

# A HOLISTIC DIGITAL APPROACH TO THE CO-CREATION OF PUBLIC SERVICES

*Sanja Vrbeč<sup>1</sup> Rok Hržica<sup>2</sup> and Tina Jukić<sup>3</sup>*

**Abstract:** Both the academic community and international political actors have promoted co-creation as a solution to the ‘wicked’ problems of today. However, in spite of the academic and political interest, a holistic and guided approach to the practical implementation of co-creation by public entities is still lacking. All the efforts invested so far have been limited to either specific policy areas or specific aspects of the co-creation process. More importantly, these efforts have failed to maximise the potential of digitalisation as a supporting instrument of this cause.

The COGOV project financed within the framework of the Horizon 2020 programme aims to address this gap by providing a holistic digital toolkit that supports and guides public organisations through the whole process of service renewal on the basis of co-creation. To achieve this, the toolkit consists of four tools tackling different aspects related to co-creation: 1) the Co-Ready tool supports the assessment of organisational readiness for co-creation; 2) the Co-Serve tool supports the selection of public services most suitable for a renewal based on co-creation principles; 3) the Co-Renew tool provides a co-creation platform for the renewal of the public service (previously selected with the help of the Co-Serve tool); and 4) the Co-Master tool supports the quality assessment of the co-creation process that took place during the service renewal.

The first, second and fourth tools (Co-Ready, Co-Serve and Co-Master) build on the concept of decision support models and rely on data gathered on the basis of a systematic literature review and case studies conducted in the context of the COGOV project. Their aim is not only to provide an informed assessment of the present state of play (regarding the organisational and service readiness for co-creation or the quality of the co-creation process), but also guidelines as to which aspects (and how) need to be improved or taken into consideration as potential challenges during co-creation. In contrast, the third tool (Co-Renew) builds on the idea of a customer journey – a largely overlooked concept in the context of the public sector – with the purpose of providing a platform for public organisations to actively include external stakeholders in the process of service renewal.

Hence, the aim of this paper is threefold. Firstly, to scan the current endeavours and tools available to public organisations interested in implementing co-creation within their work. Secondly, to present a blueprint of a holistic toolkit for co-creation as a potential solution to the gaps noted in the present approach. Thirdly, to invigorate the debate about the link between theory, digitalisation, and concrete instruments practitioners need for the successful implementation of co-creation in the public sector.

## Points for Practitioners

The paper discusses a holistic digital toolkit for the co-creation of public services intended for practitioners working in public organisations. As such, it contributes to the discussion and eventually development of a fully-fledged instrument for co-creation that will transform the approach of public organisations to service renewal. By drawing on the theory of co-creation, evidence-based data, and the concepts of decision support models and customer journey, the paper makes efforts to bridge theory and practice and thus contribute to the creation of an innovative toolkit that will support the introduction of co-creation in the public sector.

**Key words:** co-creation, public services renewal, digital toolkit, decision support models, user journey.

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<sup>1</sup> Postdoctoral researcher, Faculty of Public Administration, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant, Faculty of Public Administration, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Faculty of Public Administration, University of Ljubljana, Ljubljana, Slovenia.