

Featured Paper: Poverty Issues
Dilemma over the Redevelopment of Poor Areas:
A Case Study of Airin District

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1. Introduction

Since the collapse of the bubble economy, Japan has been experiencing a rise in the relative poverty and welfare assistance rates against the background of the economic stagnation called the “lost 20 years.” Under these circumstances, public and private sector safety nets for the poor have gradually been created in recent years, and laws dealing with poverty have been newly developed. For example, to resolve serious poverty issues affecting children, the Act to Accelerate Measures for Disadvantaged Children was passed in 2014, and various measures including study support, employment support, and increasing the number of school social workers have been implemented. Another measure to encourage self-reliance before people accept public assistance is the Services and Support for Needy Persons Act passed in 2015, which provides counseling service counters for poor and needy persons in the municipalities which have welfare offices.

Meanwhile, there are few poverty measures and poverty studies handling directly the relationship between poverty and the community. Though the existing theory of community welfare has been developed, there are few discussions about how to apply the concepts and methods of community social work, community-based total care systems, resident participation and user-centered services, for the resolution of poverty issues (Noda, 2012).

It is true that poverty is a personal issue, but poverty is not completely unrelated to the issues which communities have. Especially, the poverty issues in developed countries cannot be separated from urban areas. For instance, the concentration of poverty in an inner city called a ‘ghetto’ in the USA, the suburbs in France, and the former industrial areas that have deindustrialized in the UK, is a major public concern (Wilson, 1987; Mori, 2016; Jones, 2011). The urban areas where poor people are concentrated are sometimes used for redevelopment, due to people’s recent tendency to live in city centers, and it is sometimes seen that these areas have been transformed into new dwelling areas for the middle class, who are working in knowledge-based or advanced service industries. The process of renovating deteriorated urban areas by forcing the relocation of the current residents is called gentrification, and it is causing serious social problems (Smith, 1996).

Considering poverty issues at the community level is very important for the study of social

welfare. In this paper, taking the example of Airin District in Nishinari Ward, Osaka City, which the author has been investigating for a long time, the author will clarify the following two points. One is to grasp the reason why poverty has been concentrated in Airin District¹, and the other is to analyze the merits and demerits of the redevelopment projects carried out to eliminate the concentration of poverty in this district.

2. Records as the Town for Workers

2.1 Kamagasaki as an Area in Decline

Before the name Airin District was given by the administration in 1966, the town had been called Kamagasaki. Before the twentieth century it was farm land with fields. However in the twentieth century the area's population drastically increased due to urbanization and industrialization, and much of the area was turned into streets with cheap lodging houses where poor people were concentrated². In addition, this area was gutted by the Great Osaka Air Raids in 1945 during the Pacific War. However, against the background of rapid reconstruction, the area became well-known for its flophouses³ in the 1950s. In Kamagasaki, where homeless workers with intermittent income are concentrated, the poverty tends historically to be highly concentrated, which has been a major concern of the media.

During the period of high economic growth large scale academic surveys were conducted to clarify the actual situation. The first research was the "Comprehensive Study of Areas in Social Decline in Osaka City," supported by the Ministry of Education in 1958.⁴ In 1959, as a part of the research, the "Field Survey of Kamagasaki in Nishinari Ward"⁵ (hereinafter the 1959 survey) was conducted. The researchers participating in this survey considered that rapid urbanization and industrialization would cause these areas to decline and grow in size, and many social pathologies such as unemployment, delinquency, crime, prostitution, and the collapse of families, would arise in such areas. Kamagasaki was considered as one of the largest slums which existed in major cities, and a large-scale survey was conducted with a view to resolving the social issues (Osaka Sociological Association 1961a; Osaka Sociological Association 1961b)⁶.

The 1959 survey revealed that many people had to live in small houses⁷, there were a lot of workers with low and intermittent wages, the rate of single households was much higher than the average of Osaka City⁸, the rate of single parent households was high⁹, the number of children who did not go to school was large, and organized crime was rampant¹⁰.

2.2 Transformation from a Slum into a Labor Camp for Drifters

As mentioned earlier, Kamagasaki was seen as an area in decline from the 1950s, and fundamental measures were considered. It was the First Kamagasaki Riot (hereinafter the First Riot)

on August 1, 1961, that promoted this. This riot, in reaction to the police's actions in response to the death of a day worker in a traffic accident, lasted three days. The First Riot was a great disaster which resulted in more than 500 wounded. With this as a starting point however, measures for Kamagasaki (later measures for Airin) started. Prior to the First Riot, the Osaka City Council on March 7, 1961, announced measures for Kamagasaki for the first time since the war. The measures included using influential persons in Nishinari Ward to organize the Nishinari Airin Group, and improving the living standards of the residents by giving life guidance, educational guidance, and providing side jobs in Nishinari Airin Hall which was to be established in April, 1961 (Haraguchi, 2003). After the First Riot, the Liaison Council of Kamagasaki was established by Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture and the Osaka Prefectural Police. The council discussed what the measures for Kamagasaki should be. As a result, it was decided that Osaka City would assume measures for public welfare¹¹, and Osaka Prefecture would assume measures for labor¹².

However in spite of such measures by the administration there were repeated riots. On May 28, 1966, a fifth riot broke out because of dissatisfaction with the response of the fire department to a fire. The grievances of day workers made the riot more violent, some 2000 people set fire to pachinko parlors and police boxes, and threw stones. As a result, the Third Party Liaison Council of Airin was organized by Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture and the Osaka Prefectural Police, and Kamagasaki was renamed Airin District on June 15, 1966. It was officially decided that additional measures would be taken by shaping the district¹³.

Before it was renamed Airin District, Osaka City, Osaka Prefecture, and the Osaka Prefectural Police were independently responsible for welfare, labor, and security, but there were no comprehensive measures for the region overall. However after it was renamed Airin District, it was decided that Airin District would be developed as a supply center for day labor¹⁴. The main issue in the background was to eliminate labor force shortages for the construction of the venue for the 1970 Japan World Exposition, in Osaka, with the effective use of day workers. As a result, the number of day workers drastically increased, and family households moved outside the district. This was how the Airin District, which had been called a slum before, gradually was transformed into a flophouse area for unmarried men.

In the mid-1970s while the percentage of men in the district increased to 70%, the percentage of juveniles decreased to 10%. In the bubble economy period around 1990, men accounted for 85%, and the juvenile population was only 2% (Osaka City University Urban Research Plaza, 2011).

2.3 Prosperity and the Decline of the Day Labor Market

During the period of high economic growth, in Airin District there were various types of available jobs in port transport and manufacturing as well as the construction industry, but after the Oil Crisis, the construction industry became the main source of jobs. Because the construction

industry depends heavily on public works and the weather, it is difficult to secure stable income throughout the year. Therefore, the labor environment in Airin District became more fluid than before.

On the other hand, in the 1980s Airin District experienced an economic boom and the number of day workers drastically increased¹⁵. Especially in the bubble economy period from the late 1980s to early 1990s, huge public projects in the Kansai region, such as the construction of the Kansai Science City, Kansai International Airport, and the Akashi-Kaikyo Bridge started. Also the number of private projects for buildings and condominiums increased. This is why Airin District became very lively.

The collapse of the bubble economy and the subsequent prolonged recession however cast a huge shadow over Airin District. Many day workers in the district, who moved from worksite to worksite, could not pay for cheap rooming houses, and the number of day workers who spent the nights on the streets increased rapidly. Particularly middle aged and old day workers were in a very vulnerable position. They were used as an important source of labor in the period of economic booms, but in the prolonged recession after the collapse of the bubble economy employers rarely hired them.

As the issue of unemployment for old day workers became serious, the Osaka Municipal Rehabilitation Consultation Office (hereinafter the Consultation Office), which had provided livelihood consultations for people with no fixed address, expanded its operations and made it possible for healthy day workers to apply for emergency assistance funds, which had been originally for old day workers who could not work because of illness or other reasons. However, many more applicants than the Consultation Office had expected applied, and it could not handle them. Therefore, the office stopped this expanded system. This withdrawal brought a fierce backlash from day workers which led to large-scale riots again (the Second and Third Riots).

Taking these riots as an opportunity, the labor union which had been responsible for supporting day workers in Airin District shifted its emphasis from conventional labor concerns, such as wage hikes and the improvement of working conditions, to employment security for old day workers and the protection of the rights of the homeless. This is how Airin District was gradually transformed from a town for workers to a town for those on welfare.

3. Safety Nets for the Town of Welfare

3.1 Serious Issues for the Homeless

Although after the collapse of the bubble economy many day workers in Airin District were chronically unemployed, the public sector, including Osaka City, did not take specific measures. Day workers who were forced into homelessness in the district overflowed, and the number of homeless people amounted to over a thousand in the late 1990s. Near Shin-Imamiya Station, which is a gateway to the district, there were clusters of small dwellings of homeless people which were covered with

blue sheets. Shelters for the homeless were constructed in front of the junior high school building in the area. Furthermore, tents or small dwellings in the parks both inside and outside the district were set up. In those days, public assistance was given only to a very few homeless people with illnesses or disabilities, and the dysfunction of the social welfare system worsened the homeless issue. Later it was not until the homeless issue was recognized as a social issue not only for the area but also for the rest of the city, that the administration began reluctantly to take measures to tackle the homeless issue.

In 2000, the free of charge Temporary Night Emergency Shelter was established in Airin District, as was the Independence Support Center for the Homeless which was established outside of the district. In addition, after 2003, when the “Application of Public Assistance for the Homeless” was issued from the director of the Public Assistance Division of the Social Welfare and War Victims’ Relief Bureau, Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, public assistance was given to more homeless people living in the district, and the number of people who lived in monthly rental housing increased. These measures drastically decreased the number of homeless.

3.2 Issues after Incorporation of the Social Welfare System: Serious Social Isolation

Some 2,500 households were accepting public assistance in 2002, but the number increased to 6,000 households in 2003. After 2008, when the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the termination of contracts of temporary workers became socially serious, the number of public assistance applications increased again. The background to this increase was the notification, “Thorough Support for People Who Have Lost Jobs or Housing,” by the director for the Public Assistance Division of the Social Welfare and War Victims’ Relief Bureau in March 2009. Because of this notification, many people who lost their jobs or housing were given thorough protection to ensure they had a place to live, and so rejections of public assistance applications on the grounds of being homeless decreased. As a result, while the homeless in Airin District decreased, public assistance recipients increased. In 2010, approximately 9,000 people, equivalent to one-third of the residents in the district, were receiving public assistance.

As stated above, before being renamed Airin District, the area was a slum (a poor area where many women and children had a fixed address to live at). On the other hand, in the late 1960s to 1990s, after it was renamed Airin District, the area was transformed into a town for workers (a poor area where unmarried male workers did not have a place to settle down). In the 2000s, due to the increase in the number of people receiving public assistance, the area became a town of welfare (a poor area where unmarried male workers had a place to settle down).

Airin District returned to being a place to settle down, but there was a large difference in quality between the area in the 1950s, and its current state. It is assumed that there were many family households in this district, and that closer human relationships in the community were formed in the

past, but in Airin District after the advances in welfare, there are now many unmarried persons of advanced age who are anonymous, and mutual assistance between the residents can hardly be expected.

Currently, most of the people living in Airin District are unmarried and of advanced age who do not have social relationships, such as kinship and community relationships. Because many of them have been hopping from one job to another as a day worker, they have difficulty in getting accustomed to the lifestyle of being in one place for a long period. Although public assistance has enabled them to settle down, and the homeless issue in Airin District has improved, new issues including social isolation and subsequent solitary deaths have emerged.

Katsuyoshi Kawai points out that the issue of social isolation is not emerging uniformly all around the country, and more attention must be paid to the localization of the issue and its regional features (Kawai, 2013). From this point of view, based on the census data, Kawai calculated the ratio of unmarried persons of advanced age who tend to be socially isolated (the ratio of households with unmarried senior citizens over 65 years of age), and broke down the top 30 municipalities into three categories; 1) islands 2) underpopulated areas 3) major cities. As a result, it was revealed that senior citizens living alone in major cities increased rapidly between 1995 and 2010 (Kawai, 2013). Especially, Nishinari Ward showed a remarkably high rate. The ratio of unmarried senior citizens in this ward has been soaring; 43.3% in 1995, 49.6% in 2000, 60.7% in 2005 and 66.1% in 2010. It is assumed that in Airin District, where the great majority of the residents are unmarried, the ratio of unmarried senior citizens is much higher than the average in Nishinari Ward.

Thus, in recent years, Airin District has had a high risk of social isolation. Katsuhiko Fujimori, by referring to the survey on social isolation conducted by the Minato Council of Social Welfare, Tokyo, points out that the majority of unmarried elderly people who “have no supporters in an emergency” are the young-old, males, low-income earners and people living in rental houses. All these characteristics are similar to the current situation in Airin District (Fujimori, 2010). Many people living in Airin District have been moving from place to place and do not have enough social relationships in the community. According to the survey report called the “Current Situation of Welfare Acceptance in Nishinari Ward, Osaka,” issued by the Osaka Employment, Welfare and Residential Study Group” in 2006, 23% of the public assistance recipients in Airin District who have experienced homelessness does not have neighborhood relationships, friendships, or advisers. Furthermore, the survey report shows that the majority of public assistance recipients do not participate in group or social activities. Although while thanks to the social welfare system they have just about been incorporated into the social welfare system, they still tend to be excluded from social relationships.

Typically public assistance recipients receive support from case workers, but this does not necessarily lead to the avoidance of social isolation. One reason for this is that as Nishinari Ward has

far more public assistance recipients than other municipalities, case workers in the ward are responsible for too many households, and it is difficult to provide complete support¹⁶.

Because the acceptance of public assistance usually enables the recipients to secure housing and maintain the minimum standard of living, it seems to contribute to the stability of social relationships. However, the norm of noninvolvement, “Don’t pry into someone’s past,” is rooted in Airin District, where day workers with high fluidity are concentrated (Aoki, 1989; Nishizawa, 1995). Therefore, even after settling down, there are many cases where people are isolated.

As the issue of social isolation in Airin District is becoming serious, the active involvement by promoters of community welfare, such as local welfare commissioners, or the Council of Social Welfare, is expected, but they cannot establish relationships with new residents in the district. While other municipalities are taking part in activities for solving the issues of social isolation, based on residents’ associations including neighborhood associations and residents’ associations for apartment houses, most of the residents in Airin District do not participate in such community organizations, and it is difficult to solve the issues by using normal approaches.

3.3 Many Solitary Deaths

As mentioned earlier, the expansion of social isolation in Airin District is frequently causing solitary deaths. There are no official data indicating the number of solitary deaths in the district, so let us estimate it from the number of cremations of public assistance recipients in the district, and the number of unnatural deaths dealt with by Nishinari Police Station.

The number of cremations of public assistance recipients in Osaka City in 2014 was 3,833, of which 1,151 were in Nishinari Ward, accounting for 30% of the whole and which overwhelmed the other wards. Because public assistance recipients in Airin District account for one-third of those in Nishinari Ward, by simple arithmetic approximately 400 public assistance recipients die per year. Of course they do not all die at home, so it is necessary to reduce a little bit the actual number of solitary deaths.

The number of unnatural deaths which Nishinari Police Station deals with will indicate a more accurate number of solitary deaths. Unnatural death means a death with unclear causes at the time of death, and it is considered that death at home accounts for the majority. According to the statistical data, which the author requested from the Osaka Prefectural Police, the number of unnatural deaths dealt with by Nishinari Police Station, which is responsible for Airin District, stayed at around 600 people between 2002 and 2014. In recent years deaths on the streets have drastically decreased, so it is expected that most unnatural deaths are solitary deaths at home¹⁷.

The ratio of the elderly unnatural deaths dealt with by Nishinari Police Station is noteworthy. It accounted for 49.0% in 2002, but it increased to 63.8% in 2006, 67.1% in 2010, and 69.0% in 2014. The figures show the rapid increase in solitary deaths of the elderly in Airin District.

To solve the issues of serious social isolation and solitary death, the Nishinari Council of Social Welfare launched the “Support Program for Watching Vulnerable People in the Local Community Network” in 2015, collected information on households with a high possibility of solitary death, and built a system to deal with the emergency. In addition, in Airin District, with the collaboration of five NPOs and Nishinari Ward Office, the “Hito-hana Project” was launched in 2013. This project aims to prevent social isolation of public assistance recipients who are old and unmarried. Mainly based at the Hito-hana Center, it is providing a variety of activities such as expressive activities, experiential learning, farm work and volunteer activities¹⁸.

Recently, efforts to prevent social isolation and solitary deaths have moved forward in Airin District, but it is just a beginning and they are not a sufficient safety net. There are too many people who potentially need assistance, so it is undeniable that it is difficult to address the issues with limited resources.

4. Community Creation and Redevelopment

4.1 The Record of Community Planning

Katuyoshi Kawai states that it is necessary to take measures for solving the issue of isolation by regional or community creation. Let me explain the case of Airin District (Kawai, 2013).

Since the late 1990s, when the issues of homelessness became serious, efforts for community creation have been promoted in the district. A typical activity is by the Forum for Revitalization of Kamagasaki. Sen Arimura, a staff member of the Nishinari Labor and Welfare Center, has been playing a primary role as the secretary general. In regular meeting held by the forum, various issues in Airin District have been discussed. While conventional social movements in this area tended to promote the protection of the rights of day workers and homeless people, based on the political convictions of the Forum for Revitalization of Kamagasaki, the regional issues have been discussed and shared regardless of beliefs or occupational positions. These approaches have gradually created a relationship between groups and individuals, although there have sometimes been conflicts.

Meanwhile in 2005, by utilizing the Osaka City Community Creation Activity Support System, the Haginochaya Community Promotion Association, and the Haginochaya Council of Social Welfare, played a primary role in starting the “Community Creation Study Group for the Neighborhood of Haginochaya Elementary School and Imamiya Junior High School¹⁹.” Architect Seiji Terakawa, an associate professor at Kindai University, participated in the study group as an adviser and consultant, and developed activities for, 1) improvement of the neighborhood of Haginochaya elementary school 2) collaboration with other groups in the area and 3) formulation of the concept of community creation.

In 2008, to promote relationships with other groups in the area, and making the stepping stone

of the “Community Creation Study Group for the Neighborhood of Haginochaya Elementary School and Imamiya Junior High School, an area comprehensive platform called Haginochaya Community Creation Conference (provisional) was established (Arimura and Terakawa, 2014). The main members of the Community Creation Study Group for the Neighborhood of Haginochaya Elementary School and Imamiya Junior High School were local residents participating in the Haginochaya Community Promotion Association, and the Haginochaya Council of Social Welfare. On the other hand the Haginochaya Community Creation Conference (provisional)²⁰ included not only its members but also welfare facilities, support groups, educational institutions, store associations, and unions of cheap rooming houses, and made it possible for various organizations, whose network had been less active before, to meet together.

The Haginochaya Community Creation Conference (provisional) has brought about big changes in Airin District since its foundation. For example in the past when neighborhood associations or the Council of Social Welfare asked the administration to improve the environment in the district, the administration passively responded to such issues, saying for example “Riots might break out.” However, the Haginochaya Community Creation Conference (provisional) consists of many organizations in Airin District, and the opinions provided to the conference had a large influence as they were seen as the collective opinions of various stakeholders. This became a driving force to lobby the administration. As a result, responses to problems such as long neglected stray dogs, stalls which had occupied the streets illegally, and the trade in stimulant drugs, were advanced significantly.

4.2 The Development of the Nishinari Special Zone Project

As mentioned previously, from the 2000s, the revitalization of Airin District was led by the private sector. In the 2010s, measures for regional development were begun seriously by the administration. It was a redevelopment plan named “Nishinari Special Zone Project” that promoted these measures. Let us look at its outline.

Toru Hashimoto was inaugurated as mayor of Osaka City in December 2011. He had strong concerns about the future of Airin District, which had many issues in various fields such as sanitation, the environment, security, the economy, welfare, education and others. He suggested the “Nishinari Special Zone Project” in January 2012 to reform Nishinari Ward. In February 2012 the “Project Team for the Nishinari Special Zone Project” led by the head of Nishinari Ward, and the “Council for the Nishinari Special Zone Project,” were organized to promote its project team. As a result the city will coordinate its responses to the issues which were being separately dealt with by each department, and the concept of revitalizing Nishinari Ward as a whole has been established.

Next we will look at the position of Airin District in the Nishinari Special Zone Project. Wataru Suzuki, a professor at the department of economics of Gakushuin University, who was chairperson

of the Council for the Nishinari Special Zone Project and a special adviser to Osaka City, compared the Nishinari Special Zone to the center pin in bowling. He mentioned that success in the Nishinari Special Zone Project would have ripple effects throughout Osaka City. Suzuki also suggested that Airin District was “a center pin of a center pin” and expressed clearly the need for political intervention in the district (Suzuki, 2016).

The Nishinari Special Zone Project was launched with Hashimoto’s proposal, but this was not a top down approach by the administration, and instead was based on collaboration by the community creators including the Haginochaya Community Creation Conference (provisional), and the Forum for Revitalization of Kamagasaki.

The report by the Council for the Nishinari Special Zone Project is categorized into three steps; 1) short-term intensive measures for difficult issues at hand, 2) mid and long-term measures for the future and 3) investment projects and large-scale projects for the future in as many as eight fields and 56 items²¹.

In July 2013, to put the Nishinari Special Zone Project into concrete shape, the Area Management Council was set up and various activities began to be developed according to the topics. The Area Management Council consists of five special committees; 1) the utilization of unused lands in the district, 2) attracting people near Shin-Imamiya Station and promoting tourism, 3) the living environment and welfare, 4) child-rearing and its growth and 5) rebuilding Airin General Center and the development of its surroundings, whose members are administrative officers, experts, neighborhood associations, welfare facilities and support groups. To prepare for the projects related to the Nishinari Special Zone Project, the Community Creation around Haginochaya LLC was established in 2014, and has been promoting activities mainly for cleaning up the environment around Airin District (Arimura and Terakawa).

From September to December 2014, to consider the future of Airin General Center²² established in 1970, a review meeting on community creation in Airin District (hereinafter the Meeting on Community Creation) was held. The trades of day workers had been actively performed at the center before, but in recent years the center has not worked well because of the decrease in day workers. It was also revealed that the seismic resistance of the structure is inadequate due to the deterioration of the building, and urgent action is needed. Under these circumstances, and considering the future of Airin General Center, which symbolizes the town of the worker, it is a priority issue for the Nishinari Special Zone Project.

The point of dispute in the Meeting on Community Creation was whether the center should be rebuilt or repaired, and if it was rebuilt, whether it would be built in the same place or elsewhere. Because Airin General Center is adjacent to Shin-Imamiya Station, where the JR Loop Line and Nankai Line both run, Osaka City and land owners showed much interest in a development project in front of the station after the rebuilding.

Various opinions from the public were expressed in the Meetings on Community Creation which were held six times, and differences in opinions and disputes were often seen. Finally however, it was decided that while actions for the revitalization of the region would be promoted, at the same time conventional measures would be continued. In July 2016 it was decided that Airin General Center would be rebuilt in the same place²³.

4.3 The Concept of Gentrification

When the activities for the Nishinari Special Zone Project started in earnest, illegal waste-dumping decreased considerably and a large number of abandoned bikes were removed. Flowers were planted in the parks, and walls in the town were painted white. Illegal gambling by organized criminals and the selling of stimulant drugs on the streets were hardly seen. In addition, there are now many international tourists around Shin-Imamiya station and the occupancy rate of cheap rooming houses is now higher²⁴. Restaurants for day workers have English menus and stylish pubs counting on international tourists have newly opened. In March 2017, Hoshino Resorts, which is known for its luxury hotel business, announced that they would build a large-scale accommodation facility near Airin District. Linked to such developments, the construction of hotels for tourists and business people is booming. Under these circumstances the previous image of Airin District as insanitary and dangerous has considerably changed in recent years.

In the Nishinari Special Zone Project, it is considered that Airin District will continue to play a role as a supply center for day labor. At the same time the possibility of revitalization of the station area, which has become desolate, is being explored. To attract households with children, visible changes are taking place one after another. For example occupation of the park by homeless people has been prohibited, which before was sometimes permitted. So far there have not been conspicuous actions such as excluding public assistance recipients or using force to move the homeless, but in the process of attracting tourists and households with children, future rises in land prices are expected, so it is undeniable that the supply of cheap apartments for rent might decrease.

Based on the results of discussions in the Meeting on Community Creation, at the Osaka City's Future Approach on Community Creation in Airin District, which Toru Hashimoto announced in January 26, 2015, the phrase, "Consider the approach with the utmost care so that socially vulnerable people, such as homeless people, will not be excluded from the region" was added. However, while the image of the area is changing thanks to the Nishinari Special Zone Project, it is not known whether this promise will be surely kept; the possibility of further gentrification will be high.

5. Conclusion

In Airin District, where social relations such as kinship and community relationships are weak, the public and private sector have been taking actions for people living alone. These actions have

been taken because poverty is established in this district. However the extreme concentration of poverty has led to large-scale redevelopment. To put it briefly, the Nishinari Special Zone Project is to eliminate the regional concentration of poverty. As long as the current situation of Airin District with its high aging rate and dependency on welfare is neglected, the further decline of the district will be inevitable. The redevelopment of Airin District, on the other hand, could cause gentrification and destroy the multilayered safety nets established in this area. Revitalization of the region that will not exclude socially vulnerable people is more important than anything else. One realistic way to realize it will be to incorporate the future vision for revitalization of Airin District into the social welfare plans.

Kotobuki District ²⁵, which is known as a labor camp for drifters in Yokohama, has shown an extremely high aging rate and welfare dependency like Airin District since the collapse of the bubble economy. Just like Airin District, momentum for community creation is growing, but unlike Airin the future vision of this town is incorporated into the social welfare plans (Yamamoto, 2013). Of course “revitalization of the region” is a keyword in Kotobuki District, but more emphasis is put on protection of the socially vulnerable. “Community Creation for Welfare” is a basic policy and the administration does not intend to disperse the impoverished.

However in the case of Airin District the future vision is not incorporated into the social welfare plans, and a series of community creation measures by the administration do not necessarily consider the value, or the philosophy of social welfare, as most important. While various possibilities including invigorating the commercial area, increasing tourists, and attracting households with children are explored, measures to deal with the issues of socially vulnerable people tend to be postponed. Various measures are likely to be taken to prevent the concentration of poverty in Airin District, and the risk of gentrification in the district is higher than in Kotobuki District.

According to the report by the Council for the Nishinari Special Zone Project, concerning the projects related to the future vision for the district, it is important not only to sum up the intentions and requests by local residents and the people involved, but also for them to participate in decision making and implementation. However, it is doubtful whether day workers living in cheap rooming houses, homeless people in shelters, and unmarried people receiving public assistance are considered important as local residents. Though they are the majority of the residents in Airin District, most of them do not participate in local organizations such as neighborhood associations, and therefore do not have political power. Given these issues, the Nishinari Special Zone Project will carry out a questionnaire survey targeting day workers, homeless people and public assistance recipients in 2017, but it is necessary to confirm carefully how much the results of the survey can be reflected in the policies.

It is expected that the development of the Nishinari Special Zone Project will change the lives of day workers, homeless people and public assistance recipients in Airin District. What problems

will this change cause? In the case of public assistance recipients, even if they cannot continue to live in their current houses, they will be able to secure a new house, and furthermore they might live in a better rental house in a “general place for living.” However, because they are living under multilayered safety nets, they might have problems in moving to a new house. These things considered, the Nishinari Special Zone Project might make socially vulnerable people disperse and become ‘invisible.’ Namely the Nishinari Special Zone Project, which aims to prevent the concentration of poverty, could cause new problems in other districts.

Of course it is not easy to immediately reform the process which has concentrated poverty in Airin District for more than 50 years. In Airin District, living in tents or preparing meals in the parks has been tolerated, so there are many people who will never change their lifestyles such as depending on the authorities. However during the course of redevelopment, it is impossible to admit such exceptions.

Under such a dilemma, the Nishinari Special Zone Project is required to have a soft landing, in order not to impose a burden on the people in Airin District, especially socially vulnerable people.

The Nishinari Special Zone Project has become a driving force for causing big changes in Airin District, which was in ever greater decline. The project has focused on the merits of redevelopment and is making progress. Meanwhile, those involved in the project have not had enough discussions about the problems that poor people face. As for the project, at this point in time there is no turning back. The author believes that the risks the “silent majority” living in Airin District will suffer must be paid close attention to. Therefore it is indispensable to incorporate the future vision of Airin District into the social welfare plans.

Notes)

¹ Airin District is often called Kamagasaki. Generally, while the public sector calls the area Airin District, the private sector calls it Kamagasaki. In previous studies, the name Kamagasaki was often used, but this paper will use the name of Airin District. This is because Airin District will be clearer in terms of defining the area than Kamagasaki. Kamagasaki is a common name meaning vaguely the area where cheap rooming houses in the northeast of Nishinari Ward are concentrated. Therefore, the author considers that using the name Kamagasaki is inappropriate when using specific figures about the trend of the population and welfare recipients.

² According to the geologist Masahiro Kato, after the fifth National Industrial Exhibition was held in 1903, many people were forced to move from Nago Town (currently the Nipponbashi neighborhood in Naniwa Ward, Osaka City) to Kamagasaki, due to multiple factors such as construction of municipal streetcars and the eradication of slums. To accommodate these people cheap lodging houses were constructed (Kato, 2002).

³ An area where cheap rooming houses are concentrated is called a flophouse area. The Airin District, Sanya District in Tokyo and Kotobuki District in Yokohama are well-known flophouse areas.

⁴ This study was conducted mainly by a dozen sociologists at colleges in the Kansai region and field surveys were conducted in three declining areas in Osaka City in 1958. Specific locations were not revealed.

⁵ The name of Kamagasaki did not officially exist after the name of the town was changed in 1922. People however have still used its name when referring to the area of flophouses in the northeast of Nishinari Ward. In the 1959 survey, when determining the extent in detail of Kamagasaki, Kamagasaki was designated as one of the 14 towns including the old Kamagasaki District and the Tobita District.

⁶ The researchers participating in the 1959 survey considered that Kamagasaki was an agglomeration of social pathologies, and that it must be improved. In addition, they tended to consider that the causes of poverty were due to the personalities or activities of individuals. However in the 1980s, subsequent researchers strongly criticized their viewpoints because their viewpoints were strongly reflecting the stereotype of impoverished areas.

⁷ The number of people living in cheap rooming houses (183 houses) or simple apartments that are virtually cheap rooming houses (150 apartments), exceeded half of the population of Kamagasaki and the mobility of living was extremely high.

⁸ The ratio of single households in Kamagasaki is 36.4%, which is much higher than the average in Osaka City of 7.2%.

⁹ While the ratio of single mother households was 22%, the ratio of single father households was 8%.

¹⁰ According to the survey conducted by the Osaka Prefectural Police Department, the number of organized criminal groups within the jurisdiction of the Nishinari Police Station was 91 (with 11,485 members), which was the most in Osaka Prefecture.

¹¹ Measures for public welfare were divided into two approaches. One was the improvement of welfare for residents, using community based welfare facilities (Rimpo-kan). The facilities provided services such as employment support, education and medical care. The other was municipal houses such as Osaka Municipal housing and Osaka Prefectural housing for low-income families living with poor living conditions.

¹² Osaka Prefecture, which was in charge of labor, established the Nishinari Branch Office of Osaka Prefect. Gov., Dep. of Labor and provided services for employment support for day workers as well as life support. In October 1962, taking over the duties of the Nishinari Branch Office of Osaka Prefect. Gov., Dep. of Labor, the Nishinari Labor and Welfare Center was established. The center tried to improve the labor environment by making employers provide clear working conditions.

¹³ It seems that Kamagasaki was renamed the Airin District because the name Kamagasaki was not an official name, and it would create a negative image to the public, and would be discriminatory for the residents in this area.

¹⁴ Airin General Center, which had three functions of medical care, housing and labor, was established in 1970. In 1971, the Osaka Municipal Consultation Office was founded for people with no fixed address, to give advice on staying in welfare facilities or hospitalizations, and to assess and provide public assistance.

¹⁵ The number of day workers around 1980 was around 15,000 people, but in 1986, when the bubble economy began, it ballooned to 25,000.

¹⁶ The standard number of welfare caseworkers decided by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare is 80:1, but Osaka City originally set its own number. General households (households below the age of 60) is 70:1, elderly households (households aged 60-65) 140:1, and very elderly households (households over the age of 65) 380:1. For your information the percentage of elderly households accepting public assistance is 60%.

¹⁷ There are 65 police stations in Osaka Prefecture. Looking at the data for the last 10 years, the number of unnatural deaths within the jurisdiction of the Nishinari Police Station is overwhelmingly higher than the other police stations.

¹⁸ Unmarried recipients of public assistance over 65 years old can participate in the "Hito-hana Project." As of March 2016, 134 people (126 men and 8 women) were using the project. At first the target was limited to public assistance recipients over 65 years old in Airin District, but the project is currently available in the entire Nishinari Ward.

¹⁹ Haginochaya is located in the center of Airin District.

²⁰ The word "provisional" for the Haginochaya Community Creation Conference (provisional) is left on purpose so that various groups can gather and take flexible actions. The word provisional implies a strong will to overcome conflicts or separation of the regions.

²¹ Tax revenue per capita in Nishinari Ward is the lowest in the 24 wards of Osaka, but expenditure is by far the highest. It is believed that the Nishinari Special Zone Project will eliminate this imbalance.

²² Airin General Center is a large building, with 13 stories above ground and one floor under ground, it has three departments, labor, medical care, and housing (municipal housing). This is the symbol of Airin District

²³ Therefore the Public Employment Security Office, which was in the current Airin General Center, has temporarily moved to a location under the Nankai railway viaduct near the center. The Osaka Social Medical Center and Osaka City Haginochaya Daiichi-Housing, which were once part of Airin General Center, it has been decided will be moved to the site of Haginochaya Elementary School, which was closed in 2014. The new center will be built in 2030.

²⁴ The cheap rooming houses in Airin District have been actively attracting international tourists since around 2000. Recent increases in inbound tourists are promoting this. Focusing on this increase, by subsidizing cheap rooming houses, Nishinari Ward is promoting the improvement of facilities to accept international tourists.

²⁵ Kotobuki District is an area of 0.06 km², where day workers engaging in the port transport industry are concentrated. Since the collapse of the bubble economy, most of the residents are receiving public assistance.

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