Between Expertise and Authenticity – Co-creation in Finnish Housing First Initiatives from the Perspective of Experts-by-experience[1]

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> **Abstract**_Homelessness, as other severe societal problems, is increasingly thought to be resolved through means of tighter collaboration between different actors. As a case in point, the co-creation of homelessness services has been one of the core features of the Finnish Housing First paradigm. This article provides a grassroots' illustration of how the participants experience co-creation in practice. It focuses on a particular Finnish application of co-creation, inviting former beneficiaries as 'experts-by-experience' into social welfare organisations. The article develops Dodge's (2010) work on the tensions the participatory ethos poses for civil society organisations by identifying similar contradictions in the participants' experiences. It argues that the co-creation discourse places a double demand on participating service users, requiring them to strike a difficult balance between policy-relevant expertise and authenticity. The experts-by-experience need to remain close enough to real-life experiences to appear reliable in the eyes of the service users, and to be able to contribute experience-based input. At the same time, they need to distance themselves from those experiences in order to be recognised as experts delivering policy-relevant knowledge. Subsequently, under a co-creation paradigm, the tensions previously managed by civil society organisations are increasingly transformed into contrasting demands for individual participants.

> **Keywords**_ Co-creation, participatory governance, service user involvement, homelessness, expertise-by-experience, Housing First

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Introduction

While the merits and future potential of the Finnish Housing First paradigm have been widely discussed (Benjaminsen and Knutagård, 2016; Pleace *et al.*, 2016), one core aspect of this new paradigm has received relatively little academic attention. In addition to the Housing First (HF) initiatives emphasising housing as a basic human right, they are also assembled following what social scientists have called a participatory governance paradigm (see McLaverty, 2011; Kuokkanen, 2016). Key practices in this co-operative way of governing are collaborative networks and diverse means of co-production of public services (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Pestoff, 2012).

Within HF initiatives, this has meant both the setting up of collaborative networks among various stakeholders to develop housing services, as well as a specific attitude towards clients as partners in designing and delivering these services (Doberstein and Nichols, 2016; Macnaughton *et al.*, 2017). In Finland, the inclusion of former and current clients into service co-design has taken place through the concept of expertise-by-experience (Meriluoto, forthcoming 2018; Alanko and Hellman, 2017). Selected homeless people have been invited to act as experts and as representatives of people with homelessness experiences, with hopes that their involvement will make the developed services more "knowledge-based", more efficient and more inclusive (Y-Foundation, 2017). The experts-by-experience can either be employed in relevant public or third sector organisations, or act on a voluntary basis in service consultation, evaluation and policy-making.

The aim of this article is to deepen our understanding of this hitherto less explored aspect of HF initiatives. It investigates how the co-creation discourse is employed to define the desired role for the participating service users, and how the participants perceive of this role. The article develops Dodge's (2010) findings on two key tensions the participatory ethos has created for the civil society organisations (CSOs) into analytical categories used to illustrate the contradictions experienced by the experts-by-experience. By investigating the co-creation talk in Finnish Housing First policy documents, and contrasting them to interview data of experts-by-experience and civil society practitioners, the article identifies how the tensions between collaboration and remaining "bottom up", and credibility and authenticity take shape under the co-creation paradigm, and how the participants experience these tensions.

This article's specific focus is on uses of co-creation as a discursive resource. I perceive of the co-creation talk as a new way of constructing the meaning of civic participation, and consequently posing a challenge for the CSOs and individual service users to reconfigure the way they legitimize their position as members of the governance networks. As such, the article contributes to the emerging field of critical analysis of HF policy (see Raitakari and Juhila, 2015). However, I wish to

underline that the article's argument should not be read as an inevitable conse-quence of co-creation, but a potential outcome that may alert current practitioners to pay particular attention to these aspects of the new collaborative paradigm. These critical notions are pressingly relevant for an increasing number of homeless-ness practitioners and policy-makers, as the practice of expertise-by-experience is fast being implemented across Europe (see Y-Foundation, 2017, p.79).

The article proceeds as follows: I start with discussing the ethos of co-creation with a specific focus on how co-creation is understood and leaned upon in battling homelessness. After positioning the projects of expertise-by-experience among these participatory governance initiatives, I present my methods, data and its context. Next, I proceed with analysing how the co-creation talk is employed to shape the role of the participating service users in Finnish HF initiatives, and how they experience the spaces for action thus constructed. I end with a discussion of the possible implications the identified tensions created by participatory practices might have both within homelessness policy and beyond.

Promises and Tensions of Co-Creation

During the past thirty years, different forms of citizen-engagement, customer involvement and collaboration have gained in popularity at an accelerating pace (e.g. Polletta, 2016). Increased participation and tighter collaboration between "relevant stakeholders" is presented as a solution to a myriad of problems – home-lessness included (e.g. Doberstein and Nichols, 2016, p.7; Watts and Fitzpatrick, 2017). Through tighter and more diverse collaboration, a variety of ends is sought after: more efficient and customer-oriented services, activated and "empowered" clients, as well as more democratic legitimacy for the governance process and the decisions made (Needham, 2008; Martin, 2009; Fledderus *et al.*, 2014).

This ethos of collaborative networks and partnerships has also been embraced in public service production (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Brandsen *et al.*, 2018). In practice, this has meant the introduction of new practices and vocabulary, such as service user involvement, co-production and co-creation (Barnes and Cotterell, 2012; Alanko and Hellman, 2017; Brandsen and Honigh, 2018). As Brandsen and colleagues (2018, p.3) explain, the new, often fuzzy and overlapping concepts all refer to some form of "joint effort of citizens and public sector professionals in the initiation, planning, design and implementation of public services".

Brandsen and Honigh (2018, p.13) distinguish between co-production and co-crea-tion by positioning co-production at the implementation phase of the service production cycle, while co-creation, in their definition, concerns services at a strategic level. Based on their definition, I use the term co-creation to refer to the

Finnish concept "yhteiskehittäminen", which translates directly to "co-develop-ment", as the practices investigated in this article all take place at the strategic and planning stages, rather than during service delivery.

Through these new concepts, new roles and relationships are being crafted in governing public services. The connections between different actors in co-creation networks are represented as being equal and inclusive, in contrast to the hierar-chical organization and power discrepancies of the "old" government paradigm (Sterling, 2005; Martin, 2011, p.913). Furthermore, in a co-creation setting, CSOs are considered key partners in public service delivery (Martin, 2012; Pestoff, 2012). Their active involvement is seen as a means to make public governance more participative and inclusive, as the CSOs are hoped to bridge the gap between the administration and the citizenry (Martin, 2011; Palumbo, 2015, pp.118–122). The CSOs – and more precisely, the service users channelled through them to decision-making processes – are thought to voice the concerns and opinions of "the people", and represent their hands-on type of knowledge in decision-making (Sterling, 2005, pp.146–153; Barnes and Cotterell, 2012).

The homelessness policy and service delivery is no exception from this trend. Lately, a strong emphasis has been put on the development of inclusive and collaborative governance networks both at the policy formulation as well as the service delivery phases of the policy process (see Doberstein and Nichols, 2016). In HF initiatives, a particularly strong focus has been placed on the collaboration of not only public, private and third sector organisations in service delivery, but also on collaboration with researchers and "experts-by-experience" to enhance the "evidence-base" of the policy endorsed (Allen, 2016; Benjaminsen and Knutagård, 2016). The Finnish HF policy has furthermore emphasised the "activation" of services users (Tainio and Fredriksson, 2009, p.192).

In earlier literature, such practices of co-creation are most often investigated rather optimistically (Steen *et al.*, 2018, p.284). However, some previous studies have indicated how the novel rhetoric of partnerships and networks may come at a cost to civil society actors. The new network governance paradigm implies as Swyngedouw (2005, p.1994) puts it "a common purpose, joint action, a framework of shared values", hence placing the civil society "in co-operation" with public administration (also Barnes, 2008; Lehoux *et al.*, 2012). In more detail, previous studies have suggested that current user involvement schemes may enable the co-optation of user-groups' experience-based knowledge (Barnes and Cotterell, 2012; Martin, 2012), and provide them with an increasingly narrow field of action, limiting their possibilities to voice criticism and act as advocates for their members (Beresford, 2002, p.96; Barnes *et al.*, 2007; Martin, 2009).

Some earlier literature on"expertisation" even suggests that by identifying problems in technical terms and emphasising knowledge over values and opinions, collaborative governance projects can re-frame discussions from political debates into administrative issues for which an objectively best solution is to be found as long as enough accurate and relevant knowledge is gathered (e.g. Li, 2007, p.7; Meriluoto, forthcoming 2018). Some social scientists have argued that this manner of talking is emblematic of the so called post-political paradigm, where value differences and power discrepancies are guised under the rhetoric of joint problem-solving towards mutual and self-evident goals (e.g. Swyngedouw, 1994; Swyngedouw, 2005).

Jennifer Dodge (2010) has investigated the potential effects of the participatory paradigm from the CSOs' perspective. She has identified two key tensions that the CSOs partaking in participatory arrangements need to manage. These are: 1) balancing collaboration with governance elites with the demand of staying "bottom up", and 2) developing relevant and potentially amenable policy-ideas to decision-makers while maintaining the autonomy to be critical (Dodge, 2010, p.385). In this article, I make use of Dodge's findings as analytical categories to illustrate how the participating service users' role is positioned and negotiated through the rhetoric of co-creation.

Methodology: Interpretive Governmental Analysis

My point of departure in this article is a governmental approach (esp. Foucault, 2004; see also Lövbrand and Stripple, 2015). It allows conceptualising participatory forms of governance as a deliberately constructed and constantly evolving system of logic and knowledge, crafted based on, and used to advance, specific political goals and ambitions (Bevir, 2011a). It does not regard co-creation and other forms of participatory governance as an empirical "reality", but instead the result of deliberate political choices to value certain ways of knowing and being above others (Bevir, 2011a ibid.; Palumbo, 2015, p.92). This interpretive approach to governance emphasises the agency, situated meaning-makings and interpretations involved in building, enacting and responding to contemporary forms of governance, such as co-creation (Bevir, 2011a; also Li, 2007).

One way to investigate participatory forms of governance interpretively is to perceive of them as narratives and specific ways of talking (Bevir, 2011b; Palumbo, 2015, p.xviii). As a governmental device, the power of the co-creation –discourse lies in its ability to present itself as a naturally evolved way of thinking and doing. As it attempts and succeeds in justifying certain ways of reasoning as logical, or "true" (Bröckling *et al.*, 2011, p.11), it also succeeds in masking everyday, value-

based political decisions as necessary or inevitable (Hay, 2007, p.80). This is why I posit that it is vital to open up the co-creation discourse and investigate the forms of participation it enables prioritising and presenting as preferable.

Subsequently, while I remain aware of the varying attempts to "fix" the meaning of co-creation (e.g. Brandsen and Honigh, 2018) my intention here is not to contribute to the discussion on how co-creation should be defined based on empirical evidence. Instead, I focus on interpreting its uses in my data to ask how the rhetoric of co-creation is deliberately being used to present a certain position and way of being as preferable for the experts-by-experience. After having inductively identified similar tensions from my data as described by Dodge (2010), I developed her findings into descriptive categories to illustrate how the co-creation discourse sets demands for the ways of participating of the experts-by-experience, and how the experts-by-experience perceive of and respond to these demands. What and how should the experts-by-experience aim at doing? What, in turn, is deemed "not suitable"? And most significantly, how are these demands made to appear as feasible and reasonable?

Context and Data

In Finland, civil society organizations have traditionally worked in tight co-operation with the state, and the relatively large and active civil society has had an important role in the cohesion and efficient function of the society (Siisiäinen and Blom, 2009). The CSOs working in the homelessness field follow this trend by actively collaborating with state and municipal authorities in policy and service design. In fact, deepening and institutionalising patterns of collaboration has been one of the key objectives of Finnish homelessness CSOs in recent years (see Timonen, 2016, p.27).

As it stands, Finnish CSOs face a dual pressure from the on-going social and healthcare reform that encourages privatisation of public services, and the participatory turn in governance norms emphasising the experiential knowledge and inclusion of the service users (see Salminen and Wilhelmsson, 2013). In this context, the grassroots-level experiences and contacts of the CSOs is one of their strongest assets (Peltosalmi *et al.*, 2016, pp.106–107).

As a means to bring forward service users' experiential knowledge and to engage the organisations' beneficiaries, Finnish mental health organisations introduced the term expert-by-experience into the Finnish context in the early 2000s. Drawing on examples from the UK and Denmark, it was then disseminated across the health and social welfare sector, and to both public sector organisations and CSOs, especially in the 2010s (Rissanen, 2015, p.201). Crucially, all of the projects that adopted the term were initiated by the CSOs and public administration as a policy response

to the above-formulated demands for more participatory approaches. The Finnish projects then diverge from the bottom-up initiatives of survivor movements, found for example in the UK (Noorani, 2013). At the moment, the involvement of experts-by-experience in service design and evaluation has become a standard for inclusive social welfare and healthcare practices in Finland, and "the establishment of an operating model for expertise by experience and client involvement" is one of the government's key projects for the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health[2]. In policy design, their involvement is not yet as common, but it is quickly expanding.

In homelessness policies, the concept gained strong momentum as part of the National Strategies of Reducing Long-term Homelessness (PAAVO I, 2008–2011 and PAAVO II, 2012–2015). Of particular significance was a collaborative project entitled "A Name on the Door" (Nimi Ovessa, 2010–2012), which was one of the first driving forces in the implementation of the Finnish Housing First strategy. The project's key method of co-creation was "systematic network collaboration between municipalities and project partners, in which the expertise-by-experience of the service users has a significant role"[3]. Subsequently, the principles of participatory governance and service co-creation became entangled with the notion of expertise-by-experience; a practice that is tasked with providing the service users' view to service development. The current AUNE- Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016–2019 continues to emphasise the role of experts-by-experience in service co-design (Ministry of the Environment 2016, p.10).

In earlier literature, as well as in national surveys, the new national homelessness strategy in Finland has been identified a success (Benjaminsen and Knutagård, 2016). Finland started to implement Housing First –principles as part of the 2008 national strategy, leading to a profound change in the service structure, working culture and the field's operating principles. The new principles resulted in the conversion of shelters into congregate housing (Y-Foundation, 2017, p.30–32), but also to a new, collaborative working culture both within housing units as well as at a national level of policy-design.

Statistics indicate that homelessness in Finland has continued to decrease for five consecutive years (Helskyaho *et al.*, 2018). The strategy has cut public expenditure in social welfare and healthcare services, and most importantly, diminished individual suffering (Sillanpää, 2013). The purpose of the following analysis is by no means to devalue these achievements, but widen the analytical scope to highlight other possible effects of the practices of governing through which the national strategy has been implemented.

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2   stm.fi/en/services-responsive-to-client-needs/project-description

3   http://asuntoensin.fi/ohjelma/historia/nimi-ovessa-hanke/ Translation by the author.

This article focuses on the time period of the two PAAVO-strategies, and investigates the relevant policy documents[4] produced during this period from the point of view of co-creation. It connects this data with themed interviews with four experts-by-experience and two professionals in a Finnish civil society organisation operating in the homelessness field[5]. The interview data was produced as part of the author's PhD research investigating expertise-by-experience in Finnish social welfare organisations, where in total 23 experts-by-experience, and 14 practitioners were interviewed (Meriluoto, forthcoming 2018). From this data, all interviews with a connection to homelessness or homelessness work were chosen to be analysed in this article.

The interviewed experts-by-experience had all experienced homelessness in one form or another (from rough sleeping to couch surfing) in their past. They were paid employees in the organisation, and while they recognised how they were often called experts-by-experience, they preferred to be referred to as project employees so as to not build unnecessary distinctions between professionals with formal training and professionals with experiential background. Their tasks varied from consulting in service design, such as the planning of a new housing unit, to providing peer support, and from giving lectures to social welfare practitioners to acting as

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[4]   The documents analysed are:

- Decision of the Finnish Government 9.6.2016: Action Plan for Preventing Homelessness in Finland 2016–2019 (Helsinki: Ministry of the Environment).

- Timonen, S. 2016. PAAVO Verkostokehittäjät. Projektin loppuraportti. [PAAVO Network Developers. Final Project Report]. (Helsinki: Y-Foundation, Helsinki Deaconess Institute, Blue Ribbon Finland, No Fixed Abode. Street Mission of the Rauma region).

- Karppinen, J. & Fredriksson, P. 2016. Loppuraportti. Pitkäaikaisasunnottomuuden vähentämisohjelma (Paavo 2) 2012 – 2015. [Final Report. Programme for Reducing Long-term Homelessness (Paavo 2)]. (Helsinki: Ministry of the Environment).

- Karppinen, J. 2014. Väliraportti 2012–2013. Pitkäaikaisasunnottomuuden vähentämisohjelma (Paavo 2) 2012 – 2015. [Interim Report. Programme for Reducing Long-term Homelessness (Paavo 2)]. (Helsinki: Ministry of the Environment).

- Kaakinen, J. 2012. Pitkäaikaisasunnottomuuden vähentämisohjelma 2008 – 2011. Loppuraportti. [Program for Reducing Long-Term Homelessness 2008–2011. Final Report]. (Ympäristöhallinto [Environment Administration]).

- Nimi Ovessa. Palveluinnovaatiot pitkäaikaisasunnottomuuden vähentämisessä. Hankesuunnitelma 21.5.2010 [A Name on the Door. Service Innovations in Reducing Long-term Homelessness. Project Plan 21.5.2010].

- Hallituksen asuntopoliittiset ohjelmat: Pitkäaikaisasunnottomuuden vähentämisohjelma. [The Government's Housing Policy Programmes: Reducing Long-Term Homelessness]. Reports of the Ministry of the Environment 15/2008.

[5]   Detailed information about the CSO and the interviewees has been omitted in order to ensure the anonymity of the informants.

members in Ministerial steering committees of the national homelessness strategy. The practitioners interviewed worked in a project tasked with developing expertise-by-experience in the respective organisation.

The interviews were conducted in Finnish, and were later transcribed and relevant extracts translated into English by the researcher. The limited interview-data accentuates that the present article does not aim at providing a comprehensive description of co-creation in HF initiatives, but instead point to some of the potential consequences that have previously received little attention. Due to the extremely limited number of homelessness practitioners interviewed, I do not use direct excerpts from their interviews so as to not risk their anonymity.

Analysis – What Can Be Done with Co-creation Talk?

In the following analysis, I will investigate what characterises the role and position envisaged for the experts-by-experience through the co-creation discourse. By using Dodge's (2010) analysis as my grid, I will identify how the co-creation talk places them in the axis between being collaborative and "policy-relevant" while remaining "bottom up" and critical. I will start by describing how co-creation was described in the policy documents. Then, I will put these descriptions for discussion alongside my interview data, with a particular attention to how the dominant co-creation paradigm affects the participants' capabilities of successfully balancing with the above contrasting demands.

The core of co-creation: Collaboration and equal partnership

The policy documents produced for and around the Finnish HF policy are immersed with rhetoric of co-creation, collaboration and partnership. The very first Government Decision on the strategy is described as "*being based on partnership by nature*" (Name on the Door, 2010, p.4). The following quote from the Verkostokehittäjät [Network developers] project entails all of the key characteristics of participatory network governance identified in earlier literature: wide inclusion of actors, collaborative networks as a form of organising service design and delivery, and co-operation towards "mutual goals":

> It was crucial that all those willing would be included, that participation would bring different actors together and would clarify the programme's objectives as mutual goals for the development work. [---] One of the [project's] key objectives was to develop a collaborative network for the development of homelessness services. (Timonen, 2016, p.2)

The descriptions of co-creation highlight the equality and joint purpose of the project actors. Practitioners, researchers, experts-by-experience and the international partners join forces as "equal partners" (also Name on the Door, 2010, p.9) towards mutual objectives. This equal partnership is described as "a new manner of working" (Karppinen, 2014, p.10), and the creation of "a tradition of co-creation in homelessness work" (Karppinen and Fredriksson, 2016, p.3) is highlighted as one of the prime achievements of HF initiatives. The Final report of the Network Developers' project acclaims: "One of the key learning outcomes of the project is how the inclusion of clients and experts-by-experience is crucial and absolutely necessary" (Timonen, 2016, p.29).

On a concrete level, the inclusion of experts-by-experience is stated to function on two levels. First, "the voice of the service users in service design becomes all the more crucial during our times of economic scarcity" (Name on the Door, 2010, p.36). The services developed through co-creation are hoped to be more efficient and more customer oriented. Because service user involvement and the ensuing co-creation "bring forth voices that have previously been entirely out of reach" (Karppinen, 2014, p.10), the co-designed services are "more housing-friendly and meet the residents' needs better" (Karppinen and Fredriksson, 2016, p.13). These concrete and practical objectives position the experts-by-experience as collaborators in very pragmatic terms: they hold key information that is useful when designing better-functioning services.

Another strand of objectives moves on a more abstract level, and focuses on the inclusion of the experts-by-experience who take part in service co-creation. As the Name on the Door project plan describes, inclusion is a goal on two fronts: the aim is to bring the voice of the homeless into service design within the project, and to ensure that inclusion is employed as an overall principle throughout the HF policy (Name on the Door, 2010, p.36, also Kaakinen, 2012, p.13). Through service co-creation, the former and current service users can experience feelings of inclusion, with hopes that these experiences empower them to take part in society more widely (Name on the Door, 2010, p.36). Thanks to this inclusive approach, the experts-by-experience are reported to have "become more active also in their own life and state that they have been heard" (Karppinen, 2014, p.10). The position constructed through the inclusion-oriented talk accentuates the value of the presence of experts-by-experience in governance networks and the equality of their input in decision-making.

The environment of participation of the experts-by-experience is described as a process of mutual "learning and knowledge-sharing" (e.g. Timonen, 2016, p.4). The government's new Action Plan (2016) envisions:

> The goal of joint development is to ensure that all parties central to the measures are involved, create trust, competence and joint learning, and to build a whole, in which individual projects are not separate, but interact instead with each other and strengthen each other in solving problems. (Ministry of the Environment, 2016, pp.11–12)

The described objective of co-creation is to gather different actors' diverse forms of knowledge so as to come up with the best possible solutions for the wicked problem of homelessness. The knowledge of the experts-by-experience is presented as knowledge of a different quality, but of equal value when working towards finding collaborative solutions.

However, the principle of equality of all voices on the one hand, and the demand for concrete input for service development on the other presents a tension that is not easily reconcilable in the framework of "knowledge-sharing". By calling upon participants *as experts* to join in mutual knowledge production, it becomes rational to present knowledge as the legitimate form of input. In contrast to previous state-civil society –relationship, emphasising interest mediation, the co-creation talk constructs civil society agents and service users as experts of a new kind. This makes the definitions of knowledge and expertise powerful tools to delineate what form of participation is acceptable and "useful" (Martin, 2009; Meriluoto, 2018a).

Crucially, the co-creation paradigm does not seem to radically redefine knowledge and expertise, but instead evaluates them with very traditional technocratic standards, valuing representativeness, credibility and"policy-relevance". Subsequently, the participants' expert-position makes it possible to de-legitimise emotional and opinionated speech as they are thought to be the very antithesis of expertise and expert knowledge (Meriluoto, 2018b; also Barnes, 2009; Martin, 2009; Smith-Merry, 2012). Co-creation, then, requires learning most of all from the experts-by-experience, who need to be able to present their experiences in a form that is recognised as knowledge by other network members.

A strong preference for collaboration and traditional definitions of policy-relevant input make it difficult to consider the participants experiential knowledge equally alongside other forms of expertise. For example, the Paavo II Final Report states bluntly, how "*encountering people with homelessness experiences as equal partners continues to be difficult for many*" (Karppinen and Fredriksson, 2016, p.14). I argue that these difficulties are indicative of both the service users' and practitioners' struggle to find a balance between similar contradicting demands to those identified by Dodge (2010). While the outspoken objectives of expertise-by-experience present it as a means to "lift" the service users' authentic experiences into decision-making, the discourse emphasising expertise and knowledge steers the

projects towards evaluating these experiences with the same criteria used when evaluating the credibility and reliability of other forms of knowledge. I turn to these experiences next.

Credibility over authenticity? – The double demands of co-creation

The policy documents define the service users as collaborative partners. This role demanded the experts-by-experience to strike a balance between collaborating while voicing out demands "from the streets", as well as appearing credible and authentic at the same time.

In a democratically ideal balance between collaboration and remaining "bottom up", the service users would be able to assume an equal position with other network members, and include their points of view effectively and meaningfully to decision-making and service design. They would be able to initiate new projects and ways of working, and significantly influence existing projects' objectives. A balance between policy-relevance and authenticity, on the other hand, would require treating different forms of knowledge as equal contributions to decision-making. However, in my interviewees' experience, the co-creation discourse strongly prioritises collaboration over bottom up activities, and sets a new requirement of policy-relevance for the experiences brought forward by the service users.

The most pressing tension described by my interviewees appeared between producing "policy-relevant" input while maintaining the autonomy to be critical and to voice out authentic experiences "from the streets". This tension was recognised by all of my interviewees. They regularly described their role as being "an interpreter", "a bridge" or even "conciliator general". They explained how they operated "between two worlds": that of practitioners and policy-makers, and another one of people with similar experiences.

The contradicting demands of these two worlds created an inner tension for the experts-by-experience. They described how they had to be *experts* when talking to practitioners and decision-makers, and "just people with experiences" when talking to service users. This double role means that the experts-by-experience constantly need to juggle between being credible in the eyes of the experts while remaining authentic in the eyes of the service users. In an expert context, a credible expert masters their experiences and is able to present them in a policy-relevant manner. Among people with similar experiences, an expert-by-experience is required to cast all titles aside and manifest "sameness" in the eyes of the service users.

These two registers don't sit easily together, as the following interviewee illustrates:

> Sometimes public officials don't trust me to be competent enough to collaborate with them. Because they obviously have an education and a certain knowledge base and a long experience of their own profession. […] And on the other hand, the service users can see the expert-by-experience as being more on the service provider's side. They're still unsure whether he's"our guy". Whether he's there to genuinely advocate our stuff or whether he's already too trained and forgotten the genuine experiences.

The interviewee describes a double pull between the demand to perform as an expert among practitioners and policy-makers, and the ability to make a U-turn when working among people experiencing homelessness. The very factors that increase an expert's-by-experience credibility in the eyes of other experts diminish it in the eyes of the service users. Furthermore, the title of an expert is an asset in the world of policy-makers, but becomes an instant liability, oozing pretentiousness "on the streets", as the following interviewee explains:

> Well, I mean, the title [of an expert-by-experience] is entirely useless. Imagine if I went to a housing unit to present myself as an expert-by-experience? They'd look at me and go: "Well be whoever you want for all I care!". […] An expert-by-experience, I mean, it has a certain "Who do you think you are?" -clang to it. Like, "do you think you're better than everyone else?" Somehow you're no longer on the same level. You lift yourself up somewhere. You make yourself too important.

The notion of an expert, well-intendedly used to highlight the equal value of expert-by-experience knowledge, is "entirely useless", if not detrimental in the context of the service users, as it hints to the possibility of a hierarchy between the experts-by-experience and people currently experiencing homelessness.

The role of experts-by-experience *as experts* appears to require a delicate positioning in the line between being a credible expert and remaining authentic and true to real-life experiences. On the one hand, this expert-role seems to necessitate a regular contact with one's own and others' "experiences from the streets" in order to stay fresh and authentic. However, these raw experiences alone are not easily considered as policy relevant knowledge, but they need to be justified and ideally presented by using a discourse that is familiar and recognisable for the other experts in the field. The raw experiences need to be distilled and wrapped into a form of neutral and actionable knowledge whose policy-relevance is evaluated with much of the same criteria as formal knowledge.

The experienced effects of the double demands of co-creation

The tension between the need to perform as an expert delivering policy-relevant knowledge, while staying true to the authentic experiences "of the field" was experienced as largely unsolvable by my interviewees. This unease became manifest in particular when discussing their role as an expert. Some experienced the concept as either narrowing their possibilities to bring forward diverse points of view, or causing an unwanted hierarchy between the service users and themselves. The following excerpt illustrates how the concept of expertise can be experienced as limiting the participants' ways of being:

TM: Why do you want to be an expert-by-experience?

EbE: I can't say that I do.

TM: Okay!

EbE: I mean"to want" is a pretty bad way to put it. […] I don't' want to be an expert-by-experience because I don't like the concept. […]

TM: Why?

EbE: I guess I don't like it because it's a concept. It immediately sets boundaries for people. There are a lot of people who cannot be fitted into any molds, nor should they be. […] The trainings for experts-by-experience, which I think are utter bullshit. […], they tend to erase all expertise anyone might have because they force it into a certain frame. […] And for me, experiential knowledge is something that entails a lot of emotions and other things you cannot possibly measure. So when the trainings start to organise that kind of knowledge, it erases so much information that could be extremely useful. So when everyone's experience is so hugely valuable, who has the right to determine when someone is an expert based on them? It's a really shitty concept in fact. I can't stand it.

The interviewee explains how a certain definition of knowledge can limit the form of acceptable input from experts-by-experience. A particular conception of knowledge forces experiences into a frame that is recognised as knowledge by other experts, but by so doing, loses the authenticity of the experiences.

The other half of the coin is how the concept of expertise "allows access" to certain environments. The following interviewee explains how the notion of expertise ensures a certain manner of participation and"policy-relevant input" that the other network members expect of the experts-by-experience:

I think it [the concept "expert-by-experience"] comes more from the professionals' part. They want a title or a sign that you're not just anyone when you walk into an office. The title signals that you come from somewhere and are,

somehow, an employee after all. So by the title you're also given the right to access these environments. I think it's a safety measure from the part of the professionals, so that not just anyone can walk into a ministry. You need the title to show that you have a legitimate reason to be there.

The interviewee suspects that naming experts-by-experience "experts" is "a safety measure from the professionals' part". It allows the projects to determine who can voice out opinions, and what kind of input is accepted. Succeeding to perform according to the criteria set for an expert opens up previously closed doors for the experts-by-experience. Failing to do so, i.e. remaining too attached to the authentic experiences, can reversely result in one's input being unrecognised and unacknowledged. An expert-by-experience reports an experience from a steering group:

> To give you an example: I was part of a steering group of [a HF project]. I was the only one with homelessness experiences. I was able to be very critical there, and in fact it's the only thing that's worth doing, as I'm very sceptical of the permanency of these initiatives' achievements. But yes, I've been allowed access to this steering group and I have been able to speak freely. But that's just it, they listen to me but nothing happens after that. They just go: "what an interesting person, he has this homelessness thing in the background".

In the above interviewee's experience, the authenticity of their experiences was either not recognised as knowledge, or was merely listened to as a curious extra flavour. They suspect that their experiences of exclusion resulted from the fact that in contrast to the promises of co-creation, not all participants' input was treated equally. It was primarily expertise, not authenticity that was welcome, as the following interviewee forcefully puts:

> EbE: The whole project didn't go right at all. They had agreed on everything already without us. If it had gone right, I should have been involved throughout the project stages.

> TM: Why couldn't you be?

> EbE: They don't allow outsiders to that kind of meeting.

> TM: Right. Did they tell that to your face?

> EbE: No no, they'd never. But everyone else has a title and I don't. There are engineers, planners and architects. What business does a former prisoner have there?

Despite the projects' objectives of equal forms of expertise joining forces towards mutual goals, the interviewed experts-by-experience regularly reported of hidden hierarchies or unspoken codes of conduct that led to their knowledge being side-lined. As the above interviewee illustratively describes, a former prisoner does not have any business among "actual experts". Too much authenticity and too little formal expertise had left these participants with feelings of exclusion.

Furthermore, the interviewees' disappointment points to the different expectations of the experts-by-experience and the project administration about the right balance between collaboration and "bottom up" activities. As the above quotes illustrate, many experts-by-experience expected their participation in co-creation practices to be "bottom up" by nature. They expected these collaborative spaces to serve as new fora in which ideas and initiatives "from the field" could be expressed. However, in these interviewees' experience, the realised co-creation strongly emphasised conformity to the predetermined plans. Co-creation in these projects appeared to rarely enable making initiatives from"the bottom up".

Discussion: How to Tame a Lion?

My purpose in this article was to examine what kind of demands are set for the participating service users through the co-creation discourse of HF initiatives, and how the participants experience these demands.

My findings show how the co-creation discourse provided the vocabulary to legitimately justify why the service users should have a seat at the table, and moreover, why their experiential knowledge should be listened to. Following its rationale, people with first hand experiences need to be incorporated to ensure the combination of multiple forms of knowledge for joint problem solving. However, as the article has shown, "useful" contribution is defined as precisely *knowledge*, making it possible to require specific, and strikingly traditional signs of expertise from the experts-by-experience in order for their input to be recognised as "policy-relevant" and credible.

This, I suggest, signifies a big challenge for the experts-by-experience to balance between demands of autonomy and authenticity on the one hand, and collaboration and policy relevance on the other. Indeed, in the interviewees' experience, this double demand seems close to unsolvable. The credibility of experts-by-experience *as experts* rests on a completely opposite skill-set than their credibility among the service users. At the same time, their expertise also necessitates regular contact with "the field" in order to be authentic and "fresh".

This double demand, previously posed for and managed by the CSOs, now presents itself as an inherent tension for the participating service users. The experts-by-experience need to find a way to master two different ways of talking and being, and strike an acceptable balance between raw experiences and actionable knowledge. As the results of this article show, the participants' expectations towards the right balance between the right to voice out concerns from the streets and the demands to conform to pre-existing paradigms of knowledge and predefined goals, differed to a large extent from the project administration's expectations. This resulted in feelings of not being recognised and acknowledged among the participants.

The demands of expertise over authenticity can be interpreted as being in partial contrast with the HF principles. While the fundamental principle of Housing First is to perceive of housing as everyone's basic human right, participation in co-creating HF services is not presented as the service users' right, but as beneficial practice. Instead of articulating participation as the service users' right to voice out their opinions and concerns, the co-creation discourse allows requiring them to prove their worth by producing useful knowledge, which, in turn, remains defined by the public administration. Consequently, the definitions of knowledge become powerful governmental devices, applicable to evaluate and select participants that are "the best fit" in particular governance networks.

As the stage of participation is not set as a debate between different interests and opinions, but as collaboration toward mutual goals, the service users are less welcome to participate as advocates but more as collaborators. Once the experts-by-experience become parts of the governance network in charge of service development, "bottom-up" activities and counter agendas, such as identifying a social service practice as harmful, become nigh impossible. The co-creation paradigm regards and reconfigures its participants as experts, and is strikingly ill equipped to deal with political agendas and opinionated input. Expertisation, as the literature on 'post-democracy' has already suggested (see e.g. Swyngedouw, 1994; Swyngedouw, 2005; Li, 2007, p.7), poses a great challenge for participants with political goals.

In addition to this de-politicising tendency, expertise-by-experience can also pose other concerns when evaluated from the point of view of their value for democracy. It is an individualising practice, forcefully advancing the participation of the few. As the experts-by-experience are assumed to represent the experiential knowledge of all homeless people (constructed as one category), the possibilities of participation of the many can be ignored. The new participatory mechanisms can lead us to

discard the old tools that can be used to gather the opinions of the many, as the inclusion of the homeless can be considered "taken care of" through the engagement of experts-by-experience.

Hence, the co-creation talk appears as a double edged sword for the participating service users: the discourse of experiential expertise is the one way of justification that is now recognised and that the service users can use to claim a role at the decision-making table. However, as it makes evaluating their participation possible based on the input and contribution they are able to produce, the co-creation talk may be used to suppress the participants' possibilities to voice out differing views and opinionated arguments, inducing them to trade advocacy for partnership. From a post-structuralist democratic point of view, this is highly problematic, as it may imply the administration's willingness to rather steer and limit the service users' participation rather than open up new possibilities to fundamentally question the premises of the conversation and propose radically new alternatives.

When moving further in HF initiatives that draw on co-creation and expertise-by-experience, the CSOs partaking in these initiatives would benefit from opening up the initiatives' rhetoric of partnership and knowledge-sharing, and demand their critical examination. A key question to be asked is: how could knowledge and expertise be re-thought in a radically different way in the initiatives' context in order to ensure genuine equal partnership between different actors, and to allow more authenticity as part of expertise?

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