

### 365 Unattractive, eye-watering devastation, no longer enough for small measures

The decline of the central city area is beyond the scope of the eye. In my final lecture at university about 10 years ago, I said that only 5% of the central city areas in Japan would survive, and this is now becoming a reality. The year 2009 is going to be another tough year. The government comes out with various policies every few years, but they lack consistency. It is an oversimplification to refer to the laws dealing with city centers as the "Three Laws on Urban Development. The hiragana "city planning" is not about conventional government urban planning, but about taking a total view of one's life, including both hardware and software, and improving it, based on ideas from the local community and citizens' side. The central city area is part of that problem. Conversely, to consider the revitalization of the central city area, it must be positioned within the broader meaning of "city planning.

For example, administrative agencies and large hospitals have been relocated from the center of the city to the suburbs. In the suburbs, commercial location has been gradual. The self-centered, discrete construction of individual buildings has taken precedence, lacking the concept of considering the city as a whole. It is no wonder that even if the central shopping district is decorated, it will decline. Now a system has been established to regulate development in the suburbs. However, if there was a will to do so, it could have been done before the system was in place.

There must be some latent expectations for the central city area (see figure below left), but if things continue as they are, those expectations will be lost. It is impossible to revitalize the shopping district alone. Other factors besides purchasing are admittedly important.

Nevertheless, some central city districts have achieved some success through various innovations. These include Aomori City as a compact city, Marugamemachi in Takamatsu City, where the shopping district jointly holds land and manages it, and Kanazawa City, which voluntarily created an ordinance. In this way, new local government management policies that are not led by the central government, but rather by local spontaneous ingenuity and a departure from the traditional pursuit of laws and regulations, are expected.

The essence of a city is to have attractions that attract different kinds of people, to have people interact with each other, and to create both jobs and enjoyment there. Before World War II, going to a department store or Ginza was like going to a theme park today; it was educational, like a museum, and fun, like going to a show. Even without shopping, each product and the atmosphere of the town was unusual. The people walking around the city are also fashionable, and it is fun just to walk around, not just to see special events. There are also chance encounters with people. Such complex elements have disappeared from today's shopping streets.

The appeal of a city is "heterogeneous exchange.

Cities need places to meet. Not only meeting places and theaters where specific groups of people gather, but also places where unspecified groups of people can meet freely. In Western cities, it was the square. In the bazaar of an Islamic city, the first thing to do is to have a cup of tea and a conversation. There was liveliness, fun, and an attraction that drew people together. Commerce is a part of this process. It gave visitors a sense of the city's character. In the past, the central city area naturally had this kind of attraction without any special effort, but that is not the case today.

Local governments and shopping districts have reached their limits in terms of small measures. Only those who have a new idea that the central city area is responsible for the unique liveliness of the city and its places of interaction, and who can nurture the local government and implement total measures on a continuous basis on their own initiative, will be able to pioneer the next era.