

# Supporting Communities through Social Government in Co-Creation and Co-Production of Public Services: The SocialGov Concept and Platform Architecture

Maria A. Wimmer, University of Koblenz-Landau, Koblenz, Germany

Sabrina Scherer, University of Koblenz-Landau, Koblenz, Germany

## ABSTRACT

Governments are facing demands towards more transparency, better connectivity and collaboration among different actors in public service provisioning. Their constituencies demand that public services better reflect citizens' needs and social innovation. Integrating Internet, Web 2.0, social media and new concepts of open government and community governance bear tremendous potentials for engaging citizens and businesses in co-creation and co-production of public services and therewith addressing their high expectations. This paper first reviews existing concepts of co-creation and co-production. Subsequently, the Social Government (SocialGov) concept is introduced, which implements new trends of co-creation and co-production of public services in a collaborative environment. In SocialGov, the actors collaborate on the par with one another and the citizens and businesses take over social and public responsibility in their local communities.

## KEYWORDS

Co-Creation, Co-Production, Open Government, Public Service Provisioning, Social Government, Social Innovation, Social Media

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Strengthening the partnership and collaboration between governments and private as well as civic sector actors has emerged as a strong demand of open government and of new public governance models (DGCONNECT, 2013, p. 6; Löffler & Timm-Arnold, 2013, p. 3). Along the demand, co-creation and co-production of public services arose as new trend to engage citizens and businesses more actively in public service design and public service provisioning. Different authors and institutions consider these concepts as important social and economic assets for the public sector (Bovaird, 2007; DGCONNECT, 2013; European Commission, 2013; Koch, Füller, & Brunswicker, 2011; Linders, 2012; Löffler & Timm-Arnold, 2013; Nam, 2012; Pestoff, 2006; Pestoff, Osborne, & Brandsen, 2006; Ramaswamy, 2009; Sorensen & Torfing, 2012). The wide diffusion of social technologies such as Web 2.0 and social media in the private and civic sectors (Nambisan & Nambisan, 2013, p. 12), and increasingly also in the public sector (Ferro, Loukis, Charalabidis, & Osella, 2013, p. 360; Mergel, 2012, p. 44) promote this evolution. However, governments are lagging behind in regard to

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a widely accepted use of such social technologies (Cassia & Magno, 2009, p. 334; Linders, 2012, p. 453; Sorensen & Torfing, 2012, pp. 843f).

While public administrations at all levels struggle with changing requirements demanding more transparency, better connectivity and collaboration among different actors (DGCONNECT, 2013), the concept of co-creation and co-production offers means to overcome these challenges. Yet, the use of the Internet, and of social and mobile technologies largely influence communication structures, expectations and behaviour of citizens and businesses (Nambisan & Nambisan, 2013, p. 8; Sorensen & Torfing, 2012, pp. 847f), which demands the public sector to carefully plan and deploy co-creation and co-production solutions. This requires well trained staff and a culture of social and open innovation at the side of the governments. However, another challenge the public sector has to cope with are financial constraints resulting in less staff available to keep pace with these fast developments in the digital era (Nambisan & Nambisan, 2013, p. 8).

To overcome above mentioned challenges and to leverage the potentials of co-creation and co-production, this contribution introduces a concept we call *Social Government* (SocialGov). The SocialGov concept aims to integrate methods, concepts and tools of co-creation and co-production with those of social communities and of open government. The concept aims to enable transparency, to explore open data, open services and open processes, and to integrate concepts of personalisation in the SocialGov environment. This way, innovative personalised open and collaborative public service provisioning is offered for social communities, where the different actors collaborate on the par among each other. SocialGov asks consumers of public services to take responsibility and to engage in public service provisioning alike - and with it in the society. The concept is also designed in a way that all stakeholders involved in this new co-creation and co-production paradigm benefit from the collaboration by bringing in expertise and insights from the different sides. Therewith, the SocialGov concept transforms the traditional paradigm of public service provisioning into a paradigm of co-creation and co-production.

This paper presents the SocialGov concept and the architecture of an integrated ICT platform (the SocialGov platform) supporting the concept. The SocialGov concept and architecture have evolved from a collaboration with scholars to compile a project proposal called SocialGov, which was submitted to the H2020 research programme of the European Commission. The research applied methods of design science research, which aims to design artefacts that conceptualise ideas, practices, models, frameworks, and products to support the analysis, design, implementation and use of information systems (Hevner & Chatterjee, 2010; Peffers, Tuunanen, Rothenberger, & Chatterjee, 2007). The SocialGov concept and platform (the designed artefacts) are designed based on a review of relevant literature on co-creation and co-production in public service provisioning as well as on e-participation to set grounds, to inform needs and to provide a common understanding of terms the SocialGov concept builds upon (see the next section). Furthermore, five different public service delivery cases were studied to analyse how co-creation and co-production can overcome above mentioned challenges and contribute to leverage the potentials of community engagement, open governance and social technologies: (1) waste management on a municipal level, (2) a portal that provides public services for businesses hosted by a federal administration, (3) urban planning in a city, (4) childcare on local level, and (5) citizens' self-organisation and voluntary work in a city. Only the last case is used throughout this paper to exemplify the concept and platform of SocialGov, which are detailed in section 3 (concept with objectives, phases, and user roles respectively) and section 4 (platform with its technical features). Finally, section 5 reflects how the concept introduced helps overcome the challenges described above and it outlines future works.

## 2. SETTING GROUNDS

To set the basis of a common understanding of Social Government, key terms are defined first. Broadbent and Guthrie (2008) define public services as “those activities which are enshrined within

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