

## **Advisory Opinion**

### **Towards the Implementation of New National Spatial Strategies on the Basis of the COVID-19 Pandemic**



**26 September 2023**

**Science Council of Japan**

**Subcommittee on Human and Economic Geography  
of the Committee on Area Studies**

**This advisory opinion is the result of the deliberations of the Subcommittee on Human and Economic Geography of the Committee on Area Studies of the Science Council of Japan.**

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**This English version is a translation of the original written in Japanese.**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **I Background**

The Comprehensive National Land Development Act, enacted in 1950, was revised into the National Spatial Planning Act in 2005. The first National Spatial Planning (National Plan) was formulated in 2008, and the second planning in 2015, respectively. In July 2022, an "interim summary" was published for the formulation of the third plan, and in July 2023, the third National Spatial Planning (National Plan) was formulated.

In addition, the comprehensive strategy of the Digital Garden City State Concept was launched in December 2022, and, in parallel, discussions on the third National Spatial Planning (Regional Plans) are progressing in each local region.

In line with this revision of the National Spatial Strategies, the Human and Economic Geography Subcommittee will express its views on the state of the new National Spatial Strategies. This will be done on the basis of the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the results of research in human and economic geography to date, the Science Council of Japan's response to COVID-19, and in particular the content of discussions on the nature of regional policies under the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **II Current Status and Issues**

The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism established an Expert Committee for Long-Term Prospect of National Land, which published its final summary in June 2021. In response to this, discussions were held in the Planning Subcommittee toward the formulation of the Third National Spatial Planning (National Plan), and an interim summary was published in July 2022.

The plan lists the following three points as priority areas: 1) new living spheres where local stakeholders reconstruct daily life areas using digital technology - local living spheres; 2) the evolution of super megaregions, the world's only new metropolitan area that enables various kinds of lifestyles and economic activities in response to diverse needs; and 3) national land that maintains a complementary relationship of each local function through the restructuring and relocation of industries - Reiwa Industrial Relocation.

These three points are mostly followed in the Third National Spatial Planning (National Plan) formulated in July 2023. Regarding 1) local living spheres, it states that "By promoting public-private co-creation efforts to solve local issues with digital ideas, it will be possible to maintain various functions even in areas with small population, and, as a result, people will be able to continue to maintain healthy and cultural lives in the areas they want to live in."

However, population decline is spreading to cities with relatively large populations, and it

seems difficult to overcome the problems facing regional cities only through the use of digital technology and regional management from a "co" perspective. Based on the results of regional revitalization measures, we believe it is important to further strengthen measures to combat population decline and promote industry and urban functions in basic local governments, and to add to this the use of digital technology and wide-area cooperation.

Regarding any super-mega-region in (2), although the relationship among the three major metropolitan areas of Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka may be strengthened by the Linear Chuo Shinkansen, bringing about innovation and economic growth, it will be necessary to deal with issues, such as aging and population decline in the suburbs, within each metropolitan area.

In addition, as for the possibility of "dispersal of the population and central functions of companies concentrated in Tokyo," it seems that the concentration of central management functions in Tokyo will increase.

In order to prevent the expansion of regional disparities, it is necessary to ensure that the spreading effects of "super-mega-regions" reach a wider area, and to formulate regional plans to strengthen the competitiveness of regional areas.

Regarding the industrial relocation in the Reiwa Era in (3), the plan states, "In addition to the smooth transformation of the industrial structure for the local community and economy, the decentralization of growth industries will build a nation where industrial functions can be complemented from a national perspective, realizing a sustainable economy, and simultaneously achieving large-scale disaster risk reduction and carbon neutrality."

In the case of industrial complexes such as steel and petrochemicals, they tend to be highly location-specific and difficult to relocate, so it is more realistic to encourage in-situ change.

On the other hand, although the decentralization of machinery industries has progressed, there are disaster risks even in rural areas, and it may be difficult to respond to decarbonization, so it is important to strengthen the resilience of the supply chain.

### **III Main Points of the Advisory Opinion**

#### **(1) Development of national land policy based on EBPM (evidence-based policy making)**

The three points that were proposed at this time, new living spheres, super mega regions, and Reiwa Industrial Relocation, are ambitious initiatives that will significantly change the situation of the conventional national land. These points can utilize the research results of human and economic geography on living spheres, urban functions, and industrial locations. In addition, big data analysis results using RESAS (Regional Economy Society Analyzing System) and the case examples of regional revitalization measures need to be utilized effectively.

Based on the logic that links the proposed policy with the effects of the policy and by

examining the evidence that is the premise of the logic before implementing the policy, it is necessary to refine the development of policies.

## (2) Development of national land policies based on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged the promotion of remote work and the establishment of satellite offices. It is important to aim for a decentralized national land structure based on the impact on regions and the verification of policy responses.

Regarding the location of globalized industries, we should reconsider the division of labor between overseas and domestic, including reevaluating domestic production, and create attractive employment opportunities in local areas.

The tourism industry, which was considered a driver of economic growth, has revealed its vulnerability during the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to review past policies that focused on increasing the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan.

On that basis, in order to promote the future growth and development of the tourism industry, it is necessary to emphasize tourism policies that improve the attractiveness of tourist destinations, stabilize employment, and increase circulation within the region, and incorporate them into national land policies.

## (3) Promoting "Regional Plans" that utilized local knowledge

Based on the National Spatial Planning (National Plan), the third Regional Plans will be formulated in the future. It is necessary to accumulate bottom-up discussions by local actors that emphasize local living spheres, and to create unique policy content that takes into account the characteristics of the region.

In order to encourage the participation of young people who will be responsible for the future of the region, it is important to link learning in the newly established compulsory subject "Geography" in high schools to the solving of regional issues.

In addition, to utilize "local knowledge" in the formulation of "Regional Plans" it is necessary that these plans increase opportunities for learning about the region for a wide range of people, including university students and working adults.