

# The potential of co-production for the welfare state and local democracy in Sweden

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## 1. Behaviour change, demand management and resilient communities

### SEEING CITIZENS AS ACTIVE CO-PRODUCERS

The elections to the European Parliament in May 2014 have highlighted the challenges facing democracies in Western Europe: There is a general perception that citizens have become apathetic, are not interested in politics and have lost trust in government.

However, when most of us look around the neighbourhood where we live, we become aware that many citizens are actually quite active in helping others, even if they don't show any interest in elections or join a political party. For example, a (German) lady in my street organises a street party every summer and a get-together at Christmas time; this strengthens social networks in our street and we have fun together. Another person in the street works with the police and the council to organise Neighbourhood Watch meetings several times a year. Several neighbours with children act as parent governors at local schools, which not only helps to improve the education of their children but makes a valuable contribution to all our welfare in the area by ensuring that schools focus on what the whole community regards as important, not just what teachers and school managers value. Other neighbours where I live in Birmingham – generally retired people – work with the local school as traffic wardens, helping pupils to cross the high street safely at the start and end of the school day.

These are all examples of citizens making a contribution through personal inter-relationships – but sometimes this is not necessary. For example, when Birmingham citizens take their garden rubbish to the local tip or pay the £35 annual fee for having their garden rubbish collected by Birmingham City Council, they are complying with the new refuse collection policy (caused, of course, by fiscal austerity) by developing new forms of behaviour.

Indeed, there is qualitative and quantitative evidence that the relationship between citizens

and governments is changing profoundly. At one time, public services were simply delivered by professionals with little involvement of citizens. Increasingly, citizens play a more active role in the commissioning, design, delivery and assessment of public services. Part of these collaborative relationships between citizens and public services are driven by professionals who recognise that the contributions of citizens are important for the 'service experience' and can improve desired personal and social outcomes. The mini-case study of the co-production approach of Kulturverket in Umeå makes the point:

#### Mini-case study: 'Kids tell Pros what to do' in Umeå, Sweden

"If grown-ups no longer can teach children everything, why not simply do it the other way round. Use what the children know and what the grown-ups know. Use the ideas of children and young people and let professional adults make the most of them. Let kids tell pros what to do."

The City of Umeå, which is the European Capital of Culture in 2014, aims at making learning more creative by involving school pupils of different ages in arts and culture projects which they co-produce with professionals. The overall objective is to give all children and young people in the municipality access to cultural experiences and to integrate creative learning processes into the everyday work of the schools. Most projects start in the schools but end up being presented professionally – e.g. in the Opera, in theatre venues or in the Museum of Contemporary Art in Umeå.

#### FAIR GAME – A FOOTBALL MUSICAL

The Kulturverket (the cultural services unit of the City Council) in Umeå has been working with children with long-term health issues, their families and local schools since 2012 to find a way of making people more aware of what they can do to improve their health. Together they have created char-

acters, music and lyrics for a football musical. This artistic material will be interpreted by professional artists, choreographers, playwrights etc and performed in Umeå on 6 June 2014. The Football Musical Fair Game is a unique mix of sports, arts and music, which presents the serious issues in a way which is lively and fun. Previous experience suggests it will attract a wide audience.

**Source:** [www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/kids-tell-pros-what-to-do-in-umea/](http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/kids-tell-pros-what-to-do-in-umea/)

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However, there are also instances where citizens take the initiative to improve public services.

#### Mini-case study: Citizens bus around citizens in rural Brieselang

Like many rural areas elsewhere, the local authority of Brieselang (with about 11,000 inhabitants) in the Land (state) of Brandenburg, close to Berlin, suffered from poor public transport. In particular, elderly people living in two outer areas called Bredow and Zeestow, had difficulties getting to the town centre to access shops and public facilities and the train station which connects with Berlin. In 2006 a number of citizens got together and decided to do something about this. It had become evident that neither of the key public transport agencies in the area – the transport company run by the district authority and the regional public transport network – could solve this unsatisfactory situation.

The result was a new community association which set up a new mini-bus service with the local authority to complement the existing public transport offer in the area.

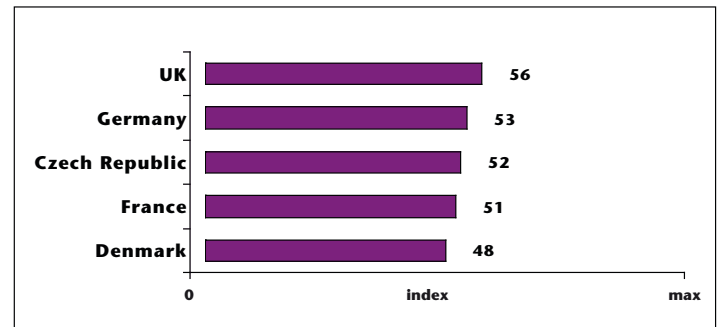
**Source:** [www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/citizens-bus-around-citizens-in-rural-brieselang](http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/citizens-bus-around-citizens-in-rural-brieselang)

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#### Hypothesis 1: Citizens already play a very active role in improving public services and outcomes

A representative citizen survey in five European countries designed by *Governance International* and carried out by Tns-Sofres shows that citizens play a much bigger role in public services than many professionals in those countries realise. And, as Figure 1 shows, citizens in the UK scored higher than those in the Czech Republic, Denmark, France and Germany in terms of co-production in health, community safety and crime prevention.

**Figure 1: Level of co-production between citizens and public services (local environment, health and community safety)**



*Source: Elke Loeffler et al. (2008), "If you want to go fast, walk alone. If you want to go far, walk together" Citizens and the co-production of public services.*

#### MAKING BETTER USE OF THE CAPABILITIES OF CITIZENS AND COMMUNITY ASSETS

But the extent to which citizens get involved varies from sector to sector: the survey showed that people are most active in local environmental issues, followed by health improvement initiatives, but they are much less likely to get involved in crime prevention.

In order to identify who is interested in contributing to which kind of issue local authorities need to undertake a new type of market research. This means it is time to ask citizens a new question – not just the classic "How satisfied are you with our services?" – but rather "What can you do to help others?" And it may be time to ask public officials a new question – not just "How should we improve our organisation?" but also "How can we support citizens to improve their wellbeing?"

#### Hypothesis 2: It is time to ask citizens "what can you do?" and not just "what do you need?"

So far, the public sector has focussed on 'deficit' analysis by exploring the needs of priority target groups. A positive assets-based approach may be helpful to map the assets, not just the needs in the area. This would identify community assets in the local area such as leisure facilities and non-profit organisations providing support but it would also map the individual capabilities of service users and other citizens.

*Governance International* has developed a 'See What You Can Do' Toolkit which enables communities and staff working in public services to identify through a structured dialogue what people can do and who they want to do it with. This enables citizens to co-produce in groups, which creates social capital and makes communities more resilient so that they can respond constructively to change, drawing on the assets and public services that they have available. It

means that communities have the strength to protect themselves and maintain their wellbeing.

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CO-PRODUCTION

The European survey shows the potential for much deeper and wider citizen involvement in public services – more than 70% of citizens in five EU countries reported that they are willing to do more to improve some aspect of those public services that impact on their quality of life.

#### Hypothesis 3: “We are getting younger”: Demographic change as a great opportunity for co-production

The same survey also found that citizens who are elderly, female and not active in the labour market are more likely to be active co-producers than other groups of citizens. One upside of this is that the ‘ageing society’ has a silver lining – it will not just generate higher demand for health and social care but also increase the number of citizens who can and will make valuable contributions to improve the wellbeing of local communities. An-

other way of looking at this is to realise that, if we categorise people not by their age but by their “remaining life years”, we find that the population may have been getting ‘younger’ over the past few decades, in the sense that on average they have been getting further away from death! This has the further implication that more and more people have a longer period during which they are able to act as active co-producers.

Recent research on the social determinants of health shows that reducing loneliness of older people is a key issue for local government and health care providers. This not only improves the wellbeing of older people but also reduces demand on health and social care services. A cost-benefit analysis by Professor Martin Knapp of the London School of Economics shows that a ‘befriending scheme’ (typically this involves funding a non-profit organisation such as Age UK to recruit volunteers to visit older people and help them to get out and about) costs £80 per older person per year but brings about savings of £300 per person per year (Knapp, 2011). This gives local authorities a new role as a ‘community connector’ and creates more collaborative relationships between citizens and local authorities.



## 2. The impact of co-production on local services

### NEW FORMS OF SERVICE DELIVERY: THE FOUR CO'S

As Professor Victor Pestoff writes in his recent [Governance International blog](#), the concept of co-production is regarded as new in Sweden, even if we can discern several classical examples of co-production in the Swedish welfare state. The Swedish concept *ofmedskapande* perhaps comes closest to co-production and has gained some attention in the public debate.

So let's start with what is NOT co-production. This is not about the end of the (Swedish)

welfare state with citizens having to 'help themselves' rather than getting state help nor it is the end of local self-government in Sweden. As the prefix 'co' indicates it "takes two to tango" – co-production is about making better use of the resources in civil society and the public sector, not about civil society replacing the public sector completely.

This implies a more collaborative approach by local government towards service users and local communities but also towards its own (front-line) staff.



The Governance  
 International  
 Co-Production Star:  
 A toolkit for  
 public services and  
 communities

**Hypothesis 4: Co-production is as much about citizen participation in public services as staff participation.**

The Co-production Star developed by *Governance International* highlights different ways of involving citizens and communities in public services. They include:

**Co-commissioning public services** – shifting the focus from services that local government think citizens need to outcomes that citizens believe to be priorities, e.g. through training service users

to play an effective role on interview panels in job interviews or tendering processes.

**Co-designing public services** – using the customer journey approach to look at how an existing service can be improved from the service user's point of view. Alternatively, citizens can help to co-design new service offers with professionals.

**Mini-case study: Co-commissioning housing for people with learning disabilities in Midlothian Council**

A need to reshape and re-commission learning disability provision in Midlothian offered an opportunity to involve service users differently. A number of people were being supported in quite traditional residential placements; whilst these were scored highly by the inspectors and liked by both users and carers, it was felt that there was still more that could be offered to enhance the quality of life and opportunities for residents. This was a difficult time for all involved but involving residents meant they had an opportunity to shape what the future might look like. Moreover, when the changes did eventually happen people were on board and felt that they had been a part of it all. Using a Person Centred Planning approach with all residents, and actively involving their families, a tender document was produced. Each of the 90 residents involved were included as individuals with their own personal hopes and wishes for the future. Following an initial screening of applicants by the local authority, nine shortlisted companies came to an event where all users, carers and involved professionals met them and said who they thought deserved to be invited for formal interview. Five companies were shortlisted for interview – one provider who had looked good on paper did not make it through to the shortlist, as users were clear it was not offering what was required. The interview was



carried out in a user accessible way and a service user, supported by an advocacy agency, played an active role in it; questions such as 'How will you support me to have a good life?' were more relevant than some of the more technical aspects of the tender documentation. Three years on, the users have settled into new accommodation, have new day service opportunities and are far more involved in shaping their services alongside their new support staff than ever before.

**Source:** *Governance International* (2014), Co-Production Peer Challenge of Disability Services in Stockport Council: "Making it better together".

**Contact:** Alison White, Head of Service, Adult and Social Care, Midlothian Council.

**Mini-case study: The Esther approach in the County of Jönköping**

The Esther approach was initiated by the Chief Executive of the Medical Department in Eksjö, Mr. M. Bojestig, in 1997. It was triggered as a result of a negative experience of an elderly woman patient called Esther with the healthcare system.

Following this event, an analysis of patients' care journeys was undertaken to identify redundancies and gaps in the current system. The process redesign consisted of over 60 interviews and several workshops with patients, staff, and government officials between 1997 and 1999. It identified that patients felt that healthcare personnel didn't have enough time to listen; and that too many people were involved in their care. It was also clear that individual work processes of staff in the care chain didn't fit together with the work of other colleagues, before or after their patient contact. This lack of coordination could mean, for example, that although a patient's social worker may have gathered information about their circumstances the patient would also be asked the same questions by their GP, nurse, and so on. This inadequate coordination causes considerable waste, redundancy and, in the worst case, medical errors.

An action plan was developed to redesign processes to avoid past errors and gaps. Furthermore, a comprehensive quality management system was put in place to reshape the thinking of healthcare providers and planners to focus on the aspects of a service that patients, rather than clinicians and managers, most valued – to create 'patient value'. This included the development of a staff network of 'Esther coaches' and a regular dialogue between staff and patients which focusses on issues chosen by the patients.

**Source:** [www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/the-esther-approach-to-healthcare-in-sweden-a-business-case-for-radical-improvement/](http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/the-esther-approach-to-healthcare-in-sweden-a-business-case-for-radical-improvement/)

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**Co-delivering public services** – this may involve peer support approaches or new forms of collaboration between citizens and professionals as this is the case in the gastroenterology unit in the Highland Hospital in Eksjö.

**Co-assessing public services** – giving citizens an active role in service inspections and scrutiny, by training them as peer assessors or enabling them to undertake their own community surveys or community asset-mapping.

### Mini-case study: Patients taking greater responsibility for improving their health: The case of the gastroenterology unit in the Highland Hospital

In 2001, the gastroenterology unit in Highland Hospital in Eksjö had long waiting lists and faced the high costs involved in expanding the size of the ward. The consultant Jörgen Tholstrup decided to redesign the care process based on co-production principles. This meant a fundamental shift from the traditional role of the physician, who was considered to be the 'top dog', to a setting where the team and the patients are partners and where the capabilities of patients and their personal network are used to improve their own health.

For in-patients this meant that instead of the medical team 'doing the rounds' every morning, and inspecting each patient in their bed, discussing their case 'over their heads', the unit reversed the procedure. The medical staff invite each patient to come to the team room for a planning meeting. Here the patients can interview the medical experts about what has changed since the last discussion, how they feel, what they are worried about and what they are suggesting might be done.

For out-patients with a stable condition the pre-scheduled annual visits were discontinued – it was found that they had led patients to ignore important symptoms, as those who were due for a check-up thought it would be fine to wait until the check-up before reporting them, while those who had recently been 'cleared' at a check-up assumed that the symptoms were unimportant. Instead, a thorough self-monitoring regime has been introduced – patients are asked once a year to send in a blood test and to fill in a short form asking quality-of-life questions. Then a nurse contacts them on the phone for a detailed conversation, covering their overall health condition, any troubles since the last contact, their potential need for prescriptions and any other issues the patient wants to discuss. They are offered a visit to the doctor, if they want it. Most importantly, they are encouraged to get in touch with the unit immediately if any signs appear that the disease is getting worse or if they become worried for any reason. When patients make these unscheduled calls, the nurse can recommend self-care, where it is suitable, or offer an appointment to see the clinician at the hospital within three days. (Patients can also contact the clinic via e-mail, if they prefer).

As extensive evaluations show, this approach has improved the health of patients significantly, greatly reduced the number of deaths and increased staff satisfaction in the hospital unit. Moreover, rather than the ward having to be expanded, it has shrunk in size, unlike other comparable wards in Sweden.

**Source:** [www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/empowering-patients-to-need-less-care-and-do-better-in-highland-hospital-south-sweden/](http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/empowering-patients-to-need-less-care-and-do-better-in-highland-hospital-south-sweden/)

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### Mini-case study: Peer assessors checking the quality of local services with review officers in Stockport, UK

The Adult Social Care department of Stockport Council is involving people who use services in quality checks and visits to the services funded by Stockport Council. Over the last two years, Stockport Council has recruited and trained a number of volunteers who accompany Quality Officers on regular visits. In particular, the two-day training & visit programme focusses on what to look for during a quality check and also how to ask the right questions to get people's views on the service they receive. Staff meet with Peer Assessors quarterly to discuss their experiences of visiting services and to offer ongoing training and briefing sessions. The Peer Assessors enjoy getting involved in this way and the Supporting People Team value the input and experience that the peer assessors bring to the service review process.

Lucy, one of the Peer Assessors talks about her experiences:

***What type of services have you visited since you have become a Peer Assessor?***

My first visit was to a temporary accommodation service for women who are homeless, some of whom had babies. I have also been on visits to a drug and alcohol rehabilitation service, a supported living scheme for people with physical and sensory disabilities and a sheltered housing scheme for older people.

***What is the best thing about being a Peer Assessor?***

The best thing is that service users are made aware that some Peer Assessors have gone down the same road as them, so from that they can see that it is not impossible to change and mend their lives. That is what being a 'Peer' is about, to support people by giving them the courage that 'if others can do it, I also can do it'. From these visits I have also learned a lot about what is happening in the community and how some service users can help as volunteers in the same service that has helped them.

***Are there any challenges?***

Sometimes, people do not open up and tell you their feelings. In this case, you have to be able to communicate skillfully to reach out to them and assure them of your support and the confidentiality of our talks. We let them know that we are not there to endanger their stay after we have left – quite the opposite, we want to ensure their comfort.

**Source:** Governance International (2014), Co-Production Peer Challenge of Disability Services in Stockport Council: "Making it better together".

**Contact:** Jo Lancaster, Adult Social Care, Stockport Council



## BARRIERS AND DRIVERS OF CO-PRODUCTION IN SWEDISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In spite of the illuminating best practice cases cited above, according to Victor Pestoff public service co-production still remains a rather rare plant in the Swedish public sector. It is often limited by the strong professional ethos and authority of public service providers. This is also a barrier in other European countries, in particular in sectors with a strong professional ethos such as education. The common view has been that service quality is guaranteed by the training and expertise of professionals.

The strong professional ethos is not the only factor that might be an obstacle when trying to promote co-production in the Swedish public sector. The longstanding strong pact between labour unions and public sector employers can mean resistance to giving power to a third party, such as individual citizens or community groups.

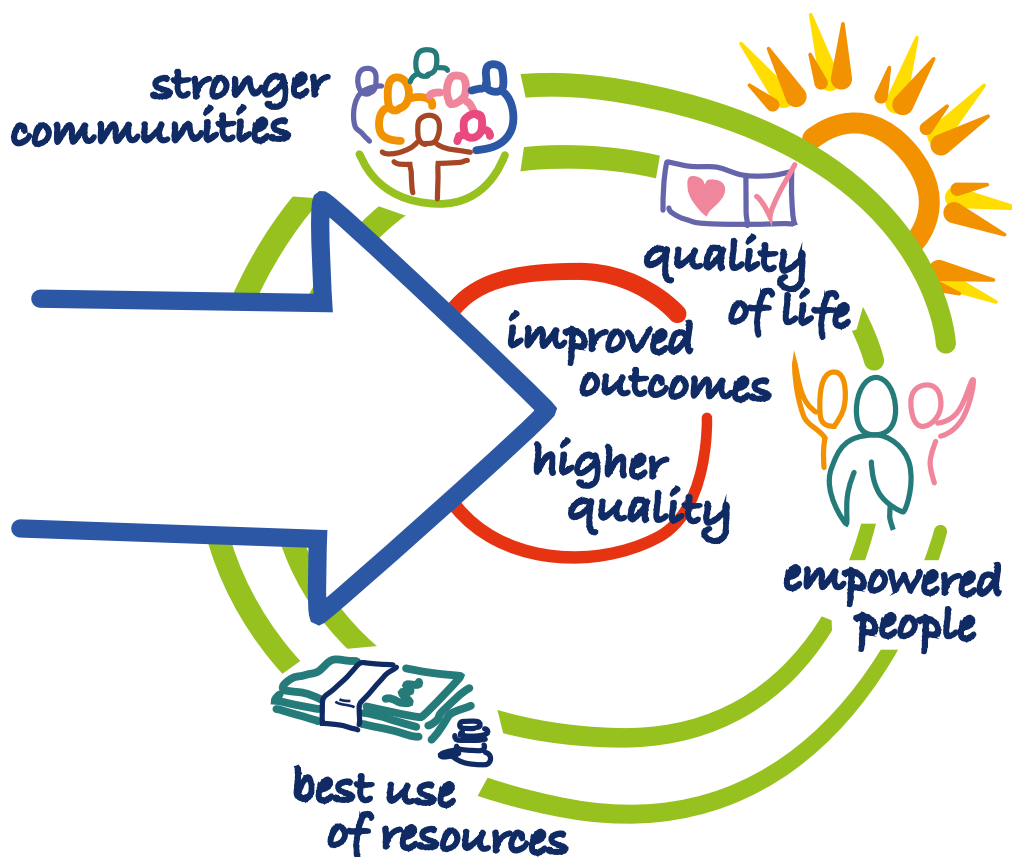
And finally, the involvement of citizens in public services also has its limits, as some people may not want to co-produce or need some support to realise their own capabilities. For exam-

ple, so-called 'disadvantaged citizens' may not be aware of their strengths or underused capabilities. In this case, some capacity-building is required to help individuals and groups to unleash their potential.

Of course, co-production is not without costs. For example, encouraging citizens to become 'environment champions' to report or deal with litter, fly-tipping and graffiti on surfaces in their area requires support and training, e.g. on health and safety issues. And the savings resulting from increased activities and social control from citizens may not necessarily benefit the service which has made the investment.

As cost pressures are likely to increase in the light of a growing older population and the number of co-producers is likely to rise local authorities in Sweden may use this opportunity to experiment with different co-production approaches in a range of services.

**Hypothesis 5: There has never been a better time for experimenting with co-production in Sweden.**



### 3. Strengthening local democracy through the back-door

Not everybody wants to participate in political decision-making but everybody has some capability to help others. In brief, not everybody wants to talk but many more people want to do stuff. This offers the potential for a very different way of building democratic action – from the bottom up.

We need to respect and to promote all the forms of citizen contribution – co-commissioning, co-design, co-delivery, co-assessment. All of them help collective action to work better and therefore all of them reinforce the commitment to collective behaviour.

Moreover, it is likely that they are connected and that people who enjoy one form of co-production can be tempted to widen their activities and horizon – e.g. people who give regular feedback on how well their local bins are emptied might well be prepared to take part in a focus group to co-design an approach to recycling which will encourage a lot more people to separate their recyclable waste. Others may get interested into looking into the budget of their local authority to understand how much money is spent on waste collection and campaign for a new bin collection scheme. As the saying goes, ‘one thing leads to another ...’

**Hypothesis 6: Community-led forms of co-production may trigger the interest of citizens in wider governance and political issues. (It would be interesting to test this in a citizen survey!).**

The most effective form of co-ordination of co-production will often involve neighbourhood action – both by citizens and by professional officers of public agencies. And neighbourhood actions to co-ordinate how the 4 Co’s are happening locally through individual actions naturally lead to the possibility of neighbourhood discussions on what are the local priorities for the spending of public money – in other words, some form of participatory budgeting or, at the very least, discussions about how some local public services can be designed better to meet local needs and make use of what local people can do to help. And the neighbourhood champions who get most involved in local actions to co-ordinate co-production are likely to develop as important community leaders, even if only informally.

All of this seems a long way away from the most common symbols of democratic action – national Parliaments and local government assemblies. However, local collective action, whether formal or informal, support and reinforce democracy as a participative vehicle for mobilising and expressing the will of local people. Co-production will not always lead to such local participative democracy – but it may grow the number of citizens interested in taking part in it.

Of course, not all elected politicians will welcome co-production in their patches. For some, this will be because they fear it will undermine universal public services, to which they are passionately committed. For others, it may be because they fear that those whose welfare is most improved through co-production will be the more active, articulate and self-confident citizens, so that the vulnerable and disadvantaged will be even worse off. Both these fears have to be tackled to bringing elected politicians on board, otherwise co-production will not become an ally of local democratic action.

However, there is likely to be another motive behind the reluctance of many politicians to support co-production – fear that their own powers to make decisions will be constrained by ‘bringing the people in’. They may be partly reassured to find that many citizens who co-produce then develop a greater interest in political issues. Some citizens may even lend support to local political representatives in the struggle to improve the local area. However, this will not apply to all citizens and the fear is likely to be justified that local people will want to make more decisions for themselves and to leave less room for their politicians to decide things on their behalf.

So co-production poses both a lifeline and a challenge to democracy. The lifeline would involve finding ways of engaging neighbourhood champions in the democratic decision making process in such a way as to reinvigorate the belief of ordinary citizens that democratic action is the proper way to run major parts of our society. The challenge will be to convince Parliaments and local government assemblies that they are only one part – not necessarily the major part – of how democracy changes people’s lives for the better.



## 4. Literature and Resources

For the full version of the Swedish case studies and other international co-production case studies visit the *Governance International* Good Practice Hub:  
<http://www.govint.org/good-practice/case-studies/>

For further co-production resources, visit <http://www.govint.org/good-practice/publications/co-production/>

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