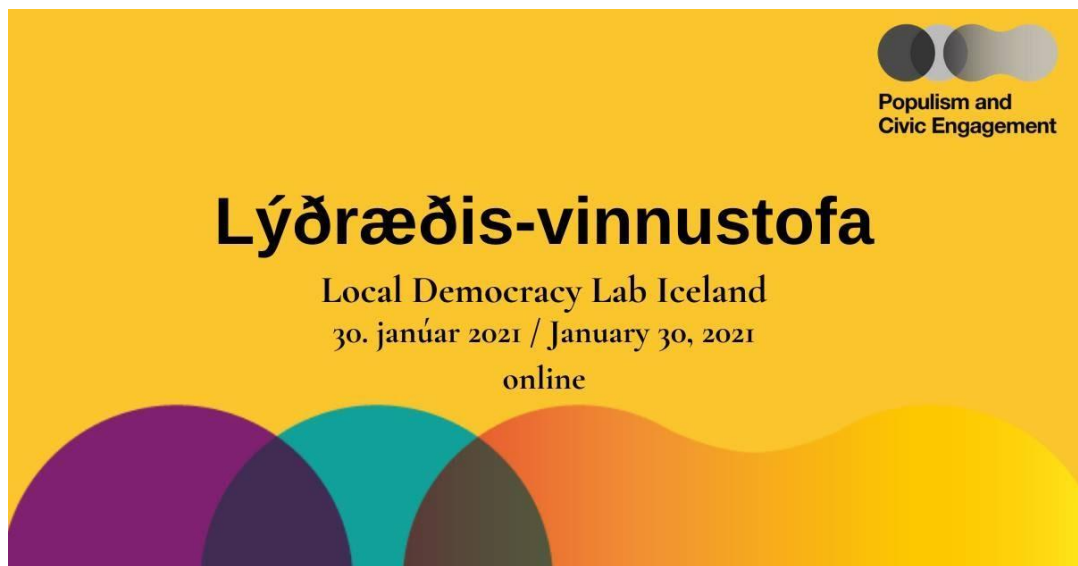




PaCE Local Democracy Labs in Iceland

30th of January 2021



Trust in public administration in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic

The document aims to introduce the main findings of the PaCE Local Democracy Lab in Iceland: *“Trust in public administration, in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic”*. The local democracy lab was hosted by the City of Reykjavík, one of the partners of the [PaCE – Populism and Civic Engagement](#) project and it was the first online democracy lab in a series of six local democracy labs carried out in six European countries. The number of participants to the democracy lab in Iceland were twenty-seven.

1. Summary

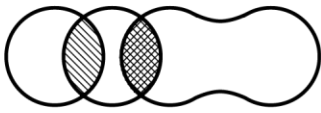
1.1. Key Findings

The report highlights overall the participants' trust in the measures undertaken by the authorities regarding the protection against the Covid-19. However, participants considered many of its actions challenging as they recognized its importance as a solid and non-partisan actor (State policy over party politics). Some participants have underlined the limited access and accessibility of information for minority groups, a lack of transparency and coordination between different authorities' departments regarding the distribution of measures, and the applicability in different sectors. For example, participants did not identify a clear distinction in the content of the authorities formulated and whether those measures were related to the social, economic, or personal area of life. Therefore, a polarized opinion has been highlighted by participants: whether the undertaken measures should be directed towards protecting citizens and keeping the country closed for people coming from the outside or towards protecting the economy and opening the country, e.g., for tourism.

The PaCE Local Democracy Lab in Iceland revealed interesting statements and declarations from twenty-seven participants. The participants' statements have been qualitatively analyzed by the thematic analysis method being organized in two levels: on the one hand, based on the participants' views, and the other hand, based on the consequences the measures had on different sectors. In addition, the outcomes were classified as *recommendations* to be considered by policymakers and authorities for improvements in public preparation in the future.

Summary of the outcomes of the PaCE Local Democracy Lab in Iceland

- High level of trust in the measures adopted by authorities as protection against the Covid-19-pandemic, especially trust in the ministers and health authorities.
- Lack of clarity, accessibility and personalized information considering the diversity of business and private life of different groups in the society and the available knowledge and needs of different minority and disadvantaged groups.



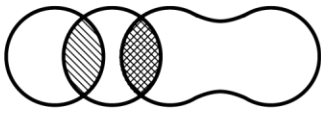
- Poor coordination of messages distributed by different authorities, experts and other public institutions when measures were enforced in different sectors and for different groups of people.
- Insignificant monitoring and follow-up of strategies adopted for the assessment of the long-term effects of the Covid-19 and measures applied in different sectors such as economy and unemployment, health/mental health, and wellbeing (e.g. psychological issues, domestic violence etc.).
- Insufficient analysis and evaluation of the impact of the crisis on loneliness, isolation and human rights protection of vulnerable members of the Icelandic community.

Participants agreed that:

- Language barriers are a big challenge for cultural, economic and social integration of foreigners in Iceland. This was seen even more urgently as public health information and news had to be communicated effectively across all social groups in the country e.g. hearing-impaired people, people with dyslexia etc. However, the participants group felt that the result was far from the ideal one.
- Better communication of the State's right-protecting entities, such as the Ombudsman (Umbodsmadur), is needed. With some groups being unaware of the violation of their rights, or that there is help available for them, with international students and workers specifically mentioned.

The participants recalled a more attention of government and authorities to preventive measures to be a part of policy strategy. For instance, participants recommended the implementation of education programs for the general public, more accessible and better health services, well-being and welfare programs, and support programmes for a healthy lifestyle.

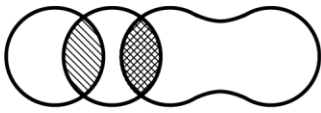
The participants also highlighted the need of a better monitoring of the cascading long-term effects on groups of people confronting with difficulties in their private lives, cf. risk of domestic violence, social isolation, suicide, and financial/economic collapse.



1.2. Recommendations

A list of recommendations based on the main finding of the discussion carried by the participants to the PaCE Local Democracy Lab in Iceland are presented below. The recommendations are formulated based on some areas and actions highlighted by participants as not being enough addressed by the authorities' measures or lacking strategies of visibility and accessibility of the information for different minority groups. The following is a summary of these recommendations:

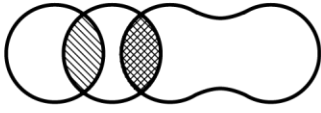
1. The *availability and accessibility of information, and additional explanation of* undertaken measures was one of the limitations underlined by the participants that might influence the trust in authorities/government, especially when it comes to minority groups such as immigrants, workers from other countries, disabled people, elderly people or non-Icelandic speakers. Therefore, a **coherent information and communication strategy** is required from authorities for a better distribution of information about the implementation of measures in different context and sectors of socio-economic, socio-cultural, health and personal life. The communication strategy might ensure an inclusive approach for different members of the community, guarantying the equal access to information of members of the Icelandic community. At the same time, it is necessary to sharpen the *coordination among representatives of the authorities and representatives of minorities* so that measures reflect the clear diversity of the needs of different groups.
2. The Covid-19 crisis and the protection measures have impacted, according to participants main discussion points in the local democracy lab Iceland, different sectors such as the **socio-economic, socio-cultural, healthcare sectors and personal life**. One issue emerged from the participants' statements is that the measures are not formulated in a way that indicated which sector the measures were applicable to, and what possible impact they might have on people's life, e.g. on the professionals' status, health, family and social participation. From this perspective, a more in-depth **strategy of distribution of information for different sectors** is required from authorities/government in order for people to evaluate the impact in different sectors of their life and enforcement measures in different contexts and different organisations.



3. *Media plays an essential role in the distribution of information* within the extended Icelandic community. However, some participants in the local democracy labs have *criticized the transparency of information* and the lack of engagement with the public. Therefore, a few recommendations have been proposed by participants:
 - The creation of an open online platform/forum managed by people for sharing opinions and seeking clarifications on undertaken measures and the regulation of implementation.
 - To have clearer information about where particular questions can be addressed to different authorities.
 - The creation of a public space for debate and dialogue, where differences in opinion and possible conflicts between individuals and diverse communities could be addressed and some amelioration strategies can be proposed.

4. The undertaken measures have caused some indirect consequences on *personal life, family, and social lives*. For instance, the prolonged cohabitation of some members of the Icelandic community entails different kinds of risks, e.g., the *risk of domestic violence*. In this context, the authorities/government strategy, in a crisis such as the Covid-19, should consider closer monitoring programmes of families and different communities at risk of domestic violence as a possible measure. The authorities might also include preventive measures for **the amelioration of psychological and mental health effects**. Therefore, one of the recommendations made by the organizers of the local democracy lab in Reykjavík is the investment in support groups where specialists can assist people with different needs with **expertise in psychology for family, management of the crisis, and risk situations, and resilience programmes**.

5. The Covid-19 has demonstrated one more time that people are not prepared when faced with a situation of crisis. People needs the adaptation of resilience mechanisms and responses to crisis in order to handle better the social and personal life in such circumstances. However, history has repeatedly demonstrated that a crisis can at any time “knock” on our door. Therefore, **preventive measures are necessary to be envisaged** for a better preparation of general population for and eventual crisis. In this regard, the

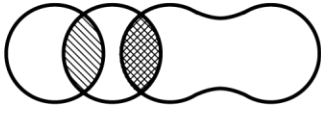


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participants have made some recommendations that support the creation of *public educational programmes*, especially in a form of a *regular educational strategy to be implemented in schools and industry*. A resilient society must be willing to create and focus on *social and well-being programs and a healthy lifestyle*.

6. The crisis might entangle as well *adverse human rights effects*, especially when this comes to minority groups. In this context, educational programmes must be created in order to strengthen the people's knowledge of **availability of suitable protecting entities** such as Umbodsmadur (agent, law representative), Working, and Trade Unions.
7. One of the significant effects of the implementation of protection measures against the Covid-19 was on the *employment sector*, where the most affected categories are groups of immigrants and people working in the foreign labour market. This has a significant consequence on the *tourism industry, where most of members of the minority groups lost their jobs*. The participants' discussion highlighted the lack of authorities' support measures and transparent clear information about which authorities' people can address particular questions to, how to apply for financial support and whether all category of workers such as self-employees have the rights to governmental financial subsidies. One recommendation might be that authorities delegate to civil community organisations (i.e. Trade Unions) the task of communicating preventive measures about the Covid-19 to foreign workers in their native languages.

More details about the outcomes of the PaCE Local Democracy Lab
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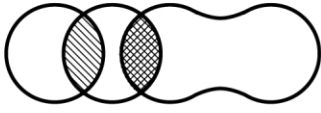
The organisation and implementation of the PaCE Local Democracy Lab in Iceland would not be possible without the financial contribution of the ***PaCE – Populism and Civil Engagement*** project financed by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation (No 822337).

We acknowledge the active participation of twenty-seven participants for bringing their insights, knowledge, experience and contribution to the research on populism movement, and for engaging in such a, constructive and open exchange of, opinions and ideas about democracy and trust in administration/public authority in Iceland in the time of Covid-19.

We would like to acknowledge the generous and professional support of Sophie Kiesouw, project lead PaCE in Netherlands and Aleksandra Zietek, Local connector Krakow, Poland, both from Democratic Society in Brussels for closely planning together with the Municipality of Reykjavík the Local Democracy Lab in Iceland.

We would like to thank for the efficient and passionate support of Kári Gunnarsson, the leader of the facilitator team in Iceland that contributed along the organisation, implementation, selection of participants and carrying out the local democracy lab in Iceland. Thanks equally to the members of the facilitators team, Sigurborg Kr. Hannesdóttir, Finnur Þ. Gunnþórsson and Dr. Magnús Yngvi Jósefsson from Iceland and Sophie Kiesouw from the Netherlands who creatively and professionally contributed in carrying out the online version of local democracy lab.

We acknowledge Róbert Bjarnason, manager of Citizens Foundation in Iceland for the design and development of the online platform of deliberation ***Better Reykjavík – Your Priorities*** made available for participants of the democracy lab.



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We are thankful for all the help from every individual and organisations in Iceland that supporting us in preparing and reaching out to participants:

- Nemendafélag Háskólans á Bifröst
- Félagið Ísland-Palestína
- Tékkneska á Íslandi (TÉKÍS)
- FIA - Filipino-Icelandic Association
- Hola – Félag spænskumælandi á Íslandi
- Iceland News Polska
- KUMPÁNI, félag félagsvísinda- og sálfræðinema við HA
- Öryrkjabandalag Íslands – Sjálfsbjörg
- Projekt Polska
- Samtökin '78
- SONI - Society of New Icelanders
- Thailensk-Íslenska Félagið
- DACIA-félag Rúmena á Íslandi
- Velferðarsvið Reykjavíkurborgar

And all others that helped.