

Citizen Participation in the Formulation of Comprehensive Plans

Odawara City,
Kanagawa Prefecture



Background and Impetus

The Odawara area is full of possibilities as it has been blessed with abundant natural beauty, resources, and a rich cultural history. However, in the age of population decline, declining birthrate, and ageing population, a new comprehensive plan (Note 1) was formulated with the aim of creating a town with sustainable citizen autonomy that could continue to progress for the next 50 to 100 years.

The comprehensive plan, the “Odawara TRY Plan”, was formulated in 2011 as part of the fundamental philosophy of the new mayor’s manifesto for urban development, and it involves a genuine citizen-oriented process for formulation work, and establishing a base for government and private collaboration that can also be utilised in project development after the plan’s formulation.

Project Aims

1. Reflect citizens opinions at the initial stage of policy formation (uncover the silent majority’s views in particular)
2. Citizen participation in the operation of municipal government and regional development activities
3. Fully employ the private sector’s vitality and know-how
4. Reform city officials’ way of thinking and active participation

Project Outline

To create a town with sustainable citizen autonomy, the following citizen participation initiatives were carried out for the formulation process of the comprehensive plan.

○Odawara TRY Forum (citizen discussion forum)

A new citizen participation method was brought in to uncover the opinions of the silent majority, by holding discussion forums for randomly selected citizens. 3,000 invitations were sent out, and 200 people agreed to participate. Opinions and ideas from ordinary citizens on 63 subjects from 8 fields were collected and reflected in the plan.



The Odawara TRY Forum in session

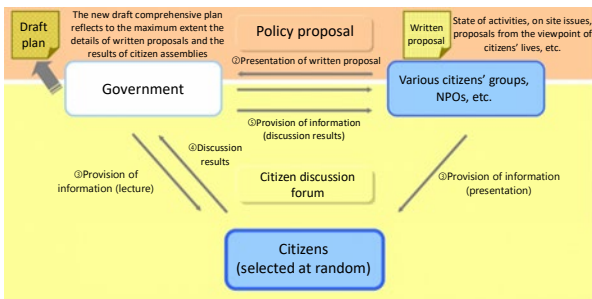
○Formulation of separate local plans

With the aim of resident-oriented urban development, local people held discussions, shared their wisdom, spoke of their visions of the future for the area, and activities that they were engaged in themselves, at 25 districts’ neighbourhood council associations. This was mainly centred on neighborhood council officers but involved officials from all sorts of organisations with strong

connections to the area. Approximately 750 people participated in carrying out this operation.

○Full-scale citizen participation in planning paired with the active participation of officials

In scenario planning, the city drafts stories for every potential process with multiple stories per policy. Plans are made with many city officials engaging in discussions outside of their areas of responsibility, allowing for broadened perspective. Discussions were held in an open setting in which those officials could express their thoughts regarding Odawara's future and brush up on the details of the city's plans.



Concept of citizens' discussion forum



A meeting of city officials

Strengths and Innovations

In FY 2010 Odawara was given the Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Award for demonstrating an example of a system that allows for the manifestation of the silent majority's power, in order to achieve sustainable citizen autonomy, and implementing real citizen participation by reflecting the results of that system in the comprehensive plan, as well as showing the possibility of changing officials'

way of thinking and putting active citizen participation into practice.

○Odawara TRY Forum

1. While following the basic structure of "Planungszelle" (Note 2), examine and construct a method that suits the city.
2. To ensure that the citizen forum participants reflect the composition of the city's population as closely as possible, send out invitations several times while monitoring the acceptance percentages in terms of gender and age groups. Compensate participants.
3. Provision of information at the citizen discussion forum will be carried out by civic activity organisations which are involved in activities in the area related to the themes, and information from various viewpoints will be offered for debate.

○Formulation of separate local plans

1. At all 25 districts' neighbourhood council associations in the city, local residents are the main constituents in the formulation of separate local plans that include details of initiatives in which residents themselves are engaged, and implement a vision of the future for the area by making use of local resources to solve issues.
2. When formulating separate local plans, people concerned with the local area should be organised into study groups, starting with neighbourhood councils, and including groups concerned with social welfare, children, disaster prevention, and firefighting, as well as people involved with schools, police, and shopping districts.

○Full-scale citizen participation in planning paired with the active participation of officials

1. Utilise the scenario planning method, and create even more opportunities for officials to have discussions. At the same time, value officials' independence, and create environments in which true opinions can be shared, without

being inhibited by people's positions or official stances.

2. Select one scenario from the multiple scenarios created, through presentations to the mayor and deputy mayor. Create a general plan and implementation plan based on this scenario.

Results of the Project

The number of Odawara TRY Forum participants who had never been involved in city initiatives before was 70%, so previously unheard opinions were uncovered. The discussions led to the development of conversations about what participants themselves could do, along with a feeling of solidarity. They also helped build relationships with officials.

Following the formulation of separate local plans, currently, each community has developed a wide range of independent initiatives in a variety of areas (social welfare, disaster prevention, crime prevention, child rearing, the environment, promotion of regional development, cultural education, etc.). In 2016, all 26 districts had set up local community organisations.

City officials have taken the first step to building relationships with citizens through the TRY Forums, formulation of separate local plans and scenario planning, while also broadening their outlook concerning Odawara, and gaining a realisation that they are contributing to the future of Odawara.

Problems, and Responses

○Reflecting and implementing citizens' opinions in the plan

There were more than 1,000 citizens' opinions gathered together from the Odawara TRY Forum and policy proposals, and among them there were some opinions that opposed each other, so placing all of them in a plan was difficult. In addition, another important issue is how to connect it with putting independent citizen activities into practice.

○Utilisation of Planungszelle

The opinions of the silent majority were reflected in the plan due to the use of the Planungszelle method, but it took a lot of time from the start of preparations for hosting to the final report, and the financial burden was also an issue due to matters like compensation (5,000 yen per person per day), so there is a need to consider how to gather the opinions of the silent majority in the future.

Future Developments

The formulation of a comprehensive plan to reflect the overall opinions of citizens, the Odawara TRY Plan, will start to demonstrate its worth with the implementation of policies. There is a need to engage in and trigger the promotion of citizens' independent activities, and plan formulation has been used up to now as an opportunity for the development of these practices in various areas.

In 2017, the then current comprehensive plan was reviewed and initiatives were started as part of the latter stages of the general plan, but there is a need to change the government's role from a service provider to a platform builder as a way to get the best mix of public, private, and joint collaboration. Initiatives to implement the vision of the city's future, as a town of hope that is creating its future through the power of its citizens that was touted in the comprehensive plan, and includes this way of self-government, will be promoted together with citizens.

Reference URL

<http://www.city.odawara.kanagawa.jp/municipality/vision/>

(Comprehensive Plan "Odawara TRY Plan")

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Definitions of Technical Terms etc.

(Note 1) Comprehensive plan

A plan that is formulated by the local government and is the basis for all of the local government's plans, and a comprehensive guide for administrative management

(Note 2) Planungszelle

A method for citizen participation that was invented in Germany. Randomly selected citizens have a number of discussions to search for a solution to governmental policy matters