

Positioning Co-Creation: Democratisation versus Added Value



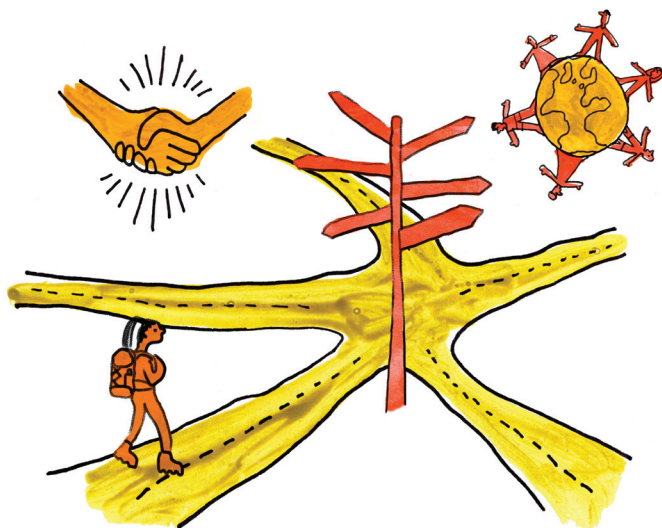
Possible uses of co-creation in research and innovation:

- It can be used to integrate diverse perspectives and knowledge for improvement of innovation product and ideas
- It can be used to integrate diverse perspectives and knowledge for evaluation of the priorities and direction of research and innovation policies and practices In each case, organisers should carefully consider the role of, and expectations placed on laypeople in a co-creation process

The issue at stake

The involvement of non-experts in research activities or in science and policy decision-making has become popular. This involvement can happen according to two paradigms: (1) democratising research processes to a wider public that contributes its visions, worldviews, values and needs, i.e. involving citizens as “experts of daily life” with their own agendas; or (2) including laypeople to make use of their creativity and perspectives in order to materialise better products with improved marketability, i.e. involving citizens as users or consumers.

While both framings rely on an active integration of laypeople as a valuable knowledge source, the concept of *who is considered a layperson and their role* differs between citizens, consumers, non-experts and uninformed people. Accordingly, the way experts and laypersons are expected to interact (or not) differs fundamentally and remains mutually exclusive.



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GoNano strategy and key findings

The GoNano co-creation definition put research avenues and product development in the spotlight while paying attention to broad and inclusive citizen deliberation. The notion of “co-creation” holds the promise of integrating these two rationales, but not making a clear choice between the two framings complicated the involvement of non-experts. In the end, this was partially resolved on a methodological basis in GoNano.

One of the most critical voices described the citizens' outcomes as a “...mixture of attitudes without any real knowledge”, and that “...citizens don't have any awareness”. [...] This critical perception may be attributed to the fact that initially, there was no representative of the citizens, NGOs or the media involved in the discussion. Moreover, the debate was dominated by a few applied researchers and a company director. While some citizens' needs and values were accepted, the relation to nanotechnologies remained unclear.

Outcome GoNano Workshops 2019

Key recommendations on using co-creation in research and innovation

- Align the project strategy with the intention
Be clear on the intention and motivation for participation and co-creation. Consider whether the question is suitable for involving laypeople, or reframe it accordingly if necessary.
- Be aware of what you expect of laypeople
What role are lay participants assigned? State your expectations regarding laypeople's contributions. Is it creativity? Normative orientation? Evaluation of a product? Clarify roles for laypeople and also make sure that they are willing to contribute in this way. However, also be sure to leave space (and time) for thinking “outside the box” and exploring differing perspectives.
- Commit to a strategy and follow through
There are different options on where to start a process. Where you choose depends on the research field in question and your expectation of laypeople's contributions. It helps to commit to one specific starting point and focus on one strategy to gain a clear outcome, but again include flexibility in the timeframe for the unexpected that may provide benefits for the overall co-creation process.
- Support the implementation with shared language and empathy as a precondition or outcome of co-creation
Allow for organisers to proactively support participants in challenging the ways in which the views of others are anticipated, simplified (or ignored), compared to science/scientists, industry/industry representatives and society/citizen-consumers. Additional economic resources to implement and foster this attitude should be provided if needed (see Policy Brief 6 and 7).

The EU-funded GoNano project (Governing Nanotechnologies through Societal Engagement) aims to align future nanotechnologies with societal needs and concerns. From September 2017 until December 2020, GoNano brought together citizens, researchers, industry, civil society organisations and policy makers across Europe to co-create concrete suggestions for future nanotechnologies.

The GoNano policy briefs present the results of the engagement activities and provide recommendations based on the GoNano experiences. This is the fifth of a series of seven policy briefs. Please see <http://gonano-project.eu/policy-briefs/> for the complete series.



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