



**Policy Brief : Co-creation as a way to facilitate user-centricity and take-up of eGovernment services. The case of digital public services for older adults.**

# MobileAge

## ***Policy Priority: Addressing the low take-up of eGovernment services, in particular by older adults and facilitating citizen participation***

### **1. Summary**

- Co-creation may become a way to improve the quality of eGovernment services and thus their uptake, by involving end users as partners in the planning, design and provision of digital services.
- However, co-creation is a complex and demanding process for both sides: government units as well as citizens, and requires careful planning and evaluation.
- Co-creation consists of several phases, from the early identification of problems and needs, the conceptualisation of a service and its design to its implementation and maintenance.
- The biggest challenge is to engage a knowledgeable and motivated group of citizens whose contributions lead to improvements of a service that benefits an entire target group.
- Co-creation requires more resources than ordinary service design; it only pays off when government units meet the proposals of citizens with sufficient scope for action. This is more likely for local or regional information services than for nationwide transaction services.
- In order to identify services that justify the effort of co-creation, we recommend to plan four steps, (1) a broad consultation on the collaborative improvement of information services on different topics, (2) a formal and official selection of a specific problem focus and the allocation of resources for co-creation, (3) the service design process itself, and (4) a systematic evaluation of the co-created service.

### **2. Background: Co-creation as a way to improve user-centricity and take-up of eGovernment services**

There has been a long debate about why eGovernment services have not experienced the uptake that was anticipated, especially among citizens. Since 2001, the European Member States hold the bi-annual Ministerial Conferences to review the achievements of eGovernment across Europe in bi-annual benchmarking reports, featuring statistics and recommendations concerning 12 eGovernment services for citizens. Starting off with an “administration centric” approach, over the past ten years the whole process has shifted towards a “government-driven user centric” approach. The latest, most innovative stage, however, is called “customer-driven customer centricity” and the most recent Ministerial Declaration (EU Tallin, 2017) stated that the EU eGovernment Action Plan (2016-2020) has been a “significant step in this transformation journey”. Yet, it is realised that “more needs to be done and faster to ensure its implementation”. The preceding benchmarking report (European Commission, 2009) shows no progress in the user experience. In addition to more user-centricity it also asks for

### **Citizen engagement**

That digital means are used to empower citizens and businesses to voice the views, allowing policy makers to collect new ideas, involve citizens more in the creation of public services and provide better digital public service.

In sum, citizen-driven service development of public services has been promoted greatly at European and national level for the past decade, and has not been fully implemented yet.

Co-creation provides concrete solutions to improve user centricity, by covering government-driven and citizen-driven service development. The Mobile Age project has undertaken five pilot projects with both variations. In the pilot sites, services for older adults were co-created, by older adults, a user group in which the need for public services is particularly high, while at the same time the uptake of e-services is particularly low.

### **3. Co-creation model and roles of citizens in digital public service co-creation**

The European Commission has high expectations on co-creation as a promising new approach to service development and design. The term is used in more than 75 calls within the H2020 Framework

Programme across a variety of topic areas. However, there is no common understanding on what co-creation means with respect to other participatory or collaborative approaches (e.g. co-production or co-design), the role of users, the role of technology or anticipated results.

Mobile Age developed a process model for co-creating digital public services consisting of seven streams of activities. The streams of action are interdependent and also informed by a number of **co-creation preconditions**: (1) existing strategy and policy objectives, (2) existing collaborations, (3) existing services, (4) existing (open) data infrastructure and (5) existing IT infrastructure. There are **five core streams of activity** in co-creation: (1) engaging stakeholders, (2) co-creating a service concept, (3) collecting, creating, validating & integrating data, (4) co-creating software and (5) evaluating co-creation process & results. These streams of activities lead to a number of **co-creation results**: (1) new & amended collaborations between different stakeholders, (2) the provision of a digital service, (3) open data, (4) software/apps and (5) an evaluation & impact assessment. The figure below provides an overview on the different aspects of the Mobile Age co-creation methodology (for a detailed account on the Mobile Age methodology see [www.mobile-age.eu](http://www.mobile-age.eu))

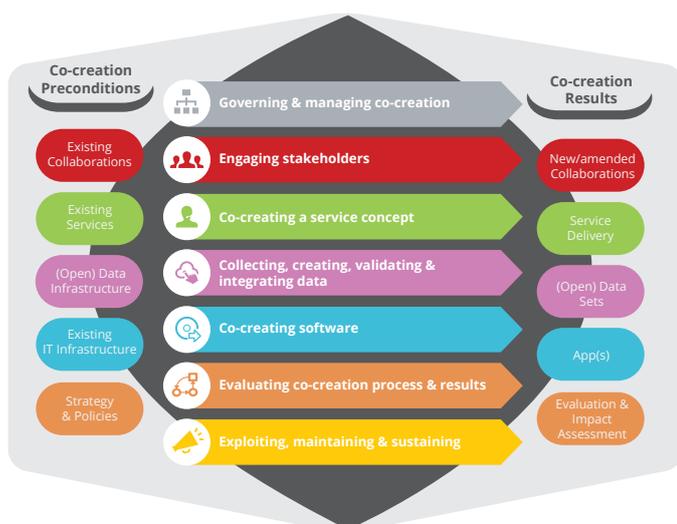


Figure 1: Overview co-creation model

While participation in some co-creation initiatives is limited to co-design of the interface of an application, others also involve citizens in generating topics and contents. Hence, participants can take different roles in the co-creation process.

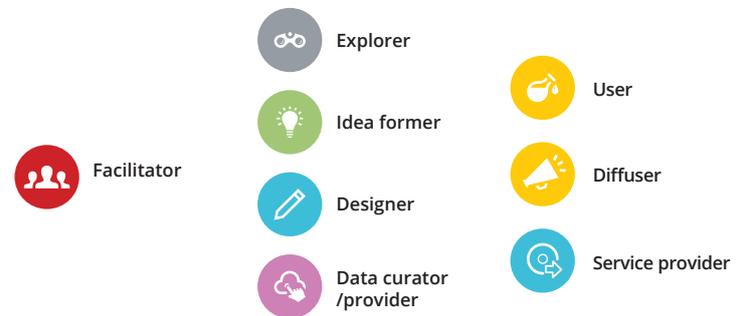


Figure 2: Roles of citizens in co-creation processes

The degree of user involvement and their agency and control differs substantially across co-creation projects and also with respect to the (1) structure and frequency of interaction, (2) participants' abilities and interests, (3) equality of engaged parties and (4) openness of task as well as predictability of solution.

#### 4. Co-creation requires expertise, commitment and scope for action

For most governmental authorities/administrative bodies, co-creation is a challenge not to be underestimated as it is time- and resource-intensive. It also challenges the self-confidence, self-assurance and authority of those employees that have designed existing services or are responsible for designing new ones. Co-creation calls for sharing knowledge and control over a process and its results. While this challenge is widely discussed and policy makers have pledged for a cultural change within government towards more openness, it is equally important to regard the scope for action of local government in (re)designing its services. All of the 12 basic eGovernment services that are subject to the regular benchmarking are complex transaction services requiring access to public registers run by other agencies, with interoperability and security requirements as well as many restrictions. Local governments have almost no scope for action in changing content, functionality and design of most of these transaction services. In addition, most citizens lack the expertise to improve the back-office side of services.

However, **citizens may well contribute their knowledge to improving front office services, in particular local information services.** For example, older residents are well suited to co-create a district guide as they have more expertise about what information is relevant to them and can co-produce relevant data. In addition, local government has the neces-

sary scope for action to implement design proposals and by doing so collaboratively improve the user experience.

### Policy recommendation

Not all eGovernment services are equally well-suited for co-creation. Local information services should be given priority as they allow for a greater legal and technical scope of action on the side of government as well as are more relevant to civic co-creators' knowledge and potential contributions. In particular, Mobile Government offers many opportunities where either printed information or static Websites can be improved through apps for mobile devices and fulfil the promise of anytime-anywhere-access to required information.

### 5. Consultation on High Priority Services for pre-defined target groups

Co-creation is demanding for government as well as for co-creating citizens. Therefore, the focus on the service (domain) to be (re)designed needs to be chosen carefully. Prior to embarking on a co-creation process, initiators have to make a number of decisions, relating to (1) the openness of the co-creation process, (2) its purpose and (3) the scope of design. Mobile Age pilots started with different degrees of openness and encountered varying challenges in the final implementation of a service.

In order to justify the efforts on both sides, the selected service should be relevant for government as well as for citizens. Local governments have several information obligations towards different groups of citizens, e.g. for parents, young people or older adults covering different topics each. Since a relevant service should reach as many members of the target audience as possible, a broad (online) consultation is an appropriate way to identify the priorities of the target audience. For example, with regard to the target group of older citizens and the commitments of many local governments to become age-friendly cities and communities, local governments can initiate a consultation process based on the eight fields of action as proposed by the WHO (see figure 3).

### Policy recommendation

To justify the resources required for a successful co-creation process, a broad consultation on a range of possible services should be carried out in order to select the service area with highest priority. In addition, it is crucial to allow for a certain openness so that co-creators take control and ownership over the

process and its results.

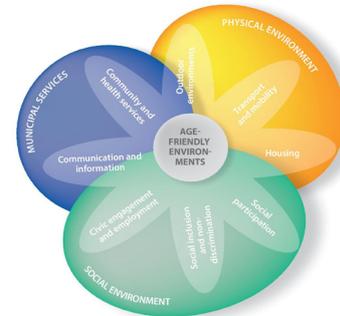


Figure 3: Framework for age-friendly environments (WHO, 2017)

### 6. Co-creation requires professional facilitators, appropriate methods and the “right” group(s) of co-creators

Co-creation is based on the idea that the target audience of a digital service, their needs and resources, can be represented by a small group of citizens who participate in a co-creation process. The biggest challenge for government, when embarking on a co-creation process, is to engage a group of citizens that is can speak for the needs and requirements of the whole target group.

As co-creation of information services requires a broad range of expertise (e.g. knowledge on the topic area, ability to collect and/or create data, provide input on interface design, support dissemination) it is very unlikely that there are individuals who have all these different competences and capabilities. Mobile Age has made positive experiences in engaging permanent groups with mixed competencies, e.g. some members have local knowledge, others technical competence or engage as data curators. This has proven be a great opportunity for all participants to learn from each other and value each other's specific expertise and contribution.

In order to engage co-creators effectively, appropriate methods have to be employed. We cannot assume that government employees responsible for a certain field of action have the relevant competencies (e.g. as moderators and facilitators) to select and conduct a range of co-creation interventions. Participating citizens may not even consider them to be neutral and not having their own interest. Research on the success factors of citizens' participation has shown that external professional moderation is one of three key success factors. In

most of the Mobile Age pilots, research teams acted as facilitators. In these processes, a broad range of methods and tools have been employed to also allow for the sharing of tacit knowledge and support co-creators along different streams of co-creation activities. Mobile Age will provide an interactive guidebook presenting appropriate and useful methods as well as examples of their deployment in the co-creation of digital public services for older adults.

## Policy recommendation

Successful co-creation needs professional moderation and facilitation, employing the appropriate methods for the respective target groups and subject area. In most cases this cannot be provided by government employees responsible for a specific subject area or policy field. Rather, external moderators should be considered. They have experience with different types of engagement methods and guarantee for the fairness and transparency of a process, in which government may be perceived as a stakeholder with their own interests. The recruitment and engagement of co-creators (as permanent group or phase specific groups) depends on kind of service and the target audience.

## 7. Summary

Co-creation is a promising approach to address the lack of user-centricity and user experience of eGovernment services. However, there is no guarantee for its success. It is a complex multi-task and multi-stakeholder process, more demanding than traditional citizen participation. Our own research on success factors of citizen participation has identified three success factors: (1) a problem of high concern to both sides, government and citizens, (2) professional facilitation, and (3) sufficient resources. We are convinced that this is also the case for co-creation processes of eGovernment services. It is not easy to meet these requirements in times of a mismatch between the many needs for services in the public interest and low public budgets. However, a low budget for co-creation activities does not allow meeting its objectives and desired results. Due to the openness and flexibility inherent to any co-creation process, providing guidelines and recommendations for such a process is a contradictory and therefore challenging task. Nevertheless, the lessons learned in Mobile Age, laid down in this policy brief and the upcoming interactive guidebook, provide a corner stone to more user-centric public services and the promises of open government. Each process is a journey in a partly unknown territory and an adventure. We can all profit from travel reports.

Therefore, it is important that future co-creation processes are evaluated and the lessons learned are published in order to co-create our knowledge about this new journey.

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