



Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland

Report of Co-production Symposium

Lough Neagh Discovery Centre,
Oxford Island
20 September 2019



A report by Community Places for the Carnegie UK Trust
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Acknowledgements

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We would like to thank all those who attended the symposium for their time and input.



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Introduction

The Carnegie UK Trust's [Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland](#) project provides support to enable Community Planning Partnerships to implement a local wellbeing outcomes approach. A core element of the Trust's support focuses on co-production, and the Trust commissioned [Community Places](#) to deliver a support package for the three Community Planning Partnerships participating in the project and to share learning and resources with all eleven Partnerships.

Symposium aims

As part of the support package, Community Places organised and facilitated a symposium open to all Community Planning partners. The event was hosted by Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Community Planning Partnership and held in the Lough Neagh Discovery Centre at Oxford Island on 20 September 2019. Participants at the symposium represented Local Government, the public sector and the third sector.

The symposium objectives were:

- To present the Carnegie UK Trust funded co-production support programme;
- To provide opportunities for participants to identify the types of support and resources needed for co-production and to share their experiences;
- To present for discussion co-production principles and good practice from other jurisdictions; and
- To explore how learning from the support programme can best be captured and shared.

Structure and inputs

The symposium which was facilitated by Community Places staff team members Dr Louise O'Kane (Planning and Engagement Officer) and Colm Bradley (Director) and by Professor Brendan Murtagh of Queens University Belfast. The programme included inputs on co-production principles and practice from other jurisdictions by Dr Claire Bynner of the University of Glasgow and Susan Paxton of the Scottish Community Development Centre.

The participants were facilitated in considering the inputs on good practice issues and in discussing materials on definitions and principles of co-production prepared by Community Places. This report sets out the findings of the issues explored during these discussions and the implications for moving a progressive wellbeing approach forward across Northern Ireland.



The context of co-production

It is important to acknowledge that there are examples, research evidence, and technical support on co-production, including practices within Northern Ireland. There are especially innovative models in Scotland backed by legislation, dedicated capacity building organisations, and a tradition of Community Planning based on co-production ideas.

Learning from Scotland

Dr Claire Bynner from the University of Glasgow drew on extensive research on the Scottish context and highlighted the issues for moving co-production into Community Planning in Northern Ireland.

- The [Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services](#) (2011) set the **strategic context for the reform of public policy** and in particular, put the user at the heart of service provision. Such high-level, politically backed, and cross-agency support emphasised the empowerment of communities and individuals in the design and delivery of the services they use.
- This was facilitated by **technical assistance and capacity building** via, for example, [What Works Scotland](#) to support a process of learning, reflection and improvement based on the experiences of the wider public.
- **Legislation**, especially through the [Community Empowerment \(Scotland\) Act 2015](#), strengthened the legitimacy of co-production with politicians as well as civil servants and communities.
- Co-production stimulated innovative **place-based approaches** with new initiatives such as [Children's Neighbourhoods](#), which emphasised the need to reach beyond predictable consultees in designing services for the most vulnerable.


The co-production perspective

Susan Paxton from the [Scottish Community Development Centre](#) examined the challenges from the Co-production Network perspective and the implications for good practice in Northern Ireland.

- **Commitment and leadership** are essential in any successful co-production process. The Scottish experience underscores the time it takes to create meaningful participation and the need for patience in developing and implementing effective approaches.
- **Power sharing** involves a significant cultural shift and a change in mind-set, especially among those with power (which might be political, legal, financial resources) as a basis for meaningful co-production.
- Part of the answer involves **skills, knowledge and learning from best practice**. The Scottish experience placed a particular emphasis on facilitation skills, participatory practices and brokering relationships between organisations and staff.
- There is a need to see **communities as assets** with experience, resources and capacities to articulate what they need and to partner with other agencies in delivering change. Creative structures and methods such as citizen juries, community councils and workshops have variously supported more effective forms of co-production. There are also meaningful initiatives such as the Glasgow Decides small grants fund that used a participatory budgeting approach. Four place-based and one themed on disabilities involved the creation of citizens panels to co-produce the participatory budgeting process.

Not everything works

Scottish practice is still evolving and despite significant progress, there are obstacles in embedding co-production across the political and administrative system:

- There remains, for example, a predominance of **usual participants** where consultation processes tend to be dominated by NGOs and community organisations from a narrow range of established groups.
 - Problems also remain about the **lack of influence** and the need to create more significant relationships between communities, politicians and public officials in co-design processes.
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- Related to this, the legitimacy of co-production processes is a concern for some elected representatives, especially at a local authority level. **Cultures of decision-making** are well ingrained, which makes it difficult to bring in new ways of working that involve a shift in control to communities and service users.
 - The impact of co-production on **resource allocation** and effecting a meaningful shift in spending to service users, in response to their defined needs, is also mixed. Initiatives such as participatory budgeting have introduced new thinking into the ways in which communities can determine local budgets.



Sources of information and support

<p>Resources and practice from Scotland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scottish Community Development Centre • Improvement Service Scotland web resources • What Works Scotland (publications, guidance, best practice) 	<p>Community Planning in Northern Ireland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Community Planning teams internal to the Council (NI) • Other local authorities in Northern Ireland • Community or economic development teams within the Council 	<p>Health and Social Care organisations (NI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Health (NI) Co-production Guide • HSST Community Development Team/manager • Intermediaries such as the Public Health Agency (NI) and Patient Client Council
<p>Community and Voluntary Sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Development Health Network • UK bodies such as New Economics Foundation • Other CVS organisations and individuals including Community Places 	<p>Interpersonal and informal networks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal organisational advice from experienced individual • Ask the service users or representative groups • Colleagues in other statutory agencies experienced in engagement practices 	<p>Online resources and searches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carnegie UK Trust newsletter and website • General online search (on co-production and engagement methods) • Online library access (such as universities)

The information contained within this table was identified by symposium participants.



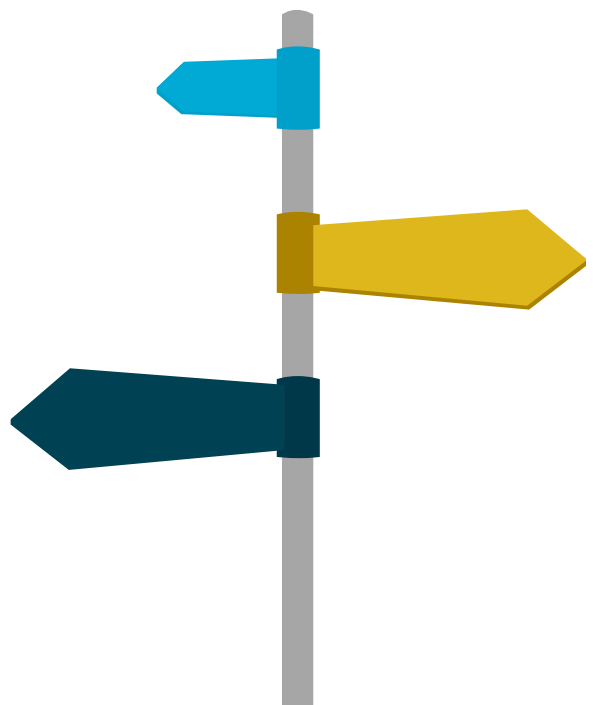
Strengthening skills and knowledge

Materials on definitions of co-production and principles from Northern Ireland and other jurisdictions were considered by participants. In feedback from these discussions, participants said they were drawn to the Welsh and Scottish definitions and principles with some suggesting that a plainer English definition could be found.

The use of Mentimeter, an online voting system, revealed that the symposium contributed to specific areas of learning:

- First, there was a clearer understanding of the **principles of co-production** and the experience of Scotland was valued in exploring the practical challenges and opportunities of co-production, in particular within place-based approaches.
- The **signposting to other resources** and more specialist advice was also welcomed, especially given the needs of different participants across central and local government, agencies, NGOs and community groups. The idea of a wholesaler service matching the needs of users with appropriate sources of information was highlighted across the feedback sessions.
- There was also a recognition of the **clarity of terms used**, the emphasis on accessible concepts and definitions and deepening the understanding of co-production in service delivery.

- A number of local authorities welcomed the concept as a framework for deepening their engagement and empowerment processes especially as **Community Planning** evolves.
- The **mix of methods** presented also gave respondents an insight into how co-production is operationalised in practice and the need for this type of methodological guidance is a recurring theme in the learning from the pilot.



Learning gained by participants

The symposium was designed to facilitate learning from each other as well as from experiences in Scotland. Participants shared and discussed details of their own examples of processes and projects, which broadly fit with the definitions and principles presented. Examples considered included:

- Participatory budgeting pilots encouraged a distinctive approach to resource allocation across sectors, with new schemes and initiatives being adopted by housing associations, local authorities and community anchor organisations.
- Western Health Trust Pathfinder Project (in Fermanagh/Omagh) is based on an extensive programme of community engagement to better align and deliver services to the needs of a changing (and especially ageing) population.
- NI Business Start-up Programme (at Council level) shows how a targeted approach on economic development involved social enterprise intermediaries, council resources and emerging enterprises in a coordinated, locally based investment programme.
- The Disability Action Plan (linked to the Fermanagh/Omagh Community Plan) stressed monitoring and feedback to user groups to enable disabled people to assess the extent and quality of changes in services.
- The Senior Forum in Belfast and locally based older people's networks have helped to develop age friendly policies and facilities.
- The development of Community Plans is seen as a significant opportunity to extend co-production practices to strengthen user involvement in evaluating current policies and in developing the next generation of Plans.

Applying the learning

The symposium explored how co-production might be best taken forward, especially in the context of Community Planning. There was a recognition that there needs to be a clear policy framework, describing the principles and scope of co-production and how it can be applied to Community Planning. Technical assistance and best practice resources were valued but it was acknowledged that time and political commitment are essential for effective roll-out within local government.



Priorities for co-production in Northern Ireland

Priorities

The enabling environment

Technical assistance

Time and commitment

Best practice

Key Themes

- A clear and agreed policy framework
- A legislative framework for co-production across government
- More effective advocacy and selling the concept
- Toolkits to support practice
- A quick-guide resources accessible to users involved in the process
- Engaged support throughout the process
- Time and patience to plan for and deliver co-production
- Leadership at a strategic and operational level
- Trust and mutual commitment to effect a cultural change
- Experience and examples from other places
- Sharing practice within communities to strengthen practice
- Achieving buy-in from actors

The symposium was especially useful when the importance of co-production to Community Planning is considered. The feedback below shows that participants emphasised the value of co-production in building trust; brokerage and leadership; and political buy-in. These soft skills are critical in effecting a culture of power sharing and reciprocity, but respondents also highlighted the need for legislative change to encourage co-production and resources to guide practice. The potential of digital methods to widen participation is important to access hard to reach groups and areas.

The role of co-production in Community Planning

Building trust

Trust, time, permission and legitimacy could strengthen Community Plans via co-production

Sharing knowledge

Needs an open approach to sharing evidence, research and data, on which decisions are based

Leadership

Strong and patient leadership is needed by key people to effect a cultural change in engagement

A brokerage role

Difficult conversations (identify differences) can be confronted in a safe and productive space

Widening participation

Targeting hard to reach groups and areas in co-produced working groups and Community Plans

Political buy-in

Politicians' commitment throughout the process and involves working with participatory processes

Digital engagement

More innovative ways of extending participation to groups who have access challenges

Resources

Enabling communities to exercise greater control over resource planning and allocation decisions

Legislative support

Helping to develop a community rights guarantee within Community Planning in Northern Ireland

Implementing the learning

Participants identified a variety of ways in which they will use the learning gained. These ranged from applying a co-production approach to new projects; to reviewing a Community Plan; and from sharing knowledge with colleagues and partners; to informing and shaping community engagement strategies and practice. During small group discussions participants identified the types of support needed to apply co-production and the changes required for further growth. These include:

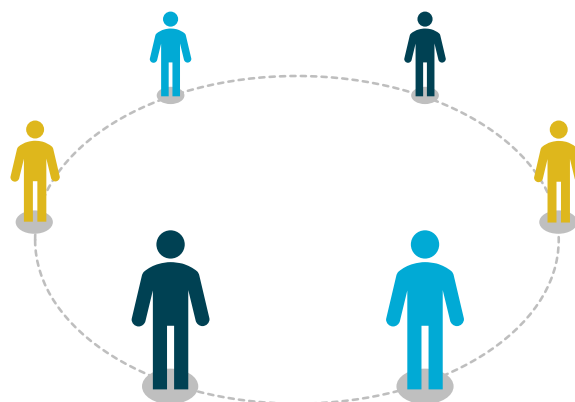
- Learning events, sharing good practice and tools.
- Access to good external facilitation and advice.
- A common framework for co-production.
- A toolkit or accessible 'how to' guide.
- Resources especially financial and time to deliver an effective co-production process.
- Training on implementation.
- Developing better understanding of approach by elected representatives and Community Planning partners.
- Trust building.
- 'Safe spaces' for discussing difficult issues.
- Support for developing more local examples.
- Methods for widening local voices (beyond the 'usual suspects').

In terms of changes needed to support a co-production approach, participants felt that we need legislation (similar to the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015); a culture change by elected representatives and within Community Planning partner organisations; and endorsement by Departments and the respective Ministers.



Discussion themes

- There is a significant gap in technical assistance, especially to operationalise co-production in practice with participants placing an emphasis on accessible, straightforward and problem-centred guidance.
 - Here, it was recognised that there were excellent resources, toolkits and best practice case studies across the UK, but that a community of practice, that links into local, as well as expertise across the devolved regions, was needed.
 - It was recognised that co-production faces particular barriers, but also opportunities, in Northern Ireland. Whilst it was acknowledged that co-production could enable ‘difficult conversations’ (over identity, resource allocation and segregated communities) it should not deflect from the commitment to a more participative approach especially within Community Planning.
 - A number of contributors emphasised the need to effect a cultural change in thinking about engagement rather than just focus on techniques and toolkits. Co-production means sharing power in resource allocation, ‘blurring the boundaries’ and surrendering control over decision making.
- Linked to this was the need to better understand the different legitimacies that stakeholders bring into co-production processes. Politicians are elected, public officials have statutory responsibilities (and constraints), the private sector holds necessary resources and the community (in a broad sense) are often most affected by user-orientated decisions and services. How these various positions are reconciled, the risk and uncertainty involved and specific methods for genuinely coproducing services underscore the need for practice-based support in Northern Ireland.
 - There was also a discussion about what co-production is for. Some felt that there was a danger that co-production would be seen as a concept in its own right rather than as a means for achieving more inclusive policy outcomes. Here, a number of advocates felt that it should be more clearly tied to wellbeing, child poverty or spatial deprivation, especially within the context of Community Planning.



Conclusions

In summary, the event had a significant impact on understanding the principles, methodologies and operation of co-production. This was the first good practice sharing and learning event for Community Planning partners. There is clearly an appetite for more, especially among those responsible for Community Planning and the shared learning within the group but in particular from practice in Scotland was valued. Participants recognised the importance of co-production, learnt much from the symposium and want to know more and to have ready access to advice, facilitation, guidance and good practice. They indicated that there are examples of co-production within the region and that these may provide valuable learning for others. They also would welcome a common framework for applying co-production to further wellbeing through Community Planning.



The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913.

Andrew Carnegie House
Pittencrieff Street
Dunfermline
KY12 8AW

Tel: +44 (0)1383 721445

Fax: +44 (0)1383 749799

Email: info@carnegieuk.org

www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk

This report was written by Community Places

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