



A Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Basic Character of the Japanese Planning System: Toward a Drastic Reform for Decentralization and Participation

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Since the beginning of the 21st century, concerns and actual movements to reform the Japan's City Planning Act have remarkably risen among the people outside the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, which is responsible for the nation's city planning administration. Nearly ten concrete proposals have been made public by academic societies, civic groups, think tanks and others. Such phenomena to change the basic rule of the traditional city planning are, as a whole, an epoch-making event in the entire history of the nation's modern planning era for nearly 120 years.

Many proposals try to properly locate people's desires and activities (Machizukuri) to manage and enhance the physical environment of their local community in the legal planning system, which is traditionally based upon the centralization of planning powers in the hands of bureaucrats, not of citizens. So the general trend of the reform direction seems to head toward such key words as 'decentralization' and 'participation.'

In August 2009, the Democratic Party took the control of the central government, which was materially the first shift of political power since the end of the war in 1945. As the new government emphasizes the 'local autonomy,' it is quite probable that the city planning system that is basically local matter will become an important national agenda and that the reform of City Planning Act will be discussed and actually advanced further.

We are really witnessing the great transformation of the Japan's planning history. So the topic of the legal reform will be a very important one to the planners at the spot of local planning practice and to the administrators at the central government. Similarly the topic of theoretical framework for such reform will be a very important one to planning theorists and historians.

In this context, the author tries to the following:

- (1) To briefly review the existing proposals in order to examine the key points for the reform of the traditional planning system;
- (2) To trace the historical development of Japan's modern planning since the 1888 Tokyo Urban Improvement Act till present and to make a brief comparison with the American and British developments in order to examine why the Japanese system has become such a centralized and 'anti-participation' style; and
- (3) To develop some basic hypothetical principles for the reform and make self-examination about them.

KEY WORDS: Historical analysis, comparative analysis, Japanese planning system, decentralization, participation.