Developing Neighbourhood Management Capacity in Kobe, Japan: Interactions between civil society and formal planning institutions

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Patsy Healey[1]

Introduction

This case study focuses on how residents' initiatives in the city of Kobe which evolved to promote better living conditions in neighbourhoods came to interact with, and helped to shape, developing municipal urban planning practices in a large urban area in Japan. This experience has been influential in the evolution of urban planning legislation and practice in the country in the late twentieth century and has also had some influence elsewhere in East Asia.

The case study is organised as follows. The first section provides a background to Kobe's urban development and the interaction between this and the development of urban policy and urban planning organisation and legislation in Japan and in Kobe itself since the 1950s. The second section provides an account of the development of local civil society activism in Kobe, and of an initiative in the Mano neighbourhood, which became an example of what are now known as *machizukuri* organisations. This account tells the story of early activism and protest, a developing relationship with the municipality as Kobe City Council itself acquired more formal planning powers from central government, the 'testing' of the institutional capacity created in this way when a major earthquake struck in 1995, and the situation in the city in the early 2000s. The conclusion draws out wider lessons for ways in which the capacity for effective institutions for managing urban development and change might be promoted.

Background

Kobe lies at the western end of Japan's enormous central coastal urban belt, in the Kansai region which also includes Osaka and Kyoto.[2] Kobe itself is a city of some 1.5 million people, situated around 30 minutes from Osaka to the east, and three hours by bullet train (*Shinkansen*) to Tokyo. Port and industrial areas fringe the coast, with mixed commercial and residential areas in and around the old urban core, and newer residential areas spreading up hillsides towards more mountainous areas to the north, with some suburban centres beyond the mountains (see Figures 1 and 2). Since the 1960s, the City Council has been vigorously developing its coastline, with major land reclamations to create islands for new harbour, industrial, commercial and residential uses. It has also encouraged the development of new settlements in its periphery. As a result, inner areas of the city tended to get neglected. These inner areas have also been very much affected by major transport works, such as the Hanshin Expressway and the bullet train. By 2007, Kobe was one of 17 cities in Japan designated to have a higher degree of municipal autonomy in policy areas, including social welfare, public health and urban planning. It is also located in an earthquake zone and suffered a very serious earthquake in 1995.

The city population grew very rapidly throughout the twentieth century, from around 200,000 in 1900 to nearly 1.5 million today. Population levels recovered quickly from the disaster of the Second World War, and from the impact of the 1995 earthquake. Mostly this growth came

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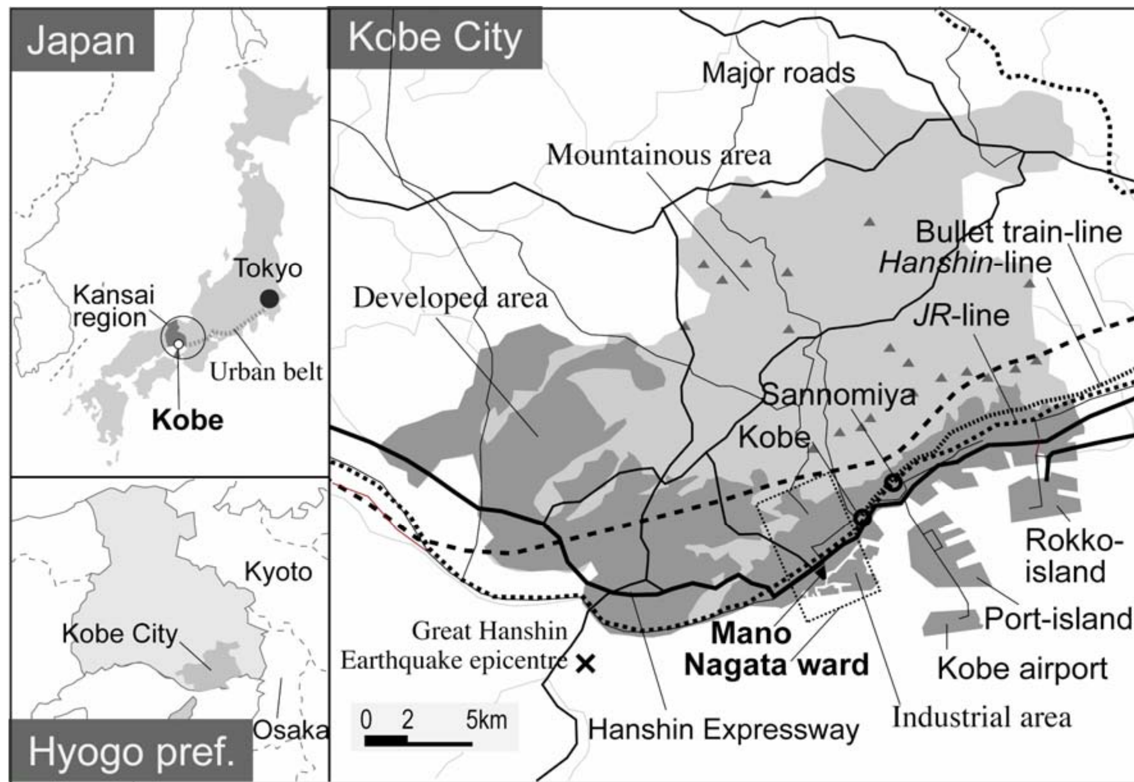
1. The author acknowledges the help and guidance of the following in developing this case study: Andre Sorensen, Carolyn Funck, Shun-ichi Watanabe, Kayo Murakami and Maki Ryu.

2. Kobe was one of the first Japanese cities to open up to Western trade in the later nineteenth century and is more cosmopolitan than many other cities in Japan.

Figure 1. Kobe, Japan



Source: drawn by Kayo Murakami.

from migration within Japan, but unusually for Japan, there is a considerable proportion of non-Japanese residents (around 3 per cent). Its economy was dominated by industrial and port-related activity, which still remains important. But, as elsewhere, there has been a major shift to the tertiary sector in recent years, creating demands for new kinds of buildings as well as problems of physical obsolescence of former industrial and harbour installations. The City Council has been very active in promoting city centre and waterfront re-development, and embarked on two major land reclamation projects, creating two new large islands, Port-island and Rokko-island. In terms of housing stock, just before the 1995 earthquake, around half was privately owned, around 14 per cent was rented from public or semi-public bodies, and 30 per cent was privately rented. But these patterns varied in different parts of the city. Private renting was particularly high in the inner-city neighbourhoods, which tended to be poorer, while private ownership was higher in the mountain and peripheral areas to the north (Hirayama, 2000). Japanese people place great value on the ownership of a piece of land, which, in a country plagued by earthquakes and fires, seems more stable than buildings. Land and property ownership arrangements can often be very complex, creating difficult challenges in situations where some kind of urban development is proposed.[3]

Japan has a tradition of strong national government. This was re-enforced in the twentieth century, which saw a massive expansion of the national government and the bureaucracies which served it. The state operated hierarchically, with lower levels of government (prefectures and municipalities) organised to ensure compliance with national directives and aims (Sorensen, 2002:157). This top-down system was disrupted after the disaster of Japan's

3. Freehold ownership is possible, but there are also complex leasing, sub-leasing and rental arrangements.

Figure 2. The City of Kobe today

Source: www.city.kobe.jp.

military project in the Second World War and the subsequent US occupation, but came to be re-constituted from the 1950s. It proved an effective vehicle for the national project of rapid economic development, pursued especially by the promotion of industrial development and major infrastructure schemes across the country. It was this momentum which produced the major transport investments in Kobe, and encouraged the creation of the reclaimed islands in the harbour area. Later commentators have come to refer to Japan as the 'development' or 'construction' state, as the major construction interests which grew from this policy thrust came to have very strong connections to the major elites in the dominant Liberal Democratic Party (Sorensen, 2005).

As this project gained momentum, the country, already highly urbanised, saw massive urbanisation and the growth of the enormous megalopolis that stretches from Tokyo in the east to Osaka and Kobe in the west. Some of this was in the form of planned settlements, as in the north of Kobe (Ishida, 2007; Sorensen, 2002), but much was in the form of sprawling suburbs enabled by very weak land use regulation. Kobe municipality also vigorously pursued its own physical development agenda, through land reclamation, waterfront reconfiguration and support for new settlements in the periphery. The 'construction state' was less interested in liveability or environmental consequences, urging citizens to put up with poor living conditions for the sake of the national project. Since the 1990s, however, and partly in response to this neglect, there have been strengthening moves to decentralise government and strengthen the role of municipalities (Sorensen, 2008). Much more attention is now given also to the role of civil society initiatives in urban development management, inspired especially by Kobe's own experience after the 1995 earthquake (Shaw and Goda, 2004; Pekkanen, 2000). Kobe municipality has been energetic in promoting and taking advantage of these opportunities.

Box 1. Key legislation in the development of the Japanese planning system

Before 1919:	**Customary regulations** governing fire and earthquake protection.
1919:	**City Planning Law**: zoning plans for urban and urbanising areas introduced; approved by bureaucrats of the Ministry of Home Affairs (later, Ministry of Construction); land readjustment mechanism introduced for urban areas.
1968:	**New City Planning Law** (still prevailing): Prefectures and municipalities could approve their own zoning plans, and undertake Land readjustment projects. *Senbiki* (urban growth boundary) system introduced. 8 land use zones introduced.
1980:	**Major revision to the City Planning Law**: Municipalities allowed to prepare District Plans.
1992:	**City Planning Law Amendment**: Municipal Master Plan system introduced, requiring that a fundamental city planning concept is formulated and that measures are taken to ensure that local public opinion is reflected in the plan. 12 zoning categories introduced.
1999:	**City Planning Law Amendment**: Municipalities given the power to introduce more specific zoning norms.

Source: Sorensen, 2002; Watanabe, 2007a, 2007b.

Japanese government centralism and progressive moves to decentralise are reflected in the development of the Japanese approach to urban land development regulation (see Box 1). Japan has a long history of urban living. Its tradition of wooden construction combined with the experience of being situated in a major earthquake zone ensured that customary regulations focused on fire and earthquake protection, but the major response to the frequency of both was to build relatively flimsy structures. In the early twentieth century, the country introduced western concepts of land use and development management,[4] and in particular the practice of zoning.

The first planning law in Japan was agreed in 1919. This required a zoning ordinance to be approved before development[5] could take place in areas defined as urban or urbanising.[6] These ordinances allocated land to three generalised use categories: residential, commercial and industrial, although in each it was assumed that some kind of mix was possible. An associated Urban Building Law defined allowable uses in each zone, as well as building coverage (which later became known as the 'floor area ratio – FAR) and height. Their particular target, as in Western Europe at the time, was the management of urban extensions. Land readjustment is "*a method of pooling ownership of all land within a project area, building urban facilities such as roads and parks and dividing the land into urban plots*" (Sorensen, 2002:122). Such plans were drawn up and approved by national government bureaucrats in the Ministry of Construction.[7] Zoning plans were expected to cover a whole urban area, but provided relatively weak constraints on property-owners' land development projects. However, the zoning scheme for Tokyo proved a valuable instrument in organising redevelopment processes after the 1923 Tokyo earthquake (Sorensen, 2002).

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4. Especially from Germany (Sorensen, 2002).

5. The Japanese terminology separates 'development' into physical change to land ('kaihatsu') and to buildings ('kenchiko').

6. Note that zoning applies to defined 'city planning areas', which may not be the same as formal administrative areas.

7. Since 2001, called the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism.

In the interwar years and after the Second World War, Japan experienced not only rapid economic expansion, but also rapid urbanisation, particularly in the central coastal belt. By the late 1950s, as in other cities, the older urban areas of Kobe were suffering from both the massive transport projects driven by national policy and increasingly severe pollution from industrial activity.

> *"By the early 1960s, the enormous scale of industrial investment and lack of controls on pollution emissions resulted in some of the worst concentrations of air pollution in the world, and high levels of waste emissions into rivers and streams. In addition, the weak zoning regulations meant that many of the worst polluters were situated in close proximity to high-density residential areas"* (Sorensen, 2002:201).

This led to a major social movement in Japanese civil society, focused on counteracting pollution. Activists in Kobe were key players in this movement. This led nationally to demands for more careful attention to the local environmental impacts of development and re-development projects. The City Planning Law of 1968 was a partial response to this demand (Sorensen, 2002:213). It allowed municipalities to prepare their own zoning ordinances and undertake small land readjustment projects. It also expanded the zones of the City Planning Law of 1919 to eight, and introduced a requirement for development permits above a certain development size.[8] The Law also introduced the *senbiki* (urban growth boundary), which provided for a clear separation between the planning regime for urban and rural areas. This was intended to reduce sprawling urbanisation. During the 1970s, however, residents' groups and municipal administrations in some cities were developing ideas and practices of much more fine-grained management of development in urban neighbourhoods, especially in already-developed areas (see Sorensen, 2002:286). This emerging practice was institutionalised in the 1980 revision to the 1968 New City Planning Law, which allowed municipalities to prepare plans to guide the development and re-development of small areas. The District Plan is a legally-enforced detailed plan. The District Plan concept was modelled on the German *Bebauungsplan*.[9] In already built-up areas, this mechanism gave local governments the power to reject developments which did not conform with zoning and building norms and requirements (Sorensen, 2002:265). A key requirement for district plans was that a very substantial majority of property owners were prepared to agree to their provisions. Local regulatory power was thus substantially strengthened, but only if owner agreement was forthcoming. Kobe was a pioneer in using this new tool.

But pressure for more effective planning tools continued. During the late 1980s, Japan experienced a massive property boom, producing intense speculation in land and property. Municipal administrations wanted more autonomy from national government in order to regulate the worst excesses of this boom, while residents' organisations sought more influence on the development in their neighbourhoods. In 1992, a major amendment to the City Planning Law required municipalities to draw up a Master Plan, and required citizen consultation in preparing these plans. Kobe's first Master Plan was ready by 1993, and was prepared with considerable citizen involvement.[10] Both the existence of the Master Plan, and the tradition of citizen activism which had built up in the previous three decades, proved a valuable resource in the response to and recovery from the 1995 earthquake. By 1999, the national government was itself actively pursuing further decentralisation, partly in response to

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8. This had the perverse effect of encouraging very small developments (Sorensen 2002).

9. However, the Japanese District Plan has not become as widely used as its German model.

10. See: Summaries of newsletters produced by Mano Machizukuri Promotion Committee (1995–1996), available in English as 'Mano Area: Activities After the Earthquake', see Mano Promotion Committee (2005).

its serious economic and political problems (Sorensen, 2002, 2008). The 1999 amendment to the City Planning Law allowed municipalities to pass their own zoning ordinances and introduce much more precise zoning requirements and building norms. Overall, by the year 2000, Japanese municipalities had much more power to regulate development, and were encouraged to work with citizens in developing their regulatory policies. However, by this time, both national government and municipalities were suffering severely from financial constraints, making public development initiatives much more difficult to pursue.

Kobe municipality in 2008 is proud of its achievements as a liveable city with an international feel.[11] Its priority is still to attract economic investment, particularly as a result of the difficult economic conditions since the early 1990s. But it is also faced with potential population decline, as the Japanese population as a whole shrinks, and the more affluent seek out the most attractive living environments. The City recognises that the condition of its neighbourhoods is an important dimension of making the city somewhere where both Japanese people and foreigners want to live. This orientation has developed in the City over many years, through the interaction between citizen activism and the shaping of municipal planning practices.

Building neighbourhood planning and management capacity in Kobe

This section provides an account of the development of neighbourhood planning and management capacity from the 1960s to the 2000s. It focuses in particular on the experiences of one neighbourhood, Mano, which became a leading proponent of new practices. The first sub-section shows how residents' initiatives developed to promote better living conditions. These were partly self-organising, but gradually evolved a more co-operative relationship with the local administration. The second sub-section shows how this relation developed in the 1980s and into the 1990s, as the local administration itself acquired more powers from national government, and developed the national planning requirement introduced in 1992 to prepare municipal Master Plans which expressed a 'fundamental concept' to guide urban planning interventions. The third sub-section describes how this experience provided helpful capacities in addressing the aftermath of the major earthquake of 1995. The final sub-section assesses the situation in the early 2000s.

The growth of citizen activism: 1965–1980

As elsewhere in Japan in the 1960s, environmental conditions in existing urban areas got progressively worse. In the inner wards of Kobe municipality, residential buildings were mainly wooden structures, of two or three storeys, squeezed together on small plots, with narrow alleys, typically three metres or less, and hence too narrow for access by normal ambulances and fire engines. Property rights to the plots, buildings and dwelling units were a complex mixture of ownership and tenancies. Residential buildings were mixed up with smaller and larger businesses, and often crushed up against expanding industrial premises, subject to very few pollution controls. Some of these areas were designated as part of a broad industrial zone. Such areas often lacked welfare services, such as schools and health centres. The dwellings provided accommodation for workers in the industries, but women, children and the elderly lived their lives primarily in and around the residential areas. As the city's economy shifted away from industrial production, they were joined by men experiencing unemployment. Over time, the more affluent moved away to the new and expanding settlements to the north, leaving a population which was increasingly poorer and more elderly

11. www.city.kobe.jp.

Box 2. Environmental and living conditions in Mano, inner city Kobe, in 1960

"*Around 1960, the population of Mano exceeded 13,000. However, around 1960 Mano was not a comfortable place any more. Opening of the Hanshin Express Way brought about air contamination. Some 300 factories emitted foul odors, soot, smoke and caused tremors to nearby houses. Increasing number of trucks running the Takamatsu Route contaminated air and increased the risk of traffic accidents. Wastes were scattered around the workshops. Increasing numbers of seniors and children were afflicted with asthma.*

When an inspection party came from Yokkaichi, a place notorious for air contaminated with soot and smoke from the Chukyo Industrial Complex and designated as an area for the relief of victims of pollution related disease, they said that conditions were more serious in Mano.

Streetcars were the general means of transportation in those days. Passengers of a streetcar could not help pinching their noses when it passed the Takamatsu Bridge to cross the Hyogo Canal because the canal smelled so bad. The Shin-minato River, previously crystal clear, was so contaminated that the fish disappeared. The mass media then warned that the Seto Inland Sea, which the river flows into, would eventually be a dead sea. As well, younger generations were moving out of Mano in search of larger houses. It was a trend in Japan (at this time) to rebuild the small houses built immediately after the war with bigger ones.

Air was contaminated and trees were cut down. In narrow streets small children fell victim to traffic accidents. Dirty rivers smelled bad. These phenomena were seen more or less around the country but it seemed adverse conditions concentrated in the Mano District."

Source: Mano Promotion Committee, 2005:3–4.

than the rest of the municipality. However, with its history as an industrial city, Kobe had strong labour unions. There were also the traditional neighbourhood associations, an institution developed across Japan in the late nineteenth century to provide a link between national government and its citizens, through which government policy priorities could be promoted (Sorensen and Funck, 2007). Both of these institutions tended to be dominated by men (Funck, 2007).[12] There were also welfare associations, linked to the Kobe Social Welfare Council.

It was in this context that a new form of citizen organisation appeared in Kobe. These came to be called *machizukuri* councils,[13] and were also appearing in a few other major Japanese cities. By the 1990s, such councils and their practices had almost become a political movement (Sorensen and Funck, 2007). But Kobe was a real pioneer. The first *machizukuri* council to emerge in Kobe in 1963 was a voluntary initiative to protest against the impact of road traffic growth and the quality of the public realm in the area of Maruyama, in Nagata ward (Watanabe, 2007a). This initiative used a mobilisation strategy similar to that of labour union leaders and did not last beyond the late 1970s, but another initiative, in the Mano area of Nagata ward, set up in 1965, continues to this day. Its origin was in concerns about the impact of air pollution on children's health. Box 2 recalls these conditions.

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12. Sorensen (2002:104–107) notes that there is some disagreement about how far these associations were promoted by government and how far they were the result of mobilisation by emerging urban middle class groups, such as shopkeepers and small firms.

13. Often translated as 'community building'.

Faced with this situation, in 1965, the chairperson of one of the neighbourhood associations who was also involved in the welfare councils, took the initiative to establish a new welfare committee involving the direct participation of residents, with groups of households established as units which took responsibility for the promotion of measures to improve the environment, reduce delinquency and promote better health. A *machizukuri* study group was established in the Mano area, involving 27 community members (including neighbourhood organisations, shopkeeper and industry organisations and others), four academics and four city government officials (Sorensen, 2002:272). Some women were also involved in this work. These experiences helped both citizens and municipal politicians and officials to learn a new practice together.

This direct involvement provided a channel through which many more residents' concerns were voiced. As a result, all kinds of local environmental improvements were undertaken and welfare services provided by volunteer labour (Mano Promotion Committee, 2005). But the Mano *Machizukuri* group also became a campaigning organisation, to promote better conditions in their area, and better government generally. For some years, it fought the municipal authorities, but later came to work with the municipality in providing welfare and social services, and in developing ideas about re-organising the physical environment. In 1978, a *Mano Machizukuri Deliberation Council* was formed which combined organisation representatives and city officials. By July 1980, this Council had produced a future vision for the area. In the City's formal zoning ordinance, the whole of the Mano area was zoned for industrial uses and gave developers of factories substantial latitude in what got built. The new vision not only focused on managing the co-existence of housing and industry, and improving the residential environment, particularly through widening roads, re-constructing the old wooden row houses and building some public housing. The idea was for a gradual shift towards the vision, rather than re-development through the land readjustment mechanism. This planning instrument had acquired a bad reputation in older urban areas, as residents feared that their property rights might be ignored and they might be displaced. The 1980 National City Planning Law provided a basis which allowed the plan agreed by the Mano *Machizukiri* Deliberation Council to be given some legal standing when Kobe drew up its own District Plan the following year.[14] In these arrangements, the *Deliberation Council* became constituted as a *Promotion Association*, with the Municipality, through its planning office, responsible for supervising construction and related matters, according to technical requirements and in accordance with what the residents had come to agree on (Miyanishi, 2003). The advantage of District Plans was that those who were not parties to the original agreed plan could be required to conform to its provisions. Such Plans had to show substantial agreement among all the parties involved, but this was provided through the consultative work of the *Machizukuri Council*. Kobe was the first city in Japan to link District planning work with *machizukuri* arrangements (Watanabe, 2007b: slide 14). In Kobe, and in other cities, these kinds of experiences greatly expanded the role of *machizukuri* arrangements in engaging with detailed physical planning.

Developing a neighbourhood planning practice: 1980–1995

In 1982, some national funding became available to promote building projects in areas such as Mano. Some demolition had been undertaken and vacant sites purchased, on which the City Council was able to build public housing and on which welfare facilities and parks could be built. There were also incentives to encourage owners to merge plots. An 'Expert Despatch

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14. The designers of the City Planning Law had the Mano case in mind as a situation which could make positive use of the law.

Fund' was established with municipal and national funding to enable the *Machizukuri* Council and individual residents to obtain technical advice from consultants, and the area District Plan had been reviewed. The District Plan mechanism, with its combination of legal authority and citizen agreement, also gave support for the regulatory norms and standards which neighbours could agree to impose. These typically applied to such matters as the preservation of areas for open spaces and public facilities, widening streets through demanding setbacks where buildings were re-built, traffic management measures and pollution controls on industrial and commercial buildings. The practice developed in Mano spread to many other older urban areas in Kobe and by the end of the 1980s, had become widespread in Kobe, including for historic conservation areas (Nunokawa, 2007).[15] The critical requirement was for a supportive city planning office and the existence of local *machizukuri councils*, with the latter able to draw upon technical advice as needed. As the main planning work of the City Council at this time was focused on the development of the new islands reclaimed from the sea, this arrangement helped to expand the expertise available for planning work overall. Expertise was provided by outside consultants, especially architects and urban designers, some working privately and some university-based. These were committed to community development work,[16] and provided their time voluntarily, or as part of student projects, or through the 'Expert Despatch System'. Some neighbourhood volunteers went on to become professionals themselves (Funck, 2007:151). This neighbourhood governance practice thus became a well-developed part of Kobe planning practice. *Machizukuri* arrangements also flourished in the development and provision of welfare services, especially care for the elderly, and in the management of parks and open spaces.[17]

In 1992, the planning function of municipalities was strengthened by the City Planning Law amendment (see Box 1), which required the preparation of a city 'Master Plan', focused around a 'fundamental concept/idea' about how a city should develop. This was similar to a US comprehensive plan, or a European strategic spatial plan, combining a vision with a spatially-specified idea of how a city should develop. This had to be agreed by the City's Municipal Assembly, but had also to ensure that 'public opinion' was incorporated in the plan in some way.[18] Kobe City was well-placed to achieve this, working from the small area District Plans already prepared, in which local residents and other stakeholders had already been involved, and amalgamating these into ward plans and then an overall idea. The first 'New Fundamental Concept of the City of Kobe' was ready for approval in 1993, with a target year of 2025. The Concept evolved subsequently into the statement provided in 2007 (see Box 3).

In this 'fundamental concept', the City Council's focus on major development and land reclamation projects is brought together with the demands of neighbourhood activists for careful attention to the welfare of citizens, the involvement of citizens in establishing policy and the liveability of urban neighbourhoods. However, there are still criticisms that the Council continues to find it difficult to be sensitive to the issues which citizens raise (Funck,

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15. Shaw and Goda (2004) describe a community initiative in the neighbouring Suma ward to the west, in protest against major road proposals. Initially hostile to the administration, in the post-earthquake period, it gradually moved to a more co-operative practice.

16. The Architecture Department of the University of Kyoto was particularly important in developing a community development orientation in planning work, through projects in the Osaka-Kyoto area.

17. Legal status was eventually given to *machizukuri* councils to take on these responsibilities in the 1998 Act regulating non-profit organisations in Japan.

18. A Master Plan is not legally required to be approved by the municipal assembly but has to be in accordance with certain plans and policies that are approved by the assembly.

Box 3. Kobe's Master Plan: 'Fundamental Concept/Idea'

Fundamental Idea:
A creative city in touch with the world and its citizens
City Image:
1. An interactive city built on mutual respect
2. A welfare-minded city
3. An attractive city with a comfortable living environment
4. A city that welcomes and promotes international cultural exchange
5. A city with a vibrant economy that will lay the foundations for future generations

Source: www.city.kobe.jp/cityoffice/17/020 — administration. Downloaded 28 November 2007.

2007:138). And by the early 1990s, a socio-spatial patterning was becoming clear in the city (Hirayama, 2000), with poorer people concentrated in the inner-city neighbourhoods, especially to the west, and more affluent people in the newer, more spacious, developments on the mountain slopes and beyond, or in the eastern neighbourhoods (where some areas had been re-developed and others had become conservation areas) and the new reclaimed island areas. Nevertheless, in some areas in the western inner ward of Nagata, where Mano is located, the local *machizukuri* councils were energetically engaged in developing the city's Master Plan. A 'model project of improving the residential environment' was agreed in 1989, and a further 'project of total improvement of the residential environment' in 1994. Through this work, the re-development of plots had been negotiated to conform with the agreed District Plan guidelines for mixed land use, road setbacks and building heights and shapes. However, streets remained narrow, as this work had proceeded in a piecemeal way, as the neighbours had agreed in 1978. Then the earthquake struck on a January morning in 1995.

Institutional capacity is tested in the response to disaster

The great Hanshin earthquake made its impact both through its formal strength (7.2 on the Richter scale), and in its impact on the built environment. It affected in particular the major infrastructures built by the national government, the Hanshin expressway and the Shinkansen bullet train line, and Kobe's inner-city neighbourhoods, including Mano. Overall, at least 5500 people died, 37,000 were injured, nearly 100,000 buildings were destroyed and a further 86,000 partially destroyed.[19] The details of the disaster and the disaster response have already been recorded in several previous studies (AIJ, 1995; Evans, 2001; Hirayama, 2000; Orr, 2006). This case study focuses on its impact on the development of municipal government and planning practices in Japan generally and in Kobe specifically.

What became obvious immediately after the earthquake was that it was the pre-existing residents' organisations, as well as volunteers from across the country, who acted as the front-line in the immediate disaster response.[20] In Kobe's inner neighbourhoods, because of the local planning and welfare provision activity of the *machizukuri* councils, most residents knew who in the community was most likely to offer advice and immediate help, and where

19. Note that different sources give different figures. These estimates are from AIJ (1995), dated April 1995 and are likely to have been revised upwards.

20. See also Shaw and Goda (2004). The author therefore does not quite agree with Orr (2006), who seems unaware of the civil society developments in Kobe prior to 1995.

such help could be found.[21] The City Council was held up by bureaucratic requirements that the province governor had to authorise the mobilisation of fire services, and rescue specialists (Orr, 2006). Meanwhile, volunteers from across the country came at once to help, and found the already-available informal networks developed with outside experts and volunteers through the *machizukuri* councils a quick way of making contact and getting to do useful work (Sorensen, 2002; Ito, 2007).

As immediate concerns for shock relief, shelter, food and water were addressed, many people began to assess what had happened to their city and their living environment. Several lessons emerged of relevance across urban Japan. One was that the 'construction state' had not been as technically good at construction as it claimed, and the story of the collapsed highways unravelled to reveal poor construction quality and corrupt contracting practices. A second lesson was that civil society across the nation responded with a surge of volunteer effort to provide assistance to the stricken area. A third lesson was that the national government was slow to organise a relief effort. A fourth lesson was that civil society organisations in Kobe were the most immediately effective agencies organising initial relief and were able to act as key players in the longer term reconstruction effort.[22] The networks they had built up in their local areas, and their connections within and beyond the municipality, provided a mobilisation and organisation capacity which helped reduce the spread of fire, rescued the elderly and infirm, and provided shelter. Ito (2007:161–162) claims that the richer a neighbourhood was in community networks, the faster was its recovery from the earthquake.

In areas such as Mano, loss of life, injury and collapse of buildings had been high. Overall, Nagata ward lost more dwelling units than any other ward in Kobe (Hirayama, 2000:126). Fire damage was made more deadly as buildings collapsed into the still-narrow streets, which fire engines and ambulances could not easily reach. The slow, steady piecemeal approach to improving the local environment had not, in the end, been such a good idea. Now, a re-development approach was needed. But people were still very concerned about their rights to individual plots and shares in plots. As Hirayama writes, "*Land ownership, leaseholds and tenants' rights were a complex mix ... with various rights locked together in a single building*" (Hirayama, 2000:126). In this context, the *machizukuri* councils in the worst affected areas of Kobe, working with the City Planning Office, turned to the land readjustment mechanism.[23] Initially, the use of this tool was initiated by the City Planning Office without consultation with the local *machizukuri* council (Ito, 2007), but local protest soon rectified this attitude. Residents and businesses themselves came to see that, with buildings destroyed across several street blocks, the land readjustment process was a way forward, so long as property rights were respected. In effect, the existing District Plans in places such as Mano—mostly recently revised, and much discussed with local residents, shopkeepers and local businesses—were used as the basis for post-earthquake reconstruction. This allowed for re-building on plots which were to stay in residential use, the widening of streets to four metres, along with general urban design improvements, the provision of more social housing for low-income residents, and the safeguarding of sites for welfare services and small parks (see Figure 3 for some illustrations of this neighbourhood planning activity).

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21. This is very evident in a Video/DVD collection of meetings and events linked to the *Machizukuri* activity in Nagata ward from 1993 to 1999. An English language version provides a summary account (Great Hanshin Earthquake: Residents' Town Creation. Director: Kenji Aioke (in English) 2001).

22. Pekkanen (2000) underlines the role of the media in making a strong critique of government failings, in contrast to the energy of voluntary efforts.

23. This is clearly seen in the Video cited in note 21.

The work of the Mano *Machizukuri* council has been much celebrated in community development and planning circles in Japan. It has become a model for neighbourhood planning and management,[24] and there is increasing interest in *machizukuri* practices in other East Asian countries such as South Korea and Taiwan, strongly influenced by Japanese approaches to urban planning in the past (Watanabe, 2007b). In Kobe, it is clear that the *machizukuri* councils did significant work in developing reconstruction plans and guidelines, drawing on the practices which had built up within the city since the late 1970s. As the reconstruction effort has been completed, the councils have continued to pay attention to the quality of local environments and promote conditions for improved liveability, in a fluid relation with the work of the municipal council. As a result, many people in Kobe have participated in many ways in local place management and development.

Figure 3. Images from Mano 1995–1996

Source: summaries of newsletters issued by the Mano Machizukuri Promotion Committee between 1995 and 1996. The Newsletter series was called: 'Mano-ke Ganbare' (Cheer-up Mannoko!).

Neighbourhood planning and management in Kobe today

Today, Kobe has recovered vigorously from the earthquake experience. The expressway and the bullet train were in operation a year later. Shopping and commercial districts were back in operation, and many of the eastern neighbourhoods recovered quickly. In the western neighbourhoods, however, recovery has been slower (Hirayama, 2000). A major reason for this has been that the capacity of residents to invest in redevelopment is very limited due to poverty. Many are elderly. Furthermore, many were moved to temporary residences in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and never returned. This led to further confusion about ownerships. In addition, Kobe City's finances were 'stretched to the limit' (Hirayama, 2000:120), especially because of its investment in major large-scale development works, particularly the reclamation of the islands, before the earthquake. By 2004, 22 per cent of the city budget was still being spent on the redemption of municipal bonds.[25] Hirayama (2000) argues that the earthquake and the recovery processes have actually increased the polarisation occurring in the city, with the inner western neighbourhoods becoming increasingly poorer than the rest of the city. By 2007, Kobe had much more power over the regulation of

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24. In the form of '*fukkō machizukuri*' (post-disaster reconstruction *machizukuri*), the experiences before and after the earthquake in Kobe are now being theorised and disseminated widely by Satoh et al. (2006).

25. See www.city.kobe.jp/cityoffice — administration, downloaded 28 November 2007.

development, but has very limited resources for pro-active development planning. There are other criticisms too. Some feel that the civil society energy reflected in the early *machizukuri* practices has been undermined by the incorporation of their work into the municipal city planning system. Yet the Mayor and the Municipal Assembly remain at least formally committed to a close relation with citizens, and to taking a more integrated view of development than in the past, when the primary drive was economic development. Now environmental quality, liveability and citizen involvement are seen as necessary qualities for the promotion of economic prosperity. However, there are also tensions in the implementation of an integrated approach to area development. For residents, the environmental, economic and welfare and physical issues were all tied together as they worked on their improvement proposals. But these became separated into different administrative channels as they got formalised within bureaucratic practices. The City's Master Plan, for example, is attached to its specific urban planning functions rather than providing an overall 'vision' which animates all areas of the administration's work. So citizen vigilance and activism may still be needed to shape Kobe's governance practices and the way its planning system works.

Conclusions

In this section, the lessons which can be drawn from this experience are summarised (see Box 4). However, before doing this, it is important to underline the specificities of the Japanese institutional context. Japan is a country with a long-established and well-developed government bureaucracy and had, until recently, substantial resources for infrastructure investment. There is also a long tradition in the society of collaborative working on common development projects. Sorensen and Funck remark that:

> *"many Japanese people demonstrate an enormous willingness and talent for working together with their neighbours in common projects"* (2007:277).

This was a resource for the emergence of neighbourhood associations in urban contexts a century ago, and also fuelled the growth of what has become a 'machizukuri' movement in many parts of urban Japan. Through the expansion of such citizen activism, Japanese national politicians and bureaucrats have been forced to recognise that the quality of local living conditions matters a lot—for citizens especially, but also to overall economic and environmental performance. This in turn has created pressures for changes to the formal arrangements regulating urban land and property development. In emphasising the

Box 4. Main lessons from the case study

- Civil society mobilisation and vigilance can be an important force for change in urban planning;
- Building new approaches to urban planning takes time and continual attention over decades;
- Creating appropriate planning processes and instruments also takes time, to allow for collective learning and experimentation;
- Citizens can make valuable inputs to creating a city-wide 'master plan' or vision for a city;
- Land use regulations have an important role, and citizens can make a valuable input to how they are developed and used;
- Academics and other planning consultants can provide a helpful role in expanding the resources available for doing planning work;
- Local planning activity benefits from different levels of government, citizens and other stakeholders working together on common problems.

specificities, it should also be born in mind that Japanese society remains relatively homogeneous in terms of culture and history. It therefore lacks the tensions within cities which are more obviously multi-cultural in their social composition. Japan is also a country where government laws tend on the whole to be observed, rather than ignored, and where bureaucracy has historically had a tradition of some competence in administrative activity.

Expanding on the lessons in Box 4, firstly, civil society mobilisation and vigilance has been an important force for change, in both the development of Japanese local government capacity and specifically in the development of urban planning tools. The energy for change in the Kobe case reported here came from within the society, rather than being promoted by outside agencies. Secondly, capacity-building in new approaches to local administration and urban planning is no quick fix. It needs time and continual attention and commitment. In this case, it evolved over thirty years.

Thirdly, the development of effective urban planning tools too needs time to allow for learning and experimentation. It often involves not just the development of new tools but a culture change in practices. As Watanabe argues, the *machizukuri* challenge to urban planning:

> *"requires that the traditional urban planning (in Japan) which is a hard technology for construction and engineering works should evolve into a new hard and soft social technology which would enrich the quality of people's urban life as a whole"* (Watanabe, 2007b: slide 17).

Fourthly, the case shows that the tool of a 'Master Plan', understood as a strategic vision, or orientation to a city 'as a whole', still has a valuable role, linking initiatives in different areas together. Fifthly, the case also shows that the details of land use regulations are also important, as people work out exactly when the scale and orientation of buildings and streets makes a difference to the liveability of an area. It also shows that it is possible for citizens to get involved in both master planning and in detailed land use regulation work.

Sixthly, outside experts, such as academics and independent consultants, can provide a helpful support role to local civil society initiatives, as well as to government administrations. However, some mechanism for funding this activity is likely to be needed, though academics and students may also provide this role as part of their own educational and research activities. In this way, the expertise available can be expanded. Seventhly, citizens and stakeholders, local administrations and national governments need each other in efforts to improve the liveability of local environments. In this case, national government provided some funds and changed legislation to provide more institutional space for local initiatives. Local administrations learned to value citizens and their participation and needed their energy and initiative. Local residents and stakeholders needed some support from legal authority and often needed additional resources to solve difficult problems, not just between themselves and powerful outside developers, but in relation to conflicts among themselves.

The case also shows some problems which often cause difficulty. In particular, initiatives in the area of participation in local neighbourhood development do not always lead to more integrated approaches within a local administration, where some departments may continue to disregard them. And there is an ever-present danger that the delicate, negotiated balance of respect and responsibility between citizen initiative and government administration will be lost. Where this happens, citizens will feel that they have been co-opted and 'captured' too far by administrations, and turn to other routes to seek to improve the liveability of their local environments, such as the courts or informal mechanisms. Or their concerns may just lie neglected, until the next burst of civil society energy can be mobilised.

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