

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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# An exploration of citizens' professionalism in coproducing social care services

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**Abstract**

Citizens' involvement in public service delivery challenges the principles of professionalism as such citizens are amateurs. However, there is little evidence of the (non)integration of these principles by citizen coproducers and how this affects professionalism in public service delivery. This article focuses on two principles of professionalism: expertise and accountability. The theoretical framework further reviews the coproduction literature on what can be expected of citizens with regard to these principles and elaborates on the concept of amateurism. The concepts of professionalism and amateurism form the framework for the analysis of citizen coproducers' identity. Empirically, this paper presents two case studies of social services in the European context. The results show that these citizen coproducers to a certain extent create a professional identity, tend to stay away from integrating accountability, and introduce elements of amateurism. The presence and guidance of public servants in coproduction can ensure accountability and streamline amateurism.

**Dutch**

De betrokkenheid van burgers bij het leveren van publieke diensten kan een uitdaging vormen voor de beginselen van professionalisme, aangezien deze burgers amateurs zijn op

Sylke Jaspers and Sanna Tuurnas made equal contributions to this article.

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het vlak van publieke dienstverlening. Er is echter weinig wetenschappelijk bewijs van de (non)integratie van professionalisme door burger coproducten en hoe dit de professionaliteit in de publieke dienstverlening beïnvloedt. Dit artikel richt zich op twee principes van professionalisme: expertise en verantwoording. Het theoretisch kader gaat in op de coproductieliteratuur, op wat van burgers verwacht kan worden met betrekking tot deze principes, en op het begrip amateurisme. De begrippen professionalisme en amateurisme vormen het kader voor de analyse van de identiteit van burger coproducten. Empirisch worden in dit artikel twee casestudies gepresenteerd van sociale diensten in de Europese context. De resultaten laten zien dat de burger coproducten tot op zekere hoogte een professionele identiteit creëren, toch afstand houden van een gevoel van verantwoordingsplicht, en terwijl elementen van amateurisme introduceren. Dit toont aan dat de aanwezigheid en begeleiding van overheidsambtenaren in coproductie deze verantwoordelijkheid voor publieke dienstverlening behoudt, en tegelijkertijd voordelige elementen van amateurisme die burgers met zich meenemen kan stroomlijnen.

### Finnish

Kansalaisten osallistuminen julkisten palvelujen tuottamiseen haastaa ammatillisuuden periaatteet, sillä kansalaisia voidaan pitää palveluntuotannossa amatööreinä. On kuitenkin vain vähän näyttöä siitä, kuinka tämä vaikuttaa julkisten, yhteistuotettujen palvelujen ammatillisuuteen. Tämä artikkeli keskittyy kahteen ammatillisuuden periaatteeseen julkisten palvelujen yhteistuotannossa: asiantuntemukseen ja tilivelvollisuuteen. Teoreettinen viitekehys tarkastelee yhteistuotantokirjallisuutta erityisesti siitä näkökulmasta, mitä kansalaisilta palvelujen yhteistuottajina voidaan odottaa näiden periaatteiden suhteen, ja tarkentaa amatöörismin käsitettä. Ammatillisuuden ja amatööriyden käsitteet muodostavat puitteet kansalaisyhteistuottajien identiteetin analyysille. Empiirisesti artikkeli esittelee kaksi sosiaalipalvelujen tapaustutkimusta eurooppalaisessa kontekstissa. Tulokset

osoittavat, että kansalaiset yhteistuottajina luovat itselleen jossain määrin ammatillista identiteettiä, pyrkivät välttämään liiallista tilivelvollisuutta, ja tuovat mukanaan amatöörimäisiä elementtejä palveluihin. Virkahenkilöiden läsnäolo ja ohjaus yhteistuotannossa voi varmistaa tilivelvollisuuden toteutumista ja virtaviivaistaa amatöörimäisyyttä palveluissa.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Public organizations across the globe invite citizens to coproduce public service delivery (cf., Bovaird et al., 2015; Brandsen et al., 2018; Osborne, 2017). According to Brandsen and Honingh (2016, p. 431), coproduction “is a relationship between a paid employee of an organization and (groups of) individual citizens that requires a direct and active contribution from these citizens to the work of the organization.” In this article, we focus on a mode of coproduction in which citizens voluntarily collaborate in the delivery of services (Nabatchi et al., 2017), and which does not include involuntary actions prompting the cocreation of value (cf., Alford, 2002; Osborne et al., 2016). Here, citizens are given opportunities and space to set the direction of public services, for instance, by engaging in neighborhood planning, delivering social care, or codesigning and coimplementing public space. Coproduction transforms the relations between public organizations and citizens: instead of being objects, citizens are perceived as the cooperators or partners of public organizations (Peeters, 2013).

This leads us to examine the respective roles of professionals and citizens in public service provision and, in a broader sense, professionalism as the principle of public service delivery (Ryan, 2012; Sullivan, 2000). Professionals have already faced shifts in how they are expected to collaborate with citizens (Aschhoff & Vogel, 2019; Brandsen & Honingh, 2013; Steen & Tuurnas, 2018). These shifts challenge professionals to reconsider the “nature of professional standards and quality” (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016, p. 430), and have promoted the creation of a collaborative identity among professionals (Aschhoff & Vogel, 2019). They have impacts on the roles of professionals in terms of issues such as discretion and accountability (Steen & Tuurnas, 2018). These implications of coproduction are the focus of this study; however, in this article, we explore shifts in professionalism from the perspective of citizen coproducers.

In coproduction, citizens bring their situational knowledge based on their experiences to the service process. In this way, they supplement professional knowledge (Brandsen & Honingh, 2016; Osborne, 2017). However, there are perceptions that increased citizen contributions to public service delivery leads to a decline in professionalism (Salamon, 1987). This opposition is considered to especially come from professional staff emphasizing that education, training, and experience are important and contribute more to service quality than the perspective of the user (Bovaird, 2007). Additionally, changing accountability relations in coproduction raises the question of who is to be held accountable when citizens themselves take part in service delivery, particularly in cases of service failure (Williams et al., 2016). Regarding the structure of our research, based on our theoretical framework, we discuss the principles of professionalism with regard to expertise and accountability and citizen coproducers' identity in relation to professionalism and amateurism. These elements offer an analytical framework for reflecting on citizen coproducers' roles in terms of professionalism. Against this setting, our research question is as follows: *to what extent do citizens who coproduce public services integrate elements of professionalism, specifically those of expertise and accountability, and to what extent do they identify with elements of amateurism?*

Empirically, we analyze citizen coproducers' views on professionalism, accountability, expertise, and their identity through a multiple case study focused on the two contexts of Belgium (Flanders) and Finland. In both countries, there is a long tradition of collaboration between the public sector and civil society; for instance, the third sector provides a large proportion of care services, yet with public funding and a strong professional orientation. Both cases are based in the field of social services. Additionally, these two cases in reference to two different national contexts allow us to gain insights that surpass the relevance of conducting a case study on one specific sectorial and country context. A multiple case study approach enables us to explore different role identifications of citizen coproducers at a microlevel.

Our results show that citizen coproducers can create a professional identity to a certain extent and that specific training can contribute to this identity but that their identity also entails elements of amateurism that do not per se undermine professionalism in public service delivery. Therefore, we claim that amateurism and professionalism can coexist in public service delivery at a microlevel without directly endangering the core elements of professionalism such as expertise and accountability. Finally, in the conclusion, we identify directions for an emerging research agenda focused on this topic and elaborate on the practical relevance of this study.

## 2 | PROFESSIONALISM AS A PRINCIPLE OF GOVERNANCE AND COPRODUCTION

Professionalism has been seen as a core element of welfare state public service delivery across Europe (Bertilsson, 1990; Svensson, 2006). The role of professionals is to realize the interests of the state and individual citizens in a way that respects the value of equality by ensuring citizens' social rights (Alford & O'Flynn, 2009; Bertilsson, 1990; Duyvendak et al., 2006). Accordingly, professionalism is seen as a way to protect and maintain public values in governance. Professionalism can also be seen as a public value in itself existing among many others (Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007; Beck Jørgensen & Rutgers, 2015; Huberts, 2014; Trommel, 2018; Van der Wal & Huberts, 2008; Van der Wal & Yang, 2015). There are several ways to understand and position professionalism within the hierarchy of different public values (Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). Many definitions of professionalism (cf., Huberts, 2014; Van der Wal & Yang, 2015) indicate that there are (sub)values fitting under the umbrella value of professionalism. According to Paanakker (2020), professionalism is contextualized, and depending on the nature of the profession involved, professionalism is associated with numerous different values.

Under the broad theme of professionalism, this paper focuses on the selected aspects of expertise and accountability in discussing professionalism. These assets are viewed as sources of the legitimacy of professionals in society (Molander et al., 2012; Svensson, 2006). We also recognize there are other aspects of professionalism of interest when examining coproduction, such as loyalty and effectiveness. However, we choose to focus on expertise and accountability, first because they are often mentioned elements of professionalism with regard to the quality of governance (Huberts, 2014; Paanakker, 2020). Second, these aspects refer directly to some of the undesired effects of the coproduction of public services (Steen et al., 2018) related to the amateurism of citizen coproducers. For example, the idea that "patients could die because of self-administered treatments" (Steen et al., 2018, p. 285) is an undesired effect of coproduction referring to citizen coproducers' lack of education. Or, for instance, if citizens carry out the design of a public service, who is responsible for negative consequences and service failures (Williams et al., 2016)? A lack of clear responsibilities for public servants and citizen coproducers can lead to a failing accountability for the quality of public services (Tuurnas et al., 2016). In the following, we further elaborate on the two aspects and how coproduction challenges them.

First, with regard to expertise, professionalism is often linked to the education of public servants in specific areas such as nursing, law, or urban planning. Through their professional education, public servants develop skills that they further deepen while carrying out their work, which leads to expertise. However, public servants can be considered

to produce effective and equal outcomes for clients and service users due to their learned experience of public service delivery, broad understanding of society, and trained skills in specific service areas (Bertilsson, 1990; Duyvendak et al., 2006; Svensson, 2006). Moreover, in realizing professionalism, public servants make judgments and use discretion based on their professional skills and knowledge. Thus, expertise, and, more specifically skillfulness, education, experience, and discretion, can be seen as core elements of professionalism.

As noted in the literature, coproduction challenges the role of professional expertise in service delivery, positioning professionals' future roles as coordinators rather than as the sole experts of public services (e.g., Bovaird, 2007; Tuurnas, 2021). This pattern, as Brandsen and Honingh (2016) argue, has created debate on the nature of professional standards and quality in public services. Therefore, does this mean that expertise in, for example, designing public space is expected from citizens when they coproduce services? In that case, coproduction reinforces inequalities in terms of knowledge and expertise, giving more power to wealthy and educated citizens (Alford & Yates, 2016). Or, is there simply less expertise, and potentially less quality, in coproduced services or public spaces?

Second, public accountability is understood as a means of legitimizing professionalism in public services. Beck Jørgensen and Bozeman (2007) show that professionalism is related to the fact that public professionals must be accountable to politicians and their policies. Being accountable therefore also reflects other traits of the public servant such as reliability. This view further acknowledges that accountability as such is less substantive as a person can be responsible to all sorts of people such as the public, colleagues and stakeholders. Therefore, accountability is less specific and more multifaceted than political loyalty (Beck Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007). Moreover, accountability can become more difficult to define in hybrid service models where the roles of professionals and citizens intermingle because it is less clear who is responsible for the (good or bad) outcomes (Duyvendak et al., 2006; Tuurnas et al., 2016).

As noted in the coproduction literature, coproduction challenges the public accountability of professionals (Jaspers & Steen, 2019; Ryan, 2012; Steen et al., 2018; Tuurnas et al., 2016). How public servants can make decisions, especially when they must balance numerous values, is an essential question; however, equally important is the question of who is held accountable when citizen coproducers balance values and make decisions (Alford, 2014; Jaspers & Steen, 2019; Jaspers & Steen, 2021). Steen, Brandsen, and Verschuere (2018, p. 285) claim that "there is concern about ensuring supervision of and accountability for quality of public services in the context of co-creation and co-production." Who is to be held accountable when service fails? In defining the role of citizen coproducers in public service delivery, we next explore the discussion on citizen positions in public service delivery.

### 3 | CITIZENS COPRODUCERS' IDENTITY AND PROFESSIONALISM

When codesigning a public service, do the designers require some kind of expertise, and do they need to be held accountable for the plans they design? We ask these questions because of the pejorative connotation ascribed to amateurism linked to citizens' voluntary activities. There is a perception that a lack of expertise and education among citizen- and user coproducers causes public services to exhibit diminishing quality and effectiveness (Bovaird, 2007; Salamon, 1987).

Although civic participation is often found to be beneficial for public service performance (Putnam, 1993), concerns still exist that public service failure can result from amateurism or insufficient professionalism. For example, public service failures are often taken to be in part due to failures in professionalism, which can occur when professionals and nonprofessionals work together (Francis, 2013). According to Edwards (2014b), p. 140, "the term 'amateur' attracts problematic connotations of low expertise, lesser performance, and, more often than not, no pay." The author argues that amateurism, which characterizes the roles of amateurs, is often seen as the opposite of professionalism, characterizing the roles of public servants. In their study, Ewert and Evers (2014) discuss role expectations for citizens such as the "expert-patient" involved in health care practices. As mentioned above, a lack of skills necessary to execute the tasks of a profession (represented by the job position of the individual and by the diploma he or she holds) is often linked to the concept of amateurism. For example, with regard to health care, citizens who seek

to diagnose their own symptoms through an internet search could be labeled amateurs. Amateurism in public service delivery, which includes coproduction, is linked to unaccountable, unprepared, lesser, and unreliable practices (Dunston, 2014; Edwards, 2014b).

Because a focus on amateurism recenters the public servant at the locus of authority and action, Edwards' (2014b) conceptualization of amateurism complements the elements of amateurism with what it brings to service production other than being the opposite of professionalism. For Edwards, there are two main characteristics that define amateurism in citizen collaboration: (1) to do something for the love of it and (2) to be passionate about learning something relevant to an activity. Are citizens taking over and adopting the principles of professionalism, or are they identifying with the principles of amateurism and being dependent on public servants to embody professionalism in the services they coproduce (Birchall & Simmons, 2004)?

Overall, we have presented some aspects of the principles of professionalism that can be used when evaluating and analyzing citizens' integration of the principles of professionalism in their role perception. The list is by no means exhaustive as the principles and values are itinerant and context dependent and can be observed from different perspectives through various hierarchical orders (cf., Nabatchi, 2018). Keeping this in mind, we consider accountability and professional expertise to be core principles of professionalism. We also consider the amateurism–professionalism divide to be a potential lens through which to analyze professionalism in citizen coproduction. Here, it is important to take into account the type of coproduction involved. For instance, those who coproduce in the implementation of public services can feel pressured to become more professional and act in a professional way, as pressures to increase transparency, efficiency, and accountability also increase on their side (Eisenberg & Eschenfelder, 2009; Merrell, 2000).

## 4 | MULTIPLE CASE STUDY AS A RESEARCH STRATEGY

The research design used in this study relies on a multiple case study conducted in the contexts of Flanders (Belgium) and Finland. As Chmiliar (2012, p. 2) notes, multiple case studies are selected to “develop a better understanding of the issue or to theorize about a broader context.” By using a multiple case study approach, we are able to examine citizens' perceptions of and experiences with professionalism in reference to two politico-administrative contexts (Chmiliar, 2012). The approach intends to explore a variety of coproduction initiatives with the aim of being open and curious about the different ways in which citizens identify with principles of professionalism and amateurism. This exploration provides a starting point for understanding citizens' involvement in social services throughout welfare states in Europe. Next, the country and case contexts are presented.

### 4.1 | Mediation in Finland

The Nordic model of a strong welfare state is based on principles of universalism. In the Finnish model, public bodies are to a great extent responsible for the financing and production of public services, such as education, health care, and social services (Anttonen et al., 2012, pp. 21–22). Overall, the Finnish welfare system still relies heavily on trained public servants. As in many other European countries, there is a strong trend of citizen coproduction in Finland. Along with this trend, scholars have observed hints of responsabilization of citizens. For instance, civil society actors and individual citizens are invited to join the government in strengthening active citizenship and volunteer work (Koskiahho, 2015).

The case of mediation can be described as a unique public service of the Finnish welfare system, as the service model relies on the efforts of citizen coproducers as volunteering mediators. For citizens as parties of mediation (the victim and offender), mediation is a voluntary and free service. The service creates an opportunity for parties of mediation to reconcile an offense that occurred in the presence of nonparty mediators, who often work as mediators on a voluntary basis. Mediation office staff contact the volunteer mediators, who, for their part, contact the parties

to the mediation and begin the mediation process. The professional staff of the mediation office also take part in the mediation process with the volunteer mediators. After the mediation process is completed at the mediation office, the case returns to the district court for final resolution (National Institute for Health and Welfare, 2016).

## 4.2 | Social care in Flanders, Belgium

Belgium's welfare system belongs to the Bismarckian welfare state model. It is “cash-heavy,” giving priority to cash transfers and for example focusing on activation and minimum income protection, in contrast to the Scandinavian welfare states, which are “service-heavy.” Nevertheless, there has been a trend toward interactive policy-making as well as a quest for policy legitimacy (Van Damme & Brans, 2008), adopting mechanisms, such as opinion polls, citizen panels, participatory budget, and deliberative polling (Van Damme et al., 2017). In Flanders, coproduction is organized (although not exclusively) by municipalities in a top-down manner as part of their own unique government programs. For example, each municipality has a municipal welfare department or OCMW (the Dutch abbreviation for a municipal welfare department), that is responsible for the welfare of citizens and provides a number of services such as social security, financial assistance (living wage), medical assistance, home care, and admission to service centers. It is, however, determined at the municipal level whether and how coproduction is invited (e.g., Jaspers, 2018).

In a small city in Flanders, the local OCMW was confronted with a percentage of elderly people experiencing loneliness. To tackle the issue of loneliness, a project given the fictive name of Connected Care was initiated by the OCMW and a university college. The initiative created a network of over 80 senior citizens who engage in social caretaking by delivering services to each other such as checking in with each other or sharing knowledge on topics such as inheritance law. These services are otherwise delivered by trained public servants at the local OCMW department and would sometimes also require these elderly citizens to move to service flats or homes to obtain this much help. Through this project, the local government wants to deisolate elderly people, empower them, help them live longer at home, and reduce the financial burden for both the local government and elderly persons in need.

## 4.3 | Data and analysis

This study makes use of existing data. We use interviews of both citizen coproducers and public servants in the analysis to gain insights about professionalism from the perspective of professionals and the citizen coproducers themselves (see a detailed description of respondent characteristics in Appendix 1). We include public servants in the analysis for their ability to consider citizen coproducers' integration of professionalism from a broader, public service organization and delivery perspective. For the mediation case, interviews (individual and focus group) were conducted at the Middle Finland Mediation Office, which is located in the city of Jyväskylä in 2013. For the study, 15 persons, including citizen coproducers (volunteering mediators) and mediation office staff members, were interviewed. For our social care study in Flanders, we used interview data collected in 2017 with the aim of obtaining better insight into expectations for the realization of public values, which include the principles of professionalism. For the study, 17 persons, including the participating elderly persons, public servants, and volunteers involved, were interviewed (Jaspers & Steen, 2019). Table 1 presents a more detailed description of the data.

Both cases present a public sector-led initiative that invites citizens to coproduce and make substantial inputs for service delivery. The different nature of both cases, for example, in the level of skills needed, in our view offers an interesting lens through which to examine and analyze coproduction from the viewpoint of professionalism. Our case study approach can be described as explorative (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). We sought to identify patterns and connections linked to the theoretical framework described in Table 2, which is used as a conceptual lens to

TABLE 1 Description of the data

	Case of mediation, Finland	Case of connected care, Flanders
Number of interviews and description	15 interviews (data collected in 2013): <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4 mediation office staff members</li><li>• 8 citizen coproducers serving as mediators</li><li>• 2 police officers serving as key stakeholders</li><li>• A national mediation expert</li></ul>	17 interviews (data collected in 2016) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 OCMW staff member</li><li>• 1 trained volunteer from a university college</li><li>• 4 citizen coproducers also part of the coordinating team</li><li>• 11 citizen coproducers providing social care to one another</li></ul>
Interview themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Volunteering and professionalism (roles)</li><li>• Coproduction as the form of volunteer-service user interaction</li><li>• Accountability and responsibility</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Motivations to coproduce</li><li>• Desired public value</li><li>• Difficulties experienced in realizing public value</li><li>• Coping with difficulties</li></ul>

TABLE 2 Analytical framework: Citizen coproducers' identity as an interplay between professionalism and amateurism

Citizens' identify with	Specific elements
Aspects of professionalism	
Expertise	Skillfulness, education, experience, and discretion
Accountability	Being accountable to policies and processes; acting in a serious, reflective and competent manner; and demonstrating reliability
Aspects of amateurism	
In contrast with professionalism	Low expertise, lesser performance, and, more often than not, no pay
Motivations	Doing something for the love of it; Being passionate to learn something relevant to an activity

identify the identities of citizen coproducers with regard to professionalism. The process of coding also allowed us to remain open to new insights while frequently comparing and discussing our code lists with the research team. A thorough analysis of the interviews was carried out using a code list created on the basis of the theoretical framework. In the coding process, attention was given to direct and indirect references to the codes. The final coding list is shown in the appendices (Appendix B).

Thus, through the analysis, we seek cues regarding citizen coproducers' integration of the principles of professionalism: Do they feel that such principles are necessary? If they do, how do they experience acting according to these principles?

## 5 | CASE ANALYSIS

### 5.1 | Mediation services

#### 5.1.1 | Expertise

According to the interviews with the staff of the mediation office, citizen coproducers often use more creative ways to solve complex situations through mediation as they use their various backgrounds and lived experience and are not burdened by professional routines (R2, R3, R12). This type of skillfulness was perceived as a special feature of the citizen coproducers. However, the mediation does not rely on lived experience as a source of expertise, but the



volunteering mediators receive training before starting their mediation work. In the interviews, the volunteers described the ability to secure training and cultivate their expertise (R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R11). The training they received was appreciated and gave the voluntary mediators a sense of expertise (R1, R4, R8). As a volunteering mediator (R4) put it,

Mediation work is binding compared to volunteering in kids sports activities and such .... So there is this kind of commitment, also in the sense that although we are trained for this, we maintain and strengthen our skills and capacity to mediate.

Interestingly, there was a shared perspective among the interviewees that expertise and skillfulness come with experience. The interviewed citizen coproducers believed that an experienced volunteer mediator is as professional as public servants in a traditional sense (R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R11).

I would say that professionalism rather refers to that kind of attitude where one learns to manage what one is doing. In addition, as far as I am concerned, professionalism is defined a bit narrowly these days. (R8)

The interviewed citizens considered that there was space for using discretion in the mediation process.

### 5.1.2 | Accountability

The interviewed citizen coproducers felt accountable in their role in the mediation process. All the interviewed parties highlighted the role of the process in which they served as mediators. This made them feel accountable to the policies and processes of mediation. The interviewed citizen mediators also felt that the shared process of mediation in which they participated even made them semiprofessional as it required a serious, reflective and competent manner of behavior. For instance, in a focus group interview, one citizen coproducer described their accountability as follows:

We are considered state authorities here, a bit like the lay members of a court. We are bound by absolute confidentiality, and the agreement between the parties of conciliation is binding ... In other types of voluntary work, you are not acting as an authority. In an amateur theatre, for example, it is different. (R6)

With regard to reliability, the interviewed citizen coproducers also emphasized their commitment to the process and to its reliability. Then, again, the interviewees also reflected on their role as volunteers in relation to the mediation office staff, noting that as volunteers, they decide whether to take the case, and how often (R8, R9, R10).

I can inform the staff that this winter I am not taking any cases ... it is quite voluntary in this sense. (R9)

This point was also highlighted by the interviewed mediation office staff and stakeholders (R1, R2, R3, R14, R15). Finally, the interviewed citizen coproducers exhibited a strong shared view of their moral accountability. Thus, they do their best as mediators and offer the parties of mediation an opportunity to reach an agreement and avoid heavy court proceedings. As analyzed in the next section, competence was seen as a result of training, learning-by-doing and lived experience.

### 5.1.3 | Citizen coproducers' identity

As citizen coproducers and volunteers, the interviewed mediators described themselves as “in-betweeners” and as semiprofessionals due to the training they had received. The public servants, stakeholders and the citizen coproducers themselves agreed that citizen coproducers are not as reliable as professionals (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R8, R14, R15), as they operate on a volunteer basis and can leave at any time. Thus, they experienced lower performance expectations than the professional public servants. Moreover, when comparing themselves to the mediation office staff, the interviewed citizen coproducers said that the staff have a better understanding of the process as they are involved with mediation daily, as opposed to the volunteering mediators who perform mediation work, for example, once per month.

When describing their relationship as volunteers to the professional public servants in terms of expertise, the public servants (in this case, the mediation staff) were considered supervisors or facilitators of the mediation process as a whole but not their managers (R4, R5, R7, R9, R11). However, as noted above, the expertise brought to the service by the volunteering mediators was seen as being as valuable as that of a trained, professional public servant. The interviewed volunteering mediators also wanted to learn more about mediation, and this was a way to develop their expertise.

For the relationships between the citizen coproducers as public service deliverers and clients, the interviewed volunteer mediators also felt that they, relative to the public servants, are considered more approachable to the mediation parties (especially offenders), who might distrust authorities:

It makes a difference whether we introduce ourselves as volunteers or as authorities. Think about the first contact, and how we present ourselves. We have to use our own personalities. I think many have taken part because of the nonauthoritarian nature of this. It is not top-down. (R11)

Not being paid was also seen as a dividing point in distinguishing a public servant from a volunteering mediator (R2, R4, R6, R8) and strengthened the amateur identity. These views were shared across most of the interviewed parties as well as by the mediation staff members.

According to the analysis, the sense of being important to the process of mediation, as well the sense of contributing something to societal issues, were seen as the motivation for coproduction (R5, R6; R7, R10). As there were no financial rewards, across the interview data, the volunteering mediators felt that they were contributing to the coproduction process for the love of it.

## 5.2 | Case of social elderly care

### 5.2.1 | Expertise

The participants in Connected Care, regardless of whether they were involved in the steering committee, did not receive any specific training in delivering social care. The participants of course have their own expertise stemming from their education and job experiences that they can put to use such as skills for organizing information sessions on laws of inheritance (R16) “you have different people with different experiences that give you advice on certain things” (R21, also R24).

Specific skills that are required of citizens to deliver social care according to the citizen coproducers themselves include caring for other people, being willing to help others, or having something to share with others that is desired by such others (R16, 18, 20). While being able to offer help is not a precondition for participation, the project only worked when at least a considerable number of elderly people are able to offer help to others (R17, 18): “people do not want to be bound to something, especially not young people. But you do need people to keep the organization going” (R17). Although citizens are not required to actively help others to be able to participate in the project (i.e., they can also be on the receiving end), some citizen coproducers viewed themselves as less capable of offering services and therefore felt as if they were at a deficit when they could not reciprocate, which often resulted in a

reticence around asking for help: “I could not ask for anything because I don't think you can ask for something if you cannot give anything in return” (R17). Moreover, some respondents were specific in mentioning that they do not have the same skillset as that of a professional public servant in providing care to others: “I am always very clear on what they can ask from me, and I clearly tell them what they should ask of a professional” (R17, also R31).

With regard to experience, the coproducing citizens brought their lived experiences to the needs of this cohort group and to the design and implementation of the project. At the beginning of the project, the public servants introduced a format for coproduction in collaboration with the university. However, the respondents stressed that this format, which originally centered around connecting demands and offerings, did not respond to the needs of their group. Their lived experience allowed them to identify and address needs in a way that the public servants could not, which was more to provide social care by getting to know the other participants through activities (e.g., information sessions, workshops, walks) and then connecting offer and demand:

It used to be that the supply and demand system was all divided up like this, name-by-name, but that didn't work. We then made it more concise, by activity and then all the names behind it. (R26)

### 5.2.2 | Accountability

The citizen coproducers find themselves to be little accountable for the policy success of Connected Care. The interview data showed how these citizens, when encountering difficulties, expect a public servant or the coordinating team to manage such difficulties, indicating that in statements such as “they know what they are doing” (R18) and “the public servant knows about the difficulties, she will know what to do” (R19, also R20). The coproducing elderly also reported not feeling accountable for the implementation of processes that aim at deisolating elderly individuals.

Second, the coproducing elderly expressed the need to feel comfortable with those from whom they accepted help or to whom they provided help (R20). This renders the contributions or inputs of the citizen coproducers less reliable. Moreover, the interviewed coproducing elderly people preferred to maintain their individual freedom by determining when and how much they wanted to coproduce. For example, their commitment required the freedom to be allowed to take breaks: “she [another coproducer] was taking up all my energy, and therefore I was thinking about quitting the project” (R21).

Finally, in terms of accountability, which the study defines as acting in a serious and reflective manner, the data on the interviewed citizens involved in the steering committee show that these citizens assumed more responsibility with regard to planning activities, designing the framework of the project, managing finances, and ensuring inclusion, than the regular citizen coproducers. The respondents reported that serving on the committee made them feel responsible for addressing some of the problems voiced by those in need, and they took this responsibility seriously:

People come with their stories and needs, and we make time to determine how we/the project can best provide something for them. (R22)

However, one member of the steering committee claimed that when individuals must be corrected or rebuked, the public servant should do this due to her professional position (R23).

### 5.2.3 | Citizen coproducers' identity

In Connected Care, the citizen coproducers, including those on the steering committee, did not see themselves as or identify with the public servants. These individuals stated that they are doing something for themselves and for others, which makes them feel good. In the best case, they describe rediscovering their own talents and skills and putting them to use. These individuals all feel the direct or indirect benefits of being involved in such a project due

to the principle of reciprocity: they are receiving help and meeting other people, addressing their isolation, and the younger individuals know that they will be able to rely on this service when they are in more need of help and care.

With regard to integrating principles of professionalism in their identity, the case study shows that the citizen coproducers are not fully capable of exhibiting accountability, reliability and expertise regarding social care. For example, most of the coproducers' input was not unconditional. This partly had to do with the desire of the elderly to realize their individual freedom (which entails agency over when, how, and how much to coproduce). As one elderly person stated, "there should be no obligations; otherwise, I don't want to be involved" (R28). Nevertheless, their vulnerability, which stems from their own experiences of loneliness, seemed to be a strength. This experience as an aspect of expertise and skillfulness allowed the project to be more responsive to the needs of the cohort group and to create a more effective coproduction design. Based on the above, this citizen coproducer identity integrates principles of amateurism more than the principles of professionalism. Such individual coproducers are willing to help if they can, participate for the love of it, and seek to (re)learn things they enjoy in the form of helping or inspiring others as long as it is a positive experience. Identifying more with aspects of amateurism than with those of professionalism in the case of Connected Care enabled responsive service delivery.

## 6 | DISCUSSION

From the above two cases, we identify differences as well as numerous similarities that offer valuable findings for the study of citizen coproducers' integration of principles of professionalism. In terms of expertise, both cases underscore the value of accumulating expertise from experience. In the case of elderly care, this included detailed knowledge of diverse areas such as inheritance law or gardening, or, in the case of mediation, a broader ability to solve complex situations as a result of one's life experiences rather than adopting the routine solutions of professional public servants. Interestingly, the citizen coproducers' expertise emerged from experience in citizen coproduction and less from professional training. In this way, the citizen coproducers contested the idea of professionalism as a product of professional education, while their lived experience made a good case for the added value of amateurism in public service delivery.

Regarding accountability, we found similar cues in both cases: overall accountability over the service was assigned to the public servants. Although the citizen coproducers in the mediation case felt accountable for their actions as a part of the process, they still felt that the public servants guided the process and were accountable for it and that they were there to help the citizen coproducers when they faced challenging situations. In the case of elderly care, the interviewed coproducers felt that the public servants were most capable of dealing with conflicts and individual issues in coproduction and expected such behavior from the public servants.

Additionally, the aspects of amateurism that are present in the identities of the citizen coproducers, which are in direct contrast with professionalism, were essential for the working and success of both cases. Having lower performance expectations due to no pay and the freedom to choose the pace of volunteering were seen as valuable motivations for the citizens to coproduce. Discovering one's own skills and developing new ones were also seen as important elements of their activities. Having no pay, in the case of mediation, was seen as a securing factor and as an element that set them apart from the professionals. However, such elements were never linked to the risk of lower quality of the delivered services; on the contrary, they were understood as a strength.

In terms of differences, the coproducers of the mediation case seemed to integrate aspects of professionals more strongly, considering themselves essential actors of the mediation process. Here, we can conclude that the training offered to the citizen coproducers and their responsibility for and autonomy over actual service provision played an important role in the identities of the citizen coproducers, which included elements of both professionalism and amateurism. As noted above, in the case of mediation, the citizen coproducers viewed themselves as "in betweeners": adopting aspects of the roles of public servants and volunteers.

In the case of social elderly care, the coproducers did not build such an identity integrating professionalism, and they required much encouragement and support. The group of citizen coproducers interviewed was quite

heterogeneous and had many different skills based on previous training, education and experiences. This was desirable as the aim of the project was to allow any willing citizen to take part in the project without prerequisites. Additionally, their lived experience allowed the coproduced service to be responsive to the needs of the elderly people in a way that the public professionals were unable to do on their own.

Moreover, in terms of the differences in the identities of the citizen coproducers across the cases, the interviewees of Connected Care also viewed themselves as users in making use of the project as a way of meeting people, socializing and building social capital. Then, again, for the mediation case, the interviewed citizen coproducers identified themselves as core actors contributing to the process of mediation. These differences can be seen to stem from the purpose of the service in which they were involved as citizen coproducers. In Connected Care, the aim was to be as inclusive as possible, offering elderly people a chance to connect, and the project provided value by encouraging people to participate. However, for the mediation context, the core aim of citizen coproduction was service provision where, according to those interviewed, specific skills were needed. Although the experience with volunteering in mediation was highlighted as an essential source of their professionalism, the skills acquired in the mediation training were also highly appreciated by the volunteering citizens.

This exploration of the integration of citizen coproducers' identity with regard to professionalism and amateurism should be considered in light of some limitations. Qualitative multiple case analysis cannot offer universal explanations about professionalism in citizen coproduction. First, in this study, we focused on two broad elements of professionalism in coproduction and did not exclude the possibility that focusing on other public values leads to different conclusions about the complementarity of professionalism and amateurism. Second, the context of the studied services showed differences in the level of the required skills among the citizen coproducers, as discussed above. However, two European, fairly similar politico-administrative contexts (in comparison to non-Western contexts) strengthens the result that professionalism and amateurism can coexist in professionally led welfare services. To investigate this argument further, large sample international and cross-sectorial analyses are needed.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

In this article, we analyzed two cases of coproduction to understand how, in delivering public services, citizen coproducers integrate selected principles of professionalism. Specifically, we explored to what extent citizens who coproduce services integrate aspects of expertise and accountability and what this integration or lack thereof means for professionalism in coproduction. We used existing data obtained from two coproduction cases in Finland and Belgium (Flanders) with the aim of exploring the broader shift in professionalism occurring in European welfare states, which are increasingly inviting citizens to coproduce services.

The results show that the level and availability of training for citizen coproducers contribute to the development of an identity that integrates principles of professionalism and can be desirable for coproducing public services. In service delivery, a certain level of professionalism is needed, especially if service users cannot choose service providers (professional public servants or volunteers). Therefore, there must be clear guidelines to be followed by citizen coproducers on how to address users and implement policies in a serious, reflective and competent manner. If citizen coproducers are given an opportunity to assume responsibility and are viewed as serious actors, they potentially develop an identity that exhibits features of professionalism. However, we cannot always expect professionalism from citizen coproduction. Moreover, we argue that this outcome is also not always desirable as coproduction can reinforce structural exclusion. The value of citizen coproduction here lies outside developing an identity around professionalism through processes such as ensuring inclusion, engagement and responsive services, as found from the elderly care case. Additionally, citizens' lived experience can be a positive contribution by welcoming amateurism in public service production. Overall, our research shows that professionalism is indeed contextualized, for example, across different types of services, not only with regard to the meaning of professionalism (cf., Paanakker, 2020) but also with regard to the need for its adoption by actors other than professional public servants.

Our results show that citizen coproducers can integrate elements of professionalism to a certain extent and that specific training can contribute to their professional identity but that their identity also entails elements of amateurism that do not per se undermine professionalism in public service delivery. Therefore, we claim that amateurism and professionalism can coexist in public service delivery at a microlevel without necessarily endangering the core elements of professionalism such as expertise and accountability.

Several literature streams, such as studies on street-level bureaucracy, social policy, coproduction, amateurism and volunteer studies, can benefit from this exploratory study. For instance, there is an ongoing debate about the respective roles of professionalism, government involvement and civil society in public service delivery (see Peeters, 2013; Ryan, 2012; Salamon, 1987; Steen & Tuurnas, 2018; Sullivan, 2000; van Bochove et al., 2016). Our contribution within this wide topic is to have offered insights about the professionalism of citizen coproducers and to open further avenues for research concerning the topic. More specifically, this study sheds light on the (desired) limitations of citizen expertise and accountability with regard to professionalism and the added value of citizen coproducers' amateurism in public service delivery. Other scholars can therefore investigate and further research this topic in relation to other aspects of professionalism at a micro-level, such as the integration of neutrality and equity, in reference to different public service sectors as we have begun exploring this wide-reaching issue. Moreover, as noted above, large-scale samples can offer further knowledge about professionalism in coproduction in different country and sectorial contexts. For instance, future research can shift the research framework to the field of health services or urban development. Additionally, case studies that focus on service failure due to the involvement of citizens could be analyzed from the perspective of professionalism and amateurism. Additionally, this microlevel analysis has some insights that can inform further meso-level studies into whether coproduction as an organizational feature challenges the professionalism of public service delivery by inviting amateurism (cf., Edwards, 2014a; Steen et al., 2018). This study indicates that amateurism is not necessarily a threat to professionalism (Tonkens, 2016; van Bochove et al., 2016), as citizen coproducers as amateurs bring value to services as in the case of elderly care from the perspective of lived experiences and inclusiveness and in the case of mediation from the perspective of expertise from experience.

Finally, the cases examined here offer insights for practice in showing that amateurism and professionalism can coexist. Professionalism in public service delivery is thus not simply either present or absent if public servants still guide the process and do not leave such responsibilities to citizen coproducers through responsabilization (Brandsen et al., 2017; Peeters, 2013; Tonkens, 2016). In general, based on the present study, we strongly believe that to secure accountability over coproduction, there is a need for institutionalized organizations and facilitating public servants in such models to address issues around reliability and specific expertise. This is essential for avoiding service failure and accountability. When designing and implementing citizen coproduction initiatives, it is important to carefully analyze the nature of the planned service in terms of the citizens' skills and the training they need. Those developing such programs should consider the specific skills that are required, how the training is organized, and whether the service requires specific training. We argue that citizen inputs in public services are desirable, but the services should not be based on the rationale of the responsabilization of citizens. According to our study, the professional public servants must still be accountable for the coproduced service while the citizen coproducers can provide responsiveness and effectiveness to public service delivery based on their lived experience and their input, which is largely based on amateurism.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available on request from the authors

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## APPENDIX A

### Respondent characteristics

Respondent	Sex	Type of coproducer/other
1	Female	Public professional, mediation office
2	Female	Public professional, mediation office
3	Female	Public professional, mediation office
4	Female	Citizen coproducer
5	Male	Citizen coproducer
6	Male	Citizen coproducer
7	Female	Citizen coproducer
8	Male	Citizen coproducer
9	Male	Citizen coproducer
10	Female	Citizen coproducer
11	Male	Citizen coproducer
12	Female	Public professional, mediation office
13	Female	Mediation expert
14	Male	Public professional, mediation stakeholder
15	Male	Public professional, mediation stakeholder
16	Female	Citizen coproducer
17	Male	Citizen coproducer
18	Male	Citizen coproducer
19	Female	Citizen coproducer, steering committee
20	Female	Citizen coproducer
21	Female	Citizen coproducer
22	Male	Citizen coproducer, steering committee
23	Female	Citizen coproducer, steering committee
24	Female	Public professional, steering committee
25	Female	Volunteer, steering committee
26	Female	Citizen coproducer, steering committee
27	Male	Citizen coproducer
28	Female	Citizen coproducer
29	Female	Citizen coproducer
30	Female	Citizen coproducer
31	Female	Citizen coproducer
32	Female	Citizen coproducer

## APPENDIX B

### List of codes

- Professionalism
  - Accountability
    - Being accountable to policies and processes
    - Acting in a serious, reflective and competent manner
    - Reliability
  - Skillfulness and education
    - Specific skills and education
    - Expertise
    - Experience
    - Confidentiality
- Amateurism
  - Negative amateurism
    - Limited expertise
    - Lesser performance
  - Positive amateurism
    - Doing something for the love of it
    - A passion to learn something relevant to the activity