

# A study of civic action groups in Canberra

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The purpose of this paper is to examine civic action groups in Canberra which were active in 1997. This study is based on the interviews with leaders of civic action groups and public servants of the ACT Government (the self-government of Canberra). The examination revealed the following three points:

(1) The administration policies of the ACT Government changed in the middle of 1980s. The government had started to cut down administrative costs and to develop Canberra flexibly with due regard to requests by residents and developers. The issues of the civic action groups were more or less associated with the new administration policies.

(2) The author conducted another survey of civic action groups in the city in 1988. Many of the groups active at that time have been dissolved and new groups had emerged in 1997. The turnover of civic action groups in the city can be explained by the lack of residential groups which correspond to *Chonaikai* in urban Japan. *Chonaikai* deal with most issues and problems in its area and try to solve them. However, there is not such a residential group in Canberra. When an issue arises, only residents who are interested will come together, form a new civic action group, and try to solve the problem. Even if some of the group members try to tackle other issues after the initial issue is resolved, they cannot obtain cooperation from other members. Therefore, the group usually dissolves after resolution of the initial issue. In this manner, many of the groups active in 1988 had been dissolved by 1997.

(3) Canberra nowadays consists of three areas in terms of their stages of development. They are developing areas, established areas, and redeveloping areas. Residents often take civic action in the developing areas and redeveloping areas. While civic action in the developing areas assume a form of "promotion" of development, that in the redeveloping areas aims at "prevention" of development. This tendency was observed in 1997 as well as in 1988. Moreover, civic action in the form of "promotion" of development was found in 1997 in established areas and redeveloping areas as well.