Research on how the systematic shrinking of urban areas in depopulating cities should be

Urban Planning Department　Urban Disaster Mitigation Division
KIUCHI Nozomu (Ph.D. in Engineering) , Head
Urban Planning Division
SAKATA Tomohiko(Ph.D. in Engineering), Senior Researcher
FUJIOKA Keitaro, Head

(Keyword)　Depopulation, Urban Structure, Urban Area Restructuring, Systematic Shrinking

1. Switching to Consolidated Urban Structure and Restructuring of Urban Areas

With the ongoing depopulation and tough financial affairs and environment restrictions, one of the recent challenges in urban policy is to realize a “consolidated urban structure”, compact city, as a form of “sustainable city” in provincial regions. 1)

Many cities have recently been implementing such measures such as revitalization of central commercial areas, the consolidation of city functions into a specific zone within the areas designated for urbanization, the promotion of public transportation and its network maintenance, the control of large-scale customer-attracting facility locations, and the prevention of urban expansion. However, with the exception of including measures to prevent the urban expansion in the suburbs, they focus on accepting the migration and the city functions to consolidated areas, and does not include any measures to proactively shrink the urban areas by relocating the population and the city functions from non-consolidated areas.

The Department of Urban Research thinks it is necessary to map out the measures to proactively promote the “systematic shrinking of urban areas” when restructuring the urban areas that are experiencing depopulation, investigating the special characteristics of the cities that need to shrink systematically, the prerequisites to practice such measures, and the effective procedures.

2. Shrinking of Urban Areas and Relocation of Residents

The followings are assumed as cases that require some measures to shrink urban areas.

(1) Along with the depopulation, the demand for land lots has decreased and vacant land and houses have naturally increased.

(2) In the period when the situation above is left as it is and until the land lots disappear, QOL (the quality of life), of the residents in the area has dropped and the management cost of administrative service has increased.

(3) The emigration of residents is intended as a policy in the stages from (1) to (2) in order to control the disadvantages in the stage (2).

Based on this, it is clear that a key point is how to proceed with the relocation of residents followed by the depopulation in the area, though there are not so many cases that can be referred to in Japan.

When it comes to agricultural villages, there are quite a lot of records on the depopulating-village relocation project that intends to move from inconvenient-to-live marginal villages within mountains to the foot of them . Oguni-machi in Yamagata has succeeded to systematically proceed with the village restructuring as a municipal, through core-village preparation, village relocation, and methods for living in mountains during summer and at the foot during winter. Yet, since the

social circumstances have been changed as the road development and maintenance level has improved, as in the pavement and the snow clearance, we haven't heard of any cases that have been worked on in recent years.

And in urban areas, the collective relocation for disaster prevention in progress in such areas affected by the tsunami disaster caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake, it is relatively easy to reach an agreement on resident relocation and the public burden in the areas that doubt their safety.

Yubari City in Hokkaido developed around coal mines and had a population of 120,000 in its prime but now its population has dropped to just over 12,000 following the closure of the mines. And its growth strategy with promotion on tourism etc. hit a setback and it is now facing a financial predicament, as it has been designated as an organization for fiscal reconstruction in 2010. The master plan of urban planning of March 2012 is almost the only case in Japan that specifies how to shrink urban areas systematically, basically targeting the "compact town development that reduces the urban management costs". It is intended to restructure and consolidate the municipal dwelling houses, old houses for coal miners, in each area at the moment and heads for restructuring through a gradual construction of sustainable regional communities by consolidating urban areas in the north to the south in a long run.

3. Summary

The cases we have investigated so far made us realize that the improvement of QOL of residents is a major factor. Currently, we are working out some scenarios for systematic shrinking intending to build a method based on them to indicate the advantages and disadvantages in quantity in the future.

Reference

Yoshiyuki Shibata "Heading for the Consolidated and Low-CO2 City Development"
pp.20 – 21, 2012 Report of National Institute for Land and Infrastructure Management
http://www.nilim.go.jp/lab/bcg/siryou/2012report/2012nilim_I.pdf