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Co-Design for Government: Magic Bullet or Magical Thinking?

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Abstract

Co-design is variously described by its practitioners and proponents as a method, mindset, process and set of tools. As a novel means for creatively engaging citizens and stakeholders to find solutions to complex problems, co-design holds great promise for policy-makers. It has been vaunted as a way to generate more innovative ideas, ensure policies and services match the needs of their users, achieve economic efficiencies by improving responsiveness, foster cooperation and trust between different groups, meaningfully engage the 'hard to reach', achieve buy-in and support for change, and build social capital. This paper considers how we might determine whether advocates of co-design are 'magical thinkers' or if co-design indeed has potential to dramatically improve policy processes and outcomes.

In an era of declining faith in democratic politics and weakening trust in experts, the legitimacy of governments around the world is being challenged. At the same time, governments are expected to address a range of pressing and complex public problems, such as unemployment, climate change, chronic health conditions and an ageing population. The ways in which public policies are developed and implemented is of critical importance in this context. Co-design is emerging as a promising yet nebulous approach for governments to work with communities and stakeholders to address complex issues. As it is currently applied and discussed, co-design risks being little more than a buzzword in the public sector. This paper addresses confusion around the meaning of the term, sets forth a comprehensive definition, and raises questions about the appropriateness of available evidence to support the claims being made about the benefits of co-design.

Researchers, public sector workers and consultants alike are describing co-design as an innovative methodology that can improve both the process and outcomes of government services and policies. The term is increasingly common in government discourse, yet a clear shared definition is lacking. For specialist practitioners, co-design is a distinct set of principles and practices for understanding problems and generating solutions. It signifies the active involvement of a diverse range of participants in exploring, developing and testing responses to shared challenges. In the public sector, co-design is often invoked as a more effective, democratic and innovative alternative to conventional approaches to community engagement, public participation, service design and

policy development. This paper explores the various understandings and uses of co-design in the context of public policy, highlighting tensions in its discursive and practical applications.

This analysis is based on a review of literature that discusses co-design practice in the context of government policy and services. It was inspired by the author's experience of discovering and applying co-design methods on public service design and innovation projects while working at a social change agency in New Zealand. In part because there are few academic articles on co-design for policy, but also because of the importance of developing a practice-based understanding, this paper draws extensively on 'grey' literature, including presentations, blogs, discussion papers and reports produced by design consultants, non-governmental organisations and public sector departments. In addition it draws on scholarly literature on design-for-policy, public sector innovation, design research and policy sciences.

The paper opens by presenting some examples of co-design, then puts forth a definition of co-design as a methodology for policy-making. Breaking it down into a process, principles and practical tools allows us to consider its philosophical underpinnings, implicit goals and related concepts. The paper then outlines challenges that question the feasibility of achieving these outcomes in the contemporary context of policy-making. Finally, pointing to the paucity of academic research on the emerging discourse and practice of co-design in public policy contexts, it sketches potential directions for future research.

A taste of co-design in policy discourse and practice

On a winter's morning in 2015, a small group of casually dressed public sector workers gathered in a poorly heated, run-down building tucked away in an industrial zone in New Zealand's largest city. Surrounded by walls plastered in colourful sticky notes, the team and their design coach warmed up over cups of tea and an energising activity that involved drawing an animal that represented them. Local families, predominantly from indigenous (Māori) and Pacific Island cultures, began trickling in for interviews, in which they shared their attitudes to and experiences of driver licensing. These interviews helped the team build empathy with and understand the perspectives of people who were struggling to navigate and follow New Zealand's graduated driver licensing system. Over the following weeks, the interviewers would compare, analyse and synthesise the data from this ethnographic design research to build up a picture of the licensing system from the perspective of these 'end users' (Auckland Co-Design Lab 2016, 126). The insights and issues they identified would later be used to challenge and inspire a wide range of people to come up with ideas to improve the system. The 'end users' were then brought back in to test and refine the ideas. The final step was presenting the preferred concepts and recommendations as a 'case for change' to key stakeholders in government with the power to implement different policies and services within the licensing system.

This vignette of the work of the Driver Licensing Challenge from the Auckland

Co-Design Lab provides a tangible example of the practice of co-design in the public sector. Funded by New Zealand's central government and hosted by the country's largest local government, the Auckland Co-Design Lab was established to provide a 'neutral space' for multi-agency teams 'to explore the use of co-design and other innovative approaches to address complex social issues' (Auckland Co-Design Lab 2015). It offers one of many examples of co-design being used to effect change in a governmental context. The Auckland Co-Design Lab will be used throughout this paper to illustrate some of the tensions, challenges and benefits of co-design for policy.

Many claims about the need for and benefits of co-design in the public sector have been made recently, in particular, by design-led innovation units and as part of reform processes in Australia and New Zealand. Co-design is often framed as a new or different way to address longstanding social challenges that the public sector is failing to address. It has been put forth as a promising approach to improving public policies and human services in discussions on the reform of Australia's Federation (DPM&C 2015) and as part of the New Zealand Government Policy Project (Government Economics Network 2016), as well as by other public sector agencies (e.g. Evans 2012; Department of Health and Human Services 2016). An article on New Zealand's 'Future State Project', for instance, asserts: 'Co-design harnesses the knowledge and creativity of citizens and staff in identifying problems and generating and implementing solutions – it offers the opportunity to uncover the real barriers to, and accelerants of, progress.' (Gill et al. 2010, 34). These purported benefits will be discussed further, but before we

continue, it will help to put forth a definition of co-design.

Towards a definition of co-design for policy

Many definitions and synonyms appear in discussions of co-design. Without a clear definition, it is impossible to pinpoint examples of practice or evaluate their impacts. A simple way to understand the term is to break it down into its constitutive parts. The 'co' in co-design is typically seen to refer to 'cooperative' or 'collaborative' design, which draws on the Scandinavian tradition of participatory design (Steen, Manschot, and De Koning 2011, 53; Burkett 2012, 6; Torjman 2012, 19; Bradwell and Marr 2008, 17). These design methods emerged out of user involvement in workplace and software systems design nearly 40 years ago, and co-design continues to be an important concept in information and communications technologies today (E. Sanders 2014, 61–62; Kimbell 2015, 65). Like the concepts of 'user-centred innovation' and 'co-creation', the notion of co-design was born in private sector innovation literature, but '[has] been increasingly applied within public services' (Farr 2013, 447). 'Design' in this sense draws on the discipline of industrial design, rather than the usual conceptualisation of 'policy design' in political studies literature - as a problem solving process that configures a pattern of action in order to achieve a specific governmental outcome (O'Rafferty, de Eyto, and Lewis 2016, 2).

A shared definition of co-design that is appropriate for governmental contexts is needed in order to advance practice and research in this domain. An appropriate

definition of co-design as a methodology for policy-making would recognise it as a design-led process, involving creative and participatory principles and tools to engage different kinds of people and knowledge in public problem-solving. Co-design for policy has three key components - process, principles and practical tools - each of which are discussed in turn below. This understanding is based on both academic and practitioner accounts of co-design, and resembles Elizabeth Sanders' (2014) description of co-design as method, mindset and tools. The definition proposed here has been adapted specifically for the context of public policy; however, the author has only just started testing it with practitioners, commissioners and participants in policy co-design work.

Co-design is a design-led process. There are many iterations of 'design thinking' and design-led innovation models in use amongst private, public and community organisations around the world.[1] These models, and the very concept of 'design thinking', attempt to codify design processes so that non-designers can understand and use them. One of the most well-known is the 'Double Diamond', which was developed by the UK Design Council (2007) based on its research with eleven international companies, and aims to visually represent common phases in the process of design. Common features of these models include iterative stages of divergence and convergence (going wide then getting focused); and a series of phases starting with 'discovery' or 'inspiration', leading to 'design' or 'ideation',

[1] Design thinking can be summed up as 'a human-centered, prototype-driven process for innovation' (Cohen 2014). In more scholarly terms, design thinking has been defined as the application of abductive reasoning to reframe an unstable problem situation and create a new object, service or system (Dorst 2010).

and followed by 'delivery' or 'implementation' (see, e.g. IDEO, n.d.; Evans and Terrey 2016, 246). The driver licensing challenge followed the Auckland Co-Design Lab's (2015) similar approach of: frame, explore, imagine, test. As with the policy cycle (see, e.g., Colebatch 2005), in practice this process is not so linear or sequential. Defining co-design as a design-led process is nonetheless important, as it indicates that it is a methodology for innovation. It is about generating and testing new solutions to public problems, not merely offering creative approaches to consultation or 'co-production' at the stage of delivery.

Co-design follows the principles of participatory design. Co-design practitioners and guides often talk about these principles as a 'mindset'. Sanders (2008), for instance, distinguishes between a 'participatory mindset' and 'expert mindset'. A defining characteristic of participatory design is a 'belief that all people are creative' (Naranjo-Bock 2012) and that, as 'experts in their own experiences,' they should be involved in designing products, services and policies that relate to those experiences (Cabinet Office 2017). Co-design thus aligns with forms of normative social science, such as community-driven development and deliberative democracy, which also seek to enhance citizen participation and empowerment (Evans and Terrey 2016, 244). Challenging the usual role of external experts in policy advisory systems (Howlett and Migone 2013), the co-design mindset espouses a 'faith' that every individual has 'the capacity to participate in and direct change in their lives' (Burkett 2012, 8). Lived experience is thus treated as a type of expertise in participatory design. Following on from the belief, or assumption, that everyone is creative – or at least can be creative – and

we should all be able to participate in decisions that affect us, different types of people must be involved in policy co-design. In the driver licensing challenge, this meant involving drivers with and without driver licences, and their families, as well as key stakeholders in the system, such as driving instructors, testing agents, police officers, and so on. If people from these groups were not actively involved in the design process, but emphasis was put on their views and experiences, the process could be described as user-centred or human-centred design. It is only *co*-design if people who are affected by the issue are *active participants* in the design process.

Co-design uses visual and tangible tools to access, generate and test experiences and ideas. While co-design is more than a 'toolkit', the practical methods that it offers are one of its key characteristics. According to Sanders (2014), there are three main types of tools, or techniques, for co-design: telling, enacting and making. Using these methods can provide rich evidence of 'real rather than assumed behaviours' (O'Rafferty, de Eyto, and Lewis 2016, 15) and of tacit knowledge that is ingrained in people's everyday experiences. Tools such as diaries, collages, card sorts, model-building, and various forms of mapping and role playing can help to reveal knowledge that is non-verbal, holistic, non-linear, emotional or intuitive, and which may not be uncovered by other methods (Akama and Prendiville 2016, 31–34; E. Sanders 2014). This is different from deliberative approaches to policy-making, which focus on telling, and include very little enacting or making. The creative techniques of co-design also help to generate and test ideas as rapidly and pragmatically as possible. While people

may be creative experts in their own experience, some are likely to need support or facilitation to express themselves and meaningfully participate in collaborative design and decision-making. An important part of the co-design process is having a skilled and experienced facilitator who can choose the most appropriate tools to enable people to communicate and engage with each other as well as feel comfortable and inspired enough to envision their own and others' ideas. Some tools come from commercial design disciplines; others draw on methodologies for community engagement and systems thinking, for example. Design, more generally, is seen as offering powerful tools for collective creativity, especially by visualising complex ideas and flattening hierarchies (Aviv Katz, cited in Service Design Network 2016, 84; Kimbell 2015; E. Sanders 2014).

Prototyping is an important stage of co-design, and embodies the features of co-design as process, principles and practical tools. Prototyping is a quick, low cost way to test an idea (or aspect of it) by creating an early sample or model and eliciting rapid feedback on it. The sample or model might be made out of paper or plasticine, role-played or shown on video. The objective is to receive feedback from existing or potential users in order to refine or discard the idea. This usually occurs in a final phase of the co-design process, following the generation of ideas. Some design researchers and practitioners describe prototypes as 'learning devices' (Burkett 2016). Evans and Terrey (2016, 248) describe prototyping as a 'design experiment', which 'claims to provide an evidence base about "what works" in the early stages of the development of an intervention; in addition, it may provide a staging post for a broader and more generalisable test in the

future.' In the 'testing' phase of the driver licensing challenge, numerous prototypes were created and tested, first with community members then stakeholders, before ten refined concepts were put forth as tangible ways to get more people driving with the right licence. User testing of an enrolment pack prototype, for instance, indicated that a well-designed information package posted to young people as they approached the legal driving age could address the gap in awareness of the steps required to become a safe driver, and that being automatically 'opted in' would make young people more likely to participate in the licensing process (Auckland Co-Design Lab 2016, 73–74).

Claims about the benefits of co-design

Many claims are being made by public servants, scholars and consultants about the benefits of applying co-design in the public sector. These are predominantly framed in the context of service design, but they are often extended to policy design. The unique features of government and policy-making may mean that evidence and best practice from other sectors is not applicable or transferable, though. And while co-design may have transformative effects, many of the claims about its benefits have not been rigorously evaluated.

In their article reviewing literature and discussing case studies of service design projects –including public services – Steen and colleagues (2011, 58–59) assert that co-design has four main types of benefits: it can improve idea generation, service delivery, project management and longer-term outcomes. Their schema is

translated into benefits for (a) clients, (b) governments and providers, and (c) service design and quality in the Victorian State Government's guide to co-design (Department of Health and Human Services and Peer Academy 2016, 11). Two key claims are articulated elsewhere by proponents of co-design: that it generates useful new ideas; and that it helps to meet existing and future needs. The first key claim, more specifically, is that, through ideation and experimentation, especially by generating additional ideas, co-design is seen to stimulate innovation in public services (Bradwell and Marr 2008, 14; All, Van Looy, and Castellar 2013). This follows the general argument in favour of 'design thinking', initially seen in the private sector, 'where it is generally recognised that the quality of design improves the more user interests are integrated into the design process' (Brown, cited in Evans and Terrey 2016, 245). Secondly, by ensuring that public policy and services better meet the needs of citizens and stakeholders, co-design helps to pre-empt future problems, especially by overcoming the common problem of policy interventions being based on flawed assumptions (O'Rafferty, de Eyto, and Lewis 2016, 15; Bradwell and Marr 2008, 13–15; Lenihan and Briggs 2011). There is, however, little empirical evidence to support these claims (Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers 2015).

Although published in a peer-reviewed journal, for instance, the evidence review by Steen et al (2011) is not very robust. Their article does not describe the methodology of their literature review, and many of the sources they cite are not scholarly publications. Some sources are little more than pamphlets published by the UK Design Council advocating for a particular approach, and providing little

to no research evidence to substantiate the claims they make about the benefits of co-design. The plethora of grey literature on public and social innovation labs is also full of unsubstantiated claims, and to date there is a lack of research critically examining these assertions. As a practitioner with experience of co-design projects in the social sectors in the UK and Australia writes,

> New, "innovative," policies and programs are regularly implemented and maintained, but without much effort to collect specific evidence that a particular solution is actually effective. While the public services often describe themselves as "risk-averse," in reality the government regularly places big bets on national programs and policies that are untested in context. (Vanstone 2016, 73)

The lack of documentation and published evaluations of co-design approaches in the public sector limits knowledge sharing and evidence building. While the approach of the Auckland Co-Design Lab – intended as a 'proof of concept' in its first two years – has been evaluated, for instance, information about that process or findings has not been made publicly available.

There is nonetheless evidence from some other fields, including healthcare and the private sector, about the impacts of using co-design methodology. Some of the findings from evaluations of the design of public services may be applicable to policy contexts. Healthcare co-design experiments, for example, have shown that applying a participatory design approach to improve the patient experience, specifically by reducing patient waiting time in Emergency Departments, have increased efficiency across the health system in the UK and Australia (Frontier Economics 2013; Piper et al. 2012).

As well as considering the evidence from studies of service design and experience based co-design in healthcare, literature that focuses on the benefits of citizen participation in policy and governance is also relevant here. There are strong instrumental and normative arguments in support of citizen participation in policy-making. From an instrumental standpoint, democratic governments fail to effectively apply conventional policy tools, such as regulation, to complex and contested problems, especially when the public is distrustful of governments or elites (MacArthur 2016, 634; Fischer 2009). Involving citizens in designing and delivering public policy and services may increase their quality and effectiveness, as citizens may possess relevant local knowledge and contribute novel ideas because they are not burdened by professional expertise or acculturated to business-as-usual approaches (Fung 2006, 73). Normative arguments, on the other hand, take issue with the domination of elites in policy, and see participatory mechanisms as an opportunity to strengthen 'the depth and quality of a democracy' (MacArthur 2016, 634). However, there is a lack of research that assesses the impacts of involving citizens and other stakeholders in the design and delivery of public policy and services. As Burkett (2012, 5) notes, 'there seems to be little focus in the research on the effects of the depth, quality or nature of citizen participation in social services – meaning for example, that there is little evidence about whether participation by more people, or deeper participation by a few key people, is more effective.'

Despite the lack of evidence of the benefits of co-design for policy, this literature review has identified three plausible hypotheses, which warrant further

investigation. Firstly, the involvement of different types of participants (citizens, professionals and experts) throughout the design process should mean that the definition of problems and generation of solutions better meet the needs of the public, which would likely lead to improved efficacy and efficiency of policy and services. Secondly, offering methods and principles for improving idea generation and experimentation should stimulate innovation within the public sector. Finally, if participants in the co-design process do strengthen relationships, build trust and mutual understanding, then co-design may indeed build social capital and address disengagement and low trust in government.

This last point, the social value of co-design, is particularly important in the context of public policy-making. Co-design, it has been suggested, 'creates a feeling of involvement and ownership' (Bradwell and Marr 2008, 15) by generating 'a shared understanding and shared language between participants and designers' and by supporting 'a sense of immersion, dialogue and empathy for the perspective of those who will use and experience the design' (Hagen and Rowland 2011). If effective, it therefore offers an approach for addressing disengagement from politics and democracy, by enhancing trust in and positive engagement between policy workers, citizens and other stakeholders (Bradwell and Marr 2008, 10, 14). Case study analyses have shown potentially transformative results for participants in co-design projects. By bringing diverse people together and helping them to forge meaningful connections, co-design has contributed to creating social relations (Akama and Prendiville 2016, 34) (Akama and Prendiville 2016, 34) and building social capital (Bradwell and Marr 2008,

10). It may even transform its participants through the emotional and social connections they make (Akama and Prendiville 2016, 37–38). It is unclear to what extent these benefits are achieved in practice, if at all, beyond the individual case studies discussed in the literature. There is a need for greater investigation into the process and outcomes of co-design practice in the context of public policy and service design.

Existing practice guides gloss over the challenges, risks and limitations of co-design, yet these warrant further exploration too. In addition to some conceptual confusion, many practical challenges and risks await those applying co-design in a governmental context. The experience of the Auckland Co-Design Lab Driver Licensing Challenge illustrates a few of the issues and limitations that Simon O'Rafferty and his colleagues (2016, 14–15) identified through their design research project in the context of environmental policy in Ireland, as well as the significant risks identified by Steen et al. (2011, 59). This is exemplified in three words emblazoned on the cover of the final output of the Driver Licensing Challenge: 'NOT GOVERNMENT POLICY' (Auckland Co-Design Lab 2016). The first risk identified by Steen et al. (2011, 59) is 'diminished *control* over the project, because other people, other departments or other organizations are involved.' Secondly, there may be challenges relating to the 'increased *complexity* of the project, because the objectives and interests of diverse people, departments or other organizations must be managed and balanced, which can require extra coordination efforts'. The Driver Licensing Challenge was co-sponsored by government agencies responsible for driver licensing policy and services; the

design team was made up of public sector employees seconded from relevant agencies; and they engaged over 360 people over the course of the project, including 'from across government, employers, training organisations, driving instructors and many others' (Auckland Co-Design Lab 2016, 17). This required extensive coordination and sensitivity. Despite wide engagement with the project, government ministers were reluctant to adopt the recommendations, or even make public the outputs produced by the Lab. Overall, the Director of the Co-Design Lab suggested her unit's approach was 'too ambitious given the timeframe, budget and untested environment and mandate' (Strange 2016, 13). In particular, she said, it was 'super challenging to build capability from scratch and create an outstanding outcome at the same time' (Strange 2016, 17).

O'Rafferty, de Eyto, and Lewis (2016, 14–15) put forth several 'dilemmas of co-design' for public policy, including: the gap between co-design research and conventional forms of evidence; legitimacy of co-design activity as perceived by stakeholders and beneficiaries; and embeddedness of the activity within the policy innovation system. The tension between design and data, along with the need for a stronger connection between the co-design activity and 'mainstream' policy processes, was evident in the Driver Licensing Challenge. The Auckland Co-Design Lab's final report, 'The Case for Change', privileges the findings of ethnographic design research conducted with community members. While there are a few statistics indicating the scope and impacts of the problem of driving without or in breach of a licence (Auckland Co-Design Lab 2016, 5–7), there is little acknowledgement of the international research evidence that supports the

graduated driver licensing system. As a result, the perceptions from community members, while reflecting genuine views, undermine the rationale for the existing system, despite research showing it is effective at reducing accidents among young drivers (Begg and Stephenson 2003). Although government employees were seconded into the design team, the place-based challenge focused on disadvantaged communities in a suburban context. There was consequently a lack of alignment and connection with the wider processes and actors in the policy-making system in the capital city, which reduced the likelihood of the recommendations being implemented. Weak ties across agencies also made implementation of the system-wide recommendations difficult. Another specific challenge was the lack of alignment between the full design process and outputs and the typical approach to policy-making. The Director of the Co-Design Lab revealed that the insights generated could easily be used as an input into policy design, but the full process 'can be difficult to digest' (Strange 2016, 12).

Other examples of co-design in practice are often limited to the early phase of policy-making. The UK Cabinet Office (2017) notes, for instance, 'Co-design can work at any point in policy design, however it is most commonly used at the beginning of a policy to help understand where a policy needs to focus.' Indeed, half of the public sector workers surveyed by PwC reported using co-design only at the beginning of the design process (Bradwell and Marr 2008, 35). Implementation poses a particular challenge for co-design projects, especially when a small number of people have participated in creating a solution that will require significant buy-in and investment to put in place. Co-design typically

happens with small, site-specific groups currently, and it is not obvious how participation and solutions can be scaled into system-wide responses with multiple delivery channels in large organisations (Bradwell and Marr 2008, 39–40; Farr 2013), especially given 'the complexities of modern organized bureaucracies, networks, democratic mechanisms, and systems of resource allocation' (Chen et al. 2016, 3). Embedding design into government is not just about upskilling policy workers on designerly methods, but also about bringing other disciplinary knowledge into the design process. There are also questions as to whether co-design can even be scaled up in this way. Design researchers Akama and Prendiville (2016, 37), for instance, argue that co-design 'needs to be firmly rooted in its location, time and people' so that it can progress 'organically from rich engagements and deep interactions over time.' Recent research on public sector innovation labs that take a design-led approach has similarly suggested that they may be better suited to 'singular programs, projects or services' as they struggle with 'higher level policy change' (Tonurist, Kattel, and Lember 2015, 20; see also Bason and Schneider 2014, 34–39).

A significant challenge reported by co-design practitioners attempting to apply their craft within the public sector is that the structure and culture of government is not well suited to co-design. 'Co-design challenges the established ways in which policy is made and services are delivered, monitored and evaluated,' summarise Evans and Terrey (2016, 260), adding: 'Most significantly, it questions dominant public sector cultures and values.' Policy officials do not generally respond well to the risks of diminished control and increased complexity. Co-design, explains Ingrid Burkett (2012, 7), 'involves a shift

in the locus of responsibility and control so that "clients" or users of services become active partners in designing, shaping and resourcing services, rather than being passive recipients of pre-determined services'. As Bradwell and Marr (2008, 37) note, 'Commitment to participation requires a real willingness on behalf of those who have power to share it'. Currently, however, at least in the context of environmental policy in Ireland, 'the competencies and mind-sets required for co-design are not typically found within the public sector organisations' (O'Rafferty, de Eyto, and Lewis 2016, 15). Bureaucratic systems are not designed to be experimental or responsive – they are set up to develop long-term plans, rather than prototypes that can be quickly discarded (Dean 2016). As noted by senior public managers from Australia and Canada, effectively applying co-design in the public sector 'will require all kinds of new knowledge, structures, and practices' (Lenihan and Briggs 2011, 46).

There are a number of methodological concerns too, particularly around the need to tailor co-design processes for each project and to enable meaningful participation, as well as challenges related to implementation and scaling. For co-design projects to be effective, the methods and tools need to be carefully selected and appropriately applied to each project (Steen, Manschot, and De Koning 2011, 59). Particularly careful consideration needs to be given to the means for involving citizens, users or stakeholders in co-design activities. 'Merely opening up possibilities for choice and participation' is not enough, notes Burkett (2012, 8); people need to 'have access to the information, skills, capacities and support to participate effectively in co-designing services.' A particular challenge, which may be inevitable in some government-led or initiated projects, arises when participants feel resentment or distrust towards a key project

partner or sponsor (DMA 2015). As Evans and Terrey (2016, 243) warn, although they do not explore this risk in their discussion of co-design for policy-making, 'Done badly, it can destroy trust systems'. The literature on participatory policy-making reveals the risks of co-optation and deepening cynicism if participatory projects are poorly designed, inadequately facilitated, or outright manipulative (see, e.g., MacArthur 2016, 637–38).

The potential risks, questionable benefits and inevitable challenges of applying co-design in governmental contexts raise all kinds of issues for further research. While it remains an emerging field, it seems that co-design practice is beginning to mature enough to ask questions like, 'What kind of co-design works, and where?' (Bradwell and Marr 2008, 11). As Burkett (2012, 5) puts it,

> Does co-design lead to greater social impact? This is, of course, the million dollar question. Does involving and engaging people in developing, designing and delivering social services actually create better services and thus lead to great social impacts?

A more nuanced analysis of participation is needed to understand the efficacy of co-design. Following Fung (2006, 67), we could ask, for instance, 'Who participates? How do they communicate and make decisions? What is the connection between their conclusions and opinions on one hand and public policy and action on the other?' In answering those questions, we could also seek to understand whether and, if so, how co-design processes actively seek and effectively integrate a diverse range of views. Evidence from the already cited international survey of co-design in the public sector suggests they often do not do this well – the users were already known to the project team in most cases (Bradwell and Marr 2008, 40).

More documentation and dissemination of the processes and findings from co-design projects is needed in order to develop this knowledge. Without it, we cannot hope to provide practice-based evidence to inform the development of public sector capabilities or support different organisations and disciplines to understand and communicate about the benefits and risks of co-design (Steen, Manschot, and De Koning 2011, 59–60). As O'Rafferty and colleagues (2016, 16) conclude, 'further development of the theoretical and practical framework of co-design for policy and public services is required.'

Conclusion: a call for more research on co-design for policy

Claims abound about the benefits of co-design, yet these are largely based on service design projects and there is limited evidence of the impacts of co-design for developing and implementing public policy. Despite the prevalence of conceptual confusion, limited evidence and likely challenges in practice, this paper has shown that it is nonetheless possible to define co-design in a way that is appropriate for public policy practitioners and researchers. This definition has been based on both academic and practitioner accounts of co-design, but has not yet been tested with these groups. A shared definition for co-design that is appropriate in governmental contexts is needed in order to advance practice and research in this domain.

The challenges of the policy-making environment may make it difficult to achieve the potential outcomes of co-design in practice, yet its radical potential to transform the

process and outcomes of policy-making warrants further exploration. As a novel means for creatively engaging citizens and stakeholders to find solutions to complex problems, co-design holds great promise for policy-makers. It may be an approach that helps to generate more innovative ideas, achieve economic efficiencies by improving responsiveness, foster cooperation between different groups, reinvigorate trust between citizens and public servants, and have transformative effects on participants' agency and wellbeing. Further research is needed to strengthen our understanding of what co-design entails in practice as well as if, and how, it achieves any of these benefits for participants, policy makers, and the people and institutions they represent.

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