

COSIE

Co-creation of Service Innovation in Europe

Where next for co-creating public services?

**Emerging lessons and
new questions from CoSIE**



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Introduction

Governments in some of the world's richest nations are facing democratic demands to respond to new social needs. Many developed economies have undergone a period of low-growth and been affected by the current COVID-19 crisis. Policies designed to deliver social outcomes must be more effective for less resources.

The goal of the Co-Creation of Public Service Innovation in Europe project (CoSIE) is to contribute to democratic renewal and social inclusion by engaging diverse citizen groups and stakeholders in varied public services. More specifically, it aims to:

- a) advance the active shaping of service priorities by end users and their informal support network and**
- b) engage citizens, especially groups often called 'hard to reach'.**

It realises these aims through real-life pilots in nine countries with services as varied as public health, social care, labour market activation, housing, and criminal justice.

This summary draws together some of the 'big ideas' emerging from CoSIE, associated with conceptualising co-creation, implementing co-creation and evidencing co-creation.

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The importance of strengths or asset-based approaches

Co-creation invariably attempts to reposition people who are usually the targets of services as *asset holders*.

The CoSIE project illustrates that co-creation requires a fundamental re-think of how people who use services are viewed: both what they bring to the co-creation of services and the purpose of the services that they help to co-create.

Asset-based approaches start from the position that people have assets or 'strengths'. These include both their current intangible resources (perhaps skills, experience or networks) and their potential to develop new community and personal assets. The idea of asset-based approaches therefore draws together concepts of participation and citizenship with social capital.

Asset-based approaches don't impose a 'one size fits all' structure on diverse communities. Instead, they support citizens' development of their capacity and their opportunities to exercise agency in undertaking small acts that build meaningful relations. These can make huge differences in people's lives. This implies that services should be personalised and contextualised by community, asking questions such as 'what matters to people?' and not 'what is the matter with them?'.¹

The wider use of asset-based approaches in public service raises several questions that insights from the CoSIE project can help to address.



Co-creation is a moral endeavour

Asset-based approaches mean that people exercise agency to define goals themselves in order to meet needs that they judge to be important. But this is not simply about giving people choice.

People also need a guiding vision of a good life, well lived². This seems a promising line of argument for asset-based approaches and aligns with arguments for human rights that draw on concepts of agency and purpose, therefore implying that asset-based approaches and co-creation in public services are not simply desirable, but morally necessary.

The idea of co-creating public services demands a fundamental re-think of the role of the welfare state and hence the relationship between individuals and the state.³

Individuals and communities co-create with public services to grow their capabilities.

From a policy perspective, this implies that co-creation necessarily involves adopting asset-based practices and that co-creation is a necessary practice in public service reform, not merely desirable.

From a practice perspective, the focus on supporting individuals to develop their capabilities suggests new modes of working for organisations and front-line staff. These would be radically different, requiring organisations and staff to fundamentally re-think their purpose and how they relate to people in receipt of services. This is unlikely to be a linear process but rather an iterative and interactive one.





Traditional public services need to change to meet social challenges

Much thinking and writing on co-creation underestimates the tasks and responsibilities of professionals.⁴ Yet co-creation by definition implies a break with the former roles of frontline staff as providers of services to passive recipients or customers. In other words, it means a new role for a 'professional co-producer' who is expected to motivate and mobilise the capacities and resources of people who use services.

This change leads to a requirement for frontline staff to build new capacities, professional competencies, and skills to take on a more responsive and inclusive approach. The first reaction of professionals toward innovation can be resistance or even hostility, particularly when there is a high level of technical and procedural expertise. This has been described in terms of difficulties in adopting an 'outward look' capable of recognising the knowledge and resources that people who use services bring with them⁵.

Change may well start with value-based recruitment practices, but also implies new approaches to staff training, different ways of assessing people's needs and different understandings of how 'cases' are managed with new connections and divisions of labour. Perhaps more fundamentally, professional co-producers will have to 'unlearn' previous practice and make a conscious break with previous value systems that shaped their prior professional training and practice.

Part of the solution may also be to ensure that more professionals either have lived experience themselves or that people with lived experience are part of the team they work in.

Technology can be an asset

Technology, and particularly digital technologies, have been seen as important for improving public sector innovation capabilities. Yet it is essential to differentiate promotional hype from genuine opportunities, and to take heed of different technologies and different service contexts.⁶

Some CoSIE pilots have successfully adapted commercial social media and digital open data in creative and inclusive ways. Others have learned that barriers to digital inclusion are deeper than anticipated. Moreover, popular on-line platforms may be unwelcome and inappropriate in contexts where people are marginalised and stigmatised.

Storytelling curated in digital form and mobilised for change through Community Reporting is a key contribution of CoSIE.

It has become clear through knowledge exchange across the project that the generic infrastructure of social media and open data may have a potential role to play in the development of co-creative approaches in future. However, there is often a core set of facilities, resources and information management functions that must be provided under the governance umbrella of local service environments at a number of levels in order to enable the widespread adoption and implementation of co-creation and associated practices.



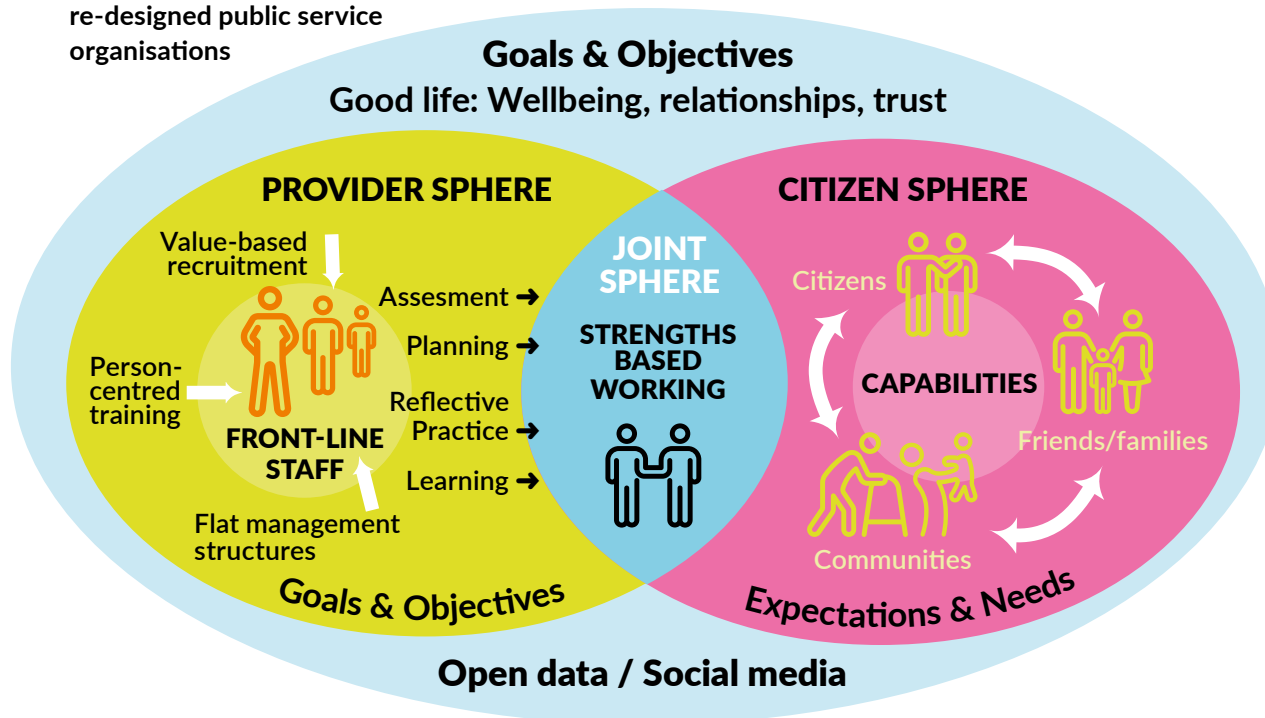
More questions

Co-created services often start with like-minded groups of individuals, but this raises questions about their potential to be scaled-up.

Some CoSIE pilots have begun to influence policy and practice beyond their original local and service contexts, although scaling up is mostly still in the future. There is an extensive evidence base we can draw on when thinking about how pilots might scale-up, much of which draws on practice in health and social care.

What comes across strongly from research is the complexity of both the concepts and the evidence on scaling-up. It suggests, when thinking about scalability, it is important to consider both 'hard' components like metrics, and 'soft' components like socio-cultural factors and distinguish two broad approaches to scaling-up: top-down and bottom-up models.

Strengths-based work requires re-designed public service organisations



The need for evidence

A review of the evidence on scaling-up innovations has found that being evidence-based is the most common requirement for an innovation to be spread and scaled-up⁷. It also reported that to demonstrate effectiveness, most innovations needed to have been evaluated and supported by empirical data, published in reports or in peer-reviewed journals.

However, developing an evidence-base for co-creation and associated strengths-based approaches is challenging. Assumptions about what counts as reliable evidence are not fully shared, and may be contested.



Find out more about CoSIE

<https://cosie.turkuamk.fi/>

Main paper – *This is a summary of a longer paper:*

Fox, C., Baines, S., Wilson, R., Martin, M., Ganugi, G., Prandini, R., Bassi, and Gründemann (2020) *Where Next for Co-creating Public Services? Emerging lessons and new questions from CoSIE*, Turku: Turku University of Applied Sciences

<https://cosie.turkuamk.fi/uploads/2020/10/3e7fab8f-cosie-co-creation-positioning-paper.pdf>

References – *For a full list of references please see main paper.*

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- ⁷ Shiell-Davis, K., Wright, A. and Seditas, K. (2015) *Scaling-Up Innovations, What Works Scotland*



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