

The Future City Concept

*The Future City Concept is one of the major policies in the Government's New Growth Strategy, which was adopted by the Cabinet in June 2010. We spoke with Building Research Institute Chief Executive **Dr. Shuzo Murakami**, who heads up an expert review panel on the Future City Concept, about the purpose and aims of the concept.*

First, please describe the concept behind Future Cities.

Shuzo Murakami: The Future City Concept is a concept to introduce broad legislation, including special measures, based on the New Growth Strategy adopted by the Government last year, and to try to build cities that generate new value for the environment, the economy and society. Ultimately, the aim is to realize a “prosperous and sustainable economic society in which peo-

ple can live comfortably.”

The Future City Concept plan comes with three premises. The first is to have the growth strategy take shape through efforts such as the ongoing creation of international collaborative ventures centered on superior environmental technologies. The second is the advancement of green innovation that aims to establish a low-carbon society, and lastly is progress on regional revitalization aimed at a super-graying society.

The goals behind the concept include realizing a low-carbon society and rich biodiversity [creation of environmental value], making it so that people can maintain their health in an increasingly aging society and the achievement of regional self-sufficiency [creation of social value], and advancing the accumulation of knowledge [creation of economic value].

The Future City Concept plan is being developed to bring about concrete action to achieve the goals of the concept based on these premises.

Let's look now at how the future cities concept can be realized by enhancing the three values, namely environmental, social and economic value. As I mentioned at the beginning, since the starting point is the New Growth Strategy, it is important to envisage a city able to create



Building Research Institute Chief Executive
Dr. Shuzo Murakami

economic value. The promotion of this concept will be crucially important to the path Japan as a whole takes in the future in terms of new economic development, not to mention the global environment and solutions to social problems.

What kind of things were behind the development of this concept?

At the moment, from a global perspective, cities act as the hub in the accumulation of information and generate a significant proportion of GDP. The same goes for Japan, where the Tokyo metropolitan area produces more than 30% of the country's GDP. The question of what aspects will further increase the value of cities in the future is attracting global attention. It is against this backdrop that the Future City Concept came up for discussion.

What are the key elements that will ensure the success of Future Cities?

The key elements would be the Government being involved and putting energy into driving the initiative in its own way, and project management. The implementation framework is largely divided among three parties; namely, the Government, which formulates the programs and allocates budgetary funds, promotional organizations such as advisory boards, which the Government establishes either inside or outside organizations, and the agents of management and implementation who operate under consortiums made up of the Government, business and academia. Government subsidies are finite. Future Cities need to develop systems where they can promote the concept indepen-

We have to approach the realization of Future Cities with an “open country” mindset in which we collaborate with interested parties from overseas from the initial planning stages.

dently. For instance, some cities which have been successful as Eco-Model Cities have leaders who excel in project management. We need to learn from them and speed up the process of developing human resources.

Another important thing is having a global perspective. In smart grid demonstration experiments being conducted by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, the cities of Yokohama and Kitakyushu are operating together with foreign companies. I think we have to approach the realization of Future Cities with an “open country” mindset in which we collaborate with interested parties from overseas from the initial planning stages. Globalization from early on would provide a significant stimulus for that sense of stagnation in Japanese society, or for the things that need to be enhanced, like high cost structures and the slowness of decision-making. This is an aspect that would revitalize Japan as a whole, as well as lead to opportunities for Japan to make international contributions to solutions to the environmental problems the world's cities face.