

***Case Study of Administrative Planning in Japan:
Initiation Stage of Citizen Participation and Information Sharing
in Child Rearing Support Plan***

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Abstract

In Tokyo, encouraging the acceptance of childcare centers is an urgent issue as many children still need a nursery. The Japanese government has implemented an institutional reform, and local governments have formulated a new child rearing support plan along with the reform. However, the reform is focused on extending the duration of child care at nurseries and on increasing the capacity of nurseries. Consequently, kindergartens and small childcare facilities with short childcare durations are concerned about not being able to attract customers or even face closure. This study reports the case of City A in Tokyo, where an innovative approach was adopted in the formulation of an administrative plan, which entailed considering the opinions of various stakeholders and evaluating them at the planning stage. The method involved tracking the progress of the city's child rearing support plan from the beginning to its completion and interviewing the staff in charge of planning. In City A, while investigating the demand for services expected of the new plan, opinions from small childcare facilities, kindergartens, child rearing support NPOs, etc. were also gathered. In a departure from the usual conduct of administrative plans, in City A, citizens were included in the process of gathering information, which happens prior to the formulation of the draft. The Administrative Procedure Law of Japan does not have provisions for administrative planning, and no measures enable the participation of citizens in this process. The case of City A offers a solution to this problem.

Keywords: Japan, local government, administrative plan, administrative survey, information sharing.

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Introduction

As Japan's birth rates continue to decline, the population in metropolitan areas, such as Tokyo, continues to increase. At the same time, municipalities continue to be faced with depopulation, and this may polarize the populations in these regions.

One reason for the concentration of the population in metropolitan regions is that they offer many opportunities for employment. Young people who migrate to big cities in search of employment also get married and raise their children in the cities. Given these reasons, population concentration in metropolitan regions seems inevitable [Tokyo metropolitan government, 2016a], which, however, could be curtailed if opportunities for employment in rural regions increase significantly. This may also counter the effects of depopulation in these regions. Conversely, many parents in Tokyo find it difficult to work and raise their children simultaneously. This problem is compounded by the shortage of childcare centers in Tokyo [Tokyo metropolitan government, 2016b]. Therefore, it is important to increase the acceptance rates of childcare centers in big cities to reduce the number of children on waiting lists.

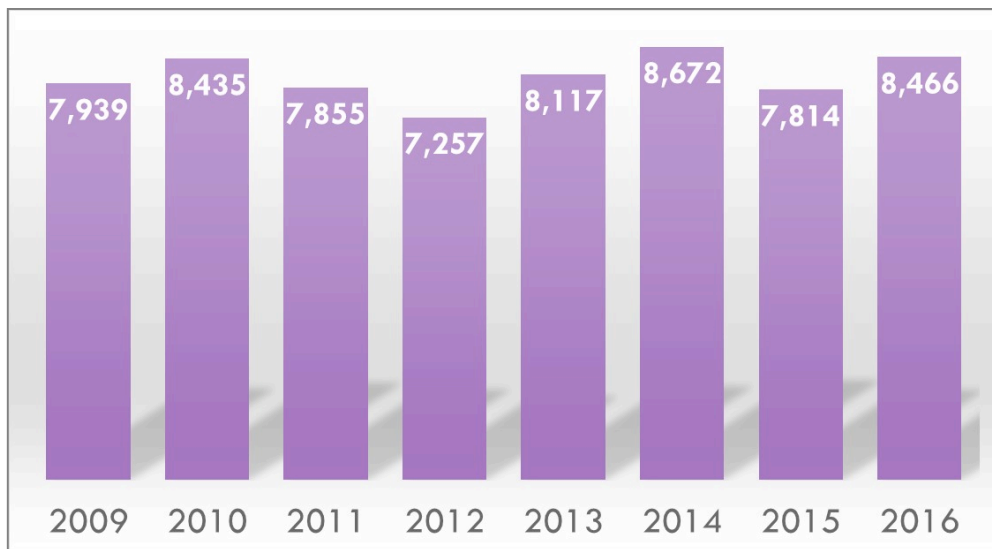


Fig.1. Number of children on waiting list for children care center in Tokyo.
Figure based on [Tokyo metropolitan government, 2016b].

To counter this problem, the Japanese government enforced the Child and Child Care Support Act (Act No. 65 of 2012). In effect, this Act served to increase the acceptance rate and the duration of the enrollment process at childcare centers as well as kindergartens. The Act also allowed working parents to deposit and started a new system from FY2015 [Cabinet office, government of Japan, n.d.]. In FY2013, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government stated that it aimed to eliminate the need to place children on waiting lists of kindergartens and childcare centers by FY2017 [Tokyo metropolitan government, 2015a].

Although the Japanese government and the Tokyo Metropolitan Government have initiated these measures, municipalities are best suited to, and most capable of, addressing this problem effectively. As the basic form of local government, municipalities deal with residents more frequently, and this equips them to address this problem in a more effective manner.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government requested municipalities in Tokyo to formulate administrative plans to eliminate the need to place children on waiting lists of childcare centers until FY2017. Consequently, the "Child Rearing Support Plan" was introduced in the municipalities in FY2015 [Tokyo metropolitan government, 2015b.].

Background

The Administrative Procedure Act, enacted in 1993 in Japan, does not grant provisions for administrative planning. The lack of provisions to do so is a crucial issue in the context of administrative law [Takagi, Tsuneoka, and Suda, 2017].

The Administrative Procedure Act was last revised in 2005, and this revision empowered the general public to offer proposals or comment on proposed policies. In addition, governmental bodies were obligated to consider public opinion. In effect, the revision allows the public to control administrative planning to a reasonable extent.

It is also necessary to reform the legal system to increase public participation levels in administrative activities. The Administrative Procedure Act is likely to be revised to accommodate the need for more public participation. It is expected that the revision would focus on the ease of participation and the interests of the general public [Ushijima, 2016].

Local governments are expected to set up councils involving experts and residents to draft administrative plans. More importantly, the councils will be consulted in the drafting process. Residents can also influence administrative plans and express their opinions and interests by participating in workshops, conferences, hearings, and surveys [Isozaki, 2012].

At the local level, administrative plans are classified into three types: (i) comprehensive plans, (ii) basic plans, and (iii) individual plans. Comprehensive plans represent the highest level of administrative planning. Basic administrative plans typically pertain to welfare and urban development. Individual administrative plans represent a level lower than basic administrative planning. The "Child Rearing Support Plan" is an example of an individual administrative plan, whereas measures such as "Community Welfare Administrative Planning" are examples of basic administrative plans. Individual administrative plans are typically based on concrete and specific information; they pertain to the everyday lives of citizens. These plans are typically based on estimates such as the number of children who may be admitted to nurseries and other child care facilities over the next ten years. Individual plans also typically involve many stakeholders. For example, child care services are provided by nurseries, kindergartens, "childcare mothers," child rearing support NPOs, and other facilities. Although a large number of children are placed on waiting lists of childcare centers, setting up a public daycare center may endanger private daycare centers. Setting up public daycare centers may even result in the phasing out of private facilities. Therefore, it is highly difficult to address the needs and interests of all stakeholders equally.

This paper considers the case of CITY A, given the groundbreaking manner in which it formulated its administrative plans, and how, in doing so, it was also able to address the interests of various stakeholders. CITY A's case also allows one to identify the

means to address the needs and interests of various stakeholders in an equal manner, especially in the case of administrative planning.

Study

In FY2014, CITY A, located at the center of Tokyo, formulated a child rearing support plan, with a focus period of 10 years from FY2015 to FY2024. This administrative plan was formulated with the help of a council, which included citizens, representatives from child rearing support NPOs, representatives from parents' associations (especially parents of nursery school students), and academic researchers. In total, the council was comprised of 18 members. Moreover, CITY A's child rearing support plan was based on survey questions designed by the municipal council.

1) Survey design

Typically, formulating an administrative plan involves the evaluation of previous administrative plans; surveys are also conducted to determine the changes and improvements expected by various stakeholders. Moreover, in most cases, demand surveys are the only means available to express public interests and opinions. More often, the opportunity to answer surveys is mistaken for citizen participation.

In order to formulate a strong child rearing support plan, the Japanese government distributed a draft questionnaire (as a form of demand survey) to municipalities across the country. The draft questionnaire consisted of 23 pages. Although it did not indicate the direction of the survey items, the questions and the possible answers were described in detail. The draft questionnaire was divided into two parts: (i) mandatory items and (ii) arbitrary items. And municipalities were bound to investigate the mandatory items.

子どもの育ちをめぐる環境についてうかがいます。

問7 宛名のお子さんの子育て（教育を含む）に日常的に関わっている方はどなた（施設）ですか。お子さんからみた関係で当てはまる番号すべてに○をつけてください。

1. 父母ともに	2. 母親	3. 父親	4. 祖父母	5. 幼稚園	6. 保育所
7. 認定こども園 8. その他（ ）					

問8 宛名のお子さんの子育て（教育を含む）に、もっとも影響すると思われる環境すべてに○をつけてください。

1. 家庭	2. 地域	3. 幼稚園	4. 保育所	5. 認定こども園
6. その他（ ）				

問9 日頃、宛名のお子さんをみてもらえる親族・知人はいますか。当てはまる番号すべてに○をつけてください。

1. 日常的に祖父母等の親族にみてもらえる	} ⇒ 問9-1へ
2. 緊急時もしくは用事の際には祖父母等の親族にみてもらえる	
3. 日常的に子どもをみてもらえる友人・知人がいる	} ⇒ 問9-2へ
4. 緊急時もしくは用事の際には子どもをみてもらえる友人・知人がいる	
5. いずれもない	⇒ 問10へ

Fig. 2. A draft questionnaire of the Japanese government.
Figure adapted from [Nishitokyo, 2014a].

Typically, the Japanese government does not take part in the administration of demand surveys. As a rule, local governments design and implement the draft investigation items. However, since the formulation of a child rearing support plan was an urgent task, the Japanese government took it upon itself to distribute the questionnaire.

Many local governments used the questionnaire unaltered; in other words, the questions and items formulated by the Japanese government were not modified. A large number of municipal councils only showed the findings of this demand survey in one meeting.

Generally, moreover, the public is not afforded the opportunity to influence the research design. Citizens are only expected to participate in surveys.

CITY A, however, deleted the list of arbitrary items indicated by the Japanese government. Instead, questions deemed urgent by CITY A's municipal council were included in the questionnaire. CITY A also considered the needs and interests expressed by the council members. CITY A invited questions from the council members, and the members were encouraged to share the concerns they faced not only as individuals but also as representatives of their respective organizations. For example, CITY A requested the representatives of the parents' association to recruit and discuss questions at meetings organized by the association. Compared to other municipal councils, CITY A directed more resources and efforts toward designing questions for the survey.

問14 あなたは、親の事情にかかわらず、子どもの育ちのためには、乳幼児期の集団での保育・教育が、何歳から、週に何日、1日何時間必要と思いますか。(数字は一律に一字)

歳から 週に 日 1日に 時間

問15 「お子さん」の平日の教育・保育の事業を選ぶ際に、重視する点はどのようなことですか。重要だと思順に、順位を書いてください。

1 位	2 位	3 位	4 位	5 位
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【重視する点】 下記より選択し、番号を上記の記入欄に記入する。

1 教育・保育の方針に共感できる	2 保育だけでなく、さまざまな教育プログラムを提供している
3 行事が充実している	4 園長・保育士・職員スタッフ等の対応や園の印象がよい
5 地域の評判がよい	6 アレルギーなど個別の支援対応ができる
7 障がい児の受け入れができる	8 施設・設備が清潔で整っている
9 部屋や園庭などの一人あたりの面積が広い	10 給食を提供している
11 自宅の近く	12 子どもが将来通う小学校のある居住地区内にある

Fig. 3. Invited questions from the council members (CITY A).
Figure adapted from [Nishitokyo, 2014b].

2) Council Meetings

Most municipal councils scheduled meetings based solely on their Presidents' schedule, and there was usually no room to change the date, venue, or the timing. Details were usually communicated to the members a week or two ahead of a meeting, and the meetings were held once every quarter.

The members of CITY A's municipal council, however, were given annual calendars, which also indicated dates for the meetings. Schedule adjustment can be selected on weekdays and Saturdays, morning, afternoon and nighttime, it was decided on the day when many members can participate.

Once finalized, members were given notice two months prior to a meeting. Necessary items were also mailed in advance, and members received these mails at least two weeks prior to the meeting. The meetings were held once every month.

In addition, nursery and daycare facilities were provided for members with children. In some cases, makeshift nursery rooms were also set up to accommodate the children.

Discussion

1) Survey design

Compared to other municipalities, CITY A encouraged and ensured greater public participation. For instance, members of CITY A's municipal council were involved in designing the questionnaire for the demand survey. The council was instrumental in gathering and consolidating the opinions of the various stakeholders; these opinions were also incorporated in the design of the demand survey.

The positive effects of CITY A's inclusive method are listed below:

The survey embodied the diverse perspectives, needs, and concerns of the stakeholders. By doing so, CITY A was able to create a level playing field for the stakeholders. This allowed otherwise marginalized opinions and interests to be shared and reduced the influence of dominant stakeholders. Stakeholders and council members were involved in reviewing the survey questions, whereas, in most other municipalities, stakeholders and council members were involved only in discussing the results of the survey. Compared to other municipalities, CITY A also devoted more time (the council devoted three months) to design the survey questions. As a result, members and stakeholders were able to understand the significance and implications of the survey questions. This in turn paved the way for vigorous debates and discussions. As the concerns and interests of all stakeholders were noted, it became possible to share impartial and unbiased data.

2) Meeting management

The annual calendar allowed council members to plan for the monthly meetings in advance. Moreover, the two-month advance notice for meetings enabled members to prepare effectively. A flexible schedule was adopted in consideration of the members' diverse lifestyles. In addition, nursery and daycare facilities were provided for members with children.

Conclusion

Typically, local governments do not encourage citizens to participate in the process of drafting an administrative survey prior to the drafting of an administrative plan. Citizens are usually only allowed to participate in surveys as respondents. As a result, the questionnaire of administrative survey typically do not reflect the citizens' interests.

CITY A, however, has favored an all-inclusive process. The municipal council was instrumental in encouraging public participation from the stage of gathering

information. Citizens of CITY A were involved in every crucial stage of the formulation an administrative plan. In order to address the often diverse, and sometimes conflicting, interests of various stakeholders, it is important to gather and record data in an objective manner. This also paves the way for fruitful discussions and debates. This case study also shows that it is important to encourage public participation in order to gather more relevant and objective information. This in turn allows governments to formulate effective administrative plans.

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