

From City Planning to *Machizukuri*
A Japanese Experience of Community Planning

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1. City Planning and its Background

The origin of modern city planning in the west in the 19th century was two fold, that is, to solve the public health problems in the downtown and to preserve amenity of the middle-class suburbs. The prevailing idea for the planning, therefore, can be summarized that the livability of the region should be maintained for the benefit of the residents.

On the other hand, in Japan, like most of the developing countries, city planning was initiated from the top down idea of catching up to the Western countries by building modern nation and functional modern cities. Therefore, the basic driving force for the planning was governance of the city by the central government.

Since the city planning has been an instrumental tool for creating modern cities by the government, government's intervention to the day to day building activities of the urban areas has been considered as administrative regulations applied under the authorities of central government rather than residents' effort for creating livable cities.

The governance rules of the city planning, therefore, have been perceived that they should be equally applied to the general public, carefully protected by the professional planners, and governed by the statutory regulations. In theory, the rules have a legal power and they should be applied universally without exception.

Conventional planning paradigm in the city planning was and still is based upon the assumption that statutory regulations should be the base of the planning, which is reinforced by the egalitarian rule prepared by the professionals. In this planning paradigm, individuals were considered as atoms separated from each other not as

mobilized citizens working together for the betterment of their living conditions.

Sometimes, the rules and regulations tend to be relaxed so as to avoid the violation or non-conforming status, using quantitative measures that can be applied any personnel concerned, and at the same time, to the contrary, the implementation tends to be rigid in order to avoid the exception.

Results are usually measured by quantifiable and often relatively lower outcome rather than process. Citizen participation seems to be based on the assumption that individuals are dissolved atomic (and sometimes evil) egos rather than organized association.

This kind of governance rules for planning had been efficient until general public unanimously (and in most cases unconsciously) follow the rules without any fundamental query whether the rules should be commonly applied to any circumstances or whether there can be any opportunity for the individuals to involve in formulating these rules..

2. Emergence of *Machizukuri* in Japan

Since the early 1960's, new trend in city planning has emerged in the city planning arena in Japan. It is called *Machizukuri*, literally meaning 'town (*machi*) building (*zukur*)', creating physical space as well as human network in local community. Japanese word of *Machizukuri* has a subtle nuance of soft-oriented bottom-up community planning activities and/or hand-on community design towards the betterment of the environment.

In general, evolution of *Machizukuri* idea is divided into three phases; one, *Machizukuri* as a protest of the conventional planning in the 1960's and the 1970's, two, *Machizukuri* as an alternative for planning in the 1980's, and three, *Machizukuri* as system for local governance in the 1990' and thereafter.

In the 1960's and the 1970's, there were a number of environmental disputes in Japan, known as public nuisance, which led to the serious confrontation between authoritarian establishments and local citizen movement activists. For example, the protest against the destruction of historic houses led to the urban conservation movements called *Machinami Hozon*, townscape preservation, since the late 1960's

and the protest against air pollution created by the industrial estate resulted in severe struggle for safeguarding residential quarters.

At the same time, there are some other usages of the term, *Machizukuri*, in the 1960's and the 1970's, such as upgrade of living conditions in unfavorable residential areas, capacity building activities in local communities, and public involvement in local planning process by the liberal administration by the elected officials in local governments.

Because the top-down conventional planning system was still quite compelling and the way of conducting day to day business was based on merely following a precedent similar cases, avoiding any possible disputes.

Accordingly, the protests of the conventional planning process tended to lead a fierce confrontation between two camps and leaned to be idealistic and sometime ideological conflicts, which gave the *Machizukuri* of this decade distinctive characteristic. This feature of *Machizukuri* may accord with the universal phenomena of rise of fierce environmentalists in the late 1960's which led to the violent protests by younger generations in many cities around the world.

The late 1980's and early 1990's witnessed another type of *Machizukuri* movements in various spheres in Japanese planning. Various types of constructive partnership between public and private sectors have emerged in the formation of planning in local level. For example, a series of experimental collaboration between public and private sectors began to be common in many municipalities, such as workshops for the creation of new vest-pocket parks, local collaboration for safeguarding historic houses, and open forum for drafting local master plan.

Democratic open discussion became relatively common in many *Machizukuri* projects even in very conservative rural communities, just unlike traditional Japanese who had been shy to express their own opinion in the public and prefer to negotiate behind curtain for fear of losing faces. Newly emerging discussion-based democracy in this decade paved the way for paradigm shift of planning through local community initiative in the following decade.

However extensive the private initiative may be spread in planning arena, traditional statutory planning system seemed unchangeable at that time, because the legal power of central government was still so dominant that no one could envisage alternative

decision making process for planning.

At the turn of the century, Japanese planning system was at a turning point towards a delegation of planning authorities to the local governments, which was designed in line with the structural change of government organization and adoption of 'small government' policy of current ruling party. At the same time, due to the poor financial conditions of both national, regional and local governments in these years, local governance has to be supported not only conventional municipalities but also various local players like voluntary non-profit organizations and the like in the local community

Local community was no longer mere participants of partnership projects; instead, it was assigned to be one of the main players for planning system and real counterpart of fiscally shrinking local governments. The question has been changed from how to make local community participate in planning process to how to enable the local community to become major actor to play a central role for the community business. *Machizukuri*, therefore, has become a burning issue for planning.

As of 2000, a consolidation law became effective to delegate various authorities from central government to prefecture and local governments and planning law was one them. In fact, City Planning Act of Japan had already delegated its regulating and planning authorities to the prefecture and local government by its 1992 amendment and local and business communities were granted the authority to initiate to create or change the statutory city planning regulations and projects. Moreover, in 2000, city planning procedure was assigned to the local government under its autonomy, which marked an end of hierarchical top-down planning system in Japan for the first time in its planning history.

In 2003, Local Autonomy Act was further amended to introduce the designated manager system, which enabled non-profit organizations to participate in the management of publicly owned facilities. This may add more responsible status for local NPO's for management of public assets previously exclusively conducted by the public sector.

These arrangements gave a momentum to the *Machizukuri* movements towards more responsible and sometime more collaborative attitude for the public-private partnership schemes.

Nowadays, *Machizukuri* covers much wider scope than statutory city planning. And local community in *Machizukuri* has emerged as one of the key players for decision making, implementation, collaboration, and management issues in planning. *Machizukuri* movements have established themselves as the main driving force of planning, comparing with their previous status as obedient (or sometime noisy) partners. Management sphere for self supporting mechanism is getting more important for sustainable *Machizukuri* movements.

3. Several Features of local *Machizukuri* Movements

Machizukuri encompasses a sort of new public management system encouraging general public to be a part of decision making and implementation of various parts of city life. *Machizukuri* approach marks sharp contrast with conventional city planning mechanism.

For example, as a legal system, conventional city planning mechanism is based on the ideal presumption of equal protection and just compensation for each planning control measures or actions. On the contrary, *Machizukuri*, should be based upon transparent discussion making process in the local community by the individuals. Therefore, the decision can be flexible as well as inventive and, at the same time, fair. Its common goals are not quantifiable achievements by benchmarks stipulated in statutory procedures but upgraded quality of life judged by performance standard. Local network should be horizontal based on local or theme community rather than vertical based on sectionalism or professionalism.

Planning system paradigm in the 21st century should shift from conventional city planning to community-led partnership based on local governance. Our statutory system itself should be re-tailored to accommodate emerging *Machizukuri* movements in various phases.

Consequently, *Machizukuri* leads to require small scale and bottom-up service for common goods. Our final goal may be to re-attain the commons in planning through *Machizukuri*. Once prevailing social capital for community, commons today are not necessarily a physical entity, but a common understanding of the space.