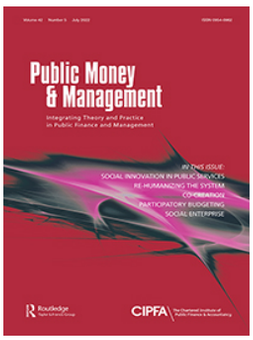

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Supporting co-creation processes through modelling

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IMPACT
At a time when co-creation is being used as a mechanism to support the implementation and assessment of initiatives, this article provides an alternative which levers pre-configured models to guide participants through the co-creative process. Each model links to the practical challenges associated with co-creation and supports both practitioners and participants in realizing and communicating co-creation within their own environments as part of reflective, emergent and evaluation engagements.

ABSTRACT
This article introduces novel modelling approaches to the co-creation of service innovation in social contexts. The models respond to some of the practical challenges of working with multiple stakeholders in distributed environments. The aim of the tools is to enable, support and guide the complex discussions that are required to identify, and strengthen participation in the co-creation processes of service innovation in contexts of health, social care and welfare. Evidence suggests that the tools support stakeholders' reflection on the wide range of social, ethical, moral, organizational and technical challenges of sustainable and effective services and associated service environments.

KEYWORDS
Digital tools; living labs; multi-agency; partnerships; public services; stakeholders

Introduction

We have seen over a decade of near universal enthusiasm for service and social innovations in public services as a response to the challenges of society (Mulgan et al., 2007; Hartley 2005; European Commission, 2013). The promises of transformation have, perhaps unsurprisingly, shown that the innovation of services is much more difficult in practice (Moulaert et al., 2013; Brandsen and Honingh, 2016). Successful projects have often failed to be sustainable or to scale beyond the environment where they were initially designed and/or implemented (Brandsen et al., 2016; 2018; Meijer & Thaens, 2020). The efficiency and effectiveness of the ways in which the capacities, roles and relationships between a range of stakeholders, including citizens, public managers, public sector and NGO staff, are deployed and been supported by digital tools and technologies (such as open data) have also been questioned (Brandsen et al., 2018; Jamieson et al., 2019). This has led some to describe innovation in these areas as having the properties of a 'magic concept' (Bragaglia, 2020) and raise the spectre of the 'dark side' of such efforts with perverse effects endemic within the current orthodoxy (Meijer & Thaens, 2020).

In spite of these critiques, one of the approaches that has been applied with persistent, if qualified, success to service innovation is that of 'living labs'. This represents a form of engagement in which the processes of innovation and co-creation are organized, accessed and studied (Gascó-Hernández, 2017; Dekker et al., 2019). This approach to emergent user-driven innovations is intended to empower the individual user, or the community as a whole, to represent their perspectives and worldviews (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Ståhlbröst, 2009; De Moor et al., 2010). Living labs encompass societal and technological dimensions in multi-agency partnership environments, including businesses, citizens, governments, and academia (Bergvall-Kåreborn & Ståhlbröst, 2009). However, many of the tools that have been created and designed to capture insight and information regarding co-creation have been generic (Abbate et al., 2019). In contrast, design thinking and participatory methods share the perspective that not all innovations are the same (Bekker & Long, 2000). The response to this has been the provision of a range of tools and techniques to improve and consolidate practice. It is in this tradition that we developed a contribution to the field of co-creation and service and social innovation which encourages collaborative social learning. Drawing on living lab concepts in public or government services (Gascó-Hernández, 2017), our first tool provided capacity for stakeholders involved in social and service innovation to participate in a sensemaking process in order to reflect on models which represent the design of an intervention and wider service innovation environment (Martin et al., 2019).

Our second tool evolved in response to emerging requirements identified as part of a Horizon 20/20 project across nine countries—each delivering a service innovation pilot. CoSMoS (Co-Creation Service Modelling System) is an open-source digital platform comprised of a collection of complementary service co-creation models (Jamieson et al., 2020). CoSMoS supports contexts (both synchronous or asynchronous) where participants' views can be elicited in response to specific models, which are recorded and then displayed via visualization in real time. The use of the tool builds models as part of the development process of rendering a range of co-creation processes explicit, including modelling stakeholder engagement with services and service environments. The real-time provision of interactive representations through modelling can take a number of forms—from online meetings, using tools such

as Zoom, to more traditional face-to-face deliberations. The overall aim is to promote active reflection, with participants involved in the co-creation processes where evolving models act as 'mirrors' and 'windows' between stakeholders to promote more focused, mutually informed debates. The digital representation of these models allows for the curation of evidence, including websites, images and files, social media and open data sources, which can be used in wider discussions. CoSMoS has been designed so that stakeholders can be engaged interactively or offline, individually or within a workshop environment. The outputs can then be shared and compared with a range of involved stakeholders acting to enhance discussions regarding the variety of aspects of service and social innovation.

From models of processes to supporting processes of modelling

The initial objective of our living lab work was to create a set of generic models which could be related and mapped onto each of our service innovations. The living lab was used as a stimulus to discuss the processes and methods of co-creation and service innovation across the pilots contexts within the project. Pilots commenced in three 'waves'. This sequence was intended to ensure that later starting pilots would build on earlier ones, and enable the project to nurture, explore and analyse service innovations.

Phase 1: The first wave pilots—probation, disabilities/complex needs and childhood obesity

In order to initiate the input for the generation of models, each pilot in the first wave was actively engaged in intensive, facilitated, face-to-face discussions about their pilot context and was supported by desk research. This process identified and related the actors, processes and resources and key aspects of political, social and technical contexts. The emphasis was on the roles, responsibilities and relationships within each pilot, as well as on the intervention and service processes themselves. These were then refined and elaborated in living lab discussions within the pilots, resulting in further elaborations. The first living lab tool was deployed as a means of recording, presenting, co-designing, and discussing models developed with, and by, pilots in Hull (probation), Jönköping (planning for disabilities/complex needs) and Reggio-Emilia (childhood obesity).

By juxtaposing and synchronizing multiple visual displays, this process supported a projection-oriented approach to capturing and maintaining the different aspects of complex socio-technical systems and environments in which the co-creation process of the service innovation was being undertaken. A project workshop reflected an emerging clarity and appreciation of the pilots—both from an internal perspective and also in terms of the ability to communicate and explain their context and approach to each other and to external audiences. The living lab at this stage had significantly increased the capacity of the pilots to communicate to the wider project partnership by providing a common approach to visualization and modelling, as well as supporting internal communications and co-creation within the pilots.

Phase 2: The challenges of creating models

The original project plan was based on the assumption that, following completion of the living lab sessions with the first wave pilots, the following waves would be able, with support, to produce their own models. After significant effort, problems with this approach persisted despite the development of additional technical features to support the process. Testing the generic models in paper-based, face-to-face workshops demonstrated that the models themselves were accessible and useful to the pilots. The conclusion emerged that it was the approach to authoring and visual design in the first living lab digital platform that was challenging and required relatively expert local support.

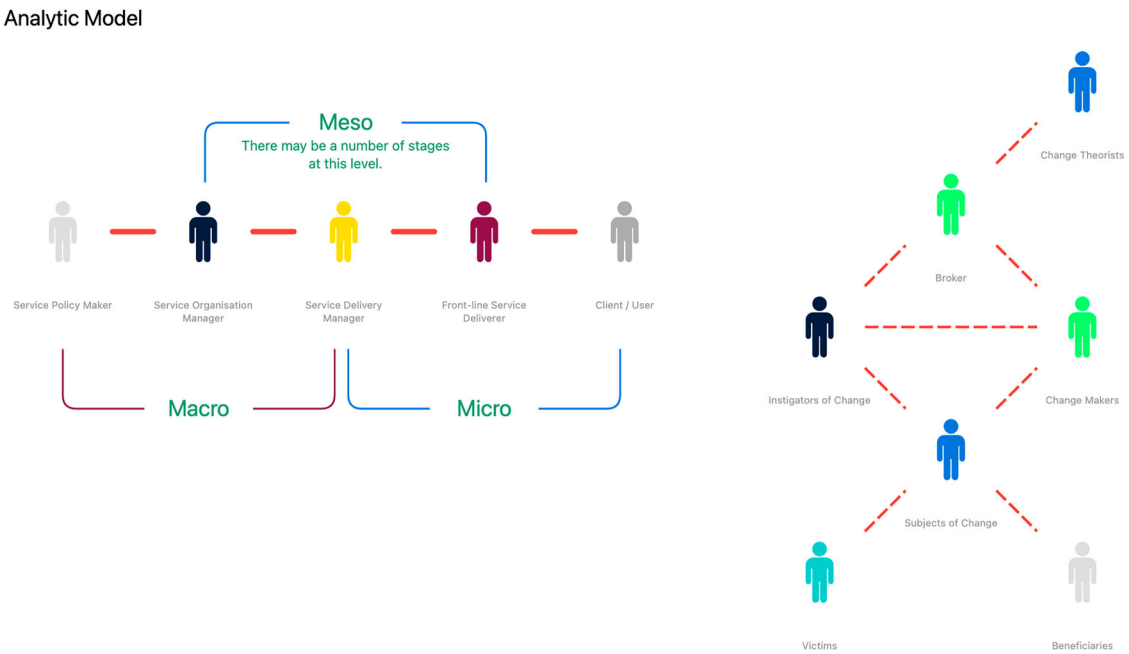

Figure 1. Model produced by CoSMoS in relation to co-creation and service and social innovation.

Phase 3: CoSMOS—a new approach to modelling (and sensemaking) service innovation

Recognizing that the barrier-to-entry for the pilots to model using the initial living lab toolset was prohibitive, an alternative approach was devised. Based on the experiences from the second phase, we moved the emphasis from creating models to supporting pilot deliberations to modelling as a co-creation process in which template generic models were created to be populated and discussed by stakeholders in the pilots. The initial model for testing this was the co-creation of service model. The outcome of this process was a model of each pilot, which is a specific instance representing local developments identifying the emphasis of development and delivery platform and the contribution of actors/organizations involved.

The successful engagement of the consortium members with the initial model in CoSMOS led to a widening of the tool to include other models and key aspects of service innovation activity, as well as a repository to store supporting images and documents (see Figure 1).

The provision of the range of models in the form of an interactive digital tool offers the means to apply explicit modelling processes in co-creation activities across diverse spatial, governance, practice and technical domains.

Contribution to practice

The modelling method of CoSMoS supports the concept and practice of co-creation and offers a significant potential for stakeholders, service designers and participants to jointly improve the output of their efforts and service provision in a range of settings by providing a structured approach to the co-creation process. It achieves this by responding to the opportunity that the online cost-efficiencies and availability of multimedia-rich interactions to provide a more sustainable means of creating value in new forms of producer-consumer collaboration (see Füller et al., 2009) and the call from Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) for new building blocks for co-creation.

CoSMOS has emerged from the challenges of working with a heterogenous set of service innovation pilot projects both in terms of their socio-political, linguistic, technical and service contexts. It is an attempt to derive models that are sympathetic to various stages of maturity and co-creation approaches of the pilots and to raise key external elements and factors which are relevant in any service development lifecycle.

This sort of deployment of a lab approach, which seeks to improve collaboration in new ways, is challenging—particularly as such developments are often highly focused, tightly resourced and pragmatic. However, we have evidence that the CoSMOS approach scaffolds a wider range of conversational possibilities between stakeholders involved in the co-creative process in relation to complex public service areas.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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