

BeCoDigital

Digital Co-Creation of Public Services with Citizens: Understanding Pre-Conditions, Technologies and Outcomes

DURATION
01/09/2022 – 31/12/2024

BUDGET
€ 593 032

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Context: Digital government consists of the use of digital technologies to improve the internal functioning of administrations and the delivery of services to companies and citizens. However, discussion amongst scholars is ongoing regarding what the next stage of digital government will be. Numerous authors call for a digital government that is citizen-centric, open to external innovations, or integrating citizens' input and ideas for smarter decisions. All these visions about the "next step" of digital government converge towards a changing relationship between citizens and government and argue for the digital co-creation of public services with citizens. Co-creation can be defined as a process in which actors exchange resources and jointly create value through an engagement interface.

Objectives: The objective of the BECODIGITAL project is to develop a practical and scientifically grounded roadmap to support citizen co-creation through digital technologies while ensuring that this co-creation is performed in an inclusive manner, and to validate it in a federal government context. The project has three sub-objectives:

- Objective 1: Understanding stakeholders' pre-conditions towards digital co-creation: The first objective is thus to gain a greater understanding of the human, technical and organizational pre-conditions for an inclusive co-creation, that integrates inputs from a representative and inclusive set of citizens.
- Objective 2: Exploiting an ecosystem of digital technologies to enable co-creation: In this objective, we will investigate the complementarity of co-creation methods to form a coherent ecosystem for digital co-creation, ensuring the participation of people with lower digital skills. In particular, we will explore how the use of processing technologies can make sense of the citizens' contributions from other digital co-creation methods such as sensors, social media or platforms.
- Objective 3: Evaluating the outcomes of digital co-creation: Mainly positive outcomes are identified within the co-creation literature such as bringing opportunities of learning, enabling democratic participation and promotion of innovation in society, increased service quality and policy effectiveness and ultimately strengthening trust in government. However, several scholars warn about the potential dark side of co-creation. It is key to evaluate both positive and negative outcomes of digital co-creation, allowing for co-creation methods to be iteratively improved and instantiated to reach their objectives. The exact relation between digital co-creation and these various outcomes is still a black box that will be investigated in this objective.

The most appropriate methodologies are selected according to their compatibility with the research objectives and in view of ensuring the feasibility of completing the research tasks within a 2-years implementation period. As a consequence, BECODIGITAL will be based on three main methodological building blocks in its research design: the design science research approach; the selection of relevant use cases; the action research methodology.



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Methodology: First, we choose to rely on the Design Science Research (DSR) approach as overarching approach to achieve the objectives of this project. Second, we chose to focus on concrete use cases to embed our research in a practical setting. The use cases will be separated in two categories:

- Past projects: the researchers will be able to examine past digital co-creation projects to derive best practices (at least three cases);
- Ongoing project: the researchers will be able to apply and validate the co-creation roadmap on two ongoing cases, and to evaluate it based on measurement metrics following action research best practices.

Third, we have chosen to apply the Action Research approach to validate the co-creation roadmap in a practical setting. Action Research is defined as an approach in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in the diagnosis of the problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis.

Impact: In terms of foreseen impact, we will have a major contribution to scientific knowledge by tackling research gaps and disseminating the research through high-ranked publications. We will also have a major impact on public services as the research will be performed for the benefit of the federal government (through the suggestion and testing of a clear roadmap to enhance digital co-creation) and in close collaboration with federal partners (through frequent knowledge transfers and seminars). Furthermore, through the implementation of the roadmap, BECODIGITAL could be of benefit for a wide range of stakeholders across the civil society; citizens, third parties, and private parties.

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LINKS

<https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/research-groups/govtrust/research/projects/becodigital/>

<https://events.unamur.be/event/109/>

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