

Progress of Citizen Participation and Multi-sectorial Collaboration as the Driving Forces of Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Japan

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Social and legal systems for coastal management in Japan have been fragmented since Japan began its modernization over a century ago. The demands of each field and industrial sector resulted in systems being formulated to achieve optimal results in each individual field or sector, and the initial stage involved integrating domestic and imported western ideas step by step. Starting in the late 1990s, following the Global Summit and the revolution in environmental thinking, citizen participation was promoted in Japan based on amendments to the River Law and Seacoast Act.

In the process of participation, numerous conferences and informal discussion meetings are held everywhere and at every stage. At these meetings, ideas about a 'lack of true common sense' have been expressed by non-governmental sectors. Incorporating the citizen sector as a newcomer to the decision-making process brought about the reconstruction of a new decision-making scheme. Under the former scheme, it was hard to break through barriers of governmental sectionalism to achieve integrated coastal zone management.

The citizen sector is relatively free from pecuniary interests and other ties, so citizens can think about issues in a way that transcends the current dictates of common sense. A case in Japan is introduced: a project to "set back" a sea wall at the river mouth where Nakatsu tidal flat is located, in Oita prefecture fronting the Seto Inland Sea in western Japan. This site is habitat to many endangered species such as the Japanese horseshoe crab.

In the current commonsense view, setting back a sea wall is a kind of taboo for the governmental land management system, even though other countries have chosen this method. In addition, river mouth management is complicated by the jurisdictions held by a variety of administrative departments, for example, departments of seacoasts, ports, protective forests, parks, rivers and fisheries. These administrators find it impossible to compromise if it means losing any of their territorial area, even on a small scale.

At Nakatsu, tidal flat ecosystem conservation activities that started in the 1970s evolved from a protest campaign to consensus building. A multi-sectorial conference decided to select the set back plan in order to conserve endangered species habitat and biodiversity at the river mouth. And, it is very significant that this choice was rational and in fact the optimum for wave and flood disaster prevention. This site provides natural and ecological services to small scale fisheries by local people and environmental educational activities as well.

Even its natural salt marsh and sand bars play multiple roles in conserving human habitat. The set back plan was proposed by a conservation group, and local people agreed to it. Local residents know about this phenomenon based on their experience, but they had not spoken out about older, traditional ways of habitation on this coast. With scientific data and specialists' advice, the local government decided on this rather unusual plan. On the international level, the 1st Asia and Pacific Water Summit was held in Oita in 2007. The Nakatsu example was introduced as a case of good practice of Japanese citizen participation and decision-making systems. In 2010, Nakatsu tidal flat was awarded the International Wetland Prize.

These promotion activities have highlighted the importance of integrated coastal zone management, and are encouraging national and local governments to form a new scheme. Specifically, the Nakatsu case pointed out the following; 1) Citizen participation can be the trigger to overcoming overly compartmentalized management. 2) Multi-sectorial collaboration to decide local affairs activates local knowledge and a sense of local residents' responsibility. 3) For coastal zone administrators, both legal systems and scientific data are essential in order to decide on more rational and ecological methodologies.

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