

Putting Unused Public Land to Practical Use: The Organizational Characteristics of Grassroots Groups That Have the Capacity to Maintain and Manage Sustainable Multi-purpose Squares

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This study aims to clarify the organizational characteristics of grassroots groups that have the capacity to maintain and manage unused public land as sustainable multi-purpose squares for ball games. In addition, the study investigated the circumstances in which this might occur. The maintenance and management of public facilities and infrastructure is a serious policy problem in Japan. New mechanisms have been introduced into the development, maintenance, and management of public properties in order to conserve public expenditure and to provide public services more efficiently. They include Public-Private Partnerships, Private Finance Initiatives, and a designated manager system based on market mechanisms. In contrast, grassroots groups are likely to be able to maintain and manage the public properties that do not benefit from the principle of appropriate market competition. Maintenance and management by these groups is likely to keep costs low and enhance the utility of users in comparison with maintenance and management by municipal government; these are reasons for grassroots groups to maintain and manage such public properties. This study investigated unused land that Saitama City Office has converted into multi-purpose squares for ball games in 2014 and 2015. Our conclusion is that grassroots groups are able to maintain and manage the squares on an ongoing basis in the following circumstances. First, the grassroots groups are motivated to participate; second, the groups have sufficient members and devised ways to carry out the necessary maintenance and management; and finally, sufficient human resources and money are secured so the groups can continue to maintain and manage the squares in the future. Further, we have identified two necessary conditions for transforming existing unused public land into multi-purpose squares for ball games managed by residents. First, residents' needs should be surveyed to identify if they need a site for children to enjoy ball games and second, an organization should be established to bear the cost of maintaining and managing the squares.