

Machizukuri Mariko

Mariko Saigo, president of Machizukuri Company Sheep Network (“machizukuri” means “town planning”), is a leading urban planner. She has carried out citizen-participation town development in many parts of Japan and has successfully revitalized local urban centers. In 2011 she won the Best Future Project of the MIPIM Awards at the Marche International des Professionnels d’Immobilier (MIPIM). She is a member of the Study Group of the Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake and has been actively participating in reconstruction efforts since the disaster. Osamu Sawaji spoke with her.

What got you interested in town development?

Mariko Saigo: At university, I studied architectural social science. During the research, I visited Kawagoe, in Saitama as well as Kyoto and Kanazawa, where old streets and buildings were preserved, and I found that in towns where the streets and buildings were well maintained in a harmonized manner, the residents were always cleaning the areas and there was strong community cooperation because they are proud of and love the town. As I continued my research, I started to become interested in creating beautiful and comfortable towns.

Where did you first start to become fully involved in town development?

My career started with work I was involved in for the preservation of traditional commercial buildings in the local shopping area in Kawagoe City at the end of the 1970s. At that time, traditional commercial buildings were being torn down, and local shopping areas were going out of fashion. Working together with shopping area representatives, a university professor,

and staff from the municipal government, I created Town Development Guidelines, comprising sixty-seven items in the Kawagoe Machinami Committee that were designed to revitalize the shopping area while maintaining the streets with traditional commercial buildings. The guidelines stipulated limits for the height of buildings, location of inner gardens, the maintenance of green zones and other rules. Based on these guidelines, the Kawagoe Machinami Committee, the residents and public offices worked together to preserve the town’s beautiful landscape. As a result, Kawagoe has now become a tourist spot attracting as many as five million visitors each year.

What is your involvement in town development?

What is important in urban development is that the residents become independent. Therefore, the workshop is important. In the workshop, for example, the residents discuss what kind of towns they would like to develop. I write down these ideas on paper slips and put them up on the board so that everybody can see them. Then, I sort the slips into groups by themes. I

do not select any particular ideas or make judgments. However, when I continue this operation of sorting the participants' opinions in front of their eyes, they gradually start sharing ideas.

The project of urban development proceeds by sharing of its image among residents. And then, the next stage is to establish a company for urban development. Communication is important and I think women seem to be suited to this process.

You are a member of the Study Group of the Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake. Which city's reconstruction efforts are you now involved with?

I have become a member of Compact City Ishinomaki Machinaka Sosei Council that promotes town development in Ishinomaki, Miyagi Prefecture, which was severely damaged by the tsunami of March 11 last year. The area hardest hit in Ishinomaki was the coastal area in which houses were developed as a result of an increase in the population after the end of World War II. The central area of the city, where historic buildings remain, sustained only limited damage. It is important to construct houses for affected people here, through redevelopment projects. In this way, the area will become a lively, convenient, comfortable and compact city where residential houses and shops are



concentrated in the center of the city. The project of developing 2,000 houses in the central city will start. There is a very beautiful eco-friendly waterfront town called Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm, Sweden. I hope the new area will become a town like this.

We also aim to create an Ishinomaki brand and make new industries from its unique culture and lifestyle, encompassing aspects such as ma-

rine products, marine processed products and fishing boat flags. For example, at the International Market for Retail Real Estate (MAPIC) held in Cannes, France, in November 2011, we exhibited hats and clothing made of fishing boat flags. The products proved a major hit with visitors. We even had an offer to open a shop that will handle these unique products in the cultural complex that the French government and Paris City are planning to jointly develop. The people of Ishinomaki are now revived and full of energy. They are making every effort to turn this tragedy into opportunities for the future.

In addition to this development in Ishinomaki, to support reconstruction efforts in other affected areas, I have set up a project team with members of the Reconstruction Design Council in Response to the Great East Japan Earthquake. This team will support reconstruction efforts led by local residents in the same manner as in Ishinomaki. I want to assist with the challenges the residents are facing for reconstruction.

