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Does co-creation impact public service
delivery?

The importance of state and governance
traditions

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Abstract (100 words)

Co-creation in public service delivery assumes a new kind of partnership between citizens and civil servants. Whether this partnership actually occurs varies per country. We examine to what extent state and governance traditions can explain whether co-creation changes public service delivery. Our research shows that state and governance traditions determine the extent to which co-creation can become institutionalized in a country's governance framework. Where there is an authoritative state tradition, co-creation initiatives will probably face more barriers and it will only cause change incrementally. Where there is a governance culture of consultation, the changes might occur faster and more openly.

Key words: co-creation, social innovation, state and governance traditions, game changer

Implications for policy makers/practitioners (98 words)

This research shows that co-creation between citizens and public officials requires different adaptations in different policy contexts. We recommend that in order to understand why co-creation did or did not take off; one should consider the policy context. For instance, our research shows that an authoritative strategy can be very useful in order to implement co-creation smoothly and rapidly. Authority shared with multiple actors, however, creates multiple decision points. Practitioners interested in facilitation co-creation must be aware of their institutional context to understand what kind of strategy the co-creation initiative should pursue to succeed over the long term.

1 Introduction

Across the western world, the public sector is facing challenges to innovate in response to a range of societal problems, such as an ageing population, climate change and the energy transition, and immigration and integration. Furthermore, citizens have increasingly higher expectations regarding how government should deal with these challenges (Osborne & Brown, 2011). The dominant view has become that conventional approaches cannot capture the complexity of these problems and resolve them (Hartley, Sørensen & Torfing, 2013). After the New Public Management paradigm (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1999), policymakers now embrace the idea that governments should acknowledge the multi-actor environment (and its resources) in which they operate in order to meet the needs of modern society. According to this view, governments should seek new forms of close collaboration with a broad variety of stakeholders that can be located in the (semi-)public, private and civic realms of society to achieve their goals (Hartley, 2005; Mulgan, 2003). We acknowledge this in using the concept *co-creation in social innovation*. However, we also argue that existing relationships between the stakeholders in public services are forged over time. They embody the convictions that have evolved regarding how responsibility between partners in public service delivery is shared and are, therefore, heavily institutionalized (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1999). Pursuing co-creation challenges these institutionalized relationships. We argue, in line with Pollitt and Bouckaert (1999), that in order to explain why governments do not all react in the same way to similar issues (e.g. an economic crisis, ageing population, unemployment and a decline of legitimacy of public institutions) one needs to take the surrounding national policy context into consideration. Hence, whether and how governments adapt public service delivery to favour co-creation will depend on the surrounding *state and governance traditions* of that country (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1999).

In this article we argue that co-creation, by definition, prescribes a certain relationship between involved actors within the public domain. Further, we examine how this relationship might amount to a fundamental shift in how public services are delivered. By building forth on Pollitt & Bouckaert (1999), we examine how co-creation may change the relationship between citizens and public organizations in four countries (the Netherlands, Estonia, Germany and the UK) and therefore can be considered a game-changer in public services across the EU. These four countries were selected because they are embedded in different combinations of state and governance traditions (see Table 1) and can thus, provide a range of examples for investigating to what extent co-creation

has indeed changed relationships between participating actors. In order to investigate whether co-creation is indeed such a 'game changer' empirically, we examine an example of co-creation in each country and analyse to what extent relationships between citizens and public organizations have changed, and whether this can be explained by the dominant state and governance traditions of the particular country. In doing so, this article addresses the following questions:

To what extent does co-creation require changes in the relationship between citizens and public organizations? To what extent can these changes be explained by surrounding state and governance traditions?

In the next section, we proceed by elaborating on the concept of co-creation in social innovation and examine why co-creation presupposes a change in relationships between actors in public service delivery. Furthermore, we elaborate on why state and governance traditions could be considered as determinants of whether such a change in relationships will actually take place. In the third section, we outline the research strategy. Section 4 presents the results of our research and examines to what extent co-creation can indeed be considered a game changer and to what extent this can be related to the dominant state and governance traditions. Section 5 ends with a brief conclusion.

2 Theoretical Framework

Co-creation in social innovation

Based on the literature, we define co-creation in social innovation as *the creation of long-lasting outcomes* (Mair, 2010; Mulgan, 2009) *that aim, through a process of participation and collaboration, to address societal needs by fundamentally changing the relationships* (Osborne & Brown, 2011), *positions and rules between the involved stakeholders* (Voorberg, Bekkers, & Tummers, 2015). By approaching social innovation as defined above, we are framing it within the *new public governance* (NPG) paradigm, in which relatively autonomous but interdependent actors try to shape the content and results of all kinds of policy programmes (Osborne, 2006). This implies that public service provision will be based on inter-organizational relationships between several actors. The governance process then focuses on effectiveness and outcomes, rather than on output (ibid.; p. 384). The emerging image is one of governing within networks in close collaboration with the equal partners.

As such, within the NPG paradigm, citizens become *co-creators* and are expected to deliver valuable input to the development of a public services (Stoker, 2006). We define public co-creation as *the involvement of citizens in the initiation and/or design of public services* (Voorberg et al., 2015 p. 1347). The efforts of citizens are considered crucial in making an initiative successful (Scott, 1998). These partnerships and horizontal relationships between citizens and governments amount to a fundamental difference from previous paradigms such as *New Public Management* (NPM) and traditional *Public Administration* (PA) (Osborne, 2006). In the old PA model, citizens were regarded as service users, with no contribution to make regarding adding value to public services. NPM is also distinct in that it was based not on collaboration between different actors but on competition and market-type elements to improve public services. Service users were then considered customers rather than co-creators. Embracing co-creation in contemporary policy can thus in this paradigm, be considered a fundamental game changer from these previous paradigms since it brings together actors from the state, the market and civil society (Streeck & Schmitter, 1985) in newly formed partnerships. However, we argue that whether co-creation is indeed the game changer it is claimed to be depends on the policy context within a country. We elaborate on this argument below.

State and governance traditions as enablers of or impediments to 'game change'

The research of Pollitt and Bouckaert (1999) showed that it is not certain that the public sector will adapt to a new paradigm (see also Johnson & Osborne, 2003). Further, even if they do, they may not adapt similarly. Pollitt and Bouckaert (1999) explained this by referring to the specific national policy context (in terms of *state and governance traditions*) in which every policy sector is embedded. State and governance traditions can be defined as *sets of institutions and cultural practices that constitute a set of expectation about behaviour* (Loughlin & Peters, 1997). Different state and governance traditions may explain why governments respond differently to conceptually identical challenges (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1999; p. 39). This results in two important considerations. First, *whether* co-creation will be 'allowed' to be a game changer is dependent on the state and governance traditions already in place. Second, if this game change occurs, the *extent* to which public services are changed by will also depend on these state and governance traditions. Therefore, in order to understand why co-creation may be implemented differently across countries, we need consider these traditions. In this article, we provide a preliminary step to identify the relationship between co-creation and the surrounding state and governance traditions.

Key features of state and governance traditions relevant to co-creation

The academic literature describes a variety of features as state and governance traditions (Lijphart, 2012; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1999). Here, we identify those, which are deemed important when it comes to co-creation, rather than providing a comprehensive overview of all the possible state and governance traditions. Building forth on the works of Pollitt and Bouckaert (1999) and of Loughlin and Peters (1997), we categorize these features along two *dimensions*. The first dimension involves the extent to which countries have a tradition of *sharing authority* with parties or agencies who are not government. This creates a spectrum with two ideal types. At one end of the spectrum, there are ‘consultative’ governments. This tradition is characterized by multiple collaborative structures between government and social partners, civil society and maybe even private actors. These structures are the result of extended institutionalization processes. At the other extreme, we find ‘authoritative’ governments that seek to develop policy in an exclusive manner and thus retain as much autonomy as possible.

The second dimension refers to the *culture of governance*. Also in this dimension we distinguish a spectrum between two ideal types. Here, we use the classical distinction between ‘Rechtsstaat’ and ‘Public Interest’ (Pierre, 1995). In Rechtsstaat-oriented states (e.g. the Netherlands, Germany), state actions are aimed at the preparation and enforcement of laws. The culture of governance is characterized by an emphasis on legal correctness and legal control (the “rule-of-law”). At the other end of the spectrum we find ‘public interest’ countries (Anglo-Saxon countries, such as the UK). Here, the government role is less dominating. Its position is usually better characterized by labelling it as ‘chair’ or ‘referee’ that safeguards the fair distribution of resources. Its decisions are based on which party (for instance among competing interests groups) would best serve the public interest. In these countries, the law is more in the background compared to Rechtsstaat-leaning countries.

In the next section we introduce the research strategy that we have used to explore the relationship between dimensions of state and governance traditions and whether and how co-creation is implemented.

3 Research Strategy

Given the limited empirical knowledge about the relationship between state and governance traditions and co-creation, case-study research is an appropriate strategy. Case studies will allow us to analyse, in depth, whether and how state and governance traditions influence changes in relationships between actors. Since we selected cases based on the independent factor (state and governance traditions), our study is a *co-variational international comparative* case study (Blatter & Haverland, 2012).

Case selection

Our cases were selected using a set of eligibility criteria. The most important criterion is that all cases had to be rooted in different combinations of state and governance traditions. Combining the two dimensions introduced in Section 2 creates a two-by-two matrix with four possible combinations of state and governance traditions. In this article, we investigate how co-creation is implemented in four distinct countries (Germany, the Netherlands, UK and Estonia). We should note at this stage that a country's placement in a specific cell can be debatable since both dimensions are on a continuum between two ideal-types. As a result, classifying a country along these two dimensions is to an extent relative to the other countries rather than absolute. Table 1 categorizes the four countries we examine in this article and where they are positioned along our two dimensions. We elaborate briefly on each country.

- Insert table 1 about here -

Estonia – authoritative and public interest

The state of Estonia is relatively young, since it has been an independent country since 1991. Therefore, both state and governance traditions are rooted within the Soviet system. Consequently, the state forms the central actor and is largely responsible for public service delivery. That is why we can classify Estonia still as a country with an authoritative structure. In terms of its governance culture, Estonia law is more in the background compared to countries with a Rechtsstaat tradition. Therefore, we characterize the governance culture as 'public interest' (Praxis, 2011 [1, 2]; Lember & Sarapuu, 2014). However, we must note that this kind of public interest culture is quite different to that in Anglo-Saxon countries (which also have a public interest characterization). Whereas, in the UK, the governance culture is characterized by competition between parties (including government), due to a lack of emphasis on protocols and regulations, in former Soviet countries it enables

governments to retain their dominant positions as an authoritative actor. As such, in these countries, the government is still the central actor in most policy issues.

Germany – authoritative and Rechtsstaat

According to Pollitt & Bouckaert (1999), Germany can be characterized as a federal country in which authority is shared among multiple layers of government. This is one of the fundamental principles in German administration. However, this sharing is formalized in multiple procedures and protocols, therefore resulting in a very hierarchical administration is very hierarchical (Jann, 2003). These procedures and protocols virtually make Germany an ideal-type example when seeking a country with a Rechtsstaat governance culture. Although there is a formal form of consultation with other parties and governmental layers, Germany is authoritative in the sense that policy decisions explicitly lie with formally responsible administrators. The consultations are also formalized. As a result, strong interdependencies exist between the many government levels. To illustrate, implementation of federal legislation is, in most policy areas, delegated to the state (*Länder*) level. However, the executions is often delegated further to local authorities (Lodge & Wegrich, 2005).

The Netherlands – consultative and Rechtsstaat

The Netherlands has a consensus state tradition. The administration is characterized by the involvement of a rich palette of social partners and various governmental bodies. Policy execution is based on the 'principle of subsidiarity' meaning that it is carried out at the most decentralized level as possible. On this basis, the state tradition can be characterized as 'consensus gaining', with Dutch governmental bodies used to collaborating with non-governmental bodies (Gemeente Amsterdam, Stadsdeel Oost, 2013). However, as with Germany, the Netherlands also have a Rechtsstaat culture of governance, in which there is a strong emphasis on protocols and rule following. One manifestation of this culture is that in 1848 it was decided that everyone (including the monarch) falls under the constitutional law. The combination of a tradition of consensus gaining and a Rechtsstaat culture of governance means that, just as in Germany, governmental actions and its related activities are institutionalized and formalized within laws and regulations (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1999 p. 270).

UK – consultative and public interest

The UK has a long history of being a unitary and centralized state characterized by an authoritative state tradition (Loughlin & Peters, 1997). However, devolution has heralded the promise of a more decentralized state structure (Mitchell, 2009). Nevertheless, the national government remains in control of key areas of social and economic policy issues, most recently demonstrated in the UK's decision to leave the European Union while all devolved administrations showed a clear preference to remain (Guadian, 2016). Moreover, since the introduction of NPM, ministers largely base their decisions on inputs from alternative sources, other than civil servants. This form of decentralization, is not based on the principle of subsidiarity. As a result, local government is less protected from central governmental interventions than countries such as Germany and the Netherlands (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1999 p. 294). Therefore, compared to a country like Estonia, the UK is much more consultative. The governance culture in the UK can be characterized as the (Anglo-Saxon) public interest model in that, with regard to public service provision, the government acts as a referee, deciding which party best serves the public interest. As such, the government has a background role in policy execution. Governmental and other parties operate relatively independently of each other compared to states in which there is a tradition of consensus gaining. Governmental and other parties may even be competitors in public service provision.

In addition to meeting the criteria regarding different state and governance traditions, we ensured that our cases were as similar as possible regarding other important elements. First, all the cases selected had to involve co-creation in which citizens took the initiative. Second, this co-creation had to fall within the welfare domain. Third, all the co-creation projects had to have been running for at least one year. Table 2 provides a brief overview of the selected cases and their primary objectives.

- Insert table 2 about here -

As we examined only one case in each country, the external validity of our findings is potentially limited. Nevertheless, our study can provide a possible analytical understanding of the relationship between whether, and how, co-creation has been adopted as a social innovation and the institutional context. Hence, our aim is analytical generalization, focusing on an enhanced theoretical understanding of co-creation (Yin, 2013). To enhance internal validity, we

operationalized the model's concepts in an interview protocol. This protocol was then used as a template in conducting interviews with actors involved in the four co-creation cases.

We interviewed ten key actors in each case. We distinguished between citizens (people who are voluntarily involved in a co-creation process) and civil servants (involved on a professional basis and representing a government or public organization). All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. To increase the internal validity further we analysed relevant policy documents, published by both the co-creation projects and the involved municipalities. These documents are included in our reference list.

4 Results

For each case, we assessed the extent to which co-creation demanded a change to the conventional way of conducting public services, to what extent this change actually took place (according to our interviewed respondents) and how dimensions of state traditions and governance culture can explain any change that took place.

Estonia – Maarja Kula

Co-creation demands a fundamental change to the traditional way that public services are provided in Estonia. Co-creation is fundamentally different to how services were provided under the former Soviet system. Co-creation aims to create outcomes that are specific to the preferences of target groups. As such, it diverges from traditional public services in the sense that it leads to diversity in public services, rather than creating a uniform supply. However, in the 1990s at the start of the Estonian state, there was a great willingness to conduct public services differently than in the Soviet period. As such, a window of opportunity opened for entrepreneurial citizens: *“At the end of the 1990s a lot of things were still in flux and we wanted to prove to the government that we could do things in a different way”* (Estonian citizen). As a result, initiatives such as Maarja Kula (our case study) were viewed favourably by the government and could count on its support. As one civil servant commented: *“I think Maarja Kula, as an institution, was an important breaking point in that it was motivated to involve a range of stakeholders and to fill a gap that was present in Estonia”* (Estonian civil servant). As such, in the Maarja Kula project, relationships between government and citizen initiatives were changed. Consequently, the government changed its policy on youth care

provision and started to actively educate civil servants on these alternative forms of youth care provision. These changes to the existing relationships happened in a rather top-down way. The authoritative state traditions and the absence of a strong law orientation made it relatively easy to implement co-creation as a new paradigm. As one of the initiators put it: *“Siiri Oviir, the then minister of social affairs, took only about 20 minutes to remove the obstacles that stood in the way of developing the village in 2003”* (Estonian citizen). As such, co-creation was not ‘hindered’ by existing institutional barriers, even though youth care professionals were somewhat reluctant to involve citizens in youth care provision. Thus, in Estonia, co-creation did change the relationships between citizens and civil servants. This shows how the state traditions and the governance culture acted as supporting elements when it came to implementing co-creation projects once policymakers were convinced of the usefulness of co-creation.

Germany – Dialogue macht Schule

Also in Germany, co-creation requires a fundamental shift from how public services have traditionally been provided. Given the strict and formal distribution of authority over the different governmental levels, the extent to which services are provided in line with the preferences of target groups very much depends on the formally responsible administrator and its authority. Although policy is conducted in a consultative manner in Germany, the decision of which stakeholders can be invited to partake in this process is formal. Co-creation clearly diverges from this formalized way of providing services by bringing in actors from backgrounds other than those stated in the protocols.

Our assessment concluded that relationships between citizens and civil servants were not visibly changed through the Dialogue macht Schule project. While many civil servants emphasized that the integration of migrants had become a major focus and that education could play a major role in addressing this problem, they did not necessarily see this type of co-creation as the solution. As one civil servant mentioned: *“[We] are opposed to letting non-professional staff into the classroom”* (German civil servant). An important argument for this is that responsibilities are strictly separated in Germany: *“[there is] a clear separation between formal education that takes place in school and non-formal education, such as what Dialogue macht Schule is teaching, which should remain outside school”* (German civil servant). In addition, civil servants pointed to the fact that the curriculum of public schools is drafted at the federal level but implemented locally and, therefore, changing it was difficult. Here, we can recognize the Rechtsstaat orientation as hampering co-creation since changes in the curriculum of German education needs to be decided by multiple

layers of administrative actors (in a formal consultation) and the authority to take a decision is delegated to another party. As such, in Germany, co-creation demands a fundamental break with how services are traditionally provided, but the strong orientation towards laws and protocols, with a strict and formal distribution of responsibilities, makes this a difficult process. Our case study showed how co-creation can be constrained by state and governance traditions, where multiple governmental layers need to be convinced of its merits. Moreover, even if they are convinced of the usefulness, our case showed that it is questionable whether the partnerships between citizens and civil servants are indeed equal.

The Netherlands – Starters4Communities (S4C)

Co-creation in the Netherlands does not require such a major shift in policy delivery as it does in Germany and Estonia. Given the tradition of authority sharing and consultation with other stakeholders, allowing new stakeholders (such as citizen groups) to become co-creators is not such a fundamental change from the 'Dutch way' of conducting policy. Also given the decentralized structure and the relatively few governmental levels (compared to Germany) and the principle of subsidiarity, adapting a policy in favour of specific target groups can often be in line with the rationale of many public administrators. However, given that there is also an emphasis on following rules and protocols in the Netherlands, it might be that new parties cannot get a seat at the decision-making table and be accepted as partners before this becomes part of these protocols. Problems could occur with social innovations if citizens attempt to claim formal responsibility for public services.

In the S4C case, there were distinct responses with regards to changed relationships between citizens and civil servants as a result of co-creation. On the one hand, the civil servants indicated that they clearly took 'a step back' in order to let citizen initiatives flourish: *"We don't organize anything, that's the big change from the past. We have changed from 'taking care for' to 'making sure that'. Instead of taking care for people we just facilitate [them]"* (Dutch civil servant). The consultative tradition to some extent paved the road for this: *"Alliances [with social partners] were already there [...] they are becoming really good neighbourhoods if citizens want to invest in them"* (Dutch civil servant). As such, co-creation did not mark such a major difference from the past. On the other hand, citizens commented that, in the S4C projects, civil servants remained responsible: *"The supervisors [of the project] are professionals. They know the [safety] criteria. Of course, you need to comply with the conditions. That's their [involved professionals] job"* (Dutch

citizen). As such, the formal relationships between actors remained intact. This reflects a combination of both consultation and authority sharing, and the Rechtsstaat culture of the Netherlands. Indeed collaboration with other partners is everyday practice, but the collaboration structures are institutionalized and formalized in protocols and regulations, and therefore relatively resistant to change.

As such, co-creation did not change the relationships between citizens and civil servants that significantly. With a consultative tradition, collaboration with other partners is nothing new for civil servants. Furthermore, the formalized structures of how this collaboration should be governed remained intact. This case shows that state and governance traditions resulted in co-creation amounting to only an incremental step in changing public service delivery. In terms of the focus of this article – the relationships between actors – we failed to identify major changes.

UK – Dementia Care East Dunbartonshire

Also in the UK, the government is aware of the potential of co-creation, stated for instance by former Prime Minister Cameron in his plea for the ‘big society’ (Cameron, 2010). However, co-creation might be less a drastic change in public service delivery than suggested by the former Prime Minister. Given the public interest governance culture, competition between various partners in public service delivery was already part of the UK administration. Co-creation only forms another step in existing trends in public service reform. Further, since public officials in the UK are not as focused on protocols as their German and Dutch counterparts, new possibilities for exploration and experimentation may occur more easily in public service delivery. Although the UK government is authoritative in nature, it tends to stay in the background. This means that while co-creation may bring new players to the table, the government remains responsible for public service delivery. The relationships between actors in public service delivery may not change that much.

Some civil servants saw co-creation as just another step on a path that was initiated with the introduction of NPM a few years back. One civil servant commented: *“the co-production stuff gave us a pattern, if you like, of how – ok, we’ve got good relations, this could be better maybe – but how can we get everybody else on board or get more people on board”* (UK civil servant). Therefore, the fresh political attention given to involving citizens created a renewed window of opportunity for co-creation (i.e. the involvement of citizens and their organizations): *“I think the joint improvement team approached East Dunbartonshire and said: Look, we’d be interested to work with you, and they worked closely with Governance International who are earmarking co-production with the joint*

improvement team” (UK civil servant). However, other civil servants stressed that, at least in dementia care, co-creation could be traced back to before the NPM era and was always part of elderly care: “That is the view we work with. This is not a new dawn. We do work with people and not to them. I think what co-production is trying to push more, is that we use this idea that people have, to be more involved in leading what they want to do. Which is great, that would be my values too” (UK civil servant).

As such, co-creation in the UK does not amount to a fundamental ‘game-changing’ revolution in terms of the relationships between citizens and civil servants. At least in this case, it fits rather well with contemporary convictions on how public services should be delivered. Respondents seem to agree that it has been part of elderly care for quite some time. From the theoretical perspective of state and governance traditions, the reason for this may be related to the reforms that the UK administration underwent during the Thatcher regime. During this time, early forms of collaboration were implemented top-down, thus paving the way for other stakeholders to become involved in public service delivery (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 1999). As such, the current attention to co-creation can be thought of as just the next step on this path.

5 Conclusions

Social innovation is gaining momentum as a dominant paradigm for public service delivery in contemporary western policy. A key element of social innovation is co-creation: involving multiple stakeholders in public service delivery. Consequently, co-creation has been heralded as a game changer in how public services are delivered. However, we argue that whether and how co-creation is indeed such a game changer depends on the state traditions and governance culture that together characterize the public sector. Therefore, we examined, through an international comparison between four co-creation endeavours (in Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK), whether, and how, the relationships between citizens and public officials changed as fundamentally as the concept of co-creation presupposes. Here, we aimed to answer the following questions: *To what extent does co-creation require changes in the relationship between citizens and public organizations? To what extent can these changes be explained by surrounding state and governance traditions?*

Our case study in Estonia revealed that relationships between public officials and citizens were drastically changed due to top-down willingness to form a partnership. The traditionally authoritative state thereby helped to implement co-creation as part of the new paradigm. In Germany, co-creation required a similar fundamental shift, but our study showed that this was only marginally realized. Due to Germany's authoritative state tradition and Rechtsstaat culture, reforms have to be agreed by multiple layers of administration with shared and formalized authorities. Also in the Netherlands, such a fundamental shift could not be identified. With its consultative tradition, co-creation was not very different from how public services were already delivered in the Netherlands. In the UK, co-creation also failed to create a ground-breaking change in relationships between citizens and public officials. However, given that in the UK, NPM was introduced in the 1990's, co-creation amounted to a natural next step in partnerships between citizens and public organizations.

Based on this analysis, we can draw some theoretical implications. We firstly conclude that whether co-creation requires changes in the relationships between citizens and public organizations varies from country to country. In some countries, such as Estonia and Germany, co-creation requires a 'game change' (Osborne & Brown, 2011). However, in countries such as the Netherlands and the UK, this is much less the case. Second, regarding whether state traditions and governance culture could explain why this change had occurred (or not), we found that a specific set of state and governance traditions could stimulate co-creation (in Estonia) but equally hamper co-creation (in Germany). The Dutch case showed that state and governance traditions could pave the way for co-creation in the form of an incremental innovation. In the UK case, previous major changes in public service delivery a few years back (NPM) had changed the state and governance traditions such that co-creation fitted with contemporary ideas of public service provision. As such, our research empirically illustrates the claim of Pollitt and Bouckaert (1999) that state and governance traditions can explain why governments respond differently to similar challenges. Our article suggests that country-specifics might have important value in explaining whether, why and how co-creation is adopted. This suggests that, in trying to understand this, one should apply an ecological perspective and consider the context in which adoption is being attempted (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Walker, 2008).

Due to common constraints of time and resources, our research has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. The external validity is limited since we examined only one case in each country. There is thus a risk that the differences we identified are specific to the individual case rather than being representative of the entire country. However, the article made plausible assumptions about how state and governance traditions might affect changes in public service delivery. We suggest that in order to understand why co-creation is embraced as a strategy in public service delivery, we need to consider this wider macro-level context.

Further research, extending our theoretical and empirical approach to other state and governance traditions (e.g. African and Asian countries), is required to ascertain the role of state and governance traditions in facilitating co-creation in a more robust way. A quantitative study would seem most apt to provide the necessary external validity for the initial observations we have made based on our qualitative case studies. We hope our interim results will encourage public management scholars to explore the nexus of state tradition and co-creation capacity in more detail.

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Table 2 manuscript : Is co-creation a game changer in the relationships between citizens and governments?

Country: Initiative	Primary objectives of initiative
Estonia – Maarja Küla	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To establish a home for fifty people with learning disabilities To make society more understanding and aware of learning disabilities
Germany – Dialogue macht Schule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To overcome cultural differences between teenagers of different backgrounds To show students different ways of participating in society Help foreign youngsters get the same grades as native youngsters
The Netherlands – Staters4Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve the labour opportunities for young graduates by building up valuable experience in civil initiatives To increase the financial sustainability of civil initiatives by adding knowledge from young urban professionals
UK – Dementia Care East Dunbartonshire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Change the perception of older people from being service recipients to being seen as assets for their communities

Table 1 Overview of the selected cases

Table 1 manuscript : Is co-creation a game changer in the relationships between citizens and governments?

State tradition Governance culture	Authoritative	Consultative
Rechtsstaat	Germany	Netherlands
Public Interest	Estonia	UK

Table 2 Categorization of selected countries