

Big Messages

Lessons for co-creative mobility initiatives in neighbourhoods



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Photo: Vrije Universiteit Brussel



It starts from
the idea that
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Introduction

Cities-4-People, METAMORPHOSIS, Looper and SUNRISE are four different EU-funded projects with a shared mission: to co-create participatory (mobility) solutions with citizens at the neighbourhood level.

Co-creation is an approach that focuses on bringing together different societal factors (typically including public administrators and citizens) around matters of shared concern. In addition to improving the quality and relevance of a service, a "product" (incl. public infrastructure) or policy, co-creation is increasingly applied to make governance more democratic, fair, and inclusive. It starts from the idea that everyone has expert knowledge and experience in their own life. This is why neighbourhood mobility provides such a strong foundation for pursuing co-creation – people have a deep knowledge of their own neighbourhood, and a huge stake in ensuring the quality and safety of the spaces they inhabit and move through in daily life.

There are many ways to imagine co-creation in the context of neighbourhood mobility. Cities-4-People took a bottom-up and open-ended approach to identifying mobility problems and co-creating solutions and implementations in five

European cities. METAMORPHOSIS applied co-creation with children to develop novel and innovative pilots that stemmed from youthful imagination. Looper applied learning loops to the co-creative process to foster iterative feedback that informed each stage of design and implementation. SUNRISE developed "neighbourhood mobility labs" as a way to apply co-creation in Sustainable Neighbourhood Mobility Planning.

These projects came together to ask fundamental questions for ongoing and future mobility projects at the neighbourhood level: What do we share in common? What can we learn from each other? What have we discovered, what could we improve, and what can we suggest to others based on our experiences? This process culminated in October 2020 at the "Joint Neighbourhood Conference", which included practitioners, policymakers, citizens, and others.

Drawing from the experiences within the projects and the discussions during the "Joint Neighbourhood Conference", the four co-creative 'Neighbourhood Projects' present the following 10 Big Messages as essential findings with a two-fold intention:

- to provide advice for other cities and neighbourhood actors
- to enable policy makers, funders etc. to improve the context conditions of co-creation projects at the neighbourhood level.

The projects' 10 Big Messages are:

1. Utilise the advantages of the neighbourhood level
2. Invest in citizen participation
3. Educate on the value of co-creation and provide training and resources
4. Level the playing field (everybody is an expert, understand the citizens' needs)
5. Be where the people are
6. Allow experiments
7. Ensure diversity and inclusivity in communities
8. Manage expectations
9. Evaluate and value the interpersonal and social results
10. Look at the big picture



O

Utilise the advantages of the neighbourhood level

The neighbourhood is where everyday life unfolds, where people leave their front door in the morning, meet their neighbors, where children go to school and typically where people shop for their daily needs. In short: The neighbourhood is the extended version of the home, where people spend a large part of their time. The neighbourhood shapes our lives and our sense of what is normal and most of us have an intimate and very detailed knowledge about it.

This provides unique opportunities for action: the spatial proximity of many destinations means that neighbourhood mobility takes place on foot, bicycles, kick scooters and other modes of transportation. The problems and effects of interventions are direct and tangible, which is conducive to experimentation and action research. Otherness is often perceived as less threatening because people are on their home turf, which can translate into an openness for other perceptions and

needs. Finally, a sense of community, a shared language, cultural references and established communication channels found in a neighbourhood provide social capital that can support meaningful collaboration.

There are, naturally, challenges inherent to the neighbourhood level as well: there may be tensions between competing types of space usage. Local communities are often portrayed as closed with a stifling degree of social control, tacit – and therefore inaccessible – knowledge and intransparent decision making structures. Meanwhile, external actors (city administration, investors, corporate property owners) are often well organised, connected and funded, which may create a power imbalance against the neighbourhood residents. City centres and wealthier neighbourhoods thus tend to get more attention and care in terms of urban design, barrier-free retrofitting, pedestrianisation etc. Other areas can be left behind.





Photo: METAMORPHOSIS / Harry Schiffer

Recommendations

- **Neighbourhood-level planning** should be acknowledged, promoted and funded as a standard element of planning for the sustainable city.
- Any intervention in or around residential neighbourhoods has to **embrace and strengthen the inherent resilience features of neighbourhoods** as precaution to future crises, including pandemics.
- The development of real estate has to **increase the functional diversity** of and around neighbourhoods in order to reduce the need to travel to shops, workplaces etc.
- Awareness of **social capital in the neighbourhoods** – and knowledge of how to protect and utilise it – should be an integral part of education for city planners.
- The “attention boundary” of Cost Benefit Analysis methods has to be extended in order to **capture the social “return on investment”** of all planned measures that affect neighbourhoods.
- The European Commission’s Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning (SUMP) concept should be updated in order to **make city-wide and neighbourhood-level planning approaches structurally compatible** and to utilise synergies between them.



02

Invest in citizen participation and co-creation

Investment in citizen participation includes time, money, trust, effort, and commitment. Co-creation with citizens takes longer than traditional planning and consultation approaches. But the investment increases trust between citizens and policy makers, extends knowledge of participants about a subject, and builds participants' capacities.

Trust between participants is essential to co-creation, and it is also one of the main outcomes that facilitators can hope to achieve. However, when a co-creation process is set up by external partners such as the government or researchers, communities and residents may perceive them with distrust, as 'outsiders'. Building this trust between citizens and other stakeholders (such as policy makers and civil organisations) is a process that takes time, effort, and therefore investment. The same holds true when helping citizens to build knowledge and capacities: participatory efforts that are sustainable and of a high quality require continuous and structured engagement with local communities and residents.





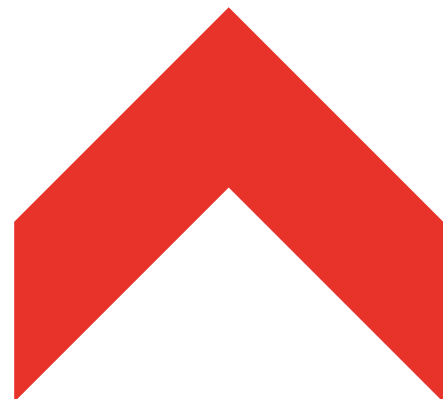
Photo: METAMORPHOSIS Project, RADpaRADe

Recommendations

- Investing time, staff and money into well-designed co-creation processes pays back in broader engagement, more creative ideas and smoother implementation.
- Invest in strengthening mutually beneficial relationships between local anchors to reduce distrust and alienation of citizens from public authorities, especially among minority or disadvantaged groups. An NGO, business, or school may facilitate this process as an anchor, because citizens already trust this actor and are familiar with interacting with them.
- Ensure that project results will be implemented, and demonstrate how the results of the co-creation process are seriously taken up by decision makers in order to ensure trust and motivation from participants.
- Public authorities and project facilitators should manifest their commitment to co-creation through a formal "participation promise", that is, a public statement to confirm that the thoughts, ideas and concerns of citizens will be taken into account and not shelved away. Provide evidence later on how, in what ways and in what cases this has materialised.
- Adapt participation approach to local participation culture.



Photo: METAMORPHOSIS Project, Vitoria-Gasteiz





03

Educate on the value of co-creation and provide training and resources



Co-creation can and has been applied successfully to many situations. Companies employ it with their clients, clinics and researchers employ it with their patients, and local governments employ it with their citizens and stakeholders. However, it is not a common approach taken on in urban planning and governance realms. One barrier is a lack of familiarity with the process, its benefits and suitable methods and tools. City planners' and policymakers' work can be made better by the involvement of the citizens (who are often also the subjects of their work), and citizen initiatives can be enhanced by working with local authorities. In order for co-creation to be taken up more widely, people must understand the value of such approaches. It would benefit city planners and policymakers to bring other stakeholders, including residents, into the planning process, and by the same token, it is important that residents and other stakeholders understand the benefits of their involvement.

One sure fire way to boost co-creation being taken seriously is to professionalise it, provide the necessary funding and training for city staff and others; develop tools, manuals, guidelines, best practice repositories, curricula, vocational training programmes, PhD stipends, and conferences.

Recommendations

- Develop strategies to educate authorities on the economic, social and environmental value of including citizens' **participation and co-creation as an intrinsic part of any city making process** (visioning, planning, implementing, evaluating).
- **Provide training to planning authorities** to empower them to take co-creative approaches with suitable methods and tools.
- Update university curricula for a broad range of disciplines and offer practice-based experiences (internships, volunteer, and professional opportunities) to **ensure that young graduates are equipped** with the appreciation and skills to facilitate co-creation processes.
- **Show decision-makers the evidence** that investing time, staff, and money into well-designed co-creation processes reaps huge benefits. **Co-creation takes longer than traditional planning and consultation** approaches, but the time and resources invested pay back.
- Establish networks, exchange fora, best practice repositories, conferences etc. to **systematically collect, share, and educate** on tools and approaches to facilitate co-creation across citizens, policy makers, and researchers.



Photo: Cities-4-People Consortium, 2020. Co-creation in Hamburg

04

Level the playing field

Photo: METAMORPHOSIS Project

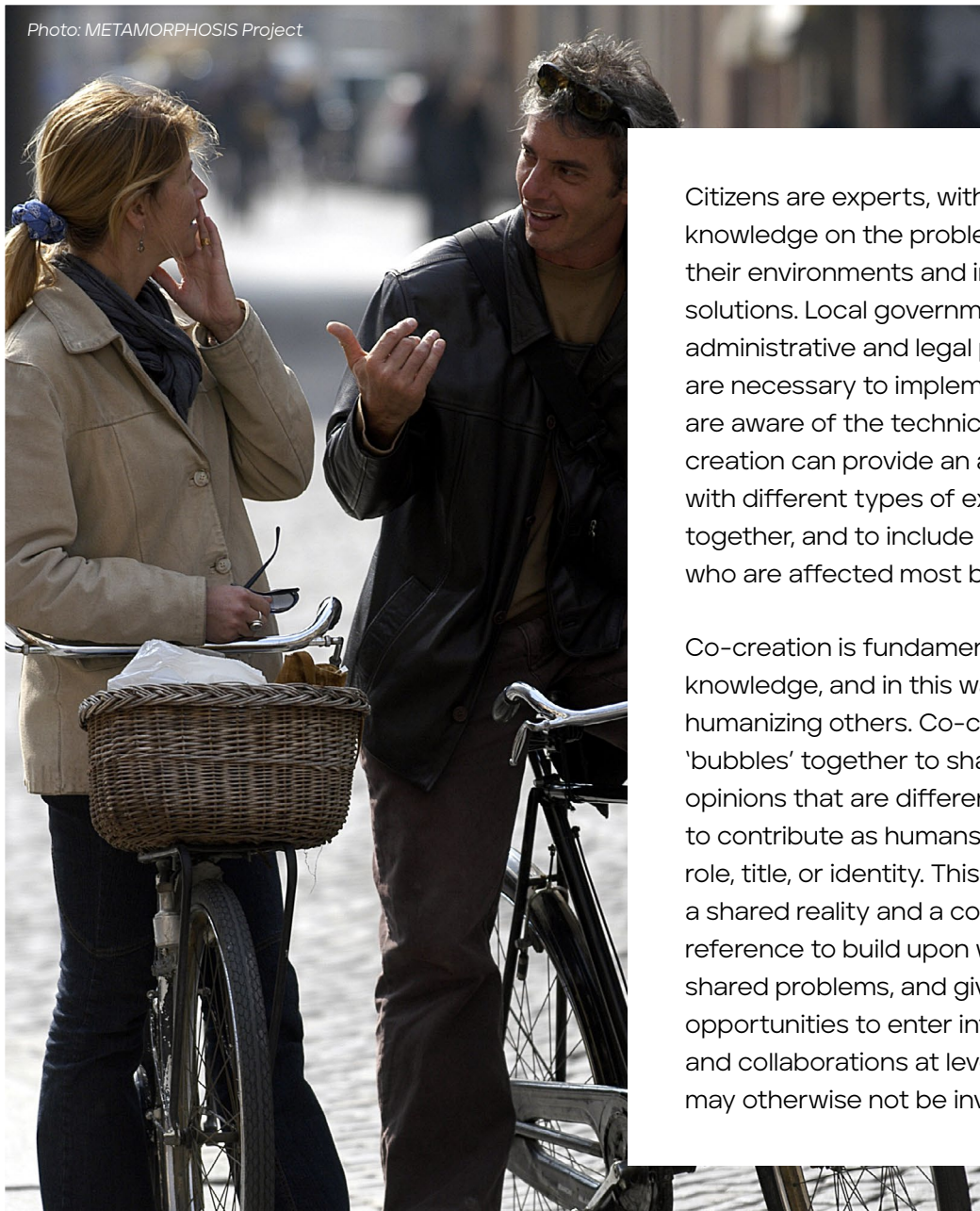


Photo: METAMORPHOSIS Project

Citizens are experts, with detailed knowledge on the problems they face in their environments and insight into possible solutions. Local governments know the administrative and legal procedures that are necessary to implement solutions and are aware of the technical possibilities. Co-creation can provide an avenue for groups with different types of expertise to come together, and to include the voices of those who are affected most by decision making.

Co-creation is fundamentally about sharing knowledge, and in this way, it is also about humanizing others. Co-creation can bring 'bubbles' together to share ideas and opinions that are different, and allow people to contribute as humans, not limited to their role, title, or identity. This process can create a shared reality and a common point of reference to build upon when tackling shared problems, and gives citizens opportunities to enter into discussions and collaborations at levels where they may otherwise not be invited.



Recommendations

- **The co-creation process should be open to all.** Perspectives are further democratised when workshops are organised with citizens of all backgrounds and co-creation methods are used to engage them.
- **Co-creation should aim to create solutions that have involved all relevant stakeholders.** Otherwise, conflicts of interest or negative impacts can prevent the implementation of even the best idea. Consensus might not always be achievable. Decisions on non-multipliable resources such as space will inevitably have winners and losers.
- **Consider citizens as equal partners** and allow time to explain to them the co-creation process, the role of the participants and the possible outcomes.
- **Build co-creation into your participation culture** as a necessary step to develop new policies, plans and strategies.
- Turn problems into solutions by **using an iterative approach**, such as learning loops, to improve and give everyone a chance to contribute.
- **The involvement of public authorities in a true partnership** can be beneficial to a development or planning process as it increases the likelihood of implementation. Co-creation will disappoint citizens when they feel nothing is done with their input.
- A data-driven approach can establish a concrete basis for action. The **collected data can then be used to petition local authorities.** Bias in the presentation of data can affect the way people perceive and issue. With this in mind, data should be presented and visualised in formats that are easily understandable for citizens and policy makers.
- **Considering different stakeholders as equals** can reduce distrust between them.
- **Children have a unique view** on public spaces and future development and their inputs should be heard.

05

Be where the people are

In order to include the citizens' point of view, you need to be where the citizens are and experience the city as they do, at the times and places that are most convenient for them. It is not up to the citizens to face the hurdles to be able to participate. It is up to the policymakers and facilitators to make sure it is possible for them to be heard.

But in addition to reaching citizens in terms of communication and accessibility,

'being where the people are' is also about putting people's priorities, ideas, and capabilities at the core of your efforts. Ideally citizens should feel that the city and their surroundings are theirs - which would include policies. But it takes effort to be involved and feel that ownership. Even when people have a stake, their availability or mobility might prevent them from being heard.



Photo: METAMORPHOSIS Project



Photo: Emmy Linde

Recommendations

- Connect with people – start from this base. Get to know the person and **invest in creating human relationships**.
 - **Remove the obstacles that prevent participation.** This means you take into account availability of people (move with their agendas instead of yours), the platforms you use to communicate, the locations where you meet people and the tone-of-voice and vocabulary you use. Seemingly banal issues such as appropriate meeting venues, times and facilities (e.g. provision of childcare) can have a large impact on participation.
 - **Identify the right channels of communication** that will best reach the local community. People may be less acquainted with technology but may rely more on their group of friends or associations. In this case, organising an activity at the club that they know well will be more effective to involve this group of citizens than using an online platform.
 - **Work with local community networks** and already established groups and forums instead of creating new ones from scratch.
- By working with actors that already have relationships with citizens, you can tap into their existing trust. However, some groups are quite fixed in a lobby for certain issues. Always try to combine people from an existing group with individuals to get a more complete and balanced representation.
- **Online platforms can help to facilitate civic engagement,** allowing the direct participation of people in the decision-making process.
 - **A combination of online and offline tools allows you to involve different citizens groups at the same time.** New technologies and digital tools can facilitate knowledge sharing and mutual learning. While digital co-design tools and platforms prove useful in certain instances, physical meetings and events are still important instruments to engage citizens as the proximity of others and their opinions/knowledge will improve bonding and understanding, knowledge exchange and collaboration. **Online and offline tools and meetings achieve different results.**

Recommendations continued

- Research the specific (hard-to-reach) groups and people to identify the best way to contact them. **There is not one way to reach everybody** – your invitations need to be tailor made for each target audience.
- Make sure to **consider the needs of specific vulnerable groups** when deciding which co-creative tools and activities to implement. Not all activities might be accessible to people with disabilities, such as people in a wheelchair or people with sight problems. You need to understand the limitations and possibilities of each group.
- **Keep the co-creation process compact** in order to prevent participation fatigue and people dropping off along the way.
- Developing better mobility and transportation requires an understanding of the ever changing citizens' needs and new technologies. **Research projects that focus on new transport and mobility should draw from the knowledge of previous projects and contribute knowledge to future efforts in order to drive an ongoing process of identifying citizens' needs and adapting to new technology.**
- **Keep digging** to bring in all affected people – this will ultimately be more groups than first meet the eye, as research and time spent in a neighbourhood will uncover many people and groups who are unexpectedly affected by mobility initiatives.
- **Visit the groups that would not attend your workshops** or events in order to increase the variety of input and opinions.



Photo: Yuri and the team enjoying streets with fewer parked cars (c) City of Bremen, M. Glotz-Richter



06

Allow experiments

Allowing experiments is about creating room to fail, both in the culture of the project (letting people know it's okay to try things that do not work), and in the project planning (making sure there is room, budget, time and space for experimentation).

The use of 'pilots', or intervention trials for urban mobility schemes, follows this principle, in demonstrating the 'art-of-the-possible', and where co-design, interactive participation, and other useful feedback from local community participants can be gathered, to inform future direction and what works (and what does not). Pilots

should be experimental. When designing one, ask: Does this pilot really encourage experimentation? Or does it mandate where experimentation starts and ends, and imply that the experiments must be successful? Ensure that project planning and preconditions do not constrict your potential to experiment.

Experimentation is an important part of the human developmental process, which is especially true in the case of children and young people. In becoming adults, we must therefore not lose sight that 'trial-and-error', and other experimental techniques, are essential for learning.

Recommendations

- **Allow flexibility** – to be able to adjust planned processes to the reality “on the ground” is important for a good co-creation process. A co-creation process needs fluidity and agility. The administrative project reporting process and framework should also reflect on and accommodate this.
- **Dedicate a regular budget** for planning and implementing sustainable mobility concepts, including experiments, interventions and measures.
- **Use ‘prototyping’ and small-scale pilots** to test new solutions and ideas, without mandating that they are immediately successful.
- **Act on “small” lessons learnt.** Citizens are more likely to take part in longer planning processes when they see that facilitators react to citizen input.
- **Allow for genuine experimentation,** which inevitably comes with a real risk of failure, and without the need to sugar-coat the results. Appreciate learning from lower-than and different-from the expected impacts.
- **Provide enough time** for conducting, analysing, and reacting to tests, trials, and prototypes.
- Building tangible and concrete prototypes or other physical points of reference can help to **build a stronger collective memory** of previous co-creation sessions and progress.

Photo: METAMORPHOSIS Project



07

Ensure diversity and inclusivity in communities

When engaging a local community, it is crucial to take into account the needs, demands and wishes of a wide diversity of people, including children and families, older and/or mobility-impaired people, those from lower income and/or migrant backgrounds, LGBT+ groups; and to treat males, females and non-binary groups in an equal and respectful manner.

Mobility means different things to different people. For some people, mobility may be about efficiency in moving through a city; for others, mobility may be about comfortably moving throughout their own home, or socialising with others in their

neighbourhood. Historically, the design and management of cities has benefited some users at the expense of others, for example, planning and decision making on urban street design was, and is, dominated by middle-aged, employed, car-owning, white men. This "windshield-perspective" has led to car domination at the expense of other forms of transport, including walking (the most prevalent form), and which is used more predominantly by women and children. To ensure high performance and diverse perspectives, various groups should be reflected in the project team's composition, and the team should promote equality and diversity in the process.

Photo: Lendwirbel Outdoor Schule. METAMORPHOSIS Project





Recommendations

- Establish **open, continuous, and accessible channels of communication** with local communities.
- **Involve people from all ages.** For example, involve children's visions and ideas when it comes to neighbourhood activities and redesign of street use, in order to make public space fit for future generations. The needs of children are typically well received by adults.
- **Ensure that there are methodical and robust processes in place for assessing and addressing issues relating to ethics,** data protection and privacy (including GDPR), especially when working with children and other vulnerable groups. While there is much attention on digital co-design tools and platforms, **physical meeting opportunities and events are still important** instruments to engage citizens who do not use digital services or prefer personal interaction.
- Make an active effort to **reach hard-to-reach groups** and others. Conduct research into the neighbourhood and try different methods to engage a diverse group, and learn and evolve from experience.
- The distribution of road space is highly unfair, as it strongly favours motorised traffic. The EU should take action in helping the member countries to **improve their national road codes** towards a more equal road space allocation.



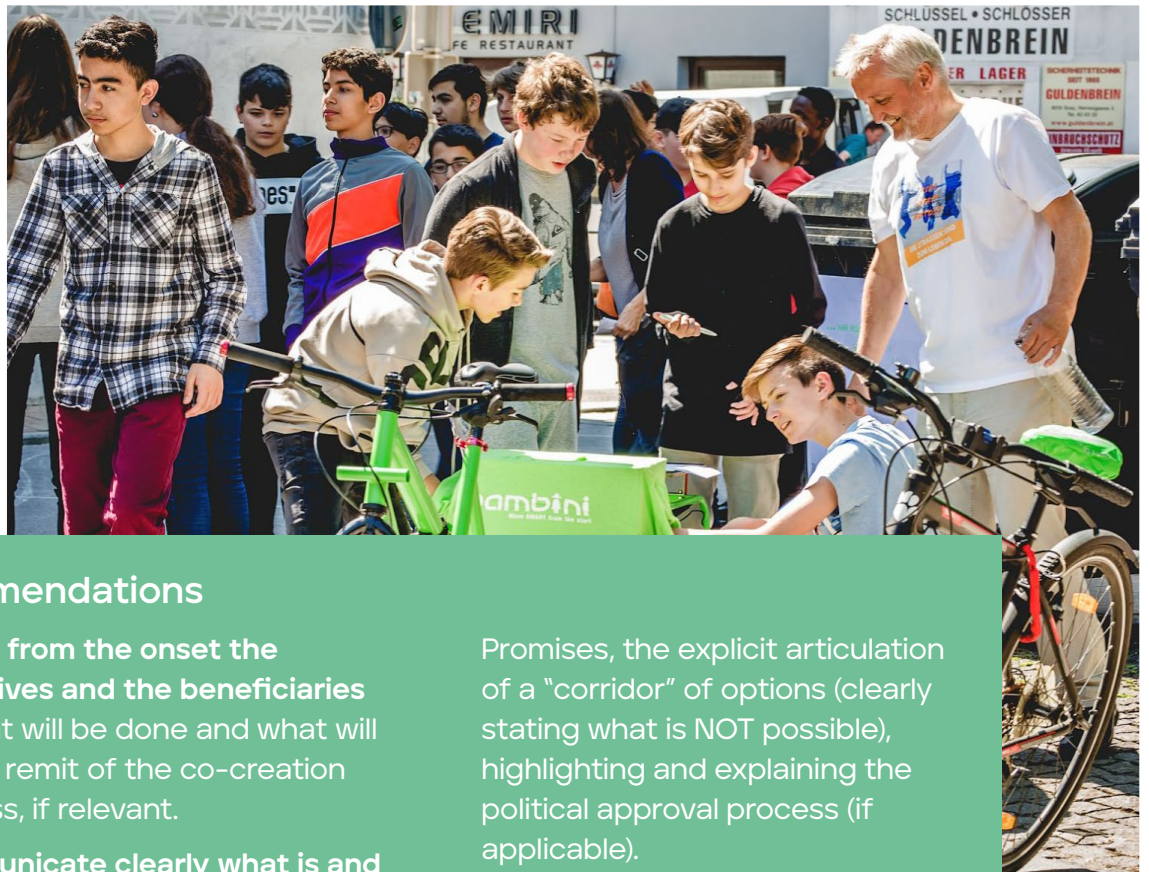
08

Manage expectations

Manage expectations of participants and avoid making promises which either may not be kept, or which may later hamper flexibility and experimentation. This holds true both in the short term (for example, during a single co-creation session) and in the long term (through the course of the project).

Expectation management is most fundamentally about maintaining openness, realism, and honesty about a project's boundaries and what it can achieve. For example, citizen science initiatives can be clearly framed as experimental, with goals like building citizen knowledge or advocating for a political change; citizens build knowledge and add political pressure. Simply put, avoid guaranteeing specific outcomes, but be very clear about what goals and opportunities are. Finally, remember that people are individuals who may have clashing interests or diverging opinions.





Recommendations

- **Define from the onset the objectives and the beneficiaries** of what will be done and what will be the remit of the co-creation process, if relevant.
- **Communicate clearly what is and what is not possible.** People often want to see immediate results. If permits are needed for a certain intervention, communicate this to citizens.
- **Keep participants updated.** If something changes over the course of a project, be open about those changes and outline what the implications are.
- **Manage expectations** to avoid disillusionment and unrealistic demands by using means such as Memorandums of Understanding (MoU), Dossiers, Participation Promises, the explicit articulation of a "corridor" of options (clearly stating what is NOT possible), highlighting and explaining the political approval process (if applicable).
- Acknowledge that even though **co-creation might be unpredictable** and time-consuming, it is a way in which people's complex daily realities can be understood and catered for in an effective and lasting way.
- **Be transparent.** Citizens, policymakers, NGOs, and researchers may all have different agendas. Real progress is possible if there is openness and honesty about these differences.



Photo: METAMORPHOSIS / Harry Schiffer





Photo: Bergschaf

09

Evaluate and value the interpersonal and social results

When it comes to evaluation, remember what these projects are actually about – people’s experiences, well being, and quality of life.

Evaluation should be built into the timeline of the project. Project facilitators need to build a shared understanding of the purpose of the evaluation and what are the expected outcomes. Co-creating the evaluation methodology, and co-identifying what core outcomes are valued, can help develop a shared understanding of what people value in the space of transport and mobility. This will enable shared expectations of how the intended measure will benefit people’s lives and create social value.

Both process and impact evaluations are important. Process evaluations collect data on the services, activities, and inputs (what was done) and outcome or impact evaluations collect data that describes what was achieved. Outcome indicators include traditional technical indicators, such as changes in traffic flow, or increase in use of active transport modes. Additionally, impact indicators should report on social value, in terms of how and in what ways people’s lives are enhanced – how people think and feel about the effects of the measures on their lived experience. This is especially important among people living in disadvantaged areas, who traditionally feel left out of planning processes.

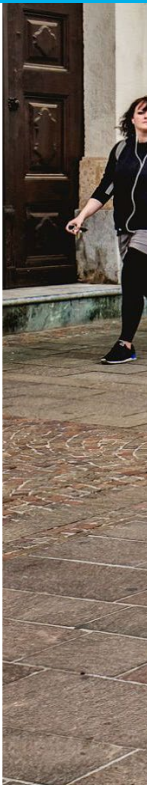




Photo: Bergschaf

Recommendations

- Make sure that methods for evaluations are relevant for the target group and the citizens in the neighbourhood you work in (co-assessment and co-evaluation). No single solution fits all, and often a **combination of quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods works best.**
- Document and **report interpersonal and social results** and effects (such as relationships, trust or new collaborations).
- **Integrate co-creation** and structured planning and evaluation methods.
- **Be aware of the limits of conventional impact assessment approaches.** A before / after comparison of standard KPIs might not be the best tool. Develop new approaches based on drawing exercises, diaries, participant observation, interviews, and more.
- Consider how to **capture intangibles like quality and innovativeness.** This could mean pursuing a question like "What measures would have been taken in the project had the co-creation process not taken place?"
- In addition to the concrete pilot or objective at hand, **focus on growing the skills needed for people and communities to take further ownership** over the public spaces in their neighbourhoods towards mobilizing structural changes.

10

Look at the big picture

Co-creation in mobility requires a holistic approach to the cityscape. Cities are complex ecosystems populated by a variety of stakeholders that collaborate with each other. The lines of what is and is not mobility are not so clear. Health (individual and group), environment, finance, business, geography, and more all play a role. Whenever we want to develop meaningful interventions to tackle mobility challenges, it becomes evident that the specific "issue"

is complex in its nature and does not simply revolve around a mere mobility challenge.

Local culture and needs of the public, a balance of facilities, the use of public space, existing policies, and other local circumstances can be addressed through co-creation. Only an approach that looks at the bigger picture allows for the development of measures that have an impact.

Photo: Kids on streets with no cars on sidewalks (c) City of Bremen, M. Glotz-Richter



Recommendations

- **City departments need to work together.** Citizens do not care if a responsibility lies in one department or another – coordinate to get the job done.
- **Include the general public in planning** urban mobility developments to make sure that all aspects are considered. People care about their entire ecosystem. It is up to policy makers and facilitators to connect concerns of the public to the relevant areas, and connect the different areas to specific policy.
- Remember that **mobility is not just about transportation and efficiency**, and encompasses many aspects of people's experiences in daily life. Individuals have different priorities – such as safety, enjoyability, speed of trip, health – which each person may value differently. One virtue of prompting people to co-create as citizens rather than end-users can be in helping them to see this bigger picture, and the myriad concerns and issues which form a neighbourhood's landscape.
- Develop strategies to **educate authorities** on the economic, social and environmental value of including citizens' participation as an intrinsic part of any city planning process.
- Invest money in neighbourhood-level activities that **look at the entire ecosystem of a neighbourhood** – not just at the separate issues.
- Be strategic about complementarities with city-wide initiatives and plans. **Pursue synergies with your city's other Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans.**
- **Put effort into making the initiative convenient, accessible, interesting, and relevant** to different groups of people. Host different activities and work with different technologies for children, tinkerers, thinkers, and those with various levels of interest.
- City-wide efforts to make the overall mobility system sustainable (in particular SUMP) and **neighbourhood-level activities should be linked through proactive communication and coordination** to ensure mutual complementarity.

Project Partners

Cities4People



METAMORPHOSIS



Looper



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SUNRISE



The Ministry for Climate Protection,
Environment, Mobility, Urban and
Housing Development

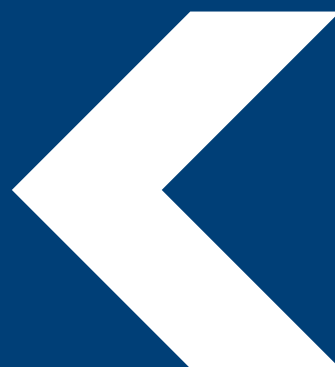




Photo: Kerekesséta



Co-creation is fundamentally about sharing ideas and knowledge, and in this way, it's also about enabling the vision and energy of the community.





ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication is a joint effort of four EU-funded projects – SUNRISE, Cities-4-People, METAMORPHOSIS, Looper – that worked with citizens to co-create mobility solutions at the neighbourhood level. POLIS, the network of European cities and regions on transport innovation, coordinated the production process of this publication, whereas WAAG – art, technology and society, its content.

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