

Country Report Towards Urbanization, Japan 2018

1. Performance of Abe Cabinet since 2012

- National economy is growing well under the efforts of so called Abe-no-Mix.
- Prime Minister Mr. Abe was elected again as The President of the Liberal Democratic Party on September 20, 2018, for his third time. He can continue his work another three years until 2021 and it is the limit of his duty term of 9 years. The new cabinet invited 12 fresh ministers among 24.

2. The Field of Planning and Human Settlements

(1) Restructure the region into the networked compact cities

- The rapid increase of aged population in big cities and the so quick population decrease in rural areas require the regional restructuring into more convenient and efficient systems. For this purpose, dispersed urban functions should be recentralized in big core center or sub centers, and those centers should be networked by good public transport services and IT networks.

National Government designated 21 cities as leading areas to realize the above scheme and 161 municipalities have finished to formulate the new strategy and 407 municipalities are under preparation out of 1,724 municipalities in Japan as of September, 2018.

(2) Increase of vacant land and empty houses

- Total number of empty houses is estimated as 10.7 million, 16.9%, 2018 in Japan.
- Majority of land and house succession has not been officially registered in Japan because of the lack of people's recognition, the complicated legal procedures and the heavy succession tax. As a result, vacant land and houses increased so much and caused the low density built-up areas, and inefficiency of public services including the maintenance of infra structures. This is also a strong barrier to realize the networked compact cities.

In order to overcome these problems, the National Government established "Special Law to Take Measures for Empty Houses" in 2015 and each municipality is trying to

designate those vacant and troublesome houses and, if necessary, to enforce to demolish those houses if it makes some serious problems such as to be a base for crimes.

The coordination system by municipalities is also introduced and a municipality can coordinate the ownership and usage of low efficient land and houses to establish the agreement of the area together with the development and management of public space and community facilities.

(3) To increase the green space in cities and towns

The Law of Urban Green was amended in 2017 to approve:

- 1) the semi-public facilities such as coffee shop and restaurant within the public green parks
- 2) non-governmental organizations can develop and manage public green space and open space utilizing the empty houses and vacant land
- 3) designated agricultural field in urban area with the exemption/reduction of land and estate tax can be utilized for the restaurant managed by farmers.

3. Other matters

(1) Reconstruction after 2011.3.11 East Japan Giant Earthquake

- 7 years after the giant tsunami have passed and urban reconstruction works have been strongly executed.
- Reconstruction works for residents, including the houses removed to highland and public supplied houses, will be almost completed by the March, 2019.
- Agriculture and fishery are almost recovered to the level of before the disaster, and the promotion of tourism and the establishment of new industries are expected.
- Kamaishi-City, the host city of Rugby World Cup in 2019, has almost completed the reconstruction works and the Kamaishi Memorial Stadium becomes one of the World Cup fields.

(2) Counter measures against increasing natural hazards

- Global warming brought so big water floods in urban areas such as the disasters in western Japan in July, 2018, and also Kansai area in September including the damage

of Kansai Airport attacked by the typhoon.

- The earthquake attacked Hokkaido region in September, 2018, caused so many mountain landslides over so many houses and agricultural fields. 41 victims, about 700 injured and all Hokkaido with 3 million households' blackout were reported.
- It is urgent to reconstruct these areas and prepare stronger counter measures such as the preparation of safe escape routes, and the construction of strong banks against huge Tsunami.

(3) Preparation for Tokyo Olympiad 2020

- Construction and improvement of stadiums, Olympic villages, transportation facilities and other matters including the preparation of multi-language guides and accommodation for foreigners.
- Urban renewal projects and road construction such as inner ring road of Tokyo are also undergoing.

(4) Promoting the international cooperation of infra-structure development

- Japanese experience to develop infra-structures together with urban development and the other know-hows would be applicable to Asian and African countries.
- Japanese technologies would have two important aspects.

One is the Transit Oriented Development under the cooperation of railway companies and urban development companies.

Second is the technologies and know-hows to create “Smart City” or “Eco City” including the excellent ideas for transport, environment, energy, disaster prevention and public health.