

Introduction

Most familiar day-to-day public services are the responsibility of local government. These include: family and resident registration; building and management of daycare centres, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, libraries, public halls and similar facilities; construction, maintenance and management of refuse and sewage disposal facilities, water supply and sewage works; development and improvement of roads and parks; and police and fire fighting services. Local government plays a significant role in the growth of society as a whole, as well as in the stability and improvement of people's daily lives.

In contrast to the sectional administration of the central government's ministries and agencies, local government provides comprehensive services in its administrative region—its local development and cultural policies are good examples of this.

Japanese society is still experiencing rapid changes. After World War II, policies were implemented to achieve economic strength on a par with that of the world's advanced nations. This achieved, the country has entered a mature phase, while at the same time encountering many unexpected problems and challenges. One important task is that of building a society in which the individual is given priority. The role of local authorities, particularly those closest to the people, will become increasingly important in improving the quality of people's lives and identifying the full range of popular needs.

1. Planning

Local authorities must attempt to predict the future of their respective communities, and the direction in which they ought to proceed. They must also accurately determine which measures will or will not lead to growth and to the promotion of the community's wellbeing. However, sources of revenue are limited and do not always match the requirements.

As a result, local authorities must prioritise services in a systematic and methodical fashion. They must also look to improve the efficiency of services in order to free more funds for providing such services. Planning is therefore crucial.

The basis of local government planning is what is known as the "comprehensive plan."

This is a three-part exercise: the first is to identify the future vision of local development as the authority sees it; the second is the planning of specific measures to turn that vision into reality; and the third is annual fiscal planning for the implementation of such measures based on a three- to five-year budget plan. In practice, however, the three separate phases are not so clearly distinguished, and one or more (and sometimes all) are often closely integrated. During a five- or ten-year period these plans are revised or updated to meet changing requirements, or when a new governor or mayor is elected.

Each prefecture prepares its own comprehensive plan, although only that of Okinawa Prefecture has a legal basis—all of the prefectures formulated their plans independently as part of the re-establishment of local government after World War II.

The Local Autonomy Law was revised in 1969, requiring the municipalities to formulate a “basic vision” with the approval of the elected council, as part of a resolve to provide comprehensive and planned administrative services. This was in line with the trend at that time of developing plans from the central to local levels, and legislated as a plan that took precedence over various plans under specific laws, such as the City Planning Law, within the framework of the local government system.

Comprehensive plans reflect the issues facing local government, and the objectives of the central government’s plans in any given period. Until the 1960s, policies emphasised economic growth and regional development. This then changed to an emphasis on social welfare, and more recently the focus has been on policy-making which encompasses consideration of the nature, history, culture and living environment of the region and allows people to experience real quality in their daily lives. The way in which such policies are implemented has also changed. Formerly it was government taking the lead, and now the process has shifted to the united efforts of local authorities and their residents, and even further to voluntary participation by residents. Local governments are in the process of introducing systems to evaluate administrative performance that stress efficiency and effectiveness.

2. Registration

Primarily a municipal responsibility, much of the work is done over an office counter. The public tends to measure the quality of services as a whole by the kind of counter-service it receives. At one time people strongly criticised the inefficient and unsatisfactory counter-services, which became synonymous with public services in general. Nowadays efforts have been increasing to raise standards—extended weekday hours, weekend and holiday service, and broader area services are among the measures being taken.

Local area networks and on-line systems have increasingly been introduced by local governments, mainly for registration and taxation, and there is a similar growth in the spread of information network systems, which will be accessible by residents. Some local governments have already introduced an electronic system that issues copies of resident cards and certificates of personal seals using electromagnetic cards and personal identification numbers. This will be explained further in the following sections. In order for all administrative matters to be properly automated, measures are being considered to maintain the security and confidentiality of personal information, and more and more local authorities are enacting bylaws to control access to such information.

The principal forms of registration, which are all conducted by municipalities, are described in the following sections.

2.1 Residents Registration

Resident registration was created to identify accurately the residents within a local authority’s jurisdiction. The register contains consolidated records of all residents within the community, forming a database for residence-related attestation, voter registration and other affairs concerning residents. It also makes notification procedures easy for people who have changed their addresses. The register is

extensively used for the purpose of National Health Insurance, taxation, compulsory education, and vaccination.

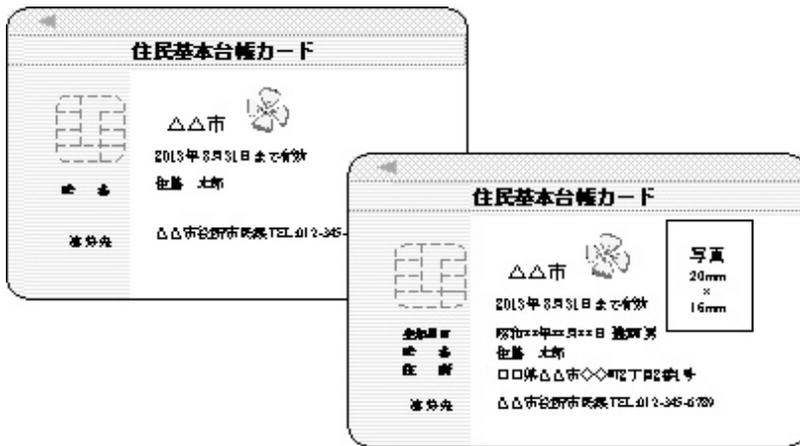
The residents register is composed of resident cards on which statutory information on individual residents is recorded. In principle, a resident card is prepared by a municipality based on the resident's notification.

In August 2002, a new system, the Basic Residential Register Network System (Juki Net), was created to integrate data kept by individual municipalities and make it accessible to administrative organizations throughout the country. Through this system, information needed for resident identification, i.e., resident's name, date of birth, sex, and address, as well as resident card codes are made available, and modifications/additions to the information can be done. This system is already in operation, offering residents various services, such as the ability to receive copies of resident cards anywhere in Japan, and the simplification of administrative procedures concerning changes in residence.



Automated certificate issuing corner

(Kizu Town)



Basic resident register card (sample)

2.2 Family Registration

The family register is an important public register in terms of both public and private law. It records the legal status of people including births, deaths, parents and children, and marital status. Family registration was previously an administrative function delegated to mayors as an agency of the nation, but in accordance with revisions to the Local Autonomy Law by the Omnibus Decentralisation Act, this function is now entrusted to the localities (refer to Chapter Four 7(3), p. 51). The procedures are stipulated in detail in statutes governing family registration.

Each register is created upon notification by a resident, with the original retained by the municipality and a copy forwarded for retention by the central or local Judicial Affairs Bureau, which has jurisdiction over these matters.

2.3 Registration of Foreign Nationals

The registration of foreign nationals is a service performed to ensure the fair treatment of foreign residents by clarifying their residential and legal status. Mayors record foreign applicants in the foreign nationals register after examination of their applications.

2.4 Certification of Personal Seals

In Japan, personal seals take the place of signatures on contracts and official documents. However, seals can be duplicated, and it is thus necessary to certify that the seals in use for important documents are genuine. These certificates are issued by each municipality according to its own procedures as prescribed by its bylaws, and are a service provided for the convenience of residents.



Local government customer services in action. (Atami City, Shizuoka Prefecture)

3. Social Services

The aim of social services is to provide a quality of life for the socially disadvantaged that is on a par with that of all other members of society. Services are provided for those with special physical and mental challenges, single-parent families, children and the elderly. Social services may be divided broadly into public support, such as public financial assistance, and welfare services, such as those for children, childbirth, the elderly and those with special physical and mental challenges.

In general, the three main target areas are facilities, home-care and income. Most recently, the concept of community-based welfare has gained increasing importance.

Nearly all of the following services, which are directly and closely related to residents, are the responsibility of local government. Welfare offices are established in prefectures and cities to promote these social welfare services. Prefectural welfare offices cover areas other than cities, which are known as “*gun*” (counties).

3.1 Public Financial Assistance

Japan’s Public Financial Assistance System was introduced to assure a minimum standard of living by providing adequate care to those in need in order to help them lead independent lives. Assistance is available for daily living, education, housing, medical care, nursing care, childbirth, employment, funerals and ceremonies. Assistance is provided as a single type of allowance or a combination of several types of allowance depending on the circumstance of the persons in need.

Cities are responsible for public financial assistance in their respective areas, while prefectures provide for towns and villages.

3.2 Child Welfare

Child welfare services include the provision of facilities for those with special mental and physical disabilities, rehabilitation centres for children with sight, hearing and speech difficulties, as well as facilities for maternity and day-care support, and for children who have no guardians. Prefectures and designated cities also run counselling offices for children.

There is a national system that provides child allowances for low income families. Allowances were previously provided to families with pre-school children up to the age of six. However, starting in April 2004, coverage has been extended to include all children up to the third grade in elementary school (up to nine years of age).



A nursery school prepares for the Tanabata (Seventh Night) Festival. (Mie Prefecture)

3.3 Services for the Elderly

Japan is a rapidly ageing society, and it is forecast that early in the 21st century the percentage of elderly to the total population in Japan will reach a level unparalleled in the history of any other country.

In preparation, in 1994, the central government enacted the “New Gold Plan.”

In December 1999, the government enacted the “Gold Plan 21” in line with its 5-year plan to promote the health and welfare of the elderly. This is a new 10-year plan to promote the health and welfare of the elderly, and a complete revision of the previous plan enacted in 1989.

For its part, local government is actively pursuing policies for the benefit of the elderly living at home, in addition to developing and improving facilities and services for the elderly, and helping them to lead meaningful lives.

Additionally, the Nursing Insurance System was inaugurated in April 2000. This is a comprehensive system to provide people requiring nursing care with the individual level of health and welfare services they need to carry out independent lives.

3.4 Services for Those with Special Physical and Mental Challenges

As part of a policy of “full participation,” a comprehensive range of home-care and residential services are available to help the physically challenged lead independent lives and participate fully in society.

For those with special physical and mental disabilities, for both adults and children under age 18, diverse programs are underway to build in-patient/out-patient facilities and offer home help and other services, with a view to enhancing both residential and in-home care services.



The Nagano Paralympics, 1998. (Nagano Prefecture)

4. Social Insurance

There are five kinds of social insurance: medical, pension, unemployment, employee accident and nursing insurance. Through the Nationwide Comprehensive Health Insurance program, almost all Japanese benefit from medical and pension insurance.

4.1 Medical Insurance

There are three types of medical insurance: health insurance for private sector employees; employee insurance provided by mutual aid associations (mainly for public sector employees) and National Health Insurance (generally for the selfemployed and for those engaged in agriculture). As of April 2002, the number of insured persons and their families was 126,460,000.

National Health Insurance is operated by municipalities (National Health Insurance Associations in exceptional cases), and accounts for one-third of the membership of all the medical insurance schemes in Japan.

4.2 Pension Insurance

The public pension scheme is intended to provide a minimum level of income for retired persons. Aside from the basic national pension scheme, three others are available as additional benefits: welfare pension for private sector employees, mutual aid pension for public sector employees, and the national pension scheme. While the central government manages the national pension scheme, municipalities are responsible for its registration procedures.

4.3 Unemployment Insurance

Unemployment insurance is managed by the central government, providing those able and willing to work with income to stabilise their lives while they are unemployed.

4.4 Employee Accident Insurance

Employee accident insurance also is managed by the central government. It provides annuity or lump sum benefits for employees who have suffered an occupational sickness, injury or death, to guarantee their living expenses or those of the surviving family.

4.5 Nursing Insurance

The nursing insurance system, supported by the entire society, covers all citizens enrolled in medical insurance plans provided by central or local government, as well as plans for persons over the age of 40. Persons must be 40 years of age to qualify, and those deemed eligible by local authorities to receive nursing care services will receive a level of services appropriate to their condition, ranging from in-home care to stays at nursing facilities, as stipulated in pertinent regulations.

5. Health and Hygiene Services

Health and hygiene services are designed to promote the preservation and improvement of the health of residents. Although “health and hygiene” is not strictly defined, it is generally acknowledged to include public health, environmental health, medical care and pharmaceutical matters. The central government’s responsibilities include quarantines, the licensing of medical practitioners, the specification and revision of the handling standards for pharmaceuticals, as well as the licensing of pharmaceutical manufacturers. Local government on the other hand, especially at the prefectural level, provides everyday services.

Most services are provided at public health centres—the responsibility of prefectures and designated cities (cities with statutory obligations to set up public health centres)—which carry out medical examinations, food hygiene activities, hygiene awareness programs, as well as the inspection and guidance of hotels and lodging establishments, public baths, barbershops, beauty salons and other businesses related to public health. Many prefectures and municipalities also run their own hospitals and clinics.

Health and hygiene services include services that require integrated execution or guidance covering an area greater than that of the individual municipalities, and sometimes involve authoritative administration such as the implementation of controls and the granting of approvals. Prefectures are therefore responsible for most health and hygiene services, while municipal responsibilities are limited to activities directly serving their residents such as vaccinations, the issuing of burial or cremation permits, the management of mother-and-child health centres and clinics, and district nurse services.

6. Environmental Services

Japan also had to face up to the darker side of economic prosperity—pollution, destruction of the natural environment, and so on—following its rapid growth in the late 50s and early 60s. This led to the introduction of the Environmental Pollution Prevention Law of 1967. Under its provisions, the central and local government and related organisations have been working together to devise measures to control environmental pollution.

The Law cites seven forms of typical environmental pollution: air, water, soil and noise pollution, plus vibration, subsidence and foul odours. Environmental standards have been established for the first four, and private industry, central and local government, as well as individual citizens, are all required to cooperate in controlling pollution.

For environmental conservation purposes, local authorities are engaged in regulation and guidance based on statutes, by monitoring, measuring and controlling pollution, playing an active role in fighting pollution, and through the drive to protect the natural environment.

A wide range of environmental measures have been taken recently to prevent pollution on a regional basis and preserve healthy local environments. These include policies on wastewater, everyday noise, the greening of towns and cities, the development of a more comfortable living environment, and recycling cans. Amid these activities, the central government enacted the Basic Environmental Law in 1993 to cover broad environmental issues, rather than focus on pollution controls alone. Furthermore, the Basic Law for Establishing the Recycling-based Society was passed in the year 2000. The Law's aim is to aid in the formulation of a society geared toward sustainable development, in order to preserve the environment.

Local governments are working hard to formulate local environment management plans in step with these central government trends, as well as to make other efforts to systematically promote local environmental preservation.

Notably, through such actions as conducting environmental impact assessments and taking measures to prevent global warming, local governments are seeking to expand their efforts to preserve the environment to a global scale.



Volunteers help nurture a *buna* (beech) forest on the skirts of Mt. Hakusan. (Ishikawa Prefecture)

7. Waste Collection and Recycling

Waste collection and recycling are basic services supporting the healthy and comfortable life of residents and are promoted in a comprehensive way based on the Fundamental Law for Establishing a Sound Material-Cycle Society.

Improved standards of living and an increase in industrial activity have led to a greater volume and wider variety of waste. There is also a growing problem in developing waste disposal facilities due to reasons such as the difficulty of finding suitable sites and the opposition of nearby residents. Illegal dumping of industrial waste is also a problem.

Accordingly, the central government has recently revised the legislation governing waste disposal and introduced laws on the development of industrial waste facilities to guarantee the proper disposal of industrial waste by improving systems and standards at industrial waste facilities.

Municipalities are responsible for the collection and disposal of general waste, including domestic refuse, bulky refuse, sewage and septic tank sludge. Disposal must be in accordance with each municipality's own plan. However, they can permit or contract a disposal company for this purpose.

With its limited land area, Japan faces serious difficulties in relation to environmentally harmful waste and its disposal. Statutes require the producers of such waste to be responsible for its disposal, although local authorities are allowed to make certain exceptions in order to supplement the disposal of industrial waste. In any case it has become very difficult for waste producers to provide adequate disposal facilities and local authorities cannot avoid taking on ultimate responsibility in this regard.

To reduce the volume of general waste, local authorities and their respective communities are working together to reduce waste and promote recycling.

General waste disposal and the cleaning of septic tanks requires a license from the mayor. Industrial waste disposal requires a license from the governor.



Waste collection. (Tokyo Metropolis)

8. Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Services

One of local government's main duties is the promotion of efficient agriculture, forestry and fisheries management to enable a stable supply of food. Most of the effort is directed to ensuring that the right crops are planted in the right place—bearing in mind the topographical characteristics, human resources and market demand in each area.

8.1 Agriculture

Although the chief focus of agricultural administration in the past was on improving productivity and stabilizing the prices of agricultural products, the abolition of the Agricultural Basic Law in 1999 led to the enforcement of the Basic Law on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas. Today, emphasis is on securing a stable supply of foodstuff; exercising multilateral functions, including environmental conservation; the sustainable development of agriculture; and promoting rural areas.

To implement this agricultural policy, local governments are carrying out a variety of measures. They include developing a production infrastructure, implementing structural reform, putting consumption and distribution measures into effect, developing and disseminating technology, and directly supporting mountainous regions.

In addition, organisations such as the farmers' cooperative, a nation-wide entity, play an important role in providing guidance on farming and farm finance.

According to 2002 statistics, Japan's total farm area is 4,760,000 hectares (more than 12 million acres), or 13% of the total land area. There are 3,750,000 people engaged in agriculture, although the total number declined sharply in the rapid economic growth period of the 50s and 60s as people migrated to live and work in the cities. Although the steady growth from the late 70s has slowed the rate of decline, the average age of agricultural workers is continuing to rise, making it crucial to recruit and train young agricultural workers. Modernisation of management methods has become another vital task as agriculture, in line with other industries, recognises the need for large-scale operations and higher productivity.

Accordingly, the emphasis has recently shifted from the conventional "hardware" oriented activities such as improvements in the agricultural infrastructure, to those more "software" oriented, for example

measures to maintain an adequate number of workers, increasing the scale of agricultural management, adding more value to agricultural products, improving workers' welfare, and vitalising farming districts.



A farmer harvesting apples. (Aomori Prefecture)

8.2 Forestry

In 2002, the total area of forested and non-agricultural land amounted to 25,120,000 hectares (about 62 million acres) or 67% of the total land area; of this, state-owned forests accounted for 7,840,000 hectares, and the rest 17,280,000 hectares. Local authorities owned 2,800,000 hectares.

Public sector forestry is split between land conservation, and the protection and cultivation of forest resources, including promotion of the regional forestry industry. The central government has responsibility for nation-wide mountain and water management planning, forest planning and state-owned forest management. Prefectures are responsible for the maintenance of mountainous areas, forest protection and forest road networks, based on the central government's plan. Municipalities are undertaking the general promotion of forest protection and cultivation.

There are also many local organisations independently engaged in forest management to develop their own assets and to protect and cultivate forest resources.

In recent years forestry has seen hard times owing to a prolonged lull in the demand for timber, reductions in the local workforce, and the growing pressure from increasingly competitive imported timber as the value of the yen has continued to rise. On the other hand, there is a growing trend toward taking a fresh look at forest resources from the perspective of promoting healthy, cultural and educational use of forests, or that of conserving and nurturing of the natural environment. There is a growing demand for more policies that take such perspectives into account.



A log-cutting operation. (Tokushima Prefecture)

8.3 Fisheries

Annual fisheries production exceeded 10 million tons in every year from 1972 to 1990, but then fell below that mark in 1991, to 9.98 million tons. The slide in production has continued since that time, to 5.88 million tons in 2002. Imports of marine products are now growing steadily in terms of both volume and cost—for example, lobster, prawn and shrimp, which make up the largest portion of imported seafood in terms of cost, totalled 240,000 tons in 2003, with a value of some 248.1 billion yen.

Each year sees a decline in the number of persons employed in the fishing industry—in 2002 those employed totalled 240,000. The majority are self-employed fishermen, typically operating on a very small scale, and for the most part engaged in coastal fishing.

In such circumstances local authorities work to help stabilise small businesses and revitalise the fishing communities, rather than support fisheries run by large companies. Local government's main involvement is in improving and developing harbour facilities and fishing technologies, as well as expanding fishing reefs to encourage the growth of coastal fishing. At the same time specific measures are being taken to help the small-scale coastal fishermen.



Preparations for releasing stocks of *kurumaebi* (prawn) fry. (Okayama Prefecture)

9. Services for Commerce and Industry

Support for commerce and industry is primarily for small and medium-sized enterprises. Japan's commercial and industrial structure is characterised by its duality—capital-intensive big business with high productivity and labour-intensive smaller companies with low productivity. While small businesses played an important part in the country's economic growth and in people's daily lives, the environment in which they operate has undergone dramatic changes as a result of: the dominance of large companies in terms of capital, development capability and marketing skills; the ever greater importance of globalisation and the changes that this has induced in Japan's economic structure; and the increasing difficulty of securing loans in the midst of Japan's current economic stagnation.

It is therefore necessary to help smaller businesses achieve sound growth through upgrading and technical training. However, they find it hard to raise capital from private financial institutions, since they cannot command the same level of credit-worthiness as can big companies. For this reason, a financial system was established to enable central and local government, as well as government financial institutions, to provide low-interest loans to small businesses. In addition, local authorities promote local industries that utilise local resources as a means of creating employment.



The Ishikawa Science Park. (Ishikawa Prefecture)

Local authorities are also actively improving commercial and industrial management methods, building industrial complexes to attract inward investment, undertaking commercial and industrial research, and formulating policies to improve consumption and distribution, as well as promoting tourism. Municipalities have their local chambers of commerce and industry, as well as commerce and industry associations, for mutual aid and information sharing between members.

10. Urban Development

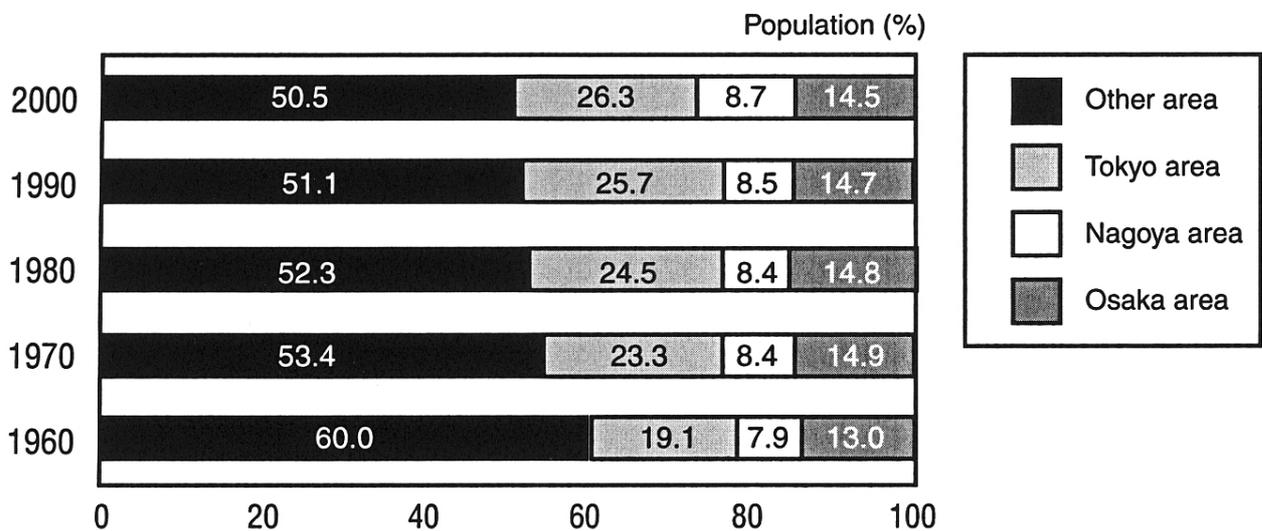
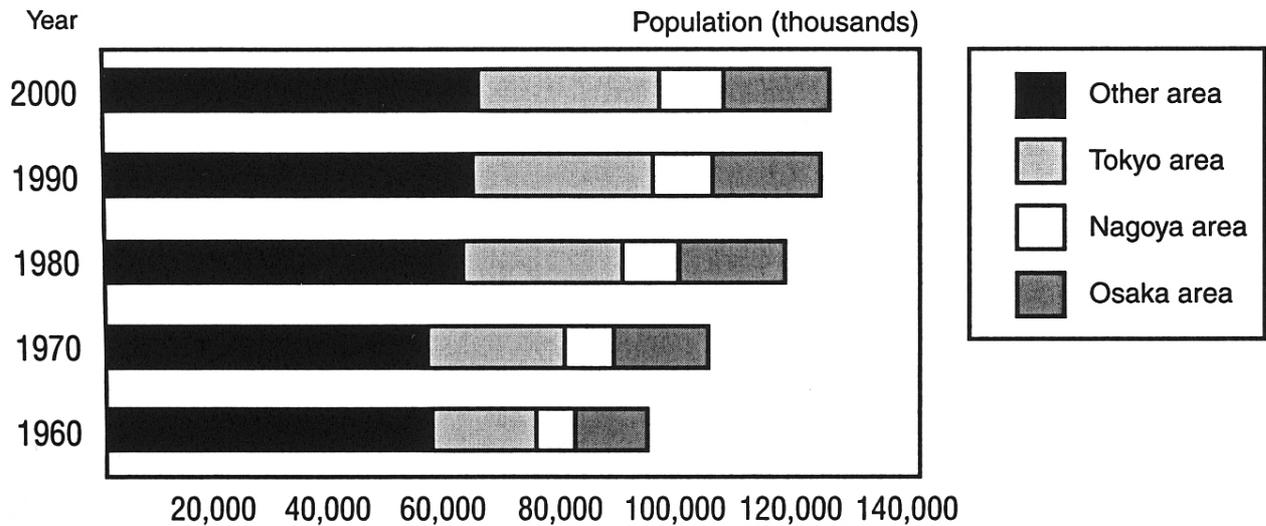
Urbanisation has continued apace for the past 40 years, and although it may have slowed recently, it is generally accepted that it will continue.

Of the more than 127 million people who inhabit Japan's 377,000 square kilometres, half of them live in just 14% of the total land area—the three large urban areas called the Tokyo, Kansai and Nagoya areas. The Tokyo area (Tokyo Metropolis and Kanagawa, Saitama and Chiba Prefectures) had a population of 33 million people; the Kansai area (Osaka, Kyoto, Hyogo and Nara Prefectures) had 18 million; while the Nagoya area (Aichi, Gifu and Mie Prefectures) had 11 million.

Of these, Tokyo and the Tokyo area have the highest concentration of population, and as a result the highest concentration of functions for the economy, information, education, culture and entertainment. This concentration has even spawned a new term in Japan—"unipolar concentration in Tokyo."

Unfortunately, the standard of the urban infrastructure in Japan, in terms of roads, parks and sewerage, is still lower than that of Western European and American countries, since the history of urban development has been a short one and urbanisation came so rapidly. This partly explains the feeling among the Japanese that their life-style is lagging behind the country's acknowledged economic power.

Population in the Three Main Urban Areas



Population in the Three Main Urban Areas

Systematic urban development will go a long way toward achieving a sound, vital and comfortable urban environment and a higher quality of life for Japan's citizens. Development of local cities will also correct the concentration in Tokyo and promote a more balanced national land development, by way of creating a multipolar, dispersed nation.

The urban development programs of local authorities follow an area approach, such as land re-zoning and redevelopment, with an emphasis on city planning based on the City Planning Law.

Prefectural governors and mayors of designated cities are responsible for designating city areas in need of improvement, development and maintenance, and for specifying which urban areas should be systematically developed to promote urbanization, as well as which should be controlled. All development, according to its scale and purpose, is subject to the approval of prefectural governors or the mayors of designated, core, or special cities.

Mayors are responsible for formulating city plans, which are subject to public hearings and inspection, and to screening by city planning committees held at the prefectural level, before they are finally approved.



The “Yokohama Minato Mirai 21” waterfront redevelopment project.

(Kanagawa Prefecture)

11. Infrastructure and Public Housing

Local authorities prepare town and city plans and their associated basic development programs to promote the improvement of various urban facilities, as well as area development and construction.

11.1 Roads

Road expenditures account for the highest proportion of local authorities’ construction budgets.

Under the law, roads in Japan are classified into four types: national expressways, national highways, prefectural roads and municipal roads. The Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport is responsible for managing and maintaining national expressways, as well as national highways, although some national highways are the responsibility of the governors or mayors of designated cities. Prefectures or designated cities are responsible for prefectural roads, and municipalities for municipal roads. National expressways and highways represent only a small proportion of the nation’s roads, more than 95% of which are the responsibility of local government.

The percentage of paved roads and roads wide enough to comfortably accommodate two-way traffic is still lower for municipal roads than for those with a prefectural or national classification.

11.2 Rivers

River management encompasses the maintenance and improvement of rivers, as well as flood control.

Rivers are categorised in four types: 1st and 2nd class rivers, to which the River Law applies, other rivers to which this Law applies (with appropriate amendments), and ordinary rivers to which the Law does not apply. Rivers are classified according to their importance in terms of land preservation and national economy, and in terms of various public interests.



Kurobe Dam. (Toyama Prefecture)

First class rivers are managed either by the Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport or by governors; 2nd class by governors; and those others to which the River Law applies, by mayors of municipalities.

Dam construction for flood prevention is a vital undertaking of local authorities, as well as water supply for human consumption and agriculture.

Recently, however, rivers are being seen more as public amenities, and efforts are now being directed towards improving water quality and riverside roads. At the same time, riverside parks are being developed as people recognise the importance of preserving riparian environments.

11.3 Sewerage

One of the most promoted projects among local authorities in Japan is the improvement of the nation's sewerage systems, which had lagged behind those in Europe and America.

Prefectures are involved in the construction, maintenance and management of river basin sewerage, while municipalities look after public and urban sewerage channels. Both authorities have passed bylaws to regulate sewage management and are empowered to require the installation of pre-treatment facilities by parties discharging water that fails to meet the legal standards. They can also carry out inspections at wastewater treatment or pre-treatment facilities and can charge fees for sewerage services.

As sewerage-related projects, rural towns and villages and farming areas are working to improve drainage in farming communities, installing communal septic tanks, and introducing flush toilet systems to improve the quality of life as well as preserve the natural environment.

11.4 Housing

Japan's housing supply almost meets demand, and quality has improved, but standards are still lower than in most of Europe and the United States. Thus, improving housing standards is still a major issue. The emphasis of housing policy is now on building more comfortable, better quality homes, rather than simply building in large numbers.

Public housing is provided according to local authorities' five-year housing development plans, and homes for sale and for rent are built by the Urban Development Corporation, as well as by the local governments' Public Corporation for Housing Supply. Additionally, amid changes in the social conditions that effect housing, such as declining birth rates leading to an ageing society and a diversification of lifestyles, efforts are being made in recent years to formulate a comprehensive housing policy that includes measures that address the economy, urban issues and the ageing society.

12. Police Services

Until World War II, police services in Japan were a state responsibility; after the War, almost all services were assigned to the prefectures. Today the central government remains responsible for the National Public Safety Commission and for the National Police Agency, which together plan and coordinate police services, and for cultural education, communications and criminal identification. All other activities familiar to residents are carried out by the prefectures. Each prefecture has its own Public Safety Committee, and the Prefectural Police Headquarters is responsible for police stations, as well as police-boxes, which are more familiar to local residents.



Responding to residents at a local police post. (Shizuoka Prefecture)

Routine police activities include: crime prevention activities such as patrol, control and guidance on door locking; crime suppression and investigation; arresting suspects; protection activities for people in a weak position, such as children, the elderly and runaways; traffic control; and maintenance of public safety and order. Also, in each police-box and at other locations, officers give directions and deal with lost property. Further, in order to protect the safety of the living environment of residents, police administration includes cleanup measures to preserve the morality of public spaces.

Traffic-related activities have taken up a large portion of police services in recent years. With increasingly brisk economic activities and improvement of the national income, road traffic has become an inseparable element of people's daily lives, but at the same time it is accompanied by problems of traffic accidents, congestion and pollution.

Nearly 282,000 people were accepted into the police force in April 2004 to run prefectural police departments as well as 6,600 police-boxes throughout Japan.

13. Fire Services

Fire services are responsible for firefighting, as well as dealing with incidents arising from earthquakes, hurricanes and floods. Before the World War II, firefighting was a police function; after the War, municipalities took over most of the role (although the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is the main provider of these services in Tokyo).

Major activities include fire prevention, firefighting, flood control and rescue during monsoons and typhoons, and providing an ambulance service for traffic accidents and emergencies.

Municipalities are improving their preparedness to deal with major disasters, such as fires caused by earthquakes, forest fires, hurricane and flood damage, oil-refinery explosions, fires at sea resulting from tanker collisions and oil spills, and air disasters. For this purpose they are concluding mutual support agreements with other municipalities, or joining forces and creating joint firefighting organisations. Prefectures are also strengthening their firefighting/disaster prevention set-ups, and building working relationships with the police, the Self-Defense Forces and other relevant bodies for cooperation and support.

Generally, fire services are provided by both the regular, full-time fire brigades and voluntary brigades, although lately it is the regular brigades who predominate.



Firefighters at work. (Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture)

14. Education

The Fundamental Law of Education and the School Education Law were enacted as part of Japan's post-war education reforms, which established the present school system comprising six years at primary school, three years at lower secondary (junior high) and upper secondary (senior high) schools respectively, and four years at universities.

Nine years of compulsory education (primary school and junior high school) became the norm, and equal educational opportunities for all are strongly promoted, as is clearly illustrated by the marked increase in the percentage of students continuing on to senior high school—42.5% in 1950, to 82.1% in 1970, 94.2% in 1980, and 97.3% in 2003. The system provides every child throughout Japan with the same level of compulsory education based on standards laid down by central government. In 2002, new standards introducing a 5-day school week system were adopted. The new system is designed to ensure that children acquire basic, fundamental knowledge and foster their desire to learn and think on their own. Primary and lower secondary school education is a municipal responsibility.

Based on the Law on Organisations and Functions of Local Educational Administration, prefectural and municipal boards of education are responsible for providing local education. Boards of education are autonomous, independent from governors or mayors, and are responsible for all related matters—from establishment and management of schools to staff appointments—except budget-making, which rests with governors and mayors, who also appoint board of education members, with council approval. Governors have legal authority over private elementary schools, lower and upper secondary schools, and other miscellaneous schools.

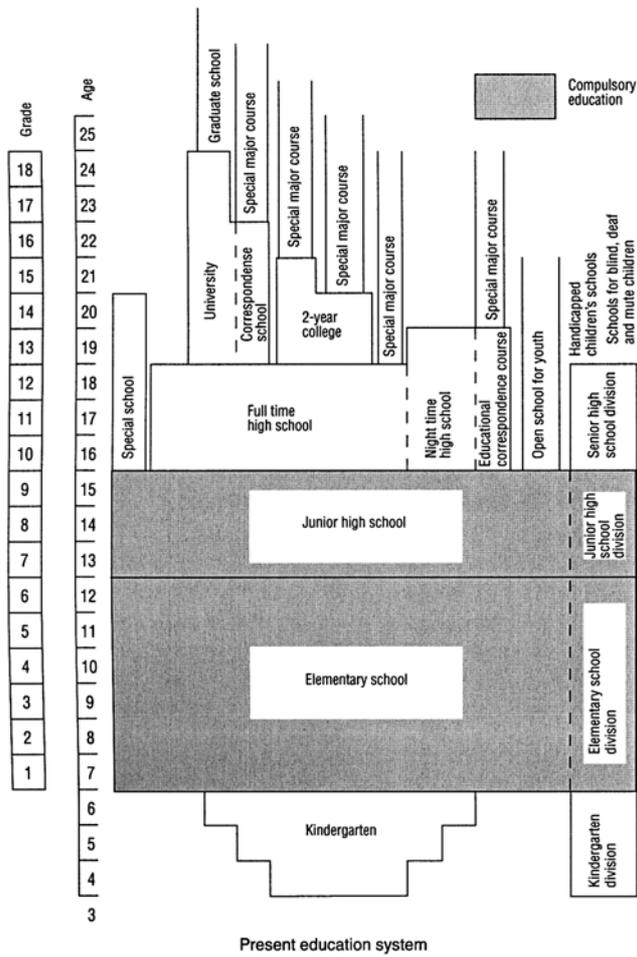
Of all elementary and lower secondary schools 97% are public, and 3% are private; whilst 76% of upper secondary schools are public and 24% private. Most public upper secondary schools are founded by prefectures, which may also establish special schools, including those for students with sight and hearing difficulties.

In educational administration, social education is considered as important as academic, and local authorities provide a wide range of services, including various courses, forums and classes, as well as establishing and managing libraries, public halls and museums, arranging youth education and providing equipment for sports and recreation. Social education will gain importance as the population ages and people find themselves with more leisure time.

The concept of lifelong education is firmly rooted, and providing the relevant opportunities will be a vital task for local government.



A foreign language class (Tokushima Prefecture)



15. Local Public Enterprises and Third Sector Companies

15.1 Local Public Enterprises

Local authorities are involved in a variety of corporate enterprises, including water supply and sewerage, public transport, health care, and others—all a necessary part of daily life and all contributing to growth at the local level.

The generic term applied to such bodies is “local public enterprises.” In addition to those mentioned, electricity and gas supply, wholesale markets, slaughterhouses, and port development are typical enterprise activities. Recently, widespread diversification has added tourist facilities such as ski slopes, residential land development and wine-making—all taking advantage of special local characteristics.

Although such enterprises are generally part of local government, the emphasis on efficient and streamlined management sets them apart from usual day-to-day local authority operations. Local public enterprises are run by corporate managers who are the equivalent of presidents in private companies, and they have to set up special accounts. A local government’s operation costs are usually funded by tax revenues, but public enterprises charge customers for their services to cover ongoing costs.

The Japan Finance Corporation for Municipal Enterprises was established to provide secure loans to local public enterprises.



The Bureau of Waterworks. (Aichi Prefecture)

15.2 Third Sector Companies

As public requirements grow more diverse and sophisticated, local authorities are experimenting with a number of approaches: one is known as the “third sector” system. Third sector companies differ from the public and the private sector, although they are designed to benefit from the functions and advantages of both.

In the late 1960s many third sector bodies were set up as the principal organisations in large-scale projects, utilising private sector financing capability and project know-how. Since then the areas in which such organisations operate have gradually expanded: third sector companies have been set up recently to handle work commissioned by local authorities, such as the management of public facilities, and they have also been introduced in other areas such as resort development. Since the 1980s, systems were established to actively engage the vitality of the private sector which, together with the energetic approach of local authorities to local development, led to an increase in the number of such companies at the end of the decade.

Although the third sector system was created to benefit from the best aspects of both the public and private sectors, some companies have been beset with financial difficulties due to poor management or problems originating from their incorporation. This situation requires an in-depth study of the issue on the part of local authorities.



The 44.1-kilometer Watarase Canyon Railroad, built with third sector (combined government-private sector) funding. (Gunma Prefecture)