

**Local Initiatives and Citizen Participation on Housing and Urban Development:
A Comparative Study on Community Building in Japan and the United States**

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[SYNOPSIS]

Generally speaking, people believe that local governments or local communities should take responsibility for housing and urban development. Centralized housing and urban development programs have not met the needs of local communities; as a result, they instead produced conflicts between the authorities and communities or among residents. This study explores how local communities manage housing and urban development in a decentralized society.

We must note that decentralizing authority over housing and urban development policy was neither easy nor simple. There were two major reasons for the difficulties. The first was a lack of local government capacity. Most local governments were faced with limited abilities to engage in policy management. They sometimes failed to manage policy resources adequately. The second was the distortion of local priorities. The policies that subsidize a minority are often denied by the majority when the decisions over those policies are made in local initiatives with general citizen participation. The programs for a minority sometimes do not benefit the majority even though they may improve the overall living environment.

Through comparative research on various experiences in the United States and Japan, this study demonstrates that these problems exist in both countries. We also will offer the hypothesis that the solution is a new policy framework that involves non-profit organizations in the community-building process.

There are three advantages to the activities of the non-profit sector. First, non-profit organizations can act on behalf of the citizens' good without political pressure from the majority. Second, some non-profits have expert among their members; consequently, they propose professional plans even though the targeted people may not have sufficient specialization themselves. Third, non-profits are not limited to working with a particular administrative region; therefore, they can work with any local governments. For example, a large organization in a major city can work with a small local government.