

Private corporations aimed at public administration of local (neighborhood) areas; their present conditions and capabilities in Japan.

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[SYNOPSIS]

Since 1990s, widening national budget deficit and local economic impoverishment have hardly hit financial conditions of municipal governments. Many municipalities have faced financial hardship and have been forced to lower their standards of public services. Small municipalities were forced to merge with larger ones. In many cases, mergers of municipalities would marginalize mountainous areas and islands.

Under such conditions, some private corporations are playing some parts of public affairs which were administered by municipal governments in pre-merger days. These private corporations include community organizations called Jichikai or Chonaikai, some kind of non-profit corporations, and agricultural corporations based on small communities.

Private corporations do not play parts of public works because local communities have been isolated from centers of public administrations as the result of mergers. Today, in Japan, private corporations which are neither public nor genuinely for-profit are required to use governmental and market resources so that they could take some roles in social problem solving.

In this research, we have chosen 9 corporations and organizations which are playing role of administering public affairs in their communities and studied them mainly through interviews and field works. The standards of choice are (i) whether they could provide opportunities for discussion and consensus-building among members of communities, and (ii) whether they could manage not-for profit (and social-oriented) businesses.

As the result of this research, we find that (1) school district-based community corporations in mountainous areas and islands provide residents with opportunities to discuss public affairs and build consensus, and (2) enterprises based on community corporations and organizations produce not for-profit and highly public works. These works contain (a) administration of common resources of communities, (b) project and community businesses, and (c) advocacy, empowerment, and support of the aged and challenged.