



European
Commission

Ref. Ares(2022)6082311 - 02/09/2022

Milano Porta Garibaldi

BIODIVERCITIES

DIGEST #4: DEC 2021- FEB 2022

Authors: Helena Junyer and Anna Paola Quaglia.

INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

Despite high interest in co-creation on the side of public authorities and beyond, there are significant challenges for invited forms of public participation processes to be successful. In order to understand why there are barriers to institutionalize citizen engagement in policymaking, it is necessary to explore the institutional context where collaboration for co-creation takes place.

Institutional theory has been developed to give insights into the complex processes, incentives and constraints that shape the formation and evolution of institutions, where institutions are understood as the formal and informal rules that greatly influence human life. Studying the institutional context in which co-creation projects are grounded is thus relevant for several reasons: it is useful to grasp the rules that are in place, how these affect (hamper or facilitate) the way the different actors within the urban and territorial settings - citizens, NGO's and public authorities – can (inter)act with each other, and how these actions can impact institutions, by triggering their maintenance or prompt change of some sort. Investigating institutional arrangements will contribute to a better understanding of how and why cities develop the way they do. However, here we are not interested in *any kind* of development. We are interested in the conditions structuring governance processes. Depending on the viewpoint, whether that of a policy officer or a practitioner, insights about such conditions might change.

In light of Deliverable 2, this Digest's goal is to provide some conceptual tools that will help understand which barriers non-governmental actors face while reaching out to local authorities to anchor their co-creative process to the policy and institutional domain. However, we hope this Digest will provide food for thought for ALL actors involved in BiodiverCities, by inspiring and offering useful clarifications to unpack challenges met a.k.a. barriers and lessons learned while co-creating.

- Deliverable N°2: to be delivered **by March 31, 2022**. Reach out to us to discuss it more in depth!



- Sign up for the [Competence Centre on Participatory and Deliberative Democracy's newsletter](#). If you have accomplishments, news, stories of your activities you would like to share via the newsletter, we can host some of those. We can also promote your event, if part of BiodiverCities, on our [website](#). Write us!
- **Final policy event** for BiodiverCities: it will take place on September 8, at the European Committee of the Regions, in Brussels. Check out the dedicated webpage ([here](#)) and spread the word!

LET'S BEGIN BY TALKING ABOUT THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK. What is it?

The Pillars framework (Scott, 2005) asserts that institutions are made up of diverse elements. These are the regulative pillar (formal rules, laws, policies, protocol, and standards), the normative pillar (values, role expectations, social norms, duties, responsibilities, i.e. normative rules which prescribe what is considered appropriate behavior), and the cultural-cognitive pillar (shared conceptions and frames through which meaning is given and the world is interpreted). In this way, Scott defines institutions as:

"a set of cultural-cognitive, normative and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life" (Scott, 1995: 56)

Institutions, in other words, impose constraints by defining legal, moral and cultural boundaries, distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable practices. Institutions thus set constraints *on actions*, bounding interaction and collaboration between citizen initiatives and public authorities.

USING INSTITUTIONAL THEORY TO CLASSIFY BARRIERS IN COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE to understand why collaboration with local authorities can be difficult to achieve

Institutional arrangements can raise barriers for effective collaboration and hamper the uptake of co-creation projects by public institutions, but due to different contexts and natures of the projects, there will probably be variation in the said challenges.

Co-creation literature recognizes that these challenges can be found in the **organizational routines**, in the **cultural norms** or in the **institutional arena** where co-creative interaction takes place.

Therefore, it is **never** just a **matter of one condition** nor are the "pillars"/categories **static**. They are shaped by a dynamic and changing context and they influence each other.

*There are conditions to success. The first condition is that you **must be really allowed** to realize a participative process. The second condition is that you **must really want to do it** [...] and the third and perhaps the most complicated condition, is that you **must really be able** to do it."*

Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the German Speaking Community, Belgium



Organizational routines

They refer to the internal characteristics of the public administration. For instance, there might be not enough budget to invest in innovation projects; a highly fragmented public administration may hamper the efforts to achieve clear communication; a highly bureaucratized administration may frustrate the co-creative efforts.

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Given the way that the public administration works today, it is really difficult to bring some change. Their working system disallows and leads us far from innovative topics that we're dealing with (i.e. green infrastructure for biodiversity conservation), thus cities are still developing in a 'grey manner'. Anonymous interviewee, BiodiverCities

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Cultural norms

Sustaining and legitimizing co-creative projects, let alone co-creative governance processes can also be a hard task full of barriers if there are cultural norms resisting the practice of more open forms of governance. For instance, a country or city that does not yet have a culture of engaging their citizens in policy making; if the local authorities do not have a sense of necessity or urgency regarding the problem or challenge raised through a co-creative project or by societal actors, including citizens (e.g., in the case of BiodiverCities, biodiversity conservation); if there is a lack of focus on innovative projects in general; and if there are specific identities and roles established, associated to local authorities and citizens - **all these conditions will greatly affect deliberative efforts.**

Institutional design

The institutional arena where interaction and collaboration take place is not always well suited and well designed for co-creation. Effective institutional designs are needed to support the advancement of collaborative governance. On this point, Ansell and Torfing (2021, p. 30) clarify that: "[...] platforms are relatively permanent infrastructures that provide technical and/or physical opportunities for the contingent construction, adaptation and multiplication of arenas. Arenas are temporary, purpose built institutionalizations of interaction that comprise a mixture of resources, rules, norms, and procedures that both shape and are shaped by actual processes of collaboration."

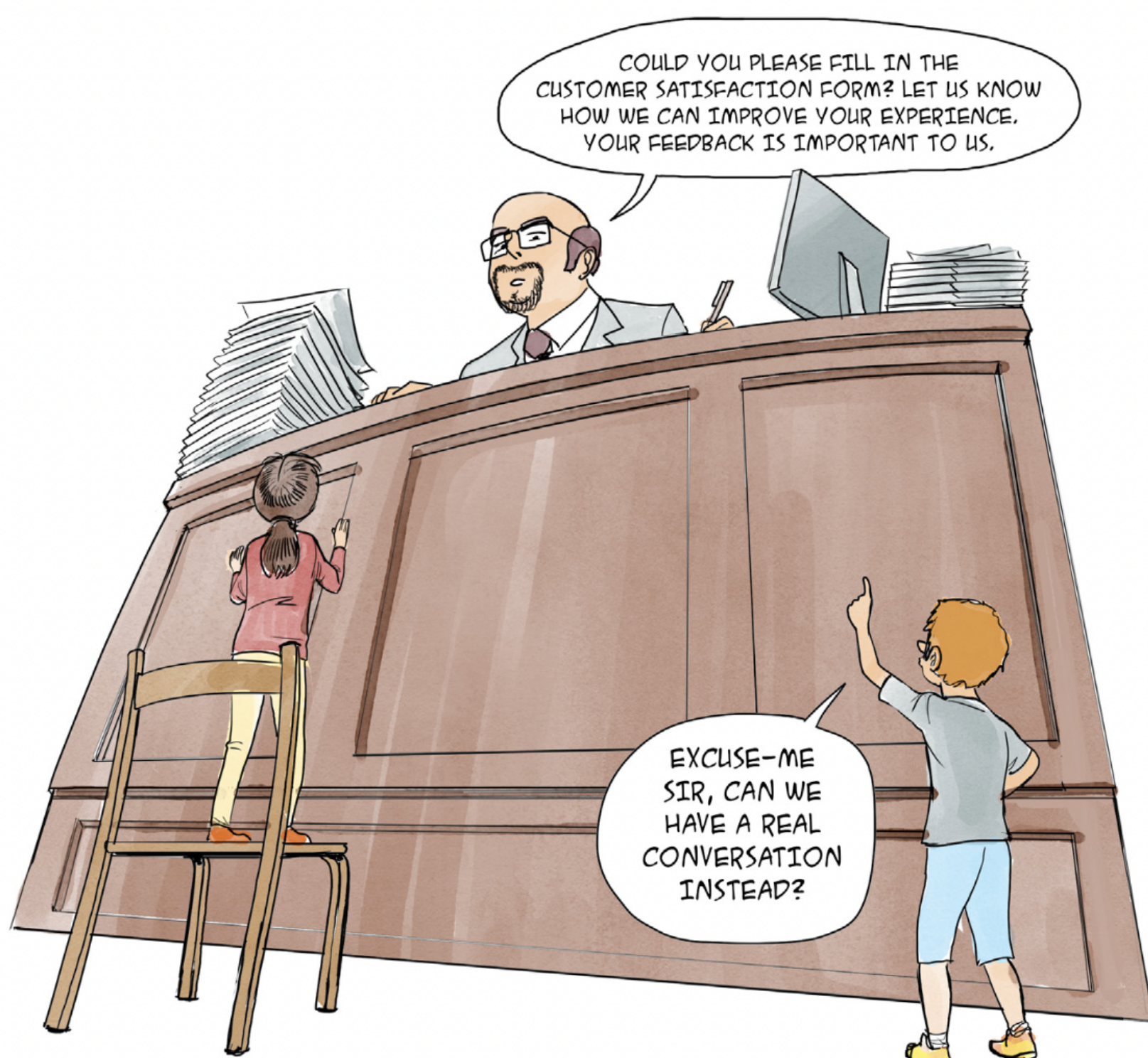
Engaging with the municipality is difficult because we are a small initiative.

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There is little political recognition, they ignore our requests.

Anonymous interviewee, BiodiverCities



SO WHAT?

As you know, for Deliverable 2, you were asked to reflect upon specific challenges, rather than categories that are more general and conceptual. Indeed, when one gets on the ground, reflecting on specific challenges, it is generally found that each issue touches upon multiple dimensions and is the effect of a multiplicity of elements. Also, old habits 'die hard'!

For example, if the public institution tends to be working in silos, with each department managing their own projects, this can be both due to conservative organizational norms (culture) and to the institutional context that goes beyond the organization itself (institutional design). As an exercise, you could indicate to which challenge each topic refers to as well as ideas on how to address it – from your experience, your point of view.

TOPICS		Which category(-ies?) 	Ideas for change
Anchorage and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...in municipal formal plans or strategies • New organizational structures • ...for the project by the politicians 		
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of project activity across departments in the municipality • Competences and skills of public servants 		
Funding arrangements	Financial issues now and future		
Institutionalization and scaling up of the project	<p>What happens after the project is implemented?</p> <p>Plans, future responsibility and inclusion of project in policy / administration</p>		
Leadership / Bridge-builders	<p>Leadership and facilitation roles may be held by different actors in the project. This can be both formal or informal roles functioning as bridge-builders in the project. Who are the bridge builders between stakeholders and what kind of resources do they have / need?</p>		
Engagement of citizens	How to engage them and keep them engaged through different phases of the co-creation process?		
Trust and control	<p>Trust is a significant element between different actors in co-creation processes. Co-creation is also about power sharing which means that public authorities have to allocate responsibility. This balancing act of allocation might generate a dilemma, between trusting and controlling.</p> <p>Have you experienced this sort of dilemma? Trust and control between municipality and citizens /other stakeholders.</p>		

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Ansell, C., & Torfing, J. (2021). *Public governance as co-creation: A strategy for revitalizing the public sector and rejuvenating democracy*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK.
- Scott, W. R (2014). *Institutions and organizations: ideas, interests and identities* (4th edition), Sage: Thousand Oaks, USA.

This Digest is one of several Digests realized within the BiodiverCities project. The Digest consist of a short document generally focusing on a topic (e.g. co-creation), of relevance to the project's scope - citizen engagement in support of urban biodiversity. Within BiodiverCities, we used Digests as a way to communicate with experts by sharing relevant information, taking stock of the project's progress, offering tips and tools as well as inspiration about citizen engagement.

BiodiverCities is a pilot project funded by the European Parliament, run by the JRC in collaboration with Directorate-General for Environment of the European Commission. Any questions? Reach out to us at: EU-CITIZEN-ENGAGEMENT@ec.europa.eu