

Up-to-date Documents on Local Autonomy in Japan No.5

Recent Community Policy in Japan

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Foreword

The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) and the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS) have been working since FY 2005 on a “Project on the overseas dissemination of information on the local governance system of Japan and its operation”. On the basis of the recognition that the dissemination to overseas countries of information on the Japanese local governance system and its operation was insufficient, the objective of this project was defined as the pursuit of comparative studies on local governance by means of compiling in foreign languages materials on the Japanese local governance system and its implementation as well as by accumulating literature and reference materials on local governance in Japan and foreign countries.

In FY 2008, as a project which were begun in FY 2005, we continued to compile “Statistics on Local Governance (Japanese/English)” and to conduct a search for literature and reference materials concerned with local governance in Japan and overseas to be stored in the Institute for Comparative Studies in Local Governance (COSLOG). We have also started a new research to compile a new series on “Historic Development of Japanese Local Governance”.

In addition, continuing from the previous year, we will continue to compile “Up-to-date Documents on Local Autonomy in Japan” and will make up 4 themes in FY 2008 on “Papers on the Local Governance System and its Implementation in Selected Fields in Japan”, for which we have taken up 10 themes already in the past years.

This project is to be continued in FY 2009, and we aim to improve the materials so that they will be of real use and benefit to those who are working in the field of local governance.

If you have any comments, suggestions or inquiries regarding our project, please feel free to contact the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) or the Institute for Comparative Studies in Local Governance (COSLOG) of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS).

March 2009

Michihiro Kayama
Chairman of the Board of Directors
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Tatsuo Hatta
President
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Preface

This booklet is one of the results of research activities conducted by the Institute for Comparative Studies in Local Governance (COSLOG) in FY 2008 as one part of a project that started in FY 2005 entitled “Project on the overseas dissemination of information on the local governance system of Japan and its operation”, in cooperation with the Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR). For the purpose of implementing this project, a “Research committee for the project on the overseas dissemination of information on the local governance system of Japan and its operation” has been set up, and a chief and deputy chiefs with responsibility for the project have been designated from among the members concerned with each research subject.

This booklet “Recent Community Policy in Japan” was written by Professor Kiyotaka Yokomichi, the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies as the fifth volume of “Up-to-date Documents on Local Autonomy in Japan”.

At the present time in Japan, there is a heightening of interest in communities. The national government has launched a Community Research Committee, and new community policies have begun to be examined. This booklet introduces Japanese community policies, including their historical development, recent trends and future issues.

We will continue to take up new topics, and add to the series.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Yokomichi, and also to other members of the research committee for their opinions and advice.

March 2009

Hiroshi Ikawa

Chairperson

Research committee for the project on the overseas dissemination of information
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1. Introduction

In many countries in the world, apart from central government, local governments with autonomy and independent corporate status are formally recognized and given responsibility for carrying out administrative duties within their respective jurisdictions. This is also the system that exists in Japan, in which there are 2 kinds of local governments, prefectures, which are local governments covering a wide geographical area, and municipalities (cities, towns and villages), which are the basic units of local government.

However, a characteristic of Japan is that within the geographical area of municipalities, which are the form of local government most familiar to local residents, there are many different kinds of still smaller groupings or units, which have a variety of different names, such as local autonomy associations, neighborhood associations, community councils, and so on, and it is entirely natural and commonplace for these bodies to exist as organizations of residents, membership of which is comprised of the residents of a specified area and which carry out their activities on a cooperative, autonomous basis, with a view to resolving the various problem issues that arise at the local level at which they operate (hereafter, these autonomous organizations of residents will be referred to as “communities”).

These “communities” are not bodies with public authority, constituting part of the structure of national governance, as local governments do; they carry out a wide range of public activities for the public benefit of the local societies within which they exist, and while cooperating with local governments, which have a comprehensive responsibility for these local societies.

Recently in Japan, interest in local communities has heightened. Individual local governments have begun various ways of getting to grips with the issue of how to enliven local communities, and national government too has set up a Community Research Committee and begun to examine new community policies.

This paper aims to provide an explanation of community policies in Japan, including the historical development process, recent trends and future issues.

2 Community Policies in the 1940s

2.1 Systematization of Local Neighborhood Associations in Wartime

(1) Communities and the Enforcement of a Modern local governance system

The enforcement of the Municipal Law named “Shisei-Chosonsei”, constituting the modern local governance system, was carried out concomitantly with the Great Meiji Consolidation, as a result of which the number of cities, towns and villages was reduced from a total of 71,314 to 15,859, about a fifth of the

original number. The result was that the former towns and villages were no more than one part of the newly constituted area comprised of cities, towns and villages, but the former groupings of towns and villages as they existed prior to the mergers were maintained, and communities in such forms as neighborhood associations continued to exist. In urban areas too, neighborhood groupings carried over from the Edo area, or newly formed neighborhood associations taking such forms as public health districts and other forms of groupings.

The national government (Home Ministry) at this time put effort into the development of cities, towns and villages as early modern units of local government, but did not go beyond acknowledging the existence of local neighborhood associations as autonomous associations of local residents.

However, from the 1930s, the function and role of local neighborhood associations and other local bodies began to attract attention, and their value as subsidiary units of cities, towns and villages came to be acknowledged. And within the framework of the wartime systematization, in October 1938, the Local System Investigation Committee made a report to the Home Minister entitled “An Outline of Revisions to the Governance System of Agricultural Villages”. The report contained the following passage: “Town and village communities are recognized as existing in an appropriate form as subsidiary units of towns and villages, and on the one hand, are to be utilized in support of the activities of towns and villages, while on the other hand, efforts are to be made to develop healthful activities on the part of such communities” The Home Ministry received the report and engaged itself in giving positive guidance and encouragement to neighborhood associations and the like.

(2) The 1940 “Outline of Arrangements for Neighborhood Associations”

In September 1940, the Home Ministry issued a document (Home Ministry Regulation, No. 17), entitled: “Outline of Arrangements for Neighborhood Associations”. Addressed to the head of each prefecture, the directive set out arrangements to be made. Its main points are as follows:

- A division is to be made into cities, towns and villages, and Neighborhood Associations are to be organized.
- All dwellings within the area of a Neighborhood Association to be included;
- At the same time as making Neighborhood Associations local people’s associations, such associations are to be made organizationally subsidiary to cities, towns and villages;
- Within the framework of a Neighborhood Association, about every 10 dwellings to be organized into a Neighborhood Team;
- Each Neighborhood Team to be the executive organ of a Neighborhood Association.

The result was that, on the basis of the directive, Neighborhood Associations and Neighborhood Teams were organized in every city, town and village in Japan. Subsequently, in 1943, the Municipal Law was revised, by which Neighborhood Associations were legally incorporated into the system of cities, towns and villages. Specifically, on condition of obtaining the permission of the mayor of a city, town or village, each such body was entitled to be the possessor of necessary property in its own name. Furthermore, included in the law was a regulation specifying that the mayor of a city, town or village could ask

Neighborhood Associations to help with a part of his/her work as mayor.

In this way, Neighborhood Associations were reorganized and systematized throughout the whole country as the smallest administrative structure within the framework of national wartime policy, and it was in this capacity that they operated in practice.

2.2 Postwar Dissolution by order of GHQ and Subsequent Revival

(1) Abolition of the Outline of Arrangements for Neighborhood Associations of 1940

After the end of World War II, the General Headquarters of the Allied Powers (GHQ) sought the abolition of Neighborhood Associations as foundations of the wartime system of national control through orders transmitted to every corner of the country.

On receipt of the request from GHQ, the Japanese government, using as its administrative device Home Ministry Order No. 4, ordered the annulment of the Outline of Arrangements for Neighborhood Associations (Home Ministry Regulation No. 17) of 1940.

However, on the basis of the wishes of residents, in a situation in which it was permissible for voluntary bodies to be established afresh, Residents' Associations, which were unchanged from the former Neighborhood Associations, were formed in many areas.

(2) The Dissemination and Execution of Government Order No. 15 of 1947

In the light of the above situation, GHQ requested the Japanese government for a legal measure which would enable all the associations analogous to the former Neighborhood Associations to be eliminated. In response to this request, in May 1947, the government promulgated Government Order No. 15, "Government Order Concerning the Dissolution, Prohibition of the Accession, and Other Restrictions on Neighborhood Associations".

Under this Order, bodies that were formed after the abolition of Neighborhood Associations and Neighborhood Team in a form analogous to these bodies, had to be dissolved by May 31, 1947. Through this Order, former Neighborhood Associations and the like were erased from the face of Japan.

(3) The Invalidation of Government Order No. 15 of 1947, and the Revival of Neighborhood Associations

Accompanying the restoration of Japan's sovereignty, under the "Law concerning the Abolition of Matters pertaining to Orders issued Concomitant to Acceptance of the Potsdam Declaration", Government Order No. 15 of 1947 requiring the abolition of Neighborhood Associations and analogous bodies was made invalid.

The government's reaction to the invalidation was not, in respect of the revival of Neighborhood Associations and analogous bodies, one of positive encouragement. However, at a local level, Neighborhood Associations and analogous bodies were revived in local areas across the country, and there were some local governments which positively promoted that movement.

3 Community Policy in the 1970s

3.1 1969 Report of the Investigation Committee of the Quality of Life Policy Council

In September 1969, the Investigation Committee of the Quality of Life Policy Council issued a report entitled, “Communities - the Recovery of Humanity in Daily Life-”. Issued at the same time as the development of high-level economic growth and urbanization, the report appealed for the creation of new communities at a time when the old local communities were heading for collapse.

This report defined communities in the following words: “Located in the places where we live our everyday lives, [communities] are groups of people, open and with feelings of mutual trust among their members, who have an attachment to a particular locality and many kinds of common objectives, and who live as individual or family units imbued with an awareness of autonomy and responsibility as citizens.”

The thinking of the report is also shown in the following passage. “Former communities were composed of “traditional-type layers of residents”. If we take the present, in which the former stage is moving toward disintegration, as the second stage, what we can say has been overwhelmingly generated is “layers of residents marked by apathy and disinterest”. In the third stage, which should come from now on, must be characterized by the formation of “layers of residents of the concerned-citizen type”.

And in order to move toward the formation of the type of community envisaged here, it is important that in the necessary response in the area of administration, the following four government policies are seen as fundamental.

- Establishment of a feedback system within the administration (establishment of a system of public hearings, strengthening of PR mechanisms);
- Provision of various kinds of community facilities;
- Provision of information;
- Training of community leaders.

This report, which is based on the concept of stages of levels, contained various problem areas in terms of the point which saw new communities as based on the rejection of existing communities in such forms as Neighborhood Associations and the like, which in reality continued to exist and to carry out their activities. But at the same time, this report had a large impact on the formation of community policies by both national government and local governments.

3.2 “Outline of Measures Concerned with Communities (Neighborhood Society)”, issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1971

As its response to the report from the Investigation Committee of the Quality of Life Policy Council, the Ministry of Home Affairs (now the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications), formulated in April 1971 a document entitled “Outline of Measures Concerned with Communities (Neighborhood Society)”, and on April 3, 1971, sent the document to all prefectures, as a communiqué from the Vice-Minister of Home Affairs, under the heading “Concerning the Promotion of Communities (Neighborhood Society)”.

The said Outline refers to “the promotion of policies that contribute to new community formation with the aim of forming basic local society that is able to realize and manage the kind of neighborhood-based society that residents hope for.” Specifically, the following model community measures were prepared as preliminary policies aimed at establishing policy measures concerned with communities. The policies aimed:

- To establish model community areas throughout the country.
- To select model community areas through discussion between prefectural governors and the heads of municipalities.
- To take the area of an elementary school district as the broad criterion for the size of a model community area.
- To let community infrastructure plans be drawn up by municipalities on the basis of resident participation.
- To let residents determine plans concerned with community activities.
- To have central government undertake financial measures such as a priority acknowledgement about issuing local bonds for the funding of community facilities based on community infrastructure plans.
- To have central government establish a Community Research Committee to undertake investigations and research concerning communities, and to provide necessary guidance for the formulation and execution of plans concerned with model communities.

As a result of the above, using the Outline as a basis, 40 community areas were established in 1971, 13 in 1972, and 30 in 1973, making a total of 83 areas designated as model communities (46 in urban areas, and 37 in rural areas).

In these model community areas, community plans (comprehensive plans combining community infrastructure plans and plans concerning community activities) were drawn up. Subsequently, on the basis of these plans, arrangements for community facilities, primarily focusing on community centers, were taken forward. Furthermore, the administration and operation of these facilities as well as all kinds of activities by residents, with the main focus on cultural and recreational activities, were also developed.

The Community Research Committee referred to above issued an interim report in 1973 and a final report in 1977.

4. Community Policies from the 1980s on

4.1 “Outline of the Establishment of Community Promotion Areas”, Ministry of Home Affairs, 1983

In 1983, when 10 years had elapsed since the close of the specification of model communities in 1973, the Ministry of Home Affairs determined the formulation of a document entitled “Outline of the Establishment of Community Promotion Areas” and on November 7, 1983, sent it to all prefectures, as a communiqué from the Director General of the Administration Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, under the title, “On the Promotion of Community Policy Measures”.

The objective of these policy measures, based on the promotion situation of model community area establishment policies, was to establish afresh new “Community Promotion Areas”, centered on cities which were acknowledged to have a very strong need for the promotion of new community policies accompanying the development of urbanization as well as the periphery of these areas. At the same time, the new measures aimed to enliven community activities.

The measures were targeted at areas other than those designated as model community areas, and the target areas were designated by the Ministry of Home Affairs in consultation with prefectures. It should also be mentioned that in contrast to community promotion areas, the Ministry of Home Affairs implemented as support measures, channeled through municipalities, financial devices (special local allocation tax) and the provision of information.

These Community Promotion Area Policies were not concerned with establishing facilities such as community centers, but focused rather on enlivening all kinds of community activities.

On the basis of this Outline, 147 areas were designated as Community Promotion Areas in the 3-year period 1983-85. The designation period for such areas was set at 5 years, so designation of Community Promotion Areas ended in 1989.

Looking at the results of the policies establishing Community Promotion Areas, progress could be discerned in terms of mutual contact within the areas between all kinds of constituent organizations, and neighborhood consultative committees were formed. Also, mention should be made of the many projects and activities undertaken by areas in their entirety.

4.2 “Policies for the Establishment of Community Activity Invigoration Areas”, Ministry of Home Affairs, 1990.

As a continuation of the Community Promotion Area Establishment Policies, the Ministry of Home Affairs embarked from 1990 on policies to establish Community Activity Invigoration Areas, and on November 5, 1990, sent to all prefectures, as a communiqué from the Director General of the Administration Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, a notification entitled, “Concerning the Invigoration of Community Activities”.

These policies were aimed at areas where community activities were already being carried on, but where there was a demand for the activities to be further invigorated. With this aim in mind, the policies made a fresh designation of “Community Activity Invigoration Areas”, and offered guidance and assistance. It was anticipated that by these means, two main results could be engendered: 1) the invigoration of community activities in such forms as the planning and implementation of projects such as “urban community formation” or “cultural events” and so on the basis of drafts independently formulated by the areas concerned; and 2) community plans and policies including such matters as a future vision and improvements of daily life environment in the areas concerned.

The targets of this policy were areas other than those designated as “Model Community Areas” or “Community Promotion Areas”, and the forms of assistance from the Ministry of Home Affairs, namely

financial measures (special local allocation tax) and information provision, channeled through municipalities, were to be the same as those for the establishment of Community Promotion Areas. The time scale for the new policy was set at 3 years, in contrast to the 5-year period for the establishment policy of Community Promotion Areas.

In the period from 1990 to 1992, 141 areas were designated as Community Activity Invigoration Areas. A characteristic of the newly designated areas is that, unlike the target areas for the Policies for the Establishment of Community Promotion Areas, the areas chosen were not biased toward urban areas. It should also be noted that the results of the policy have been effective in terms of invigoration of community activities and raising the level of residents' commitment as expressed in getting to grips with events and movements.

4.3 Community Policies of the Ministry of Home Affairs since 1993

As explained up to this point, the Ministry of Home Affairs devised community policies in 3 stages: 1) policies for the establishment of Model Community Areas (1971-1973); 2) policies for the establishment of Community Promotion Areas (1983-1985); and 3) policies for the establishment of Community Activity Invigoration Areas (1990-1992). Furthermore, the methods were ones of expecting that results achieved in Model Areas where assistance and support were given by national government would be disseminated to other areas all over Japan.

During the above 3 stages, community formation has been taken forward over the country as a whole and an unfair imbalance has arisen between those areas that were previously targeted and other areas. In order to adjust to this change, from 1993 onward, the Ministry of Home Affairs has redefined the targets of its community policies as all municipalities.

Specifically, with a view to strengthening the organization and functions of communities, the Ministry decided to implement financial measures (ordinary local allocation tax) to community leader training projects and so on.

In addition, since the designated community areas spanning the 3 stages referred to above took the area of an elementary school district as the criterion of their size, they were larger than the areas of Neighborhood Associations that had existed hitherto, so that in addition to these, quite separate community councils and the like were formed. However, in many of these bodies, Neighborhood Associations, which were themselves communities, were included as the main constituent bodies. This shows that communities existed in layers, and at the same time that, unlike the image of communities depicted in the report of the Investigation Committee of the Quality of Life Policy Council referred to above, in real-life communities, Neighborhood Associations continued to play an important role as they had done in the past.

4.4 Creation of a System for Acquiring Corporate Status

As pointed out above, Neighborhood Associations played an important role in communities, but in the absence of corporate legal status, they were "organizations without rights". As already explained, under the

revision of the Municipal Law of 1943, there was a period when such organizations were permitted to possess their own property in their own names, but with the implementation of the Local Autonomy Law of 1947, this system was abolished.

It follows from this that even if Neighborhood Associations had property in the form of facilities in which to assemble, they could not file registration in their own names. As a result, registration was made in the name of a representative member of the association, and there were a significant number of cases where trouble arose concerning a change in the registration because the member in whose name registration had been carried out, died or moved away.

In this situation, in 1991, central government opened the way, through a revision of the Local Autonomy Law, to enable Neighborhood Associations to obtain corporate status and carry out property registration and other matters in the name of the organization.

Specifically, organizations tied to a specific locality such as Neighborhood Associations (i.e. organizations which were formed on the basis of ties or attachment held by persons having a place of residence in a set area such as a “chou” or “aza” (the name given to sections of a town or village) or some other set area) were to be permitted, for the purpose of acquiring premises, or having rights pertaining to such premises for joint activities in the area concerned, to have corporate status by means of obtaining permission from the head of the city, town or village concerned, thereby obtaining the rights and having the responsibilities specified in the objectives of the agreement.

According to a survey by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the number of organizations which obtained permission on the basis of this system rose steeply from 898 in April, 1992, just after the system had started, to 22,050 in November 2002. However, the total number of Neighborhood Associations amounted in 2002 to 296,770, so in relation to this figure, the percentage of organizations that obtained permission to acquire corporate status under the system described here was no more than 7.4% of the total ¹.

5 Local Government Community Policies and the Present State of Communities

5.1 Local Government Community Policies

According to a survey ² conducted in 1990 by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the number of municipalities which were implementing some kind of community policy amounted to 88% of the total. It should also be noted that, of this total, 41% were already implementing such a policy before the announcement in 1971 by the Ministry of Home Affairs of the policy contained in the “Outline of Measures concerned with Communities (Neighborhood Society)”.

It is possible to conclude therefore from this account that even before the Ministry of Home Affairs embarked on its community-oriented policies, starting with the Model Communities policy, a sizable number of municipalities were already implementing community policies. It is also fair to go on to say that as a result of the community-oriented policies of the Ministry of Home Affairs, the number of such municipalities expanded very considerably over the country as a whole.

The main community policies carried out by these municipalities can be categorized as follows:

- Locating the concept of “community” within the basic plan of the municipality;
- Providing financial assistance for communities;
- Establishing and administering community facilities.

In 2000, the Japan Center for Cities also conducted a survey³ targeted at cities, and this produced the same kind of results. Specifically, the survey showed that 71% of cities were implementing community policies, and of this number, 34%, less than half, were already implementing such policies before the launch of the Model Communities policy in 1971 by the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Furthermore, if we look at the content of these community policies, we can see that the main items consist of financial help for community activities and the establishment and administration of community centers.

5.2 The Present State of Communities

According to the 1990 survey referred to above by the Ministry of Home Affairs, areas with communities covered 75% of the land area of Japan, or in population terms, about 81% of the population. In terms of the size of the communities, the majority were of a small scale, with 64% having a population of less than 1,000, and a land area of less than 1 square kilometer.

In terms of the activities carried out by communities, many fell into the following categories:

- Sporting and recreational activities;
- Various kinds of organizational activities, including youth groups, women’s societies, senior citizens’ clubs, etc.
- activities aimed at improving a cleaner lifestyle and environment;
- Festivals and other such events.

On the other hand, according to a survey⁴ targeted at cities and carried out by the Japan Center for Cities in 2001, 73% of cities had established community organizations as the main pillar of community activities (there is an overlap here with the percentage of cities reported in the 2000 survey of the Japan Center for Cities as implementing community policies). In terms of the composition of these community organizations, in the largest proportion of cases, amounting to 54.5%, many diverse organizations, such as women’s societies, senior citizens’ clubs and so on, were found in addition to Neighborhood Associations, followed by 32.8% of community organizations consisting only of Neighborhood Associations. It was also noted that in around 10% of cases, citizens’ groups such as NPOs, volunteer organizations, and so on, were added.

Also according to the 2000 report by the Japan Center for Cities, the community activities carried out can be categorized as follows:

- Greening and beautifying, maintaining and improving cleanliness, recycling.
- The o-bon festival and other festival-type events.
- Sporting and recreational activities.

- Disseminating communications from the administration in the form of PR and other material.
- Disaster prevention and other safety-oriented activities.
- Planning, maintaining and administering group meeting facilities.

The same survey also covered the role of the Neighborhood Associations. The results showed that apart from only 1 city, Neighborhood Associations existed in all other cities, and in all areas of 75% of the cities. Many of the areas in which Neighborhood Associations did not exist were areas where there were many apartment houses. The membership rate of Neighborhood Associations was over 70% in 80% of the cities, and stood at a high level in the country as a whole. However, in about 40% of Neighborhood Associations, the membership rate showed a declining trend.

6 Changes in the Environment Surrounding Communities

6.1 The Great Hanshin Earthquake and the Lessons Learned from it

January 17, 1995, was the date of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, centered on Kobe. It was a massive tragedy that resulted in more than 6,000 dead and 40,000 injured.

What the Great Hanshin Earthquake once again taught the people of Japan was that when we are afflicted with a great disaster of this kind, sufficient disaster prevention and rescue and support activities cannot be carried out simply by relying on the administration, primarily the fire and ambulance services and the police service.

From a different perspective, it should be noted that immediately after the disaster, many volunteers traveled to the scene and took part in all kinds of support and rescue activities. This greatly heightened the awareness of the Japanese people regarding the importance of volunteer activities. Indeed, it was as a result of this that 1995 was named “Volunteer Year 1”.

A further point is that along with recognition of the importance of volunteers, people were also made aware of the importance of communities in the form of Neighborhood Associations and the like. Specifically, a big difference could be noticed in terms of post-disaster assistance, management of evacuation areas, and so on, between areas where a community spirit functioned in such ways as shared knowledge among residents about who they each were, and areas where there was no such community spirit.

6.2 Invigoration of NPO Activities and The Enactment of the NPO Law

In the same way as in many Western countries, in Japan too, many NPOs (Non-Profit Organizations) were formed in order to carry out activities that contribute to society such as volunteer activities. Vibrant activities could be found in many different fields, including welfare, education, culture, urban community creation and the environment.

However, these NPOs were not recognized in terms of having corporate status. As a result, opening a bank account or renting an office in the name of the organization was impossible, and many disadvantages

of this kind hindered the development of activities.

In the face of this situation, the “Law to Promote Specified Nonprofit Activities” (the so-called “NPO Law”) was enacted in 1998. Under this law, organizations carrying out non-profit activities could be granted corporate status, with a view to meeting the objective of promoting the spontaneous development of socially contributory activities by the people.

Specifically, on receipt of approval from a prefecture or from the national government (Cabinet Office), an NPO assumed the right and the duty to carry out activities in pursuance of specified objectives, and was granted corporate status.

From December 1998, when the law was implemented, up to July 2008, 32,350 organizations received approval from prefectures, and 2,813 organizations received approval from the Cabinet Office, making a total of 35,163 organizations that were approved under the law ⁵. It goes without saying, of course, that quite apart from the organizations that had received approval, large numbers of NPOs continued to exist and carry out activities without being given corporate status.

These NPOs are citizen’s activity organizations, each of which has its own special objectives. However, in many cases, their fields of activity are the same as the fields of activity of communities like Neighborhood Associations, namely welfare, urban community creation, culture and sport, or activities related to local safety. What has resulted from this is that accompanying the invigoration of these citizen’s activity organizations, including volunteer groups, which have not reached the stage of being organized in the form of NPOs, a new problem has arisen in the form of the relationship between these organizations on the one hand and communities like Neighborhood Associations on the other in terms of their respective roles.

6.3 New Proposals for “Public Space”

In March 2005, the Research Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications issued a report entitled “Reform Strategy for Local Government Management in a Decentralized Society – Aiming at the Formation of a New Type of Public Space ”.

The main point of the report can be found in its demand for new ways of constituting public space. Previously, welfare provision and other kinds of public services had been provided completely by the administration (public sector) in the form of the national government or local governments. But on the one hand, the development of an aging society and a declining birthrate meant that an expansion of demands on public services could be expected, while on the other hand, the severe financial situation faced by the administration meant that it was no longer possible for the administration to respond to everything as had been the case in the past. In this situation, central government and local governments should prioritize their responses to target areas which had to be dealt with by government, and locate public-type areas other than these prioritized areas in a new concept of “public space”, revealing a new type of thinking in which there is a sharing of responsibility between the administration and the private sector (residents, private sector firms).

This new concept of public space can be divided into 2 categories: one in which responsibilities are shared with private-sector firms and the other in which responsibilities are shared with residents. The former case comprises areas in which services that were formerly offered directly by the administration should be outsourced to private-sector firms, while the latter case also comprised services which were formerly offered directly by the administration, but in these cases, they should now be offered in cooperation with residents (local cooperation).

In terms of the relationship with communities, the latter case posed problems. “local cooperation” is defined as “a state of cooperating in the provision of public services, which are necessary for a specific area, with participation by residents taking the form of many different entities who exist within this fixed area”. On a different point, thinking of the relationship with the local government within whose jurisdiction the “local cooperation” area is located, it is important that the relationship does not become one of sub-contracting or take on a hierarchical form, but rather that both sides treat other as equals and respect their mutual autonomy.

Turning to the Neighborhood Associations and analogous bodies, there is no doubt whatever that this can be regarded as a community in which residents participate, and right up to the present time, these communities have performed a role of providing services in cooperation with local governments. As a result of the new concept of public space and the thinking that has been shown in terms of local cooperation, expectations vis-à-vis communities like Neighborhood Associations have expanded. And at the same time, a need has developed to construct new forms of relationships with the local government where they are included.

6.4 The Development of Mergers of Municipalities (the Great Heisei Consolidation)

In 1999, the government carried out major reforms to the “Law concerning Exceptional Measures on Municipal Mergers” (the so-called “Municipal Merger Law”), strengthening the movement of municipal mergers. As a result, the number of municipalities stood at 3,229 in April 1999, but by March 2006, through the application of the Municipal Merger Law, this number had greatly decreased to 1,821.

Promotion of mergers between municipalities (the Great Heisei Consolidation) is currently being carried out under the “Law concerning Exceptional Measures on Municipal Mergers and Other Matters” (the so-called “New Municipal Merger Law”), a continuation of the Municipal Merger Law. The law will continue in force until 2010, by when it is expected that the number of municipalities will decrease by about half⁶.

The increased size of local area divisions caused by the mergers will have the end result of increasing the distance between residents of municipalities and the municipal administration. There is also a fear that communities that have existed up to now will decrease.

With this situation in mind, unlike the Great Showa Consolidation which was promoted in the 1950s, on this occasion, central government has taken up a position of respecting and preserving existing divisions of municipalities.

In the first place, in the 1999 reform of the Municipal Merger Law, a system of Local Deliberative Councils was introduced. This system was created as a device to enable the opinions of each merged city, town or village to be reflected. As a result of consultations among the various municipalities concerned, it became possible to locate this council in the area of the old municipality as it existed before the merger as a unit within the post-merger municipality.

Furthermore, through revisions made in 2004 to the Municipal Merger Law and the enactment of the New Municipal Merger Law, the system of Special Merged Districts and Local Autonomy Districts was introduced. In the former case, it became possible to establish special districts, which have the identity of corporate persons, matching the area of the former municipalities. However, their continued existence was limited to a maximum of 5 years. In the latter case, local consultation committees are established in administrative wards which do not have corporate status for the purpose of reflecting the views of residents, and the districts could be located according to the pre-existing municipality. And in the case of the Local Autonomy Districts, by means of the revisions of the Local Autonomy Law in the same year, this same system was introduced as a general system for all municipalities.

As of July 2006, the number of municipalities which have introduced these systems is as follows: Local Deliberative Council 216 municipalities (780 Local Deliberative Councils), Special Merged District 6 municipalities (14 Special Merged Districts), Local Autonomy District 53 municipalities (192 Local Autonomy Districts) ⁷

In merged municipalities, the importance of a “community” as an intermediary between the municipal administration and residents is growing. In such municipalities, including the utilization of newly introduced systems as mentioned above, the strengthening of community policies has become a major issue.

6.5 Fear of the Decline of Communities

As explained above, the position with regard to communities in the form of Neighborhood Associations and the like is that their importance has come to be newly recognized, but the present situation is not in any way one that conveys relief and reassurance.

In the first place, in large urban areas, the sense of being linked to people by virtue of living in a particular locality was weak, and the participation rate in Neighborhood Associations is low compared to local areas. In addition, there has recently been a rise in the diversification of values and consciousness of privacy, and there is a growing trend toward viewing neighborhood contacts as unwanted.

On the other hand, in local areas, neighborhood contacts are relatively strong, but there are worries that as a result of the continuing development of mergers, feelings of communal awareness that have existed hitherto will become dispersed. A further phenomenon is the emergence of localities where it is difficult to maintain communities in the form of Neighborhood Associations and the like, as represented by the term “threshold hamlets” accompanying the ongoing population decline and aging society.

In the light in particular of responses to crisis situations such as natural disasters, expectations have

risen regarding the role of communities in respect of such matters as the safety and security of communities, urban community building, etc, but despite this, the continuing weakening of communities themselves has become a problem.

7 Recent Trends in Community Policy

7.1 The Launch of the Community Research Committee

In February 2007, with the aim of opening up to debate questions of the revitalization of communities and the rebirth of local vitality, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications launched the Community Research Committee. This was the first time for such a committee to be established since the former Community Research Committee which was set up on the basis of the “Outline of Measures Concerned with Communities (Neighborhood Society)” of 1971. The launch of the new body was a sign that once again, community policies had become a major policy issue for central government (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications).

The results of the deliberations held within the Community Research Committee were issued in the form an announcement entitled “Community Research Committee Interim Summary”.

7.2 Outline of the “Community Research Committee Interim Summary”

An Outline of the “Community Research Committee Interim Summary” (hereafter “Interim Summary”) is given below. It should be noted that a community is defined as “a collective body of people with common attributes (such as a daily living environment, specified objectives, special interests, and so on) as well as an awareness of interrelatedness, and who carry out mutual communication with one another”. With this definition in mind, “community” as used in this paper has the meaning of a “shared locality for daily living”, and is termed “local community”. The main points from the Summary mentioned above now follow:

- (1) In answer to the question of why regeneration of local communities is now necessary, the following 3 reasons can be cited.
 - In a context characterized by a growing percentage of elderly people and a declining birthrate, the hollowing-out of farming, mountain and fishing villages, the continuing diversification and individualization of family patterns, and the weakening of the power of common features of local areas are ongoing trends, and there is a increase in the need for strengthening of a local community safety net.
 - In a context characterized by ongoing mergers among municipalities and the beginnings of a debate on the introduction of a regional system of administration, there is a fear that if the feelings of shared awareness that have previously existed become more dispersed, and if local cohesiveness is further diluted, this will invite a lowering of the quality and the level of services for residents provided by local community organizations.
 - As decentralization continues to advance, it becomes all the more important to put emphasis not only

on organizational autonomy, but also on the autonomy of residents.

(2) The following points clarify 3 perspectives to which attention has been drawn with reference to the discussion within the Community Research Committee.

- The perspective of how to carry on overall coordination with on the one hand Neighborhood Associations and analogous bodies centered on a specific sense of locality, and on the other hand, functional organizations such as NPOs.
- The perspective of examining how to respond to the actual situations of urban areas and of farming, mountain and fishing villages, where the circumstances of local communities are very different from each other.
- The perspective of how to unify the various policies relating to local communities that have been drawn up by the various divisions and bureaus of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications.

(3) The following points are indicated as basic items concerned with the regeneration of local communities.

- The driving force to motivate residents to participate in local community activities is equivalent to a spontaneous desire to participate in such activities.
- It can be presumed that by making such preparations as applying a suitable motive and constructing a suitable system, regeneration can be smoothly elicited and will emerge.
- However, there is a fear that if measures such as the construction of a system are “imposed from above”, the reverse effect in the form of decline of communities will result.

(4) Against the above background, it is possible to divide specific suggestions into 2 forms: i) specific policies cutting across different fields; and ii) specific policies aligned to individually separate fields.

(a) Specific suggestions (specific policies cutting across different fields)

- Construction of a platform

With reference to community activities, from the perspective not of seeing these as disparate activities related to the separate objectives and functions of many different kinds of groups, but of using them to revitalize the comprehensive power of the local community, many different kinds of activities can be effectively coordinated by means of carrying out liaison while at the same time adjusting and achieving consensus between different opinions. It is possible to think of constructing and putting in place a “platform” as a setting for such kind of liaison.

It is likely that the community platform will encompass many different types of configurations, reflecting the differences in the current situation, environment and history of local communities.

- Utilization of ICT

ICT (Information and Communication Technology), with SNS (Social Networking Service) as the primary focus, can bind together separated constituent members, and be an effective formative influence on theme-oriented communities.

There are several points to which attention needs to be paid, but it has become difficult to think of

daily life that does not utilize ICT. From the perspective of combining real activities and virtual activities, there is a need to deepen the debate, taking the existence and the advances of ICT as a precondition, on questions such as “How can we use it? How can we use it safely?”.

- The Ideal Form of Intervention by the Administration

The foundation of local community activities is the independence of local residents. It follows from this that there is a need for local residents to escape from a belief on the part of the administration that everything should be left to them.

On the other hand, from the perspective of a need for the administration to respect the independence of local residents, a pattern that needs to be advanced and taken forward is one that is based on an attitude of cooperation with local residents.

- Utilization and Training of Specialists

On the question of how to take forward local community activities, the role of a coordinator in aiming to achieve a consensus can arguably be thought of as very significant.

(b) Specific suggestions (specific policies aligned to individually separate fields)

The 4 points listed below represent concrete proposals already being carried out.

- Educational activities and childcare in local communities.
- Local history, culture and landscapes; urban community creation.
- Anti-crime and disaster prevention activities.
- The ideal form of rural hamlets.

(5) In the final part of the “Interim Summary”, the following aspects are pointed out.

- Until now, there has been an attitude for participation in community activities to be regarded as a matter for each individual person. Now, however, there is a need for a change in consciousness and thinking so that participation in local community activities is rather seen as a “public” matter.
- It is also reasonable to think that the time has come for central government to examine issues such as what would be the ideal pattern for a legal framework in the form of a structure or environment that would make it easy for local residents to carry out and to participate in local community activities.
- It is also necessary to put in place a system whereby the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications too can promote policies aimed at local community revitalization.

7.3 Strengthening Internal Ministry Systems and Launching the New Community Research Committee

As mentioned above, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications took receipt of the “Interim Report”, and in July 2008, the Ministry strengthened its systems concerned with community policies by establishing a Section for the Promotion of Communities and Exchanges.

Also in July of the same year, the Ministry launched the “Research Committee concerned with a New Model for Communities”. While this Research Committee took as a basis the proposals made by the previous Research Committee, it will not simply stop at acknowledging an approach that comprised the

collapse of the hitherto existing system and regeneration, but aimed to put forward models concerned with new ways of linking person to person and new ways of associating within a context of a changing community environment, targeted at communities in large cities, local cities, farming villages, and so on.

Attention is now focused on waiting to see what kind of report this new Research Committee will produce, and what kind of community policies will be developed by central government (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications).

8. Problem Issues in Community Policies and the Future Outlook

8.1 Previous Community Policies

There have been 2 major turning points in the past in community policies in Japan.

One was the publication by the then Home Ministry of the “Outline of Arrangements for Neighborhood Associations”. Focusing on the Neighborhood Associations, which carried on activities as autonomous organizations of residents of cities, towns and villages, the policy enunciated in this document systematized these organizations as the smallest administrative organizations of the state, bearing the responsibilities of one part of the wartime system.

On the basis of this kind of thinking, Neighborhood Associations were formed in every corner of the country. In addition to their function of carrying out the traditional roles of communities in improving and extending mutual support among citizens or joint welfare arrangements, they also undertook activities in the capacity of organizations which aimed at a thorough implementation of national policies.

The second turning point was the issuance of the “Outline of Measures Concerned with Communities (Neighborhood Society)” by the then Ministry of Home Affairs in 1971. Since the abolition of Neighborhood Associations by GHQ in 1947, any kind of intervention by central government in the affairs of communities was considered to be prohibited. The “Outline” referred to here was epochal in that it broke with this taboo, and took the line that positive involvement in community formation by central government was something to be encouraged and taken forward. However, the concept of a “model community” proposed in this document was defined as being different from the hitherto existing Neighborhood Associations, and as having a much larger scale equivalent to the area of an elementary school district.

Following the issuance of this document, many municipalities initiated community policies, and the formation of communities was actively promoted all over the country. Furthermore, Neighborhood Associations came to play the same central role in these communities that they had played hitherto, and in addition, citizens’ activity groups such as women’s associations, old people’s clubs, and NPOs also participated.

8.2 Community Policies at a Turning Point

The present day is the third turning point for community policies. It is precisely for this reason that after a lapse of 35 years, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications has established the new

Community Research Committee and begun to study a new policy for community development.

The following can be cited as problem issues concerned with community policies at this turning point in time.

- Within the structure of Neighborhood Associations, which have played a central role in communities up to now, signs of organizational fatigue, such as rigidity of the membership and the advancing age of leaders, can now be discerned. Against this background, there are also signs that it is becoming difficult for Neighborhood Associations to continue to sustain themselves in local areas characterized by the growth of phenomena such as hollowing out and the advancing age of the residents. How to respond to these issues is a problem.
- Up until now, involvement with citizens' activity groups such as NPOs or volunteer groups was rather superficial and not deep-rooted. However, the level of activity of these citizens' activity groups has recently increased. The problem is how to construct cooperative relationships with such citizens' activity organizations.
- There is a problem with how to add on citizens' activity groups to Neighborhood Associations and various other kinds of organizations as well as how to construct a community activity platform, including the utilization of ICT, in support of the aim of enlivening the general level of communities.
- How should a partnership or cooperative relationships be constructed between communities and the administration (local governments) while raising the level of autonomous activity in communities?
- (With particular reference to merged municipalities), there is a problem of how to arrange relationships between communities and Local Autonomy Districts.
- Whether central government should prepare a legal framework for communities as autonomous organizations within municipalities, and whether this should be brought closer to the concept of neighborhood government remains a problem.

8.3 Toward Autonomous Communities

Community activities have mutual support of residents as their foundation, and while maintaining this pattern, it may be felt to be appropriate to shift the priority focus from functions that support the administration to friendship-oriented activities such as sports and recreation, and to focus on autonomous activities such as maintaining safety and preparedness for disasters. It follows from this that the development of autonomous communities may be the major direction of activities in the future.

Note

¹ Mochizuki, Hiroshi, Chien ni yoru dantai no ninka jimmu no joukyou tou ni kansuru chousa kekka nitsuite [On the results of a survey concerned with the circumstances of permission given to organizations on the basis of locality-based ties], Chihou jichi [Local Autonomy], No. 675, February 2004, pp 54-55

² Fujii, Kazunari, (1991) Shin komyuniti wo kangaeru (sono 4), [New: thinking about communities, Part 4], Chihou jichi [Local Autonomy], No. 522, May 1991, pp58-65

- ³ Quoted from Japan Center for Cities, Kinrin jichi to komyuniti – jichitai no komyuniti seisaku to “jichiteki komyuniti” no tenbou, [Neighborhood Autonomy and Community – Community Policies of Local Governments and the Outlook for “Autonomous Communities”], March 2001.
- ⁴ Quoted from ibid, Jichi-teki komyuniti no kouchiku to kinrin seifu no sentaku,[Constructing Automomous Communities and Selecting Neighborhood Government], March 2002.
- ⁵ Quoted from the Cabinet Office NPO Home page (<http://www.npo-homepage.go.jp>)
- ⁶ On mergers among municipalities, see Yokomichi, Kiyotaka, “The Development of Municipal Mergers in Japan”, (COSLOG Up-to-date Documents on Local Autonomy in Japan No. 1), 2007.
- ⁷ Research Committee on Municipal Mergers,Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Atarashii machizukuri wo mezashite ~ gappei shi-chou-son no torikumi no jittai ~, [Aiming at making a new form of municipality – the reality of efforts in post-merger municipalities], March 2007.p48

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