

# The Potential of Germany's “Soziale Stadt” Program

The contemporary city faces a number of problems, including worsening employment environments, issues associated with immigration and multicultural society, and the deterioration of the built urban environment. Germany has long sought to respond to urban problems through its “Soziale Stadt” or “Social City” experiment, which has attempted to revivify the city through a variety of means, such as urban redevelopment and the creation of environmental cities. The history of the Soziale Stadt concept reaches back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What is the Soziale Stadt Program? In this issue of My Vision, we look at initiatives based on this concept and their significance, and consider what suggestions they may offer Japan.

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Keywords...Urban experiment, vitalization of regional cities, increasing the sense of solidarity, communities in which individuals with diverse backgrounds become one

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Keywords...Social housing, market adjustment function, initiatives developed for districts

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## Commencing an Urban Experiment – Realization of a Japanese Version of Germany’s “Soziale Stadt”



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### The City – A Major Actor in Social Policy

Traveling in Germany’s regional areas, what most impresses one is the vitality of the nation’s regional cities. Germany is a federal state, and its regions were originally highly diverse. Some are city municipalities, like Hamburg and Bremen, inheritors of the tradition of the free cities of the Hanseatic League, which are now states in the federal republic. However, the important thing here is not the federal system alone. It is worth focusing on the fact that cities play an important role alongside the federal and state governments in addressing the problems faced by contemporary cities (employment instability, loss of a sense of community, environmental problems in depressed areas, etc.). The key phrase is “Soziale Stadt,” or “Social Cities.”

Nevertheless, from the perspective of population, the scale of Germany’s cities is not especially large. The majority of Germany’s cities have populations of no more than 20,000; with a population of 100,000, a city is considered a “large city.” The fact that German cities with populations of less than 100,000 are major actors in the implementation of diverse social policy must surely be of relevance to Japan’s regional cities, where population decline is a serious issue.

### Integration of Urban Redevelopment and Community Revitalization Policies based on NPO Activities

The Soziale Stadt Program commenced in 1999. The program was commenced as a means of spurring redevelopment in response to the aging of infrastructure and changes in Germany’s industrial structure, in addition to improving the housing environment for immigrants, but as we are informed by Professor Masako Murota of Tokyo City University, the focus of the program shifted from economic, environmental, social revitalization to the solution of social problems. The key was an approach to the implementation of policy that integrated the “hard” and the “soft” – the renovation of residential and business areas at the same time as the revitalization of community bonds that would be passed down through generations.

Professor Kenji Yamamoto of Teikyo University also emphasizes the empowerment of city residents. Among its activities, the Soziale Stadt Program provides support for the acquisition of qualifications by people who quit school early, among others, and to enable residents themselves to organize community activities such as festivals. The element that we should pay particular attention to is the existence of “District Managers.” District Managers stand between the administration and the residents of the city, and provide general consultation services for residents. The majority of these individuals are members of NPOs, including Christian and labor union-affiliated NPOs. The heavy involvement of NPOs, in both the quantitative and qualitative senses, is a significant element in the implementation of the Soziale Stadt Program.

### Inclusion of All City Residents, Improvement of the Sense of Solidarity

What, then, does the “sozial” in “Soziale Stadt” actually mean? Professor Satoshi Baba of The University of Tokyo informs us that the German word encompasses the idea of a vision of the entire

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social landscape, in which mutual assistance maintains social integration and prevents the society from fracturing. The contemporary Soziale Stadt Program also does not focus exclusively on partial measures, for example providing assistance to some of the poorer members of society, but is a concept that encompasses all of the residents of the city and seeks to increase their sense of solidarity. In the fact that German cities traditionally competed with each other while working to resolve social issues under the leadership of the Oberbürgermeister (Lord Mayor), a specialist urban bureaucrat possessing considerable discretionary power, we can see the historical background that led to contemporary Germany's Soziale Stadt.

Within Germany, Hamburg is the city that has been most progressive in advancing programs to revitalize depressed areas within the city. Through redevelopment closely tied to residents' concerns, Hamburg has sought to develop districts that combine residences, shops, offices and cultural facilities, and which are home to individuals from diverse social strata. Professor Shigeaki Oba of Osaka City University explicates the role played in this by social housing. When housing is left to the market, disparities in supply develop as a result of factors including social stratification and the characteristics of specific districts. The distinctive feature of social housing is that it allows housing to be supplied on the basis of low-interest government loans provided on the basis of conditions including the income of the applicant; after the government loan is repaid, the residence can be freely rented or resold.

The city of Erlangen in Bavaria often attracts international attention. Erlangen has a population of approximately 110,000, but its per capita GDP is twice the German average. The fact that the city has a university and is home to global companies is a major factor in this. The journalist Heizou Takamatsu, who reports from the region, also focuses attention on the important role that NPOs have played in the city's Soziale Stadt Programs. It is some 740 NPOs, involved in fields ranging from sports and culture to environmental issues, education and welfare, that have created a single community from residents of diverse backgrounds. The city's NPO and cultural policies have stimulated an enduring love of the city in its residents, and are a source of creativity.

### **Now is the Time to commence Diverse Social Experiments in Japanese Cities**

Considered individually, similar initiatives to these German Soziale Stadt initiatives can be observed among local municipalities in Japan. However, the uniqueness of the German program is evident in the fact that it seeks both to revitalize regional economies and solve social problems, and integrates "hard" initiatives (such as the upgrading and redevelopment of urban infrastructure) and the enhancement of "soft" elements that function through citizen participation, in particular via the involvement of NPOs. The creation of new urban identities and the stimulation of affection for their city among residents through the mixing of residents of different generations, social classes and national origins will provide important hints for Japan's regional cities.

The creation of a new vision that enables us to overcome the "disappearance" of Japan's regional areas and a "shrinking society" will be essential if we are to address the numerous social issues that Japan faces against the background of a declining and aging population. What we need at this juncture is a Japanese version of the Soziale Stadt concept and the launch of diverse urban experiments based on that concept.

Professor Uno teaches in the Institute of Social Science, The University of Tokyo, and serves as NIRA's Executive Vice President. He took his Ph.D. (Law) from The University of Tokyo, and specializes in the history of political thought and political philosophy.

# Realizing Sustainable Regional Revitalization through an Integrated Approach to Initiatives



**Masako Murota**

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The major distinguishing feature of German urban revitalization is the fact that it combines urban and housing policy that focuses on the improvement of infrastructure and the revitalization of housing estates with such policy focuses as immigration, education and welfare policy, and implements these in an integrated fashion. By advancing the renovation of residential and business areas that have become decrepit in tandem with efforts including the strengthening of community, the promotion of employment, the provision of support to the disabled, the elderly and immigrants, and education for young people, the German initiative seeks to recreate sustainable regional communities at the same time as realizing regional revitalization.

Termed the “Soziale Stadt” Program, this policy was commenced in 1999. Some examples of the program’s implementation: If there is an increase in the number of children in an area, and empty lots are turned into playgrounds, the program does not restrict itself to the “hard” aspect, the construction of parks, etc.; it also takes “soft” approaches in an

attempt to ensure a sound upbringing for the children. Or, in districts in which there is a large number of immigrants, the program not only works to improve the residential environment and develop community centers, but in tandem with this also provides German-language classes to parents and children, and organizes parties or small festivals for local residents and immigrants, functioning to realize social integration and promote employment and interaction with the local community. In areas in which new sites are created by the relocation of a factory, land use is converted in order, for example, to generate renewable energy or stimulate the tourism industry. At the same time, use is made of the surplus facilities for purposes such as conducting training programs for the unemployed, and implementing measures to promote entrepreneurship and attract human resources and innovation. The focus of the program was on economic, environmental, social revitalization, but today it is being more actively utilized as a means of improving the urban environment and solving social issues.

This integrated approach – i.e., the attempt to realize structural solutions to urban social issues generated by the aging of infrastructure and buildings, and changes in the economic and social environments, and thus to revitalize and create new appeal in the targeted areas and districts, through a policy approach that integrates “hard” and “soft” elements – can provide a model for Japan. In many of Japan’s deteriorating urban areas which are in need of revitalization, there are few young people, and the elderly are isolated. There is a gap between elderly peoples’ groups and young peoples’ networks, and limited opportunity for mutual discussion and mutual assistance between generations. As a result, these areas are not “passed on” from one generation to the next. In order to transform these areas, it will first be necessary to renovate the districts concerned; it would be desirable to improve aging infrastructure, rundown and empty houses, poorly managed greenery, etc. by area basis. In addition, it will also be necessary to make these areas appealing enough to attract young people back to them, realizing a revitalization on the “soft” front that allows the area to be “passed on” between generations.

Professor Murota conducts research in the area of urban and architectural planning, with a focus on the realization of a sustainable society. She is engaged in empirical research on the formation of communities throughout Japan. After completing coursework in social engineering in the doctoral program of the Tokyo Institute of Technology, she served as an Associate Professor at the Musashi Institute of Technology before taking her present position. The recipient of numerous prizes, Professor Murota was also an outside member of a policy committee of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism.



## The “Soziale Stadt” or “Socially Integrative City” Program: Contributing to the Empowerment of the Socially Vulnerable



**Kenji Yamamoto**

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Around 1960, one could find close to the center of any German city large residential buildings and areas offering a poor living environment. Such areas had been constructed as dense clusters of housing for factory workers during Germany's era of industrialization from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This housing generally offered poor living conditions, and when social housing Sozialwohnung or publicly subsidized apartment meeting modern standards began to be built in the suburbs in the 1960s, there was an ongoing exodus. However, Germans who were unable to move continued to live in the old areas, and at the same time foreign workers gradually moved into empty apartments, in order to let their family members join them from their respective home countries. In the 1970s, the need to improve these residential districts in German inner cities was increasingly recognized, and improvement programs commenced, advanced by city administrations that took responsibility for the provision of housing and public companies and other entities under their jurisdiction, with financial assistance from the federal government. At the same time, the

large-scale suburban residential complexes built in the 1960s and the surrounding areas were aging, and at a time when their deficiencies as living environments became apparent, they began to become densely populated by the socially vulnerable such as the unemployed and single mothers, in addition to non-German immigrants.

In response, in the 1990s the “Soziale Stadt” Program, also known as the “Socially Integrative City” Program, which sought to improve urban areas in which residences and the living environment more generally had deteriorated and which were facing social problems, was advanced in earnest based on cooperation between federal, state and municipal governments. A distinctive feature of the Program is the fact that it does not focus exclusively on improving residences and the physical living environment, but also implements projects that assist in empowering residents. This has allowed some residents to live stably in Germany for the first time by enabling them to obtain qualifications for employment. The Program supports high school dropouts to obtain qualifications and residents to develop the ability to plan and conduct community activities such as community festivals. Staff called “District Managers,” who offer consultation services to local residents, are assigned to each district, and work for the revitalization of their district as a liaison between the administration and residents.

In Germany, whether in the inner cities or the suburbs, Catholic, Protestant, labor union and other social welfare groups have long been active in working for the benefit of the socially vulnerable. The majority of District Managers are members of such NPOs. It could be said that it is the power of NPOs that enables German society to function. While the foundation for NPO activities differs between Germany and Japan, it is undoubtedly the case that Japan has much to learn from Germany's Soziale Stadt Program.

Note: About the translation of “Soziale Stadt Program”

Professor Yamamoto uses “Socially Integrative City” as the English translation of “Soziale Stadt” rather than the direct translation, “Social City,” in order to distinguish between “Sozialestadt” as a historical concept related to the German welfare state, and “Soziale Stadt” as a program contributing to social and urban development that commenced in the 1990s.

Professor Yamamoto specializes in socioeconomic social and economic geography. He holds a Ph.D. in Science, and is the former President of the Japan Association of Economic Geographers. His research outcomes based on field studies in Germany are highly regarded. Professor Yamamoto studied at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Science. He has conducted research at German universities including the Technical University of Munich and Heidelberg University. After serving as a Professor in Kyushu University's Graduate School of Economics and as Dean of the same school, Professor Yamamoto is now a Professor Emeritus of Kyushu University. He was awarded the Philipp Franz von Siebold-Prize in 2000 by the President of the Federal Republic of Germany.

# A “Program for All Citizens”: The Historical Background of the Soziale Stadt Program



**Satoshi Baba**

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Germany has traditionally been a decentralized nation with highly autonomous cities, and institutions and policy have been created on a foundation of strong city administrations. The Soziale Stadt Program forms part of this tradition, and it can be seen to have inherited the role played by the city in German history.

With the progress of industrialization in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Germany’s population began to concentrate in cities, and urban problems including housing shortages, poor hygiene, poverty and unemployment began to become issues. It was the cities that first grappled with realizing a solution to these problems. Germany’s cities had been incorporated into the state by the Prussian Reform Movement at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but retained strong self-government and a high level of financial autonomy. The Oberbürgermeister (Lord Mayor) was a specialist urban bureaucrat with a term of 12 years, and possessed considerable discretionary power. Cities cooperated while competing with each other.

German cities during this period were known as “Sozialstadt,” and are regarded as precursors to the German welfare state that developed after the First World War. Under the banner of the “Sozialstaat” (“Social State”), the role of central actor in social policy in Germany shifted from the city to the state. However, with the formation of the federal republic following the Nazi period and the Second World War, the role of the city once again increased during the process of decentralization from the 1970s onwards.

The German word “sozial” has the connotation of a view of society as a whole, in which mutual assistance prevents social fracture, maintaining social integration. German scholar of administrative law Ernst Forsthoff conceptualized this as Daseinsvorsorge (provision of public utilities and public services). This is an important concept which means that the administration undertakes to provide the necessities of city residents’ lives, not just to lower-income residents, but to all residents. It encompasses the idea that the city, as part of the state, provides the electricity, gas, transport, etc. that are indispensable to residents’ lives, and also tackles issues such as education, assistance for the poor, and hygiene.

The current Soziale Stadt Program also does not rest with providing assistance to poorer social strata, but is based in the concept of providing coverage to all the residents of the city, encompassing whole districts and ultimately the entire city. We can consider the program to have inherited the historical concept of “sozial.” Building on this continuity, the contemporary Soziale Stadt Program has set itself the new aim of raising the level of problematic districts while harnessing the strength of new actors including private sector entities and NPOs.

Professor Baba is engaged in research that analyzes the problems of German cities following modernization and industrialization, and studies their significance from the perspectives of economics and economic history. He specializes in the study of modern German urban history and western economic history. Professor Baba completed coursework in the Ph.D. program of The University of Tokyo’s Graduate School of Economics, taking a Ph.D. in Economics. He held positions as an Assistant Professor in The University of Tokyo’s Faculty of Economics and Graduate School of Economics before taking his present position in 1998. He has also been a visiting researcher in the Faculty of Philosophy and History, Goethe University Frankfurt, and the Centre for Urban History, University of Leicester.

# Housing Policies in which Initiatives are developed in Districts



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There have long been significant disparities between German states, and the makeup of citizens, including immigrants, also varies greatly between regions. The Soziale Stadt Program was born from questioning of how each local municipality in this society marked by significant disparity between states and between municipalities could guarantee a fixed standard of living for all of their residents. Housing policy, one of the pillars of the program, is characterized by the emphasis placed on the market supply and demand function.

This has its origin in the provision of government assistance to build houses amid Germany's post-WWII housing shortage, in order to ensure the provision of housing to a wide range of social strata. If housing were to be left up to the market, there would be disparities of supply between different social strata and between districts within the city. Low-interest government loans, conditional upon factors including the residents' income, are provided to both companies and individuals, enabling the supply of large amounts of housing. This is termed "social housing," and is a concept unique to Germany, referring not to public housing but to temporary housing for low-income residents for which government loans have not yet been repaid. When the government loan is repaid, tenancy of the house is not restricted to low-income individuals; the house can be rented or resold. An upper limit for rent is set by each district or street within the city, but the amount itself is determined by the balance of supply and demand in the market. On this point, this approach differs from the concept behind welfare policy.

The city-state of Hamburg is characterized by a high rate of dependence on rental housing, and its housing policy has been proactive even by German standards. Recent economic growth has created a tight housing supply situation, re-energizing the construction of social housing. At the same time, because disparity between districts within the city has also increased, measures are now being implemented that respond more closely to the actual situation of specific districts. The organization STEG, commissioned by the state to conduct a redevelopment project in Hamburg, was launched as a city-owned company and later privatized. STEG's function in coordinating between the administration and residents is steadily being transferred to residents' groups and other entities within individual districts. Citizen participation, a defining feature of the Soziale Stadt Program, is enabling responses to individual issues that are understood precisely because the people involved are residents of the district.

Even by comparison with other German cities, Hamburg has been quick to undertake urban renewal initiatives such as the redevelopment of declining urban districts, but these efforts cannot be called an unconditional success. The economy is growing, but time will still be necessary for the elimination of disparities between districts and divisions within the community. Hamburg remains on the path to renewal.

Focusing on Hamburg and the Ruhr region, Professor Oba conducts research on German urban policy, in particular land and housing policy since modernization, international comparison of the regional housing market in advanced industrial nations, urban development projects, and projects for the renewal of declining urban districts. He completed coursework in Osaka City University's Graduate School of Literature and Human Sciences (specializing in Geography). He holds a Ph.D. in Literature. Professor Oba served as an Associate Professor at Osaka City University's Graduate School of Literature and Human Sciences before taking his present position. He has also been a Visiting Professor at the Ruhr-University Bochum, Germany.

# Germany's "Soziale Stadt" as an Auxiliary Program



Heizou Takamatsu  
Journalist

I report from Erlangen (population approximately 110,000), a city in the north of the state of Bavaria. Erlangen is implementing the Soziale Stadt Program in multiple districts. The purpose of the Soziale Stadt Program is to provide comprehensive support for urban renewal from both the "hard" (buildings, etc.) and "soft" (community involvement, etc.) perspectives, but it also seems to be applied in cities and areas that have already achieved a specific level of economic power and quality of life. Erlangen is one of these. I would like to consider how to understand the relationship of cities with the Program based on my observations in Erlangen. The characteristics of the city in Germany may provide us with one clue in doing so.

In general, the definition of "city" is vague. In the case of Germany, however, due to the historical background, the image of the city and related institutions, etc. are comparatively clear. In addition, the scale of urban municipalities is relatively small. A city of 100,000 is considered a large city, and is qualitatively quite different from Japanese cities of the same size. Cities in Germany also seek to comprehensively optimize elements throughout the entire city, encompassing economics, culture, education, the environment, welfare and resident participation. In a word, there is a strong disposition towards improving the quality of the city. Erlangen is a city that had already achieved a high level of quality; nevertheless, if a survey of data for the entire city showed, for example, areas in which interaction between generations should be more active, this would be addressed as an urban planning project. At such times, application for the Soziale Stadt Program would also represent a possibility.

I will consider one of the important elements of the Soziale Stadt – resident participation. The city is not a premodern human group with shared bonds and blood ties; it is a space densely inhabited by strangers. Mechanisms to enable people to get to know each other are therefore essential, and cultural policy and NPOs (and equivalent organizations) fulfill this role. They transform the city from a collection of strangers into a space encompassing community elements. In Germany, NPOs have long collaborated closely with administrations in order to improve the quality of life of citizens. This also applies in areas that are targets of the Soziale Stadt Program. For example, sports clubs (which are also organizations equivalent to NPOs) in districts that are subject to the Program are involved from the beginning in the planning, construction and operation of sports facilities in the district. There are approximately 740 NPOs in Erlangen that fulfill this role, focusing in addition to sport on areas including culture, environmental problems, education and welfare.

If you read the local newspaper, you will see that when the city applies for a Soziale Stadt Program, the details are carefully reported, and a member of staff of the City Planning Bureau is interviewed. It is important news for the region. Nevertheless, I think that the easiest way to understand the Soziale Stadt Program is to view it as an extension of urban management, playing an auxiliary role in increasing the quality of the city as a whole.

(Submitted manuscript)

Mr. Takamatsu resides in Erlangen, in Bavaria. He began regularly visiting the city in the latter half of the 1990s, and has been a resident since 2002. As a journalist, Mr. Takamatsu reports on various aspects of his adopted region, including culture, the environment, the economy, and sports. He writes about the development of regional cities, comparing customs and social systems between Germany and Japan. In addition to lecturing for local governments and universities when he visits his native Japan, Mr. Takamatsu is also involved in a training program in Erlangen that combines intensive lectures and excursions.