



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## Tackling the COVID-19 Pandemic in Türkiye in the Context of Local Service Delivery Paradigms

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### Abstract

Many researchers have investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cities and conducted studies in urban areas to understand the various response efforts. The main purpose of this study is to evaluate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on metropolitan municipalities in the context of the local service delivery paradigms. In this context, the study examined the activities carried out by the top five most populous provinces in Türkiye (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Antalya, Konya, Kocaeli, Şanlıurfa, Adana) between 2020 and 2021 within the scope of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. The data obtained on the activities of the metropolitan municipalities were evaluated through content analysis, and content coding was performed using the MAXQDA program. In the realization of these policies in Türkiye, despite the influence of many methods in the context of various service delivery administrations, such as local government, intergovernmental, local governance, e-municipality, and city diplomacy, it is seen that the directives of the central government are predominantly effective, and local governments do not use the cooperation method effectively.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, Local government, Paradigm, Service delivery, Governance.

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## 1. Introduction

Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) is a global epidemic known as the COVID-19 pandemic. In China, the coronavirus was first discovered in new patients in December 2019. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020, as a result of the virus's rapid spread to other nations around the world. Since the COVID-19 epidemic started, more than 2 million people in the European Region have died from the illness. More than three years had elapsed since the pandemic by the middle of 2023. However, the pandemic has not yet been completed. But for the time being, the pandemic's worldwide emergency is over (World Health Organization, 2023). More than 90% of all COVID-19 pandemic cases worldwide occur in urban areas. Cities frequently carry the brunt of the issue, with poor living conditions, insufficient water and sanitation services, and inadequate healthcare systems.

COVID-19 Pandemic is a multifaceted global issue that extends far beyond health and well-being. COVID-19 has revealed complex global interdependence and has impacted a wide range of issues that perpetuate ethnic, economic, social, and gender inequities in societal structures. The number of people experiencing food insecurity has increased from 113 million to 135 million in 2019 (Lambert et al., 2020, p. 312). Without immediate action, the lives and livelihoods of 265 million people in low-income and middle-income countries are expected to be threatened during the COVID-19 (Anthem, 2020). More than 1.5 billion young people have been affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, with the most vulnerable students and youth being severely affected. COVID-19 also deeply impacts the elderly population. The death rates from epidemics in the past have also confirmed that age is an important factor. For example, when looking at the case/death rates of patients who died from SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome), one of the coronavirus variants, it was observed that case/death rates increased with increasing age (World Health Organization, 2020). The gains gained following the objectives of the 2030 Education Agenda were partially lost (UNESCO, 2020). Controlling mobility was one of the first steps taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19. However, staying in is a luxury that everyone cannot afford. Restrictions on movement can have disastrous consequences for the 79.5 million displaced individuals living in overcrowded conditions with little access to employment or services around the world. The COVID-19 outbreak has been controlled by the use of public health initiatives. These considerations also lead to alarming increases in domestic violence and mental health problems, as well as some other negative effects (Lambert et al., 2020, pp. 312–313). Sharifi and Khavarian-Garmsir (2020, p. 11) divided matters affected by the epidemic into four categories: environmental quality, socioeconomic impacts, management and governance, transportation, and urban design.

This study aimed to evaluate the disruptions experienced by local governments and the methods and policies to fight them during COVID-19. This paper is divided into six sections. After this first section with the introduction, the second section analyzes the literature on various service delivery management in line with the efforts of local governments in the fight against COVID-19. The third section provides an overview of the research methodology. The fourth section presents a general description of the pandemic process in relation to Türkiye.

The fifth section details the activities and policies implemented by local governments to fight the spread of viruses between 2020 and 2021. Finally, the sixth section contains the conclusion where the findings of the study are evaluated.

## **2. Literature**

During the traditional public administration period, which lasted until the 1970s, welfare state practices within the framework of Keynesian economic policies gained importance in many countries (Şengül, 1999, p. 5). One of the two decisive features of welfare state period practices regarding public services is that the services aim to fulfill the basic functions of daily life, and the other is that the state provides these services without intermediaries, that is, directly through the institutions it has established (Eser et al., 2011, p. 203). The organizational structure, temperature, and functions of local governments in the welfare state period were hierarchical and bureaucratic, in line with Fordist organizational forms. The structure, functioning, and services in local governments, more comprehensively, exhibit an outlook in which the number of actors is low; there are official and elected local democratic representatives shaped within the framework of a centralist service delivery approach, there is a bureaucratic and hierarchical organizational structure, horizontal and vertical networks are limited, intensive tutelage relations between the center and the local, routine public policies are implemented, and social democratic ideology and technocratic discourse are dominant (Bıçkı & Sobacı, 2011, pp. 227–229).

After the 1970s, factors such as the desire to reach more customers, the development of technology, and competition led to a shift in the understanding of public administration towards the use of private sector management techniques. Attempts to downsize the state have resulted in consumer orientation, total quality management, and cooperation practices gaining importance in the field of public administration. These initiatives also aim to restructure the local administration system (Erençin, 2002, p. 29). The impact of the new public management approach on local governments may emerge in different ways, depending on time and space factors. While local governments in the Netherlands focused on efficiency and other administrative values in the 1980s, they shifted toward participatory policymaking in the 1990s. In Germany, local governments focused on bottom-up political renewal in the 1980s but shifted to self-management and contract management in the 1990s (Hendriks & Tops, 1999, p. 149).

In the 2000s, beyond discussions on the new public management approach in the field of public administration, the search for new paradigms started to claim to be the dominant theory (Sobacı & Köseoğlu, 2015, pp. 233–235). In theory, these paradigms are built on “network governance” (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012, p. 2). In this context, the idea of strengthening the capabilities to think and act effectively in several different dimensions in the new complex model of polycentric network governance is discussed. Network governance takes into account the advantages of network coordination in both the public and private sectors, facilitating enhanced learning opportunities for governments, such as information exchange, sharing best-practice examples, and increasing the capacity to plan and address complex problems (Provan

& Kenis, 2008, p. 229). The cooperation of local governments through networks brings together the units included in the network around common problems.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, central governments quickly mobilized their decision-making mechanisms and started to take measures primarily in the fields of health and economy. In such an important period, it is no longer important to act according to the new public administration understanding, defend the minimal state understanding (Yılmaz, 2021, p. 83) or maintain the rules of the traditional public administration understanding. COVID-19 has brought many debates in the field of public administration. Among these debates are changes in the methods and actors involved in the formulation and implementation of public policies, as well as changes in the organizational structure, organizational culture, working styles and habits, service capacity, and the rules (efficiency and effectiveness, speed, transparency, accountability, fairness, and ethical behavior, among others) of public administration, which includes both central public administration and local governments (Ömürgönülşen, 2020, p. 342).

In the context of the aforementioned discussions, it is crucial to consider how local government organizations will adjust to these novel situations (Ömürgönülşen, 2020, p. 342). Public health crises, such as the COVID-19, have elicited debates on how cities should be built and managed to better prepare for future public health emergencies (Fan et al., 2023, p. 1536). Local governments have a more flexible and effective structure than central governments in terms of serving the public. Because they are closer to the public in the provision of services to the public, they have the ability to act more quickly and easily. They also encourage participation and are more effective in solving local problems. They guarantee the attainment of the intended outcomes. Local governments play a crucial role in public health, as they are the organizations closest to the people and best understand their needs (Karataş & Gördeles Beşer, 2021, pp. 1345–1346). The most important role of municipalities in terms of public health should be to create healthy cities in terms of the physical environment, to eliminate factors that endanger public health, and even to plan and organize the urban space in a way that allows for the improvement of public health. Another role is to provide services for vulnerable groups in cities by implementing social municipalism practices (Etiler, 2020, p. 70).

The pandemic, in particular, often enables and legitimizes the emergence of new planning and governance paradigms (Manzano Gómez, 2023, p. 1571). COVID-19 exposes both shortcomings and potential opportunities for governance at different levels (Fan et al., 2023, p. 1536). The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the welfare state often fails to deliver social services (Beck & Gwilym, 2023, p. 556). Observing the early pandemic developments, President Eric Garcetti of Los Angeles Municipality and C40 (Cities Climate Leadership Group) met with 45 mayors from around the world immediately after the WHO designated COVID-19 as a pandemic. Cities have been at the forefront of efforts to strengthen their capacity to stop the spread of the virus, to develop a guide to share tools and policy initiatives in this direction, and to deliver emergency health services effectively and efficiently (Pipa & Bouchet, 2020b, p. 602). C40 is just one of the effective efforts supporting the local response to COVID-19. In addition to these efforts, cities are providing medical aids such as masks as part of their international bilateral cooperation (Solarczyk, 2020). The rapid communication network and learning process developed by cities reveal important results regarding the role of cities in the COVID-19

pandemic process. Such practical measures offer a chance to shift cities' policy priorities swiftly and assess their capacity for coordinated problem solving (Acuto et al., 2021, p. 139).

Local governments have some advantages over national governments in tackling global issues. Cities are the primary locations where people directly experience global challenges like climate change, migration, and pandemics. Cities' efforts in the global arena do not include security considerations and are instead centered on practical responses and activities (Rudakowska & Simon, 2020, p. 1). Through collaboration and network governance initiatives at the local level, an attempt was made to remove the obstacles experienced at the national level. Cities are at the forefront of the search for solutions to emerging global problems because the central government's nationalistic policies align more closely with the multilateralism ideal. Instead of adopting a policy to deal with global issues, cities frequently start collaborative measures with the cities of other nations and rely on their global networks and bilateral partnerships.

In recent years, the literature on the role of local governments in the fight against COVID-19 has begun to emphasize the relevance of city diplomacy (Acuto et al., 2020; Acuto et al., 2021; Kihlgren Grandi, 2020; Kosovac et al., 2020; Kosovac et al., 2021; Pipa & Bouchet, 2020a; Pipa & Bouchet, 2020b). The pandemic brought up a reevaluation of urban networks built by scientists in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. The fact that existing networks are working and exchanging knowledge and techniques relevant to the pandemic process demonstrates the cities' ability to better handle this process collaboratively (Acuto et al., 2021, pp. 138-142). City diplomacy plays a significant role in this context because it allows cities to operate more pragmatically and quickly than national governments (Rudakowska & Simon, 2020). According to Pipa & Bouchet (2020a), city diplomacy activities during the pandemic include economic and material benefits, the exchange of knowledge and experience, and advocacy initiatives. For example, COVID-19 has also had the effect of challenging the solidarity and cooperation between sister cities in the fight against pandemics. Undoubtedly, the examples of cooperation and solidarity (transfer of information and technology, personnel, medical devices, and supplies, etc.) between sister cities during this difficult period will help to develop functional examples in similar crisis periods in the future. In this respect, the pandemic period has also provided opportunities to draw attention to the role of solidarity and cooperation in sister city relations in global crises (Bay & Çalışkan, 2022, p. 26).

Different levels of governments are expected to have access to fundamentally different types and amounts of information during a significant health crisis such as the current COVID-19 epidemic. For example, local governments understand local problems better than national governments. As such, the problem of information asymmetry among public administrators is alleviated, allowing them to make timely decisions and implement appropriate solutions (Li et al., 2020, p. 698). Furthermore, this knowledge must be made available to citizens. Wilkinson et al. (2020, p. 513) claimed clear and reliable information on people, the disease, and the principles of disease control. As such, local governments and other actors should be concerned with the appropriate use of communication technology (e.g., radio and social media). As a matter of fact, during the pandemic, local governments actively used social media as a communication and public relations tool and frequently included the COVID-19 theme in their posts (Pekküçükşen & Yıldırım, 2021, p. 6708). Small and large cities can benefit from

information sharing and reporting produced and delivered in this manner (Rudakowska & Simon, 2020). It also shows that digital technology solutions play an important role in certain clusters during the COVID-19 pandemic (Clement et al., 2023, p. 4). The use of information and communication technologies has had a significant impact on a city's relationship with other actors, especially with the recent increase in digitization. Technology is communication that links a city with the outside world. It has become a much easier and less costly method for working on vehicles. During the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, the role of digital technology should not be underestimated in events and activities that maintain communication, such as meetings, conferences, fairs, and congresses, in connecting cities with the world. At the beginning of the pandemic, municipalities prioritized services to meet basic needs; in the following period, they started to gain new experiences in the use of technology (such as psychological counseling, telephone counseling, video and live internet broadcasting, and informative seminars) (Urhan & Aslankoç, 2021, p. 945).

Cooperation between central and local governments is also important. The central-local government relationships in each country impact its response to the pandemic. In Italy, the ruling and opposition parties politicized the pandemic process for political gain. This impeded the national effort. States and local governments in the United States were left to fend for themselves. In China, the response was immediately centralized, as Xi Jinping replaced local leaders with his allies and mobilized vast resources to keep the spread under control (Ren, 2020, p. 10). According to Gao & Yu (2020, pp. 14–15), the central government in China ought to delegate additional authority to local governments. In the event of a public health outbreak, the central government must provide all required resources and directions, as well as be able to engage in local matters, in order to prevent the virus from spreading. Despite this, the local community, at the municipal and county levels, remains the primary responsible entity and must strive for good governance within restrictions. Furthermore, the central government should consider the capacity differences between local communities. Otherwise, social inequities between communities develop. Federal and state budgetary assistance to local governments should consider and rectify fiscal imbalances and social inequities among these governments with specific consideration given to weak local governments with limited capabilities (Dzigbede, 2020, p. 642).

### **3. Methodology**

This study employs a four-step research methodology. The steps are illustrated in a diagram in Table 1.

**Table 1***Research Methodology Scheme*

Step 1.	<b>Determining the area and scope of the research</b>	
	In general, urban areas with large, dense populations, high levels of proximity and mobility appear to be more vulnerable to the spread of COVID-19 and many other viruses (Simon et al., 2021, p. 131). For this reason, the field research sample was selected from the most populous provinces in Türkiye: <sup>1</sup> İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Antalya, Konya, Kocaeli, Şanlıurfa, and Adana. <sup>2</sup> The study focuses on the year in which COVID-19 cases and deaths started and the year of peak incidence (2020-2021).	
Step 2.	<b>Determining the research method</b>	
	In the study, data from the municipalities' activity reports for 2020-2021 were coded using the MAXQDA program. MAXQDA, a qualitative research tool, facilitates the coding and analysis of source materials. Keywords used to search the relevant activity reports: "Covid," "Covid," "COVID," "COVID," "pandemic," "outbreak," "Kovid," Koronavirüs," "Virüs," "Pandemi," "Salgın."	
Step 3.	<b>Determination of code headings</b>	
	Three different main code headings were created during the research.	
Step 3.1.	<b>Code headings for local service disruptions</b>	Objective: To identify the range and intensity of service disruptions in municipalities during COVID-19.
	<b>Code headings for local measures</b>	Objective: To identify the local measures most frequently used by municipalities during COVID-19.
	<b>Code headings for service delivery models</b>	Objective: To identify the service delivery methods used by municipalities during COVID-19.
	<b>Code headings for local service disruptions</b>	Objective: To identify the range and intensity of service disruptions in municipalities during COVID-19.
	<b>Code headings for local measures</b>	Objective: To identify the local measures most frequently used by municipalities during COVID-19.
	<b>Code headings for service delivery models</b>	Objective: To identify the service delivery methods used by municipalities during COVID-19.
Step 4.	<b>The intersection of code headings (local measures and local service models)</b>	
	This section aims to clarify the relationship between the code headings and includes a more detailed identification of the activities of municipalities in the COVID-19 process. + First, the relationship between local service disruptions and local measures was analyzed. Was there a direct solution to the disruptions caused by COVID-19, or were other measures developed to compensate for them? + Second, the relationship between local measures and local service models was examined. It was investigated whether there was a change in the service policies of municipalities during the COVID-19 pandemic.	

**4. A Brief Overview of COVID-19 in Türkiye**

In Türkiye, 17,004,677 confirmed cases of COVID-19 with 101,419 deaths have been reported to the WHO from January 3, 2020, to 2:06 am CET, November 22, 2023. As of January 28, 2023, a total of 139,694,693 vaccine doses had been administered (WHO Health Emergency

<sup>1</sup> Bursa is the fourth most populous province in Türkiye, according to Turkish Statistical Institute. However, the MAXQDA program was unable to analyze the Bursa Metropolitan Municipality's annual reports for 2020 and 2021 because the pdf file's nature prevented word searches.

<sup>2</sup> Activity reports on unavailable data: Adana metropolitan municipality activity report for 2021.

Dashboard, 2023). The first case was diagnosed in Türkiye on March 11, 2020. As of 2020, the number of infections has begun to increase, with the highest number of deaths occurring in 2021.

Considering the actors involved in the pandemic management process in Türkiye, the Ministry of Health is the most authorized and responsible institution for pandemic management, operating under the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye at the central government. The Coronavirus Science Board, Community Sciences Board, General Directorate of Public Health, and Department of Communicable Diseases are institutions that play an active role in the pandemic management process under the Ministry of Health. At the provincial level, the Provincial Hygiene Board, governorships, and municipalities are authorities that contribute to the pandemic management process (Tavukcu & Eke, 2021, p. 116). On March 11, 2020, after the first case was detected, public authorities implemented several public policies to prevent the outbreak. Government authorities initially worked to slow the spread of the disease and to ensure that the capacity of the health system was not exceeded. The aim was to reduce the number of deaths and minimize the damage to public service delivery and economic activities (Bimay & Kaypak, 2022, p. 439). However, it is arguable that the policies implemented in this process were handled with a pragmatist approach, centralized public policies increased, and the central government's interventionist role was brought to the forefront (Bimay & Kaypak, 2022, p. 439). With the emergence of COVID-19, provincial and district sanitation boards have become more active. The members of these boards are the mayor and municipal physician (Etiler, 2020, p. 69). The duties and responsibilities of municipalities in the field of health are defined by Article 20 of Public Health Law No. 1583, the recognized basic law in the field of public health in Türkiye. Although local governments in Türkiye are included in the provincial and district sanitation boards, the fact that the majority of chairmen and members of the boards are representatives of the central government has caused them to remain in the background of this process. While local governments are expected to take urgent measures during the epidemic process, various groups have expressed that decisions are made from the center in the measures taken against the epidemic and that there is insufficient social and psychological support in this respect (Bimay & Kaypak, 2022, p. 446). For example, in a study from the Isparta province in Türkiye, it was observed that in the decisions taken by the provincial sanitation board in each period, priority was given to the implementation of central government decisions within the province (Cansever & Cansever, 2023, p. 646). In this regard, expanding the scope of autonomous decision-making of local governments and creating partnerships between central and local governments are important issues in the fight against COVID-19 in Türkiye.

## **5. Results**

### **5.1 Local Service Disruptions for Municipalities During COVID-19**

Disruptions caused by the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic in municipalities in eight provinces of Türkiye between 2020 and 2021 were coded under 13 different subcode headings (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1**

*Local Service Disruptions for Municipalities During COVID-19*



**Figure 2**

*Issues in the Municipalities - Code-Subcode-Sections Model*

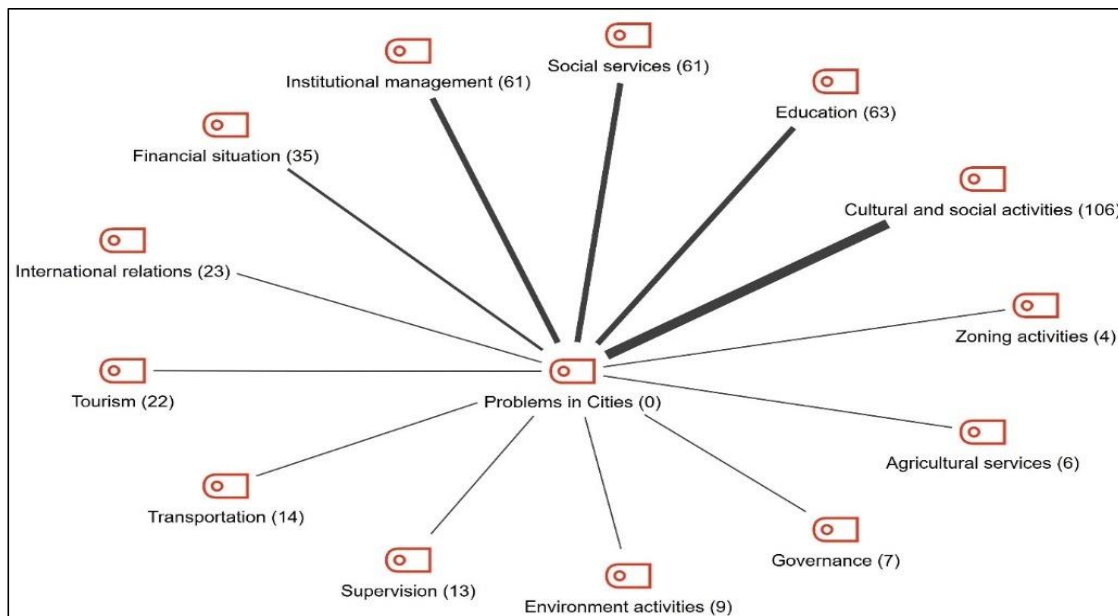


Figure 2 shows the intensity of the issues faced by municipalities during COVID-19. In total, 424 problems were identified. Cultural and social activities suffered the most disruption during the process. During the pandemic, activities that would strengthen the metropolitan municipalities' cultural structure and sense of belonging were suspended and postponed due to pandemic restrictions. This is followed by issues related to education, social services, and

institutional management. As stated by Kuruhalil et al. (2021, p. 2), as a result of the pandemic, there have been some changes in human life, social life, social service provision, and the changes experienced have created a crisis situation. In this context, the importance of social work has become more understandable with various social problems experienced during the pandemic process, and the need for social services has clearly emerged. Therefore, the social work profession has had to keep up with these changes while trying to intervene in the crisis. The pandemic slows down the development of municipalities' organizational activities. This situation creates significant disruptions in the institutional capacity of municipalities and thus affects municipal services. Furthermore, the pandemic has brought about additional challenges for disadvantaged groups within metropolitan municipalities. The elderly, women, youth, people with disabilities, the poor, migrants, or other groups with limited or restricted access to municipal services are among those at a disadvantage during COVID-19. Disadvantaged groups may be more vulnerable during the pandemic process than other people living in the province. For this reason, the importance of social services mentioned earlier gains importance again in the realization of services for these disadvantaged groups. Although less intense than others, one important issue is the financial situation experienced by the municipality during the pandemic. Considering that municipalities in Türkiye have limited own revenues and are financially dependent on the central government, financial problems lead to even more serious problems during the pandemic.

**Figure 3**

*Code Co-occurrence Model (Code Co-occurrence)*

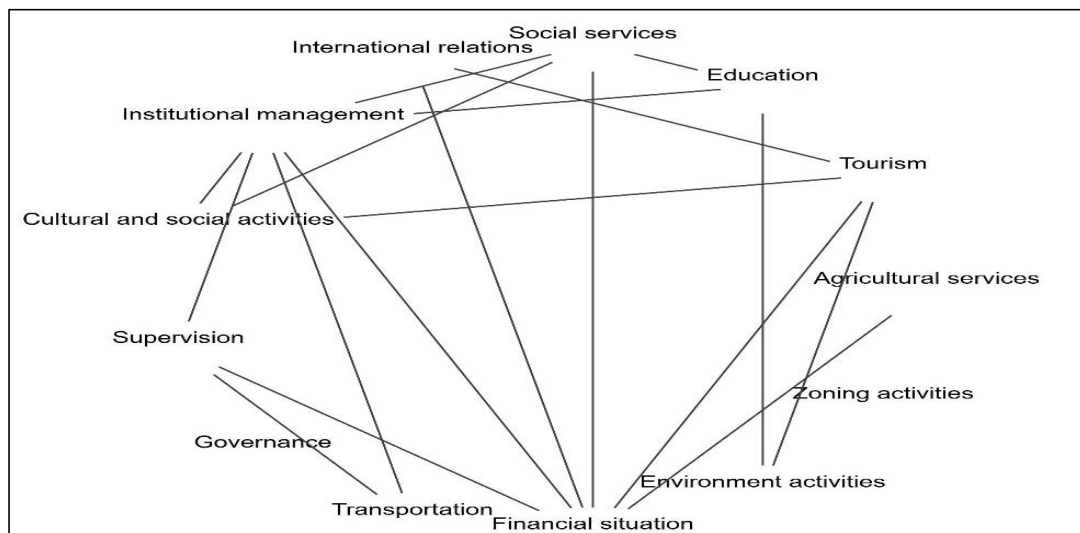


Figure 3 shows the overlapping codes. This figure shows the themes that affected the other themes. For example, in COVID-19, the inspection and operation of public transport are negatively affected by staff shortages (institutional management supervision). Cultural and social activities, which support disadvantaged groups in society, have an impact on social services (Cultural and Social Activities - Social Services). Institutional management training, which aims to develop human resources, has not yet taken place. The metropolitan municipalities lack the organization of fairs to draw in both domestic and foreign tourists,

leading to a decline in municipal revenues (Tourism-Financial Situation). Therefore, a service failure in the municipalities during the pandemic can have a direct or indirect impact on other service areas, leading to additional problems.

**Figure 4**

Code Map

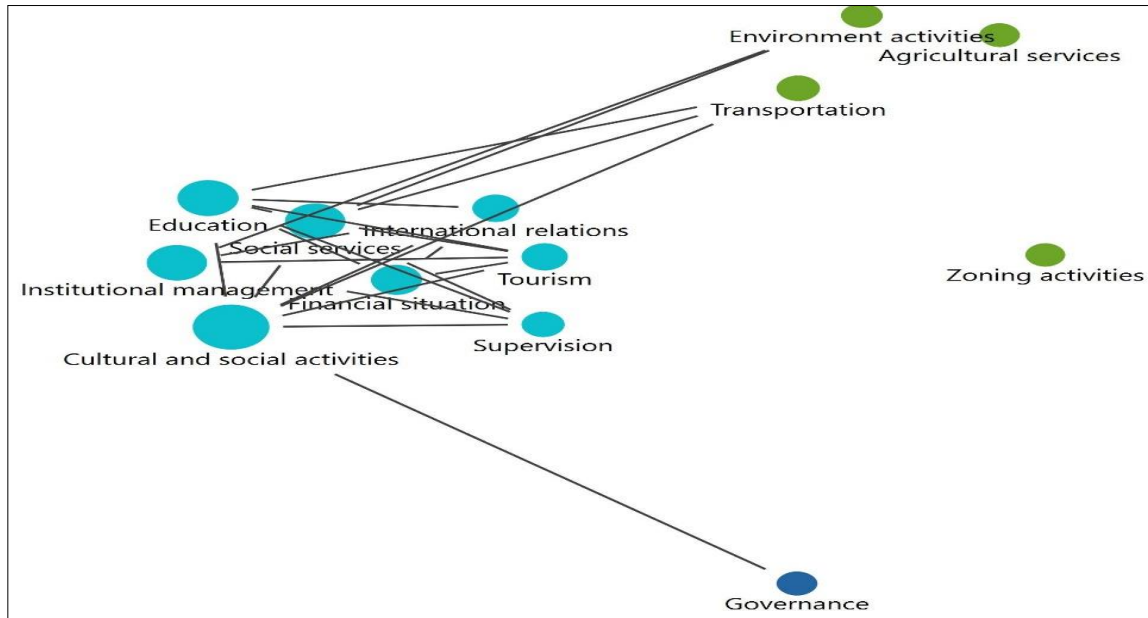
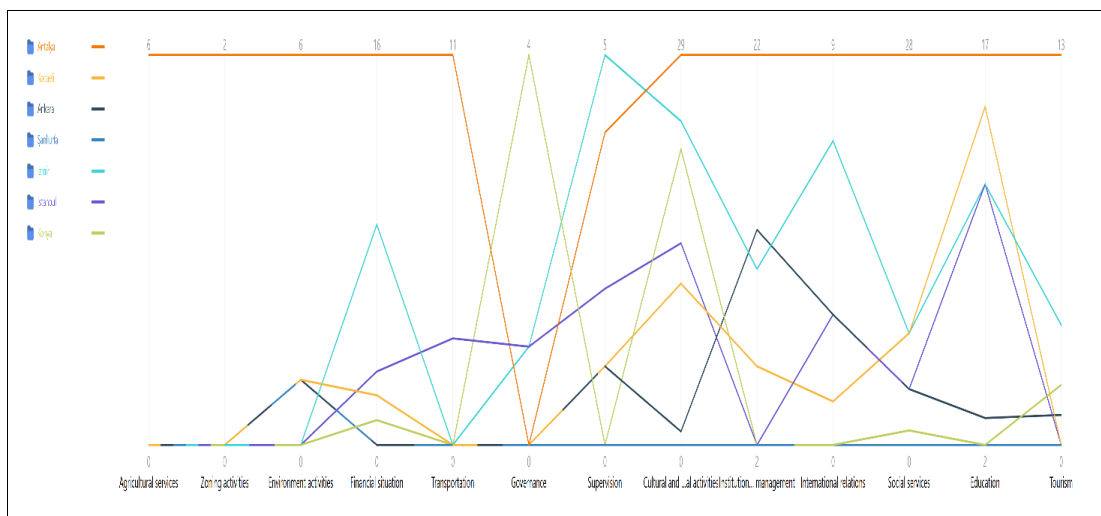


Figure 4 shows the code map. The code map shows the proximity of the codes in the same document. Although the financial situation is not the most common issue for municipalities (see Figure 3), it is at the center of many other issues. The negative financial situation during COVID-19 is the root cause of many issues that municipalities face. Zoning, governance, the environment, agricultural activities, and transportation are relatively independent issues.

**Figure 5**

Comparing Profiles on Issues Facing Municipalities

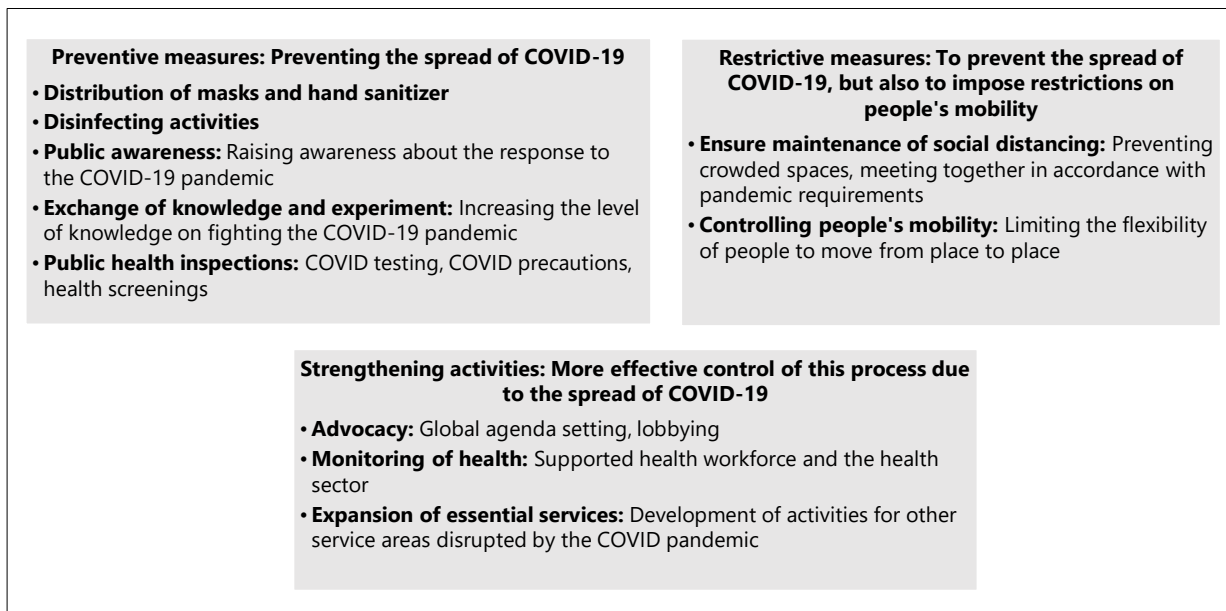


As shown in Figure 5, the issues faced by metropolitan municipalities during COVID-19 vary from municipality to municipality. Antalya appears to have experienced the most significant disruptions in all issue areas except governance. Konya and Izmir are the municipalities with the most governance problems. Sanliurfa is the municipality with the fewest service disruptions in general. Municipalities generally face more problems in the areas of agricultural activities, zoning activities and transportation, while they face more issues in other areas, especially cultural and social activities.

The activities carried out by municipalities in 2020-2021 to assess their role in the fight against COVID-19 were coded using the MAXQDA program. Three main headings were created. Each heading consisted of various numbers of subheadings (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6**

*Local Measures of Municipalities in the Fight Against COVID-19*



**Figure 7**

*Local Measures of Municipalities in the Municipalities - Code-Subcode-Sections Model*

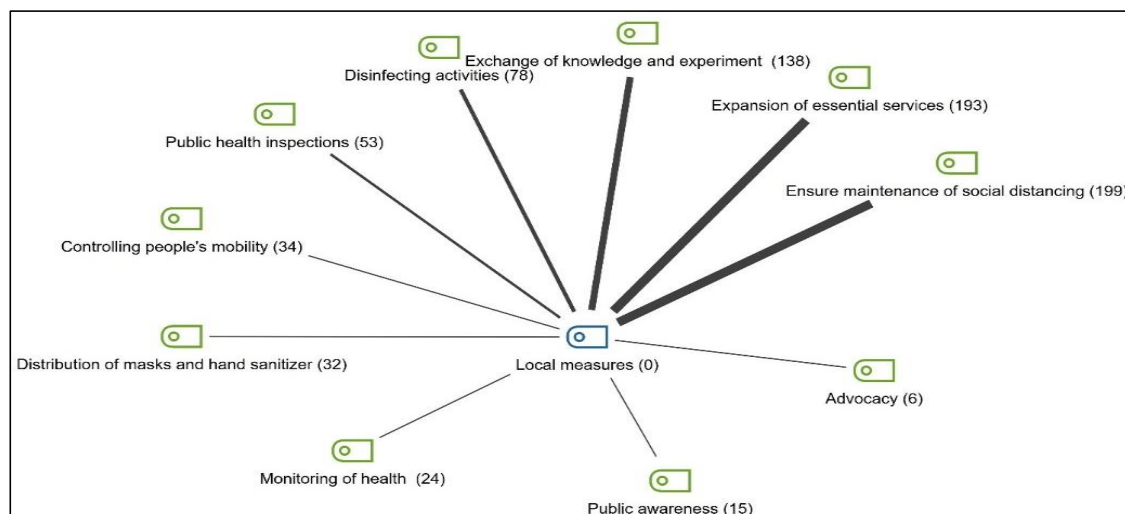


Figure 7 shows the intensity of local measures taken by municipalities to fight COVID-19. It can be seen that the most common way in which municipalities are tackling COVID-19 is through measures to maintain social distancing. Municipalities that have faced COVID-19 often resort to restrictive measures until they develop new solutions. Many services were disrupted in the fight against COVID-19. To strengthen these areas, municipalities are also taking supportive action. As there is no thematic distinction in the provision of basic services, municipalities' strengthening activities in this area have emerged with quantitatively high frequency. One of the most common methods used by municipalities in the fight against COVID-19 is prevention through information and experience sharing. Another frequently used method is disinfection services provided in many areas of the metropolitan municipalities. This was followed by health screenings to prevent COVID-19 transmission.

It is possible to divide the measures taken by municipalities in the COVID-19 process into "immediate measures" and "supporting measures." Municipalities implement some of the measures directly to manage the issue when it arises. This is an immediate measure. Other measures are not directly implemented at the time of the issue but are among the various measures taken to manage the negative consequences of COVID-19, which are supporting measures.

**Table 2**

*Issues in Municipalities and Local Measures: Code Relationships Browser*

Code System	Disinfecting activities	Distribution of masks and hand sanitizer	Exchange of knowledge and experiment	Public health inspections	Controlling people's mobility	Ensure maintenance of social distancing	Expansion of essential services	Total
Agricultural services						1	1	2
Zoning activities								0
Environment activities					1	1	1	3
Financial situation						4	5	9
Transportation						1	1	2
Governance			1		1	1	1	4
Supervision						3	1	4
Cultural and social activities			2	1	4	56	9	65
Institutional management			1			8	2	11
International relations			2			2	1	5
Social services		2	3		1	15	7	28
Education	1		1			19	6	33
Tourism					1	5		6
Total	1	2	16	1	8	109	35	172

Table 2 shows the code relationships between the issues experienced during COVID-19 and the measures taken by the municipalities. In Table 2, local measures are direct interventions at the time of the COVID-19 (immediate measures). Out of a total of 424 issues (see Figure 2), 172 were directly addressed locally. Advocacy and awareness raising activities are not included in Table 2. These are not solutions that have been directly implemented in COVID-19. For

example, cultural and social activities were prevented by restrictive methods due to movement control (cultural and social activities—controlling people’s mobility). Because social services for disadvantaged segments of society have been disrupted, assistance, protection, and shelter services have been provided to these people. Although there are various limitations in the organization of social activities due to COVID-19, especially through the university clubs, young people’s demands, such as trips, meeting halls, material support, rations, and transportation vehicles, have been met, contributing to their social support (social services—expansion of essential services). Table 2 shows that among the immediate measures taken to address the issues experienced in the COVID-19 process, the most common method is to provide conditions in accordance with social distancing rules, i.e., the application of restrictive provisions. This is an important result in the context of the capacity of municipalities in Türkiye to act quickly and flexibly and produce innovative solutions in the face of sudden and rapidly developing problems such as COVID-19.

**Figure 8**  
*Comparing Profiles on Local Measures of Municipalities*

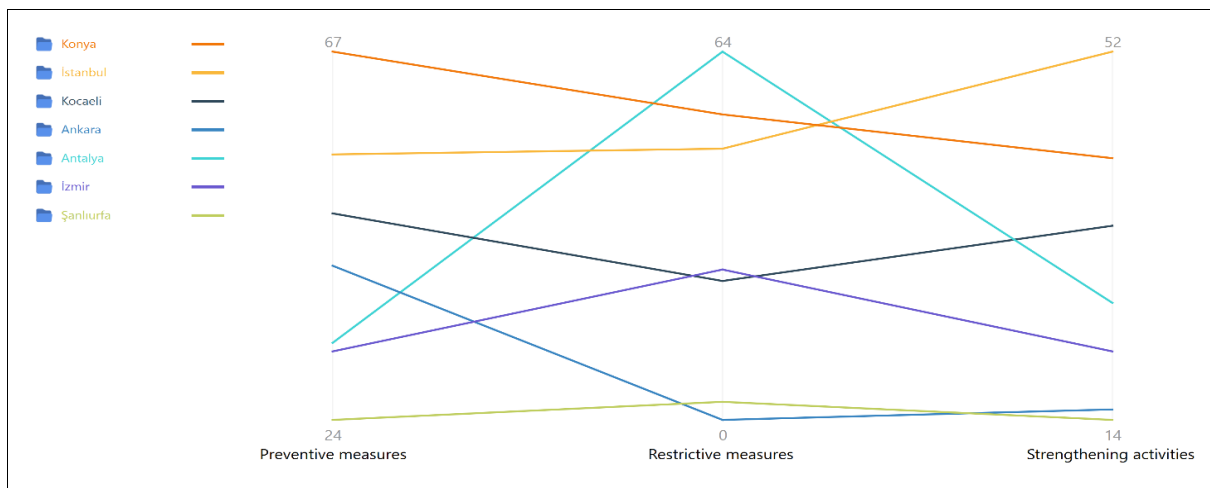


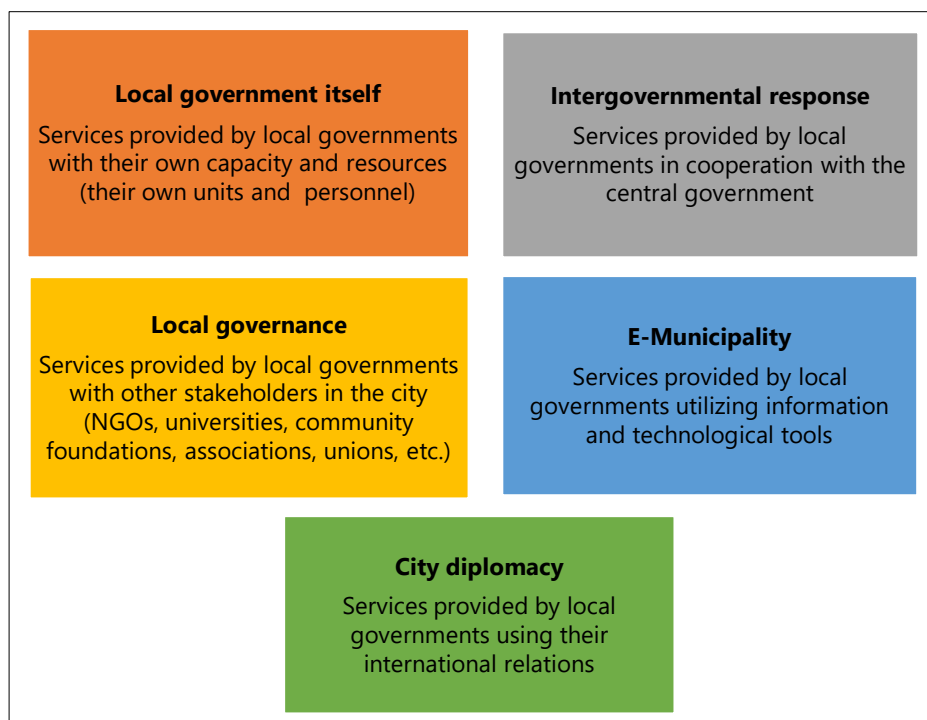
Figure 8’s analysis of the local measures municipalities took to combat COVID-19 reveals that they generally implement preventive and restrictive measures more intensively. However, a different result was observed for Istanbul. Observations reveal that Istanbul implemented strengthening activities more strongly during COVID-19. In fact, during COVID-19, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality carried out more advocacy and monitoring of health activities than other municipalities.

### 5.2 Service Delivery Models of Municipalities in the Fight Against COVID-19

In this part of the study, the structural and functional evaluation of municipal service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic is presented. A third coding was conducted in this context. The measures taken by the municipalities in the fight against COVID-19 were coded according to their local service delivery. The literature on the responses of local governments in the fight against COVID-19 has led to the coding of service delivery methods under five main headings.

**Figure 9**

*Service Delivery Models of Municipalities in the Fight Against COVID-19*



**Figure 10**

*Service Delivery Model: - Code-Subcode-Sections Model*

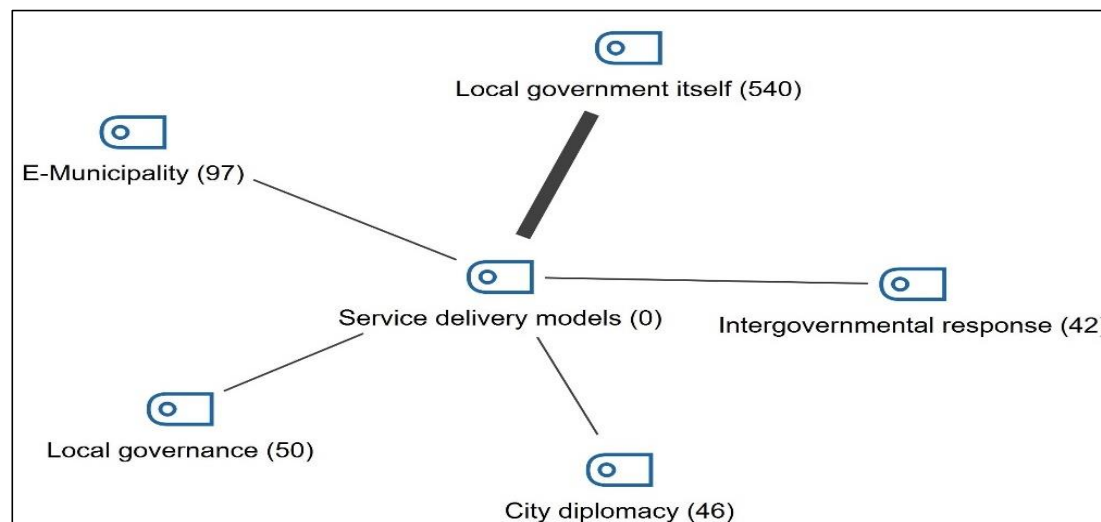


Figure 10 shows the density of service delivery models used by municipalities for measures they have taken in the fight against COVID-19. Municipalities have mostly played an active role in the pandemic process with their own capabilities and resources. This is followed by e-municipal activities. Intergovernmental responses, local governance, and city diplomacy—which are generally within the framework of cooperation—are the least frequently used service delivery models.

**Figure 11**

*Local Measure-Local Services Delivery: Code Co-Occurrence Model (Overlapping Codes)*

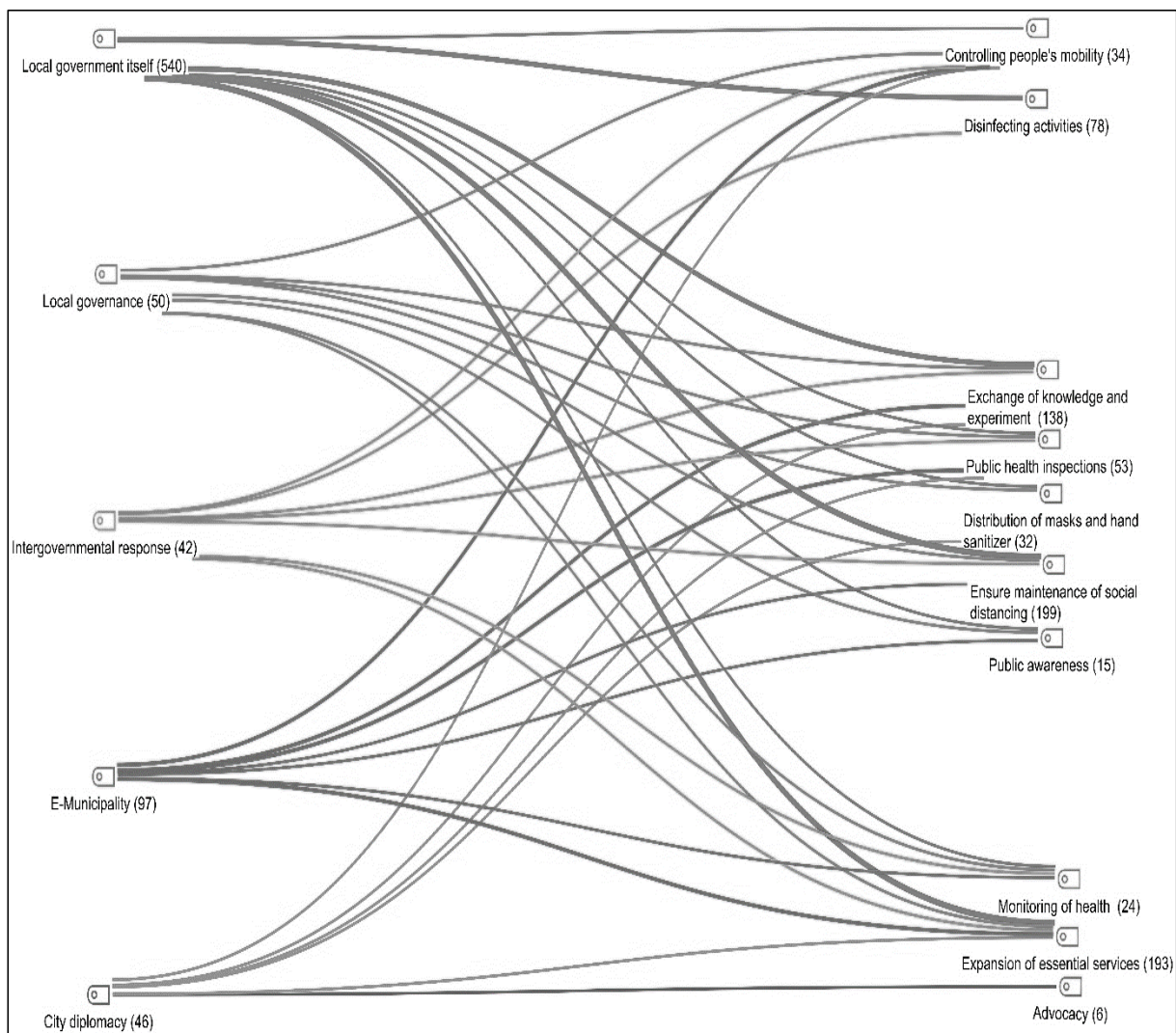


Figure 11 illustrates the code relations for the local measures implemented by municipalities, along with the service delivery method they employed to combat COVID-19. Local government itself is the most widely used method of service delivery across the whole range of local measures taken. Advocacy is seen as an activity that is carried out only in the context of city diplomacy.



**Table 3***Local Measures and Local Services Delivery: Code Relationships Browser*

Code system	Local government itself	Intergovernmental response	Local governance	E-Municipality	City diplomacy	Total
Disinfecting activities	76	1				77
Distribution of masks and hand sanitizer	27		2		3	32
Exchange of knowledge and experiment	55	7	17	36	25	140
Public awareness	12		1	2		15
Public health inspections	34	12	2	5	1	54
Controlling people's mobility	30	1	1	1	1	34
Ensure maintenance of social distancing	169	9	6	16		200
Advocacy					6	6
Expansion of essential services	122	9	19	33	10	193
Monitoring of health	18	3	1	2		24
Total	543	42	49	95	46	775

Table 3 shows the browser of code relationships between local measures and local service delivery. Among the services that local governments are providing themselves in the fight against COVID-19, ensuring the maintenance of social distancing is the most prominent. The decisions taken by the Ministry of Interior regarding places of public gathering, such as wedding ceremonies, internet cafes, funeral ceremonies, mosques and masjids, military send-offs, exams, amusement parks and thematic parks, restaurants, cafes, coffee houses, workplaces, commercial taxis and stops, urban and intercity public transportation vehicles, have been updated as required by the process and notified to provincial governorships and local governments through circulars (Bimay & Kaypak, 2022, p. 440). In this context, municipalities have taken the necessary measures in areas with dense human populations. The second most intense measure is the expansion of essential services. Basic services are included in strengthening activities. As is the global situation (e.g., Ayuningtyas et al., 2022; Baginsky & Manthorpe, 2020; Miller, 2020), social assistance plays an important role in these activities. In addition to municipalities, other urban actors such as NGOs are important partners in this process. Table 3 shows that the most intensive practice of local governance is the expansion of essential services.

The exchange of information and experiences is one of the most important activities in the fight against COVID-19. Table 3 shows that municipalities use a variety of methods to share knowledge and experience, particularly in well-balanced ways. In sharing knowledge and experience, municipalities often conduct public awareness-raising activities. Through communication technology, public awareness-raising activities have become easier and faster. Metropolitan municipalities in the country transfer knowledge and experience not only to their own communities, stakeholders, or other metropolitan municipalities in the country but also

to other metropolitan municipalities around the world. Thus, “pioneering” metropolitan municipalities that have experienced various problems are guiding other metropolitan municipalities that have not yet faced the problems and “do not know what to do.” Table 3 shows that intergovernmental responses, where central and local governments act together, play the least role in terms of knowledge and experience. Disagreements between central and local governments on medical mitigation measures and disconnected, uncoordinated practices can make pandemic response more difficult. In Türkiye, vertical coordination crises have occurred in the fight against the pandemic, especially in some metropolitan areas. In some provinces with a high number of cases, such as Istanbul, Ankara, and Adana, there have been disputes between municipalities and the central government on issues such as social aid to those in need and bread distribution. Municipalities were given the opportunity to create resources in the fight against COVID-19, and especially metropolitan mayors, by inviting them to cabinet meetings occasionally (Uzun, 2020, p. 1206).

Table 3 indicates that municipalities in Türkiye do not engage in high-level advocacy activities; instead, they employ an alternative approach through advocacy in the realm of city diplomacy. During the pandemic period, the most important tool in city diplomacy activities was the sharing of information and experiences among world cities. In addition, many international networks have shared the methods of world cities in their fight against COVID-19.

**Figure 12**

*Comparing Profiles on Local Services Delivery of Municipalities*

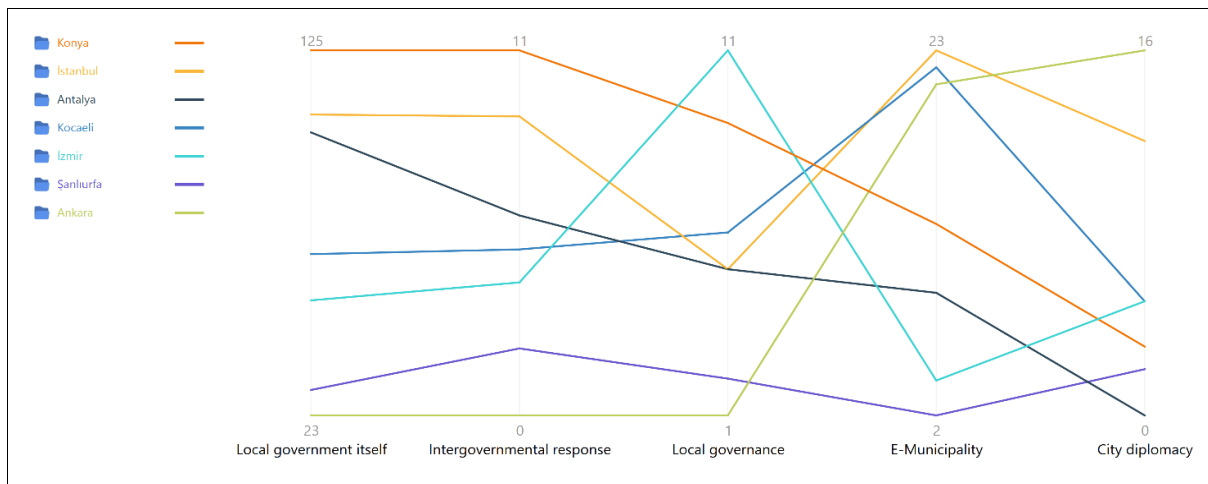


Figure 12 shows how municipalities are providing services in the fight against COVID-19. Konya and Antalya Metropolitan Municipalities rely more on their own municipal facilities and cooperation with the central government and less on other local or international relationships. Istanbul and Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipalities, on the other hand, generally use all the service delivery methods in Figure 12. However, e-municipality activities in particular are used intensively. Especially the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Smart City Department, established in 2016, is known to have united all smart city stakeholders and initiatives in line with a single vision, with the Istanbul Smart City Roadmap prepared in 2017; a smart city

manifesto has also been prepared in the province (Akıllı Şehir, 2024). It can be seen that Istanbul has integrated its active work in the field of digitalization into the management of the COVID-19 process. The Izmir Metropolitan Municipality used local governance tools extensively during COVID-19. Ankara made considerable use of city diplomacy. Ankara has assumed a pioneering role in this field due to its status as a capital city. Ankara Metropolitan Municipality has not only used city diplomacy activities effectively in the fight against COVID-19 but has also assumed a beneficial role for other municipalities. Şanlıurfa is the least active municipality in terms of local service delivery in general.

## **6. Conclusion**

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on metropolitan municipalities has been diverse. The importance of many municipal services, such as social services, and disadvantaged groups in urban and human life has reemerged with the pandemic. In this context, it is also understood that municipal services should be planned in a more sustainable manner, not only for today, and that municipalities should be prepared for the risks and crises they may face in the future. It is also seen that the disruptions caused by COVID-19 in municipal services have a multiplier effect. For this reason, one impact can be the source of any other. This demonstrates the multifaceted impact of COVID-19 on municipal service disruptions. A study of the most populous provinces in Türkiye shows that the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on municipalities' finances has been an important driver of disruptions in most other services. In this context, it is possible to say that there is a double-sided effect in the service disruptions of municipalities. While stagnation in areas such as culture and tourism weakens the financial structure of municipalities, municipalities, which already have to struggle with financial problems, cannot fulfill other services such as social services due to financial constraints. In light of these disruptions experienced by municipalities, municipalities in Türkiye are most likely to adopt restrictive measures as a result of the central government's leading role. This indicates that municipalities in Türkiye have a limited capacity to act quickly and flexibly in the face of sudden and rapidly evolving problems and to generate innovative solutions such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Municipalities have resorted to various service delivery methods in their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Cooperation with the central government, urban stakeholders, other world cities, and international actors has played an important role in this process. Digital and technological tools have also facilitated the COVID-19 pandemic. However, metropolitan municipalities in Türkiye predominantly use the service model of local government itself most intensively. Directives made by the central government have an important role in the measures taken and services provided by municipalities with their own capacities. Furthermore, it is observed that the service disruptions experienced by municipalities during the COVID-19 period differ from city to city. The different economic, social, and cultural dynamics of cities, the diversity of different social groups living in the city, and the differences in the demographic characteristics of city dwellers also differentiate the service disruptions experienced by municipalities. On the other hand, municipalities generally focus on preventive and restrictive measures in their service delivery methods during the COVID-19 fight. As mentioned above, this situation is one of the consequences of the

relationship between central and local governments in Türkiye. However, the existence of some good practice examples from municipalities in the fight against COVID-19 demonstrates that some municipalities can play a pioneering role for other municipalities.

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#### ETHICS

The author declares that this article complies with ethical standards and rules.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Nisa Erdem  | General contribution rate: 100%

The author has confirmed that there is no other person who meets the authorship condition of this study.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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