

Practical research on community development and establishment of welfare and living environment in aging and under-populated regions

—Case studies of restructuring for a compact living environment in Japan and Sweden—

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[SYNOPSIS]

In this research, the following points came to light based on our comparative study of restructuring of community development in the town of Alvesta (population: 18,684, population aging rate: 20%) in Sweden, which has advanced welfare systems, and Sagara village (population: 5,398, population aging rate: 30%) in Kumamoto prefecture, which is moving ahead with the development of welfare and the living environment, with its understanding on community welfare despite its aging, low population. Our focus is on ways to build a compact welfare living environment system where elderly and handicapped people can continue the life they are accustomed to in the community.

(1) Because of the lack of manpower, insufficient welfare service and cooperative structure, it is difficult to familiarize the users with the local living environment of Sagara. (2) As a regional characteristic of Alvesta, because of its strong community foundation based on its small size, a high level of consciousness regarding establishing a welfare living environment is already deeply rooted in the local residents. Through our study, we showed that a system that reflects the voice of residents is already formed and functioning. (3) The living infrastructure and services centered on walking and cycling, available to all residents, were in place. Houses and other facilities were equipped with slopes and elevators to ensure that they were easily accessible irrespective of the physical condition of the person. Based on this, for setting up welfare living systems in aging and under-populated regions of Japan, we proposed: (4) Setting up region-specific systems where specialists from various fields such as construction, medical, health, welfare, etc. will respond to day-to-day living problems on a need basis. (5) Activities to spread awareness and cultivate affinity toward the region among residents. (6) It is important to devise original and ingenious methods that will lead to the satisfaction, well-being, and comfort of the residents, by making the most of the culture, history, life style, and distinct climate and natural features of the region.