

NEWS



Active learning and city-to-city communication: Pillars of our crisis management response

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The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated in the last months that certain governance models have had to be reconsidered both in terms of coordination between departments, and in the way public services are provided. It is also affecting the way

they relate to their citizenship and to other levels of government. As such, local government networks like Metropolis rapidly provided to their members with knowledge for the management of COVID-19 from containment, crisis management to recovery in all areas and public policies beyond health issues.

Some of our initiative during this period has been the Cities for Global Health platform, the Covid-19 Service Point in the USE platform, the Emergency Governance Initiative for Cities and Regions and the Live Learning Experience: beyond the outbreak sessions. The latter has been a crucial space for exchange, shared learning and creating a virtual community in tough times.

Every week since the end of March and, together with UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments) and UN-Habitat, we have been offering a space for debate and dialogue on different local policy areas (from housing, to mobility, to food security etc) with more than 3,000 participants from local and regional governments, the UN system and partners from civil society. With this virtual community we have not only mobilised opinion on media, but produced concrete documents such as the Women's Leadership for the Post COVID-19 Era: A call to action from Local and Regional Governments Leaders and briefings or guides in response to the needs of local governments and on the basis of new learnings of local authorities when preparing and responding to the pandemic and in support of the social and economic recovery later.

In the last few weeks we have addressed issues such as peace, local democracy and public security. Here below some of our main conclusions:

The thematic session on **Food Systems: Lessons from the pandemic** - that took place on July 2, with the collaboration of the World Sustainable Urban Food Centre of Valencia (CEMAS) addressed **the need to ameliorate our food systems** and, in this sense, two key conclusions were highlighted by participants: the importance of **producing and consuming local food** and **linking food resilience with climate sustainability, equity and women empowerment**.

During the session, Rima Mukhamedshina, Director General of the Department for Food and Social Nutrition of one of our members, the Municipality of Kazan, had the opportunity to explain their experience during the quarantine caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and they succeed to provide food packages to hundreds of people with a **special attention to healthy food for children**.

The thematic session on **Reimagining Public Safety in the face of historical inequalities and emerging crisis in Cities** took place on June 25, with the collaboration of Safer Cities. During this Live Learning Experience various of our members had the opportunity to bring out their local strategy to tackle insecurity in this emergency period. Their vision clearly evidenced different urban issues that characterize the specific geographical area, but at the same time it outlined some common focuses that local and regional governments have been addressing. In particular, **gender stood out as one of the main points jeopardizing public security** in the different cities.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Mxolisi Kaunda, Mayor of Durban, proposed an "integrated urban strategy", that encourages the creation of "businesses for vulnerable groups" - including women. Sharing the same vision that promotes inclusion, Luis Ernesto Gómez, Secretary of Interior of Bogotá, reported the results of a local study proving that "security improves if you manage to create trust among citizens, among neighbours". Accordingly, he insisted that the action taken by Bogotá during the crisis focused on a closer contact with all citizens, that seeks to hear the bottom-up requests, to find them an answer at the urban scale.

From his side, Ismael del Toro, Mayor of Guadalajara, presented the program "Ciudad tranquila y ordenada".

He highlighted the importance of the "co-responsibility of citizens in accelerating prevention policies to reach the new normality". His presentations, as many other, showed that **the pandemic gave the chance to rethink the role that the inhabitants play - even informally - in the urban life**. In fact, the crisis, as stated Santiago Saura, Councillor of Madrid, "changed the priorities" of local governments. In particular, the crisis made understand that gender issues must be faced urgently to ensure that in the run to sustainable development no-one is left behind.

On June 18, the session organized in collaboration with the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy (ODP) - **Local Democracy in the aftermath of the Covid-19 Pandemic** - focused on local democracy, discussing its role in a post-Covid era. In particular, this Live Learning Experience contrasted the need for a decentralized democratic system, to the centralization of decision-making during the current emergency situation.

The Metropolis Secretary General - Octavi de la Varga - made one of the opening remarks, highlighting that "the Covid-19 must teach us that finding an efficient solution does not mean giving up democracy: for this, **we must rethink democracy!**". In this line, many speakers highlighted the importance of a transformation in the current democratic model, that allow local governments, which have a deeper understanding of urban problems at the "human scale", to have their voices heard at the national and supranational level.

More specifically, Laia Bonet, Deputy Mayor of Barcelona underlined the role of new urban issues in citizens' everyday life: "**We must be able to guarantee new rights, such as digitalization, and face new challenges such as climate change, that are in particular affecting women, LGBTQ+ people, the inhabitants of peripheries etc.**" From his side, Shi Qi, Deputy Division Chief of Xi'an Foreign Affairs Office, gave some hints on a post-Covid approach that seeks the transformation of democratic systems "empowering citizens and businesses", as a way to reach sustainable economic and social development.

The previous edition of these Live Learning Experience sessions - **The Peace Agenda during and after Covid-19** - took place on June 11, organized in collaboration with the World Forum on Cities and Territories of Peace and addressed the agenda of local governments for peace.

Diana Alarcón, General Coordinator of Advisers and International Affairs of Mexico City, participated in the conversation asserting that : "**The construction of peace must be done with regards to the human and social rights of all people**. It must be a positive peace, which is built on economic development, universal access to basic services, culture, health, housing", she asserted. And Jaime Morales, Undersecretary for Human Rights of the Government of Mexico City, explained how Mexico City had sought, in the midst of the pandemic, to guarantee universal access to basic services to all the population, especially to groups of priority attention as older adults.

During the session, we also counted on the presence of Nadine Burbar, Chief of Resilience of Ramallah, who pointed out that the consolidation of peace is key to having resilient cities and communities, and for this it is essential to have communities at the center of efforts, promoting citizen participation and the solutions that come from the ground.

Also, Vladimir Rodríguez, High Counselor for the Rights of Victims, Peace and Reconciliation of Bogotá, pointed out that the outbreak has generated an increase in urban violence, and this has generated a situation of mistrust between citizens and institutions, and that it is necessary to develop conflict resolution mechanisms between the local and regional level.

Live Learning Experiences involved cities and metropolises from all over the world seeking to create new solutions for challenges that the pandemic has highlighted, now more than ever.

For more information on previous sessions, please contact us : communication@metropolis.org

