

## Chapter 14

# Challenges to the Cocreation of the SDGs and the Way Forward

### Abstract

This concluding chapter summarizes the critical insights that changemakers ought to consider in their attempt to lead and manage cocreation processes and enhance their impact. The chapter also addresses three crucial challenges to the advent of a sustainable future: the need to rethink the assumptions of mainstream economics, the need to secure political stability in times of rapid societal change; and the demand for the deepening democracy. Finally, the chapter argues that local efforts to build a sustainable future will only succeed if key economic, political, and democratic challenges are effectively dealt with at the global and national levels.

*Keywords:* Sustainable futures; mainstream economics; doughnut economy; political stability; deepening democracy; local-global interaction

### Local Cocreation Is Central to Achieving the UN's SDGs

The SDGs are a true gift to the world. For the first time, the world has a unified agenda and a common language to talk about global problems that need to be addressed and the global ambitions that call for collective action. There might be both synergies and trade-offs between the SDGs, but they have set a clear direction for changemakers around the world.

Confronted with the daunting task of achieving the ambitious goals that UN member-states have set for the world, we might all feel a little alone, small, and intimidated vis-à-vis this grand enterprise. Indeed, we might doubt that we will ever be capable of creating the conditions for sustainable living on the planet earth. We argue that there is no reason to feel overwhelmed or doubt our capacity to achieve the SDGs since the power and wisdom of the many come to our rescue. All over the world, there are scores of local actors – politicians, public employees,

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private firms, NGOs, philanthropists, trade-unions, and dedicated citizens – ready to pursue one or more SDGs and ready to build alliances and collaborate with other competent, knowledgeable, and motivated actors and to involve those people who are affected by the problems in question and will enjoy the benefits accruing from new and better solutions. Small and seemingly insignificant initiatives may provide the spark that sets the world on fire and drives change. The shining example is the individual school-strike of a young Swedish girl that mobilized hundreds of thousands of young people, reinvigorated the climate movement, and forced the EU and many European governments to launch more ambitious climate plans. Less spectacular efforts can also do the trick and fortunately there are many changemakers who bring relevant and affected actors together and catalyze change.

In line with Goal 17, we propose that cocreation of SDG solutions in and through purpose-built networks and partnerships will allow us to tap into the resources of manifold actors from the public sector, the economic realm, and civil society and thereby invoke the collective wisdom and intelligence of the crowd. Cocreation brings together interdependent actors in problem-focused collaboration, in which differences are constructively managed in ways that stimulate mutual learning and innovation and build common ownership over joint solutions. The combination of resource mobilization, innovation, and democratic ownership is a potent cocktail that will help us reach the SDGs.

Reaping the fruits of local cocreation projects requires systematic reflection about each of the steps in the process, from translating the global SDGs to the national and local context, via the construction of platforms and arenas and securing funding, to evaluating achievements and ensuring accountability for new solutions. This book has sought to stimulate, inform, and guide the reflections of local changemakers in order to make the most of their efforts to cocreate innovative SDG solutions. The huge variation in context does not allow us to provide a fixed recipe for how to make local cocreation projects successful in achieving one or more SDGs. However, the chapters have each provided some insights that local changemakers ought to consider in order to lead and manage cocreation projects and enhance their impact.

The *first insight* is that cocreation can be a vehicle for translating generic global and national sustainability goals to the local context, thereby making these goals concrete and relevant to local actors. Furthermore, as a strategy of translation, cocreation helps to harness the energy, enthusiasm, and capacity of local actors and motivates their efforts to achieve sustainability.

The *second insight* is that the formation of platforms can help to attract participants and make it easier for them to collaborate. Platforms can also enhance synergies between the different resources, skills, and perspectives that actors bring to the table, amplify the impact of their joint investments, help to scale up successful solutions, and foster social learning that spurs innovation.

The *third insight* is that stakeholder analysis is a crucial tool for bringing together relevant and affect actors in local cocreation, but should be combined with efforts to clarify the interdependencies between the participants and to

empower weak, vulnerable, and inexperienced actors so that they can participate on an equal footing with other actors.

The *fourth insight* is that problem diagnoses that stress the urgent need for change combined with ambitious and visionary goals and the involvement of resourceful actors with fresh ideas can stimulate the development of the innovative solutions needed to achieve the SDGs. Leaders of cocreation must act as conveners, facilitators, and catalysts to bring out the innovative potential of cocreation.

The *fifth insight* is that cocreation processes can use experimentation and design thinking to further their innovation agenda. Cocreated prototypes of SDG solutions is particularly valuable for involving local actors in bottom-up dialogue, providing fast learning, and building support and diffusing innovation.

The *sixth insight* is that there are various ways of funding the cocreation of prototypes of new SDG solutions and that blended-financing offers an important way of covering the costs of realizing innovation. The legitimacy of funding and financing cocreation of SDG solutions depends on clear oversight and fiscal auditing.

The *seventh insight* is that blueprint strategies based on the assumption that one-size-fits-all are ill equipped to address local sustainability challenges, while more adaptive strategies that aim to respond dynamically to changing circumstances on the ground can help to overcome different implementation traps.

The *eighth insight* is that the emergent character of cocreation reduces the relevance of the classical forms of formative and summative evaluation and invites the usage of developmental evaluation that encourages the participants in cocreation processes to engage in real-time reflections about problems, solutions, and impacts.

The *ninth insight* is that efforts to ensure the accountability of cocreation networks and partnership is important for securing support from sponsors, relevant stakeholders, affected citizens, and the general public. With cocreation, formal accountability mechanisms are often limited and need to be supplemented with social and more informal accountability mechanisms.

The *final insight* is that leadership is crucial for cocreation success, but is often more horizontal, distributional, and relational than the top-down leadership practices found in hierarchical organizations, and it needs to balance directional leadership with bottom-up input. The formation of leadership teams depends on recruitment of leaders with strong local connections and specialized skills.

Well-designed local cocreation processes are central to achieving the SDGs, especially if the myriad of local projects support each other and create synergies and, when they work and produce desirable results, they are scaled up to regional and national levels. That being said, we should not forget that local action is conditioned by regional, national, and global structures, regulation, and governance. Local cocreation projects are dependent on political support, legal frameworks, funding and financing, and expert knowledge that are often provided, or not provided, from above. Hence, local cocreators must enmesh themselves in the tangled web of multilevel governance, draw on the political and economic resources, regulatory frameworks, and forms of governance that enable

change, and try to mitigate or overcome the barriers imposed by the regional, national, and global conditions for local action.

Having briefly recapitulated the main thrust of the argument advanced in this book, the remainder of this concluding chapter will address three crucial challenges to the creation of a sustainable future and seek to identify some prospective solutions.

## **Toward a New Economic Thinking That Recognizes the Natural Limits to Growth?**

This section considers the economic challenge to a sustainable future. The creation of global sustainability requires a new economic thinking that is not merely driven by the ambition of enhancing economic growth, but incorporates the natural limits to growth and the need to protect natural and human environments. Making progress toward the achievement of the SDGs will in many cases require and stimulate economic growth and thus contribute to the depletion of natural resources. Hence, to avoid increasing the pressure on the natural and planetary conditions for human existence in the effort to achieve the SDGs, we need a new economic theory that has room for ethical concerns and puts a premium on sustainable growth based on a circular economy. We shall briefly look at some recent attempts to renew micro- and macroeconomics that heed the call for new economic theories that support the transition to sustainability.

The recognition that the earth's resources cannot support the present rates of economic and population growth is by no means new. The *Limits to Growth* report (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972), commissioned by the Club of Rome, was published some 50 years ago. It generated a huge discussion, including criticisms of the failure to take into account technological innovations, and paved the way for the idea of "sustainable development" that was famously introduced and broadcasted by the 1987 Brundtland report and aimed to combine the wish for continued economic growth that enables redistribution of wealth and eradication of extreme poverty and the demand for a sustainable human-ecosystem equilibrium that secures resources for future generations. The concept of sustainable development has been criticized for its attempt to marry opposites, but it can also be seen as lever for renewing the way that we think about and organize the global economy. Hence, it seems clear that there can be no sustainable living if unfettered economic growth based on the current model of industrial production continues. This conclusion is stressed by the recent Human Development Report 2020 (UN, 2020b) that recommends a decoupling of economic growth from emissions and material use and refocuses growth on human well-being and equal opportunities for human growth.

So-called heterodox economists have long problematized the assumptions of mainstream economics and provided alternative models and policy recommendations (Jacobs & Mazzucato, 2016). Heterodox economics is a mixed bag of theories characterized by pluralism at the level of methods and basic assumptions and a general ambition to take a more holistic perspective on economic dynamics

rather than merely focusing on aggregate productivity and economic growth (Kvangraven & Alves, 2019). Hence, some economists argue that economics should pay more attention to the distribution of economic surplus and not only measure productive outcomes, and also have more focus on equality, well-being, dignity, health, and political rights. Others argue that economics should focus more on the power relations that shape economic decisions and the norms and ethics that inform these decisions (Rodrik, 2020).

An important and well-cited paper by Bowles and Carlin (2019) offers an interesting new perspective on how to understand microeconomic processes. The paper seeks to “outline a framework for a well-functioning economy under contemporary conditions consonant with values summarized by a broad concept of freedom that goes considerably beyond a fair distribution of rising living standards, and is better able to support a more just, democratic and sustainable society” (Bowles & Carlin, 2019, p. 1).

The paper begins by asserting that all modern economic policy paradigms – classical liberalism, Keynesianism, and neoliberalism – combine a set of ethical values with a model of how the economy works. Neoliberalism builds on a normative framework of negative freedom and procedural justice that supports economic transactions taking place in free markets with no or limited government interference. In the neoliberal market equilibrium model, every economic actor can exit his or her current relationship at zero costs (Bowles & Carlin, 2019, p. 3). In this completely individual and voluntary exchange process, there is no need for power and coercion and thus no room for ethical judgment. Indeed, the space for public values is eliminated.

A new microeconomics will bring back power and ethical concerns into economic transactions, for instance, by insisting that contracts between economic agents are always incomplete and thus rely on negotiation, bargains and, ultimately, the exercise of power. Following this line of thinking, the private firm, together with other institutional forms of exchange, emerges as politicized structures where principals and agents fight over outcomes. Since political power struggles often hurt both parties, social and ethical norms may be helpful in creating a situation in which both principals and agents would be better off and no one affected would be worse off. This is evidenced by the positive experiences with corporatist negotiation in Scandinavia and by the growing worldwide embrace of Corporate Social Responsibility. While these ideas are intended to challenge the hegemony of neoliberalism, they have a long tradition in institutional economics (Commons, 1931; Veblen, 1973).

The recognition that social norms are essential to the operation of market economies prompts a debate about the cultivation of ethical concerns about distributive justice, sustainability, and social accountability. A new economic policy paradigm based on this insight will not be located along the government-market continuum that connects planned economy with an unfettered free market economy. Rather, it will be located within the triangular space connecting government, markets, and civil society (see Fig. 14.1 below). For as Bowles and Carlin conclude: “Exploring the non-government non-market dimensions of our institutional and policy options provides the basis for

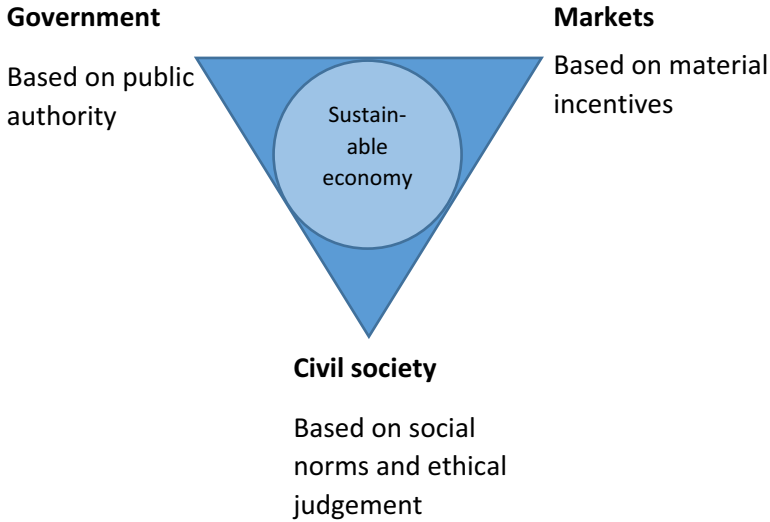


Fig. 14.1. The Triangular Space Circumscribing a New Sustainable Economics. *Source:* Adapted from Bowles and Carlin (2019).

integrating a set of democratic, egalitarian, and sustainability values with an economic model consonant with today’s economy” (2019, p. 9). Hence, we will have to constantly weigh economic concerns, government preferences, and civil society norms against each other in order to create a sustainable future. That is why a sustainable economy is not found in the corners of the triangle in Fig. 14.1, but in the circle circumscribed by the triangle.

Kate Raworth’s famous “donut economics” (Raworth, 2017) provides us with a new macroeconomic perspective that, like Bowles and Carlin, recommends that we move from a self-contained to an embedded market economy. Raworth starts off by asking an intriguing question: what if we started economics, not with the established theories, but with the ambition of meeting the needs of all within the means of the planet. The challenge would then be “to create economies – local to global – that ensure no one falls short on life’s essentials – from food and housing to healthcare and political voice – while safeguarding Earth’s life-giving systems, from a stable climate and fertile soils to healthy oceans and a protective ozone layer” (Raworth, 2017, p. 8).

Environmental issues are largely neglected in mainstream neoclassical economics. Environmental degradation is described as an externality caused by market failure, a clean environment is portrayed as a luxury product, and pollution is something that would be paid for by further growth. It is time to turn the tables and abandon the goal of blind and senseless growth in GDP and start by asking how we can shape the economy so that it promotes social equality and sustainable development. To that end, Raworth claims, economic policy-makers

need a new compass that clearly envisages the social and planetary boundaries that our economies must respect, and that is conveyed by the image of the doughnut. The hole in the middle reveals the risk that people worldwide are falling short on life’s essentials, such as food and water, education, healthcare, housing, and the other social priorities captured by the SDGs (shortfall). Beyond the Doughnut’s outer ring, however, humanity risks putting too much pressure on Earth’s critical life-supporting systems, thus causing climate breakdown, habitat destruction, extreme biodiversity loss etc. (overshoot). Between these two sets of boundaries – the social and the planetary – lies a possible safe and just future for humanity that needs to be supported by a circular economy, sustainable energy production, social redistribution, accountable partnerships with the state, the creativity of the crowd, the contribution of households, and growth in human rights and potential. The doughnut model is shown in Fig. 14.2.

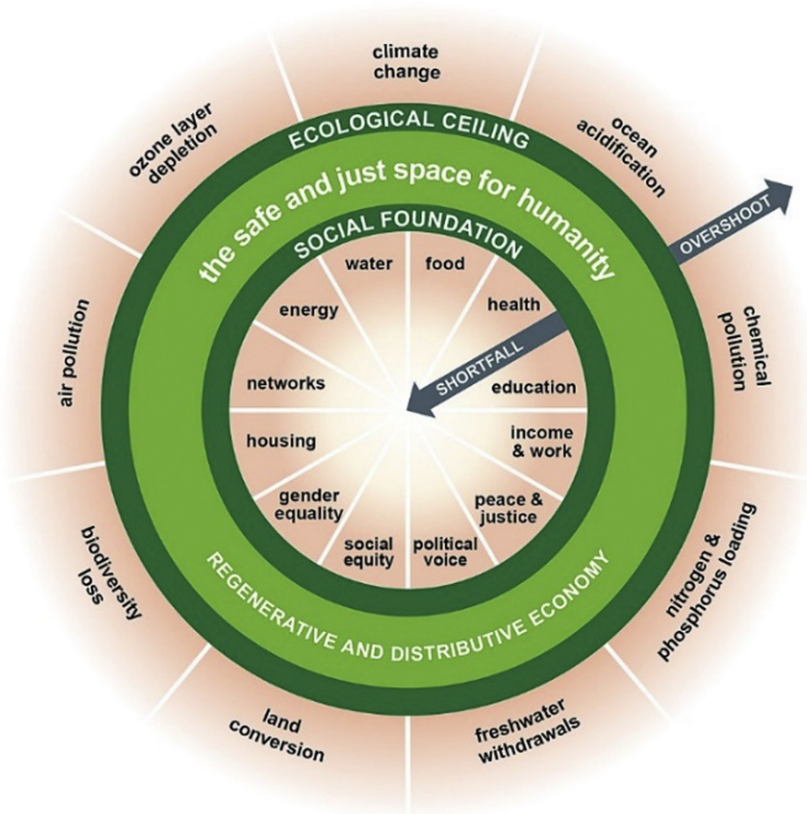


Fig. 14.2. The Doughnut Model.

Although this framework has been criticized for not integrating the criteria for ecological safety and social justice (Rockström et al., 2021), doughnut economics is helpful in defining the safe and just space for humanity that a regenerative and distributive economy must strive to create and maintain but is less precise when it comes to theoretical content and practical policy recommendations. On the theoretical side, it encourages economic thinkers to replace the rational economic man model with a new model of social and adaptable humans, to analyze the joint contribution of embedded markets, accountable government, private households, and civic organizations, and to abandon mechanical equilibrium models in favor of dynamic complexity models. On the practical policy side, we are wisely warned against believing that one size fits all. Given the speed and scale of the change needed and the diversity of contexts, it is impossible to prescribe the policies and institutions that will be needed in the future. This leads Raworth to see social experimentation as a way ahead, thus leaving us with the challenge of how to scale up successful experiments that help to stay above the social foundation and below the ecological ceiling.

Experimentation with economic policy and governance will look different in different fields. For instance, new research on water management pinpoints the limits of conventional economic policy recommendations based on privatization, pricing, and property rights and shows that the SDG for water requires institutional and technological innovations to supply, allocate, and manage water, as well as political and financial commitment to help those who otherwise might be left behind (Garrick, Hanemann, & Hepburn, 2020). Experimentation with economic policy and institutions is gaining increasing prominence (Bardsley et al., 2020) and may help to fit new environmental and agricultural governance solutions to different contexts (Higgins, Hellerstein, Wallander, & Lynch, 2017; Noussair & van Soest, 2014).

## **Securing Political Stability in Times of Rapid Societal Change**

This section reflects on the political challenge associated with the transition to a sustainable future. The problem is that both global problems and efforts to solve them will tend to foster disruptive change and heightened turbulence. Climate change will enhance extreme weather conditions and cause drought, flooding, and rising sea-levels that in turn will disrupt agricultural production and lead to hunger and an increasing number of refugees. Scarcity of clean water will give rise to armed conflicts and the persistent degradation of natural environments will have a negative impact on the livelihood of tribal communities, small holders, and fishermen. Attempts to solve these problems and improve the conditions for sustainable living may help to mitigate conflicts and generate support for government, but in some areas the transformation process itself may be a source of conflict and upheaval. Hence, the transformation from a global economy based on fossil fuels to a world based on renewable energy will create winners and losers and if the latter are not compensated then conflicts and protest will arise. Coal miners will strike, consumers hit by carbon taxes will protest, and those regions

that have prospered from fossil fuel production will suffer from economic decline and hold national governments to account for their misfortune. The protests by the so-called “yellow vest” movement in France is a case in point. A modern political leader, President Macron, had seen the light and wanted to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by introducing fuel taxes that placed a heavy burden on the working class and the lower middle class, especially in rural and semirural areas. In November 2018, more than 300,000 protesters gathered in big demonstrations all around France and in the coming months, there were many similar demonstrations and some of these developed into violent clashes between protesters and police. In many parts of the world, there have been large-scale protests against new hydropower plants that provide a source of renewable energy, but may have devastating consequences for natural habitats and lead to displacement of local residents. Hence, in Austria, Georgia, and the Balkan countries, there have been massive protests and in North Sumatra indigenous people staged a protest against a planned 510-megawatt hydroelectric dam, which threatens to evict them from their ancestral land and damage the ecosystem of the Batang Toru forest, home to critically endangered Sumatran tigers and orangutans.

Without political intermediation and dialogue, rapid societal change – whether driven by global problems or new sustainable governance solutions – may be a source of political protest and conflict that will threaten political stability. Hence, governments around the world and at different levels are facing a dilemma: if they fail to solve the pressing problems our planet are currently facing, their population might suffer and stage large-scale protests, and if they embark on large-scale reforms that lead to disruptive change without compensating losers, the reforms might spark conflicts and destabilizing resistance.

Political tensions may not only result from pressing societal problems and the transformations necessary to solve them. Involving relevant and affected actors from the economic sector, civil society, and local neighborhoods in addressing global problems, designing solutions, and achieving one or more SDGs may empower the participants and generate an appetite for more popular participation and political influence that neither liberal representative democracies nor more autocratic governments will be prepared to accept. If governments accept the growing demands for enhanced participation, it might undermine the stable rule of the governing elite. On the other hand, if they reject the demands, which tend to be fueled by educational reform and growing affluence, it may trigger protests, conflicts and political struggles that undermine government power. Hence, governments are facing another dilemma, since both expanding and limiting participation may lead to political tension.

The dilemmas facing governments during the transition to a sustainable future beg the question of whether the governments should fear or oppose sustainability reforms and whether they will prevent enhanced participation out of concern for maintaining political stability. In short: will societal disruption necessarily cause political instability? Much depends on how we conceptualize political stability. Political stability is often associated with the absence of violence, the longevity of government, and the absence of structural change (Hurwitz, 1973). However, the incidence of violent protests is not in itself a source of instability since a stable

political system may be able to cope well with such protests. The demand for longevity or durability of government also misses the point since stable democracies are predicated on regular overturn of the incumbent government and the formation of new governments. Finally, structural change at the level of legal rules and policies may provide a source of constitutional and systemic stability. In sum, change is not necessarily antithetical to political stability. We can have political stability even if some elements change as long as other elements embodying the constitutive characteristics of the system continue and allow us to conclude that the system has survived (Thrasher & Vallier, 2018).

In line with this argument, Dowding and Kimber (1983, p. 239) long ago defined political stability as the capacity of a political system or regime to prevent contingencies that might force its nonsurvival, i.e. forcing it to give up one or more of its constitutive characteristics. Defined in this way, political stability is unlikely to be threatened by the cocreation of a sustainable future through more or less disruptive reforms and initiatives. Hence, most systems or regimes will be able to change their policies, regulations, and even their forms of governance without seriously compromising the key characteristics that define them. However, some political systems or regimes will stubbornly insist on not changing anything and as a result they are less likely to survive. Challenges, tensions, and pressures will continue to build up and initially lead to increased repression and finally to system breakdown and regime collapse, thus leaving us with no or limited governance capacity and civic insecurity until a new system or regime is created.

The stability of a political system or regime depends on its robustness, i.e. its ability to produce flexible, adaptive, and innovative responses to environmental, social, and political challenges in order to uphold their key agendas, functions, and values (Anderies & Janssen, 2013; Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2020; Howlett, Capano, & Ramesh, 2018). Building robust political systems calls for open-ended debates about problems and solutions that facilitate innovation and experimentation; horizontal political alignment aiming to align the ideas and visions of key political actors into public governance initiatives; vertical ownership over new policy initiatives in order to secure implementation and optimize impact; procedures for ensuring equity across countries, social groups, and generations; and commitment to compensate those actors who incur short-term losses from change.

In a globalized world, national political systems are interdependent. Therefore, robustness may also derive from transnational partnerships between developed and developing countries that may facilitate exploration and exploitation of new solutions through transfer of technology, expertise, and money, joint dialogue about local needs and new opportunities, and respect for the particularity of the system that receives external support.

## **Local Cocreation and the Demand for Deepening Democracy**

This section deals with the democratic challenge associated with the struggle for a sustainable future for humankind. We briefly touched on the topic of democracy in the last section when noting that participation in cocreation of SDG solutions may empower the participants and generate further demand for democratic influence. We shall now further explore the democratizing impact of cocreation.

Let us first make it perfectly clear that the primary reason for striving to cocreate public solutions to pressing problems is not that it enhances democracy. Cocreation is first and foremost used as a strategy for solving complex problems because it is an efficient and effective tool for creative problem-solving. Cocreation harnesses valuable experiences, insights, and ideas and leverages necessary resources. Relevant and affected actors all tend to make their different contributions to defining and understanding the problem at hand and their sustained interaction tends to stimulate learning and innovation and to build common ownership for new solutions. While hierarchical government uses authority and expertise to drive swift problem-solving, it often fails to take local needs and forms of knowledge into account and to mobilize the resources of private actors such as business firms, civil society organizations, and citizens. Market-based governance tends to be more inclusive than public hierarchies as it involves private contractors who are competing with each other in the production of new and path-breaking solutions that will eventually receive public funding. However, competition often ends in bitter rivalry that prevents knowledge sharing and pooling of resources to maximize impact. By contrast, cocreation invites a broad range of actors to collaborate in defining problems and designing and implementing solutions. Collaboration may be difficult in contested areas where views and interests differ, but the actors' recognition of their mutual dependency on each other's resources and the availability of well-designed arenas and adequate leadership tend to facilitate alignment, agreement, and coordinated action.

While collaboration takes time and is sometimes troublesome, cocreation is efficient because it mobilizes resources that would not otherwise be mobilized in public governance. Likewise, it is effective because it stimulates the production of innovative solutions that outperform existing solutions. However, cocreation also has a noteworthy positive side-effect as it contributes to the democratization of public governance. Democracy is a particular form of governing and way of life that gives citizens a free and equal opportunity to participate in public debate and effectively influence decisions that affect their lives. Civil and political rights, such as freedom of speech, the right to organize, universal suffrage etc., provide an important precondition for democracy that in modern mass societies often involves constitutionally guaranteed procedures for participation in free and fair elections that allow citizens to elect political representatives who will govern on their behalf until next election when their candidacy will be on the line. Liberal representative democracy is far from ubiquitous, and is currently under pressure from political attempts to curb the rights to free and equal participation. Hence, representative democracy may also take illiberal forms where a particular party, clan, or cadre claims to incarnate the will of the people and forms a representative

government that governs on behalf of the people, although in an unresponsive way and with limited opposition (Zakaria, 2007).

Whatever its form, representative democracy suffers from three weaknesses that stem from the limits to popular participation (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019). The first weakness is that by excluding large segments of the population from the actual decision-making process that only involves elected representatives and government officials, it turns citizens into passive spectators. The educational revolution and the growing aspirations of the middle class tend to enhance the competence and assertiveness of a growing number of citizens who are increasingly dissatisfied with the passive spectator role and want to have a more active and direct involvement in making decisions that affect their lives (Dalton & Welzel, 2014).

The second weakness is that representative democracy lacks an efficient mechanism for transmitting relevant information, experiences, views, and ideas to the political decision-makers in the solution phase and mobilizing relevant societal resources in the implementation phase. Interestingly, new research shows that elected government officials increasingly solicit relevant information, opinions, and ideas from the population and societal actors so that they can better understand the problems they are trying to solve and devise solutions that are tailored to the local context and draw upon local resources in the implementation phase (Hendriks & Lees-Marshment, 2019). For many years, citizen participation was mainly portrayed as a *supply channel* that enabled citizens to voice their opinions between elections. New perspectives on citizen participation stress the public decision-makers' *demand for input*.

The third weakness is that the combination of elite competition and technocracy in representative democracy tends to create a distance between the executive decision-makers and the people, which makes it difficult to create broad-based popular support for government initiatives and thus hampers implementation of new policy initiatives. Even well-intended and well-designed legislation may appear as dictates by people on the ground who have not been involved in the decision-making process either because they are deemed unqualified to participate or because the elected government believes that societal interference in policy making is illegitimate.

The weaknesses inherent to representative democracy have prompted widespread democratic experimentation and innovation (Sabel, 2012; Saward, 2003; Smith, 2009, 2019). Much of this democratic experimentalism seeks to enhance citizen participation through staging of townhall meetings and public consultation processes in relation to local planning; establishment of participatory boards with user representation in public service institutions; formation of online or in-person citizen panels responding to policy proposals; experimentation with participatory budgeting; and the introduction of some form of workplace or classroom democracy. Although there are also examples of increased use of referendums that allow citizens to vote for or against government proposals, most of the new participatory experiments aim to enhance the participation of local stakeholders in deliberation defined as "a thoughtful, open, and accessible discussion about information, views, experiences, and ideas during which people seek to make a

decision or judgment based on facts, data, values, emotions and other less technical considerations” (Nabatchi & Leighninger, 2015, p. 14).

Worldwide there has been an increase in the use of minipublics and citizen juries that bring together a group of randomly chosen citizens to deliberate on a specific issue, whether it is the definition of specific problem or the choice of a particular policy solution. Over a number of days, participants are exposed to information and a wide range of views from witnesses, who are selected based on their expertise or because they represent affected interests. With trained moderators ensuring fair proceedings, the participants are given the opportunity to ask questions and request additional information. Following a process of deliberation among themselves, the jurors produce a decision or recommendation in the form of a citizens’ report. Typically, the sponsoring public agency is required to respond, either by acting on the report or explaining why it disagrees with it and will not follow the decision or recommendation (Smith & Wales, 1999, p. 296).

In much the same way as deliberative minipublics and citizen juries, cocreation seeks to involve a group of citizens and lay actors in deliberation about public problems and solutions. Different experiences, views, and opinions are brought to the table, competing interpretations of problems and solutions are debated, and agreement is forged based on a widespread readiness to listen to each other’s arguments, revise one’s own opinion as a result of learning, and concede to what appears to be a better argument. However, as indicated in [Table 14.1](#), there are three important points where cocreation as a participatory arena diverges from and complements deliberative minipublics and citizen juries.

First, the participants in cocreation are not randomly selected and are not seen to be representative of the general public. Rather, they are selected because they are affected by the problem and the emerging solution, or possess relevant knowledge, expertise, resources, or authority. This selection principle is important because it motivates the participants to be relatively intensely engaged in creative problem-solving over a certain period of time.

Second, in terms of representation, cocreation tends to mix citizens and private stakeholders with elected officials, public administrators, and representatives from

Table 14.1. Comparing Deliberative MiniPublics and Citizen Juries With Cocreation.

	<b>Deliberative Minipublics and Citizen Juries</b>	<b>Cocreation as a Participatory Arena</b>
<i>Selection</i>	Random selection	Purposive selection
<i>Representation</i>	Citizens deliberate amongst themselves	Citizens deliberate with a broad range of public and private actors
<i>Mode of action</i>	Talk-centric	Talk- and action-centric

international donor organizations. The citizens are not supposed to merely deliberate amongst themselves but will often engage in discussions with elected politicians, civil servants, and donors who possess valuable resources that are necessary for cocreating solutions and can help ensure that the most successful ones are upscaled. This composition of actors is important since it might enhance the uptake of new policy proposals and public solutions. Research shows that the policy recommendations from deliberative minipublics and citizen juries are often discarded by public authorities because they have not been a part of the discussion and have no ownership over the proposed solution (Hendriks, 2016), whereas cocreation arenas, where politicians and civil servants are involved in discussions with engaged citizens, tend to produce a much higher policy uptake (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019).

Finally, although cocreation involves deliberation, it goes beyond a “talk-centric” view of democracy to emphasize the active role of citizens and lay actors in creative problem-solving and public innovation. Cocreation arenas are not merely providing an arena for joint deliberation, but also for joint action based on the design and testing of prototypes, coordinated implementation, and collaborative adaptation. Hence, cocreation is not only about talking, but equally about acting to produce much needed change. The combination of talk and action is important because whereas deliberation may favor the more educated and resourceful actors, the engagement in transformative action may involve other groups with complementary skills. That being said, we should note that talk and action tend to shade into each other as we can act by means of talking and talk by performing certain actions. So what we are arguing is really that cocreation tends to emphasize practical engagement in transformative actions to a much higher extent than traditional forms of deliberative democracy.

In sum, cocreation can be seen as a variant of participatory and deliberative democracy that emphasizes the need for engaged participation of relevant and affected actors, including public decision-makers, in creative problem-solving that combines discussion and practical interventions. Although more than often than not, cocreation involves citizens, lay actors, and public decision-makers in joint discussions and concerted action, there is a risk that the proliferation of cocreation projects at the local level is not sufficiently linked with the established forms of representative democracy, thus giving rise to a bifurcated democracy in which central, regional, and local government decisions based on representative democracy are out of sync with the myriad of local cocreation projects based on direct participation, deliberation, and joint action. As indicated in [Fig. 14.3](#), this problem can be solved either through a combination of co-creation arenas with metagovernance or through the development of new forms of hybrid democracy.

Metagovernance involves attempts to steer distributed problem-solving without trying to dictate solutions and forms of cooperation (Torfing, Peters, Pierre, & Sørensen, 2012). Central, regional, and local government can metagovern local cocreation arenas by designing collaborative platforms that provide templates and offer resources for collaborative interaction and by framing this interaction through the formation of goals, values, and storylines. Metagovernance may also involve some form of process management, for example, by

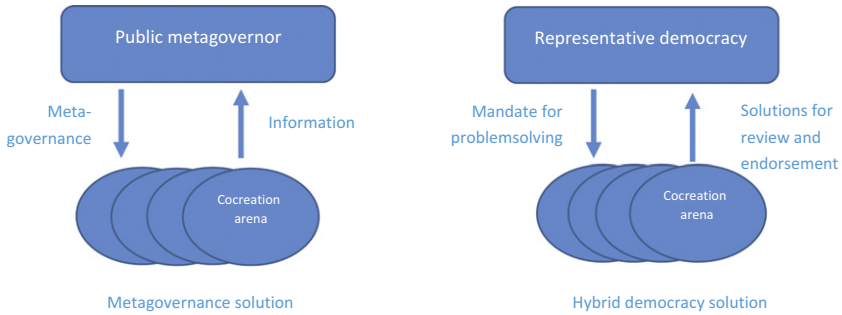


Fig. 14.3. Linking Cocreation Arenas With Elected Government Through Metagovernance or Hybrid Democracy.

encouraging reporting and assessment of results, praising good achievements, and offering counseling and advice when obstacles are encountered. Metagovernance is a crucial tool of governance that governments can use to reap the fruits of local distributed interaction involving manifold public and private actors while still playing a crucial role as agenda setter, direction giver, resource provider, and facilitator. Metagovernance both helps to provide “democratic anchorage” of networked cocreation in democratically elected government (Sørensen & Torfing, 2005) and to maintain a holistic perspective on public governance and value production, thus mitigating the risk of fragmentation and network egotism, i.e., the attempt of cocreation networks and partnerships to merely advance their own interests, perhaps even at the expense of other equally worthy courses of action. It goes without saying that metagovernance works best when there is a persistent flow of information from the local actors and cocreation arenas to the metagovernors. A good overview of local activities helps to tailor metagovernance to the actual needs.

In our interpretation, hybrid democracy has nothing in common with illiberal democracy, but is a positive and constructive attempt to combine participatory and deliberative forms of cocreational democracy with representative forms of democracy and the responsible exercise of executive power. This can, for example, be done by sequencing democratic actions: first, elected government sets the agenda, creates collaborative platforms, and mandates the formation of cocreation arenas; then cocreation arenas involve public and private actors, including civil society organizations, citizens, and neighborhoods, in creative problem-solving in relation to one or more SDGs; finally, elected government discusses, amends, and endorses the cocreated solution and invests in its realization. In Denmark, Gentofte Municipality has developed such a sequenced model of hybrid democracy and evaluations show that it strengthens political leadership, civic participation, innovation, and democratic legitimacy (Sørensen & Torfing, 2019). This model of hybrid democracy has now spread to other municipalities and countries.

Both metagovernance and hybrid democracy presuppose that there is a well-functioning and democratically elected government that can prompt problem-focused action, facilitate, and support coordination and ensure top-down accountability. In those parts of the world where such forms of government are not in place, there are other ways of supporting bottom-up cocreation of SDG solutions and ensuring coordination and accountability. One option is to rely on international donor organizations and UN agencies who may work with national, regional, and local government institutions to frame and channel a variety of cocreation projects. Another option is to form cross-cutting networks of local cocreation projects that can support each other, coordinate their activities, and share best practices.

### **From Global to Local and Back Again**

This concluding section argues that while the global SDGs lead to a new focus on local cocreation in networks and partnerships, the local efforts to build a sustainable future will only succeed if key economic, political, and democratic challenges are dealt with at the global and national level. Hence, local action must be supplemented and supported by global, international, and national efforts to improve the economic, political, and democratic conditions for cocreation at the local level.

The unanimous UN support for the SDGs provides a strong base for global efforts to support local initiatives and the UN is already doing a lot to spur local action in all parts of the world in an effort to save the planet. In 2019, world leaders assembled at the SDG Summit called for a Decade of Action for Sustainable Development and pledged to mobilize financing, enhance national implementation, and strengthen institutions to achieve the SDGs by 2030, leaving no one behind. The UN offers a wide range of online resources at its Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform (<https://sdgs.un.org>). The UN partnership portal related to goal 17 provides a global registry of multistakeholder networks that may serve as a source of inspiration for local voluntary action. Finally, the annual SDG reports help to keep track of global implementation efforts and prompt further action to meet the Goals.

Although the World Bank does not talk about sustainability as such, it is strongly affiliated with the 2030 Agenda and perceives the SDGs as being well aligned with its twin goals of ending extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity. The World Bank aims to catalyze the SDGs and the rest of the 2030 Agenda through the exercise of leadership, global convening, and promotion of country-level uptake. The World Bank is working with client countries to deliver on the 2030 Agenda in three critical areas: (1) financing of development projects; (2) the provision of data on performance in relation to key goals, and (3) implementation of country-led and country-owned policies to attain the SDGs. Recently, a group of environmental economists at the World Bank began working on ways to measure sustainability as a part of the *Changing Wealth of Nations* project (World Bank, 2018). They were concerned that measuring the flow of

“income” through the growth in GDP provides no indication of the state of natural assets such as forests, water, and minerals, which are critical for generating sustainable economic growth. Hence, they explored whether it is possible to systematically track and measure “wealth” in terms of forests, water and minerals, just as we track and measure assets like buildings, machinery, roads etc. Political opposition to the project, mainly from the US, has apparently stalled the project, but there is hope that a new US Presidency will revive this agenda.

Although the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with its emphatic concern for maintaining a stable monetary system and global price stability, may seem to be distant from the SDGs, it engages with the SDGs when they affect economic stability and sustainable and inclusive growth. As such, the IMF aims to ensure financial stability and durable growth rates that are compatible with growing income equality. It helps to assess public spending needs and to create fiscal space for growth-enhancing and poverty-reducing investments in health, education, infrastructure, and agricultural productivity. It assists countries in making sure that energy prices reflect health and environmental costs and helps them with pricing carbon emissions and removing black energy subsidies (Annett & Lane, 2018).

The OECD is still focusing on GDP growth rather than the sustainability of the planet. However, in 2016, it launched an action plan to support the realization of the UN SDGs by helping countries to assess their global position in relation to the SDGs, providing data and expertise and helping to improve policies and institutions so that they can deliver the SDGs (OECD, 2016). In 2019, this plan was followed by another report on how countries measure their progress on the SDGs, particularly with a focus on economic aspects such as entrepreneurship, finance, trade, labor markets etc. (OECD, 2019). The OECD is also supporting the formation of partnerships that can create synergies among private and public, domestic and international, and donor and developing country resources. While the focus on environmental sustainability remains limited, there are two areas where OECD initiatives particularly support the 2030 Agenda. The first area is the attempt to reduce global inequality and the second is the fight against illicit financial flows, including money laundering, tax evasion, and international bribery that all have a devastating impact on the developing countries.

Private investment corporations make an important contribution to delivering the SDGs through so-called impact investments that are actively seeking investments that can create a significant, positive impact in the area of environmental sustainability and social justice. Some of the big impact investors are Vital Capital Fund, Triodos Investment Management, the Reinvestment Fund, BlueOrchard Finance, and the Community Reinvestment Fund. Working in tandem with government and international organizations providing investment guarantees, impact investments may play a small but significant role in closing the SDG funding gap. Large philanthropists such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation also contribute to closing this gap, especially in the field of health and education. Philanthropy not only helps to fund important projects around the globe, but play a crucial role in promoting risk-taking in the search for innovative solutions. Philanthropy is not merely a North-South affair since the global south is creating its own philanthropy organizations such as the African Philanthropy

Forum that aims to promote a giving culture and supports projects in countries throughout the continent. Building a supportive environment for philanthropy in all parts of the world may further enhance its role and impact.

Global microfunding is another way to support the global attainment of the SDGs. For example, the US-based nonprofit [Kiva.org](http://Kiva.org) runs an online crowd-funding platform that connects microborrowers and -lenders. Borrowers advertise their need for funding and a supportive lender provides the loan that is paid back in 97% of the cases, enabling the lender to offer new loans. Microfunding is expanding at the global scale and plays a key role in India, Indonesia, and other Asian countries. It provides support to millions of people and the number of people that are positively affected is even bigger.

Local cocreation of SDGs is not only affected by distant global and international actors. National governments play an even bigger role in providing a supportive environment that puts social, economic, and environmental sustainability on the agenda and stimulates cross-boundary collaboration that involves local citizens and stakeholders. Drawing on the argument presented in the previous sections, we recommend national governments to do three things to stimulate cocreation for sustainability.

First, we recommend that national governments revise their economic models, objectives, and policy-making routines so that they are not merely focusing on advancing productive efficiency and GDP growth, but also take into account the need for social redistribution of wealth and life opportunities and the planetary limits to economic activities. While the instruments for enhancing social redistributions are well-known, governments need to find new ways of building sustainable production and consumption systems based on a low carbon circular economy.

Second, we recommend that national governments provide political and financial support for local changemakers and encourage them to form networks and partnerships that can spur collaboration and innovation. Supporting local cocreation may involve the formation of new platforms and arenas that spur local action, but it may also involve an enhanced responsiveness to local ideas and strategies for scaling best practices. Governments can go a long way to enhance change and support sustainable production, consumption, and living without jeopardizing political stability.

Finally, we recommend that national governments pay attention to the demands of their increasingly competent, critical, and assertive citizens to influence the conditions that shape their daily living and their quality of life. Mass participation in cocreating sustainable solutions to pressing social and environmental problems will further empower citizens and supplement existing forms of representative democracy with new forms of participatory and deliberative democracy at the local level, which may not only mobilize valuable resources, but also enhance the democratic legitimacy of government.

On a final note, we believe that the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to eliminating the distance between global, national, and local action. The pandemic has clearly demonstrated that humankind is facing global problems that assert themselves with equal force and magnitude in Maputo, Malaga, and Malibu. At

the same time, the pandemic has made it clear that national and local action matter and may either reduce or accelerate the spread of the virus and the mortality rate. As such, the COVID-19 outbreak has revealed that we are all part of the same community of destiny and that the local, national, and global levels are closely related. Remembering this important lesson may help engage actors at all levels in joint action to deliver the SDGs.