

# Chapter 13

## Co-Creation as a Social Innovation in Delivery of Public Services at Local Government Level: The Slovak Experience

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines social innovations in the public sector emphasizing the plural forms of ownership in public service provision which enable co-creation. It identifies different types of co-creation as social innovations, as well as the drivers for, and barriers to, successful co-creation processes at the subnational level in Slovakia. This study is a part of the research project “Learning from innovation in public sector environments” (LIPSE) and as such focuses on co-creation in the fields of welfare and the environment. One of the findings is that co-creation innovations are predominantly proposed and initiated by other actors, rather than by local self-governments, contrary to the main role that local governments are believed to play in initiating the co-creation processes. Explanations for such situations are provided.*

### INTRODUCTION

For more than 30 years the delivery of local public services has been undergoing change, from a style of delivery dominated by the public sector to a more efficient, more effective mixed system, characterized by variations in ownership and sources of financing. Much of this change has come about through the process of privatization (Cullis & Jones, 1987. Privatization in the public sector translates into the

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introduction of market type mechanisms (MTM), or the private sector assuming full responsibility for public services delivery. Marketization of the public service is a major feature of new public management (NPM) (Cooper, 2003; Lane, 2000; Pollit & Bouckaert, 2011). Even before the NPM era (for NPM analysis see, for example, Pollit & Bouckaert, 2011), the works of authors like Cullis and Jones (1998) raised questions about the capacity of the state and its subsystems to produce and deliver public services, given that the modes of production and financing are not clearly defined. Concepts such as public-private-civil sector mix, partnerships, co-operation, and co-creation have emerged as ways of organizing public services production and delivery. These concepts propose alternative approaches to improving the quality of public services delivery. Our case deals with one such “instrument” – co-creation, as the innovative solution for service delivery at the local self-government level.

Most experts claim that innovative solutions in public service delivery, which are intended to enhance public values such as effectiveness, efficiency, and legitimacy, can be found especially through the collaboration of different stakeholders (Bekkers, Tummers, & Voorberg, 2013). One of the central elements in such a solution is the active participation of citizens and grassroots organizations to produce social outcomes that really matter (Bason, 2010). Such participation is aligned with the idea that delivering public services should be an open process, with end users involved in the design and development (Chesbrough, 2003; Silva & Buček, 2014; Von Hippel, 2007). Only then can social innovation result in changes in the relationships between the various stakeholders (Bekkers et al., 2013).

This chapter delivers a focused case study, through describing and analyzing co-creation activities in the prevailing conditions of Slovak local self-government. Its main goal is to evaluate the current level of co-creation at the municipal level in the Slovak Republic and to try to explain the current state of affairs. This national perspective has the potential to provide significant new insights into the theory and practice of sub-national governance, simply because it shows that patterns of local government typical in developed countries may not necessarily function well in dissimilar conditions.

The focus on local self-government level is intentional. According to theories of decentralization (for example, Bailey, 1999), local self-government is in close proximity to each citizen and is expected to serve local needs. This means that, in the area of social innovations, for example, local self-government is where the largest proportion of a country’s co-creative innovations normally happen. To test this assumption in the specific case of the Slovak Republic, this research first investigated two questions:

1. What is the state of co-creation in local public service delivery at the Slovak local self-government level?
2. What are the roles of the main actors in the promotion or prohibition of the development of co-creation in delivery of local public services in Slovakia?

The analysis employed standard qualitative research methods, applied to the “Learning from Innovation in Public Sector Environments” (LIPSE) research project. To answer the first research question (identifying different types of co-creation in public service delivery) the study focused on the areas of welfare and the environment. The second step (identifying roles of main stakeholders, and drivers and barriers that account for the success or failure of co-creation processes in Slovak municipalities) involved two main approaches – direct data collection (interviews with stakeholders from 10 selected projects) and indirect methods (content analysis of relevant documents, web pages of Slovak municipalities, media articles, and other sources). The results for the analysis, discussed in the final section of this chapter, provide important lessons on how standard expectations may fail in non-standard conditions.

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