

Converging Paths? Co-creation practices in public services in Poland and Ukraine

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Abstract. This study investigates how co-creation is being institutionalized in public service delivery in Poland and Ukraine, focusing on six domains of citizen involvement: legislative frameworks, digital platforms, public consultations, civic monitoring, local initiatives, and civic education. These neighboring countries, connected through shared regional initiatives but shaped by differing political, administrative, and civic trajectories, offer a compelling basis for comparative analysis. While both have made strides in adopting participatory practices, Poland tends to follow a more structured, policy-aligned approach, whereas Ukraine exhibits dynamic, bottom-up developments driven by ongoing decentralization reforms. Our findings indicate that co-creation is becoming more systematically integrated into governance structures, although institutionalization remains uneven across domains and administrative levels. Key challenges include institutional fragmentation, limited translation of public input into policy outcomes, and underdeveloped interdisciplinary competencies, particularly in light of digital transformation and the growing role of AI. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for strengthening co-creation ecosystems in both countries.

Keywords. Public sector, co-creation, public services, institutionalization.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, co-creation has emerged as a key principle in the modernization of public service delivery, aligned with broader trends in digital transformation and democratic governance (Edelmann & Mureddu, 2023). Both Poland and Ukraine have made notable advances in digital public services and citizen engagement, supported by national strategies and cross-border initiatives such as Interreg NEXT Poland–Ukraine (*Interreg NEXT Poland – Ukraine 2021-2027*, 2023). While existing literature highlights the benefits of co-creation (Mureddu & Osimo, 2020; Rodriguez Müller et al., 2021) there is limited comparative research on how different countries implement and embed participatory practices across governance domains. Poland and Ukraine offer a particularly relevant case for such an analysis: Poland as an EU member state aligning with European standards of participatory governance, and Ukraine as a country navigating decentralization, digital reform, and institutional change under complex political conditions. This study *aims* to compare the institutionalization of co-creation in Poland and Ukraine, focusing on six key domains of citizen involvement: legislative frameworks, digital platforms, public consultations, civic monitoring, local initiatives, and civic education. We apply a structured qualitative comparison *approach* based on official documents, public data, and civic programs to map and analyze institutional practices across both countries. This study *contributes* to the growing body of research on participatory public governance by providing a structured comparison of how co-creation is operationalized in Poland and Ukraine. It identifies both common patterns and country-specific differences across six domains of citizen involvement, offering insights into the extent and nature of institutionalization. It also offers practical recommendations for strengthening co-creation ecosystems and supporting more inclusive and sustainable public service delivery.

2. Comparative context

This section provides a comparative overview of the evolving digital public service landscape and mechanisms of citizen involvement in co-creation in Poland and Ukraine. It maps key policy frameworks, platforms, and practices across six domains, highlighting similarities, differences, and context-specific developments.

2.1 Digital transformation landscape

Poland and Ukraine have a strong history of digital cooperation, recently strengthened by the 2024 Memorandum of Cooperation in the Digital Sector, focusing on AI, cybersecurity, data protection, and internet infrastructure (Ministry of Digitalization, 2023). The Interreg NEXT Poland–Ukraine 2021–2027 program, co-funded by the EU, further supports joint innovation, startups, and digital solutions (*Interreg NEXT Poland – Ukraine 2021-2027*, 2023). Progress in digital transformation and co-created public services is reflected in the E-Government Development Index (EGDI) and E-Participation Index. In 2024, Ukraine scored 0.88 in EGDI and 1.0 in e-participation; Poland scored 0.86 and 0.75, respectively (*United Nations E-Government Knowledgebase*, 2023). While both countries have similar human capital levels (0.82 Ukraine, 0.83 Poland), Poland leads in telecommunications infrastructure (0.96 vs. 0.84), whereas Ukraine surpasses Poland in online service availability (0.98 vs. 0.80) (Ciepielewska-Kowalik, 2024a).

2.2 Co-creation of public services

Co-creation is increasingly recognized as a strategy to enhance the quality and efficiency of public services, while also fostering trust in government and strengthening democratic governance. In *Poland*, the concept of co-creation has gained momentum, particularly in the context of Europeanization and the shift toward knowledge-based governance (Szarek-Iwaniuk & Senetra, 2020; Ciepielewska-Kowalik, 2024b). In *Ukraine*, co-creation has evolved alongside decentralization reforms, with local authorities and citizens increasingly collaborating to address community needs (Khutkyy & Matveieva, 2024; Keudel & Huss, 2024). Table 1 presents a comparative overview of *citizen involvement mechanisms for public service co-creation* across six key domains in Poland and Ukraine: (1) *Legislative frameworks* – legal instruments and policies that guarantee citizens' rights to access information, participate in governance, and influence decision-making; (2) *Digital platforms* – government-run portals, apps, and tools that facilitate access to services and civic participation; (3) *Public consultations* – formal processes (hearings, online consultations, forums) through which citizens provide input on policies, projects, and laws; (4) *Civic monitoring* – citizen-led oversight of service quality and institutional performance via feedback tools, open data, and evaluation platforms; (5) *Local initiatives* – community-driven projects like participatory budgeting and local improvement plans supported by local authorities; (6) *Civic education* – programs that promote democratic awareness, participatory skills, and active citizenship..

Tab. 1 - Comparative overview of citizen involvement mechanisms for public service co-creation across six domains in Poland and Ukraine.

Domains	Mechanisms in Poland	Mechanisms in Ukraine
Legislative Frameworks	The Law “On Access to Public Information” (2001) (Poland, 2001) guarantees citizens the right to access information held by public institutions, as well as private entities performing public functions. PROO program (Poland, 2018) promotes the development of civil society, civic education, and volunteerism, aiming to enhance citizen participation in decision-making The Law on Participation in Local Self-Government (Poland, 1990) outlines principles of local governance and enables citizen involvement in local institutions.	The Law of Ukraine “On Citizens’ Appeals” (1996) (Ukraine, 1996) allows citizens to submit suggestions, complaints, and proposals to public authorities. The Law of Ukraine “On Access to Public Information” (Ukraine, 2011), ensures citizens can access reliable information about government activities. The concept of e-government development in Ukraine (<i>Concept of the Development of E-Governance in Ukraine</i> , 2017) promotes transparency and digital access to public services in line with European standards.
Digital platforms	The mObywatel (<i>Portal MObywatel</i> , 2023) streamlines citizen-government interactions, with ~600,000 daily visits by early 2025. The mObywatel (<i>Mobile Application MObywatel</i> , 2023) provides digital access to personal documents and a wide range of public services. Gov.pl portal (<i>Polish Public Services Portal Gov.Pl</i> , 2023) offers centralized access to government services, including the dedicated platform for entrepreneurs (biznes.gov.pl) (<i>Portal for Entrepreneurs</i> , 2023).	The Diya portal (Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, 2023a) offers access to 130+ online public services, enhancing transparency and interaction, with 21 million users by January 2025. The Diya mobile app (Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine, 2023b) allows mobile access to services and digital document storage, with over 10 million downloads by January 2025. The platforms “Public Budget” (DEM) (<i>Platform</i>

Public consultations	Local governments are required to engage citizens in decision-making through consultations, hearings, and working groups (<i>Order on the Principles of Conducting Public Consultations of Documents Developed in the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy</i> , 2014), (<i>Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy</i> , 2023)	“Public Budget” (<i>DEM</i>), 2023), State Geocadastre (<i>State Geocadastre</i> , 2023), Public Services Portal iGov (<i>Public Services Portal iGov</i> , 2023) etc., support service access and civic engagement Public hearings, discussions, and consultations incorporate citizens’ views into local decision-making (Ukraine, 1997a), (<i>Public Hearings of the Kyiv City Council</i> , 2023).
Civic monitoring	Citizens contribute to service transparency and efficiency by monitoring administrative services via tools like the Public Services Monitoring System (<i>Public Services Monitoring System</i> , 2023) and E-Governance platforms Public Services Monitoring System (<i>E-Governance Platform</i> , 2023).	Civic monitoring, regulated by national law (Ukraine, 1997b), allows citizens to assess service quality and oversee local government performance.
Local initiatives	Mechanisms such as participatory budgeting enable citizens to propose and implement local projects in areas like infrastructure and public space (<i>What Is a Local Initiative?</i> , 2023).	Support mechanisms, including participatory budgeting, empower citizens to propose and implement local projects, with outcomes shared via local platforms and the (<i>Association of Ukrainian Cities</i> , 2023).
Civic education	The (<i>The ABCs of Civic Participation</i> , 2023) promotes engagement from basic awareness to active involvement, while programs like (<i>A Conscious Citizen Program</i> , 2023) support civic education and public influence.	Adult education programs—supported by international and local initiatives—equip citizens with practical knowledge on governance, budgeting, and participation tools, fostering civic capacity and democratic engagement (<i>Decentralization. International Support</i> , 2023).

Our comparative analysis reveals that both Poland and Ukraine demonstrate growing commitments to co-creation as a strategy to enhance public service quality and strengthen democratic governance. Ukraine’s Diya platform exemplifies large-scale digital integration, enabling streamlined access to over 130 services, while Poland’s mObywatel and Gov.pl platforms reflect steady progress toward e-participation. Legal frameworks in both contexts promote transparency and participation, yet Poland shows more structured alignment with EU-supported civic programs. Public consultations and participatory budgeting processes are increasingly present in both countries, but their impact on actual decision-making warrants further scrutiny. Mechanisms for civic monitoring and support for local initiatives are present but unevenly developed, particularly at the local level. However, its institutionalization ranges from formalized resources to project-based initiatives. Together, these observations reflect both *common patterns* and *country-specific differences* across all six domains. These trends suggest that participatory approaches are *becoming more systematically integrated if unevenly institutionalized*, across governance structures, varying not only between countries but also across thematic domains and levels of implementation.

3. Discussion and conclusions

This study examines the institutionalization of co-creation in Poland and Ukraine by comparing mechanisms of citizen involvement in public service design and delivery. Drawing from a structured comparison across six key domains – legislative frameworks, digital platforms, public consultations, civic monitoring, local initiatives, and civic education – we highlight both convergences and contextual differences in the two countries’ approaches. To advance the institutionalization of co-creation in Poland and Ukraine, several *recommendations* can be derived from the comparative analysis of existing mechanisms and practices identified in our study: *First*, participation must translate into real impact – public consultations and legislative *feedback tools* should more systematically inform policy and service improvements. *Second*, civic education should embed co-creation literacy not only in community initiatives but also in *academic and professional training*. *Third*, *inclusive* access to digital co-creation tools requires improved user experience and accessibility on platforms. This involves applying *user-centered design* principles and addressing the needs of underrepresented groups through simplified services and integrated digital skills training. *Fourth*, cross-border learning communities should be fostered to support knowledge exchange. Joint academic modules, civic hackathons, and institutional partnerships can leverage existing tools for comparative learning and innovation. *Finally*, our analysis also underscores the need to build *educational ecosystems* that support co-creation competencies, especially as public services become more digitized and AI-driven (Rizun et al., 2025). Beyond administrative literacy, co-creation now requires interdisciplinary capabilities in areas such as ethics, data governance, and responsible AI.

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