



# Briefing paper Co-production of services

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## Table of contents:

I.	<a href="#">Introduction</a> .....	2
II.	<a href="#">Understanding co production</a> .....	2
III.	<a href="#">Benefits</a> .....	6
IV.	<a href="#">Challenges and recommendations</a> .....	7
V.	<a href="#">Co-production and EU funds</a> .....	8
VI.	<a href="#">Conclusions</a> .....	9



## I. Introduction

EPR commissioned a study entitled *EPR Study on co-production in services for people with disabilities* in 2016. It aims to raise awareness of co-production as an approach to service delivery, present examples of co-production, provide recommendations to inform the development of future initiatives using co-productive approaches and to point out changes in legislation, policies and funding needed to support the implementation of co-production. This paper is designed to complement the study; to give more background to the concept and to explore co-production in more detail.

This paper presents the main features of co-production, starting with a brief section on its origins and possible definitions, in order to identify the key principles of this approach. The third and fourth section focus on challenges and benefits of using co-production-inspired practices. The fifth section presents relevant policy and funding developments on co-production at the European level and the last section includes conclusions drawn from the information provided in the paper.

**Co-production** can be seen as an approach where all stakeholders participate equally in the process to improve social service provision. Each party brings their own unique combination of expertise, capability, knowledge and experience and contributes to achieve the common goal of a better service. This approach shifts the focus from merely including the other's "perspective" to actively engaging all parties and meaningfully sharing experiences.

## II. Understanding co-production

### **II.1 Definition**

In the 1970s, a new concept to describe the relationship and involvement of service providers emerged in United States. An academic research team led by Elinor Ostrom linked the rise in neighbourhood crime rates to the decision for police officers to stop patrolling the streets on foot and use cars instead. As result of this new policy adopted in Chicago, the police lost the vital connections with the local community members and therefore, recognition of the service users<sup>1 2</sup>. When referring to concept of co-production, the author of this first study claimed:

*Co-production implies that citizens can play an active role in producing public goods and services of consequence to the them (...). Coproduction of many goods and services normally considered to be public goods by government agencies and citizens organized into polycentric systems is crucial for achieving higher levels of welfare<sup>3</sup>.*

Despite the fact that the concept was first developed in relation to community involvement and service providers (police) in the context of crime, co-production influenced other sectors, emerging as a radical challenge to existing approaches to local economic development and the delivery of welfare and public services<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Boyle, D., Clarke, S. and Burns, S. (2006). *Aspects of co-production: the implications for work, health and volunteering*. New Economics Foundation, London, p.9 (Available at [http://www.i-r-e.org/bdf/docs/a006\\_co-production-work-health-volunteering.pdf](http://www.i-r-e.org/bdf/docs/a006_co-production-work-health-volunteering.pdf))

<sup>2</sup> Realpe, A; Wallace, L.M. (2010). *What is co-production?* The Health Foundation, London, p.7 (Available at [http://personcentredcare.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/what\\_is\\_co-production.pdf](http://personcentredcare.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/what_is_co-production.pdf))

<sup>3</sup> Ostrom, E. (1996). *Crossing the Great Divide: Co-production, synergy, and development*, World Development, Vol. 24, No. 6, pp 1073 -1087, p.1073; 1083

<sup>4</sup> Boyle, D., Clarke, S. and Burns, S. (2006). *Aspects of co-production: the implications for work, health and volunteering*. New Economics Foundation, London, p.9 (Available at [http://www.i-r-e.org/bdf/docs/a006\\_co-production-work-health-volunteering.pdf](http://www.i-r-e.org/bdf/docs/a006_co-production-work-health-volunteering.pdf))

In order to shed light on what can be considered co-production, it is useful to quote some definitions that have emerged over the years.

*Co-production is where service users, peer supporters and staff work together as equal partners to design and deliver a service, ensuring that people with lived experience lead the way. This includes development, governance, delivery and evaluation (The National Survivor User Network (NSUN) and Together, 2014)<sup>5</sup>*

*Co-production recognises that people who use social care services (and their families) have knowledge and experience that can be used to help make services better, not only for themselves but for other people who need social care. (Think Local act Personal)<sup>6</sup>*

*Co-production means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change. (David Boyle, Anna Coote, Chris Sherwood and Julia Slay, 2010)<sup>7</sup>*

Focusing on co-production in services for people with disabilities, Angelova-Mladenova echoes the above definitions in the study commissioned by EPR:

*(...) **equal partnership and collaboration** between service providers and people using services. Co-production is about recognising that people who use services are **experts in their own rights**, rather than passive recipients of care ('clients', 'service users'), and about involving them in the shaping of services. This requires a **shift of power and control** from service providers towards people using services. Instead of having services designed and delivered for people with disabilities, they are **designed and delivered with them**<sup>8</sup>.*

As pointed out in the *Joint Understanding of co-production*<sup>9</sup> document, inclusive working practices inspired by a co-production approach fully reflect the '**nothing about us, without us**' principle and other principles enshrined within the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The group of European NGOs that developed the Joint Understanding document highlight that in the disability field, co-production offers an equal balance of power and responsibility among all stakeholders, stressing the full, structural, ongoing and meaningful involvement of individuals with support needs at all stages<sup>10</sup>. Furthermore, co-production is likely to provide opportunities to rethink and reassess practices on an ongoing basis. Additionally, the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL)'s definition stresses another aspect, namely the commitment of the parties involved in co-production practices (defined as '*partnership and collaboration between parties passionate about improving service provision*')<sup>11</sup>.

In clinician-patient relationships, in the medical sector, co-production means a radical change in the way the relationship between the two actors is conceived. In the meeting between doctor and patient there is no longer one expert, but rather two, each of them bringing a different perspective and expertise on the same topic.

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<sup>5</sup> Together/NSUN (2014). Service User Involvement in the delivery of mental health services, Briefing (Available at <http://www.together-uk.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/06/Service-User-Involvement-briefing.pdf> )

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/Browse/Informationandadvice/CareandSupport/jargonBuster/#Co-production>

<sup>7</sup> Boyle, D., Coote, A., Sherwood, C. and Slay, J. (2010). *Right here, right now. Taking co-production into the mainstream*, Discussion Paper, nef, THE Lab – Innovating public services, NESTA, London. (Available at [http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/right\\_here\\_right\\_now.pdf](http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/right_here_right_now.pdf) )

<sup>8</sup> Angelova-Mladenova, L. (2016). *Study of co-production in services for people with disabilities*. European Platform for Rehabilitation (Available at [http://www.epr.eu/images/EPR/documents/Studies/Co-production\\_Study\\_2016/EPR\\_Co-production\\_study\\_2016.pdf](http://www.epr.eu/images/EPR/documents/Studies/Co-production_Study_2016/EPR_Co-production_study_2016.pdf) )

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> The European Network on Independent Living (ENIL) (2013). Fact Sheet. (Available at [http://www.enil.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/FAQ\\_Co-production.pdf](http://www.enil.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/FAQ_Co-production.pdf) )

According to Julia Slay and Lucie Stephens, the characteristics of co-production-inspired practices can be summarised in six basic principles<sup>12</sup>:

**Building on people’s capabilities:** co-production recognises and nurtures people’s capabilities, supporting pro-active attitudes of the individual, moving away from a deficit based approach.

**Assets-based approach:** where all actors are considered equal partners at all stages of the process of service provision.

**Reciprocity and mutuality:** by fostering shared responsibility and mutual expectations, co-production promotes reciprocal relationships among parties.

**Blurring distinctions:** full activation of networks to overcome distinctions based on the traditional roles of actors to reconfigure the way services are developed and delivered. **Facilitating rather than delivering:** enabling agencies to become catalysts and facilitators rather than being the main providers themselves. **Peer support networks:** importance of engaging peer and personal networks alongside professionals to transfer knowledge.

## II.II Assessing co-production in practice

After presenting the conceptual framework, the next step to better understand co-production working practices is to look at how the interactions between the different parties involved shape the delivery of services. According to Griffiths, co-production and its principles can be present to a different extent in the delivery of services. It means that services are characterised by the different degree of involvement of the stakeholders. Therefore, it is possible to refer to a *co-production spectrum* in service provisions<sup>13</sup>.

Bovaird’s scheme presents different scenarios to assess the co-production level in services, based on whether service professionals act alone or together with users and communities to plan and deliver public services<sup>14</sup>.

	<b>Professionals as sole service planners</b>	<b>Service user and/or community as co-planners</b>	<b>No professional input into service planning</b>
<b>Professionals as sole service deliverer</b>	Traditional professional service provision	<i>Traditional professional service provision with users and communities involved in planning and design</i>	
<b>Professionals and users/communities as co-deliverers</b>	<i>User co-delivery of professionally designed services</i>	<b>Full user/professional co-production</b>	User/community co-delivery of services with professionals, with little formal planning or design
<b>Users/communities as sole deliverers</b>	User/community delivery of professionally planned services	User/community delivery of co-planned or co-designed services	Traditional self-organized community provision

Based on Bovaird’s scheme, full co-production of services is only when users and professionals fully share the task of planning and designing the service, then delivering it. In full co-production-based practices, users, communities and professionals develop relationships in which both parties take risks and develop trust in each other expertise, capabilities and experience to enhance the service.

<sup>12</sup> Slay, J. and Stephens, L. (2013). *Co-production in mental health. A literature review*, Commissioned by Mind, New Economics Foundation, Mary Murphy Editor, London (Available at [http://b3cdn.net/nefoundation/ca0975b7cd88125c3e\\_ywm6bp311.pdf](http://b3cdn.net/nefoundation/ca0975b7cd88125c3e_ywm6bp311.pdf))

<sup>13</sup> Bovaird, T. (2008). What next for the co-production of public services?, Centre for Public Service Partnerships October 2008 (Available at <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/reports/whats-next-co-production-public-services.pdf>)

<sup>14</sup> Bovaird, T. (2007). Beyond Engagement and Participation: User and Community Coproduction of Public Services, *Public Administration Review*, September | October 2007, pp. 846-860, p. 848 (Available at [http://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/bovaird\\_final\\_version\\_pdf\\_1.pdf](http://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/bovaird_final_version_pdf_1.pdf))

The *Co-Production Star* toolkit enables organisations commissioning (planning, agreeing and monitoring), and delivering public services and their local communities to map the current level of co-production, improve existing co-production approaches, identify the potential for new approaches and scale up co-production across services and communities<sup>15</sup>. In the *Co-Production Star* model, the four “Cos” show how to integrate co-production into service delivery:

- **Co-commissioning:** those commissioning the service work together with users and local communities in the prioritisation and planning of public services;
- **Co-design:** service providers and citizens redesign public services to improve outcomes and reduce costs;
- **Co-delivery:** service providers work with citizens using the services in order to improve the delivery process and take preventative action with local communities to improve outcomes; and
- **Co-assessment:** service providers work together with citizens as evaluators of public service quality and outcomes.

Moreover, this model describes the steps of the journey to transform the service provision in line with the co-production approach<sup>16</sup>:

- 1. Map It:** explore existing and new forms of co-production
- 2. Focus It:** focus on those with the highest impact
- 3. People It:** using assets-based approaches
- 4. Market it:** in order to bring about behaviour change
- 5. Grow It:** within and beyond the organisation and local community.

## II.IV Co-production in practice(s)

There are numerous examples of co-production working practices developed over the years and in a variety of contexts. For the purposes of this paper, this section focuses just on few examples to show the potential and wide application of co-production approaches.

Practice	Topic	Outcome	Info
<b>Washington Youth Court</b> (US)	Near collapse of the youth court system in the District of Columbia	Young people to reinforce the anti-crime message and curb youth offending	<a href="#">Link (p.82)</a>
<b>Welcome to Utrecht</b> (NL)	Better wellbeing for refugees arriving in a city	Promoting residents participation in volunteering activity for refugees via social media and internet	Governance International (2015) <a href="#">Website</a>
<b>We Empower uS bH</b> (D)	Development of support tools, aimed to improve the career opportunities for people with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus	Seven instruments were developed, including: Guidelines for action and practical help in training and vocation, Empowerment and self-management of young persons with Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, Information, tips and hints for employers, Information for occupational guidance counsellors, Vocational biographies of people with disabilities, Promoting activities with the help of friends, colleagues and the social network, and Peer support training.	EPR, 2016 <a href="#">Link (p.18)</a>
<b>My Way</b> (UK <sup>o</sup> )	Supporting the transition of young disabled people from children and young people's services to adult services	All the people involved have become experts in their own right and have pushed the agenda of personalised services forward	SCIE <a href="#">(Link)</a>
<b>KeyRing</b> (United Kingdom)	Independent living	Active engagement and collaboration between people who use services, volunteers and paid employees	ENIL (2013) <a href="#">Website</a>

<sup>15</sup> Governance International (2015). *The Co-Production Star - bringing citizen power into public services to improve outcomes*. (Available at [http://www.coproductionsotland.org.uk/files/3614/2789/2009/7.\\_Introduction\\_to\\_the\\_Co-production\\_Star.pdf](http://www.coproductionsotland.org.uk/files/3614/2789/2009/7._Introduction_to_the_Co-production_Star.pdf))

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem

### III. Benefits

A recent systematic literature review of 20 articles helps in individuating some common benefits connected to the use of co-production working practices<sup>17</sup>. The authors identify three clusters of potential benefits for both direct participants (involved in the processes) and also the broader community.

#### A) Better Services

Co-production is a shift from outcome-centred to process-centred logic. Services delivered following the co-production approach are likely to present advantages in terms of:

*Cost-Effectiveness*: by bringing in extra resources, in the form of help, support and effort from clients, their families and neighbours<sup>18</sup>;

*Effectiveness*: active involvement of citizens can foster increased public knowledge and greater cooperation, and outcome oriented effectiveness, meaning better policy and implementation decisions.

*Quality*: quality of services is evaluated against standards defined in the co-production process. Including users enhances the assessment of the performance and can be crucial to identify possible improvements of the service.

*Satisfaction*: users' involvement in the service from planning to delivery ensure that they contribute to identify key indicators relevant for them and providers will be considered as more responsive to their suggestions.

*Performance*: starting from the assumption that performance is a social-learning process involving both the evaluators and the evaluated, co-production is best suited to assess service performance.

#### B) Better Relationship between citizen/client and the professional organisation

*Learning*: the relationships experience between organisations and individuals can be defined as ongoing and mutual learning process where both parties can learn from each other.

*Trust*: the meaningful partnerships between service providers and those using the service fosters people's belief that their interests are being included and treated fairly from the other party;

*Needs and abilities*: co-production and participation bolster attention and awareness of users' needs and abilities. Therefore, services can be re-adapted to better meet the needs and promoting abilities

#### C) Better Democratic Quality

*Empowerment*: stressing the importance of citizens' perceived influence on the process

*Fairness*: considered as the ability of individual to express their point of view, inclusion of this perspective in the decision, transparency in taking decisions and respectful treatment of the parties involved

*Equity*: as an even distribution of benefits and/or input

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<sup>17</sup> Vanleene, Daphne, Bram Verschuere, and Joris Voets. (2015). *Benefits and Risks of Coproduction: a Preliminary Literature Review*. In IIAS Workshop on Coproduction, Proceedings (Available at <http://hdl.handle.net/1854/LU-6909634>)

<sup>18</sup> David Boyle and Michael Harris (2009). *The challenge of co-production. How equal partnerships between professionals and the public are crucial to improving public services?* Discussion Paper, NESTA, p.19 (Available at [http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/the\\_challenge\\_of\\_co-production.pdf](http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_challenge_of_co-production.pdf))

For the authors of a study published by the *New Economics Foundation* (nef), the seeming increase in social needs is due to social service models that fail to ask people for *their help* and *to use the skills they have* <sup>19</sup>.

Additionally, the Social Care Institute for Excellence points out that some social groups, when using services, can be more exposed to the risk of exclusion. Co-production helps in overcoming these barriers and allow for a more meaningful participation of all members of the society, thus promoting inclusion and diversity<sup>20</sup> and offering the possibility for a more active participation as citizens<sup>21</sup>.

The benefits of using co-production-inspired working practices has been shown in the health sector, such as in dealing with long-term health conditions, where co-production practices can be used to promote self-management of the patients, with improved health outcomes<sup>22</sup>.

## **IV. Challenges and recommendations**

Using co-production presents potential benefits in improving the way services are delivered and yet it cannot be considered a panacea free of challenges<sup>23</sup>. Bovaird identifies some critical issues correlated to co-production practices<sup>24 25 26</sup> and this paper offers some recommendations to address them

*Representation:* co-production strives to engage all stakeholders in the process. Notwithstanding, doubts on whether representativeness of all stakeholders in the process is ensured remain.

Meaningful participation of all parties in the process should be promoted by ensuring that stakeholders, including clients, are properly informed and aware of the possibilities of co-production and that they are supported to take part. This may include supported decision making and creative communication methods. Service providers should critically assess their co-production processes in cooperation with people with disabilities.

*Involvement:* despite some service users wishing to be part of the process, some others simply may not be so committed in actively contributing to improving the process. In other cases, the commitment can decline over time.

Clarification of the common benefits to improve the service, having and monitoring goals and a timeframe for them can promote and maintain involvement of all parties. The voluntary nature should also be clear.

*Professional resistance:* in some cases, “experts” might be reluctant to hand over discretion or involve service users and their support networks. This means that service providers might not believe there is an added value of bringing in the expertise of the users in improving the service, whilst in other cases,

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<sup>19</sup> Stephens, L., Ryan-Collins, J. and Boyle, D. (2008). Co-production: A Manifesto for the Core Economy, *New Economics Foundation*. (Available at [http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/assets/BCC/nef\\_Co-production\\_1.pdf](http://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/assets/BCC/nef_Co-production_1.pdf))

<sup>20</sup> SCIE (2013). What is co-production – Introduction. *Co-production in social care: what it is and how to do it (Guide)* (Available at <http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/guides/guide51/what-is-coproduction/index.asp>)

<sup>21</sup> Bovaird, T. (2008). What next for the co-production of public services?, Centre for Public Service Partnerships October 2008 (Available at <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/reports/whats-next-co-production-public-services.pdf>)

<sup>22</sup> Realpe, A; Wallace, L.M. (2010). *What is co-production?* The Health Foundation, London, p.10-11 (Available at [http://personcentredcare.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/what\\_is\\_co-production.pdf](http://personcentredcare.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/what_is_co-production.pdf))

<sup>23</sup> Bovaird, T. (2007). Beyond Engagement and Participation: User and Community Coproduction of Public Services, *Public Administration Review*, September | October 2007, pp. 846-860, p. 856 (Available at [http://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/bovaird\\_final\\_version\\_pdf\\_1.pdf](http://www.cbs.dk/files/cbs.dk/bovaird_final_version_pdf_1.pdf))

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Bovaird, T. (2008). What next for the co-production of public services?, Centre for Public Service Partnerships October 2008 (Available at <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/tsrc/documents/tsrc/reports/whats-next-co-production-public-services.pdf>)

<sup>26</sup> David Boyle and Michael Harris (2009). *The challenge of co-production. How equal partnerships between professionals and the public are crucial to improving public services?* Discussion Paper, NESTA, p.13 (Available at (Available at [http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/the\\_challenge\\_of\\_co-production.pdf](http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_challenge_of_co-production.pdf))

the outcomes of the top-ranking managers of the service provider do not match with those expressed by the user.

*Accountability:* the inclusiveness of the processes blurs the responsibility among all stakeholders involved and in turn, accountability.

The working environment must be one that values and takes into account input from all actors, including users. Staff can be shown the benefits of working with “experts by experience” to improve services and outcomes through sharing good practices and success stories. Sharing and co-creating services can promote goal alignment of all parties.

In each co-production process, a discussion about roles, responsibilities, expectations and possibilities among the parties involved could help. If there is disagreement between a professional and service user, mechanisms should be in place to support consensus-building.

*Individual versus collective co-production:* co-production is still essentially considered a bilateral relationship between a provider and an individual user. Nonetheless, the principles of co-production aim to include other stakeholders.

Service providers should take a collaborative approach to service provision, considering which partnerships could add to the effectiveness of services and quality of life outcomes, then work to ensure that all relevant stakeholders in the process are present should they wish they to be. Co-production should also be embraced by funders and commissioners of services.

*Scalability:* despite the success of certain practices, the resilience of the classical model to deliver services can make it harder to scaling up co-production working practices.

Better promotion of successful practices can create a multiplier effect in different sectors. EU funding should support projects that develop, scale up and mainstream co-production processes.

## **V. Co-production and EU funds**

Co-production working practices can bring about social change and transform the delivery of services. European Union Member States are searching for new ways to engage citizens and bolster their involvement in the provision and governance of social services due to the demographic, political and economic challenges facing the welfare state in the 21st century<sup>27</sup>.

It is important to note that the literature focusing on citizen as a valuable partner in public service delivery refers also to the concept of *co-creation*. According to a recent study comparative study, *co-production* and *co-creation* can be used interchangeably.<sup>28</sup> The European Commission highlights that connectivity and the use of web 2.0 technologies are enablers of social innovation, providing tools for cross-sectoral collaboration and co-creation, in particular in the fields like education and healthcare. In these two sectors, expert patients and

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<sup>27</sup> Pestoff, Victor (2011). Co-production, new public governance and third sector social services, *Europe Ciências Sociais Unisinos* 2011 (1), 47 (Enero-Abril) (Available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273863031\\_Co-Producao\\_nova\\_governanca\\_publica\\_e\\_servicos\\_sociais\\_no\\_Terceiro\\_Setor\\_na\\_Europa](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273863031_Co-Producao_nova_governanca_publica_e_servicos_sociais_no_Terceiro_Setor_na_Europa))

<sup>28</sup> W. H. Voorberg, V. J. J. M. Bekkers & L. G. Tummers (2014): A Systematic Review of Co-Creation and Co-Production: Embarking on the social innovation journey, *Public Management Review*, DOI: 10.1080/14719037.2014.930505 (Available at <http://www.lipse.org/userfiles/uploads/systematic%20review%20co-production.pdf>)

expert learners become partners with professional service provider organisations, enhancing access, quality and affordability of the services<sup>29</sup>.

These innovations coincide with the rising demand of individuals to be actors in their lives and enable them to collaborate to find collective solutions to overcome some of the social issues they face.

The European Union has been supporting the further development of collaborative practices and in particular with the HORIZON 2020 research programme<sup>30</sup>. H2020 aims to use untapped sources of growth and employment, renew the legitimacy of public policy-making, especially through greater citizens' involvement, and supporting the delivery of better public services for all<sup>31</sup>. In order to achieve this goal, H2020 offered numerous opportunities to investigate the topic of co-creation further under the call CO-CREATION FOR GROWTH AND INCLUSION (H2020-SC6-CO-CREATION-2016-2017).

CO-CREATION-02-2016: “User-driven innovation: value creation through design enabled innovation”  
*User-centred design thinking and the application of design tools and methods, when applied to services, systems and organisations, enable structured service and business-model innovation, organisational innovation as well as other intangible forms of innovation. Aspects of inclusiveness and social objectives of addressing inequalities in citizens' access to the innovations should be taken into account.*

CO-CREATION-03-2016: “Piloting demand-driven collaborative innovation models in Europe”  
*Experimenting mechanisms to facilitate the match between supply and demand for innovative ideas, as well as the development of absorptive capacities within businesses and other knowledge users. Addressing such issues would facilitate knowledge co-creation among actors that better understand each other's needs and language*

CO-CREATION-04-2017: “Applied co-creation to deliver public services”  
*Innovation actions will pilot the co-designing and co-creation of public services, using ICT and relying on open data or open public services. They need to bring together a variety of actors in society.*

Another programme under which there may be calls for projects where co-production could be addressed is the Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI). European Social Fund programmes in different countries could also support projects relating to co-production<sup>32</sup>.

## **VI. Conclusions**

Co-production is not an alternative to public provision or funding of services but an approach to transform the way services are delivered. It presents potential benefits for innovating in different sectors, from adult social care and elderly care, to healthcare, mental health services, supported housing, criminal justice and education, to mention just a few<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Agnes Hubert (2010). Empowering people, driving change: Social innovation in the European Union. Bureau of European Policy Advisers, Report May 2010. (Available at [http://net4society.eu/\\_media/Social\\_innovation\\_europe.pdf](http://net4society.eu/_media/Social_innovation_europe.pdf))

<sup>30</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/social-incubators/section-1/1\\_agnes\\_hubert-empowering\\_people\\_driving\\_change.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/innovation-union/pdf/social-incubators/section-1/1_agnes_hubert-empowering_people_driving_change.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> European Commission (2016) 13. Europe in a changing world – inclusive, innovative and reflective Societies, Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2016 – 2017, Consolidated version following European Commission Decision C(2016)8265 of 13 December 2016, p.14 (Available at [http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2016\\_2017/main/h2020-wp1617-societies\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2016_2017/main/h2020-wp1617-societies_en.pdf))

<sup>32</sup> Angelova-Mladenova, L. (2016). *Study of co-production in services for people with disabilities*. European Platform for Rehabilitation (Available at [http://www.epr.eu/images/EPR/documents/Studies/Co-production\\_Study\\_2016/EPR\\_Co-production\\_study\\_2016.pdf](http://www.epr.eu/images/EPR/documents/Studies/Co-production_Study_2016/EPR_Co-production_study_2016.pdf))

<sup>33</sup> Boyle, D., Coote,A., Sherwood,C. and Slay,J. (2010). *Right here, right now. Taking co-production into the mainstream*, Discussion Paper, nef, THE Lab – Innovating public services , NESTA, London.p.13 (Available at [http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/right\\_here\\_right\\_now.pdf](http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/right_here_right_now.pdf))

Co-production is not a “gift” from the service providers but it promotes a new relationship between the actors involved, where all stakeholders are considered *experts* and *crucial assets* in the process. It goes beyond addressing needs and emphasises the capabilities and skills of those using the service. Co-production requires engagement and meaningful participation of all stakeholders to fully tap the resources within the social relationships among the parties. As pointed out at the 2016 EPR Public Affairs event on co-production, co-production with persons with disabilities is not about changing skills, but first and foremost about changing attitudes<sup>34</sup>.

By fostering inclusion and participation, co-production working practices ensure that the services are designed *with* and *for* those using the services. Co-production practices are extremely well-suited to promote the General Principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and in particular *the respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons (a); Non-discrimination (b); Full and effective participation and inclusion in society (c); Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity (d); Equality of opportunity (e); Accessibility (f).*

Co-production working practices present some limitations too. In addition to the shared accountability which seems to blur responsibility on outcomes, another important limiting factor seems to be connected to the involvement of the parties in the process. An underdeveloped issue is *voluntariness* in co-production practices, referring to the genuine participation of all parties because they are willing to take part in the programme and to work together to improve the service. Co-production can produce benefits for all parties involved and yet, it doesn't mean *per se* that the parties are willing to get involved. On the other hand, reward systems can influence the participation in co-production practices with participants only motivated by the reward rather than achieving the goal together. In order to fully unleash the potential of co-production, all parties should be willing to participate because they all share the ultimate goal of improving the service and they are eager to achieve this goal by voluntarily committing time and even efforts, whilst maintaining the possibility to opt out.

The European Commission has invested in the co-production approach in certain fields and the results of the many initiatives funded under the H2020 strategy for 2016-2017 will surely provide additional information to mainstream co-production-inspired working practices to improve the delivery of services, including those in partnership with people with disabilities. EPR calls on the Commission to ensure there are future project calls related to co-production that are accessible to not-for-profit social service providers and that support innovation in the social sector.

EPR is committed to continue to work with partners to share information, good practice and promote co-production among service providers and decision makers.

*The European Platform for Rehabilitation (EPR) is the Network of providers of rehabilitation services committed to excellence and innovation. EPR and its members contribute to a society where every person with a disability and persons in other vulnerable situations have access to the highest quality services that create equal opportunities for all and independent participation in society. More information on [www.epr.eu](http://www.epr.eu)*