

# Uplifting Innovation through Co-Creation: From the Local to the Global Level

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## Co-creation as a foundation for public sector innovation

The scale and complexity of the challenges Governments are facing today are compelling public institutions to adopt novel ways to think and implement public policies. This means being able to develop innovative responses to tackle long-term transformations. Governments need to understand, test and embed new ways of doing things through public sector innovation. Engaging with the public and co-creating public sector policies and services with citizens and residents is a foundational element of effecting change.<sup>2</sup> This has been emphasized by 43 countries around the world through their commitment to the 2019 OECD Declaration on Public Sector Innovation.<sup>3</sup> The Declaration incorporates the following key priorities:

- Bring public, private, not-for-profit and individual actors together to engage in partnerships, collaboration and co-creation to develop new approaches or solutions to problems.
- Create partnerships and link into existing networks of exchange inside, outside and across the innovation system to increase the capacity to innovate.
- Develop a spectrum of engagement and co-creation practices and use different forms of co-creation to ensure that innovation efforts are informed by lived experience and relevant expertise.
- Look for opportunities to partner with other countries on cross-border challenges requiring innovative approaches.
- Listen for new and emerging voices to pick up weak signals that things might be changing, as this can help identify an emergent need or opportunity for innovation.

Co-creation empowers people to take an active role in issues that affect them, and it can strengthen the legitimacy of government programmes and build public trust, which has been near record lows in recent years. This can contribute to reinforcing democracy.

While Governments have been increasingly leveraging co-creation over the past several years, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored its necessity, as Governments had to act quickly to put in place processes and services that functioned in the

“new normal” context while also meeting people’s needs. One of the most critical lessons from the pandemic is that Governments must place citizens and inclusion at the centre of policymaking.<sup>4</sup>

The OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation (OPSI)<sup>5</sup> and the Support for Improvement in Governance and Management (SIGMA) programme<sup>6</sup> have sought to explore innovative co-creation approaches leveraged by Governments, how they are enabling the public sector to meet the unprecedented challenges of today and tomorrow, and what lessons may be learned from these efforts. Much of the information gathered is included in OPSI reports on government innovation trends,<sup>7</sup> the COVID-19 Innovative Response Tracker,<sup>8</sup> and the Case Study Library,<sup>9</sup> a constantly growing repository of over 700 case studies where public servants can learn about innovative projects around the world and even reach out to the teams behind them to learn more. The cases referred to below can be found in these reports.

## Co-creation in practice

The COVID-19 crisis served as a catalyst for public sector innovation in many ways, and there emerged creative and fantastic ideas and initiatives for both short-term response and long-term recovery. Co-creation has been one of the leading approaches, as illustrated in the following examples:

- Hack the Crisis began as a 48-hour hackathon in Estonia to bring together civic-minded citizens and government agencies and was duplicated around the world, leading to the Global Hack. In some countries such efforts have been embedded in government more long-term, as in the case of UpdateDeutschland in Germany.<sup>10</sup>
- In the United States, the Health+ Long COVID programme uses human-centred design to co-create patient-centred solutions with those impacted, with efforts including Healthathons designed to rapidly prototype and deliver solutions with the community.
- In the wake of COVID-19, a Philosophy of Care was co-created in South Australia to underpin mental health-care provision. The new care standard centred on people with lived experiences of distress and crisis emergency.

- Representing a form of cross-border innovation, the Global Cities Innovation Collaborative has enabled cities around the world to discuss issues of mutual concern and to launch global open innovation competitions for individuals with great ideas to co-develop pioneering solutions for shared COVID-19-related challenges and economic recovery.

While Governments are still grappling with the effects of the pandemic, they must also now deal with the shocks caused by the events in Ukraine, as well as with issues such as climate change, digital disruption, and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Examples of innovative co-creation by Governments and their partners that focus on issues beyond COVID-19 can be seen in a multitude of policy areas.

In re-imagining communities, both in times of crisis and for enhanced community spaces, Ukraine, Estonia and Colombia are exemplary. ReStart Ukraine<sup>11</sup> is an open collective exploring ways to restore afflicted areas in a post-war scenario using a co-created toolbox to empower municipalities. Avalinn AR<sup>12</sup> in Estonia enables residents to use an augmented reality app to co-create urban development solutions. The city of Bogotá in Colombia is co-creating public spaces to improve neighbourhoods.<sup>13</sup>

Climate change remains a key concern across the globe. In Denmark, crea.visions enables the public to co-create with AI thought-provoking visions of utopias and dystopias to raise awareness about climate change challenges. On a European Union scale, the Citizen and Multi-Actor Consultation on Horizon 2020 (CIMULACT) project<sup>14</sup> brought together more

than a thousand citizens in 30 countries to co-create visions for sustainable futures and transform them into innovation recommendations.

In the policy area of protecting marginalized groups, the Activation Anti-Displacement programme in Austin, Texas, combats homelessness by co-creating anti-displacement strategies and data-driven equity tools to mitigate displacement risks. In Georgia, the Government's ServiceLab worked with individuals with hearing impairments to co-design an emergency services hotline with video chat and sign language capabilities.

Digital disruption can be used as a means to co-create. The NHS AI Lab<sup>15</sup> in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is bringing together cross-sector stakeholders and the public for co-creation and experimentation around AI to revolutionize health care. CitizenLab, a civic technology company in Belgium, empowers civil servants with AI-augmented processes for analysing citizen input and strengthening collaboration. In Colombia, the *Emerging Technologies Handbook*<sup>16</sup> promotes innovation and co-creation through the use of emerging technologies to advance the SDGs.

These cases represent just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Governments using innovative methods to co-create with their people to help address practically every type of challenge societies face. The key to moving forward is embedding such practices in the routine business of government and building a new collaborative capacity and culture at all levels—from the smallest teams to national systems and even beyond, to transnational and global ecosystems.

## Sources of inspiration: Toolkit Navigator and Innovation Playbook

In addition to the hundreds of examples of public sector innovation collected in the OPSI Case Study Library, there are many other tailor-made resources that can help Governments successfully employ co-creation approaches. The OPSI Toolkit Navigator provides support by orienting users around a vast collection of innovation toolkits (including the Open Government Partnership's Participation and Co-Creation Toolkit, Co-design Canvas, the Neighbourhood Ideas Exchange Toolkit, and the Partnership Co-design Toolkit) so that users can find those best suited to their situational needs.

A variety of quality resources other than the Toolkit Navigator exist to promote and enable co-creation. The Innovation Playbook offers actionable instruments for the implementation of the Declaration on Public Sector Innovation, including a key line of action focused on cultivating new partnerships and involving different voices.

Sources: OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, "Toolkit Navigator: putting innovation theory into practice", available at <https://oecd-opsi.org/toolkit-navigator>; *Innovation Playbook: Your 3-Step Journey to Put the Declaration on Public Sector Innovation into Practice* (April 2022), available at <https://oecd-opsi.org/publications/innovation-playbook>.

Note: In the Declaration, ministers and other national representatives affirm their commitment to five key action areas for public sector innovation, one of which is cultivating new partnerships and involving different voices.

## From ad hoc to systems approaches for today and tomorrow

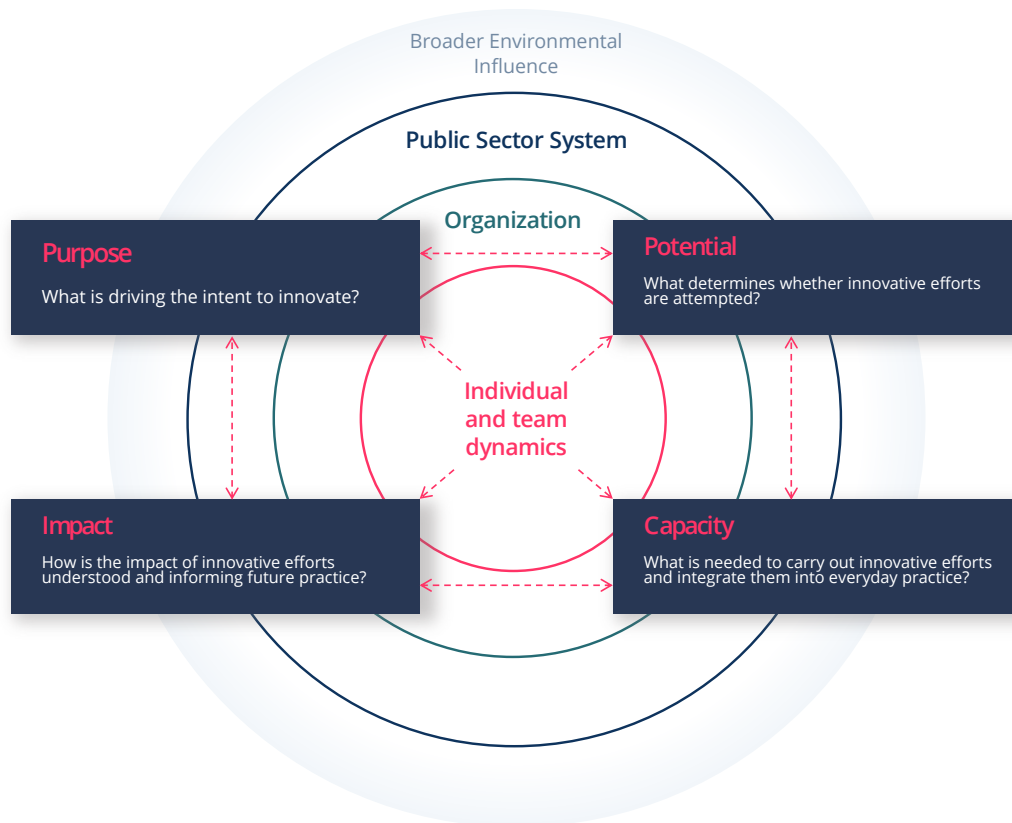
Governments shifting from COVID-19 response to longer-term recovery are turning their attention towards emerging new challenges as well as enduring priorities such as achieving the SDGs. When it comes to co-creation, Governments are increasingly recognizing that critical insights and good ideas often come from outside the walls of government. A key challenge Governments face, however, is moving beyond one-off ad hoc solutions in narrow environments. For innovative capacity to flourish, Governments need to move away from innovation as a sporadic activity (fuelled predominantly by crises) to systemically embedding innovation at the heart of policymaking and public administration.

To achieve this, Governments must enhance their systemic capacity to innovate. OPSI has developed the *Innovative Capacity of Governments: A Systemic Framework*<sup>17</sup> to facilitate this process. The Framework supports three levels of analysis (individuals and teams, organizations, and whole systems) through four innovation lenses (purpose of innovation, potential

for innovation, capacity to innovate, and impact of innovation). While this Framework is broader than co-creation, Governments will need to promote collaboration-relevant capacities and align processes to take innovative co-creation to the next level. The SDGs are systemic in nature, and Governments will need to ensure their co-creation activities are aligned to match cascading transversal effects.

While it can be overwhelming for Governments to deal with the crises and challenges of today, they must also prepare themselves for the future, working with citizens and residents in anticipating what may be necessary but has not yet emerged—and in some cases, even shaping future possibilities to build a bright future for the generations that follow. This approach hinges on harnessing collective imaginations. Ideas and life experiences must be able to permeate across organizations both inside and outside of government, and then be heard and acted upon, even when the return on investment may not be clear. Thus, in addition to strengthening their capacity to innovate, Governments should seek to build up good anticipatory innovative governance so that they are prepared to withstand and cope with future shocks.<sup>18</sup>

### Innovative Capacity Framework



Source: Misha Kaur and others, *Innovative Capacity of Governments: A Systemic Framework*, OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, No. 51 (Paris, OECD Publishing, 19 September 2022), available at <https://oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/innovative-capacity-wp.pdf>, adapted from figure 1, p. 22.

## Endnotes

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- 2 Christopher Ansell and Jacob Torfing, “Co-creation: the new kid on the block in public governance”, *Policy and Politics*, vol. 49, No. 2 (Policy Press, 2021), pp. 211-230, available at <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557321X16115951196045>.
- 3 OECD, *Declaration on Public Sector Innovation*, OECD Legal Instruments (OECD/Legal/0450), available at <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/oecd-legal-0450>.
- 4 OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, Mohammed Bin Rashid Centre for Government Innovation, and World Government Summit, *Global Trends 2020: Embracing Innovation in Government—Innovative Responses to the COVID-19 Crisis* (OECD OPSI, July 2020), available at <https://trends.oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/OECD-Innovative-Responses-to-Covid-19.pdf>.
- 5 Information on the OECD Observatory of Public Sector innovation is available at <https://oecd-opsi.org/>.
- 6 The SIGMA programme is a joint OECD - European Union initiative. Information on the SIGMA programme is available at <https://sigmaweb.org/>.
- 7 The reports are available on the OPSI website at <https://oecd-opsi.org/work-areas/innovation-trends>.
- 8 Information on the COVID-19 Innovative Response Tracker is available at <https://oecd-opsi.org/covid-response>.
- 9 Information on the OPSI Case Study Library is available at <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations>.
- 10 Information on UpdateDeutschland is available at <https://updatedeutschland.org>.
- 11 Information on ReStart Ukraine is available at <https://restartukraine.io>.
- 12 Information on Avalinn AR is available at <https://www.putukavail.ee/virtuaalreaalsus-linnaplaneerimises>.
- 13 OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, “Co-creation of public spaces for the improvement of neighbourhoods in Bogota”, Case Study Library (2021), available at <https://oecd-opsi.org/innovations/co-creation-of-public-spaces-bogota>.
- 14 See <http://www.cimulact.eu>; project details are available on the Missions Publiques website at <https://missionspubliques.org/pf/cimulact-un-agenda-de-la-recherche-europeenne-co-construit-avec-les-citoyens/>.
- 15 United Kingdom, National Health Service, “The NHS AI Lab: accelerating the safe adoption of artificial intelligence in health and care”, available at <https://transform.england.nhs.uk/ai-lab>.
- 16 Colombia, Ministry of Information, Communications and Technologies, “Guía con lineamientos generales para el uso de tecnologías emergentes”, available at [https://gobiernodigital.mintic.gov.co/692/articles-160829-Guia\\_Tecnologias\\_Emergentes.pdf](https://gobiernodigital.mintic.gov.co/692/articles-160829-Guia_Tecnologias_Emergentes.pdf).
- 17 Misha Kaur and others, *Innovative Capacity of Governments: A Systematic Framework*, OECD Working Papers on Public Governance, No. 51 (Paris, OECD Publishing, 19 September 2022), available at <https://oecd-opsi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/innovative-capacity-wp.pdf>. A summary of the report is available on the OPSI website at <https://oecd-opsi.org/publications/innovative-capacity-framework>.
- 18 OECD Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, “Exploring the future and taking action today”, available at <https://oecd-opsi.org/work-areas/anticipatory-innovation>.