Citizen perceptions of disaster simulations

When presented the possibility of participating in a one-day disaster scenario exercise, most participants in all groups showed a strong interest, or at least a certain "why-not" attitude: "In the end it's only one day" (G9-P7 - see source document for full reference). When discussing this type of activity, the majority perceived it as a more realistic, "tangible" experience; only one participant felt that it would rather be "like a film set" (G4-P1) and, therefore, not providing a "real" experience. Another reason for rejecting the idea was the perception that such exercise would be more dedicated to professionals, and participating citizens would be reduced to passive roles: "I would be a test subject made available to professionals; in a course I would learn more, because I would be the leading actor" (G4-P3). Four participants considered themselves to be too anxious to participate; but none indicated a lack of time as the reason for not participating. Amongst those who were interested in participating in the scenario, three main themes emerged during the discussions: a strong interest in understanding the processes involved; learning about emotional response; and evolving socialities. Regarding the understanding of processes involved in managing a disaster situation, participants in all age groups outlined that such experience and gained knowledge "would be useful to clear up misbeliefs related to emergency response, rather than learning basics" (G4-P5). Another important factor perceived was learning how "not to hinder other people providing aid" (G9-P9), "because at the end we risk to hinder the rescuers" (G9-P5); "I would not say that a person will be able to act as they are supposed to, but at least they will not impede operations like people who do not know anything at all" (G1-P1). Regarding emotional responses, a number of participants perceived such scenario exercise as a "psychological challenge" (G5-P2), which may help to recognise one's own strengths and limits: "It's useful also for ourselves, not only for other people" (G9-P7). Despite being a simulation, they recognised it as "a way to get closer, […] it's a small step, but it's a way to get sensitised. After that, you may also look spontaneously for more information" (G1-P8). Here, participation was also seen as a potential motivator for becoming more engaged in preparedness: "You sensitise people to learn more about disasters" (G1-P1). Finally, the participation in a larger-scale disaster simulation exercise was perceived as promoting social cohesion, because "it is done with other people and all the community. This means that the community will be ready in case of an emergency" (G2-P9) or, beyond merely increasing a sense of existing community, "it creates a community, it helps us come together" (G7-P6).

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: Norms/values, Worldviews, Open-mindedness, Communication, Power relations, Attitudes toward authorities, Social networks

Disaster Phases: Preparedness, Response

Types of Actors Concerned: National civil protection body, Local authorities, Non-active citizens, Active citizens, Government, Red Cross, NGOs, Law enforcement agencies, Healthcare and emergency services

Hazards: Natural hazards, Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations, Man-made intentional hazards

Recommendations:
- Develop culturally aware disaster preparedness and response training
- Training programmes for citizens of all ages should be developed. These are necessary to increase citizens' knowledge

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of and preparedness in case of disasters. The training activities should be organized on the basis of a training strategy and should take various forms, ranging from emergency drill to workshops

Source

[Deliverable D5.5 "Report on citizens' reactions and opinions: Citizen Summit 3 (Italy)" (page 29)](#)

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