LOCAL DEMOCRACY DURING COMPLEX EMERGENCIES

Emergency Governance for Cities and Regions
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UCLG United Cities and Local Governments | **metropolis** | **LSECities** | **LSE** THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

INTRODUCING ANALYTICS NOTE #06

This Analytics Note focuses on how responses to complex emergencies by cities and regions are rooted in democratic practices. The information underpinning this Analytics Note stems from a recent survey of 30 local and regional governments from 22 countries conducted by the Emergency Governance Initiative (EGI) at the end of 2022. The survey addressed four dimensions: governance and coordination, finance, public service delivery, and democratic practices in times of crises. The analysis presented here considers the results of the fourth dimension of democratic practices. The analysis of the other three dimensions will be part of a summary paper of the EGI's first phase to be published later this year. The main findings presented below are complemented by additional analysis of open-source databases, community engagement platforms, and publications on related experiences by UCLG, Metropolis and their network partners. This issue directly connects with the role of cities and regional governments to strengthen local democracy in times of emergency. Moreover, it is closely linked to Policy Brief 06 (Policy Brief #06). This Analytics Note presents insights on the democracy pillars of participation, deliberation and good governance and the degree to which these are underpinned by digital era governance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The EGI team would like to thank the local government officials who took time out of their busy schedules to respond to the 2022 survey and describe in detail their learnings and experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, amongst others, and their current practices to tackle complex emergencies.

Main findings

Democratic practices sparked by complex emergencies (30 local and regional governments)

— Complex emergencies have the potential to reshape the role of local democracy.

— Participation, deliberation, and good governance are key pillars of local democracy that are activated during complex emergencies.

— Digital era governance, with social media, tailored digital platforms, open data and websites, as well as chatgroups and chat boxes, is a particularly prominent feature of local democratic engagement.

— Communication during complex emergencies and as part of emergency action has evolved from a sectorial task to a broader skill across all LRG departments.

The emergency turn of local democracy (18 key local government practices)

— COVID-19 and climate change are the most noteworthy complex emergencies that feature as part of the analysed practices of local democracy. Others include migration, social unrest, and the housing crisis.

— Key metrics used to assess the impact of participatory practices are the number of ideas generated, the number of new bodies or committees created, and the number of people involved.

Deliberation for complex emergencies (90 of 1,286 deliberative practices worldwide)

— 90 out of 1,286 deliberative practices over 30 years documented in multiple databases have links with complex emergencies, and only 7% are explicitly described as emergency related.

— The vast majority of emergency-related deliberations analysed were initiated by local governments (82%).

— Citizen assemblies and juries are the most common deliberative models for emergency governance, in most cases these are used to address the climate emergency (82%).

— The use of deliberative practices has notably increased over the last decade, with a strong influence on emergency-related practices after 2019.

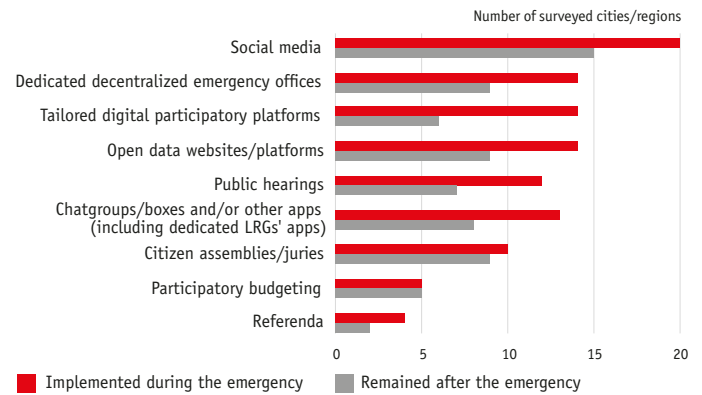# 1. DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES SPARKED BY COMPLEX EMERGENCIES

This section covers insights on democratic practices implemented by local and regional governments (LRGs) in times of emergency based on the EGI 2022 survey. It explores the extent to which local responses to complex emergencies are legitimised through equitable and meaningful citizen engagement.[1] The survey results suggest LRGs carried out various mechanisms mainly around the democratic pillars of 'participation',[2] 'deliberation'[3] and 'good governance'[4] underpinned by 'digital era governance'.[5] Additional details on the democracy pillars and domains can be found in Policy Brief #06. Further features on the survey sample and its main findings are introduced below.

The 2022 EGI survey was conducted from 24 October to 15 December 2022 and completed by city officials. **The sample used for the present analysis cuts across 30 territories from 22 countries** (see Figure 1), with a stronger representation of cities and regions from Europe (44%), Latin America and the Caribbean (23%), and Asia (17%) – and a lower representation from Africa (13%) and Oceania (3%). No more than five cities or regions from the same country were included in the analysis. Populations across LRGs surveyed span from 16,500 inhabitants to over 9 million.

[1] In this publication, 'citizens' refers to both legally recognised citizens and residents of a given city or region.

[2] This pillar includes the following domains: public hearings, referenda, participatory budgeting, town halls, and public consultations. Focusing on breadth of participation and reaching as many and diverse people as possible. The depth of engagement is less ambitious, with aims such as gathering opinions and aggregating points of view. For more information, please review Policy Brief #06.

[3] This pillar includes all democratic mechanisms based on sortition such as citizen assemblies and citizen juries, or any other modalities aimed at bringing collective knowledge and data to increase democratic engagement and better decision-making. For more information, please review Policy Brief #06.

[4] This pillar includes domains such as accountability, transparency, communication, responsiveness, openness, commissions, facts, and science directed to implement a continuous process of trust building between citizens and LRGs. For more information please review Policy Brief #06.

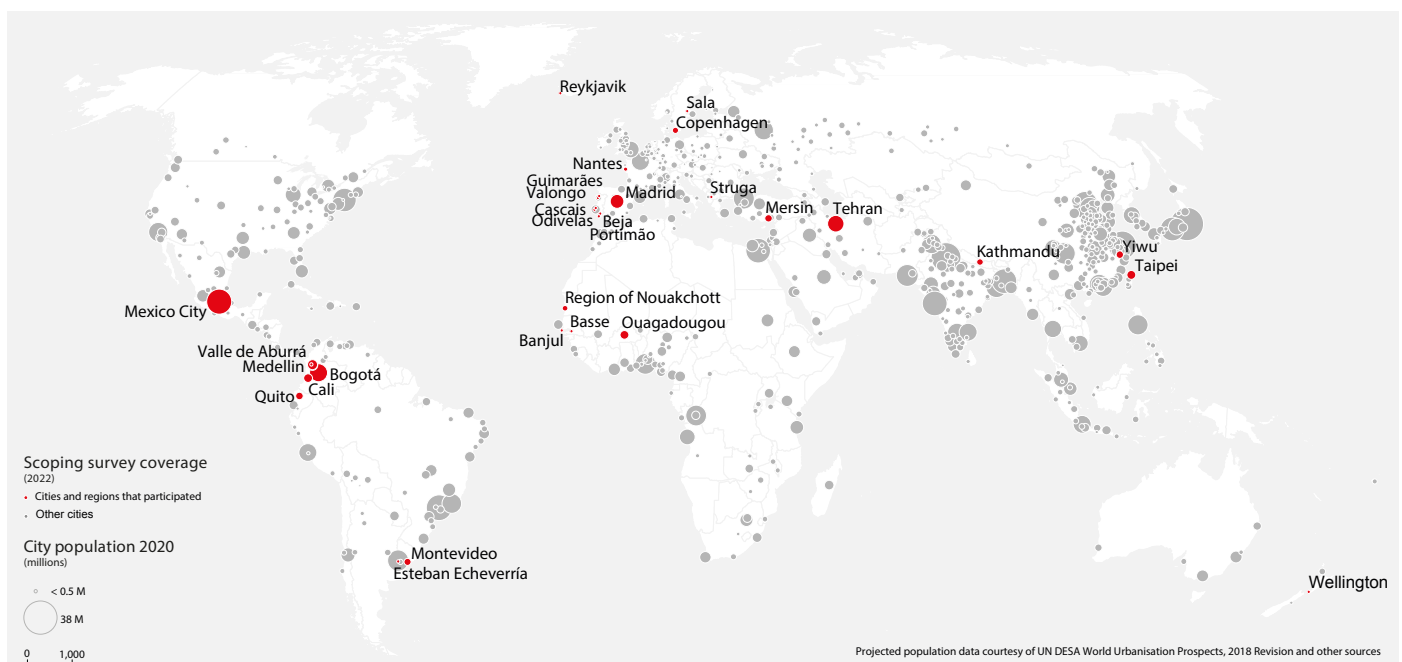## Figure 2: Survey results (2022) — 'Democratic legitimacy of emergency action'

Has your LRG implemented any of the following mechanisms to involve citizens/inhabitants in governing a complex emergency? Did the mechanism remain after the emergency?

Number of surveyed cities/regions

- Social media
- Dedicated decentralized emergency offices
- Tailored digital participatory platforms
- Open data websites/platforms
- Public hearings
- Chatgroups/boxes and/or other apps (including dedicated LRGs' apps)
- Citizen assemblies/juries
- Participatory budgeting
- Referenda

■ Implemented during the emergency   ■ Remained after the emergency

As shown in Figure 2, much of LRGs' democratic engagement for complex emergencies falls under the 'digital era governance' category. When addressing climate change and COVID-19, respondents focused on building closer communication with citizens, using "new technological solutions that bolster elements of democratic legitimacy" (Policy Brief #06). This was reflected in the survey results where most respondents across all regions reported that their governments adopted various digital mechanisms to support the response (mainly during COVID-19), such as expanding the use of social media (87% of the respondents used them), open data websites and tailored digital platforms (64%), and chatgroups/boxes (59%).

[5] Policy Brief #06 refers to the digital era governance as a cross-cutting component that underpins the Democratic Pillars holding the potential to enable more democratic responses to complex emergencies. For broader insights, please see Policy Brief #06.

Figure 1: Cities and regions featured in the 2022 survey

Reykjavik
Sala
Copenhagen
Nantes
Guimarães
Valongo
Cascais
Odivelas Beja
Portimão
Madrid
Struga
Mersin
Tehran
Kathmandu
Yiwu
Taipei
Mexico City
Region of Nouakchott
Basse Ouagadougou
Banjul
Valle de Aburrá
Medellin
Bogotá
Quito Cali
Montevideo
Esteban Echeverría
Wellington

Scoping survey coverage
(2022)
• Cities and regions that participated
• Other cities

City population 2020
(millions)
○ < 0.5 M
○ 38 M

0   1,000

Projected population data courtesy of UN DESA World Urbanisation Prospects, 2018 Revision and other sources

Only 21% of the social media platforms remained active after the emergency period ended, and on average, 11% of the digital tools continued to be employed. Interestingly, LRGs are also relying on digital tools both for internal coordination and sharing information to improve public services and citizen satisfaction. Despite the potential of technological tools, where existing inefficiencies exist (e.g., lack of articulation and communication across city departments and levels of government), digital platforms would only replicate such inefficiencies digitally, as mentioned across survey responses. Some city officials also expressed concern that digital technologies facilitated the proliferation of fake news, an increasing threat to democracy, and the overall governance of emergencies.

LRGs tend to focus on the 'good governance' domains of democracy rather than engaging in more fundamental democratic reforms in times of emergency. In response to a question on democracy mechanisms introduced in response to COVID-19 and climate change, most LRGs surveyed reported that their governments adopted practices aligned under the 'good governance' pillar, such as digital solutions to improve citizen communication and increase transparency and accountability during decision-making processes. A third of the respondents also offered dedicated decentralised emergency offices.

Additionally, 45% of the survey respondents also used citizen assemblies and citizen juries – mechanisms that sit under the democracy pillar of **'deliberation'** – with a higher proportion in Latin America and Asia. These results may indicate that deliberative practices for emergency governance have been gaining momentum across regions (see complementary data on deliberative practices in section 3).

Participatory budgeting was one of the least used mechanisms in all regions, with only five respondents implementing it. **This might indicate that when addressing complex emergencies, LRGs strongly prefer some democratic mechanisms that are neither radical changes nor traditional democratic practices**. As stated by one of the survey respondents, it is likely that during emergency management, LRGs adopt a "constant evolution" approach that helps them "adapt to new realities". Nevertheless, participatory budgeting had the highest permanency level, and was the single mechanism that remained the same post-emergency.

Lastly, four LRGs used referenda as an instrument for citizen engagement and one LRG maintained this instrument after the emergency. This may suggest that those practices which are time-consuming and may have more profound implications for emergency action were less preferred. This appears to be also the case for other more critical pillars of democracy, such as representation (e.g., adjustments to parliament, parties, balance of power, leadership) and rights (e.g., human rights, citizenship, justice, and rule of law).

Qualitative insights of the EGI 2022 survey responses allowed for further reflection on essential democracy components and citizen involvement in times of crisis:

Complex emergencies may reshape the role of, and engagement in local democracy. Across the survey responses, LRGs are placing themselves more as citizen representatives, inviting people to take part in the decision-making processes. There is also a recognition of the value of collective problem-solving through their direct involvement (Policy Brief #06) as noted by one of the survey respondents: "As an LRG we came to realize the importance of involving civil society organization and the community because they have been in the forefront working with the LRG". Moreover, LRGs are requiring all societal actors to have active roles during emergency responses (e.g., citizen training for crisis management and the private sector getting involved in and sharing economic losses). For this to happen, some LRGs have established flexible emergency procedures in which various actors and communities can engage directly. They have offered training and legal support to encourage such involvement such as providing volunteer groups and citizen aid teams with legal powers to help during COVID-19 activities.

Similarly, the role of local governments in decision-making during complex emergencies is being reassessed. Survey respondents agreed that LRGs should have greater participation throughout different coordination mechanisms and decision-making processes at the national level throughout the emergency period. For example, during COVID-19, most LRGs were at the forefront of emergency responses primarily because they were the closest level of government to citizens (Policy Brief #06). Under a similar rationale, several LRGs also reiterated the importance of local actions to achieve global challenges related to climate change.

Communicating for and during complex emergencies has evolved from a sectorial task to a broader skill across all LRG departments. For example, some city officials mentioned the need for the development of "emergency language" and communication skills amongst broader government actors (e.g., Bogotá, Colombia). Under traditional emergencies, risk management units have guides and protocols to communicate with a diverse range of actors depending on the action needed. However, complex emergencies – chiefly COVID-19 – have required other departments across LRGs, such as education, culture, mobility, and security to engage directly with citizens. Interestingly, when asking LRGs about governance challenges and knowledge gaps, only 3% indicated that 'citizen participation and dialogue mechanisms' were highly challenging.

Some city officials also pointed out the need for testing strategies and consultation mechanisms with the general public to prepare for possible complex emergencies while advocating for protocols closer to those used to mitigate, prepare, respond, and recover from traditional emergencies. However, to what extent can future complex emergencies be predicted – and how can traditional emergency management be re-framed to adapt to complex emergencies?

2. THE EMERGENCY TURN OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY

The following section analyses democratic practices implemented at the local level in times of emergency based on two sets of publications from UCLG[6] and one from Metropolis,[7] in addition to UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat's Live Learning Experiences initiative during the COVID-19 pandemic and some practices published in the repository of good practices of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD). Throughout these publications and platforms, over 30 examples were identified as directly or indirectly related to democratic practices and emergency management. Of these, 18 were selected and analysed further based on key aspects.[8] The analysis of those 18 practices is summarised below:

The sample cuts across ten years (2012-2022), with most practices (15) occurring after 2019. Regarding regional distribution: eight examples were from European LRGs, five were Asian, four took place in Latin America, and one was developed in Africa. Of the selected practices, ten aimed to address issues related to COVID-19, five were climate change-related, and the remaining three corresponded to migration, social unrest and the housing crisis respectively. Furthermore, the size of LRGs in the sample varied, from 5,000 residents in Alto del Carmen (Chile) to over 9 million in the case of Seoul (South Korea).

Most practices established at the local level across the sample were related to the democracy pillar of 'participation'. Some of the most common practices include citizen dialogues (Alto del Carmen, Chile), tailored surveys (Turin, Italy), committees and conventions to generate proposals for tackling climate change (Union of Salvador de Bahia, Brazil), online platforms allowing people to vote for others' ideas (Barcelona, Spain) and hackathons for transport solutions for COVID-19 (Bogotá, Colombia). The two largest cities from the sample (Bogotá and Seoul) privileged online practices, while the smallest ones did not use technology for the practice implementation. This may signal that larger LRGs privilege reaching as many diverse people as possible during emergencies rather than in-depth engagement, due to its size, diversity and inherent complexity.

There were three practices under the pillar of **'representation'**. Mandlakazi (Mozambique) implemented a participative and inclusive governance tool based on Municipal 'Forums' (e.g., the Children's Forum, Women's Forum, and Youth Forum) initiated during COVID-19 for decision-making. Milan (Italy) created a permanent body for civic participation to develop their Air and Climate Plan. Similarly, Grenoble (France) created the Citizens' Convention, made of 100 people with a representative panel of the metropolitan territory.

Additionally, three practices combined democratic pillars in which '**good governance**', '**rights**',[9] and the '**digital era governance**' intersect. That was the case of the 'Legislative Theatre', a mechanism carried out by the city of Manchester (UK) to improve the quality of decision-making through new forms of participatory democracy, including recent migrants.

Some LRGs have clearly identified the outcome of their initiatives. The majority of cases displayed identifiable quantitative and qualitative outcomes in their participatory processes (12 cases out of the overall sample had this information available). Specific metrics used to assess impact were the number of proposals or propositions (4), the creation of new bodies or committees (3), and the number of people involved (2), among other methods. However, there were only a few cases where LRGs directly reflected on the level of participation as a proportion of the total population size.

Of the overall sample, most practices (10) did not use digital platforms. **This could imply that more engaging deliberative practices for decision-making privilege in-person scenarios, leaving online platforms for participatory practices only.** On the other hand, another explanation could be related to the existing digital gap. For example, Amsterdam (the Netherlands) reflected on some of their fundamental assumptions when using technological solutions to manage COVID-19: "We thought almost everyone had access to internet. We were wrong. Last 2 weeks 5000+ laptops were handed out". Also, according to UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat, "the number of internet users in the Global North is about 86% while in the Global South, it is 47%. At least 1.3 billion people live in countries where entry-level mobile data plans (of 1 GB per month) are not affordable". Lastly, digital literacy proficiency could also be associated: the least developed nations have an "average literacy rate of only 65%", and according to the World Bank, in some regions, (such as Latin America and South Asia), COVID-19 is responsible for an increase in the gap close to a 30%.

Lastly, some innovative practices included the development of "manifestos" such as in the city of Bilbao (Spain) to ensure ethical use of data and the protection of rights, "creative dialogues" combining "rigours and fun testing spaces" as a policy innovation such as in the city of Manchester (United Kingdom) and concepts of "collaborative governance" and "cities as mayors" such as in Santiago de Chile (Chile) and Seoul (South Korea) respectively.

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[6] The GOLD VI: Working Paper Series and Cases Repository and GOLD VI Report on Pathways to Urban and Territorial Equality

[7] Participatory Governance in Local Care Programs: Lessons from Bogotá and Chicago

[8] Three main principles were used to select an analysis sample: a) examples were direct responses from LRGs to address complex emergencies that involved citizens in the process; b) there was an emphasis on active – rather than passive – citizen engagement and c) availability of information. The criteria helped prioritise participatory practices where people were given information to take action or clear opportunities for interaction during decision-making processes with tangible outcomes.

[9] This pillar includes domains such as human rights, citizenship, justice, and rule of law. Policy Brief #06 defines 'rights' as a key component of the democratic legitimacy for emergency responses, especially around building trust, guaranteeing law is being equally and objectively applied across society groups, and the importance of open presentation of any temporary limitations of rights (such as limiting movement during Covid-19). For more information please review Policy Brief #06.

3.DELIBERATION FOR COMPLEX EMERGENCIES

This section reviews deliberative practices implemented by LRGs in response to complex emergencies. These practices were identified through the following open-source databases and online platforms covering both emergency and non-emergency-related deliberative practices:

— Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions database by the OECD: 574 practices.

— Participedia: 279 practices (in emergency-related areas such as environment, health, human and civil rights, migration, and housing at the local and regional levels).

— International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (IOPD) by UCLG: 433 practices.

— Case studies published by participatory democracy and community engagement platforms: Decidim, Involve, Citizen Lab, Knoca, and Your Priorities.

90 practices out of 1,286 covering a period of almost 30 years (from 1995 to 2022) were identified as emergency-related based on standardised criteria.[10]

Less than 10% of deliberative practices from the sample of 90 implemented at the local level were explicitly described as emergency-related;[11] most occurred between 2019 and 2022. Concerning the level of sub-national government, as shown in Figure 3, the majority of emergency-related practices were run by local governments followed by regional and sub-city governments (decentralised city authorities or boroughs).

Figure 3: Level of government at which selected deliberative practices were implemented

Percentage of a total of 90 emergency-related practices by sub-national governments
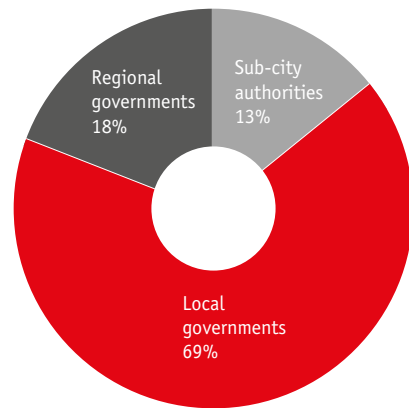
In terms of regional distribution, European LRGs carried out most of the practices included in the sample (84%), with a marked overrepresentation of UK-based initiatives (36%).[12] LRGs commonly used deliberative methods to address climate change (82%), the housing emergency (9%), and COVID-19 (6%). On average, 71 citizens were selected to participate.[13] However, this number could vary depending on the time, budget, and/or complexity of the issue to be addressed as well as the metrics through which outcomes are presented. As shown in Figure 4, the most common deliberative modes in the sample were citizen assemblies (36%), followed by citizen juries (24%). According to the OECD, the former are "well-suited to address issues of greater importance", denoting the level of complexity behind emergency governance.

Figure 4: LRGs' deliberative practices by type of emergency
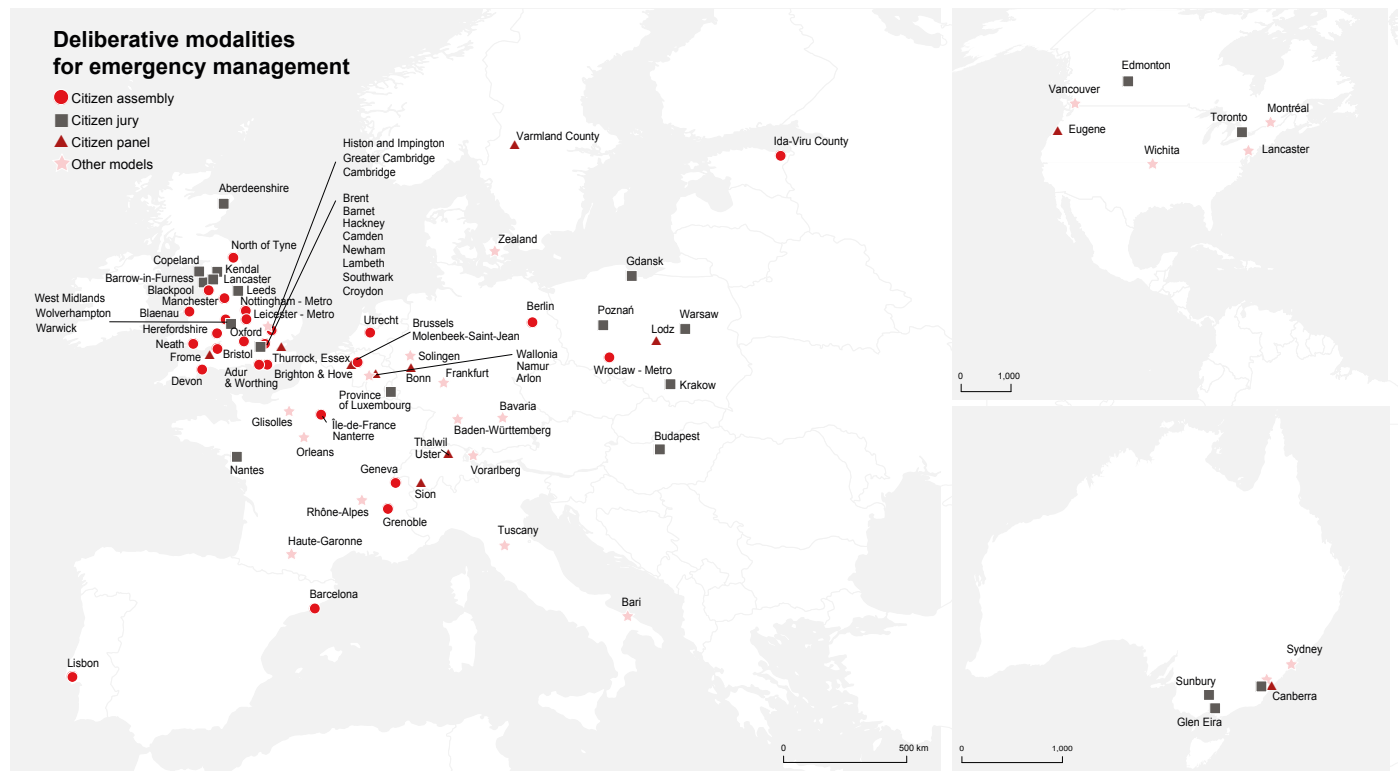
[10] The criteria for the sample selection included: a) strong and direct relation to a complex emergency: 'proxy' examples such as sustainable mobility assemblies or homeless panels were excluded when not framed under the complex emergencies of climate change or housing; b) practices implemented by LRGs: only experiences implemented by LRGs or decentralised authorities at a sub-city level, such as London boroughs, were included; c) active citizen engagement was prioritised, ruling out Q&R or information-only sessions and d) availability of information where at least the following elements were identifiable: name of the initiative, name of the LRGs implementing it, year of implementation, number of participants involved and general description.

[11] This is an indicative percentage as practices across open-source databases and online platforms are constantly changing and, on some occasions, overlap.

[12] Based on the survey responses, section 1 of this Analytics Note suggested that Latin America and Asia regions are implementing deliberative practices as part of LRGs emergency responses. However, the datasets used for the analysis in section 3 do not reflect the same results. This could be related to the sources and availability of information used for the analysis and the inexistence of databases that feature these types of experiences in those regions.

[13] For the average estimate to be representative of LRGs practices, four outliers were excluded from the analysis which engaged with 1700 on average.

When contrasting emergency and non-emergency-related practices, the following patterns emerge: **emergency-related practices had a higher share of citizen assemblies and citizen juries compared to non-emergency-related practices** (see Figure 5). According to the OECD, these two modes involve "the most face-to-face participant meeting time". Citizen juries are the most widely used model to tackle a broader range of topics, including the environment, followed by 'planning cells' used for urban planning issues. Based on the above, **citizen assemblies could represent a tailored deliberative practice used for emergency management that allows for in-depth careful deliberation around complex matters.** Citizen assemblies are also more expensive and time-consuming than other deliberation modes according to the OECD.[14] This might explain why the use of this mechanism was primarily directed to tackle climate change (82%) over other complex emergencies such as COVID-19, as the latter required faster decision-making processes. Also, citizen assemblies involve on average 90 participants for non-emergency-related practices, in contrast to 71 across the emergency-related sample.

Figure 5: Deliberative models at regional and local levels across emergency and non-emergency-related issues
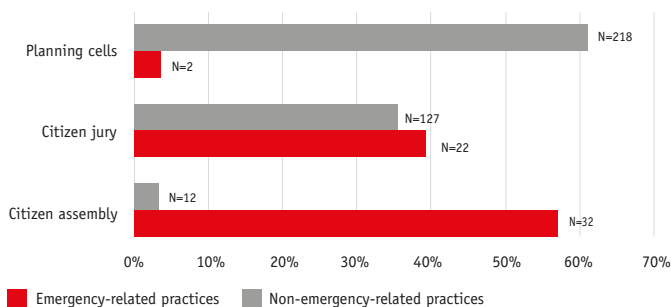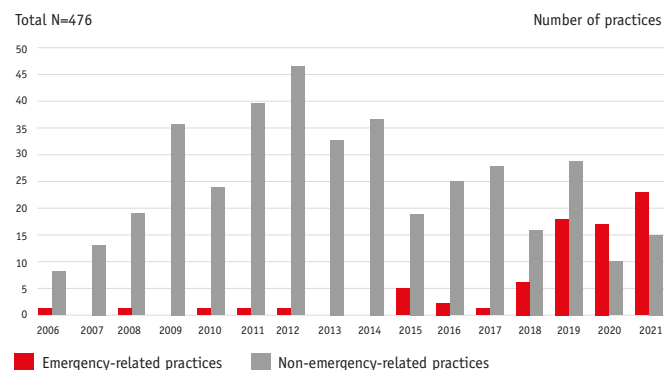
In most non-emergency-related practices at local and regional levels, 'urban planning' and 'strategic planning' were at the centre of the agenda. For the specific case of citizen assemblies and citizen juries, 'health' (14%) and 'environment' (12%) were two of the most referenced focus areas likely to be related to COVID-19 and climate change, respectively.

Non-emergency-related practices occurred at the local (65%) and regional levels (21%). The emergency-related sample includes an even greater share of local and sub-city practices (82%) and slightly fewer regional practices (18%) (see Figure 3).

Regarding the timeline over which emergency-related and non-emergency-related practices took place, Figure 6 reveals an emergency momentum from 2018 onwards. Complex emergencies seems to have played a key role as part of a "notable trend for public authorities to increasingly use representative, deliberative processes for public decision-making".

Figure 6: Number of deliberative practices at regional and local levels per year across emergency and non-emergency-related issues

Finally, when looking at the regional distribution of non-emergency-related practices, Europe features most prominently with the implementation of these practices with 45%, followed by Asia with 33%, where 94% of the cases took place in Japan under the deliberative model of 'planning cells'. Moreover, when analysing citizen assemblies and citizen juries exclusively (again as a proxy for emergency-related practices), North America (28%) and Oceania (26%) are the regions where most citizen assemblies and juries took place after Europe. Europe's representation remains the same (45%) whilst Asia's decreases below 1%.

Considering the European bias of the data above, additional data by the University of Geneva was analysed which focusses on the policies being designed to respond to COVID-19 in the urban South informal settings. This exercise identified 143 emergency-related practices of which 45% were government initiatives, and 66% of these initiatives had a local and city scope. The study suggests that "community empowerment initiatives were the most numerous in the emergency phase" with 83% of the practices carried out during COVID-19, and only 17% during the recovery and transformation phases.

Based on the findings of section 3, LRGs across the globe should continue implementing deliberative mechanisms such as citizen assemblies for emergency management. This mechanism provides the infrastructure for in-depth deliberation around complex matters and legitimises decision-making processes during the emergency response.

[14] According to the OECD, the average duration of the citizen assemblies is 47 weeks, of which 19 days implied face-to-face meetings.

[15] The sample analysed 413 practices at regional and local levels. Emergency-related practices (N=90) correspond to those identified across different data sources and cover almost 30 years in section 3 of this Analytics Note, 'Deliberation for complex emergencies' (see footnote #10 for further methodological information on the emergency-related sample). Non-emergency-related practices (N=357) were extracted from the OECD (Representative Deliberative Processes and Institutions database). To select and analyse the latter sample, the information was first filtered by the level of government, focusing on regional and local levels. Then, all emergency-related practices from the OECD included in the N90 sample were excluded from the analysis. Lastly, the research focused on the three most relevant deliberative models.