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Learning loops in the public realm. Enabling social learning in communities to tackle the challenges of cities in transition

Co-creation a way of supporting development of neighbourhood-level transport innovations

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Abstract: Co-creation is a much discussed concept in the fields of urban planning, architecture, urban design and many more. In the HORIZON 2020 project SUNRISE, co-creation is the key concept to develop, implement, assess and facilitate learning about new ways to address common mobility challenges at the neighbourhood level. Towards this aim, six SUNRISE cities (Bremen, Budapest, Jerusalem, Malmö, Southend on Sea, Thessaloniki) foster co-creation processes with the explicit mandate to implement innovative solutions for and with their residents, and other stakeholders. The SUNRISE action neighbourhoods combine a blend of proven online and face-to-face co-creation methods, tools and techniques to bring together citizens, policy-makers and other stakeholders to learn from each other and to address urban challenges in neighbourhoods in transitions. This contribution gives an overview of various methods for co-identification and co-development of sustainable mobility solutions at the neighbourhood level, and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of online and offline tools.

Keywords: co-creation; participation; mobility solutions; online and offline participation methods

Introduction

Today's urban challenges are complex: population growth, climate change, new technologies and many more create new challenges for urban development. The development of solutions requires integrative and holistic approaches. Participation, empowerment and social learning make it possible to integrate the needs and requirements of local stakeholders into urban planning and are often seen as a good lever to solve urban challenges.

Citizens and urban policy makers are experimenting with new collaborative approaches like co-creation to tackle persistent urban issues, such as climate change adaptation, quality of life, and urban inequalities. In search for more effective action plans, citizens, public institutions, private sector, and knowledge institutions are increasingly teaming up in formal and informal networks (Puerari 2018:1). Participation is an essential component of co-creation. In the HORIZON 2020 project SUNRISE,

participation is one of the key aspects to co-develop, co-implement, co-assess and facilitate learning about new ways to address common mobility challenges at the neighbourhood level. Towards this aim, six SUNRISE cities (Bremen, Budapest, Jerusalem, Malmö, Southend on Sea, Thessaloniki) foster co-creative participation processes with the explicit mandate to implement innovative solutions for and with their residents, and other stakeholders.. The SUNRISE action neighbourhoods combine a blend of proven online and face-to-face participation techniques to bring together citizens, stakeholders and policy-makers to learn from each other and to address urban challenges in neighbourhoods and cities in transitions.

This contribution gives an overview of various participation methods for co-identification and co-development of sustainable mobility solutions at the neighbourhood level, and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of online and offline participation tools. Main questions are: How can these tools enhance the co-creation processes? To what extent can these tools help people, communities and policy-makers to 'learn' about the problems or to develop solutions on the neighbourhood level?

Co-Creation

People and their cities are engaging in new ways. In some cities, anyone with a smart phone can report graffiti or a pothole directly to the right city department. Others participate in change labs that engage people from problem definition all the way to finding solutions. All of these activities are part of a process called co-creation (Leading Cities 2014:1). Originally conceived as a business strategy for identifying new forms of customer engagement, co-creation is currently used in several sectors, such as marketing, public service management, design, innovation, urban and regional planning (Lund 2017: 32). Given this diversity of application contexts, it is therefore perhaps not surprising that the concept does not have one clear definition.

In the field of urban development/ urban planning, the research group Leading Cities (2014: 3) comprehensively defined co-creation as “the active flow of information and ideas among five sectors of society: government, academia, business, non-profits and citizens (...) which allows for participation, engagement, and empowerment in, developing policy, creating programs, improving services, and tackling systemic change with each dimension of society represented from the beginning.

The combination of the following two definitions from the literature describes SUNRISE’s notion of co-creation:

- Co-creation refers to a process that brings together different parties, e.g. a company and a group of customers, to jointly produce a mutually valued outcome (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).
- In a co-creation approach, heterogeneous actors collaborate to produce knowledge, instruments, technology, artefacts, policy, know-how, etc. (JPI Urban Europe 2016: 52).

Participation – The Basis of Co-Creation

The central aspects of “co-creation” – the term for creating something together as a team – are therefore idea generation and cooperation. In order to develop new solutions in accordance with urban challenges, the co-creation approach focuses on the cooperation of transdisciplinary actors who jointly address challenges in a "process of creation" (Dübner et al. 2018: 142).

Participation is an essential component of co-creation and a much-discussed concept in the field of urban planning, urban design and other fields. For government leaders, agencies and developers, public participation allows them to collect and provide information about community needs, identify attitudes and opinions, generate new ideas, allow for smoother implementation, and build constituency support. However, for citizens and community organizations, co-creation can offer opportunities to gain representation and be heard, exercise political rights and influence policy decisions (Leading Cities 2014: 4). Participation is also a big challenge because it requires an actor to yield some of its power to another actor. Often this transfer is from the city administration to residents or other interested actors. The shift of power and the subsequent renegotiations of power relations are a core ingredient of every participation process. All persons in key positions in a participation process need to be aware of the shift of power and its ramifications (Arnstein 1969: 216).

The extent of opportunities for and rights of participation in a particular process of co-development and co-decision depends on several factors. On the one hand, the degree to which the interests of citizens can be taken into account depends on the type of process involved (formal or informal), and from the willingness of decision-makers in politics, the administration and business (the urban stakeholders). On the other hand, the chosen method also determines largely the level of influence of citizens' or stakeholders' interests.

Against this background, the influence of citizens in and through participation processes can be distinguished in three steps: information, consultation and decision-influencing (simplified distinction according to Arnstein 1969; Arbter et al. 2007: 9):

- **Information:** Informative methods ensure that stakeholders and interested actors are informed about a project and its likely effects; informative methods offer little scope of influencing the decisions taken. Public meetings aimed exclusively at informing, and providing opportunities to inspect official documents, are examples of this approach.
- **Consultation:** Consultative methods provide stakeholders and interested actors with an opportunity to comment on suggestions plans or decisions, and to table their ideas, which are to be taken into account at the decision stage. Suitable for co-design processes, consultative methods need openness to differing views and alternatives. Suggestions and advice to be taken into account by local decision-makers are the outcome of such methods.
- **Co-decision:** The furthest reaching form of participation methods are joint decisions in order to find an agreed solution. This is the level all participation activities in SUNRISE were striving for. Here stakeholders and interested actors have the opportunity to influence a decision, a project and the details of its implementation. Such methods require the integration of persons from politics, administration, and other stakeholders in the process. The scope

ranges from cooperatively developing suggestions all the way to the participants having extensive powers to decide.

In SUNRISE, we strive for the third step, decision-influencing, or co-decision to meet the expectations of a co-creation process with stakeholder and resident involvement. Information, however, must accompany all participation processes in their entire duration for reasons of transparency, visibility and to keep interested stakeholders involved.

Methods and Tools for Co-Creation

There is a wide range of different kinds of participation tools, methods and technologies in the practice in different countries and cultural contexts. Depending on the goals of the participation process and the groups to be integrated, different methods are suitable for co-creation on the neighbourhood-level. In order to achieve different objectives and address several target groups it is useful to apply a mix of methods. A good mix consists of different, complementary methods that further the goal of co-learning, co-creation and commitment building.

The best applicable method of a particular participation process depends on many factors, including the objectives, the target groups, the personnel, financial and time resources as well as the embedding in the political-administrative system (Senatsverwaltung Berlin 2011: 92 &160).

Differences among participatory processes result from the number of participants and from the regulation of access. In principle, a process may be aimed to the general public, and thus to all interested actors, to reach as many people as possible. A process may, however, also refer to a selection of representatives of different interest groups or to all those directly affected by a particular topic or the subject-matter of the participatory procedure. For the selection of the method, the following questions are relevant (Nanz & Fritsche 2012: 25):

- Is the number of participants limited by any given factors?
- Are there special hard-to-reach groups that need to be integrated in a specific way?
- Are specific methods particularly suitable for those certain parts of groups?

The SUNRISE mission is to develop, implement, assess and facilitate co-learning about new, collaborative ways to address common urban mobility challenges at the neighbourhood level. Towards this aim, the SUNRISE action neighbourhoods combine a blend of proven online and face-to-face participation methods, tools and techniques (e.g. citizen advisory committee, dialogue centre tool, field trips, focus groups, message board, mobile stand, opinion survey, public meeting etc.) to bring together citizens, stakeholders and policy-makers to learn from each other and create new mobility solutions.

Online Methods and Tools for Co-Development Mobility Solutions

In the face of the trend towards digitization, the consensus that successful urban solutions shall collectively be conceived and developed as a societal task is becoming increasingly present (Sørensen & Torfing, 2016). As we cannot elude the digitization of our built surroundings and everyday lives, we can make use of technology in a way that cities become more liveable for the individual and address overarching goals such as sustainability and resilience. In addition to a variety of conventional and innovative participation methods, digital tools create options for integrating local actors into decision-making and implementation processes relevant to urban development (Dübner et al. 2018:141).

Online tools have the potential to include some target groups that might be hard to approach with offline methods that are place-bound or take an amount of time. For such groups, online tools are suitable, as they may participate from home or via mobile phones. However, not all target groups have access to internet at home or on their mobile phones, or prefer to participate face-to-face. Furthermore, online literacy of target groups varies greatly: online tools may be difficult to understand for people who do not regularly work with them. A further problem is that many online tools, like crowdsourcing of ideas or mapping tools, have the disadvantage that we do not know exactly who participated and require a continuous moderation of the online platform to sort out meaningful contribution (Franta et al. 2017: 46).

In SUNRISE, mainly city-specific SUNRISE websites were used as an online tool for stakeholder information and involvement. The city-specific websites in SUNRISE are used as virtual information centres, where all information publication material is made available. Furthermore, a web-based mapping forum was implemented into the website, which allows collecting mobility-related issues, needs and ideas. The objective of this forum was the collection of geo-referenced problems, needs and ideas, which are subsequently rated by users. The following core functionalities were implemented:

- Submit ideas: Users are able to submit new innovative ideas for public transport;
- View ideas: All users are able to view ideas;
- Rate ideas: Users are able to rate existing ideas;
- Comment ideas: Users are able to comment on and discuss existing ideas.

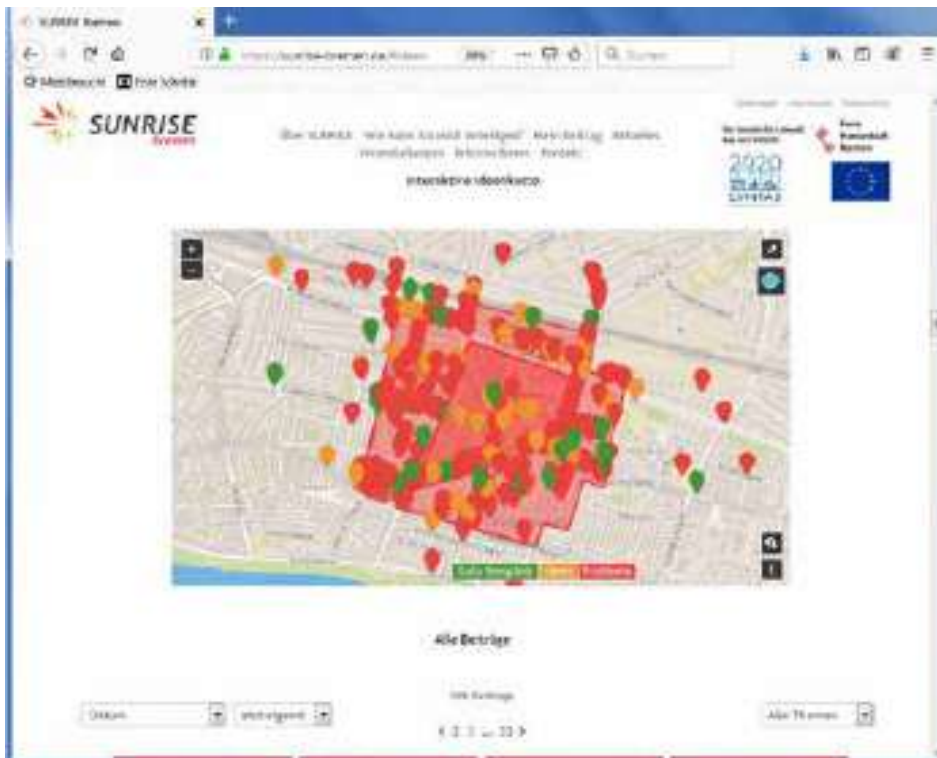


Figure 1: Website-based mapping tool Bremen (www.sunrise-bremen.de)

The online mapping tool offers the following advantages for the co-development of mobility solutions:

- Many people can share their needs and ideas:
- The functionalities of rating and commenting the ideas enable collaboration, learning and (further) development of ideas;
- A process of developing mobility solutions is possible because the tool has been permanently implemented on the homepage.

Disadvantages for the co-development of mobility solutions of online mapping tools are:

- Only people with high web-affinity are reached; some (often senior) people do not use the internet;
- It is not possible to trace who the participants are or to ensure that different stakeholders participate.

Offline Methods and Tools for Co-Development Mobility Solutions

Co-creation does not take place in a vacuum, but always occurs within socio-spatial contexts. Spaces and places are the relevant conditions that facilitate the interaction and access between actors that bring innovative ideas and resources and are also catalysts of interactive learning and innovation. Creating the physical (and mental) spaces for learning and experimenting is a necessary condition for fundamental change. Spaces and places facilitate visionary collaborations for making and learning together through co-creation practices. They enable collaborating actors to systematically and deliberately explore solutions across sectorial boundaries. Moreover, they constitute interventions within socio-spatial contexts themselves (Puerari et al. 2018:6). Spaces and places of co-creation are found to affect their socio-spatial environment, e.g., by providing meeting places, creating visibility for local sustainability issues, or by becoming “vehicles for innovation in urban planning processes” (Scholl et al. 2016: 89) .

For this reason, the SUNRISE cities also use a wide range of different kinds of offline participations methods for co-identification and co-planning of sustainable mobility solutions in the neighbourhood. On the one hand the cities used methods like mobile stands, opinion surveys, public meetings etc., aimed at the general public, and thus to all interested actors, to reach as many people as possible.



Figure 2: Mobile Stand in Törökör (Budapest)

The participation methods aimed at the general public offer the following advantages for the co-development of mobility solutions:

- Many people can share their needs and ideas;
- It is clear who the participants are and it can be ensured that different stakeholders participate;

- Depending on the method, tools and techniques, collaboration is also possible;

Possible disadvantages for the co-development of mobility solutions of offline methods for the general public are:

- Due to the mostly temporary nature of methods, the possibilities of a process for developing mobility solutions and learning from each other are limited.

On the other hand, the SUNRISE cities also use participatory methods for co-creation referring to a selection of representatives of different interest groups or to those directly affected by a particular topic (e.g. citizen advisory committee, workshops, focus groups, field trips for blind people etc.).



Figure 3: Workshop with councillor members in Southend-on-Sea

The participation methods referring to a selection of representatives of different interest groups offer the following advantages for the co-development of mobility solutions:

- Due to the small number of participants, intensive cooperation is possible;
- If the method is used repeatedly, a process of developing mobility solutions and learning from each other is possible.

Possible disadvantages for the co-development of mobility solutions of the offline methods for specific groups or stakeholders are:

- Due to the limited number of participants, not all stakeholders may be involved.

Conclusion

Co-creation is a new form of urban planning with the municipality, private organizations and individual citizens. In the literature Co-creation benefits are associated with improving processes of idea generation, decision-making and promoting co-operation and creativity. In addition, co-creation positively impacts on improving users' satisfaction and building trust or loyalty over the long-term. Especially when urban planning ideas are co-developed and tested already in the early stages, the projects are more likely to proceed smoothly, in a good spirit and are not in danger of being delayed or halted as a result of political or social resistance. There is also a possibility of minimizing economic risks as there is no need to make costly changes afterwards, if it is noticed that something went wrong in the planning stage (Oksman et al. 2014: 189)

Participation is a central aspect of co-creation, but every participation method, tool or technique is socially selective. No participation process attracts all people in the same way. This leads to certain social groups being over- or under-represented in the processes, depending on the format, the invitation policy, the setting and the structure. For those reasons, digital participation alone does not work: Only physical meetings enable dynamic face-to-face discussions and therefore, community building and networking.

Online tools have the potential to include some target groups that might be hard to approach with offline methods that are place-bound or take an amount of time. For such groups, online tools are suitable, as they may participate from home or via mobile phones. Moreover, during offline events further participatory tools and settings can reach target groups which are excluded from online discussions. Thus, what has been a crowd-sourced online need to be discussed offline and vice versa in a continuous process. All in all, online and offline dialogue should coexist in co-creation processes.

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