

What can the UK Offer to Revitalise City Centres in Japan?

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In recent years there has been a continuous decline in Japan's city centre economies. The main reason for this decline during this period was the emergence of out-of-town superstores. In the U.K., however, the existence of out-of-town centres does not seem to have hindered the economic growth of city centres, especially after the introduction of PPG6 (Planning Policy Guidance No.6). The structure of this paper is as follows. Firstly, we look at the current economic situation in Japan's city centres, both from an economic and non-economic (i.e. cultural) perspectives. Secondly, we briefly examine the effects of the so-called 'Three Community Management Laws, namely the Law on Improvement and Vitalisation in City Centres, the Large-scale Retail Stores Location Law and the Reformed Town Planning Law on the city centre economy. Thirdly, we examine the effects of regeneration scheme on city centre in the U.K by referring to the idea of sentimental value or sense of place. The paper concludes that any city in Japan can be revived with the right kind of sentiment and motivation from the people provided that a city's identity can be fostered and protected.

Keywords: Sentimental Value, Sense of Place, city centre revitalization of Japan and the UK

Introduction

The decline of Japan's regional city centres has long been lamented. Alarmingly, in recent years, some regional city centres have found that more than 50% of their shopping spaces are left unoccupied, while large stores in the suburbs are extremely popular with local customers and successfully attract shoppers. Several surveys of local residents have confirmed the appeal of suburban stores which are far more convenient, and their existence cannot be denied. However, by fostering this form of community management, it is likely that cities will ultimately lose their individual characteristics; towns whose picturesque qualities were once charming will become bland and not attractive to tourists.

In the UK, where the author spent several years conducting research, city centre economies remain active despite the presence of suburban stores. A recent investigation conducted in the town of Horsham, approximately 50 km south of London, found that both locals and tourists were drawn to the town centre's traditional charm and made weekend visits to purchase items like clothing. This demonstrated a marked segregation from items like groceries and daily necessities which were sold and purchased at stores in the suburbs. In 1994, the city centre's retail investments made

up 14% of the entire retail industry, but by 2005, they had risen to 35%; this trend of increase is expected to continue.¹⁾ What, then, accounts for the difference between Japan and the UK, both island nations with similar systems of government?

This paper will first consider the current state of Japan's city centres before looking at the results of the author's annual research trips to the UK over the past 17 years. This will lead to an examination of UK's system of community management and examples thereof, while also introducing the country's urban planning system's PPG6 (Planning Policy Guidance No.6) and the community management philosophy of 'sense of place'. Considering the relationships between local restoration, local attachment and a town's individual character, we suggest that 'sentimental value' is an important keyword in the discussion of community management.

1. Investigating the Current State of Japan's City Centres

While policies regarding Japanese city centres typically fall under land policy and urban planning, they do, however, also touch upon aspects of cultural policy. Historically, city centres play a major role in people's memories of 'place'. In Europe, for instance, city centres are home to

churches and many other buildings steeped in culture and tradition, and the sentimental attachment the townspeople have with these places is a significant factor in urban planning. In Japan, however, the push for urbanisation after World War II led to a population shift from rural communities to cities, and the cultural and historical significance of the city centres became less of a priority than having a convenient place to live and do business.

As with other land policies, the deregulation of city centres was prioritised, as well as the accompanying emphasis on competition. Specifically, between 1998 and 2000, three laws were enacted in succession in the hope of freeing up sites for the development of large suburban stores while simultaneously invigorating city centres: the Law on Improvement and Vitalisation in City Centres, the Large-Scale Retail Stores Location Law and the Revised City Planning Law. Below, we shall look at the current state of city centre economics and the Three Community Management Laws.

1-1 What are the Three Community Management Laws?

The US–Japan Structural Impediments Initiative, begun in 1989, became a point of contention regarding Japan’s expanding domestic demand and the deregulation of its land market. Because of demands from the US and a cluster of initiatives that permitted competition between city centre shopping areas and suburban supermarkets, the Large-Scale Retail Store Law was revised to ease requirements for the construction of retail stores, eventually giving rise to the Large-Scale Retail Store Location Law. At the same time there was a need for revitalising declining city centres. The city centre revitalisation efforts which predicted this decline set up TMOs (Town Management Organisations), which served as a means of supporting organisations with assistance payments under that same law (per the Law on Improvement and Vitalisation in City Centres). In other words, suburban retail stores could be more easily constructed, but various subsidiaries were also established in order to act as a check against prospective city centres. The City Planning Law which was one of Three Community Management

Laws was also revised, but this change was inevitable because of the revision to the Large-Scale Retail Store Location Law. Below, we shall examine the effect of these Three Laws after their implementation.

1-2 General Results of the Three Community Management Laws

It is safe to conclude in advance that the Three Community Management Laws (in particular the Law on Improvement and Vitalisation of City Centres) did not demonstrate an appreciable effect on the reinvigoration of city centres. On 23 February 2005, a report on the Three Community Management Laws entitled ‘The Relationship Between Population Shift and City Centre Retail Sales’ was presented in a joint meeting of the Industrial Structure Council and the Council for Small Business. The report found that out of 155 cities with a population of over 100,000 that had adopted city centre invigoration urban planning by October 2003 (excluding Tokyo and ordinance-designated cities), 25 experienced a decline in population. Also, roughly 80% of regional cities with a population of 100,000 or more showed a decline in population in their city centres. In addition, according to ‘On the State of Community Management for City Centre Restoration’ (Advisory Council Report, 2005), out of 121 cities and towns that had adopted city centre vitalisation as a basis for urban planning, over 90% had shown a decrease in the number of stores, annual sales and number of businesses.

It is a foregone conclusion that businesses in a location-dependent industry lose sales when there are no people living in the area where the businesses are located. Regional cities were hit with a flood of large-scale suburban retail stores, and the economic decline of their city centre’s economies became even more pronounced. In order to examine this point in more detail, we analysed the data on trends in land value, number of tourists and resident population for city centres following the implementation of the Three Community Management Laws.

2. Specific Effects of the Three Community Management Laws on City Centres

For data comparison, let us look at both general nationwide data on city centres and trends in cities whose basic planning was approved by the Cabinet Office up through March 2009. In 2006, the revision of the Law on Improvement and Vitalisation in City Centres provided subsidy measures for invigoration, and the approval of basic planning became the exclusive purview of the Cabinet Office. By March 2009, out of 77 submitted plans, 75 cities received Cabinet Office approval. Although the volume of the data is rather small, the information given is extremely thorough. Even on the most challenging subjects, each municipality maintained scrupulous data relevant to their town areas, especially with regard to more elusive statistics, such as tourist numbers and changing land values in city centres.

The fact that they have received government approval suggests that these municipalities are comparatively more enthusiastic about city centre revitalisation. Ultimately, some amount of sampling bias or error is to be expected, but once the basic planning is approved, more attention will be directed towards future efforts without bias on past performance. An approved municipality is not a 'successfully revitalised city' that may experience population growth in its city centre. Rather, it can be argued that requests for approval are made specifically because these cities are in need of revitalisation. Therefore, it is unlikely that there are major data errors between typical city and government approved city centres. In the following section, we examine the change in city centre land values and population and tourist numbers for five years before and after the introduction of the laws by population bracket using a data set of both approved and typical cities with an emphasis placed on well-maintained data.

2-1 Official Land Values and Population Change

The official listed land values after the implementation of the Three Community Management Laws greatly decreased for cities of all sizes. Overall, the average yearly decline in land value was approximately 7.7%. The largest drop was in cities with a population of 200,000 (11.4%

per year). After the burst of the economic bubble, land values trended towards a nationwide decline. Nevertheless, it is clear that these Three Community Management Laws resulted in no increase in land values.²⁾

Next, let us look at the change in population in these city centres. Cities with a population over 400,000 showed a slight increase in city centre population, but smaller cities showed a decrease. City centres with the most prominent population increase were Takamatsu-shi (Kagawa-ken), Chiba-shi (Chiba-ken), Takikawa-shi (Hokkaido), Hamamatsu-shi (Shizuoka-ken), Takarazuka-shi (Hyogo-ken) Aomori-shi (Aomori-ken), Amagasaki-shi (Hyogo-ken), Kagoshima-shi (Kagoshima-ken), Oita-shi (Oita-ken), Yatsushiro-shi (Kumamoto-ken) and Kitakyushu-shi (Fukuoka-ken). Moreover, all cities with large populations (above 200,000 to 300,000) showed a prominent population increase.

Conversely, the most prominent decrease in population was observed in Takaoka-shi (Toyama-ken), Fuchu-shi (Tokyo-to), Kuji-shi (Iwate-ken), Fukui-shi (Fukui-ken), Echizen-shi (Fukui-ken), Gifu-shi (Gifu-ken), Hyuga-shi (Miyazaki-ken) and Beppu-shi (Oita-ken), many of which are smaller cities with a population range between 100,000 and 200,000. When we break cities down by population bracket, smaller cities show a decline in their city centre population.

Although there are many smaller districts fervently working on efforts such as tourism, there is a strong trend towards a decrease in the overall business population because of a fragile industry base. We can safely surmise that these Three Community Management Laws had no impact on population increase in city centres of cities with a population under 400,000.

2-2 Changes in City Centre Business Populations

Next, we shall look at the change in the commercial labour population of city centres before and after the implementation of the Three Community Management Laws. As expected, the active commercial labour population showed a decrease regardless of city population size. Considering the aforementioned change in city centre population, the drop in commercial labour population due to the decline of city centre business should result in

an offset of the population growth for large cities. This can be assumed to be the result of promoting residence in central areas as seen in policies for compact cities (cities that have been consolidated). In small municipalities where such compacting is problematic, a decline in business population indicates a decline in the city centre's individuality. This is a major cause of the loss of commercial and traditional culture in local areas. Furthermore, in municipalities where the number of suburban stores is expanding, we can assume that there are various effects on urban activities (for more on this, refer to the nationwide survey conducted by Adachi (2004)).

2-3 Change in City Centre Tourist Numbers

Lastly, we look at tourist numbers based on population bracket by comparing data from 1995 and 2005. Many cities that applied for approval for their city centres maintained tourist count data. Because of Japan's lack of structured tourist records prior to March 2009, a careful analysis is required. Data was compiled for the total number of day trips and overnight stays which revealed that smaller towns have a higher tourist growth rate (annualised). A noteworthy point observed was the remarkably high tourism rate of Bungotakada-shi in Oita-ken in recent years due to the growing popularity of 'Showa retro' townscapes. In addition, we identified urban clusters of cities that are culturally rich and known as tourist destinations, such as Takikawa-shi (Hokkaido), Morioka-shi (Iwate-ken) and Matsue-shi (Shimane-ken). Conversely, a compact city like Aomori-shi, which had undergone significant population growth, had few tourists visiting its city centre. Municipalities such as Aomori-shi (Aomori-ken), Takarazuka-shi (Hyogo-ken), Saijo-shi (Ehime-ken), and Otsu-shi (Shiga-ken) despite being highly dedicated to the revitalisation of their city centres, seem to have planned their efforts focusing on the potential of their cities rather than their cultural or historical individuality.

Cities such as Takarazuka-shi, a dormitory town for Osaka and Kobe, showed low tourist appeal, but its city centre population experienced growth at a significant rate. A similar effect was seen in Aomori-shi, which seems to have developed unique residential policies. After excluding cities

with a population of under 100,000 and over 400,000, all cities showed a drop in tourist numbers for their city centres.

This decrease was especially true for cities in the 200,000 to 300,000 population bracket (15% annual drop). A decrease in tourism in cities of this particular size indicates that the landscape policies and other measures meant to increase city centre appeal are insufficient to generate a substantial boost in tourism.

The above data reveals several key points. First, with the exception of cities with a population over 400,000, the adoption of the Three Community Management Laws failed to prevent city centres from experiencing a steady decline in population, indicating that the Laws had no effect.

Second, the Three Community Management Laws were intended to foster city appeal, but they did not actually boost tourism. Cities in the 100,000 to 400,000 bracket especially showed a steady decrease in the number of tourists; however, cities with a population under 100,000 showed an increase in tourist numbers. This is most likely due to specialised policies that proved effective for cities with smaller populations because of the community management aspects of promoting tourism. Municipalities were able to attain these results by surpassing the systematic framework and independently putting in effort.

Third, some cities with a population over 400,000 experienced a functional improvement in residential policy as well as other areas, which led to an increase in city population. Regions such as Aomori-shi and Takarazuka-shi implemented revitalisation policies promoting residence rather than tourism. Conversely, small-scale municipalities built up their appeal by touting themselves as tourism cities, which they played as a trump card in their revitalisation efforts. Many mid-sized cities, however, showed little increase in tourist numbers, presumably because the drop in the labour population in their city centres weakened their ability to handle further city management, diminishing these cities' appeal.

In order to revive central commerce, it is necessary to take steps to increase the tourist count by leveraging distinct characteristics, such as scenery and regional foods. However, the Three Community Management Laws made no effort to address such characteristics. Rather, their

competitive policies have a high potential of resulting in a decrease in city centre population and accelerating the rate at which stores are abandoned en masse.

3. Trends in Revitalisation Measures in the UK

What policies will help Japan overcome the current situation? From a milieu of methods available, the author chose to refer to the model used in the UK. The author spent 17 years conducting annual research activities in the UK, where city centre commerce sales are steadily improving, backed by an urban planning system. Let us begin by focusing on the initial implementation of PPG No.6.

3-1 Characteristics of UK's Community Management to Prevent Metropolitan Decline

In 1993, the UK developed PPG6, (Planning Policy Guidance No.6)³⁾, an urban planning principle that made a very clear division between city centres and suburban areas. PPG6 states that, 'In order to prioritise urban development and new locations, city centre areas take a higher priority over suburbs'. In other words, a merchant would only be able to open a store in the suburbs if there were no open shop spaces or open buildings in a city centre; as a result, large stores would not be able to expand into the suburbs if the city centre is already in a declining state. Large suburban stores can expand only after a certain amount of capital has been invested and the city centre economy is reinvigorated, the implication being suburban stores cannot dominate from the outset.

Furthermore, under this rule, many city centres with large capital have set up shops in the UK. Research conducted by the author in September 2011 shows that large retail capital stores such as Marks & Spencer, Tesco and Sainsbury's had shops throughout the city centre.

In such settings, large retailers attempt to avoid competition with each other. Product retailers (appliances, clothing, etc.) therefore have locations in city centres, whereas suburban stores specialise in commodities that can be stored, such as cheap food and drink. Based on the services offered, people form a distinction between 'city centres' and 'suburban stores'.

Different areas are thus able to maintain their

individuality, and the separation of services eliminates needless competition. This urban planning guideline has demonstrable benefits for competing companies. No such system currently exists in Japan.

3-2 Sense of Place and Tourist Destinations

The British philosophy of community management often refers to the term 'Sense of Place'. Sense of place refers to an area's individual characteristics. The author came across this term often during his research in the UK,⁴⁾ and it frequently occurs in relevant literature; this term embodies the importance of the distinct characteristics of each region and implies that community management is born out of the local atmosphere.

Kirby, an expert in British community management employed at a community management firm, said the following about the meaning of 'sense of place':

Urban experiences still depend on 'local lifeworlds', which memories and imagination, in which unique local histories are part of global trends and restore a sense of place to urban life.⁵⁾

The British theme of city revival seems to be a central topic of discussion since the 1970s. In London, the area around Covent Garden, which was a setting in *My Fair Lady*, underwent restoration spurred on by the Londoner's strong sense of attachment to the area. This is also seen in the reconstruction of spaces as historical fixtures.⁶⁾ Regent Street, in Central London, is a locale that was considered for this type of reconstruction.

The driving force behind people taking the initiative to manage their cities is a sense of respect for their ancestral history and traditions, as well as their emotional attachments. The power of a location to differentiate itself from others is where this sense of place is born. In this way, local attachment builds up individuality, eventually leading to branding. This, in turn, sets the groundwork for establishing an attractive tourist destination.

4. Examples of British Reconstruction: The Declining Ferry Industry and Building Tourism via Art

This section illustrates some examples of community management in the UK.⁷⁾ In the autumn of 2010, the author visited a town called Folkestone, a small seaside town southeast of London (population approximately 50,000), for research. Once a prosperous seaside retreat, it had fallen into a rather dilapidated state after the cessation of the ferry service to France in 1992.

In need of a replacement for the ferry industry, Folkestone decided to restore its former glory by focusing on the tourism industry. However, the administration had little in the way of a specific vision or budget, and people did not want to invest in a place that was run down - a phenomenon frequently seen in Japan as well.

One of the people to take action was Roger De Haan, a well-known, wealthy local. De Haan had great affection for the place where he was born and raised, and could not bear to see his town slip into decline. As such, he began efforts to restore the local flavour. He sold his father's travel agency (est. 1959) for a fortune (£1.3 billion, approximately ¥150 billion) and invested around £50 million (approximately ¥6.5 billion) to establish The Roger De Haan Charitable Trust (hereafter RDHCT) with the intention of reviving his hometown.

The trust was first used in restoring local education. Approximately 20 years ago, education in Folkestone fell into ruin. According to an academic assessment, the local secondary school was listed as the fourth worst in the entire country. The school was thus changed into an academy, a type of vocational school, in an attempt to revamp

An old building turned into an art studio (photo by the author, 10/2010)



the education system.⁸⁾

To start with, £45 million (approximately ¥5 billion) was invested for renovating the school facility buildings. Then, nationally acclaimed architect Norman Foster was employed to help create attractive facilities (e.g. nicely designed wall). This action mobilised the community, and the Regional Development Agency (RDA) and High Education Foundation Centre contributed support funds. As a result, the atmosphere of the school suddenly changed, and in a short period, its educational standards were among the best in Britain.

Building Renewal

In addition to education projects, the RDHCT implemented various policies to renew the city as a centre of the arts. In the past, the area had produced many well-known artists, a fact which inspired the decision to reshape the town as a hub for art and artists. The RDHCT established a company called Creative Foundation (a real estate company) that set up residences and studios for as many artists as possible. Nowadays, more properties are being renovated for use as artist studios (see photo), indicating that more artists are moving to the area. Efforts to revitalise this once declining region are taking on other forms as well, such as the use of empty stores in the shopping districts of surrounding cities as exhibition spaces for art.

De Haan had another objective for his charitable activities; he wanted to overcome the tendency of governmental urban policy being short-term due to regime change. He once commented that, 'If private businesses run by locals take the lead, long-term community management will be possible'. In Japan as well, starting with the Ohara Museum of Art in Kurashiki-shi (Okayama-ken), wealthy locals are involved in regional restoration establishing various tourist destinations. In the UK, however, many people like Mr De Haan have contributed private funds to initiate community management efforts. The UK also has a long history of national trusts, and citizen organisations purchase land for conservation purposes. Local attachment makes for a driving force in motivating the community - the ideal form for community management.

5. Sentimental Value and Sense of Place

Now let us introduce the important concept of sentimental value. Sentimental value is the natural affection that people have for the area in which they live. After spending years and years being fond of a place, local people become invested in the area's individuality. Whether it is a local shrine or some coastal scenery, the places and qualities that give people's hometowns their character inspire people to protect and love them. The aforementioned actions of Roger De Haan show, above all else, the sentimental value a hometown can have; it was through this sentimental attachment that Folkestone's sense of place was restored.

Once the character of a place is established, it can be used to attract tourists if the people are proud of it. Characterizing and branding a city occurs regardless of the region. Hence, this can be used as a strategy for urban revival anywhere. How does this point relate to Japanese community management? Have we not identified our own regional character and carefully preserved it?

The author has visited many cities across Japan. On getting off the train at a station, one sees convenience stores, consumer finance companies, chain stores and pubs lining up the street. One would be increasingly hard pressed to tell what town one was in just by looking at it. As a result, both locals and out-of-towners will often think, 'I wonder what this town used to be like'? And, eventually, the demand for that city will drop.

Surely, this has not caused the people to give up, deep down inside, has it?

To move forward, local revival will require an industry to act as a foundation; however, over the last 30 years, Tokyo has become increasingly overpopulated and the bases of local industry are weakening. The country still relies too much on Tokyo's information power and efficiency. However, as Tokyo has the lowest birth rate in the country, it is indicative of a drop in Japan's childbearing population and nationwide productive capacity.⁹⁾ Many national buildings are at a high risk from earthquakes and other calamities.

On the economic policy front, the country is shouldering a debt over 200% of GDP as of 2010, and previous employment policies founded on increased public spending are no longer tenable.

In the midst of this deteriorating situation, industrial policy has marked the tourism industry as not needing company attraction and public spending. In order to promote its tourism industry, a city needs to distinguish itself from other cities, and extract regional character and sense of place.

As a preclusion, over 80% of the revitalisation success stories nationwide occur in communities where people who love their towns have taken action to bring back local character (for more details on this data, see the author's *Shutter Street* (i.e. declined main street) Restoration Project (Minerva Books, 2010). While the theme of revival differs by region, it often involves maintaining old townscapes, conserving traditional facilities, the sale of local specialty products, etc. We can term this type of community management 'reservation' by reviving original regional character.

One of the best examples of successful local revival in recent years has been Nagahama-shi in Shiga-ken. Saddened by the decline of the city centre's commercial facilities since the late 1980s, a group of eight locals decided to take action. Investing ¥80 million, they set up a community management firm, 'Kurokabe' ('black wall', the nickname of a well-know local bank). The entire shopping district was done up in a uniform jet black and the town became vibrant and bustling again. They succeeded in bringing in large volumes of tourists from Osaka on day trips. Over the past 20 years, their tourist numbers increased from 80,000 per year to over 2 million. Similar to the case of Roger De Haan and Folkestone, in Nagahama-shi, human love for the community combined with fundraising successfully revitalised a declining and neglected city centre.

Conclusion

This paper has covered both the British system of city centre revitalisation and examples of similar issues in Japan in order to illustrate the connection between emotional attachment (sentimental value) and community management, and to assert the importance of the preservation of local character.

An ageing and declining population, exhaustion of finances and the decay of industry are all foreseeable threats to regional cities. Nowadays, there are fewer opportunities to secure money and

investments for community management, and without specialised population policies by the government, the population will continue to drop. In areas without industry, only large supermarkets are flourishing, and scrambling for a piece of the pie is preventing city wealth from increasing.

We have also noted several examples of local people recognising anew both the charm and the love they have for their towns. This has proven that it is possible for people to find the motivation to struggle against the difficulties of urban decay in regional areas and to resurrect the allure for their towns. Attachment to a community is a powerful source of motivation.

Reviving a city's character, in short, is the essence of sustainable community management. There is always a historical background to each city centre and rediscovering this enables the community management of a rich local identity. We should look for such characteristics in the hidden places that locals love and would go out of their way to protect. This could be an effective strategy to help raise awareness among tourists, especially foreigners. In so doing, we will at least have a much higher probability of increasing overall regional income.

In the UK, this happened naturally. Japan not only has many attractive areas like in the UK, but also has a rich and varied cuisine. We must not give up on transforming our towns into sites for tourism before we have even begun. Instead, we need to rediscover our charm. Even local excursions can make for fantastic tourism. If a town's identity can be fostered and protected, then any town can be revived with the right kind of sentiment and motivation from the people.

Notes

- 1) See Blackwell, M. and Rahman, T. (2010) 'Funding Town Centre Management in the U.K', *Journal of Town and City Management*, Vol.1, p94.
- 2) Similar research was conducted using nationwide data that also gave city level [118 data points by the author] comparative results; these results showed no disparity.
- 3) The name was changed to PPS6 (Planning Policy Statements No.6) in 2005, but the fundamental system is the same.
- 4) During the research, at an October 2010 hearing at the University of Greenwich, Professor Kennel indicated that in recent years, this term has had immense impact on community management.

5) Kirby, A., and Kent, T., 'The local icon: Reuse of buildings in place marketing', *Journal of Town and City Management*, 2010, p.81.

6) See Kirby, A., and Kent, T., 'The local icon: Reuse of buildings in place marketing', *Journal of Town and City Management*, 2010, Section p.86.

7) In late October 2010, the author along with Michiko Mukuno's research department from Oita University conducted a joint research on the restoration of British cities. The towns chiefly visited were to the southeast of London (south of the River Thames, near the sea) in order to look into a region where the arts had been used as a means of establishing individuality for town restoration.

8) 'Academies' were created as an effort to restore declining secondary education in some region by allocating specific government resources.

9) For more on this point, see discussion by Motani Kosuke, *Regional Vitality of Japan*, Nihon Keizai Shimbun, Inc., 2007.

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