Through the discussion of these three issues and a critical review of the existing scholarship, the paper will seek to lay the foundation for a critical approach to coproduction analysis.

Keywords: coproduction, state-society relations, autonomy, water, Ecuador

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[1] Department of International Development, London School of Economics and Political Science, g.goodwin@lse.ac.uk. Initial ideas for this paper came while teaching 'The Informal Economy and Development' at the London School of Economics and Political Science in 2015/16. Thanks to the students on the course and the course convenor, Kate Meagher, for highlighting many of the issues I discuss in this paper and for providing the inspiration to write it in the first place. I am grateful to Tim Forsyth for his encouragement and insight and to Lloyd Gruber for his extremely helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I am also indebted to the numerous people I visited and interviewed during fieldwork in Ecuador and to the Department of International Development at the London School of Economics and Political Science for supporting this research through RIIF funding. I remain solely responsible for the views expressed in this paper.

Introduction

Two decades after Ostrom (1996) introduced 'coproduction' to the development lexicon, interest in the concept and practice continues to grow.[2] The simple idea that she posited – various actors and organizations interact to coproduce public goods and services – challenged binary thinking about development and highlighted organizational and institutional diversity. The concept helped shift development thinking away from market fundamentalism to a more nuanced position that recognized alternative ways of delivering public goods and services. However, it was also vague and incomplete and soon attracted critical attention.

The opening intervention came from Evans (1996) who recognized the importance of the concept but argued closer attention must be paid to relationships between bureaucrats and citizens. Joshi and Moore (2004) made the next important contribution by proposing a revised version of the concept that emphasizes the institutionalized nature of coproduction. By stressing the long-term character of coproduction and offering a tighter conceptualization of the process, the authors made a vital contribution to the scholarship. However, like Ostrom, they pay little attention to the politics of the process. Mitlin (2008) was one of the first development scholars to pick up on the lack of politics in coproduction analysis. She claimed coproduction can provide a platform for marginalized groups to extend their social and political rights. In doing so, she pointed towards its emancipatory and transformative potential. Viewed through this lens, coproduction becomes a site of political struggle rather than a technical process of public service delivery. More recent contributions have continued in this vein, providing further insight into the politics of coproduction and highlighting other important dimensions of the process.[3]

Thus, over the last two decades, coproduction research has expanded to capture crucial issues missed in earlier studies. However, while these contributions have added depth and richness to coproduction analysis, important elements have been overlooked or underexplored. The main aim of this paper is to highlight and explain some of these missing dimensions and point toward a critical approach to coproduction analysis. I will argue that three particular

[2] The term 'coproduction' has been used to explore various issues across the social and natural sciences. Three broad strands of coproduction research are evident. The first relates to the coproduction of public goods and services; the second concerns the coproduction of knowledge; and, the third relates to environmental governance. While these approaches are distinct, they share at least one important feature: the desire to transcend binary categorizations and thinking. For a recent attempt to synthesize these approaches, see Miller and Wyborn (2018) In this article, I focus on the coproduction of public goods and services and when I refer to the 'coproduction scholarship' I do so with this particular strand of coproduction analysis in mind. Within this domain, coproduction has been used to investigate a range of issues, including housing, water, security, waste, and recycling.

[3] See, for example, McMillan et al 2014 and Fieuw and Mitlin 2018.

issues demand greater conceptual and practical attention. The first concerns the history and ubiquity of coproduction. The existing literature focuses on the coproduction of public goods and services during the neoliberal stage of capitalism. Hence, coproduction is typically associated with state retreat. However, the process has long historical roots and has been evident across various phases of capitalist development, including periods of state retrenchment and expansion. Thus, coproduction is more deeply rooted in development than commonly believed. I will argue that unearthing the history of coproduction is crucial for understanding contemporary processes and outcomes. The second area relates to the form of state-society relations that emerge through coproduction. By actively involving organized groups of citizens in the production of public goods and services, coproduction simultaneously promotes autonomy from and engagement with the state. While this process can give organized sectors of society greater political power and create new political opportunities, it can also generate strains and tensions as struggles emerge over the state's reach and authority. Here, I will argue that close attention must be paid to the form and frequency of contributions to coproduction and the composition of actors involved in the process. The third issue concerns the macroeconomics of coproduction. The existing scholarship offers critical insights into coproduction politics but overlooks economic factors, especially the relationship between coproduction, commodification and accumulation. I will argue that important constraints, tensions and implications are missed when these factors are overlooked.

To demonstrate the salience of these issues, I will draw on the case of water coproduction in Ecuador. The case provides fascinating terrain to investigate coproduction for several reasons. First, the country's constitutional and legal framework, which has been rewritten over the last decade, entrusts water management to the state and community and creates a formal framework that combines state and social actors. Hence, coproduction has a constitutional, legal and bureaucratic foundation. Second, the construction of the new water regime involved intense political struggle between the government, social movements and water associations. Thus, the politics of coproduction comes to the fore, revealing important dimensions that are overlooked or underexplored in the existing scholarship. Third, the political struggle was primarily linked to the expansion rather than the retreat of the state. Hence, the case demonstrates the existence of coproduction outside the context of structural adjustment and neoliberal reform. Indeed, the paper shows that coproduction is deeply rooted in Ecuador's history, becoming increasingly common place from the 1960s as capitalist modernization accelerated.

The next section critically surveys the existing coproduction scholarship. I will identify two broad and overlapping strands of research and analysis: one that treats coproduction as a largely technical process of public service delivery and another that characterizes it as a political process which involves and generates political struggle and change. I will argue that both strands of coproduction analysis offer valuable insights, but politics must be integrated into the analysis. I will also highlight competing definitions and conceptualizations of coproduction and identify the most appropriate reading for a critical approach to coproduction analysis. The paper will then turn to water coproduction in Ecuador, using the case to highlight important dimensions overlooked in the existing literature.

Coproduction: origins, evolution and critique

Coproduction analysis has a long and convoluted history. Initial ideas emerged from collaborative research conducted in the 1970s on urban public policy in the United States, especially planning and policing.[4] Researchers working in this group, which included Vincent and Elinor Ostrom, showed public goods and services were often delivered - or 'produced' - through complex interactions between multiple actors and organizations. Their findings challenged the prevailing orthodoxy which advocated public service provisioning through large, centralised state bureaucracies. Their research was also at odds with orthodox public choice and neoclassical theorists who generally advocated pure market solutions. Initial coproduction research therefore charted a course between the state and the market and stressed organizational and institutional plurality.

While coproduction research continued in the 1980s, the concept and practice was marginalized as neoliberal ideology and policy took centre stage. Messianic belief in the market left little room for organizational and institutional diversity. Public policy shifted towards allowing market prices to determine the allocation of scarce resources and increasing the space for private sector involvement in the delivery of public goods and services. Privatization was promoted to reduce corruption and increase efficiency and swathes of the public sector were transferred to the private sector. While neoliberal ideology remained hegemonic in the 1990s, the limits of market fundamentalism started to become clearer, especially in the Global South. The lost decade of the 1980s left a trail of socioeconomic destruction in its wake and mass mobilizations against structural adjustment and neoliberal reform became a common feature of the political landscape in the 1990s, especially in Latin America. During this period, mainstream development thinking slowly started to shift, with a growing number of scholars

[4] See, for example, Ostrom (1972).

recognizing the limits of one-size-fits-all policy prescriptions based on free market principles and the importance of institutional and organizational diversity and plurality (Brett 2009).

Ostrom introduced coproduction to the development scholarship within this context.[5] She did so in a landmark special issue of *World Development* which aimed to transcend classic state-market public-private binaries and illustrate the importance of understanding how states and societies interact in the process of development. In her article, she offers a definition of coproduction - 'process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not "in" the same organization' (1996: 1073) – which is simultaneously vague and revealing.

Its vagueness suggests coproduction can include a plethora of actors, goods and services and a panoply of organizational and institutional arrangements. The focus Ostrom places on public agencies in this article and elsewhere suggests the state is directly involved in coproduction. However, her definition leaves the door open to non-state actors coproducing goods and services without direct state support. It also reveals important aspects of coproduction. First, coproduction is a process and therefore relates to ongoing interactions between actors rather than single, one-off events. Second, coproduction requires inputs or contributions from at least two different sets of actors. The form these contributions take is left open but can include labour, material, financial and knowledge inputs. This distinguishes coproduction from conventional forms of public service delivery through the state or market. Third, coproduction underscores the importance of human agency. The process 'implies that citizens can play an active role in producing public goods and services of consequence to them' (1996: 1073).[6]

Ostrom employs microeconomic analysis to determine the degree of citizen participation, suggesting it will vary according to budget constraints, wage rates and opportunity costs. Opportunities for coproduction exist when inputs from public officials and citizens are complementary rather than substitutable.[7] Various combinations can produce the same level of output. The precise combination will depend on the budget constraint and the relationship between the wage rates of public officials and opportunity costs of citizens. Thus, Ostrom uses

[5] Of course, Ostrom was hugely influential in shifting the terrain of development thinking in the early 1990s, particularly after the publication of *Governing the Commons* (1990). For critical reflections on her work and legacy, see Forsyth and Johnson (2014).

[6] More broadly, as Miller and Wyborn (2018) note, the emphasis on 'production' stresses that the 'world is made, not given'.

[7] Ostrom (1996) provides some empirical examples of complementarity in coproduction regimes, focusing on sanitation and education. See McGranahan (2014) for a more detailed analysis of complementarity in the coproduction of sanitation.

economic efficiency as grounds to measure the potential for coproduction and the degree of inputs provided by public officials and citizens. She recognizes other dimensions of the process. For example, the challenge of generating trust between bureaucrats and politicians and the need to create the right incentives for actors to participate and perform. Still, coproduction is conceptualized as a largely technical process where the principal objective is to achieve the maximum output given a particular budget constraint.

Most scholars who have undertaken coproduction research and analysis follow this largely technical approach. However, alternative perspectives have emerged. One of the most influential contributions within this group has come from Joshi and Moore (2004). Criticising the vagueness of the formulation proposed by Ostrom (1996), the authors posit 'institutionalised coproduction' in its place. From this perspective, coproduction is understood as 'the provision of public services (broadly defined, to include regulation) through regular, long-term relationships between state agencies and organized groups of citizens, where both make substantial resource contributions' (2004: 40).

The definition diverges from Ostrom's formulation in two important respects. First, greater emphasis is placed on organization, which shifts analytical attention away from relations between public officials and individual citizens towards interactions between state and social organizations. Hence, the main unit of analysis shifts from the individual to the collective. Second, coproduction is limited to state-society interactions, which ensures the concept is not used to capture virtually any productive process which involves more than one group of individuals.[8] For example, this definition precludes using coproduction to explore interactions between businesses and citizens, which is important because the term has been used to capture highly exploitative relationships between the two groups.[9]

The long-term character of coproduction is also stressed. Explicitly conceptualizing coproduction as an institutional process implies a degree of longevity and durability and excludes temporary arrangements or short-term solutions. Joshi and Moore further attempt to delineate the boundaries of coproduction by distinguishing it from contractual forms of

[8] While this helps bring greater clarity to coproduction analysis, it also excludes interactions between organized citizens and non-governmental organizations, which is problematic. I will return to this below.

[9] Where, for example, 'poor people find themselves volunteering to shovel ditches to shore up the profits of multinational water companies' McMillan et al (2014: 203). More generally, excluding interactions between citizens and businesses prevents coproduction being conflated with corporate initiatives, like 'bottom of pyramid' or 'corporate social responsibility' schemes. Of course, limiting coproduction to state-society interactions does not mean it cannot be adverse or exploitative.

collaboration.[10] In contrast to formal contract-based partnerships, coproduction is frequently, though not universally, informal and open-ended (2004: 40). Importantly, it also demands significant contributions from all parties involved in the process. While Ostrom's formulation also demands inputs from the various actors who participate in coproduction, this crucial point is more emphatically stated in this conceptualization. Moreover, the basis for social participation is not explicitly based on economic criteria, which opens the door to organized groups of citizens engaging in coproduction for reasons that transcend economic rationality.

The authors also offer fresh insight into the forces behind coproduction, tentatively proposing two drivers: 'governance' and 'logistical' (2004: 41). The first relates to declines in government capacity at the national or local level. Coproduction emerges as a practical solution to the inability of states to provide adequate public service provisioning. The second concerns the logistical challenges states face in providing public services, especially in rural areas. Collaboration between the state and society is required when significant geographic or demographic obstacles block public service delivery. For example, where terrain is mountainous, or populations are scattered.

While insightful, these drivers reveal a tension in this conceptualization of coproduction. On the one hand, the authors note both drivers indicate state 'imperfections' or 'incompleteness', which suggests coproduction is unnecessary in settings with well-developed effective states. On the other hand, they suggest coproduction will not fade away if states develop capacity. The case of water coproduction discussed in the next section will shine some light on this tension.

Further insights into coproduction emerge through the cases and examples briefly discussed in the article. The first concerns the coproduction of policing in Karachi, Pakistan (2004: 34-37). The initiative was driven by the local economic elite who collaborated with the local police and government to monitor and tackle escalating crime and disorder in the city. Contributions from the elite came in the form of labour, knowledge, information and finance while the police and government committed human and financial resources and provided bureaucratic organisation and authority.

Two important points emerge from the Karachi case. First, coproduction stretches across class lines. The process is often seen as a way of bringing public goods and services to the poor. It has been widely criticized on this basis as it demands that the poor organize to secure

[10] For example, public-private partnerships are explicitly excluded from coproduction analysis when following this conceptualization.

public goods and services, while middle and upper classes gain access without participating directly in the delivery process. From this perspective, coproduction emerges as a 'second best' solution which exploits poor and marginalized communities, undermines universal citizenship, and advances neoliberal political projects.[11] While these criticisms certainly have foundation, the case illustrates coproduction is not limited to collaborations between the state and the poor. Other social classes sometimes participate in coproduction which indicates its prevalence. Second, coproduction is generally driven by social actors. The case illustrates this point, but this conceptualization of coproduction obscures it somewhat. That is, viewing coproduction as a response to state 'failure' or 'incompleteness' downplays the active role social actors often perform in initiating and driving the process.

The article also briefly considers the case of irrigation systems, which are often designed, constructed and operated by farmers, bureaucrats and governments (2004: 41-3). While the authors focus on irrigation, their analysis offers clues as to the factors that contribute to successful coproduction arrangements more broadly. The first relates to the discretion and authority of the social organizations involved in coproduction. Better performance is observed when farmers have some control over the delivery of irrigation at the local level. The second concerns the degree of influence farmers have over the state. Improved outcomes are observed when farmers have formal or informal institutional channels to influence policies and bureaucracies. The third relates to the social relationships between farmers and bureaucrats. Greater proximity between the two groups fosters trust and cooperation and generates better outcomes. This connects to Evans (1996) who argues coproduction requires 'embeddedness' as well as 'complementarity' or, more precisely, 'complementarity creates a basis for productive interaction, but without embeddedness the potential for mutual gain is hard to realize' (1996: 1123).[12] Direct participation of politicians and bureaucrats is required to build trust and develop relationships with social actors. Thus, public officials must be embedded in coproduction to make it effective. Without citing the concept of embeddedness, Joshi and Moore suggest this is also an important factor.

[11] 'In the contemporary context of neoliberal austerity, the concept of co-production has been mobilized to justify shrinking public spending and the withdrawal of the state from guaranteeing the conditions of social citizenship' McMillan et al (2014: 202-3). See also Miraftab (2004) and Cross (2016). It is no coincidence that politicians involved in the British Conservative-Liberal coalition government embraced coproduction as it aggressively reduced public spending and restructured the state in the 2010s. See Boyle and Harris (2009).

[12] Embeddedness, for decades a core concept in economic sociology, has recently filtered into public administration and political science. See, for example, Pepinsky et al (2017).

Other perspectives have emerged from authors who follow a largely technical approach to coproduction. Loeffler and Bovaird (2016) provide a recent overview of this literature from a public administration perspective. However, they follow a broader definition of coproduction, which means their review includes studies of processes which fall outside the formulation proposed by Joshi and Moore (2004). The authors define coproduction as 'public services, service users and communities making better use of each other's assets and resources to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency' (2016: 1006). The distinction between 'users' and 'communities' means this formulation does not require organization.[13] For example, it includes coproducing health through partnerships between nurses and families. Thus, the boundaries of coproduction are significantly expanded. While this might be helpful for researchers who approach coproduction from a public administration perspective, it is problematic for scholars who are interested in understanding the politics of coproduction. Individual and collective participation in coproduction involve distinct relations with the state and generates alternative processes of political change. Hence, including both within a single definition is problematic and this formulation of coproduction is not suitable for the purposes of this paper.

While the diverse of group of scholars who view coproduction as a largely technical process cast some light on the politics of coproduction, researchers who place politics at the centre of their analysis offer real insight into this issue. Mitlin (2008) was one of the first scholars to move decisively in this direction. Focusing on urban communities, organizations and movements, she claims poor citizens not only use coproduction as a mechanism to gain access to public services but also as a platform to transform their relationship with the state and strengthen their political rights. Thus, coproduction entails challenging and reconfiguring power relations. Her analysis provides further evidence of the vital role social organizations perform in driving coproduction. Indeed, she argues the cases of urban coproduction included in the article prospered despite, not because of, the state (2008: 13).[14] Thus, she follows Joshi and Moore (2004) in highlighting state failure. However, she places greater emphasis on the need for social organizations to activate and propel the process.

She also gives some attention to the broader socioeconomic context in which coproduction emerges, suggesting it appears not solely as a result of state failure. Limited economic resources and informality are identified as factors that require the poor to pursue active

[13] Brandsen and Pestoff (2006: 497) go a step further by suggesting coproduction should be limited to processes which include 'voluntary efforts of individual citizens'. See also Boyle and Harris (2009) and Brandsen and Honingh (2015).

[14] Mitlin explores some these cases in greater depth elsewhere. See, for example, Mitlin and Muller (2007). See also Fieuw and Mitlin (2018).

strategies to accelerate development, including coproduction (2008: 3). She also cites commodification, hinting at the difficulties the urban poor face accessing basic services through the market and their need to retain or create alternative forms of organization. While Mitlin does not pursue this line of enquiry, her observation draws attention to the relationship between coproduction and commodification, suggesting coproduction can promote decommodification by reducing dependency on the market to satisfy basic needs. I return to this point in the next section.

Mitlin also highlights the complexity of coproduction politics. Social organizations navigate tricky political terrain, seeking greater engagement with the state, on the one hand, while aiming to protect their autonomy, on the other (2008: 7). She claims that the cases she analyses are examples of 'self-organized coproduction', as the organizations involved in coproduction engage with the state while maintaining some autonomy over the delivery process (2008: 10). Crucially, their objective is not to build local services before handing them over to the state to manage, but to retain a high degree of control over the long term. The process therefore creates new ties between state and society and establishes new relations of authority and autonomy. More broadly, Mitlin points towards a crucial point: coproduction not only produces public goods and services but new political subjects and political relations.

Further insight into this process comes from the case of urban water committees – or *mesas técnicas de agua* (MTA) - in Caracas, Venezuela studied by McMillan et al (2014). The authors stress the need to look beyond the public-private binary by noting that water companies operating in the Global South often exclude the poorest sectors of society regardless of the ownership structure.[15] Hence unorthodox and creative solutions are often required to extend water and sanitation to poor and marginalized communities. The authors insist, however, that coproduction cannot be reduced to a technical process of service delivery. Taking aim at the 'depolitized' coproduction scholarship, they stress the emancipatory and radical potential of coproduction, arguing citizen participation in urban water management 'creates the possibility of empowerment, because the committees engage citizens in a wider process of social change and promote a radical rethinking of the concept of citizenship' (2014: 202).

Integrating water committees into a wider political project was a vital part of this process in Venezuela. From the late 1990s, Hugo Chavez directed a process of radical political change that included creating new forms of political participation and channelling oil revenues into innovative social programmes. The MTAs, which predated his ascent to power but became

[15] On this particular issue, see Bakker (2010), Anand (2017) and Goodwin (2018b).

more prevalent and powerful during his presidency, were part of a wider effort to increase space for local political participation and decrease reliance on liberal democratic institutions. The relationship between the community associations and the national water company, Hidrocapital, was transformed through the creation of a 'communal management' model and state investment in water infrastructure and management was significantly increased (2014: 205-7). Meanwhile, collaboration between water bureaucrats and water associations provided opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and created new accountability mechanisms.[16]

While the authors are critical of the harmonious picture of state-society relations painted by Evans (1996), their analysis supports his argument that strong ties between citizens and bureaucrats can generate positive outcomes in coproduction arrangements. Yet, their study also reveals the challenge and risks of these relationships. Two crucial issues are highlighted. First, increased engagement with the state came with increased bureaucratization which reduced space for creativity and threatened the autonomy of the committees. Second, close association with a radical political project risked the long-term viability of the coproduction process. For instance, members of the water committees expressed concern over the future of the organizations if the right-wing opposition took power.[17] Thus, the case points towards one of the tensions Mitlin (2008) highlights in her analysis of urban coproduction: the challenge that grassroots organizations and social movements face in increasing engagement with the state while protecting their autonomy. The case of water coproduction in Ecuador, which I will discuss in the next section, allows a closer inspection of this tension.

To sum up, coproduction research and analysis has proliferated since Ostrom (1996) introduced the concept to the development scholarship two decades ago. Her insights provide a useful starting point to think about how states and societies interact to deliver public goods and services. However, her definition of coproduction is vague, and her analysis is narrowly focused on service delivery. Moreover, she suggests coproduction is based on individual exchanges between rational economic actors, which masks the complexity and diversity of the process. While Joshi and Moore (2004) also follow a largely technical approach to coproduction, they provide a more robust and useful conceptualization. Their formulation limits coproduction to interactions between state and society, which precludes business-citizen interactions and shifts analytical attention to the organizations involved in the process. The

[16] See McGranahan (2014: 250) for further reflections on the accountability mechanisms built into coproduction.
[17] There was historical precedent for this at the local level. The authors report that water committees were disbanded when a right-wing mayor came to power in the mid-1990s, before reappearing and proliferating when Chavez came to power at the end of the decade.

emphasis that it places on the contributions of the various actors involved in coproduction is also important. Their formulation therefore offers a useful overarching framework to explore coproduction. I will analyse water coproduction in Ecuador from this broad conceptual perspective while drawing and building on insights from Mitlin (2008) and other scholars who have explored the politics of coproduction. Hence, while I take inspiration from the original insight of Ostrom (1996), I will follow an alternative approach, which stresses collective over individual involvement in coproduction and seeks to unearth and explain the politics and economics of the process.

Coproducing water in Ecuador: interactions, tensions and possibilities

Communities perform a crucial role in managing and distributing water in Ecuador. Water associations supply water for drinking and sanitation to over 30% of the total population – or over 4.5 million people (FRH 2013).[18] Meanwhile, over 80% of farmers with access to irrigation secure water through community organizations (FRH 2011). Urban and rural communities have performed a crucial role in developing the hydraulic infrastructure and organizational capacity to manage and distribute potable and irrigation water. Yet, the state and other actors have also made significant contributions. Thus, water has been coproduced in Ecuador, with several organized actors providing important inputs.

Here, I will not seek to provide a detailed account of water coproduction in Ecuador, including the considerable variation that exists at the local level. Rather, I will draw out broad patterns to highlight important issues that are either underdeveloped or overlooked in the existing literature. The section will focus on three main issues: a) the history and ubiquity of coproduction b) the form of state-society relations that emerge through the process and c) the connection between coproduction, commodification and accumulation. Before delving into these issues, I will briefly outline the empirical research upon which this paper draws.

Methodology

The case is based on fieldwork I have undertaken in Ecuador since 2015.[19] The basic aim of this research is to understand the roots and significance of the political struggle over the construction of the new water regime in the country and explore the potential of this regime to promote the sustainable and equitable distribution of water.[20] Data collated during fieldwork

[18] In this article, I use the term 'water associations' to refer to the diverse group of community-based organisations that manage the distribution of potable and irrigation water in Ecuador at the local level.
[19] I have conducted four fieldwork trips during this period, building on exploratory research I undertook between 2009 and 2011.
[20] The struggle started during the presidency of Rafael Correa (2007-17) and has continued under his predecessor Lenin Moreno (2017-), albeit in a different form.

fall into four main categories: i) interviews ii) legal documentation and legislative reports iii) government reports, official data and non-governmental reports and iv) local and national newspaper archives. In addition, I participated in community meetings, visited water systems, and observed water-related protests.

To explore variation in water management and state-society relations at the local level, I conducted interviews with representatives of water associations in five highland and two coastal provinces.[21] These associations, which include organisations that manage potable and irrigation water, are located in rural areas where access to water remains a significant challenge.[22] They range in size and sophistication, with the smallest comprising a few hundred users and the largest over 10,000. In addition, I interviewed representatives of local governments, state bureaucracies, public water companies, non-governmental organisations and indigenous and peasant movements. I also interviewed two legislators who were involved in drafting the new water law.

To analyse the legal framework and legislative process, I collated legal documentation and legislative reports from the National Assembly in Quito, including historical water legislation and a complete set of legislative proposals and debates related to the new water law. Government reports and official data provided insight into water policies, public investment, and water distribution. Non-governmental organisation reports on water infrastructure, management and legislation offered additional insights. Several excellent studies produced by the *Foro de los Recursos Hídricos* in Quito were particularly helpful.[23]

I collated press reports related to water management, infrastructure, policies and protests from the 1960s, including reports from the local and national newspaper archives.[24] The reports enabled me to explore the historical evolution of water laws, policies and organisations and secure additional historical and contemporary evidence of water coproduction. I was also able to triangulate information I derived from interviews and other sources through local and national newspaper reports.

[21] Broadly speaking, mainland Ecuador is divided into three geographic zones: i) the coastal Pacific region; ii) the highland Andean region; and iii) the lowland Amazonian region. Today, the national population is around 17 million, the bulk of which is concentrated in the coastal and highland regions. Water coproduction is strongest in the Andean region but also evident in some coastal provinces.

[22] I selected water associations to ensure variation in size, location, composition and orientation, but I made no attempt to select a representative sample of the total universe of association in Ecuador, which is estimated to surpass 10,000.

[23] The *Foro de los Recursos Hídricos* also helped me coordinate my fieldwork. I would particularly like to thank Carlos Zambrano for his tremendous help and insight.

[24] I also draw on online newspaper archives. In this paper, I mark these sources with an asterisk.

History and ubiquity

Water coproduction has long roots in Ecuador. Decades before structural adjustment and neoliberal reform reduced the state's capacity to provide public goods and services, communities started to mobilize and form alliances to access water. The process gathered pace in the 1960s and 1970s as the state started to take on a more active role in the process of development and land reform accelerated the dissolution of the traditional hacienda complex, which transformed water rights and created space for community organization in rural areas. Under the hacienda system, which remained broadly intact after the end of the colonial period in the early 1800s, water rights were embedded in traditional peasant-patron relations and mediated at the local level. Land was the main mechanism through which landowning elites dominated and exploited peasant families and communities. However, water was another crucial factor as it was fundamental to the reproduction of the peasant household and economy. The rupture of the hacienda complex reduced peasant reliance on the landowning elite to secure access to water and created greater space for communal organization. Within this context, rural communities increasingly turned to the state to secure water rights and develop water infrastructure. Concurrently, urban communities, which swelled through rapid rural-urban migration, also started to mobilize to access water, especially those located on the largely informal outskirts of rapidly expanding towns and cities, which were outside the reach of public water systems.

The timing and details varied from case to case, but a general pattern of coproduction started to emerge: communities contributed labour and finance while state agencies and local governments provided raw materials, technical assistance, and contributed to overall construction costs.[25] A report in the local highland newspaper, *El Espectador*, gives a glimpse of this process in the early 1970s.

> Community members of Ilapo are holding a *minga* to build a canal to hold pipes for a potable water system that will benefit more than 10,000 inhabitants…the communities have organized a consortium…each family within the consortium is contributing a total of 300 sucres, paid in instalments, to develop the project which will provide drinking water for the inhabitants of Ilapo and will cost approximately 3 million

[25] In some cases, public water companies also made important contributions, especially in the southern highland city of Cuenca where the public water utility, ETAPA, has a long history of working with water associations in rural and urban areas. While collaborations between the public water firm and community water systems have borne fruit in some cases, they have created tensions in others, largely over issues related to urbanisation and autonomy.

> sucres…the provincial government has provided materials to connect to the water sources.[26]

Notably, the communities and government were not the only actors involved in the project. The newspaper reports that *Caritas*, an international non-government organization linked to the Catholic Church, provided pipes and accessories and *Misión Andina*, a non-governmental organization connected to the United Nations and other multilateral institutions, supplied technical support, transport, and materials.[27] Hence, in this case, potable water was coproduced through the communities, local government and non-governmental organizations.

The newspaper report notes that the communities were to manage the water system after it was constructed, which was the common pattern in the highland region, both for potable and irrigation water.[28] Communities therefore not only performed important roles in constructing water systems but in developing the organizational capacity to manage and sustain them. Water legislation introduced in the 1970s provided a legal basis for water associations and promoted grassroots participation in water management.[29] Thus, communal water organization was promoted from 'above' as well as driven from 'below'.

The balance between state and community participation in the coproduction of water shifted in the 1980s and 1990s as the state reduced water regulation and investment under structural adjustment and neoliberal reform. Water associations proliferated as the possibility of the state bringing potable and irrigation water to poor communities became ever more remote. Faced with limited access to public funds, communities turned to multilateral organizations, overseas development agencies and non-governmental organizations to help construct or improve water systems. Communities continued to provide major contributions through labour and finance. However, this diverse set of national and international actors supplied important inputs,

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[26] *El Espectador*, 17/06/72. The '*minga*' is a collective labour practice that is deeply rooted in Andean societies. The practice, which exhibits significant variation, is based on principles of reciprocity and solidarity. Traditionally, labour is not remunerated in cash, but food, drink and festivities are provided. More recently, however, in some cases, it has approached wage labour as members of the community can opt out if they pay a penalty or hire a replacement. The *minga*, regardless of its specific form, performs a fundamental role in the construction and maintenance of water systems in the highlands, but is far less common in the coast, where wage labour is more widely used.

[27] *Misión Andina* was heavily involved in the development of water systems in the highlands from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s. The model depicted in the case described above was replicated across the highlands. Indeed, Armijos (2012, 2013) suggests that this model provided the template for the state water and sanitation agencies that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s. Hence, international actors heavily influenced water coproduction in Ecuador from its initial stages.

[28] When I visited Ilapo in August 2018 the water system was run by a water association with the support of the local government and the Spanish non-governmental organisation, Ayuda en Acción. Thus, the basic pattern established in the 1970s remains in place.

[29] The two principal pieces of legislation introduced during this period were: *Ley de Aguas* (1972) and *Ley Juntas Administradoras de Agua y Alcantarillado* (1979).

including funding, materials, machinery and technical assistance.[30] The state was not absent from this process. Water legislation provided a legal basis for the establishment of water associations and the water bureaucracy authorised access to water sources and regulated water associations. Moreover, state agencies and local governments continued to contribute and work directly with communities to construct water systems.[31] Yet, overall, the composition of coproduction changed in the 1980s and 1990s, with the state making fewer contributions.[32]

The political terrain started to shift in the late 2000s when Rafael Correa came to power and implemented a state-directed development model that broke with the neoliberal orthodoxy in several dimensions. During this period, public spending on water management and infrastructure increased, albeit from a very low base. More importantly, the government also introduced a comprehensive new water law which laid the foundation for the construction of a new water regime.[33] By primarily entrusting water management to the state and community and creating new spaces for social participation in water management, the new regime effectively formalized water coproduction, integrating water associations, local governments and state agencies into a formal unified framework. The new regime places greater emphasis on public-community collaboration and increases state regulation of water associations. The introduction of the regime came at a time when overseas development agencies, multilateral institutions and non-governmental organizations started to perform a less active role in water infrastructure and management due to local political opposition and financial constraints. However, these actors continued to provide important contributions in some cases. Over the last decade, then, the dynamics of water coproduction have shifted as the state has become a more prominent actor, especially in the bureaucratic and regulatory domains. Meanwhile, communities have continued to perform a prominent role in managing and maintaining potable and irrigation water systems, but within a more clearly defined legal and regulatory framework.

Taking a longer-term view of water coproduction in Ecuador shows that the process was well underway in the decades before structural adjustment and neoliberal reform and the general pattern established during that period was reproduced in the decades that followed. The

[30] International NGOs that made important contributions during this period include Plan International and Protos while overseas development agency support came from various countries, including Italy, Spain and Switzerland.
[31] See, for example, Armijos (2012).
[32] During this period, the state also transferred several state-operated irrigation systems to local farmers, following the general trend in Latin America. See FRH (2011).
[33] The new water law – *Ley Orgánica de Recursos Hídricos, Usos y Aprovechamiento de Agua* – is based on the 2008 constitution. The constitution entrusts the management of water to the state and community and explicitly promotes alliances between the two parties (Art. 318). The law follows the constitution but creates space for private firms to operate (see below).

constant feature has been the active involvement of communities in the construction, maintenance and operation of water systems, while the variable component has been the size and form of the contributions of state agencies, local governments, public water companies, multilateral organizations, overseas development agencies and non-governmental organizations. Hence, water coproduction has exhibited basic continuity since the 1960s and has been evident during various stages of capitalist development, including episodes of state retreat and expansion.

The fact coproduction is not limited to structural adjustment and neoliberal reform is not entirely missed in the existing literature. For example, as noted in the previous section, McMillan et al (2014) explore coproduction during the period of state expansion under Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. Still, it is typically associated with state retrenchment, especially in the Global South. Moreover, the historical roots of coproduction have been largely overlooked, which means important factors that shape contemporary processes and outcomes have been missed.

Historicizing coproduction also provides insight into the drivers of coproduction. The two factors Joshi and Moore (2004) tentatively posit – 'logistical' and 'governance' – have both been apparent in Ecuador. The basic challenge of providing potable and irrigation water to rural communities and urban peripheries encouraged the state to promote coproduction in the 1960s and 1970s. Yet, while logistical challenges are considerable in some cases, they are not extreme in most. Meanwhile, structural adjustment, neoliberal reform and economic decline reduced the state's capacity to bring potable and irrigation water to poor urban and rural communities, providing some evidence of governance drivers. However, coproduction was already firmly established by that stage, indicating that it is more deeply rooted in the process of capitalist development. Moreover, it remained a central feature of the state-directed development model that emerged after structural adjustment and neoliberal reform, showing that it does not simply fade away as state capacity increases. While this lends support to the accent their conceptualization places on the institutionalized character of coproduction, the case suggests other drivers are important. For example, community mobilization and international actors have both been crucial factors. The historical transformation of the agrarian economy was also hugely influential, showing how the dissolution of traditional institutions and the acceleration of modernization can create space for coproduction.

Taking a longer-term view of coproduction provides additional conceptual insight. The active involvement of multilateral organizations, overseas development agencies and non-

governmental organizations in water coproduction in Ecuador suggests that the Joshi and Moore (2004) formulation is too restrictive. While limiting the process to interactions between state agencies and organized citizens is appealing, the case suggests the concept should be expanded to include this diverse set of organized actors, while retaining the need for all participants to make 'substantial resource contributions' and excluding business-citizen interactions. Expanding the boundaries of coproduction to incorporate this diverse group of organizations is particularly important because the composition of actors involved in the process has a significant bearing on coproduction politics. The analysis presented in the next section highlights this point.

Engagement and autonomy

Coproduction reconfigures state-society relations and creates new political subjects and relations. In doing so, it generates political tensions and creates new political opportunities, both at the national and local level. What explains its capacity to create tension and drive change? The answer partly lies in its tendency to promote engagement with and autonomy from the state. While Mitlin (2008) pointed toward this tendency a decade ago, its roots and implications have not been fully explored in the coproduction literature. Below, I will highlight two aspects that warrant particular attention.

The first dimension concerns the form, amount and frequency of contributions to coproduction. Here, the active role rural and urban communities have performed in developing potable and irrigation water systems in Ecuador is especially important. The general process – as explained above – has involved communities contributing labour and finance to the construction, maintenance and management of water systems. Thus, rural and urban communities have made significant resource contributions over the long-term which has given them a strong sense of ownership and control.

The ongoing struggle over the construction and implementation of the new water regime illustrates the political salience of this aspect of water coproduction. Faced with the prospect of greater state regulation and control, water associations have resisted by highlighting the actors involved in the construction of water systems. Yaku Perez Guartambel, the leader of a coalition of community water systems in the southern highlands and president of the highland indigenous movement, *Ecuarunari*, makes this point forcefully:

> Was it the Correa government or the Secretary of Water or the hundreds and thousands of *mingueros* who organized through water to construct community systems?[34]

There is considerable evidence to support his claims. The representatives of the highland water organizations I interviewed all stressed this point, providing vivid accounts of the efforts and sacrifices community members of the past and present have made to construct, manage and maintain water systems. For example, the president of a water association in Chimborazo explained how the communities integrated into the organization recently constructed a new irrigation system:

> We used our own labour power…we organized a *minga* with the participation of men, women and children…to build the system. We carried gravel, sand and cement on our backs and sometimes on animals…this process lasted three years, all of it based on participation in the *minga.*

Newspaper archives, as indicated in the previous section, provide additional evidence. For example, an article in the daily newspaper *El Comercio* in the early 1970s reports:

> Five hundred and twenty-nine kilometres of irrigation channels and eighty-three kilometres of access routes have been constructed in the country through the system of communitarian work called the *minga.*[35]

These sources highlight the considerable amount of labour power communities have contributed to the construction of water infrastructure. Through these physical endeavours, collective identities, memories and practices have emerged which have created a heightened sense of communal ownership and control. This highlights a crucial point about coproduction: the form as well the amount of resource contribution matter. The case also shows the frequency of contributions is important, with communities being actively involved in the maintenance and management of water systems over the long-term. Together, these factors have generated a strong basis for autonomy, which has created opportunities for communities to carve out space for control over local resources, develop alternative forms of local level organization, and renegotiate their relationship with the state.[36]

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[34] *El Mercurio,* 06/07/16* *Mingueros* refers to people who participate in the collective labour practice the *minga* (see above).

[35] *El Comercio* 28/02/72.

[36] For a recent important contribution to autonomy debates, see Dinerstein (2015), who imaginatively conceptualises autonomy as the 'art of organising hope'.

The composition of actors involved in coproduction also had a significant bearing on this process. The participation of overseas development agencies, multilateral institutions and non-government organizations in water coproduction reduced the reliance of communities on the state and increased space for them to develop their autonomous organizational capacity, especially during structural adjustment and neoliberal reform in the 1980s and 1990s. With cash-strapped state agencies and local governments contributing less funding, materials and technical support, communities reduced their engagement with the state and strengthened their relationships with non-state actors. In most cases, these actors actively promoted communal control of water systems, which gave rural and urban communities additional impetus and resources to develop their autonomous capacity. During this period, the bureaucratic and regulatory capacity of the state also diminished, which reduced interactions between water associations and state officials. Hence, when the Correa government attempted to increase state regulation and control of water its plans were met with fierce opposition from communities who sought to protect the autonomous spaces they had constructed during earlier phases of coproduction. Identifying the actors involved in coproduction and the form, amount and frequency of their contributions therefore provides important insights into the politics of the process.

The second issue concerns the legal, bureaucratic and political framework in which coproduction is embedded. While coproduction is generally less clearly defined than public or private approaches to public service delivery, the process is still heavily influenced by formal state structures and institutions. Here, I want to highlight the important role this plays in mediating the relationship between engagement and autonomy and show how coproduction is linked to broader processes of political change.

The legislative process behind the construction of the new water regime in Ecuador offers a window into these issues.[37] To kick-start the process, two proposals were presented, one from the national government, and another from the indigenous movement. The two proposals, which provided the foundation for subsequent debates within the legislature, offered alternative visions of water governance and management. Whereas the government proposal sought to

[37] The 2008 constitution pronounced that a new water law must be introduced within twelve months of the constitution coming into effect. Eleven months later, the executive branch of the Correa government and Pachakutik, the political arm of the national indigenous movement, CONAIE, submitted separate proposals to the National Assembly. Five years later, following widespread protests, national consultation and intense political struggle, the new water law was introduced. While the final version of the law accommodated some of the demands of social movements and water associations, it remained within the spirit of the original government proposal, particularly in relation the centralization of power within state agencies.

centralize decision making within state agencies, the indigenous proposal aimed to protect the autonomy of water associations and carve out space for broad social participation in the design and implementation of water laws and policies. Viewed through the lens of coproduction, the indigenous proposal provided a framework to assuage the tension between engagement and autonomy by giving water associations and social movements the institutional space to influence the legal and legislative process. Meanwhile, the government proposal exacerbated this tension by attempting to limit the decision-making capacity of water associations and incorporate them into a centralized, state-centric bureaucratic and regulatory framework.[38]

This cursory look at these two legislative proposals indicates two important features of coproduction. First, it shows how formal state structures and institutions can aggravate or assuage political tensions embedded within coproduction. Thus, analytical attention must be paid to this broader domain as well as the narrower process of coproduction. Second, it illustrates how coproduction creates political tensions and struggles that can be refracted on to formal state structures and institutions, highlighting the importance of exploring the wider implications of the process and not reducing it to the delivery of public goods and services. Hence, coproduction can trigger processes of political change that shape the evolution and structure of the state. The case suggests that while the state 'imperfections' or 'incompleteness' that Joshi and Moore (2004) highlight are important in the early phases of coproduction the processes that emerge in response to these limitations can change the development path of the state. This provides additional insight into the tension in the drivers of coproduction highlighted in the previous section. That is, while coproduction might initially emerge partly because of state failures, it can change the trajectory of the state, which means that it will not necessarily fade away if state capacity develops.

The broader tension between engagement and autonomy discussed in this section sheds further light on the challenges grassroots organizations and social movements confront when participating in coproduction. Water associations in Ecuador have faced similar dilemmas to the ones reported by Mitlin (2008) and McMillan et al (2014). The comparison with Venezuela under Hugo Chavez is particularly interesting as Ecuador experienced a similar, if less radical, process of political change under Rafael Correa. However, there were important differences that shaped the dynamics of coproduction. For example, while the leftist political party Correa led gained unprecedented political support, it was less dominant than the coalition of parties

[38] The proposal went against legislation introduced in the 1970s which gave significant autonomy to water associations. The lack of enforcement of this legislation in the 1980s and 1990s gave them greater *de facto* autonomy. See Armijo (2012) for a useful discussion of the evolution of the legal framework during this period.

Chavez directed. Hence, there was greater political competition in Ecuador and water associations were less integrated into a national political project.[39] Furthermore, the relative strength and autonomy of water associations and social movements in Ecuador made them less willing to align fully with Correa, especially because of his efforts to control social movements through threats, regulation and co-optation.[40] The tense and conflictive relationship between the Correa governments and social movements reduced the space for collaboration as many rural water associations have direct or indirect links with indigenous and peasant movements. Hence, political projects that seek to modify or transform power relations through expanding the reach and capacity of the state can strengthen as well as threaten coproduction. This highlights the importance of examining the legal, bureaucratic and political framework within which coproduction is embedded.[41] Considering the macroeconomic context is also crucial. I will highlight this in the next section.

Commodification and accumulation

If politics have received significant attention in the existing coproduction literature, economics have been largely ignored, especially macroeconomic factors. Part of the reason for this comes from the theoretical assumptions and approach some coproduction scholars have followed. For example, Ostrom (1996) views coproduction through the lens of orthodox microeconomics and therefore overlooks macroeconomic issues. Moreover, she adopts a methodological individualistic approach which skirts issues related to structure and power. Meanwhile, scholars who have explored the politics of coproduction have paid scant attention to the national and international economy, even if some have pointed towards the importance of economic factors. In this section, I will briefly discuss two important macroeconomic factors, commodification and accumulation, that influence the dynamics of coproduction. Relatedly, I will also highlight the need to consider the structure of the national and international economy.

Commodification is another factor that contributes to the emergence of coproduction in the Global South. Unable to access goods and services through markets, poor and marginalized communities pursue alternative avenues to satisfy their basic needs. When participating in

[39] Some of the representatives of the water associations I interviewed were enthusiastic supporters of Correa, while others were extremely hostile or rather lukewarm towards him. The desire to protect autonomy was widely expressed regardless of political orientation.
[40] See Conaghan (2015).
[41] This analysis, as suggested through the brief comparison of water coproduction in Ecuador and Venezuela presented above, should extend to the national and local political party system. For example, Fieuw and Mitlin (2018: 227-8) suggest greater local-level political competition in South Africa led to improved outcomes for communities that participated in housing coproduction.

coproduction individuals and communities therefore renegotiate their relationship with the market as well as the state.[42]

Water coproduction in Ecuador illustrates this point. Water associations provide communities with a mechanism to access and distribute water without relying on the market. Water management is based on a range of communal practices and traditions and provides a basis for the reproduction and creation of alternative forms of organisation. Some water associations have also collectively purchased high-altitude grassland – *páramo* - to conserve water sources and, in so doing, effectively removed the land from the market. Hence, coproduction performs a decommodifying function by supporting organizations that limit reliance on markets and the extension of market principles. Yet, this does not mean the associations, communities or water are outside the market. For example, rural farmers who access irrigation through water coproduction generally produce agricultural goods for the market, hence water is still integrated into national and global markets, albeit indirectly. Indeed, coproduction supports insertion into agricultural and food markets by providing farmers with access to irrigation. Meanwhile, the payment of tariffs to access water through associations encourages farmers to produce a marketable agricultural surplus and promotes capitalist agriculture. Larger potable and irrigation water associations generate sufficient resources to employ and pay staff and therefore support local markets. Thus, water coproduction in Ecuador simultaneously supports commodification and promotes decommodification.

The fact coproduction does not fully embrace the market indicates the role it can perform in restricting commodification and limiting accumulation. With grassroots organizations and social movements collaborating with the state, development agencies, and non-governmental organizations to supply public services, the opportunities for the private sector to generate profits can diminish. Tensions can emerge as national and international firms attempt to access these closed or restricted spaces.

Recent developments in Ecuador illustrate this point. While the 2008 constitution prohibits water privatization, the new water law creates space for private water firms and establishes the legal basis for the transfer of public and community potable water systems to the private sector. Some of the representatives of the water associations I interviewed expressed concern about

[42] Here, I draw loosely on Goodwin (2018a).

the possibility of this occurring, which created tension and suspicion and complicated collaboration with local governments and state agencies.

International economic structures and actors were influential in carving out space for private firms to participate directly in the new water regime. The most obvious source of pressure came from Guayaquil where Interagua, a private company which is now part of the French transnational firm Veolia, has held a long-term contract to supply drinking water to the populous city since the early 2000s. Without a clause being inserted into the law to allow private firms to provide drinking water, the firm company would have been without a legal basis. The involvement of European firms in the water sector in Ecuador is particularly salient as while the new water law was being drafted the Correa government was negotiating a free trade agreement with the European Union. Providing European firms with access to public and strategic sectors was central to the negotiations and the agreement was influential in creating space for private water firms to operate, which is consistent with the way free trade deals have been used more generally (Bakker 2010).[43] Since the signing of the free trade agreement, Veolia has formed an alliance with the public water company that supplies water to the coastal city Manta.[44] It has also signed contracts with European firms to upgrade the water system in Guayaquil.[45] Hence, the structure and dynamics of the world economy have a significant bearing on coproduction. In the Ecuadorian case, the approval of a free trade agreement with the European Union and the active involvement of multinational corporations in the water sector reduced space for the expansion of coproduction and threatened the future of existing processes.

The role grassroots organizations and social movements involved in coproduction perform in challenging the economic interests and strategies of the state is another source of tension. The clearest illustration of this in Ecuador has come through the role that water associations have performed in resisting medium and large-scale mining. Soon after the approval of the new constitution in 2008, the Correa government set about developing the nascent mining sector, actively promoting the construction of several large mines in the highlands. With mines threatening the water supplies and economic livelihoods of rural communities, rural and urban

[43] On concluding negotiations with Ecuador, the European Union declared that the agreement 'includes an ambitious deal on market access for services, establishment and government procurement.' See 'EU and Ecuador Conclude Negotiations for Trade and Development Agreement', EU Commission, 17/07/14. Press coverage of the negotiations also stress the importance of access to public services. See, for example, 'El pais llegó a consensos para negociar con la UE', *El Comercio*, 26/04/13*

[44] 'EPAM promueve su alianza estratégica con VEOLIA', *Revista de Manabí*, 14/03/17*

[45] 'Interagua firmó contrato con empresa Italiana', *Alcadia de Guayaquil*, 23/06/17*

water associations, along with indigenous and environmental movements, have mobilized to prevent their development, bringing them into direct confrontation with the state. Within this context, coproduction becomes highly problematic as water associations become wary of state support in fear of being co-opted. State-society relations become antagonistic and possibilities for collaboration dwindle as trust erodes and suspicions grow.

The case therefore shows that conflicts can emerge when the economic interests of the organisations involved in coproduction sharply diverge. Within these contexts, the kind of synergistic state-society relations highlighted by Evans (1996) and Joshi and Moore (2004) are incredibly hard to establish. The case also shows that coproduction can restrict commodification and accumulation which instils the process with additional strains and tensions. The structure and dynamics of the world economy have a significant bearing on this, with countries in the Global South coming under constant pressure to open public services to global competition, which can reduce space for coproduction. Trade agreements are one important way of securing access to these sectors for multinational corporations. More broadly, the case suggests that scholars must place coproduction within the context of a global capitalist economic system that demands perpetual expansion and recognize the unequal position countries in the Global South occupy in the world economy. Failing to do so means important constraints, tensions and implications are missed. Recognizing the role nation states perform in the process of capitalist development is also central as this has a significant bearing on state-society relations and coproduction processes.

Conclusion: towards a critical approach to coproduction analysis

Coproduction provides a useful framework to analyse how states and societies interact to deliver public goods and services in the Global South. It challenges binary thinking about capitalist development and recognizes organizational and institutional diversity. It also suggests poor and marginalized communities do not simply wait for the state to deliver public goods and services but organize and mobilize to gain access to basic services and improve their lives. Their active involvement in the process can give them greater influence over the type of public goods and services they receive which can guard against, although by no means prevent, programmes simply being imposed by the state.[46] The literature shows that this is often a conflictive process, with grassroots organizations and social movements navigating a complex political terrain and coproduction sometimes being used to exploit the poor and provide them

[46] See, for example, Alderman (forthcoming), on the tensions that can emerge when states impose development projects on communities.

with second rate services. However, it also points towards the emancipatory and transformative potential of coproduction.

In this paper, I have attempted to provide greater clarity on the problem and promise of coproduction by critically evaluating the existing literature and discussing the case of water coproduction in Ecuador. Through the analysis of this case I highlighted three points that are overlooked or underexplored in the existing scholarship. The first relates to the history and ubiquity of coproduction. I showed that coproduction is deeply rooted in Ecuador's history, becoming more prevalent from the 1960s as capitalist modernization advanced. During this period, water coproduction exhibited basic continuity. However, the composition of actors involved in the process shifted which had important implications for the politics of coproduction. The second point picked up on the first and explained how coproduction promotes autonomy from and engagement with the state and political tensions emerge around this process. The retreat of the state during structural adjustment and neoliberal reform prompted water associations to collaborate with overseas development agencies and non-governmental organizations. This reduced their reliance on the state and strengthened their autonomy. Resistance to efforts to increase state regulation of water associations under Rafael Correa was partly due to this earlier change in the dynamics of coproduction. The central point is that coproduction not only produces public goods and services but new political subjects and relations. The third point expanded on this to show that when participating in coproduction individuals and communities renegotiate their relationship with the market as well as the state. Here, I showed how water coproduction in Ecuador simultaneously supports commodification and decommodification. I also highlighted the strains and tensions that arise when private firms attempt to access sectors in which coproduction occurs and when the economic interests of the actors involved in coproduction sharply diverge.

By critically evaluating the coproduction literature and highlighting these three issues, I have attempted to lay the foundation for a critical approach to coproduction analysis. The basis of this approach is the recognition that coproduction is a historical process which occurs within an unequal capitalist global system and creates new political subjects, relations and opportunities. However, further empirical and conceptual work is required to develop a robust framework. Hence, this paper is an invitation to scholars to develop and critique the ideas I have presented and create a framework that better captures the problem and promise of coproduction.

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