Co-Production Guidebook

Connecting Nature
Bringing Cities to Life, Bringing Life into Cities
Co-producing nature-based solutions in cities: collaborating with and mobilising diverse urban actors

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Co-production is a novel governance method for developing nature-based solutions where there are a lot of actors (individuals, groups or organisations) involved. Co-production is about collaboration, empowerment and producing shared results, such as policies and visions.

This guidebook introduces what co-production is. It covers:
- The outputs and benefits of co-production
- Principles to define and evaluate co-production processes
- How to design co-production processes step by step

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In response to this uncertainty, Connecting Nature has developed a process tool to help cities and other organisations navigate the path towards implementation of Nature-Based Solutions on a large scale: the Connecting Nature Framework. The Framework identifies three distinct phases of development for a nature-based solution: planning, delivery and stewardship.

Throughout each phase there are seven separate elements that cities and other entities need to consider when shaping their individual nature-based solution: technical solutions, governance, impact assessment, finance, entrepreneurship, co-production and reflexive monitoring.

Cities may choose to start with any element of the Framework process and consider the others in the order that suits their context. What emerges from the Framework process is a comprehensive 360° overview of each stage of development of the nature-based solution.

Guidebooks
To assist you in developing your nature-based solution, Connecting Nature has produced a series of guidebooks. The overall Connecting Nature Framework Guidebook is a good starting point. There is also a guidebook for each element of the framework process describing the implementation steps and providing case studies to show how it works in practice. A step-by-step how-to manual on the Connecting Nature Framework process is also available.

All the Connecting Nature guidebooks and the manual may be downloaded from www.connectingnature.eu.

Nature-Based Solutions benefit biodiversity and support the delivery of a range of ecosystem services.

What are Nature Based Solutions?
The European Commission defines nature-based solutions as solutions to societal change that are: “inspired and supported by nature, which are cost-effective, simultaneously provide environmental, social and economic benefits and help build resilience. Such solutions bring more and more diverse, nature and natural features and processes into cities, landscapes and seascapes, through locally adapted, resource-efficient and systemic interventions.”

What is the Connecting Nature Framework?
Designing and implementing Nature-Based Solutions on a scale that delivers economic, environmental and social co-benefits, while also building resilience and benefitting biodiversity is complex with many different issues to consider.

Many questions arise and need answers.

Who will manage it?
How will it be financed?
Who needs to be involved in the planning, delivery and stewardship?
Will it support innovation and generate jobs?
How can we manage change?
Even identifying where to start can often be a challenge!

Connecting Nature Framework

Guidebooks

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What is Co-Production?

Co-production in a nutshell

Co-production is a governance method which can be used by cities and other stakeholders when developing nature-based solutions in cities and for the good of cities. Not only does co-production foster collaboration and partnership but it stimulates learning among diverse actors – these actors could be civil servants, citizens, urban planners, entrepreneurs, architects, scientists or engineers, to name but a few. In a co-production model, they contribute to the design, implementation and management of nature-based solutions together.

Co-production democratizes urban governance

Actors are not just consulted or informed, they are involved from the very beginning in the process. They have a role in the making of plans, infrastructure and policy. The goal of co-production is to generate results that may be shared with all the actors. Examples of such results would be new ways to frame a problem, or new policies and visions. By bringing diverse actors together, co-production also results in new relationships. It can therefore mobilise and empower participants to create better and greener cities and communities.

Why co-produce nature-based solutions?

Nature-based solutions address complex urban problems which have no quick fix. Because if this complexity, a diverse set of actors is needed to collaboratively design a nature-based solution that will respond to various needs. However, more often than not, policy and planning leave little room for collaborative processes.

Co-production creates better and greener cities and communities in the following ways:

- It produces tangible outputs: new visions, new ways of framing problems, and innovative solutions, including, for example, new business models
- It allows for new relationships, partnerships and collaborations among actors who were previously not in contact with each other
- It mobilises and empowers a diverse set of actors for joint solutions and action
- It engages the ‘unusual suspects’ in enhancing the ownership of and quality of solutions
- It allows for the collection of knowledge in the absence of data
- It bursts open departmental siloes within city governments and other local government agencies to facilitate the pooling of resources

Why do design a ‘good’ co-production?

It is important to keep the different elements that make a co-production process in mind throughout: goals, principles, steps, tools and capacities.

What elements make up a co-production process?

Figure 1: What makes co-production processes

What elements make up a co-production process?

It is important to keep the different elements that make a co-production process in mind throughout: goals, principles, steps, tools and capacities.

How to design a ‘good’ co-production?

In order to ensure that processes intended to do co-production actually deliver co-production, every co-production process needs to adhere to certain design principles. For example, co-productions should involve everyone who is affected by the outcomes (irrespective of people’s interests or resources) and they should not only benefit policymakers and urban planners, but also the local community – this is an example of the Inclusivity principle. All the principles are laid out below.
Knowledge co-produced is immediately relevant and translated into actionable knowledge for policy and planning. Co-production principles connect to multiple goals, strategies and agendas within the city. This helps to create synergies across sectors. Co-production processes can be designed and implemented in five steps. The steps are iterative, which means that they are continuously reflected upon, redefined and adapted if and when needed.

**Step 1:** Define the goals of the co-production process

For example, the goals of the co-production process are defined in step 1 (see below) but they may change or be adapted throughout the process.

**Three process design principles ensure procedural quality:**
1. **Inclusivity** for bringing together diverse actors and multiple types of knowledge at equal level
2. **Openness** to adopt, integrate and share knowledge throughout
3. **Legitimacy** to ensure that the process includes legitimate and credible knowledge and is trusted by participants and wider urban actors

**Three output design principles show what kind of results should be generated as a result of the co-production:**
1. **Actionable knowledge for policy and planning** ensures that the co-produced knowledge is immediately relevant and translated into policy and planning
2. **Usable knowledge and empowerment** ensures that the co-produced knowledge outputs are valuable to and taken up by many actors
3. **Extending institutions for N-Synergies** ensures that the co-produced knowledge connects to multiple goals, strategies and agendas within the city. This helps to create synergies across sectors.

![The co-production design principles](image-url)
Learning from practice: co-production goals in Genk

In Genk, Mien Quartier works on the design and implementation of the co-production process of the Stiemer Valley. Here’s what she has to say about her experience of co-production:

“We, the city government, believe that all residents have individual talents for creating a better city. We aim to give everyone the space they need to develop their own initiatives and we design our co-production processes in a participatory way. In the co-production process of the Stiemer Valley, we engage citizens through various activities. One example is the 'Stiemersafari' bike tour, to discover the valley in a fun way. Our Friends of the Stiemer take part in brainstorms and organise events throughout the whole co-production process.”

“We have learned that the process is at least as important as the end result. It helps to create a common vision and approach with the involved stakeholders. You need to ensure that the process and outcome are valuable for everyone involved. Then you can motivate people to take action. We thus focus on identifying and connecting with the right actors, developing lasting relationships and planning our engagement formats.”

Step 3: Plan the co-production steps and activities

The steps in a co-production process are puzzle pieces which connect together activities that need to happen to achieve the goals of the co-production process. They can vary in order and are iterative. It is important to identify the concrete co-production steps with a timeline of when these are going to happen. This is not meant to be a blueprint – it is likely that the process will need to change and adapt therefore it is important to allow for enough flexibility and time to do so. It is also important to identify and – as early as possible – reach out to the actors who need to be involved in each co-production step.

In the figure, we highlight different possible steps to take in a co-production process. Each of these steps helps to achieve different – intermediate – process goals.

Learning from practice: co-production principles in Poznań – Legitimacy

The city of Poznań co-produced an 'open garden' in a local preschool, a small part of which citizens have access to. The garden increases the amount of accessible green space in the city and gives the school the opportunity to make its playground a nature-oriented one. Police officers contributed with knowledge about safety rules for opening up the preschool garden to the public. Their involvement in the process was important for the legitimacy design principle.
Step 4: Select the co-production tools

Specific co-production tools facilitate each step of the process towards desired goals. The choice of tools depends on the type of co-production activity chosen, the materials and skills needed, and the type of actors involved. It is important to identify the requirements and other needs related to the specific co-production step and the use of the tool.

Some examples of co-production tools used in partner cities are given below.

Learning from practice: Poznan used envisioning workshops as a tool to engage with current and future users. In Poznań, children, teachers, parents and residents participated in envisioning workshops as part of the process of co-producing the preschool open garden. In these workshops, the participants exchanged ideas about what an open garden could look like and how to play and have fun in it. Participants, especially children, visualised their ideas in pictures and drawings. This method helped to identify the needs of the garden, and the designer and architect who then used the presented ideas to create a conceptual design for the garden.

Learning from practice: Glasgow used postcards as a tool to seek feedback on its Open Space Strategy from citizens. In Glasgow, postcards were used to get people to engage with the proposed open space strategy. The postcards were disseminated across the city and included a picture, return address and stamps, encouraging citizens to consider the key aims of the draft strategy and to give feedback. This approach allowed the city to collect feedback from a large number of people in a relatively short period of time.

Learning from practice: Stirling used a workshop to engage with the local community. In Stirling, a workshop was held to discuss the future of a local park. Participants were encouraged to share their ideas and suggestions for how the park could be improved. The workshop helped to identify the needs of the local community and to create a plan for the future of the park.

Learning from practice: Edinburgh used a survey to engage with the public. In Edinburgh, a survey was conducted to gather feedback on a proposed development. The survey asked questions about the proposed development and allowed the public to express their opinions and concerns.

Learning from practice: Bristol used a social media campaign to engage with the public. In Bristol, a social media campaign was launched to promote a proposed development. The campaign included posts on social media platforms, encouraging people to engage with the project and to share their thoughts and ideas.

Learning from practice: Dundee used a community meeting to engage with the local community. In Dundee, a community meeting was held to discuss a proposed development. The meeting provided an opportunity for the public to ask questions and to express their views and concerns about the proposed development.

Learning from practice: Glasgow used a consultation process to engage with the public. In Glasgow, a consultation process was carried out to gather feedback on a proposed development. The consultation involved multiple meetings and events, allowing the public to express their thoughts and ideas.

Learning from practice: Edinburgh used a focus group to engage with a specific group. In Edinburgh, a focus group was held to discuss a proposed development with a specific group of people. The group was selected based on their expertise and experience in the field, allowing for a more in-depth discussion of the proposed development.

Learning from practice: Stirling used a public meeting to engage with the local community. In Stirling, a public meeting was held to discuss a proposed development. The meeting allowed the public to ask questions and to express their thoughts and ideas about the proposed development.

Some examples of co-production tools used in partner cities are given below.
Learning from practice: In Genk, the city harnessed the activity of a city youth service programme, Junior Teams, as a tool to generate ideas about how to develop the Stiemervalley.

The Junior Team is an annual programme run by the city’s youth service in which pupils from the sixth grade work for a few months on the question of how to make the city more child friendly. In 2018, the city involved the Junior Team in the development of the Stiemervalley, a route that runs through several neighbourhoods alongside a waterway connecting a number of important wetland areas.

The Junior Team explored the Stiemervalley by way of different activities and co-developed ideas on how to make the Stiemervalley attractive. They made ten proposals for the Stiemervalley, from which the following three were selected for implementation by other kids and the city of Genk: 1. Putting up bird houses, 2. Building a treehouse and 3. Establishing a trail for children in the water.

Pictures: (Top) The Junior team presents their 10 proposals to the city, the press and the public.

(Bottom) The Junior Team and the youth service put up the bird houses.

Step 5: Reflect on the co-production process and results

Co-production processes are never set in stone. They are open processes and evolve over time as learning progresses. They ‘go with the flow’ of the participants’ ideas and needs. This requires continuous reflexivity. Reflexivity helps to identify lessons learned and to adapt the process in light of changing objectives. Therefore, those involved in co-production should ask a lot of questions of the process along the way such as Which goals does the process aim to achieve? Is the process on the way to achieving these, or do we need adaptations? Reflexive monitoring can help to achieve reflexivity (for more on reflexivity, see the Connecting Nature Reflexive Monitoring guidebook).
Invest in capacities for co-production

Co-production doesn't just happen; it requires the development of new skills, organisational resources and relationships for exchange and collaboration. Three main capacities to start with are:

Creating space for co-production. Co-production means departing from pre-defined results and conventional planning processes. Setting up, designing and implementing co-production requires a lot of time, openness, trust, political support and skills. Using professional facilitators and mediators helps to build trust and shared understanding.

Generating uptake of co-produced knowledge. There are two aspects to this: at a community level, the co-production process and its results need to be supported by the stakeholders – outreach and awareness activities such as PR campaigns or public events are important to achieve this. At a local government level, the co-production process should be built into existing strategic agendas and plans in order to foster connections and synergies so that the knowledge gained is available for future innovations.

Delivering ‘good’ co-production. There are many aspects to realising good co-production. Firstly, co-production is all about inclusivity; it is important to include the usual suspects but also to go beyond them and to give voice to critical perspectives; regular community meetings which are open to all create good conditions for co-production to succeed. Secondly, it is critical to take time to analyse inputs and discussions and to incorporate them in the outputs. Related to this, it is important to communicate to participants how outputs evolve and change due to the nature of co-production – if care is not taken to communicate the reasons for changing outputs, participants may feel they have wasted their time, and may become frustrated and disengage from the process. It is important to track who does (and does not!) benefit from the results.

Additional Resources

For more information on Connecting Nature, visit:
• www.connectingnature.eu
• YouTube channel Connecting Nature: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC24BLYUmvx7asehGu-XMKW/videos

For more information on co-production approaches and tools, visit:
• The European Union Horizon 2020 project SIC (Social Innovation Community): https://www.siceurope.eu/, and for the tools: https://www.silearning.eu/tools/
• Bound and Mulgan (2019), tools are in the compendium: https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/compendium-innovation-methods/
• The collective action toolkit for social impact: https://www.frogdesign.com/work/frog-collective-action-toolkit