WHAT IS CO-CREATION?
Kanika Verma (K.V.):
Co-creation is a process, part of a social innovation methodology, just after the dialogue process and before the prototype process starts.
Jayne Engle (J.E.):
Co-creation is about trust and it's about seeing ourselves all as agents of social change and about being in something together, it's where we carry out commoning or doing together what we couldn't possibly do on our own.
Janene Ware (J.W.)
Co-creation asks of us which is to create something and be innovative in a really different way. Is such an integral core component of social innovation.
Co-creation very much stops this idea that we can come into a community with a pre-set solution.

KEYS TO ACHIEVING SUCCESS
Itziar Moreno (I.M.)
Well, for us, the co-creation process has to, above all, be linked to the listening. This is absolutely vital. Starting from this base, we feel that different elements can be part of this co-creation process, such as: people, their stories and, lastly, actions.
K.V.
Analyze the dialogue findings. Once the co-creation process starts it is very important to understand what the individual objective of those stakeholders are, but also come to a common understanding of the collective objectives as well.

EVEN IN UNFAVOURABLE CONTEXTS
J.E.
On the community level what I was studying was a new paradigm for Community Development and in this process, citizens were directly engaged in co-creating every part of the development process and this was in a context of great hardship, of massive poverty, of dysfunctional governments as well as quite regular disasters, so a very very challenging context.
K.V.
We are currently working in a areas of very patriarchal nature, and a women’s voice is sometimes not heard and is not even sometimes registered, so for us was a little difficult to have women as an equal participant in the process, but through interactive dialogue and through games we were able to get their voices heard in the process.

HOW DO WE KNOW THAT THE PROCESS IS ADVANCING?
J.W.
That kind of success is when you see people from different walks of life, different backgrounds different ages bent over a table and together talking about and coming up with and excited about ideas.
I.M.
If we have created networks, if we have woven these networks into the community, these social networks, we will not have failed.
So I’ll share an anecdote: after the co-creation sessions, I think it was the first co-creation session, the main company from the Busturialdea region, an automobile cooperative with more than 3000 employees, showed interest in following the project and in joining our task group that met every week or every two weeks to follow the project. What’s more, they were interested in financing some of the ideas that might emerge from the co-creation process and they also provided us with rooms and all kinds of help so that we could conduct new co-creation sessions with young people.
K.V.
As part of the regional coalition have some members talking about the program, and it was extremely interesting to note that they knew the facts and figures of the program themselves, they were the ones that sharing that opinion. The moment that you have someone within the community start sharing the success and understand the change themselves, we understand that the co-creation process is working.

HOW DO WE ENSURE IT ADVANCES?
I.M.
Things that we can avoid or to proceed with care in the co-creation processes. On the one hand, there are our pre-existing ideas regarding how to solve the problems of the community, regarding how to tackle the challenges that an area might be facing. It is natural to have them, it is normal and even human, but we need to always be open to being questioned and not impose those ideas in the co-creation processes. We need to be flexible, to be able to handle the uncertainty of not knowing what might emerge from a co-creation session and to go with it, to adapt on the fly according to what comes up in the session.

J.W.

One example of this was, we had gone into work with a group of residents they were all women and they were very concerned about the safety of their community. This included a group of 13/14 women ranging from 15 years of age up to mid to late 70s. And we very quickly became apparent that whenever they were asked to engage in writing something down or putting ideas down on paper that they'd gathered around one or two women and past the sticking, their post-it notes and the pens to that those particular women and that those women became the people who wrote. We realized that we needed to change our whole approach to this particular workshop and any future workshops that we were having with this group of residents, because literacy was suddenly a huge issue.

It's going prepared, have activities and have design tools that you know are going to work and that you've experimented with but be prepared to just throw them all away and do something completely different because context can dictate that the way you do something has to change.

I.M.

(Meetings) should be very enjoyable, create an atmosphere which is as relaxed and informal as possible, taking into account that there are a wide range of participants: young people who may be 18 alongside people from the company, from the local council. They are agents with very different ideas, lives and responsibilities, but they all have to be on the same level in the co-creation session. Everyone's opinions matter to us in the same way and at the same level. The participants should feel comfortable, relaxed and not self-conscious in front of the rest of the participants; it needs to be a very informal and participative environment.

Everybody is safe enough and comfortable enough and has the capacity to contribute their voice to the creative process in front of you.

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THE FACILITATING TEAM?

J.E.

So, I often think of my work as an ecosystem building or ecosystem curating and that is work that involves collectively building movements of change.

J.W.

Capacity bridging, which is where the various stakeholders and partners can come together and rather than having a solution and wanting to impose that onto a community or onto a group of people that we come together and we look at what do we already have, what are the assets we have. Even as residents in a community we have found that you can come with a whole heap of assumptions about your neighbors.

K.V.

Management expertise is a key feature in the program, where implementing solutions at different points became a critical point for success.

Another key factor or an expertise that is required in the program is the functional support on some of the services that the entrepreneurs needs, which could be around technology around capacity building or even market development.

In our particular program we had a person who trained the team and would help the team tried to understand some of the nuances of understanding behaviors of the community and, at the same time, ensuring that the co-creation process is as inclusive as possible,

A fourth expertise that the program looks at, is on knowledge management, because of the dynamic changes, the geography and the program continuously keep seeing, there is a lot of learning that keeps coming out and needs to be documented effectively.

IN CONCLUSION...

I.M.

If we manage to properly relate the outcomes of the listening and apply them to the dynamics of the co-creation, the ideas, solutions and prototypes which may arise will inevitably be linked to the listening process and therefore have a greater impact. The community will take ownership of them, and they will ultimately help to achieve the social transformation we desire. Creating movements is more important than creating initiatives.

K.V.

I have to mention the (co-creation process) requires a lot of patience and the results can be phenomenal. A good co-creation process ultimately builds bridges in the community and the stakeholders. Can lead to innovative solutions never seen before, ultimately leading to impact scale.
J.W.

I think one of the big learnings that we had here in Northern Ireland in particular, has been a shift away from focusing on capacity building in communities and looking at capacity affirming. Nothing about a community without the community is ultimately for the community and it definitely doesn’t speak for the community if there is no process of sitting down.

J.E.

Only way to fight against our current challenges, which are daunting, societal challenges I believe is through co-creation and so it’s so important to get to how do we do it much better, more deeply and more effectively, across sectors, across scales and across ways of thinking and the current ways that we organize ourselves.