



# Strengthening Public Governance of Local Government: Lessons from the COVID-19-Crisis

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# Welcome to Variety: Many LG-systems

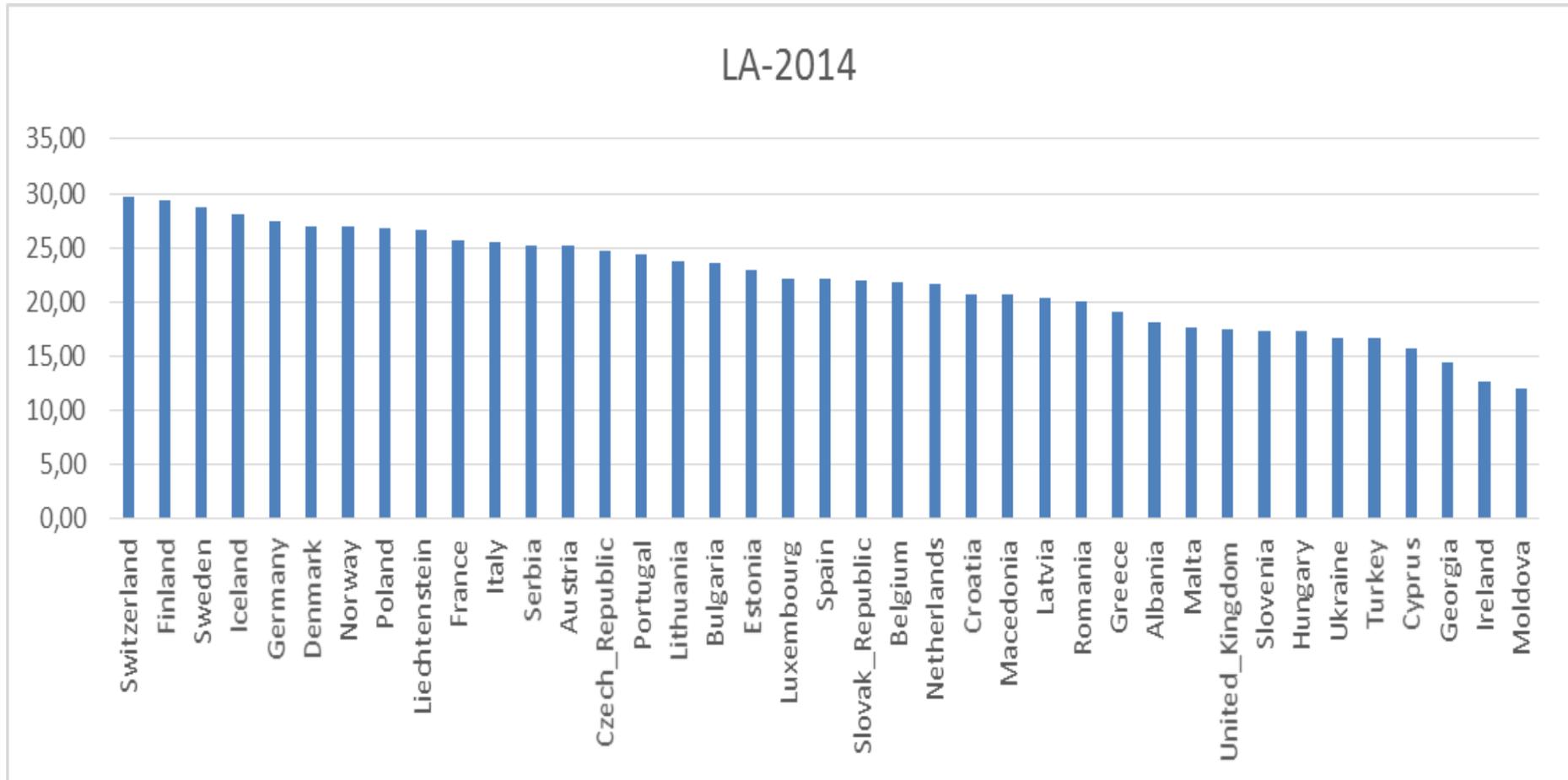


Continental European Napoleonic Type (CEN)	Continental European Federal Type (CEF)	Nordic Type (NO)	Anglo Sax. Type (AS)	Central Eastern European Type (CEE)	South Eastern Europ. Type (SEE)
Belgium	Austria	Iceland	Cyprus	Czech Rep.	Albania
France	Germany	Netherl.	England	Hungary	Croatia
Greece	Switzerland	Norway	Ireland	Latvia	Romania
Italy		Sweden	Israel	Lithuania	Serbia
Portugal				Poland	Slovenia
Spain				Slovakia	
Turkey	Source: Kuhlmann et al. in: Heinelt et al. (eds.) 2018				



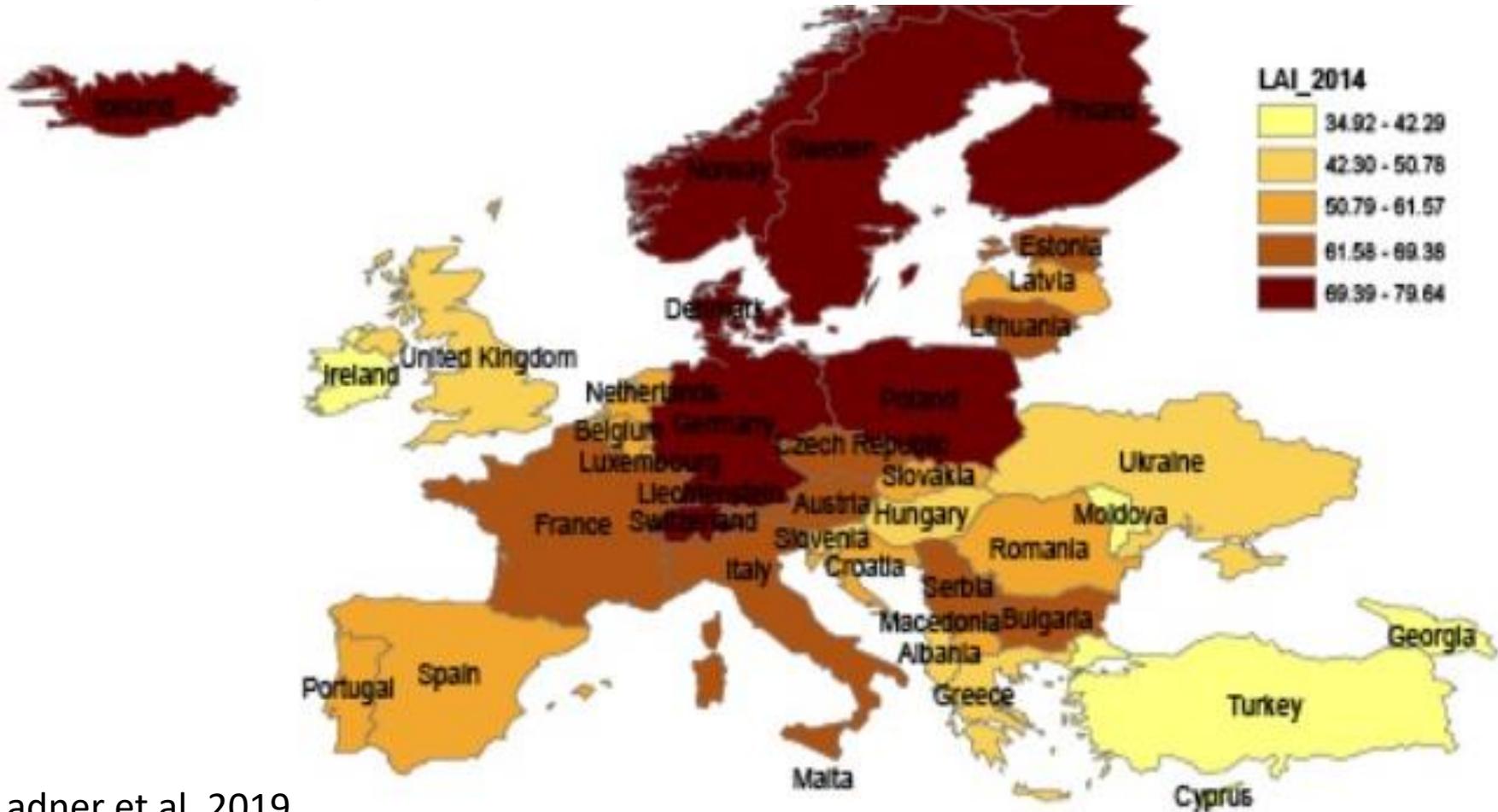


# Increasing, Yet Varying Local Autonomy



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## Local Autonomy Index 2014



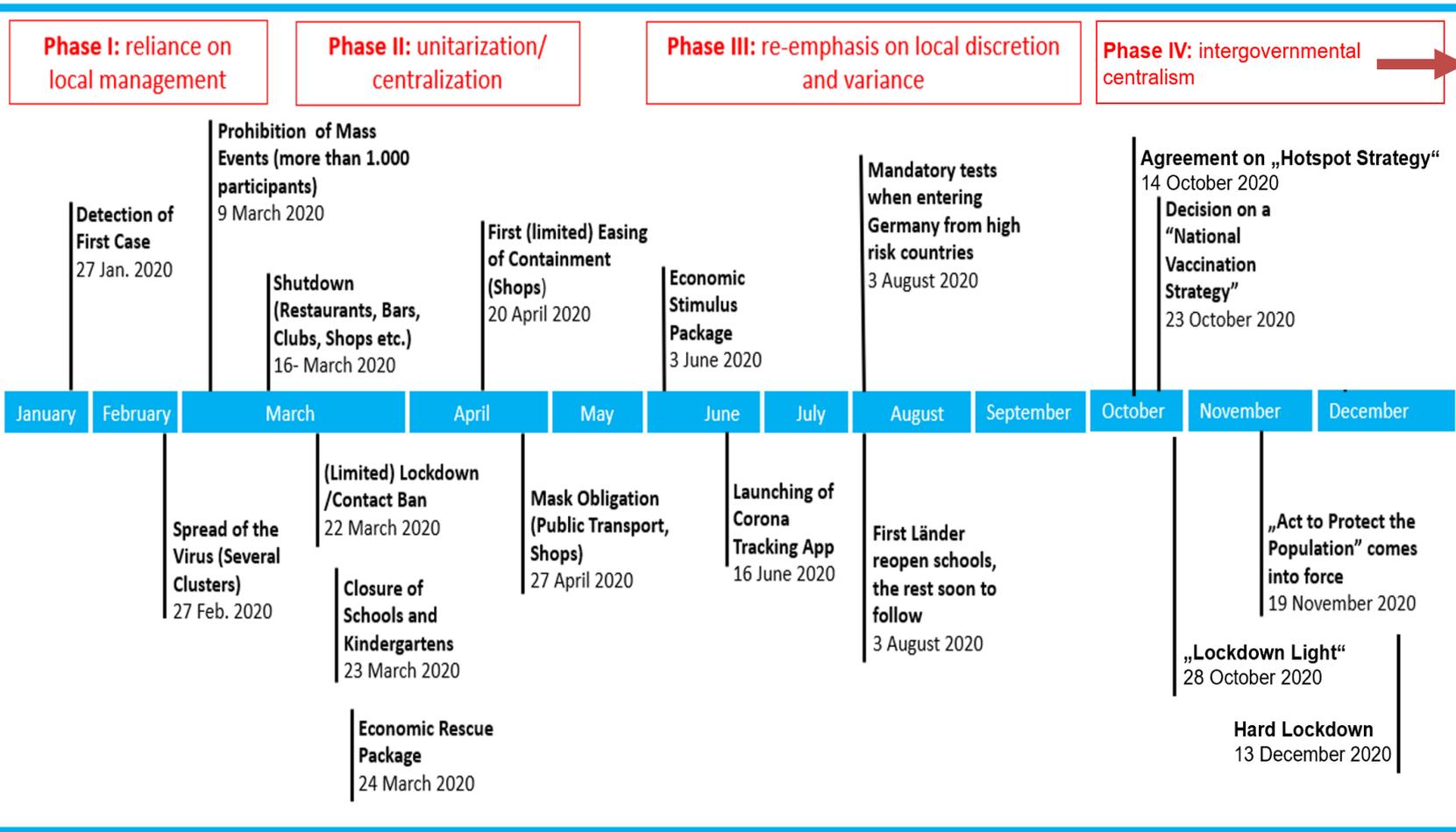
Ladner et al. 2019

# Role of Local Governments in the COVID-19 Crisis: Example of Germany

- Länder and LGs responsible for pandemic management based on Federal Law on the Prevention of Infection → executed in their own discretion
- 375 local health authorities as central pillars of Germany's crisis response
  - “Every public health officer of a county has more powers than the Federal Minister of Health” (Tagesspiegel, 12.4.2020) → agile reactions
- Most containment measures first taken by LGs, later at upper levels (school closures, city-wide mask obligations etc.)
- However, local health authorities reached capacity limits (in October 2020 75% of cases untraceable); reasons:
  - Comprehensive track and trace system, strict quarantining rules
  - Staff shortage even before the crisis
  - Horizontal coordination problems (with medical practitioners, hospitals)
  - Lacking digitalization → contact tracing; registration; reporting of cases
- Local discretion increasingly curbed during the crisis → centralization
- Five phases of crisis management in the intergovernmental setting: from sub-national/local predominance to increasingly centralist approaches

## Timeline of Containment Measures

**Phase V:**  
Centralization  
(Federal  
Emergency  
Brake in  
April  
2021)



# Role of Local Governments in the COVID-19 Crisis: Example of Germany

- In general more agile reactions possible at the local level
- Local governments as resilience-promoting institutions for crises mitigation
- Multi-purpose profile supports horizontal coordination capacities
- More comprehensive cross-cutting assessment/handling of the crisis
- Capability to overcome departmental egoisms and silo-logic, also due to directly elected powerful mayor as local executive
- Shifting of resources for crisis management within the local authority more easily possible than in upper-level administrations
- Local mitigation measures more accepted by citizens than centrally imposed measures → promotion of overall legitimacy of crisis mitigation policies
- More proximity to local problems and tailor-made measures possible
- More agility, flexibility, inclination to experiments

# Citizens' Assessments of Governments' Responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic

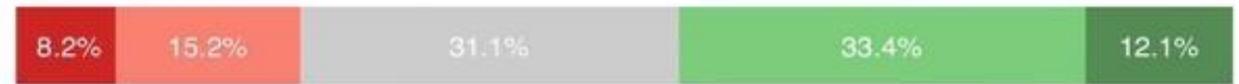
Local Governments



Local Health Authority



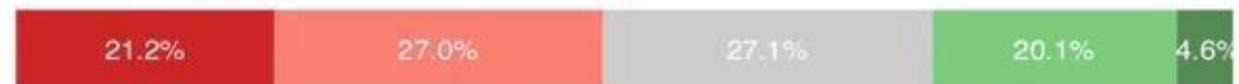
Länder Authorities



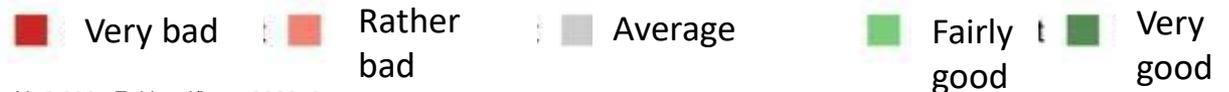
Federal Authorities



European Union



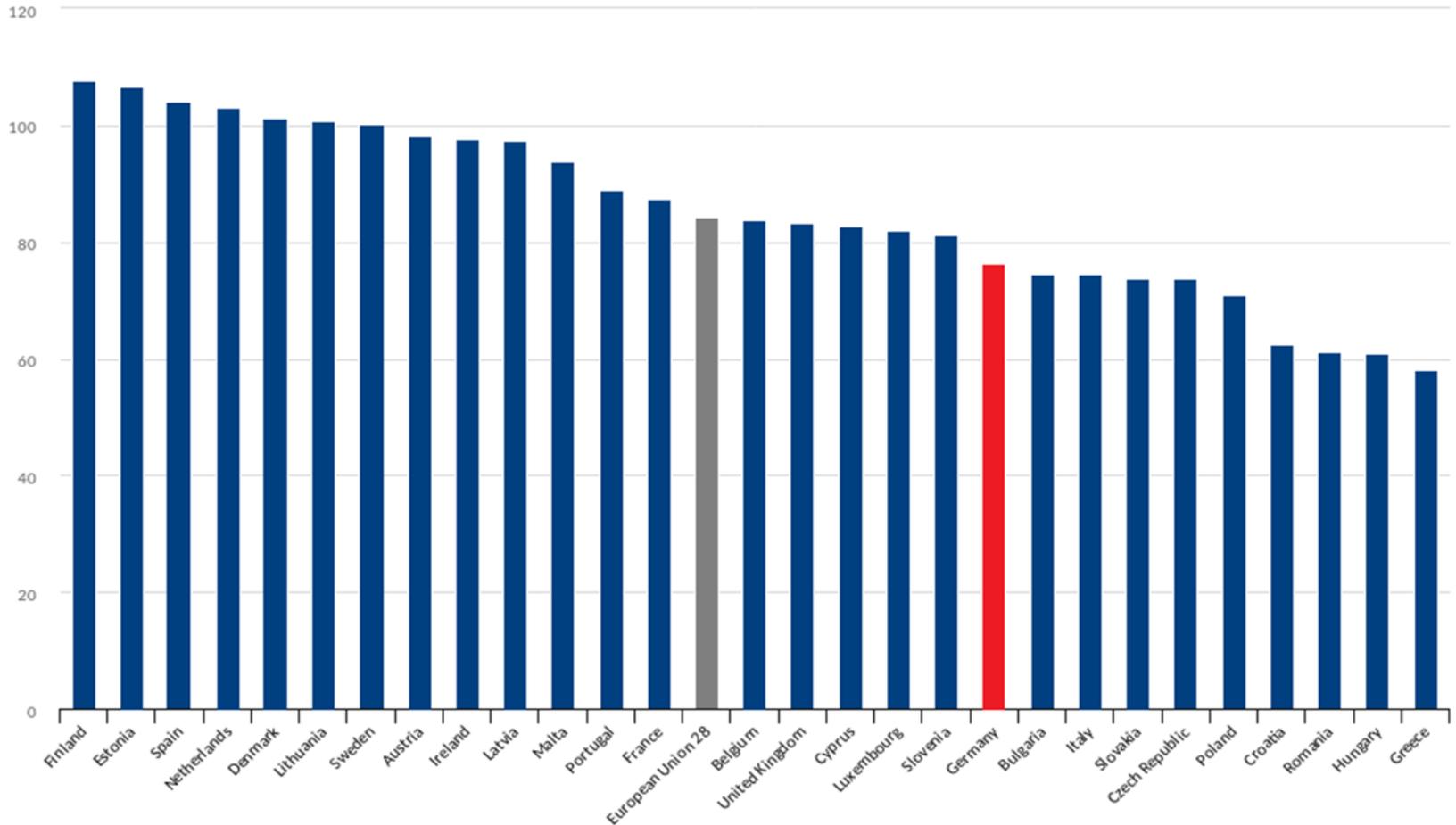
0% 25% 50% 75% 100%  
Prozent



# Crisis as a Window of Opportunity for the Digital Transformation

- Key Question: How do actors use the crisis as a window of opportunity to facilitate/accelerate innovation and reform?
- Strategic or incremental usage of the crisis to obtain pre-defined goals or implement existing solutions that are waiting to be put in practice
- Federal government took the opportunity of re-enforcing investments into the digitalization of public administration and for advancing (ongoing or new) modernization efforts
- Economic stimulus package grants additional measures to kick-off the economy, strengthen LGs, invest into digitalization, health capacities, sustainable technologies
- Allocation of 4.3 billion Euro to the digitalization of public administration, including 3 billion allotted to the introduction of local e-services only

# Germany's position in international rankings (Digitalization of Public Administration)



[digital-agenda-data.eu/charts/desi-components](https://digital-agenda-data.eu/charts/desi-components) (2018)

# Digital Maturity in Local Service Delivery

Service	Information available online	Partially processed online (forms, emails)	Fully processed online	N
Passports	87%	21%	2%	210
Certificates (birth / marriage)	67%	44%	10%	101
Criminal record	75%	26%	23%	205
Registration of residency	80%	39%	3%	205
Authentication of certificates	96%	8%	1%	178
Dog tax registration	80%	33%	6%	118
Residents parking perming	81%	27%	8%	84
Parking permit for people with disabilities	91%	18%	0%	87
Housing benefits	85%	30%	0%	54
Vehicle registration (only county-free cities)	83%	33%	10%	48

Source: city survey (mayors). Question: “Which services of your local one-stop shop are online available and to what extent?”

## Some Early lessons

- Local governments play a significant role in coping with multiple crises and general 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges:
  - Pandemic management; integration of migrants; coping with climate change; managing the digital transformation; eService provision
- Crisis used as a window of opportunity for accelerating the digital transformation (at the local level) → progress/success remains to be seen
- Decentralization, subnational discretion, federal/local variance not as hurdles but as assets in crisis management
  - Ensure agility, flexibility, tailor-made containment solutions
  - Specifically in situations with varying affectedness of territories
  - Routine, experience, capacities at the subnational level necessary
- Variation of solutions particularly important in situations of uncertain, volatile, ambiguous knowledge about the effectiveness of certain measures in order to promote learning and avoid large-scale failures (from „fatal remedies“)
- Systematic comparative evaluations necessary to increase evidence-base

**Thank you very much for your attention!**