# Successful Government Responses to the Pandemic:
## Contextualizing National and Urban Responses to the COVID-19 Outbreak in East and West

Ari-Veikko Anttiroiko, Tampere University, Finland

## ABSTRACT

This article discusses national and local strategies for confronting COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis sheds light on how societal context, institutional arrangements, knowledge culture, and technology deployment manifest in national responses to the pandemic. Discussion describes country cases from East and South East Asia, on the one hand, and from Europe and Asia-Pacific, on the other. The overall impression is that Asian cases reflect proactivity and diligence, while Western responses are reactive and more often than not slightly delayed. Both country groups include successes, while the overwhelming majority of global benchmarks are Asian. As the management of COVID-19 crisis is essentially a multi-level governance issue, discussion about national strategies is supplemented with a glance at the role of cities. The COVID-19-related urban challenges revolve around increased interest in urban safety, creative approaches to and the uses of urban space, the rise of digital urban platforms, and deeper insights on citizen engagement.

## KEYWORDS

Asia, Asia-Pacific, Containment, COVID-19, Europe, Government, Mitigation, Pandemic, Response, Strategy, Urban Response

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 will be remembered as the year of the global spread of coronavirus disease. It has made a global impact not only on health but also on education, social life, economy and public governance. This situation is the most recent reminder of the need to foresee the potential threats to humanity in the global age. One way to conceptualize pandemic is to see it as an instance of risk society that emanates from the pores of late modernity and its globalizing tendencies.

Every country designs and implements its anti-contagion policies and interventions through some kind of historical, context-specific pathway, which includes various development stages, learning from and negotiating with others, and the diffusion of ideas across governments. The key actors that inform, prepare and make decisions on such policies, are conditioned by contextual factors, including institutional landscape, cultural orientations, economic conditions, and political styles. In

the times like the COVID-19 crisis, particular additional elements to such a context include a high degree of uncertainty, sensitiveness of political situation, disputes over stringent policy measures, and uncertainties regarding the duration and termination of exceptional measures. Another feature that characterizes pandemics is the likely fatality of government's non-decision making. (Weibel et al., 2020.). In short, from a public policy and management point of view, COVID-19 has created an exceptionally pressing policy making situation (see e.g. Weible et al., 2020; OECD, 2020a; Kauzya & Niland, 2020; WHO, 2020b).

This article analyzes national strategies designed to combat the COVID-19 pandemic in the first half of 2020. First question is, what are the most characteristic features of national strategies and responses of countries to COVID-19 when seen through conventional East-West dichotomy. Furthermore, to what extent their approaches can be explained by these two different societal and cultural contexts. As crisis management is a multi-level challenge, discussion continues with a brief investigation of the role of cities within given national frameworks.

The research strategy resembles descriptive multiple case study, even though the "cases" are used only as exemplifications derived from an electronic media content analysis. The findings of national and local cases were analyzed against academic and professional views of government responses to epidemics, with special reference to strategies that aim at minimizing the risk of transmissions and slowing down the spread of infectious diseases. The aim of such an analysis is to make sense of an exceptional case of COVID-19 regarding government policies, and provide tentative empirically grounded insights into understanding and evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the factual policies adopted by case countries and further assessing tentatively the relevance of contextual interpretation along East-West dichotomy.

## 2. COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated to COVID-19, is a shorter name given to a novel virus identified as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2). It is an infectious disease caused by then new coronavirus that started to develop from Wuhan, China, in late 2019. It causes a sudden respiratory infection, which can be mild especially among children and healthy adults, but can be fatal to old people as well as those with underlying medical condition. Some 20-30% of infected people have required hospitalization, about 4% being seriously ill and for some of them the disease being fatal. As it is a new virus, nobody has prior immunity, which means that the entire human population is potentially susceptible to COVID-19 infection. (ECDC, 2020.)

The story of COVID-19 started with the virus that originated in Wuhan, China. The earliest registered deaths took place in the city in November 2019. By the end of the year, when Chinese authorities first reported it to the World Health Organization (WHO), it had already spread considerably. On 30 January 2020, WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern and, on February 11, baptized the virus as COVID-19. As situation worsened, on March 11, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic (on the concept of pandemic, see Yamamoto, 2013; Doshi, 2011; Morens et al., 2009). By that time, it had become clear that the spread of the virus was likely to continue and turning the tide would require dedicated measures throughout the world.

From Wuhan the virus started to spread to different countries with different scale and pace (Brahma et al., 2020). The virus spread to nearby countries and Asia-Pacific, and soon also to southern and central part of Europe and the USA. Infections increased exceptionally quickly in February in Italy, making it number three in the world after China and South Korea in terms of number of registered infections. In March, Iran became one of the special cases with increased number of infections. At that time, situation in many European countries started to be alarming, most notably in Spain, followed by considerable increase in confirmed cases in France and Germany. In the latter half of March situation in the USA started to worsen considerably. During April and May the virus became genuinely global, spreading to all continents. In May-June 2020, many countries started to

15 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/article/successful-government-responses-to-the-pandemic/262504

## Related Content

### How to Eliminate Slums in Pakistan
Niaz Ahmad (2020). *International Journal of Urban Planning and Smart Cities (pp. 30-42).*
www.irma-international.org/article/how-to-eliminate-slums-in-pakistan/258062

### Investigating E-Planning in Practice: An Actor-Network Case Study Approach
Wayne Williamsonand Bruno Parolin (2012). *International Journal of E-Planning Research (pp. 68-86).*
www.irma-international.org/article/investigating-planning-practice/70082

### Local Perspectives of Sustainable Urbanism: The Spanish Legislative Model
María Jesús Garcia García (2022). *Handbook of Research on Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Change, and Digitalization (pp. 257-267).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/local-perspectives-of-sustainable-urbanism/290486

### Quantitative Data Analysis on Student Centered Learning
Santhosh K.P. Kumarand Shija Gangadharan (2019). *International Journal of Smart Education and Urban Society (pp. 19-24).*
www.irma-international.org/article/quantitative-data-analysis-on-student-centered-learning/218223

### Exploring Ways to Use 3D Urban Models to Visualize Multi-Scalar Climate Change Data and Mitigation Change Models for e-Planning
John Danahy, Robert Wright, Jacob Mitchelland Rob Feick (2013). *International Journal of E-Planning Research (pp. 1-17).*
www.irma-international.org/article/exploring-ways-to-use-3d-urban-models-to-visualize-multi-scalar-climate-change-data-and-mitigation-change-models-for-e-planning/78888