

The Issue and New Movement of Urban Planning System in Tokyo Metropolitan Area

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Abstract:

In decentralization, many municipalities are concerned about the decreasing population and the decline of economic vitality in the future. In this aspect, the urban planning system of Japan presented various problems, but many municipalities have made initiatives to resolve the problems regionally. Therefore, it is important to consider this new direction of decentralized urban planning through clarifying the field problems and new initiatives to deal with the problems.

This study aims at identifying the issues and the new initiatives and finding a vision on urban planning system through a questionnaire survey of municipalities managing city planning area in Japan. In particular, focusing on the Tokyo Metropolitan Area (TMA), the center of industry and business in Japan, this study discusses features of TMA by comparing with municipalities outside TMA. The results of the survey show that many municipalities have various problems, and they need to reform the urban planning system. However, many municipalities have made efforts on the master plan, zoning, community design ordinance, urbanization control area, and so on. In addition, as a participatory system by residents, the urban planning proposal system is not disseminated in numbers, but many municipalities have made attempts to use the urban planning proposal system with accumulated experience. Furthermore, the survey results show that some municipalities enacted provisions to use the urban planning proposal system with community design ordinance, as a system to shift from accumulation of community design experience to urban planning. Namely, this means that the role of the community organization by residents becomes more important in urban planning.

This study suggests the possibility that each municipality can change the urban planning system to reflect regional characteristics, by community design ordinance, and it shows an important vision of a new decentralized urban planning.

Keywords:

urban planning system, community design ordinance, localization, Tokyo metropolitan area

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1. Introduction

The Tokyo Metropolitan Area (TMA) that includes Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama and Chiba has become the center of industry and business in Japan since the rapid growth period, and TMA has absorbed population from all parts of the country. In Japan, population decline has already begun in some regions while there is also an emergent shift to a concentration of population in metropolitan areas. TMA is, however, concerned about population decline, projected to start from 2019, and the resultant decline of economic vitality. In order to sustain a metropolitan area of richness and vitality, it is necessary to seek the close cooperation of government, municipalities, private organizations, residents and others. Particularly, TMA that includes big cities and suburbs has various characteristic urban planning problems in each local area. To vitalize TMA, we should pay attention to how municipalities take measures to resolve each problem.

However, while progressing in decentralization and transferring authority to municipalities, the urban planning system enacted in 1968, the rapid growth period, has continued to add other laws without changing the system itself resulting in various problems. Therefore, it is important to consider the new direction of decentralized urban planning through clarifying real field problems and new measures to deal with problems by TMA management.

2. This Research

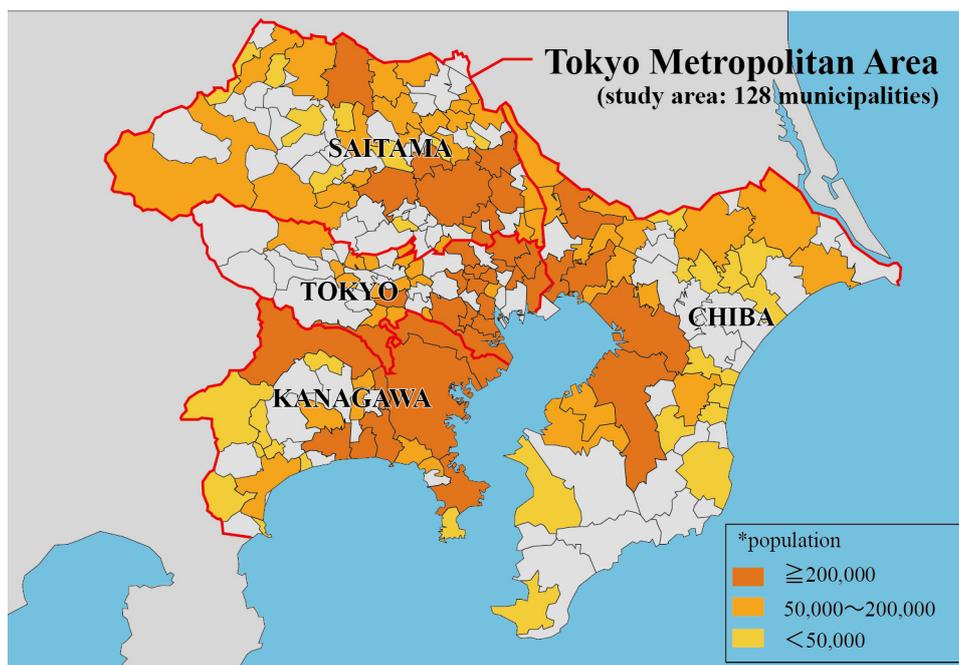


Figure 1. Study area in TMA

This study aims at identifying the issues and the new initiatives related to the urban planning system in TMA through questionnaire survey. The survey was administered to urban planning departments of 1370 municipalities in Japan from November 15 through December 31, 2013. The special wards of Tokyo were counted as one municipality. The response rate reached 52.9 percent of total survey target (TMA and non-TMA) and 64.6 percent of TMA. By further breakdown of population in TMA, response rate was 84.1 percent in municipalities of over

200,000 people, 61.8 percent in municipalities of 50,000 to less than 200,000 people and 55.4 percent in municipalities of less than 50,000 people, showing a bigger sample from large municipalities. Comparing with results of areas other than TMA (non-TMA), this study discusses the characteristics of TMA (Figure1).

3. Issues of Urban Planning System

For the question on whether municipalities have problems in the current urban planning system, the result showed that 43.8 percent of municipalities have problems. This is higher than the result for non-TMA which was 32.5 percent (Figure 2). Particularly, as Figure 2 shows, 64.9 percent of municipalities of over 200,000 people, 43.6 percent of municipalities of 50,000 to less than 200,000 people and 22.2 percent of municipalities of less than 50,000 people in TMA have problems. Moreover, in the case of non-TMA, the survey showed that 42.4 percent of municipalities of over 200,000 people have problems. This is higher than the average (32.5 percent) of the whole non-TMA. From this result, it is inferred that large municipalities have more problems than smaller ones, regardless of region.

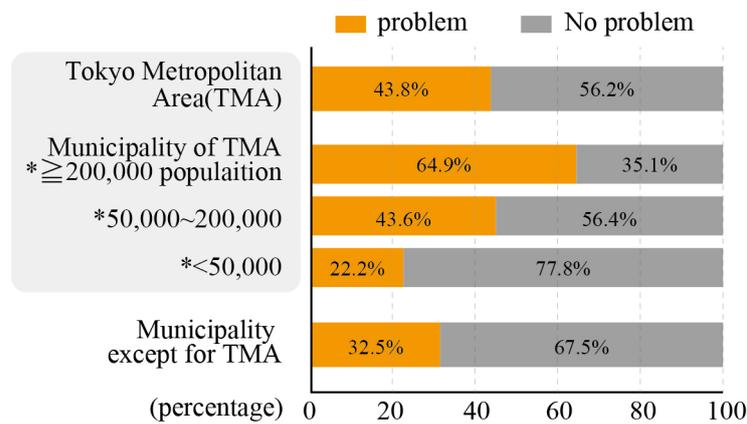


Figure 2. Ratio of the municipalities with problems of urban planning system

Among 56 municipalities that indicated they had problems in the urban planning system, the problem most cited was Zoning (including land use and productive green zone) at 53.6 percent. Next, as Figure 3 shows, they pointed out District planning (19.6 percent), City planning facilities (14.3 percent), and Relation with the prefecture (10.7 percent). On the other hand, among 194 municipalities in non-TMA, the problems most cited were Area division (16.5 percent) and Zoning (16.0 percent). Therefore, there is little difference in trends between TMA and non-TMA. Further looking at classification by population, Zoning was pointed out by 41.7 percent of municipalities of over 200,000 people, 62.5 percent of municipalities between 50,000 and less than 200,000 people and 62.5 percent of municipalities with less than 50,000 people in TMA. In this regard, we can recognize that Zoning, the base system of urban planning, is generally problematic regardless of population scale or region.

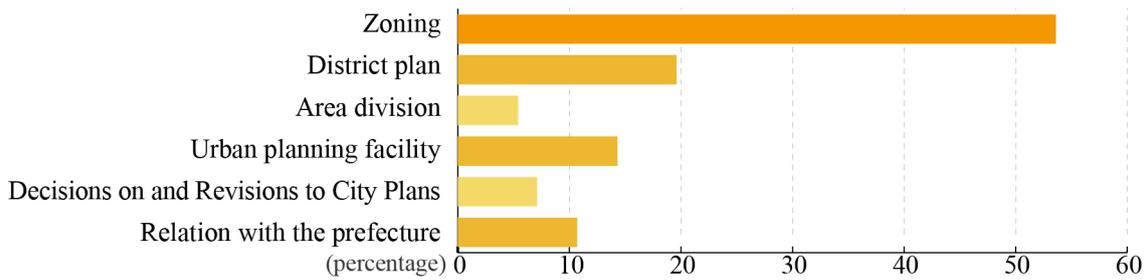


Figure 3. Breakdown of problems of urban planning system (n=56)

Another problem is difficulty of revision. Of the 56 municipalities in TMA, 60.7 percent pointed out that revision to decisions already made is difficult. In addition, “difficulty of utilization of the complicated system” and “worries over demand for relaxation of regulations” followed as 17.8 percent. Comparing with non-TMA, 64.9 percent of 194 municipalities pointed out difficulty of revision as a problem, so it can be considered as a nationwide problem.

As Figure 4 shows, the causes of the problems were lack of financial resources (42.9 percent), weakness of authority (41.1 percent), lack of administrative resources (41.1 percent) and problems from citizens (30.4 percent) as pointed out by 56 municipalities in TMA. Considering this result, it is concluded that the transfer of authority and financial resources to municipalities in decentralization is still insufficient resulting in problems like lack of administrative resources and so on. Particularly, in the case of special wards in Tokyo (23 wards), the authority of financial resources is with the city government so the situation is different from the others.

However, as Figure 4 shows, in non-TMA, difficult social situation (42.2 percent) was pointed out as the biggest cause of the problems. This was followed by lack of expertise able to handle the complicated problems (37.6 percent), weakness of authority (33.5 percent) and the lack of administrative resources (32.9 percent). Therefore non-TMA shows a different tendency from TMA. In this regard, while TMA is currently having population concentration, non-TMA with shrinking populations is now in a worse social situation than TMA, and they face a limitation to dealing with such problems.

To sum up, faced with a limitation of authority and financial resources, there are many municipalities that need administrative resources with expertise to handle the bad social situation and complexity of problems.

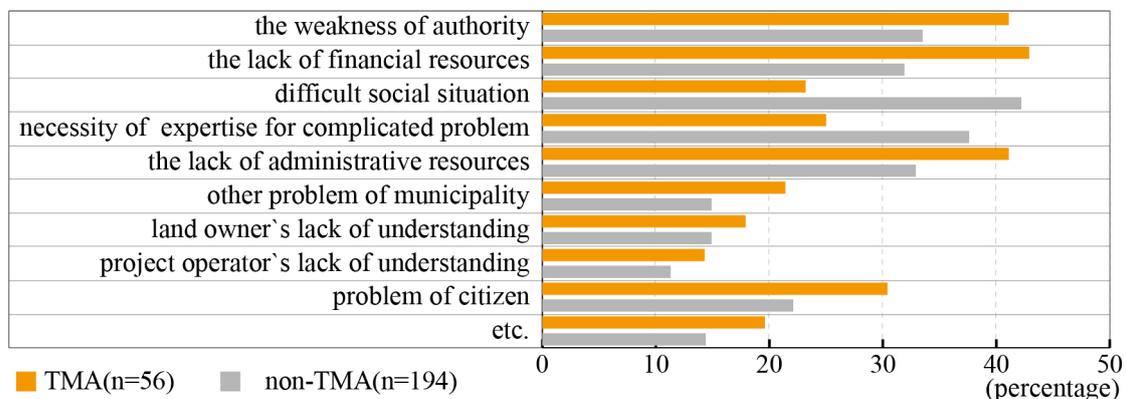


Figure 4. Ratio of causes of problems

Following the questions on the problems, 35.9 percent of TMA indicated they need reform of the urban planning system, which is higher than non-TMA's 26.5 percent. Moreover, Figure 5 shows that more large municipalities need reform than small municipalities. Since reform is needed by many, it is concluded that the current urban planning system is reaching its limitation.

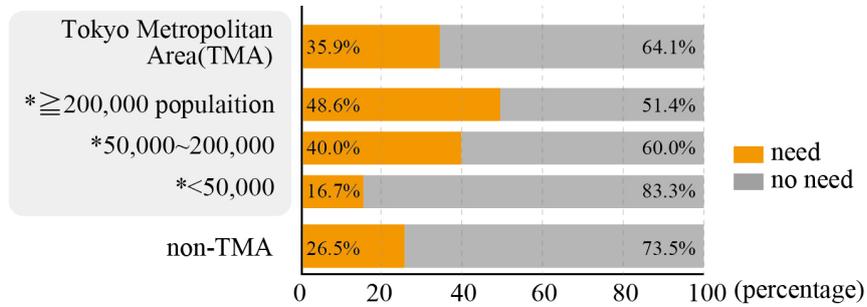


Figure 5. Ratio of necessity of reforming urban planning system

On the details of reform, various aspects were examined. In the case of Zoning, many municipalities suggested that more authority should be transferred to municipalities in order that the system can be operated flexibly. Also, in the case of the Building Standards Act and City Planning Act, many municipalities suggested that the relation of the two acts should be clarified and clear-cut lines of authority and responsibility established. Further they indicated that in the Building Standards Act, group restriction is too loose so it has a bad effect on community design. It is suggested that the Building Standards Act revises mainly restriction for individual building, and group restriction be combined with the City Planning Act. Moreover, liaison between municipality and prefecture is important in decentralization, but there are many problems of unclear roles and authority not being transferred properly, so it is necessary to clarify the roles. Regarding Area division, some municipalities proposed that revision should be flexible and be based on the actual situation of local communities. In addition, there is a suggestion that various laws and regulations should be modified according to changing social situation and population decline.

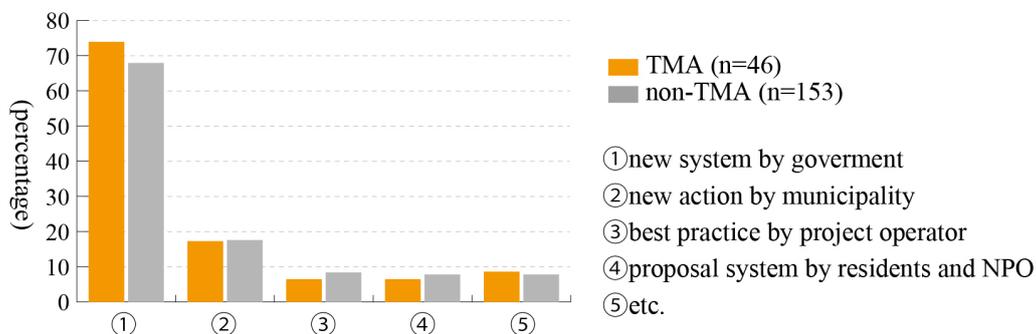


Figure 6. Ratio of reforming process

As Figure 6 shows, in TMA, 73.9 percent of 46 municipalities wanting reform of the urban planning system insisted that the government take the leading role in system reform.

Moreover, 67.9 percent of municipalities wanting reform in non-TMA also insisted the same. However, more specifically, they insisted that reform should consider regional characteristics as well as the government's stance. For example, authority should be given to create local originality, to enable customized zoning to handle local problems and to make it possible to manage flexibly by unification of community design sections of the Building Standard Act and Urban Planning Act.

4. New movement

In the survey results about new original initiatives of municipality to deal with problems on urban planning system (for example system, plan, policy and so on), 45.3 percent of municipalities in TMA answered "executed already", "under consideration" and "feel necessity" as Figure 7 shows. In particular, 67.5 percent of municipalities wanting reform of urban planning system provided the same answers, so that it is considered that municipalities wanting reform are higher than other municipalities in terms of rate of "executed already", "under consideration" and "feel necessity".

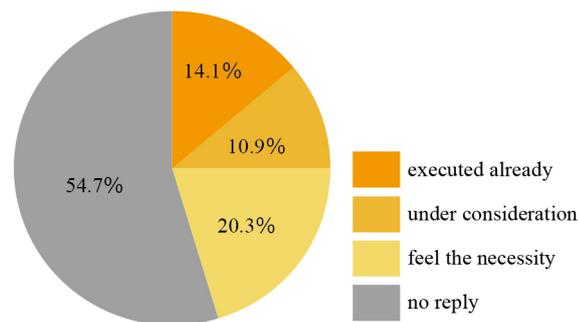


Figure7. Ratio of municipalities about new measures

For details of new initiatives, initiatives on master plan (MP), zoning, community design ordinance, urbanization control area and so forth were pointed out. First of all, in initiatives on MP, MP of many municipalities were aimed at building compact cities as preparation for decreasing population, and considered aspects of the environment like low carbon emission and disaster prevention. In initiatives about zoning, many municipalities have restricted building height by assigning height control districts, because building-to-land ratio and floor area ratio cannot control building height. Also, some municipalities considered establishing original land use standards that are suitable for the regional situation. In initiatives about ordinance, many municipalities enacted community design ordinance for community design by residents, which laid emphasis on a scheme leading to realize community design using regional characteristics. Moreover, some municipalities enacted land use control ordinance to restrict and to guide suited land use for the regional situation, and enacted design control ordinance to restrict building design in areas of district plan. In initiative about urbanization control area, there were land-use plan and guideline for regional revitalization and continuance of local community. In shrinking population and urban area, it seems that regional management, as urban planning, became more important.

In summary, the fact that most initiatives are related to control of urban decreasing population means it is a symbol of the problem of current urban planning in Japan. Moreover, most initiatives are viewed as just responding to new menus added by the government in the framework of current law without making entirely new initiatives. So it appears that municipalities are searching for proper methods by trial and error.

5. Proposal system

5.1 Urban planning proposal system (based on Article 21-2 of City Planning Act)

The urban planning proposal system based on Article 21-2 of City Planning Act was established in 2002 as a system to enable residents and so on to participate independently and actively in urban planning. Figure 8 shows the status of utilization of this proposal system and 20.3 percent of TMA had taken some action. For details of actions, 14.1 percent of TMA had already practiced the proposal system, 3.1 percent were in progress, and 3.1 percent were receiving inquiries about the proposal system at present. In numbers, it shows that not many municipalities use the proposal system. However, compared with non-TMA, TMA has used this proposal system more than non-TMA (13.5 percent). Particularly, in the case of municipalities of over 2000,000 people, the rate of municipalities with action was 40.5 percent in TMA and 46.9 percent in non-TMA. For this reason, it can be said that use of the proposal system is concentrated in large municipalities.

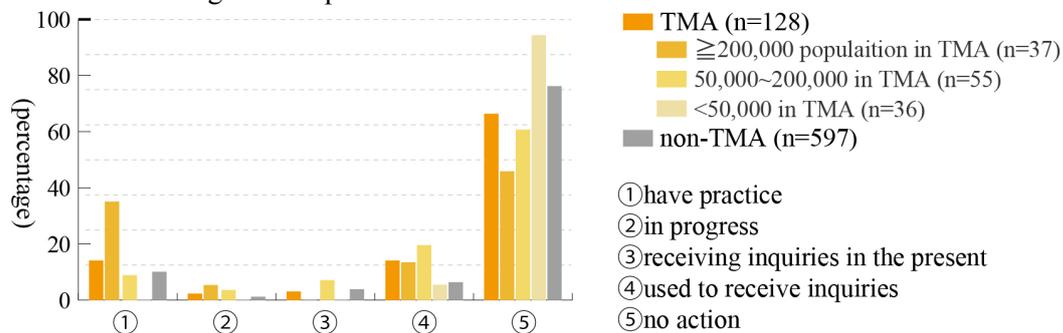


Figure 8. Ratio of experience of using proposal system

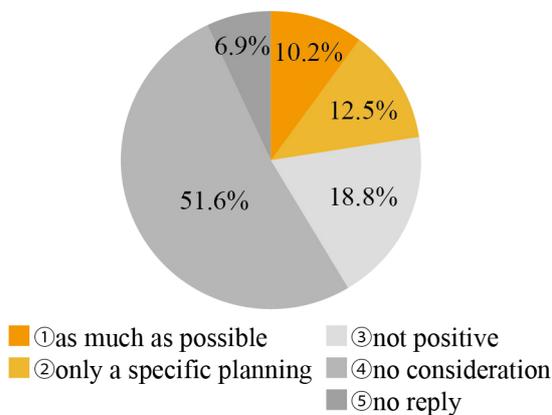


Figure 9. Ratio of consideration of using proposal system from now on

Table 1. Comparison of fig.8 and fig.9

Fig.9 \ Fig.8	①②		③④	
	type	Number (percentage*)	type	Number (percentage*)
①②③	A1	12 (9.4%)	B1	10 (7.8%)
④	A2	0 (0.0%)	B2	17 (13.3%)
⑤	A3	17 (13.3%)	B3	62 (48.4%)
Total (percentage*)		29 (22.7%)		89 (69.5%)

*n=128(municipalities in TMA)

As for consideration of using the proposal system from now on, responses received from municipalities was 22.7 percent in TMA and 14.9 percent in non-TMA, so it can be expected that this system will be used more in future. Moreover, as Table 1 shows, compared with experience of using the proposal system until now and using from now on, rate of municipalities that wanted to use proposal system was not only 43.1 percent of municipalities having experience but also 20.0 percent of municipalities having no experience. Therefore, more use of the proposal system is expected from now on. In contrast, 38.5 percent of municipalities having experience of using the proposal system did not consider using this system from now on, so this

indicates a problem of continuous use.

Regarding problems of using the proposal system, hurdle of the high proposal standard, lack of knowledge and experience of the proposer and lack of administrative experience of the municipality were highlighted. On the other hand, to solve these problems, there were many municipalities that utilize the proposal system by drawing up clarification guidelines, and offering preliminary consultation and support by community design ordinance. Municipalities using the proposal system are not many in numbers, but those who are using are accumulating experience of using the proposal system. Despite having some remaining problems, it turns out that many municipalities have made attempts to use the proposal system to suit the primary purpose of making it possible for residents to participate independently and actively in urban planning.

5.2 Community design ordinance

Another participation system for residents is community design ordinance. As Figure 10 shows, 36.7 percent of TMA had enacted community design ordinance already and municipalities under consideration is 2.3 percent, and municipalities considering from now on is 10.9 percent. In total, it turns out that about half of TMA, 49.9 percent, needed to operate a community design ordinance. Particularly, municipalities that enacted the ordinance and municipalities under consideration occupied 62.2 percent in municipalities of over 200,000 people, 38.1 percent in municipalities of 50,000 to less than 200,000 people and 16.7 percent in municipalities of less than 50,000 people. In non-TMA, the figures were 9.9 percent of total non-TMA and 33.4 percent of municipalities of over 200,000 people. In this regard, it appears that TMA is more active in making a system of community design by residents than non-TMA.

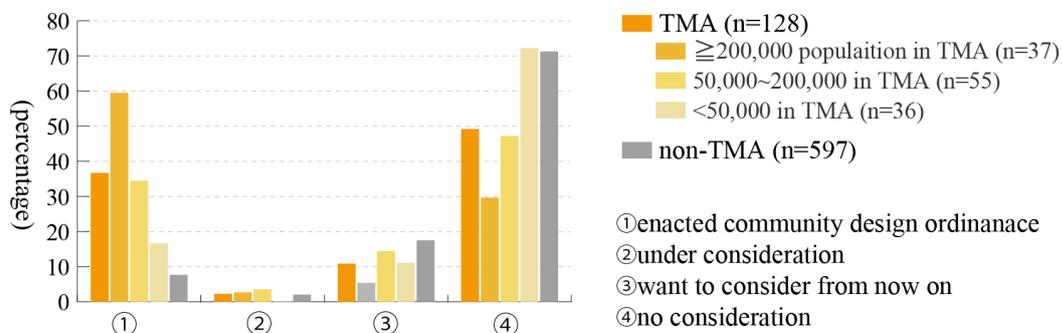


Figure 10. Ratio of status of using community design ordinance

As a new trend of community design ordinance, ordinance to realize urban planning MP and ordinance including procedures of urban planning proposal system and district planning have been increasing. Moreover, ordinance that set up a procedure of large-scale development including community design was found.

In summary, community design ordinance has generally been the role of complementing urban planning until now. However, the results show that the ordinance may possibly be used to construct a new urban planning system when the urban planning system itself is decentralized because the ordinance can establish a procedure to decide a means to realize MP, base plan showing direction of urban planning, by municipality.

6. Combination of proposal system and community design ordinance

From the above results, it appears that community design ordinance is related to the urban planning proposal system. On closer inspection, 26 municipalities have established the ordinance including rules about urban planning proposal system in TMA. The features of these ordinances need to be discussed.

First, there is extension of proposer standard. Originally, in the urban planning proposal system, the proposer who qualifies to submit a proposal to the municipality is the landowner, community planning NPO, and so on. In addition, the municipality can add a group to the proposer by ordinance, and there are many municipalities that have set up community organizations by residents as groups. Up to now, even though residents were encouraged to participate, the lack of knowledge and resources caused difficulties. Now using the experience of community design and consensus of community organization, it has extended the participation of residents.

Second, there is relaxation of the proposal standard. There are many municipalities that encourage residents to use the urban planning proposal system by relaxation of proposal area standard on ordinance and lowering area standard 0.1 through 0.3 hectare from original standard 0.5 hectare. Especially, it is notable that a municipality promotes utilization of the proposal system by relaxation of area standard to realize the community plan only in district established community plan. In addition, in spite of unchangeable agreement rate of two-thirds of landowners, there is a municipality that established another proposal system on ordinance by explaining the proposal sufficiently to residents instead of obtaining the agreement rate of landowners. In this regard, it is important that this movement facilitates proposals by residents by relaxation of proposal standard and establishing another system against difficulties of initiative by proposal standard.

Third, there is support to the proposer. There are many municipalities that specify support to groups trying to use the proposal system on ordinance. Mostly, these are just basic support of information. However, some municipalities give active support to the proposer to enable them to propose from initial ideas by providing experts, and so on. Furthermore, the scope of support has been widened. Not only support at the proposal stage, but also support on formation and approval of community organizations are also deemed important. Supporting residents to form community organization by ordinance makes it possible to promote main agents of community design and lead to use of the urban planning proposal system by accumulating community design experience. Thus, this movement is considered possible to promote community design more suitable to local areas.

Finally, there is consultation between community organization and proposer not on the ordinance itself but on the guideline of using the proposal system. In case of proposal to district established community plan, some municipality have been giving guidance and advice to the proposer to negotiate with community organization in advance before the proposer submits a proposal. Until now, there are opportunities to participate in decision on and revision to city plans by inspection and public hearing, and so on. However, the fact that community organizations can negotiate with the proposer based on their approved community plan means expansion of the field of the community design agent, and it is considered that this scheme can increase the possibility of proposal approvals and realization of the community plan.

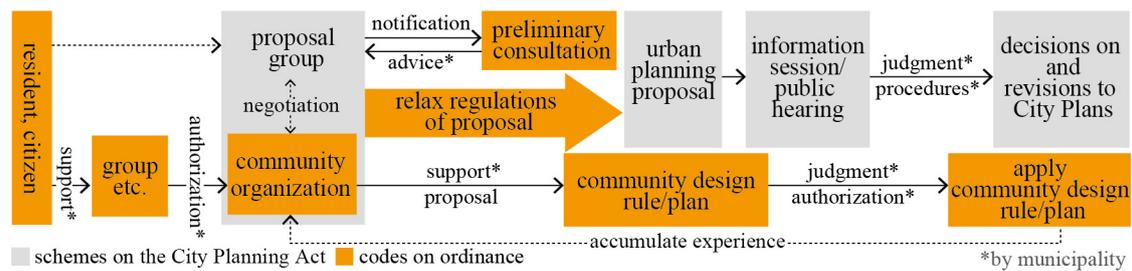


Figure 11. Combination of proposal system and community design ordinance

In conclusion, there are not many municipalities using the urban planning proposal system and various problems have been pointed out. However, municipalities that enacted provisions to use the urban planning proposal system with community design ordinance as a system to shift from accumulation of community design experience to urban planning are increasing. In this regard, as Figure 11 shows, there is a high possibility that community design will be realized by local community agents all the more in decentralization.

7. Concluding remarks

From this research, it is clear that there are various problems and new initiatives in TMA. Facing various problems of the urban planning system, there are many municipalities that felt limitations of the current urban planning system and many municipalities wanted reform of the current urban planning system. In this situation, we should note that many municipalities are trying to solve each local problem by new original trials in the face of decentralization. However, these are just trials in the framework of the current urban planning system by selecting and improving the menu that the government offers, and not entirely new methods.

On the other hand, many problems have been pointed out in the urban planning proposal system but these have not spread out throughout the whole country. However, we should note that municipalities facilitating participation of urban planning by developing community design ordinance combined with the urban planning proposal system are increasing and it is possible to use the experiences of community organizations for urban planning.

In the trend of decentralization and decreasing population, community design by local community agents is important power for urban planning from now on. In order to use this power, many municipalities are customizing the proposal system by community design ordinance. In this regard, it is considered to show an important vision of new decentralized urban planning.

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