

Citizens and Machizukuri - Toward attractive regions

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Machizukuri (town making) is a new conceptual wording in the field of urban planning in the 1990s of Japan, and is composed of town as to *Machi* and making as to *zukuri*. It describes the act of citizen-led improvements of local towns. It is intended to encourage citizens living and working in the area to think and act on the way their town should be, in contrast to urban planning, which until then was led by initiatives of local authorities. The Japanese language is made up of Kanji (Chinese characters), which originally came from China, and Hiragana, Japanese original alphabet, and the use of hiragana is intended to give the language an everyday and civic impression. (Taguchi 2024)

As part of the "Open University" program, the Hosei University Public Lecture Series is held annually in regional cities. This year, the lectures were held in Kanazawa City, Okayama City, and Miyazaki City. While making the contents of these lectures widely available to current students, we have decided to publish the transcripts of each lecture starting with this issue as "a series of Hosei University Public Lectures."

The Meaning and issues of Machizukuri

Attractive town is where people voluntarily do Machizukuri by themselves. They are doing it because they think it is necessary. Even if the result of their efforts ended up copying other's work, it was all right. We should utilize various laws and public subsidies to our advantage. We are not doing it because others say so or there is a prepared system in place. It is because we really think about our town. If the system is not sufficient, we will change it little by little.

Today's topic is to voluntarily and independently create our town. I want to use the term "Machizukuri." When I first started as a planner, several terms "regional development," "urban planning," "urban development," and "urban improvement" were used to describe how to improve a region. These are all fine words, but when you hear them, you probably think they may be the words of governmental use. Regional development, urban development, urban planning, and urban construction are all written in Chinese characters, but when written in Chinese characters, they do not seem to be issues for the citizens themselves. But it is citizens' own problem to improve the region or town. The idea of how to make the region better should be the citizens' own problem.

When I hear the words used so far, I get the feeling that those are done by government bureaucrats or by experts. In fact, there is a text written by a government official about "regional development" 30 years ago. It says, "Regional development is not for a specific region's benefit, but for meeting the state objectives." Their translation of regions is a set of areas targeted by the national planning policies, never like community planning areas. Nobody writes this way today, but it says that what the community does for the community is not regional development.

At that time, there was a boom in regional development. We assisted in the development of many regions. I think that regional development is done for the community, and good communities are created for residents. As a result of good neighborhoods forged, the country will be prosperous. It is impossible for a country to become so if there are only bad regions. Yet it used to be widely believed that what was good for the nation was according to national purposes, not for the sake of the regions. This is exactly the kind of thinking that was used for industrial development at that time. So, let's turn the whole country into an industrial zone. They were not thinking for the sake of the local community. Politicians may not say so because they worry about elections, but this is the composition of a brilliant bureaucrat. That was the idea behind the industrial development and new industrial cities of that time. I believe that we should think from the component parts, in which people think and act for the sake of their community to improve, and then to create towns, regions, and the national land of Japan.

Germany is different from other countries that have also recovered after the war. The federal system is also different. There are places where each region is independent and self-reliant. Germany has made a miraculous recovery like Japan, but recently people say that Germany is not so great. They say that Japan has surpassed the GNP per capita of

Germany, and now is experiencing a leisure boom and car resorts. But Germans works 500 hours less per year than Japanese, and yet they have the same level of affluence and become the center of the EC. They have magnificent houses, and every town has lush forest. Thereby, considering German case, it becomes meaningless if we do only the calculations based on GNP alone.

Environmental Issues in the context of globalization

I have some experiences to negotiate with companies about environmental issues. Twenty years ago, they said, "Companies export products, and don't want to spend unnecessary environmental costs to win in the global competition. Domestically, companies are trying to do the bare minimum, and are exporting for the sake of the Japanese nation." We were told from them to be patient and not to talk about environmental issues or health." The purpose of exporting and earning money is to make our lives healthier and more affluent. It is meaningless if we can make money by sacrificing our health. I am not saying anything absurd, but it is natural to think about health and the environment. Nevertheless, that may sound unreasonable to the companies.

The method we employed in controlling environmental issues later spread throughout Japan, and the Yokohama style was followed by the establishment of the National Environment Agency, and the national government also enacted related laws. As far as the environmental issues are concerned, the local governments tackled them. Nowadays, that level of implementation of pollution control has been taken as a normal procedure. If we did not do so at that time, and if all we did was to earn money, the environment of the Japanese territory would have become devastated. We understand that we can't earn money by selling off everything. That is why it is impossible. By selling things economically to foreign countries, we can afford a good living for ourselves. If we do not have a certain balance in mind, we will not be able to live. We do not share a view that money is only important to be used for the benefit of the country.

If the central government controls the country, it will extremely move in one-sided manner, as it did in the time of the last war. When talking about their regional development, regional development is only for the good of the country. In addition, they sacrifice other people's environment as well. According to their principle, Japanese companies are now being blamed for cutting down the forests, and are making a mess of the global environment. We have finally come to realize this, but we will not be able to keep up with the real era of internationalization unless we restructure the entire Japanese way of doing things once again.

Instead of blaming the way of doing for the sake of the nation, but rather, we start from the regional level and reconsider our approach. The region is not a closed area. Every local problem is connected to the world and to the entire planet. The same is true of the food we eat. We gather food from all over the earth and eat it. The same is true for the commodity production. Even the production of a single disposable chopstick is connected to the problem of tropical rainforests. We must always think about these issues. You have probably heard that chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are causing a hole in the earth's ozone layer. Our lives are not closed off; they are all connected to the entire planet. While thinking about the earth, we must first think about what we can do to improve our own neighborhoods and how we can improve each community, and then build good towns. I believe that this style of examining problems will eventually lead to a better Japan, a better world, and a better planet.

I have mentioned words that were used before "Machizukuri." The terms "regional development," "urban development," "urban planning," and "community development" are all fine terms in themselves, but it misleads that only the national government and local governments are responsible for their implementation. Local problems must be considered in local context, and they must be taken by people living in the towns. For this understanding, we need a simple word that citizens can understand and feel as one's own, and that is why I am advocating the use of the word "Machizukuri." The word "Machizukuri" has somehow been used in the past, but its meaning was not as positive as it is today.

Machizukuri and Citizens

I would like all of you to think how to build your own town as to future regional objectives. Okayama city of Okayama Prefecture is a big region. Although, we cannot think about the entire Okayama City, we can think about our own neighborhoods. A town can be large or small, but at the very least, it extends beyond our own homes.

In addition to your own house, there is your next door neighbor, the road in front of you, the creek running through it, and so on. I would like the citizens to think about their own problems from their immediate surroundings. A town

will not be a good thing if it is run only for national purposes and for the convenience of the local government. In order to make a town really good, we should think of it as our own matter. That is why I used the term "Machizukuri." It is a civic word. When we say "Machizukuri" in hiragana, you may have the feeling that this has something to do with us, rather than with the government office.

Machizukuri cannot be done unless we do it ourselves. The city administration may build roads and sewers, and rivers may be renovated. But they do not represent the whole of the town. They are skeletons in human terms. Without skeletons, we would be in trouble. But if a skeleton comes out here and chats, it is not worthwhile listening to it. It is not alive. It is the citizens who make the living content. However, it is the role of the government to create the framework properly. I am not saying that government offices are bad. Both are necessary, but it is the citizens who make the city and region alive. If here is the city of Okayama, we want to feel the entire city by these civic activities. I believe that the public sector's role is to support these activities.

In this way, city planning can become an issue for the citizens. When I use the word "Machizukuri," I don't refer to uniform towns all over the country. Each region is different. I walked the Japanese archipelago during the heavy snowfall, and there is little snow around here. Even though Hyogo and Hiroshima prefectures had snow, the Okayama area did not.

Machizukuri and Regional Character

The way to build houses is different in each region. In Hokuriku, west side of Japanese main island, Toyama region has the largest houses in size among the Japanese regions. As it snows hard, they protect themselves from it all by themselves. In so-called Scattered House Village, it is as if a single house has created a forest, and people live in this forest. It is surprisingly hot there in summer due to the foehn phenomenon. The houses are built to provide shade, and they live in a place of shrine forest. Therefore, their houses here become very large. It is a house that was born in the snow and in the conditions of Toyama Prefecture.

Each house is different. There is no need to make them the same. When Okinawa was returned to Japan from the US occupation, they employed the existing national standards tailored for public housing and built them exactly as they had in other main islands. However, in Okinawa, they were completely useless. Public housing was not allowed to have shutters. There are tremendous typhoons in Okinawa region. Shutters of windows are needed to protect inside of houses from typhoons. And it is different not only from typhoons but also sunlight. The sun comes in and burns the tatami mats, so houses are closed at noon. The eaves become bigger. The traditional way of building a house in Okinawa is to make a large roof and a dirt floor to prevent the sun from shining on it. The house is built with the large roof above the earth, and the earthen floor absorbs the sunlight, and the ceiling is enlarged inside to keep the house cool.

Like this way, houses in various regions are made based on their different manners. As people in regions have struggled to make it better, they have gradually improved it. Then identical characteristics of each region has emerged. Nevertheless, we still have a uniform public housing project that looks like a cut-up piece of yokan (a Japanese sweet curd) that doesn't look nice. Since the U.S. military moved in, there are fewer traditional houses these days even in Okinawa, but the old Okinawan houses were beautiful to look at. The relationship between the stone fences protecting the house and its roofs makes beautiful harmony in design.

Towns are different depending on their climate. (Our usage of the word "Hudo" in Japanese that is translated to climate in English is composed of spirit and weather.) Even if the climate is similar, there are places where the history is different. For example, the weather may not be that different between Kyoto and Yokohama, but if the same style of houses is built in towns like Yokohama opened in 1859 as a new international port, and Kyoto with old temples and shrines established in 794, respective scenery can be destroyed. Even if weathers are similar, histories are different. Each region has a different history and climate. That is why people find their own reasons to live in each region.

I don't know if everything is good, but the people of Okayama are blessed in terms of climate. The question is whether they are aware of their own climate, which they really think is blessed. If they are aware of their climate, they should make the best use of it. If people do not become conscious of their climate, it is a nobody's place to live.

Conscious Machizukuri

The spiritual climate may not change so much, but the times are moving on. If a town is left alone in the middle of these changes and you cannot recognize what is good, it may become a boring, standardized town. It is us to recognize good characters of Okayama, nobody will do it for us. As Okinawa and Hokkaido possess their conspicuous characters, we understand that uniformity is not good. But in other places, they are not so identical that they are easily swept away without being aware of it. As a result, Okayama may somehow lose its characters.

Kurashiki, the neighboring city of Okayama, is very conscious of its own history and has created Kurashiki-like atmosphere in a limited part, if not all, of the city. Therefore, the citizens there have a strong awareness of Machizukuri. Otherwise, while accepting the current trend of the society and feel complacent about the present environment, the town may easily lose its characters. A town is not just about what it is today. It is about tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, and for our children's generation, and the generation after that. What kind of town will we create?

When I visited small towns in Germany, they were trying to clean up the streets. The small towns have become a bit of a mess due to the last war and other factors, but they are making some improvements to their houses. Traditionally, there were beautiful towns with large wooden structures, but at one time people thought that it looked cool to paint them. But when you look at them with infrared rays, you can see that there used to be big and beautiful wooden structures beneath them. So, they scraped off the paint, uncovered the woodwork, then repainted the walls, and cleaned up the window frames. Then, they expanded the activities. The whole town became a wonderful place to live and visit. Then, the town hall started to build a square and designed street lights, and many such small, wonderful towns were recreated.

People started to hold competitions of town making, and the competitions were very strict. I have also served as a judge for their competitions, and I am sorry to say that Japanese competitions are rather fickle and are easily ended. Germans are very enthusiastic, and there are about eight jurors, they all visit two candidate sites a day for two weeks. In Japan, the people who are asked to serve as jury members are usually so busy that they are assigned to Okayama today, Nagoya tomorrow, etc., and cannot be held for two weeks in the same town.

Germans are very proud of their towns. Their criteria are quite unique. I cannot introduce all of them, except beautiful and green criterions, they are also based on the level of participation of the citizens. It is neither enough to say that only government officials are involved nor enough to say that the government did it. The major criterion is how much the citizens are involved.

Another thing is that a young Japanese friend of mine is a member of the jury, though he is an outsider. They have a lounge coach where meetings can be held and they discuss. He attended the meeting and thought a certain town was beautiful, but the Germans thought differently and yelled at him about what was wrong with it. They say, "That town doesn't use its own materials properly, or that town is copying someone else's. It may look beautiful at first glance, but it's not." It is true that the town may be beautiful in the eyes of the average person. However, if they are not really doing things on their own, they are imitating others, and that is not good.

Unique Machizukuri

Having such tough discussions tells us that the towns are so much their own. Even if it is not our own creation, it can become temporarily beautiful. But we won't feel attached to it. As I mentioned earlier, a town that has been created by ourselves can be loved by the residents. The results you see are different in each era. We did not have enough money before like today. Recalling my experiences of Machizukuri, if it were now, I would have done things a little differently, or used different materials. But I worked very hard at that time, though there were difficulties, tremendous resistance. I think of all these things now as memories. Therefore, I am very attached to such a town.

If we had the money, we could clean it up again. And if we had the opportunity, we could see what the suitable materials were like. But the question is whether people in the town share the feeling, and whether they are willing to do it together, whether they are determined to build their town independently, not just doing it according to the world's trends. If people live in a rented house, they would not do it themselves.

I think the current evaluation system of Germany has a good point. They do not evaluate at first glance. They say which is better in a beauty contest. It is about whether people are doing it voluntarily on their own. Otherwise, there will be no permanence. If it is a beauty contest, it may be enough to be the winner for a time. But a town is not a temporary entity. A town can last for years, centuries, or even millennia. Even young towns grow old. They age, but

they can rejuvenate like a phoenix. A town matures and ages again. That is how it will always continue. If we talk only about today and tomorrow, we will never create a good town. I believe that we need to evaluate what people have done in the past and how to connect it to the future while making the most of it. I am not only talking about my generation or my own problems. A town is created as a collaborative work, with citizens working together. You can never do it alone. It is not created by one great king or one great mayor. It cannot be done unless it is done collaboratively. It is not just about the present, but also about how to connect it to the future. For connecting to the future, we need to know what our past has been like.

The future is hard to read. We don't even know what will happen tomorrow. We don't even know what will happen five years from now. But if we study the past, we can understand it quite well. Then, if we think about what happened 10 years ago, the next 10 years will be like, and if we think about what happened 100 years ago, we may be able to think about what will happen 50 years from now.

I study history a lot. Before joining the City of Yokohama, I assisted people in Machizukuri of various regions. I always ask them about the history. Surprisingly, there are some people who don't know much about their history. Even officials of local authorities have little knowledge of their towns, though they have plenty of knowledge about city planning regulations. They don't know if their town is a castle town or not. But I forced myself to find out, and I found out that it was a castle town. Then what kind of lord was there? They do not have much concern about that. I am sure that you all know well about Okayama, but there are many other such places in Japan.

Qualitative Evaluation of Cities

We often make too many numerical comparisons. When we were poor, we talked about things like road pavement rates and sewerage system penetration rates. But from now on, it is about the quality that is unique to our city. Quality cannot be evaluated. It is the same with ability. These days, everything is based on deviation scores, so scores are assigned that people are sorted into categories such as this student's aptitude for priority universities. I think this is no longer meaningless. We know that such things as athletic ability, craftsmanship, cooking, fishing, and so on are not comparable to English ability or mathematical ability.

Like these human abilities have many characteristics that cannot be compared. There cannot be comparison between being good at drawing and being good at mathematics. However, no matter how good you are at drawing, you will not get into a good university, except for art colleges. Nevertheless, painting is still a great ability and a great personality.

There is a quality that cannot be compared. That is the individuality of a city. However, it is no good unless we appreciate it and recognize it for what it is. We call it culture. Culture is not only art. Many fine art museums have been built here in Okayama. The Orient Museum, the prefecture's new museum, small Takehisa Yumeji museum near here which I visited, Hayashibara's museum; there are many wonderful places here. They are good in terms of art and culture, but the culture I am talking about is not only art, but also more broadly the culture of creating our own values. We create our own way of life. I would like you to create a culture that has its own uniqueness.

Culture is not only about things. We are always thinking from the heart. That is how we evaluate. We tend to evaluate in terms of amount of something, or the amount per capita, or the rate of something. We consider such quantities in society, but we have something that cannot be measured only by those quantities. If it is something that is truly good for us and that we feel belongs to us, then it can become a unique local culture.

There is no need to think about complicated logic. It is absolutely a matter of quality, not quantity. Honestly speaking, quality was something I did not clearly understand. About 15 years ago, when I was still at Yokohama city government, I translated a book "*The Quality of Urban Environment*" by Harvey S. Perloff. At that time, I did not really know how to think about the issue of quality. We were in the era of rapid economic growth, saying big was good, and I had no idea what to think about the quality of the urban environment. I felt awkward how to translate this, afterwards I titled the book "*The Human Environment City*" in Japanese. In other words, there is always a human being with the quality. The quality is perceived by human beings. The quantity does not require the presence of human beings.

The issue of quality, however, is concerned with people. It is a town where people live. A town becomes meaningful so long as it is a town that is considered from the perspective of human beings. At the same time they have sensitivity. We cannot evaluate what we think is beautiful, or what we think is fun, or what we think is happy, but it also includes

such feelings.

In England, the word "amenity" is used as a basic principle for Machizukuri. Nowadays, the Environment Agency and other organizations use the word "amenity" a lot. But if you read the explanations by the British people, amenity is the overall awareness of being glad to live here and there, feeling happy and at ease. The British people say, "We know what amenity is, but we can't explain it, since defining it precisely would become a little bit a lie. It is the totality of their mind. But we can recognize the value of it, as well. There are other important things that cannot be measured. We value amenity as living organisms for people who have hearts and emotions, and use it as the basis for Machizukuri.

Attractive Machizukuri

The most important thing is that when people hear the word "Machizukuri," they think that this is not someone else's problem, but their own problem. It is not a matter of uniformity, but rather a matter of how citizens can create their own town.

Achieving this, as I mentioned earlier, it is not enough to be a frog in a well. We are now in the age of information and globalization, and lots of information is coming in. In this environment, cities are becoming more competitive to each other. Nowadays, you can live anywhere. A friend of mine is living in Spain because his wife was a little sick. The Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) promoted a scheme called "Silver Colombia." Despite MITI's policy, he chose there. He is now retired, and I visited him there. He lives comfortably with a clear view of the Mediterranean Sea and Gibraltar in the distance. When I asked him why he came here, he said that his wife's illness would have got worse in Japan. There were no wheelchair-accessible places. Here he can walk, the air is dry, and the prices are cheap, so he is here to live. And his wife was in a wheelchair, but now she can walk with a cane. As for local language, he doesn't speak at all. When I was there, he took me to a restaurant, but he could not order the menu. He phoned his friend and said he wanted to order this. The friend then translated in Spanish and say, "This is what he wants to the restaurant. And his wife's illness has been cured. This is one example, but now people can live anywhere in the world without advice from the government.

If we don't really improve our community, people will move out rapidly. So long as people become aware of their community, prosperous towns will be built. Regarding the trend of new industries, IT industries are coming to flourish. IT industries are created by brains of people. Since the brain is inseparable part of people, intelligent and conscious people need to live. And this kind of creative towns for new industries must be an interesting and attractive place where people are happy to live. It is up to you if you can make such a town.