

# **Harmonizing Culture and Growth: Insights from *Machizukuri*'s Approach to Cultural Asset Utilization in Japanese Urban Planning**

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## **Abstract**

By examining case studies from Yanaka, Kyoto, Fukaya, and the post-earthquake redevelopment in Kobe, this paper investigates how the Machizukuri approach utilizes cultural assets to create a balance between cultural preservation and economic growth in the context of Japan's urban planning. The paper advocates for the adaptability of Machizukuri principles to various cultural contexts, enriching urban planning discourse by offering a model for integrating cultural asset utilization into sustainable urban development. It also emphasizes the potential of community-driven planning to harmonize cultural preservation with economic growth.

**Keywords:** Machizukuri, cultural asset utilization

## 1. Introduction

In various fields, including urban planning, there exists a perception that culture and economic growth are a dichotomy.<sup>1</sup> Is it inevitable for these two elements to be at odds? This paper challenges the perceived opposition between culture and growth, exploring instances where they intersect and complement each other. Central to this examination is *Machizukuri* (まちづくり), a unique Japanese model of urban planning. It eschews the traditional confines of urban planning, advocating instead for a system that cultivates community stewardship and direct engagement with the city. A pivotal component of this approach is *Bunkazai No Katsuyou* (文化財の活用, also known as cultural asset utilization), which utilizes cultural assets within the built environment to achieve both cultural preservation and economic growth.

Through the examination of case studies and engagement with theoretical frameworks, this paper aims to illustrate that culture and growth are not inherently contradictory. Instead, they can be jointly fostered by adopting appropriate urban planning strategies, as evidenced by the insights derived from the Machizukuri approach to cultural asset utilization.

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<sup>1</sup> Guiso, Sapienza, Zingales, 2006, pp. 23. Ntibagirirwa, 2009, pp. 297.

## 2. The Machizukuri Approach

The planning system in Japan is multifaceted, characterized by a blend of legal and legislative controls, plan-making, land use planning, zoning, and regulation of population density. This system operates across three levels—national, regional, and local. Notably, Japan does not draw a clear distinction between urban and rural planning within its City Planning framework. “City Planning” does not refer to the planning of “cities,” but rather implies “physical planning in urbanizing or urbanized areas.”<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Japan only has 12 zone types, all of which are essentially designated for mixed-use. This approach allows for a versatile use of areas, accommodating a wide array of building types within the same zone, from single-family homes to multi-family residences, businesses, industries, and religious institutions.<sup>3</sup>

Under this context, there is no exact English translation for the unique Japanese approach to urban planning that is to be discussed here<sup>4</sup>. It is simply termed as “Machizukuri (まちづくり).” The term Machizukuri can be dissected into two words—“Machi (まち, or the Kanji 町)” and “Zukuri (づくり, or the original form “tsukuri (つくり)” and verb form “tsukuru (つくる).” “Machi” is a noun that signifies the meaning of a community or neighborhood. “Tsukuru” is an important tri-syllable verb with deep historical roots and multiple meanings<sup>5</sup>, encapsulating more than just the act of making. It embodies a cultural ethos of craftsmanship and pride in creation. This ethos is not solely about the personal satisfaction derived from creation, but is deeply intertwined with the intent to delight and serve others, whether they be the gods, the community, or individual recipients. The spirit of “tsukuru” implies that every act of making is performed with an audience in mind, aiming to please and provide comfort. In this context, the incorporation of “tsukuri” into Machizukuri imbues urban planning with these rich connotations. Machizukuri is not just about constructing physical spaces, but about crafting environments that resonate with the community’s “soul,” ensuring that the process of making and improving urban environments is a highly skilled, thoughtful, and culturally resonant practice aimed at enhancing the collective well-being and comfort of the community. Hence, it would be wrong to take the meaning of Machizukuri as simply “town-building.” It is also wrong to limit it to English expressions such as “community development,” “community design,” or even “community improvement.”

In order to understand what Machizukuri truly means, it is important to look at its history and how it emerged. Machizukuri first emerged in Japan during the period of the late 1960s to early 1970s as a unifying concept to address the challenges posed by living environments.<sup>6</sup> Amidst an era marked by global anti-establishment protest movements and riots, Machizukuri

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<sup>2</sup> Global Development Research Center, n.d..

<sup>3</sup> Hapas Japan, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> CityLAB, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Li, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Satoh, 2019, pp. 127.

was born as an ideal based on local dialogue aimed at enhancing the built environment, quality of life, and local community welfare. Propelled by Japan's economic boom and a critical mindset, this movement sought greater public participation and autonomy in decision-making, advocating for a process that included the voices of the broader Japanese citizenry.

Throughout the years, the meaning behind Machizukuri also evolved with its times. Machizukuri's evolution can be classified into three phases. The first began in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the development and refinement of said philosophy mentioned above. The second, from the mid-1980s onwards, was characterized by experimentation and model-making through community participation. During this period, experimental cases contributed to the creation of new action models. Finally, in the latter part of the 1990s, the third phase of Machizukuri began to concentrate on area and community management.<sup>7</sup>

Contemporary Machizukuri was hence shaped by the accumulation of trial and error experiences of varied stakeholders<sup>8</sup> over the preceding two decades. Residents, small business owners, and government officials collaborated to address local concerns, often represented by organizations that derive “from traditional autonomous townspeople management groups that have existed since the Edo period [1603-1868]... [and] today, the majority of households in Japanese traditional residential areas engage in these neighborhood associations.”<sup>9</sup> The main aim is to empower local communities in the development of their built environments through “more participation, independence in the decision-making process, ... that [gives] voice to the whole scope of the Japanese population.”<sup>10</sup> As such, Machizukuri developed *progressively* as an accumulation of experiences and can be described as the act of sharing practices in every setting. If one were to summarize Machizukuri in the simplest of terms, then it can be described as a collaborative, community-driven endeavor that aims to enhance the local milieu and rejuvenate urban areas by leveraging the deep-rooted cultural connections<sup>11</sup> and local knowledge of its residents.

However, it should be noted that there is still no single, all-encompassing approach to Machizukuri, and its practice varies widely across Japan. The extent and nature of its implementation are significantly influenced by the involvement of local authorities and community members, the degree of openness in regional governance structures, and the ability of developers to negotiate their economic interests.<sup>12</sup> Despite these limitations, the enhancement of Machizukuri through practical application has established it as a fundamental aspect of

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<sup>7</sup> Satoh, 2019, pp. 130.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 127.

<sup>11</sup> Ono, 2017, pp. 392.

<sup>12</sup> CityLAB, 2021.

contemporary urban planning in recent decades.<sup>13</sup>

Under today's context, three distinct traits define contemporary Machizukuri initiatives. First, they typically operate on a compact scale, centering around singular communities. Second, there is a concerted effort to cultivate and oversee communal areas like parks and meeting halls that serve as the neighborhood's social heart. Finally, significant emphasis is placed on community members' active involvement in the implementation of an organizing strategy and decision-making process, which serves not just as a procedural end, but also to validate the community group's efforts.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Satoh, 2019, pp. 127.

<sup>14</sup> Sorensen, Koizumi, Miyamoto, 2008, pp. 40.

### 3. The Concept of Cultural Asset Utilization and its Relation to Machizukuri

It goes without saying that every nation's culture is an irreplaceable treasure. In the realm of urban planning, the need to weave cultural assets into the fabric of development is crucial. These assets serve as anchors of identity in an ever-globalizing world, offering cities a unique character and competitive edge. By thoughtfully incorporating historical landscapes, architecture, and traditions into the modern urban matrix, planners create spaces that reflect the stories and values of the past. This synergy not only enriches the aesthetic and cultural tapestry of urban life, but also promotes a sustainable model of development that values continuity and diversity. It invites community stewardship, fosters civic pride, and stimulates cultural tourism, all of which are vital for vibrant and resilient cities. Under this pretext, Bunkazai No Katsuyou comes in as a strategic imperative for urban planning that seeks to capitalize on a city's cultural narrative.

To comprehend the full meaning of “Bunkazai No Katsuyou (文化財の活用),” it is essential to deconstruct the phrase into its components——“Bunka (文化),” “Zai (財),” “Katsuyou (活用),” and the particle “No (の).” “Bunka” signifies culture, representing the collective traditions, practices, perspectives, artifacts, and spaces<sup>15</sup> that shape the identity of a community or society. When the word “Zai” is added onto “Bunka” to form the word “Bunkazai,” the connotation that “Zai” brings (similar to the nuances that the English word “assets” bring) highlights the tangible and intangible *value* of said culture. Within the context of Bunkazai No Katsuyou, “Bunkazai” hence specifically refers to cultural assets such as historical monuments, artistic works, traditional customs, and other cultural expressions. “Katsuyou” is harder to translate. It can denote utilization or application, suggesting a deliberate and strategic use of resources for specific goals, but it is not limited to such. Rather, there is also the connotation of “flexibility” with the word “Katsu (活).” It implies an *active* and *flexible* engagement with cultural assets to leverage their potential, not just preserving them, but also weaving them into the fabric of everyday life, contributing to the cultural richness and sustainability of urban environments.

For the simplicity of this paper, “Bunkazai” would be referred to commonly as cultural assets, while “Katsuyou” would be translated to the word utilization. However, it is extremely important to keep in mind the connotations that these words bring and that the English translations do not encompass their full meanings. In such a case, the particle “No” serves as a connector, linking “Bunkazai” (cultural assets) with “Katsuyou” (utilization), indicating a focus on the utilization of cultural assets. Similarly, for simplicity, this phrase would be collectively referred to as “cultural asset utilization.”

There also exist certain misunderstandings around the concept of “utilization” of cultural

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<sup>15</sup> Yoshida, n.d..

assets. Some believe that utilizing a cultural asset would be to impose additional restrictions, or that once a property is designated as a cultural asset, it cannot be freely used.<sup>16</sup> That is not true. The ultimate goal of “Katsuyou” is to balance preservation with utilization, leveraging the assets’ cultural and historical value while also ensuring their continued use over time. As such, the essence of “Bunkazai No Katsuyou” is to find harmony between leveraging upon the assets’ cultural significance and using them in a way that adds value to contemporary society, providing the balance between cultural preservation and economic growth.

So, what are the aspects of cultural asset utilization then? It involves the integration of both preservation and maintenance with adaptive reuse, which innovatively repurposes cultural assets without compromising their intrinsic value. It also involves the enhancement of public access and interaction through educational programs and promotes community engagement at the same time, ensuring that these assets contribute to the social fabric. Research and documentation underpin these efforts by deepening the understanding of cultural assets, and sustainable tourism practices showcase them responsibly, contributing to economic vitality. Referencing Figure 1, this comprehensive stewardship is supported collaboratively by national and local governments, the private sector,<sup>17</sup> local small businesses, community groups, and residents.

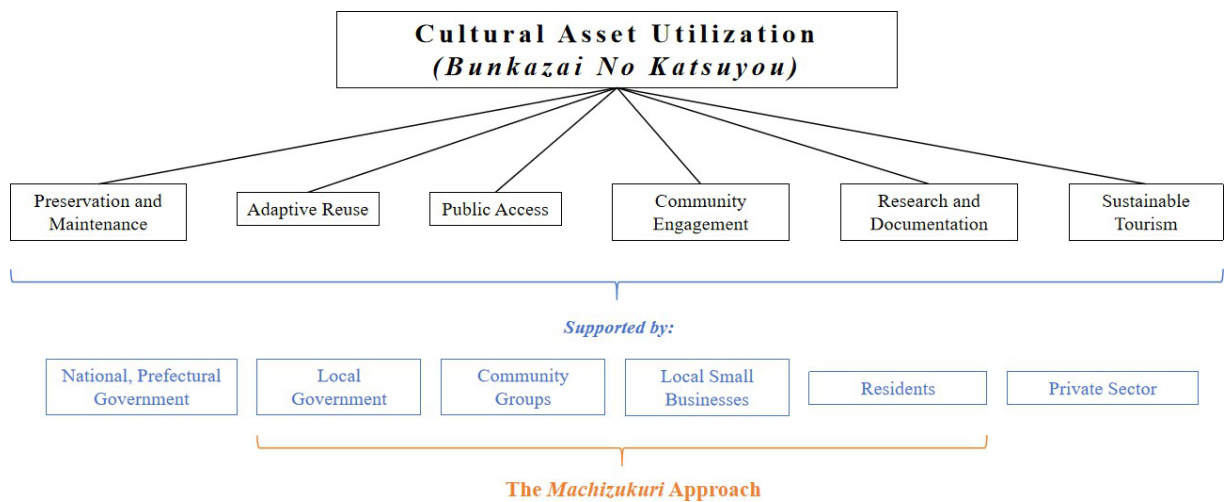


Figure 1. Summary of Cultural Asset Utilization<sup>18</sup> and its Relationship with Machizukuri

How is Machizukuri related to all of these then?

First, Machizukuri cannot be separated from culture. As mentioned in Section 2,

<sup>16</sup> Shimizu, n.d..

<sup>17</sup> Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Adapted from: Maegawa, Kobayashi, Kawakami, 2011, pp. 196. Murakami, 2022, pp. 33. 文化観光高付加価値化リサーチチーム「session」[Cultural Tourism High-Value-Added Research Team 'session'], 2021.

Machizukuri originated during the period of the late 1960s to early 1970s as a concept to address challenges posed by living environments. One of these challenges was the preservation of historical areas, as this was a period marked by pivotal changes and reflections on conservation, inspired partly by international movements such as the European Architectural Heritage Year in 1975. The central government of Japan, influenced by such, took significant steps towards protecting historical areas, leading to amendments in the Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties and the designation of groups of traditional buildings as a new category of cultural property. From that point on, two movements had an impact on the preservation of historical sites in Japan—the academic movement that developed a new comprehensive perspective for the study of urban history in Japan in the 1990s, and the Machizukuri movement.<sup>19</sup> The Machizukuri movement significantly overlapped with the idea of “Preserved Districts,” altering the perception of these districts from mere relics of the past to vital elements of contemporary life. Local governments, in an effort to revitalize struggling regions, realized the impossibility of achieving economic prosperity without leveraging their cultural character. As a result, cultural elements previously disregarded were given new prominence as local residents and authorities worked together to capitalize on these cultural assets. Now, many “Preserved Districts” are recognized as essential components in policy-making for regional development, shifting the dynamic from preservation for its own sake to active utilization for community enrichment and sustainability.<sup>20</sup>

Second, Machizukuri is *the* approach that provides the platform, manner, and way in which the local government, community groups, and residents can work together to provide support for cultural asset utilization.<sup>21</sup> As explained in Section 2, Machizukuri is “a collaborative, community-driven endeavor that aims to enhance the local milieu and rejuvenate urban areas by leveraging the deep-rooted cultural connections and local knowledge of its residents.” As such, implementing this method would then allow for the process of public consultation and public involvement in urban planning practices,<sup>22</sup> thereby serving as the platform that enables the local government to interact with the community (i.e. small businesses, community groups, and individuals) and placing them in the center.<sup>23</sup> Hence, Machizukuri plays a key role in supporting cultural asset utilization within numerous Japanese urban communities.

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<sup>19</sup> Kiyonaga, 2015, pp. 467.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 468.

<sup>21</sup> Haimes, 2022, pp. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Bosman, 2007, pp. 309.

<sup>23</sup> Yuriko, 2017, pp. 170.

## 4. Case Study Analysis

Having explored the theoretical underpinnings of Machizukuri and its role in cultural asset utilization, this section delves into practical applications through case studies. These examples illustrate how the Machizukuri approach has successfully utilized cultural assets in urban planning, balancing the importance of cultural preservation with the need for economic growth. It also highlights the limitations of the Machizukuri approach.

### 4.1. Case Study 1—Yanaka, Tokyo: Preserving Edo’s Legacy Through Machizukuri

Yanaka, a sector of Taito, Tokyo, exemplifies the profound impact of the Machizukuri approach on urban planning, particularly in leveraging existing cultural assets to further cultural preservation alongside economic growth.

Largely due to its survival through major historical disasters, Yanaka has retained its Edo-period urban form and road network. This historical continuity has preserved over 70 temples<sup>24</sup> in the area, alongside small cemeteries and the expansive Yanaka cemetery, contributing to a distinct urban character marked by narrow roads, lanes, and densely packed houses.

Yanaka’s application of the Machizukuri approach has not only preserved its rich cultural character, but also stimulated economic growth by transforming its cultural assets into vibrant economic assets. The initiatives spearheaded by local groups, such as the YaNeSen magazine and the Yanaka Gakko (the Yanaka School),<sup>25</sup> have played a pivotal role in attracting tourism, a key driver of local economic development. By mapping and promoting the area’s cultural assets through educational walking tours and community art events, these initiatives have drawn visitors and locals alike, keen to explore Yanaka’s unique historical and cultural offerings.

Moreover, the strategic emphasis on enhancing shared community spaces has revitalized local businesses and fostered new economic opportunities. Art exhibitions, festivals, and events organized within these spaces have created platforms for local artisans, performers, and entrepreneurs to showcase their work, attracting investment and stimulating local commerce. For example, the graffiti competition and “streetcorner workshops” organized by Yanaka Gakko not only enriched Yanaka’s cultural tapestry, but also contributed to a dynamic local economy by increasing foot traffic and patronage of local establishments.<sup>26</sup>

Through the Machizukuri approach, traditional neighborhood associations and new citizens movements (Yanaka Gakko) also managed to come together and successfully negotiate with developers to modify condominium projects to better integrate with the area’s historical

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<sup>24</sup> Sorensen, Koizumi, Miyamoto, 2008, pp. 41.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42.

landscape, demonstrating how the Machizukuri approach can lead to development that respects culture while contributing to the housing market. By ensuring that new developments are in harmony with Yanaka's cultural essence, these negotiations have preserved the area's appeal as a desirable place to live, work, and visit, thereby supporting property values and attracting further economic investment.

Furthermore, the establishment of a permanent Machizukuri Council <sup>27</sup> has institutionalized the community's vision for sustainable development. This formalization of community-led urban planning initiatives not only safeguards Yanaka's culture, but also ensures its continued development as a thriving economic locale. By asserting community rights over shared spaces and championing the preservation of cultural assets, Yanaka has fostered an environment where culture acts as a cornerstone for sustainable economic growth.

#### **4.2. Case Study 2—Kyoto: Utilizing Culture for Modern Vitality with Machizukuri**

Kyoto, officially known as Kyoto City, is the capital of Kyoto Prefecture, located in the Kansai region of Honshu. Known for its rich history, cultural heritage, and ancient traditions, Kyoto stands as a testament to Japan's cultural continuity. The city is famous for its temples, tea houses, and traditional practices, making it an important case study to gain insights from. By examining the case studies of Aneyakouji and Nishijin in Kyoto, this section aims to explore how Kyoto utilized the Machizukuri approach and effectively utilized cultural assets for economic advancement while also preserving them.

In Aneyakouji, a historic street in Kyoto,<sup>28</sup> the Machizukuri approach became instrumental in rallying community action against gentrification. The initiative began in response to a development proposal by Osaka Gas in 1995, which envisioned an eleven-story apartment complex that conflicted with the area's traditional character. The mobilization of the Aneyakouji committee, comprising neighborhood associations and residents, marked a significant step towards community-led urban planning. Through persistent negotiation and collaboration with Osaka Gas and the Kyoto Center for Community Collaboration, the original development plan was substantially revised to align with the community's needs.<sup>29</sup>

The committee of Aneyakouji, through the Machizukuri approach, saw approximately half the members writing down their experiences and personally engaging in the negotiation efforts. These efforts culminated in the establishment of an urban code in 2000 and a Building Agreement in 2001, later augmented by a design code under the Cityscape Environment Improvement Project in 2004.<sup>30</sup> These codes were aimed at preserving the cultural and historical

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<sup>27</sup> Sorensen, Koizumi, Miyamoto, 2008, pp. 44.

<sup>28</sup> In Kyoto, a neighborhood is delineated by its streets; specifically, an area between two north-south streets and an east-west street constitutes a neighborhood. In comparison to other areas of the city, a neighborhood is substantially smaller in the center, and many developments exceed a single neighborhood line.

<sup>29</sup> Baba, 2011, pp. 130.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130.

essence of Aneyakouji by emphasizing traditional architectural features. The city's backing of these community initiatives, including the enactment of ordinances for building height regulation, showcased the power of Machizukuri in marrying community interests with urban planning, thus ensuring the sustainable preservation of Aneyakouji's culture.

The story of Nishijin offers a broader perspective on the Machizukuri approach's impact on cultural asset utilization. Nishijin is a district in Kyoto spanning from Kamigyō ward to Kita ward and known for being the traditional weaving district of Kyoto. Under the Machizukuri approach, both business owners and residents of the community have been able to collectively determine everything from architectural designs to the incorporation of communal amenities like benches and green spaces.<sup>31</sup>

This participatory approach not only preserved Nishijin's cultural essence, but also propelled the district towards economic rejuvenation. By providing a platform for locals to contribute their insights and aspirations for the district's future ("directly materialize the image of life in the town that the residents had ideated"),<sup>32</sup> the Machizukuri process facilitated the modernization of *machiya* (traditional merchant houses) while safeguarding their cultural significance, blending them seamlessly with contemporary establishments like cafes, fashion boutiques, and offices.<sup>33</sup>

The desire for authentic representation and the pursuit of a shared vision for their neighborhood underscores a profound aesthetic and cultural understanding intrinsic to the Machizukuri process. The approach has been pivotal in establishing and maintaining a connection between the local community that "knows best" and the authorities that carry out the actual planning of a city, ensuring the proper utilization of cultural assets.

Through the lens of Aneyakouji and Nishijin, Kyoto's Machizukuri approach reveals the profound impact of community involvement in urban planning, particularly in utilizing cultural assets. These case studies highlight the indispensable role of local communities in navigating the complexities of preserving their culture amidst economic and urban development. By fostering a collaborative environment between residents and urban planners using the Machizukuri approach, Kyoto showcases the potential for cultural assets to drive economic growth while maintaining their intrinsic values.

#### **4.3. Case study 3—Fukaya, Saitama: Revitalization through Machizukuri**

Fukaya is a city located in Saitama Prefecture, Japan. This city saw significant changes, from its historical roots as a bustling post-town on the Nakasendo highway to facing the modern challenges of urban decline in its downtown area. The Machizukuri approach has since emerged

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<sup>31</sup> Haimes, 2022, pp. 20.

<sup>32</sup> Satoh, 2019, pp. 134-135.

<sup>33</sup> Haimes, 2022, pp. 20.

as a powerful tool that enabled Fukaya to utilize its rich cultural assets as a foundation for urban revitalization and economic growth.

In the face of declining vitality in its downtown area, exacerbated by suburban sprawl and the abandonment of traditional shopping streets, Fukaya faced the challenge of reinvigorating its urban core while preserving its character.<sup>34</sup> The proposed land readjustment projects, aimed at modernizing the cityscape, initially threatened to erase the physical markers of Fukaya's past. However, the formation of a Machizukuri non-profit organization called Fukaya Nigiwai Kobo (FUNK)<sup>35</sup> marked a pivotal shift towards a more integrated approach, focusing on the conservation and adaptive reuse of the city's historical buildings instead of tearing everything down.

FUNK's initiatives to preserve and repurpose Fukaya's cultural assets have proven to be a linchpin in downtown revitalization. By conducting surveys of historic structures and advocating for their innovative reuse, FUNK has helped to transform these buildings from neglected relics into centers of community and economic activity. For example, they successfully renovated a brick warehouse into a multipurpose community space. This space has now been turned into a hub for art events and meetings, serving not just as a preserved cultural asset but also as a catalyst for community engagement and economic activity.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, FUNK's efforts to promote the city's culture through tours and events have attracted visitors and locals alike, generating increased foot traffic and stimulating local businesses.<sup>37</sup> This approach has not only enhanced the economic profile of downtown Fukaya but also reinforced the value of culture as a shared asset.

#### **4.4. Case Study 4—Limitations of the Approach: Navigating Challenges in the Rokkouchi Station South Area Urban Redevelopment Project, Kobe**

The Machizukuri approach, aimed at integrating community engagement in urban planning, can also face significant challenges, particularly under the constraints of urgent redevelopment needs and without solid support from official city entities. These limitations become starkly evident in the context of the Rokkouchi Station South Area Urban Redevelopment Project in Kobe, following the devastating earthquake.

First, the urgency required in post-disaster scenarios can starkly contrast with the inherently deliberative nature of the Machizukuri approach. In the case of Kobe, the swift approval of redevelopment plans just two months after the earthquake highlighted a pressing need for rapid reconstruction,<sup>38</sup> which the time-consuming Machizukuri approach, with its emphasis on

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<sup>34</sup> Sorensen, Koizumi, Miyamoto, 2008, pp. 45.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46.

<sup>36</sup> Sorensen, Koizumi, Miyamoto, 2008, pp. 47.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47.

<sup>38</sup> Evans, 2002, pp. 454.

community consensus and involvement, struggled to meet. This mismatch in pace between urgent redevelopment demands and the slower, community-driven planning process can lead to friction and unmet expectations on both sides.

Second, the effectiveness of Machizukuri is heavily contingent upon support from city planning departments and officials. However, in Kobe, the city's initial plans for the Rokkouchi Station South Area, which proposed high-rise flats and a park, met with significant opposition from the community. The residents' desire for a redevelopment that preserved the low-rise, community-centric character of their neighborhood was initially dismissed by city officials. This exemplifies a critical limitation of the Machizukuri approach: without formal recognition and support from city authorities, community-led initiatives and alternative proposals may be sidelined, rendering the process ineffective in influencing the final urban design and redevelopment outcomes. This is why, as highlighted in Figure 1, local government is also an important supporter of the Machizukuri approach.

The establishment of the reconstruction Machizukuri council<sup>39</sup> in Kobe aimed to bridge this gap between community desires and official redevelopment plans. Yet, the council's struggle to reconcile residents' preferences with the city's insistence on larger-scale urban renewal underscores the challenges Machizukuri faces without unequivocal city support. The eventual compromise — a slightly modified plan that still prioritized larger urban development goals over specific community requests — illustrates the inherent limitations of Machizukuri in effecting substantial change in the face of other pressing needs, particularly in post-disaster urban redevelopment contexts.

Despite the limitations, there was a gradual shift in perception towards the reconstruction efforts over time. As the immediate aftermath of the disaster receded and the stark immediacies of loss and displacement began to heal, the role of the Machizukuri council evolved. The council gradually became a vital platform for resident engagement in the finer aspects of the redevelopment process.<sup>40</sup>

This transition underscores an essential strength of the Machizukuri approach—its capacity to facilitate a meaningful dialogue between residents and city officials, even if initially constrained by broader urban planning directives. The involvement of residents in decisions regarding the detailed layout of buildings, the arrangement of living spaces, and the design of the parks played a crucial role in reshaping the community's engagement with the redevelopment process. Such participatory avenues, fostered by the Machizukuri council, allowed residents to exert a tangible influence on aspects of the redevelopment that directly impacted their daily lives and the character of their community.

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<sup>39</sup> Evans, 2002, pp. 454.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 454-455.

The evolving role of the Machizukuri council in Kobe demonstrates that, while the approach may face limitations in influencing overarching urban redevelopment strategies, especially in post-disaster contexts, it can still serve as an effective mechanism for integrating community perspectives into the finer details of urban design and planning.

#### **4.5. Summary: Harmonizing Culture and Growth**

The exploration of Machizukuri's approach to cultural asset utilization in Japanese urban planning, specifically through the lens of Bunkazai Katsuyou (cultural asset utilization), provides a nuanced understanding of how culture can be harmonized with the demands of contemporary urban development such as economic growth. The case studies of Yanaka, Kyoto, Fukaya, and the Rokkounichi Station South Area in Kobe each offer unique insights into the opportunities and challenges presented by this approach.

*Yanaka, Tokyo*, demonstrates the power of community-driven efforts to preserve and showcase a specific historical era. By leveraging its Edo-period heritage, Yanaka has revitalized its local economy through tourism and cultural festivals, emphasizing the potential of Machizukuri to sustain economic vitality without sacrificing cultural integrity.

*Kyoto's* initiatives in *Aneyakouji* and *Nishijin* exemplify the broader application of Machizukuri in a city renowned for its culture. Here, the Machizukuri approach facilitated a balance between preserving the city's ancient traditions and temples and fostering economic development. Community actions in Aneyakouji against gentrification and the inclusive planning in Nishijin for preserving traditional industries highlight how Machizukuri can serve as a bridge between past and present, ensuring that culture continues to play a vital role in the city's living landscape.

*Fukaya, Saitama*, faced with urban decline, showcases how the Machizukuri approach can help to catalyze the revitalization of historical downtown areas. These efforts not only bolstered Fukaya's economy, but also reinforced the significance of preserving culture as a communal asset.

On the other hand, the urban redevelopment project in *Kobe* illustrated the limitations of the Machizukuri approach. Despite these limitations, the establishment of a reconstruction Machizukuri council eventually facilitated a more inclusive planning process. This example underscored the Machizukuri approach's capacity to evolve and adapt. However, it is still important to keep the limitations mentioned in mind, as they still do significantly affect the potential of the Machizukuri approach.

In general, across these case studies, the Machizukuri approach has proven effective in utilizing cultural assets to balance cultural preservation with economic growth. Of course, this journey is fraught with challenges, from negotiating the pace of redevelopment to securing

official support and reconciling community desires with broader urban planning goals. Despite these hurdles, Machizukuri offers a promising pathway toward creating urban spaces that celebrate cultural continuity while embracing the demands of modern living. The approach's success lies in its ability to bring the community into the planning process, fostering collaboration, dialogue, and innovation, ensuring that a place's culture remains a vibrant and integral part of Japan's urban future.

## 5. Implications for Urban Planning

Policy recommendations emerging from the insights gained through Machizukuri emphasize a comprehensive and participatory approach to urban planning. The aim is not to say which is better--culture or growth--but rather to show that the two, through the right approach, need not be dichotomous. The Machizukuri approach calls for the establishment of policy frameworks that actively support community involvement at every stage of the urban planning process. Such policies would aim to foster an inclusive environment where dialogue between residents, community groups, government officials, developers, and other stakeholders is foundational to the planning and development process.

The successful integration of Machizukuri principles into urban planning also depends on the creation of mechanisms that allow for continuous feedback and adaptation based on community input.

Moreover, urban policies inspired by Machizukuri should strive to ensure that community participation is representative, capturing the diverse voices and experiences within urban populations. This inclusivity ensures that urban planning is reflective of the collective needs and aspirations of the community, rather than a subset of voices. Policies must be designed to lower barriers to participation, making it accessible for all community members to contribute to the planning process.

Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (Figure 2) is hence brought in to analyze the Machizukuri approach as a means to underscore the importance and depth of community engagement within urban planning practices.

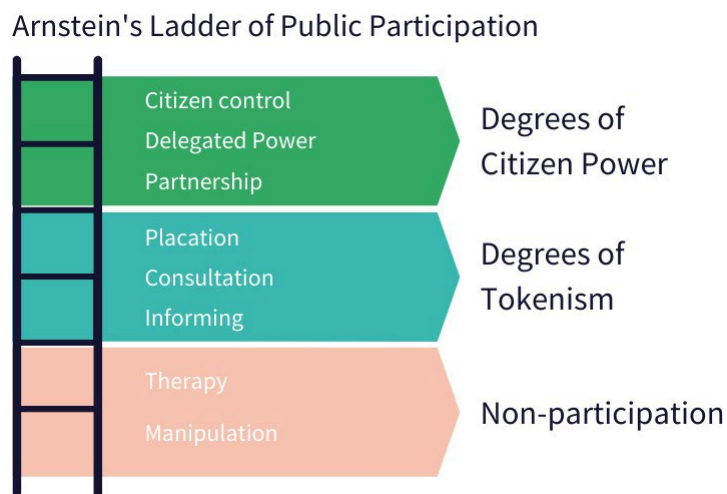


Figure 2. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Commonplace, 2023.

In analyzing the Machizukuri approach through said lens, it becomes clear that this Japanese practice of community-driven urban planning endeavors to operate at the higher levels of the ladder, where “Citizen Power” is emphasized. Arnstein’s framework showcases a spectrum of participation that ranges from non-participation to tokenism, and ultimately to citizen power, which includes partnership, delegated power, and citizen control. Machizukuri, with its core emphasis on collaborative and bottom-up planning processes, inherently seeks to elevate community engagement from mere consultation to active decision-making roles within urban development projects.

The essence of Machizukuri aligns with the upper rungs of Arnstein’s ladder, where the goal is not just to inform or consult with the community, but to engage them in meaningful partnership and share decision-making authority. This parallels the aim of achieving delegated power and, in some instances, citizen control, where residents not only contribute to but lead the planning processes, directly influencing the outcomes that shape their urban environments. However, as seen in the varied case studies, the challenge often lies in fully realizing this ideal, with obstacles such as urgent redevelopment needs and lack of official support sometimes relegating community input to lower levels of participation.

By applying Arnstein’s framework to assess the Machizukuri approach, it is evident that for Machizukuri to be fully effective, policies and practices must be *consciously* designed to support community engagement at the highest levels of participation. This involves ensuring that local government structures and urban planning policies not only allow, but actively encourage and facilitate, genuine community partnership and shared governance. Bridging this gap can enhance the efficacy of the Machizukuri approach, ensuring that it serves as a model for community-driven urban planning that truly empowers residents and provides them with a platform to voice their opinions and exercise their capacities to shape their cities.

The principles of Machizukuri, while deeply rooted in Japanese culture, hold significant promise for application in diverse cultural contexts. The approach’s emphasis on community engagement, cultural preservation, and sustainable development resonates with universal challenges faced by urban planners worldwide. However, adapting Machizukuri to different cultural, social, and regulatory landscapes requires careful consideration of local nuances and the establishment of frameworks developed in local contexts.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1. Contributions**

This paper investigates how Japan's Machizukuri approach offers a strategy for utilizing cultural assets in contemporary urban settings. Through a series of case studies, the paper sheds light on how Machizukuri facilitates a dynamic balance between preserving cultural integrity and fostering economic growth.

It is also interesting to note that the essence of Machizukuri could probably be characterized by its generality, reflecting a broader, culturally ingrained preference for organic, community-led development processes. This understanding challenges the conventional emphasis on directive planning methodologies, proposing instead that acknowledging the importance of participatory practices might be sufficient for fostering meaningful urban development.

Moreover, this paper contributes to the discourse on urban planning by suggesting that the implementation of participatory practices should be adaptable to the cultural and contextual realities of different societies. By showcasing how Machizukuri facilitates the balance between cultural preservation and economic growth, this paper advocates for a more flexible, culturally sensitive approach to urban planning, emphasizing the need for planning methodologies that respect and leverage the unique cultural characteristics of each community.

### **6.2. Limitations and Future Research**

This paper primarily supports the notion that culture and growth can indeed be harmonized through the application of the Machizukuri approach in urban planning. While it offers a comprehensive overview of how this approach has been implemented across various Japanese cities, the paper relies heavily on secondary sources and theoretical frameworks.

Given this limitation, future research should aim to delve deeper into the operational dynamics of Machizukuri, exploring how this approach plays out in practice across different contexts. This necessitates a shift towards more qualitative methodologies, such as field research and interviews with key stakeholders involved in the Machizukuri process.

Another notable observation from the literature on Machizukuri is its tendency toward a selection bias; typically, only successful applications of the approach are documented and celebrated. This inclination can obscure the reality that not all Machizukuri initiatives achieve their intended outcomes. As such, more research could be done on the factors that might hinder the Machizukuri process.

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