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An Analysis of Collaborative Governance through Multistakeholder Coproduction in Nottingham City.

by

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BS (Hons.), MSc

Submitted to

University of Nottingham

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Abstract

This thesis examines coproduction as the situated practice of collaborative governance within the urban context of Nottingham, United Kingdom. It investigates (i) local government and non-government stakeholders' rationales to participate in coproduction in Nottingham, (ii) the landscape of multi-stakeholder coproduction in Nottingham, (iii) and the perceptions of local government and non-governmental stakeholders on the role and nature of coproduction processes within Nottingham.

The study adopts a qualitative approach, drawing on semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and documentary analysis to examine the roles of local government and non-government stakeholders, including, academia, industry, and civil society. This approach enables a context-specific analysis of how coproduction is shaped, facilitated, and experienced within an urban setting.

The findings demonstrate that coproduction in Nottingham is dynamic, uneven, and shaped by the interplay between governance structures, stakeholder rationales, and the practical realities of collaboration. Coproduction is enacted through a range of mechanisms, including policy-driven, government-led, academia-driven, and civil society-led practices. However, these processes are frequently constrained by traditional governance arrangements, resource limitations, selective participation, and unequal power relations. Participation is often structured through consultative and episodic forms of engagement, with more influential forms of decision-making remaining concentrated among a limited group of stakeholders. The thesis further shows that while coproduction is framed as an inclusive and collaborative process, its practice often reflects tensions between rhetoric and reality.

Overall, this thesis aims to contribute to existing literature by fulfilling the three research gaps identified. It does so primarily through the development of a re-developed model of collaborative governance, building on Ansell and Gash's (2008, p. 550) framework. This integrated framework brings together the empirical findings and theoretical insights of the study, incorporating stakeholder incentives, institutional constraints, and the intended and unintended outcomes of coproduction, including

both public value and public disvalue. This primary contribution is supported by a spectrum of participation (collaborative, self-interested, symbolic, and non-participation) and a set of empirically grounded modes of coproduction, including state-led, partnership-led, and civil society-led practices, which function as interpretive tools to synthesise patterns across the empirical findings.

Overall, the thesis provides a critical and empirically grounded account of multistakeholder coproduction in an urban setting, demonstrating how the spectrum of participation and the coexistence of state-led, partnership-led, and civil society-led modes of coproduction reveal a misalignment between the rhetoric and reality of collaborative governance. It shows how stakeholder incentives, institutional constraints, and uneven power relations shape both the outcomes of coproduction and the emergence of public value and public disvalue in practice.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to thank all the people who took part in this research, I am very grateful for your time and contributions to this study. I would also like to thank my supervisors, Dr Amanda Crompton and Professor Judy Muthuri, who have played a significant role in guiding me through this journey in my academic journey through the past few years. I would also like to thank Professor Mihaela Kelemen for agreeing to join the supervision team shortly, I really appreciate your guidance and support. A special note of appreciation for Dr Claire Ingram, for guiding me through the corrections in the last year. Thank you to my internal and external assessors, Dr Lara Bianchi and Dr Steven Parker, for taking the time to assess my thesis and for providing their valuable and constructive feedback. I would like to thank Dr Anne Touboulic, your kindness and guidance have seen me through the darkest of times in this journey. I am very grateful for your encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr Kelly Vere for her continued support and understanding as I worked on this thesis alongside full-time work. I would like to acknowledge the Business School and the University of Nottingham for endowing me with the Masters Dean's Scholarship for Excellence, PhD Studentship and the Vice Chancellor's Research Excellence Scholarship (International). These scholarships enabled me to pursue this doctorate.

They say it takes a village, and I appreciate all the kindness and support I have received in this journey. I come from a country where women are not afforded the same opportunities as men, I am very grateful to my parents for being supportive of my education and ambitions. I would like to start by acknowledging Mohsen bhai, your friendship, guidance and mentorship have empowered me every day. Thank you for giving me the courage to start and complete this journey, you have been the voice of reason innumerable times. Fareeha, you have been there for me through all the stages of the PhD these past few years, I hope I can be there for you in the same ways in your doctoral journey. To Maria, Abdullah, Faysal, Shayan and Rameen, thank you for your love and support throughout. I must mention Rabia, Shunaid, Simran, and Arvin for bringing a lightness to this journey. Thank you to Fareeha, Dhanya, and Safa, for their generosity this past year.

I would like to thank my friends and peers at the Business School, University of Nottingham, and beyond, who have encouraged me along the way and made the journey wonderful: Dr. Danielly Lima Bezerra, Dr Shiwani Varal, Dr. Temiloluwa Daike, Dr. Sahattaya (Pai) Achtzehn, Dr Fabian Maier, Dr David Achtzehn, and Monique Steijger-Storm. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my late friend Ahmed. Thank you for your friendship and kindness. I would not be here if you hadn't given me the fierce competition and yet the abundance of help. I miss you.

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Acronyms

CG	Collaborative Governance
NPG	New Public Governance
NPM	New Public Management
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSOL	Community Organisers and Leaders Interviews
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
DA	Documentary Analysis
IND	Industry Interviews
INT	Interview
LG	Local Government Interviews
NCC	Nottingham City Council
UK	United Kingdom
UN1	University 1
UN2	University 2

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Context

In today's landscape of public management, pluralistic approaches such as New Public Governance have gained popularity to address complex policy problems and overcome the limitations of traditional governance approaches (Head and Alford, 2015; McConnell, 2017; Peters, 2017; Walls, 2018). Complex policy challenges such as climate change (Lazarus, 2008; Emerson and Murchie, 2010; Howarth et al., 2022) and urban and regional planning (Agranoff, 2014; Broto and Alves, 2018; Gherhes, Hoole and Vorley, 2023), characterised by their persistent and complex nature, have dominated critical discourse on the necessity of transformative approaches in governance (Head, 2019; Voets et al., 2021). Global pandemics such as the COVID-19 are another example of policy challenge (Angeli, Camporesi and Dal Fabbro, 2021; Klasche, 2021; Baltzersen, 2022). Addressing these issues entails multifaceted strategies, incorporating broader stakeholder collaboration, adaptability, and innovative thinking.

Over the past few decades, the evolution of public expectations for effective, equitable, and public-centric services has driven a paradigm shift departing from insular, fragmented governance frameworks (Barnett, 2003; Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2006; Bevir, 2011; Peters et al., 2022). This shift is reflected in rising expectations for transparency, stakeholder participation, and service responsiveness, driven in part by increased public scrutiny, greater access to information, and growing demands for accountability in public decision-making. At the same time, governance frameworks increasingly span multiple scales and jurisdictions, bringing together multiple key government and non-government stakeholders (Frieling, Lindenberg and Stokman, 2014; Kettl, 2015; Kern and Smutko, 2021; Momen, 2021). For example, local authorities in England collectively manage around £100 billion in annual spending while facing increasing service pressures {Citation}, and evidence suggests that public sector priorities are increasingly delivered through collaboration with non-government stakeholders, particularly under conditions of evolving public expectations and policy complexity (Local Government Association, 2022). These developments have led to

growing criticism of traditional hierarchical governance arrangements as insufficient for addressing complex policy challenges.

Building on this shift from government to governance, collaborative governance (CG) has emerged as a key approach for addressing complex and interdependent policy challenges. In public policymaking, diverse multistakeholder collaboration arrangements have emerged, blending state, market, and community-based elements, such as coproduction, cocreation, and codesign (Broto and Alves, 2018; Farr, 2018; Lee, Feiertag and Unger, 2024b). Furthermore, the rising public demand for meaningful stakeholder participation calls for inclusive mechanisms such as coproduction that allows non-government stakeholders, such as academia, industry, and civil society to actively take part in decisions that affect them (Søreide and Truex, 2013; Kern and Smutko, 2021; Perry, 2022a).

Within this context, coproduction can be understood as the practice of CG, aiming to better coordinate and integrate diverse actors through stakeholder participation and public deliberation (Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017; Souza and Neto, 2018; Goodwin, 2019). Non-government stakeholders can also be involved in coproduction of public services, contributing to the development of solutions to complex societal challenges (Scott, Thomas and Magallanes, 2019; Sawkins, 2024). As such, multi-stakeholder coproduction enables the inclusion of diverse perspectives, supporting the development of policies that are more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive. In parallel, government arrangements must adapt to the dynamic environments by leveraging knowledge and strategic synergies across sectors (Heikkila and Gerlak, 2013; Wisnumurti et al., 2020). As governance challenges become increasingly interconnected, the need for effective coproduction practices becomes ever more pressing.

However, existing research emphasises the need for situated, context specific analyses of collaboration, particularly to understand how diverse stakeholders navigate differing perspectives and why CG arrangements are difficult to establish and sustain (Rhodes, 2017; Kalesnikaite, 2019a; Bartels and Turnbull, 2020a; Van Duijn, 2022). This is particularly evident in urban contexts due to high population density, socio-economic diversity, and the concentration of infrastructure, public services, and

stakeholders, which may increase collaboration demands and policy interdependencies compared to other spatial contexts (Florida, 1995; Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2006; Nesti, 2018; Kalesnikaite, 2019b). Furthermore, governance processes are inherently socio-spatial and place-based, prompting growing attention to urban settings as sites where diverse stakeholders interact and participate (Florida, 1995; Agranoff, 2014; Nesti, 2018; Arkorful et al., 2021; Bradley, Israa H Mahmoud and Arlati, 2022). The locality has therefore become a focal point for governance, as the public are often more invested influencing governance arrangements that directly impact their lives through mechanisms such as collaborative decision-making processes, and coproduction initiatives (Arkorful et al., 2021; Bradley, Israa H Mahmoud and Arlati, 2022; Gherhes, Hoole and Vorley, 2023). Local governance has been widely promoted by international development organisations such as the World Bank and the United Nations, contributing to reforms across different local contexts (Goldfrank, 2012; Kutty et al., 2020; Bigger and Webber, 2021; Nicolò et al., 2023).

In the United Kingdom (UK), recent decades have seen waves of devolution, alongside the expansion of collaborative and participatory decision-making mechanisms at the local level, further reinforcing the importance of local governance arrangements (Anderson, 2003; Kersting et al., 2009; Ansell and Torfing, 2015; Arkorful et al., 2021). Existing literature also positions cities as critical sites for developing and testing governance theory (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2006; Agranoff, 2014; Johnson and Watt, 2022; Van Duijn, Bannink and Ybema, 2022a).

Despite this, while there is a growing body of work examining coproduction in different contexts, much of this research has tended to focus on comparative case studies across cities or on individual projects within cities, often examining living labs, technology-enabled participation, or sector-specific initiatives, with less attention paid to the broader ecosystem of collaboration within a single place (Ghose, 2005; Kalesnikaite, 2019a; Garg and Barach, 2021; Bradley, Israa H Mahmoud and Arlati, 2022). Less attention has been paid to in depth, single case analyses that examine the broader ecosystem of multistakeholder coproduction within a city. Responding to calls for ‘natural experiments’ in collaboration, this research examines coproduction as the practice of CG within a specific localised context (Ansell and Gash, 2008a, p.

562). As a result, this PhD research aims to assess the current scope and potential of multistakeholder coproduction within a single city case.

In line with this, Nottingham, a city in the East Midlands (UK), is ranked as the eighth smart city in the UK (Wood et al., 2017), and has a rich array of stakeholder organisations (as discussed in Chapter 3 and 4) (Nottingham Castle, 2021; Karagounis and Rossiter, 2022). It therefore provides a compelling context to explore the landscape of multistakeholder coproduction, including stakeholder rationales and experiences, that enable and shape CG.

1.1.1 Research Gaps

This section outlines the key research gaps which this thesis aims to address in light of the above research context (section 1.1). First, this thesis aims to address the disconnect between existing theoretical frameworks and how CG operates in specific contexts (Batory and Sara Svensson, 2019; Ansell et al., 2020a; Van Duijn, 2022). Although governance is widely conceptualised as a collaborative process involving dispersed authority (Ansell and Gash, 2008b; Kirk Emerson, Nabatchi and S. Balogh, 2012; Ran and Qi, 2019), existing research often fails to adequately capture how these theoretical principles translate into practice within specific urban contexts. As a result, there is a disconnect between theoretical models of CG and how collaboration is enacted in practice within particular settings (Bevir and Rhodes, 2022; Peters et al., 2022). This thesis contributes to addressing this gap by empirically grounding CG theory within the urban context of Nottingham, demonstrating how local conditions shape and reconfigure theoretical assumptions about collaboration.

Second, this thesis responds to the fragmented scope of existing research on multistakeholder CG and coproduction (Bevir, 2011; Van Duijn, Bannink and Ybema, 2022a). Current studies predominantly rely on comparative analyses across cities or focus on single projects, often examining specific initiatives (Frieling, Lindenberg and Stokman, 2014; Bang and Kim, 2016; Bradley, Israa H Mahmoud and Arlati, 2022; Peters et al., 2022). As a result, research has largely examined coproduction in partial and disconnected ways, rather than as a broader system of governance within a single place. To address this research gap, this thesis adopts a novel approach by examining coproduction as a situated mode of CG, enabling the analysis of how multiple forms

of collaboration coexist and interact within a single urban context. This provides a contextual and place-based account of the broader landscape of multistakeholder coproduction within one city.

Third, this thesis examines the limited empirical understanding of how multistakeholder coproduction is enacted and experienced in practice. While CG is widely promoted as a mechanism for addressing complex policy challenges, much of the literature remains conceptual or normative, with insufficient attention to how these processes unfold in real-world settings (Ansell and Gash, 2008b; Bartels and Turnbull, 2020b; La Grouw et al., 2024). In particular, there is a lack of insight into how local government and non-government stakeholders navigate differing perspectives, engage with coproduction processes, and experience the opportunities and barriers associated with participation (Bevir and Rhodes, 2022; Peters et al., 2022). This thesis responds to this gap by examining the rationales, mechanisms, and lived experiences of both local government and non-government stakeholders (Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), communities, academia, and industry) thereby providing a grounded account of how coproduction is facilitated, negotiated, enacted, and sustained in practice (Djalante, 2012; Kern and Smutko, 2021; Momen, 2021; Perry, 2022a). Importantly, this includes examining instances where coproduction processes are constrained, contested, or fail to achieve their intended outcomes, thereby offering a more critical and realistic account of CG in practice (Bianchi, Nasi and Rivenbark, 2021a; Cluley, Parker and Radnor, 2021; Peters et al., 2022).

1.2 Research Questions

The following research question and sub-questions will be asked to inform this research:

Overarching research question:

‘How does multistakeholder coproduction take place in Nottingham?’

Objective 1: To explore local government and non-government stakeholders’ rationales to participate in coproduction in Nottingham.

1.1 What are the current policy and CG frameworks guiding coproduction in Nottingham?

1.2 Why do local government and non-government stakeholders engage in coproduction processes within the city?

Objective 2: To map the landscape of multi-stakeholder coproduction in Nottingham.

2.1 What are the local government-led coproduction mechanisms?

2.2 What are the existing opportunities and avenues of coproduction amongst local non-government stakeholders?

Objective 3. To investigate the perceptions of local government and non-governmental stakeholders on the role and nature of coproduction processes within Nottingham.

3.1 How do local non-governmental stakeholders (citizens, civil society organisations, academia and industry) perceive their contributions to the practice of coproduction?

3.2 What are the key barriers and opportunities experienced by local government and non-government stakeholders (citizens, civil society organisations, and academia) in enabling, facilitating and participating within coproduction processes.

1.3 Thesis structure

Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on the shift from government to governance (Section 2.2), CG principles and practice (Section 2.3), coproduction as the situated practice of CG (Section 2.4), and the urban context (Section 2.5). Additionally, Section 2.6 revisits the research gaps identified in the literature and the research questions that guide this study.

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology of the study, covering the qualitative tradition, and the ontological and epistemological considerations of the study (Section 3.2), the case study approach (Section 3.3), the data collection methods (Section 3.4), the sampling strategy (Section 3.5), the approach to data analysis and the analytical framework linking research questions to the study's empirical findings (Section 3.6), and the considerations of ethics and reflexivity (Section 3.7).

With this methodological framework established, Chapters 4 to 7 present the empirical findings of the study. Chapter 4 examines multistakeholder coproduction by situating government and non-government stakeholders within the historical context of Nottingham City, beginning with an exploration of the context and development of coproduction in Nottingham (Section 4.2), and the role of non-government stakeholders in the city (Section 4.3).

Building on this contextual grounding, Chapter 5 examines the contextual drivers and motivations for multistakeholder coproduction, beginning with an analysis of the key contextual drivers shaping coproduction (Section 5.2), followed by an exploration of the motivations underpinning coproduction (Section 5.3).

Chapter 6 then examines the coproduction mechanisms operating in Nottingham City, covering policy driven coproduction (Section 6.2), government led voluntary and discretionary collaboration (Section 6.3), academia driven collaborative mechanisms (Section 6.4), and civil society driven coproduction (Section 6.5).

Lastly, Chapter 7 examines experiences of collaborative processes, covering participation dynamics within coproduction processes (Section 7.2), social limitations affecting collaboration (Section 7.3), and governance challenges encountered in practice (Section 7.4).

Drawing on the research findings (Chapters 4,5,6, and 7), Chapter 8 presents the discussion of the study, connecting the dots between the rhetoric and reality of coproduction (Section 8.2), and developing a novel conceptualisation of local CG (Section 8.3). It then outlines the key theoretical and empirical contributions and policy recommendations arising from the study (Section 8.4).

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by summarising the thesis (Section 9.2), and reflecting reflects on the limitations of the study and outlines directions for future research, highlighting the need for further exploration of coproduction as a mode of CG within urban settings (Section 9.3).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical review of the academic literature relevant to collaborative governance (CG), with particular emphasis on its interpretation, application, and challenges within an urban context (see Figure 1). The chapter is structured thematically to build a comprehensive conceptual and contextual foundation for the study. It draws together theoretical insights from governance studies, policy studies, and public administration to explore how CG has evolved and how , as a mode of CG, functions in complex and multi-stakeholder urban spaces. Coproduction has increasingly been positioned as a situated practice addressing diverse policy challenges across multiple geographical scales and institutional levels (Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017; Goodwin, 2019). According to Bovaird and Loeffler (2022), CG provides a framework for engaging communities, civil society organisations and other non-government stakeholders in processes that were previously exclusive to the government or elite stakeholders.

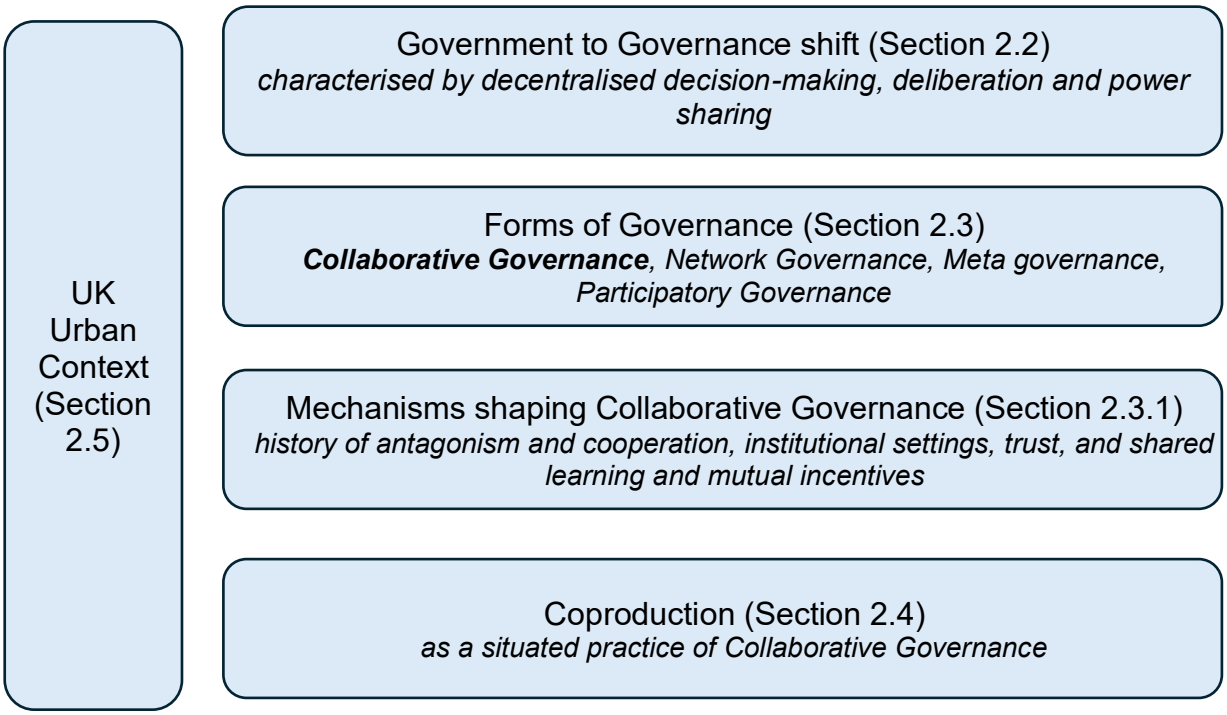


Figure 1 Conceptual Map of the literature

Section 2.2 sets the context by outlining the diverse meanings and interpretations of governance as a concept. It traces the evolution of the term governance from

hierarchical models of state control to more open forms of decision-making, thus providing the groundwork for understanding the emergence of CG within a broader governance landscape. Section 2.3 further elaborates how CG is defined and theorised in the literature. It examines its key components, underlying values, and normative claims, while also engaging with competing or adjacent concepts such as participatory governance, network governance, and meta-governance. The section considers how CG is situated within the wider field of policy studies, and narrows the focus to the UK context, considering how national institutional structures, political culture, and devolution reforms have shaped the development and practice of CG. It also identifies and examines the core institutional, relational, and procedural components that underpin effective CG. These elements include history of antagonism and cooperation, institutional settings, shared learning and mutual incentives, facilitative leadership for stakeholders and trust.

Section 2.4 turns to the different ways in which collaboration is brought to life through the practice of coproduction, which can include deliberative forums, partnership arrangements and urban experimentation. It considers how as a mode of CG operates in practice and explores the institutional conditions that shape its success or limitations. It also discusses the range of actors involved in processes to highlight the importance of inclusion, power asymmetry, elite influence, and stakeholder capacity. The enabling conditions and institutional mechanisms that facilitate meaningful collaboration are also considered.

Section 2.5 explores the increasing attention given to ‘cities in academic and grey literature as sites of complex policy problems and CG. It reflects on the spatial and institutional dynamics that make cities uniquely positioned for collaboration and experimentation, particularly in the context of power redistribution, public services and socio-economic pressures. The section also considers the immediacy of governance demands faced by local governments and the opportunities for multi-stakeholder engagement that cities present. Finally, Section 2.5 synthesises the chapter’s key arguments and identifies gaps in the literature that the thesis aims to address. Collectively, the literature reviewed in this chapter informs the conceptual framing and methodological direction of the study.

2.2 Government to Governance

Since the late 20th century, the concept and practice of governance have gained increasing global prominence. Governance has been conceptualised, interpreted and manifested in various ways (Jessop, 1995). Over the past few decades, the public sector has undergone significant evolution, influenced by political and intellectual reforms including 'New Public Management' (Hood, 1995; Hood and Dixon, 2015) and 'New Public Governance' (Osborne, 2006, 2010). Some scholars have studied governance as an effective, accountable, and democratic effort (Bevir, 2011; Ansell and Torfing, 2022), while others study it as a collective endeavour amongst stakeholders rather than a siloed government effort (describing it as more 'steering' and less 'rowing') (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). Reading across the literature, governance is understood as the social mechanisms and networks that govern public affairs based on shared goals and interdependence (Ansell and Torfing, 2022).

Over the past few decades, the evolution of public expectations for effective, equitable, and public-centric services has driven a paradigm shift departing from insular, fragmented governance frameworks (Bardhan and Mookherjee, 2006; Bevir, 2011; Peters *et al.*, 2022). These developments have led to growing criticism of traditional hierarchical governance arrangements as insufficient for addressing complex policy challenges, marked by rising expectations for transparency, accountability, and stakeholder participation. While earlier reforms associated with New Public Management (NPM) sought to address these pressures by improving efficiency through private-sector techniques such as competition, privatisation, and performance measurement, with a primary focus on service delivery (Christensen, 2012; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2015). In contrast, New Public Governance (NPG) emphasises the creation of public value through collaboration, network management, and stakeholder participation, reflecting a move towards multistakeholder approaches to policymaking (Sorrentino, Sicilia and Howlett, 2018; Ansell and Torfing, 2022). Public value refers to the collective benefits generated through CG processes, strengthened trust between government and non-government stakeholders, informed decision-making, and more sustainable and context-sensitive planning (Benington, 2011; Vignieri, 2020; Cluley, Parker and Radnor, 2023). Therefore, NPG frameworks (further discussed in section 2.3) are characterised by their reliance on enhanced stakeholder collaboration,

shared power, and ongoing interaction between interdependent stakeholders, rather than hierarchical control within the government (Frieling, Lindenberg and Stokman, 2014; Kettl, 2015; Kern and Smutko, 2021; Momen, 2021).

Within this context, the role of the public sector in shaping urban environments has shifted from 'government' to governance'. Today's public sector serves to establish governance frameworks in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, such as local governments, citizens, enterprises, and non-profit organisations thus abandoning the traditional hierarchal mode of government exercising power, dispensing public services, and pushing information (Yigitcanlar et al., 2018; Conti et al., 2019; Maccani et al., 2020).Gjaltema et al. (2020) pointed to the shift from government to governance, which captures a movement away from a traditional, hierarchical, state-centric model of authority and towards a more collaborative and open approach where power is diffused across multiple government and non-government actors and institutions.

This paradigm shift is especially evident at the local level, where urban and local governments are increasingly expected to work collaboratively with civil society and private sector stakeholders. Recent literature emphasises this transformation in UK local governance, noting that councils are no longer just service providers, but also enablers of collaboration and community empowerment (Arkorful et al., 2021; Johnson and Watt, 2022; Van Duijn, Bannink and Ybema, 2022b). It identifies the emergence of horizontal forms of authority, such as local partnerships and participatory budgeting, which integrate the core principles of governance such as deliberation and shared accountability (Souza and Neto, 2018; Bradley, Israa H. Mahmoud and Arlati, 2022a).

This shift is also characterised by the dispersion of authority and power from national to local and regional governments (Ran and Qi, 2018). Local authorities act as independent of national governments in different aspects such as setting local strategic priorities, growth and planning strategy, and budget plans (Arkorful et al., 2021). Devolved state power is at the centre of CG, which is now exercised through partnerships and coalitions at multiple sites (Anderson, 2003; Bevir, 2020; Waring et al., 2022). Li, Liu and Ye (2022) suggest that in this context, the local government is supposed to play an essential part in the pluralistic system but does not need to

provide all services by itself. As a result, new collaborative frameworks of governance have emerged, where government functions are dispersed horizontally and vertically.

2.2.1 Governance in the United Kingdom

CG in the United Kingdom has emerged through a historically centralised institutional structure, where decision-making was concentrated in the hands of central government (Hood and Dixon, 2015; Batory and S. Svensson, 2019). Rather than being underpinned by a structural shift towards devolved decision-making, collaborative practices in the UK have typically evolved as extensions of existing institutional mechanisms consisting of central control, hierarchical authority, and managerial performance. Although there have been rhetorical and policy-level moves towards integration and partnership, the deeper institutional conditions that shape power dynamics and resource flows have remained largely intact, often constraining meaningful collaboration (Imrie and Raco, 1999; Whicher, 2021).

The modern history of institutional reform in the UK is often traced back to the early New Labour period, where ‘modernisation’ became the guiding principle for public service transformation (MacLeavy, 2004). Under the Blair government (1997-2007), the concept of ‘joined-up government’ (JUG) gained prominence as a response to siloed public service delivery. JUG was intended to promote greater coordination across departments and agencies, especially at the local level (Blair, 2000; Silvestre, Marques and Gomes, 2018). However, as Ling (2002) critically observes, this agenda was not underpinned by a coherent institutional restructuring but rather a fragmented set of initiatives driven by central departments, particularly the Cabinet Office and HM Treasury. JUG operated more as a top-down integration strategy than as a redistribution of governance power, often layering collaborative rhetoric on existing structures rather than reforming them (O’Flynn and Wanna, 2008).

In parallel with the central reform agenda, New Labour introduced area-based initiatives such as Education Action Zones and the New Deal for Communities to enhance community-led policy engagement (Hood and Dixon, 2015). These were designed to support collaboration between local government, community

organisations, and other stakeholders. Whicher (2021) argues that the dominant institutional logic continued to emphasise managerial efficiency and accountability to central government. Even within new governance spaces, local authorities and their partners were subjected to intensive performance monitoring, often through centrally defined Public Service Agreements. This reflects a pattern in UK governance where collaborative initiatives have rarely been accompanied by meaningful devolution of power or financial autonomy, instead functioning as technocratic instruments of centrally driven reforms (North, 2000; Lukes, 2004; Reed, 2012).

Hood and Dixon (2015) argue that despite extensive reform rhetoric over several decades, the UK's political-administrative system remained largely centralised and hierarchical from about 1997-2010. Their analysis of reform trajectories found no significant shift in the core governance model, with civil service hierarchies, centrally imposed targets, and audit mechanisms persisting throughout. Local authorities, although increasingly involved in partnership arrangements, continued to operate under strong vertical constraints. The institutional setting thus limited the potential for sustained or autonomous CG at the local level (Johnson and Watt, 2022).

Following the 2008 global financial crisis and the election of the Conservative-led government in 2010, institutional conditions for collaboration became further constrained under the policy of austerity. Hastings et al. (2017) provided evidence of how austerity gave way to budgetary reductions but also marked a shift towards discursive and institutional reconfiguration of governance, where local government internalised the central government's austerity narrative, justifying service cuts and governance changes as pragmatic necessities. Public consultation became more about compliance and managing expectations than genuine power-sharing. In this context, CG was increasingly framed as a means to do more with less, rather than a process of equitable collective decision-making (Davies and Blanco, 2017).

Critically, austerity introduced what Peck (2012) described as 'austerity urbanism,' where devolution tasked cities with delivering more public services under increasingly constrained conditions. This shift reinforced existing institutional imbalances, placing significant pressure on local authorities to collaborate within extremely limited fiscal and political space. Hastings et al. (2017) argue that the discursive institutions of

austerity shaped how collaboration was conceptualised and operationalised, reinforcing a managerial governance approach where collaboration is reduced to a tool for efficient service delivery, rather than a means of shared power and collective decision-making.

Recent discussions around urban experimentation have offered some insight into how cities attempt to innovate within these institutional arrangements (Raven et al., 2019; Li, Li and Jiang, 2024; Mikuła et al., 2024). As highlighted by Fuller (2017) some UK cities have engaged in experimental governance initiatives aimed at testing new forms of collaboration. These include neighbourhood-level planning projects, sustainability pilots, and informal partnership networks. However, the literature acknowledges that such initiatives are often short-term, heavily reliant on external or project-based funding, and rarely integrated into broader governance frameworks. The institutional conditions necessary to support and sustain these experiments are often absent, making them fragile, episodic, and dependent on temporary leadership or financial support (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012; Davies and Blanco, 2017; Fuller, 2017).

Fuller (2017) further posits that experimentation tends to reproduce rather than challenge dominant institutional narratives. Local actors often remain resistant to the structural redistribution of power, thus aligning their language with that of central government to emphasise cost-effectiveness, compliance, and statutory duties. While the language of collaboration, partnership, and joined-up delivery has become embedded in public discourse, the structural mechanisms of central control, performance management, and fiscal dependency have largely remained intact (Elston and Bel, 2023). Collaboration, where it has occurred, has often been limited to implementation rather than agenda-setting, and has typically served instrumental purposes aligned with national priorities. These historic institutional arrangements continue to shape what CG looks like in UK cities today (Peck, 2012; Gherhes, Hoole and Vorley, 2023). Inherent in these institutional shifts is a commitment to pluralistic representation and engagement, recognising that the edifice of democracy is buttressed not only by the freedom to vote but also by the capacity to influence and contribute to the policymaking process in a meaningful way (Sorrentino, Sicilia and Howlett, 2018; Ansell and Torfing, 2022).

2.3 Collaborative Governance: Principles to Practice

Within this broader transformation, CG has emerged as a distinct yet interrelated concept among several governance models, including network governance (Carlsson and Sandström, 2007; Provan and Kenis, 2007; Sørensen and Torfing, 2007), meta-governance (Sørensen, 2006; Kooiman and Jentoft, 2009; Gjaltema, Biesbroek and Termeer, 2020), and participatory governance (Fischer, 2006; Gustafson and Hertting, 2017; Newig *et al.*, 2018; Bussu *et al.*, 2022). Each of these concepts addresses the growing complexity of the policy process characterised by fragmentation, interdependence, and the participation of multiple actors beyond the state. As depicted in Table 1, these governance frameworks overlap in their emphasis on decentralised decision-making, inclusion, and adaptability, but they diverge in their analytical focus, normative underpinnings, and institutional arrangements (Morçöl *et al.*, 2021).

CG has gained traction as a response to fragmented authority (see Table 1), interdependence among actors, and the need for coordinated public problem-solving. Its processes are typically marked by sustained, structured engagement between state and non-state actors, shared authority, and the institutionalisation of deliberation and mutual accountability mechanisms (Thomson, Perry and Miller, 2007; Torfing and Ansell, 2016). The focus on formalised interaction distinguishes it from participatory governance, which prioritises the inclusion of citizens and stakeholders in public decision-making but does not necessarily entail power-sharing or institutionalised collaboration (Ran and Qi, 2019; Cao *et al.*, 2023). Participatory governance is often limited to consultative functions or input gathering (see Table 1), whereas CG involves collective agenda-setting, resource mobilisation, and joint decision-making across the policy cycle (Newig *et al.*, 2018; Ulibarri *et al.*, 2020).

Table 1 Comparative Analysis of Governance Frameworks

Governance Type	Coordination Mechanism	Actors	Power Dynamics	Comparison with/relationship to CG	Governance form in context with CG	Leading Authors
Network Governance	Coordination through inter-organisational networks and mutual dependency rather than hierarchy.	Public agencies, private partners, voluntary organisations connected through policy networks.	Power is distributed but often uneven; dominated by resource-rich or strategically positioned actors.	Cooperation and negotiation can achieve collective goals more efficiently than markets or hierarchies.	Provides the structural foundation for CG; collaboration occurs *within* these networks to achieve shared outcomes.	(Carlsson and Sandström, 2007; Provan and Kenis, 2007; Sørensen and Torfing, 2007)
Participatory Governance	Coordination through participatory forums, consultations, and citizen engagement processes.	Citizens, community groups, civil society, alongside state actors.	Seeks to democratise decision-making, but participation may be symbolic or constrained by institutional limits.	Inclusion and deliberation enhance legitimacy and trust in governance.	CG draws on participatory principles but extends them by formalising shared decision-making and joint responsibility for implementation.	(Fischer, 2006; Gustafson and Hertting, 2017; Newig *et al.*, 2018; Bussu *et al.*, 2022)
Meta-Governance	Governance of governance through coordination by steering and designing the rules, norms, and processes that	Typically, state actors, policy designers, or central authorities overseeing multiple	Central actors retain meta-control through rule-setting and enabling conditions; indirect power.	Even in decentralised systems, some hierarchical oversight is necessary to maintain	Operates above CG, meta-governors shape the conditions under which	(Sørensen, 2006; Kooiman and Jentoft, 2009; Gjaltema, Biesbroek and Termeer, 2020)

	shape other governance arrangements.	governance networks.		coherence and accountability.	collaboration occurs.	
Collaborative Governance	Coordination through structured, formalised collaboration among diverse stakeholders aimed at joint decision-making.	Public, private, and civil-society actors working collectively toward shared goals.	Relies on trust, reciprocity, and deliberation; tensions arise from power asymmetries and competing interests.	Collective problem-solving and can generate public value when managed inclusively and transparently.	The focus of this thesis, synthesises features of other governance forms, while emphasising sustained, institutionalised collaboration across sectors.	(Ansell and Gash, 2008b; Emerson, Nabatchi and S. B. Balogh, 2012; Batory and S. Svensson, 2019; Ansell *et al.*, 2020a; Sørensen *et al.*, 2020)

Although both participatory and CG emphasise democratic values, the latter's focus is more pragmatic. It is designed not only to democratise governance but also to enhance problem-solving through cross-sectoral capacity building and the pooling of knowledge, legitimacy, and resources (Newig and Kvarda, 2012). In practice, participatory governance may be employed to legitimise predetermined outcomes, while CG requires negotiated goals and outcomes among interdependent actors (Esposito and Ricci, 2015; Bussu *et al.*, 2022). This situates CG at the intersection of institutional theory, deliberative democracy, and implementation studies, offering a comprehensive framework for analysing complex public challenges in contemporary urban and regional governance (Frieling, Lindenberg and Stokman, 2014; Bradford, 2016; Bradley, Israa H. Mahmoud and Arlati, 2022b).

Similarly, CG is situated within and often overlaps with networked interactions among policy stakeholders. Modern governance often unfolds through dense webs of interdependent organisations, including public agencies, NGOs, private firms, and civic associations (Ansell and Gash, 2008a; Bodin, Sandström and Crona, 2016; Wang and Ran, 2021a). These networks enable flexibility, resource sharing, and information exchange, which are vital in addressing complex policy problems (Alford and Head, 2017). Yet, where network governance tends to focus on structural relationships, inter-organisational dependencies, and informal coordination (see Table 1), CG adds a layer of normative intentionality and procedural design. It seeks to institutionalise not only coordination but shared interests, trust, power sharing and accountability mechanisms to underpin collective decision-making (Amsler, 2016; Beshi and Kaur, 2020). In this sense, network governance describes the architecture of relationships, while CG accounts for the mechanisms that enable these relationships to function in a productive and equitable way (Bevir, 2020; Wang and Ran, 2021a). The distinction also becomes clearer as networked governance may involve strategic or interest-based coordination without necessarily achieving inclusiveness or equity. CG, in contrast, aspires to balance power asymmetries and foster a sense of joint ownership. It places normative expectations on participants to engage in principled dialogue and to work toward consensus-based outcomes (Morçöl *et al.*, 2021).

The role of meta-governance adds further conceptual clarity as it defines the processes through which governing actors, typically public authorities, design, enable, and steer diverse governance arrangements (see Table 1) without directly controlling them (Silvestre, Marques and Gomes, 2018; Gjaltema, Biesbroek and Termeer, 2020). Through meta-governance, actors can structure the institutional conditions that allow CG to emerge, including convening platforms, rule-setting, and framing policy problems in ways that enable deliberation and shared action (Jessop, 1998; Kooiman and Jentoft, 2009). In this light, CG may be seen as an operational manifestation of meta-governance strategies, particularly when governments choose to facilitate rather than dictate the governance process (Ansell and Gash, 2018; Gjaltema, Biesbroek and Termeer, 2020). This layered relationship reveals that CG is not merely a new governance model, but a reflexive and adaptive framework embedded in a complex governance ecosystem (Howlett, Kekez and Poocharoen, 2017).

2.3.1 Collaborative Governance Frameworks

CG is a widely used term with multiple perspectives and conceptualisations attached to its use. Within policy studies, CG has been offered as a solution to traditional and autocratic models of government, emphasising the importance of adaptive, responsive, and inclusive approaches to policymaking to address the diverse and interconnected challenges facing societies today (Reddel, 2002; Bingham, Nabatchi and O'Leary, 2005a; Christensen and Lægreid, 2007). Additionally, the term CG is not restricted to government stakeholders, but extends the policymaking spaces to various non-government stakeholders, needed to take part in collaborations and effective decision-making processes (Lasker and Weiss, 2003; Warner, 2006; Scott, Thomas and Magallanes, 2019).

CG literature often denotes a distinct type of dynamic between government and non-governmental stakeholders. CG has been widely conceptualised as a participatory model involving shared authority and collective problem-solving across sectors. Emerson et al. (2012, p. 2) offer a conceptualisation, describing it as:

> *'the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished'.*

This proposition emphasises collaboration as a dynamic and adaptive process rather than a fixed institutional form. Emerson et al. (2012) stress that trust-building, shared motivation, and joint capacity development are central to sustaining collaborative efforts. Similarly, Reilly (1998) characterises CG as a problem-solving approach grounded in the 'shared pursuit' of solutions by both government agencies and citizens. This highlights the normative dimension of collaboration, characterising it as a deliberate attempt to bridge institutional boundaries through inclusive dialogue and joint responsibility. Both perspectives propose that CG is particularly suited to addressing complex, cross-cutting issues where no single actor holds the authority or capacity to act unilaterally. Thus, collaboration becomes both a governance strategy and a democratic aspiration.

Mosley and Wong (2021) echo this perspective, emphasising the complexity and potential intractability of certain issues in the absence of multilateral collaboration and define collaborative management as the approach to address problems that single organisations alone cannot resolve. Further expanding on the intersectoral collaboration theme, Bingham and O'Leary (2014) highlight the critical intersection between public and private sectors. This suggests that although CG is frequently perceived as a structured, managed process, it fundamentally depends on collaborating actors proactively seeking to engage in collective problem-solving efforts.

CG is widely used in academic literature; however, it encompasses a significant array of concepts. While there have been several attempts to provide a cohesive analytical framework to organise the field, the rapid growth in CG literature has thwarted this type of synthesising work. Several scholars highlight essential features of CG including a diverse range of non-government stakeholders, joint activities, joint structures, and shared resources aimed at seeking consensus on public issues (Boston and Gill,

2011; Scott, Thomas and Magallanes, 2019; Wisnumurti *et al.*, 2020; Agbodzakey, 2024). Collaborative arrangements often thrive on a significant degree of self-organisation, where participating actors have the autonomy to choose the activities they engage in and the partners they collaborate with to implement policies and programs (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; 2012; Ansell and Gash, 2018; Sørensen *et al.*, 2020).

Within the field of policy studies, CG is increasingly recognised as both an analytical and normative framework for understanding how public value is achieved in settings characterised by pluralism, uncertainty, and institutional fragmentation (Frieling, Lindenberg and Stokman, 2014; Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017). As Newig et al. (2018) argue, collaborative arrangements are not only mechanisms of democratic inclusion but also of effective policy delivery, especially in domains such as environmental planning, local development, and health systems governance.

CG literature is characterised by a tension between idealistic and pragmatic perspectives. On the one hand, scholars often present an overly optimistic view of CG, emphasising its transformative potential to empower citizens, foster trust, and achieve productive synergies (Scott and Thomas, 2017; Batory and Sara Svensson, 2019; Agbodzakey, 2024). This idealised perspective often overlooks the inherent power imbalances, conflicting interests, and potential for manipulation that exist within collaborative arrangements. On the other hand, critics adopt a more pragmatic, and often sceptical, approach, highlighting the challenges of CG (Ansell *et al.*, 2020a; McIvor, 2020a). They argue that the conceptual boundaries of CG remain ambiguous and contested, and literature lacks consensus on what distinguishes collaboration from other participatory or network-based approaches (Ansell and Gash, 2018; Batory and S. Svensson, 2019). This ambiguity risks overstretching the concept, allowing it to be applied to almost any form of multi-actor engagement, regardless of power dynamics or institutional context (Ansell and Gash, 2008a; Emerson, Nabatchi and S. B. Balogh, 2012).

Scholars have also examined CG through the lens of mutual learning, accountability, and enhanced trust and legitimacy, positioning it as a bridging concept between democratic theory and policy analysis (Amsler, 2016; Ansell et al., 2020a). CG is

frequently applied in empirical studies to explain the conditions under which joint problem-solving is sustained, the role of facilitative leadership, and the impacts of process design on governance outcomes (Frieling, Lindenberg and Stokman, 2014; Ulibarri et al., 2020). Ultimately, while CG draws from and interacts with participatory, network, and meta-governance models, it presents a unique combination of procedural integrity, institutional embeddedness, and multi-stakeholder problem-solving. Its positioning within policy studies reflects a broader move toward integrated and adaptive governance frameworks (Stoker, 1998; Ansell and Gash, 2008a; Scott and Thomas, 2017).

The practice of CG has also come under debate in academic literature. Ansell and Gash (2018, p. 17) argue that CG has evolved from being a 'last resort' option to a 'proactive policy instrument on a grander scale'. Therefore, CG provides an environment where various government and non-government stakeholders with diverse expertise, and perspectives on public problems and their solutions will bring together their knowledge and resources (La Grouw et al., 2024). Recent literature has increasingly called for academic studies to pay more attention to inherent challenges and nuances of the processes of aligning different stakeholder perspectives in an increasingly complex, culturally diverse, and continuously evolving context (Bannink and Trommel, 2019a; Van Duijn, Bannink and Ybema, 2022a). In addition to this, emerging literature also places value on 'situated knowledge' (La Grouw et al., 2024), claiming it necessary to understand how various stakeholders with conflicting perspectives facilitate, negotiate, and participate in collaborative practices (Ulibarri et al., 2020; Agbodzakey, 2024).

Scholars emphasise that CG arrangements are embedded within complex and evolving socio-political contexts, where government and non-government stakeholder approaches are shaped by their distinct institutional settings, experiences, and normative assumptions (Bannink and Trommel, 2019b; La Grouw *et al.*, 2024). The concept of *situated knowledge* has emerged in the literature as an important analytical lens for understanding *how* actors' context-specific understandings and interpretations inform their participation in collaborative processes (Crompton, 2019; Beshi and Kaur, 2020). Rather than being objective or universally shared, such knowledge is socially constructed, rooted in stakeholders' organisational, cultural, and professional

contexts. Within CG, situated knowledge becomes particularly important given the diversity of actors bringing different perspectives on public problems and their solutions (Crompton, 2019; La Grouw, Bannink and Van Hout, 2020).

Acknowledging this epistemic plurality enables a more nuanced analysis of how stakeholders negotiate meaning, navigate tensions, and engage in joint decision-making processes. Scholars such as Bannink and Trommel (2019b) and Van Duijn (2022a) argue that recognising these dynamics is essential for aligning perspectives in diverse governance settings. Consequently, the incorporation of situated knowledge into analyses of CG enhances our understanding of how legitimacy, trust, and inclusion are negotiated and institutionalised in practice (Rhodes, 2017; Scott, Thomas and Magallanes, 2019; Bartels and Turnbull, 2020b).

Agrawal and Lemos (2007) acknowledge the importance of examining diverse collaborative arrangements, encompassing partnerships among government, private sector, civil society, and communities, as well as hybrid structures like public-private and private-social collaborations, and co-management regimes. Ansell and Gash (2007, p. 544) offer a very influential yet restrictive definition of CG where:

> *'one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets'.*

This definition requires government to be the initiating actor, participation from non-government stakeholders, and excludes purely consultative practices. In scholarly discourse, CG refers to a structured arrangement whereby public agencies engage directly with non-state stakeholders in a collective, formalised decision-making process (Bingham, 2009; Sirianni, 2009). Existing studies also point towards the significance of community-based collaborative initiatives such as collective resource management, as well as intergovernmental collaborations, engaged in interstate river basin commissions and national government's inter-agency efforts on public health or climate change policy (Bremer and Meisch, 2017; Kalesnikaite, 2019a; Shu and Wang, 2021). This expanded perspective recognises the varied forms of CG that extend

beyond conventional government-initiated arrangements (Emerson, 2018; Agbodzakey, 2021; Hofstad *et al.*, 2022).

Scholars have previously studied various theoretical and empirical dimensions of CG to better understand and align theory and practice. Ansell (2020b) explored the impact of inclusivity on the effectiveness and legitimacy of CG, and proposed a conceptual model to analyse the factors contributing to inclusion in collaborative processes. Torfing et al. (2020) investigated the conditions under which collaborative networks produce innovative public value outcomes, identifying key institutional design and leadership factors. Sørensen et al. (2020) examined how politicians navigate the intersection of CG and representative democracy, exploring strategies for aligning policymaking across these arenas through various forms of political boundary spanning.

The existing literature on CG, while recognising its potential, reveals a pressing need for greater rigor and a shift in focus. The field is saturated by conceptual ambiguity, hindering the development of a cohesive understanding of CG (Batory and Svensson, 2019; Ansell *et al.*, 2020a). This ambiguity requires an effort to establish clear and consistent definitions of key concepts, allowing for more meaningful comparisons of research findings and a more robust theoretical framework.

Ansell and Torfing (2022) characterise CG as a ‘communicative activity’, which entails the transparency (exchange of information), mutual respect, and interdependence amongst participants. Furthermore, these rest on the perceived legitimacy, and trust amongst those involved. The efficacy of CG relies largely on its context, characterised by ‘the environment within which the collaborative is established, its procedural landscape and its capacity for deliberation and facilitative leadership’ (Ansell and Torfing, 2022, p. 501). These conditions may facilitate or discourage cooperation between stakeholder groups. Ansell and Torfing (2022) narrowed these procedural characteristics down to four broad variables: past history of antagonism or cooperation among stakeholders, institutional structures, mutual learning and understanding, and leadership. Ambrose and Siddiki (2024) characterise these processes according to their orientation toward consensus and its deliberative nature, aiming to develop and execute public policy, as well as to oversee the management of programs or public

assets. This conceptualisation highlights the integral role of various stakeholders working collaboratively to steer policy and programmatic implementations within the public sphere.

2.3.1.1 History of Antagonism and Cooperation

Scholars suggest that a prior history of antagonism or cooperation among stakeholders can either hinder or facilitate collaborative efforts (Gray, 1989; Andranovich, 1995). CG relies heavily on the relationships between stakeholders. Therefore, it is crucial to evaluate the level of trust and mutual respect among potential partners before establishing the CG principles. Mutual respect and trust form the basis of cooperation, which facilitates the collaborative processes where government and non-government stakeholders assume diverse roles (Ansell and Torfing, 2022).

Futrell (2003) argues that policy deadlocks often generate a strong impetus for CG. Ansell and Gash (2008b) corroborate this notion, noting that when stakeholders are highly interdependent, even significant conflicts can create a powerful incentive for CG. The literature clearly indicates that high levels of conflict are not necessarily a barrier to collaboration (Kern and Smutko, 2021; Smith and Sørensen, 2023; Ulibarri, 2024). In many successful collaboration cases, stakeholders recognise that they cannot achieve their goals without engaging in collaborative processes with other stakeholder groups, even if those groups have completely different or opposing incentives (Weber, 2003).

CG, however, can often be hindered by narratives of antagonism amongst stakeholder groups. The ‘us versus them’ approach to CG can be severely detrimental to these processes. A prehistory of conflict amongst stakeholders will likely manifest itself in low levels of trust, which can lead to diminished commitment, manipulative strategies, and disingenuous communication (Ansell and Gash, 2018). Conversely, a history of successful collaboration can foster effective collective decision-making and high levels of trust, cultivating a productive cycle of collaboration.

2.3.1.2 Institutional Settings

A defining characteristic of effective CG lies in its ability to integrate with, rather than overthrow, existing institutional structures (Nam and Pardo, 2011). Instead of completely replacing established systems, successful CG initiatives function as complementary mechanisms, often operating alongside or even within existing organisations (Torfing, Cristofoli, et al., 2020; Li, Li and Jiang, 2024). For instance, addressing power imbalances is not an outcome of CG, but a procedural change that needs to be in place from the initial stages of the collaboration. At a procedural level, institutional design concerns the selection of participants, the establishment of regulatory frameworks for participation, and the creation of decision-making and accountability mechanisms that structure collaboration within existing organisations (Torfing, Cristofoli, et al., 2020). However, institutional design also shapes power relations within collaboration. Li et al. (2024) show that institutional rules regulate stakeholder behaviour through regulatory frameworks, while the allocation of institutional resources reinforces the dominant coordinating role of local government. As a result, collaborative initiatives typically function as complementary mechanisms embedded within established governance arrangements.

Within this context, and according to the shift from government to governance, it can be argued that we live in a collaborative era, depicted by an open approach where power is diffused across multiple government and non-government actors and institutions. This paradigm shift is especially evident at the local level, where urban and local governments are increasingly expected to work collaboratively with civil society and private sector stakeholders. Recent literature emphasises this transformation in UK local governance, noting that councils are no longer just service providers, but also enablers of collaboration and community empowerment (Arkorful *et al.*, 2021; Johnson and Watt, 2022; Van Duijn, Bannink and Ybema, 2022b). Souza and Neto (2018) argue the emergence of horizontal forms of authority, such as participatory budgeting, which integrate the core principles of governance such as deliberation, , and shared accountability.

However, Gjaltema et al. (2020, p. 1774) caution against viewing the shift as a linear or complete replacement of government by governance. Instead, they argue that

governance networks typically operate in the shadow of hierarchy, where governments retain the authority to shape, steer, or constrain networked arrangements. This leads to the concept of meta-governance, where the government repositions itself as a coordinator or facilitator of governance functions (Gherhes, Hoole and Vorley, 2023). Crucially, the literature highlights that this shift is not universally enabling. Fukuyama (2016) identifies various limitations and ambiguities in how governance is enacted, such as the lack of clarity in actor roles, uneven power dynamics within networks, and inconsistent outcomes in terms of accountability and legitimacy. Similarly, Keping (2018) reflects on the tensions local authorities face in balancing democratic responsiveness with managerial efficiency, especially under conditions of fiscal austerity and administrative reform.

2.3.1.2.1 Elite Stakeholders

Elite stakeholders play a complex and often ambivalent role in CG. These actors, (including political leaders, senior bureaucrats, influential businesspeople, and prominent community figures) can provide resources, institutional access, and strategic support (Levine, 2017). However, their influence can distort inclusion in collaborative processes, especially when power asymmetries go unaddressed. Studies have shown that elites often dominate CG frameworks by shaping agendas, selecting participants, and limiting dissenting opinions. This phenomenon, referred to as elite capture, undermines the democratic intent of collaboration by restricting access for marginalised or less organised groups, whose participation may be limited due to structural, social, or institutional barriers (Warren and Visser, 2016; Levine, 2017; Waheduzzaman, As-Saber and Hamid, 2018).

In the absence of adequate strategies to share power in an equitable manner, collaborative processes may be at risk of manipulation by elite actors if some stakeholders do not have the capacity, organisation, or agency to participate, or to participate in an equitable setting (Purdy, 2012; Ran and Qi, 2018; Turnhout et al., 2020). These imbalances of power, where actors utilise their resources and capacity to influence decisions in an unjust manner, may produce distrust and weak commitment from other stakeholder groups (Head, 2019). Such dominance not only compromises procedural fairness but also erodes trust and weakens long-term

stakeholder commitment. While elite involvement is sometimes defended as necessary for effective project delivery, especially in contexts lacking administrative capacity, it raises questions about legitimacy and equity in governance (Rolfe, 2018; Ran and Qi, 2019; Cao et al., 2023). Therefore, overcoming these power symmetries requires a deliberate shift in organisational culture and procedures. For instance, traditionally centralised and hierarchical entities must create space for collective decision-making, embracing new protocols and cultures that value shared power and collaborative processes (Souza and Neto, 2018; Ran and Qi, 2019).

2.3.1.3 Shared Learning and Mutual Incentives

As discussed briefly in Chapter 1, complex policy problems have necessitated collaborative solutions. From a resource dependency standpoint, tackling these critical policy challenges and providing high-quality integrated services necessitates increased interdependencies among public, private nonprofit, and private business actors. CG represents a range of concepts and perspectives that grapple with the challenge of jointly identifying, connecting, and developing solutions to these complex policy problems (Batory and S. Svensson, 2019).

When CG is adopted as an appropriate approach to addressing complex policy challenges, the facilitators must focus on establishing its foundational elements. Ansell and Torfing (2022) emphasise the importance of employing appropriate methods and strategies to initiate collaborative efforts, as this will determine the effectiveness of the collaboration. Emerson et al. (2012) propose that effective collaboration is achieved by fostering mutual learning and aligning incentives among the stakeholders. These two key characteristics should be embedded within the collaborative process, from the initial agenda-setting and problem definition stages to the project delivery and implementation phases. Each stakeholder participating in the collaboration must develop a comprehensive understanding of the collaborative process and, to some extent, understand the perspectives of the other stakeholders.

Scholars also point to mutual or consequential incentives of collaboration as driven by a mix of both internal and external motivating factors (Choi and Robertson, 2019; Ulibarri et al., 2023). Internally, collaborating parties may be motivated by mutual

problems, resource needs, interests, or potential opportunities. Externally, incentives such as situational or institutional crises, or opportunities for joint action can further drive collective problem solving (Head, 2019; Tando, Sudarmo and Haryanti, 2020). Such incentives induce different actors and groups to engage together. Ambrose and Siddiki (2024) stress the importance of analysing the incentives for government and non-government stakeholders to facilitate and participate in CG. Incentives to collaborate also depend on the stakeholders' expectations and interpretations of whether the collaborative process will bring about meaningful results, particularly against the resources that collaboration requires (Jessop, 1995; Spekkink and Boons, 2015).

2.3.1.4 Trust

Trust is widely recognised in the social sciences as a foundational element of social order, democratic legitimacy, and effective governance (Fitzgerald and Wolak, 2016; Beshi and Kaur, 2020; Arkorful et al., 2021). Low levels of trust have been attributed to the creation of challenges such as dishonest communications, strategies of manipulation and insufficient commitment. Developing trust, however, can be resource intensive and time consuming, requiring repeated, high-quality interactions (K. Emerson, Nabatchi and S. Balogh, 2012), a history of successful cooperation (further discussed in Section 2.3.1.1), and demonstrable competence and expertise from all participating stakeholders (Arkorful et al., 2021). Within the literature on CG, trust has evolved from being seen as a desirable relational quality to being understood as an essential condition for cooperation, particularly where governance occurs across organisational, sectoral, and institutional boundaries (Ran and Qi, 2019). Its presence enables joint decision-making, reduces transaction costs, and facilitates the management of uncertainty. All of these are crucial in governance settings where multiple actors must work together under conditions of ambiguity, asymmetry, and resource scarcity (Jahn Hansen, 2006; Van Meerkerk and Edelenbos, 2014; Siddiki, Kim and Leach, 2017).

At its core, trust is defined by a willingness by one party to accept vulnerability based on positive expectations of another party's intentions or behaviour (Siddiki, Kim and

Leach, 2017). As Ran and Qi (2019) argue, this vulnerability arises in situations of interdependence where no single actor holds full control over outcomes. In CG, trust therefore functions both as a precondition for engagement and as a product of successful interaction. Importantly, trust is not monolithic. Drawing on Mayer et al. (1995), Ran and Qi (2019) outline three key attributes that shape perceptions of trustworthiness: ability (competence in performing tasks), benevolence (genuine concern for the partner's interests), and integrity (adherence to shared norms or ethical principles). These characteristics apply both at the interpersonal level, between individuals representing different organisations, and at the inter-organisational level, where sustained cooperation often depends on the institutional reputations and histories of the entities involved (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995; Porumbescu, 2017).

Crucially, within CG trust manifests at different levels. At the micro level, it is built through repeated interpersonal interactions marked by reciprocity and open communication. At the meso level, trust is embedded in inter-organisational arrangements, collaborative procedures, and shared norms of engagement. Inter-organisational trust, in particular, emerges not from isolated individual perceptions but from institutionalised relationships supported by mutual learning, accountability mechanisms, and shared goals (Ansell and Gash, 2007; Wilkes, 2014; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2015; Noordzij, De Koster and Van Der Waal, 2021). Trust is rooted in broader institutional frameworks, regulatory systems, and societal norms that shape expectations of reliability and fairness across governance processes. This institutionalisation is particularly relevant in situated governance, where actors are embedded in dense, overlapping networks and governance processes are subject to political contestation and frequent restructuring (Klijn, Edelenbos and Steijn, 2010; Van Meerkerk and Edelenbos, 2014).

Additionally, Ran and Qi (2019) point out the importance of considering stakeholder trust at both interpersonal as well as interorganisational levels, as individuals act as points of contact between stakeholders and organisations and play a crucial role in building and fostering trust. In CG, trust is 'produced and reproduced through interactions over time' (Ran and Qi, 2019, p. 7). Government and non-government stakeholders develop trust as the representatives develop contact and the interaction

continues. Through interactions in collaborative work this trust can be further strengthened, recreated, patterned and institutionalised (Liu, 2024).

Trust is also widely understood as a social control mechanism (Barnes and Prior, 1996; Siddiki, Kim and Leach, 2017). Rather than relying on formal sanctions or bureaucratic oversight, CG often depends on trust to ensure that actors comply with agreements and remain committed to collective goals (Ansell and Gash, 2018; Emerson, 2018). In contexts of policy uncertainty or limited government capacity, (conditions frequently observed in UK local governance since the onset of austerity) trust allows actors to coordinate by enabling flexibility, improvisation, and adaptive responses (Kim, 2010; Ran and Qi, 2019; Noordzij, De Koster and Van Der Waal, 2021). For instance, Lowndes and McCaughie (2013) analysed the reliance of English local authorities on informal trust-based collaboration among partners in Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) to sustain coordination and creativity despite shrinking resources and weakened institutional structures. Similarly, Lowndes and Gardner (2016) demonstrate how local authorities drew heavily on trust-based relationships and coordination such as shared service arrangements to maintain service delivery and institutional resilience. Additionally, research on UK climate governance further shows that, even in the absence of national orchestration or sub regional frameworks, voluntary and trust dependent collaboration has enabled local climate initiatives to emerge across multiple governance levels, though in fragmented and uneven forms (Russell and Christie, 2021). However, this trust-based coordination is inherently fragile. It is contingent on positive past experiences and shared understandings, and can be quickly undermined by perceived betrayal, power abuse, or failure to deliver on commitments (Ansell and Gash, 2007; O'Leary and Bingham, 2009; Waardenburg *et al.*, 2020).

Yet trust does not operate independently of power. Ran and Qi (2019) warn against romanticising trust as an apolitical good. Rather, trust and power are mutually constitutive. Asymmetric power relations can constrain the emergence of trust, especially when weaker actors perceive dominant ones as controlling the agenda or outcomes. For example, in multi-stakeholder collaborations where local authorities work with large private developers or state agencies, trust may be difficult to build if the process lacks mechanisms to balance influence. At the same time, trust can serve

as a counterweight to power, allowing marginalised actors to participate more confidently when norms of reciprocity, transparency, and accountability are institutionalised (Park and Blenkinsopp, 2011; Porumbescu, 2017). In this sense, trust enhances not just cooperation but also the equity and inclusiveness of governance.

Finally, trust is dynamic and iterative, shaped by historical experience, institutional memory, and evolving expectations (K. Emerson, Nabatchi and S. Balogh, 2012; Jacobs *et al.*, 2020). In collaborative settings, building trust requires time, resources, and commitment (Beshi and Kaur, 2020). These elements are often scarce in urban governance environments marked by austerity and administrative churn. As such, trust cannot be assumed as a background condition but must be actively cultivated through deliberate strategies including inclusive design, open communication, shared learning, and accountability practices. Therefore, trust in CG is best understood as a multidimensional and relational construct that bridges conflicts of interest, reduces uncertainty, and facilitates collective decision-making. It is a crucial mechanism through which actors in the public, private, and civic sectors can co-create urban policies and manage collective challenges (OECD, 2017; Porumbescu, 2017). In cities particularly, where local authorities must navigate fiscal constraints, fragmented responsibilities, and increasingly diverse stakeholder landscapes, trust becomes not only a facilitator of governance but a site of governance itself. Understanding how trust is built, maintained, and undermined is thus essential to understanding how CG unfolds in urban settings (Money and Cohen, 2015; Ninan *et al.*, 2024).

2.4 Coproduction as the Situated Practice of Collaborative Governance

As detailed above in Section 2.3 and 2.3.1 there are various interpretations of CG, which leads to an inconsistency in terms of what 'effective' CG looks like. Furthermore, given some of the challenges associated with balancing power dynamics and establishing trust for example, there may be a disparity between the theory of CG and the practice of collaborative work. CG presents a deeper reconfiguration of government stakeholders than most participatory models, positioning stakeholders as coproducers in collective decision-making (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015; Loeffler and Bovaird, 2018). Sorrentino et al. (2018) point out the rapid adoption of CG and related

concepts, such as collaboration, coproduction, and cocreation, as discussed in Table 2 has led to an increase in siloed discussions, rather than a cohesive narrative. Table 2 provides a comparative overview of three commonly cited collaborative concepts in the literature: coproduction, cocreation, and codesign.

Table 2 Comparative Analysis of Concepts

	Coproduction	**Cocreation**	**Codesign**
Actor	Individual citizens, private sector	Individual citizens, users	Individual citizens, users, designers
Objective	Emphasis on promoting engagement; includes austerity	Emphasis on solving a problem	Emphasis on creating social benefits and addressing needs
Input	Includes financial contribution	Creativity and ideas	Includes knowledge and expertise of designer
Output	Broad, services included	Mainly physical design of public space	Mainly physical design of public space
Phase	Delivery and management, if not whole phase	Planning, if not whole phase	Planning
Means	Participation of various actors, shared responsibility	Participation of locals, digital tools, design	Emphasis on collaborative process
Context/ Topic	Broad	Specific (design-related)	Specific (design-related)

As illustrated in Table 2, these approaches share a common emphasis on collaboration between government and non-government actors, yet they differ in their objectives, forms of input, and stages of the policy cycle in which participation occurs. Coproduction typically refers to the participation of citizens, service users, or civil society actors in the delivery and management of public services, emphasising shared responsibility between professionals and users (Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017; Souza and Neto, 2018). In contrast, cocreation is generally associated with collaborative problem-solving and innovation, where stakeholders contribute ideas, creativity, and experiential knowledge to develop new solutions (Trencher et al., 2014; Haustein and Lorson, 2023). Codesign, meanwhile, tends to focus more narrowly on the collaborative design of policies, services, or physical spaces, often occurring at

earlier stages of planning and development (Farr, 2018; Lee, Feiertag and Unger, 2024a).

While these approaches are conceptually related, the literature suggests that coproduction represents a broader form of collaboration within governance frameworks (Howlett, Kekez and Poocharoen, 2017; Howarth et al., 2022; Lee, Feiertag and Unger, 2024a). Unlike codesign or cocreation, which often operate at specific stages of project development, coproduction can span multiple phases of the policy cycle, including agenda setting, design, implementation, and service delivery (Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017). For this reason, coproduction has become a prominent strand within CG research, particularly in studies examining how governments and citizens jointly address complex societal challenges (Sorrentino, Sicilia and Howlett, 2018; Turnhout *et al.*, 2020). Among these approaches, coproduction offers the most appropriate conceptual lens for this study because it captures the ongoing and institutionalised collaboration between government and non-government actors across multiple stages of the policy process. In this thesis, coproduction is therefore treated as a situated practice of CG that illustrates how collaborative processes are operationalised within real policy contexts.

Coproduction is amongst one of the popular modes of New Public Governance (Torfing, Bøgh Andersen, et al., 2020). The concept has gained increasing attention in recent years as a means to address complex societal challenges and promote effective and inclusive decision-making processes (Sorrentino, Sicilia and Howlett, 2018; Turnhout et al., 2020). Coproduction has become a prominent strand in CG studies highlighting the growing intersection between citizens and government in the formation and implementation of public initiatives. According to Ostrom(1996), the critical role of stakeholders' active participation in managing common-pool resources and delivering public services, demonstrating its perceived benefits across a range of contexts from community policing to environmental conservation.

Coproduction literature draws focus to the co-dependency shared amongst government and non-government stakeholders for policy implementation and service delivery (Lee, Feiertag and Unger, 2024a). Coproduction as a practice of collaboration governance encompasses the ‘process of cooperation among public managers,

professionals, third-sector organizations, and users with the aim to provide a given public service' (Vignieri, 2020, p. 48). Bovaird and Loeffler (2016, p. 254) define as '... professionals and citizens making better use of each other's assets, resources and contributions to achieve better outcomes or improved efficiency'. Furthermore, coproduction encompasses a wide range of practices and activities, leading to a heterogeneous understanding of the concept. It can involve collaborative efforts at various stages, from policy design (Howlett, Kekez and Poocharoen, 2017) to public service delivery (Fledderus, Brandsen and Honingh, 2015), reflecting the diverse ways in which government and non-government stakeholders can work together to address complex societal challenges and promote effective and inclusive governance (Crompton, 2019). In the context of urban CG, coproduction is often seen as a means to foster citizen participation in decision-making processes (Wyborn, 2015; Sorrentino, Sicilia and Howlett, 2018; Vignieri, 2020). Coproduction not only highlights the interdependence of various stakeholders in decision-making processes but also emphasise the need for equitable and inclusive participation in CG efforts (Rigon and Walker, 2024).

Coproduction has been widely conceptualised 'as an umbrella concept that captures a wide variety of activities that can occur in any phase of the public service cycle' (Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017, p. 769). This highlights the breadth and flexibility of the concept across different stages of policymaking in governance processes. However, the literature also demonstrates that coproduction is not a singular or consistently applied concept in practice. Oliver et al. (2019, p. 3) note that coproduction has 'come to refer to activities as diverse as consultation on topics', reflecting the wide variation in how the concept is operationalised in practice. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that coproduction encompasses a wide range of collaborative practices with differing degrees of stakeholder involvement and influence. In this thesis, coproduction is therefore treated as an analytical lens through which a range of CG practices can be examined, recognising that empirical forms of collaboration may not always align with normative ideals of shared decision-making.

Coproduction is not monolithic but varies across different applications and sectors. NESTA (2013, p. 5) provided a comprehensive definition, characterising coproduction as the involvement of individuals and community groups in public service delivery. This

definition clarifies that coproduction is a collective process between various stakeholders and recognises that the role of civil society extends beyond that of public service users.

> *'Coproduction means delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbours. Where activities are co-produced in this way, both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change'.*

In climate adaptation planning, for example, coproduction has been used to integrate scientific models with local knowledge systems, producing shared knowledge that is more likely to guide effective and legitimate decision-making. Wyborn (2015) and Howarth et al. (2022) have illustrated how collaborative climate governance benefits from coproduction by enabling mutual learning between scientists, policy-makers, and local communities. In these settings, coproduction supports the generation of shared problem definitions, increases policy adaptability, and enhances long-term resilience strategies (Bremer and Meisch, 2017).

Coproduction has also been adopted in education and youth services, where coproduction initiatives have engaged young people in the design of curricula, community programmes, and interventions aimed at improving wellbeing and social inclusion (Oh and Bush, 2014; Perry, 2022a; Rigon and Walker, 2024). These efforts aim to shift the role of young people from passive recipients of policy to active participants in shaping their social environments. In addition, education coproduction initiatives often involve third-sector organisations and schools working together to collectively design and deliver place-based initiates (Lepofsky and Fraser, 2003; Bradley and Mahmoud, 2024). While coproduction continues to be applied to a wide range of areas in the policy arena, there is a common emphasis on reshaping multi-stakeholder governance relations to include more horizontal, iterative, and deliberative practices in the policy cycle (Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017; Goulart and Falanga, 2022).

On a more practical note, several studies have noted that coproduction of policy and services can be constrained by institutional rigidity, resource limitations, and disparities in capacity among stakeholders (Brown and Head, 2019; Jaspers and

Steen, 2019). Moreover, when coproduction is introduced instrumentally as a cost-saving measure, rather than a democratic practice, it risks becoming tokenistic or reinforcing existing power hierarchies (Merriam *et al.*, 2001; Brown and Head, 2019; Oliver, Kothari and Mays, 2019). Nevertheless, although coproduction is widely associated with fostering learning, dispersing power, and building trust, the realities of its situated practice often reproduce the very institutional constraints and power imbalances it seeks to address.

There has been much criticism on being practiced as an 'expert-focused' exercise, where wider civil society stakeholders such as citizens and communities are overlooked in decision-making processes, whereas organised non-government stakeholders such as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), academia and industry will have more agency in decisions (Kenneth D. Butterfield, Reed and Lemak, 2004; Crompton et al., 2018). Scholars have also debated the nature of participation, and the extent to which each stakeholder has power and authority to affect and shape decisions (Fung, 2006; Menegasso and Salm, 2010). These critics argue that effective coproduction should involve the meaningful engagement of all stakeholders, in decision-making processes (Ostrom, 1996; Frieling, Lindenberg and Stokman, 2014; Broto and Alves, 2018; Crompton, 2019).

These debates highlight that challenges of coproduction extend beyond participation itself, raising deeper questions about how knowledge, power, and legitimacy are distributed within collaborative processes. Perry (2022) argues that coproduction is often embedded in academic and policy environments that privilege professional authority and formal evidence, which marginalises alternative perspectives and constrains meaningful knowledge exchange. Similarly, Williams et al. (2020) highlight that coproduction frequently operates within technocratic and managerial frameworks that value efficiency, performance, and measurable outputs over the messy, time-consuming work of building mutual understanding. Bell and Pahl (2018) further contend that while coproduction is frequently framed as a socially progressive practice, it is increasingly shaped by neoliberal logics that instrumentalise participation to deliver pre-defined institutional goals rather than redistribute power. This produces what Williams et al. (2020) describe as the dark side of coproduction, where participation can generate frustration, tokenism, and even harm for contributors when their input is

undervalued or co-opted. In such contexts, repeated experiences of limited influence or tokenistic engagement can also foster apathy and indifference among participants, further undermining the sustainability of coproduction efforts (Zhelnina, 2020). Lee, Feiertag and Unger (2024b) also show that vague definitions of coproduction allow dominant actors to manipulate its discourse, maintaining control while appearing inclusive. These critiques reveal that the challenges of coproduction lie not only in participation but in the enduring asymmetries of power that determine whose knowledge is recognised and whose interests ultimately shape collaborative outcomes.

The extant literature on coproduction in policy and local governance, therefore, demonstrates a paradigm shift towards inclusive and collaborative approaches that harnesses the collective capacities of government and the public (Ansell et al., 2020b; Goulart and Falanga, 2022). Yet, recent literature has also moved beyond overtly optimistic approaches to call for closer empirical attention to failed cases of coproduction (Richardson, Durose and Perry, 2019; Sawkins, 2024). Oliver, Kothari and Mays (2019) highlight that, while coproduction is widely promoted as a means of improving legitimacy and impact, it often imposes significant practical, emotional, and professional costs on participants. They identify how collaborative processes can reproduce hierarchies of expertise, marginalise less powerful actors, and result in policy-based evidence that reflects dominant interests rather than diverse perspectives. Such dynamics challenge the ideal of coproduction as an egalitarian practice, revealing how it can inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities and lead to researcher burnout or stakeholder fatigue. Similarly, Sorrentino et al. (2018) argue that the optimistic discourse surrounding coproduction has obscured its potential for value co-destruction, where divergent goals, conflicting perspectives, or asymmetrical relationships between state and non-state actors undermine public value rather than enhance it. These insights demonstrate the need to move beyond a celebratory understanding of coproduction and develop more critical frameworks that account for its contextual limitations, governance risks, and uneven outcomes across different policy settings.

Building on these critiques, Williams et al. (2020) caution against the increasingly symbolic use of coproduction, arguing that the concept has become overly expansive and technocratic, often masking deep power asymmetries and the exclusion of

marginalised stakeholders. They highlight the need to recover the egalitarian and democratic rationale of coproduction, rather than treating it as a technical exercise in partnership working. Similarly, Cluley, Parker and Radnor (2021) argue that the emphasis on value creation in public service reform obscures the potential for dis/value or even harm, as collaborative processes can reproduce institutional bias, marginalise certain groups, or generate coercive forms of participation. These critiques expose coproduction as a contested process that can simultaneously create and destroy public value, challenging assumptions of its inherent inclusivity and democratic virtue (Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2015; Dudau, Glennon and Verschuere, 2019).

2.4.1 Stakeholders in Coproduction

As established in the section above, coproduction is inherently relational and built on the interactions between a diverse range of actors who share responsibility for shaping policy design and governance outcomes. It depends on the collaboration of multiple stakeholders whose interests, resources, and capacities intersect within complex institutional settings (Scott, Thomas and Magallanes, 2019; Momen, 2021). In practice, these actors, including government, civil society, and academia, each bring distinct forms of power, knowledge, and motivation to the process. Their involvement determines not only the inclusivity and legitimacy of coproduction but also the extent to which power and accountability are distributed across governance frameworks. Understanding the role of each stakeholder is therefore crucial for analysing how coproduction takes place in practice, how knowledge is exchanged, and how competing interests are negotiated (Bingham, 2009; Sahel, 2016). The following subsections examine the specific contributions and challenges associated with different stakeholder groups, highlighting how their interactions shape the effectiveness and democratic quality of coproduction processes.

2.4.1.1 Government Stakeholders

While national governments do not need to be involved directly in CG, they have the power to create macro-regulations such as policies to create the conditions for such

systems that define the budget, local services, and consensus-oriented decision making (Batory and Svensson, 2020; Agbodzakey, 2021). Urban CG solutions can be adopted as an approach to collective action, by overcoming challenges through collective synergies at the community level (Lasker and Weiss, 2003; Bradley, Israa H Mahmoud and Arlati, 2022). The introduction of representation at a local level can help align urban stakeholders' interests and concerns that can be targeted and addressed more effectively. Therefore, publicly accepted policy outcomes are likely to rely quite heavily on government interventions in decision-making processes that engage non-government stakeholders (Li, Li and Jiang, 2024).

Moreover, CG functions have also marked a shift towards dispersing responsibility of decision-making and provision of public services. These models of devolved CG are prevalent primarily across UK, USA and Western Europe, where local government and non-government stakeholder collaboration occurs through relationships of co-dependence and reciprocity (Griggs and Roberts, 2012; Fitzgerald and Wolak, 2016). These collaborations are operationalised through various forms of coproduction with non-government stakeholders including citizens themselves through partnerships, community volunteering and strategies of responsibilisation (Pill, 2022; Lee and Na, 2024). Local governments are dependent on non-government stakeholders such as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), universities, and citizens to participate in dialogue with them to ensure responsiveness, legitimation of local planning and policy decisions (Dwyer, 1998; Barnes, 1999; Balloch and Taylor, 2001; Collins, 2001; MacLeavy, 2004). Ansell and Gash (2008b) and others pose the condition that the processes of CG should be initiated by government stakeholders (Bingham, Nabatchi and O'Leary, 2005b; Emerson, Nabatchi and S. B. Balogh, 2012). Another important consideration is that collaboration is often initiated by government actors, which places them in control of the agenda, including both the process and the content of engagement. As a result, other stakeholders may have limited influence over how priorities are set or how collaborative arrangements are structured. This can confine participation to the boundaries established by those with greater institutional authority, reinforcing elite interests (previously discussed in Section 2.3.1.2 CG Institutional Settings) and limiting genuine power-sharing. Such imbalances risk undermining the inclusivity and effectiveness of collaboration, ultimately constraining the ability to achieve intended outcomes (Loeffler and Bovaird, 2018; Castán Broto *et al.*, 2022)

Local governments play a central role in urban CG, serving as conveners, regulators, and facilitators of collaboration. They bear the responsibility to create an enabling environment for collaboration to thrive. This entails providing platforms for dialogue, establishing transparent rules and guidelines, and ensuring accountability in collaborative processes (Agranoff, 2012; Cairney and Toomey, 2024). Moreover, local governments play a critical role in shaping the agenda and priorities of collaborative initiatives, aligning them with broader policy objectives. Furthermore, local governments can act as catalysts for collaboration by incentivising and supporting collaborative endeavours. This may involve offering financial resources, technical assistance, or capacity-building support to foster partnerships among stakeholders (Kalesnikaite, 2019a; Arkorful et al., 2021). Local governments also have the potential to cultivate a culture of collaboration through effective leadership, communication, and the promotion of a shared vision for the city's future (Shu and Wang, 2021; Ortega and Béhague, 2022).

2.4.1.2 Non-Government Stakeholders

2.4.1.2.1 Academia

Academia plays a crucial role in understanding, analysing, and contributing to CG in urban settings (Firdausijah, 2019; Perry, 2022a). Therefore, it can be argued that academic research and scholarship are essential for advancing our understanding of the theories, concepts, and practices of CG (Kapucu and Hu, 2020). In the dynamic landscape of urban CG, universities have emerged as pivotal players, contributing unique resources, expertise, and perspectives to address complex urban challenges. By conducting comprehensive research on urban challenges, providing data-driven analysis and evidence-based solutions, they play a key role in informing policy development while catalysing sustainable practices within urban areas (Peters et al., 2022).

Furthermore, universities also invest significantly in capacity-building through an array of educational programs, courses, and workshops that equip stakeholders with essential knowledge foundations (Weerts and Sandmann, 2008). By empowering

stakeholders through training sessions and educational initiatives, universities can foster meaningful collaboration to enhance the overall effectiveness of urban government efforts (Wisnumurti et al., 2020). Additionally, universities serve as key conveners and facilitators of collaborative processes by facilitating forums, conferences, and workshops where government and non-government stakeholders can come together to share their perspectives, exchange ideas, and collectively create solutions (Kern and Smutko, 2021).

Various real-life examples demonstrate the function of universities in urban CG. For instance, Cities Partnerships Programme initiative by University College London illustrates how universities can take charge in comprehensive efforts to revitalise cities through partnerships with local government bodies, businesses, and community organisations (University College London, 2018). Similarly, the Urban Innovation Policy Lab at the Edinburgh Napier University demonstrates how universities can operate as centres for innovation by bringing together diverse stakeholders to collaboratively develop solutions for sustainable urban development while fostering an environment conducive to creative problem-solving (Mora and Deakin, 2019).

As Perry (2022a) notes, universities are increasingly positioned as civic institutions that can bridge the gap between academic expertise and community knowledge, creating spaces for collaboration and mutual learning. However, this role is not without challenges. Perry (2022a) cautions that the institutional norms and hierarchies within universities can shape which voices are legitimised in these spaces, potentially reproducing existing power imbalances rather than dismantling them. Similarly, Bell and Pahl (2018) argue that while universities can act as catalysts for socially just collaboration, they must also confront the risk of instrumentalising participation to meet research or policy agendas. Williams et al. (2020) add that academic-led coproduction can unintentionally marginalise community participants, highlighting the need for reflexive practices that recognise and mitigate the asymmetries of power, knowledge, and capacity within these engagements.

2.4.1.2.2 Industry

Governance literature increasingly recognises industry as a central actor within governance arrangements (Tomo et al., 2020). Private sector actors are commonly positioned as key participants in addressing complex policy challenges that exceed the capacity of the government alone. Florini and Pauli (2018) contend that the industry sector is generally understood as for-profit organisations that are distinguished from governmental and CSOs by their profit-oriented objectives, organisational structures, and access to capital, technology, and specialised expertise. The literature further emphasises that industry actors are heterogeneous, varying significantly in size, sectoral focus, resource capacity, and proximity to public decision-making processes, which shapes how they engage in CG (Shrestha, 2018; Tomo et al., 2020).

Scott and Thomas (2017) suggest that collaborative processes can benefit from the private sector's financial resources, technical knowledge, innovation capacity, and implementation expertise. Private sector actors may participate across different stages of coproduction, including agenda-setting, co-design, and service delivery, particularly in policy areas such as infrastructure development, urban regeneration, and sustainability initiatives (Stoker, 1998; Smith and Sørensen, 2023). Therefore, industry participation is framed as enhancing problem-solving capacity and enabling the mobilisation of resources that may otherwise be unavailable to public or civil society actors alone (Ysa, 2007; Donahue, Zeckhauser and Breyer, 2012).

However, scholars raise concerns regarding the implications of industry involvement in collaborative processes, cautioning that private sector actors often possess disproportionate resources and technical expertise. This positions them as elite stakeholders and further exacerbates power asymmetries over collaborative agendas and decision-making processes (Donahue, Zeckhauser and Breyer, 2012; Smith and Sørensen, 2023). Previous studies further demonstrate that elite stakeholders are more likely to benefit from participation in collaborative initiatives and processes, raising concerns that CG may reinforce existing inequalities rather than redistribute influence more equitably (Scott and Thomas, 2017; Waheduzzaman, As-Saber and Hamid, 2018).

Lastly, industry participation is frequently critiqued for the risk of prioritising market interests and marginalising less-resourceful stakeholders if institutional design and accountability mechanisms are insufficient (Tomo et al., 2020). As a result, industry is discussed within the literature both as an enabler of collaboration and as a potential source of power asymmetry within CG arrangements (Donahue, Zeckhauser and Breyer, 2012). Empirical studies examining CG in practice illustrate that industry actors commonly engage in coproduction through public–private partnerships, cross-sectoral networks, and multi-actor governance regimes (Ysa, 2007; Smith and Sørensen, 2023). Collectively, this literature highlights the importance of examining industry participation in coproduction (Tomo et al., 2020).

2.4.1.2.3 Civil Society

Historically, studies have discussed the term civil society as closely related to the notion of citizenship, assigning certain responsibilities and duties to both civil society and the government (Wisnumurti et al., 2020). While civil society definitions primarily focus on government power, politics and individual freedom, others tend to focus on aspects of collective decision-making, cohesion and synergies (Syal, Van Wessel and Sahoo, 2021). Civil society is commonly understood as a sphere of social activity that exists between the state, the market, and the private household, where individuals and groups organise collectively around shared interests and public concerns (Syal, Van Wessel and Sahoo, 2021).

Within this sphere, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are typically defined as formally organised, non-governmental and non-profit entities that operate to advance collective interests, represent community concerns, or provide services addressing social needs (Syal, Van Wessel and Sahoo, 2021). Other conceptualisations of CSOs also encompass self-organised groups and grassroots movements characterised by voluntary participation and capacity for collective action to promote and advocate for common interests (Johnston et al., 2011a; Ansell et al., 2020b; Enarsson, Hinton and Borgström, 2024). On the contrary, citizens as 'individuals' are also integral participants in civil society. This encompasses the various activities that people

engage in within the civil society domain, such as volunteering, organising events and petitions, and supporting diverse causes (Dean, 2018)..

The literature further distinguishes civil society not only as CSOs but also as community and advocacy groups where individual citizens and communities engaging in collective action. Habermas (1974), for example, describes civil society as composed of more or less spontaneously created associations, organisations, and movements that channel concerns into the public sphere. Given these conceptual foundations, civil society is understood in this thesis as encompassing organisations (CSOs), self-organised groups (community and advocacy groups) and individual citizens actively engaged in civic life (Habermas, Lennox and Lennox, 1974; Diamond, 1994; Syal, Van Wessel and Sahoo, 2021).

The literature on civil society in collaborative processes tends to focus on concepts such as, which demographic of the public is invited, the level of empowerment of the civil society groups invited, and the overall goal of what is to be achieved from this participation process (Newton, 2012; Maccani et al., 2020; Syal, Van Wessel and Sahoo, 2021). Authors argue that the role of citizens and public in CG processes, systems and structures is indispensable (Bartoletti and Faccioli, 2016; Lee and Na, 2024). Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia (2017) shed light on the importance of exploring who is invited, how people interact and the rationale for participation. This aligns well with the central aims of CG, where civil society is often seen as a mechanism for collective decision-making and democratic participation.

Collaborative approaches to governance aim to understand consensus-based processes with civil society as a vehicle to transfer power along the ‘ladder of participation’. Arnstein’s (1969) ladder conceptualises participation as a spectrum of power-sharing arrangements between citizens and the state, distinguishing between different degrees of influence over decision-making. However, Arnstein differentiates between forms of participation that enable influence and those that are primarily symbolic. Lower rungs of the ladder, including informing and consultation, are characterised by limited opportunities for the public to shape outcomes, as decision-making authority remains with government actors. In contrast, higher rungs such as

partnership, delegated power, and citizen control indicate increasing levels of shared or transferred authority.

2.5 The Urban Context

Cities in particular have become important 'spaces of neoliberalism', experiencing uneven economic growth, intensifying class divides, and growing strains within the urban fabric (Healey, 2004; Brenner, 2009). Existing literature maps much of this urban transformation, including ideas such as the melting pot (Odugbemi and Jacobson, 2008; Jacobs, 2020) and the creative class (Florida, 2002; Landry, 2003), referring to the capabilities of the skilled class concentrated in cities. Therefore, cities came to be characterised by knowledge orientation, cultural diversity and most importantly economic growth. The industrialisation era and mass populations moving to cities have led to various challenges in urban development, which have sparked concerns among national governments, city planners, and citizens. These challenges encompass issues related to housing, pollution, employment, waste management, access to clean water, and infrastructure development (Caragliu, Del Bo and Nijkamp, 2011; Nam and Pardo, 2011; Money and Cohen, 2015).

This shift is exacerbated by the marked withdrawal of national government support and reduction in social welfare, combined with the restructuring of local government bodies to manage stringent budgets, impacting their ability to deliver services effectively (Kearns and Paddison, 2000; Brenner and Theodore, 2002). According to the Population Reference Bureau (2007), the global urban population exceeded 50% in 2007 for the first time. Urbanisation has since become an increasingly prominent worldwide trend, with the proportion of populations residing in cities reaching 70% across Asia and Europe (Population Reference Bureau, 2007). Therefore, today's cities have become arenas for market-driven development, fostering the need for societal oversight, particularly of marginalised groups, amidst an array of neoliberal policies aimed to further a market-driven agenda (Madanipour, 2015; Bartoletti and Faccioli, 2016; Bradley, Israa H Mahmoud and Arlati, 2022, 2022).

Within this context, cities provide an important setting for examining how governance processes are shaped and enacted in practice. Cities offer a particularly rich context

for CG due to their spatial density, institutional complexity, and the heterogeneity of their stakeholders (Yigitcanlar et al., 2018; Hofstad et al., 2022). Urban environments are inherently multi-scalar, containing overlapping and intersecting governance frameworks that span local authorities, civil society actors, private entities, and community organisations. This complexity necessitates coordination mechanisms capable of managing interdependencies, which CG arrangements are well-suited to facilitate (Broto and Alves, 2018; Conti *et al.*, 2019) In the CLEVER Cities project, for example, urban living labs in London, Milan, and Hamburg showcased how collaboration pathways were not only instrumental in place-based regeneration but also in triggering long-term changes in urban governance structures, demonstrating the adaptive and iterative potential of collaborative frameworks embedded within city systems (Bradley, Israa H Mahmoud and Arlati, 2022).

By focusing on cities, this shifts attention from abstract theoretical models of CG towards an examination of how these collaborative processes unfold in practice. Whilst scholarly discourse has debated the normative, structural and theoretical underpinnings of CG, there remains a noticeable gap in understanding how these frameworks materialise on the ground (Griggs, Howarth and Feandeiro, 2020; Bradley, Israa H Mahmoud and Arlati, 2022). By focusing our attention on cities, this shifts the focus from theory to practice, examining how CG unfolds in real-world urban settings, how diverse stakeholders interact within these frameworks, and how governance processes are shaped by everyday complexities, contextual constraints, and local dynamics. (Fish, Ioris and Watson, 2010; Griggs and Roberts, 2012; Jun, 2013; Rosyadia et al., 2020) Building on the theoretical elements, the urban context reveals the situated, and often messy, realities of collaborative practice in contemporary governance (Arkorful et al., 2021).

Moreover, cities as urban spaces provide a distinct advantage in experimentation and learning. Urban spaces are increasingly seen as laboratories of governance innovation, where initiatives such as Urban Living Labs (ULLs) serve as platforms for multi-actor engagement, collaboration, and CG (Bradley, Israa H Mahmoud and Arlati, 2022). These labs foster collaborative practices that are iterative and context-sensitive, with governance arrangements evolving through the mobilisation and consolidation of networks. Furthermore, cities are dynamic spaces that face complex

policy problems ranging from climate adaptation to spatial justice that cannot be effectively addressed through top-down or siloed mechanisms alone (Hartmann, 2012; Colding, Barthel and Sörqvist, 2019). The density and diversity of actors in cities amplify both the demand for such mechanisms and the possibility of their institutionalisation. In Milan, participatory models involving public, private, and third-sector stakeholders enabled a broader redistribution of ecosystem service benefits, reinforcing equitable access to urban green infrastructure (Casprini *et al.*, 2023). CG models enable distributed problem-solving by leveraging local knowledge and the capacities of non-state actors, thus fostering governance that is more responsive and legitimate (Agranoff, 2014; Bradford, 2016).

Alongside these developments, cities have also undergone institutional and policy transformations. In such an environment, cities are encouraged to foster competitiveness, urging on a brand of urban entrepreneurship. This evolution is marked by cities becoming 'leaner', witnessing an evolution from traditional local government structures to ones that are characterised by collaborative, participatory governance (Bradford, 2016; Rosyadia et al., 2020; Wisnumurti et al., 2020). This collaborative approach signals a paradigm shift, impacting the manner in which cities shape policies and how power dynamics are distributed, particularly as influential private and local stakeholders exert strong influence on urban policymaking. Planning in cities has also adapted, scaling down from expansive urban strategies to more localised neighbourhood-specific plans (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 2014). Such a local focus provides new opportunities for meaningful engagement, especially for groups that have historically been on the fringes of policy influence, such as ethnic minorities, low-income groups, and other marginalised groups at the grassroots level (Kearns, 1995; Kofman, 1995; Painter and Philo, 1995).

These developments are also reflected in how cities are conceptualised within contemporary policy discourse, as significant literature has emerged regarding the future of cities, harnessing the latest technological and knowledge advancements observed in urban areas globally (Kitchin, 2015). Despite progress, complex policy challenges continue to persist in cities. Nevertheless, UN-Habitat (2016) acknowledges the immense potential of contemporary cities, recognising their economic, social, and environmental promise. In recent years, the terminology of

'smart' and 'people-centric' has become prevalent in defining cities that are overcoming today's policy challenges through the lens of sustainable urban development (Arkorful *et al.*, 2021; Anthony, 2024; Ninan *et al.*, 2024).

Earlier conceptualisations of cities as learning regions further reinforce this emphasis on collaboration and knowledge exchange. Florida's (1995) seminal work influenced a lot of existing literature on studying cities as learning regions. The learning region as an approach to studying cities explicitly addressed the quality of collaborative and creative policymaking. In particular, it marks a shift towards regional development concepts with an emphasis on the individual and collective learning processes of urban actors involved within collaborative settings (Brenner and Theodore, 2002; Jacobs, 2020). This learning is not however, limited to learning that exclusively takes place amongst regional actors, but rather extends to regional actors learning through global networks as well (Melo and Baiocchi, 2006).

At a more granular level, attention has also been directed towards the everyday practices through which collaboration is enacted. La Grouw et al. (2024) have argued that 'the mundane uncovers the importance of the material, spatial, and temporal organisation of actor-positioning processes and the potential of language to inhibit or enable CG' (2024, p. 2). Although often referred to as 'mundane', these interactions are not insignificant; rather, they reveal how collaboration is continuously shaped through routine activities such as informal conversations, micro-negotiations, and the taken-for-granted ways participants interpret and respond to each other's actions. As Kalesnikaite (2019a) demonstrates, these everyday practices carry analytical weight because they illuminate how power, meaning, and problem-solving emerge within local governance settings.

2.5.1 Coproduction and Local Governance

In the domain of urban policy, collaborative practices such as coproduction have been employed as a response to the complex and situated nature of local governance (Perry and Atherton, 2017). Urban problems such as housing, environmental adaption and learning, transport planning, and neighbourhood regeneration cannot be addressed

effectively through linear solutions. Coproduction in this context allows local authorities to draw on the situated knowledge of residents, community groups, and local businesses, who are often better attuned to the local dynamics of their neighbourhoods than elite stakeholders and local government stakeholders (Bovaird and Loeffler, 2016, 2022; Noordzij, De Koster and Van Der Waal, 2021). For instance, co-produced urban planning initiatives have been used to identify infrastructure needs in underserved communities and to design more inclusive public spaces, collectively producing outcomes that are not only feasible but socially accepted and adopted by the wider public (Strokosch and Osborne, 2020; Turnhout et al., 2020). Its relevance to CG is particularly evident in urban contexts, where the density of stakeholders, diversity of knowledge, and immediacy of urban policy challenges create both the demand for and the possibility of genuine CG (Ansell and Torfing, 2015; Frantzeskaki and Rok, 2018; Nesti, 2018).

The complexity of local governance literature is enhanced by research that spans various disciplines, such as urban planning, economics, and public administration. It is believed that there is still much to be discovered about the contested concepts and the future of local governance (Reddel, 2002; Denters and Rose, 2005). Despite some reviews of several governance dimensions (Osborne and Strokosch, 2022; Wang and Ran, 2023), little attention has been devoted to empirically analysing the existing knowledge practices in local governance. Bianchi, Nasi and Rivenbark (2021a) found that public participation, partnership, power, reform, community and performance are most popularly discussed in local governance literature.

The literature on CG acknowledges that collaborative practice is disconnected from its rhetoric, as putting the theoretical components in place is very time consuming and complex (La Grouw et al., 2024). While academic literature on CG discusses the components and conditions necessary to facilitate CG through emerging complexities, it does not fully capture the empirical realities of its practice (Bevir and Rhodes, 2022; Peters et al., 2022). Lastly, studies have also pointed to the need for empirical studies focusing on multiple stakeholders such as academics, practitioners, local government policymakers and citizens to better understand the complex nature of CG (Bevir, 2011; Van Duijn, Bannink and Ybema, 2022a).

2.6 Research Gaps and Research Questions

The literature reviewed in this chapter highlights three key gaps. First, although CG is supported by an extensive body of theoretical work, there remains limited understanding of how these principles are enacted within specific urban contexts. Second, research on multistakeholder coproduction remains fragmented, with a predominant focus on comparative cases or isolated projects rather than the broader ecosystem of collaboration within a single place. Third, much of the existing literature remains conceptual or normative, with insufficient empirical attention to how local government and non-government stakeholders experience, negotiate, and sustain coproduction processes in practice. These gaps point to the need for a more situated and empirically grounded analysis of coproduction as a mode of CG.

The following research question and sub-questions will be asked to inform this research:

Overarching research question:

How does multistakeholder coproduction take place in Nottingham?

Objective 1: To explore local government and non-government stakeholders' rationales to participate in coproduction in Nottingham.

1.1 What are the current policy and collaborative governance frameworks guiding coproduction in Nottingham?

1.2 Why do local government and non-government stakeholders engage in coproduction processes within the city?

Objective 2: To map the landscape of multi-stakeholder coproduction in Nottingham.

2.1 What are the local government-led coproduction mechanisms?

2.2 What are the existing opportunities and avenues of coproduction amongst local non-government stakeholders?

Objective 3. To investigate the perceptions of local government and non-governmental stakeholders on the role and nature of coproduction processes within Nottingham.

3.1 How do local non-governmental stakeholders (citizens, civil society organisations, academia and industry) perceive their contributions to the practice of coproduction?

3.2 What are the key barriers and opportunities experienced by local government and non-government stakeholders (citizens, civil society organisations, and academia) in enabling, facilitating and participating within coproduction processes?

2.7 Summary

In the rhetoric of CG, government and non-government stakeholders collaborate as equals, sharing responsibilities and benefits more fairly. Such collaboration can be driven by government stakeholders but can also be grassroots-driven and characterised by voluntary engagement, aimed at a more transparent and equitable CG model to those driven by authoritarian and rigid hierarchal models (Kourtit, Nijkamp and Arribas, 2012). Collaborative approaches are aimed at diluting the concentration of power, preventing any single stakeholder from dictating the course of action, as noted by Ran and Qi (2018). In this form of CG, stakeholder groups act collectively, adopting a cooperative stance over asserting dominance. The interactions and deliberations within a self-regulated CG context are marked by fairness and representativeness, ensuring balanced input and preventing any one party from monopolising discussions or decisions. This approach fosters a spirit of mutual respect and shared vision, essential for achieving the common goals of the collaborative partnership.

By addressing the critiques and embracing the diverse practices encompassed by coproduction, governance literature can further explore the potential for more effective and collaborative forms of decision-making and service delivery (Nguyen, Collins and Collins, 2024; Wang, Zhang and Ran, 2024). Literature points to the importance of shifting focus from theoretical narratives to practice-based dynamics in CG processes (Arkorful et al., 2021; Peters et al., 2022). This approach can also help uncover the key elements needed for effective CG, such as trust, reciprocity, power, and long-term

cooperation. La Grouw et al. (2024) argue that to understand and create responses to policy problems, the examination of the small situated dynamics of collaborative actors and the environment in which they operate is necessary. While holistic frameworks do offer valuable insights into the components of successful CG, they often overlook the situated interactions which are crucial in navigating complex problems (Fish, Ioris and Watson, 2010; Malekpour, Tawfik and Chesterfield, 2021). The literature reviewed in thus chapter highlights that an investigation into unpacking the dynamics of CG, by examining coproduction in practice, is warranted. This chapter has reviewed the relevant literature on CG, setting the theoretical stage for the empirical investigation that follows. Chapter 3 details the research paradigm and strategy employed to explore how CG unfolds in Nottingham City.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the methodology, research method and research techniques adopted in collecting and analysing data to address the research question on how coproduction takes place within Nottingham city.

Section 3.2 establishes the study's grounding in qualitative inquiry and justifies its suitability for examining complex, context specific coproduction processes and stakeholder perspectives. It outlines the underlying ontological and epistemological considerations, positioning the research within an interpretivist and relativist framework to capture multiple, socially constructed realities. The chapter then moves to Section 3.3 The Case Study Approach, which justifies the use of an in depth, context rich case study design and explains the rationale for selecting Nottingham as an appropriate and information rich case for exploring coproduction as the practice of collaborative governance (CG). Section 3.4 discusses methods for data collection adopted in the study, combining semi-structured interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and documentary analysis to enable triangulation and provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

The chapter then presents 3.5 Sampling Strategy, explaining the use of purposive sampling to capture a diverse range of stakeholders across local government, universities, civil society, and the private sector, alongside the sampling approaches for focus groups and documentary sources. Subsequently, 3.6 Data Analysis details the analytical approach, including the coding process and the development of themes, as well as the framework used to link empirical findings to the research questions. The chapter then addresses 3.7 Ethics and Reflexivity, outlining ethical considerations and reflecting on the researcher's positionality and its potential influence on the research process. Finally, the chapter concludes with 3.8 Summary, which synthesises the methodological choices and reinforces their alignment with the research aims, providing a transition to the findings chapter.

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3.2 The Qualitative Tradition

Qualitative inquiry provides the philosophical and methodological foundation for this research. It assumes that social reality is complex, context dependent, and constructed through human meaning making (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Silverman, 2014). According to Silverman (2014), qualitative research seeks to describe and interpret the social world as it is experienced and constructed by participants, therefore allowing the researcher a depth of understanding over quantitative reasoning. Therefore, a qualitative approach is particularly suited to this study as it explores coproduction as a situated practice in Nottingham City, where meanings of collaboration, trust and power are negotiated among diverse actors including local government, academia, and civil society (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2019; Bryman, Bell and Harley, 2022).

The qualitative tradition has developed in response to positivist assumptions that the social world could be studied with the same objectivity and methods as the natural sciences (Prasad, 2015; Cassell, Cunliffe and Grandy, 2018). Positivist approaches emphasised explanation and prediction, whereas qualitative researchers sought to understand the subjective meanings that guide social action (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Cunliffe (2011) posits that qualitative research emerged from an interpretive turn that recognised the importance of language, culture and context in shaping social life. Therefore, this view assumes that behaviour cannot be separated from the meanings and contexts in which it occurs, which directs researchers to engage directly with participants to uncover these meanings (Silverman, 2014).

Additionally, the craft of qualitative research, as described by Guba and Lincoln (1994) acknowledges the existence of multiple constructed realities and the inseparability of knower and known. These assumptions position understanding, interpretation and reflexivity as central to inquiry. Within business and management studies, qualitative research enables a means of exploring organisations as a network of relationships, practices and sense-making processes (Prasad, 2015; Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022). Qualitative researchers immerse themselves in the contexts where meaning is produced and negotiated by actors, thereby generating rich and contextualised insights (Cunliffe, 2011; Silverman, 2014). Bell, Harley and Bryman (2022) support this

view, adding that such approaches capture the complexity and ambiguity of organisational nuances, making them valuable for studying evolving governance and collaboration processes that are continuously produced and negotiated by various actors.

Furthermore, qualitative research enables the exploration of concepts including power, identity and trust through the meaning, stakeholder understanding, and lived experiences of collaboration, which are often marginalised in quantitative studies (Cunliffe, 2011; Prasad, 2015). This is especially important for this study, as it seeks to explore coproduction, and to understand how stakeholders with varying levels of resources, interests, and power interact. Qualitative methods make it possible to examine how these asymmetries are negotiated through dialogue and practice (Silverman, 2014; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Therefore, the qualitative inquiry lends itself to exploring the objectives of this research, enabling the researcher to understand the situated meanings and logics that guide behaviour in a specific context instead of producing generalisable laws (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023).

3.2.1 The ontological and epistemological considerations of the study

This section discusses the interpretivist paradigm underpinning this research. An interpretivist epistemology assumes that knowledge is produced through the meanings individuals and groups assign to their experiences (Silverman, 2014). In the context of coproduction, this means that policies, strategies and practices are understood not as fixed or objective entities but as phenomena that are interpreted and made sense of by those involved (Bevir and Rhodes, 2022). A relativist ontology supports this position by recognising that there is no single social reality waiting to be uncovered. Instead, multiple realities exist, each constructed through the perspectives, interactions and contexts of different stakeholders (Prasad, 2018).

These realities are dynamic and contingent, shaped by the historical, institutional and cultural setting of Nottingham. By adopting this approach, the study foregrounds the diverse ways in which actors perceive, negotiate and enact collaboration, emphasising

that local governance processes are continuously constructed through situated meanings and influence the practice of coproduction.

3.2.1.1 Interpretivism

Building on the qualitative foundations outlined in the previous section, this research adopts an interpretivist epistemology that seeks to understand the social world through the meanings that individuals and groups assign to their experiences. This study lends itself to Bell, Harley and Bryman's (2022) understanding of epistemology, which concerns itself with the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired and justified. Within an interpretivist framework, knowledge is viewed not as objective or value-free but as socially constructed and contextually situated. Therefore, Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe this as a 'transactional and subjectivist' relationship between researcher and participants, in which findings emerge from interaction and interpretation rather than detached observation.

While positivist epistemologies have been adopted based on the belief that the researcher can remain independent of the research subject and uncover universal laws that govern behaviour (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) , interpretivism, in contrast, holds that understanding the social world requires grasping the subjective meanings that people attach to their actions (Bevir and Rhodes, 2022). As Prasad (2018) explains, interpretivist inquiry emphasises understanding rather than explanation, prioritising the perspectives of participants over external theoretical impositions. The aim is therefore not prediction or generalisation but the development of rich, context-specific insights into lived experiences.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2023) discuss qualitative inquiry as a strategy aligned with interpretivism and inductive reasoning. They explain that qualitative research is most appropriate when the aim is to explore 'what' and 'how' questions and when contextual detail is central to understanding social processes. Silverman (2014) argues that qualitative research should aim to situate participants' accounts within their organisational and cultural settings to reveal how meaning is produced. For this study, this involves analysing the meanings, narratives and practices through which collaboration is enacted within cross-stakeholder interactions, policy documents and

collaborative processes. The interpretivist approach also values participants' subjective perspectives, recognising that each actor brings their own histories, experiences and expectations to the practice of collaboration within local governance processes.

In the context of this research, adopting an interpretivist epistemology allows an exploration of how actors in Nottingham City understand and enact coproduction. Local governance processes involve complex interactions among individuals and organisations, each with their own experiences, institutional backgrounds and values. An interpretivist approach positions the researcher to uncover how these diverse participants interpret collaboration, trust, and power and how this influences their engagement with coproduction. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue, knowledge is created through the exchange between inquirer and respondent and thus cannot be separated from the context in which it is produced. This study therefore treats knowledge as co-constructed through dialogue between the researcher and participants.

Furthermore, Bell, Harley and Bryman (2022) note that interpretivism assumes social reality is meaningful only through the processes by which people create and interpret symbols, language and shared understandings. This epistemological position enabled the researcher to unpack the meanings attached to collaboration in Nottingham City dependant on the social, political and organisational environment in which governance occurs. Furthermore, interpretivism also complements the variance in perceptions of experiences, opinions and meanings of various stakeholders being considered in this research. Recognising these differences aligns with Prasad's (2018) view that interpretive research must attend to the multiplicity of perspectives that constitute social phenomena.

Prasad (2018) proposes that interpretivism provides a framework for understanding how individuals and groups construct meaning in their everyday worlds, which is essential for analysing complex social processes such as coproduction. In Nottingham City, collaboration in governance processes is dynamic and shaped by how participants interpret their roles, responsibilities and relationships. This study, therefore, does not aim to test hypotheses about governance effectiveness but to

explore how meanings of collaboration are produced, sustained and sometimes contested. Such an approach aligns with the interpretivist view that knowledge emerges from the subjective and intersubjective processes through which people make sense of their experiences (Silverman, 2014).

Silverman (2014, p. 53) further contends that interpretivist inquiry contributes to a deeper understanding of organisational realities by uncovering the narratives, discourses and symbolic practices through which actors construct their world. Applying this lens to Nottingham City allows the research to examine how dialogue, texts and actions within coproduction initiatives shape what counts as legitimate participation or successful governance. The study thus interprets governance not as an objective arrangement but as a meaning-making process rooted in participants' lived realities (Cunliffe, 2011; Prasad, 2018).

In summary, the interpretivist epistemology adopted in this study provides a coherent foundation for exploring the social construction of coproduction in Nottingham City. It asserts that knowledge is context dependent, co-created and shaped through the interpretive acts of both researcher and participant. This orientation allows the study to move beyond surface-level descriptions of governance structures to uncover the deeper meanings, assumptions and relationships that underpin them (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022). The following section discusses the complementary ontological relativist position that underlies this epistemological stance that reality itself is multiple and socially constructed.

3.2.1.2 Relativism

Ontology concerns the nature of reality and what can be known about it. In keeping with the interpretivist epistemology outlined above, this research adopts a relativist ontology, which assumes that social reality is not singular or fixed but multiple and constructed through human interpretation and interaction (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Prasad, 2018). The relativist position stands in contrast to the realist view that assumes a stable external world independent of perception. Instead, it recognises that people experience and make sense of reality in diverse ways, shaped by their cultural, historical and social contexts (Cunliffe, 2011).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the relativist ontology posits that realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, which are situated in social experiences. These constructions are local and specific, and their form and content depend on the individuals or groups holding them. This means that reality is always mediated by human sense-making, rather than existing as a universal truth waiting to be discovered. Bell, Harley and Bryman (2022) explain that, from a relativist ontological position, what is perceived as real is dependent on the interpretive frameworks through which people understand their world. The focus of inquiry therefore shifts from uncovering objective facts to exploring how meanings are produced, negotiated and sustained within particular settings.

This ontological stance is central to the present study of coproduction in Nottingham City, where different stakeholders construct differing realities of collaboration, trust and power. Relativism acknowledges that various stakeholder groups in this study may experience collaboration differently. The multiplicity of these perspectives is valid within their own experiential contexts. Therefore, recognising this plurality of realities enables the research to capture the diversity of meanings that shape the practice of governance (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2019). As Cunliffe (2011) argues, understanding social phenomena requires acknowledging that organisational realities are ongoing accomplishments, created and re-created through interaction and discourse.

Additionally, a relativist ontology also implies that no single account of reality can claim superior access and understanding to the truth. Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe this as a rejection of the idea of an objective world that can be perfectly represented through research. Instead, knowledge claims of social reality are always partial, provisional and situated. Prasad (2018) supports this view, suggesting that the goal of qualitative inquiry is not to produce universal generalisations but to capture the local and contextual realities of participants. This has important implications for the Nottingham study, where coproduction is viewed not as a uniform process but as one that takes multiple forms depending on who is involved and what the objectives are at any given time.

Silverman (2014) supports this notion, proposing that social reality is accomplished through interaction, language and practice, and therefore varies across contexts and participants. In this sense, organisations and governance processes are ongoing processes of meaning making. Bell, Harley and Bryman (2022) similarly note that interpretive researchers focus on understanding the meanings that people attach to social phenomena, accepting that those meanings differ across time and place. In Nottingham City, participants construct their own versions of what constitutes legitimate governance through discourse, negotiation and institutional practice. Therefore, a relativist ontological stance encourages the researcher to understand and capture the multiplicity of meanings as experienced differently by various actors. This perspective allows the study to trace how coproduction in Nottingham City adapts over time as relationships, resources and priorities shift. Such an approach is particularly useful for understanding policy environments where meanings and roles are continually renegotiated. Rather than seeking definitive answers about what collaboration is, the research instead explores how it is experienced and redefined by those involved.

However, relativism does not imply that anything goes, as critics sometimes claim (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Instead, it acknowledges that interpretations can be more or less persuasive depending on their coherence, plausibility and resonance with participants' lived experiences (Silverman, 2014). Trustworthiness in this context arises from the rigour of the interpretive process and the transparency with which meanings are represented. Through iterative engagement with participants and careful triangulation of research techniques (discussed further in Section 3.4), this study aims to construct a credible and well-substantiated account of the realities of collaboration in governance, manifest through the process of coproduction within Nottingham City (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2019).

Throughout this iterative process, the research aims to develop a rich, contextual understanding of how stakeholders construct meanings of collaboration, trust and power. Recognising that coproduction is not a neutral or uniform process, the study pays particular attention to how discourse, language and interaction shape participants' understandings. For example, it considers how certain narratives or framings of collaboration become dominant, reflecting power relations and institutional

histories (Cunliffe, 2011; Silverman, 2022). Therefore, the researcher's interpretive position focuses on understanding how meanings are negotiated, contested and stabilised through communication.

3.3 The Case Study Approach

Within this study's interpretivist epistemology and relativist ontology, a case study research design is particularly appropriate. Case study research aligns closely with interpretivism because it facilitates the in-depth exploration of phenomena within their real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). Therefore, this study investigates coproduction in Nottingham City as a single, context-specific case within which various examples of coproduction are studied. Rather than treating Nottingham as an instance from which to derive generalisations, the aim is to develop a nuanced and situated understanding of how governance is experienced and constructed in this particular setting and how these constructions influence the practice of coproduction (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Stake, 1995).

Yin (2018) identifies several rationales for adopting a single-case design, including critical, extreme or unique, revelatory, and longitudinal cases. This study aligns most closely with the logic of a revelatory and contextually unique case. Nottingham provides an opportunity to examine the practice of multistakeholder coproduction within a specific urban governance context that has not been extensively studied in depth. In this sense, the case is not selected for its representativeness, but for its ability to reveal the complexities, tensions, and dynamics of CG as they unfold in practice. Furthermore, Yin (2018) emphasises that single-case designs are appropriate where the aim is to capture the richness and complexity of a phenomenon within its real-life setting, particularly when the case itself is treated as a bounded system. In this study, Nottingham functions as a bounded urban context within which multiple forms of coproduction coexist, interact, and evolve. This enables an embedded understanding of governance processes, where different stakeholder groups, practices, and mechanisms can be examined within a single, coherent case structure.

The project employs a case study method (further discussed in detail in Section 3.3) following the definition by Piekkari, Welch and Paavilainen (2009, p. 569) as 'a research strategy that examines, through the use of a variety of data sources, a phenomenon in its naturalistic context, with the purpose of confronting theory with the empirical world'. In this thesis, the case study approach is used to explore how various stakeholder groups conceptualise coproduction and how their interpretations shape their engagement with governance processes and their participation in coproduction. Consistent with the interpretivist tradition, theory and data are in dialogue, with emerging insights contributing to the refinement of existing conceptual frameworks rather than the testing of predetermined hypotheses (Prasad, 2018; Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022).

This thesis therefore seeks to offer a comprehensive and situated understanding of how state and non-state actors experience coproduction in Nottingham City. It examines how their individual and collective interpretations of power, inclusivity and trust influence participation and interaction. The case study approach, with its focus on depth, complexity and context, is well suited to exploring these issues within an interpretivist paradigm (Stake, 1995; Silverman, 2014). Rather than striving for statistical generalisation, the aim is to develop theoretical and conceptual insights that resonate with the experiences of participants and that can inform understanding in similar contexts. Through detailed analysis of multiple data sources including interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis (further discussed in detail in Section 3.4) the research seeks to capture the dynamic and relational nature of coproduction. This stance allows the study to embrace the diversity of experiences and interpretations that characterise coproduction in Nottingham City

3.3.1 Case Study Selection

One of the limitations identified in Section 2.6 was that existing research on collaborative practices such as coproduction lacks in-depth, contextually grounded analysis within urban settings. While urban contexts have attracted attention in recent years, most studies have focused on comparative analyses (Frieling, Lindenberg and Stokman, 2014; Kalesnikaite, 2019a; Ulibarri et al., 2020) and specific project-based case studies. Consequently, the nuances of coproduction as experienced and

interpreted by local actors within a single urban setting remain underexplored. This research responds to this gap by adopting a single-case study approach, focusing on Nottingham City. The decision to focus on a single case is consistent with the interpretivist aim of exploring meaning and context in depth (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

The Nottingham case offers a rich context-driven to highlight how meanings of collaboration are constructed through the interplay of various factors. The study captures how governance is enacted as a lived process rather than a static institutional arrangement by focusing on participants' perspectives and experiences, (Cunliffe, 2011; Prasad, 2018). The insights generated aim to contribute to theory development in coproduction and to stimulate further qualitative inquiry into how multi-stakeholder processes are negotiated in other urban contexts.

Nottingham City represents a compelling and distinctive case in the context of urban coproduction in the United Kingdom. Nottingham is recognised as a leading city in collaborative and forward-looking urban planning, particularly through its flagship policy initiatives including Smart Nottingham and Carbon Neutral 2028 that explicitly consider collaboration with various non-government actors as an essential element to meeting the projects' objectives (Society for Ecological Restoration, 2015; UK Smart Cities Index, 2017). These initiatives demonstrate efforts from local government actors to coproduce urban policies through partnerships between local government, academia, industry and community actors. As Flyvbjerg (2006) note, qualitative researchers may select a single case when it represents a unique or extreme example, allowing for detailed exploration of contextually specific dynamics. Nottingham's explicit commitment to collaborative problem-solving and its ranking within the United Kingdom's top ten smart cities make it an ideal site for examining how governance processes are experienced and negotiated by different stakeholders (UK Smart Cities Index, 2017).

The selection of Nottingham is also supported by its well-documented policy framework, which integrates collaboration into its core urban development strategies (Karagounis and Rossiter, 2022; Nottingham Economic Recovery & Renewal Plan, 2022). The city has adopted an inclusive governance vision that combines technological innovation with collaborative policymaking. For example, Nottingham's

Economic Renewal and Recovery Plan and the Waste Strategy both prioritise cross-sectoral collaboration between local government, citizens, academia and industry (Nottingham Economic Recovery & Renewal Plan, 2022; A Municipal Resources and Waste Strategy, 2023).

When I began my initial scoping exercises in early 2020, Nottingham stood out for its explicit commitment to engaging with non-government stakeholders within governance design and implementation. The initial policy documents for flagship initiatives as well as its central functions demonstrated the local government's deliberate approach to embed collaboration into policymaking. Nottingham's recognition as one of Europe's three 'lighthouse' cities further demonstrates its role as a model for sustainable, collaborative innovation (Society for Ecological Restoration, 2015). These features made the city not only accessible but also theoretically and empirically rich for the interpretive exploration of governance practices.

In addition to Nottingham's rich context, (2008) pragmatic considerations such as time and access – alongside theoretical relevance – also guided case selection (Seawright and Gerring, (2008). Not least, the COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges for physical access to distant field sites, narrowing the pool of feasible options. In this regard, while Nottingham was not selected solely out of convenience, my professional position within one of Nottingham's two major universities at this time better facilitated access to diverse stakeholders, including those in local government, academia, civil society organisations and industry. This access enabled direct engagement with participants who were actively shaping, influencing, participating, and enacting coproduction processes. The proximity also allowed for sustained immersion, consistent with interpretivist research principles that emphasise contextual understanding and reflexive engagement (Prasad, 2018).

The initial scoping conversations conducted within my university and with local practitioners identified several key initiatives and strategic documents relevant to coproduction. These interactions guided the development of the research focus and generated leads on key participants across the four actors central to this study including local government, academia, industry and civil society. Each of these groups were actively engaging with policy and urban strategies in Nottingham, aligning closely

with the study's aim of understanding how coproduction is enacted through multi-actor participation.

The decision to focus on Nottingham, therefore, rests on both theoretical and practical grounds. Theoretically, Nottingham provides a rich site for exploring how collaboration is interpreted and practiced across multiple actors within a single city. Practically, it offers the researcher access to a wide range of stakeholders and empirical material essential for interpretivist inquiry. As Silverman (2022) explains, qualitative case studies do not aim for statistical generalisation but instead seek to develop theoretical and conceptual understanding. Similarly, Yin (2018, p. 50) argues that case studies allow researchers to investigate 'contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts', especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are blurred. Nottingham exemplifies such a setting, where collaboration is both a policy objective and a lived practice.

3.4 Methods

Following Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) research process framework, this section details the rationale for the chosen research methods and their alignment with the study's interpretivist epistemology and relativist ontology. This study recognises that coproduction is not a fixed or objective phenomenon but is constructed through the diverse meanings and lived experiences of those who participate in it. The research therefore sought to capture a multiplicity of perspectives and contexts, foregrounding the ways in which stakeholders interpret, negotiate and enact collaboration in Nottingham.

While a range of qualitative methodologies are available, including individual or group interviews, observations, the selection of methods should not be viewed as a mere checklist of options. Instead, methodological choices must be rigorously justified in relation to the research questions, the philosophical assumptions underpinning the study, and pragmatic considerations. Factors such as the project's purpose, timeline, budgetary constraints, the nature of the research topic, participant access, and the researcher's own positionality and expertise all contribute to shaping methodological appropriateness (Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Three complementary data collection

methods were employed in this study: individual interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis. The subsequent sections elaborate on the rationale for these techniques, demonstrating how these methods, when employed within an interpretivist framework, enable the exploration of diverse interpretations, relational practices and situated understandings that shape coproduction processes.

3.4.1 Semi-Structured Interview

Qualitative interviewing is a data collection method that entails a detailed, systematic conversation that enables in-depth information about respondents' insights and knowledge (Horton, Macve and Struyven, 2004). The decision to use individual interviews was informed by three key factors: the project's overarching objectives, the insights gained from the literature review, and the underlying philosophical paradigms guiding the research. It is a technique to record insights into respondents' memories and explanations that explain social realities and descriptions of collaboration and coproduction in Nottingham city. Semi-structured interviews were used in this research as they allow for 'rich' lived experiences to be captured (Whiting, 2008; Matthews and Ross, 2010). An example interview guide used with local government participants is available in Appendix A.

The interview questions were designed to be open-ended, enabling participants to share their individual experiences and reveal the underlying mechanisms and structures influencing these experiences. This involved posing follow-up questions such as 'What do you think are the factors causing this?' and asking for specific examples to better understand the generative mechanisms and contextual factors shaping their perspectives. The interviewees were able to narrate their own experiences in the process of participating in governance processes, and their interactions with other actors. The stream of questions in case study interviews tend to be fluid although guided by certain themes, allowing the interviewees to narrate their personal rendition of events and relationships (Stake, 1995). Whiting (2008) views qualitative interviews as an active process where the researcher listens attentively and asks questions to gain 'insider accounts'. Interviews possess considerable strengths, allowing access to forms of information and perspectives that may be otherwise

challenging to obtain, such as reflections on alternative courses of action and accounts of decision-making processes.

According to Gillham (2007) and Longhurst (2003), semi-structured interviews are considered the most effective approach, as they strike a balance between structure, flexibility, and data quality. In this study, this approach enabled me maintain alignment with the research questions and remain focused on the topic, while also allowing participants to provide in-depth, open-ended responses and guide the conversation organically without significant diversion. The interviews typically lasted between 45 to 60 minutes, though a few exceeded an hour. I used both the Teams 'Record' feature to record online interviews or a dictaphone for in-person interviews to capture the conversations, which were then meticulously transcribed. By recording the interviews, I could focus on the interviewees' discussions without extensive notetaking, allowing me to guide the conversations more effectively.

3.4.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus groups can broadly be defined as group discussions where the researcher is actively encouraging of, and attentive to the group interaction (Creswell and Creswell, 2007). Focus groups gained popularity amongst qualitative researchers because they allow for access to group norms and provide insights into the formation of views which cannot be readily achieved via individual interviews (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). Moreover, focus groups can be used in combination with other methods, in this case, semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2019).

Participants engaged in interactive discussions that encouraged debate and reflection, enabling diverse perspectives to surface. As noted by Bloor et al. (2001), focus groups offer a platform where individuals can collectively reflect on shared experiences, and in this study, the group discussions provided valuable insights into both convergent and divergent understandings of coproduction. This method enabled me to uncover the perceptions, experiences, and shared understandings among selected participants. As Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis (2019) demonstrate, focus groups

allow for the exploration of both commonalities and differences in participants' interpretations. The interactive setting also encouraged participants to reflect critically on their own roles and the contributions of other stakeholder groups, thereby creating a more nuanced picture of coproduction in practice. The schedule used to guide these focus groups can be found in Appendix B.

In this study, focus groups were used to capture the collective experiences of civil society participation within Nottingham city. The approach was designed to explore three main areas: firstly, the shared experiences of civil society participants in relation to coproduction processes; secondly, the ways in which participants interpret opportunities and challenges for inclusive participation; and thirdly, the reasons and barriers that civil society actors face in engaging with coproduction initiatives. This approach allowed for the comparison of perspectives and rationales used by civil society participants in Nottingham, providing a richer understanding of how citizen voices shape and respond to governance processes.

3.4.3 Documentary Analysis

In social research, documents cover a potentially broad spectrum of materials, both textual and otherwise. Mogalakwe (2006) defines documents as standardised artefacts that typically occur in formal and informal formats such as case reports, notes, drafts, statistics, annual reports and expert opinions. Within qualitative research, documents and their analysis are typically used as a complementary strategy to other methods, such as interviews (McCulloch, 2004; Mogalakwe, 2006). Scott (2014) proposed four criteria for deciding whether to employ a document for research: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning. To ensure authenticity and credibility, the documents in this study were accessed through official stakeholder websites (national and local government webpages) and, on some occasions, identified directly through research participants in interviews.

For this research, both online and offline documents related to collaboration processes (including partnerships, consultations, and other cross-stakeholder collaborations) within Nottingham City were collected. I gathered publicly available national and local government documents such as regulatory acts, policies, reports, strategies and

participation brochures, as well as non-government stakeholder reports and collaboration agreements. To avoid potential ethical conflicts, only publicly available documents were considered. Where unpublished or draft documents were accessed through participating organisations or individual participants, permission was obtained. News relating to the local government was documented from September 2019 to August 2023.

Analysing current national and local policy documents offered valuable insights into the evolving discourse around stakeholder participation and coproduction in Nottingham. Documentary analysis provided crucial contextual information about the environment in which research participants operate, informed the development of appropriate research questions, and supplied supplementary data that could be triangulated with interviews and focus groups. It also enabled the tracking of changes and developments over time.

Together, these national, local, and citizen-oriented policy documents provide a layered understanding of the governance environment in Nottingham. They capture the institutional inclusivity, strategic ambitions, and collaborative practices that shape governance in the city. By analysing them alongside interviews and focus groups, I was able to bridge the gap between institutional intentions and lived experiences, ensuring that the study captured both the structural and experiential dimensions of coproduction.

3.5 Sampling Strategy

To address the research questions laid out in Section 1.2 and Section 2.6, initiatives, organisations and key local government policymakers were identified within the city. The literature review (see Chapter 2), desk research, and the initial scoping exercises helped identify a range of key local government and non-governmental stakeholders and organisations that could offer insights into the reasons, processes, structures, perceptions, and experiences of coproduction within the city. In this section I explain the sampling strategy for each of my chosen methods.

It is important to note that the process of data collection for this study took place during a particularly challenging period, shaped significantly by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Gatekeeping mechanisms became more pronounced, and opportunities to build rapport or identify participants through informal or in-person networks were limited. As a result, the sampling process required greater reliance on formal contacts, referrals, and persistence over an extended period. As a result, access to organisations was more constrained, and the sampling process relied more heavily on formal contact routes and gatekeepers, often extending the period required to secure participation.

These access-related challenges were further shaped by the broader institutional context. During this period, public sector organisations in the United Kingdom, including Nottingham City Council, were functioning at or near capacity in response to the pandemic. These conditions affected stakeholder availability and responsiveness, with implications for both the scope and pacing of data collection. Reflecting on the PhD journey, the data collection process required considerable flexibility, persistence, and responsiveness to evolving circumstances.

3.5.1 Interviews

The snowball sampling technique guided the selection and recruitment of relevant interviewee involved in coproduction activities. Snowball sampling is a non-probability approach in which existing participants recommend other potential participants who meet the study's criteria (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2019; Silverman, 2022). It is particularly suitable when studying social settings where participants are connected through professional or community networks and where it is not possible to identify the whole population in advance (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022). Snowball sampling helped reach key people across stakeholder groups by asking existing participants through my University networks to recommend others involved in similar activities (Silverman, 2014). This method was suitable because coproduction often works through close professional and community networks, where participants already know and work with one another based on established rapport. As Stake (1995) explains, the purpose of case study research is particularisation rather than generalisation.

Lastly, because recommendations are made through existing contacts, snowball sampling often helps to build trust and credibility, encouraging openness and richer insights during qualitative interviews (Silverman, 2022).

Because coproduction emerges from the interactions of multiple groups rather than a single actor, it was necessary to include a diverse yet interconnected set of stakeholders (see Table 3) in this study. Local government stakeholders design and implement policies, while universities act as partners and knowledge brokers, industry contributes expertise and resources, CSOs mobilise communities and advocate for change, and citizens themselves provide legitimacy and experiential perspectives. Including these groups ensured a holistic picture of coproduction, capturing both institutional perspectives and the lived experiences of those most directly affected. This approach also reflected the interpretivist orientation of the study by foregrounding multiple voices and perspectives. This sampling technique was appropriate for the Nottingham study given the interconnected nature of coproduction, where stakeholders often interact across institutional and sectoral boundaries. It allowed access to a wide range of local actors from local government, academia, industry, civil society organisations, community groups and citizens. Table 3 presents an overview of interview participants in this study. Additional information regarding interview duration and dates is presented in Appendix D.

Table 3 Overview of Interview Participants

Stakeholder Group	**No. of Participants**
Local Government Interviews (LG-INT)	8
Universities (UN1 and UN2)	6
Industry Interviews (IND-INT)	4
Civil Society Organisations (CSO1 AND CSO2)	3
Community Organisers and Leaders Interviews (CSOL-INT)	5
Total number of semi-structured interview participants	**26**

Taken together, the stakeholder groups in Table 3 represent the core actors that construct, negotiate, and experience coproduction in Nottingham. Examining these perspectives side by side enabled analysis not only of how policies are formally

designed, but also how they are interpreted, negotiated, and at times contested across institutional and community settings. Comparing stakeholder groups made it possible to identify both convergence and divergence in how coproduction was understood and enacted. For example, university representatives may frame collaboration in strategic or instrumental terms, whereas community actors may emphasise lived experience, accountability, or access. This lens allowed the study to trace how governance arrangements are shaped, mediated, and experienced through the practice of coproduction. This integrative approach ensures that the study captures both the CG frameworks and the everyday practices of collaboration, providing a fuller and more nuanced understanding of coproduction in the city. The selection of participants for each stakeholder group within the city are discussed in the following sections.

3.5.1.1 Local Government

I wanted to gain a comprehensive understanding of policy perspectives on coproduction from local government policymakers. Participants, representing both high-level and mid-level positions, were selected based on their influence on the design and implementation of relevant policies. A total of 8 participants, identified through desk research and initial interviews, participated in individual semi-structured interviews. Table 4 provides a complete list of research participants.

Table 4 List of participants from Nottingham City Council

Interview Code	Particulars
LG-INT Policy Officer 1	Responsible for growth and development policy design and implementation
LG-INT Senior Management 1	Strategic lead for growth and city development
LG-INT Smart Nottingham Manager	Held ownership of ‘smart’ initiatives, especially the implementation of the Smart Nottingham Strategy
LG-INT Senior Management 2	Responsible for oversight of economic development
LG-INT Policy Officer 2	Responsible for ‘economic’ programmes at the NCC, and responsible for the Development advisory board

LG-INT Community Engagement Lead	Led public and stakeholder consultations and participations.
LG-INT Policy Lead	Senior Policy and Performance Officer
LG-INT City Rooms Project Lead	Specialised in urban design, and responsible for leading the City Rooms (a physical space for local-led stakeholder participation in Nottingham) initiative.

3.5.1.2 Universities

As with the local government, I wanted to capture the role played by the two large Universities in Nottingham in facilitating and participating in coproduction processes with the local government. Through the initial scoping exercises, and desk research I was able to identify multiple streams of work between the local government and the Universities to solve local challenges. The list of research participants who accepted and attended the interviews are listed below in Table 5.

Table 5 List of participants from the academic stakeholder group

Interview Code	Particulars
UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities	Academic lead at University 1 specialising in urban sustainability and resilience, with involvement in collaborative research and policy engagement with local and regional stakeholders.
UN1-INT Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University Representative on the NCC Development Advisory Board	Senior university leadership representative at University 1 involved in strategic engagement with local through participation on the NCC's strategic governance board.
UN1-INT Research Associate, Inclusive Policy and Governance Studies	Research Associate at University 1 working on research related to inclusive governance and public policy, with experience in collaborative projects involving local policy stakeholders.
UN1-INT Research Assistant in Future	Research assistant at University 1 involved in research initiatives focused on future cities and community

Cities and Community Engagement	engagement, including collaboration with civic and local government partners.
UN2-INT Responsible Officer	Knowledge exchange and impact officer at University 2 working within the Nottingham Civic Exchange to facilitate partnerships between the university, local government, and civic organisations.
UN2-INT Director of the Public Policy and Management Research Group	Director of the Public Policy and Management Research Group at University 2 with expertise in public policy research and engagement with government and policy stakeholders.

3.5.1.3 Civil Society

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) were identified through a combination of snowball sampling and desk research in this study. Initial interviews with local government and university participants provided insight into key civil society actors involved in collaborative initiatives across the city. These organisations and individuals were subsequently selected to capture a range of perspectives on community participation, advocacy, and engagement within Nottingham.

3.5.1.3.1 Nottingham Citizens (CSO 1)

I chose Nottingham Citizens as an organisation for my research to understand its engagement with local government, how it mobilised local communities and citizens in various programs and its emphasis (if any) on coproduction. Nottingham Citizens operates at a local level, making it an ideal case for examining its interactions with both local government and non-government stakeholders. Through an online search, I identified Nottingham Citizens as a prominent CSO dedicated to capacity building, community leadership, and community organising. Established with a strong grassroots presence, it has a long-standing relationship with the local government. During my data collection, Nottingham Citizens had several active initiatives including those with a focus on social justice and community welfare in local governance. This organisation's comprehensive approach provided valuable insights into how local civil society stakeholders are mobilised for community participation and bottom-up initiatives within a local framework, offering a rich context for my research on

coproduction. Two community organisers (see Table 6) were interviewed as part of the data collection process.

Table 6 List of interviews with Civil Society Organisation 1 (CSO1)

Interview Code	Particulars
CSO1-INT Senior Organiser	Senior community organiser at Nottingham Citizens responsible for coordinating community organising campaigns and engagement with member organisations, including local government. Provided insights into the organisation's strategies for mobilising citizens and facilitating collaborative initiatives related to social justice and community welfare.
CSO1-INT Organiser	Community organiser at Nottingham Citizens involved in grassroots mobilisation, leadership development, and community engagement activities.

3.5.1.3.2 Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (CSO 2)

At the time I was starting my data collection, the Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's petition for a prominent derelict urban space to be turned into a green space for local community welfare was capturing local and national attention in the news. The petition was aimed at bridging the communication gap between the local community's vision and demands for the urban space, with that of the local government's plans. After some desk research, and a local government research participant's mention of the petition in an interview, I decided to study the organisation within my research to understand its collaboration with the local government and non-government stakeholders and its focus on environmental conservation within urban planning and development. Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust operates at a regional and local level, with its offices located within the city, providing an ideal case to examine its interactions with local government and non-government actors. Through an online search, I identified the Trust for its dedicated youth development programs, grassroots focus on conservation and its longstanding collaborative efforts with the local government.

Table 7 List of interviews with Civil Society Organisation 2 (CSO2)

Interview Code	Particulars
CSO2-INT Senior Organiser	Senior organiser at Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust involved in coordinating community engagement and advocacy related to the redevelopment of Green Park urban site into a green community space. Provided insights into the Trust's collaboration with local government and civil society actors in urban environmental initiatives.

3.5.1.3.3 Local Community leaders and stakeholders

I wanted to capture diverse community perspectives on stakeholder participation and coproduction. Therefore, key informant interviews were conducted with four community organisers and leaders (see Table 8). These individuals, representing both community organisations and grassroots groups, provided valuable insights into local perspectives on these issues.

Table 8 List of civil society interviews Community Organisers and Leaders

Interview Code	Particulars
CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 1	Coproduced the Design Quality Framework for collaborative urban planning with long term engagement of the local government
CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 2	Consortium representing local civil society organisations and communities at the strategic local government level
CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 3	Community leader and youth advocate in Nottingham
CSOL-INT Community Organiser 1	Campaigning group for the local government's Carbon Neutral 2028 pledge
CSOL-INT Community Organiser 2	Influenced the local government to change its plans for an urban space through their petition.

3.5.1.4 Local Private Sector Participants

I wanted to explore why and how private stakeholders engage in coproduction activities at the local government level in Nottingham. Through desk research and snowballing method, I identified four key informants (see Table 9) who were either part of local government advisory boards or active participants in coproduction initiatives. These informants provided valuable insights into how private sector stakeholders interact and influence decision-making processes. At the time of data collection, these informants were actively involved in various governance activities, including strategic economic plans, local place-making and policy formulation. Each of the four key informants was interviewed to understand their roles, experiences, and perspectives on coproduction in Nottingham. These interviews provided a comprehensive view of the dynamics and challenges of local governance and the extent of stakeholder participation in decision-making processes.

Table 9 List of Private Sector participants

Interview Code	Particulars
IND-INT Senior Member, Development Advisory Board	The lead of a partnership of NCC, some of Nottingham's key businesses, educational institutions (University 1 and 2), public sector organisations and One Nottingham with the vision to create an economic recovery plan for Nottingham.
IND-INT Senior Member, Green Park Advisory Board	The lead of a project board consisting of local non-government stakeholders (University 1 and 2, local councillors, local community sector representatives chosen by NCC) and NCC to help rebuild the derelict Green Park site.
IND-INT Member, Nottingham Creative Quarter	Responsible for leading the Nottingham Creative Quarter (a collaboration between University 2 and NCC) to promote creative and digital businesses in the city. Also, a member for the Development advisory board.

IND-INT Senior Manager, Creative Organisation	Responsible for leading an award-winning creative business in Nottingham.

3.5.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups were used as a complementary data collection method to capture collective perspectives from participants rooted in geographic communities within Nottingham, while also including participants connected through communities of interest, such as civil society organisations and advocacy groups. Following the interview with senior organiser at CSO2, the researcher was invited to conduct a focus group with volunteers (CSO2-FGD) involved in the CSOs community initiatives, providing an opportunity to capture perspectives from wider community participants. This opportunity emerged through snowball sampling, whereby an interview participant facilitated access to additional participants within the organisation who were actively engaged in relevant collaborative activities. During the discussion, participants reflected on their motivations for participating in coproduction, experiences of coproduction, opportunities of coproduction that participants were aware of. Much of the discussion centred on participants' experiences of collaboration with local government through their volunteering activities at CSO2, particularly in relation to the Green Park project, for which CSO2 led a petition and advocacy effort through the Nottingham Green Umbrella Group (see Appendix E).

Table 10 Overview of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Participants

FGD Code	Date	Recruitment Approach	Duration	No. of Participants
CSO2 Volunteers (CSO2-FGD)	Wednesday, 20 July 2022	Snowball sampling	1 hour	6
Civil Society (CS-FGD1)	Friday, 21 July 2023	Open call invitation	2 hours	4
Civil Society (CS-FGD2)	Friday, 21 July 2023	Open call invitation	2.5 hours	6
Total number of FGD participants				***16***

To recruit participants for the civil society, focus groups (CS-FGD1 and CS-FGD2), I used an open call for participants that specifically invited members of civil society to take part. This was combined with a purposive sampling strategy, as the goal was not statistical representativeness but to include participants with relevant experiences of participation in collaboration opportunities (Bell, Harley and Bryman, 2022, p. 197; Silverman, 2014, p. 65). Purposive sampling is particularly appropriate when the research requires information-rich cases to address the research questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019, p. 316). In this case, the aim was to capture a multiplicity of civil society experiences, recognising that citizen involvement in governance is diverse and cannot be understood through individual accounts alone.

The civil society focus groups (CS-FGD1 and CS-FGD2) were held on Friday, 21 July 2023 at an accessible venue close to the city centre. Participants were recruited with the intention of capturing a multiplicity of citizen experiences of participation in coproduction. Table 10 summarises the focus groups, including their duration and areas of focus. By facilitating interactive group discussions and encouraging debate, it elicited diverse responses around key themes, for example the contextual drivers and motivations for coproduction. The focus groups were recorded with a digital recorder and transcribed verbatim with the consent of participants.

3.5.3 Documentary Analysis

Documentary analysis, as outlined by Labuschagne (2015), involves a systematic process of finding, evaluating, and synthesising information from relevant sources. This research adopted a keep a look out approach, gathering both historical evidence and current policy documents. I also requested the research participants to identify and share any relevant publicly available documentation that could be included in the documentary analysis (Bowen, 2009). Table 11 provides a sample of the types of documents analysed and the insights they offered. A full list of documents included in the analysis is provided in Appendix E.

The selection of policy documents for analysis was guided by their relevance to the research questions and their role in shaping, guiding, or evidencing coproduction in Nottingham. These documents were not analysed merely for descriptive purposes but were chosen because they reveal the institutional, political and social contexts in which

coproduction is constructed and enacted. National frameworks such as the *National Planning Policy Framework* were included because they set statutory expectations for consultation and participation, influencing how local authorities structure their participation with stakeholders. Understanding these frameworks was important for identifying the top-down pressures that inform local practice.

At the local level, documents such as the Carbon Neutral 2028 Plan were included because it placed collaboration and coproduction at the heart of the city's development agenda. These policies not only illustrate Nottingham's ambitions to position itself as an innovative and sustainable city but also show how collaboration is framed as both a policy objective and a method of implementation. Analysing these documents allowed me to examine how collaboration is formally institutionalised in Nottingham, and how it is linked to wider discourses of innovation, sustainability and inclusivity.

Additionally, documents such as the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) were chosen because they provide insight into how governance processes are perceived and experienced by citizens. These sources are directly relevant to this study's interpretivist focus, as they offer evidence of the multiplicity of stakeholder voices and reveal the tensions and opportunities around participation in governance. They were also critical for contextualising the interview and focus group findings.

Table 11 A sampling of documents analysed (see complete list of documents analysed in Appendix E)

Documents selected	Published by	Date Published	Data Analysed
Social Exclusion Unit Volume 302: debated on Monday 8 December 1997	House of Commons	1997	Early policy discourse on social exclusion, highlighting the role of community engagement in addressing inequalities.
Transcript of a speech by the Prime Minister on the Big Society, 19 July 2010.	Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister's Office	2010	National framing of citizen participation and shifting governance responsibilities towards communities.

Open Public Services White Paper	Open Public Services and Cabinet Office	2011	Policy framework promoting decentralisation and the involvement of multiple actors in public service delivery.
National Planning Policy Framework	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018 to 2021)	2012	Governance framework outlining formal mechanisms for community participation in planning processes.
The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution	HM Government	2020	National strategy emphasising multi-level governance and collaboration in delivering sustainability transitions.
Nottingham Economic Recovery & Renewal Plan	Nottingham City Council	2022	Local government strategy illustrating partnership-based governance and stakeholder engagement in economic recovery.
Universities for Nottingham Civic Agreement	Nottingham City Council, University 1 and University 2	2022	Institutional collaboration demonstrating shared governance and collaborative local development initiatives.
Green Park, Nottingham - the big conversation Setting the scene for a new vision	Nottingham City Council	2022	Example of collaborative engagement processes informing local development and coproduction practices.
Local Government Update by the Minister of State for Equalities, Local Government, Faith and Communities	UK Parliament	2022	National policy direction on devolution, community empowerment, and evolving local governance roles.
Statement of Community Involvement	Nottingham City Council	2023	Formal framework guiding community participation and coproduction within local planning decision-making.

3.6 Data Analysis

This section sets out the fourth stage of the research process (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). The research adopts an abductive reasoning process, consistent with interpretivist traditions (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2019). Abduction involves moving iteratively between empirical data and theoretical concepts to develop plausible interpretations of social reality. In this study, initial data collection and analysis guided the identification of key themes and relationships, such as perceptions of power, trust and inclusivity among different stakeholder groups. These emerging patterns were then reinterpreted in light of existing theoretical perspectives on CG and coproduction allowing theory and data to inform one another in a cyclical manner.

Additionally, I discuss the rationales for choosing a thematic analysis in conjunction with the abductive reasoning and the process of coding involved in understanding and identifying recurring patterns and trends. Thematic analysis refers to 'identifying, organising and interpreting themes in textual data' (King and Brooks, 2018, p. 219). Themes here are identified as 'recurrent and distinctive features of participants' accounts, characterising particular perceptions and/or experiences, which the researcher sees as relevant to the research question' (King and Horrocks, 2010, p. 150).

In practice, adopting a relativist ontology requires methodological openness to multiple perspectives and interpretations. Bell, Harley and Bryman (2022) suggest that this involves giving voice to participants and treating their accounts as valid constructions of reality rather than as data to be tested against an external standard. The researcher's task becomes one of bringing together these diverse constructions to develop a coherent understanding of the phenomenon. In this study, the process of coding and analysing qualitative data was guided by these ontological considerations, ensuring that each narrative was treated as a legitimate version of reality rather than a deviation from a single truth. Therefore, this research focuses on understanding how participants in Nottingham City interpret and make sense of their understanding of collaboration and their experiences of coproduction.

The decision to employ thematic analysis reflects the interpretivist orientation of this study, which assumes that meaning is co-constructed through participants' accounts and researcher interpretation (Clarke and Braun, 2017). Rather than seeking to uncover hidden mechanisms, the analysis was designed to explore the ways in which participants describe, frame and make sense of coproduction in Nottingham. This approach aligns with a relativist ontology by recognising that multiple realities are represented in the data, and that these realities emerge through dialogue, interaction and context. Thematic analysis therefore provided a flexible yet systematic framework for exploring the diversity of meanings across different stakeholder groups while remaining grounded in the case-specific context.

3.6.1 Coding

Coding was the primary analytical technique employed in this process (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2019). This involves a process where the researcher 'attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorisation, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes', which helps in distilling, sorting, and making comparisons across data segments (Saldaña, 2013, p. 4). I used NVIVO software to manage and organise the data, making the processes of searching, retrieving, and sorting coded data more efficient (Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014).

The coding process was iterative and unfolded across several stages of analysis. Through an iterative process of analysis, an initial 10 transcripts were openly coded, these emerging findings were continuously examined in relation to existing literature and research questions to identify themes that can be used as initial codes. These initial codes were treated as provisional rather than fixed categories. Once the initial codes had been established through open coding of the first 10 interview transcripts, the subsequent interview transcripts, focus group transcripts and documents were imported into NVivo and coded using these initial codes. This approach allowed the researcher to examine whether the patterns and themes emerging from the first round of coding was reflected in the rest of the individual interviews transcripts and focus groups.

As the data from interviews, focus groups and documents were analysed, additional codes were generated, some initial codes were refined or collapsed, and others were discarded where they lacked analytical relevance. This ensured that the coding framework evolved in response to the full dataset rather than being constrained by the first phase of analysis. Themes such as local government-led coproduction mechanisms, social limitations, and governance challenges were therefore developed through iterative dialogue between data and theory rather than being imposed deductively.

Following this, axial coding was employed to explore relationships between categories and to examine patterns of similarity and divergence across stakeholder groups. This stage involved analysing how coproduction was framed by different actors, how rationalities were connected to institutional roles, and how experiences of collaboration intersected with governance arrangements. Selective coding was then undertaken to consolidate broader thematic patterns and to identify higher order analytical categories that linked empirical material to the research questions and the conceptual framework of the study (Strauss, 2010; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014). Through this process, coding trees were reorganised and refined, enabling more abstract themes to emerge from the data.

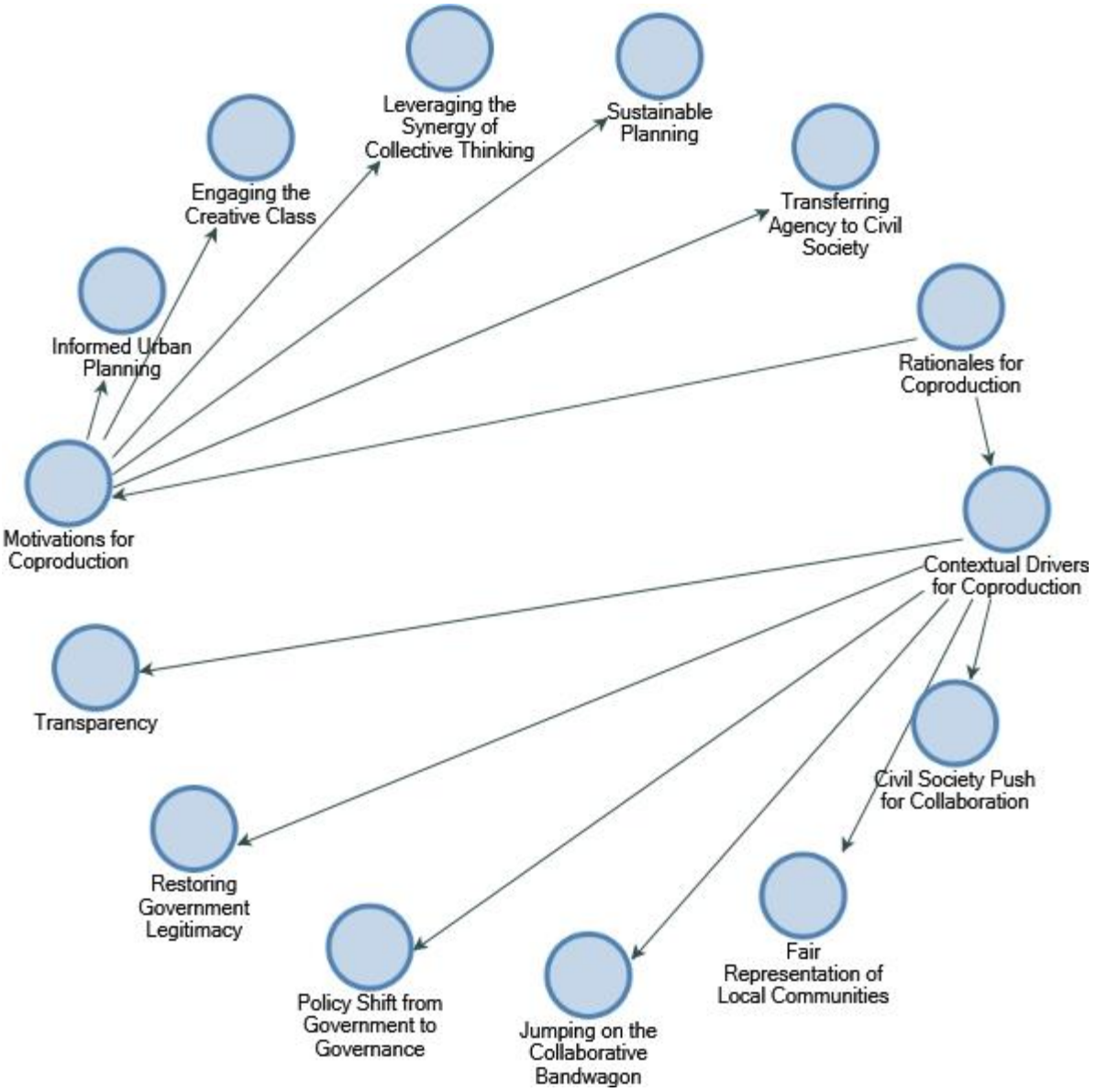


Figure 2 Stakeholder Rationales for Coproduction

Figure 2 presents the coding structure, including umbrella categories such as 'contextual drivers' and 'motivations' of coproduction, which developed gradually through this iterative engagement with the material. Analytical coding categories were refined and reorganised as patterns became clearer across stakeholder groups and data sources, as recommended by Saldana et al. (2013). In accordance with abductive reasoning (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2019), I looked at the relevant literature on these themes to observe and understand the existing academic debates on them. This abductive movement between empirical material and theoretical debates on CG and coproduction informed the refinement of analytical categories. More specifically, I

relied on the theory building technique, as more abstract and analytical themes emerged from the individual accounts of the participants' collective actions. Furthermore, themes around inclusivity, trust and power were interpreted in relation to both participants lived experiences and existing academic debates. This process involved applying increasingly specific analytical codes, refining and deepening the developing themes.

Focus groups were particularly valuable for examining shared experiences of collaboration and collective interpretations of local coproduction processes. For example, discussions among participants highlighted how civil society stakeholders understood opportunities for participation with local government, the perceived benefits of coproduction, and the practical challenges encountered in coproduction initiatives. These focus group insights complemented the individual perspectives obtained through interviews and helped reveal how certain narratives about coproduction were constructed and circulated among civil society participants. Additionally, documentary analysis played an important role in contextualising participants' accounts of coproduction. Documentary analysis was undertaken alongside interviews and focus groups and integrated into the thematic coding process. Documents were analysed to contextualise participants' accounts and to examine the alignment between policy narratives and stakeholders' experiences of coproduction.

Finally, triangulation across methods strengthened the credibility of the analysis. The combination of interviews and focus groups allowed for the identification of converging and contrasting perspectives and supported a more layered interpretation of coproduction in Nottingham. Documentary analysis also served an important triangulation function within the research design. By comparing participants' narratives with formal policy documents and organisational reports, the researcher was able to identify areas of convergence and divergence between official accounts of CG and the lived experiences described by participants. This helped strengthen the analytical depth of the study by situating individual and collective perspectives within their broader policy and institutional context. The outcome of this process is not a singular account of reality but a nuanced understanding of the diverse and sometimes

conflicting ways in which coproduction is constructed and experienced across different stakeholder groups.

3.6.2 Analytical Framework for Linking Research Questions to Empirical Findings

The analytical framework below (Figure 3) illustrates how the empirical findings are structured and presented across Chapters 4 to 7. In doing so, it demonstrates how the data has been systematically organised to address the research questions (as set out in section 2.6), and how each findings chapter contributes to answering specific elements of the overarching research question. The framework illustrates how the analysis is organised across four interconnected chapters: policy and governance context (Chapter 4), contextual drivers and motivations for coproduction (Chapter 5), coproduction mechanisms (Chapter 6), and stakeholder experiences (Chapter 7). Rather than treating these chapters as discrete units, the framework shows how they function cumulatively as layers of analysis that build towards answering the overarching research question. By making these relationships explicit, the framework demonstrates how empirical evidence is systematically arranged to address each research objective

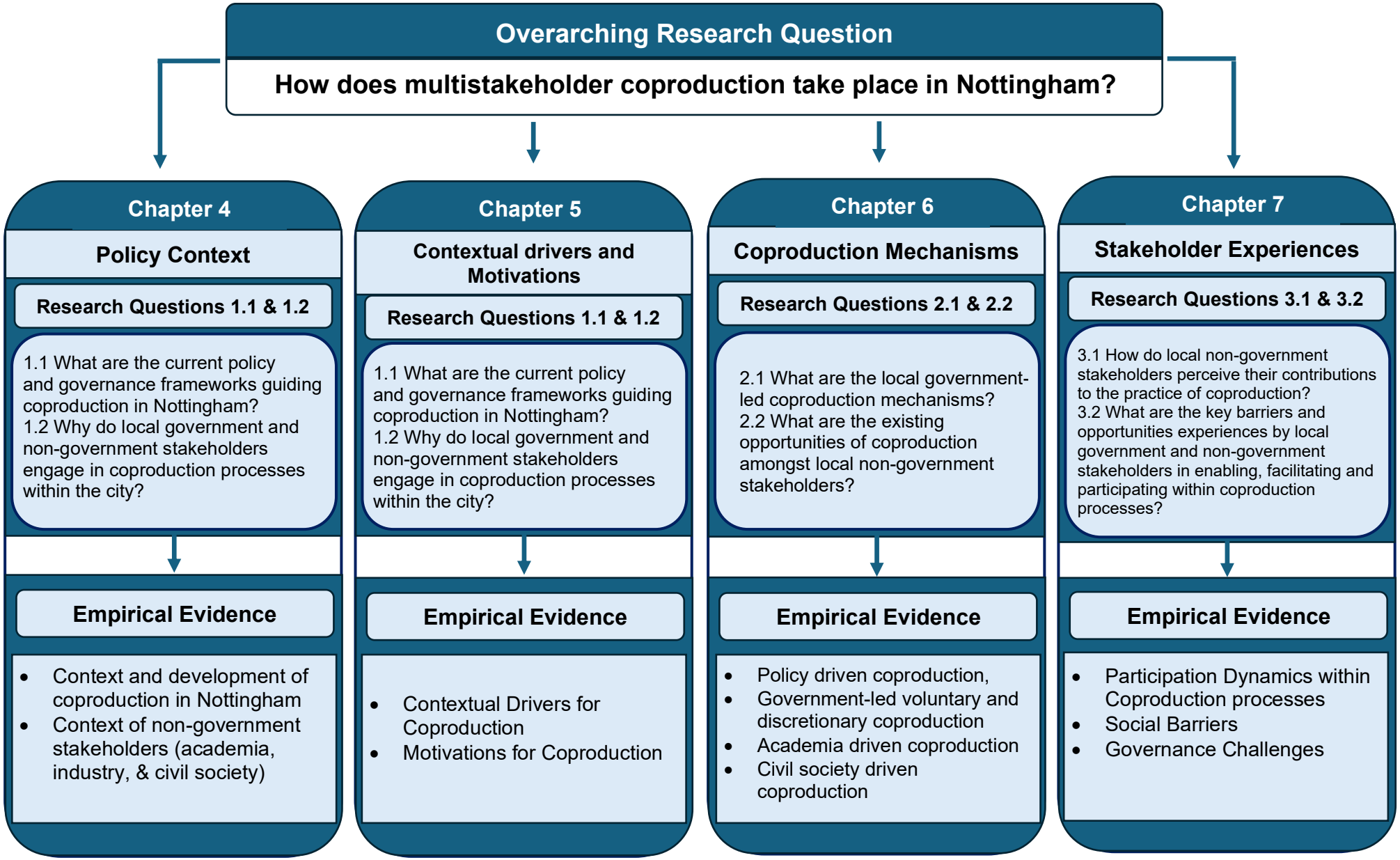


Figure 3 Analytical Framework Linking Research Questions to Empirical Findings

3.7 Ethics and Reflexivity

This chapter also addresses the importance of reflexivity and the researcher's positionality. Reflexivity entails a ‘a set of continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted practices through which researchers self-consciously critique, appraise, and evaluate how their subjectivity and context influence the research processes’ (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023, p. 241). From an interpretivist viewpoint, knowledge claims are evaluated not by criteria of validity or reliability in the positivist sense but through trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This involves demonstrating that interpretations are credible to participants, transferable to similar contexts and grounded in the data generated through interaction. Guba and Lincoln (1994) describe this as a hermeneutic process involving continuous interpretation and reinterpretation. Triangulation through interviews, focus groups and document analysis strengthens credibility by revealing patterns across multiple perspectives (Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis, 2019; Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2022). These methodological strategies reflect the epistemological belief that meaning is emergent, negotiated and context specific.

A key feature of the qualitative tradition is the flexibility and reflexivity that is associated with research design. Cooper and Schindler (2014) observe that qualitative research evolves to capture emerging insights, allowing meaning to unfold naturally. Similarly, reflexivity is central to maintaining authenticity and credibility, as the researcher’s awareness of how their own background and assumptions influence the inquiry remains central to qualitative research (Cunliffe, 2011; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). The researcher’s role is to engage empathetically with participants’ perspectives while remaining critically aware of how their own assumptions influence understanding (Silverman, 2022). In this study, reflexivity was central to maintaining awareness of how the researcher’s professional background and familiarity with Nottingham’s institutional environment shaped interactions and interpretation. For example, during interviews with university and local government stakeholders, the researcher remained attentive to the possibility that shared familiarity with institutional structures and local initiatives could lead to unexamined assumptions. To mitigate this, follow-up questions were used to encourage participants to elaborate on their perspectives rather than relying on presumed shared understanding.

During data analysis, particular care was taken to compare perspectives across stakeholder groups in order to identify divergent interpretations of collaborative processes. This ensured that a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of collaboration and reduced the likelihood that the findings would reflect the perspective of a single stakeholder group. Reflexive notes were also maintained during the research process to document emerging assumptions and reflect on how the researcher's positionality might influence interpretation of the data. These strategies contributed to the transparency and robustness of the research process by ensuring that interpretations were grounded in multiple sources of data and informed by diverse local stakeholder experiences.

My prior experience, which included living and volunteering in Nottingham as well as professional involvement in multi-stakeholder collaborations between academia and civil society, shaped my positioning in this qualitative research study. These experiences provided insight into how different parts of the institution operate and interact, as well as exposure to the ways universities engage with external partners. This familiarity helped me navigate conversations with university stakeholders, and find connections in local government, civil society, and industry stakeholders through my university network, and interpret institutional dynamics discussed during interviews. During the first year of my PhD, I had in-depth scoping conversations with various academics and professionals across in Nottingham to better understand the collaborative landscape in the city. While my existing knowledge of multi-stakeholder collaborations helped me in building a comfortable rapport with participants, navigating the nuances of public sector organisations (during Covid-19) presented a challenge. Specifically, keeping pace with the numerous initiatives, and political events mentioned in early interviews proved demanding.

This research project addressed key ethical considerations, such as obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring their confidentiality, and avoiding potential harm. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, were central to this research. This research project's data collection protocols were reviewed and approved by the Nottingham University Business School's research ethics committee in August 2020. All participants were provided with an ethics form (see Appendix C) to ensure they understood the study's purpose, what their participation in the study

would entail, how the information they agreed to share would be utilised, and the potential outputs of the research. All participants consented to being recorded, and the recordings were securely stored on a password-protected university server. To protect participants' identities, their names were anonymised, but some contextual information was retained, with the consent of the participants. For local government, academics, industry professionals and community organisers, their professional titles were used to provide background on the organisations and the stakeholders involved. Similarly, for civil society participants, the organisation type was recorded to offer essential context for the emerging themes. All research participants agreed to having this information used for analysis and thesis purposes.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological framework underpinning this research project. By grounding the study in an interpretivist epistemology and a relativist ontology, the research acknowledges that collaboration and coproduction are understood through the diverse meanings and experiences of those who participate in it. Rather than assuming a single objective reality, this approach emphasises the multiplicity of perspectives through which such practices are interpreted, negotiated and enacted. In adopting this position, the study seeks to develop a nuanced and context-specific understanding of collaboration as it unfolds within the historically and geographically situated case of Nottingham (Yin, 2018). The research employs a case study approach, allowing for flexibility in design and enabling the capture of multiple perspectives across stakeholder groups.

Taken together, the methodological choices outlined in this chapter establish the foundation for an inquiry that is both rigorous and sensitive to context. By emphasising the meanings participants attach to their experiences and situating them within the specific institutional and cultural setting of Nottingham, the chapter provides the basis for analysing coproduction as a lived and evolving practice. This framing ensures that the study remains consistent with its interpretivist and relativist assumptions, while also addressing the research questions through an approach that is coherent, transparent and reflexive.

Accordingly, the following chapters will present findings based on the research methods discussed here. Chapter 4 will provide a brief contextual background of the history of coproduction and key stakeholders involved in Nottingham city. Chapter 5 will offer the rationales and motivations driving local government and non-government stakeholders to engage in or develop coproduction initiatives. Chapter 6 presents the mechanisms of coproduction. Chapter 7 reflects on these mechanisms forming experiences of local government and non-government stakeholders in coproduction processes in Nottingham.

Chapter 4: Multistakeholder Coproduction: Historical Context for Local Government and Non-Government Stakeholders in Nottingham City

4.1 Introduction

The chapter explores how collaborative governance (CG) in Nottingham has evolved over time (1997-2023), situating current coproduction practices within this governance framework and in response to wider national and local policy shifts. It begins by outlining the development of CG in the UK and how national agendas such as the Localism Act 2011, National Planning Policy Framework, The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution, and more recently the UK National Action Plan for Open Government 2019-2021 (please refer to Appendix E) have influenced local governance priorities. This provides important context for understanding why particular forms of coproduction have emerged and how they are framed within local government practice, addressing Objective 1.

To further understand the rise of CG within the city, the chapter also examines the operational and institutional context within which Nottingham City Council (NCC) functions, including financial constraints, and central government intervention. These dynamics help explain the opportunities and limitations experienced by stakeholders when engaging in coproduction.

Finally, the chapter explores the roles, relationships and experiences of non-government stakeholders who were involved in coproduction, including universities and civil society. In doing so, this chapter begins to map the landscape of multi-stakeholder coproduction in Nottingham, addressing Objective 2 and establishing the foundation for a more detailed analysis of coproduction processes, barriers, opportunities, and stakeholder perceptions explored in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

4.2 The national context shaping coproduction in Nottingham

During the Coalition government (2010-2015) there was an emphasis on collaborative forms of governance, as policymakers sought alternative ways to address complex

social challenges and rethink the role of the state. Within this context, the national government introduced the concept of the 'Big Society', framing it as a shift away from state-led solutions towards greater citizen involvement and shared responsibility at the local level. This vision emphasised cultural change, encouraging citizens and communities to take a more active role in shaping social outcomes and public services, as articulated by the UK Prime Minister (from 2010-2016) David Cameron.

> *'The Big Society is about a huge culture change … where people, in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighbourhoods, in their workplace … don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face … but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities.' (Transcript of a speech by the Prime Minister on the Big Society, 2010)*

However, despite the national political narrative promoting greater citizen participation and collaborative decision-making processes, the practical implementation of coproduction has been significantly constrained by financial pressures on local government. As discussed in Chapter 2 in relation to austerity urbanism, reductions in public funding have limited the capacity of local authorities to sustain meaningful engagement with non-government stakeholders. Within the last two decades local government funding in the UK has faced significant cuts.

> *'Local government has coped with a prolonged period of real-terms spending reduction which is without parallel in modern times. This large fall in local authorities' resources has been primarily caused by very significant cuts in central government grants.' (DA, Local government finance and the 2019 Spending Review)*

Consequently, local governments have been inclined to align local planning policies in accordance with these trends to secure investment, which may explain the focus on smart, and carbon-neutral strategies (discussed later in the chapter).

‘The city’s local government has ambitious plans and initiatives especially around energy, carbon and sustainability.’ (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)

As articulated by the Smart Cities Lead, smart city initiatives in the UK are increasingly framed not as deployments of advanced digital systems, but as systemic approaches to improving how cities function for their citizens. The emphasis on making the city work better places citizens as both beneficiaries and active participants in local governance planning, positioning technological tools as enablers rather than drivers of change. In this context, smart cities were positioned as adaptable and learning cities that evolved through coproduction with their citizens.

‘The UK Smart cities are a lot less about technology and these days and it's very much about a people-centred city. How we can make the city work better, become smarter for its citizens using a people-centred approach.’ (LG-INT City Rooms Project Lead)

The strategy demonstrated inclusivity of civil society stakeholders through placing citizens at the centre, encouraging active public participation and seeking to integrate the public’s voice in shaping the urban future. This focus on inclusion is critical for ensuring that local governance developments within the city serve all community members equitably. Decision-making in this context reportedly moved beyond traditional top-down approaches, fostering shared decision-making and emphasising the value of coproduction. By embedding citizen engagement into service development, the strategy aimed to create an environment where policies and projects better reflected the needs and aspirations of Nottingham's residents, aligning with a more democratic and collaborative city vision.

‘Smart Nottingham will be taken forward in partnership with Nottingham City Council, the University I, University 2, local businesses and citizens and will focus on four strategic priorities, all under the concept of a ‘Citizen First’ approach.’ (Smart Nottingham, Nottingham’s Smart City Strategy 2019, p.3)

With the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a shift in national governance priorities, clearly articulated in the UK Government's Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution, which reframed economic growth and industrial renewal through the lens of climate change and decarbonisation. The emphasis on clean technologies and green innovation signalled a decisive move away from earlier digitally focused 'smart' modernisation agendas, positioning sustainability and net-zero objectives as central to future investment, policy direction and funding allocations. This national reframing provided an important contextual backdrop for local authorities, shaping how cities articulated and branded their strategic priorities.

> *'Today we will mobilise the same forces to level up our country and enable our proud industrial heartlands to forge the future once again. By investing in clean technologies – wind, carbon capture, hydrogen and many others – Britain will lead the world into a new Green Industrial Revolution.' (The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution, 2020, p.5)*

As funding priorities increasingly centred on carbon reduction and climate resilience, NCC repositioned its local strategic framing away from the 'smart' city agenda (the Smart City Strategy was published in 2019 on the Smart Nottingham webpage owned by NCC) towards 'carbon neutral' and 'sustainable' narratives (the Carbon Neutral Nottingham Charter was published in 2020). This rebranding was not indicative of a complete departure from smart city principles, but rather a pragmatic governance response intended to align local government with national funding frameworks. A local government participant confirmed the discontinuation of the Smart Nottingham ambition.

> *'In the current situation (with Covid-19 and the national government move towards sustainability), we have had to discontinue the smart city ambition, however it's there intrinsically in the work that continues under a different guise, but we don't bring it all together under the label smart cities.' (LG-INT Policy Officer 2)*

As the smart city ambitions were phased out, the NCC's flagship strategy called the Nottingham Economic Recovery and Renewal Plan was published In 2022. It encapsulated a forward-looking ambition to transform Nottingham city into a leading

city in inclusivity and environmental sustainability. The strategic objectives set forth in this plan demonstrate a commitment to fostering a vibrant cultural and creative ecosystem. Further, the local government aspired to be at the forefront in environmental movement by aiming to make Nottingham the first carbon neutral city in the UK.

> *'..we seek to reimagine Nottingham as an inclusive, green, creative and digitally enabled city, widely recognised as; an internationally renowned city of culture, creativity & innovation, The UK's first carbon neutral city and a city which offers opportunities for everyone.' (DA: Nottingham Economic Recovery and Renewal Plan, 2022)*

NCC demonstrated a strategic pivot towards climate focused governance through its Carbon Neutral 2028 agenda. The strategy noted environmental sustainability as a central organising principle of the city's governing strategy. In this context, earlier smart city goals were absorbed within a broader sustainability narrative, where stakeholder involvement from non-government stakeholders was retained as an enabling mechanism of decarbonisation and inclusive growth. This reframing reflects how local authorities have adapted their policy priorities to address intensifying environmental pressures while aligning with national climate agendas and funding trajectories.

> *'Ultimately, the aspiration of sustainable carbon neutrality by 2028 is one that is for, and on behalf of, the whole city. The success of the city in rising to the challenge depends upon the involvement of all citizens, business, the public* sector and our educational establishments.' (DA: Carbon Neutral Nottingham Charter, 2020, p.26)

The Nottingham Economic Recovery & Renewal Plan also demonstrated a multi-stakeholder approach by seeking to involve public, private, voluntary, community, and educational sectors to craft a unified, city-wide strategy for post-pandemic recovery. The plan demonstrated the local government's ambition to foster consensus building through engaging civic institutions, businesses, and individuals in a mutual partnership. The multi-stakeholder decision-making process was designed to be

inclusive, with an emphasis on including diverse voices and addressing the needs of marginalised communities, indicating a citizen-centred approach.

> *'In partnership, the partners are setting out our Economic Recovery and Renewal Plan, a city-wide plan that is 'owned' by a coalition of partners across the public, private, voluntary and community, and educational sectors. Our aim is to build the economy back in a way that is equitable, inclusive and sustainable – both socially and environmentally – so that no-one in our city is left behind.' (DA: Nottingham Economic Recovery & Renewal Plan, 2022)*

Whilst local government stakeholders emphasised a governance approach that prioritised partnership and citizen inclusion, the extent to which solutions are truly co-produced, or collectively sought will be explored in Chapters 6 and 7. Local government participants alluded to continuous scoping for potential synergies with non-government stakeholders, such as academia.

> *'Our aim is to focus on scoping opportunities for collaborations between local government and academia that channel synergies.' (LG-INT Senior Management 1)*

One respondent drew attention to the complex and fragmented institutional context within which coproduction in Nottingham operates. The city's distinctive political geography, characterised by overlapping and misaligned administrative boundaries between Nottingham city, surrounding areas (Broxtowe and Rushcliffe) and Nottinghamshire County authority, introduces additional coordination challenges for coproduction with non-government stakeholders. This fragmentation is further compounded by the fact that many individuals who regularly interact with Nottingham through work, leisure, and the use of public services such as transport do not reside within the city's administrative boundaries. As a result, a significant proportion of those who shape and experience the city on a daily basis fall outside the formal remit of NCC, complicating efforts to design inclusive, place-based governance initiatives and undermining traditional notions of citizenship and stakeholder representation in collaborative and co-produced policymaking.

'*The complicating factor for Nottingham is its political geography. A lot of what we might think of as the City of Nottingham is not technically the city, it's the county and that's kind of an oddity through its historical governance*.' (UN-I University Advisory Board Representative)

Furthermore, the local government was criticised for demonstrating a propensity towards an inward-looking approach. This perspective implied that coproduction is at times limited to elite stakeholders (as previously discussed in Section 2.3.1.2.1) with the aim of affirming NCC preferred policies. Non-government participants suggested that genuine collaborative inclusion, which could arguably challenge or broaden the scope of policy formulation, might be compromised in favour of reinforcing existing local and national government agendas.

'The local government has an awkward legacy of being controlling…it looks inwardly and pursues citizen engagement only as far as that endorses the policies that the government wants to pursue.' (CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 1)

Several participants described NCC as becoming more inward-looking in recent years, with fewer efforts to engage openly with external stakeholders. In this context, coproduction can appear limited or selective, taking place mainly when it supports policies the NCC already intends to pursue. Rather than being a genuinely open process, engagement is sometimes perceived as a way of reinforcing existing decisions. This raises concerns about how meaningful and inclusive coproduction is in practice, particularly given the need for broad cooperation across administrative boundaries and with a wide range of non-government actors in the city.

'The local government used to be quite approachable; however it hasn't been outward looking the past few years.' (UN2-INT Director of the Public Policy and Management Research Group)

Several non-government participants described a historical tendency for NCC to retain control and to be cautious about sharing decision-making power with non-government stakeholders, including its citizens and key institutions such as universities. This

legacy of paternalism (further explored in Section 7.4.1) suggests that coproduction has often been carefully managed rather than genuinely shared.

> *'Nottingham as a Council has a bit of a history of paternalism, and you look back in the mists of time and you know it didn't want to let go of the universities it wanted to run them itself.' (UN2-INT Responsible Officer)*

This section demonstrates how the emergence of coproduction in Nottingham has been shaped by a series of shifting national governance narratives and local institutional dynamics. National agendas promoting decentralisation, citizen participation, and CG, beginning with the Big Society and continuing through smart city strategies and sustainability-led policies, have created an institutional expectation for greater stakeholder involvement in local decision-making. At the same time, financial pressures on local government, evolving funding priorities, and the need to align with national policy frameworks have influenced how these collaborative approaches are interpreted and implemented at the city level.

4.2.1 A City in Trouble

The preceding section demonstrated how national governance agendas encouraged decentralisation and enhanced stakeholder participation within Nottingham's local governance. However, the practical realisation of coproduction within the city has been significantly shaped, and at times constrained, by the local government's financial circumstances. This subsection therefore examines how the financial pressures facing Nottingham City Council (NCC), alongside heightened external oversight, altered the governance environment within which collaborative practices operate.

This is an important theme emerging from the data that helps to understand the wider operational and financial context that the local government was operating under. Along with the Covid -19 pandemic implications (discussed in detail in Chapters 7), the local government was under significant scrutiny due to misallocation of assets, and wider financial challenges. In 2022, the national government issued special intervention after an investigation into the NCC's operations. The investigation's findings revealed several financial and governance failures in the local government.

> *'Housing Revenue Account expenditure found 'serious historical financial and governance failings' as well as 'cultural failings and a reluctance to escalate issues appropriately'.' (National Government Press Release: Further action taken to address failures at Nottingham City Council, 2022, p2.)*

In response to these concerns, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities intervened directly in NCC's governance arrangements. This intervention was framed as a necessary step to address serious and ongoing weaknesses in how the NCC was being managed and held accountable. Drawing on powers set out in the Local Government Act 1999, the national government justified its involvement on the grounds that the Council had failed to meet its statutory *best value* duty, which requires local authorities to deliver services efficiently, effectively, and economically. Key decision-making responsibilities for the NCC were temporarily transferred from elected local officials to central government-appointed representatives.

> *'…on the basis of the evidence provided that Nottingham City Council is failing to comply with its Best Value duty. He is therefore minded to exercise his Best Value powers under the Local Government Act 1999 and appoint Commissioners.' (Local Government Update 2022, Statement by Minister of State for Equalities, Local Government, Faith and Communities, p.1)*

Despite the national government intervention to help and improve the local government's financial and governance performance, the NCC failed to meet its expenses for the year 2023/2024. This announcement came when the Finance Director at the local government issued Section 114 to declare the NCC bankrupt.

> *'Members of the Council are required to consider this report…because in my professional opinion the expenditure of the authority incurred (including expenditure it proposes to incur) in the 2023/24 financial year is likely to exceed resources (including sums borrowed) available to it*

> *to meet that expenditure. The purpose of this report is for me to formally notify the Council that in my opinion the Council is unable to meet its statutory requirement to deliver a balanced budget for 2023/24.' (Report made under part VIII s.114(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 ('The Act'), p.7)*

Taken together, the findings outlined above illustrate how coproduction in Nottingham has emerged within a context of significant institutional and financial pressure. The financial crisis within NCC, combined with heightened central government oversight, altered the governance environment in which collaborative practices take place. These conditions highlight that coproduction in the city cannot be understood solely as a proactive governance strategy aimed at enhancing participation. Rather, it also reflects a pragmatic response to constrained resources and increased scrutiny of local government operations. In this context, engaging non-government stakeholders, including universities, CSOs, and private sector actors, became increasingly important for mobilising additional capacity, expertise, and legitimacy. At the same time, these circumstances introduced new tensions, as financial instability and external intervention limited the autonomy and flexibility of local governance arrangements.

4.2.2 Policy and Legislation

The ambition for a more transparent and collaborative local government was evident within national and local policy frameworks, particularly highlighted by the recent national government's 2021-2023 Open Government policy paper and the NCC policy and strategy documents discussed in the previous section. The Open Government policy paper aimed to make government processes and information more accessible and transparent, consequently fostering trust and enabling more meaningful dialogue. This, in turn, was meant to create better feedback loops, allowing citizens to provide input and shape the design and delivery of public services. The following quote highlighted the potential for transparency to move beyond mere consultation towards genuine coproduction, where citizens become active participants in shaping the services that affect their lives.

> *'Greater transparency will further encourage dialogue between local authorities and citizens, increasing trust and leading to better feedback loops and co-creation of services.' (UK National Action Plan for Open Government 2019-2021 Policy paper)*

The NCC's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), updated for the first time since 2007, adhered with the requirements of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. All Councils in England are mandated to produce an SCI, mainstreaming the procedures for public consultations in both planning policy and individual planning applications. This illustrates the national government's move towards decentralised governance, characterised by greater opportunities for coproduction, leading to policies that shape local governance and meet local needs.

NCC's SCI also echoed principles such as inclusivity, responsibility, and engagement. It asserted that meaningful inclusivity requires active engagement with diverse perspectives and lived experiences. By embracing place-making principles, the planning process can empower citizens and non-government actors to shape their environment and contribute to their own growth and well-being.

> *'An inclusive city is only achievable if all voices and experiences are heard. The planning system offers a great opportunity to deliver social targets through Place-making and to help individuals and communities to grow, thrive and develop along the process.' (Nottingham City Council Statement of Community Involvement 2023, p.1)*

This section has examined the national, institutional, and financial conditions that have shaped the emergence and evolution of coproduction in Nottingham. By tracing the shift from the Big Society agenda through smart city ambitions and towards sustainability-led governance, the analysis demonstrates how coproduction has been embedded within changing national policy narratives. In doing so, this section directly addresses Research Question 1.1, identifying the policy and CG frameworks guiding coproduction within the city.

The findings indicate that coproduction in Nottingham is shaped by broader governance reforms that promote decentralisation, participation, and collaborative responsibility. National planning legislation, open government agendas, and sustainability frameworks have created institutional expectations that encourage local authorities to involve non-government stakeholders in decision-making processes.

4.3 Context of non-government stakeholders in Nottingham

This section of the chapter sets the context for the non-government stakeholder groups (previously discussed in sections 2.4.1 and 3.5). It presents the findings pertaining to the roles that non-government stakeholders (academia, industry, and civil society) have played within the coproduction landscape in Nottingham city. It identifies the city's unique characteristics, exploring its historical and contemporary context to understand the factors shaping coproduction. By examining Nottingham's rebellious identity, its vibrant academic and industry actors, and its history of bottom-up movements, this section provides a crucial backdrop for understanding the rationalities, experiences, and challenges of coproduction processes.

4.3.1 Universities

Universities were positioned by local government and non-government participants alike as stabilising and bridging stakeholders within the coproduction landscape. As anchor institutions, universities were viewed as having a long-term presence and commitment to place, enabling them to operate beyond the shorter political and funding cycles that shape local government decision-making. Unlike public sector strategies that may shift in response to national policy changes or electoral cycles, universities were perceived to offer continuity, institutional memory, and capacity for sustained engagement. This stability was seen as particularly valuable in mediating relationships between various local government and non-government stakeholders, including local government, industry, and civil society, and in facilitating processes of citizen participation. In this sense, universities were not only knowledge providers but also intermediaries, helping to bridge information gaps, maintain partnerships over time, and support collaborative and co-produced approaches to addressing complex urban challenges.

> *'We are anchor institutions, as we have a longer-term imperative as our strategic priorities will not change with the general elections.' (UN2-INT Responsible Officer)*

Multiple participants recognised the increasing prominence and influence of academic institutions as independent voices and experts in public discourse. This could be attributed to the capacity of academia to offer viewpoints and analysis that are free from overt political biases, contrasting with local government and non-government stakeholders in the policymaking process. This perceived impartiality from political agendas enhanced the credibility and authority of academic contributions in shaping policy and social debate.

> *'Academia suddenly has more standing than it did in the past, as we have the ability to provide independent opinions without any political leaning.' (UN1-INT University Advisory Board Representative)*

Participants also acknowledged universities as key stakeholders in urban policy debates, noted for their dual role in both contributing to city-relevant discourses and fostering strong connections with local communities. This engagement was evident not only through universities' participation in policy discussions but also through their commitment to research and knowledge exchange that directly benefit the wider community.

> *'Universities engage in policy debates and topics of relevance to the city, but also have a strong connection to communities, both in terms of its research and knowledge exchange.' (LG-INT Community Engagement Lead)*

Building on their role as anchor institutions, universities in Nottingham were described as actively shaping and sustaining cross-sector alliances to support coproduction. Participants highlighted how universities move beyond passive engagement by creating formal partnership structures that bring together local government, communities, industry, and civil society around shared challenges. Through these alliances, universities were seen to mobilise research expertise, institutional resources, and student capacity to support place-based problem-solving, while also

creating spaces for collective learning and mutual benefit between academic and non-academic actors. Nottingham Civic Exchange is based on a collaboration model demonstrating a proactive approach to address community issues through the shared synergies of academic research, community engagement, and stakeholder collaboration.

> *'Nottingham Civic Exchange acts as a resource to look at social and economic issues in new ways. This means facilitating debate, acting as a bridge between research and policy debates, and developing practical projects at a local, city and regional level (Laying the Foundations of a Good Work City: Mapping Nottingham's Employment, 2019, p.70)*

Alongside research-led partnerships, universities in Nottingham also formalised their civic role through dedicated agreements designed to embed community engagement into their core activities. The Universities for Nottingham Civic Agreement was targeted towards harnessing the innovative and creative skills of the student and academic body for the direct benefit of local communities. This strategic initiative represented a commitment to bridging university resources and talents with external community-focused projects, fostering a reciprocal relationship where academic capabilities contribute to local development and community welfare.

> *'To better connect the expertise and energy of our innovative, creative student and academic community with initiatives that directly benefit our local communities.' (Universities for Nottingham Civic Agreement, 2022, p.3)*

The academic institutions within the city were also recognised as influential centres of knowledge, possessing extensive capabilities for research and interpretation of complex issues. Their role extended beyond the academic arena, as they established meaningful relationships with local communities, indicating a model of engaged academia where universities function as vital conduits for knowledge dissemination and application in the community context. This partnership highlighted the importance of academic expertise in informing community development and fostering mutual understanding of local concerns.

> *'The two major Universities in the city are knowledge powerhouses with great connections to local communities through research and sense-making.' (LG-INT Senior Management 2)*

This section suggests that universities occupy an important position within Nottingham's coproduction landscape. Participants frequently described universities as anchor institutions that offer a degree of stability, institutional memory, and long-term commitment to place, enabling them to operate beyond the shorter political and funding cycles that often shape local government decision-making. In addition to their roles in research and knowledge production, universities were also characterised as intermediary actors that can help facilitate connections between local government, civil society, and industry.

4.3.2 Private Sector

With significant investments in technology, healthcare, and education, including the presence of two prestigious universities, the city has attempted to craft a new economic landscape that blends heritage with progression. The investment in technology and healthcare was evident in institutions such as BioCity Nottingham, one of the largest bioscience innovation and incubation centres in Europe. The city's hospitals and medical research facilities collaborate with universities and businesses to pioneer advancements in healthcare, making substantial contributions to Nottingham's growing life sciences sector. University 1 and University 2 have emerged as hubs of innovation, contributing to the local and global economy through impactful research and a skilled graduate workforce. These institutions are particularly influential in the realms of medicine and the creative arts, fostering partnerships that stimulate economic growth.

> *'The city today is home to: BioCity, the UK's largest bioscience innovation and incubation centre; Queen's Medical Centre, the UK's largest teaching hospital; two leading universities; Experian, and a growing financial technology sector; Games Workshop.' (Nottingham Economic Recovery & Renewal Plan, 2022, p.6)*

The city's recognition as a UNESCO City of Literature was one example of how Nottingham has leveraged its rich history to enhance its cultural and economic standing. Celebrated through numerous literary events, such as the Nottingham Festival of Literature, the initiative garnered both local and international attention. It also included efforts to engage young people in literature with programs aimed at budding readers and writers.

> *'Nottingham boasts a grassroots live literature scene driven by a diverse and young (a third of its population is under 24) community supported by wide-ranging literary organisations including Nottingham Poetry Festival, Nottingham Writers' Studio, Nottingham Playhouse, Bromley House Library and a swathe of innovatively independent publishers and poetry groups.' (UNESCO Cities of Literature, 2015, p.2)*

This section demonstrates how Nottingham's evolving economic landscape provides an important context for understanding the role of private sector actors within the city's coproduction environment. The transition from traditional industrial activities towards creative, digital, and knowledge-based industries has contributed to the emergence of a diverse economic ecosystem that intersects with local governance and policy agendas.

4.3.3 Civil Society

As discussed previously in Section 4.2, in 2010 the national government introduced the idea of Big Society to the United Kingdom. This marked a renewed focus towards a devolved local government in the country and created opportunities for many civil society and community organisations to prosper, develop and formalise. Accordingly, participants consistently highlighted the central role of CSOs and community groups in shaping coproduction in Nottingham. CSOs and community groups were widely understood as key intermediaries between local communities and formal governance structures, providing channels through which citizens could articulate concerns, mobilise around shared issues, and engage with public decision-making processes. Within this landscape, civil society was positioned not as a homogenous actor, but as

a diverse and issue-driven set of organisations whose influence was shaped by their missions, resources, and capacities for inclusion.

> *'CSOs are trusted bridges connecting communities and voicing our concerns to policymakers.' (CS-FGD1, Participant 4)*

The involvement of CSOs in environmental advocacy was evident, with a focus on channelling local community concerns into structured campaigns. These organisations prioritised the conservation of environmental and heritage sites, organising and representing community interests to engage in dialogue with NCC. Such efforts highlighted the role of CSOs as intermediaries that could articulate, coordinate, and elevate community priorities in the public policy arena, particularly in the context of environmental conservation.

> *'Several of our projects are focused on advocacy for community concerns around conservation of environmental and heritage sites. Our focus was to organise individual and community concerns around Green Park and communicate these to local government through our campaign'. (CSO2-INT Senior Organiser)*

Interactions between local government officials and citizens can present challenges, often leading to reliance on intermediary figures who represent the interests of specific groups within the community. Local government participants pointed to resource limitations and access to individual citizens, suggesting a potential disconnect between government bodies and the broader public. As a result, engagement practices commonly involved liaising with recognised community leaders or group representatives who spoke on behalf of specific constituencies. While this approach enables more manageable communication, it may also limit the breadth and inclusivity of civil society participation by privileging certain stakeholders over others and reducing opportunities for civil society participation throughout the coproduction processes.

'It's difficult to liaise directly with citizens due to limited resources, it is a common practice to speak to somebody who is the head of a certain group that represents citizens.' (LG-INT Policy Officer 1)

Community groups and CSOs captured in this study could be seen as instrumental in facilitating robust democratic engagement by amplifying the voices of diverse community members, including those from vulnerable groups. This approach highlighted the critical importance of inclusive dialogues in democratic systems, ensuring that all stakeholder groups could contribute to public discourse without fear of reprisal or exclusion. Through their efforts, CSOs contribute to the strengthening of democratic principles by endorsing and practicing CG where all citizens are heard and can influence decision-making processes.

'I think it's about us as part of our building and movement is about providing people with more opportunities to make their voices heard…because it's so critical to a democracy that even vulnerable stakeholder groups can speak out and without fear.' (CSO2-INT Senior Organiser)

Civil society participants tended to prefer engaging with CSOs over the local government. This was attributed to the perceived approachability of CSOs and community leaders, which may facilitate easier and more effective communication channels for individuals seeking to engage in coproduction processes.

'I am more open to engaging with CSOs as compared to local government as they are more approachable.' (CS-FGD1, Participant 2)

An established relationship between CSOs and the NCC was identified, characterised by an ongoing dialogue. While participants noted that NCC were at times hesitant regarding specific campaigns or advocacy positions put forward by CSOs, particularly where these challenged existing policy priorities, this was often described as a cautious or measured response rather than outright opposition. In this sense, engagement was maintained, but endorsement was not always immediate or

unconditional. Nevertheless, there appeared to be a strong foundation of trust and mutual respect built over several years. This relationship facilitated a continuous exchange of ideas and allowed engagement to be maintained even when differing perspectives emerged.

> *'We have an open door to having a dialogue with the government, even if they may be resistant to some of our campaigns, but I think there is a level of trust and respect for the alliance over a number of years.' (CSO1-INT Organiser)*

This section has mapped the key non-government stakeholders involved in Nottingham's coproduction landscape, including universities, the private sector, and CSOs. In doing so, it directly contributes to Objective 2, addressing Research Question 2.1 by identifying the existing opportunities and avenues of coproduction available to non-government stakeholders. First, universities were positioned as anchor institutions and intermediary actors that provide continuity, knowledge exchange, and partnership infrastructure. Their civic agreements, research collaborations, and facilitative platforms illustrate formalised mechanisms through which academia participates in coproduction processes. This mapping also informs Research Question 2.2, by identifying institutionalised partnership structures that intersect with local government-led mechanisms.

The private sector was situated within Nottingham's evolving economic landscape, highlighting how economic restructuring, creative industries, and innovation ecosystems intersect with CG agendas. These dynamics demonstrate how coproduction is embedded within broader economic development strategies. CSOs were shown to function as trusted intermediaries between citizens and formal governance structures. Taken together, this section answers the overarching research objective of how multistakeholder coproduction takes place in Nottingham by identifying stakeholders and relational dynamics within the local coproduction landscape.

4.4 Summary

This chapter has examined the historical, political, and institutional context within which coproduction takes place in Nottingham city. In direct response to the overarching research objective, it has demonstrated that coproduction in the city is shaped by the interaction between national governance reforms, local institutional constraints, and the roles of diverse non-government actors. By focusing on both local government and non-government stakeholders, it has provided a place-based understanding of the factors that shape participation, decision-making, and collaboration at the local level

Section 4.2 addressed Research Question 1.1 by identifying the policy and collaborative governance frameworks guiding coproduction, including decentralisation agendas, planning legislation, sustainability strategies, and open government initiatives. The chapter traced the evolution of coproduction in Nottingham through key moments in UK public administration. It highlighted how national policy narratives such as the Big Society, smart city agendas, and sustainability-led governance have influenced local strategies and priorities. At the same time, it demonstrated how financial pressures, central government intervention, and organisational challenges within NCC have constrained the scope and consistency of coproduction in practice. These findings contribute directly to understanding the CG frameworks and rationales that underpin stakeholder engagement in coproduction.

Section 4.3 addressed Objective 2 by examining non-government stakeholders, the chapter highlighted the distinct, yet complementary roles played by universities and civil society. Universities were positioned as anchor institutions that provide continuity, expertise, and capacity for cross-sector collaboration, while civil society were shown to act as trusted intermediaries that amplify citizen voices and support community-led engagement. Together, these findings help map the local coproduction landscape and identify avenues for participation.

The chapter also revealed ongoing tensions within coproduction arrangements, including challenges related to fragmented governance boundaries, limited resources, and perceptions of control and restricted inclusivity. These issues raise important

questions about how meaningful and inclusive coproduction processes are in practice. In doing so, the chapter establishes foundations prepares the ground for the more detailed examination of stakeholder perceptions, barriers, and opportunities that are explored in the later findings' chapters. This contextual foundation informs the subsequent analysis of stakeholder rationales, motivations, and lived experiences explored in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Building on this contextual foundation, the following chapter examines the varying rationales that local government and non-government stakeholders hold for engaging in coproduction, exploring how these motivations shape participation, expectations, and coproduction outcomes.

Chapter 5: Contextual Drivers and Motivations for Multistakeholder Coproduction

5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses Objective 1 of the research (see chapter one), which seeks to explore local government and non-government stakeholders' rationales for engaging in coproduction within Nottingham city. This chapter dissects the contextual drivers and motivations that shape the landscape of coproduction, examining both the local government-led initiatives designed to engage non-government stakeholders demanding greater inclusion as well as partnership and community-led coproduction mechanisms. While both contextual drivers and motivations define the reasons for participating in coproduction, they capture different aspects of why coproduction emerges and is sustained. Contextual drivers refer to the structural, institutional, and policy driven factors that explain why local government stakeholders initiate or facilitate coproduction. In contrast, motivations capture the perceived value and benefits that draw local government and non-government actors into participating in coproduction processes.

Section 5.2 Contextual drivers for Coproduction, addresses Research Question 1.2 by analysing the factors motivating local government stakeholders to embrace coproduction processes. It investigates the shift from traditional government models to more CG frameworks, driven by factors such as declining public trust, demands for enhanced transparency and accountability, and a growing recognition of the value inherent in diverse perspectives. Section 5.3 of the chapter, also addresses Research Question 1.2 Motivations for Coproduction, shifts the focus to the civil society-driven forces shaping coproduction. It explores how citizens, community groups, and non-government organisations actively shaped the coproduction practices, advocating for greater involvement in urban planning, leveraging the power of collective thinking, and demanding a more central role in addressing local challenges.

5.2 Contextual Drivers for Coproduction

This section presents contextual drivers, exploring why local government stakeholders initiate and facilitate coproduction processes. The contextual drivers identified in this section emerged primarily from interviews with local government participants in Nottingham and were reinforced by non-government stakeholders' perspectives. Contextual drivers refer to the institutional, policy, and governance pressures that encourage local government to move beyond traditional top-down decision-making toward collaborative approaches such as coproduction. Drawing on primary data from local government and non-government stakeholders and analysis of national and local policy frameworks (see Table 11 and APPENDIX E), this section demonstrates how broader governance agendas are interpreted and enacted within Nottingham City Council (NCC), shaping the conditions under which coproduction is practiced. These rationalities help explain why coproduction emerges as a governance response in Nottingham.

Before examining local government-driven mechanisms of coproduction, it is necessary to clarify the scope of policy engagement in this section. This chapter does not seek to provide a comprehensive review of national coproduction policy, nor to evaluate coproduction as a normative governance ideal. Instead, policy is examined here in a bounded and instrumental sense: as a set of statutory, procedural, and strategic frameworks that shape how NCC operationalises coproduction through institutionalised mechanisms. The focus is therefore limited to policies that mandate, structure, or incentivise coproduction at the local level, including formal engagement guidance, consultation requirements, data-gathering instruments, and partnership frameworks. The section demonstrates that while policy mandates the existence of the principles of coproduction, it does not guarantee dispersion of power, enhanced influence, or stakeholder inclusivity. Instead, it produces differentiated forms of engagement with varying implications for power and representation.

5.2.1 Policy Shift from Government to Governance

This subsection situates the empirical findings within the broader governance context that shapes how local government operates in Nottingham. It outlines the shift from

traditional, hierarchical models of government towards governance arrangements that emphasise coproduction practices encompassing collaboration, participation, and engagement with non-government stakeholders. By tracing how national and local policy frameworks promote decentralisation in governance decision-making, civic engagement, and shared responsibility, this section explains the conditions under which coproduction has become a prominent approach at the local level. This contextual grounding is necessary for understanding why coproduction emerges as a relevant practice in Nottingham, not as an isolated local initiative, but as part of a wider reconfiguration of relationships between local governments, civil society and academia.

In response to the financial crisis of 2007, the Conservative government's policy initiative 'The Big Society' emphasised the role of local government, and civil society in addressing social and economic challenges.

> *'We will promote the radical devolution of power and greater financial autonomy to local government, including a full review of local government finance.' (DA, Policy Paper - Building the Big Society, 2010, p. 2)*

The Big Society was based on the principle that the local government and civil society are best placed to understand and address issues specific to their local areas. This initiative reinforced expectations that the local government should coproduce local decision-making rather than act as sole decision makers. By empowering local stakeholders with greater authority, the aim was to stimulate more collaborative approaches to governance.

> *'..empowering communities through decentralisation and localism, by giving local councils and neighbourhoods more power to take decisions and shape their area.' (DA, House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee Report on The Big Society 2011, p. 3)*

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019 is another policy instrument issued by the national government that mandated the engagement of local communities in neighbourhood planning and development. By situating civil society at

the centre of local development, the policy aims to embed inclusive and locally driven decision-making.

> *'Neighbourhood planning gives communities the power to develop a shared vision for their area. Neighbourhood plans can shape, direct and help to deliver sustainable development, by influencing local planning decisions as part of the statutory development plan.' (DA, National Planning Policy Framework, 2019, p. 10)*

These national policy instruments have been supported by a broader political narrative promoting devolution where power shifts away from nationally centralised government models and towards local governments. This shift has been articulated through national narratives that emphasise empowering local authorities and communities to respond to locally embedded challenges, as demonstrated below.

> *'So, we are going to give greater powers to council leaders and to communities. We are going to give more communities a greater say over changes to transport, housing, public services and infrastructure that will benefit their areas and drive local growth.' (DA, Briefing Paper Number 08789, 13 January 2020 Local government; Queen's Speech, 2019, p.2)*

The national government's push for local councils to involve the public more meaningfully in decision-making can be seen in the recent policy paper on Open Government 2021. The concept of open government, as can be seen in the excerpt below, demonstrates the critical role of transparency, accountability, and public involvement to repair and enhance trust between the government and its citizens.

> *The principles of transparency, accountability and public participation will be more vital than ever to building trust between citizens and state. Preserving and nurturing this dynamic is crucial for fostering the effective policies and responsive delivery at the core of Open Government. (DA, UK National Action Plan for Open Government 2021-2023 p. 2)*

Coproduction practices are also emphasised in the NCC's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) 2019 document, which was revised for the first time since 2007 as

a requirement of the NPPF. All Councils within the UK are required to produce a statement, setting out the public consultation processes in planning policy documents and planning applications. The principles of the NPPF can be seen in NCCs SCI 2019 indicating the transition from centralised planning, towards the introduction of local neighbourhood planning through community involvement.

> *'Nottingham City Council seeks to put citizens at the heart of everything it does and attaches great importance to undertaking effective community engagement to give everyone the opportunity to have their say on planning policy.' (DA, NCC Statement of Community Involvement, 2023, p.3)*

Non-government participants also emphasised that the momentum behind coproduction is largely guided and exercised through policies and regulatory frameworks that operate at local and national levels. These governance structures are not only shaping the local planning agendas but are also mandating compliance with wider, legally binding policy regulations such as enhanced participation of civil society in local decision-making.

> *'It's not just drawing on local policy, it's also showing compliance to the wider policies and frameworks and legal regulations that are in place as well and citizen engagement more so now is being recognised and tied to legal regulations as well.' (UN1-INT Research Associate, Inclusive Policy and Governance Studies)*

Another participant from academia remarked on the conscious effort within the NCC to engage with local communities and citizens by proactively seeking their perspectives. This account reflects how expectations of participation have become embedded within contemporary governance norms, creating pressure on local government to demonstrate openness and responsiveness in its decision-making processes. The participant's observation points to an institutional shift away from one-way communication towards practices that integrate public input into planning and decision-making, reinforcing the conditions under which coproduction is promoted and normalised.

> *'There's a desire within the Council to engage and connect with the people who live and work in the city to get their views and opinions and ensure that that is fed into decisions.*' (UN2-INT *Responsible Officer)*

The Local Government Strategic Plan for 2023–27 further represents the ongoing shift from government to governance within local policy frameworks. Rather than positioning decision-making as an internal function of the local authority, the plan signals an expectation that governance should be shaped through ongoing engagement with the local communities. By emphasising listening, early intervention, and responsiveness to lived experience, the plan illustrates how local government roles are being reframed towards facilitation and coordination, rather than top-down control. In this sense, the plan reinforces the broader governance transition in which coproduction becomes a routine feature of how local authorities are expected to operate, rather than an exceptional or optional practice.

> *'We will continue to improve the way the council works, and this is best done by listening to our residents. Our aim will be to identify and prevent issues before they occur. Decisions will be based on experience and expertise and guided by what's important to the people who live here.' (DA, Local Government Strategic Plan 2023-2027)*

These findings demonstrate that the shift from government to governance operates as a structural and policy-driven contextual driver shaping the adoption of coproduction in Nottingham's local governance processes. National policy initiatives, planning frameworks, and governance narratives have progressively promoted the decentralisation of power to communities in local governance, embedding expectations of collaboration and shared responsibility. Within this context, coproduction does not emerge as an isolated place-based policy movement, but as a response to wider institutional pressures that encourage local authorities to engage civil society and other non-government stakeholders more directly in decision-making processes. This governance shift provides the backdrop against which subsequent contextual drivers can be understood. Therefore, this theme contributes to Research Question 1.1, illustrating how policy and governance agendas guide coproduction processes within the city.

5.2.2 Civil society pressure for collaboration

This subsection examines how civil society actors function as a contextual driver shaping coproduction in Nottingham. While civil society are an important stakeholder group within this study, their influence on coproduction processes is most often exercised through organised Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and community organisers and leaders that articulate public interests and apply pressure on local government. In this sense, these stakeholders act as an intermediary force that influences why coproduction processes are initiated. The influence of civil society was also acknowledged by local government participants who observed that the shift towards coproduction processes is driven by civil society's desire for direct involvement in decision-making processes.

> *'I think there is a wider movement around people taking more power back, having more responsibility and moving away from more paternalistic kind of government models.' (UN2-INT Responsible Officer)*

Similarly, non-government participants identified mutual engagement of civil society and local government as a key force in shaping community narratives and outcomes. The concept of a shared journey demonstrates a collaborative approach to governance and a collective vision for the future through inclusive dialogue. The idea of shared ownership reflects a vested interest from both local government and non-government stakeholders in the city's planning.

> *'Citizens and local government need to work together so it's a shared understanding and a shared journey. I think a collaborative approach to local governance ensures that the impact is more far reaching and creates a sense of shared ownership of the city.' (UN1-INT Research Associate, Inclusive Policy and Governance Studies)*

Local government participants framed coproduction not only as a procedural requirement but as an acknowledgement of the intrinsic value of non-government stakeholders' knowledge and experience. Listening was constructed as a normative responsibility of the NCC, while recognising that communities possess situated expertise about their own needs and priorities.

'The local authorities are there to support local communities and stakeholders, to hear their voices is paramount, and because they know what they need and what they want.' (LG-INT Policy Officer 1)

However, some non-government participants identified a disconnect between coproduction initiatives and tangible influence in decision-making. This critique suggests that while opportunities for civil society input may exist, they fail to translate into influencing decision-making. This was raised by a community participant who advocated for enhanced participation and expressed a desire to move from tokenistic consultation to meaningful collaboration where public voices not only inform but hold value in decision-making processes.

'The consultations that the local government puts out for communities and stakeholders have no political or legal mechanism that makes these consultations have any kind of real power.' (CSOL-INT Community Organiser 2)

An industry participant also criticised traditional consultation practices that tend to favour elite stakeholders, which can lead to skewed representations of civil society's needs. This can result in a narrow range of voices shaping discussions, while wider community perspectives remain underrepresented. From this viewpoint, coproduction was seen as a way to reach beyond professional stakeholders and better reflect the needs and views of a wider section of civil society.

'If you only engage with professional stakeholders responding, you're not going to get an accurate idea of what everybody wants, and I think government needs to make extra effort to engage with wider communities to make sure they get a really representative voice.' (IND-INT Senior Member, Development Advisory Board)

A community leader also expressed scepticism regarding the traditional consultation methods and the perceived lack of transparency in how public feedback is utilised in the decision-making process. They pointed to a disconnect between collecting feedback from the public through consultations and these contributions translating into tangible outcomes in decisions or understanding of how those inputs inform local

governmental actions. The absence of clear accountability mechanisms further hinders trust in the effectiveness of such consultations and leads to cynicism about public participation. This sense of disconnect and lack of follow-through has likely contributed to the push for coproduction in governance.

> *'The local government asks people to fill out these consultations, but I haven't seen any accountability as to what happens to those contributions. I don't really understand how did the consultation documents that stakeholders filled out, how did that connect to this decision-making process?' (CSOL-I Community Leader I)*

Taken together, these accounts illustrate how civil society actors function as a significant contextual driver for coproduction in Nottingham. While opportunities for engagement exist, participants repeatedly emphasised the limitations of traditional consultation processes in enabling meaningful influence over decision making. CSOs and community actors articulated a clear desire to move beyond tokenistic participation towards forms of engagement that recognise their knowledge, experience, and collective interests. These findings contribute to Research Question 1.2 by showing how stakeholder expectations of influence and meaningful participation shape local government responses and the expansion of coproduction practices.

5.2.3 Restoring Government Legitimacy

This subsection examines civil society demands for enhanced participation as a contextual driver influencing the initiation of coproduction processes in Nottingham. Rather than positioning citizens solely as participants drawn into coproduction, the analysis highlights how civil society expectations, critique, and pressure lead towards more inclusive and collaborative public decision-making. Within Nottingham, civil society contributes to the conditions under which the City Council seeks to initiate or expand coproduction processes.

Government stakeholders acknowledged a broader crisis of confidence that extends beyond local government to include national government. This reflects wider public concerns about the public's trust in democratic processes and decision-making, which place pressure on local authorities including the NCC to find new ways of rebuilding

trust. In light of this, coproduction emerges as a response to weakened legitimacy, where enhanced participation is used to demonstrate openness and restore confidence in governance processes.

> *'I'm aware that there's a much wider question there about trust in democratic processes, not just at local government level, but at national and an international level.' (LG-INT Senior Management 2)*

A non-government participant also admitted that local government may not always act in their best interests, highlighting a lack of government legitimacy. This perception highlights a clear challenge to local government legitimacy, where decision-making is viewed with scepticism.

> *'There is a perception with the NCC that people think it's not necessarily acting in their best interest.' (CS-FGD2, Participant 1)*

Additionally, a senior local government participant brought attention to the public discourse on the efficacy of civil society's contributions within the local government's decisions. This scepticism reflects deep-rooted concerns about legitimacy, where civil society questions not only outcomes but also the value of participation itself. Such doubts signify a need for empowering civil society beyond mere consultation and towards meaningful coproduction of policies.

> *'Non-government actors can tend to be sceptical towards local governments about how much difference what public say will have, or how much influence it will have.' (LG-INT Senior Management 2)*

In line with this, a community organiser reflected on the public desire for tangible outcomes from local government-led dialogues. While opportunities for dialogue exist, the absence of clear outcomes weakens confidence in local government and its willingness to act on public input. The wider public's readiness for tangible progress complements the coproduction processes. This transition seeks not only to involve various non-government stakeholders, but to empower wider civil society stakeholders as well, ensuring that their engagement directly contributes to collective decision-making.

'..we engaged with residents and people about their perceptions about the local government. The overarching message that came across was that it was great to have the public engagement opportunities, but people want to see action. They are fed up with the talking and want to see if it translates into making a difference.' (CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 1)

Another community organiser criticised local government bodies for the lack of external scrutiny. This perception of weak accountability further undermines legitimacy, as decision-making is seen as closed and inward looking rather than transparent. Such perceptions erode public trust and prompt a push towards enhanced collaboration.

'Our public sector institutions are marking their own homework; you know they're not being scrutinised enough.' (CSO1-INT Senior Organiser)

Local government participants also acknowledged that public engagement is often carried out in a limited and episodic way. Such approaches were recognised as insufficient for rebuilding trust, as they can give the impression that engagement is transactional rather than meaningful. When interaction is limited to the local government's priorities, public confidence in the sincerity of these collaborative processes weakens, which can further reinforce legitimacy challenges.

'In big organisations such as the NCC, we tend to go engage the public at one point in time, but do not communicate throughout the process of decision making. It doesn't help if they only see you when you need something and that's maybe a kind of truth of how it should go if we're only parasitical.' (LG-INT Community Engagement Lead)

A CSO2 volunteer articulated a common community perception of being side-lined by the local government, whose engagement with civil society was considered as a mere formality rather than a genuine interest in local public concerns contributing to the scepticism towards the local government. These experiences contribute to a perception that participation is performative rather than influential, further eroding trust in governance processes. Embedding public contributions into the decision-making

processes is seen as crucial for maintaining the legitimacy and effectiveness of the local government processes.

> *'I don't think we're listened to as much as we'd like to be, because even when we voice our concerns they are not addressed. A lot of government officials don't do anything about our concerns; they just want to perform that they are listening.' (CSO2-FGD Participant 4)*

These findings contribute to Research Question 1.1 by demonstrating that engagement in coproduction in Nottingham is driven not only by policy or institutional agendas, but by ongoing legitimacy challenges faced by local government. Enhanced collaborative practices are a widely supported way to respond to public distrust, strengthen accountability, and rebuild confidence in local decision making.

5.2.4 Fair representation of local communities

This subsection addresses why concerns about fair representation drive both local government and non-government stakeholders to engage in coproduction processes within the city. Fair representation emerged as a key contextual driver for the adoption of coproduction processes in Nottingham, grounded in concerns that traditional top-down decision-making structures failed to reflect the lived experiences of civil society stakeholders. Rather than framing this solely as a democratic concern, participants discussed the lack of representation as a practical governance problem that limits the ability of local government to respond effectively to local needs. Several participants referred to high levels of poverty and deprivation and questioned whether current governance arrangements reflect the realities of local neighbourhoods. Non-government stakeholders engaged in coproduction because they felt that their lived experiences and interests were missing from decision-making processes, while local government stakeholders engaged to address these gaps in understanding.

A non-government participant highlighted the disconnect created when decisions are made by representatives who are not embedded in the communities they serve. This was presented as a clear barrier to fair representation, as decision-makers may lack insight into local priorities and challenges. This disconnect motivated engagement in

coproduction as a way for locally rooted actors to have greater influence over decisions affecting their communities.

> *'We know Nottingham has local counsellors that aren't local, they have an area they have some power over, but they don't live there. I think there are people living and organisations existing and rooted in local communities, and they should have a deeper say on decisions that are made.' (CSOL-INT Community Organiser 1)*

Government participants presented a vision for governance that is acutely attuned to the needs of local communities and stakeholders, emphasising the necessity of genuinely understanding their interests. They described engagement as a way to achieve well-informed and relevant decision-making by gaining a clearer picture of community needs, therefore strengthening the alignment between local government action and community needs.

> *'Ultimately, our purpose is to meet the needs of local people and all our local interests. And we can only do that well if we have a good strong clear up-to-date picture based on what people tell us and then triangulate it with what else we know in terms of other data like expert input.' (LG-INT Community Engagement Lead)*

A senior local government participant described engagement in coproduction processes as a mechanism to move beyond organisational silos and develop a more complete understanding of complex societal challenges. Their participation in coproduction was driven by the recognition that informed decision-making depends on combining academic insight, practical experience, and sector specific knowledge. By engaging a wide range of partners, local government actors sought to draw on collective expertise to better understand local challenges and shape responses.

> *'It was a mandate of mine that we would try and make the advisory group as representative as possible of the people of Nottingham. We went to great lengths to ensure that the Green Park Vision represented the city. That means that there is representation of creative as well as underrepresented*

communities as well.' (IND-INT Senior Member, Green Park Advisory Board)

A non-government participant highlighted persistent inequalities within the city as a core governance challenge that pushes demand for fairer representation in decision making. The growing divide between those who are well off and those who are not was described as evidence that existing governance processes fail to adequately represent the needs and realities of all communities. This concern explains why non-government stakeholders push for coproduction, as enhanced participation is seen as a way to bring individual citizens into decision-making and address representational gaps within local governance.

'And you've got the perennial challenge of inclusivity of the growing difference between those who are well off and those not so well off.' (IND-INT Senior Manager Creative Organisation)

Non-government stakeholders further questioned the composition of the advisory boards, pointing to a missed opportunity for civil society stakeholders. Their engagement in coproduction was driven by a desire to challenge governance structures that they felt did not adequately represent local communities.

'Why couldn't they have members of the public on the Green Park advisory board group and not people who already represent an organisation or institution or civil society?' (IND-INT Senior Manager Creative Organisation)

Non-government participants also acknowledged the shortcomings in civil society stakeholder representation on NCC's advisory boards such as the Development advisory board and the Green Park advisory board, in relation to including representation from young people and marginalised communities. This illustrates an increased awareness among non-government actors that governance structures often fail to represent the diverse local communities. This recognition motivated continued engagement in coproduction as a way to address shortcomings within existing governance structures.

'I think us members of the Development board and the Green Park board do recognise that we aren't representative and diverse enough, especially in terms of young people and underprivileged communities.' (IND-INT Member, Nottingham Creative Quarter)

Other non-government participants also stressed the need for stakeholder representation as a fundamental rationale for coproduction in governance. They viewed engagement as a way to contribute perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked in decision-making processes.

'Urban governance is not just aimed at designing a good quality of life, but at ensuring knowledgeable, innovative and inclusive principles that enable people to enjoy a high living standard per se.' (UN2-INT Director of the Public Policy and Management Research Group)

Government stakeholders acknowledged the challenge of balancing diverse and sometimes conflicting views. Their engagement in coproduction reflected an attempt to manage these complexities by creating opportunities where different perspectives could be heard, compared, and considered within policy development.

'We must listen to those voices because they are important, but then we are also weighing that up against often contrary, or very opposite views. Finding that balance is an ongoing challenge, and being able to synthesise that, collate those voices, find the commonalities, analyse them for the extent to which they either support or challenge a proposed policy initiative is an ongoing part of the job.' (LG-INT Policy Lead)

Overall, concerns about the lack of fair representation functioned as a strong contextual driver for the use of coproduction in Nottingham. These findings contribute to Research Question 1.2 by illustrating how demands for broader and more equitable representation shape participation in coproduction across the city. Participant accounts show that enhanced participation through coproduction is widely seen as a way to address representational gaps and to improve the fairness and responsiveness of local government decision making.

5.2.5 Transparency

This subsection examines transparency as a contextual driver shaping why coproduction is pursued in Nottingham. In response to the Research Question 1.1 of why local government and non-government stakeholders engage in coproduction, it demonstrates how concerns around transparency within local governance have created pressure for more open and collaborative approaches. Situating these concerns within Nottingham's distinctive social, cultural, and governance context, the section highlights how coproduction is framed by both local government and non-government stakeholders as a mechanism for responding to local governance challenges. Non-government participants stressed that current coproduction processes lack sufficient transparency throughout the decision-making process. For example, a focus group participant expressed disillusionment regarding these processes, highlighting a sense of futility in engaging with petitions that lead to no concrete change.

> *'I'm constantly seeing these petitions that I need to sign and support, but it just feels like there is no point to it because nothing changes. It seems like the government talks but doesn't walk the walk.' (CS-FGD2, Participant 6)*

Furthermore, non-government participants also emphasised the need for a well-structured management system and the free flow of information in establishing a governance model that is transparent and open. They highlight the potential of cities to exemplify how stakeholder engagement, which is foundational to planning and coordination, can be conducted in a meaningful way. Their insight reflects the shift towards coproduction, advocating for systems that not only inform civil society actors but actively involve them, facilitating engaged, empowered community groups.

> *'A well-structured management or open information flow is crucial for ensuring that a sustainable, transparent and accountable system is put in place and that to me is such a powerful brochure of how cities can show that stakeholder engagement is central to planning and coordinating so that community groups could be engaged meaningfully and actively.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)*

In the context of this study, the Robin Hood Energy case is included as a key Nottingham-specific governance episode that heightened public scrutiny and intensified concerns around transparency. For local government, this created pressure to facilitate in coproduction processes as a way to respond to public scrutiny. In the midst of this data collection, the NCC was under significant scrutiny following the sale of the council owned energy company, Robin Hood Energy and an amount of approximately £16 million (in September 2020) from the Housing Revenue Account that had been wrongly used for the local government's General Fund (previously discussed in Chapter 4). In the past few years, the inward-looking strategic governance in addition to these two key incidents have exacerbated civil society concerns. Within the context of this study, the Robin Hood Energy case illustrates how governance failures heightened public scrutiny in Nottingham, creating pressure for more transparent and collaborative approaches to decision-making that are explored in this chapter.

> *'The Council should use the experience of owning Robinhood Energy to consider whether there are any lessons for its wider governance, particularly in relation to the 'checks and balances' which need to be in place, including the need for a stronger monitoring and scrutiny function and moving to a culture where challenge of policy priorities and how they are being implemented is seen as a positive.' (DA, Nottingham City Council, Report concerning the Council's governance arrangements for Robin Hood Energy Ltd)*

Another non-government participant extended this critique by pointing to the outdated nature of existing governance structures, arguing that they reinforce an inward-facing approach within local government decision-making. This introspective approach by the local government has likely exacerbated public dissatisfaction with governance, creating pressure for change. Non-government participants suggested that these outdated methods are not equipped to support the transparent processes that the civil society now demands.

> *'The outdated processes and governance structures have only heightened the inward facing attitude and strategy processes of the*

council.' (UN2-INT Director of the Public Policy and Management Research Group)

Non-government participants expressed deep-rooted scepticism towards existing collaborative processes, critiquing a lack of institutional openness in how feedback is handled within the local government. This sentiment echoed a key motivation for the adoption of coproduction, to increase institutional openness.

*'I'm very cynical about these sorts of consultation processes as they exist now. There is no transparency about the processes before and after these touchpoints.' (*CS-FGDI, *Participant 3)*

Community organisers also expressed clear frustration with the lack of transparency in the consultation processes, where contributions from non-government stakeholders seem to vanish into local government processes without a trace. The lack of feedback or explanation on how stakeholder input influences decision-making fuels scepticism towards coproduction processes. This disconnect between coproduction and visible policy outcomes has likely been a driving force behind the shift to collaborative approaches, which advocate for processes that are not only transparent but also demonstratively accountable.

'I don't think there's accountability in the processes of stakeholder consultations and engagement activities. A few months after the consultations, we get an announcement of the decisions. There needs to be more clarity after the consultation documents that people filled out and stakeholder contributions connect to the decision-making process.' (CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 3)

These findings demonstrate that transparency concerns arising from Nottingham's recent governance challenges function as a key driver for initiating coproduction processes. Therefore, this subsection contributes to Research Questions and 1.2 by showing how policy and governance frameworks shape the rationale for collaboration.

5.2.6 Jumping on the collaborative bandwagon

This subsection examines the topical policy bandwagon as a contextual driver shaping the initiation of coproduction processes in Nottingham. Participants described how dominant policy agendas, particularly around smart cities, place pressure on local government to adopt collaborative approaches to governance. In this context, coproduction is pursued as a way of aligning the city's governance practices with contemporary policy expectations that frame participation as a defining feature of modern and smart cities. These pressures help explain why coproduction is initiated, rather than why stakeholders continue to engage once such processes are established.

> *'There's a lot of focus on technology, but I also think smart cities is to do with wider stakeholders and engaging communities with governance processes.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)*

Additionally, participants also observed a tension between Nottingham's technological ambitions and its approach to public involvement. This critique explains why some stakeholders engage in coproduction to address gaps between the city's smart image and its governance practices, particularly around coproduction.

> *'I'm suggesting Nottingham isn't as smart as it needs to be when it comes to putting people at the centre of its decisions, but I do think it is smart in the technological way with its transport and Carbon Neutral 2028 ambitions.' (UN2-INT Director of the Public Policy and Management Research Group)*

Local government participants framed participating in coproduction as part of a broader push to innovate and respond to complex challenges. Their engagement reflects the expectation that smart cities are willing to experiment, learn, and work collaboratively, particularly where problems cannot be solved by local government alone. In this sense, participation through coproduction is linked to how local government positions itself within current policy debates.

> *'There has to be a degree of willingness to try new things and potentially fail, but then also to learn from the failure and to go through the design cycle to*

address pressing societal issues such as cost of living that local governments cannot tackle in isolation.' (LG-INT City Rooms Project Lead)

Overall, the collaborative bandwagon functions as a contextual driver by creating pressure on local government to initiate coproduction as a visible signal of alignment with contemporary smart city agendas, rather than as a response solely to local demand. These findings contribute to Research Question 1.2 by illustrating how external policy narratives influence the adoption of coproduction mechanisms by the NCC within Nottingham city.

5.3 Motivations for Coproduction

This section explores the motivations that draw local government and non-government stakeholders into coproduction processes within Nottingham. Motivations capture the perceived benefits and value that encourage stakeholders to participate in coproduction once such processes are established. Based primarily on interview and focus group data, this section highlights how expectations of agency, synergy, shared ownership, and informed decision-making shaped coproduction initiatives in the city. In contrast to contextual drivers, which explain why collaboration is initiated, motivations illuminate why actors choose to engage in collaborative opportunities and how they interpret their role within Nottingham's governance landscape.

5.3.1 Informed Urban Planning

This subsection examines informed decision-making as a motivation that explains why local government and non-government stakeholders engage in coproduction processes within the city. Participants described engagement in coproduction as being driven by the need to make decisions that are better informed by local knowledge, lived experience, and practical insight of local stakeholders. For both groups, participation in coproduction was motivated by the belief that effective responses to local challenges depend on access to a wider range of perspectives.

Both local government and non-government stakeholders stressed the importance of public participation and the need for an enhanced dialogue with wider stakeholders. Senior local government officials admitted that without actively engaging with the non-

government actors, local government actors can only speculate regarding public needs and desires. The motivation for coproduction arises out of the recognition that non-government actors have valuable knowledge of lived experiences, for instance what they want and require in public spaces.

> *'Without talking to stakeholders, we don't necessarily know if we're designing places and making decisions that are effective and fit for purpose.' (LG-INT Senior Management 2)*

A community organiser contributed that those who live in the city are best placed to identify gaps, needs, and opportunities for improvement. Daily experience of using public spaces and services was described as providing insight that formal planning processes often overlook.

> *'People who live in a place generally have a good idea about what's missing and what it needs, what would be good for a city?' (CSOL-INT Community Organiser 2)*

Non-government actors also linked their engagement in coproduction to concerns about long term decision-making. They described participation as a way to ensure that governance decisions are informed not only by present needs, but also by consideration of future generations. Engagement in coproduction was therefore driven by a desire to influence planning in ways that anticipate long term challenges.

> *'Without collaboration through meaningful dialogue, how do we ensure that the local governance decisions we make today are fit for purpose for the next generation.' (CSOL-I Senior Community Organiser II)*

Government participants further explained their engagement in coproduction through examples that highlighted the limits of top-down planning. They described coproduction mechanisms as a practical way to understand diverse needs and preferences that may otherwise remain unseen. In the context of designing local spaces, engagement with non-government stakeholders was seen as essential for making decisions that reflect how places are used and valued.

‘Without talking to people while designing local places such as a park, we don't necessarily know what people might want in that park or whereabouts in the city it should be.’ (LG-INT Policy Officer 2)

Overall, these findings show that informed decision-making is a key reason why both local government and non-government stakeholders engage in coproduction processes within the city. These findings contribute to Research Question 1.2 by showing that local government actors engage to improve the accuracy and effectiveness of planning decisions, while non-government actors engage to ensure that their lived experiences and knowledge shape outcomes that address local challenges more effectively.

5.3.2 Engaging the Creative Class

This theme illustrates engagement with the creative class (previously discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.5) as a motivation explaining why local government and non-government stakeholders choose to engage in coproduction processes within the city. Participants described coproduction as a way to attract, retain, and mobilise creative skills, knowledge, and talent that are seen as central to the city’s economic and social development. For both groups, engagement in coproduction is driven by the expectation that collaborative spaces allow creative actors to contribute more directly to shaping the city. While discussing the Nottingham Creative Quarter, a participant from a university posited that there is a case for increasing employment opportunities through economic partnerships and cultivating a healthy ecosystem for businesses to attract investment.

’There is a case for making Nottingham a stickier place for students, especially after graduation. We have a challenge of skills retention in this city, as students don’t have a lot of opportunities available after graduation and are forced to move to other cities.’ (UN2-INT Responsible Officer)

The City Room in Nottingham was one such example, where diverse stakeholders and their expertise could be harnessed to develop creative solutions to local governance and development challenges. As discussed in Appendix F, City Rooms demonstrates

the NCC's intent to not only involve non-government stakeholders in planning but to collaborate in solving local challenges through leveraging diverse skills and expertise. Local government and non-government stakeholders described their engagement as motivated by opportunities to work alongside diverse actors to develop creative responses to local governance and development challenges. In this context, participation was driven by the chance to move beyond consultation, to actively shape local outcomes through shared problem solving.

> *'…the purpose of these City Rooms is to foster meaningful connections between people and place, using creative methods of engagement to encourage active participation in the future of our buildings, streets and neighbourhoods.' (DA, City Room Nottingham Vision)*

Participants also highlighted the need to harness collective strengths without neglecting any impactful factors, with a special emphasis on creativity and original thinking. They engaged in collaborative processes to bring together different skills, ideas, and perspectives that are seen as necessary for shaping the city's identity and responding to complex urban challenges. Engagement was therefore linked to a desire to coproduce decisions that reflect a broad range of creative input.

> '*Our collaborative focus was on cocreating the vision and identity of site, and then delivering on those collaboratively made decisions. It was essential for us to ensure that we harness the forces of creativity and original thinking of the different stakeholders.'* (LG-INT Green Park Advisory board Lead)

Overall, these findings suggest that engaging the creative class is one of several factors shaping why local government and non-government stakeholders participate in coproduction processes within the city (thus addressing Research Question 1.2). Local government actors engage to access creative skills and ideas that support economic development and place making, while non-government actors engage to contribute their expertise and influence how the city develops.

5.3.3 Leveraging the Synergy of Collective Thinking

An emerging rationale was the recognition of non-government stakeholder engagement to create solutions that are representative of all key community groups. Participants described engagement in coproduction as being motivated by the expectation that collective decision-making allows different forms of knowledge, expertise, and resources to be brought together in ways that individual actors or organisations cannot achieve alone.

A senior local 141overnmentt participant pointed to the holistic approach to addressing societal challenges, including going beyond traditional silos and engaging academia, businesses, civil society, and voluntary sectors in a collective effort. Their participation in coproduction was driven by the recognition that informed decision-making depends on combining academic insight, practical experience, and sector specific knowledge. By engaging a wide range of partners, local government actors sought to draw on collective expertise to better understand local challenges and shape responses.

> *'Working in partnership with research institutions like the universities and societies and then also engage with business and voluntary sector, civil society and other academic partners to ensure that we are reading and understanding those areas of societal challenge in a way that is collaborative and draws on the expertise, the resource and the focus of different research partners as part of our understanding.' (LG-INT Senior Management 2)*

However, when considered alongside earlier findings on fair representation (see Section 5.2.4), this emphasis on engaging a 'wide range' of partners requires qualification. While local government participants framed coproduction as cross-sectoral and inclusive, non-government accounts highlighted concerns that participation often remained concentrated among organised and institutionally embedded stakeholders. In this sense, a wide range of stakeholders involved does not necessarily mean a breadth of representation.

Nevertheless, non-government participants also discussed how diverse community voices help inform decision-making. A wide spectrum of perspectives ensures creative

and possibly more effective solutions. Collaboration amongst stakeholders was further encouraged by the richness of data gathered directly from the public that produces more effective and reflective policy outcomes.

> *'You can get tremendous amount of information when integrating and reaching out to diverse audiences ranging from ordinary citizens, architects, and academics. This helps the government capture views from a whole range of people and get a full picture of what it is that people want.' (CSO2-INT Senior Organiser)*

Another local government participant reinforced the importance of collaboration by emphasising that addressing complex local challenges requires both individual expertise and collective engagement. Their account suggests that working across roles and perspectives creates space for creative thinking and more informed responses to societal issues.

> *'Working individually but also collectively would then help us create a process of creative thinking and ideation, which would support an informed response to the pressing societal challenges.' (LG-INT Policy Officer 1)*

Local government participants referred to the need to leverage the synergy of the diverse population of Nottingham within the planning and development of the city. Although the current national and local policies were found to be mostly stakeholder-centric, the rhetoric of placing local stakeholders and communities at the core of the city remains vague in public practice. They described participation in collaborative processes as a way to bring together different skills, experiences, and capacities that exist across the city. A local government participant highlighted that they initiated coproduction to experiment, learn, and improve collective approaches to decision-making by combining academic rigor, community organising, and strategic leadership.

> *'We need to try new things to potentially fail, but then also to learn from the failure and to go through the kind of design cycle that the market demands of new products and services… We need to understand that we need the research, support and rigor of academics, and we need the community organising, the convening power and the strategic leverage of local*

authorities. In short, if you can bring all those things to bear on a challenge, we can then create a better, more collaborative, coproduced response and that's one of the ways in which I see the local authority meaningfully embedding citizen voices in that process of decision making.' (LG-INT Smart Nottingham Lead)

Overall, these findings contribute to Research Question 1.2 by indicating that leveraging the synergy of collective thinking is a contributing factor in local collaboration, although its role varies across stakeholders and is shaped by institutional constraints. Local government actors participate to combine expertise and resources in addressing complex challenges, while non-government actors engage to ensure that their knowledge and experience contribute to collective decision making. The expectation that coproduction leads to better informed and more effective governance outcomes motivates stakeholders to initiate, facilitate, and sustain coproduction.

5.3.4 Transferring Agency to Civil Society

This theme presents the expectations around transferring agency to civil society as a key motivation for local government and non-government stakeholders initiating, facilitating, and participating in coproduction processes within the city. Participants described engagement in coproduction as being motivated by the desire for civil society to have a more meaningful role in shaping local decisions, moving beyond consultation towards influence over planning priorities and decision outcomes throughout the policy cycle.

A civil society participant emphasised that their engagement in coproduction is driven by the expectation that their contribution should influence outcomes. Their motivation to engage reflects desire for agency that alters outcomes rather than merely informing them.

'If I engage with the citizen participation opportunities the local government advertises, I will want my contribution to make a difference, rather than it be performative.' (CS-FGDI, Participant 4)

Government participants emphasised that despite efforts to involve civil society more closely through coproduction, statutory responsibilities and accountability for decisions ultimately remained with the local authority, placing clear limits on how far decision-making power could be devolved. As can be seen below, they described engagement in coproduction as being motivated by a desire to empower civil society to take a more active role in shaping their communities.

> *'The local government should encourage citizens taking ownership and facilitate awareness of effectively engaging with the government, regardless of whether there is a regulation that tells you to do so or not.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)*

Non-government participants also described participation in coproduction as a way to develop reciprocal relationships between local authorities and communities. The recognition that non-government actors can and should take ownership of community issues broadens the scope of governance and reinforces the value of public agency. The motivation for coproduction thus arises from the understanding that empowering non-government actors not only enriches their civic engagement but also serves as a practical strategy for effective problem-solving.

> *'We need to build on local people's capabilities and develop that reciprocal relationship where civil society takes ownership of smaller local issues which the public and private stakeholders cannot deal with due resource limitations.' (UN1-INT Research Associate, Inclusive Policy and Governance Studies)*

Furthermore, a non-government stakeholder critiqued the local government for its failure to maximise potential of the diverse non-government actors due to a lack of shared ownership. This reflects a central motivation for transitioning toward coproduction practices across governance functions, by embedding collective ownership within public decision-making.

> *'My enduring criticism of the local government is that often they fail to make the most of some really good initiatives because they're never fully undertaken on the basis of shared ownership.' (CSOL-INT Community Organiser 1)*

These accounts point to a gap between expectations of agency and the realities of governance practice. While coproduction created spaces for dialogue, learning, and shared problem-solving, it did not always translate into civil society having decisive influence over outcomes. Agency was expanded in relation to voice and participation, but remained limited in relation to final decisions, resources, and formal authority. In this sense, the findings suggest that coproduction in Nottingham reshaped how civil society stakeholders could engage with decision-making but did not amount to a full transfer of agency, highlighting the practical and institutional limits of civil society influence within local governance.

Taken together, these findings address Research Question 1.2 illustrating why both local government and non-government stakeholders engage in coproduction processes within the city in relation to agency. Non-government actors engage to seek greater influence and ownership over decisions that affect their communities, while local government actors engage to respond to these expectations and to strengthen participation within the limits of existing authority. While coproduction expanded opportunities for voice and involvement, participants recognised that the transfer of agency remained partial, highlighting the negotiated nature of civil society influence within local governance decision-making.

5.3.5 Sustainable Planning

This subsection examines sustainable planning as a motivation explaining why local government and non-government stakeholders engage in coproduction processes within the city. Participants described engagement in coproduction as being motivated by the need to plan in ways that are coordinated, inclusive, and capable of addressing complex urban challenges over time. For both groups, participation in coproduction was driven by the belief that sustainable planning cannot be achieved through isolated decision-making but requires ongoing collaboration across sectors and communities.

A non-government participant, who was involved in the Development Advisory Board responsible for designing and drafting the Nottingham Economic Recovery and Renewal Plan, criticised planning approaches that rely on limited or internal discussions. Their engagement in coproduction was motivated by concern that

decisions made within closed governance settings, particularly when driven by short term cost savings, risk producing plans that are poorly informed and ineffective in addressing longer term local challenges. The participant warned that while isolated decisions may appear efficient in the short term, it could ultimately cost the local government more if the resulting plan fails to respond to the realities faced by local communities and wider civil society.

> *'We ought to be working a little bit closer and more collaboratively instead of creating the risk of a planning tragedy on the cheap a little bit. Conversations amongst key government officers is not the way to come to ensure you have a collaborative and successful outcome.' (IND-INT Senior Member, Development Advisory Board)*

Another non-government participant emphasised the role of high-level collaboration in delivering planning decisions that can endure future challenges. Their engagement in coproduction was motivated by the notion that sustainable planning depends on bringing together stakeholders with different roles, expertise, and interests to support coordinated decision-making. Participation was therefore driven by the expectation that coproduction strengthens both the planning process and its long-term effectiveness.

> *'…a high level of collaboration including varying backgrounds, roles and interests, these interdependent stakeholders are crucial for ensuring that decisions are sustainable and will withstand future foreseen challenges.' (UN-I University Representative on the NCC Development Advisory Board)*

Another motivation for coproduction that emerged in the study was integrating non-government stakeholders to combine efforts towards sustainable development. A non-government participant critiqued the limited participation opportunities that result from isolated efforts, implying that sustainable development requires an integrated approach involving all relevant stakeholders. Engagement was therefore seen as a way to improve the quality and relevance of planning decisions.

> *'These decisions need to be made in dialogue with the communities and other local actors, otherwise the council risks making poorly informed policies that*

don't serve the purpose.' (UN2-INT Research Assistant in Future Cities and Community Engagement)

Another non-government participant stressed the importance of community ownership in achieving sustainable planning outcomes. Their engagement in coproduction was driven by the belief that planning decisions are more likely to succeed when communities are actively involved and share responsibility for outcomes. Without drawing on the collective knowledge and involvement of communities, local governance was seen as less capable of responding effectively to long term challenges.

'Without having community ownership and engagement at the core, no local government can remain sustainable for very long.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)

This theme demonstrates that sustainable planning is another factor in why local government, and non-government stakeholders engage in coproduction processes within the city. Stakeholders participate, facilitate, and initiate coproduction to shape planning decisions that are better coordinated, more inclusive, and more capable of responding to long term urban challenges and achieving sustainable planning outcomes.

5.4 Summary

This chapter explored the rationales driving coproduction as a situated practice of CG in Nottingham City. In direct response to Research Question 1.2, the chapter addressed Objective 1 of the study by empirically examining why local government and non-government stakeholders engage in coproduction at the local level. Drawing on contributions from participants embedded in Nottingham's governance landscape, the findings identified two interrelated sets of rationalities shaping coproduction processes within the city. Within this chapter, contextual drivers present why coproduction is initiated and facilitated by local government through policy, institutional, and governance pressures, while motivations explain why local

government and non-government actors choose to engage once these coproduction practices exist, based on perceived benefits, values, and opportunities for influence.

A key finding was the clear disconnect between the local government's stated commitment to coproduction and the lived experiences of non-government stakeholders. While the local government policies and participants expressed the intentions of active engagement and consultation, non-government participants consistently raised concerns about a lack of influence within coproduction processes, criticising what they perceived as symbolic engagement practices and the continued dominance of top-down decision-making. This disconnect demonstrated that while coproduction rhetoric was readily adopted, local government-led coproduction practices often lacked meaningful dispersion of power.

The perspectives of local government and non-government participants diverged significantly. Local government representatives often framed coproduction as a means of gathering information and building consensus, emphasising the importance of structured consultations and community engagement strategies. However, non-government stakeholders viewed these practices with scepticism, highlighting the limited impact their input had on actual policy decisions. This points to a fundamental difference in how coproduction is understood. For local government actors, coproduction was often framed as a tool for informing decisions and managing participation, whereas non-government actors articulated expectations of shared ownership, agency, and genuine influence over outcomes affecting their communities and public services.

Calls for greater transparency and accountability in local governance emerged as central themes across the chapter. Non-government stakeholders stressed the need for clearer communication, accessible information, and visible mechanisms that demonstrate how public input is used within coproduction processes. Within Nottingham, perceptions of inward-facing governance practices and episodic engagement were found to intensify scepticism towards coproduction, reinforcing concerns that participation was often limited to specific moments rather than embedded throughout decision-making. These inward-facing and episodic approaches to coproduction contributed to distrust and reinforced perceptions that

collaboration functioned as a performative exercise rather than a sustained commitment to coproduction.

Critically, the chapter revealed a persistent tension between stakeholder expectations of coproduction and the realities of power, capacity, and institutional constraint. While coproduction and CG are frequently presented as solutions to complex urban policy challenges, the Nottingham case demonstrates that they remain shaped by existing political dynamics and organisational limitations. In this regard, the rationalities for coproduction identified in Nottingham reflect both the shortcomings of traditional governance, including deficits in trust, legitimacy, transparency, and representation, and the aspirational potential of coproduction to address these challenges. Whether and how coproduction practices in Nottingham succeed in moving beyond these tensions and delivering more equitable and influential forms of collaboration is explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 6: Coproduction Mechanisms in Nottingham City

6.1 Introduction

This chapter builds on the rationalities identified in Chapter 5 Rationalities of Multi-Stakeholder Coproduction. It addresses Research Questions 2.1 and 2.2 by identifying the coproduction mechanisms employed by the local government and non-government stakeholders within the city. These mechanisms are employed in institutions, embedded in national policies, and utilised in various ways by local government and non-government stakeholders (a complete list of initiatives analysed for this study can be found in Appendix F). The study recognises coproduction as a complex realm in which the relationship between local government and non-government actors is constantly negotiated.

In this thesis, coproduction is understood as the situated practice of collaborative governance (CG)_(see Chapter 2, Section 2.4) encompassing a range of arrangements through which local government and non-government stakeholders are involved in the shaping of policies, plans, or services. However, not all collaborative arrangements fully align with the rhetoric of coproduction (previously discussed in section 2.4) in practice; rather, they reflect varying degrees of stakeholder influence and participation. Consultations, citizen panels, formal partnerships, and advisory boards are all treated as forms of coproduction, as they intend to include stakeholder knowledge and participation within governance processes. These coproduction mechanisms vary in the degree of influence and decision-making capacity afforded to participating stakeholders. Where mechanisms enable sustained dialogue and meaningful impact on decisions, they represent stronger forms of coproduction. Where coproduction is constrained, symbolic, or primarily aimed towards legitimising predetermined local government decisions, they are considered as weak or tokenistic forms of coproduction. Analysing these arrangements along a spectrum of participation (see Section 8.2, Figure 5) illustrates how various stakeholders participate across different coproduction mechanisms.

6.2 Policy-Driven Coproduction

Across these mechanisms, coproduction is shaped by policy design but is also shaped by varying degrees of participation. These factors decide which stakeholders able to participate in coproduction and the extent to which different forms of input can inform decision-making.

6.2.1 Statutory and Procedural Coproduction

This subsection examines statutory and procedural participation policies that establish formal requirements for public engagement and define the conditions under which coproduction is expected to occur. These policies shape coproduction as compliance and accountability. This subsection highlights how national and local government policies both enable coproduction and constrain its scope.

The Community Engagement Guide (CEG) (see Appendix E) was the first document that was coproduced as a framework to be rolled out across NCC. This document indicates the NCC's intention towards embedding coproduction in its planning processes. The guidance document calls for engagement to begin as soon as there is an intention to submit a planning proposal, with a strong focus on outreach and inclusion and how communication is maintained with the community in later stages of the project.

> *'Community engagement should begin as soon as there is an intention to submit a proposal for pre-application or planning permission, and must continue through the design process, setting up frameworks that allow communities to build upon the learnings of the process.' (DA, Local Government's Community Engagement Guide, 2021)*

WHEN?	WHAT?	WHY? HOW?
Before and well ahead of any event or survey, at least 2 weeks in advance	What is the event about?; what is happening?, when and where?; how can people participate?; what is the main point of contact?; what happens with the data; when will they hear the results?	People need time to process the message and to organise themselves to participate in the most appropriate way.
Immediately after any event or survey	Key headlines about the results; implications of these headlines on design/ process; what happens next?	Letting people know the key headlines of the engagement process soon after the event is crucial to build up trust and to generate a sense of ownership in the community who invested their time participating.
When key changes take place	Key change and reasons why this happened; implications of the change on previous community inputs; how can people comment; what is the main point of contact; what happens next?	Keeping people in the loop of the design development process is one of the most powerful tools to maintain trust and long-term partnerships. People then understand that communication channels are open if they have any further comments to make regarding the changes.
When a construction stage or a development phase was completed	Key headlines about the progress; review of programme/schedule/phasing; what happens next? Celebratory events are a great way to further engage the community and to build up long lasting trust and mutual respect	Updating people when construction is happening is a strong strategy to let communities know they are side by side with the developer during the whole process.

Figure 4 Good Communication Practice, Excerpt from the local government's Community Engagement Brief

Government participants pointed to a push towards embedding stakeholder engagement in Nottingham City Council's (NCC) decisions on key services such as libraries, waste management, and budgeting. The inclusion of non-government stakeholders in shaping local policies represents the integration of coproduction processes within decision-making processes in Nottingham, aiming to bridge the gap between the local government decisions and the local needs.

> *'Opportunities to have your say in council decisions such as the libraries initiatives, waste and recycling and budget are some of the ways we are trying to scale up stakeholder engagement.' (LG-INT Community Engagement Lead)*

Overall, documents such as the Community Engagement Guide articulate expectations around early engagement, outreach, and ongoing dialogue with non-government stakeholders. As such, statutory and procedural policies establish the conditions under which coproduction is expected to occur, while also defining its scope within existing governance arrangements.

6.2.2 Consultative and Panel-Based Coproduction

This subsection examines local government-led consultative and panel-based engagement mechanisms that seek to involve non-government stakeholders in deliberation while retaining agenda-setting authority within the NCC. Initiatives including citizen panels, consultations, and episodic engagement activities are designed to gather views and feedback on proposed strategies and demonstrate openness and inclusivity from the local government. By analysing these mechanisms, this subsection considers how consultation functions as an intermediary form of coproduction, situated between statutory duties and collaborative decision-making.
I identified several local government-led coproduction mechanisms in this research that stated intentions of coproduction with non-government stakeholders as well as transferring greater agency to the public. Through the 'Your City, Your Say, Nottingham Citizens' panel, as promoted through the NCC website, citizens could participate by providing feedback to shape local public services. Through participating in the panel, citizens had the opportunity to potentially add value to the decisions that may affect them and their communities.

> *'The citizens panel has been a valuable tool in harnessing the skills and expertise the wider communities in different government projects and policy areas they may be interested in.'(LG-INT Policy Lead)*

The panel's role was to reflect civil society's perspectives across various domains like health, environment, economy, and urban planning aligning with earlier findings in Chapter 5 regarding the importance of fair representation (Section 5.2.4) and the aspiration towards synergistic collective thinking (Section 5.3.3), whereby diverse stakeholder knowledge is brought together to inform policy deliberation. Feedback was gathered from the group on various topics and strategies that the local government was working on.

> *'Nottingham's Citizens' Panel is a group of residents that have volunteered to share their views on consultations happening in Nottingham. The local government consults on a wide range of things such as health and wellbeing, the environment, the local economy, large planning projects and*

more.' (DA, Your City, Your Say' Nottingham Citizens' Panel webpage, 2020)

The panel also enables access to a group of residents who could be invited to participate in a range of collaborative activities as they became available within the NCC. In this sense, the panel operated as an engagement infrastructure that enabled continuity of interaction between the local government and participating residents across multiple policy areas. However, the extent of influence afforded to panel members varied depending on the activity in question, meaning that the panel encompassed both consultative exercises and more collaborative forms of participation.

'When unique opportunities arise such as focus groups and mystery shopper exercises, the Citizens' Panel will be the first place that we look to.' (DA, Your City, Your Say' Nottingham Citizens' Panel webpage, 2020l)

Contrary to the above, a local government participant shed light on the limitations of this citizen panel, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. This panel had been active pre-pandemic and served as a mechanism for long-term collaboration with different community stakeholders in the city. Through this channel, the local government was able to engage local communities in decision-making and policy regarding key issues. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, this panel had shifted to virtual dialogue, which while accessible, may have limited the quality of coproduction between local government and non-government stakeholders.

The citizen's panel is a bit of a misnomer, especially post COVID. We've just had a review because we haven't offered panel activities where people come together, and it's unfortunately existed pretty much as just an e-mail distribution list which encourages people to participate in consultations and surveys. (LG-INT Policy Officer 1)

As noted by a community organiser in reference to the Big Conversation consultation, some local government participation initiatives were perceived as structured around predefined positions, offering limited scope for participants to shape the framing of issues under discussion. This meant that participating communities were given pre-

defined strategies to gather feedback on their opinions; as to what they agreed and disagreed with. While coproduction mechanisms such as these provided opportunities for non-government participants to engage with policy, their participation was limited to policy areas and priorities pre-decided by the NCC.

> *'It seems that most of the local government's attempts at wider public participation have a pre-text that you can either agree or disagree on.' (CSOL-INT Community Organiser 1)*

A good example is The Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2020–2028 Action Plan that emphasised coproduction through a city-wide consultation phase. Developed in collaboration with University 2, the initiative incorporated multiple stages of public engagement intended to inform the development of the Action Plan. The consultation was framed around listening and learning from citizens and partners, with engagement primarily used to inform the development of the Action Plan rather than to involve participants directly in decision-making (previously discussed in section 5.3.4).

> *'The first step of this process was an eight-week citywide consultation, from January to March 2020, which gathered feedback on the draft Action Plan. The approach was to listen, inform and learn from citizens and partners.' (DA, Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2020 – 2028 Action Plan, 2020, p.10)*

Consultative and panel-based mechanisms offer more interaction than data-driven participation but remain constrained by institutional control over policy scope, design, and outcomes. While participants are invited to contribute, their role is typically limited to responding to predefined questions, with limited visibility over how input shapes final decisions.

6.2.3 Partnership and Strategic Coproduction

This subsection examines coproduction mechanisms through which participation is formalised and mediated between local government and non-government stakeholders. Strategic partnerships and city-wide initiatives, such as One Nottingham formalise collaboration by bringing together representatives from public, private, and voluntary sectors.

The move towards devolution could be observed in the roll out of the Local Government Act in 2000 by the national government across all local authorities in England and Wales. This legislation gave local authorities the power to govern and make their decisions independently of the national government.

> *'Every local authority are to have power to do anything which they consider is likely to achieve any one or more of the following objects; (a)the promotion or improvement of the economic well-being of their area, (b)the promotion or improvement of the social well-being of their area, and (c)the promotion or improvement of the environmental well-being of their area contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom' (DA, Local Government Act 2000, Section 2(1))*

This policy gave way to the emergence of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) such as One Nottingham that is designed to facilitate coproduction across diverse sectors with the goal of fostering inclusive decision-making. The members of One Nottingham were chosen by the local government. The aim of creating One Nottingham was to enhance representational diversity, develop a shared vision, and foster a culture of collaboration and partnership within the city's strategic planning.

> *'One Nottingham is the strategic partnership for the City of Nottingham. As a partnership, we bring together and harness the strengths and resources of the voluntary and community, public, business and faith sectors to work together for the benefit of Nottingham and its people.' (DA, One Nottingham TOR, p.1)*

The One Nottingham board included a mix of business leaders, public sector agencies, community groups, faith and voluntary sector representatives, alongside youth cabinet members and key local government figures. This was meant to ensure that a wide range of local government and non-government stakeholders were considered in the city's strategic direction.

> *'The Board's membership is diverse and is made up of businesses, other public sector agencies, community, faith and voluntary sector representatives, youth cabinet members, the Leader and the Chief*

Executive of the City Council and the Portfolio Holder for Communities.' (DA, The Nottingham Plan 2020, p.4)

The senior management of One Nottingham reflected on the evolution of strategic partnerships, which were previously mandated by law to oversee urban planning and modernisation. As the legal requirement and national government funding for such boards waned, many cities chose to disband theirs. Similarly, One Nottingham's operations slowly diminished, and the project was especially adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, where NCC's senior management had to take over governance of the board from the previously independent chair.

'Strategic partnerships were quite a powerful concept about 20 years ago and it was a legal requirement that you had to have a strategic partnership board to oversee investment in the city. That formal role gradually disappeared, and most cities had disbanded their original partnership board, but Nottingham have decided to keep it going.' (CSOL-I CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 2)

Partnership and strategic coproduction mechanisms enable more sustained forms of interaction between local government and non-government stakeholders, creating opportunities for ongoing collaboration around shared priorities. However, these arrangements typically limit participation to invited or representative actors, shaping who is able to engage and whose perspectives are included. While partnerships can deepen collaboration among institutional and professional organisations, they may also limit participation by giving preference to elite stakeholders (previously discussed in Chapter 2) over community groups. The decline of some partnership forms of coproduction further highlights the NCC's dependence on political priorities and available resources, pointing to causes of the inconsistent nature of institutionalised coproduction.

Taken together, the local government-driven mechanisms examined in Section 6.2 illustrate how national and local policies ensure that opportunities for coproduction are present, they also structure how coproduction takes place, shaping its inclusivity, and potential influence. As a result, local government-led coproduction is characterised by uneven inclusivity, with deeper forms of coproduction often dependent on institutional

design and discretion rather than guaranteed through policy alone. In doing so, this section contributes to Research Questions 2.1 by mapping local government-led coproduction mechanisms. Building on this analysis, the following section turns to forms of participation that operate beyond formal policy mandates, examining how coproduction is enabled through discretionary practices.

6.3 Local government-Led Voluntary and Discretionary Collaboration

This section examines local government-led coproduction initiatives that operate beyond formal policy mandates (thereby addressing Research Question 2.1), focusing on voluntary and discretionary forms of coproduction with non-government stakeholders. It considers cases in which local government stakeholders actively enabled coproduction through partnerships, spaces, and engagement processes, often motivated by aims such as drawing on community knowledge, supporting planning processes, or widening participation. In contrast to the policy-driven mechanisms discussed in the previous section, these initiatives were not required by statutory frameworks but emerged through NCC's institutional choice and voluntary discretion. While these initiatives may appear more flexible or open, their inclusivity remains uneven, shaped by factors such as institutional discretion, digital access, and existing networks.

6.3.1 Institutionalising civil society engagement through physical spaces

This subsection examines face-to-face coproduction mechanisms beyond formal policy mandates, where coproduction is enabled through place-based interaction and institutional provision rather than statutory requirement. One mechanism initiated by the NCC involved the creation of a dedicated physical space in which communities could engage directly with NCC coproduction processes. Local government participants described the City Room (Appendix F) as supporting forms of coproduction that extended beyond one-way dialogue, and enabled stakeholders to work together on shared initiatives. From the perspective of community stakeholders, the availability of a physical space was identified as an important condition for

sustaining coproduction, particularly by enabling facilitated dialogue and ongoing interaction.

> *'We used the City Rooms space to bring together various different community representatives, citizens and other stakeholders with the local government to coproduce the Community Engagement Guide.' (CSOL-I Senior Community Organiser II)*

The City Room also functioned as an enabling infrastructure for a range of coproduction activities, including creation of the Design Quality Framework. As noted by a local government stakeholder, the provision of a shared physical setting supported short-to-medium term interaction between non-government stakeholders and NCC, allowing coproduction processes to be embedded across multiple projects rather than one-off consultations.

> *'The key thing was that the City Room became a vehicle for a lot of other projects that we were working on, one of them being the Design Quality Framework because it provided us with the actual physical space that we used to do all the stakeholder engagement.' (LG-INT City Rooms Project Lead)*

The establishment of the City Room and related initiatives, such as the Co-PLACE programme in 2018, supported wider coproduction by investing in a physical environment designed to encourage stakeholder interaction. The space was described as intentionally neutral and informal, with the aim of reducing barriers to participation and enabling non-government stakeholders to participate more confidently in coproduction activities. In this way, the City Room illustrates how physical infrastructures can function as mechanisms for formalising coproduction by shaping the conditions under which it takes place.

> *'Inspired by the Farrell Review: 'The City Room was a fundamental vehicle for the delivery of the Co-PLACE programme: a neutral space with an inspirational and creative atmosphere that helped people relax and gave them the confidence to participate in activities, given the friendly and welcoming environment.' (DA, City Rooms webpage)*

6.3.2 Online spaces and the COVID-19 pandemic

This subsection focuses on online spaces of coproduction, where participation relies on digital access, digital literacy, and platform design rather than formal inclusion criteria. One theme that emerged in the study was the adaptation of stakeholders to virtual collaborative mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic. A local government stakeholder described how the use of online spaces enabled the NCC to sustain local democratic processes during extended lockdown periods.

> *'An important part of local democratic process is that we are willing and prepared to listen to public and at the same time try and encourage a constructive dialogue. We had something like 3000 people respond to the online survey and over 200 people attend public online meetings, and we created different channels for engagement to enable as diverse population as possible to be part of the conversation.' (LG-INT Community Engagement Lead)*

At the same time, stakeholders recognised that the potential of online coproduction to widen access was conditional, shaped by digital access, digital literacy, and the extent to which online processes enabled stakeholders to exert influence. Another local government participant discussed the importance of utilising multiple channels for communicating information to ensure inclusivity during the shift to online spaces, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. While recognising the growing preference for digital formats, the local government presented a conscious effort to maintain traditional printed versions.

> *'We employ different channels like the Arrow magazine which goes out to local communities in the city. It's mostly online now because a lot of people want to have it online, but it's making sure that there are paper copies available so that it doesn't exclude anybody.' (LG-INT Policy Lead)*

The City Room shifted from a physical space to a virtual platform during the COVID-19 pandemic. This demonstrated another instance of local stakeholders' adaption to virtual mechanisms of coproduction. The City Room retained its role as the home of

the Co-PLACE program despite lockdown restrictions. This shift to an online environment ensured the continuity of community engagement albeit virtually.

> *'In the wake of the 2020 Pandemic Crisis, during the first lock-down, the City Room evolved into a virtual platform to continue to serve the community and provide ongoing opportunities for the delivery of Co-PLACE.' (DA, City Room webpage)*

Overall, the shift to online coproduction mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates both the adaptability and the uneven participation of multistakeholder coproduction in Nottingham. Digital platforms enabled the continuation of consultation, dialogue, and engagement at scale, allowing the local government to sustain collaborative processes during periods of lockdown and restricted mobility. However, participation in these online spaces was contingent upon digital access, digital literacy, recruitment pathways, and levels of institutional trust, thereby reshaping who was able to engage and how influence could be exercised. This subsection contributes primarily to Research Objective 2.2 by identifying online platforms as a discretionary local government-led mechanism of coproduction, and to Research Objective 3.2 by highlighting digital exclusion and recruitment constraints as key barriers shaping stakeholders' ability to participate meaningfully in coproduction processes.

6.3.3 Planning through Invite-only Advisory Boards

This subsection examines elite and discretionary coproduction mechanisms, where participation in coproduction is not broadly accessible but selectively enabled through invitation and existing networks. Several advisory boards established by the local government were identified as mechanisms for coproduction in areas such as economic development, public services, and urban planning. These boards typically included representatives from non-government stakeholders, including Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), private firms, the creative sector, academia, and professionals based within the city.

> *'Executive arrangements by a local authority must ensure that their overview and scrutiny committee has power (or their overview and scrutiny committees have power between them to review or scrutinise decisions*

made, or other action taken, make reports or recommendations to the authority, review or scrutinise, to make reports or recommendations to the authority or the executive with respect to the discharge of any functions which are not the responsibility of the executive and to make reports or recommendations to the authority or the executive on matters which affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of that area.' (DA, Local Government Act 2000, Section 21)

The development of the Nottingham Economic Recovery & Renewal Plan by the Nottingham Development Advisory Board is one such invite-only coproduction mechanism aimed at strategic planning in Nottingham. The board brought together selected business leaders, educational institutions, and public sector stakeholders, alongside One Nottingham, and NCC, to coproduce strategic plans for economic recovery in response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participation in this coproduction mechanism was limited to the stakeholders mentioned below, while excluding community and wider civil society stakeholders.

'This plan has been developed by the Nottingham Development Board (a partnership of some of Nottingham's key businesses, educational institutions and public sector organisations) in partnership with One Nottingham and Nottingham City Council.' (DA, Nottingham Economic Recovery & Renewal Plan, p.4)

At the same time, several participants raised concerns regarding the limited inclusivity of these inward-facing coproduction mechanisms. Civil society stakeholders, in particular, noted that they were often not invited to participate or have representatives present in advisory boards, despite having relevant experience or established involvement in related initiatives. This suggests that the NCC's discretion plays a significant role in shaping whose knowledge and perspectives are incorporated into these coproduction processes.

'We were surprised to not be invited to be part of the advisory boards, even though our work and experience has been pivotal in getting the Green Park project going.' (CSO2-INT Senior Organiser)

Concerns were also raised by stakeholders involved in advisory boards regarding the concentration of participation among a relatively small group of individuals. An industry stakeholder highlighted that the same pool of members exist across multiple boards, and also pointed to potential limitations in the diversity of perspectives and the risk of insular decision-making.

> *'I think historically there were almost too many boards with the same people on them doing what seemed to be a similar thing. I think we have made some improvements to address inclusivity of stakeholders on boards, but it needs more work.' (IND-INT Senior Member, Development Advisory Board)*

Invite-only advisory boards function as discretionary coproduction mechanisms that enable sustained interaction and strategic influence for a limited group of typically elite stakeholders, which is in contrast to the contextual drivers of coproduction as explored previously in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.4. While these arrangements facilitate coordination and decision-making among institutional and professional partners, they are shaped by selective inclusion and reliance on existing networks. As a result, coproduction within advisory boards tends to limit opportunities for civil society involvement.

This section has examined forms of coproduction initiated through institutional discretion, including physical engagement spaces, digital platforms, and invite-only advisory boards. In doing so, it addresses Research Question 2.1, presenting local government-led coproduction in Nottingham. Three distinct forms were identified: place-based coproduction through physical spaces, digitally mediated coproduction, and invite-only advisory boards. These forms extend the analysis of Research Question 2.1, showing how local government-led coproduction also operates through discretionary channels rather than policy mandates.

6.4 Academia Driven Collaborative Mechanisms

This section examines CG mechanisms driven by university stakeholders (Universities I and II), specifically focusing on those influenced by policy mandates. It addresses Research Question 2.2 by examining how university stakeholders enable and facilitate

collaborative processes, often to leverage collective synergies or to promote specific policy goals. This analysis will consider the various mechanisms initiated and facilitated by university actors, including their roles in shaping policy agendas, facilitating community engagement, and holding local government accountable.

6.4.1 Promoting Education and Empowering Local Communities

The Festival of Science and Curiosity represent a non-government led coproduction mechanism targeted towards education, empowerment, and community development. The festival was formed through a coalition of stakeholders, including the NCC, universities and CSOs. This partnership reflected a shared commitment to shaping the city's cultural landscape and showed how joint initiatives can attract broad support and sustain community events over time.

> *'The festival.is produced by an enthusiastic collaboration of Nottingham organisations including Nottingham City Council, University 2, the University I….and more. All of whom are dedicated to enriching our city's culture with science and curiosity!'. (DA, Nottingham City Council Website, 2023)*

From the perspective of senior management, the festival's management and governance evolved significantly over time. Although it was initially coproduced as a project under the One Nottingham Local Strategic Partnership, the festival later adopted an independent organisational structure, becoming an independent body with its own governance arrangements.

> *'The festival of science and Curiosity, which was initiated the Local Strategic Partnership One Nottingham, but then went on to have its own structure and became its own charity'. (CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 2)*

A local government participant further described the festival's development as a process shaped by sustained coproduction and long-term institutional support. As a

member of the governance board, the participant emphasised the role of shared governance and continuity in supporting educational objectives and maintaining stakeholder engagement beyond the initial partnership-based model.

> *'I'm one of the conveners... of the festival which looked to provide that collaborative steer that would support better science engagement work with all our partners and the product of that was the Festival of Science in Curiosity. It has now outgrown the LSP and has its own board. but it was the brainchild of the council and other partners that collaboratively worked on this project.' (LG-INT Community Engagement Lead)*

Building on this example of a non-government coproduction mechanism that evolved beyond its initial institutional origins, the following section examines more formalised partnership-based coproduction, focusing on the role of universities as key intermediaries within local governance arrangements.

6.4.2 Coproduction through Partnerships

Non-government participants drew attention to the longstanding relationship between universities and the NCC in Nottingham, which has provided a foundation for partnership-based coproduction. The Civic Agreement led by Universities for Nottingham, initiated by University 1and University 2, was frequently cited by NCC and academic participants as an example of a purpose-driven coproduction mechanism that brings together higher education institutions, local government, and local communities around shared place-based priorities.

> *'As partners in this pioneering project, we are passionate advocates for our place, people, and communities. We have a shared mission to improve levels of prosperity, opportunity, sustainability, health and wellbeing for residents and the communities that unite us.' (DA, Civic Agreement, Universities for Nottingham webpage)*

The Universities for Nottingham initiative illustrates how non-government stakeholders can formalise coproduction through structured partnerships. By aligning institutional

priorities and resources, the initiative sought to identify shared challenges and develop collective responses through a coordinated approach. In this instance, coproduction involved collaborative planning and problem-solving, supported by formal governance structures and shared objectives.

> *'The initiative allowed for a collaborative process with partners which helped identify the priorities, challenges and develop the solutions together; as organisations who are committed to making a difference for our shared place. And we will do this with clarity, structure, and purpose – with our joint plan creating the first.' (DA, Economic, social and cultural impact report, Universities for Nottingham, 2020, p.5)*

A non-government stakeholder involved across multiple policy areas highlighted how partnership-based coproduction enabled organisations to combine expertise and capacity in addressing local challenges. This stakeholder also noted that working collectively provided opportunities to strengthen the city's positioning at both national and international levels, suggesting that coproduction was targeted at local problem-solving but also broader strategic objectives.

> *'We leverage our collective strengths in this collaborative venture, especially to solve local challenges and strategically position the city as one that harnesses multiple strategic advantages.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)*

The Nottingham Civic Exchange is another such initiative by University 2 that focuses on aligning university expertise with local government, community groups and wider stakeholders. This partnership-based model positions the university as an intermediary that supports coproduction through knowledge exchange and facilitation. In this role, the Civic Exchange seeks to translate research into practical initiatives aligned with local social and developmental priorities.

> *'..to maximise research, policy and practical impact by bringing together university expertise with partners seeking to address the needs of people, communities and organisations. We act as a resource to look at social*

science focused issues in new ways. This means facilitating debate, acting as a bridge between research and policy debates, and developing practical projects.' (DA, Nottingham Civic Exchange Mission webpage)

While partnership-based coproduction highlights the role of multistakeholder institutional relationships, the following section turns to more episodic forms of coproduction, in which research expertise is mobilised through projects oriented toward specific policy objectives.

6.4.3 Episodic Project Collaborations for Research Expertise

This theme examines episodic project-based coproduction mechanisms, in which research expertise is mobilised through specific projects linking universities, NCC, and civil society stakeholders. Unlike the more long-term partnerships discussed in the previous section, these forms of coproduction are organised around specific projects, policy goals, or funding opportunities.

One example frequently cited by participants was the Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028 Consultation and Engagement initiative, which involved the NCC and University 2 working together on a project focused on informing and shaping the city's carbon reduction strategy. Participants described this coproduction mechanism as building on established institutional relationships, enabling academic expertise to be drawn into local policy processes.

'We have had a long history of collaboration, and therefore there is an ongoing dialogue whenever an opportunity arises. For instance, the government collaborated with our academics to undertake the Carbon Neutral 2028 Consultation and Engagement.' (UN2-INT Responsible Officer)

Project documentation from the Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028 Consultation and Engagement initiative describes it as a co-designed and impact-oriented coproduction process, developed through collaboration between academic researchers at University 2 and officers from NCC. The project was explicitly structured to contribute to the development of Nottingham's Carbon Neutral 2028 Charter and the associated

Action Plan. Within this project, research expertise within University 2 functioned as a mechanism for supporting policy development while also shaping the ways in which local communities were involved in the process.

> *'Engagement with the communities was carried out as part of a collaborative project between a team of researchers at University 2 and officers from the local government. The research is part of a co-designed impact-led project aimed at contributing to the shaping of Nottingham's Carbon Neutral 2028 Charter and its associated Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028 Action Plan (CN28) which is led by the local government.' (DA, Citizens' Engagement and Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028, 2023, p.6)*

An academic stakeholder involved in the project emphasised the role of research expertise in supporting coproduction, particularly in shaping strategies and complex multistakeholder coproduction processes. In this account, coproduction involved integrating academic knowledge into local policy processes while also supporting interactions with community stakeholders around shared climate objectives.

> *'We partnered with the University 2 to harness their research expertise not only to guide our strategy and plan, but to use their knowledge and expertise to engage with local communities and stakeholders as well. All these partners were collaborators in the development of the Carbon Neutral strategy and plan.' (UN1-INT Research Associate, Inclusive Policy and Governance Studies)*

Beyond policy-focused initiatives, participants also referred to longer-running project-based coproduction mechanisms such as the Co(l)laboratory. This initiative brings together researchers from Universities I and II and civil society stakeholders through research-led projects aimed at addressing locally defined issues. Although this project is episodic in structure, this project illustrates how coproduction can be sustained across multiple research cycles without forming a permanent institutional partnership.

'Co(l)laboratory brings together researchers, community organisations and local people to deliver meaningful change for the people of Nottingham through research.' (CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 2)

Furthermore, a non-government stakeholder described their organisation's role in connecting academic research with local policy processes across multiple projects. This role involved facilitating coproduction by bringing together university researchers, local government stakeholders, and community groups around policy-relevant topics, often drawing on interdisciplinary expertise. In this context, episodic coproduction functions as a flexible mechanism for translating research into locally relevant policy discussions and initiatives.

'Effectively our role is to engage in policy debates and topics of relevance to the city region, both in terms of research and knowledge exchange work, but also looking to bring colleagues and local actors together from across the university and city on important topics that aim to make a difference.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)

While episodic project-based coproduction highlights how research expertise is mobilised around specific policy objectives, the following section turns to the role of non-government stakeholders in supporting coproduction by building capacity and enabling communities to engage with coproduction processes more effectively.

6.4.4 Empowering Local Communities

This theme examines the role of non-government stakeholders in supporting coproduction by building capacity and enabling local communities and CSOs to navigate and contribute to coproduction processes. These stakeholders act as intermediaries that support understanding of institutional processes, expectations, and opportunities for involvement in coproduction.

Several participants highlighted the role of universities in supporting coproduction by helping stakeholders understand how governance processes operate and how contributions can be made effectively. An academic participant from University 2 emphasised the importance of guiding stakeholders through coproduction

mechanisms, noting that such support is relevant for both academic and non-academic participants.

> *'The key is helping people kind of navigate through collaborative governance processes. Whether you're an academic or a citizen, to know what the processes are, when and how you can engage, how to best communicate that within a collaborative setting.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)*

Another non-government stakeholder reflected on the potential for universities to contribute more directly to coproduction by aligning research expertise and educational resources with local civil society's needs. Drawing on examples such as research on carbon neutral ambitions, the participant highlighted both existing contributions and the opportunity to extend coproduction to the wider civil society that have had limited contact with universities, particularly through skills development and education-focused initiatives.

> *'And clearly in other areas University 1is well integrated within communities, for instance the Carbon Neutral 2028 research. We constantly think about how we can harness our expertise more directly for the people and communities of Nottingham in the education space. And I think there's much more we can do to improve the skills of the people in Nottingham who are not yet touched by the universities.' (UN-I University Advisory Board Representative)*

An academic participant further emphasised the responsibility of universities to address barriers to coproduction faced by wider civil society stakeholders with limited access to digital platforms. In this account, universities were positioned as intermediaries capable of adapting expertise and communication practices to support more inclusive coproduction, particularly for stakeholders who may otherwise be marginalised within virtual coproduction processes.

> *'Our universities also play a major role in bridging the gap between major and minor stakeholders, especially communities that are separated from all the digital world that the rest of us live in. It's just one of the ways in*

which experts from the universities use their expertise in a more community and civic based way.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)

This section has identified several forms of coproduction initiated or facilitated by Universities I and II in Nottingham. Four forms emerged: educational and cultural coproduction, formalised partnership agreements, episodic project-based collaboration, and capacity-building and intermediary coproduction. Collectively, these forms address Research Question 2.2, by identifying existing avenues of coproduction available to non-government stakeholders, particularly academia.

The following section examines forms of participation that emerge when communities are not formally invited into coproduction processes, or where existing mechanisms are perceived as insufficient, shifting the focus to bottom-up initiatives driven by community actors themselves.

6.5 Civil Society Driven Coproduction

This section examines coproduction mechanisms initiated and facilitated by civil society stakeholders including CSOs and community organisers that emerge through bottom-up processes in Nottingham (thereby addressing Research Question 2.2). These mechanisms are initiated by stakeholders such as local individual citizens, community groups, and CSOs and develop in response to locally identified concerns, priorities, and ideas related to governance.

In contrast to the policy-mandated and institutionally structured forms of coproduction discussed earlier in the chapter, the processes examined here are initiated and led by civil society stakeholders themselves, sometimes without formal mandates, resources, or institutional authority. Rather than being invited into predefined coproduction arrangements, civil society stakeholders establish their own mechanisms for collective problem-definition, action, and accountability. The section explores how these civil society-initiated coproduction function in practice, and how they interact with, respond to, or compensate for the limitations of formal coproduction mechanisms.

6.5.1 Self-organisation and self-regulation

This subsection examines forms of civil society-driven coproduction characterised by self-organisation and self-regulation. These mechanisms emerge through collective action among civil society stakeholders, who establish their own priorities, norms, and modes of accountability. The subsection explores how such self-organised coproduction operates in practice and how it enables communities to influence local governance processes from outside formal institutional frameworks.

The Green Umbrella Group composed of environmental CSOs in Nottingham, which self-organised in response to the NCC's plans around rejuvenating the Green Park area. The group adopted a proactive role in shaping urban development by coordinating a collective submission of proposals related to the redevelopment of the Green Park site. Through this process, stakeholders sought to establish shared principles for development and to ensure that their collective position was recognised within local government decision-making processes.

> *'Members of the group, which includes some of Nottingham's biggest environmental champions, have previously developed and submitted visions as to how the site could be developed. They are now collaborating to ensure that the council and panel are aware of the level of agreement over the principles that underpin the future transformation of the site.' (Green Umbrella Group webpage, 2021)*

A CSO participant described civil society driven coproduction as a mechanism through which local communities mobilise collective resources to hold local government to account. The participant described their CSO, Nottingham Communities, as engaging in a form of coproduction which combines dialogue with scrutiny and empowers civil society stakeholders to influence governance while maintaining an independent position.

> *'Our model of community organising is basically to leverage money and people within civil society to hold the local government to account. And*

that means our work with the local government organisations is sometimes one of collaboration but also of scrutiny.' (CSO1-INT Senior Organiser)

Furthermore, a community organiser highlighted the role of wider networks in supporting self-organised coproduction. As a member of a national network focused on sustainable food systems, this CSO operated within a shared framework of themes around food security and equity while retaining autonomy to adapt priorities to local conditions. This structure shows how self-organised coproduction brings together shared principles while allowing decisions to be shaped by local priorities, enabling communities to address sustainability goals in ways that reflect their own contexts.

'We are a member of a national network of sustainable food places. We are 53 members, and each member of the network follows key themes which are common across the whole network. But you know each of those themes can be kind of localised according to the priorities of each area that's running it.' (CSOL-I Senior Community Organiser II)

Another CSO participant described coproduction processes within their CSO that involved structured deep-listening exercises with members to inform collective priority-setting (see Chapter 5, Section 5.3.3). Operating on a membership basis, the organisation developed its advocacy priorities on local government policies and decisions through these internal processes. Members were encouraged to undertake deep listening within their own organisations to identify the issues that mattered most to them. These reflections were then brought back to the CSO, where members deliberated collectively and agreed shared positions through democratic decision-making. By coordinating collective deliberation across the CSO's members, this process strengthened the legitimacy of the organisation's external advocacy.

'We would work with each of our member organisations to enable them to undertake some fairly deep listening within their own organisation about those issues and then we bring the alliance together to agree democratically.' (CSO1-INT Organiser)

Finally, a CSO participant highlighted the role of self-regulation within CSO-led coproduction, emphasising the importance of agreed standards of conduct. The

adoption of a code of conduct illustrates how community-led groups formalise expectations around behaviour and representation, reinforcing accountability within the collective.

> '*We do hold our members to certain requirements such as our code of conduct and our members agree that they are going to behave ethically and with respect in the public sphere*.' *(CSO1-INT Senior Organiser)*

While this subsection focused on self-organised coproduction through organised efforts, the following section examines community-driven coproduction that emerges in response to specific social and environmental concerns identified by communities themselves.

6.5.2 Programmes stemming from community concerns

This subsection examines community-driven coproduction mechanisms that develop in response to specific social, environmental, and political concerns raised by local communities. In these cases, coproduction is geared towards addressing issues and interests of wider civil society stakeholders, with initiatives shaped by collective priority setting and a focus on achieving tangible outcomes.

A community organiser noted how CSOs function as facilitators for coproduction by mobilising around issues of social injustice and inequality. Rather than engaging solely through formal institutional processes, these organisations develop programmes and campaigns grounded in the priorities of the communities and members they represent. Through this approach, coproduction is directed toward influencing public agendas and contributing to social and policy change.

> *'One aim is to bring about social change around issues of social injustice and inequality about those matters, those issues that matter to our member organisations. So that's the campaigning social issue outcome aspect.' (CSO1-INT Senior Organiser)*

Furthermore, a CSO participant reflected on the increase in public appreciation for green spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift in public sentiment was

described as creating conditions for community-driven coproduction around green spaces and community wellbeing, including initiatives linked to the Green Park site, through which stakeholders sought to influence local policy discussions around access to green spaces and residents' wellbeing.

> *'We saw a massive uplift in the public contacting us saying how much they valued accessing our nature reserves that we kept open throughout the pandemic the people to go and experience. This support drove our project around the Green Park site and collaborating with the local government to create green spaces in the city.' (CSO2-INT Senior Organiser)*

While this subsection focuses on how civil society concerns give rise to specific programmes and initiatives, the following section examines the strategies communities use to advance these concerns within governance processes, particularly through advocacy and negotiation.

6.5.3 Advocacy and Negotiation

This subsection examines advocacy and negotiation as key mechanisms through which civil society stakeholders facilitate community-driven coproduction. Rather than waiting to be invited into formal processes, CSOs, community leaders and organisers noted using advocacy and negotiation to shape local government agendas, influence decisions, and hold the NCC accountable. These mechanisms operate across a range of topics, including grassroots campaigning to direct engagement with institutional representatives, and present how civil society stakeholders navigate power and influence within local governance.

6.5.3.1 Campaigning

A participant from CSO2 reflected on the organisation's decision to campaign for the entire former Green Park site, rather than a smaller protected area, presenting the strategic use of advocacy within coproduction. The organisation sought to maximise its influence here when local stakeholder attention was heightened, recognising that such demands would give the CSO more room to negotiate with the NCC.

'When the original Green Park was built our campaign to protect wildlife, we thought we must go big and ambitious with our campaign for the Green Park site, or we'll never get this opportunity again.' (CSO2-INT Senior Organiser)

Another CSO participant emphasised that campaigning involves a range of tactics that shift depending on institutional responsiveness. Attending board meetings was described as one route for initiating dialogue, while more confrontational approaches were also adopted when access was restricted or demands were resisted. Public demonstrations and visible displays of collective support are also used to apply pressure and assert the legitimacy of civil society's involvement in decision-making processes.

'We might turn up at a board meeting to campaign, and other times if there's a real resistance of meeting with us, we have to kind of ratchet up the tension a little bit. Then we have to do some provocative public action. By using our people power and creating a public show of power to get a say in decisions.' (CSO1-INT Senior Organiser)

A community organiser recounted the burgeoning momentum generated by a resident's online campaign, which garnered extensive positive engagement and thousands of responses, signalling overwhelming public support. This interest in the Green Park's historical site increased when various CSOs published their visions and civil society-led petitions for the site and received widespread recognition and media coverage as well. This backdrop of heightened interest provided the catalyst for further dialogue with the local government. The local government's announcement of a consultation represented a formal avenue for input, suggesting the local government's responsiveness to the community led momentum. Recognising the potential to capitalise on this energy, the participant indicates a strategic move beyond formal mechanisms, aiming to craft a more tangible and influential vision that could impact decision-making processes within CG.

A CSO participant described how momentum generated through an individual citizen-led online petition created conditions for further community-driven coproduction. High levels of public support, combined with media attention, prompted the local

government to initiate a consultation process. Community stakeholders then sought to move beyond formal consultation by developing a shared vision that could exercise greater influence over subsequent decisions.

> *'The initial petition was organised by a resident and received 18,000 signatures, and soon after we built on the momentum and launched a formal vision of the historical site which also received overwhelming public support and media coverage. As a result, the local government took the decision to launch their consultation and has since begun work to transform the site. This entire project can be traced back to community campaigns.' (CSO2-INT Senior Organiser)*

While campaigning enabled community stakeholders to shape agendas and generate momentum around shared priorities, these efforts were closely followed by practices of accountability aimed at ensuring that commitments made by the NCC turned into concrete outcomes.

6.5.3.2 Holding Local Government to account

Alongside campaigning, accountability emerged as a core element of community-led coproduction. A CSO participant described ongoing efforts to monitor how commitments made by the local government were implemented in practice, particularly in relation to the Green Park advisory group. While supportive of formal processes in principle, participants stressed the importance of long-term oversight and accountability to ensure that initial intentions set by the NCC were accordingly reflected in the outcomes.

> *'While we have been very supportive of the Green Park advisory group in principle, the important thing is how the Green Park plan is delivered. We're keeping the City Council to that promise and we're hoping to work closely with them to develop the Green Park site over the rest of the coming year.' (CSO2-INT Senior Organiser)*

Additionally, the participant highlighted the tension that can arise when community organisations adopt a critical stance. Collaboration and partnership are sometimes

met with tension, as these stakeholders assume the role of a social conscience to highlight areas where change is essential. Advocacy was described as involving both partnership and challenge, illustrating how coproduction can oscillate between cooperation and confrontation.

> *'There is both a sense of partnership and collaboration with the local government and other times it's a more tense relationship where we are in a holding a mirror up to the local government in cases of failure.' (CSO2-INT Senior Organiser)*

A focus group participant shed light on the tensions between civil society stakeholders and local government within coproduction processes. They noted how accountability work often involves questioning the NCC directly and resisting tokenistic coproduction (further discussed in Chapter 8). Community stakeholders sought to reassert the purpose of coproduction by insisting on meaningful influence rather than symbolic gestures in influencing outcomes.

> *'We spoke with a government official as they attended one of our events and asked them difficult questions around the local government's environmental decisions. We held them to account, however they didn't seem to engage, instead they seemed more interested in taking pictures with us to advertise that they attended the event.' (CSO2-FGD, Participant 2)*

These accounts present how advocacy and negotiation function as mechanisms of bottom-up coproduction that enable communities to assert influence, apply pressure, and maintain accountability. While community-led coproduction processes broaden opportunities for civil society stakeholders to shape internal priorities and outcomes, they remain shaped by constraints related to institutional authority, resources, and recognition, demonstrating the uneven and negotiated nature of community-driven coproduction.

This section has examined coproduction mechanisms initiated by civil society actors, including self-organisation, community-led programmes, campaigning, and accountability practices. In doing so, it addresses Research Question 2.1, by mapping

bottom-up avenues of coproduction that operate independently of local government invitation. Unlike local government-led mechanisms, these initiatives emerge from locally defined concerns rather than institutional agendas. Coproduction in this context oscillates between collaboration and confrontation, illustrating how partnership and accountability coexist within local governance. Taken together, this section demonstrates that multistakeholder coproduction in Nottingham is not solely structured from above. Civil society actors actively construct alternative spaces of influence, negotiation, and accountability.

6.6 Summary

This chapter has examined how multi-stakeholder coproduction takes place in Nottingham by mapping the range of mechanisms through which local government and non-government stakeholders work together. In doing so, it contributes to Research Questions 2.1 and 2.2 by identifying the existing avenues of coproduction and clarifying how these are structured and enabled across the city.

The findings show that local government-led coproduction mechanisms play a central role in shaping the local collaboration landscape. These include statutory and procedural policies, consultation processes, advisory boards, partnerships, and discretionary initiatives. While such mechanisms embed coproduction within local governance, they tend to structure involvement through institutional priorities and administrative requirements. As a result, more sustained forms of coproduction were most commonly associated with invited or representative stakeholders, such as universities, industry partners, and CSOs, rather than with wider civil society.

The chapter also mapped a range of non-government-led coproduction mechanisms, highlighting the roles played by CSOs, universities, and community groups. These stakeholders were shown to act as intermediaries, facilitators, and organisers of coproduction, creating opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and capacity-building. In some cases, non-government stakeholders initiated coproduction independently of policy requirements, particularly where existing local government-led mechanisms were perceived as limited or insufficient.

Across both local government-led and community-driven mechanisms, the findings indicate that coproduction in Nottingham takes multiple forms and operates across different levels. Consultation, panels, partnerships, advisory boards, and community-led initiatives function as distinct arrangements, each offering different degrees of access, influence, and continuity. The chapter demonstrates that while opportunities for coproduction are widespread across the city, they are unevenly distributed. Access to coproduction is shaped by institutional design, organisational capacity, resource availability, and the presence of intermediary stakeholders. This mapping of the coproduction landscape provides a foundation for the following findings chapter, which examines how these mechanisms are experienced and negotiated by stakeholders in practice.

Chapter 7: Experiences of Collaborative Processes

7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how local government and non-government stakeholders experienced collaborative processes in Nottingham. Drawing on the perspectives of local government (Nottingham City Council (NCC), and non-government (community groups, universities, industry, CSOs, and wider civil society), the chapter explores how coproduction mechanisms were perceived and negotiated in practice. In doing so, it addresses Research Questions 3.1 and 3.2 and presents how these arrangements were experienced by local government and non-government (academia, industry and civil society) stakeholders participating in and facilitating coproduction.

The chapter focuses on the role and nature of coproduction processes as understood by different stakeholders, paying particular attention to the extent to which these processes reflect features of coproduction (see Section 2.4), for example by enabling meaningful participation, influence, and inclusion. It examines how community stakeholders perceived their contributions to local governance processes, while also identifying the barriers and opportunities that shaped their participation. In this way, the chapter addresses Objective 3 of the research by exploring stakeholder perceptions of their role in coproduction and the wider conditions that enabled or constrained collaborative practice.

The chapter is organised into four sections. Section 7.2 examines the participation dynamics that shaped coproduction processes in Nottingham, including elite participation, community influence, digital engagement, disengagement, and the limits of consultation-led participation. Section 7.3 explores the social limitations affecting coproduction, focusing on access to marginalised communities, the alignment of stakeholder incentives, and the communication of coproduction opportunities. Finally, Section 7.4 considers the governance challenges that constrained coproduction, including traditional governance practices and budgetary pressures.

7.2 Participation Dynamics within Coproduction Processes

This section addresses Research Question 3.1 by presenting the participation dynamics that shaped coproduction processes in Nottingham captured in this study. Drawing on stakeholder perspectives, it explores how collaboration was experienced in practice across a range of coproduction mechanisms, and how factors such as trust, communication, power, and access influenced participation in these processes. The analysis considers the various forms of coproduction activities undertaken in Nottingham, including partnerships, community-led initiatives, and local government-facilitated mechanisms. It explores how these activities contributed to shared goals, addressed community needs, and shaped the overall governance landscape. Furthermore, the section examines the factors that influence the effectiveness of coproduction activities, such as the level of trust and communication among stakeholders, the distribution of power and resources, and the presence of clear goals and objectives. By examining these diverse perspectives and experiences, this section aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how coproduction operated in practice and its impact on the community.

7.2.1 Elite stakeholders in Coproduction

There was some evidence to suggest that coproduction processes remained exclusive to elite stakeholders. A local government participant admitted to limitations in the composition of the NCC's Green Park Advisory Board (see Appendix F), acknowledging a subsequent gap in the understanding of local community needs . This admission highlights the complexities of inclusive representation and the importance of lived experience in advisory capacities to deliver insights that resonate with the diverse socio-economic backgrounds of local communities and stakeholders.

> *'I suppose what was interesting on the Green Park Advisory Board is that when you do come at these things as an industry practitioner and can be blind-sided to some of the obvious wider stakeholder and community needs. So, you haven't got a clue how many of the marginalised stakeholders of Nottingham live, work, and survive and as much as you might try to empathise if you have not lived that experience, then you're*

not going to be able to speak to it.' (IND-INT Senior Member, Green Park Advisory Board)

Speaking to the theme of agency in decision-making processes, civil society participants pointed to the current disconnect between advisory boards and the communities they represent. This sentiment reveals a perceived inadequacy in representation, particularly a lack of members with authentic lived experiences in the city.

'The members on the advisory board, especially with Green Park weren't the right representatives for the local area and city as most of them had no lived experience of the city whatsoever.' (CS-FGD2, Participant 4)

A civil society participant voiced concerns about the inadequate representation of the general public on advisory boards. They argued that these boards (e.g. Green Park Advisory board, Development Advisory board) are disproportionately composed of elite stakeholder representatives, which exclude the input and perspectives of local civil society. This thus raised questions about inclusivity and democratic legitimacy, suggesting a potential bias towards elite stakeholders and a potential neglect of broader community interests. This observation aligned with other participant critiques regarding the composition and effectiveness of advisory boards in capturing diverse community voices.

'Why couldn't the local government have members of the public on these advisory boards and not just people who already represent an organisation or institution or civil society group? Why couldn't there be a ballot for members of the public to be on that count?' (CS-FGD2, Participant 6)

To elaborate, a community organiser offered a critical reflection on the gaps in the NCC's approach to the Big Conversation (see Appendix F) as part of the Green Park project. This participant was responsible for the initial petition that gained widespread public traction and eventually snowballed into a significant coproduction project undertaken by the local government. However, the community leader was never contacted or engaged by the NCC regarding the project. The lack of follow-through

undermines trust and raises questions about the authenticity of commitments to inclusive policy development.

> *'I would have been keen to collaborate with the government after the petition snowballed in the project that it has today, however no one from the local government has been in touch with me.' (CSOL-INT Community Organiser 2)*

It is interesting to note that members of the advisory board indicated that the NCC has fulfilled its duty of public engagement through initiatives like The Big Conversation. Non-government stakeholders held varying perspectives on the adequacy of such efforts. It implied that while formal engagement mechanisms did exist, the scepticism about their depth and whether they genuinely captured the community's voice was evident.

> *'In my view, the city had done the public engagement with the big conversation consultation' (IND-INT Senior Member, Green Park Advisory Board)*

7.2.2 Technology as an enabler and disabler

During this research, the majority of consultations and one-off collaborative activities took place online and some participants acknowledged technology's role in widening non-government stakeholder engagement. However, the role of technology was seen to both constrain and enable collaboration. A CSO participant recognised the potential for digital exclusion and advocated for a diverse blend of engagement methods, ensuring inclusivity for all community members, including those limited by the digital divide.

> *'There should be a variety of ways of engaging not just focused on if there is an online way of doing it, for people that can't leave the house because of childcare, but equally the ones like this, people who don't have access to a computer can still come.' (CSO2-FGD, Participant 1)*

Local government participants acknowledged the possible exclusion arising out of the use of technology in governance process. By providing an alternative option of a paper survey, the NCC claimed to address the potential exclusion of civil society stakeholders unable to access online platforms.

> *'We did have in-person sessions for the libraries consultation where people could have come in to see us, but it wasn't very well taken. It was an offer that we made in case people didn't have access to technology because the NCC try and mitigate the technology gap.' (LG-INT Community Engagement Lead)*

Another local government participant pointed out the possible limitations of technology, expressing concern over the rapid pace of technological change potentially leaving more communities behind. This perspective warned against an overreliance on technology for collaboration, suggesting that it could create barriers rather than bridges in public engagement, especially for those who lack access to, or familiarity with, the latest digital tools.

> *'The changes in technology are so fast that we are at risk of leaving a lot of people behind. I think over reliance on technology for collaboration is a bad idea.' (LG-INT City Rooms Project Lead)*

7.2.3 Community Influence in Place-Making and Decision Processes

Most of the community participants felt that coproduction initiatives in Nottingham needed to provide greater agency to community stakeholders and individual citizens within collaborative processes. While a range of coproduction mechanisms exist across the city (see Chapter 6), participants highlighted that opportunities for civil society influence often remain limited to consultation rather than shared decision-making. Within the initiatives examined in this research, civil society participation typically occurred through mechanisms such as public consultations, collaborative workshops, community-led advocacy groups, and structured engagement exercises. For example, initiatives (see Appendix F) such as the Big Conversation and the Your City Your Say Citizens' Panel were designed to gather civil society perspectives on

local development and policy priorities. However, participants suggested that these mechanisms did not always translate into meaningful influence over final policy outcomes.

A community participant emphasised that coproduction projects needed to provide greater agency to community actors by enabling them to contribute not only feedback but also ideas and priorities that shape policy development. Civil society participants expressed a broader ambition for inclusive governance, where public play an active role in shaping the physical and social environments in which they live. One community organiser described how the Green Park project (see Appendix F) could facilitate more dynamic forms of community participation and collective activity.

> *'One of the big benefits of an open green space would be that it can be a space where people can do stuff in a much more dynamic way.' (CSOL-INT Community Organiser 2)*

Participants further emphasised the importance of civic input in local planning and governance decisions, their view promotes the integration of public experience and knowledge throughout the policy cycle. This stance suggests that policies will be most effective and reflective of community needs when they arise from genuine public engagement concerning local conditions and concerns.

> *'Citizens should be shaping local places and be part of that policy making process and their voices as important in developing and reviewing and evaluating policy and determining policy. And it should be routed in the lived experiences of people who will be impacted. (CSO1-INT Organiser)*

Other participants highlighted the crucial contributions that civil society stakeholders can bring to governance processes, advocating for a greater shift of agency toward communities in decision-making processes. They emphasised that communities possess valuable experiential knowledge developed through years of navigating local challenges, which can complement institutional expertise in shaping more context-sensitive policies.

'Local community stakeholders bring a huge amount of experience of challenges and understanding, after years of grappling with these sorts of issues. So, it is imperative that we include wider stakeholders and citizens in the planning process.' (IND-INT Senior Member, Development Advisory Board)

7.2.4 Community Disengagement and Participation Apathy

Empirical research further suggests that disengagement or participation apathy often emerges when stakeholders perceive coproduction processes as symbolic, one-directional, or unlikely to influence outcomes. In such cases, communities may withdraw from engagement, not due to a lack of interest in governance, but because participation is experienced as reinforcing existing power asymmetries rather than enabling meaningful influence. Participants expressed that the lack of trust, inclusivity and transparency in communities has clearly led to disillusionment regarding governance processes. This resulted in feelings of apathy amongst some non-government stakeholders, stemming from a scepticism about the influence of their engagement on local governmental decisions. A non-government participant suggested that a cycle of disenchantment discourages community participation.

'There is a general apathy amongst local communities and groups that ask Why should I bother? Will I think about these things? Will I engage? Because they believe it won't affect the government's decisions.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)

Furthermore, a non-government participants reflected on local government inaction on their contributions. This perceived inaction eroded trust between local government and non-government stakeholders, creating a vicious cycle that undermines local empowerment efforts. When stakeholders believe their contributions are disregarded, it discourages future participation and reinforces a sense of powerlessness. This dynamic can lead to ineffective coproduction, as meaningful engagement requires trust and a belief that contributions will be taken seriously. The lack of demonstrable outcomes from stakeholder engagement can also lead to apathy and disengagement, further weakening coproduction processes.

'When the local government asks stakeholders to contribute to decision making processes but doesn't act on those contributions it seems a waste of time. It also devalues local power and disincentivises people that want to get involved, which I think is a challenge because you need you need to engage people and make it exciting and interesting and easy to get involved in shaping their communities.' (UN2-INT Responsible Officer)

There was also a disconnect in expectations surrounding coproduction mechanisms. A non-government participant identified that communities may perceive coproduction efforts as outside their expertise and area of concern, anticipating grand outcomes while not feeling responsible for contributing to them. This perspective indicated the need to realign community perceptions of ownership and accountability in collaboration, as well as to manage expectations around the benefits of civic participation.

'I think the problem with collaborative mechanisms is often communities think there'll be bigger wins which are not their responsibility.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)

Participants highlighted a heightened sense of powerlessness in certain areas of the city. This observation reflected a widespread belief among residents that their voices were not valued and did not influence decision-making processes. Addressing this sense of powerlessness requires not only creating opportunities for participation but also demonstrating that civil society contributions have a tangible impact on local government decisions.

We know there are pockets in the city where actually people have very little hope about the fact that their voice matters and that they have no real power. (CSO1-INT Organiser)

7.2.5 Participation as one-way Communication

Several participants highlighted that at times coproduction initiatives within Nottingham were characterised by one-way communication between the NCC and non-government stakeholders rather than opportunities to coproduce. While mechanisms such as consultations, surveys, and public engagement exercises

created opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback, participants suggested that these processes often lacked opportunities for sustained dialogue or deliberation between stakeholders and decision-makers. As a result, participation was frequently experienced as a one-directional flow of information rather than a collaborative exchange of ideas. One participant reflected on the limitations of these processes, suggesting that these interactions primarily involved the dissemination of information from institutions to stakeholders.

> *'A lot of the time it's the lack of two-way dialogue where institutions just share one sided information and that's what is referred to as coproduction.' (UN1-INT Research Associate, Inclusive Policy and Governance Studies)*

Consultation mechanisms typically involve gathering stakeholder feedback on predetermined local government proposals or initiatives. Within coproduction (see Section 2.4), consultation can be understood as one of several engagement mechanisms, alongside more interactive forms of collaboration in which stakeholders contribute to shaping problems, solutions, and outcomes. Where communication remains one-sided, participation may remain limited to consultation rather than enabling the shared decision-making associated with coproduction. Participants therefore emphasised the importance of involving stakeholders earlier in the design of projects and policies. Early engagement was seen as a way to foster more meaningful collaboration by allowing stakeholders to contribute their perspectives before key decisions had already been made.

> *'Wider stakeholders from the public need to be engaged right at the start when the projects are being designed. This way, the wider stakeholders are more so incentivised because their interests are incorporated into the project outcomes from the outset. (UN2-INT Responsible Officer)*

Participants also noted that coproduction processes were often episodic and short-term, typically occurring at specific stages of a project rather than forming part of an ongoing dialogue between local government and non-government stakeholders. One community participant suggested that coproduction initiatives could be improved by adopting more longitudinal forms of engagement that allow stakeholders to contribute continuously throughout the lifecycle of a project.

‘In the case of Green Park, rather than a one-off consultation, the local government could have had a longitudinal process where stakeholders could continue to add to that conversation. (CS-FGDI, Participant 2)

This section has examined the participation dynamics that shaped coproduction processes in Nottingham, focusing on how different stakeholders experienced and interpreted their involvement across coproduction initiatives. The findings showed that participation was unevenly distributed, with more sustained and influential forms of collaboration often remaining concentrated among elite or invited stakeholders, while wider public participation was more commonly mediated through consultations, digital platforms, and episodic engagement exercises. The section also highlighted how non-government stakeholders perceived their contributions as valuable in shaping place-making, raising local concerns, and offering experiential knowledge, but also as frequently constrained by one-way dialogue, limited influence, and growing apathy where participation appeared ineffective.

In doing so, this section directly addresses Research Question 3.1 by demonstrating how non-government stakeholders (CSOs, wider civil society, universities, and industry) perceived their contributions to coproduction, not as uniform or consistently influential, but as shaped by the design, openness, and inclusivity of the coproduction processes in which they were involved. It also contributes to Research Question 3.2 by identifying key opportunities and barriers within participation itself, including technology, community influence, disengagement, consultation-led involvement, and the uneven distribution of influence across coproduction mechanisms.

7.3 Social Limitations

This section presents the social challenges experienced by non-government stakeholders in terms of access, task division and their relationship with local government stakeholders. It also explores the financial and resource barriers to participation for civil society participants, while also presenting the challenges to accessing and engaging marginalised stakeholders into coproduction activities. In doing so, it addresses Research Questions 3.2 by presenting key barriers experienced

by local government and non-government stakeholders in enabling, facilitating and participating within coproduction processes.

In the context of coproduction, the term marginalised stakeholders refer to actors whose ability to influence decision-making processes is limited by structural, social, or institutional barriers (see Section 2.3.1.2). Marginalised stakeholders may include individuals or groups who experience reduced access to coproduction opportunities due to socio-economic constraints, limited institutional representation, cultural or language barriers, and digital exclusion. Within this study, these terms refer particularly to wider civil society that are less embedded in formal governance structures and therefore face greater challenges in accessing coproduction opportunities compared to institutional actors such as local government, universities, or industry stakeholders.

7.3.1 Access to Marginalised Communities

Across non-government stakeholders, participants pointed to the difficulty of maintaining sustained engagement with civil society and community actors who may not be closely connected to formal governance structures. Some participants suggested that more proactive approaches to engagement were required in order to ensure that communities at risk of being overlooked remained informed and involved in coproduction initiatives.

> *'The local government needs to integrate techniques of engaging such as hosting a community of practice, learning sessions or regular catch ups. Just one to one with stakeholders to ensure that they're aware and updated. Who are the people who are important to you? Who are the people that are risky of disappearing?' (UN2-INT Responsible Officer)*

Similarly, other participants stressed the importance of direct communication with communities to enable long-term engagement. Participants suggested that without meaningful on-the-ground engagement, governance actors risk developing only a partial understanding of the experiences and priorities of communities across the city.

> *'Unless you actually get on the ground and into communities and have those conversations, you're not getting the true picture and experiential stuff which is really important in terms of stakeholder engagement in a wider perspective across the city.' (UN-I University Advisory Board Representative)*

When discussing how the needs of local communities would be integrated into the development of the Nottingham Economic Recovery and Renewal Plan (see Appendix E), which was being shaped through the Development Advisory Board (see Appendix F), participants highlighted the growing socio-economic divide within the city as a significant challenge for inclusivity in coproduction. Furthermore, the advisory group's lead suggested that widening inequalities between more affluent communities and those experiencing economic disadvantage create structural barriers to participation in coproduction processes more broadly. Individuals and groups with fewer resources may face greater difficulties accessing engagement opportunities or sustaining involvement in coproduction initiatives. Addressing this challenge, participants suggested, requires deliberate efforts to design coproduction processes that ensure stakeholders across different socio-economic backgrounds are able to engage meaningfully in shaping local policy and development priorities.

> *'We have the perennial challenge of inclusivity of the significantly growing difference between those who are well off and those not so well off in the city.' (IND-INT Senior Member, Development Advisory Board)*

A civil society participant suggested that these disparities create structural barriers to participation, as individuals and communities with fewer resources may face greater challenges in accessing engagement opportunities or maintaining sustained involvement in coproduction initiatives. Such inequalities may therefore limit the diversity of voices represented in coproduction processes and reinforce existing patterns of exclusion. Similarly, other participants attributed limited civil society participation to socio-economic factors affecting certain neighbourhoods within the city. A participant highlighted that citizens in more deprived areas may face additional barriers to engagement, including educational inequalities, weaker connections to civic networks, and fewer opportunities to interact with local government institutions.

'There is definitely a lack of access to poorer areas of the city with worse quality education and access to like social groups. And they may not get the opportunities that some other people may get to collaborate in decision making.' (CS-FGD2, Participant 3)

When discussing civil society participation in local governance decisions within NCC, a local government participant highlighted the challenges associated with directly engaging with local civil society stakeholders. The participant noted that limited access to dispersed community networks often makes direct interaction difficult for the NCC. As a result, the NCC frequently relies on intermediary organisations, such as universities or organised community groups, to communicate with wider stakeholders. This highlights a gap between formal governance structures and the communities they seek to engage, while also emphasising the important role that non-government stakeholders can play as channels for identifying, representing, and communicating the perspectives of local communities.

'It's difficult to liaise directly with wider non-government stakeholders and, it's usually more likely that we will speak to universities or head of a certain community group that have links to wider stakeholders. It's very hard to actually have that interaction with specific communities without these middlemen.' (LG-INT Smart Nottingham Lead)

7.3.2 Aligning mutual interests for collaboration incentives

Local government, and non-government (universities, civil society and industry) stakeholders repeatedly emphasised that effective coproduction processes depended heavily on the presence of mutual incentives that encouraged stakeholders to participate. In many cases, participants framed participation in coproduction initiatives not simply as a normative or civic responsibility, but as an activity that must generate tangible benefits for those involved. Without such incentives, participants suggested that coproduction initiatives struggled to maintain long-term engagement from non-government stakeholders.

Several participants highlighted that effective coproduction required the alignment of stakeholder interests. Given the diversity of actors involved in urban governance,

including local government, academics, CSOs and community members, collaboration must create outcomes that hold value for multiple stakeholder groups simultaneously. One academic participant explained that collaboration needs to be designed in a way that ensures that all participants perceive a realistic benefit from their involvement, rather than viewing engagement as an extractive process where their time and knowledge are utilised without meaningful returns.

> *'You have got to do your public consultation and participation such that its realistic and that all stakeholders collaborating get something out of it.' (UN2-INT Director of the Public Policy and Management Research Group)*

This perspective suggests that coproduction initiatives should not only create opportunities for stakeholders to contribute their perspectives but should also demonstrate how those contributions translate into meaningful outcomes. A University 1 participant reinforced the importance of designing collaboration processes that incorporate incentives which resonate with civil society stakeholders.

> *'There's got to be incentives in collaborating for the public if you want them to engage positively and enthusiastically.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)*

The University participant also described collaboration as involving a reciprocal exchange between local government and non-government stakeholders. In this view, coproduction requires a balance in which different stakeholders both contribute to and benefit from the coproduction process. For local government stakeholders, engaging with communities and CSOs may provide valuable local knowledge, strengthen legitimacy, and support the development of policies that are more responsive to community needs. For non-government stakeholders, collaboration may provide access to institutional information, opportunities to shape local initiatives, or resources that support community activities.

> *Collaborative initiatives need a trade-off between government and non-government stakeholders. For instance, local government can provide local groups with some beneficial information that will help their quality of life.' (UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities)*

The findings therefore suggest that effective coproduction depends on the ability of coproduction initiatives to identify areas of shared interest that can motivate participation across different stakeholder groups. Participants acknowledged that achieving this alignment can be challenging, particularly in complex urban governance environments where organisations and communities may have diverse priorities and responsibilities. A community participant reflected on the difficulty of identifying issues that generate sufficient collective interest to mobilise collaboration across multiple actors.

> *'There's a challenge around identifying issues that are truly going to draw people from all about organisations to take action together. How do you find that sweet spot that is really going to engage everybody?' (CSO1-INT Organiser)*

Overall, the findings indicate that the alignment of stakeholder incentives represents an important social condition for effective coproduction. While formal engagement mechanisms may provide opportunities for participation, sustained collaboration appears to depend on the extent to which stakeholders perceive that their involvement generates tangible benefits or contributes to outcomes they value.

7.3.3 Participation needs to be communicated better

Some civil society participants highlighted communication as a key factor influencing the effectiveness of coproduction initiatives. While a range of coproduction opportunities existed within Nottingham (see Chapter 6), several non-government participants suggested that many stakeholders remained unaware of these opportunities due to limitations in how coproduction initiatives were communicated. In this sense, the issue was not only the availability of these mechanisms, but also the extent to which stakeholders were informed about them and able to access them in practice. These findings also highlight the need to distinguish between different degrees of participation (further explored in section 8.2.1). Many of the opportunities described by participants were symbolic, tokenistic modes of coproduction (further explored in section 8.2.2) where non-government stakeholder influence over decision-

making remained constrained. This reinforces the distinction outlined in Section 2.4 where coproduction was considered as involving shared decision-making.

Civil society participants further emphasised that communication strategies must recognise the diversity of stakeholders involved in coproduction processes. Different groups may access information through different channels, meaning that a single communication method may not effectively reach all potential participants. One civil society participant suggested that communication methods should be tailored to accommodate these different preferences.

> *'Information needs to be available and accessible to everybody. For example, I would respond to something that would come to my e-mail whereas other stakeholders might prefer information by post. (CS-FGDI, Participant 2)*

These observations suggest that communication strategies play an important role in coproduction processes. Where opportunities are communicated primarily through limited institutional channels, participation may become concentrated among stakeholders who are already connected to governance networks. This can reinforce the patterns of elite participation discussed earlier in this chapter (see Section 7.2.1), where coproduction remains dominated by professional or organisational actors rather than the wider public. Participants also noted that effective communication requires not only the dissemination of information but also the clear articulation of the purpose and expected outcomes of coproduction initiatives. Providing clarity about the objectives of coproduction processes can help stakeholders understand how their participation may influence decision-making and what role they are expected to play within the process. In this sense, limitations in communication not only affect access to participation, but also shape the degree of participation, often reinforcing tokenistic or symbolic coproduction rather than more substantive forms of coproduction (further explored in 8.2.2).

> *'Collaboration initiatives should lay out the objectives, process and intended outcomes of the collaboration to enhance the quality of these processes.' (UN2-INT Responsible Officer)*

Civil society stakeholders shed light on the inadequate outreach efforts of local government, emphasising the need for more proactive and effective communication strategies. They argued that current communication methods are insufficient to reach diverse segments of the community (see Section 7.3.1), hindering meaningful participation in coproduction processes. This critique highlighted the importance of accessible and inclusive communication in fostering genuine collaboration between local government and civil society. Effective outreach requires not only disseminating information but also actively engaging with communities and tailoring communication strategies to meet diverse needs and preferences. The stakeholders' insights suggest a need for a more strategic and inclusive approach to communication that prioritises accessibility, clarity, and responsiveness to community concerns.

> *'I have not heard of most of these engagement and collaboration opportunities that you mentioned, and I'm sure the local government could make a more proactive effort to communicate these opportunities to a wider audience.' (CS-FGD1, Participant 4)*

The utilisation of multiple communication channels was also identified by participants as an important strategy for improving civil society participation in coproduction processes. Given the diversity of stakeholders involved in local governance processes, communication strategies must recognise that different groups engage with information in different ways. In this sense, broadening communication approaches can help ensure that coproduction initiatives reach a wider range of stakeholders rather than remaining confined to already engaged networks.

> *'Collaboration opportunities need to be communicated through different ways so we can reach diverse audiences and stakeholders.' (IND-INT Member, Nottingham Creative Quarter)*

This section has examined the social limitations that affected the practice of coproduction in Nottingham. It showed that participation was shaped not only by the existence of coproduction opportunities, but also by wider social conditions that influenced who was able to engage, under what circumstances, and with what level of sustained involvement. The findings identified difficulties in accessing marginalised communities, the challenge of aligning mutual incentives across stakeholders, and

weaknesses in communication and outreach as significant factors limiting wider participation. In this respect, the section addresses Research Question 3.1 by showing that non-government stakeholders perceived their contributions as contingent upon being recognised, informed, and meaningfully included, rather than simply being invited to participate through coproduction mechanisms. It also contributes to Research Question 3.2 by identifying the social barriers and opportunities experienced by local government and non-government stakeholders in facilitating and participating in coproduction.

7.4 Governance Challenges

This section addresses Research Questions 3.1 and 3.2 by presenting the challenges encountered by both local government and non-government stakeholders in facilitating and enabling coproduction processes in Nottingham. Participants identified a range of obstacles that hindered the effective implementation and operation of coproduction. For local government stakeholders, these challenges included navigating power dynamics, fostering genuine engagement, and developing the necessary processes and structures to support coproduction. Non-government stakeholders, on the other hand, faced challenges related to inadequate representation, perceived inaction on their contributions, and a sense of powerlessness in influencing decision-making processes. This section will delve into these challenges, drawing on participant experiences and perspectives to provide a nuanced understanding of the barriers to effective coproduction. The analysis will consider both structural and cultural factors that contribute to these challenges, exploring how power imbalances, communication barriers, and a lack of trust can impede collaborative efforts.

7.4.1 Traditional Governance Arrangements

Coproduction practices needed adequate governance structures in place. Participants noted the resistance within traditional local governmental structures prevalent within the NCC to distribute decision-making power and foster collaborative practices. Such traditional structures (previously discussed in Section 2.2 and 2.5) often prioritise top-down decision-making, which can conflict with the principles of coproduction that

emphasise shared power and inclusive participation. This governance challenge suggested structural reforms may be necessary to foster meaningful engagement and power-sharing.

> *'The government still operates within traditional government structures, where power is concentrated within the government, and people in government do not want to share that power with non-government stakeholders.' (UN2-INT Responsible Officer)*

Likewise, a community participant criticised local governance practices for being overly controlling, thus limiting the scope of meaningful coproduction. This suggested that local governance took an insular approach, which may lead to the selective adoption of collaboration. This appeared to be the case when collaboration aligned with pre-existing policy agendas, rather than embracing it as a broad, inclusive principle, thus hindering the potential scope and benefits of stakeholder engagement.

> *'The local government has an awkward legacy of being obsessively controlling as a local authority. It looks inwardly and takes on collaborative practices only as far as that endorses the policies that the Council wants to pursue.' (CSOL-INT Community Organiser 1)*

Another university participant confirmed the same, confirming a trend of insular decision making which has persisted over the years.

> *It hasn't been outward towards its local stakeholders and civil society over the past few years.' (UN2-INT Director of the Public Policy and Management Research Group*

Non-government participants stated the need for formal coproduction processes. The absence of a robust framework to enforce accountability in public engagement processes renders them ineffective. While statutory consultations are required under the Statement of Community Involvement (see Appendix E) for planning matters and are driven by formal policies, other engagement processes remain non-statutory and therefore rely more heavily on institutional discretion (see Community Engagement Guide as discussed in Section 5.2 and Appendix E) as illustrated in the Carbon Neutral

Nottingham Action Plan (see Section 6.2 and 6.4). The participants preferred more collaborative approaches where engagement not only informs but also carries weight, legally and politically, ensuring that the local government's responsiveness to civil society input is not voluntary but mandated.

> *'There's no democratic, political or legal mechanism that makes these consultations have any real power. The local government cannot be held liable for not listening to these consultations.' (CSOL-I, Community Organiser I)*

Non-government participants also emphasised the necessity for well-developed local government processes and policies that support the legitimacy of public engagement mechanisms. This perspective suggests a preference not solely for an engagement process, but also the support of governance structures that formalise and legitimise stakeholders' contributions.

> *I'd like to see more power going to wider stakeholders and communities. Certainly, more opportunities to people to contribute in, but that requires quite a lot of scaffolding and support in the form of formal processes.' (UN2-INT Responsible Officer)*

This example clearly highlighted the importance of inclusive stakeholder participation while critically questioning the efficacy of current coproduction practices. While examples of emerging best practice exist, such as the Community Engagement Guide (see Appendix F), the institutionalisation of these approaches remains evasive. A local government participant highlighted varied uptake across departments in applying collaborative practices such as the Community Engagement Guide. An example of this could be seen in the Citizens' Engagement Guide and Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028 process, conducted as part of the Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2020–2028 Action Plan, previously discussed in Chapter 6 (Sections 6.2 and 6.4) and Appendix F.

> *'The Community engagement guide is being taken by different departments, but it's gradual and I don't think we have the knowledge or the training in place for staff across the board, but there are some departments that are*

savvier than others and are embracing it more.' (LG-INT Senior Management 2)

7.4.2 Budget Constraints

Local government budgets are tied to various statutory duties, leaving very limited resources for coproduction initiatives. One participant provided context of the resource-strapped environment that local governments operate in, which impose significant limitations on their ability to support and implement coproduction processes that extended beyond their statutory obligations.

'A significant part of the local government's budget is dedicated to fulfilling statutory duties, so we have very limited resources left over for creative.' (LG-INT Policy Officer 1)

A local government participant highlighted how budgetary constraints didn't only impede project development but also restricted the scope of work to statutory duties mandated by national governments. This financial pressure forced the NCC to prioritise core initiatives, limiting their capacity to pursue coproduction initiatives, such as robust stakeholder engagement. While acknowledging the value of collaborative endeavours, participants emphasised the financial realities that often constrain their ability to fully implement them.

'We have all these great opportunities and ambitions for stakeholder engagement, but without funding they never get beyond the first stages and unfortunately due to financial challenges we've been asked only to concentrate on core delivery projects which restricts our ability to facilitate collaborative and innovative projects'. (LG-INT Smart Nottingham Lead)

Nottingham has historically experienced financial adversity, consistently ranking in the bottom most cities affected by local government funding cuts. Additionally, the current national government intervention in the NCC further hindered these deep-rooted financial challenges.

'Historically, Nottingham has always been in the bottom 20% of those most affected by the reductions. And at the moment the national government is

intervening in the City Council because of the financial challenges NCC is facing.' (UN2-INT Director of the Public Policy and Management Research Group)

Financial constraints compelled the NCC to rely on back-office functions to represent community interests, limiting direct engagement with community stakeholders. A local government participant explained that inadequate resources restrict their capacity to cultivate collaborative relationships, hindering effective communication and partnership development. This reliance on internal staff rather than direct outreach can create a disconnect between the local government and the community, potentially leading to misrepresentation of community needs and preferences.

'Due to lack of resources, we will usually link with back-office functions in all the different areas on behalf of people. But we wouldn't necessarily specifically be the ones that go out and work with local stakeholders directly.' (LG-INT Policy Officer 1)

This section has examined the governance challenges that constrained the practice of coproduction within Nottingham. The findings demonstrated that traditional governance practices, concentrated decision-making authority, inconsistent institutional uptake of collaborative approaches, and limited financial resources all affected the extent to which coproduction could move beyond consultation towards more meaningful forms of shared influence. Participants across stakeholder groups described tensions between the rhetoric of collaboration and the realities of inward-facing decision-making, limited accountability, and insufficient organisational capacity to sustain inclusive engagement.

In doing so, the section directly addresses Research Question 3.1 by showing that non-government stakeholders often perceived their contributions as constrained not by a lack of willingness to engage, but by governance structures that limited responsiveness, power-sharing, and the practical influence of their input on decision-making. It also informs Research Question 3.2 by identifying the institutional and governance barriers experienced by both local government and non-government stakeholders in enabling, facilitating, and participating in coproduction processes.

7.5 Summary

This chapter has examined how coproduction processes were experienced and interpreted by local government and non-government stakeholders in Nottingham. In direct response to Research Question 3.1, it has shown that the role and nature of coproduction are understood differently across stakeholder groups, and that these understandings are shaped by the design of coproduction mechanisms, the distribution of influence within them, and the wider social and institutional conditions under which they operate.

Section 7.2 addressed Research Question 3.1 by examining how non-government stakeholders perceived their contributions to coproduction across a range of collaborative processes. The findings showed that these contributions were valued by stakeholders as sources of lived experience, local knowledge, and community insight, particularly in relation to place-making and planning. At the same time, participation was found to be unevenly distributed, with more sustained and influential forms of collaboration often remaining concentrated among elite or invited stakeholders, while wider public involvement was more commonly structured through consultation, digital engagement, and episodic opportunities for feedback.

Section 7.3 addressed Research Question 3.2 by identifying the social barriers and opportunities experienced by stakeholders in enabling and participating in coproduction. The findings highlighted difficulties in accessing marginalised communities, aligning mutual incentives across stakeholder groups, and communicating coproduction opportunities in ways that reached wider audiences. These conditions shaped who was able to participate, under what circumstances, and with what degree of sustained involvement. The chapter showed that participation depended not only on the existence of coproduction opportunities, but also on whether stakeholders felt recognised, informed, and able to derive value from their involvement.

Finally, Section 7.4 further addressed Research Questions 3.1 and 3.2 by examining stakeholder experiences of governance challenges that constrained coproduction in practice. Traditional governance arrangements concentrated decision-making

authority, inconsistent uptake of coproduction approaches across departments, and limited financial resources were all shown to affect the extent to which coproduction could move beyond consultation towards more meaningful forms of shared influence. These findings reinforce the wider argument of the chapter that coproduction in Nottingham is shaped not only by stakeholder intentions and collaborative mechanisms, but also by the wider social, institutional, and contextual conditions within which collaboration is attempted.

Chapter 8 DISCUSSION

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the key themes that emerged from this study's findings (Chapters 4 to 7) and elaborates the contribution of the thesis according to the existing literature. Based on the combination of the four empirical chapters, this chapter presents a spectrum of participation (Figure 5) and the modes of coproduction (Table 12), which function as building blocks used to synthesise and interpret the empirical material feeding into Figure 6. Therefore, Figure 6 presents a re-developed model of collaborative governance (CG), which brings together the empirical findings and theoretical insights developed through the discussion.

Section 8.2 explains the interpretive tools used to understand coproduction throughout the research, including a spectrum of participation and a set of empirically grounded modes of coproduction. These tools are used to synthesise patterns observed across Chapters 4 to 7 and to support comparative interpretation of how coproduction was enacted within Nottingham. Section 8.3 presents the integrated framework of CG as the primary analytical contribution. This integrated framework illustrates how traditional governance arrangements shaped the practice of coproduction in Nottingham. Furthermore, it presents the outcomes that emerged from these dynamics, distinguishing between intended procedural and relational effects and unintended consequences such as symbolic participation, disengagement, and public disvalue. Section 8.4 concludes by outlining the thesis's theoretical and empirical contributions, as well as policy recommendations. Finally, 8.5 presents the concluding summary of the chapter.

8.2 Connecting the dots between rhetoric and reality of Coproduction

This section unpacks the practice of collaboration by situating coproduction within the broader framework of CG, where stakeholder participation is understood not as a fixed activity but as a spectrum of participation (Fung, 2006, p. 69). Within CG arrangements, different stakeholders navigate a range of coproduction processes and

initiatives. This spectrum varies from the involvement of non-government stakeholders as direct beneficiaries of services to their active role in leading coproduction processes and initiatives. Many local government and non-government stakeholders demonstrated awareness of these differentiated forms of participation, reflecting the dynamic nature of coproduction in practice. The research reveals that various local government and non-government stakeholders had limited understanding of coproduction which influenced the practice of coproduction (see Chapter 5 Section 5.3.4). It was observed that coproduction took place through a variety of activities. Therefore, the term coproduction was used in various ways to describe something as limited as consultation, and as collaborative as collective decision making.

8.2.1 Spectrum of Participation

There are several frameworks based on the extent of participation of non-government stakeholders, especially civil society stakeholders (Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017; Souza and Neto, 2018). While Arnstein's (1969) prolific use of a ladder as a metaphor for increasing levels of participation has been cited extensively, it has received its fair share of criticism. This study builds on the work of Souza and Neto (2018), who, building on Arnstein (1969) and Salm and Menegasso (2010), call for 'continued testing of these analytical frameworks'. Drawing from these authors, the study maps empirical evidence from the multi-stakeholder urban setting analysed in this study, and presents participation as a spectrum, namely collaborative participation, self-interested participation, symbolic participation, and nonparticipation. The spectrum of participation is used here as an interpretive device to explain how stakeholders experienced different forms of participation across instances of coproduction captured in this study.

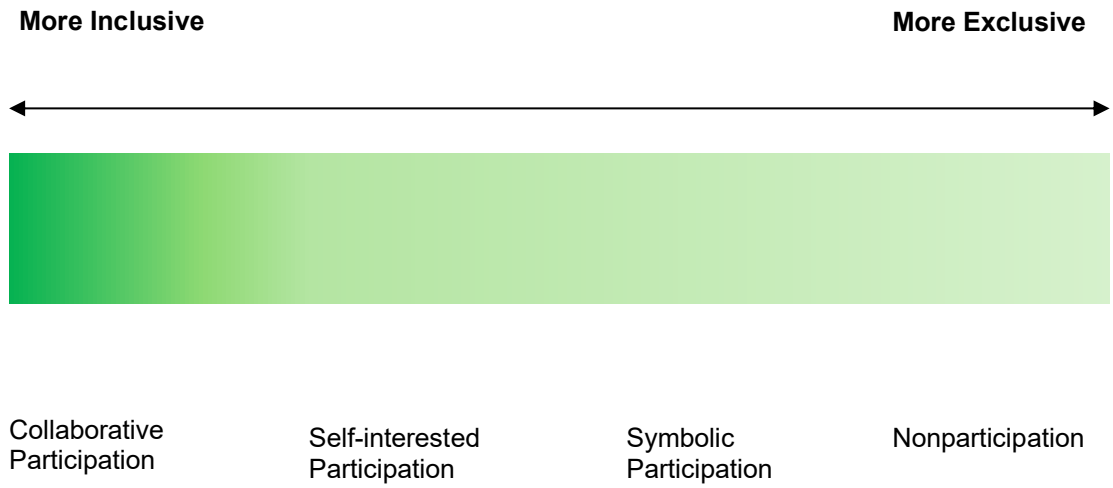


Figure 5 Spectrum of Participation (Author's own elaboration)

Collaborative participation: The most collaborative form of stakeholder participation involved local government and non-government stakeholders coming together to make decisions collectively. This type of participation played out in the form of partnerships and delegation of authority. Collaborative participation was most clearly evident in partnership-based coproduction arrangements such as Universities for Nottingham, where local government and non-government stakeholders worked together to negotiate shared priorities and collectively shape decision-making. Through the Civic Agreement, Universities I, II and Nottingham City Council aligned institutional resources, expertise, and strategic objectives around place-based challenges including prosperity, sustainability, and wellbeing. Local government and non-government stakeholders shared planning and decision-making responsibilities. These collaborations tend to focus on harnessing resource synergies, informed decision-making, empowerment and representation of CSOs and community groups. Interestingly, collaborative participation can also take the form of partnership-led coproduction which may at times exclude local government stakeholders, where CSOs and community stakeholders engage with one another for purposes of empowerment, and education.

Self-interested participation*:* This form of participation manifests when there are transactional incentives and interests that appeal to local government and non-

government stakeholders. For instance, the local government's self-interest in increasing- resource efficiency and community work leads to the rise of localised responsibilisation (Rolfe, 2018; Pill, 2022) . This dynamic can be observed in the Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028 initiative, where coproduction brought together Nottingham City Council and University 2 through a funded research collaboration focused on citizen engagement. University 2 played a central role in designing and delivering the Citizens' Engagement and Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028 report (see Section 6.4), which formed part of a wider, phased research programme aimed at informing the Carbon Neutral 2028 Charter and Action Plan. As such, participation functioned primarily as a means of advancing aligned institutional interests. In this self-interested type, the participation ceases when the incentives end and therefore the focus is on the interests available to the stakeholders involved, instead of the common good. These findings support Kern and Smutko's (2021) research, as participation in such arrangements is typically episodic.

Symbolic participation*:* *S*ymbolic, or tokenistic participation is typically initiated by local government stakeholders, although it might be exercised in partnership with CSOs. It may be characterised by procedures of representative democracy, and therefore non-government stakeholders' input and influence through participation is not guaranteed. Symbolic participation in Nottingham is most clearly illustrated through invite-only advisory boards and strategic partnership arrangements, such as the Green Park Advisory Board, and the Nottingham Development Advisory Board (see Section 6.2.3). Notably, symbolic participation was most evident in the research, reflecting how collaborative processes were structured to limit meaningful influence. These mechanisms were formally established to bring together representatives from public, private, civil society sectors. Symbolic participation in Nottingham can be observed through the Big Conversation consultation which was designed to engage civil society stakeholders in discussions about the Green Park's renovation. Participation was enabled through a survey, allowing for broad involvement across the city.

However, the role of participants within the Big Conversation was limited to expressing views within parameters set by the local government, with agenda-setting authority and decision-making power remaining institutionally centralised. Therefore, symbolic participation occurs when local government uses collaborative processes as a

procedural or legitimacy-seeking exercise, rather than as a substantive mechanism that enables non-government stakeholders to meaningfully influence decision-making. With reference to Arnstein's (1969) ladder, these activities appear to represent placation, consultation and information dissemination. For example, non-government stakeholders receive information on what the local government intends to do, or are consulted without any guarantee that they will be able to influence the local government decisions. Therefore, participation is tokenistic and occurs without the local government sharing or dispersing power with non-government stakeholders, stakeholders are only able to exercise power they already inhibit (Ghose, 2005; Souza and Neto, 2018).

Non-participation*:* Initiatives such as the Your City, Your Say Nottingham Citizens' Panel (see Chapter 6 Section 6.2.2) formally invited citizens to contribute feedback on local strategies, yet full agenda-setting authority remained within the local government. Participation was largely confined to responding to predefined questions on policy directions that had already been established, limiting opportunities for deliberation or influence over problem-framing. As one community organiser noted, engagement often amounted to choosing whether to agree or disagree with predetermined positions, rather than shaping decisions themselves. Moreover, one local government participant described the citizens' panel as just an e-mail distribution list, illustrating how participation functioned primarily as a mechanism for information dissemination. This represents the least degree of participation, also referred to in the literature as manipulative (Ansell *et al.*, 2020a; Beshi and Kaur, 2020) or nominal participation (Kamruzzaman, 2020). Non-participation 'occurs through manipulation and therapy tactics' (Souza and Neto, 2018, p. 120), and is characterised by the local government's use of tactics to educate, persuade, coerce and control non-government stakeholders and to influence their perspectives and behaviours.

8.2.2 Modes of Coproduction

Drawing on the spectrum of participation, Table 12 summarises four empirically observed modes of coproduction observed across Nottingham. Based on the above spectrum of participation, and inspired by the work of Nabatchi et al. (2017) and Souza and Neto (2018) (previously discussed in Chapter 2), this section presents four modes

of coproduction: state-led coproduction, partnership-based coproduction, CSO-led coproduction, and community-led coproduction. Table 12 summarises these modes of coproduction according to their respective key characteristics.

Table 12 Modes of Coproduction (adapted from Souza and Neto, 2018)

Empirically Observed Modes of Coproduction	Type of Participation	Key Characteristics of Coproduction Activities
State-led coproduction	Symbolic participation, Nonparticipation	Participation facilitated by government, episodic, performative inclusivity
Partnership-led coproduction	Self-interested participation, Symbolic participation	Community participation and empowerment, education, research and innovation
CSO-led coproduction	Collaborative participation, Self-interested participation	Advocacy, education, empowerment, structured campaigning
Civil Society-led coproduction	Collaborative participation, self-interested participation	Community self-engagement, empowerment, advocacy, petition

State-led coproduction: The motivations for state-led coproduction are based on principles of democracy, where participation is encouraged by the local government to develop collaborative strategies and produce public services in collaboration with non-government stakeholders. Table 12 captures contexts where the local government initiates and structures coproduction, including the timing, scope, and procedural format of participation. These processes range hugely in the type of participation by non-government stakeholders. In this research, state-led coproduction tended to include symbolic participation and nonparticipation (Section 6.2 and 6.3), where participation may be facilitated but not necessarily influential in shaping decisions. The empirical findings across Chapters 4 and 6 suggest that, in practice, state-led coproduction in Nottingham was most commonly associated with formally structured consultation and advisory mechanisms, where participation was invited and facilitated by the local authority, but decision-making discretion ultimately remained with local government actors. The data emerging from this study contradicts Souza and Neto's (2018, p. 126) notions that the 'state encourages engagement and develops collaborative strategies to produce public services, empowering citizens to make decisions on specific issues'. Instead, consistent with the literature reviewed in Section 2.4.1, state-led coproduction often functioned as a mechanism for managing participation rather than dispersing power.

This again points to evidence of the assumed aspirational value that is attached to coproduction, which does not consistently align with the practice. This gap in the perceived value of coproduction and the realities of its implementation (practice) is central to differentiating state-led coproduction from the other modes in Table 12, as the key issue is that symbolic participation adversely affects the degree of influence afforded to non-government stakeholders. This study aligns with the work of Clulely, Parker and Radnor (2021) in that the value of coproduction is often pursued, without allocation of sufficient inputs and resources to achieve positive outcomes. This helps explain why state-led coproduction can remain episodic and performative even when framed rhetorically as collaborative practice, particularly where resources and capacity are insufficient to support sustained, meaningful engagement.

State-led coproduction was the only mode of coproduction characterised by nonparticipation, challenging the assumption prevalent in the coproduction literature, that participation is an inherent feature of coproduction (Howlett, Kekez and Poocharoen, 2017; Sorrentino, Sicilia and Howlett, 2018). Instead, the findings demonstrate that coproduction can be mobilised without enabling meaningful participation, particularly where agenda-setting authority, decision-making power, and interpretive control remain centralised within local government. In this mode, coproduction functions as a performative or instrumental practice, oriented towards legitimacy, compliance, or policy delivery rather than shared governance.

Partnership-led coproduction: This mode is associated with self-interested participation. As depicted in Table 12, the research found that this mode is distinguished by the intermediary role of CSOs in shaping participation opportunities and facilitating engagement whereby these organisations are driven by the incentives available to them. In Nottingham, this involved local government and non-government stakeholders collaborating in the design of public services and spaces. Partnership-led coproduction therefore was observed through project- or initiative-based arrangements, where collaboration was enabled by organisational capacity, expertise, and access to institutional actors. Community stakeholders were seen as consumers, incentivised by individual and group incentives and rewards. This captures why participation may be contingent on perceived benefits and may cease once incentives diminish, reinforcing the association with self-interested participation. There is risk of

exclusion of civil society stakeholders in influencing decision making in these modes of coproduction. This risk can be heightened where participation is mediated through organisations, where representation, access, and agenda-setting may be shaped by institutional priorities or organisational constraints. This finding supports Bell and Pahl's (2018) where coproduction is usually positioned as a socially progressive practice, it is aimed at delivering pre-defined institutional goals rather than redistributing power.

CSO-led coproduction: This mode of coproduction is led by CSOs, representing **community** interests. In this mode mobilisation and participation are channelled through CSOs with identifiable leadership, capacity, and sustained participation practices. This aligns with the work of Souza and Neto (2018) whereby individuals, groups and communities collectively deliberate, usually through long-term cyclical processes, 'continually mobilising, participating and taking autonomous decisions and action' (Souza and Neto, 2018, p. 127). This sort of coproduction is characterised by organised forms of civil society, with a specific purpose that is determined by the concerns, priorities and opinions of the citizens, groups or communities it represents. These CSOs harness collective skills and resources, form structured campaigns, and advocate strategically in the form of community-led coproduction.

The research found a range of features depicting CSO-led coproduction including advocacy, education, empowerment, and structured campaigning, indicating that coproduction is pursued through sustained organisation, strategic messaging, and collective capacity-building. This is consistent with existing literature where there is a specific focus on empowering and educating communities (Sawkins, 2024) to effectively participate and influence in wider coproduction processes. CSOs develop and sustain strategic relationships with local government stakeholders to collaborate, negotiate and hold the state accountable over the long-term. This helps explain why CSO-led coproduction can combine collaborative and self-interested participation, as collective goals may be pursued alongside strategic participation with institutional actors. Similar to grassroots movements, community-led coproduction prioritises community empowerment, challenges existing power dynamics, addresses local needs, and builds social capital. The use of structured campaigns and strategic

advocacy further reflects the tactics employed by grassroots organisations as put forth by Dean (2018) and Johnston et al. (2011a).

Civil Society-led coproduction: This mode of coproduction is widely studied as self-organisation, bottom-up community campaigns (Van Meerkerk, 2019), recognising that civil society stakeholders have a huge role to play in identifying and tackling urban challenges. Building on the discussion above, this mode is characterised by collective deliberation (Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017; Goulart and Falanga, 2022), sustained mobilisation (Torfing and Ansell, 2016; Ansell and Gash, 2018), and autonomous action (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003; 2012; Sørensen et al., 2020). The research found that this mode is less likely to be channelled through permanent organisations and more likely to rely on flexible, civil society-led mobilisation. As presented in Chapter 6, civil society stakeholders organised through petitions, open letters, campaigns, and advocacy such as the Green Park petition, Green Park Umbrella Group and the Real Living Wage and Better Books campaigns, to bring attention to important issues and to influence decision-makers.

In Nottingham, there were examples of community self-participation and petition, capturing forms of participation that prioritise agenda-setting, pressure-building, and public visibility. Due to the pervasiveness of public disillusionment with local government bodies, this mode is the most critical of the local government, therefore offering radical solutions to complex policy challenges (Williams et al., 2020). For a number of research participants involved in community-led coproduction there was a sense of public disillusionment with the NCC (see Chapter 7, Sections 7.2.4). This suggests that community-led coproduction can demonstrate high mobilisation while still facing constraints in converting participation into institutional influence, particularly where decision-making spaces remain closed or discretionary. This mode of coproduction is typically complemented by other modes once it gains traction, as illustrated in the case of the Green Park petition that was started by a community leader, as presented in section 6.5.3. This illustrates how initiatives may shift between modes over time, moving from community mobilisation towards CSO-led or partnership-led forms as access, relationships, and organisational capacity evolve.

8.2.2.1 Synthesising the modes of Coproduction

As shown in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, the research shows that participation in coproduction was neither static nor uniformly experienced across stakeholder groups. In Chapter 5, participation was largely framed through formal consultation mechanisms initiated by the local authority, where non-government actors were invited to comment on pre-defined agendas. In contrast, Chapter 6 illustrated how participation shifted when non-government stakeholders initiated or facilitated collaborative processes themselves, particularly through advocacy, campaigning, and partnership-building activities. Chapter 7 further demonstrated how community-led coproduction frequently remained at the margins of decision-making, despite significant time and resource investment.

State-led coproduction processes exhibited no evidence of collaborative participation between local government and non-government stakeholders. The findings suggest that the degree of non-government stakeholder involvement in coproduction is related to their position on the power hierarchy - the higher their power, the greater the participation of non-government stakeholders. This provides a rationale for the associations presented in Table 12 between modes of coproduction and types of participation, as the modes differ not only by who leads them but by how influence is distributed in practice. Existing literature on coproduction highlights that power in collaborative settings is rarely evenly distributed, but instead derives from actors' ability to set agendas, define problems, allocate funding, and determine the procedural boundaries of participation (Lukes, 2004; Purdy, 2012). As Gjaltema et al. (2020, p. 1774) argue, coproduction frequently operates in the shadow of hierarchy,' where state actors retain meta-governance functions that allow them to steer collaboration while formally

inviting participation. Non-government stakeholder-driven coproduction modes appear to be more inclusive, as these stakeholders possess stronger connections to diverse communities and groups. Accordingly, Table 12 should be read as a comparative summary of how different coproduction arrangements shaped opportunities for inclusion, influence, and sustained participation studied across Nottingham.

In terms of partnership-led coproduction, the ideal type would be self-organising, as the founding principle of community-led coproduction (Johnston et al., 2011a; Ansell et al., 2020b). As shown in Table 12, this research found a distinction between CSO and community-led coproduction to reflect differences in organisational structure, strategy, and mechanisms of mobilisation, while recognising that both originate from civil society. In this context, coproduction can, in some instances, involve civil society being 'empowered, permanently mobilised, and automatically engaged in performing public services independent of the state' (Souza and Neto, 2018, p. 127), typically through CSOs.

Taken together, these findings suggest that participation in coproduction is best understood as a dynamic spectrum shaped by power, institutional design, and stakeholder positioning, rather than as a linear progression based on degrees of empowerment. This interpretation aligns with earlier critiques of participation such as Merriam (2020) and Lukes (2004) reviewed in Chapter 2, who caution against assuming that the presence of collaborative mechanisms equates to meaningful influence. Chapter 7 extends on these critiques by showing that stakeholders do not simply experience participation as imposed or constrained, but actively navigate, reinterpret, and, in some cases, strategically accept limited forms of participation when doing so serves other stakeholder interests. This suggests that participation is not only structured by power, but also relationally negotiated in practice, reinforcing the need to analyse coproduction contextually rather than normatively (Bevir, 2020; Wang and Ran, 2021).

8.3 A Novel Conceptualisation of Local Collaborative Governance

This section brings together the conceptual foundations outlined in Chapter 2 with the empirical insights developed across Chapters 4 to 7 to advance a novel, empirically grounded conceptualisation of local CG. In this thesis, CG is understood as the broader institutional and relational framework through which public decision-making is organised, while coproduction is examined as the *practice* through which the principles of CG including shared power, inclusion, deliberation, and joint problem-solving are enacted in situ.

As discussed in Chapter 2, while CG and coproduction are often presented normatively as vehicles for repairing local government and civil society relations and generating public value (Ansell and Gash, 2008b; K. Emerson, Nabatchi and S. Balogh, 2012; Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017). However, critics (Beebeejaun *et al.*, 2015; Hastings *et al.*, 2017; Cluley, Parker and Radnor, 2021; Eriksson, Williams and Hellström, 2023) increasingly question the extent to which these principles are realised in practice, particularly under conditions of austerity, power asymmetry, and institutional constraint.

Responding to these critiques, this study empirically examines coproduction as the situated practice through which CG principles are enacted by different stakeholders within Nottingham. Section 8.2 presented two interpretive tools: the spectrum of participation (Figure 5) and the empirically observed modes of coproduction (Table 7), to capture these empirical findings. The integrated governance framework (Figure 12) synthesises patterns observed across Chapters 4 - 7 by overlaying the principles of coproduction onto Ansell and Gash's (2008) classic CG framework, drawing attention to the space between *intentions* and *realities* in the practice of coproduction. While the original framework emphasises conditions, processes, and outcomes conducive to collaboration, the integrated framework developed here incorporates three additional dimensions revealed through the empirical analysis: the incentives that motivate engagement in coproduction, the institutional realities that mediate collaborative practice, and the outcomes (intended and unintended) that emerge as a result. In doing so, this section expands Ansell and Gash's framework, offering a critical and contextually grounded account of how CG operates through the practice of coproduction within a local urban setting.

The remainder of this section unpacks Figure 6 in detail. Section 8.3.1 examines the traditional governance arrangements that structured the institutional context for coproduction in Nottingham. Section 8.3.2 explores the incentives that motivated stakeholders to engage in collaborative processes, while Section 8.3.3 analyses the realities of CG as enacted in practice. Finally, Section 8.3.4 considers the outcomes of coproduction, distinguishing between aspirational public value and the unintended emergence of public disvalue. Together, these sections demonstrate how CG in

Nottingham was shaped not only by collaborative intent, but by the interaction between governance arrangements and situated practices of coproduction.

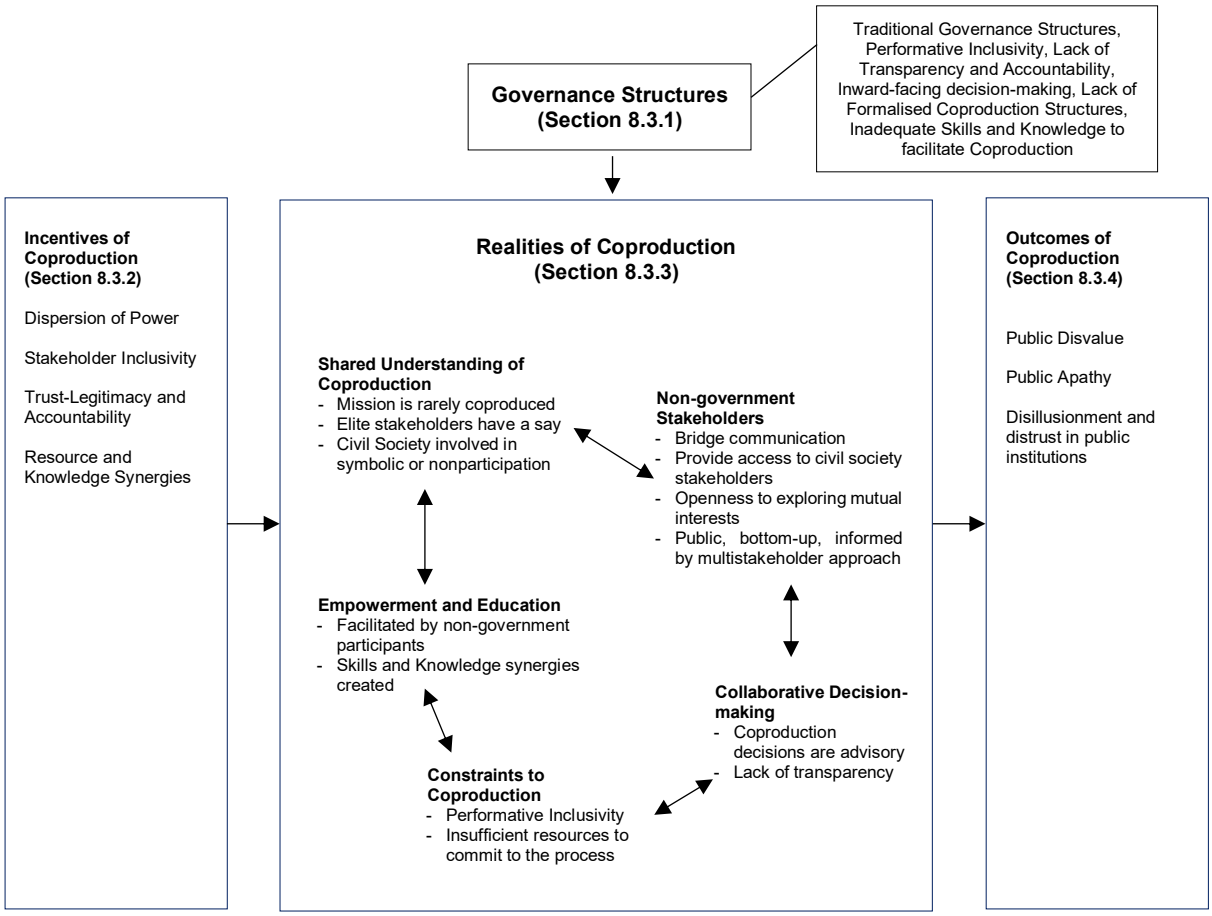


Figure 6 Re-developed Model of Collaborative Governance (Adapted from Ansel and Gash's (2008, p. 550)

8.3.1 Traditional Governance Arrangements

This section outlines the institutional context within which coproduction unfolded. Chapters 6 and 7 consistently suggested entrenched governance structures, limited institutional capacity, and exclusionary decision-making processes. As illustrated in Figure 6, the research explored how coproduction outcomes emerge from the interaction between incentives, coproduction processes, and institutional constraints in a particular place-based context. These relational dynamics substantiates the research of Gherhes et al. (2023) who identified power asymmetries and institutional arrangements as key challenges to local collaboration, while offering that contextually grounded explanations of how these dynamics manifest in urban governance spaces.

Scholars admit that CG is ‘not an alternative method of carrying out policy and providing public service, but a realisation of a historically embedded and entrenched idea describing how humans organise and manage their public affairs’ (Wang and Ran, 2021b, p. 1205). Traditional governance arrangements, characterised by top-down decision-making and concentrated power, contradicts the core principles of CG (Souza and Neto, 2018; Ran and Qi, 2019). In practice, however, CG within the city emerged not from shared intent but from necessity, consistent with Ansell and Gash (2008b), who argue that collaboration is often driven less by consensus than by structural pressures. Where stakeholders are highly interdependent, persistent conflict and policy deadlock can themselves create the conditions that compel actors to engage collaboratively, even in the absence of trust or shared goals.

Traditional governance arrangements are positioned as the overarching institutional context within which coproduction unfolded in Nottingham. These arrangements were characterised by performative forms of inclusivity, limited transparency and accountability, inward-facing decision-making practices, the absence of formalised coproduction structures, and insufficient resourcing to meaningfully support collaborative processes. Collectively, these conditions shaped both the design of coproduction initiatives and the outcomes they produced in practice. These findings are in line with Rosyadia et al., (2020, p. 1255) who identified ‘lack of resources, inadequate continual change, and utilisation of power by certain groups’. However, these empirical findings stand in contrast to the theoretical assumptions of CG and coproduction in the literature as they assume a partial move away from traditional governance arrangements in favour of CG characteristics including shared power, deliberation, and trust (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017).

The empirical findings in Chapter 5 support this critique, suggesting how statutory responsibilities and formal decision-making authority remained firmly located within the NCC, in spite of the coproduction practices employed. Even where coproduction was initiated, decisions were ultimately governed by national accountability policies, statutory duties, and budgetary factors. These governance arrangements shaped what forms of coproduction were possible and which outputs could be produced. This validates previous critical literature that cautions collaborative practices such as coproduction are frequently embedded within existing traditional governance

arrangements (Peck, 2012; Elston and Bel, 2023). These continue to exert influence through statutory obligations, formal accountability mechanisms, and organisational norms.

Furthermore, traditional governance characteristics such as lack of transparency and accountability were particularly evident across local government-led and partnership-led coproduction mechanisms (discussed in Chapter 6). Advisory boards, steering groups, and partnership forums created spaces for engagement, yet the NCC retained agenda-setting power, controlled access to coproduction processes, and determined whether coproduced inputs were integrated into final decisions. While existing literature characterises CG as designed to be transparent (Fung, 2006; Emerson, Nabatchi and S. B. Balogh, 2012), the empirical findings of the study contradict this view as collaborative practices within NCC lacked transparency. These findings align with Warren and Visser (2016), who stress the importance of institutional safeguards, particularly transparent decision-making processes in coproduction. In the absence of such safeguards, collaborative arrangements risk reinforcing exclusionary practices associated with traditional governance structures rather than challenging them.

These structures also shaped the incentives and rationalities underpinning coproduction in Nottingham. As shown in Chapter 5, local government actors frequently framed coproduction as a means of enhancing legitimacy, managing scrutiny, and demonstrating responsiveness, rather than as a mechanism for redistributing power. This managerial orientation reflects traditional governance logics in which participation is valued instrumentally, as a tool to support existing decision-making processes rather than transform them. The influence of traditional governance structures was further evident in the lack of formalised coproduction structures due to financial constraints (discussed in Chapters 6 and 7). Participation opportunities were often tied to specific projects, consultations, or funding cycles, reinforcing short-term participation rather than sustained collaboration. These findings align with Davies and Blanco (2017, p. 1532) on urban austerity and stakeholder collaborations, finding that ‘participatory governance is more likely to flourish in ‘good times’, when investment is high, public services robust and political commitment strong’. Importantly, the persistence of traditional governance structures does not imply the

absence of collaborative intent, as will be discussed in the following section. Rather, it highlights the conditions under which coproduction was negotiated and constrained.

This is evident in the limited influence afforded to non-government stakeholders, often relegated to advisory roles with minimal impact on decision-making. This tokenistic participation is further exacerbated by a lack of capacity within local government (see Section 7.4) to support meaningful coproduction. Insufficient skills and resources result in symbolic consultations, inadequate participation tools, and a lack of transparency regarding the outcomes of non-government stakeholder contributions. Civil society stakeholders, as shown in Chapter 7, demonstrated a clear awareness of these structural limits and adapted their participation strategies, accordingly, combining participation within formal coproduction spaces with advocacy, campaigning, and informal mobilisation beyond them. This dynamic suggests that coproduction was shaped as much by institutional limits as by stakeholder agency.

Traditional governance structures, as conceptualised at the top of Figure 6, shape the entire context within which coproduction is initiated, practiced and experienced. Therefore, the incentives for coproduction in Nottingham must be read as emerging from, and responding to, the institutional conditions described above, rather than as abstract commitments to collaboration. Drawing on Chapter 5, the incentives for coproduction identified in this study can be grouped into four overlapping but analytically distinct categories: dispersion of power, stakeholder inclusivity, trust, legitimacy and accountability, and resource and knowledge synergies. These are discussed in the following section.

8.3.2 Incentives of Coproduction

Specifically, the research looked at stakeholders' understanding of the rationales and potential of coproduction and how this shaped the collaborations that characterise coproduction. With regard to the broader literature, this study reveals diverse meanings associated with modes of coproduction which led to ambiguity and disconnectedness. These inherent challenges can be attributed to several reasons. Firstly, coproduction is a broad concept that can be interpreted and enacted in different ways. This lack of clarity and the diverse meanings are also evident when we read

across the various disciplines where the concept has gained popularity. As discussed in Chapter 2, the concept is used in healthcare to reconfigure relationships between service providers and service users (Emerson, 2018; Agbodzakey, 2021), and in marketing to involve consumers in product design (Ansell and Gash, 2008b; Sawkins, 2024). Within public administration and management, coproduction similarly reflects a shift away from centralised decision-making (Emerson, Nabatchi and S. B. Balogh, 2012; Purdy, 2012; Goodwin, 2019; Bovaird and Loeffler, 2022), but it has been framed both as a normative response to declining public trust (Fitzgerald and Wolak, 2016; Arkorful *et al.*, 2021).

Contextual drivers for CG in Nottingham were multifaceted, originating from both top-down and bottom-up pressures. National government policies promoting devolution and localism created top-down drivers for collaborative approaches (Davies and Blanco, 2017). The study's findings confirmed the current literature, attributing the limitations in how coproduction operated in this context to the decline in local government funding, leading to insufficient allocation of resources and time. Lowndes and Pratchett (2012) points to the Big Society as the tipping point for devolution in the United Kingdom, transferring greater responsibilities to local government bodies to make decisions and take charge of local public services. However, this transfer of responsibilities was not backed with appropriate funding, and over the years has only declined against the burgeoning increase in public service responsibility.

Simultaneously, contextual drivers for coproduction also emerged from non-government stakeholders, as bottom-up pressures arose from public demands for greater transparency, accountability, and involvement in governance. Together, these top-down and bottom-up forces created a complex dynamic that prompted the local government to initiate and facilitate collaborative mechanisms for non-government stakeholder participation. However, as highlighted by Waheduzzaman et al. (2018), such mechanisms can be distorted when underlying power asymmetries remain unaddressed. Limited transparency in consultation processes, combined with the use of selective and exclusive collaborative arrangements, can enable elite actors to shape agendas, control access, and constrain dissenting perspectives. This form of elite capture undermines the democratic intent of collaboration and reinforces distrust,

particularly among marginalised or less organised groups (Warren and Visser, 2016; Levine, 2017).

Government stakeholders adapted CG as a vehicle to address public concerns towards trust, legitimacy, transparency and accountability. While there has been a global and national policy discourse shift away from the language of 'governing' towards CG, in practice this shift remained largely focused on repairing government–public relations and managing perceptions, rather than redistributing power or decision-making authority. This finding aligns with critical scholarship on coproduction, which highlights how collaborative practices frequently operate within technocratic and managerial frameworks that prioritise efficiency, performance, and measurable outputs over the relational and time-intensive work of building mutual understanding (Williams et al., 2020). Bell and Pahl (2018) further argue that, despite being framed as socially progressive, coproduction is increasingly shaped by neoliberal governance logics that instrumentalise participation to deliver pre-defined institutional goals rather than enable meaningful power-sharing. Consistent with this, several local government and non-government stakeholders in Nottingham understood coproduction as a form of social education, aimed at improving leadership capacity and participation skills in ways that ultimately supplemented, rather than challenged, existing managerial governance arrangements, as also observed by O'Flynn (2007).

The motivations for coproduction, as presented in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3) were equally diverse and complicated. Stakeholders emphasised diverse motivations, from empowering non-government actors and fostering shared ownership to promoting sustainable development and bridging socio-economic disparities. These motivations often intersected and overlapped as found by Emerson and Gerlak (2014), creating a dynamic interplay of interests and priorities. For example, in Chapter 5 some stakeholders called for increased reciprocity and community ownership, while others highlighted the need for strategic, meaningful collaboration to address complex challenges.

In line with the work of Sawkins (2024), most local government participants highlighted the need for collective and individual agency for the responsibilisation and achievement of the common good, while most non-government actors recognised

motivations in terms of the benefits for sustainable development, and value-added social capital through coproduction. Additionally, Fenwick (2012, p. 14) suggested that the creative class/urban public are blurring the line between the governed and the government which '…raises questions about who has power to make decisions..'. This movement in public administration, from government to governance was observed by several local government and non-government actors (see Sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2). The study supported the findings of Wisnumurti er al. (2020) that collaborative practices were also driven by resource synergies, collective intelligence, and enhanced agency.

There was a clear disconnect between the rationales of coproduction amongst stakeholder groups, as presented in Chapter 5. This study revealed that local government-initiated coproduction processes did not align with the characteristics of coproduction as put forth by Souza and Neto (2018). As coproduction unfolded in Nottingham, non-government stakeholders expressed a lack of transparency and accountability in how their contributions and participation would influence the decision-making processes. Although these processes and initiatives were framed as collaborative decision-making, in practice these decisions were being driven by a managerial and control-regime agenda in exclusive invite-only spaces amongst major stakeholders. These findings align with Goodwin (2019), who cautions the divide between the rhetoric and practice of coproduction. Local government-led collaborative mechanisms in Nottingham suggested limitations regarding the depth and impact of civil society participation in decision-making. Predominantly, these mechanisms consisted of consultations and surveys, restricting public involvement to feedback on pre-determined decisions and policies. This approach restricted civil society's participation in governance decision-making processes to the lower rungs of Arnstein's (1960) ladder, namely, tokenism and nonparticipation. Furthermore, in line with Warren and Visser's (2016) findings, this study found that the asymmetries of power and expertise led to elite capture, where the influence of professional non-government stakeholders dominated the contributions of civil society stakeholders.

The local government's incentives for initiating coproduction (Chapter 5) versus local government-led coproduction (as unpacked in Chapter 6) uncovered in this research were varied, and sometimes even paradoxical in nature. While coproduction was

frequently promoted as a collaborative and inclusive practice, its practice was limited and inconsistent. This lack of conceptual clarity was not confined to local government actors but was also reflected among non-government stakeholders. Batory and Svenson (2019, p. 28) share a similar line of argument where, 'the rapid uptake of CG and related concepts, such as coordination, cooperation, joined-up governance, network governance and interactive governance, led to a rather amorphous, diffused discussion, rather than a coherent narrative'. In Nottingham, this conceptual ambiguity translated into practice, with several non-government stakeholders emphasising that the absence of formalised coproduction processes made it difficult to contribute meaningfully to local planning and decision-making (see Section 7.3).

In this research, non-government participants in possession of relatively more power and resources, for example, organisations such as academia and CSOs, held more agency in decision-making. As identified by research participants, coproduction is not inevitably inclusive and can exclude certain population groups, particularly marginalised communities who may not have the resources to take part. To this end, scholars have cautioned about the practice of coproduction being limited to tokenistic participation (Goodwin, 2019; Cluley, Parker and Radnor, 2021). The data revealed that civil society participants are also vulnerable to being drawn into tokenistic collaboration to legitimise pre-determined local government decisions.

As identified in my research, the contextual drivers and motivations for coproduction (see sections 5.2 and 5.3) versus the experiences of coproduction (see sections 7.2, 7.3 and 7.4) seemed varied and, in several instances even conflicting in nature. Furthermore, the local government's understanding of coproduction appeared to be limited. This empirical observation aligns with Nabatchi et al. (2017, p. 767), who acknowledged the 'tremendous variety in how coproduction is practiced and studied in public administration', therefore leading to the lack of clarity and consistency in its study and practice.

The study's findings indicate that coproduction frequently brought together actors with asymmetrical expectations and incentives, which in turn shaped the form and depth of collaboration. Rather than coalescing around shared understandings of collective decision-making, collaborative mechanisms often functioned as negotiated spaces

where participation was conditional and uneven. This interpretation aligns with earlier literature discussed in the thesis that frames coproduction as a contested and ambiguous practice (Ansell et al., 2020b), while also extending it by suggesting how incentive misalignment contributes to the persistence of symbolic coproduction (Williams et al., 2020).

8.3.3 Realities of Collaborative Governance

This section focuses on the mechanisms through which these institutional conditions discussed above shaped collaborative practice. Building on section 8.3.2, a central reality shaping CG in Nottingham was the persistence of traditional governance values and practices. Although CG was frequently framed as an alternative to hierarchical decision-making, the empirical findings suggest that collaborative initiatives were enacted within pre-existing institutional arrangements rather than replacing them. This supports the findings of Bradley et al. who contend that collaborative initiatives (such as coproduction) and CG are entwined, where 'both are core aspects of creating the transformations needed for more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient cities' (2022, p. 17).

This was particularly evident in local government-led coproduction mechanisms discussed in Chapter 6, such as advisory boards and formal partnership platforms. While these mechanisms created opportunities for dialogue, the decision-making authority remained with the NCC. Contributions from non-government stakeholders were advisory, with a lack of transparency and accountability regarding the outcomes of coproduction. This layering of coproduction mechanisms onto hierarchical governance structures resulted in hybrid arrangements in which coproduction coexisted with, rather than displaced, traditional governance arrangements.

Inward-facing decision-making cultures further constrained the enactment of CG. The findings in Chapters 5 and 6 suggest that many collaborative processes were designed internally by the NCC, with policy agendas, objectives, and participation established prior to stakeholder involvement. This finding echoes critiques of CG that characterise consultation-led participation as symbolic participation, where involvement is limited

to feedback on pre-defined agendas rather than shared decision-making (O'Flynn, 2007; Williams et al., 2020). For example, consultation exercises and participation initiatives were often framed around pre-determined policy directions, with non-government stakeholders invited to comment on proposals rather than participate in problem definition or agenda-setting. Exclusive coproduction was particularly evident in the invite-only mechanisms discussed in Chapter 6, where stakeholder participation was restricted to selected stakeholders based on expertise, institutional resources, or perceived strategic value. This pattern reflects processes of elite capture within coproduction spaces, as identified by Perry (2022a) and Lee, Feiertag and Unger (2024b), where participation becomes dominated by stakeholders with greater institutional capital, professional expertise, and access to decision-making networks, thereby marginalising civil society stakeholders.

Furthermore, in line with Lowndes and Pratchett (2012), austerity also gave way to performative inclusivity, which emerged as a defining feature of coproduction practices in Nottingham. Across the empirical chapters, non-government stakeholders reported limited clarity regarding how their contributions influenced decisions. This was particularly evident in Chapter 7, where civil society actors described repeated participation in consultations, panels, and workshops without receiving feedback on how their input had been used. Another key feature of CG within Nottingham was the lack of formalised structures to support coproduction. The findings in Chapters 6 and 7 suggest that many collaborative initiatives were episodic, project-based, or dependent on individual champions rather than embedded within stable institutional frameworks. For example, several coproduction initiatives discussed in Chapter 6 were tied to specific projects or funding streams and dissolved once these ended. This pattern reflects wider debates identified in Chapter 2, which highlight how, under conditions of austerity, policy uncertainty, and constrained institutional capacity, CG frequently relies on informal and trust-based coordination rather than formalised institutional arrangements (Lowndes and Gardner, 2016; Beshi and Kaur, 2020; Arkorful et al., 2021; Pill, 2022).

The absence of clear rules governing how participation should be integrated into decision-making meant that participation remained discretionary. Non-government stakeholders described uncertainty about when and how they would be involved, as

well as inconsistency in opportunities to participate across different initiatives. As a result, trust operated as a fragile substitute for institutionalisation, leaving collaborative practices vulnerable to disruption and limiting the development of sustained collaborative capacity (Ansell and Gash, 2007; O'Leary and Bingham, 2009; Waardenburg et al., 2020). This lack of institutionalisation limited the development of sustained collaborative capacity and contributed to uneven experiences of participation across governance sites.

Capacity constraints constituted a further reality shaping CG in practice. This supports the findings of Hastings et al. (2017) who highlight that austerity in the UK has had an acute impact in urban areas. Across Chapters 4 and 5, local government stakeholders repeatedly highlighted pressures relating to financial constraints, staffing, and competing priorities. These constraints influenced both the design and delivery of coproduction mechanisms in Nottingham, limiting the time and resources available to support deliberative and inclusive processes. As a result, participation frequently defaulted to familiar consultation formats that were less resource-intensive but also less collaborative. For example, surveys and short-term consultations were used in place of sustained deliberative processes, as discussed in Chapter 6. While these mechanisms enabled broad participation, they offered limited opportunities for dialogue or collective decision-making. This tendency reflects wider tensions identified in the CG literature between democratic responsiveness and managerial efficiency, particularly under conditions of fiscal constraint and administrative reform (Keping, 2018). As highlighted by Newig et al. (2018) and Ulibarri et al. (2020), CG extends beyond consultation to encompass shared agenda-setting, resource mobilisation, and joint decision-making across the policy cycle, principles that have become synonymous with coproduction. This was consistent with coproduction practices within Nottingham where local government and non-government stakeholders often held divergent interpretations of what coproduction entailed (see Chapters 5-7). For some local government actors, coproduction was understood as consultation or engagement, while non-government stakeholders often associated it with joint problem-solving or shared decision-making. This finding resonates with Williams et al.'s (2020) critique of the increasingly symbolic and technocratic use of coproduction, whereby the term is stretched to encompass a wide range of participation practices. In Nottingham, the conceptual ambiguity surrounding coproduction enabled its

application across diverse governance activities, while simultaneously obscuring questions of authority, influence, and decision-making power.

This divergence was particularly evident in civil society accounts presented in Chapter 7, where participants expressed frustration that processes framed as coproduction did not align with their expectations of influence. Rather than realising the democratic aspirations associated with coproduction, these practices often reproduced hierarchical relationships between local government and non-government actors, reinforcing perceptions of symbolic participation. The ambiguity surrounding the term enabled it to be applied to a wide range of practices without resolving questions of power or authority. In contrast to normative accounts that emphasise coproduction as a means of fostering horizontal, iterative, and deliberative governance relations across the policy cycle (Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017; Goulart and Falanga, 2022), the findings suggest that coproduction in Nottingham remained largely confined to limited forms of engagement. In practice, this contributed to mismatched expectations and reinforced perceptions of symbolic participation.

The realities of co production identified in this section illustrate how coproduction in Nottingham was shaped by a set of interacting conditions that mediated between incentives and outcomes. As represented in Figure 6, these realities did not operate as isolated constraints, but as a constellation of governance arrangements, shared understanding, and resource limitations that collectively shaped how coproduction was enacted and experienced in practice.

While incentives for coproduction such as dispersion of power, stakeholder inclusivity, trust, and resource synergies were clearly articulated, their practice was consistently shaped by traditional governance arrangements, an inward facing decision making culture, and limited institutional capacity. At the same time, the absence of a shared understanding of coproduction, combined with elite domination of coproduction and lack of transparency and accountability, constrained the scope for meaningful influence by civil society actors. Universities played important intermediary and enabling roles, particularly in relation to communication, empowerment, and skills development, yet these contributions rarely altered the underlying distribution of decision-making authority. By positioning realities as mediating conditions within the

framework, this section suggests that the outcomes of coproduction cannot be understood solely through incentives but must be interpreted in relation to the institutional and relational contexts within which coproduction unfolds.

8.3.4 Outcomes of Coproduction

This section examines the consequences of these dynamics for stakeholders and governance outcomes. As previously discussed in this chapter, the dispersion of power in the practice of coproduction does not align with the principles of coproduction. In Chapter 2 and Chapter 5 respectively, the study's findings aligned with existing literature where coproduction was utilised as an approach to repair government - public relations though reinstating trust (Ran and Qi, 2019; Beshi and Kaur, 2020), enhance legitimacy (Sandström, Crona and Bodin, 2014; Mosley and Wong, 2021), utilise resource synergies(Ostrom, 1996; Lasker and Weiss, 2003; Wisnumurti et al., 2020), and overcome urban governance challenges (Colding, Barthel and Sörqvist, 2019; Head, 2019). Cluley et al. (2021) propose that these intended outcomes of coproduction are the essence of public value. The study further presented in Chapter 7, that the rhetoric and intended outcomes of coproduction do not align with the actual outcomes of coproduction. Here, the study proposes that this misalignment leads to an unintended consequence of coproduction, as proposed by several scholars as public disvalue (Benington, 2011; Esposito and Ricci, 2015; Steen, Brandsen and Verschuere, 2018). Public disvalue is characterised as an unintended consequence of coproduction, such as inequality of participation (Choi and Robertson, 2014; Beebeejaun et al., 2015), power imbalances (Souza and Neto, 2018; Ran and Qi, 2019), further erosion of trust (Williams et al., 2020), and public disillusionment (Zhelnina, 2020). When such forms of public disvalue persist, they constitute failures of coproduction that contribute to citizen apathy, the disengagement of civil society from governance processes, and weakened decision-making capacity (Steen, Brandsen and Verschuere, 2018; Turnhout et al., 2020).

There are a range of intended and unintended factors that contribute towards the creation of public disvalue that emerged in the study. The study presents that public disvalue is a combined result of constraints that the government stakeholders operate

in, caused by external factors, and traditional governance values and practices, along with an inadequacy of skills emerging from within the government. It is well established within coproduction literature, that the rhetoric of coproduction is overly optimistic about the notion of creating public value and achieving positive intended consequences as a result. While the 'intuitive appeal' (Dudau, Glennon and Verschuere, 2019) of inclusive approaches to policy and public decisions guides its uptake by governments, the potential value is usually inflated (Sancino *et al.*, 2023) against the resources and time allocated to implement these collaborative practices. This disconnect was observed throughout the study, where the intentions of well-informed decision making, stakeholder inclusivity, and a desire to repair trust and legitimacy were impacted by limitations in how CG operated in this context. The processes of coproduction with civil society stakeholders were limited to predominantly tokenistic participation and nonparticipation, while formal stakeholders were able to access self-interested and rarely, collaborative participation in these processes.

Local government-led coproduction that was observed in this study, was in contrast to the local government's rationale for coproduction, highlighing the performative nature of such efforts (Turnhout, Van Bommel and Aarts, 2010). The research findings highlighted a significant disconnect between the aspirations of CG and the realities experienced by stakeholders. This disconnect created a sense of public disvalue, attributed to both a lack of essential skills within local government and deeply ingrained, counterproductive governance practices. This institutionally entrenched reluctance to relinquish control over decision-making processes manifests itself in coproduction practice as limited stakeholder influence, with non-stakeholder participation often relegated to a purely advisory role (Dudau, Glennon and Verschuere, 2019).

Finally, the lack of formalised structures and a commitment to sustained, longitudinal coproduction undermines the value creation and achievement of the common good. As highlighted by Thompson et al. (2007) and Torfing and Ansell (2016), CG and coproduction require time, institutional support, and repeated interaction to build trust, shared understanding, and collaborative capacity. Episodic and short-term approaches and the continued reliance on traditional governance principles result in inconsistent experiences and limited opportunities for building long-term partnerships,

fostering inclusive decision-making processes, and enhancing trust (Lowndes and Pratchett, 2012; Davies and Blanco, 2017; Fuller, 2017). Accordingly, the findings point to a critical need for a fundamental shift in both local government the capacity and culture to achieve the transformative potential of CG and coproduction. Dismantling traditional power structures (Chapter 5 Section 5.2), embracing transparency (Chapter 5 Section 5.2.5), and sustained participation (Chapter 7 Section 7.2 and 7.3) are some of the essential features to transform public disvalue into shared public value.

The research highlights the need to start with questions around ensuring public value for all stakeholders involved in CG and coproduction initiatives. This can only be achieved by meaningfully including these diverse stakeholders from the design phase of the coproduction process, a shared understanding and commitment to the principles of coproduction and aspirational outcomes, enhancing constructive dialogue and policy alignment among the involved organisations, and managing conflicting interests. Establishing this foundation is crucial to realising the transformative potential of CG and avoiding the public disvalue that emerges from the disconnect between aspirations and realities (Bianchi, Nasi and Rivenbark, 2021b).

8.4 Thesis Contributions

In this section, the contributions of the study are emphasised by highlighting how they address the thesis' aims. This thesis has highlighted the complex and multifaceted nature of CG and coproduction as perceived and experienced by multiple stakeholders within the city. This study aligns itself with Turnhout's (2020) stance, arguing that the literature on collaborative approaches to governance can be overly optimistic and positive, and that these processes may further perpetuate existing governance challenges. The concepts of CG and coproduction are underpinned by a history of collaborative approaches to democracy that encapsulate the constant participation amongst multiple stakeholders to achieve public value through collaborative decision-making. Whilst it is difficult to argue against these inherently positive values, this thesis specifically explores the recent critical stream of literature introduced by scholars that

acknowledged alternative outcomes to coproduction (Steen, Brandsen and Verschuere, 2018; Williams et al., 2020) that are not be positive (Dudau, Glennon and Verschuere, 2019; Cluley, Parker and Radnor, 2021), namely public disvalue.

As identified in Chapter 2, existing literature is increasingly calling for the need to study CG within a situated context to understand the local nuances of why and how local government and non-government stakeholders perceive and engage with collaborative mechanisms (Peters et al., 2022; La Grouw et al., 2024). This study, having been situated in a mid-sized city in the UK, addressed the calls for empirical evidence by Peters et al. (2022) and La Grouw et al. (2024). Analysing multistakeholder coproduction in Nottingham city has helped present an urban understanding of collaboration in the UK. It has illustrated how local government and non-government stakeholders within a situated context form different interactions, processes, and mechanisms of coproduction at the local level. Specifically, the study highlights non-government stakeholders that are engaging, facilitating, self-organising and collaborating across the city at various sites. To date, coproduction and urban CG have been predominantly focused on local government-led projects or cross-case study comparisons as well as institutional stakeholder participation.

Therefore, this study builds upon existing literature and contributes empirical evidence to understudied local governance practices, as local governance seeks to address complex policy problems beyond the capacity of one stakeholder group. Inclusive approaches such as coproduction have therefore become 'necessary to address highly contested arenas of policy and planning' (Head, 2019, p. 182). This study acknowledged that the barriers to effective coproduction and creation of public value may not always originate from structural inequalities or power imbalances. Instead, they can originate from the localised situated practices of coproduction and the actions of the individuals involved, which may undermine the potential of CG principles. Furthermore, this study has unpacked stories of a less than perfect case of coproduction in Nottingham in line with the call to evidence of 'failed' and messy cases of collaborative policymaking (Richardson, Durose and Perry, 2019; Sawkins, 2024).

In doing so, this study reveals that factors such as a history of long-term collaboration (Chapter 6, Section 6.4), inward-facing decision-making (Chapter 7 Section 7.4.1), and

financial constraints (Chapter 7 Section 7.4.2), can enable or constrain the CG landscape in a particular location. Furthermore Williams et al. (2020) argue that collaborative initiatives can undermine legitimacy when they raise expectations of influence that are not subsequently realised. This is in line with the findings of this study, particularly in relation to symbolic and non-participatory forms of coproduction, where repeated engagement without visible impact contributed to disillusionment and apathy among civil society stakeholders. At the same time, the findings suggest that disillusionment did not uniformly lead to withdrawal. Instead, some stakeholders continued to engage pragmatically, recognising the limitations of participation while seeking alternative routes to influence such as self-organisation, advocacy and negotiation (see Section 6.5). These empirical findings extend existing critiques by highlighting how trust erosion and the practice of coproduction can simultaneously coexist within constrained governance contexts.

Furthermore, Cluley, Parker and Radnor (2021) critique coproduction as a managerial practice that often transfers agency to citizens without redistributing power. This thesis aligns closely with their analysis, particularly in relation to self-interested, symbolic participation, and nonparticipation where coproduction functioned as a means of enhancing legitimacy and trust rather than enabling shared decision-making. However, the findings also indicate that responsibilisation was not uniformly imposed. In some community- and CSO-led coproduction, collaboration was used as tools for empowerment, advocacy, and negotiation.

Drawing directly on the analysis developed in Chapter 8, the thesis presents how CG principles are enacted through coproduction, how participation varies across modes of coproduction, and how both public value and public disvalue are produced. The contributions of the thesis are structured across two interrelated domains. First, it advances theoretical debates by reconceptualising the relationship between CG and coproduction and extends existing frameworks to account for power, incentives, and unintended outcomes. Second, it provides empirical contributions through a detailed, practice-oriented account of multistakeholder coproduction in Nottingham, offering new insights into participation, power, and governance dynamics in a local setting. Lastly, the thesis offers policy recommendations that, while grounded in the

Nottingham case, are applicable to broader multi-stakeholder CG contexts, particularly in relation to the role of coproduction.

8.4.1 Theoretical Contributions

The primary theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in its conceptualisation of coproduction as the practice through which CG principles are enacted, mediated, and constrained. Building on the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and as discussed throughout Chapter 8, the thesis positions CG as the broader institutional and relational framework, while coproduction is understood as the situated practice through which principles such as shared power, inclusion, deliberation, and joint problem-solving are operationalised. This distinction allows the thesis to move beyond treating coproduction as a normative ideal or policy instrument to an analysis of how CG is experienced and enacted in everyday governance contexts.

This thesis therefore contributes to growing critical debate that challenges the normative assumption that CG and coproduction necessarily generate positive public value. While earlier literature (Ansell and Gash, 2008b; Emerson, Nabatchi and S. B. Balogh, 2012) framed coproduction as a mechanism for improving government legitimacy, and trust, more recent contributions (Williams et al., 2020; Cluley, Parker and Radnor, 2021) have questioned this optimism by pointing to the unintended and adverse consequences that may emerge in practice. In this regard, Steen et al. (2018) emphasise that value and disvalue are experienced differently across stakeholder groups, depending on how participation is structured and whose interests are prioritised. The findings of this study align with this position, demonstrating that public disvalue in Nottingham emerged systematically through modes of coproduction (Table 7) characterised by varied participation (Figure 9), inward-facing decision-making, and traditional governance arrangements. Furthermore, power plays a very important role in determining the extent of influence in decision-making as elite stakeholders typically determine outcomes through invite-only coproduction mechanisms (Kenneth D Butterfield, Reed and Lemak, 2004; Crompton, 2019). The study confirms that participation is uneven, and is partial to professional/elite stakeholders that can afford to allocate resources and time to the coproduction process (Fiorina, 1999).

A central theoretical contribution is the development of an integrated collaborative governance framework (Figure 10), which extends Ansell and Gash's (2008) framework of collaborative governance (Figure 11) by unpacking collaborative governance practices in an urban setting. While the original framework focuses on starting conditions, collaborative processes, and outcomes, this thesis expands the framework (Figure 11) by incorporating empirically grounded dimensions that were shown to be critical in practice: stakeholder incentives for engaging in coproduction, the institutional realities shaping collaborative processes, and the intended and unintended outcomes of coproduction, including public value and public disvalue.

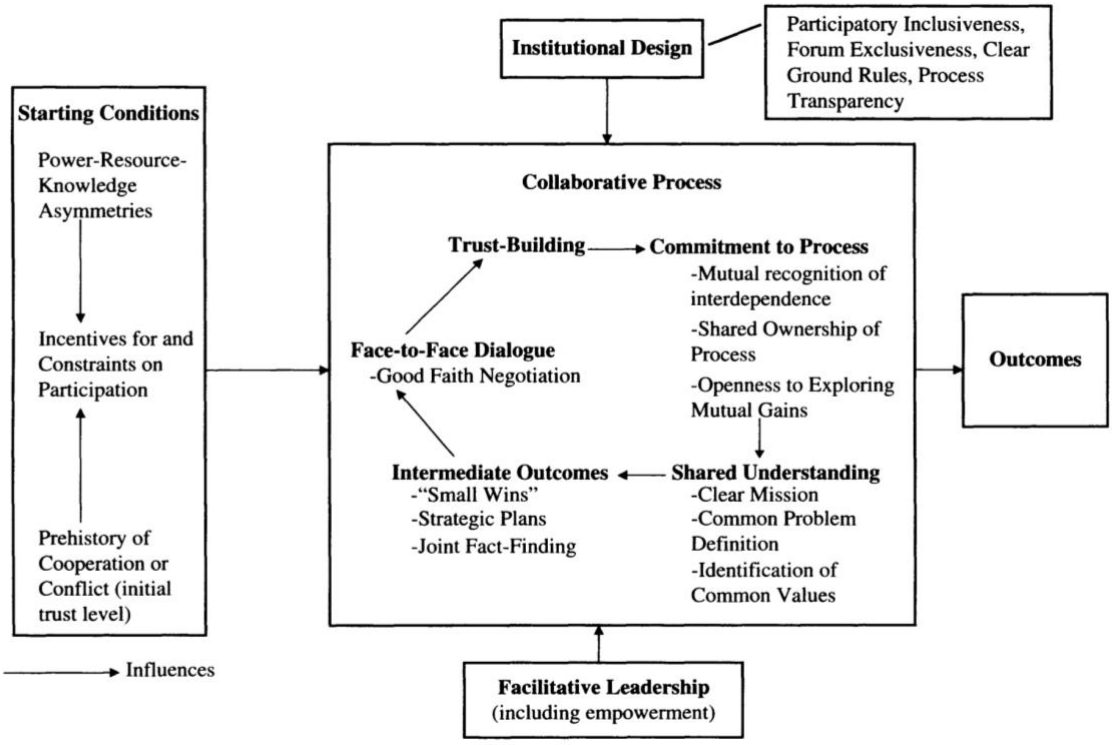


Figure 7 Model of Collaborative Governance Ansell and Gash (2008, p. 550)

By explicitly highlighting the dichotomy between incentives and realities of coproduction, the framework addresses calls for a critical account of CG, particularly under conditions of austerity, power asymmetry, and entrenched governance arrangements (Tsouvalis and Waterton, 2012; Perry and Atherton, 2017; McIvor, 2020b). The study puts forth that a more nuanced understanding of public value is needed, one that acknowledges the complexities of CG and the potential for unintended negative consequences. The study found that the practice of coproduction

in Nottingham was shaped by the various interpretations of CG that exist across different sites, and between different stakeholders in the city. Local Government and elite non-government stakeholders in the power hierarchy tend to have greater involvement in meaningful coproduction processes, such as collective decision-making.

In support of this primary contribution, the thesis also offers two complementary analytical tools that aid interpretation of the empirical material. First, it operationalises participation as a spectrum, which is used to capture variation and movement in coproduction practices rather than to propose a hierarchical or normative model of participation. This thesis uses a spectrum of participation rather than a singular approach to collaboration, similar to 'ladder' of participation (Arnstein, 1969), varieties of participation (Fung, 2006), and types of coproduction (Souza and Neto, 2018). Local government and non-government stakeholders navigate different activities of coproduction through influencing, shaping, facilitating and negotiating. The participation levels varied from engaging in symbolic consultations to meaningful collaboration where local government and non-government stakeholders possess a parity of power in collective decision-making. Many non-government participants were aware of these varying levels of participation.

This conceptualisation also aligns with literature on inclusion in CG (Johnston *et al.*, 2011b; Sandström, Crona and Bodin, 2014; Ansell *et al.*, 2020a) which emphasises the importance how stakeholders are selected and engaged purposefully. Therefore, effective coproduction requires careful consideration of who is involved and how they are engaged, rather than simply aiming for broad participation. As Ansell (2020a) argue, , inclusion in CG practice is an active and strategic process rather than a matter of 'the more the better'. However, the findings of this study suggest that, in practice, efforts towards inclusion can be performative, where the intention to collaborate does not translate into meaningful coproduction (Turnhout, Van Bommel and Aarts, 2010).

Second, it develops a set of empirically grounded modes of coproduction, which serve as building blocks for understanding how different governance arrangements shape opportunities for inclusion, influence, and sustained engagement. Many non-government stakeholders highlighted being aware of the limitations of local

government-led coproduction, admitting that they were still participating for their self-interests. This self-organisation of non-government stakeholders makes multi-stakeholder approaches interesting to study and explore further in urban CG. In doing so, the thesis aligns with and extends critical perspectives on CG (Ansell and Gash, 2008b; Emerson, Nabatchi and S. B. Balogh, 2012; Ansell et al., 2020a), coproduction (Fung, 2006; Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017; Souza and Neto, 2018), and public value (Dudau, Glennon and Verschuere, 2019; Cluley, Parker and Radnor, 2021). It does so by demonstrating how adverse outcomes are produced through specific configurations of governance rather than through participation per se (Souza and Neto, 2018; Steen, Brandsen and Verschuere, 2018; Oliver, Kothari and Mays, 2019).

8.4.2 Empirical Contributions

Empirically, this thesis responds directly to sustained calls within the CG literature for more situated and practice-oriented accounts of how collaborative initiatives unfold in real-world settings. While existing literature has extensively theorised the components, design principles, and conditions associated with CG, several scholars have noted that this literature often struggles to capture the empirical realities of collaborative practice, particularly under conditions of complexity, uncertainty, and institutional constraint (Bevir and Rhodes, 2022). By examining multistakeholder coproduction as it is practiced and experienced within a local urban governance context, this study addresses this gap by foregrounding how collaboration is enacted, negotiated, and constrained to address unique and evolving policy problems (Alford and Head, 2017; Bannink and Trommel, 2019b; Van Duijn, Bannink and Ybema, 2022a).

Secondly, the thesis provides a detailed mapping of the landscape of multistakeholder coproduction in Nottingham and identifies distinct modes of coproduction, including state-led, partnership-led, CSO-led, and community-led coproduction. In doing so, the study responds to critiques that CG research often abstracts collaboration from its institutional and organisational contexts, thereby underestimating the ways in which power, resourcing, and leadership shape collaborative outcomes (La Grouw *et al.*, 2024). The findings demonstrate that coproduction is not experienced uniformly across governance arrangements; instead, opportunities for participation, influence, and

sustained coproduction vary significantly depending on who leads coproduction, how agendas are set, and where decision-making authority is retained.

The empirical finding that state-led coproduction was the only mode characterised by nonparticipation directly addresses concerns raised by Bevir and Rhodes (2022) regarding the disconnect between the rhetoric of CG and its enactment in practice. While CG frameworks (see for example Ansell and Gash, 2007; Kirk Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh, 2012; Bovaird and Loeffler, 2022) frequently assume participation as a defining feature, La Grouw et al. (2024) have acknowledged that translating theoretical components into practice is complex, time-consuming, and often constrained by institutional inertia and competing demands. This study provides empirical evidence of how such constraints manifest in practice, demonstrating how coproduction can be mobilised without enabling meaningful participation when traditional governance arrangements and concentrated power persist.

The thesis also responds to calls for zooming in on the everyday and mundane dynamics of CG in order to better understand how collaboration is continuously shaped through practice (Ivanova, Wallenburg and Bal, 2016; Bannink and Trommel, 2019a; Bevir, 2020). By analysing routine interactions through consultations, strategic partnership, advisory groups, and community-led initiatives, the research shows how seemingly mundane practices such as agenda-setting, feedback mechanisms, informal negotiations, and resource challenges played a role in shaping participation, influence, and perceptions of legitimacy. These findings support Bannink and Trommel's (2019b) argument that attention to the material, spatial, and temporal organisation of collaborative processes is essential for understanding how actor positions are formed and maintained in practice.

Furthermore, by drawing attention to the perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups, including local government actors, civil society, industry, and universities, the thesis directly addresses calls for empirical studies that capture the relational and complex nature of CG (Bevir, 2011; Van Duijn, Bannink and Ybema, 2022a). Rather than privileging a single institutional perspective, the study demonstrates how different actors interpreted, navigated, and responded to coproduction processes in divergent ways, shaped by their positionality within local power hierarchies. This

multistakeholder approach aligns with calls to better understand how CG is experienced across roles and sectors, particularly in addressing local governance problems (Kern and Smutko, 2021; Momen, 2021; Perry, 2022b).

Finally, the empirical analysis contributes to literature emphasising the analytical significance of everyday governance practices by demonstrating how power, meaning, and problem-solving emerge through routine interactions (Kalesnikaite, 2019a; La Grouw *et al.*, 2024). By documenting how non-government stakeholders actively navigated, adapted to, and at times strategically accepted constrained forms of participation, the study complicates accounts that portray actors as either empowered collaborators or passive recipients of exclusion. Instead, the findings reinforce the view that CG is continuously shaped through situated practice, where agency is exercised within, rather than outside of, institutional constraint.

8.4.3 Policy Recommendations

8.4.3.1 National Government Policy Recommendations

- National government should increase and stabilise local government budgets to reflect the scale and complexity of responsibilities that have been devolved to local authorities. Without sufficient and predictable funding, local governments remain constrained in their ability to invest in the skills, infrastructure, and long-term relationships required for meaningful coproduction. Addressing this structural mismatch is essential if CG is to move beyond short-termism and deliver sustained public value at the local level.
- National policy frameworks should explicitly recognise the time, resources, and institutional capacity required to support coproduction. This includes moving away from short-term funding cycles that prioritise rapid delivery over relational and deliberative forms of governance.

8.4.3.2 Local Government Policy Recommendations

- Local governments should shift away from project-based and time-limited approaches to coproduction and invest in sustained, longitudinal structures that enable relationships, trust, and collaborative capacity to develop over time.

- Clear and transparent processes should be established to define how coproduction is initiated, who participates, how agendas are set, and how stakeholder input informs decisions.
- Local authorities should invest in developing skills that support collaborative practice, including facilitation, power-sharing, conflict management, and reflexive learning.
- Local governments should actively reflect on, and challenge traditional governance practices characterised by top-down decision-making and concentrated authority.
- Transparency should extend beyond consultation phases to include clear communication about how stakeholder input is interpreted, prioritised, and translated into outcomes. Closing feedback loops is essential to building trust and mitigating perceptions of tokenistic engagement.

8.5 Summary

In this chapter, the key empirical findings from Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 were discussed in relation to the existing literature. The chapter examined the disconnect between the incentives and realities of coproduction as the practice of CG in Nottingham city, revealing a sense of public disvalue stemming from inadequate local government skills, entrenched top-down governance practices, and a lack of sustained commitment to meaningful stakeholder participation. It highlighted the limitations of symbolic participation, the absence of institutionalised coproduction structures, and the challenges associated with fostering trust and achieving shared public value. Rather than functioning in line with the principles of CG, the study found that coproduction frequently operated in constrained and performative ways, shaped by institutional inertia and inward-facing decision-making processes. The findings point to the need for a shift in how coproduction is understood and practised, emphasising the importance of acknowledging, and dismantling, traditional power structures, embedding transparency, and sustained participation within coproduction processes. In doing so, this chapter presented the study's core contributions through empirically grounded analysis of localised coproduction in an urban context.

Specifically, the chapter introduced a spectrum of participation and a set of empirically observed modes of coproduction to capture the uneven, relational, and asymmetrical nature of stakeholder engagement. Furthermore, by drawing on and extending Ansell and Gash's (2008b)model of CG, the chapter demonstrated how collaborative principles are mediated through situated and localised practice in Nottingham. Lastly, the analysis engaged with critical scholarship on public disvalue to show how misalignments between collaborative rhetoric and practice produced unintended and adverse outcomes for stakeholders (Steen, Brandsen and Verschuere, 2018; Oliver, Kothari and Mays, 2019; Cluley, Parker and Radnor, 2021).

Altogether, these dynamics (as shown in Figure 6) contributed to the emergence of public disvalue, experienced by stakeholders as disillusionment and cynicism arising from the failure of CG and coproduction to fulfil their promises of shared power and meaningful participation (Loeffler and Bovaird, 2018). However, the findings highlight that stakeholders actively navigate, reinterpret, and sometimes strategically accept limited participation when it serves other organisational interests. Overall, this thesis has shown that CG in Nottingham is complex, contested, and dynamic. Consistent with Sorrentino et al.'s (2018) characterisation of coproduction as a heterogeneous umbrella concept, collaboration was shown to be continuously shaped, negotiated, and at times disregarded through practices of disengagement and apathy. By empirically tracing how coproduction was enacted across different governance arrangements, this study opens the black box coproduction as a practice of CG (La Grouw et al., 2024).

Chapter 9 CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on the key issues that emerge from the findings and highlights the contribution that this thesis makes to current research and practice of coproduction practice and collaborative governance (CG). Section 9.2 summarises the overall aim, theoretical foundations, methodological approach, and key empirical findings of the thesis, culminating in the development of an integrated framework of CG. Finally, Section 9.3 reflects on the limitations and challenges encountered during the research, and identifies opportunities for future research, pointing to opportunities for further exploration of coproduction as a mode of CG dynamics in urban contexts.

To address this, the research adopted a qualitative case study approach (Chapter 3), which enabled an in depth and context specific analysis of CG practices within a UK city (Nottingham). This approach builds on the theoretical foundations outlined in Chapter 2, while extending existing literature through empirically grounded insights into the dynamics of coproduction in a single city context.

9.2 Summary of the thesis

The overall aim of the study was to analyse coproduction as the situated practice of CG in Nottingham. The thesis introduction (Chapter 1) highlighted the need to study ‘natural experiments’ in collaboration: situations where there are multiple independent cases of collaboration operating under the auspices of a similar regulatory program, public agency, or law’ (Ansell and Gash, 2008b).

As outlined in Chapter 2, this research draws on three key bodies of literature to analyse multistakeholder coproduction in an urban setting: the rise of CG, coproduction, and the urban context of collaboration. The literature review uncovered the following research gaps: firstly, these three bodies of literature represent and explain different aspects of multi-stakeholder collaboration but in research silos therefore identifying the need for a holistic approach to the localised practice of coproduction arrangements; and secondly each concept can be studied from a stakeholder or city perspective, but a connection between the two is understudied.

This thesis aims to address these research gaps, through an overarching research question '*How does multistakeholder coproduction take place in Nottingham?'.*

To address this research question, the study aimed to;

Objective 1: Explore local government and non-government stakeholders' rationales to participate in coproduction in Nottingham.

Objective 2: Map the landscape of multi-stakeholder coproduction in Nottingham.

Objective 3. Investigate the perceptions of local government and non-governmental stakeholders on the role and nature of coproduction processes within Nottingham.

To answer this research question, this study employed a qualitative methodology employing an interpretivist epistemology and a relativist ontology, acknowledging that governance processes are continuously constructed as various stakeholders perceive, negotiate and enact collaboration. A case study approach, utilising data collection techniques namely interviews, focus groups, and documents, allowed for a nuanced exploration of Nottingham's unique context. Reflexivity remained paramount, recognising the influence of my background and experiences on the research process. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were central to data collection and analysis. This rigorous methodological framework facilitated a comprehensive examination of coproduction dynamics within Nottingham.

Chapters 4 - 7 present the context and empirical findings of the thesis and investigate how and why the local government and non-government stakeholders shape, facilitate, participate and enact in coproduction processes within Nottingham city. Chapter 4 presented the context and development of coproduction in Nottingham. Chapter 5 discusses the contextual drivers and motivations of both local government and non-government stakeholders in coproduction. Chapter 6 discusses the mechanisms of coproduction initiated and facilitated by local government and non-government stakeholders within Nottingham. Chapter 7 discusses the social barriers, governance challenges, and local government and non-government stakeholder experiences of coproduction in Nottingham. Drawing on the combined insights from the four empirical chapters, Chapter 8 presents a spectrum of participation (Figure 5) and identifies distinct modes of coproduction (Table 12), which serve as building

blocks for synthesising and interpreting the empirical findings. These elements build on Ansell and Gash's (2008b, p. 550) model of collaborative governance (Figure 7) to develop a novel reconceptualisation of local collaborative governance (Figure 6) that synthesises the empirical findings with the theoretical insights generated through the study.

9.3 Limitations and future research areas

In the previous section, the theoretical and empirical contributions of this study have been outlined; however, it is important to recognise that all research projects carry inherent limitations. The first limitation in this study emerged from the qualitative multistakeholder methodology employed for this research. The inherent inflexibility of this methodology made it difficult to limit the depth and scope of the research. In the duration of this study, at times it was a struggle to capture the bigger picture of the city, keep up with the evolving policies, and local government landscape.

Additionally, another limitation of the study is its data sample. While the study has claimed that it does not aim to be exhaustive and generalisable in its capacity, participants were predominantly chosen through desk-research and snowballing sampling, as access was very limited due to the data collection taking place at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This process was quite challenging, as access into certain stakeholder groups such as local government and CSOs was an issue. As a result, it was not possible to capture longitudinal experiences of stakeholders in coproduction over time. This limitation was partially addressed through documentary analysis, which enabled the tracking of the progress of coproduction initiatives.

Crucially, further research is needed to develop a clearer understanding of the relationship between CG and the practice of coproduction; in order to assess how far institutional arrangements enable or constrain practice, and to ensure a better alignment between the rhetoric and the reality of coproduction. Therefore, future studies are encouraged to capture the nuances of coproduction experiences over the course of coproduction processes. More generally however, participants in this study have been categorised into broader stakeholder groups. This may mean that certain stakeholders' groups, exclusive of local government, academia, industry, CSOs and civil society have been overlooked in the study. As with COVID-19, majority of the

recruitment of participants and data collection was done online and therefore might man that stakeholders without access to the internet, or limited visibility online may have not been included in the study. Additional stakeholder groups could be identified and studied in relation to participants of coproduction in the city.

Over the course of this study, there were several significant challenges faced with data collection due to the lack of access to local government, CSOs and civil society. While access to data and participants is an inherent challenge in qualitative research, this was further exacerbated during the period of this study by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly given the central role of local government and CSOs in delivering health and care services to local communities. In line with the aforementioned limitations, the study encourages future research to pay more attention to the following. Firstly, a more diverse and denser sample needs to be studies from each stakeholder in group to understand the place-based coproduction, along with identifying and exploring a wider range of stakeholder (for example non-residents using and interacting with public services and wick problems) in the city. Secondly, the impact of COVID-19 on coproduction practices needs further exploration, specifically to compare the landscape of coproduction within cities in the UK. Thirdly, the use of ethnography as a methodology would help future longitudinal research in capturing coproduction processes and practices over the course of their cycle. Another area for future research is exploring the reasons why citizens may not participate in coproduction efforts. Understanding the underlying factors that contribute to citizen non-participation could provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to foster more inclusive and CG processes. Lastly, it is recommended that future research expand the scope of urban coproduction beyond a single city in the UK in order to enable comparative analysis of coproduction processes.

In practice, coproduction processes should entail local government and non-government stakeholders collectively deliberating and deciding the purpose and intended outcomes, anchored in meaningful local CG frameworks to ensure public value for all. The process of coproduction should be iterative and cyclical, and the local government should keep non-government stakeholders informed at each stage of the process regarding the impact of their contributions. Wider civil society stakeholders

should be provided resources such as reimbursement of transport costs and paid time off work to ensure inclusivity.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Data Collection Tool: Semi-Structured Interview

Thank you for taking part in this interview. As you'll have read in the project's information sheet, I'm interviewing you as part of my PhD research. The interview will take approximately 30 - 45 minutes. It will be recorded, and a transcript will be produced. Access to the interview transcript will be limited to the me and my supervisors. Any summary interview content or direct quotations from the interview, which are made available through academic publications or other outlets, will be anonymised so that you cannot be identified. Care will be taken to ensure that any information that could identify you is not revealed. I don't anticipate that there are any risks associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.

Can I please confirm that you agree to take part in this interview and understand how the information produced by this interview will be used?

Job Description

1. What is your job title at the Nottingham City Council?
2. How long have you been working at this position?
3. Can you briefly describe your responsibilities of working in a participatory capacity with different stakeholders within Nottingham?

Perception of terms

1. What is your understanding of stakeholder collaboration (and citizen participation)?
2. How would you define a citizen?

Scope of work (projects and initiatives)

1. Do the city initiatives/projects focus on stakeholder collaboration (academia, industry and citizens) and inclusion?
2. Briefly describe the collaborative city initiatives/projects you are participating in?
3. What urban development problems do these initiatives/projects address?
4. Are there specific policy requirements to engage specific local stakeholder groups, namely civil society?
5. What department (specifically key personnel) is responsible for engaging with citizens for these projects?
6. What stage of the project are different stakeholders engaged in?

Stakeholder Engagement/Collaboration

1. How are stakeholders identified for each project? How are they engaged?
2. What are the challenges of working with different stakeholder groups?
3. What are the processes of stakeholder collaboration in the city's projects/initiatives? Preferably for each stakeholder group (academia, industry and citizens)
4. What has been your experience interacting with the non-government stakeholders regarding this project?
5. What are the barriers and challenges you faced in collaborating and engaging with non-government stakeholders?
6. What are the barriers to governments engaging and collaborating with public and other non-government stakeholders in urban governance (development)?
7. What are the benefits of engaging/collaborating public and other non-government stakeholders in urban governance?
8. How has Covid-19 affected collaborative projects/initiatives in Nottingham?

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE
Civil Society Participants

Context Setting

1. Do you engage with the government, universities or industry to solve problems for people in the city? Can you recall when did you start this work? What kind of participation work was that?
2. What kind of citizen participation work do you undertake these days? Is there a preference?
3. The local government's biggest priorities in Nottingham are: infrastructure, energy and transport. What do you think of this? Do you agree, disagree, what do you think are the biggest problems?

Questions about Public Engagement

1. Why are you involved in public engagement?
2. What kind of problems have you faced while working with government, universities or industry? Any barriers?
3. Are you aware of opportunities or networks for citizen participation within Nottingham? Prompt – do you know of opportunities available for citizens to work with other non-government actors?
4. Are there any benefits for citizens to get involved in decisions that affect them? Please explain. Who else benefits from this?

Experiences:

1. What can the local government do to improve citizen engagement opportunities from your experience?
2. What can the universities and industry do? What can citizens do themselves?
3. How can citizen engagement opportunities be designed to capture your interest in participation?

APPENDIX C: ETHICS FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Information for Research Participants

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the research project. Your participation in this research is voluntary, and you may change your mind about being involved in the research at any time, and without giving a reason.
This information sheet is designed to give you full details of the research project, its goals, the research team, the research funder, and what you will be asked to do as part of the research. If you have any questions that are not answered by this information sheet, please ask.
This research has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by the Nottingham University Business School Research Ethics Committee.
What is the research project called?

Coproduction in Collaborative Governance processes within Nottingham

Who is carrying out the research?

The research will be carried out by Farheen Akhtar from Nottingham University Business School for the PhD Strategy and International Business qualification.
The research is funded by the University of Nottingham.
Supervisors for the research:
Dr. Amanda Crompton
Associate Professor
Strategy and International Department, Nottingham University Business School

Dr. Judy Muthuri
Associate Professor
Strategy and International Department, Nottingham University Business School

What is the research about?

The aim of this project is to understand coproduction in collaborative governance processes and study the way governance networks and relationships in Nottingham city are shaped. This study adopts a case study approach towards examining interactions amongst the stakeholders in Nottingham city to understand the power dynamics between actors on both ends of the spectrum (namely: citizens, government, industry and academia) and the way these governance structures are shaped because of these interactions.

What groups of people have been asked to take part, and why?

You have been invited to take part because you represent one of the key stakeholder groups (government, academia, industry, citizens) identified within Nottingham city.

What will research participants be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this research, you will be asked to take part in a virtual interview (via Teams) that will last approximately 45 minutes. The interview will be recorded and transcribed for data analysis purposes.
You will be asked questions about your involvement in Nottingham's smart governance processes. This will include details about local and contextual factors about the lived experiences of your participation in Nottingham city.
There will not be any payment to take part in this research.

What will happen to the information I provide?

We will follow standard ethical and legal practice which means that all information about you will be handled in confidence and accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018). Therefore, data will be kept strictly confidential and all identifying information will be anonymised. All data will be stored in a secure and locked office, and on a password protected database securely, in line with all relevant legislation and guidance.
Should any resulting data be identifiable to you by the attribution of data to a job role, we will mitigate this by removing the reference to your job role and the case study, and organisations will also be anonymised.
When presenting the research in publications we will also take care to anonymise the data and not expose yours or any other participant's identity.
Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without your legal rights being affected. If you withdraw then the information collected will be erased and this information will not be used in the project analysis.

What will be the outputs of the research?

The results of this research will be analysed and published as part of the PhD Thesis for the PhD Strategy and International Business degree. The results may also be published for peer-reviewed journal article/s and conference presentations.

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Complaint procedure
If you wish to complain about the way in which the research is being conducted or have any concerns about the research then in the first instance please contact the supervisor.
Or contact the School's Research Ethics Officer:
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APPENDIX D: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION (INTERVIEWS)

Stakeholder group	Interview Code	Interview Date	Duration
Government	LG-INT Smart Nottingham Manager	8th September 2021	58 minutes
	LG-INT Senior Management 1	23rd February 2022	29 minutes
	LG-INT Senior Management 2	2nd March 2022	32 minutes
	LG-INT Policy Lead	2nd March	33 minutes
	LG-INT Policy Officer 2	12th April 2022	31 minutes
	LG-INT Policy Officer 1	13th June 2022	30 minutes
	LG-INT Community Engagement Lead	24th June 2022	62 minutes
	LG-INT City Rooms Project Lead	28th July 2022	33 minutes
Universities	UN2-INT Director of the Public Policy and Management Research Group	19th November 2021	62 minutes
	UN1-INT Chair of Sustainable and Resilient Cities	2nd December 2021	37 minutes
	UN1-INT Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University Representative on the NCC Development Advisory Board	24th March 2022	31 minutes
	UN2-INT Responsible Officer	25th May 2022	41 minutes
	UN1-INT Research Associate, Inclusive Policy and Governance Studies	7th June 2022	34 minutes
	UN1-INT Research Assistant in Future Cities and Community Engagement	18th July 2022	48 minutes
Industry	IND-INT Senior Member, Development Advisory Board	8th February 2022	56 minutes
	IND-INT Member, Nottingham Creative Quarter	25th February 2022	32 minutes
	IND-INT Senior Member, Green Park Advisory Board	8th March 2022	30 minutes
	IND-INT Senior Manager, Creative Organisation	11th July 2022	29 minutes
	CSO1-INT Organiser	13th October 2021	40 minutes

Civil Society	CSO1-INT Senior Organiser	15th October 2021	35 minutes
	CSO2-INT Senior Organiser	25th May 2022	51 minutes
	CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 1	23rd June 2022	45 minutes
	CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 2	8th August 2022	31 minutes
	CSOL-INT Senior Community Organiser 3	18th January 2023	53 minutes
	CSOL-INT Community Organiser 2	21st February 2023	64 minutes
	CSOL-INT Community Organiser 1	10th July 2023	38 minutes

APPENDIX E: DOCUMENTS SELECTED FOR DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

Documents selected	Published by	Date Published	Particulars
Social Exclusion Unit Volume 302: debated on Monday 8 December 1997	House of Commons	1997	Early policy discourse on social exclusion, highlighting the role of community engagement in addressing inequalities.
Local Government Act 2000	UK Parliament	2000	Legislative framework introducing modernised local governance structures and community participation duties.
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004		2004	Statutory basis for participatory planning and local development frameworks
Transcript of a speech by the Prime Minister on the Big Society, 19 July 2010.	Cabinet Office and the Prime Minister's Office	2010	National framing of citizen participation and shifting governance responsibilities towards communities.
Policy Paper - Building the Big Society	Cabinet Office	2010	Policy regarding community empowerment, decentralisation, and civic participation agendas
House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee Report on The Big Society	UK Parliament – Public Administration Select Committee	2011	Critical parliamentary review of participation and governance implications of the Big Society agenda.
Open Public Services White Paper	Open Public Services and Cabinet Office	2011	Policy framework promoting decentralisation and the involvement of multiple actors in public service delivery.
Localism Act 2011	UK Parliament	2011	Legislative shift towards devolution, enabling community rights while revealing tensions between devolved authority and continued central control.

The Nottingham Plan 2020	Nottingham City Council	2012	Partnership-based city strategy illustrating early forms of structured coproduction dominated by institutional and elite stakeholders.
National Planning Policy Framework	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018 to 2021)	2012	National planning framework promoting local stakeholder participation, while maintaining hierarchical policy direction shaping local governance practices.
Connected, Creative, Competitive Nottingham	Nottingham City Council	2014	Economic strategy reflecting partnership-led coproduction focused on growth, innovation, and selective stakeholder engagement.
UNESCO Cities of Literature: Nottingham	Cities of Literature	2015	Cultural governance initiative demonstrating partnership and civil society engagement in place-based identity and participation.
City Room (City Rooms went online in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic)	Nottingham City Council	2018	Local collaborative space illustrating consultative coproduction, with limited influence on formal decision-making processes.
Local government finance and the 2019 Spending Review	Communities and Local Government Select Committee	2019	Highlights fiscal constraints shaping local governance capacity, limiting the depth and sustainability of coproduction practices.
Briefing Paper Number 08789, 13 January 2020 Local government; Queen's Speech 2019	UK Parliament	2019	Overview of national legislative direction, reinforcing centralised governance structures affecting local collaborative capacity.
UK National Action Plan for Open Government 2019-2021	Department for Science, Innovation & Technology and Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport	2019	Promotes transparency and citizen participation, reflecting institutional efforts toward open and collaborative governance.

Laying the Foundations of a Good Work City: Mapping Nottingham's Employment	Nottingham Civic Exchange	2019	Evidence-based local strategy illustrating academia-led coproduction and stakeholder collaboration in economic development.
Nottingham Festival of Science and Curiosity	Festival of Science and Curiosity (FOSAC)	2020	Example of partnership-led coproduction through public engagement in science and innovation, largely project-based and episodic.
Economic, social and cultural impact report, Universities for Nottingham)	Universities for Nottingham	2020	Demonstrates universities as anchor institutions enabling partnership-led coproduction and local capacity building.
The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution	HM Government	2020	National strategy emphasising multi-level governance and collaboration in delivering sustainability transitions.
Carbon Neutral Nottingham Charter	Nottingham City Council	2020	Multi-stakeholder commitment framework illustrating voluntary, partnership-led coproduction in climate governance.
Nottingham City Council, Report concerning the Council's governance arrangements for Robin Hood Energy Ltd	Grant Thornton	2020	Highlights governance failures and accountability issues, demonstrating risks in concentrated decision-making structures.
Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2020 – 2028 Action Plan	Nottingham City Council	2020	Operational framework for sustainability governance, developed through coproduction while being shaped by institutional constraints.
Nottingham Civic Exchange Mission	University 2	2021	University 2-led initiative supporting knowledge exchange and collaborative governance through research partnerships.
Green Umbrella Group webpage	Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust	2021	Civil society-led network demonstrating grassroots coproduction and environmental collaboration outside formal structures.

Community Engagement Guide	Nottingham City Council	2021	
Nottingham Economic Recovery & Renewal Plan	Nottingham City Council	2022	Local government strategy illustrating partnership-based governance and stakeholder engagement in economic recovery.
Green Park, Nottingham - the big conversation Setting the scene for a new vision	Nottingham City Council	2022	Example of collaborative engagement processes informing local development and coproduction practices.
Universities for Nottingham Civic Agreement	Nottingham City Council, University of Nottingham, Nottingham Trent University	2022	Institutional collaboration demonstrating shared governance and collaborative local development initiatives.
Local Government Update by the Minister of State for Equalities, Local Government, Faith and Communities	UK Parliament	2022	National policy direction on devolution, community empowerment, and evolving local governance roles.
One Nottingham Vision	Nottingham City Council	2022	Strategic partnership framework demonstrating coordinated, multi-stakeholder governance with institutional dominance.
Further action taken to address failures at Nottingham City Council	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities	2022	Governance reform intervention highlighting accountability challenges and institutional restructuring that may impact resource-capacity for coproduction.
UK National Action Plan for Open Government 2021-2023	Government Digital Service	2022	Continued emphasis on transparency and participation, with ongoing challenges in achieving meaningful coproduction.

(Report made under part VIII s.114(3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 ('The Act'))		2023	Evidence of financial crisis, illustrating structural constraints limiting governance capacity for collaboration.
Local Government Strategic Plan 2023-2027	Nottingham City Council	2023	Recovery-focused governance strategy emphasising efficiency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement.
Statement of Community Involvement	Nottingham City Council	2023	Formal framework guiding community participation and coproduction within local planning decision-making.
Citizens' Engagement and Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2028	Nottingham City Council	2023	Targeted coproduction mechanisms within sustainability governance, shaped by resource and institutional limitations.
Waste Strategy	Nottingham City Council	2023	Coproduction requiring stakeholder behavioural change within structured governance systems.

APPENDIX F: COLLABROATIVE INITIATIVES ANALYSED IN NOTTINGHAM

Name of Initiatives	Description	Lead actor(s)	Key stakeholder groups involved	Nature of coproduction	Role in Nottingham's collaborative governance
One Nottingham Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) *under the Strategic Partnerships under Local Government Act 2000 (APPENDIX E)*	A formal cross-sector strategic partnership established to coordinate city-wide priorities, bringing together public, private, and civil society actors to align policy agendas and enable multiple coproduction initiatives.	Nottingham City Council	Local government, industry, CSOs, community representatives	Strategic partnership and coordination	Formal cross sector governance platform shaping city wide priorities and enabling multiple coproduction initiatives
Festival of Science and Curiosity	A city-wide public engagement initiative using science and culture to involve citizens in knowledge creation and learning, which evolved from a council-led project into an independent collaborative organisation.	Initially One Nottingham then independent charity	Local government, universities, CSOs	Shared decision making and delivery	Example of project-based coproduction maturing into independent collaborative governance structure
Universities for Nottingham Civic Agreement	A formal agreement between universities and the city council to align institutional strategies around	University 1and University 2	Local government, universities	Formalised partnership and strategic alignment	Institutionalised academic local government collaboration addressing shared

	shared place-based challenges and civic responsibilities.				place based challenges
Nottingham Civic Exchange	An intermediary platform hosted by the university to broker relationships between research, policy, and practice, supporting coproduction through facilitation and translation of knowledge.	University 2	Local government, CSOs, community groups	Knowledge exchange and facilitation	Academic intermediary translating research into policy and practice through coproduction
Creative Quarter Company	A partnership organisation established to drive place-based economic development through collaboration between public institutions, businesses, and the university.	University 2 and Nottingham City Council	Industry, civil society, academia,	Economic coproduction	Place based economic development through cross sector collaboration
Co(l)laboratory	Long-term collaborative research initiative addressing local challenges through participatory research.	University-based research teams	Universities, CSOs, individual citizens	Research-based community coproduction	Intermediary platform enabling knowledge coproduction
City Rooms: A dedicated physical and institutional space created by NCC to enable repeated and structured coproduction activities including events, design workshops, and public engagement activities on city development issues. Key outputs included the CoPLACE programme and the CEG (as below)					

Community Engagement Guide (CEG)	A council-produced framework co-designed with non-government stakeholders (specifically CSO1) to standardise and embed principles of engagement and coproduction across council activities.	Nottingham City Council	Local government, CSOs, community groups, individual citizens	Shared influence and decision making in design of policy framework	Formal policy instrument embedding engagement and coproduction principles across council activities
Co PLACE programme	A programme integrating collaborative design methods into planning processes, aimed at engaging communities directly in shaping local development proposals.	Nottingham City Council	Local government, CSOs, individual citizens	Place based engagement	Mechanism for embedding collaborative practice within planning processes
Design Quality Framework	A planning framework developed through collaborative workshops to define shared principles and standards for urban design quality across the city.	Nottingham City Council	Local government, CSOs, community organisers	Co production through workshops at the City Rooms	Use of collaborative processes to shape planning standards
Carbon Neutral Nottingham 2020 to 2028 Action Plan: A city-wide sustainability strategy developed through staged consultation and partnership working, combining expert input with public and stakeholder engagement.					
Citizens' Engagement and Carbon	Co-designed research project linking academic research with	University 2 and City Council	Local government, universities,	Episodic research-led coproduction	Research informing policy and community involvement

Neutral Nottingham 2028	local government carbon neutrality priorities.		CSOs, individual citizens		
Your City Your Say Citizens Panel	A standing panel of citizens designed to provide ongoing feedback on council policies, offering continuity but limited influence over final decision-making.	Nottingham City Council	Local government, individual citizens, community organisers	Consultative engagement	Structured but limited mechanism for longitudinal citizen input into policy
Nottingham Economic Recovery and Renewal Plan: A post-crisis strategic plan developed through collaboration between key institutional actors, prioritising economic recovery with limited grassroots involvement.					
Development Advisory Board	An invite-only advisory body bringing together senior stakeholders to shape economic development strategy, with limited transparency or citizen participation.	Nottingham City Council	Local government, industry, universities	Invite only strategic collaboration	Elite driven coproduction shaping economic development priorities
Green Park Project: The Green Park project forms part of Nottingham City Council's regeneration of the former Broadmarsh site, transforming it into a publicly accessible green space focused on sustainability, biodiversity, and urban connectivity.					
Green Park Vision Advisory Board	A project-specific advisory board convened to co-design a major development vision, highlighting tensions around representation and selective inclusion.	Nottingham City Council	Local government, industry, universities	Co design and consultation	Example of selective inclusion and tensions around representativeness

Big Conversation	A large-scale engagement exercise using multiple channels to gather views on the city's future, characterised by breadth of participation rather than sustained coproduction.	Nottingham City Council	Local government, individual citizens	Multi channel engagement	Large scale engagement exercise demonstrating inclusive but episodic coproduction
People's Green Park	Community-led coalition advocating for public ownership and environmentally sustainable development of the Green Park site.	Community organisations and individual citizens	CSOs, community groups, and individual citizens	Advocacy-led coproduction and accountability	Community-driven coproduction shaping development priorities
Green Umbrella Group	Coalition of environmental CSOs coordinating advocacy around the Green Park site.	CSOs	Environmental CSOs, community organisers, residents	Community-led agenda-setting and advocacy	Bottom-up coproduction through collective self-organisation