Conceptualizing ICT-Enabled Co-Creation of Public Value

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Introduction

Traditional views on the public value creation focus on the public sector organizations as sole initiators of the value creation processes. The rise of interactive ICT, however, opens new opportunities for broader engagement of civic stakeholders. The concept of co-creation is seen as a new framework describing the shift from considering organizations as the definers of value to a more inclusive and collaborative processes involving end-users and other external actors.

The article proposes a conceptual framework providing holistic integration of current research efforts on co-creation of public value by focusing on initiatives originating outside governmental entities. The conceptual framework provides understanding on how ICT-enabled co-creation should be used in developing public value.

The theoretical premises of the framework

The conceptualization of ICT-enabled co-creation is based on the combinations of the principles of ICT-enabled public sector theory, governance theory and co-creation theories. These research fields have a joint emphasis on the collaborative processes enabled by technological advancements, but they differ in focus:

1. **Co-creation theory** of Service science emerges forming the base for understanding the relationships between different actors. Service science suggests that value emerges when a number of entities work collectively to create mutual benefit by granting access to one another's resources including people, technologies, organizations and information.

2. **ICT-enabled public sector theory** contributes to the conceptualization through Government 2.0 approach and provides the basis for understanding value propositions the governments can provide to the civic society in terms of open data and facilitation of transparency and openness.

3. **Governance theory** contributes to the conceptualization through the New Public Governance and public value approaches. New Public Governance approach explains the context and the need for changing the power balance and enabling collaborative practices in the creation of public value.

The forms of ICT-enabled co-creation

1. **Top-down** co-creation approach refers to the implementation, design, and evaluation of public services, participation in government-initiated platforms, data and content contribution, improvement of existing processes and services, user-centric approaches to service design.

2. **Bottom-up** co-creation approach refers to the platforms emerging from outside the governmental sector. Such technologies are not necessarily created with the aim of being disruptive, but are designed by and for the citizens, using open data, collaboration technologies in innovative ways that can improve the existing channels of information and communication previously controlled by institutions alone.

Conceptualizing bottom-up co-creation of public value enabled by ICT

Service science suggests that value emerges when a number of entities work collectively to create mutual benefit by granting access to one another's resources including people, technologies, organizations and information. Interacting entities form service ecosystem consisting of several or many service systems connected by a network. In the context of this research project, service ecosystem refers to a system in which actors work together to achieve mutual benefit – public value.

The actors in the proposed framework can create value on **three levels** – micro, meso and macro. Micro level refers to the direct service-for-service exchange with the end-users. Meso level refers to indirect service exchanges with other stakeholders. Macro level refers to the complex relationships between different systems with diverse interests co-creating public. The exchanges between the actors in different levels of are needed because no one actor has all the resources needed to reach identified goals.
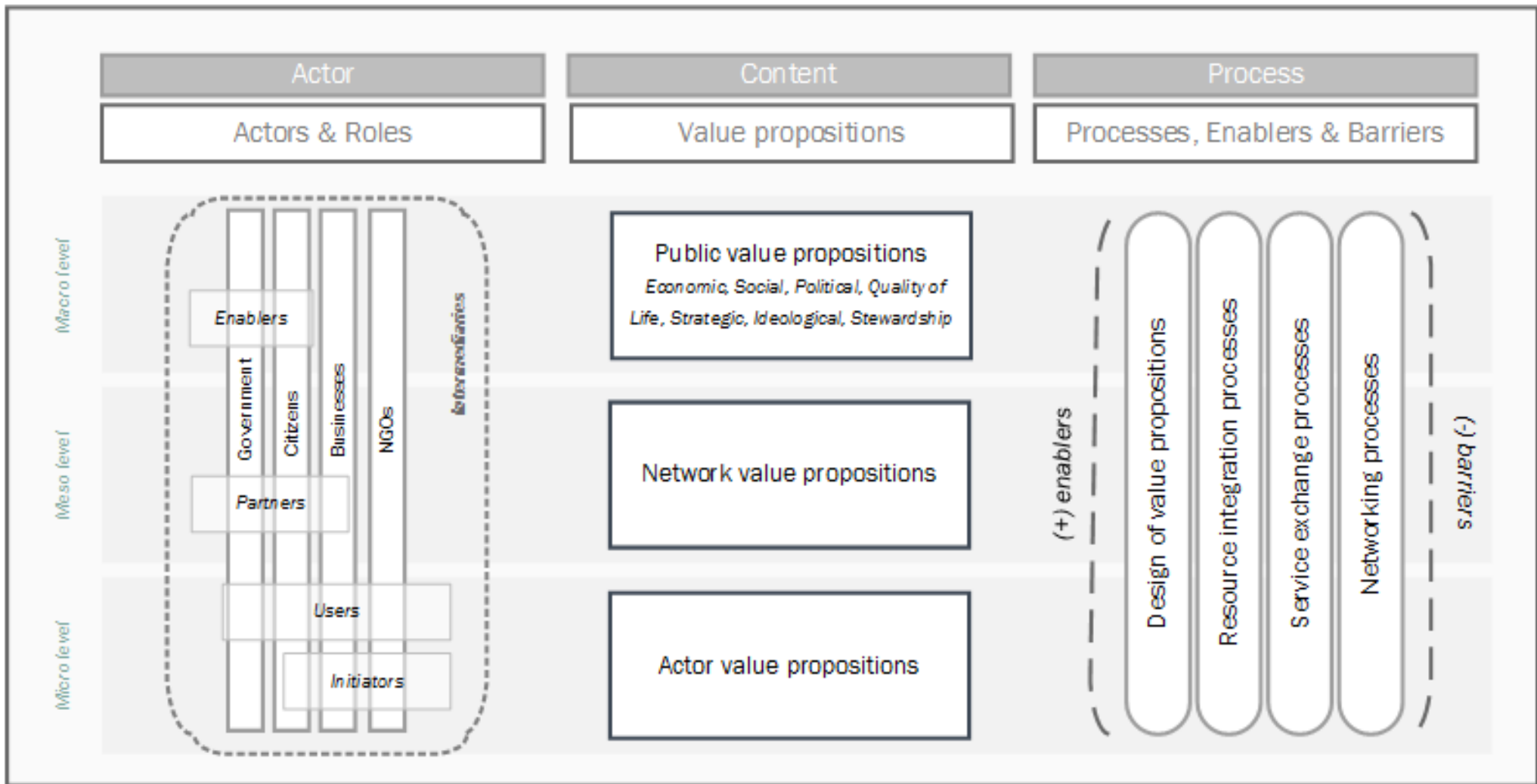
Source: developed by authors

In order to understand how public value is created on micro, meso and macro levels, three dimensions were developed allowing to categorization of the entities involved and ways they co-create public value:

1. The **processes** dimension. Research, suggests that the co-creation of public value is influenced by a variety of preconditions on the ecosystem levels – macro (strategic policy framework, infrastructure for openness, transparency and accountability, features of civic society, institutional support, open attitude of public official, lacking), meso (interoperability between governmental entities, heterogeneity of actors, embeddedness in networks, offline engagement strategies), micro (integration of external input, risk aversion of actors, clear incentives).

2. The **actors** dimension refers to the entities participating in the service ecosystem, their roles and resources. The concept of roles allows to get insights on the ways actors collaborate in service systems. Despite the diversity of actors involved in any ecosystem, it is possible to identify different types of actors, segment them and understand the nature of their relationships within defined context. Four types of actors and five roles they can perceive have been identified within research literature.

3. The **content** dimension includes deliberations on the goals and objectives of the actors involved. Knowing why individuals and organizations build platforms, and why citizens participate in them, can guide the organizations and civic leaders in fostering ICT-enabled platforms. Central concept of this dimension is value proposition.

Recommendations for further research

More empirical investigations are needed to test its consistency with the reality aimed at testing its consistency with reality. Empirical investigations are needed to gain more insights on the interrelations between the elements and the validity of the proposed framework.

Three empirical research directions can be identified: Analysis of the processes in the ecosystem, the actors in the ecosystem and the content of the public value co-creation.

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