

エコリバブルシティに向けたシビック・エンゲイジメント
—岡山市西川緑道公園のまちづくりを一例に—

Civic Engagement for an Eco-Livable City
— *Machizukuri* in Nishigawa Canal Park of Okayama City, Japan —

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岡山大学大学院社会文化科学研究科紀要
第44号 2017年11月 抜刷
Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Okayama University Vol.44 2017

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Abstract

This article describes the history of civic engagement at Nishigawa Canal Park in Okayama city, Japan. Nishigawa Canal Park was constructed in downtown Okayama from 1974 to 1982, and its total length is 2.4 km. Since 2008, citizens have held events in the park totaling over 70 days per year, with the support of the city's Nishigawa Performers Project. By analyzing their *machizukuri*—community development through collaborative actions—we demonstrate the importance of public space in urban development from two points of view: participatory democracy and an eco-livable city. Okayama has rich experiences that show its citizens value a sustainable society. It also faces challenges in urban development carried out through collaboration between public policy makers, political leaders, and citizens.

Keywords

Civic engagement, ESD, ecology, livable city, Nishigawa Canal Park, public space, sustainable city

1. Introduction

This article shows the history of civic engagement at Nishigawa Canal Park in Okayama city, Japan. Okayama city is located in the Chugoku region of Japan with a population of 700,000. The city is known for the rareness of natural disasters such as typhoons and earthquakes, and for its mild climate. In recognition of the variety of civic engagement activities in its community, Okayama city was nominated as a host city for the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) UNESCO World Conference in 2014 and has tried to become a compact city by redeveloping its public transportation system. Taking Okayama city as an example, this article focuses on the history of an urban park that has played an integral role in the process of

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enhancing civic engagement, public space, and a sustainable city.

Nishigawa Canal Park was constructed in downtown Okayama from 1974 to 1982, and its total length is 2.4 km. Since 2008, citizens have held events in the park totaling over 70 days per year, with the support of the city's Nishigawa Performers Project. Originally, Nishigawa Canal had the important role of irrigating fresh water over a length of 17 km into rice fields on reclaimed land. This article analyzes Nishigawa Canal Park because it is a case of a sustainable city realized through civic engagement in public space in a Japanese city. By analyzing *machizukuri* — community development through collaborative actions—we will demonstrate the importance of public space in urban development from two points of view: participatory democracy and an eco-livable city. The term “eco-livable city” combines the notions of “ecology” and “livable city” to refer to a low-carbon society. The characteristics of civic engagement in Nishigawa Canal Park are identified as follows: first, success and failure in constructing a walkable area in downtown Okayama; second, continued civic engagement for nearly half of a century; and third, the effort for revitalization of public spaces.

Nishigawa's history can be divided into four periods: discussion of environmental philosophy in the Edo era (first period), construction of Nishigawa Canal Park (second period), civic engagement for urban development (third period), and challenges in collaboration between citizens and the city (fourth period). Remarkably, Hirao Okazaki, (mayor from 1963–1983), promoted the slogan “Nature and Flowers, Light and Water” in the midst of the high economic growth period of the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, the canal was polluted by sewage and rubbish. Citizens' groups started clean-up efforts along the canal, and Okazaki decided to change the canal and the lanes on both sides of it into a green waterfront park as the symbol of a livable city. In 1988, around the time the Seto Long-Bridge was opened, a young architects' group called Team 25 started a flea market near the canal with the purpose of creating a downtown area that would be easy to walk through. Since the start of the 21st century, the number of participants, mainly young women, has increased, giving Nishigawa Canal Park new value for the ecological lifestyle. By analyzing the history of Nishigawa Canal Park, we will understand how citizens' efforts in Japan have developed from environmental movements and a focus on community designs to an emphasis on a healthy and ecological lifestyle. Okayama has rich experiences to show that its citizens value a sustainable society. It also faces challenges in urban development carried out through the collaboration of public policy, political leadership, and citizen participation.



Figure 1 Nishigawa Canal Park

2. First Period: Before the Creation of Nishigawa Canal Park

2.1 Local Development Philosophy in Okayama

In 1573, Naoie Ukita, a feudal lord, started to develop Okayama as a “castle town” expanding around Okayama castle, which and was largely completed by the Ikeda family in the 17th century (Araki 1976). Nishigawa Canal had been used since the Heian era in the 8th century, and the Ikeda family used it not just for defense, but for irrigation for paddy fields on reclaimed land. As the territory increased, people started to manage the long channel by paying attention to the amount of water and its cleanliness. The Nishigawa channel provided an important water supply for people’s lives (Ono and Takeuchi 2008).

However, the development of the castle town and reclamation caused problems. The balance between the preservation of nature and growth of the city was disrupted. As the city grew, lumber was gathered for construction, and energy was required for producing specialty items like Bizen ware and sea salt. As treeless hillsides with no water retaining capability began to increase, earth and sand flowed into rivers and floods occurred during heavy rain, destroying much of the downtown and nearby communities. In addition, drinking water wells were scarce in the castle town, and the inhabitants drank filtered water. As the river was polluted, contagious diseases spread all over the town. Okayama city was called the “Domain of Cholera” (Okayama-shi 1965, 1967).

Importantly, in the face of difficulties in local development, discussions were held regarding the balance of the city and villages and whether people should maintain nature or try to live in

harmony with it. In the mid-17th century, through discussions with Confucians like Banzan Kumazawa, who intended to protect nature, and Nagatada Tsuda, who managed local development, Mitsumasa Ikeda began his pragmatic policy based on Neo-Confucianism. In Kumazawa's environmental philosophy, mountains and rivers were the foundation of the state, and forest preservation was vital to the enrichment of it (Kuwako 1999). After Kumazawa's departure from politics, Lord Ikeda adopted Tsuda's initiative for large-scale land development and cultural projects in his territory in Okayama. Tsuda started public projects such as the reclamation of rice fields, creation of the Hyakken River, and construction of Kourakuen Garden and Shizutani School, which was the first public school in the world for common people. In that period, Lord Ikeda's policy was to balance nature protection and development for sustainable society in Okayama, believing that citizens' lives were inseparable from the stability of water quality and greenery.

2.2 Modernization and Waterworks Establishment

In the Meiji era, citizens began to seek the establishment of waterworks to prevent floods and the spread of infectious diseases. In 1892 and 1893, the city suffered from a great flood of the Asahi river. In 1895, to stop the spread of cholera, citizens started a movement to establish waterworks. Though Yasumasa Oda, the new mayor who took office in 1894, aimed to implement a waterworks project in 1897, the project was postponed with heavy opposition in the local assembly because of financial problems after the Sino-Japanese war. After another outbreak of cholera in 1905, the municipal council decided to construct waterworks with the support of the central government. On the other hand, the establishment of a sewer system had to wait until after World War II. Until then, citizens were burdened by the unsanitary water conditions when it rained hard.

3. Second Period: Hyper Economic Growth and the Making of a “Water and Green City”

3.1 Looking for Environmental Life Downtown

On June 29, 1945, toward the end of World War II, Okayama was bombed by the U.S. air force. In the downtown area, most houses and buildings were burned to ashes except for the post office, telephone office, and university hospital. According to interviews about life in the Nishigawa area before the war, the canal was used for both laundry and washing up, and it was also a play area for children to swim and fish in. There were fireflies, diving beetles, and dragonflies in the area

near the canal, where there were traditional houses and temples.¹

Although the time of hyper economic growth (1954–1973) brought economic prosperity, it also caused pollution problems across Japan. Nishigawa Canal was polluted daily by garbage and seemed to be one of the most contaminated places in the city. The dirty landscape was considered to be the result of citizens' lack of moral sense. Along the side of the canal, there were private vegetable gardens and parking areas. Nishigawa Canal was said to have a bad smell, and for this reason, the local assembly and newspapers criticized it as the shame of Okayama city. In 1962, a citizen charter declared, "We will make a beautiful green and clean city through clean-up activities." After the city established a sewer system, Hirao Okazaki, the mayor who took office in 1963, promoted the slogan "Nature and Flowers, Light and Water" and encouraged the civic engagement movement with catch-phrases such as "Let's plant flowers and trees!" and "Let's take care of flowers and trees!" (Okazaki 1991). These movements were aimed at improving citizens' lifestyle and educating them about the importance of clean-up activities. Neighborhood associations started clean-up activities in the canal. In January 1969, the Nishigawa Canal Federation for Environment and Beautification was established (Nishigawa Ryuiki 1985). The contamination of the canal was caused not only by citizens' lifestyle but also by the difficulty of collecting daily garbage on time in the period of rapid urban development. Restaurants and bars along the canal were among the main garbage producers in those days.

In 1970, the National Congress widely discussed the environmental crisis and impact of pollution. In April of that year, Okayama city created the Department of Pollution in the city office to reduce the harmful impact of water contamination, car emissions, and traffic noise, which had become worse with the rapid development. Thanks to the sewage system, the quality of water was improved more than ever, but the expansion of housing areas had become another source of contamination. In addition, Okayama city focused on environmental themes such as maintaining water quality, improving people's waste disposal, and controlling the noise and air pollution from cars. Unlike the pollution from heavy industrial areas, most pollution in the area resulted from the lifestyle of citizens in Okayama. Therefore, the city made multiple efforts to change its environmental ethic to solve these issues.

1 The author interviewed over 30 people who lived near Nishigawa Canal and were committed to civic engagement. Information is drawn from their life histories, newspapers, and reports on Okayama city.



Figure 2 Left: Unlawful dumping of garbage (June 16, 1971, Sanyo shimbun)
Right: Illegal parking (September 25, 1974, Sanyo Shimbun)

3.2 From Urban Pollution to Green Policy

Okazaki took the initiative in the installation of a water and sewage system in 1950 when he worked as an engineer for the water pipeline system of Okayama city. After he became the mayor, he sought to use his political leadership to make Okayama a green and water city. In December 1971, the city enacted an ordinance to promote a greenery environment, called the “Green Constitution” for urban development. On October 2, 1971, Okazaki made the following statement in the municipal assembly:

Although I’ve spoken of “Green and Flowers, Flowers and Water” for 9 years, it hasn’t been realized enough yet. During my term of office, I will work for greening, struggle against pollution and for a green environment. The meaning of “Green and Flowers, Light and Water” is to remove pollution. I will work for Green.

The Green Ordinance of Okayama city, enacted to become the first such effort in Japan, aimed at establishing a green council in Okayama to develop a partnership between the city

government, citizens, and citizen groups. The Rotary Club, Lions Club, neighborhood associations, Women's Association, Japan Commerce Okayama (JC Okayama), and labor unions joined a series of green activities called the "Month of Spring Flowers" and "Month of Fall Flowers." In 1972, the Green Plan was proposed, and it created the Green Council, which included the members of the Chamber Commerce and Women's Association.

Meanwhile, members of the Young Entrepreneurs Group Okayama organized free walk events along Nishigawa canal. After the success of a car-free walk event in Asahikawa city, Hokkaido, in 1969 which restricted cars in high streets, Tokyo (Ginza), Shizuoka, Hyogo, and Fukuoka cities held similar events (Narumi 2015). In 1972, JC Okayama planned a summer festival to realize a car-free walk to stop car circulation with the idea of "recovery of humanity" (Okayama Seinen Kaigisho 1971). They wanted to give families opportunities to enjoy not only economic richness but also emotional wealth. Nishigawa Canal was selected because of its geographic priority and good atmosphere that was seen as ecologically friendly and livable. The event attracted about 50,000 participants on July 24th. The next year, 100,000 participants visited the 1.2 km pedestrians' zone.

3.3 Making Nishigawa Canal Park

On December 1, 1972, the Green Council proposed an ambitious plan to turn the streets on both sides of Nishigawa Canal into a public park as the main attraction of the Green City. In this plan, the street on the west side of Nishigawa would be changed into a green space and the east side would be the same, leaving a 4 meter-wide lane for emergency cars. In the midst of the growth of car circulation, it was a unique idea that the car lane would be changed into a pedestrians' way and green space. However, there was some discussion in the local assembly about creating car parking spaces between the willow trees. The success of the Green Plan depended on citizens' approval of inhibiting cars' entry into the lanes along Nishigawa Canal. On December 7, 1972, Okayama city held a Green Liaison Conference that included members from the central government, prefectural government, and police, and they unanimously accepted the Green Plan. However, the police pointed out the possibility of a concentration of car circulation in the Nishigawa lanes and the necessity of providing compensation for gas station and parking lot owners. In the city, economic groups and the local assembly had worked together to create Nishigawa's green space. In 1973, some inhabitants started a movement that strongly opposed the construction of the park. The city had already offered public explanations over 10 times, and about 100 people had gathered in front of the city hall in order to hand in their petition with 2,208

signatures against the project. The opposing groups said that it was inadequate to realize the park plan without discussing it with the directors of neighborhood associations, and that it was necessary to hear directly the voices of the local residents and shop owners. They argued that their daily lives should be considered, even if they agreed with the importance of maintaining a green environment.

On the other hand, economic groups continued the summer festival successfully with car-free walking downtown. When Nishigawa line was changed to the Momotaro Avenue for the second year, 250,000 people gathered there on August 3–5, 1973. Car-free walking was accepted by residents as an enjoyable summer event that changed the area from a “car society” to a “walkable city” (Okayama Seinen Kaigisho 1974). In summary, though many people held favorable attitudes toward greening and walking, it was difficult to reach a consensus among stakeholders like local residents and shop owners. Nishigawa’s Green Plan was dropped due to a NIMBY attitude (Not In My Backyard: residents recognize the need for facilities, but do not want them not near their own houses). Okayama city was looking for a balance between green, water, pedestrians, and cars in urban development.

In 1974, the city put out a final plan. First, it planned to construct a new, one-kilometer public park. Second, the car lane on the west side of the Nishigawa canal would not be changed, but the car lane on the east side would narrow from 9 m to 6 m in order to make a greenway park. After the plan was presented in a public meeting, the opposing group agreed to the Green Plan in the spring of 1974, and the city finally started to construct Nishigawa Canal Park. On June 5th, the Nishigawa Carp Association released 5,000 carps in Nishigawa Canal in an event attended by the mayor, economic groups, and neighborhood associations. At that time, the quality of canal water had been obviously improved through the installation of the sewage system and clean-up activities. By 1974, the debate over the Green Plan ended with the realization of a beautiful canal. After the construction of Nishigawa Canal Park, residents asked Okayama city to extend the length of the park because of its beauty.

3.4 Political Leadership and Garden Philosophy

As Ono (2001) observes, Mayor Okazaki had an excellent business ability in terms of administrative efficiency. For example, he realized the idea of using the heat from the city’s waste incinerator to heat an indoor swimming pool. However, behind his decision, we must not overlook the efforts of public servants, economic groups that realized car-free walks, and citizens’ groups that carried out clean-up activities (Iwabuchi 2016). Nishigawa Canal Park’s construction

was separated into three terms: until 1976, until 1980 in the southern downstream area called Edagawa Green Park, and until 1983 in the northern upper stream area.

Kunie Ito (1924–2016), who designed Nishigawa Canal Park, made an interesting comment on the openness of parks. Nishigawa Canal Park is unique in that a single architect designed it. Because of this, the park has unity and balance. Also, as the park serves as a playground for children, Ito aimed for it to be a public space for citizens' activities with literary and ornamental sense.² He intended to make the park a place, not simply for children to play, but one that could act as a stage for music festivals and markets, and as a core space for citizens' daily lives. Thanks to his design philosophy, Okayama city established the basis for public participation in urban development in the middle of the downtown area. Interestingly, subsequent generations have unknowingly inherited the concept of a citizens' stage. The impact of Nishigawa Canal Park was that the city decided to promote accessibility to green and water downtown in the era of hyper development, which became a turning point away from pollution and toward nurturing the environment.



Figure 3 Left: Ito's design is characterized by the use of large stones
Right: Public space for citizen events

4. Changing Downtown through Urban Design

4.1 Team 25 Starts the Nishigawa Flea Market

In the 1980s, plans for reducing the amount of traffic circulation were characterized by the transit mall concept, which gave priority to pedestrians and public transportation. Ten years after the creation of Nishigawa Canal Park in August of 1986, Team 25, a group of young

2 The author interviewed Mr. Ito about the design philosophy of Nishigawa Canal Park on December 24, 2014, in Tokyo.

architects, was formed to renovate the Nishigawa area and make it a more attractive and popular place through events to show their image of the city (Nishigawa Flea Market 2000). They made the Nishigawa *Machizukuri* Charter, which had three principles. First, both roadways along the park should be made into a mall (walkway). Second, “gather, relax, and amusement” elements should be added to the park. Third, buildings on both sides should be made to match the scenery. Using this charter as a basis, Team 25 sought opportunities for people to gather in the park. The group considered the park’s problems were as follow: the park’s benefits were not being utilized by people in the surrounding area, the road divided the park from the surroundings, and there was a lack of activities and residents did not pay attention to the park.

From December 1986 to 1999, Team 25 held flea markets four times a year, for a total of 50 times, and intended to build a culture of Nishigawa where citizens’ groups made use of the park. For example, as commercial activity was prohibited in all of Okayama’s parks in those days, Team 25 asked the city for permission, explaining that the flea market was a way for citizens to enjoy community interactions and self-expression. They argued that the flea market would transform the administrative culture from one that just encouraged people to walk and look at the trees and water to one that promoted civic engagement in the public space. The following is a part of the document regarding the Nishigawa Flea Market (Ganbaru Machi Collection 50 2000).

Nishigawa Canal Park is a unique urban area even nationally known that harnessed both water and greenery. However, for all its wonderful landscape, few citizens used it and it went unutilized in urban development. To make it a treasure of Okayama and a space more closely connected to the lives of citizens, we decided to start a flea market where people can come and enjoy themselves as a way of “making a park with Humanity.” And, if we keep it going and people gather, the surrounding community will also be able to profit from it, and the proposal of the mall will be accepted by the community. Based on these opinions, we will start the market to make Nishigawa a symbol of Okayama’s uniqueness.

Team 25 thought that Nishigawa Canal Park contributed to greening but the park did not have much success in inviting people to the downtown area. They decided to promote the mall project through the flea market. Interestingly, Nishigawa Canal Park has connected a civic engagement network between Team 25 and the Okayama Future Design Committee, which consists of other professionals who promote urban development in economic and cultural senses. In December of

1986, when the Nishigawa Flea Market started on the pedestrian road, it had to change locations twice due to opposition from shop owners. From 1988, the flea market was held inside Nishigawa Canal Park and became so popular that the number of stalls increased to 250. From 1994 to 1999, it was moved to Shimoishii Park near Nishigawa Canal Park.

4.3 Challenges for the Walkable City

Team 25 held a series of events and symposiums to attract attention to the vision of a “walkable city.” From September 20th to 27th in 1987 they held the “Nishigawa Light-Up Festival” and “Water and Greenery Urban Development Symposium.” From July 10–16, 1988, they held an exhibition with the goal of making the Nishigawa area Okayama’s main attraction, and held a symposium on “How Will Nishigawa Change? Part 4: Will Nishigawa Become a Mall?”

On the other hand, Okayama city made a landscape guideline called the HOPE Plan (Housing with Proper Environment) in April 1986. In the same year, the Okayama Future Design Committee was formed and developed activity plans for Korakuen Garden and Kyobashi Farmers Market, too. Beginning in 1986, Team 25, the Okayama Future Design Committee, and the city took different approaches to urban development. Team 25 gathered people together at the flea market and sought to change the city’s design. On the other hand, the Okayama Future Design Committee had strong ties not just culturally and historically, but with companies, and even joined lobbying through urban development. The Chamber of Commerce and industry in Okayama established the Urban Affairs Committee in 1989 and proposed the concept of “1 Square Kilometer City Vision for People and Greenery,” which aimed at constructing a compact city through the circularization of street cars from four points within Okayama city (the area around Japan Rail Okayama Station, Omote-cho shopping street, City Hall, and Nakajima/Kyobashi) to stop the urban sprawl caused by the progression of motorized society. After that, members of the Okayama Future Design Committee formed RACDA, an NPO to promote the public transportation system in Okayama city, on October 1, 1995 (RACDA 2013). In order to establish a new public transportation system, the Chamber of Commerce showed a vision of a livable lifestyle through events like illumination in Nishigawa Canal Park and summer festivals called the “Okayama Starry Sky Story,” from 1997 to 1999.

On November 29, 1998, the Nishigawa Transit Mall Committee, including RACDA, held the first transit experiment in Japan, at the same time as the Nishigawa Flea Market. The Prefectural Street’s Transit Mall experiment was held on November 28, 1999, the final day of the Nishigawa Flea Market, when approximately 420 stalls and 15,000 participants gathered. By the

time the Nishigawa Flea Market had grown to be one of the largest in western Japan, urban development in the 1980s and 1990s aimed at the design of a compact city, but the task was approached differently by citizens, the local administration, and economic groups. In those days, the residents of Nishigawa area had not participated in civic engagement, but Nishigawa Canal Park was a place Team 25 advocated for in changing the city design into more than a stage for collaboration.

In order to make the urban design (e.g., mall strategy) more efficient, it was possible to keep a close relationship between citizen group and local government. However, according to the interviews with Team 25 representatives on July 3, 2013, while Team 25 was seeking activities to be independent and free from the local administration, the park administration did not have a strong intention to cooperate with citizen groups. As a result, during this period, the divide between them remained. Importantly, they took over the first plan of pedestrian priority and tried to make Nishigawa Canal Park more active by organizing the flea market.

5. New Civic Engagement and Public Policy

5.1 Succession from Nishigawa Club to NPO Tabula Rasa

After the flea market, the number of events organized by citizen groups decreased. In October 2003, the Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Office looked at Nishigawa Canal Park as a resource for inbound tourists and established Nishigawa Club to present the rich nature and activities of Nishigawa to both citizens and tourists. In addition, residents continued their monthly clean-up activities. Female volunteers who had held open cafés also participated in Nishigawa Club. Nishigawa Club held a “Café and Open-Air Tea Ceremony” in October 2003, “Media Café” in December of the same year and the “Nishigawa Art Festival” in August 2004.

It should be noted here that the female members of Nishigawa Club established NPO Tabula



Figure 4 Candle Night and farmer's market "ICHI"

Rasa in 2004. While Candle Night had been operated by Nishigawa Club since 2006, NPO Tabula Rasa collected funds from shops and stores and took it over in 2008. NPO Tabula Rasa, most of whose members are female, engaged in “soft” activities concerning ecology, art, sustainability, and local food, in contrast to the urban design proposed by Team 25 and RACDA (Tabula Rasa 2014). For example, they have held events such as “EcoSma” (2004–), which proposes the use and propagation of reusable utensils, “Happy Share Candle” (2009–), which reuses candles from wedding ceremonies, and “Organic Life Market ‘ICHI’” (2011–), which promotes friendship between cities and farm villages through healthy and organic foods. While architects, public transportation specialists, and business people joined in urban development at the beginning of the 21st century, it is clear that the number of women, young people, and producers has been gradually increasing, thanks to Nishigawa Club and Tabula Rasa.

5.2 Start of the Nishigawa Performer Project

Thirty years after the opening of the park, trees had grown so thick that they blocked sunlight and the passages beneath them were no longer relaxing for pedestrians. Moreover, the amount of traffic and parking spaces had increased. In 2006, the city established a citizens’ roundtable consisting of eight members (Nishigawa Teigensho 2007). After three years, they proposed the “Humans’ Urban Development Proposal: Starting from Nishigawa Canal Park,” which had three axes: (1) walkable city, (2) networking water and nature, and (3) increasing the attractiveness of the city center. Okayama city accepted the proposal and started brightening up the park by removing utility poles, constructing a wood deck, pruning and handling the trees, and so on.

In March 2009, at the 26th National City Greening Okayama Fair, the city held various events in collaboration with citizen performers. During the 66-day period, there were events on almost all days from 39 selected projects, like live shows, dances, open cafés, and so on. The fair demonstrated that partnership between citizens and the city was useful to promote use of the park. From the viewpoint of park maintenance, it is cost reducing if citizen groups do not use the park at all. If the focus is shifted to user convenience, however, allowing citizens to plan their activities as freely as possible will reduce cost and result in better quality events than if the events were planned by the administration. The key point is that communication between citizens and the administration benefits both sides. After the Greening Okayama Fair, the city held a “Flower and Green Harmony Fiesta in Nishigawa” in May 2010 and started the Nishigawa Performers Project, which made event procedures easier enhanced the park’s utilization (Okayama-shi 2011). In the past, performers had to ask for permission from the city to use water

and electricity in parks, and this involved complicated procedures. However, if they are selected as the members of Nishigawa Performers, the city can support them with publicity activities and rental fee exemptions for activities inside parks. Thanks to the Nishigawa Performers Project, there are over 30 activities per year with stable management and unique contents.

5.3 New Age of Civic Engagement in the 21st Century

As the number of events increased, the park became a *machizukuri* center where citizens exchanged opinions in democratic ways and generated new ideas to invite more participants. For example, gathering in Nishigawa Canal Park, they organized new events such as “Harenomi-NO,” which is a bar hopping event in the downtown area, and Organic Life Market ICHI, which aimed at connecting the city and villages in 2011. Young people also started Full Moon Bar in 2012. On April 15, 2013, the four groups of “Ichi,” “Full Moon Bar,” “Nishigawa Candle Night,” and “Harenomi-NO” declared that they would provide warm hospitality to the participants of the UNESCO World Conference on ESD.

University students and researchers also engaged in urban development. Okayama city held the “Nishigawa Promotion Forum” to discuss future designs with youth; however, it was found that only one student out of 70 had visited Nishigawa Canal Park. Therefore, the city thought to work with universities to increase youth participation. Since 2012, the Academic and General Okayama University Regional Research Association (AGORA) of Okayama University has contracted with the city to conduct annual research including a traffic census, historical surveys, and event surveys, with over 150 students participating in the investigations per project (Center AGORA 2014, 2015). The purpose of AGORA’s research on Nishigawa is to offer students opportunities to visit Nishigawa and learn urban planning skills. As citizen engagement has been increasing in the parks, some of the citizens hope that students will join activities for “making our Nishigawa area more relaxed, healthy, and human.”

5.4 Downtown Revitalization Policy Based on Citizen Participation

The year 2014 was a remarkable time in which a collaborative network grew between citizens, groups, the city, and researchers. Masao Omori, the mayor first elected in October of 2013, proposed the Downtown Revitalization Policy Package to shift from a car society to a compact city that will be walkable and enjoyable by February 2014. In this policy, Nishigawa and Kencho Street would become the basis for vitality and strolling. In the background of the policy package, the city was afraid of the increase in traffic jams and parking areas because of the opening of a

megamall near Okayama Japan Rail Station, which would attract 20,000,000 visitors per year. The city pushed policies towards a downtown that was easy to walk in, by introducing the community cycle MOMOCHARI, for example. In addition, Okayama University opened a satellite office, NISHIGAWA AGORA, which aimed at making a place for meeting, discussing, and holding symposia and activities for students and NPOs, in collaboration with Okayama city. Periodically, professors have held symposia to show their research results and future designs of the city. NPOs have used it as a stock space for their baggage, chairs, and desks for events.

From 2015 to 2016, the city conducted social traffic experiments on Nishigawa and Kencho Street. Mayor Omori's experiments were the first in 16 years, the last having been in 1998 and 1999. The city aimed to have an attractive downtown with pedestrian spaces. While the move from a motorized society to a more walkable and environmental city has been discussed since the 1972 Nishigawa Park Plan, what is going to be necessary from now on is careful consensus building with all of the stakeholders including residents, shop owners, police, and so on. In the same way, Mayor Okazaki brought various groups into green and water urban planning. The important thing is that citizens understand and engage in the future of the compact city in which they enjoy walking and become healthy. In January 2017, the Nishigawa Pedestrian Mall Committee was established, with the support of Okayama city, to prepare citizens' events. This is an important time for Okayama city to push its public policy connected with citizen engagement. The challenge is ongoing. In addition, the city has suggested building rebuilding Kencho Street, reducing its two car lanes into one.



Figure 5 Nishigawa Pedestrian Mall

6. Conclusion

This paper focused on the history of citizen engagement by various groups, and the public policy for ecology and a livable city at Nishigawa Canal Park. Throughout changing times, the citizens of Okayama have consistently participated in urban development. In this sense, Nishigawa Canal Park has been positioned as a place of *machizukuri*, urban development through citizen engagement in the downtown area. As we see, the history of civic engagement at Nishigawa Canal Park includes the lives of residents, advocacy for a transit mall, a livable lifestyle, and activities related to the symbiosis of water and greenery. At present, the participation by community residents is lower, but there is social and themed participation; for instance, efforts concerning the environment, art, ecology, and health food are increasing. For each issue, civic engagement in the Nishigawa area has a long history, but challenges have appeared intermittently. Not only from the example of Okayama but also from examples all over Japan, we can see that civic engagement is not just about planning events; instead, we should focus on why citizens start their activities and transform the city to make it more sustainable through *machizukuri* too.

Lastly, this paper concludes with a small statement on what is required for Nishigawa Canal Park's development to continue. Political leadership should understand the importance of citizens' will and support their engagement. On the other hand, citizens are looking for a co-productive way to work with the administration and economic groups for creative actions and services. Through their deliberation process for urban development, all citizens can voice their own interests and concerns in public life, and participative opportunities can contribute to the formation of varieties of public space that will improve the quality of life.

Okayama city's uniqueness in its policy toward an eco-livable city is the proximity of water and greenery in view of the *machizukuri* experience and citizens' daily lives. There is no end to the process of building an eco-livable city. For nearly half a century, citizens have taken actions toward this aim at Nishigawa Canal Park.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the Environment Research and Technology Development Fund, Grant Number 2RF-1502, "Research on urban physical structure and its planning theory of eco-livable city."

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