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“Co-creating Public Policies or Ways to Bring Citizens into the Process”

Author: Veronica Crețu

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Contents

Abstract/ Executive Summary:.....	3
On public policy creation and co-creation	5
Citizen-centric government as a pre-condition for co-creating public policies/co-designing public services.....	9
Roles citizens play in the co-creation exercise ..	14
Conclusions and recommendations.....	20
References	21
About the Author	22
Copyright information.....	23

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Abstract/ Executive Summary:

Government is not a vending machine, with bureaucrats dispensing services, but a platform—like Facebook, Twitter, and the iPhone—where citizens can build their own apps and interact with one another and come up with their own solutions.(1)

—George Packer

Citizens around the world continue witnessing unprecedented levels of growing inequality, corruption or absence of citizen voice in decision-making processes, and these are just very few examples of problems at the core of the world's development challenges and of the global agenda. One of the biggest challenges is closing the so-called feedback loop –or accountability gap– between what citizens need or demand for and what the governments actually do to respond to that demand. On one hand, citizens need to have more information and incentives to articulate their voice; while governments need to have the ability to listen, and act upon the feedback they receive from citizens on services they benefit from.

Significant efforts have been made to make public services user-friendly and reduce the administrative burden during the past years in several countries around the globe; however, studies show that service design often does not meet the expectations of citizens who require more usability and transparency. The deep understanding and knowledge of users, the re-design of services with their approach and preferred delivery channel in mind are important elements for governments to prove their ability to fulfil the needs of citizens.

The 'one-size-fits-all' approach no longer works in all spheres of the public sector regardless of whether we deal with developed or developing countries; historical, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds play an important role in the expectations of interactions with public administrations.

Engaging with stakeholders in the co-design of services or co-production of public policies raises the expectations related to higher quality of those services and greater value of the policies made. It is therefore important to start implementing specific collaborative service creation and policy-making by departing from the roles citizens play or might play in these

processes as well as from ways public administrations gather the necessary customer insight, re-define their operational processes and identify appropriate sustainability models.

Engaging citizens at different stages of the co-creation and co-design of public services and policies brings diversity into both the process and the results. As per Justin Trudeau, Prime-Minister of Canada, January 2016, World Economic Forum, “[...] diversity is an indispensable ingredient and is the engine of invention, it generates creativity and enriches the world.”

It is important to recognize that that the citizens in a democracy have both rights and duties, and that democratic governance provides opportunities for citizens to get actively engaged in shaping their world, innovating it, and exploring fully the potential of the diversity.

This paper looks into a number of key pre-conditions needed for a constructive, participatory, inclusive, open and transparent co-creation processes around public policy. It shares specific emerging trends and aspects behind a citizen-centric government, for public servants to consider when engaging with citizens, as well as, explains the different roles citizens play in the co-creation exercise.

On public policy creation and co-creation ...

The world we live in is being shaped through public policy. And if one believes that public policies are made not only by politicians, policy makers or public servants –they get it wrong. **Policy making is a far more complex and holistic process**, which involves thousands of public servants, tens of thousands of women and men who petition our parliaments and ministers, who are part of interest groups or communities of practice, who comment through the social media or represent unions, different organizations, community movements and similar. All have a strong say in public policy. And this is because our communities are affected directly by public policies with all that they entail, from the way they are being elaborated, implemented to the evaluation/assessment practices.

Why is this so? It is because the representative democracy we have been used to during the past years is gradually changing and transforming/evolving into a participatory one, greatly influenced by the advent of technology and innovations driven by the ICTs. All these, anchors public policy debate in a new form of paradigm –a paradigm in which citizens are brought closer to the decision making processes and thus, having the opportunity to articulate their needs, preferences and desires. Both theories and practices in the field of public administration are increasingly concerned with placing the citizen at the center/at the core of policymakers' considerations, not just as target, but also as agent. Actually citizens, or the beneficiaries of public policies, are considered to be the best "experts" given that they know what does best meet their needs and interests. Given this paradigm, to what extent public servants are being prepared to collaborate, not merely consult; to reach out, not merely respond. **Is there a critical mass of public servants or policy makers ready to co-create with their citizens policies or any other critically important documents?!** On the other hand, **who are the citizens who are best positioned to be part of the co-creation agenda?!**

To answer these questions, it is important to look at the way public policies are being shaped traditionally and what are the key pre-requisites needed in order to have a real, authentic co-creation process of public policies.

It is important to start from the very fact that governments alone cannot deal with a wide range of complex problems and challenges they face be it domestically, regionally or globally. The wide spectrum of emerging issues nowadays vary from climate change, gender issues or refugees' crisis. Regardless of the issues, governments need to be able to respond by

permanently reviewing and improving the quality of the services they deliver and with this, the quality of the processes behind the policy-making. Parallel to these, governments have to acknowledge that massive exposure of the citizens to the online medium and the diverse opportunities it provides (from access to data, online education, e-petitions, etc.), contributes to more informed, educated citizens who start to become more active in demanding better quality and a more “**democratic performance**”¹ as well as government’s “**policy performance**” or the ability to deliver tangible positive outcomes for society². And even if there is much talk today about the need to embrace more open and inclusive policy making, the road ahead is still long for many governments around the world. This open approach implies comprehensive changes and improvements in the decision-making processes, new change-management practices, introducing accountability measures, and comprehensive monitoring of policies’ outcomes.

How to define public policy? And what stands behind policy making?

In the public policy creation or formulation journey, one needs to be depart from the very essence of what public policy is, what does it address and what are the processes behind. First of all, “public policy is the means by which a government maintains order or addresses the needs of its citizens through actions defined by its constitution”(3). In other words, a public policy is generally not a tangible thing but rather is a term used to describe a collection of laws, mandates, or regulations established through a political process. It refers to those plans, positions and guidelines of government that influence decisions by government (e.g., policies in support of sustainable economic development or policies to enhance access to health care services by persons with disabilities or by women in remote areas). However, agreements do not exist on a precise definition of public policy. Some definitions are very complex while others are rather simple; however, all definitions have a common point and that is “public policies result from decisions made by government and some take into account the intentions behind a government action”. Over 40 years ago, Thomas Dye⁴ defined ‘public policy’ as “anything a government chooses to do or not to do.” Although Dye had simplified the term, his definition did capture the extensive scope of the subject matter. “**Policy making is the fundamental activity of governments**”. It is through the public policy making process that

¹ <http://www10.iadb.org/intal/intalcdi/pe/2009/03785.pdf>

² <http://www10.iadb.org/intal/intalcdi/pe/2009/03785.pdf>

³ <http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-public-policy-definition-types-process-examples.html>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_R._Dye

governments establish the framework within which all citizens (human and corporate) must function; and it is the process via which governments decide both which societal goals to pursue and how to (best) pursue them⁵. Another definition states that policy making includes all stages of the policy cycle: agenda setting, policy preparation, decision making, implementation and evaluation (OECD, 2001a).

All in all, “public policy” is a response, the central ordering element of which is an *explicit statement of intent regarding future actions*. Thus, Governments have more or less the same approaches when it comes to public policy elaboration. Usually, attention is being paid to *policy response* with a number of important sub-components related to a) *policy statements* – which represent the intention of the government to do something about a particular issue, b) *policy actions* – is what the government does to accomplish the goals identified and c) *policy results* – what happens as a result of the efforts to achieve the goal identified in the statement. In addition to these aspects, it is also important to mention that there are various types and forms of policy. Among the wide range of policy types are:

- ***broad policy*** which sets the government-wide direction;
- ***more specific policy*** which may be developed for a particular sector (the economy) or issue-area (child welfare, gender equity, health, etc.);
- ***operational policy*** which may guide decisions on programs, and project selection.

The following are most **common key attributes** of public policies⁶:

- Policy is made in response to some sort of issue or problem that requires attention.
- Policy is made on behalf of the "public."
- Policy is oriented toward a goal or desired state, such as the solution of a problem. Public policy problems are those that must be addressed by laws and regulations adopted by government.
- Policy is ultimately made by governments, even if the ideas come from outside government mainly through the interaction of government and the public.

When it comes to the forms that government policy can take, it is reflected most typically in legislation, regulations, and programs. These are often referred to as *policy instruments*.

⁵ Young, Shaun P. ed. (2013). Evidence-Based Policy-Making in Canada. Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press at 1

⁶ <http://www.civiced.org/pc-program/instructional-component/public-policy>

Traditionally, the policy development processes involve *research, analysis, consultation and synthesis* of information to produce recommendations. It also involves an *evaluation* of options against a set of criteria used to assess each option. An effective policy process is one that also responds to the following requirements:

- Issue or problem identification
- Issue or problem analysis
- Generating Solutions
- Consultation
- Performance Monitoring

Just looking at the first step, that of defining the problem/issue, one can see how critical it is to understand and define the problem correctly, because the way it is defined affects the policy solution/s put forward to address the issue/s. Which is why, it is critically important to diagnose the problem correctly. The same goes about all the other components be it related to generating the right solutions or applying the most adequate consultation mechanisms and platforms.

To sum up, getting public servants and scholars in general, to agree on a single, all-inclusive definition and approach to public policy development is not an easy task. Which is why going back to the definition of what public policy is, it is simply what government (via its public officials, who influences or determines public policy) does or does not do in regards to a problem that they have to address along with taking relevant measures/actions. Policy development is one of the most important areas of expertise for public servants. It is the public servants that need to understand policy as a process in the first place, and the very nature of policy development, along with recognizing that all public servants are part of the overall policy process regardless of being part of local, regional or national public authorities. In the co-creation of public policies processes are even more complex...

Citizen-centric government as a pre-condition for co-creating public policies/co-designing public services

While the traditional or classical approach to public policy seem not to fully respond to the nowadays realities, it is important to have a look at the pre-conditions needed for having a government able to co-create its policies together with the public, with its citizens. During the late 2000s the theme of ‘citizen-oriented government’ became one of the top on the public management agenda (OECD 2009). Governments at all levels have declared their interest in finding better ways to respond to and serve citizens and communities through better-designed programs and consultative processes (Advisory Group on the Reform of Australian Government Administration 2010; Bourgon 2011). More recently, the Open Government Partnership (OGP)⁷ multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance, grew from 8 founding governments in 2011 to 69 in 2016. These are just few examples of the very fact that citizen-centric government has been brought into the attention of many officials, public servants, and there are several practices and examples already on ways public policies could be co-created based on the new paradigm.

According to a McKinsey Report from July 2015⁸, when governments deliver services based on the needs of people they serve, they can **increase public satisfaction and reduce costs**. Regardless of where they are, rural or urban areas, **citizens expect more transparent, accessible, accountable and responsive services from the public sector**. Expectations are rising day by day. However, even the “one-stop shops” centralized call centers are still unable to meet the public’s expectations, the same report says. Citizens continue to feel frustrated by cumbersome or confusing websites and find it’s often still necessary to speak with multiple parties before their question is answered or their request is completed. As a result, governments face not only declining citizen satisfaction and eroding public trust but also increasing costs associated with delivering services across multiple channels. Additionally, many governments continue to design and deliver services based on their own requirements, competences, and processes instead of the needs of the people they serve.

⁷ <http://www.opengovpartnership.org/about>

⁸ http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/public_sector/implementing_a_citizen-centric_approach_to_delivering_government_services

‘Citizen-centred’ or ‘citizen-focused’ government and governance have also started getting more attention due to the emergence of the ICTs and the potential behind the technology. Advocates for Government 2.0 and Open Government suggest that ICTs might drive governments to dramatically re-conceive the role of the public bureaucracies in delivering programs and designing policy (Dunleavy et al 2006; Government 2.0 Task Force 2009). It is now conceivable to think not only of citizen-oriented service and improved policy delivery, but genuinely citizen-informed and even citizen-designed and often specifically tailored interventions that are designed to accommodate the needs of individuals and communities — what some refer to as the ‘individualisation’ of policy and service delivery (Howard 2010)⁹.

In line with the above, let us have a look at the key elements related to implementing transformational type of initiatives/ efforts aimed at increasing citizen satisfaction, bringing them closer to the policy making debate and in co-designing the services they need most:

Citizen satisfaction – or what do we know about it?

Any transformational or ambitious initiative begins with understanding citizens’ needs and priorities. Only by identifying which services citizens find most problematic and the degree of dissatisfaction with that service, can allow the government identify the best approaches for improvement. The best way, according to McKinsey Report 2015¹⁰, is to ask citizens rate each of the service the government wants to consider changing or improving, using the principle “Let citizens tell you what matters most, but avoid asking them directly”. This technique has been used successfully for transformation efforts in the public sector. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the Local Government Association undertook a project to measure how satisfied residents were with their local council’s performance¹¹. Several examples related to rating public services can be found in the projects implemented as part of Global Partnership for Social Accountability, established in 2012 with the purpose of bridging this gap, enhancing citizens’ voice and, just as importantly, supporting the capacity of governments to respond effectively to their voice¹². Discovering citizen needs and preferences by systematically learning more about the experience of citizens in receiving the services delivered to them, and

⁹ <file:///C:/Users/Gost/Desktop/459992.pdf> Putting Citizens First Engagement in Policy and Service Delivery for the 21st Century

¹⁰ http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/public_sector/implementing_a_citizen-centric_approach_to_delivering_government_services

¹¹ New Reputation Guide, LGcommunications and the Local Government Association, lga.gov.uk.

¹² <http://www.thegpsa.org/sa/>

using that feedback to improve the delivery of those programs is something that should be at the core of the citizen-driven policy making.

Citizens' feedback and internal data – what are we missing?

Combining customer-satisfaction information with operational data—call-center volumes and number of in-person visits, for instance—can generate additional insights, beyond what citizens state explicitly via surveys and other feedback channels. One of the biggest challenges is with internal data. Sometimes the data needed for the purpose of one exercise or another is missing/has not been compiled. At other times, it exists in a form that is not suitable for one's purpose and needs further adjustment (e.g., the level of aggregation, the geographic boundaries, or any other). Collecting previously uncollected data or making adjustments to existing data is often costly and time consuming. In some cases, it won't be possible to create the desired data within the time frames of a given policy exercise. Challenges such as these need to be identified and a strategy for dealing with them needs to be put in place. Research shows, however, that statistical analyses can identify why citizens are dissatisfied with a service or another, which is why, data has to be at the core of policy making processes indeed.

Understanding each and every single step citizens' make in seeking a government service

Each process/service has a beginning and an end. Citizens have to undertake particular steps in getting a particular service. What is important for government agencies is rather than focus on improvements at individual touch points, start viewing the services through the eyes of the citizen/beneficiary, meaning analysing the whole chain starting from the moment the person begins looking for the agency that is best suited to meet a need until the task is completed. It is important to know what chains/journeys are most liked by the citizens, and research shows that “by categorizing citizen journeys government agencies can prioritize those with biggest number of users and those with highest level of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction”. Another important element is to look at the kind of experiences citizens have as part of those journeys—different citizens/beneficiaries can experience the same journey differently and it is valuable to understand those ‘differences’ along with identifying internal processes which can lead to improvements of a particular segment in the ‘journey’.

Translate opportunities for improvement into actionable initiatives.

In a citizen-centric government and service delivery, it is crucial to manage demand better by preventing 'journeys' that are unnecessary/ time consuming or too expensive in the first place. Second important element is to avoid any duplicative steps and third, improve the availability, usability, and accessibility of information (particularly by placing machine readable data on open data portals, etc). Additionally, another element of the co-creation in the public sector is organizing the collaboration between the different actors, including between public administrations themselves, in order to share information, knowledge and resources.

Being futuristic in co-creation/co-design of policies with citizens

One of the most important things that public servants and policy makers in general have to do is challenge their traditional way of thinking and doing things. Policies are not being elaborated in a particular manner just because this is the traditional way of doing things. Unconventional thinking will help generate ideas that can eventually lead to more success. Thinking broadly, thinking strategically, and long-term can help governments connect the dots and see the big picture; observe and analyze the forces driving the current reality that could have long-term effects; use facts/data to draw inferences and develop the capacity to predict the changes that might occur in the years to come. Governance models for citizen transformation programs can take different forms depending on the context in which they are operating, and the future of these programs will rely not only on collecting citizen feedback – but also on regularly aggregating and analyzing information, thus, providing the big, comprehensive picture of the citizen experience.

Continuous questioning and reflection on citizen-centric approaches

Any Government that aims at implementing citizen-centric approaches in policy making, service design, etc. needs to continuously reflect, capitalize on the following aspects:

- Measure progress made with respect to promoting integrated service delivery, working within and across government, and understanding the prospects for doing even more;
- Measure progress made with respect to obtaining citizen feedback on services they benefit from and looking into efforts to discovering citizen new needs and preferences;

- Measure progress made with respect to engaging citizens and communities in service delivery and policy design and understanding the degree to which it is relevant to go further with respect to co-designing and co-delivering services, and what else might be needed to enhance the processes;
- Look into ways to build the culture, and sensibilities in public sector organisations to respond to and anticipate demands for better services and engagement, and take advantage of technological possibilities which promise to put citizens first;
- Analyse systematically the engagement and collaboration with societal actors in public service delivery and policy making in order to foster the capacity of public institutions to improve their ability to innovate their problem solving capacity;
- Assess the degree to which organizational, administrative and legislative changes are needed in order to ensure the co-creative approach to policy making;
- Assess the way citizens, users, businesses and communities as a whole are interacting among each other;
- Understand ways public administrations share information, resources and assets both among themselves, and also with third parties. This implies opening up government data and services for re-use in an electronic format along with opening up the difference decision-making processes. This can boost collaboration with stakeholders and improve effectiveness of the decision making and service delivery;
- Evaluate the degree to which the in-house and pre-service capacity building programs for public servants respond to the emerging trends and to the entire citizen-centric approach to policy making and decision making;
- Understand what brings communities of practice together and see ways citizens might be brought together as part of formal and informal platforms, to share, participate, engage, contribute, co-create;
- Reflect on how and why collaboration and co-creation in the public sector happens, what are the key factors, what are the key challenges, key benefits and emerging opportunities and how to position the government as a “platform” that continuously co-creates with its citizens.

Roles citizens play in the co-creation exercise ...

Practical experience and interaction with public servants demonstrates that many public servants, across different sectors, are far from understanding the value of the citizens in policy making processes, in co-designing services, others. More than that, many find the process of engaging the citizens useless, and argue that citizens do not have the readiness, information and motivation to seriously engage in such processes¹³. Additionally, many agencies or individuals choose to exclude or minimize public participation in planning efforts claiming citizen participation is too expensive and time consuming.

Interestingly enough, private companies have a rich history in partnering with customers or service users in innovation and value creation. Across different industries, customers have played a crucial role in suggesting improvements, new features, new options for existing services or products. There are examples of companies engaging customers in designing their products or even in developing new services. There is no doubt that such approaches have led to developments and innovations in the private sector throughout the years, and where customers' feedback or engagement is missing, the business does not exist for too long.

Then, what is missing in the public sector? Aren't private companies dealing with the same citizens government does? Isn't it about the same public, communities?

The role of citizens in public service innovation or in co-creating public policy does not have the same history as that one of the private sector. However, if one looks back into history, citizen participation goes back to ancient Greece and Colonial New England. Before the 1960s, governmental processes and procedures were designed to facilitate "external" participation. Citizen participation was institutionalized in the mid-1960s with President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs (Cogan & Sharpe, 1986 p. 283)¹⁴.

Nowadays, several social innovations originated from ideas and suggestions outside the government. Often, it was the citizens or citizens groups that "forced" the government to act on their ideas and thus, managing to bring a new dimension into the government –citizens' relationship. The kind of changes that have occurred during the past years, including due to the advent of technology, are related to the fact that citizens became able not only to develop innovative solutions to problems but also, to play a more active role in identifying the causes of the problems.

¹³ Based on a number of workshops held with public servants in Moldova around the issues of open government, co-creating public policies, during 2013-2015.

¹⁴ <http://pages.uoregon.edu/rgp/PPPM613/class10theory.htm>

Today's plea about citizen engagement in policy making departs from the very essence that citizens are the key "experts" and not the public servants sitting in their offices. This takes us to two different approaches widely debated today and mainly:

The democratic decision-making approach based on the assumption that all who are affected by a given decision have the right to participate in the making of that decision. Thus, for example, citizens know best how a particular service or another works, they know what does not work and they have tried to fix them.

The technocratic decision-making approach which implies that trained staff "experts" are best suited to make complex technical decisions. However, scientific and technocratic approaches "not only failed to solve social problems but often contributed to them" (Nelkin, 1981. p. 274). The notion that the "cure is often worse than the disease" becomes increasingly important as the technology provides alternative solutions to public policy issues¹⁵.

However, when looking at the democratic decision making approach one needs to understand the whole spectrum of roles citizens play. Below, is an interesting classification of roles for citizens in public sector co-creation is provided by IBM Center for Business in Government¹⁶ and mainly they are:

- Citizen explorer - Identifying, discovering, or defining a problem;
- Citizen ideator - conceptualizing a solution;
- Citizen designer - designing and developing the solution;
- Citizen diffuser - implementing the solution;

Interestingly enough, these roles are not too different from the role of customers in private-sector innovation. Similarly, it is interesting to observe that mechanisms that facilitate these roles are also deriving from the private sector and if appropriately used by public institutions, can indeed contribute to creating more comprehensive innovation ecosystems as well as more innovation platforms in government and by the government in dealing with co-creating policies/services together with citizens. Here are few examples:


- Online contests and competitions
- Mobile apps

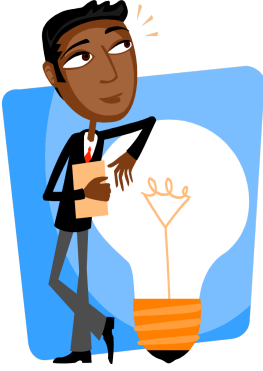

¹⁵ <http://pages.uoregon.edu/rgp/PPPM613/class10theory.htm>

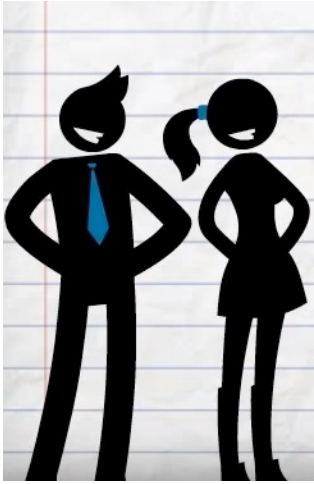
¹⁶ Engaging Citizens in Co-Creation in Public Services Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- E-petitions
- Innovation jams
- Virtual design and prototyping tools
- Open-source databases
- Participatory design workshops
- Online citizen communities

Going back to the four roles citizens play, it is important to understand the nature of each one of them.

<p>Citizen as explorer</p> 	<p>The first role reflects citizens’ capacity/ability to identify and articulate problems that are unknown to government agencies or something the government is unaware of. It also involves the capacity to formulate problems in a way that would lead to identification of practical solutions. As mentioned above, it is acknowledged these days that citizens are the best ones to signal problems or emerging issues, as they are being “closest to the ground”. Other elements related to this role lie in the very nature of the technological changes and innovations, and with this, citizens can share their knowledge about potential problems more rapidly and efficiently. Additionally, where governments have embraced open data agendas, leads to more data being explored by the citizens and thus, discover potential problems. In many countries, open data is more actively used by civil society organizations, community groups than individual citizens. All these aspects, have indeed contributing to placing the citizen in a proactive role – that of identifying and signaling problems in the public space.</p> <p>Public institutions need to take advantage of and explore the potential citizen explorers bring into the processes, and for this it is important to enhance data transparency in high-impact problem areas as well as sustain online citizen communities focused on problem identification.</p>
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<p>Citizen as ideator</p> 	<p>This role deals with capacity of citizens to bring knowledge about their unique needs and usage context to improve existing services or envision innovative solutions to civic problems. As an example, in the private sector, this has been the most common role for customer innovators—generating ideas for improving existing products or developing new products. Thus, citizens may combine their innate creativity and unique knowledge about a service or problem context to conceptualize innovative solutions. To enable the role of citizen as ideator, the problem has to be well-articulated or well-defined, but can be narrow or broad in scope. Two relevant approaches for citizens as ideators are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualizing solutions for narrow, well-defined problems • Conceptualizing solutions for broader problems <p>Additionally, two mechanisms can be used to support or facilitate the citizen’s role as ideator. The first type is contests and competitions (crowdsourcing) in varied formats. They work best when the following five key factors have all been addressed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear framing of the problem • Clear specification of the incentive/award • Clear identification of the potential solver population • Clear definition of the process • An effective platform to manage the process.
<p>Citizen as Designer</p> 	<p>Citizens can design and/or develop implementable solutions to well-defined problems in public services. There are several examples of initiatives related to development of interactive mobile Apps which citizens have designed to address specific issues such as public parking availability, public transport delays, and more. In line with this, designers, help convert innovative ideas into actual implementable solutions as well as develop "design sketches" for specific features of a larger solution.</p> <p>This is a relatively new role largely enabled by the advance of new IT-based tools that support knowledge sharing, visualization and virtual prototyping, and collaborative idea building. Examples from the private sector, where customers have assumed a more active role in the actual design and development of new products and services, illustrate the potential for the citizen’s role as designer. Three approaches for citizens as designers are:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual design and prototyping tools • Data mashups (providing the data and the tools needed for users to design and develop solutions to address specific problems). • Participatory design workshops.
<p>Citizen as diffuser</p> 	<p>The fourth citizen role—as diffuser of innovation—relates to the individual citizen’s potential to be a change agent or catalyst in enhancing the adoption of a new government service by peers. In general, this role departs from the Theory on Diffusion of Innovations, by Everett Rogers back in 1960. He studied how ideas were communicated through a culture and he found a basic pattern that was almost universally present as innovative ideas spread or diffused through a culture. To play the role as innovation diffuser, citizens need to interact and share knowledge with peers, build their reputation in the community, and thereby influence adoption decisions. This calls for a number of different platforms and mechanisms, among which forums or online communities that can host such interactions and knowledge sharing.</p> <p>Experience shows however, that if there is no continuous engagement and ownership of such platforms, such forums are not sustainable. However, it is up to government agencies to support, fund, provide the infrastructure and sustain online citizen communities. Additionally, it is recommended that public agencies enhance the “trialability” of government innovation, by building virtual prototypes that would enable citizens to experience new services and accordingly, answer a number of key questions to help define those services.</p>

The above four roles reflect different types of citizen contributions to solving problems and what is interesting is the fact that they also reflect different phases of problem-solving and imply different types of enabling structures, mechanisms, and incentives.

Public servants should also be aware of the fact that embedding these roles in the planning processes behind public policy co-creation or co-design of services generate different outcomes. Follow the examples in the table below:

Traditional planning processes around policy making	Planning based on engaging and exploring on the four roles citizens play
Generates limited information/feedback; little consultation takes place;	Includes information/feedback, consultation and negotiation and allows citizens to play a particular role (depending on the stage of the

<p>Departs from the assumption that that better information leads to better decisions</p> <p>Focuses on manipulation of data</p> <p>Plan = what we should do</p> <p>Success measured by achievement of plan's objectives</p>	<p>policy making process);</p> <p>Departs from the assumption that open participation leads to better decisions, again due to the engagement of different stakeholders and the availability of the space to play different roles</p> <p>Focuses on mobilization of support from all relevant stakeholders</p> <p>Plan = what we agree to do</p> <p>Success measured by achievement of agreement on action</p>
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To sum up, public servants, as policy makers need to be aware of the roles citizens play and ways they can contribute to problem-solving. This dictates new approaches, different types of mechanisms and support infrastructure that needs to be planned and put in place. Today, more than ever, governments (be it at central or local levels) should consider a wide range of mechanisms for citizen co-creation – from online contests and competitions, to innovation sessions, to open source data bases to participatory design workshops and communities of practice. Having such approaches to policy co-creation will lead to innovation both in government, as well as among citizens in general. Such platforms for co-creation educate, build more trust among citizens and government, and equip citizens with confidence needed in a co-creation process – based on openness, transparency, accountability and innovative thinking.

Conclusions and recommendations

Citizen engagement in co-creating public policies is an **indispensable pre-requisite of a democratic society**. There are several great benefits of engaging with citizens among which:

- The quality of public policy being developed significantly improves, as it becomes more practical and relevant and helps ensure that services are delivered in a more effective and efficient way, in line with the needs/interests and priorities of the citizens;
- Provides the opportunity for the government to verify the status of its relationship with the citizens – the degree of trust, the challenges citizens face, and the kind of measures that should or could be put in place to improve the relationship;
- Allows for more comprehensive, holistic and inclusive approaches when it comes to community development;
- Creates new venues for collaboration, cooperation among government, citizens and organizations and thus, they could work together on issues of concern to the community in a different manner;
- Provides new opportunities for diverse voices to be heard on issues that matter to people, thus, builds on diversity and innovation as core factors in co-creation processes;

To fully benefit from these opportunities, governments should align their capabilities for a citizen focus, by infusing internal vision and new staff mind-sets first. The new culture of co-creation, collaboration and co-design with citizens requires new competencies and skills/abilities. Which is why another important element for the governments is to implement new capacity building programs that would develop the new sets of skills in current public servants and the future ones. Developing new perspectives on possibilities is another important factor governments should take into account. Building “professional empathy”, learning to work with “citizens-explorers or ideators or designers or diffusers” by looking broadly and ensuring that public servants are out there, doing outreach and being familiar with citizens’ and community needs. The list can continue... However, it is not meant to serve as a ‘one-size-fits-all’ checklist that should be applied in all efforts to engage, work with, and serve citizens and communities. But it does provide a good nudge for those champions in government ready for an amazing, positive and yet challenging journey of citizen co-creation/co-design of public policies.

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About the Author

Veronica Cretu, President of the Open Government Institute with a rich experience in open government, open data, citizen engagement in policy making processes, education policies, Internet Governance. Veronica holds a MA in Contemporary Diplomacy from University of Malta and a post-graduate diploma in Diplomacy and IT from Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies of Malta. She brings more than 14 years of work experience in both national and international environments by exploring different perspectives and emerging issues on the developmental agenda and thus, actively bringing her input into a number of important international committees in present and past:

- Civil society steering committee member of the Open Government Partnership (OGP);
- Member of the multi-stakeholder advisory group (MAG) to the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) under the UN Secretary General;
- Member of the Nominating Committee of the ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, USA) and
- Member of the civil society advisory group on gender equality and women's empowerment to UN in Moldova

Veronica's areas of expertise include: Project management, project evaluation, capacity Building (including ToT) for civil society and Government; Policy Development, Organizational development; Community development; Open Government/Open Data/Citizen engagement; ICT4D and Internet Governance.

Veronica worked in Liberia, Nepal and Turkey on the issues of education and critical thinking methodology for education; in Ukraine and Azerbaijan on the issues of open government and Internet governance.

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