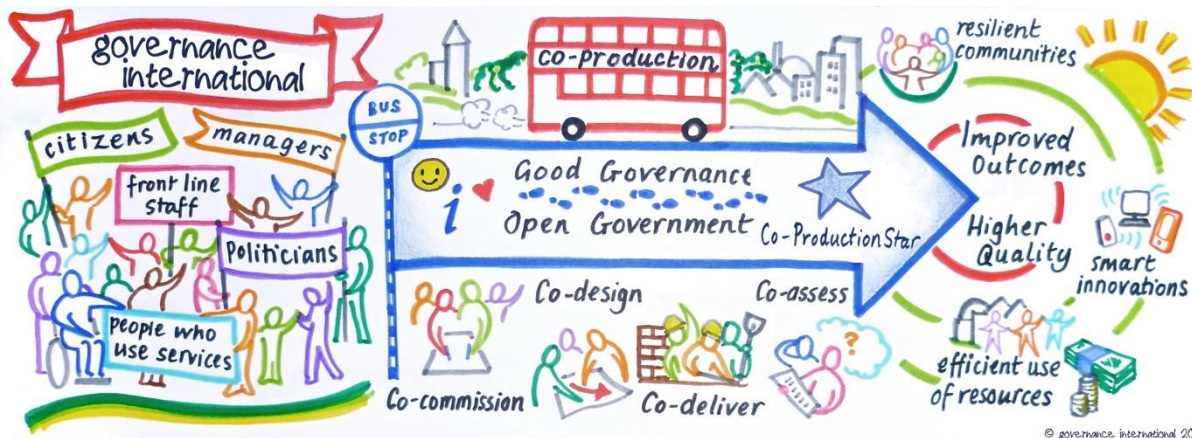**IMAGINE and Governance International**

# Co-production for Employability

## Workshop of the Midlands Co-production Network
### 21st meeting, 17 October 2019, Birmingham UK



## SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSION

### Chris Tisdall, Surrey CC – Introduction to the IMAGINE project

IMAGINE is an EU-funded project which aims at tackling youth unemployment by providing sustainable job prospects in the horticulture sector, more specifically for young people (15-34 years old) who are NEET – not in education, employment or training - in the (peri-)urban areas of North-West Europe - https://www.nweurope.eu/projects/project-search/imagine-inclusive-market-agriculture-incubator-in-north-west-europe/.

The IMAGINE project partners use a definition based on the conceptualisation of the *new economics foundation (nef)* and define co-production as**: 'delivering the IMAGINE project and incubation models in an equal and reciprocal relationship between IMAGINE employees, participating community members, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both projects and neighbourhoods become far more effective** *agents of change'*.

- Co-production = about communities and public authorities (such as councils) working together.
- Surrey-specific – it's important for a County Council also to look at how we can work effectively with District and Borough Councils, too.
- ***DOING 'WITH', NOT DOING 'TO'***
- Important not to plan a project or programme and then invite others to get involved – this isn't co-producing from the start. Need to have all parties included from the very beginning.

**Why does IMAGINE have a horticultural focus?**
- Mental health and wellbeing benefits of outdoors activities, such as growing things
- Gardening naturally encourages community cohesion and social interaction between generations and groups of people
- Able to make use of available land currently not being utilised
- Able to draw on the dormant assets already existing in communities, such as the many people with gardening knowledge from their past, and many gardens/plots of land which are currently not in use.

*Recommendations for IMAGINE, drawn from group discussions*
- Use videos to communicate what the programme is? Some participants found the complex charts hard to understand.
- Remember importance of language: *relationships,* not employees; speak about communities as people with strengths, not 'assets'.
- Ensure all partners are invited to be on board at each stage of the process, rather than just at the start. However, also keep in mind that not everybody is likely to wish to participate at all stages of a project.
- Make sure all parties are willing to move forward from previous negative engagements with each other. Encourage people not to judge new projects based on old experiences – e.g, some communities have prejudices about the Council.
- All actors should start on a level playing field – need to distribute power evenly.
- Be open to the project evolving *organically* throughout the process.

## Stanwell Events case study
- Small group of committed community members who are putting co-production into action successfully.
- Really passionate about the place they live and wanted to bring about positive change.
- Important for them to challenge the negative reputation that the Stanwell community has for some people.
- Started with a simple Easter Egg Hunt, bringing many families and generations together and engaging them in something positive. This catalysed more community-led projects, focused on the interests of the community, such as Messy Play and Foodbanks.
- Highlights the importance of locality for people and value of drawing on the expertise of local people living in those localities.
- Stressed how crucial **personal** relationships are.
- Encouraged us to trust communities more and not underestimate their ability to deliver services.

## Invitation to stay engaged with IMAGINE

Chris Tisdall, Strategic Commissioning Lead in Surrey County Council, invites you to get in touch with him if you wish to learn more about IMAGINE and get updates on how the project develops. His email is chris.tisdall@surreycc.gov.uk – you can also join him on LinkedIn or Twitter. Alternatively, you can also email frendehl.warner@surreycc.gov.uk.

## Birmingham City Council presentation on USE-IT!

- USE-IT! is an EU-funded initiative designed to enable co-production, but was not itself a co-produced project.
- Funded for £3 million for 3 years.
- Focused on Ladywood, a deprived neighbourhood next to Birmingham City Centre.
- Project was designed to be the 'bit in the middle' between members of the community and other organisations, e.g the NHS.
- Recognised that for new arrivals in the UK, it is a really expensive and complicated process to secure work within the NHS, even for those already qualified.
- Project USE-IT! set up associations and hubs for the community before establishing 'Learning Works' – a space where people can get free legal advice, language lessons, education advice, etc. People could also be linked with other micro-organisations and institutions that could make use of their talents and help them get into employment.
- This project accidentally became a trust building platform between the community and the Council. Both learned they could gain from each other. New arrivals felt more valued and public organisations knew they could help them, whilst also utilising their talents and skills.
- Hospitals were willing to work with people to ensure that people with overseas health qualifications could contribute to the NHS. Lots of success stories – e.g. individuals from Somalia, Syria, etc now working as anaesthetists in Birmingham hospitals. One eye-catching story is of a world-leading eye surgeon from Syria (who had acted as an overseas advisor to a Birmingham hospital before emigrating), who could not get any work in the NHS after coming to Birmingham, until the USE-IT! project stepped in.

### Lessons learned

- Important to start specific, know what works, and then expand.
- Have 'interpreters' – people there to understand and convey each other's 'languages ' – for example, dealing with hospital jargon and processes, Council terminology etc.
- Recognise that the project is there to provide a 'bridge' – facilitators for the discussions and helping people through the processes.
- Important to share the positive stories and work going on, so it is disseminated more widely and more quickly.

## Elke Loeffler, Governance International on Co-production for Employability in Offenbach, Germany

- The employment agency in Offenbach (a city near Frankfurt) has engaged Governance International to run its Co-production Star training programme during 2019 for about one-third of its professional staff and a group of service users.
- This gave staff a toolkit for mobilising both citizen voice and citizen action.
- Governance International definition of co-production is: 'Public service organisations and citizens making better use of each other's assets, resources and contributions to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency'.
- The training programme consisted of 5 Workshops, taking staff through the five-step Co-production Star change process (Map it! – Focus it! – People it! – Market it! – Grow it!) and then running Co-production Labs on new co-production projects which emerge from the Workshops.
- The Co-production Labs brought together professional staff, third sector organisations and service users to co-design and start to implement five new co-production projects:
    - o Co-commissioning 'employability budgets' with young jobseekers

- - Co-designing a 'Citizen Symposium' with service users (on getting ready for retirement)
    - Co-designing service offers from the 'Luise 34' second-hand shop
    - Co-delivering peer support for and with people seeking a job
    - Co-assessing training courses and other projects with participants
  - The co-design process allowed service users to shape the projects according to what THEY wanted, rather than assuming that the staff already knew.
  - The Co-production Labs were designed to take place over 100 days (subsequently extended to 120 days, to allow for the summer holiday period), which signalled that they were experimental and learning pilots – this was intended to ensure that they were not treated as a bureaucratic exercise, subject to all the scrutiny and consultative processes which often slow down and drain the energy out of social innovation in the public sector.
  - At the end of the Co-production Star training programme in November 2019, all participants will attend a celebratory ceremony and receive CPD certificates.
  - Meanwhile, it appears that four of the five Co-production Labs have made good progress and are likely to be mainstreamed by the Employment Agency.

# General advice coming from the *World Café* workshops
- Co-production projects like these should be looked on like a family – families draw on each other's strengths, help each other, and build on weaknesses together.
- Important to establish at the beginning how success is going to be assessed.
- Is it possible to measure success without facts and figures? (Views were divided – everyone agreed that qualitative assessment is essential but some also believed it was necessary to have quantitative assessment in addition).
- Sometimes hard/impossible to know where a project will be in 5 years – dealing with complex issues, changing behaviours and emerging problems/barriers, so knowledge of what is likely to happen can only be very general and imprecise - but project teams are often expected to make predictions along these lines, even though it is not possible to have much confidence in such predictions – such demands need to be kept realistic.
- Suggestion from Offenbach experience of doing 100 day trials – then evaluate how the project is going at this point – and, if it isn't working, stop!
- Funding experimentation – trial and error is valuable, even if you just learn that something will not work!
- The slogan of design sciences - "Fail fast, fail early, fail cheap – then learn, change and do it better!"
- Not all citizens want to be involved! Co-production may not always be the answer.

### Q1. How do we evaluate the full extent and outcomes of co-production?
- We have to take the long view about how well outcomes have been improved by co-production – but also to give some indication of progress in the short term which co-production has brought about
- Famous definition of quality (Persig, 1974) – 'Quality is that aspect of life which lies beyond language and number' – this means that you can see it and feel it, but not necessarily quantify it
- Is the world ready for this? Funders tend to like results with 'numbers'
- Qualitative approaches cover a wide range – see Stanwell's experience with case studies, client testimonials, sign-in sheets
- Possible questions

- How happy are you?
  - How connected are you?
- Stories and journeys
- Communicating progress on the journey often reassures stakeholders – what has happened, what will happen next, how well different processes have work – people are often influenced by the process (partly because the outcomes are harder to see or take longer to become evident)
- And this is particularly relevant to co-production, as this is itself a PROCESS, not an outcome to be evaluated
- Humility is important in making claims about outcomes achieved – other factors also contribute
- A key question in evaluation is always 'What have we learnt, as a result of this co-production activity?'
- **OVERALL CONCLUSION: We CAN'T fully evaluate the outcomes achieved as a result of taking a co-production approach – bit we can evaluate progress along the pathway to outcomes**


## Q2. How can we effectively map community assets?
- Physically get out into communities – this includes Council staff! This is the only way to really understand the capabilities embedded in our communities, it's not possible to know this while sitting at the desk in the office! (Initiate a monthly 'Community Dqy' when all Council staff leave the office and work with service users directly in communities where they live?)
- We need to maintain a community directory – keep it updated, so people can see what is going on, what is available. Traditional, mapping by the Council is important, but also local mapping is key and helps to ensure that mapping is up-to-date
- We need a broad definition of what are 'community assets
- We need to map skills in the community and also activities such as volunteering and timebanking
- Facebook/social media groups can help in communication – but they can have negatives, so need appropriate control
- Critically important - identification of natural leaders in the community
- We also need to map commitment from community – this comes from meaningful engagement, not just 'consultation' – and means that, on some issues, a particular community is very likely to work closely and effectively with us – while on other issues, it's basically not very interested
- Mapping places available for the community to get together – 'empty shops', empty council buildings – but also the places where members of the community naturally congregate – in doctors' surgeries, outside school gates, at church/mosque/temple events, pub quiz nights,
- Mapping helps with sharing current success stories more frequently - showcasing 'good news' stories can inspire more to engage
- **OVERALL CONCLUSION: We don't know what underused capabilities exist in communities – skills, commitment, leadership infrastructure – so it's time to find out and to bring these resources and capabilities into public services**


## Q3. How can co-production help us achieve sustainable and lasting results with local people?

- Need to "fan the flames" – build on existing co-production to achieve lasting results.

- Think differently – changing perspectives and perceptions and expectations.
- Pool resources
- Spread resources/unlock talent + skills
- Bring stakeholders in early
- Giving people opportunities and confidence to connect
- Empower, encourage, enable, learn => self-agency
- The community / council / other institutions should not judge each other based on past experiences. Need to forgive for past grievances and move on.
- Focused work, based on joint priorities, not public sector-led
- Leave room for experimentation
- Letting go of control – with support
- Shout about it!
- **OVERALL CONCLUSION: We need to identify, evaluate and shout about successful examples of sustainable co-production and learn from these successes.**

## And, finally, what participants at the Workshop thought about some aspects of co-production!

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Achieving citizens outcomes

**IMAGINE
Midlands Co-production Network
Workshop, 17 October 2019**

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Involving citizens in the commissioning of public services will help to identify priority services | 6 | 4 | | 2 |
| Harnessing the ideas and insights of citizens and front-line staff in service design will trigger innovations | 12 | | | |
| Giving citizens a bigger role in the delivery of public services will make big efficiency savings | 7 | 4 | 1 | |
| Involving citizens in the assessment of public services will bring big improvements in quality | 5 | 6 | 1 | |
| Front line staff are keen to enable citizens to contribute actively to public services | 1 | 7 | 4 | |
| Most citizens do not want to get engaged – only the usual suspects | | 8 | 3 | 1 |
| Citizens trust politicians to do what is good for their wellbeing | | | 4 | 8 |
| Public sector managers already understand how to support citizens to solve problems for themselves | | 2 | 9 | 1 |

Source: © Governance International 2010