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# A policy-oriented approach to co-production. The case of homestay accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers

Matteo Bassoli [a] and Francesca Campomori [b]

aDepartment of Political Science, Law, and International Studies, University of Padua, Padua, Italy;
bDepartment of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Ca Foscari Venice University, Venice, Italy

**ABSTRACT**
While co-production has become ever more crucial for contemporary public administration, there is no shared understanding on how to identify the co-producers. Drawing on a policy-oriented approach to co-production, this article develops a theoretical framework to identify policy beneficiaries and policy targets by looking at policy goals. Based on this distinction, we shed light on the different role that citizens can play in co-production, i.e., regular producers, clients, volunteers, or citizen producers. To validate this theoretical framework empirically, the article analyses different homestay-accommodation projects for refugees. Our findings will help scholars and practitioners to identify co-producers more accurately.

The concept and the phenomenon of the co-production of public services, understood as the involvement of citizens interacting with state actors in policy delivery (Steen, Brandsen, and Verschuere 2019), has gained momentum over the past two decades, raising both a practical and a scholarly interest (Alford 2014; Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017). From the practical point of view, the interest stems both from the disappointing performance of the marketization of public services and from the progressive tightening of government budgets (OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) 2011; Pestoff 2014). With regard to scholarly interest, it goes hand in hand with the shift from the paradigm of traditional Public Administration (PA) to New Public Management (NPM), and then to New Public Governance (NPG), which emphasizes the inter-organizational relationships, networks, participatory governance, as well as the engagement of citizens as co-producers in the provision of public services (Sorrentino, Sicilia, and Howlett 2018). Although the past two decades have seen the development of much literature, following the introduction to the original idea of co-production by Ostrom et al. (1978) and Parks et al. (1981), many scholars still complain about the poor and contentious formulation of this concept

(Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017; Dudau, Glennon, and Verschuere 2019; Osborne, Radnor, and Strokosch 2016; Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers 2015).

With regard to the aim of this article, we highlight two specific drawbacks in the current conceptualization of co-production and try to advance the state of the art using the theoretical lens of policy analysis and the empirical case of homestay accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers in Italy. The first drawback relates to the absence of a well-defined or shared theoretical framework for identifying the role of co-producers interacting with state actors (labelled as 'regular producers'). In other words, there is no clear answer to the question of how can we frame whether co-producer are just service users, or whether they are other actors, such as citizens, volunteers, or non-governmental partners (Sicilia et al. 2019; Alford 2002)? The second drawback concerns the empirical cases analysed in the literature of co-production. Actually, a huge number of activities have been listed and reviewed as examples of co-production, ranging from participatory budgeting to parental participation in child-care activities and to residential security measures. However, most of the examined cases build upon a mere dual relationship between a regular producer (state actor or private actor acting on behalf of state actor), and one or more lay actors (Cepiku and Giordano 2014; Pestoff 2006)-taking on the role of clients, volunteers, or citizens (Alford 2002)- who are the users of a public service. What is missing is an analysis of the co-production activity beyond the classical dichotomy 'citizen producer' *versus* 'regular producer' (Parks et al. 1981), as in the case of many co-housing experiences, such as foster care, or homestay accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers, which is the empirical study presented in this paper. In these cases, the system of relations is in fact triangular, including the regular producer, the host, and the guest: the system of co-production is therefore triadic, instead of dual.

This paper uses the case of homestay, and its triadic co-production system, in order to suggest the need for a policy-oriented approach to co-production. We believe that a policy approach is useful as it allows to overcome the vexata quaestio of the identification of co-producers interacting with state actors. In particular, analysing the differences in the policy goals of seven homestay experiences implemented in Italy, we demonstrate that the role of the host, guest, and non-state organization acting on behalf of public actor changes accordingly. The co-production structure is therefore deeply dependent on the stated policy goals.

Homestay is part of refugee reception policy often decided and implemented exclusively at local level. It consists in hosting refugees or asylum seekers in domestic facilities shared with non-refugees. This practice is usually implemented by third sector organizations (TSOs) which act on behalf of local authority and which support all the phases of this hospitality (they maintain relations both with refugees and with the host families). Homestay is conceived as temporary hospitality almost always, but the policy goals vary slightly from case to case, according to the municipalities in which they have been implemented.

We argue that the specific features of homestay, considered as a part of a public policy (refugee reception), support a re-direction of the concept of co-production for two reasons: a) As mentioned above, it helps to decouple the classical dichotomy of 'citizen producer' *versus* 'regular producer' (Parks et al. 1981), thanks to the presence of a complex triangular relationship, i.e. social workers (working on behalf of the state actor), guests (asylum seekers or refugees), and hosts (families or single persons). It thus adds clarity and better framing to the extant understandings of co-production

participants; and b) It allows the clarification of the added value of a policy-oriented approach to co-production to bridge the gap in framing the identity of co-producers.

From this point of view, the paper aims to show that the lens of public administration and service management theory, through which co-production has been mainly discussed so far (Osborne and Strokosch 2013; Osborne, Radnor, and Strokosch 2016), is not sufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the various implications of the concept. In point of fact, co-production is now a fully-fledged area of policy-making (Howlett, Kekez, and Poocharoen 2017, Nesti 2018), which means that a policy-oriented approach could complement the insights of the service management and public administration perspective in order to frame the identity and role of co-producers. Following this approach, co-production can be analysed not just as a managerial, but also as a substantive, policy tool used by governments for 'demonstrating a preference for the use of collaborative forms of governance to implement policy goals' (Howlett, Kekez, and Poocharoen 2017, 491). Co-production is, therefore, part of the implementation phase of public policy, being, however, also closely related to the designing of the policy, i.e. when the goals are set and the tools chosen. In our view, the (declared) goals of a policy, taken from official documents or from policy-makers' statements, are essential for a better understanding of the roles and relations of co-production actors, since they indicate the target group and the end beneficiaries of the policy itself. In other words, the goals indicate who is able to co-contribute to solving the problem (the target group), and who can expect an improvement of his or her condition(s) (also) as a result of the altered behaviour of the targeted groups (the end beneficiaries) (Knoepfel et al. 2010, 53–60). The goals can be wide or narrow, by which we mean that they can indicate very specific groups of end beneficiaries (narrow goals), or larger groups, including those who are not directly affected by the issue which the policy specifically aims to address (wide goals). As the analysis of the case study of homestay accommodation will show, the breadth of the goals also affects the target/beneficiary divide: the wider the goals, the more the divide between the beneficiary and the target group decreases and the target group and the beneficiaries tend to coincide. Finally, looking at policy goals from the perspective of the target groups and the end beneficiaries helps to shed more light on the classic typology of co-producer proposed by Alford (2002), which distinguishes among *clients*, *volunteers*, and *citizens*.

The structure of the paper is as follows: the next section briefly presents the state of the art of the literature on co-production and deepens our theoretical arguments for a more policy-oriented approach. The following section is conceived as a methodological note and introduces the empirical research and our focus on homestay initiatives. After this, we present our findings according to the three relevant goals identified: *migrant well-being, social inclusion, and societal change*. The penultimate section summarizes the results of the research, while, in the conclusion, we discuss the impact of our findings and present open questions for further research.

## Towards a policy-oriented approach to co-production

### The origin and development of the notion

Before proceeding with the description of the approach proposed by this paper, it is useful to provide the theoretical scenario in which co-production has grown, and which constitutes the ground for a possible advancement. It is well known that we owe

the original development of the notion of co-production to Elinor Ostrom, who argued that citizen participation is required not only in the consumption of a public service, but also in its production (Ostrom et al. 1978). Ostrom and her colleagues' argument challenged the dominant management paradigm in PA, which envisaged the government as a direct provider of services and the beneficiaries as passive recipients: to the contrary, 'public service organizations depend as much upon the community for policy implementation and service delivery as the community depended upon them' (Osborne and Strokosch 2013: 33).

Until recently co-production has been mainly discussed from the service management perspective and from the the public administration (PA) perspective. As for the former, the central idea of co-production is that services are unavoidably co-produced by *both* service staff *and* users. Neither service users, nor service providers actually choose to co-produce, since it occurs independently of whether they are aware of it or not (Osborne, Radnor, and Strokosch 2016, 641): it is involuntary and unavoidable (Strokosch and Osborne 2016, 674). Co-production is thus a core component of service delivery (Osborne and Strokosch 2013; Sicilia et al. 2019).As for the PA perspective, the old model of PA was reformed by the New Public Management (NPM), as a result of the development of the concept and practice of co-production. The NPM highlighted the market orientation as a central organizational value, together with the focus on performance and on contracting in and out (Sicilia et al. 2019). In this view, the population are framed as *consumers* or as the *customers* of public services, entitled to exercise the choice between the various providers of publicly-financed services (Pestoff 2012). In the 1990s, the NPM reforms revealed its limits in relations to governance and to the loss of control and expertise on the part of the state (Lévesque 2013). The development of the New Public Governance (NPG) model, which inaugurated a renewed interest of scholars and practitioners in co-production, took place at that time, and its key characterizing arrangements are inter-agency co-operation, partnership with non-governmental agencies, de-centralization, and a central role for users as co-producers in the delivery phase of services (Fledderus 2015). In this model, citizens assume a more active role as the *co-producers* of 'some or many of the services they expect, demand or even depend upon' (Pestoff 2012, 1105).

## The vexata quaestio of the co-producers

The academic literature has dealt at length with the identity of co-producers, without reaching any agreement on the process to identify co-producers or their types. The discussion partly concerns 'regular co-producers' (i.e. government professionals), but, above all, it concerns 'lay actors', i.e. people who participate voluntarily (Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017; Sorrentino, Sicilia, and Howlett 2018). For the first type of actor, the direct and exclusive mention of public agents or of a public authority can actually be found only in the oldest definitions of co-production (Brudney and gland 1983; Levine and Fisher 1984; Parks et al. 1981; Whitaker 1980). Recently, however, there has been a general agreement on the role which the private sector plays in co-production (Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017, 769); i.e. whenever the private sector (either profit or non-profit) provides services on behalf of a public agency, its employees are 'regular producers'.

For the second type of actor, 'lay actors', scholars have produced a variety of typologies. Among others, some scholars have identified different types of consumers based upon the nature of the inputs provided by the citizens and the public agents in the co-production process: Ostrom and colleagues (Parks et al. 1981, 1002) distinguish those cases in which the inputs are substituted from those in which they are interdependent.[1] In their understanding, only the latter case is co-production. Indeed, there are many cases of this kind: educational relationships (Bifulco and Ladd 2006), vocational training programmes (Alford 2002, 2009), and any social service provision (Strokosch and Osborne 2016). Other scholars have a wider approach (Alford 2009, 2014; Musso, Young, and Thom 2019) that encompasses other 'services' in which beneficiaries can substitute professional service provider, such as filling in postal codes on letters and accurately filing tax forms (Alford 2009). Overall, this distinction is intertwined with the specific output envisaged by the policy.

Another well-known typology is that of Alford (2002, 2009), which we adopt in our analysis on homestay. He convincingly divides consumer producers into three types: *clients*, *citizens*, and *volunteers*.

> *Clients* include not only those who pay for a services such a mass transit commuters, but also, and more important, those who receive services without paying directly from them, such as Social Security recipients. [...] [*Volunteers*] provide work inputs to the organization, albeit on a voluntary rather than a purchased basis, without necessarily consuming them. [...]. A *citizen* is part of a collective 'we', who express their aspirations through the manifold 'voice' mechanisms (Hirschman 1970), such as voting and other forms of political participations. [...]. Clients have an apparently more direct material interest in their relationship with the organization, in that they receive private value in the form of goods or services from it. [...] Volunteers, however, do not receive goods or services from the government agency to which they contribute as part of their volunteering relationship. [...] Finally, although citizens receive value from government organizations, they do so collectively. For any individual citizen, there is no direct nexus between his or her coproduction and the value he or she receives from government. *(Alford 2002, 33–34)*

This typology formally rests on the motives for co-production, i.e. on the original intent that the actors play in providing their inputs (material interest, volunteering, and collective interest). However, Alford is not referring to the subjective understanding of the actor role, but implicitly to the organizational factors constraining interests. This results in the classification being institution-driven, rather than subject-driven. It is therefore reasonable to link this classification to the policy goal of a service, as this paper suggests. Indeed, the lens of policy goals allows us to explain this classification in more abstract terms, explicitly linking the roles to the structure of the interests at stake. In other words, as anticipated in the introduction, using a policy approach in the analysis of the co-production dynamics supports a clarification in how to frame the role of lay actors.

### *Policy actors and policy goals: a new framework for co-production*

Among the very few proposals put forward by scholars to analyse co-production through the policy studies approach, that of Howlett, Kekez, and Poocharoen (2017) argues that, in a situation in which the policy implications and challenges of promoting co-produced activities are high (such as elderly care), research on co-production 'can benefit from the insights of studies into policy tool use and implementation' (*ibidem*, 490). These scholars suggest analysing co-production as a policy instrument that

governments use for making explicit their preferences in adopting collaborative forms of governance in the implementation of their policy goals. Moreover, they argue that policy theory can help to identify which tools can attain these goals and how, thus improving the knowledge of the way in which co-production works, and of the conditions which enable its success (Howlett, Kekez, and Poocharoen 2017, 497).

We welcome the idea on co-production as a policy tool, but, since our aim is to bring analytical clarity to the role of co-producers, we propose to analyse co-production also in a broader analytical framework starting from the assumption that public policies are solutions to collective problems, which envisage the activation of public actors to tackle them. From this perspective, the first phase of the policy cycle, i.e. the problem-setting, is crucial to guide policy-makers in adopting specific policy goals and choosing policy instruments accordingly. The metaphor of the basic triangle of political actors proposed by Knoepfel et al. (2010) provides a useful framework for identifying the actors concerned by means of the collective problem at stake: this framework is extremely valuable to link policy analysis to the concept of co-production. Considering this metaphor (Figure 1), the three points of the triangle correspond respectively to the *political-administrative authorities*, which design and implement the policy (the top vertex of the triangle), the *targets groups*, and the *end beneficiaries*.

The policy-makers at the top of the triangle provide a 'political definition of the collective problem' (the right-hand side). In doing so, they also directly identify the people who can take advantage from the intervention since they experience the negative effect of the problem the most (the end beneficiaries, bottom-right vertex). The end-beneficiaries may not be able to solve the problem on their own, or they may
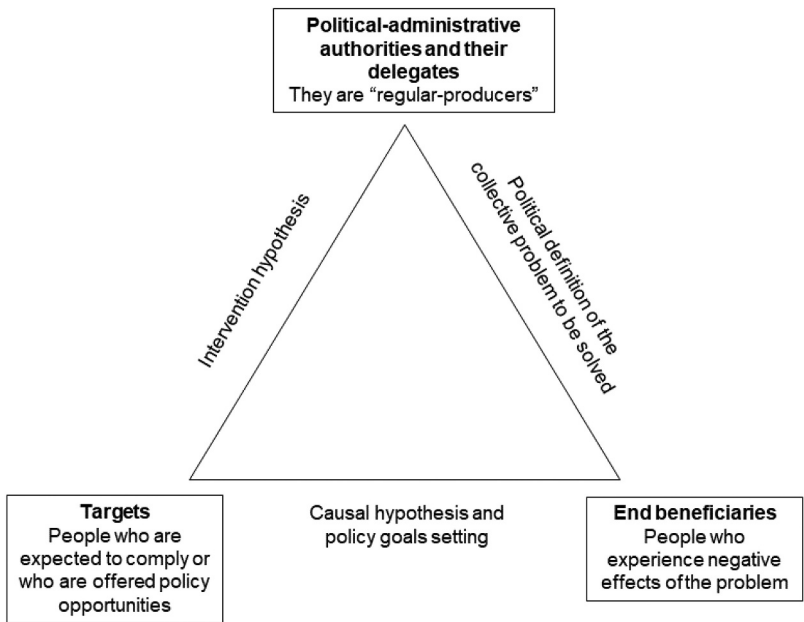


Figure 1. The triangle of policy makers and connection with co-production. **Source**: adapted from (Knoepfel et al. 2010, 57).

be hard to reach, and thus policy-makers should elaborate a *causal hypothesis* (bottom side) to respond to the issue. They set the policy goals of the intervention which should improve the situation, and identify the target groups (bottom-left vertex): 'Target populations are the persons, groups, or firms selected for behavioural change by public policy initiatives such as statues (*sic*), agency guidelines, or operational programmes. These are the people who are expected to comply with policy directives or who are offered policy opportunities' (Schneider and Ingram 1993, 334). Moreover, policy-makers also elaborate an *intervention hypothesis* (left-hand side) in order to define the specific methods of government action designed to influence the behaviour and the action of the designated target groups. The target groups can be compelled to do something in the direction of political aims (e.g. through the imposition of obligations), or they can be convinced through incentives (be they material or symbolic). It is important to underline that the action or the change(s) in the behaviour of the target groups can also be beneficial to the target group. Thus, they can simultaneously hold both the position of the targets and that of the beneficiaries of an intervention (for example, an intervention that prohibits smoking indoors brings a benefit to non-smokers, but also to the health of smokers).

How does this approach relate to co-production? From the perspective of co-production, political-administrative authorities can be interpreted as the *regular producers* of a policy intervention (Figure 1), specifying that private sector and third sector associations (TSOs) acting on behalf of the government (funded by it), are themselves regular producers (for example, when a TSO manages a welfare service such as elderly care or early childhood education, or a reception centre for asylum seekers, or – in relation to homestay – a service for hosting refugees in private accommodation) (Strokosch and Osborne 2016; Sorrentino, Sicilia, and Howlett 2018). The target group and the beneficiaries instead represent the portion of the population that could co-produce a public service (in the case of homestay, they could be both hosts and guests). Actually, the beneficiaries may or may not be co-producers, depending on the collective problem at stake. Nevertheless, within the realm of public-service provision, the end-beneficiaries are also co-producers: for example, in the case of homestay, the guests always co-produce the housing service that they receive, just as students co-produce their own learning at school. The policy goals embedded in the political definition of the collective problem to be solved also indicate the type/identity of co-producer, that is, if they are client, volunteer, or citizen co-producers (Alford 2002).

The first step of our framework is to consider the breadth of the policy goals, in order to establish whether the policy addresses just specific groups (who tend to be the sole beneficiaries), or the general citizenry (which means that policy goals include many beneficiaries, thus having an impact upon society as a whole). Policy goals can be placed in a continuum between narrow and broad based on the number of beneficiaries. In our understanding policy goals are narrow when the beneficiaries are few, while broad when they are many, up to virtually the entire population.

Departing from the analysis of policy goals, the second step consists in establishing the identity of co-producers, according to Alford (2002) typology. In narrow policy goals (Table 1, first column), when the targets are also the policy beneficiaries, we call them 'clients' because they have an individual interest at stake, while other targets who are not the beneficiaries are called 'regular co-producers' because they do not share any personal or ideal interest with the goal, and therefore receive other forms of compensation. If the policy goal is broader (Table 1, second column), then the distinction

**Table 1.** Typology.

|                          | Narrow policy goal          | Broad policy goal             |
| ------------------------ | --------------------------- | ----------------------------- |
| Target is also beneficiary | Client (consumer) producer  | Citizen (consumer) producer   |
| Target is not beneficiary  | Regular producer            | Volunteer (consumer) producer |

between targets and beneficiaries gives rise to the distinction between volunteers (target group *but not* beneficiaries) and citizens (target group *and* beneficiaries).

In this paper, as we have already written, the case of homestay accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers is used as an example of co-production and analysed with the interpretative lens just explained. We will therefore try to make explicit the link between the triangle of policy actors, with the aim of understanding the dynamics of the public policies understood as hypotheses on how to solve public problems, and the structure, and roles of co-production. Each homestay experience will therefore be analysed identifying the policy goal and its breadth, clarifying with examples the different roles played by guests and hosts in the homestay experiences.

## The policy service of homestay for refugees in Italy

To explore and describe the relevance of a policy-oriented approach to co-production, we focus on a specific policy service, which is publicly driven, involves different actors, and directly envisages co-production. Homestay is also known as home accommodation (Merikoski 2021), domestic hospitality (Bassoli and Oggioni 2017; Boccagni and Giudici 2021), or private hospitality (Monforte, Maestri, and D'Halluin 2021), i.e. refugees (temporarily) being hosted by residents. In general, homestay accommodation works as follows: some refugees who are being hosted in collective accommodation are offered the possibility of spending six months with a local family or being hosted by a single person. The general aim is that staying in a family can facilitate the integration process and at the same time mitigate the prejudice(s) of the host society. As we will see, however, within this general objective, there are many different nuances.

The choice of homestay as a case study for contributing to the theoretical debate on co-production was driven by two features: the presence of a triadic structure (civil servant, host, and guest) and the presence of a multiplicity of policy goals across cases. A similar triadic system based upon public authority and at least two sets of private citizens can also be found in tutoring programmes (tutors and tutored), the education of minors (parents and minors), and foster care (foster parents and minors), etc. However, the other systems face two fundamental limits: on the one hand, they fail to contribute to the literature with novel empirical evidence, while, on the other, they share the same goal from case to case, given the focus on the education of the minors. In contrast, homestay schemes display differences in their actual implementation (economic contribution or length of stay) and in their goals. First, homestay may serve as a lodging option to increase the housing stock (Babels 2019). Second, it is believed that a (temporary) stay of refugees in a family could enable the building of useful networks for both the labour market and the social inclusion of migrants (Marchetti 2018). Third, hosts could contribute to reducing people's prejudices and the fears relating to immigration and refugees thereby generating trust (Campomori and Feraco 2018). All these different aspects co-exist and can serve as policy goals, in line with the research frame. Regarding co-production, it is important to note that

homestay directly involves both state and non state actors in the delivery of the service. Moreover, homestay requires the activation of the refugees to implement the policy (Mazzei et al. 2020; Strokosch and Osborne 2016), who could be defined, preliminarily, as client co-producers, following Alford's typology (Alford 2002). However, homestay also presents a third party (the host), which makes this case particularly useful both for demonstrating the potential confusion about the role of the actors involved in co-production and for indicating how a policy perspective can help to solve it.

With regard to the empirical case, in Italy, from 2014 to 2018, seven homestay projects were launched and financed by the Ministry of Home Affairs (Marchetti 2018). Homestay occurred mainly within the Italian Reception and Integration System (*Sistema Accoglienza Integrazione*) (SAI), previously called the *Sistema di protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati* (SPRAR). Only in one case was the homestay activated in a government-led Emergency Reception Centre (*Centri di accoglienza straordinaria*) (CAS). In both cases, the commissioning approach implemented by national level leaves the local level with the possibility of identifying specific goals within the realm of asylum-seeker reception. The SAI (former SPRAR) system has centrally defined quality standards and national co-ordination, but the implementation is managed by the local authorities, leaving wide room of manoeuvre. Furthermore, participation in this system by the municipalities is voluntary. Likewise, local authorities which join the SAI network can voluntarily decide whether or not to activate homestay. Where it is activated, the actual management of the reception facilities is delegated to those third sector organizations which manage the entire reception and integration process within the SAIs. The CAS centres are located in the various territories according to a binding-decision of the government, which the municipalities cannot oppose. These centres are managed by the prefectures, but the actual implementation of reception activities is delegated to third sector organizations or even to private organizations (such as hotel managers), competing in a local tender. The expected quality standards (imposed upon the organizations to which the service is outsourced) are much lower than the SAI system and the underlying goal is the provision of a list of specific means of support (lodging, food, and judicial). The homestay was activated in the CAS system only in the case of Asti (a city in Piedmont). The *Regioni* (Regions) have no formal role in the refugee reception system, and do not in any way regulate homestay projects, which are therefore mainly configured within a relationship between a municipality and the third sector organization that manages the SAI project on its behalf.

## Methods

We follow Ashworth, McDermott and Currie's (2019) guiding principles to present our methods, and focus on the rationale of the qualitative choice, sampling frame, data collection, and analysis. Our research consists of an interpretive comparative study based upon interviews and secondary data. The article is part of wider research on homestay across Europe (Appendix 2), although, here, we focus only on homestay in Italy for the sake of comparability. We used five cases in the first round (July 2017-January 2018) and three cases in the second round (August 2018-November 2018) (Table 2). We believe that in-depth qualitative research is the most appropriate methodology due to the lack of previous empirical research in the field (Bassoli and Luccioni 2020; CISR 2022) and the nature of the research question (Agranoff and

**Table 2.** Research design.

| | First round | Second round |
|---|---|---|
| Data collection | July 2017 - February 2018 | August 2018 - February 2020 |
| Focus | Homestay as co-production | Connection between policy goal and co-production roles |
| Sample | Asti, Bologna, Fermo, Milan, Parma | Bologna, Ferrara, Fidenza |
| Aim | Theory building | Theory elaboration |

Radin 1991). The two rounds occurred within a two-year period along with the ongoing theorizing process, which was discussed during two conferences (Author 1 and Author 2, 2018; 2019). The research is focused on the fragmented experiences of homestay in Italy. The first round was an open-ended, inductive, and exploratory study aimed at building a better conceptualization of this experience as a co-production tool. Given the lack of policy documents, we used interviews as the primary methodology. The second round aimed at theory confirmation. In this round, we used a deductive approach to identify clearly the goals and the role(s) that the guests and hosts were expected to play.

## Sampling frame and data collection

With regard to the sampling frame, the chosen cases represent a purposive, theoretically-driven sample (see Table 2). The sampling frame satisfies two theory-driven and replication criteria. Departing from the list of all the existing cases available in the period 2017–2018, we used three sampling criteria for our research: public initiative, ongoing activities, and comparability (Appendix 1). According to the existent literature (Bassoli and Luccioni 2020),[2] the eligible public experiences are embedded in different institutional contexts. We thus concentrate solely on the Italian institutional context, with its variety of co-production schemes based on different policy goals.

With regard to our positioning, we are practitioners and scholars of migration policy. We have been conducting research and studies in the field of homestay since 2015. Author A is the founder and president of a TSO working in the field, and was a co-researcher of a national project mapping homestay practices. Author B served as a member of a scientific board of a national project addressing the impact of homestay practice in five different municipalities. Consequently, we do not have a naïve or neutral perspective on this practice. We have prior knowledge of the field, and are aware of the depth of some of the experiences that we have studied in previous research projects. For this reason, the interview strategy was biased to optimize the efforts to address hidden aspects and to clarify uncertain issues.

In order to study homestay as a case of co-production, we used two complementary methods: secondary documentation analysis, and semi-structured interviews. First, we analysed the literature on this policy. The analysis considered various types of documentation: scholarly articles, dissertations, institutional documentation, project-related documents, and other grey literature (Conn et al. 2003). The documentation gathered was extremely diversified and heterogeneous. While reports have been collected on almost all experiences, the grey literature and dissertations have mainly focused on some associations. Little evidence has emerged about policy goals, targets,

and beneficiaries, given the relative absence of policy studies in this sector (Bassoli and Luccioni 2020). The second method implemented was semi-structured interviews. The reason for this selection has to be traced back to the lack of clear policy goals in the official documentation. In this stage, 23 semi-structured interviews were conducted with project managers, civil servants, scholars, or policy-makers from all the experiences mapped. The interviews were conducted between July 2017 and February 2020. In them, we identified two actors for each practice: the project manager (usually belonging to the third sector) and the most relevant administrative position from the public authority. We successfully followed this approach in five out of the seven cases, but were unable to contact the civil servant responsible for Asti or the project manager for Fermo. We also included the interviews with five additional experts: a high rank position of the Italian national protection system, the president of a national TSO working in the field, a local branch of the same TSO, and two French scholars who are experts on homestay. The semi-structured interviews covered various aspects of the subject of study and focused on three intertwined aspects: the process, the recipient, and the relationship between the public institution and the private sector (Appendix 2).

## Coding

The corpus produced from the documentation was coded separately by the authors and later discussed in order to produce an intersubjective agreement on the policy goals, policy targets, and policy beneficiaries. Importantly, the post-coding process was theory-informed and relatively narrow (Bryman and Cramer 2004). In the first round, the cases were analysed in order to ascertain the policy features. Themes such as multilevel governance, policy actors, and political support were identified (Table 3, column

Table 3. The route from initial codes to reported findings.

| Final Codes - First round | Comment on Code Evolution | Definitive codes - Second round | Thematic Findings |
|---|---|---|---|
| Project aim | No change in code | Project aim | **Policy goal** |
| Problem-framing | The code was included in Policy beneficiary | Policy beneficiary | **Consumer producer** |
| Political entrepreneur | The code was included in Policy inception | Policy inception | **Regular producer** |
| Project drafting | The code was included in Policy inception | Policy inception | **Regular producer** |
| Policy governance | No change in code | Policy governance | **Policy goal** |
| Citizen support | No change in code | Citizen support | **Policy goal** |
| Length | The code was included in Project features | Project features | **Policy goal** |
| Economic compensation | The code was included in Project features | Project features | **Policy goal** |
| Effects on guest | The code was included in Policy beneficiary | Policy beneficiary | **Consumer producer** |
| Effects on host | The code was re-assigned to Policy target or to Policy beneficiary | Policy beneficiary Policy target | **Consumer producer** |
| Guest's selection | The code was included in Project features | Project features | **Consumer producer** |
| Host's selection | The code was included in Project features | Project features | **Consumer producer** |
| Media coverage | The code was dropped | | |
| Role of political opposition | The code was dropped | | |

one illustrates the final codes used in the first round). The ambiguous nature of the host, in the policy process, was an unexpected finding. Given the limited number of cases, we returned to this topic with additional interviews and cases in the second round. The final coding scheme of the first round, became the initial one for the second. With regard to the policy perspective, as the research developed, some codes were dropped (media coverage, the role of political opposition), some were kept, and some were modified. In Table 3, we present the different steps to reach the findings: Column 1 illustrates the final coding of Round 1, Column 2, the evolution of the codes, Column 3, our definitive codes linked to the thematic findings of the article (see Appendix 3 for exemplary codes). Lastly, during the writing stage and the final revision of the paper, a final iteration of data analysis was implemented.

## Evidence from homestay as a case of co-production

This section aims to analyse the co-production experiences represented by homestay projects. First, we investigate the underlying policy goals of each experience as they are detected by interviews and project-related documents. Second, we present how the goals determine the target groups and the end beneficiaries, making better identification of the service co-producers possible. This analysis brings to light the fact that very similar projects are able to hide objectives which, at least partially, are different, which changes the overall understanding of the intertwined co-production activities, as well as the identities of the co-producers.

The people interviewed and the rare official documentation available describe the policy goals in different terms, depending on the places in which the homestay activities have been implemented. Three main goals emerged here: *migrant well-being*, *social inclusion*, and *societal change*. Anticipating what will become clearer in the next section, we argue that while *migrant well-being* can be defined as a narrow policy goal, while *social inclusion* and, in particular, *societal change*, signal a broader perspective. Indeed, as portrayed in Figure 2, narrow policy goals correspond to a narrow definition of the policy beneficiaries (just specific individuals): in the case of *migrant well-being*, this includes only the hosted migrants. *Social inclusion* corresponds to average policy goals in that beneficiaries are not only hosted migrants but migrants in general. Finally, *societal change's policy goal* assumes as end beneficiaries the wider population, in that the declared aim is to trigger a change of attitude in society in relation the issue of refugee welcoming and inclusion.

Table 4 gives an overview of the main features of each experience concerning the public authority (responsible actor), the implementing actor, the main policy goal, and the classification about the breadth of the goal (narrow or broad).

In the next sections, we describe each goal with the relevant experiences.

## (Short term) migrant well-being

The most diffused goal is *migrant well-being*, intended as guaranteeing accommodation for a certain time and facilitating access to local services. There is the lack of a focus or longer-term vision regarding social inclusion and the transformative goal on the part of the receiving society. This goal entails the idea of co-producing the service *with* the refugees, and considers the interdependent inputs required by the service (Parks et al. 1981, 1002). It must be said that, to some extent, this goal is present in
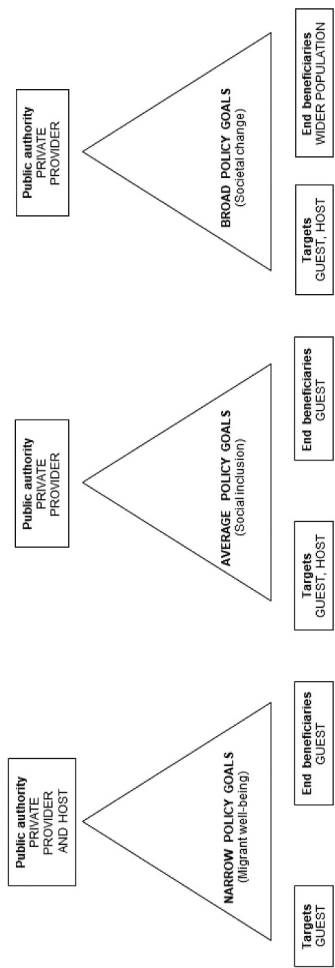
**Figure 2.** Impact of policy goals in determining target groups and beneficiaries in homestay.

**Table 4.** Overview of the main features of the seven projects of publicly-funded homestay.

| Case | Responsible public actor | Main Implementer | Main policy goal | Breadth | Policy targets | Policy beneficiary |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Asti | Prefecture (CAS) | COALA | Migrant well-being | Narrow | Guests | Guests |
| Bologna | Municipality (SPRAR) | Camelot | Migrant well-being | Narrow | Guests | Guests |
| Ferrara | Municipality (SPRAR) | | | | | |
| Fermo | Municipality (SPRAR) | RES | Migrant well-being | Narrow | Guests | Guests |
| Milan | Municipality (SPRAR) | Municipality and Farsi Prossimo | Social inclusion | Average | Guests Hosts | Guests |
| Fidenza and Parma | Municipality (SPRAR) | CIAC | Societal change | Broad | Guests Host | Wider population |

every Italian experience, but it emerges more clearly in Asti, Fermo, and Bologna/ Ferrara. The Asti case is very particular for two reasons: the homestay is included in a government-run reception centre (CAS), and the hosts are migrants themselves. This homocultural approach (i.e. hosts and guests share similar cultural background, usually they are of the same country) is deemed more appropriate for the success of domestic hospitality, addressing the well-being of the guest(s). The institutional interpretation of the hosts underlines how they are required to play the role of the regular producer. They provide a service *on behalf of* the TSO and the public authority. In the words of the project manager:

> *Homocultural projects work even better than homestay with Italian families or individuals. Migrants have an empty room and they simply 'rent' it. It might seem reductive but, actually, it is fundamental to make the project work.* (Int. As-1, Project manager).

Notwithstanding this, attention is also given to enabling the guests to gain access to Italian culture in order to understand the host society (Marchetti 2018), and sustainability is deemed fundamental, and is pursued through a substantial economic contribution to the hosts:

> *Migrant families or individuals offer themselves as hosts because we give them 400 euro per month; so it is not just for reasons of solidarity. Four hundred euro per month gives them the certainty of being sure to pay the rent and thus lowers the risk of their having a problem with housing.* (Int. As-1, Project manager).

This understanding of the host as a service provider – and thus as a regular producer – emerges, to a different extent, in all the experiences with the same narrow goal. As, for example, in the case of Fermo, the service is owned by the municipality, while the *Cooperativa Sociale Nuova Ricerca: Agenzia Res* is the operational manager of the project. According to different interviewees (Int. Pr-1, Fm-1), the municipality makes use of its territorial network of services to activate training courses, voluntary work, internships, etc., as in many other cases where guests consistently use or access local resources. This project is the most recent and the smallest project (only one couple hosting a young refugee). The guests are considered to be the beneficiaries of the project, while the hosts are the actors providing the service for a compensation of

400 euro monthly, similar to that which occurs in Asti. Attention to migrant well-being is supported by the variety of services provided along with the homestay experience.

Lastly, the case of Bologna is quite different because of its bottom-up genesis. The project was started in June 2016, after one year of political gridlock, with wide societal support (Frascaroli 2015). It is run by the Camelot Cooperative on behalf of the Municipality of Bologna, within SPRAR (System of Protection for Refugees and Asylum Seekers), similar to the Ferrara project, which began in 2018. Both projects feature an online platform that collects local families'enrolment, then evaluated by social workers. From a policy perspective, the identified goal is that of guest integration and well-being. Homestay is considered to be a proper experience for young migrants (particularly former unaccompanied minors), who are the sole recipients. Families are considered to be the best tool to (co-) provide the service, which identifies them as regular co-producers in the target groups.

> The person enters a family and mingles with its life, rhythms, territorial knowledge, and capacity of integration within the social fabric. (Int. Fe-1, Councillor).

The same migrant-centred approach emerges when discussing economic support. While economic support is present in all the cases, this case is the only one in which the funding (350 euro per month) is justified for lower-income families: the money is 'not high enough to trigger other interests for receiving migrants' (Int. Bo-5).

In all three cases, migrant well-being is presented as a narrow goal which identifies the guests both as the beneficiaries and as client co-producers, since they have a material interest in their relationship with the regular producer (i.e. the TSO that co-ordinates the project of homestay). At the same time, the hosts serve as co-producers in close co-operation with the TSO staff, thereby providing public authorities with the service required, in return for economic compensation; this is the main driver in Asti, but it also serves as a discriminating tool in Bologna, placing the host in the position of a regular producer or service provider on behalf of the public authority.

## Social inclusion

In Milan, homestay is a policy tool implemented to attain a wider policy goal, namely, the promotion of the social inclusion of all migrants. The distinction from the previous goal is theoretically clear, and traces emerged in both the interviews and the policy design. The municipality of Milan is an example of a 'Sanctuary City' i.e. a city promoting itself as a safe place for migrants (Bazurli 2019). For this reason, the policy goal is to provide social inclusion to all refugees hosted in the city *via* the exemplary cases of a few homestay experiences, rather than just meet the primary needs of those hosted. Actually, the high visibility given to the 'call to action' for recruiting families (Dazzi 2016) corresponds to a rather limited number of homestay facilities (five per year). It could indicate that the municipality aimed more to signal a change in the public discourse on refugees, rather than addressing the need of hosted migrants. This provides the case with a different target: both host and guest are the target of this homestay scheme. The Milan project features an additional specific aspect: the project was fully conceived by the municipality in close co-operation with a local TSO. Both private and public spokespersons (Int. Mi-1 and Mi-2) are ambiguous with regard to who the policy beneficiary actually is. On the one hand, they suggest that the guest is the only 'official' beneficiary, while, on the other, they also describe in detail the

additional value for the hosts, as is often the case, with volunteers contributing in the co-production effort (Alford 2002, 33).

> I find that this project provides human enrichment for families or individuals who decide to open the doors of their homes.                                      (Int. Mi-2, Project manager).

According to the institutional design of the Milan project, the guests are co-producing social inclusion both *for themselves* and *for all migrants*, which gives them the role of client co-producers, as well as volunteers. Given the high interests at stake, we consider the private interest as predominant *vis-à-vis* the collective one. At the same time, in this case, the social inclusion goal also encompasses a specific role for the hosts. Given that the hosts co-produce social inclusion for all refugees (and not just for their guests), they serve the role of volunteers with a wide public goal.

## Societal change

Lastly, the Fidenza and Parma cases are part of the same project implemented by *Centro Immigrazione Asilo e Cooperazione Internazionale* (CIAC), which is a TSO based in Parma. The project was conceived by the TSO and later discussed with the local municipalities, who decided to include homestay in their policy. It is thus not surprising that the local authorities play an ancillary role (Int. Pr-3, Fi-1). It has an explicit and declared intercultural flavour and defines both the host and the guest as the policy target (Campomori and Feraco 2018; CIAC 2015), while the beneficiaries are the whole citizenry. These experiences are based upon the assumption that the local community should play a central role in the integration of migrants. The CIAC conceives of homestay as a stepping-stone towards full the autonomy of the guests, with a clear role being played by the hosts in terms of resources, emotional support, and networks. At the same time, the hosts are identified as the beneficiaries of the same policy, thus stressing the goal of intercultural dialogue, rather than migrant well-being, in order to achieve a broader societal change.

> For us, the beneficiaries are both the families and the refugees, and we put them at the same level in our projects [...] We analyse the impact on the extended social network, gauging who is involved and how in the homestay, not just who is living together, but where they go together, who they go to visit together, looking at both sides. And then we take into account with whom both the family members and the refugees discuss the homestay, perhaps with very religious people who attend church, with work colleagues, at school, etc.                   (Int. Pr-1, Project manager).

This is the only case in which both the host and the guests are almost on an equal footing. Homestay is a concrete service implemented to reach the policy goal of societal change, and, for this reason, both the guests and the hosts are citizen co-producers. In addition to this, the wider population is also considered as an end beneficiary of the homestay experience (but not the target), since the homestay improves both social cohesion and societal change.

## Discussion

Following Howlett, Kekez, and Poocharoen (2017), we present the importance of a policy approach to co-production. Policy goals are particularly useful for analysing the co-production system as they give valuable information to identify co-producers' roles. In particular, policy goals define the targets and the beneficiaries of a policy. In

the case of the homestay, the guests (refugees), the hosts (mainly families) and the whole society may or not be identified as beneficiaries. Thereafter, we introduced seven homestay projects in Italy and shed light on the policy goals stated by decision-makers. Three main goals emerged from the interviews, and each goal was associated with the target groups and the end beneficiaries. In this section, we return to our policy-informed approach in order to clarify how it applies to the homestay policy in the cases analysed. Two points should to be highlighted in this regard: the first concerns the relationship between the target groups and the beneficiaries in the co-production structure; the second has to do with the capacity of our approach to identify the specific role of the co-producers as regular producers, clients, citizens, or volunteers.

Let us start with the first point, by using Figure 3 to explain our argument. Figure 3 plots the homestay experiences according to the policy goals: it discriminates between broad, average, and narrow goals, and between few and many beneficiaries. The experiences of Parma and Fidenza are strongly oriented towards achieving societal change and greater social cohesion (also) through the instrument of the homestay. The TSO that co-ordinates the projects on behalf of the two municipalities believes that the whole community is a beneficiary of the project. The beneficiaries are, therefore, the guests, the hosts, and the wider population. With regard to the goal of social inclusion (Milan), it is conceived as the promotion of a 'Sanctuary City', which is expected to have a direct impact on both the guests and all the refugees, but is also conceived by the regular producer as a benefit for the host, by pointing out the human enrichment provided by this experience, albeit in an indirect way. In this case, therefore, the end beneficiaries are the guests, while the targets are both the guests and the hosts. The third goal that we identified, i.e. migrant well-being, is characterized – especially in the case of Asti – by a concern mainly linked to the solution of short-term housing and the
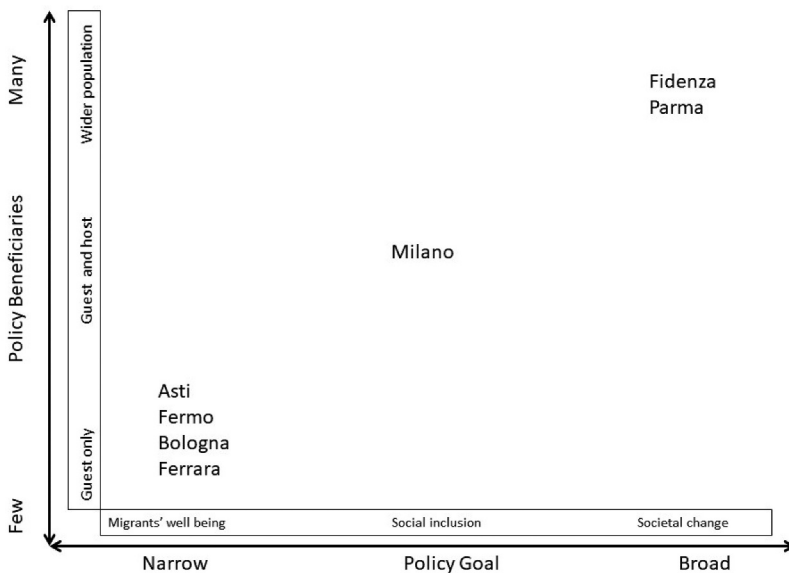


**Figure 3.** Different policy goals in homestay practices and their relation with the identification of end beneficiaries.

socio-psicological conditions of migrants. According to this policy goal, the guests are the only targets and they are the only beneficiaries of the homestay project.

With regard to the second point, the issue is the specific co-production role that the guests and the hosts play in the homestay policy. In Figure 4, we plot all the possible roles that the guest and hosts may play in co-production, even though only some are theoretically possible, because the guest is always a beneficiary (i.e. guests can neither be regular producers nor volunteers). As foreseen in Table 1, in the cities where the overriding goal is migrant well-being (Asti, Fermo, Bologna, and Ferrara), the guests play the role of client co-producers, since they receive a material incentive for their engagement with the hosts and the TSO (both playing the role of the regular producer). For the guests, the incentives correspond to the possibility of solving – even if it is only temporary – their accommodation problem, living in a safe place, and learning how to access the host society; in contrast, the hosts are regular producers who provide the service on behalf of the public authority in return for direct economic compensation. In Milan, the dominant policy goal of social inclusion assigns the role of citizen co-producers to the guests, since they are expected to co-produce social inclusion not just for themselves, but for *all* the refugees in the programme; the role assigned to the hosts by the policy goals is, instead, that of volunteers, because they 'provide work inputs to the organization, albeit voluntary rather than purchased basis, without necessarily individually consuming them' (Alford 2002, 34). Finally, the policy goal of intercultural dialogue that characterizes the Parma and Fidenza programmes assigns to both hosts and guests the role of citizen co-producers, since they are both intended to act or function not just for themselves, but also to create societal change collectively.

The distinction of roles among the co-producers is consistent with the continuum based upon the goal breadth (Figure 2). The crucial result is that the policy goals not only determine the meaning of what is happening, but also compel the co-production to spell out the policy targets and the beneficiaries, which are the core elements forging the co-production environment. As already mentioned, the hosts can be considered in
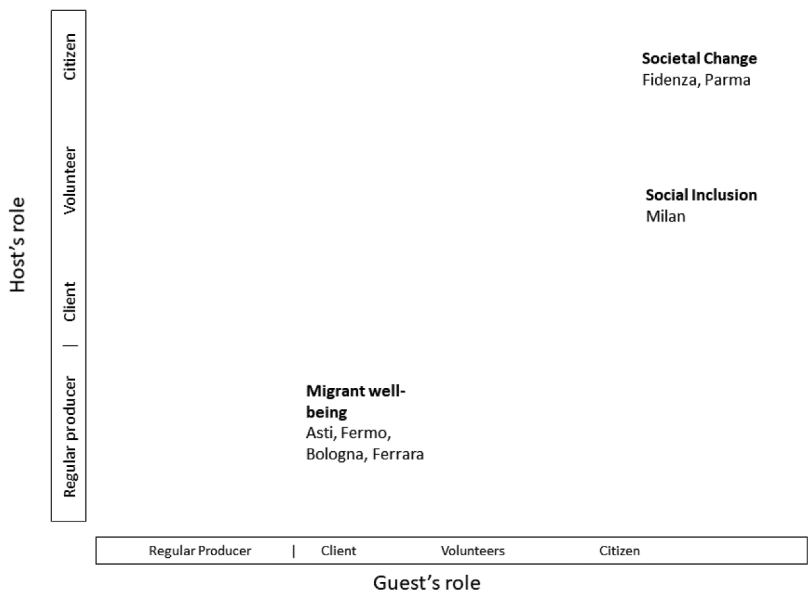


**Figure 4.** Co-Production structure.

different ways, depending on the policy which the public authority is pursuing. Hosts and guests take on different roles, depending on how the institutional actor (public or private) conceives of them, that is to say on how it presents the experience of homestay.

## Conclusion

In this article we highlight two specific drawbacks in the current conceptualization of co-production: the absence of a shared theoretical framework for identifying the role of co-producers and the lack in the literature of triadic coproduction structures. We thus try to advance the state of the art using the theoretical lens of policy analysis and the empirical case of homestay accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers in Italy. Conceiving co-production as one of the possibilities for implementing a policy allowed us to determine more fully the different roles that the actors play in this context. We have shown theoretically that focusing specifically on the policy goal is of crucial importance to determine who is co-producing what. We move beyond the classical dichotomy of 'citizen producer' *versus* 'regular producer' (Parks et al. 1981), providing, at the same time, the possibility of distinguishing clients, volunteers, and/or citizens (Alford 2002) by using a simple strategy based upon policy goals. Empirically, we have shown that there are different types of co-producers, but the same behaviour may be conceived differently in the light of the aim and the scope of the policy. Clients are the beneficiaries of narrow policy goals, because they have an individual interest at stake. Regular co-producers are the target of a policy without being beneficiaries, as they provide the service without sharing any personal or ideal interest with the goal, and thus receive other forms of compensation. Volunteers are involved in the service provision (target group) of a broad policy, as they provide support without being beneficiaries, while citizens are both the target and the end-beneficiaries of a broad policy.

Three main limitations affect this article and will be the basis of future research. The first limit is the geographic context. This analysis, with its focus on homestay in Italy, is limited. Further research is needed to expand beyond the geographical scope, which would allow us to find additional variance to test the proposed framework. Second, even if homestay has shown us the importance of this approach, it should be tested in other policies, above all, triadic ones, such as foster care of children or elderly care. Third, the focus on policy goals has broad theoretical applications, but also poor empirical precision. Long-established implementation studies suggest going/delving deeper into the cases in order to detect the differences between the announced policy goals and the empirical practices. We argue that a broader sample of countries and an approach strongly based upon qualitative interviews would provide a better under-standing of how co-production works.

## Notes

1. To exemplify when the inputs are substituted, Parks et al. (1981, 1003) use the case of municipal rubbish collectors and citizens: they may be substituted for each other in transport-ing rubbish to the curbside or to other collection locations. As for the interdependent inputs, they use the example of the interaction between teacher and students in producing education.
2. See, also, Marchetti (2018), Babels (2019), Refugees Welcome International (2022), and Khawaja and Wotherspoon (2015).

## Acknowledgements

## Disclosure statement

In accordance with Taylor & Francis policy and his ethical obligation as a researcher, Matteo Bassoli is reporting that he is the president of a third sector organization that may be remotely affected by the research reported in the enclosed paper. He has disclosed those interests fully to Taylor & Francis, and he has in place an approved plan for managing any potential conflicts arising.

## Funding

## Notes on contributors

*Matteo Bassoli* is an Associate Professor of Political Science at University of Padua; as member of the Department of Political Science, Law and International Studies (SPGI), he undertakes research on the functioning of private–public partnerships and their network structure. He has been an assistant professor at the eCampus University (2014-2019) and postdoc at Bocconi University (2007-2014). He was visiting scholar at the School of Public Policy (University College of London), Germe/Metices (Université Libre di Bruxelles), University of Essex and Cevipof – SciencesPo. He is a member of the scientific advisory board of the journal Regional Studies and Local Development. His research interests focus on local governance, political participation, cohesion policy, and social inclusion.

*Francesca Campomori* is Associate Professor at the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage (University of Venice Cà Foscari), where she teaches Social Policies and Introduction to Politics. She has a Phd in Political Science (University of Florence). From 2004 to 2010, she was a research fellow at University of Bologna, Department of Political Science. In 2008, she has been a visiting fellow at the University of Nottingham, School of Sociology and Social Policy. She is a member of the editorial advisory board of the journals Mondi Migranti and Politiche Sociali/Social Policies and of the Scientific Committee of La Rivista delle Politiche Sociali. She is also on the board of ESPANET Italia and IMISCOE. Her main research interests are in the field of immigration policy, especially in a local perspective, social policy, and social innovation. Currently, she is leading a three years INTERREG Central Europe Project called SIforREF Integrating Refugees in Society and Labour Market through Social Innovation.

## ORCID

*Matteo Bassoli* (iD) http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3601-9099
*Francesca Campomori* (iD) http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9000-2899

## Data availability statement

The data underlying this article cannot be shared publicly due to the privacy of individuals that participated in the study, which are easily recognizable given their pivotal role in the homestay experience. The data will be shared on reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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