DOI: 10.15838/esc.2021.4.76.14
UDC 353.5, LBC 60.59
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# The Effectiveness of the Authorities' Activities at the Local Level in the COVID-19 Pandemic (the Experience of Russia and China)*

**Yi WAIGENG**
Jiangxi Academy of Social Sciences
Nanchang, China
e-mail: ncyt71@163.com

**Mikhail V. MOREV**
Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences
Vologda, Russian Federation
e-mail: 379post@mail.ru
ORCID: 0000-0003-1396-8195; ResearcherID: I-9815-2016

**Yuliya V. UKHANOVA**
Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences
Vologda, Russian Federation
e-mail: yuliya.uhanova@bk.ru
ORCID: 0000-0001-7307-9520; ResearcherID: Q-7225-2017

**Kseniya E. KOSYGINA**
Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences
Vologda, Russian Federation
e-mail: sene4ka.87@mail.ru
ORCID: 0000-0001-5875-8912; ResearcherID: K-7910-2018

* The research was partially funded by the RFBR, project no. 20-011-00326 "Collective actions and social capital in Russian society".

**For citation:** Yi Waigeng, Morev M.V., Ukhanova Yu.V., Kosygina K.E. The effectiveness of the authorities' activities at the local level in the COVID-19 pandemic (the experience of Russia and China). *Economic and Social Changes: Facts, Trends, Forecast,* 2021, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 231–250. DOI: 10.15838/esc.2021.4.76.14

**Abstract.** The qualitative changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic at all levels of the organization of the world community (individual, group, national, global) have actually formed a new social reality. Moreover, this process was of a force majeure nature; it took place in the conditions of a sharp increase in the uncertainty feeling, changes in the lifestyle of almost every person and every particular family, the unpreparedness of world medicine for an adequate response to the global epidemiological challenge, as well as the inevitability of large-scale problems in the economy and politics. The current conditions have become a challenge for the existing systems of public administration. The governments of different countries had to act quickly and decisively in order, on the one hand, to keep the development of the epidemiological situation under control, and on the other hand, to prevent a sharp deterioration of social stability against the background of objectively emerging epidemiological, social and psychological challenges. While the world medicine was urgently accelerating the development of a vaccine against coronavirus infection, the scientific and political community discussed the general strategy for implementing quarantine restrictions. However, against this background, the local community level remained virtually behind the scenes, which, nevertheless, was and still remains the most practical in terms of interaction of population with the authorities. It is at the local level (meaning the regional level, as well as the level of local self-government) that the authorities are more close to the society problems, have the opportunity to interact face-to-face with its representatives, and the population, in turn, can actually participate in activities to improve living conditions (including solving problems caused by the pandemic). The article presents the experience of Russia and China in organizing interaction and evaluating the activities of local authorities by the population. Both countries have shown high efficiency in overcoming the crisis in 2020–2021, so their experience is of considerable interest, primarily in practical terms. The authors of the study have concluded about the importance of public assessment regarding the effectiveness of the activities of local authorities, as well as the prospects for actively involving citizens in solving problems arising against the background of force majeure.

**Key words:** COVID-19 pandemic, local community, public assessment of the effectiveness of public administration, civic engagement, anti-epidemic measures.

**Introduction**

The global epidemiological crisis that took place in 2019–2020 was the 18th pandemic in the history of mankind[1]. Its complexity and originality were expressed not only in the exponential spread of COVID-19, but also in the specifics of the measures required to contain the viral infection. In particular, mandatory lockdown, which has become the most effective means of preventing the epidemic, was implemented against the background of a long-term trend of an annually increasing flow of international tourism, which "in 2019 was observed in all regions of the world[2].

Large-scale restrictions on domestic and international movements, and suspension of the work of most enterprises during the lockdown could not but affect global economy, putting the world "on the verge of a global recession"[3]. Experts from leading international organizations (World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, Bloomberg, World Bank) predicted a drop in global

[1] Pandemics in the history of mankind. For reference. *Vesti.ru*, March 12, 2020. Available at: https://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=3247270; Cases of pandemics in the world in the 20th century. *RIA-novosti*, March 12, 2020. Available at: https://ria.ru/20200312/1568463184.html

[2] Finmarket with reference to the data of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Available at: http://www.finmarket.ru/news/5153745

[3] Ivanter A., Kudiyarov S., Obukhova E. The crisis to which we are ready. *Ekspert=Expert*, 2020, no. 12, p. 13.

GDP and a global recession in the next 3–4 years [1], comparable to that in the period of the Great Depression in the United States in the 1930s.

The task of coping with the complex (social, economic, political) impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is becoming more urgent as humanity passes through the acute phase of the spread of coronavirus. This is facilitated by the accumulation of public and individual experience of living under an epidemiological threat, as well as the latest achievements in the field of medicine; first of all, several vaccines, the development of which was accelerated from the very beginning.

Obviously, overcoming the epidemiological crisis is a key condition for the return of any country to normal life. And in this sense, the experience of Russia and China, which demonstrate the most successful results in handling this problem, is interesting and useful. Thus, according to the data as of the beginning of May 2021, the incidence of coronavirus in Russia was 3,298 cases per 100 thousand people, in China – 7.5 cases per 100 thousand people. For comparison, the same indicator in the United States is 9,853 cases, in most countries of Western Europe (including the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Italy, Spain, Sweden, etc.), as well as in many Latin American countries (Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, etc.) – more than 6,000 cases per 100 thousand population[4].

In the present paper, we analyze the Russian and Chinese experience of interaction between authorities and population at the local level, which has become one of the important conditions for containing the spread of coronavirus infection successfully.

Measures to prevent and combat COVID-19 have become one of the most important tasks for local governments. Urban and rural settlements play an invaluable role in preventing the spread of the virus within the country, as they are key elements in the implementation of preventive measures and in the use of all possible resources to reduce the incidence of the disease.

It is still not possible to control effectively the sources and channels of transmission of the disease, since the nature of the virus itself has not been studied sufficiently; the development and research of vaccines is underway. Due to the mutation of the virus, the threat of increased morbidity remains a serious problem.

The spread of COVID-19 will continue for a long time; in this regard, regular prevention measures are required, as well as efficient work of local governments in this direction. Currently, it is common practice to assemble special initiative groups for the prevention and control of the pandemic in districts and settlements, raise awareness among residents, train volunteers, distribute management responsibilities, introduce preventive measures in everyday work, and make joint efforts to prevent the spread of coronavirus in all areas. Based on the study of rural and urban settlements in Jiangxi Province (China) and the Vologda Oblast (Russia), the article highlights the following aspects: effectiveness of the work of local government in the context of the pandemic, public prevention measures, and related issues. The article also puts forward relevant proposals.

**Effectiveness of the work of government authorities in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in scientific discourse**

The theoretical basis for assessing the effectiveness of public administration in the crisis conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic is at the initial stage of accumulation. The limited range of research and publications on this topic is due to the fact that COVID-19 pandemic is a new challenge and it has not been resolved so far. The scientific discourse is gaining strength, and a pool of issues that require scientifically substantiated solutions in the field of public administration assessment in

[4] Current epidemic information in Russia and in the world as of May 5, 2021. *Official website of Rospotrebnadzor.* Available at: https://www.rospotrebnadzor.ru/region/korono_virus/epid.php

the context of the spread of coronavirus infection, is being formed. At the same time, we point out the growing number of publications by researchers from Russia and other countries.

Following the logic of our research, first of all, we find it necessary to highlight scientific publications that consider the actions of the authorities in addressing the issues of combating coronavirus in China and Russia [2, 3]. The academic community engage in discussing the issues of human mobility and the impact of state control measures on the COVID-19 epidemic in China as a model country that has successfully implemented policies in these areas [4, 5, 6, 7]. "The state has shown its ability to mobilize labor, financial and other resources in the shortest possible time, to work out an action plan to overcome difficulties and stabilize the situation" [8].

The impact of the new coronavirus infection on the economy and social sphere is also discussed in the works of Russian scientists. Thus, they study the implications of the pandemic for certain economic sectors [9, 10, 11, 12]. Another range of works concerns state measures to prevent socio-economic consequences of the spread of coronavirus infection, and assessment of their effectiveness [13, 14, 15, 16]. The issues concerning the implementation of epidemiological, restrictive, and administrative measures imposed by the government are considered in the study by Doctor of Sciences (Economics) T.V. Chubarova and M.A. Sharova (Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences). It is concluded that the measures taken are organized, comprehensive and interdepartmental; besides, recommendations for improving the implemented policy are given [17]. A collective monograph of the Institute of Socio-Political Research – Branch of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences is of considerable interest: it reflects key trends in the socio-political and demographic situation in Russia in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The work is aimed at obtaining reliable scientific knowledge about the reaction of society to the internal and external anti-crisis policy of the Russian state [18]. We should also point out the significance of the work *Russian Society in the Context of the Pandemic*, which is written in the form of an information and analytical report under the guidance of Academician M.K. Gorshkov, Doctor of Sciences (Sociology), Professor. The study was conducted in 22 constituent entities of the Russian Federation and covered 112 settlements, including two megacities, 19 administrative centers of RF constituent entities, 35 district centers, 19 urban-type settlements and 37 villages [19].

Let us provide some examples of research and discussions on public policy regarding the introduction of restrictive measures during the pandemic. Scientists from the University of Oxford (UK) conducted a large-scale assessment of government interventions against coronavirus infection based on modeling data from 41 countries. The authors concluded that measures such as limiting gatherings, closing face-to-face businesses with a high risk of infection, schools, and universities had a small-to-moderate effect. In turn, the order for complete self-isolation had a weak additional effect. These results suggest that by using effective interventions, some countries could contain the epidemic without ordering people to stay at home [20]. A similar study was carried out by Russian scholars from the Higher School of Economics. As a result of simulating the behavior of individuals under the possibility of being infected with COVID-19, they concluded that complete isolation of all population groups is impractical from the point of view of public welfare, while planning quarantine measures aimed at isolated homogeneous population groups is a more preferable strategy for the state [21]. In contrast, scientists in China have shown that preventive closure of schools helped reduce the transmission of the virus, although this measure alone would not have prevented the COVID-19 outbreak. Restricting household mixing proved to be the most effective

measure [22]. Scientists conducted an empirical test concerning the requirement to comply with mandatory mask-wearing. The study has found that a voluntary policy in this regard will lead to insufficient compliance with the requirement, while a mandatory policy seems to be an effective, fair and socially responsible solution to limit the transmission of the virus [23].

According to the analysis of scientific publications we can say that the assessment of the effectiveness of anti-crisis public administration measures in Russia and China during the pandemic is carried out mainly at the national (federal) level or deals with specific measures. This problem has not been sufficiently studied at the subnational (regional) and local levels from the point of view of an integrated approach. First, it is necessary to form an understanding of the extent to which regional authorities and local governments are involved in the work to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Second, we should consider people's response to these actions and pay attention to the participation of proactive citizens in overcoming the implications and addressing real social issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Research methodology and information base**

We used several data sets in our study. The analysis of China's experience in combating the pandemic is based on a study that was conducted in the first half of 2020 in Jiangxi Province in the south-east of China. The survey covered the following administrative divisions: 2 districts, 11 urban communities, and 3 villages in 5 counties, including Jinxian County of Nanchang City, Qingshanhu District of Nanchang City, Nanchang High-Tech Zone, Yuanzhou District of Yichun City, and Poyang County of Shangrao City. We selected 5 territorial units for analysis, in accordance with the structure of urban and rural communities, regional distribution, population size, and potential risks.

Materials of sociological measurements carried out on the territory of the Vologda Oblast (a constituent entity of the Northwestern Federal District of the Russian Federation) formed the information base for the study of the situation in Russia. "The monitoring of the economic situation and social well-being of the Vologda Oblast population" is carried out by Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (VolRC RAS). The survey covers 1,500 respondents over the age of 18 in the cities of Vologda and Cherepovets and in eight districts of the Vologda Oblast. The representativeness of the sample is ensured by the following conditions: proportion between the urban and rural population; proportion between residents of various types of localities; gender and age structure of the Oblast's adult population. The survey method is a questionnaire based on the respondents' place of residence.

The Vologda Oblast is a typical Russian region; its area is more than 140 thousand square meters. In the Nortwestern Federal District, it is second in population only to the Leningrad Oblast and Saint Petersburg (at the end of 2019, the population of the Vologda Oblast was 1.16 million people[5]). Among the 10 constituent entities of the Northwestern Federal District, it ranks 5th in terms of GRP (in 2018 – 582,630.4 million rubles) and life expectancy (71.82 years), 7th in terms of the share of the urban population (72.6%), 8th in terms of the average per capita monetary income (28,334 rubles per month). At yearend 2020 (as of December 31, 2020), the Vologda Oblast ranked 8th in the Northwestern Federal District in terms of the number of COVID-19 cases per 100 thousand people[6]. In other words, among the regions of the Northwestern Federal District, the Vologda Oblast is not an obvious "leader" or "outsider" either in terms of key features of its development or the state of the epidemiological situation caused by the spread of COVID-19.

[5] *Regions of Russia. Socio-economic indicators – 2020.* Rosstat. Available at: https://gks.ru/bgd/regl/b20_14p/Main.htm

[6] Real-time statistics on the spread of coronavirus. Available at: https://datalens.yandex/7o7is1q6ikh23?tab=X1&utm_source=cbregion&state=b3cbf9f7315

We should note that during the most acute phase of the "first wave" of the epidemiological crisis, when large-scale quarantine restrictions were introduced nationwide and in the Vologda Oblast as well, VolRC RAS researchers could not conduct sociological research in a usual way that requires direct interaction between interviewers and respondents. Therefore, in the period from March to June 2020, questionnaire surveys were not conducted, but instead two online surveys were implemented via GoogleForms. The surveys were dedicated to a very important event for Russia: the amendment of the Constitution; they also touched upon people's conduct in the conditions of the spread of coronavirus (the questions mainly concerned compliance with personal hygiene rules, attitude toward the activities of employers under the COVID-19 pandemic, etc.)[7].

In addition to the above-mentioned sources of information, we used regulatory and legal documents, including federal and regional laws and bylaws of state authorities at the relevant level, materials of official media, and websites of government bodies.

The collected data were processed and interpreted using systematic, comparative, statistical, and sociological analysis.

**Empirical results of the study**

Regional and local governments play a leading role in implementing effective measures to combat COVID-19; Russia and China are no exception in this regard. Measures taken at the subnational level to prevent the spread of COVID-19 require more detailed consideration in the framework of this study.

The local community level is of particular interest. A local community is a socio-territorial community located on a specific territory – a village, a settlement, a city, a group of districts and cities [24]. Socio-territorial communities are historically formed and continuously renewed communities of people who jointly develop and use a certain territory in economic, social, household and socio-cultural relations [25]. In foreign literature, "local community" is usually understood as a locality, as well as social groups with a special type of relations [26].

Measures to prevent and combat COVID-19 have become one of the most important tasks at the local community level. Urban and rural communities play an invaluable role in preventing the spread of the virus on the national level, because they are key elements in implementing preventive measures and in using all possible resources to reduce the incidence of the disease. The local community is a kind of "battleground" for joint preventive measures and for strengthening general social efforts to contain the spread of the virus.

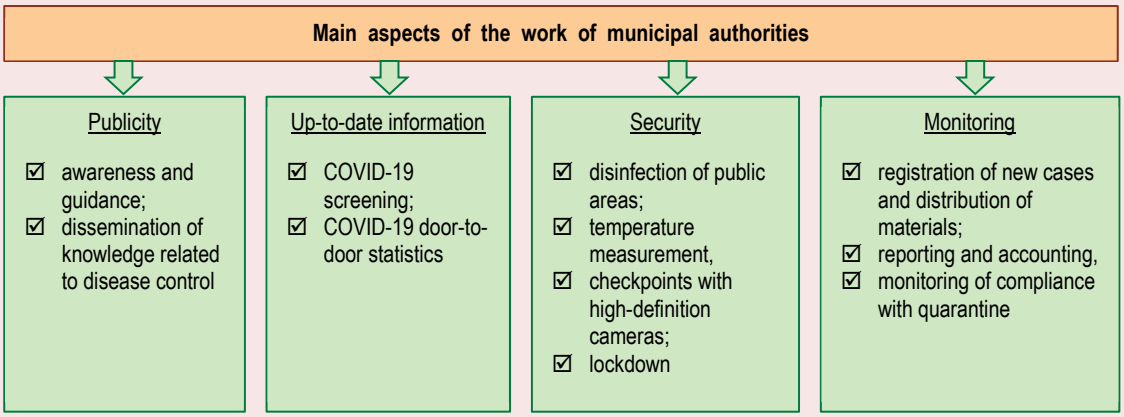
The study has shown that local governments in China engage in full-fledged cooperation in combating coronavirus at all levels, largely due to the effective work of the Party Committee and the Provincial Government in the field of personnel management, as well as the successful practice of forming the "Five Directions Government"[8]. In particular, it has been revealed that after a confirmed case of COVID-19 was discovered in the village of M in Poyang County of Shangrao City, the rural self-government bodies almost collapsed, and only after the city government intervened in the activities of the rural authorities, the order of life was restored, after which preventive measures for the spread of coronavirus brought results.

In the fight against coronavirus, the main function of Chinese local authorities is reflected in the effective management and control of such aspects as publicity (awareness and guidance, dissemination of knowledge related to disease control), up-to-date information (COVID-19

[7] In this article, the results of online surveys were not taken into account due to their indirect significance for the stated purpose of the study. Therefore, the tables and graphs (as well as the analysis) present data from surveys that were conducted after VolRC RAS had resumed the monitoring (since August 2020).

[8] The Five Directions Government is a government regime proposed by Jiangxi Province, the essence of which is that the government should be focused on loyalty, innovation, responsibility, performance of its duties and resilience.

Figure 1. Main aspects of the work of Chinese municipal authorities in the prevention of coronavirus infection




Source: own compilation.

screening, door-to-door statistics), security (disinfection of public areas, temperature measurement, operation of checkpoints with high-definition cameras, necessity to stay at home) and monitoring (registration of new cases and distribution of materials; *Fig. 1*). All the above-mentioned aspects make micro-management and micro-services particularly important in the activities of local governments.

The most important direction in overcoming the epidemiological crisis is the introduction of information monitoring methods. In particular, the analysis of the data revealed that all checkpoints in the settlements of District N of Nanchang City are equipped with high-definition cameras, which are used by persons on duty for observation with the help of the monitoring system. The observers detect clusters of people, thus reducing their workload and the risk of their infection. This provides a technical guarantee of effective management during the pandemic. The population Z of Nanchang City no longer needs to register the old-fashioned way using pen and paper; to enter the High-Tech Zone, they just need to scan a QR code in real time, use a mini-program WeChat, etc., which allows them to minimize possible risks.

In the context of the spread of COVID-19, governments at all levels in Jiangxi Province, in order to improve their efficiency, must adhere with the powers to address specific tasks and jointly tackle major issues related to the national economy and the life support of the people. In China, the Party plays a special role in resolving these issues at the local level. During the pandemic, primary-level Party organizations must follow orders from higher-level agencies, fulfill their responsibilities, strengthen good governance by ensuring the leadership role of Party members, promote public mobilization through timely and wide-scale public awareness campaigns, and systematically improve measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by strengthening organizational capacity.

The study has shown that the Party branches and Party members of rural and urban settlements performed their primary duties in an exemplary manner. Twenty-six Party members from village N of Jinxian County of Nanchang City, 18 Party members from village L of Yuanzhou District of Yichun City, and 15 from village M of Poyang County of Shangrao City took active part in a number of anti-epidemic measures, such as screening, temperature measurement, process management, and stand-by duty at COVID-19 checkpoints. By remaining at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19, they demonstrated the leading role of the Party and attracted more people to participate in government activities, thereby expanding the engagement of actors.

Network managers are an important administrative link in the management at the municipal level in Jiangxi Province, especially in the crisis period. Being a method of public administration, network management implements the relationship and interaction between actors, directs resources and personnel for management up to the primary level, helps to improve administration for each specific position and the base network, and build a network administration scheme with people working in network management. It has been found that there are 54 network managers in district N of Nanchang City, 6 network managers in 2 communities in district S of Nanchang City, 6 – in village N of Nanchang City, 8 – in village L of Yichun City, 4 network managers in village M of Shangrao City. Network managers keep in touch with residents to the greatest extent and provide timely feedback on the health status of residents, thus contributing to the achievement of good results in the implementation of preventive measures.

In addition, the analysis of the data has shown that in both urban and rural communities, due to the joint actions of the primary level authorities (for example, in village L in Yuanzhou district of Yichun City, village N in Jinxian County of Nanchang City, community N and community W in Qingshanhu District of Nanchang City), incidence control groups were established, which carried out a thorough survey of the population. It has been revealed that in other localities (in district N of Nanchang City, district S of Nanchang City, village N of Jinxian County of Nanchang City, village H of Qingshanhu District of Nanchang City, village L of Yichun City, and village M of Shangrao City), in the midst of the pandemic, disease prevention and control groups were also immediately established, which, among other things, actively motivated residents to work together to combat the pandemic and follow the instructions of the Central Committee of the Party. As a result of all these measures, the number of infected people was significantly reduced.

In Russia, a set of measures aimed at combating and preventing coronavirus infection has also been developed and implemented at the regional and municipal levels. According to the monitoring "Regions, municipalities and local communities against COVID–19", preventive measures were carried out in all constituent entities of the Russian Federation, which can be recorded on the example of the Northwestern Federal District. The analysis of the experience of the actions of regional authorities and local governments allows us to summarize the main preventive measures taken at the local level. The measures are as follows:

– informing citizens and organizations about COVID-19 prevention measures;

– disinfection of public areas;

– identifying persons suspected of having coronavirus infection (testing);

– marking for social distancing;

– restriction of access to public areas, to the territory of the municipality;

– control/supervision of compliance with these measures by citizens and organizations.

Data on the regions of the Northwestern Federal District show that in the Arkhangelsk, Kaliningrad, Leningrad, and Pskov oblasts, restrictions on movement between municipalities were not introduced, at least, the information about these measures was not found in open sources. The Vologda Oblast introduced all the above-mentioned epidemiological measures *(Tab. 1)*, including checkpoints at the entrance to and exit from the Oblast, as well as at the borders of some municipal districts[9].

During the coronacrisis, the Vologda Oblast, as well as Russia as a whole, began actively introducing digital technologies; but at the local level, it was done so as to implement effective and safe interaction between local authorities and the population rather than for monitoring the

[9] Checkpoints will start working at the entrance and exit from Vologda. Official website of the Administration. Available at: http://vologda-portal.ru/novosti/index.php?ID=425633&SECTION_ID=151

Table 1. Preventive measures introduced by regional authorities and local government bodies to counteract the spread of coronavirus infection in Russia

| RF constituent entity | Informing citizens and organizations about the measures taken | Disinfection of public areas, streets, public transport, entrances of apartment buildings | Detection | | Marking for social distancing | Restriction of access | | Control/supervision of compliance with the measures | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Incomers | Symptoms in employees and incomers | | In public areas | On the territory of the municipality | By citizens | By organizations |
| Arkhangelsk Oblast | + | + | + | + | + | + | - | + | + |
| **Vologda Oblast** | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| Kaliningrad Oblast | + | + | + | + | + | + | - | + | + |
| Republic of Karelia | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| Komi Republic | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| Leningrad Oblast | + | + | + | + | + | + | - | + | + |
| Murmansk Oblast | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| Nenets Autonomous Okrug | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| Novgorod Oblast | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| Pskov Oblast | + | + | + | + | + | + | - | + | + |

"+" – information about the measures is available in open sources.
"–" – information about the measures is not found in open sources.
Source: Regions, Municipalities and Local Communities against Covid–19. Monitoring of the All-Russian Congress of Municipalities. 2020.

epidemiological situation. The local government has developed various forms of communication with the population – mobile reception rooms, unified reference and information services, face-to-face meetings of managers with local residents, information stands, "hotlines", public online reports, services provided by "electronic" administrations, etc. [27]. These online services and platforms became particularly popular during the height of coronavirus infection and the introduction of the lockdown in order to develop a remote format for interaction between local authorities and the public.

As we can see, local authorities in Russia and China have adopted a wide range of measures aimed not so much at preventing the spread of coronavirus infection, but at maintaining the standard of living and quality of life of the general population. At the same time, we find it necessary to focus on some of the difficulties and problems that local authorities have to deal with in implementing their policies during the coronavirus crisis.

*First,* there is a lack of clear and operational guidelines and rules for the prevention and control of the virus. Largely, the lack of unified guidelines, standards for prevention and control of morbidity, and methods of public awareness campaigns led to uncoordinated actions of authorities at different levels. For example, in the Chinese province, when dealing with the coronavirus pandemic, the authorities sometimes demonstrated inconsistent network management, implemented jointly by the departments of health, public safety, transport, communications, and medical materials management, and there was also an insufficient awareness of early prevention and control.

*Second,* we can point out the problem related to the formation and dissemination of an array of data containing basic information about the community during the COVID-19 period. The spread of coronavirus is closely linked to population flows. Despite the fact that there are still some cases of infection in the country, during the period of regular prevention and control of the pandemic, population mobility in China has increased dramatically,

compared to the first wave of COVID-19. Initially, big data technology was used for preventive measures to provide each region with the necessary scientific support to predict the risk of infection and prevent disease by tracking the number of patients with COVID-19 and screening for the spread of coronavirus. However, the study has revealed that the databases in different localities are being created unevenly. It is particularly difficult to create databases in rural areas, due to the high frequency and uncertainty of population mobility. In addition, a conclusion has been obtained that China's urban and rural communities still do not have standardized data exchange processes, and there is a need to increase the effectiveness of joint emergency response. Data exchange is not yet formed between departments and socio-economic actors; data from the departments of transport, healthcare, communications, and public safety cannot be collected together and used to the fullest extent; government data is fragmented, and the degree of resource sharing is low.

In the Vologda Oblast, as in other Russian regions, data on coronavirus cases per day, data on the number of recovered patients, deaths, as well as the workload of COVID hospitals in each municipal district are promptly collected and published in official sources. At the same time, today, when the role of information technologies increases dramatically (among other things, due to the virtualization of lifestyle against the background of quarantine measures), the spread of the so-called "fake" news is a serious problem for the psychological background in society and for the preservation of social stability in the country. In this regard, the indicative point is the extent of people's satisfaction with coverage of the coronavirus situation by the media. According to surveys of VolRC RAS in the Vologda Oblast, more than 67% of people are satisfied with the volume of information in the media about the coronavirus situation in the world, in Russia and in the Oblast (16 to 28% of respondents hold the opposite opinion[10]). At the same time, we are concerned with the fact that only 35–39% of Vologda Oblast population fully and significantly trust the official information about the coronavirus situation, which is distributed in the media; *Tab. 2*).

*Third*, it is pointed out that at the local level, China and Russia do not use new technologies sufficiently. Traditional management practices continue to be used in cities and especially in rural settlements. The study has found that in Jiangxi Province, despite the need to comply with prevention measures during the pandemic, manual recording of information is still commonly used, and the use of new technologies, such as smart technology and digitalization, has not yet become widespread at the municipal level. The current implementation of measures such as scanning the QR code at registration helps to track the location of people promptly and avoid cross-infection. However, the majority of older people in rural areas and older communities do not know how to use a smartphone, and poor connection in some rural settlements also limits the use of new technologies.

In Russian society, there is also a problem of digital divide caused by the lack of infrastructure development at the local level, the socio-cultural characteristics of the regions, differences in the standard of living and the extent f development of digital competencies in local residents [28]. Of course, these problems make it difficult for municipal authorities to implement digital technologies, and in the context of an epidemiological challenge, as well.

We should note that the public assessment of the effectiveness and limitations of measures is an

[10] For comparison, according to VTsIOM, 88% of Russians in early April 2020 said that they "had enough information about the situation regarding the spread of coronavirus in the world, ways of transmission of the virus, and methods of prevention". Only 10% of respondents held the opposite opinion (Source: Russia in the pandemic: evaluation of the effectiveness of anti-epidemic measures. A VTsIOM analytical review. April 8, 2020. *Official website of VTsIOM*. Available at: https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/rossiya-v-pandemii-oczenka-effektivnosti-protivoepidemicheskikh-mer)

Table 2. Assessment of the coverage of the coronavirus situation by the media (% of respondents)

| Answer options | In the world | In Russia | In the Vologda Oblast |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Do you think that you receive sufficient or insufficient information from the media about the situation regarding the spread of coronavirus, ways of its transmission, and methods of prevention?*** | | | |
| Sooner sufficient | 77.8 | 73.5 | 67.5 |
| Sooner insufficient | 16.4 | 21.7 | 27.9 |
| Difficult to answer | 5.8 | 4.7 | 4.6 |
| ***Do you trust the official information about the coronavirus situation that is being spread in the media?*** | | | |
| I trust fully and significantly | 44.4 | 35.0 | 38.9 |
| I trust only partially | 37.0 | 41.2 | 38.9 |
| I don't trust at all | 14.5 | 20.1 | 19.1 |
| Difficult to answer | 4.1 | 3.6 | 3.3 |
| Source: VoIRC RAS public opinion monitoring (October – November 2020; N=1,500). | | | |

important condition for maintaining social stability at the local level and consolidating society and local authorities in the implementation of anti-epidemic measures. To this end, mass public opinion polls are regularly conducted on location; they demonstrate, among other things, the degree of public support for the activities of government bodies during the pandemic. The results of surveys conducted in a number of municipalities of the People's Republic of China have revealed that, with a high assessment of the effectiveness of the measures implemented by the authorities, the assessment of residents' satisfaction was also high (from 79 to 92 points on a 100-point scale; *Tab. 3*).

Table 3. Evaluation of the effectiveness of measures implemented by local authorities at the local level (China, public opinion poll data)

| Observed territory | General conditions | Degree of risk | Number of network managers | Volunteer service | Degree of achievement of the goal | Degree of residents' satisfaction | Performance evaluation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| District N of Nanchang City | 9 communities, 9,049 households, 21,610 residents | Average | 54 | 136 registered people, 50 people involved in COVID-19 prevention, most of them – elderly people | High | 92 | Excellent |
| District S of Nanchang City | 2 communities, 1,420 households, about 4,500 residents | Average | 6 | 10 employees of the Social Security Administration in Yuzhan | Average-to-high | 85 | Good |
| Village N, Jinxian County | 3 villages, about 290 households 33 Party members | Low | 6 | 41 volunteers, including: 26 Party members, 9 retired soldiers and 6 volunteers | Average-to-high | 83 | Good |
| Village L, Yuanzhou District | 8 villages, 278 households, 1,488 villages, 39 Party members | Low | 8 | More than 60 volunteers (18 Party members, and rural residents) | Average | 79 | Satisfactory |
| Village M, Poyang County | 5 villages, 1,075 households, 3,468 villages, 36 party members | High | 4 | More than 30 volunteers (rural residents-working migrants) | Average-to-high | 86 | Good |

Note: The degree of residents' satisfaction is evaluated on a one-hundred-point scale.
Source: in the first quarter of 2020, a survey was conducted, covering the following administrative divisions: 2 districts, 11 urban communities, and 3 villages in 5 counties, including Jinxian County of Nanchang City, Qingshanhu District of Nanchang City, Nanchang High-Tech Zone, Yuanzhou District of Yichun City, and Poyang County of Shangrao City. We selected 5 territorial units for analysis, in accordance with the structure of urban and rural communities, regional distribution, population size, potential risks, etc.

Table 4. Vologda Oblast population assessments of the measures taken by the regional authorities to combat the coronavirus pandemic (% of respondents)*

| Population group | Everything possible and everything necessary is being done | | Measures taken are excessive | | Measures taken are insufficient | | I know nothing about the measures taken | | I find it difficult to answer | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Aug.20 | Feb.21 | Aug.20 | Feb.21 | Aug.20 | Feb.21 | Aug.20 | Feb.21 | Aug.20 | Feb.21 |
| *Sex* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Men | 29.1 | 31.6 | 29.7 | 28.2 | 17.9 | 14.6 | 7.2 | 3.9 | 16.0 | 21.8 |
| Women | 34.4 | 36.6 | 27.7 | 26.8 | 17.2 | 14.7 | 5.2 | 3.9 | 15.5 | 18.1 |
| *Age* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Under 30 | 34.1 | 24.5 | 23.7 | 30.0 | 16.8 | 12.7 | 9.5 | 5.9 | 15.9 | 26.8 |
| 30–55 | 27.0 | 31.5 | 33.4 | 29.4 | 17.4 | 16.0 | 5.3 | 3.8 | 17.0 | 19.2 |
| Over 55 | 37.6 | 41.5 | 24.7 | 23.9 | 18.0 | 13.8 | 5.6 | 3.1 | 14.1 | 17.6 |
| *Education* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Secondary and incomplete secondary | 28.4 | 30.8 | 29.0 | 27.9 | 15.1 | 13.4 | 5.1 | 3.5 | 22.3 | 24.4 |
| Secondary vocational | 35.2 | 37.8 | 28.1 | 28.6 | 17.6 | 12.3 | 6.9 | 3.0 | 12.2 | 18.2 |
| Higher and incomplete higher | 32.4 | 33.6 | 28.8 | 25.2 | 20.0 | 19.1 | 6.0 | 5.5 | 12.8 | 16.6 |
| *Income groups* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bottom 20% | 29.1 | 26.3 | 32.0 | 24.8 | 13.8 | 10.3 | 8.4 | 5.0 | 16.7 | 33.6 |
| Middle 60% | 32.3 | 35.7 | 26.1 | 26.8 | 20.8 | 15.8 | 6.3 | 3.9 | 14.6 | 17.8 |
| Top 20% | 42.9 | 37.4 | 27.3 | 29.0 | 14.9 | 15.3 | 2.2 | 5.0 | 12.7 | 13.4 |
| *Territories* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Vologda | 26.3 | 27.3 | 41.3 | 37.9 | 14.0 | 15.2 | 2.3 | 4.8 | 16.3 | 14.9 |
| Cherepovets | 37.2 | 37.6 | 22.9 | 24.0 | 25.4 | 19.8 | 6.7 | 1.2 | 7.7 | 17.3 |
| Districts | 32.5 | 36.4 | 24.6 | 23.4 | 15.0 | 11.4 | 7.9 | 4.9 | 20.0 | 23.9 |
| Oblast | 32.1 | 34.3 | 28.6 | 27.4 | 17.5 | 14.7 | 6.1 | 3.9 | 15.7 | 19.7 |

* Surveys were conducted in August 2020, October 2020, and February 2021.
Source: VolRC RAS public opinion monitoring; N=1,500.

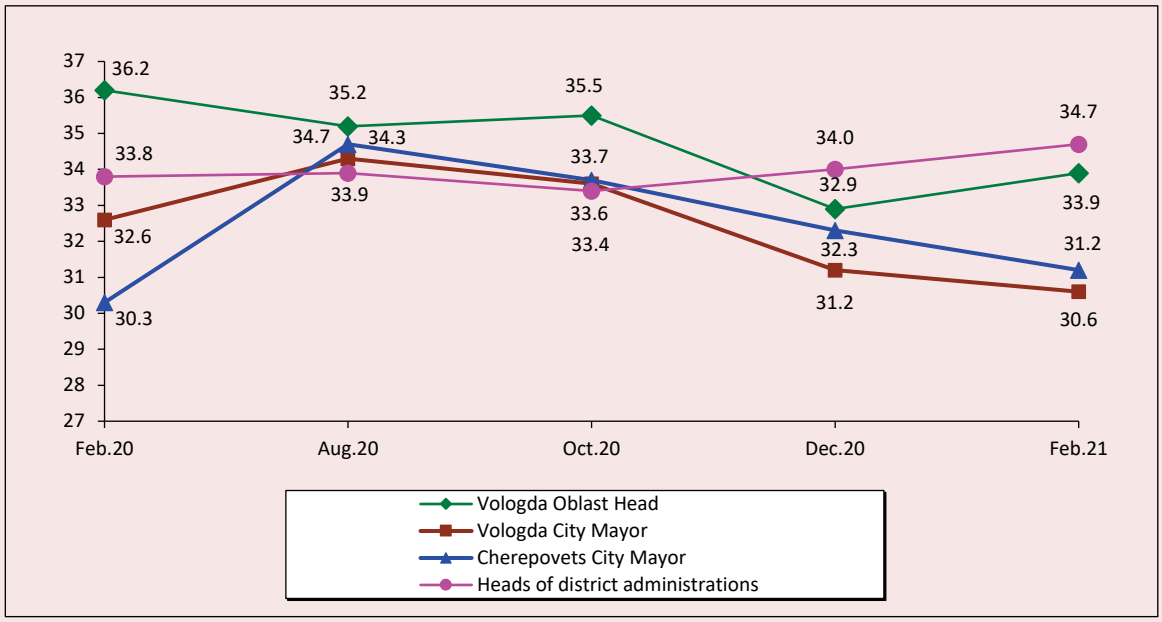
According to the monitoring of public opinion conducted by VolRC RAS for the period from August 2020 to February 2021, the share of residents of the Vologda Oblast who believe that in the context of the pandemic, regional authorities "do everything possible and everything necessary" increased from 32 to 34% *(Tab. 4)*. For comparison, the share of those who consider the measures taken by local authorities "insufficient" is almost twice lower, and during this period it decreased from 18 to 15%. At the same time, only 4–6% of the population say that they "know nothing" about the measures taken by regional authorities.

It is noteworthy that a significant preponderance of the share of positive assessments over negative ones is observed in all major socio-demographic groups (also among people who, according to self-assessment of their income, belong to 20% of the least affluent residents of the Vologda Oblast), as well as in urban and rural areas.

We should also note that the predominantly positive attitude of the population toward the activities of the authorities aimed at combating the pandemic is not a unique phenomenon for the Vologda Oblast. For example, according to VTsIOM[11], in late March – early April 2020, 59% of

[11] Russia in the pandemic: evaluation of the effectiveness of anti-epidemic measures. A VTsIOM analytical review. April 8, 2020. *Official website of VTsIOM*. Available at: https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/rossiya-v-pandemii-oczenka-effektivnosti-protivoepidemicheskikh-mer

Figure 2. Assessment of the activities of regional and municipal authorities (Vologda Oblast, % of respondents)




Surveys were conducted in August 2020, October 2020 and February 2021.
Source: VolRC RAS public opinion monitoring; N=1,500.

Russians considered the measures implemented by the authorities to prevent the spread of coronavirus to be "sufficient" (for comparison, only 32% of Russians held an opposite viewpoint)[12].

In general, the level of approval of the activities of regional and municipal authorities throughout 2020 remained stable (30–35%; *Fig. 2*), despite the fact that during this period, people had to face a huge number of not only epidemiological, but also psychological and socio-economic threats that somehow affected the daily routine of each individual[13].

Thus, the great extent of residents' support for the measures taken by the authorities at the local level has become an important factor, due to which the acute phase of the spread of coronavirus was overcome relatively successfully. This not only made it possible to maintain stability in the socio-political situation at the regional and federal levels, but also to create constructive conditions for the broad inclusion of representatives of society itself in the implementation of measures aimed at maintaining the living conditions of the most vulnerable population groups.

[12] Due to the differences in the techniques for conducting the surveys, it would be inappropriate to compare the specific research data obtained by VTsIOM and by VolRC RAS. However, in this case, it is important to characterize the general situation, which is evidenced by the results of both studies – residents' overall positive assessment of the work of the authorities during the pandemic, both in the Vologda Oblast and nationwide.

[13] The seemingly insignificant level of support for the work of regional and municipal authorities (30–35%) is largely due to the following methodological specifics of VolRC RAS surveys: in contrast to interviews, the survey assumes a significant proportion of respondents who find it difficult to answer or those who did not form a definite opinion. For example, on average for 2020, the share of such answers regarding the activities of regional and municipal authorities ranged from 20 to 36%.

Nevertheless, we should also note that at present the attitude of the population toward the activities of authorities at the regional and municipal level is actually more skeptical, compared to the federal level. This is a nationwide problem, not limited to the Vologda Oblast alone, and it is due to a wide range of factors (political, psychological, socio-cultural), which is pointed out, in particular, by Russian sociologists, as well (see, for example: Russian everyday life in a crisis: how do we live and what do we feel?: information and analytical summary based on the results of a nationwide study. IS RAS, 2015. 22 p.).

We should emphasize that when considering the crisis situation associated with the spread of coronavirus, the public discourse focuses mainly on the options for regulating this situation and on assessing the prospects for overcoming the threat that has arisen. Practitioners and theorists mainly consider the role of authorities at all levels and the effectiveness of public policy instruments to overcome the implications of the epidemiological crisis.

At the same time, the current crisis has another key dimension, which will have long-term consequences for the state and society, as well as for every citizen. We are talking about civic self-organization in the face of an unforeseen threat not only to life, health, standard of living, but also to personal freedom. This is a matter of fundamental importance in many aspects, and social security in society is one of them. The fight against the pandemic requires the involvement of both material and human resources, joint efforts of society, stimulation of its vitality, as well as the awareness that active participation in all necessary events will guarantee the protection of society. Civic engagement in addressing social issues and the cohesion of society will largely determine how successfully the governments of the countries will cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts[14].

The study has revealed that both in Chinese and Russian society, the epidemiological challenge provoked a surge in volunteer activity at the local level. It is necessary to highlight the importance of the role of volunteers in the urban communities of the Chinese province. For example, in district N of Nanchang City, there are 50 volunteers, and most of them are elderly people, and the oldest of them is 70 years old; participants from two communities of district S of Nanchang City (10 people) have been fully engaged in social work to counteract the virus; nine retired soldiers in village N of Jinxian County of Nanchang City joined the number of volunteers on their own initiative.

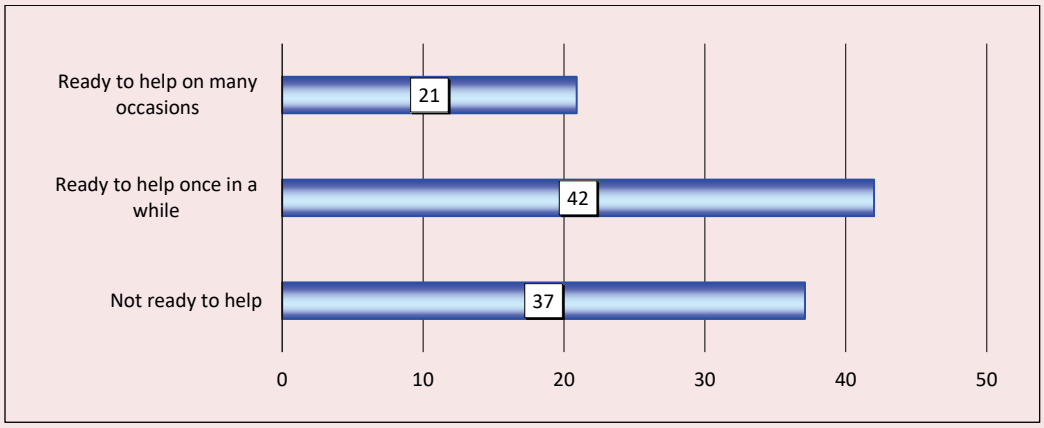
The high personal initiative of local residents in ensuring safety of life is also observed in rural communities in China. In village L in Yuanzhou District of Yichun City, 32 residents took the initiative to participate in the fight against the pandemic, and more than 30 residents of village M in Poyang County of Shangrao City became volunteers. Thus, it can be seen that the local communities mentioned above played an important role and produced their results in the implementation of preventive measures. At the same time, an analysis of the data obtained has shown that the volunteers in the villages are mainly Party members and a small number of young volunteers are working migrants. The bulk of responsibility rests with the heads of rural settlements and representatives of the authorities, while the awareness of residents about self-government and volunteerism is insufficient. Thus, there is reason to talk about the problem of the insufficiently active participation of the local community of China in addressing socially significant issues in the context of the pandemic.

The sociological research conducted by VolRC RAS in the Vologda Oblast in October – November 2020 shows that the vast majority of the regional community (63%) think that people around them are ready to help each other in the context of the spread of coronavirus infection in Russia *(Fig. 3)*.

However, the level of actual participation in various practices of self-organization aimed at helping people who find themselves in a difficult situation in connection with coronacrisis is almost two times lower than the potential of such participation (22% of respondents said they were already engaged, 40% – declare their willingness to provide such assistance in the future; *Tab. 5*). At the same time, there are grounds to say that there is a

[14] A COVID-19 Philanthropy Stimulus Package: Unlocking further giving in the UK to support civil society at a time of crisis. CAF, 2020. Available at: https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/caf-campaigns/a-champion-for-charities/policy-briefings-andconsultations-library/covid-19-philanthropy-stimulus-package (accessed May 11, 2021).

Figure 3. Vologda Oblast population assessments of whether people around them are ready/not ready to help each other in the context of the spread of coronavirus infection in Russia*, % of respondents




* Answer to the question: In your opinion, do people around you are ready or are not ready to help each other in the context of the spread of coronavirus infection in Russia? And if they are ready, is it often or seldom?

Source: Public opinion monitoring (October – November 2020; N=1,500).

Table 5. Participation and readiness of local communities to participate in helping others in conditions of the spread of coronavirus infection in Russia* (% of respondents)

| Answer option | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| I help others | 22.3 | 77.7 |
| I am willing to help others in the future | 40.0 | 60.0 |

* Answer to the question "Do you personally help people who find themselves in a difficult situation in connection with the spread of coronavirus infection, or are you willing to provide such assistance in the future?"
Source: VoIRC RAS public opinion monitoring (October – November 2020; N=1,500)

significant potential for solidarity and consolidation in the Russian society in crisis conditions at the local level.

Regional sociological data show that women are more likely to help people who find themselves in a difficult situation due to the spread of coronavirus infection than men. Depending on age and education: people aged 30–55 and those who have higher education take a direct part in overcoming the impacts of COVID-19 more often than the rest of the population of the Oblast. In terms of income, two opposite groups are most active: the bottom 20% and the top 20% *(Tab. 6)*.

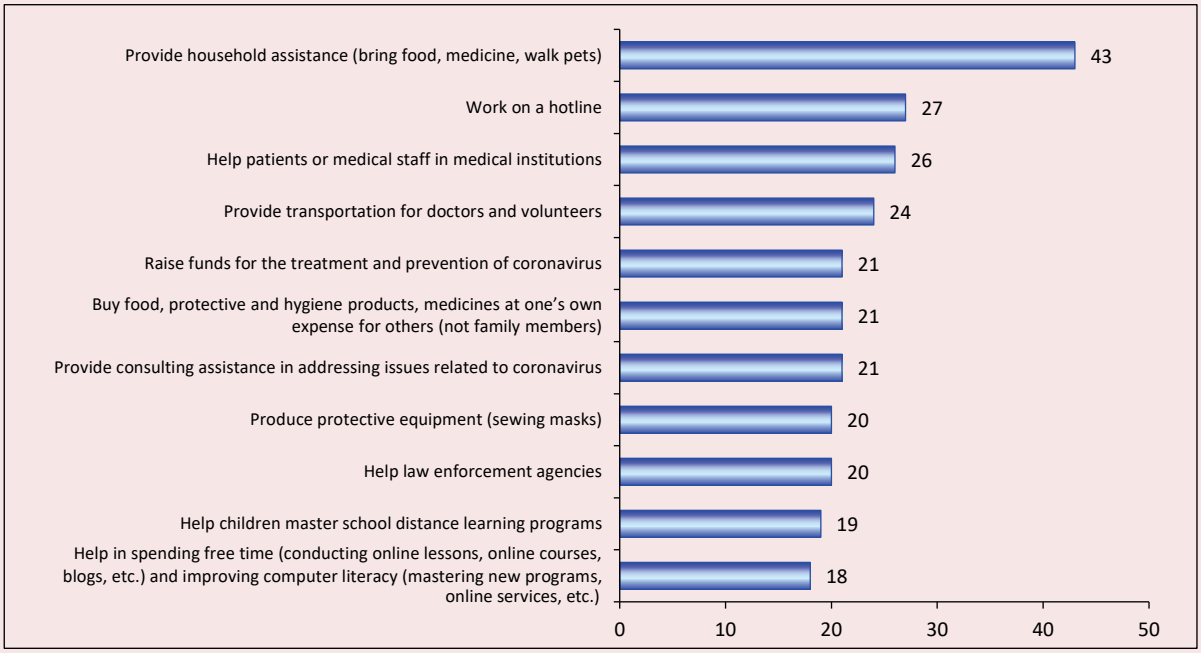
Sociological studies show that Russian youth today is a promising subject of civil self-organization aimed at combating new challenges and risks. The younger generation is the social group that is constantly open to everything new; it easily adapts to emerging changes and welcomes social transformation [29]. In particular, the socio-demographic portrait of a volunteer of the city of Vologda is as follows: first of all, this is a young person under 30 with a higher education, or a university student living in the regional center [30].

According to the obtained data, local communities during the period of coronavirus infection tend to engage in practices primarily aimed at providing household assistance to people who are under lockdown or in quarantine – more than 40% of respondents are ready to bring food, medicines, walk pets, etc. *(Fig. 4)*. More than a quarter of the population are ready to engage in such social activities as working on a hotline (27%), providing assistance in medical institutions (26%),

Table 6. Socio-demographic characteristics of the population in the context of providing assistance during the spread of coronavirus infection (real and potential participation; % of respondents)

| Population group | I provide assistance | | I am willing to provide assistance in the future | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No | Yes | No |
| **Sex** | | | | |
| Men | 18.1 | 81.9 | 34.0 | 66.0 |
| Women | 25.7 | 74.3 | 44.7 | 55.3 |
| **Age** | | | | |
| Under 30 | 22.1 | 77.9 | 45.5 | 54.5 |
| 30–55 | 25.8 | 74.2 | 42.1 | 57.9 |
| Over 55 | 18.1 | 81.9 | 35.0 | 65.0 |
| **Education** | | | | |
| Secondary and incomplete secondary | 14.1 | 85.9 | 30.6 | 69.4 |
| Secondary vocational | 21.8 | 78.2 | 37.6 | 62.4 |
| Higher and incomplete higher | 32.3 | 67.7 | 53.8 | 46.2 |
| **Income groups** | | | | |
| Bottom 20% | 26.1 | 73.9 | 36.9 | 63.1 |
| Middle 60% | 19.1 | 80.9 | 39.2 | 60.8 |
| Top 20% | 27.9 | 72.1 | 46.5 | 53.5 |
| **Territories** | | | | |
| Vologda | 27.0 | 73.0 | 51.8 | 48.2 |
| Cherepovets | 16.3 | 83.7 | 28.3 | 71.7 |
| Districts | 23.3 | 76.7 | 40.1 | 59.9 |
| Oblast | 22.3 | 77.7 | 40.0 | 60.0 |
| Source: VoIRC RAS public opinion monitoring (October – November 2020; N=1,500). | | | | |

Figure 4. Readiness of Vologda Oblast residents to participate in helping people under lockdown or in quarantine caused by the spread of coronavirus (in % of those who gave an answer to each statement)




Source: VoRC RAS public opinion monitoring (October – November 2020, N=1,500).

and transport volunteering (24%). It is noteworthy that the population of the region mainly declares they are ready for informal participation (often situational, without membership in a specific non-governmental organization), the so-called practices of smaller-scale stories, which is typical of Russian society as a whole in the modern period [31].

Thus, the destabilizing situation of the pandemic has particularly clearly demonstrated the importance of civil self-organization for social stability at the local level in Chinese and Russian societies. Through joint efforts, it is possible to mobilize the masses in a critical period. The dynamics and nature of community management can be ultimately improved only by motivating residents to participate in it.

**Conclusion**

Summarizing the results of the study, we would like to emphasize that the key to preventing the spread of the virus is to organize the life of residents effectively and not just rely on primary-level civil servants to handle the matter. In order to promote the activities of local governments, it is necessary to change the directions and ideas of pandemic prevention and control. In particular, it is necessary to start with trivial questions and details in people's daily lives and find ways to organize the activities of the local community in an efficient way. We consider it relevant to direct the power of self-government to the primary level and expand the opportunities of communities and residents. It is important to focus on mobilizing the enthusiasm of civil society activists (leaders of various initiative groups) within communities. As the fight against the spread of coronavirus is underway, it is necessary to enhance the organizational potential of public figures and strengthen their leadership potential in order to develop self-organization of residents further.

In addition, we find it important to improve modern digital technologies during the prevention and control of the pandemic in the part concerning organization of interaction between society and government at the regional and municipal levels (expansion of online platforms, online services), as well as in the development of local civic engagement as a significant resource for social development. In the course of pandemic prevention and control, online organizations such as online platforms, WeChat and QQ can be used to organize the activities of local authorities.

For Chinese society, the following measures are of greatest importance: development of political advantages of the Party, strengthening of the leadership role of the Party apparatus, improvement of the construction of Party organizations at the primary level, and full use of Party branches in the field of organizing the life of society at the local level.

The danger of the pandemic is due to a number of factors, the complexity of the fight against COVID-19 and the costs of local government activities may increase as soon as new cases are detected and confirmed. Non-epidemic target reference points are the most important indicators. The development of a scientific assessment system for effective public administration is a long-term goal in assisting local authorities. It is recommended to build a relatively substantiated assessment and measurement model that takes into account the extent of the impact of the pandemic, institutional improvement, quantitative performance indicators of participants, the technical support system, satisfaction of residents and other comprehensive assessment systems.

Summing up, we should note one of the major factors that allowed Russia and China to cope relatively well with the outbreaks of the COVID-19 epidemic and the socio-economic challenges that arise during this period. This factor consists in maintaining constructive relations between society and government, based on a positive public assessment of the activities of local governments and on the active implementation of the potential of civil society and civil initiatives in addressing dynamically emerging issues during the epidemiological crisis.

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## Information about the Authors

Yi Waigeng – Director, Researcher, Social Research Office, Jiangxi Academy of Social Sciences (649, Hongdu North Avenue, Jiangxi Province, Nanchang, China; e-mail: ncyt71@163.com)

Mikhail V. Morev – Candidate of Sciences (Economics), Leading Researcher, Deputy Head of Department, Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (56A, Gorky Street, Vologda, 160014, Russian Federation; e-mail: 379post@mail.ru)

Yulia V. Ukhanova – Candidate of Sciences (History), Senior Researcher, Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (56A, Gorky Street, Vologda, 160014, Russian Federation; e-mail: yuliya.uhanova@bk.ru)

Kseniya E. Kosygina – Researcher, Vologda Research Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences (56A, Gorky Street, Vologda, 160014, Russian Federation; e-mail: sene4ka.87@mail.ru)

Received May 19, 2021.