When co-creation and co-governance meet

Co-creation and **co-governance** are closely associated, but not always present together. They represent complementary and interdependent concepts that are connected in many community development contexts. Both concepts involve collaboration and active participation of multiple stakeholders in decision-making processes, but they operate in overlapping but different domains. In fact, co-creation can be a powerful catalyst for co-governance, especially when focused on Nature Based Solutions (NbS) and other greening projects which have the power to bring people together with less conflict and controversy than some other types of regeneration projects.

The core connection between co-creation and co-governance lies in their shared principles of collaboration, participation, and inclusivity. Co-creation can often help initiate co-governance processes by involving stakeholders in projects and initiatives that are based on collective decision-making. Co-creation works under the assumption that by engaging diverse perspectives, it can generate insights, identify needs, and capture lived experiences that are more reflective of the aspirations of the community and, as a result, lead to better solutions. Co-governance also is anchored in collaborative action but looks at creating the longer-term structures and mechanisms for incorporating collective decision making into the ongoing implementation and management of local change.

Co-creation often refers to the process in which a group of people come together to create or develop something new, be it a NbS project or a health systems process. It involves bringing together various stakeholders, including customers, employees, partners, and community members to collectively generate ideas, share insights, and contribute to the design and development process. Co-creation recognises that valuable knowledge and expertise exist beyond the boundaries of any single entity, and by involving diverse perspectives, it aims to create more grounded, but still innovative, user-centric solutions. As co-creation tends to be project related, it will have clearer time-frames, quite specific goals and objectives and often focus on one scale of implementation.

Co-governance, on the other hand, will tend to focus on a set of projects, programmes, or interventions with the means for course correction and improvement over time. It becomes more about sharing power and authority among different stakeholders, including government bodies, organizations, and citizens. Co-governance aims to create the conditions for multiple voices to be heard over the long-term. For this to occur, the process must consider issues of transparency, accountability, and the design of the organisational networks; sharing power and responsibility in a more systemic way in order to achieve more inclusive, democratic, and effective partnerships as the backbone of community development.

The pivot point: Co-creation supports co-governance

While co-creation and co-governance share many similarities, they are not interchangeable concepts. There is a point of connection between them, and creating an awareness of this relationship might help strengthen both processes. While co-creation processes can occur without

moving into the realm of collaborative governance, when certain factors all come together over time and a critical mass of involvement is reached, there is a pivot point where the co-creation process becomes the starting point for co-governance. This is not the only pathway in which governance can approached by an organisation or community but it can be a catalyst and, with some foresight, we can make this catalysing function stronger.

The fundamental questions are how can co-creation support co-governance and how can these collaborative methods begin to work more synergistically in support of healthier and more inclusive and resilient communities? At a minimum, any small co-creation project that brings people together to discuss and make some decisions together, can through a butterfly effect, be the element of change to get governance processes started. However, more time and effort is usually required. For example, we can go into the co-creation process and, as it unfolds, invest the time and resources to upskill and bring confidence and familiarity in collaborative decision making to both community members and organisations. By training and upskilling people in the methods of collaborative dialogue, conflict resolution, empowerment and more, it is possible to, bit by bit, contribute to a growing pool of experience and knowledge in the community. This can build the foundations for co-governance. That is, each time we have a co-creation project, it can be considered part of a process of continual improvement, in the sense applied to any management system (like ISO 14001).

There are a number of different ways that co-creation can contribute to the consolidation of collaborative governance in a community. Including:

1. Identify early on how this process can become iterative. Perhaps, a separate parallel or follow up project can be identified that can benefit from the learnings and people involved and some legacy knowledge of the process can be carried over.
2. Utilise the current co-creation process to challenge the existing methods and locked-in decision-making processes. This may be either by bringing key stakeholders on board, creating an atmosphere of innovation, or by leading by example.
3. Use co-creation as a catalyst to set up more transparent information sharing systems.
4. Lastly (not an exhaustive list), consider every co-creation event as an opportunity for transformative learning.

Co-creation will help to build trust between governments, organisations and local communities. When people are involved in the decision-making process, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and investment in the outcomes. All of these efforts begin to increase people's confidence in collaborative systems and to shift the ongoing balance of decision making which is at the heart of governance.

Co-governance fosters co-creation

While this describes how co-creation can support co-governance, what can collaborative governance do for co-creation? As we know, the co-creation process is more project focused

2

and more limited within project timelines, whereas co-governance seeks to improve the overall process of shared decision-making and citizen participation and to self-correct over time. Any organisation or agency that is becoming more self-aware and begins migrating towards more horizontally structured decision-making processes, can without radically tearing down the existing organisational system, 'test the waters' of participation by utilising co-creation methods in an ever-increasing number of projects and departments. In general, co-creation will become strongly intertwined with collaborative governance when it is part of a broader process of collaborative decision-making that begins to establish a more comprehensive and sustained approach. In a context of developing co-governance, co-creation can play an important role in testing methods of improved transparency and accountability. By involving a diverse group of stakeholders in the decision-making process of several parallel projects, co-governance can become more established and recognised in the business as usual of the community. The overlap in these two processes is essential, and both become stronger when they support each other.

Conclusions

A common path forward is for co-creation to contribute to the formation of a critical mass in participation that allows for more systemic collaborative governance systems to emerge. Co-creation and co-governance are intertwined approaches that aim to enhance collaboration, participation, and inclusivity and they are processes that are most effective when conceived together in a context of mutual support. Co-governance, provides the contextual framework for collaboration between government, citizens, and other stakeholders in a community. Co-creation is where this collaboration can be applied, tested and improved upon, bringing more effective and sustainable outcomes by harnessing the collective wisdom and expertise of all stakeholders.

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