

**Up-to-date Documents on Local Autonomy in Japan No.6**

## **New Policies in Wide-area Administration 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 2009, we continued to compile “Statistics on Local Governance (Japanese/English)”, “Up-to-date Documents on Local Autonomy in Japan”, “Papers on the Local Governance System and its Implementation in Selected Fields in Japan” and “Historic Development of Japanese Local Governance”. We also continued 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).

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).

February 2010

Michihiro Kayama  
Chairman of the Board of Directors  
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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 2009 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.

“Up-to-date Documents on Local Autonomy in Japan” (2009, Volumes 6,7) were written under the responsibility of the following two members:

(Chief)

Kiyotaka Yokomichi, Professor of the National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies

Yoshihiko Kawato, Associate Professor of Takasaki City University of Economics

This booklet, the 6<sup>th</sup> Volume in the series, was written on the subject of new policies in wide-area administration in Japan.

In Japan, the Great Heisei Consolidation, which has been proceeding since 1999, will come to an end in March 2010, and the time is approaching when once again, emphasis will be put on wide-area administration in the form of administrative cooperation and liaison among municipalities. This booklet aims to serve as an introduction to wide-area administration in Japan, including the system and ways in which related issues have been tackled up to now as well as recent trends.

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. Furthermore, I would like to thank Mr. Maurice Jenkins for his English translation

February 2010

Hiroshi Ikawa

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Research committee for the project on the overseas dissemination of information  
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# **New Policies in Wide-area Administration in Japan**

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## **Introduction**

It has been the case in Japan, ever since the formation of a modern nation-state as a result of the Meiji Restoration, that as a concomitant part of the process of socio-economic development and the rise in administrative standards, there has been a quantitative increase in the work undertaken by municipalities (cities, towns and villages) as local autonomous bodies, which have also become increasingly sophisticated in a qualitative sense. We can also see how municipalities have been formed with a view to responding to these changes, and how mergers and consolidations have been repeated at different times. Specifically, it is usual to refer to the Great Meiji Consolidation (1888-1889), the Great Showa Consolidation (1953-1961), and the Great Heisei Consolidation (1999-2010). Through these consolidations, the cities, towns and villages involved aimed to strengthen their financial base and raise their level of administrative ability<sup>1</sup>.

Fundamentally, the method of merging municipalities has been one of discarding the old units and forming larger-scale units, and as a result, the quantity of the duties undertaken by municipalities has increased, and they have been able to respond to demands in increasingly sophisticated ways. However, the responses shown by municipalities toward mergers have not followed a single unique pattern. There have also been cases where the units (cities, towns and villages) have stayed as they were, and the method of responding to the demands has been to construct a system of co-operation linking the various individual units. This has been termed “wide-area administration”.

As already mentioned, it is fundamentally by the use of mergers that municipalities have responded to a quantitative increase in duties and an increasingly sophisticated environment. However, in the intervals between the three great consolidations already referred to, wide-area administration has been developed<sup>2</sup>. It should also be noted that as the Great Heisei Consolidation draws to its close in March 2010, municipalities must re-engage with a process of wide-area administration.

It is with this process of wide-area administration within the municipalities of Japan that this paper will concern itself. Chapter 1 will explain the significance of wide-area administration. Chapter 2 will explain the system of wide-area administration (cooperatives) prior to World War II. Chapter 3 will focus primarily on newly introduced systems, explaining the wide-area administration systems introduced after World War II (councils, joint establishment of organs, delegation of duties, etc.). Chapter 4 will look at the pattern of activities within municipalities that have adopted wide-area administration. Chapter 5 will provide a detailed explanation and commentary on the wide-area administration zones (particularly wide-area municipal zones) that constituted the primary focus of wide-area administration activities in the 40 years following the Great Showa Consolidation. Chapter 6 will explain the “autonomous settlement zones” with which wide-area administrations is coming to grips as the Great Heisei Consolidation draws to its close. And finally, Chapter 7 will explain the direction that wide-area administration will follow in the years to come.

## **1 The significance of wide-area administration**

“Wide-area administration” includes the wide-area administration of a prefecture as a wide-area autonomous body, but within the framework of this paper, the concept taken up is that of the wide-area administration of municipalities (cities, towns and villages), constituting the basic units of local autonomy. It follows that the scope of wide-area administration exceeds the scope of a single municipality and focuses on providing services to residents through a process of co-operation among several municipalities.

In terms of the methods of implementing wide-area administration, these can be divided into 2 kinds. There is the method whereby an organization or a corporate person is especially constructed to carry out the implementation, and there is the method whereby no such organization or corporate person is constructed.

A further division into 2 categories can also be made. On the one hand, there is the concept that goes no further than administering duties on a shared basis. On the other hand, there is the concept whereby the combined area of the participating municipalities is considered as one zone and becomes the object of comprehensive planning, and on this basis, projects are realized and infrastructure within the zone is taken forward on a planned basis.

## **2 The wide-area administration system prior to World War II**

### **2.1 The introduction of a comprehensive system**

The beginning of the early modern system of local autonomy in Japan can be dated at 1888, when the Municipal Law (City Law, Town and Village Law) was established. A regulation was set up whereby several towns and villages could establish a town and village cooperative to deal with their duties on a shared basis (Town and Village Law, Article 116, Clause 1). Furthermore, it was also stipulated (ibid, Clause 2) that in the case of towns and villages which did not have the funds required to create a burden bearing a legal obligation, it is possible for them, at times when a merger conference cannot be set up or when there are circumstances that make a merger inconvenient, to create a “town and village cooperative” by means of a resolution passed by the county representative assembly<sup>3</sup>.

With regard to the reasons underlying the establishment of a town and village cooperative , reference can be made to the following extract from “Reasons for the Creation of the Municipal Law ”, which explains the fundamental rationale underlying the establishment of this law:

“If at the present time there are unavoidable circumstances which mean that a full merger cannot be realized, or if a merger is inconvenient, there is a legal recourse to create a cooperative of towns and villages in accordance with Article 116 of the Town and Village Law”

From 1888 to 1889, the Great Meiji Consolidation was taken forward, preceding the implementation of the Municipal Law. It may, however, be presumed that alternative procedures for a merger were provided for towns and villages which found it difficult to proceed with a merger within the framework of this consolidation.



## **2.2 Applied expansion of the cooperative system**

The Municipal Law underwent total reform in 1911, and at this time, it became possible for the cooperative system to be applied to cities as well as to towns and villages. Specifically, in order that municipalities could arrange for a part of their duties to be dealt with on a shared basis, enabling cities to become members of the cooperative system (City Law Article 149, Clause 1).

The resulting “partial-affairs association”, as the concrete expression of the formula for sharing part of the duties of municipalities was known, was acknowledged to be an effective method of demonstrating administrative efficiency, and this is the reason why it was decided to apply it to cities as well as towns and villages.

On the other hand, given the assumption of the state of affairs in which, within the Town and Village Law, only a town and village created a “partial-affairs association”, the same kind of regulation was established (Town and Village Law, Article 129, Clause 1), and in the event of non-occurrence in a city, but occurrence as a special necessity in a town or village, it was made possible for all the duties of the towns and villages concerned to be dealt with on a shared basis by the creation of a town and village cooperative (ibid, Clause 2).

The body thus created, which dealt with all the duties of towns and villages on a shared basis, was known as a “full cooperative”. In practice, the effects of this are no different from those of a merger, and the term was simply taken over as an expedient in place of the term “merger” from the former Municipal Law<sup>4</sup>.

## **2.3 The characteristics of a cooperative**

A cooperative was specified as a kind of local autonomous body, i.e. a “complex local organization”; it had corporate status, had jurisdiction over the total land area covered by the constituent cities, towns and villages, regarded the cities, towns and villages that participated in it, and not the residents who lived therein, as its constituent organs, and had the function of dealing with the duties of the said organs on a shared basis<sup>5</sup>. Also determined in the articles of the cooperative were matters concerned with the structure of the assembly required to operate it and the election of the assembly members, the organization and the appointment of the staff of the cooperative, and the methods of paying expenses.

## **3 The system of wide-area administration after World War II**

### **3.1 The successor to the cooperative system**

In 1947, the Municipal Law was abolished, and the Local Autonomy Law was enacted afresh, but the cooperative system, dating from the days of the Municipal Law, was taken over into the Local Autonomy Law.

The Local Autonomy Law located a cooperative within the category of one kind of “special local public body”, and stipulated (ibid, Article 284, Clause 1) that not only cities, towns and villages, but also prefectures, could establish a “partial-affairs association”. Furthermore, with reference to towns and villages, it was also stipulated that in addition to the hitherto existing “full cooperative”, a “joint office cooperative”, dealing only with all affairs of the public office, could also be established (ibid, Clause 3).

### **3.2 Creation of a simplified wide-area administration system**

According to the 1952 revision of the Local Autonomy Law, 3 categories were created as frameworks for the new wide-area administration systems, namely councils, the joint establishment of organs as well as staff members, and delegated duties.

The new categories were introduced on the basis of the “Recommendations concerning the re-allocation of administrative duties” (the so-called Kambe Recommendations), issued by the Local Administrative Investigation Committee on December 22, 1950. The said recommendations stated the following: “With regard to administration of a part of simple duties, a cooperative executive and assembly are stipulated as required organs, and with this in mind, the question is whether or not, from the standpoint of economizing on expenditure as well as of improving on the efficiency of carrying out required duties, the most appropriate formula is indeed the cooperative system on a shared basis with other local public bodies”. It was expected that even if management operations were carried out on a shared basis, the formula created would not require complex structures.

#### **(1) Councils**

It was stipulated that councils of local public bodies acting on a shared basis, could be established. Initially, 2 categories of councils were designated: one category comprised “implementation management councils”, which aimed to implement and manage the part of duties shared in common, and the other category comprised “liaison and adjustment councils”, which aimed to carry out liaison and adjustment activities in respect of the implementation and management of duties<sup>6</sup>. Subsequently, as a result of the revision to the Local Autonomy Law of 1961, a “planning formulation council” was added with the aim of facilitating the joint formulation of comprehensive planning covering a wide geographical area (Local Autonomy Law, Article 252-2, Clause 2, Item 1).

Councils have the character of common implementation organs established jointly by a number of local public bodies, and do not have the status of corporate bodies. Furthermore, because councils do not have their own employees, their duties are carried out by the employees of the participating local public bodies.

When implementation or management of a duty is carried out by a council in the name of the local public bodies that constitute the council or as their executive organ, the effect will be as if the local public bodies had carried out the implementation or management directly.

It was also stipulated that in a case where a “planning formulation council” drew up a comprehensive wide-area plan, the participating local public bodies must carry out the duties resulting from that plan.

#### **(2) Joint establishment of organs and staff**

A local public body, acting jointly with other public bodies, is able to establish organs (committees, or attached organs) on a joint basis, and is also able to establish shared employees to assist the chief executive officers, or committees, with the execution of their duties (Local Autonomy Law, Article 252-7).

Jointly established organs have the character of organs which are common to the local public bodies concerned, and the effect of actions committed by the said organs is that they are attributed to the various local public bodies.

Furthermore, the member units of the jointly established organs are regarded as employees of one or other of the local public bodies concerned, and employees of the local public body to which they belong provide assistance with the duties of the jointly established organ.

### (3) Delegation of Duties

It was stipulated that a local public body could delegate a part of its duties to another local public body, and enable the executing organ of the local public body to which duties were delegated to implement and manage the duties (Local Autonomy Law, Article 252-14).

As a result of delegating duties in this way, the local public body that has entrusted the duties loses authority over the duties so delegated. On the other hand, the local public body entrusted with the duties gains the authority to administer the duties, within the scope of what has been delegated, as if they were its own duties.

### (4) Comparison of various systems with that of cooperatives

Cooperatives are bodies with corporate status (special local public bodies) separately established to deal with wide-area administration, while in contrast to these, councils were specially created to deal with wide-area administration but without having corporate status. Different from cooperatives, councils also have no assemblies. In the case of the joint establishment of organs, without any need to separately establish a new organization, each local public body implements wide-area administration by combining organizations that already exist within itself. And in the case of delegating duties, there is no creation of an organization to deal with duties on a joint basis; instead, wide-area administration is implemented by the procedure of one local public body handing over a part of its duties to another public body. In every one of the cases enumerated here, the procedures used are simple and easy compared to the system of cooperatives.

## **3.3 The creation of local development corporations**

Through the revision of the Local Autonomy Law carried out in 1963, the system of local development corporations was established (Local Autonomy Law, Article 298).

The background to this is that in the 1960s, the promotion of regional development became a major policy issue, and local public bodies, acting in union, joined together to introduce local development corporations as a new device to handle large-scale projects.

More specifically, in order that a local public body, acting in concert with other local public bodies, can implement, on the basis of a comprehensive plan, such matters as water supplies and roads for housing, factories, and the like, it was stipulated that the local public bodies concerned could establish a local development corporation, to which the tasks enumerated here should be entrusted.

A local development corporation thus created has corporate status, and is designated as one kind of “special local public body”.

## **3.4 Expansion of the cooperative system**

### (1) Complex partial-affairs associations

Under the revision of the Local Autonomy Law carried out in 1974, a system of “complex partial-affairs associations”, representing an expansion of the system of partial-affairs associations,

was created (Local Autonomy Law, Article 285).

There was no restriction to the partial-affairs associations that had existed hitherto administering multiple duties, when this was necessary because the duties were common to all the municipalities that comprised the association. However, it was stipulated that in the case of complex partial-affairs associations, it was not a necessary requirement that the duties were common to all the municipalities that comprised the association.

Complex partial-affairs associations as described here are a kind of special variant of partial-affairs associations, but are not formally acknowledged in prefectures. These organs are created with the aim of promoting wide-area administration more effectively at municipal level, and as a result of their establishment, it has become possible to integrate and rationalize partial-affairs associations.

#### (2) Wide-area unions

Within the framework of a 1994 revision to the Local Autonomy Law, “wide-area unions” were established as a new variation on corporations (Local Autonomy Law, Article 284, Clause 3).

If we look in more detail at why wide-area unions are deemed appropriate devices for disposing of matters covering a wide area, the answer is that firstly, they can draw up comprehensive plans in relation to a wide area (wide-area plans), can carry out all liaison and adjustment tasks necessary to implement these wide-area plans, and can implement a part of the plans over a wide area in a planned and comprehensive way.

#### (3) Connections with wide-area administration

Summing up the main points of the different kinds of bodies referred to here, complex partial-affairs associations are bodies which aim to take wide-area administration forward from the perspective of handling the shared implementation of duties more efficiently. On the other hand, wide-area unions aim to take wide-area administration forward from the perspective of the comprehensive and planned implementation of projects based on wide-area plans which they have drawn up.

In either case, they represented a reform of the system that was deeply connected with the promotion of wide-area zones, which form the subject-matter of Chapter 5 of this paper.

## **4 The present state of wide-area administration at municipal level**

### **4.1 The different kinds of wide-area administration systems**

A diagrammatic summary of the different systems of wide-area administration described in the previous chapter can be found in Table 1.

**(Table 1) Kinds of wide-area administration systems**

	Names of systems	Overview of systems
Requiring the establishment of a corporate person	Partial-affairs association	The term denotes a special kind of local public organization established to jointly administer the duties of a number of local public bodies. A variation of this is a complex partial-affairs association.
	Wide-area union	The term denotes a special kind of local public organization established to administer duties which are felt to be more appropriately dealt with over a wide area. Duties can be delegated to them directly by the central government or by prefectures.
	Full cooperative	A special kind of local public organization established to administer in common all the duties of a number of Towns/Villages. This is in practice no different from a merger.
	Joint office cooperative	A special kind of local public organization established to administer in common all the duties that pertain to the implementing organ of a town or village
	Local development corporation	A special kind of local public organization established by a number of local public bodies to administer in a comprehensive and integrated way construction projects that constitute the cornerstone of local development. The jointly administered duties are limited to construction work on public facilities or to the acquisition or development of land connected to such work.
Not requiring the establishment of a corporate person	Council	A system established jointly by a number of local public bodies for carrying out joint administration or implementation, liaison and adjustment, or the preparation of plans
	Joint establishment of organs, etc.	A system established jointly by a number of local public bodies, taking such forms as a committee, committee members, or attached organs.
	Delegation of duties	A system whereby one local public body delegates the administration and implementation of part of its duties to another local public body

Note: Partially adopted from the MIC document, "Application of the current devices for the joint implementation of duties (overview)".

In all, there is a total of 8 different kinds of systems, and they can be broadly divided according to whether or not they have corporate legal status.

Taking firstly those organs or bodies that do required corporate legal status, we have 5 kinds, namely partial-affairs associations (including complex partial-affairs associations), wide-area unions, full cooperatives, joint office cooperatives, and local development corporations. In every one of these cases, the resulting body is designated as a “special local public body” under the Local Autonomy Law.

On the other hand, there are three simpler types of systems without corporate legal status, namely councils, the joint establishment of organs and staff, and the delegation of duties.

#### **4.2 Utilizing the wide-area administration system**

According to the “Survey of the present state of the joint administration of duties by local public bodies” (as of July 1, 2008), issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the present situation regarding the use of the wide-area administration system in local public bodies

(including prefectures) is shown in Table 2.

Of the 8 kinds of wide-area administration systems listed above, the full cooperative system has not been utilized since 1957, while the joint office cooperative system has not been utilized since 1960. It follows that in terms of actual practice, these 2 systems can be excluded from those utilized, leaving a total of 6 kinds of systems in use.

**(Table 2) Present state of wide-area administration (as of July 1, 2008)**

Joint administration formula	Organization covering 2 or more prefectures			Organization within 1 prefecture		Prefecture and municipality	Municipality and municipality	Total
	Prefecture and prefecture	Prefecture and municipality	Municipality and municipality	Prefecture and municipality	Municipality and municipality			
	A	B	C	D	E	B+D	C+E	A+B+C+D+E
1 Partial-affairs association	2		15	39	1,608	39	1,623	1,664(22.0)
2 Wide-area union				3	108	3	108	111(1.5)
3 Local development corporation				1		1		1(0.0)
4 Council	1	4	1	5	273	9	274	284(3.7)
5 Joint establishment of organs, etc.			1	1	405	1	406	407(5.4)
6 Delegation of duties	33	57	829	1,662	2,528	1,719	3,357	5,109(67.4)
Total	36(0.5)	61(0.8)	846(11.2)	1,711(22.6)	4,922(65.0)	1,772(23.4)	5,768(76.1)	7,576

Note: Partially adapted from the MIC document, "Present situation by jointly administered constituent bodies", (as of July 1, 2008). The figures in brackets are percentages (%).

As of July 1, 2008, there was a total of 7,576 cases using wide-area administration systems. Of these, at prefectural level, there was a total of 36 cases (Table 2A) of duties being administered on a shared basis, no more than 0.5% of the total. The total of prefectures disposing of duties on a shared basis with municipalities (Table 2, B+D) was 1,772 cases, 23.4% of the total. For the rest, cases of municipalities sharing duties among themselves (Table 2, C+E) numbered 5,776 cases in all (the most numerous), representing 76.1% of the total. It is clear from these figures that the utilization of wide-area administration systems is most commonly found among municipalities.

With regard to the kind of system used, "delegated duties" with 5,109 cases, 67.4% of the total, is the kind of system most commonly found. The second most frequently found type of system is that of partial-affairs associations, with 1,664 cases, 22.0% of the total. Furthermore, within this total are 148 bodies which use complex partial-affairs associations as specified in Article 285 of the Local Autonomy Law. Ranking third in terms of frequency of occurrence is the joint establishment of organs, with 407 cases (5.4% of the total), fourth is councils, with 284 cases (3.8% of the total), and fifth is wide-area unions, with 111 cases (1.5% of the total). Only one case was found of local development corporations, making this a type that is hardly ever utilized.

Looking more closely at the characteristics of delegated duties, the most commonly utilized type,

a very large number, 1,719 cases, consisted of duties shared between prefectures and municipalities. This large number results from the fact that many municipalities entrusted the duties of equity committees to prefectural personnel committees. Specifically, such cases numbered 1,179, comprising 22.9% of the total of delegated duties. Among delegated duties dealt with in common by municipalities, the most frequently occurring type was that of the issuance of copies of certificates of residence, totaling 936 cases, followed by duties concerned with speedboat racing, numbering 809 cases, duties concerned with the environment and public hygiene, such as garbage and sewage disposal, numbering 414 cases, and duties concerned with disaster protection, such as cases of fire, numbering 325 cases.

Turning to partial-affairs associations, the most frequently occurring type of duties administered in common is that of garbage disposal, numbering 422 cases (25.4% of the total), followed by sewage disposal, with 386 cases, fire fighting with 297 cases, ambulance service with 295 cases, and cremation with 233 cases.

If we look at the progression of partial-affairs associations over time, we find a steady growth from the late 1960s through the early 1970s, accompanying the increase in wide-area administration (joint disposal of duties) in the areas of garbage and sewage disposal and fire services. In 1967, there were 2,202 such bodies, and this increased to a peak of 3,039 in 1974. However, subsequent to this point, as a result of the shift toward wide-area unions and the process of integration in terms of the utilization of complex partial-affairs associations, the number took a decreasing trend, falling to 2,770 in 1998. And then, accompanying the Great Heisei Consolidation, which began in 1999, the number decreased significantly, dropping to 1,664 in 2008, at the time of this survey.

Turning to the joint establishment of organs, the largest number of cases was in the area of nursing care insurance certification investigation duties (nursing care certification investigation conference) on the basis of the Nursing Care Insurance Law. The number of cases totaled 142, or 34.9% of the total. This was followed by duties concerning equity committees, numbering 114 cases, and, in decreasing order of frequency, by duties concerning the certification and investigation of disability classifications on the basis of the Law concerning Services and Support for Persons with Disabilities, numbering 103 cases in total.

Turning next to councils, the largest number of cases was concerned with local development planning policy; in this area there were 122 cases, representing 43.0% of the total. This was followed, in decreasing order, by cases concerned with education matters, numbering 878 cases.

Turning finally to wide-area unions, after the first case applying this concept occurred in 1996, the number increased in 2000 on the occasion of the introduction of the nursing care insurance system. In addition to this, the result of further additions preceding the implementation of the medical insurance system for the advanced elderly in 2008 was that up to 2008, when this survey was carried out, a total of 111 local bodies were using the concept of wide-area unions. It should be noted, however, that while in theoretical terms, wide-area unions were introduced with the aim of achieving the formulation of wide-area planning, and on this basis, the comprehensive and planned implementation of projects, when it comes to the actual operation of the implementation process, there is hardly any difference between wide-area unions and partial-affairs associations.

## **5 The advance of wide-area administration zones**

It was from the end of the 1960s that the promotion of wide-area administration in the form of the nation-wide promotion of wide-area administration zones (wide-area municipal zones as well as large city outer area administration zones) was identified as an objective.

This concept is not one of implementing wide-area administration so as to administer duties on a shared basis. It attempts rather to formulate a comprehensive plan which encompasses as one zone the totality of all the municipalities (cities, towns and villages) within the geographical area concerned.

### **5.1 The background to wide-area administration zones**

From the late 1960s onwards, accompanying the advance of motorization, the geographical area within which residents carried out activities in the course of their daily lives, including commuting to the workplace or to an educational institution, shopping, and so on, expanded beyond the area of a single municipality. Furthermore, along with the rise in income levels and the urbanization of daily life, the administrative services which residents looked to municipalities to provide also expanded, and at the same time, the qualitative level of the content became more sophisticated.

In addition to the above, in the New National Comprehensive Development Plan, which was the subject of a Cabinet resolution of May 30, 1969, the concept of local development was advocated as a concept in terms of a unit comprising a wide-area daily life zone. Specifically, the plan said that the aim was “to restructure the entire land area of Japan by taking as primary zones broad livelihood zones against the background of a society which is witnessing the development of motorization and other factors. Furthermore, the primary zones will be considered to be the basic units for regional development, and autonomous regional development plans will be drawn up on the basis of the particular characteristic of each individual primary zone.”

### **5.2 The beginning of wide-area administration zones**

The concept of wide-area administration zones began with a reference in a report issued on August 27, 1968, by the 12th Local Government System Research Council, entitled “An interim report concerning administrative and financial policies aimed at responding to changes in local administration that have accompanied changes in the socio-economic situation of recent years”. Specifically, the report referred to the need “to confirm, as a policy for promoting regional society, a concept which envisages cities destined to become core cities and the farming, mountain and fishing villages on their periphery as a single unit”, and the need “to take forward wide-area administrative systems that have resulted from the pattern whereby local public bodies deal with duties on a joint, shared basis.”

The Ministry of the Interior (now the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications) took receipt of the report, and on May 28, 1969, issued “Guidelines for measures to promote wide-area municipal zones in fiscal 1969”, thus initiating on an experimental basis the policy of wide-area administration zones (wide-area municipal zones).

Subsequently, the thinking underlying the concept of wide-area livelihood zones was unveiled in the New National Comprehensive Development Plan, and it was in this context that a summary of the various ideas was made in the “Report concerning wide-area municipal zones as well as the



union of local public bodies”, issued on October 17, 1969 as the 13th report of the Local Government System Research Council.

The main points of this report comprise the following 3 points<sup>7</sup>.

- (1) The aim is to establish the everyday zones, within which residents carry on their daily lives and which continue to expand to cover ever wider geographical areas, as wide-area municipal zones. Further, by means of the joint administration of municipal services, the arrangement of facilities as well as the management of duties for such areas as roads, firefighting and ambulance services, medical care, public hygiene and sanitation, education and culture, social welfare, and the promotion of industry, can be taken forward on the basis of a wide-area comprehensive plan, so that it will be possible to move closer to a solution of the many problems that municipalities face, and to aim at the same time at the balanced development of the whole of the land area of Japan.
- (2) The idea of establishing, simply by means of mergers, a wide-area administrative system covering all municipal zones is difficult to envisage as an actual, real-life issue, and in addition is not currently appropriate, so for the moment, utilization of the formula for the joint administration of duties will be used alongside mergers with the aim of putting wide-area administration in place as a system.
- (3) At the present time, it is appropriate to try and remedy inadequacies in the formula for the joint administration of duties by improvements to the system, but it is also necessary to create new patterns for the joint disposal of duties in such forms as special local public bodies termed “unions of local public bodies”.

On the basis of this report, the then Ministry of the Interior, with a view to perpetuating the thinking found in the 1969 Guidelines referred to above, issued on April 10, 1970, “Guidelines for measures to promote wide-area municipal zones”. By doing this, the Ministry signaled a full-scale start to the policy of creating wide-area municipal zones on the basis of the report.

### **5.3 The fundamental conception of wide-area municipal zones**

The concept of a wide-area municipal zone is that of the establishment of a wide-area municipal zone in the form of a unit comprising the everyday living activities of residents. In this wide-area zone, each newly established wide-area administrative organ formulates a wide-area municipal plan, and aims to carry out the establishment of the infrastructure required in the zone in a comprehensive and planned way on the basis of the said plan. The details of this fundamental device are as given below<sup>8</sup>.

#### **5.3.1 Setting up a wide-area municipal zone**

The initial establishment of a wide-area municipal zone requires as a precondition that, broadly speaking, the number of inhabitants exceeds 100,000, and that the geographical area concerned is deemed to be able to cultivate, or to have the potential to cultivate, a zone of everyday social living (excluding large cities as well as peripheral areas deemed to have a character identical to them).

Given the existence of the above conditions, it was stipulated that the area should satisfy the following specific conditions.

- (1) The overall area of the zone, comprising both cities and surrounding farming, mountain or

fishing villages, should be able to satisfy almost all the standard demands of residents, in terms of employment opportunities, the provision of everyday living materials, medical care, education and culture, entertainment and other requirements of everyday social living.

- (2) There should be, within the zone, urban areas (core city areas) which possess an accumulation of urban facilities as well as functions which are sufficient to meet the normal demands of residents in the context of their everyday living activities.
- (3) Transport and communication facilities and networks should be constructed so as to link the core city areas with other urban areas as well as villages within the zone.

From a procedural point of view, it was stipulated that the establishment of a wide-area municipal zone is to be carried out by a prefectural governor after consultation with the municipalities concerned as well as with the Minister of the Interior. Furthermore, it must be considered that in principle, every one of the individual municipalities concerned belongs to a wide-area municipal zone.

### **5.3.2 The creation of a wide-area administrative organ**

It is stipulated that the municipalities belonging to a wide-area municipal zone shall as administrative organs (wide-area administrative organ), with the aim of taking forward the infrastructure and promotion of the zone, form a partial-affairs association in accordance with Article 284, Clause 1 of the Local Autonomy Law, or a council as specified in Article 252-2 Clause 1 of the said law.

The role of the wide-area administrative organ described here is to draw up a plan concerning the promotion of the wide-area municipal zone (wide-area municipal zone plan), and addition to this, carry out liaison and coordination duties in connection with the implementation of the said plan. Furthermore, with regard also to the implementation of duties based on the wide-area municipal zone plan, it is stipulated as being desirable that these should be carried out by the wide-area administrative organ in a coordinated way. With this aim in mind, when the wide-area administrative organ takes the form of a council, efforts should be made to abolish this and establish, as a wide-area administrative organ, a partial-affairs association.

### **5.3.3 Formulation of a wide-area municipal zone plan**

It is stipulated that a wide-area administrative organ shall, on the basis of consultation with the prefecture within which it is located, formulate a wide-area municipal zone plan aimed at taking forward, in a planned and comprehensive way, the planning and promotion of the said wide-area municipal zone.

The plan was to comprise the following fundamental concepts, fundamental plans, and implementation plans.

- (1) Fundamental concepts: a broad outline of a future vision of the promotion and development of the geographical area covered by the wide-area municipal zone, as well as of the policies and measures required to realize this vision.
- (2) Fundamental plans: the following items are to be determined on the basis of the fundamental concepts:

the layout of the urban areas and villages as well as the proposed system of transport and communication networks, and alongside this, details of the devices necessary to administer the

required duties over a wide area and the methods of operating the said devices;

items concerned with the infrastructure in the form of facilities and equipment necessary to implement the said items in concrete form.

(3) Implementation plans: specific, concrete details of what is required to implement the items referred to in the fundamental plans.

#### **5.4 The promotion of large city outer area administration zones**

On August 10, 1977, the Ministry of the Interior issued “Guidelines for measures to promote the development of large city outer area administration zones”. The Guidelines focused specifically on the development of the area constituting the periphery of large cities (large city peripheral region), seeing this as an integrated unit together with the large city concerned and not covered by the previously issued 1970 document. The aim was to promote wide-area administration comparable to the wide-area municipal zones referred to above.

The basic characteristics of this concept are as follows<sup>9</sup>.

(1) Establishing the area of the zone

It is stipulated that in the same way as a wide-area municipal zone, a large city outer area administration zone shall be established by a prefectural governor on the basis of consultation with the municipalities concerned and with the Minister of the Interior.

The specific establishment criteria were stipulated as follows:

- (a) the zone should have a population of, broadly speaking, around 400,000 people;
- (b) the zone should have geographical, historical or cultural characteristics that enable it to be seen as a single unit;
- (c) it should have the necessary urban characteristics to enable a unified future vision to be envisaged and realized;
- (d) one or other of the cities, towns and villages belonging to the wide-area municipal zone must be excluded.

(2) Establishment of a wide-area administrative organ

A wide-area administrative organ for a large city outer area administration zone was the council specified in Article 252-2, Clause 1 of the Local Autonomy Law. Both a partial-affairs association and a council are recognized as organs that can exist within a wide-area municipal zone, but it was specified that of the two kinds, a partial-affairs association was preferred as a wide-area administrative organ. However, within a large city outer area administration zone, the simpler and more convenient form of a council was judged to be the preferred type.

(3) Preparation of a promotion plan for the peripheral area of a large city

It was specified that a wide-area administrative organ that aimed to take forward the promotion and development of the area of a zone in a unified and comprehensive manner should draw up a promotion plan for the peripheral area of a large city. Furthermore, in the same way as the plan for a wide-area municipal zone, the said plan should consist of fundamental concepts, fundamental plans and implementation plans.

## **5.5 Subsequent developments regarding wide-area administration zones**

On April 17, 1979, the Ministry of the Interior issued “Guidelines for deciding on a new wide-area municipal zone plan”. This had as its basis the “Concept of settled living” which was unveiled in the Cabinet resolution endorsing the Third National Comprehensive Development Plan on November 4, 1977. The Guidelines required new plans to be formulated in the context of both wide-area municipal zones and large city outer area administration zones.

Furthermore, from fiscal 1980, the Ministry of the Interior promoted the establishment of garden city core facilities (regional plazas) as models of core facilities which could serve as focal points for the service provision for residents within a wide-area municipal zone. Subsequently, in 1984, the Ministry created the “Special countermeasures project for town development”, thereby beginning to provide positive encouragement for local independent projects based on “town development project plans”, which determined by the wide-area administrative organs of wide-area municipal zones.

The core concept of the Fourth National Comprehensive Development Plan, endorsed by the Cabinet decision of June 30, 1987, was the “Formation of a multi-polar land structure”. For its part, the Ministry of the Interior took receipt of the plan, and issued a document entitled “Concerning the development of wide-area municipal zone policies in fiscal 1989” on June 23, 1989. On March 29, 1991, the Ministry also issued a further document entitled “The future promotion of wide-area administration zones”, which expanded on and aimed to perpetuate the content of the document previously referred to.

According to this notice of 1991, both wide-area municipal zones and large city outer area administration zones were subsumed under the generic title of wide-area administration zones. With the further aim of advancing the construction of a system of wide-area administrative organs which would be able to assume the role of the main driving agent in the construction of wide-area regions, it was urged that where councils constituted the wide-area administrative organs under current arrangements, they should shift to being partial-affairs associations, while on the other hand, existing partial-affairs associations should shift to being complex partial-affairs associations.

Moreover, within the framework of the document of June 23, 1989, referred to above, the Ministry of the Interior set out “Guidelines for the advancement of hometown municipal zones in fiscal 1989”, thereby initiating the policy of hometown municipal zones.

In principle, under this policy, one wide-area municipal zone would be designated as a “hometown municipal zone” within each prefecture, and in each such zone, a hometown municipal zone fund would be created to the extent of about 1 billion yen, and the operating profits generated by the fund would be utilized to carry out various kinds of soft-side projects.

Subsequently, on April 21, 1999, the Ministry of the Interior issued “Guidelines for the promotion of hometown municipal zones” as a separate document, and carried out various revisions, including extension of the said fund to wide-area municipal zones on the periphery of large cities, thereby continuing the hometown municipal zone policy.

On March 31, 1998, the Fifth Comprehensive National Development Plan, entitled “Grand Design for the 21st Century” was endorsed by the Cabinet. Within the overall plan, the concept of the “Creation of nature-rich development areas” was identified, and it was on the basis of the thinking underlying this concept that on March 31, 2000, the Ministry of the Interior issued “Concerning

guidelines for wide-area administration zone planning”. This document annulled all previous communications concerned with the promotion of wide-area administration zones, and represented new “Guidelines for the planning of wide-area administration zones”.

Specifically, with regard to the establishment of such zones, this new policy issued in 2000 followed the same pattern as in the past to the extent that zones would be established by the prefectural governor on the basis of consultation with the municipalities concerned, but on this occasion it was newly stipulated that consultation with the Minister of the Interior was not required. Moreover, wide-area administrative organs were able to decide on wide-area administration zone plans as in the past, but it was stipulated that consultation with prefectures was unnecessary, and instead it was urged that their opinion should be sought. Both of these changes occurred after the implementation of the Omnibus Decentralization Law, and reflect the fact that in the absence of the legal base, local public bodies were no longer in a position to carry out consultations.

In addition to the above, in the new Guidelines, partial-affairs associations, wide-area unions, and councils were specified under this generic name of wide-area administrative organs. Moreover, in the case where a wide-area administrative organ took the form of a council, it was urged that it should seek to change its status to that of a partial-affairs association or a wide-area union, and at the same time, partial-affairs associations other than wide-area administrative organs as well as wide-area unions were urged to seek to integrate with wide-area administrative organs.

## 5.6 The situation of wide-area administration zones

### 5.6.1 The situation regarding the establishment of wide-area administration zones

Wide-area administration zones were started in 1969 in the form of wide-area municipal zones, and in 1977 in the form of large city outer area administrative zones. The situation in April 2008, using the latest data available, is shown in Table 3.

**(Table 3) The state of the establishment of wide-area administration zones (as of April 1, 2008)**

Categories	Number of zone areas	Number of constituent municipalities	Population (,000)	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )
Wide-area administration zone (A)	359	1,702 (95.1)	92,604 (77.6)	361,161 (97.1)
(within this figure) Wide-area municipal zones (B)	334	1,503 (84.0)	69,114 (57.9)	350,471 (94.2)
(within this figure) Large city outer area administration zones (C)	25	199 (11.1)	23,490 (19.7)	10,690 (2.9)
Average for one zone (A)	—	4.7	258	1,006
(B)	—	4.5	207	1,049
(C)	—	8	940	428
Total number of municipalities	—	1,788	119,278	371,937

Note: Partially adapted from the MIC document, "Situation of wide-area administration zones" (as of April 1, 2008). The figures in brackets are percentages (%) of the total number of municipalities.

There are currently 334 wide-area municipal zones, and 25 large city outer area administration zones, hence 359 wide-area administration zones have been established in total. As a percentage of the country as a whole, the population in the zones represents 77.6% of the national total, and 97.1% of the total national land area. It is clear from these figures that, with the exclusion of the core areas of large cities, almost all the regions of Japan are covered by wide-area administration zones. In particular, it should be noted that the core is represented by wide-area municipal zones, embracing 57.9% of the population and 94.2% of the land area. Furthermore, hometown municipal zones number 137 in total, and all of these were designated from within wide-area municipal zones.

### 5.6.2 The present situation of wide-area administrative organs

The situation of wide-area administrative organs in wide-area administration zones as of April 1, 2008, is as shown in Table 4. Looking at wide-area municipal zones, these are divided into 31 wide-area unions, 156 partial-affairs associations, and 86 councils. In the early days, there was a large number of councils, but at the present time, wide-area unions and partial-affairs associations have taken on a stronger profile and now constitute a majority. Furthermore, the reason why the total of wide-area organs is lower than that of wide-area zones is that there are municipal zones which abolished wide-area organs within their jurisdiction. In the case of large city outer area administrative zones, in all 25 such zones, councils have been established as wide-area administrative organs.

**(Table 4) Present state of wide-area administrative organs (as of April 1, 2008)**

Categories	Kinds	Numbers
Wide-area municipal zones	Wide-area unions	31
	Partial-affairs associations	158
	Councils	86
Large city outer area administration zones	Councils	25

Note: Partially adapted from the MIC document, "Situation of wide-area administrative organs" (as of April 1, 2008).

## 5.7 Evaluation of the policy of wide-area administration zones

### 5.7.1 Differentiating 4 objectives

The promotion of wide-area administration zones has been implemented for 40 years since 1969. The promotion of such zones is deeply connected with the national comprehensive development plans, and the period of 40 years can be divided into 4 periods of 10 years each in line with the formulation periods of these plans.

#### (1) Period 1 (1969-1978)

In the background to developments in this period is the concept of "wide-area, everyday living zones" which showed in the New National Comprehensive Development Plan. This is the period which saw the beginning of the policy of wide-area municipal zones, based on the Guidelines of 1970, which in turn perpetuated the Guidelines of 1969. Also in this period, wide-area administrative organs were created within the framework of the said zones, and on the basis of wide-area municipal

zone plans, a wide-ranging transport network, with roads as the main focus, was created, and joint wide-area systems to deal with such matters as garbage and waste disposal, fire service matters, and so on, were also established. Further, on the basis of the 1977 Guidelines, a start was made on the policy of large city outer area administration zones.

(2) Period 2 (1979-1988)

With the concept of settled living found in the Third National Comprehensive Development Plan as the background, a new plan was formulated on the basis of the 1979 Guidelines. This was the period in which making a comprehensive livelihood environment that displayed the concept of settled living became a target, and in which the development of service systems covering a wide area was pursued, with efforts put not only into roads, but into the various projects needed for industry and everyday life. In addition, it was in this period that saw the construction of “regional plazas”, which would become the core facilities for residents’ services in the zone areas.

(3) Period 3 (1989-1999)

Against the background of the “formation of a multi-polar land structure” in the Fourth National Comprehensive Development Plan, the third plan was determined on the basis of notices issued in 1989 and 1991. In this period, comprehensive development of zones was taken forward, aiming at putting in place a living space that would really enable people to feel a richness of feelings and emotion. The first aim was to create a model zone area, and with this in mind, a hometown municipal zone policy was launched on the basis of the Guidelines for promoting hometown municipal zones issued in 1989.

(4) Period 4 (200-2009)

The Fifth Comprehensive National Development Plan was entitled “Grand Design for the 21st Century” and incorporated the concept of “Creation of nature-rich development areas”. Against this background, this was the period when the 4th Plan was formulated on the basis of the Guidelines produced in 2000. Specifically, the hometown municipal zone policy was continued and renewed on the basis of the 1999 Guidelines that focused on the promotion of hometown municipal zones. However, the priority in this period was placed on responding to the great changes that resulted from municipal mergers.

Summing up, in the First Period, the concept of wide-area administration zones was launched and made part of Japan’s administrative framework. In the Second and Third Periods, efforts were made to develop zones further under the influence of the concepts displayed in the national comprehensive development plans produced during the periods in question. However, in the Fourth Period, precedence was given to the Great Heisei Consolidation that was launched in 1999, as a result of which the concept of wide-area administration zones was diluted.

### **5.7.2 The two objectives of wide-area administration zones**

The policy of wide-area administration zones (in particular, the policy of wide-area municipal zones) can be thought of as having 2 objectives. The first objective was to establish systems aimed at the joint administration of duties over a wide geographical area, not simply limited to a single municipality, in order thereby to supplement and strengthen municipal administration. The second objective was to take forward the establishment of the planned and comprehensive development of the zone as a whole, thereby making a concrete reality of a functional merger<sup>10</sup>.

With regard to the first objective, it is fair to say that this was almost entirely achieved thanks to the substantial progress made in Period 1 and the continuing efforts to tackle the issues in Periods 2 and 3. However, with regard to the second objective, it has to be said that although significant efforts were made, in the end, it was not achieved.

The primary reason for the failure to achieve the second objective is that the wide-area administrative organs in the form of wide area municipal zones proved unable to take on the primary role of planning and implementing integration throughout the entire zone. With the aim of functionally strengthening wide-area administration organs, central government created new systems such as complex partial-affairs associations and wide-area unions, and worked hard to ensure their utilization. In addition, efforts were made from the outset to ensure the implementation of projects based on wide-area municipal zone plans were administered by wide-area administrative organs in a comprehensive way. Furthermore, by establishing wide-area administrative organs as the main supervisory and operating agent of regional plazas and the hometown municipal zone fund, it was hoped to enhance their authority and their planning and adjustment capabilities.

However, as already pointed out above, as of April 2008, although a majority of wide-area administrative organs in wide-area municipal zones took the form of wide-area unions and partial-affairs associations, there were still 86 such organs which remained as councils.

A further point is that in the case of project implementation based on wide-area municipal plans, in almost all cases, the main implementing organs were municipalities or prefectures, and only in a very few cases, were partial-affairs associations, including wide-area administrative organs.<sup>11</sup>

What did happen as a result of the policy of wide-area municipal zones was that a road network was constructed over a wide area, and arrangements to provide wide-area services in terms of garbage and waste disposal, fire services, and so on, were realized. That said, however, wide-area administrative organs, including those that became wide-area unions and complex partial-affairs associations, remained weak as bodies able to assume the driving force in planning and project development, and were unable to achieve “functional mergers” in terms of the area of a zone as a whole.

This situation is a major reason why the central government of Japan, about 40 years after the Great Showa Consolidation of municipal mergers, again launched in 1999 a nationwide movement to promote such mergers.

## **6. Promotion of the concept of autonomous settlement zones**

### **6.1 The need for a re-evaluation of wide-area administrative zones**

Municipal mergers in Japan have developed on a large scale since the program was initiated in 1999, and it is expected that the number of 3,232 municipalities recorded in March 1999 will be merged into 1,757 merged municipalities by the time that the Great Heisei Consolidation program comes to an end in March 2010<sup>12</sup>. This kind of nationwide, large-scale reorganization of municipalities has exerted a large influence on the pattern adopted hitherto of wide-area administration zones.

The fundamental premise underlying wide-area administration zones is that to a certain extent a large number of municipalities (cities, towns and villages) exists within a zone containing citizens



who are carrying on their everyday lives. The further assumption is that these municipalities will form a wide-area administrative organ and develop wide-area administration within the zone. However, the fact is that the number of cases in which a wide-area administration zone has been formed as one municipality (wide-area municipality) as the result of mergers of municipalities under the current Great Heisei Consolidation program is just 37. Moreover, there has been a large increase, numbering 59 cases, in wide-area administration zones in which the number of constituent municipalities was only 2 and which did not go as far as becoming wide-area municipalities.

In a wide-area municipality, a wide-area administrative organ loses any reason to exist. Moreover, even where a wide-area administration zone consists of 2 constituent municipalities, the need to carry out wide-area administration on a broader scale than that of the hitherto existing wide-area administrative organs is weakened. It is entirely possible that in zones of this kind, both of the 2 municipalities which have expanded their scale, in fact continue to administer their respective duties independently. Alternatively, it has also been suggested that all the municipalities involved in a merger, with the exception of one municipality, rather than engaging in the joint administration of duties as a wide-area administrative organ following the pattern hitherto adopted, may find it more convenient and efficient to follow the line of delegation of duties.

It is a basic assumption that on the formation of a wide-area municipality, all existing wide-area administrative organs within that municipality are abolished. In actual practice, even in the wide-area municipal zones consisting of just 2 constituent municipalities, 14 wide-area administrative organs were abolished, while in the total of 59 zones, including these 14 zones, the wide-area administrative organs ceased to exist.

The time has come to review the policy whereby wide-area administration zones are established uniformly throughout the country, and wide-area administrative organs undertake wide-area administration on this basis.

## **6.2 From wide-area administration zones to autonomous settlement zones**

On December 26, 2008, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications issued a document entitled “Guidelines for the promotion of the concept of autonomous settlement zones”. At the same time as abolishing the “Guidelines for the promotion of hometown municipal zones” of April 21, 1999, and the “Guidelines for the planning of wide-area administration zones” of March 31, 2000, the new “Guidelines for the promotion of the concept of autonomous settlement zones”, represented a new policy concerning wide-area administration.

This was significant in that it marked abandonment by the government of the policy of wide-area administration zones that they had implemented for 40 years up to that point, and a major shift in wide-area administration policy to the promotion of autonomous settlement zones as a new device for wide-area administration.

## **6.3 The objectives and basic structure of autonomous settlement zones**

The concept of autonomous settlement zones was promoted from the perspective of trying to stem the outflow of people from local zones, and create a flow of people in the reverse direction, into local zones.

The fundamentals of the device are as follows<sup>13</sup>.

### **6.3.1 The establishment of zone areas**

Autonomous settlement zones are meant to be formed as the result of an accumulation of one-to-one agreements concluded on their own initiative between core cities and the surrounding municipalities.

Specifically, the issue of what kind of zone to establish, or to put this another way, the fundamental question of whether or not to establish an autonomous settlement zone is left to the initiative of each municipality.

### **6.3.2 The declaration of a core city and the agreement to the formation of an autonomous settlement zone**

Within an autonomous settlement zone, the role of a core city is emphasized. It must have a population of at least 40,000, and as the center of the zone, the ratio of the daytime to the nighttime population should be 1 or more.

The process begins with a “core city declaration” made by the core city, making clear its intention to assume a core role in terms of guaranteeing the livelihood functions necessary for the zone as a whole with a view to ensuring the residential stability of the population.

Next, the core city that has made the “core city declaration” concludes specific, one-to-one agreements with the surrounding municipalities aimed at safeguarding the livelihood functions necessary to ensure residential population stability (agreement to the formation of an autonomous settlement zone). This marks the birth of the autonomous settlement zone.

More specifically, as items in the agreement, the following can be cited: the strengthening of everyday life functions such as medical care, welfare and education, the strengthening of transportation as well as IT infrastructure networks, the strengthening of management ability in the zone in terms of such areas as human resource training, staff exchanges, and so on.

Furthermore, turning to the implementation of duties on the basis of the autonomous settlement zone agreement, it is stipulated that this issue can be handled by means of the joint establishment of organs, or by delegation of duties, and by means of private contracts.

### **6.3.3 Deciding on a shared vision for an autonomous settlement zone**

The next step is that of deciding on a “Shared vision for the future of the autonomous settlement zone”, incorporating the specific agreements that have been taken forward on the basis of the autonomous settlement zone agreement and the future image of the zone, which in turn rests on the foundation of separate, individual consultation between the core city and the surrounding municipalities. The duration of such a vision is expected to be, in broad terms, about 5 years.

## **6.4 A comparison of autonomous settlement zones with wide-area administration zone policies**

If we compare autonomous settlement zones with the hitherto standard pattern of wide-area administration zones, the following stand out as major differences.

- (1) Wide-area administration zones were thought of as entities which were to be uniformly established by prefectural governors over the country as a whole. However, in the case of autonomous settlement zones, everything, such as what kind of zone should be set up, and even

the fundamental question of whether or not the zone should be established in the first place, depends on the initiatives of the municipalities concerned. Moreover, because there is a stipulation that the population of a core city must be over a set size, it is not assumed from the beginning, unlike the case of wide-area administration zones, that autonomous settlement zones must be established all over the country.

The fact that autonomous settlement zones are formed on the basis of an agreement between a core city and the surrounding municipalities is also a flexible factor, and it is entirely possible that the boundaries of a zone will differ according to such points as the content of the services provided.

(2) In the case of a wide-area administration zone, it was the practice to set up a wide-area administrative organ as the entity responsible for the management of the zone, but in the case of an autonomous settlement zone, no separate organ of this kind is established, and the management function of the zone is located in the core city.

(3) In the case of wide-area administration zones, administrative services were provided through wide-area administrative organs such as, in particular, partial-affairs associations or wide-area unions, but in the case of autonomous settlement zones, it is assumed that more convenient formulae will be adopted such as the joint establishment of organs or the delegation of duties.

Specifically, the policy adopted in the case of wide-area administration zones was that the government set up the zones in a uniform manner across the country as a whole, established wide-area administrative organs, and cultivated them as organs which were responsible for the management of the zones; in this capacity, they drew up plans and offered comprehensive services on the basis of the plans. In contrast to this pattern, in the case of the new autonomous settlement zones, the initial establishment of the zones is left to the initiative of the municipalities in each area, existing core cities are expected to assume the role of the driving force in the management of the zones, and under their leadership, simpler and more convenient devices will be adopted to deal with such tasks as the provision of services, and so on.

## **6.5 The current situation with regard to the implementation of autonomous settlement zones**

As of October 7, 2009, 35 cities had issued core city declarations, and of these, 8 cities have concluded autonomous settlement zone agreements with the surrounding municipalities. In addition, among wide-area municipalities, there are 2 cities which are presumed to be autonomous settlement zones in their own right, with the result that 10 autonomous settlement zones now exist<sup>14</sup>.

From now on, attention will be focused on how far autonomous settlement zones will expand.

## **7 The future outlook for wide-area administration**

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the response to the expanding role of municipalities in Japan has until now basically been to adopt the method of mergers, and even in the periods between the Great Consolidations, wide-area administration has been implemented. The repetitive pattern can be illustrated as follows. Great Consolidation (Meiji Great Consolidation)→ wide-area administration (associations) → Great Consolidation (Showa Great Consolidation) → wide-area administration (wide-area administration zones) → Great Consolidation (Heisei Great Consolidation).

It should also be noted that at the present time, as a result of the new municipal system that has been formed as a result of the Heisei Great Consolidation, municipalities must once again engage themselves with wide-area administration. It is fair to say that the new age of administration has arrived.

With more specific reference to this point, the 29th Local Government System Research Council issued its report on June 16, 2009, entitled, “Report concerning the preferred pattern of basic local public bodies as well as the audit and assembly systems in the future”. The report comments in the following way on the choice facing municipalities<sup>15</sup>.

“In addition to a strengthening of the administration base as a result of mergers, a variety of different options should be prepared, including wide-area cooperation by means of jointly shared undertaking of duties among municipalities, and complementary support given by prefectures, and each municipality should be able to choose from the various options the one that is most appropriate for its own individual circumstances.”

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, for its part, as already mentioned, has abandoned its practice of producing guidelines concerned with wide-area administration, and has also stopped promoting wide-area administration zones in its capacity as central government, while on the other hand, it is leaving to the municipalities concerned the autonomous decision on whether to maintain and continue the device of wide-area administration zones adopted hitherto<sup>16</sup>.

What can be said about the future of wide-area administration is that the national government (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications) is no longer adopting the method of uniform implementation throughout the country. The age has arrived in which each municipality is able to exercise its own autonomous judgment about which method is best suited to its individual circumstances, choosing from a range of wide-area administration options which include wide-area administration zones and autonomous settlement zones up to and including mergers, which can be seen as one extreme of wide-area administration.

## [Notes]

- 1 For further details on the merger of municipalities in Japan, refer to Yokomichi, Kiyotaka (2007), *The Development of Municipal Mergers in Japan*, Up-to-date Documents on Local Autonomy in Japan, No. 1, Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) and Institute for Comparative Studies in Local Governance (COSLOG), National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS)
- 2 For further details on the repetitive nature of municipal mergers and wide-area administration in the context of the development of municipalities in Japan, see Yokomichi, Kiyotaka (2009) [in Japanese] *Kiso jichitai no shourai – gappei to kouiki gyousei no aida de [The future of basic local government – between mergers and wide-area administration]* in, *Toshi to gabanansu [Cities and governance]*, Vol. 11, pp 2-7, Japan Center for Cities
- 3 The system of local autonomy in Japan at this time consisted of three layers, namely prefectures, counties and municipalities (cities, towns and villages). The layer comprising counties was located between prefectures and municipalities. The county representative assembly was an organ that passed resolutions and gave advice within the county.
- 4 In Irie, Toshiro and Furui, Yoshimi *Chikujuyou shi-sei chouson-sei teigi [A commentary of City law, and Town and Village Law]*, Ryosho Fukyu Kai, p 1818, the following interpretation is given. “A

full cooperative is an organ that in practice is no different from a municipal merger, but when towns and villages merge, the original towns and villages are lost for ever, and this loss of identity makes the implementation of a merger extremely difficult in the case of farming villages with a strong sense of their own identity and a tendency to put emphasis on old traditions. In circumstances of this kind, the organization of a full cooperative is nothing other than a procedure for holding on to the results of a merger while not changing the names.”

- 5 Refer to *ibid*, pp 1815-1816.
- 6 Within the category of councils, liaison and adjustment councils were created by means of the enactment of the Local Autonomy Law of April, 1947, were then abolished by a further revision in December of the same year, and then re-created for a second time by the revision of 1952.
- 7 See Matsukuma, Hideo, *Kouik- shi-chou-son-ken oyobi chihou koukyou dantai no rengou* [*Wide-area municipal zones and the union of local public bodies*], *Jichi Kenkyu*, Vol. 45, No. 12, pp. 4-10.
- 8 On the basis of the “Guidelines for measures to promote wide-area municipal zones” of April 10, 1970.
- 9 On the basis of the “Guidelines for measures to promote large city outer area administration zones” of August 10, 1977.
- 10 In “Kouiki-shi-chou-son-ken ni tuite no Ichi Kousatsu[One consideration concerning wide-area municipal zones]” in *Jichi Kenkyu[Local Autonomy Research]*, Vol. 48, No. 1, Hayashi, Tadao writes as follows: “The time which has passed from the previous mergers is too short to start a new municipal merger movement. .... In the situation as it is today, we can say that the aim that is needed in terms of the establishment of wide-area municipal zones is not that of dealing with the third consolidation of municipal mergers, but of leaving cities, towns and villages as they are, and adopting a rational solution whereby only the items concerned with wide-area administration are dealt with by means of devices as the sharing of duties.” (p, 44). He continues, “Even if the question of whether municipalities concerned decide immediately to go ahead with a merger or not is left aside as a separate issue, a basic, substantial issue that has to be faced as a local public body is that of shifting, one step at a time, to the pattern of a wide-area municipal zone and effectively establishing their footing as one municipality” (p, 46).
- 11 The documentation is a little old, but a breakdown by the main implementing organs of wide-area municipal zone projects for fiscal 1994 shows that 56.2% were municipalities, 40.2% were prefectures, and only 3.6% were partial-affairs associations, including wide-area administrative organs. See Ito, Masayuki, “Kouiki-shi-chou-son-ken Sinkou Seibi Jigyou no Gaiyou[Overview of promotion and establishment projects for wide-area administrative zones]” in *Chihou Jichi[Local Autonomy]*, No. 594, 1997, p. 111
- 12 According to the home page (Japanese) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, as accessed on October 18, 2009.
- 13 On the basis of “Guidelines for the promotion of the concept of autonomous settlement zones”, December 26, 2008.
- 14 According to the home page (Japanese) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, as accessed on October 18, 2009.
- 15 Refer for further details to p.7 of the report of the 29 th Local Government System Research Council, entitled, ““Report concerning the preferred pattern of basic local public bodies as well as the audit and assembly systems in the future”, issued on June 16, 2009.
- 16 Refer to the notice entitled “Concerning future ways of handling issues related to hitherto existing wide-area administration zones”, December 26, 2008.

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