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Scaling Up of Niche Policy Innovation for Long-term Care

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## Scaling Up of Niche Policy Innovation for Long-term Care

Kyoko OHTA

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# Scaling Up of Niche Policy Innovation for Long-term Care\*

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## 1. Introduction

This paper analyzes the outcome of scaling up niche policy innovations in adult social care, originally developed in Japanese municipalities. In 2000, the Japanese government introduced public and mandatory long-term care insurance (LTCI) to develop and secure financial resources for elderly care services. The effort was said to be one of the most significant welfare reforms in the last 30 years, as the new insurance system was designed to decentralize and socialize elderly care, which was used to be provided for a long time within the family or at the hospital. Under the LTCI system, each municipality (insurer) is encouraged to coordinate its own community care system and develop a suitable care policy for the area. Simultaneously, new municipal policies are sometimes being attempted outside the national LTCI program. The national government (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare) also explores such local innovations and is investigating the adequacy of them being introduced into the national program.

For Japan's central bureaucrats, who carry out daily policymaking, one of the ways to source new policy ideas is to choose an example of policy innovation developed in a handful of municipalities as a "model case." They developed a pilot case as a policy experiment to be scaled up as a national policy. To analyze the scale-up process, this paper focuses on the impact of the policy experiment scheme such as "Special Zones (*Tokku*)," in which the central government chooses several municipalities and prefectures to make regulatory exceptions and provides financial support in selected policy areas to learn its impact. As a case study, this paper examines the process by which policy innovation developed at grassroots in Toyama, where flexible daycare and short-stay services are provided, was adopted as a national long-term care policy through the Special Zones scheme.

Section 2 provides an overview of the landscape of long-term care policy in Japan. Following a brief investigation of the theoretical framework of scaling up and overview

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of the Special Zones scheme in Japan (Section 3), Section 4 explores the case of a particular policy innovation in social care: the processes required to scale up innovations in social care policy in Toyama, Japan, and the subsequent results. Through a detailed case study, this paper investigates how the niche policies in Toyama have been developed into the national pilot case and then, adopted as national policies such as the national long-term care program. The final section discusses the implications of the analysis of the scaling up of policy innovation.

## **2. The Landscape of Long-term Care in the Community in Japan**

One of the most remarkable features of Japan's "super-aging" has been its speed and effect on changing demographic patterns of the country. By 2025, when the "baby boomer" generation reaches the age of 75 years, the population aging rate is projected to increase by up to 30%, with the expectation of reaching a relatively slower growth of nearly 40% by 2060.<sup>1</sup> There are many persistent challenges seen in the attempts to sustain Japan's economy and support the increasing number of older people while facing a shrinking total population and the prospect of fewer young workers with the country's strong immigration control policy.

As elderly care by family and neighbors was no longer feasible in many parts of Japan after the 1990s, the then Ministry of Health and Welfare developed a systematic plan to provide long-term care through social insurance. In 1997, the LTCI bill passed the Diet, and its implementation began in 2000. The LTCI program was introduced to develop and secure financial resources for elderly care services in Japan (Tamiya et al. 2011, p.1184). This effort was one of the most significant welfare reforms in the last 30 years, as the new insurance system was designed to decentralize elderly care, which had been provided for a long time, mainly within the family or through hospitals. Stigmatized elderly care services were replaced by contract-based services delivered by both private and public sector providers. In addition, municipalities were given central responsibility to manage the new system. The LTCI program is a social insurance system aimed at the rapid development of various types of care provision with the help of market forces, and it has contributed to the growth of the elderly care industry. (Saito et al. 2010, p.68).

The LTCI program has become an accepted and highly supported component of Japan's social policies. Nevertheless, it is an imperfect program and has faced some

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<sup>1</sup> Cabinet Office (2020) Aging Society White Paper 2020 (Japanese) (Accessed: 31 Jan 2021) [https://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2020/html/gaiyou/s1\\_1.html](https://www8.cao.go.jp/kourei/whitepaper/w-2020/html/gaiyou/s1_1.html)

challenges during its implementation. Japan's comprehensive LTCI program is expensive, and the total spending has risen rapidly. As insurers, local governments are responsible for providing most of the new services, adding to their workload in untenable ways as they are already suffering from financial burdens and staffing shortages (Ohta 2018, p.223). Under these circumstances, local governments not only rely on the LTCI program and care industries but are also seeking alternative measures.

There were other environmental changes for local governments in relation to the central government. In the 1990s, the socioeconomic trends of fiscal austerity and population aging forced institutional changes in the central government, and major reforms such as central government reorganization and decentralization were implemented. Furthermore, in national politics, the long-term dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) over the postwar period was shaken, and left-wing parties came into power. Such changes in the central government have led to major changes in local governments and communities. The decentralization reform in 2001 expanded the autonomy of local governments; however, at the same time, the central government of the conservative parties since the 2000s continued local government mergers and the subsidy reduction as a part of "small government" policies. Consequently, the local government is, on the one hand, forced to proceed with frugality and rationalization and on the other hand, asked to tackle various socioeconomic issues (such as the aging population and regional economic stagnation) without relying on many central government resources. In terms of social care policy, local governments sometimes attempt policy innovation outside of the national LTCI program. The national government (Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare) also explores such local innovations and is investigating the adequacy of them being introduced into the national program.

In these circumstances, it is important to understand the new way of public policymaking, which is developed in a particular municipality and then, influences the shifting national government policy. This paper aims to analyze the process of policy innovation in local governments scaled up under the new LTCI system.

### **3. Scaling Up of Niche Policy Innovation**

This section introduces the idea of scaling up with reference to literature in various fields. It also provides an overview of the national program of policy experimentation, the Special Zones scheme, for scaling up policy innovation in Japan.

### 3.1. Scaling Up

There is growing attention to the concept of scaling up in the literature of various fields, including public policy and administration. What is meant by “scaling up”? In the field of public policy on innovation, many scholars and practitioners have focused on the impact of scaling up. For example, the Scottish government recently published a report that broadly overviewed the scaling up of innovation, covering not only fields of science and technology but also those of health, education, social care, justice, and environment and ecology (What Works Scotland 2015). Associated terms, such as “spread” and “diffusion” are often used as the substitution for “scaling up,” as the report notes (ibid p.2). In Japan, in public policy analysis, policy diffusion describes the process by which other municipalities lean on the innovative public policy in a particular (often progressive) municipality, which is diffused nationwide; then, the national government adopts it to national legislation (Ito 2006).

The idea of scaling up also attracts scholarly attention in social innovation and nonprofit organizations as a strategy of niche innovation to have a broader and systemic impact on society. According to Moore et al. (2015), from a social innovation perspective, large-scale changes will necessarily involve changes to rules, resource flows, cultural beliefs, and relationships in a social system at multiple spatial or institutional scales. However, they differentiate scaling up from other synonymous terms such as diffusion or replication of a program in multiple geographic locations and contexts to maximize the number of people that a social innovation reaches. Scaled-up social innovations that affect large-scale changes will necessarily involve a more complex and diverse process. Referring to Westley et al. (2014), Moore et al. also differentiate between two kinds of scaling: “scaling out,” where an organization attempts to affect more people and cover a larger geographic area through replication and diffusion, and “scaling up,” where an organization aims to affect everybody who requires the social innovation they offer or aims to address the broader institutional or systemic roots of a problem (Moore et al. 2015, p.71).

The transition study literature focuses on the scaling-up strategy of niche innovation against a strong and stable socio-technical regime. The characteristics of the regime act as barriers that prevent niche innovations from maximizing opportunities. The typical reaction of regime actors (e.g., central government ministries and related interest groups in a particular policy community) is defensive, but they are also reactive and accommodative, and occasionally an innovative approach will appear (Rotmans and Loorbach 2010, pp.132–3). From a transition management perspective, it is possible to

carry out transition experiments to make this happen (Grin et al. 2010, pp.208–10).

This paper identifies the process of scaling up niche policy innovation, or institutionalization (becoming a national policy), in the context of welfare provision in Japan. It is generally assumed that the institutionalization of a policy innovation would equal the scaling up of the policy, but this is not always the case. Scaling-up can occur without institutionalization, and some policy niches can be institutionalized without being scaled up. This paper examines a case of successful institutionalization that leads to the scaling up of the niche policy experiment.

### 3.2. Policy Experimentation of Special Zones (*Tokku*)

One of the official Japanese niche policy experimentation programs for scaling up is the Special Zones scheme, which originally aimed to activate the local economy by relaxing certain regulations in specific geographic areas (usually one or a few municipalities). It was started in 2002 by the Koizumi administration, which developed it to symbolize a series of government structural reforms. To be approved as a Zone, municipalities apply for a specific deregulation project, and the Cabinet Office reviews and selects the Zones based on feasibility and impact. The purpose of the scheme was to abolish out-of-date and “useless” regulations, established by previous government ministries, and promote economic activities and employment in local public and private sectors. If the impact of the deregulation measure in a particular zone is detected, it will be reflected in the policy review at the national level.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper the following two Special Zones are selected as policy experiments:<sup>3</sup>

- Special Zones for Structural Reform
  - In the Zone, the previously prohibited project can be carried out because of deregulation.
  - Implemented from 2003, led by the Cabinet Office (not by the Ministries).
- Comprehensive Special Zones
  - Deregulation plus budgetary support and tax treatment.
  - Implemented from 2011, led by the Cabinet Office (not by the Ministries).

The general perception of the Special Zones scheme is that from the Cabinet Office

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<sup>2</sup> Prime Minister’s Office website (Japanese) (Accessed: 1 May 2019)  
<http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/tiiki/sogotoc/siryou/gaiyoueng.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> The effect of scaling up is unknown for the recently established National Strategic Special Zones.

and the Prime Minister's Office to individual ministries, or strong regime actors, who have strong regulatory as well as supervisory powers and do not like regulatory reform, use it as a tool of opposition. The uniqueness of this paper, however, is that the ministries themselves also refer to the results of this experiment and adopt them in their policy. The following case study focuses on scaling up innovative policy developed in a municipality through the Special Zones scheme.

### 3.3. Research Methods

To understand the process of scaling up, this research is based on a case study of the city of Toyama. Empirical data were collected through field research on February 4, 2015, and May 9, 2017, which consisted of seven in-depth interviews with Toyama government officials (from the Urban Planning Policy Section, the Construction Guidance Section, the Disability Welfare Section, and the Kadokawa Long-term Care Prevention Center) as well as official documents and web resources.

The next section analyzes the scaling up process of the niche long-term care policy developed in Toyama. The unique daycare program in the Toyama area, “the Toyama model of daycare,” was developed from the local policy niche through the Special Zones scheme to become a part of the national LTCI program.

## **4. The Process of Scaling Up: The Case of “Toyama Model” of Hybrid Day-care Services**

Toyama is situated in the middle of Japan's main island facing the Sea of Japan and is the capital of the Toyama prefecture. The city merged with 42 small surrounding municipalities in 2005, and the population is now approximately 420,000. It is one of the economic centers in the Hokuriku region. The geography of the city is characterized by the contrast between the plains sufficiently large for the urban district and the steep Tateyama mountainous area, 3,000 meters high. Under the unique compact city policy agenda, the Toyama city government revitalized the public transportation infrastructure and developed related programs in policy fields such as mobility, housing, urban planning, and healthcare. In 2012, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development listed Toyama, along with Paris, Portland, Melbourne, and Vancouver, as a world champion of the compact city policy (OECD 2012). The core idea of the compact city agenda in Toyama was compact urban planning based on public transportation, which

could be the cross-cutting driver to attack the various micro problems in the environment, the economy, and the daily life of the city.

The Toyama area is also famous in the national welfare policy community for its innovative multi-purpose daycare program. In general, personal care in Japan is well institutionalized by the medical insurance systems and the national LTCI system (the latter was introduced in 2000, which ended the traditional placement scheme and adopted a contract system for the care service provision). This means that personal care is covered under a strong and stable regime at the national level, and there is little opportunity for local governments to develop their own care policies. However, if we examine local-level policies, we can observe some areas with different forms of care services, as many local governments develop unique policies that target the local situation. In Toyama, daycare services and facilities are very common. This is because the prevalence of multi-generation families is relatively high in Toyama, and they maintain the custom of family members delivering elder care. There is a high demand for daycare facilities during the daytime when family members are absent.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, home care services are underdeveloped compared to the national average. The small-scale multi-purpose daycare for various service users (the elderly, adults, and children with disabilities) born in Toyama came to be called the “Toyama model” and became famous nationally. Then, through the deregulation measures under the Special Zones scheme, the Toyama model was diffused to the Toyama prefecture level. In 2005, the amendment of the LTCI Act reflected the success of the Toyama model, which has since become a national program. The following paragraphs detail the scaling up of the innovative niche policy and how it came to impact national social care policy.

The Toyama model of daycare has also been called “coexistence care,” characterized by the daycare in the local community households. The main users are the elderly, but adults and children with physical and/or mental disabilities can also use the facility, and they all share the same space and parts of the services. In 1993, three retired nurses from the Toyama Red Cross Hospital who were concerned about the hospitalized death of the elderly, including Kayoko Soman, started a small daycare center in an old house.<sup>5</sup> Gradually, they began accepting infants and people with disabilities in response to high demand. It became quite natural for Soman to provide care for users who shared the same space, regardless of their challenges or age. However, as government administration is

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<sup>4</sup> The ratio of the women who are working outside of the home is relatively high in Toyama, compared to other areas in Japan.

<sup>5</sup> The attempt by three retired nurses is described in the website of “Toyama model of day service.” (Japanese) (Accessed: 1 May 2019) <http://www.toyama-kyosei.jp/>

divided into types of uses,<sup>6</sup> this kind of hybrid service and facility could not be approved for the existing subsidy programs. Therefore, the services were funded through the founders' personal money and fees.

In 1996, Soman and the others approached the Toyama city government to establish a new and unique subsidy program for the daycare of adults and children with disabilities. In 1997, they also made their case to the Toyama prefecture government and were finally successful in initiating a more flexible subsidy program for the daycare of any user type. Due to the limited resources of local governments, the amount of the subsidy was calculated based on the number of users, which made it difficult to manage.

The financial situation improved in 2000 when the national LTCI program was implemented, approving elderly daycare to be covered by insurance and partly by central government funding.<sup>7</sup> However, there are still some obstacles to the universal system. At that time, each daycare home was regulated by different legislations for different types of uses and could not accept users or use government funds due to a number of conditions. The situation was most difficult for children with disabilities who could not be accepted by care homes linked to the LTCI. To improve the situation, in November 2003, the Toyama prefecture government, along with the city of Toyama and four other surrounding cities and towns, decided to apply for the Special Zone for the Structural Reform, the program run by the Cabinet Office. The specific name of the Zone was “the Special Zone for promoting the Toyama model of day service.”<sup>8</sup> The Toyama model was then finalized, allowing all approved LTCI homes to accept adults and children with physical and mental disabilities without any conditions (Figure 1).

In 2006, as a result of the amendment to the LTCI Act, the small-scale multi-purpose daycare service, or the “Toyama model,” was introduced nationwide. That same year, the Services and Supports for Persons with Disabilities (SSPD) Act was introduced to replace the old placement scheme. The LTCI Act and the SSPD Act were linked at the national level. The Toyama model was institutionalized at the regime level.

As of March 2017, there were 48 Toyama model day homes in Toyama and approximately 1,500 nationwide.<sup>9</sup> Many of these homes utilize renovated large traditional-style houses with capacities of approximately 10–20 people. Some of these provide short-stay services with only a few available beds.

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<sup>6</sup> The legislation is divided into the elderly, physically disabled, mentally disabled, and child welfare (disabled) and each piece of legislation has its own detailed conditions.

<sup>7</sup> The manager of the local unit of the LTCI is a municipality (cities and towns), but its funding comes from insurance premiums (50%), municipalities (25%), and the central government (25%).

<sup>8</sup> The area plan for the Special Zone for the Structural Reform, The Cabinet Office (in Japanese) (Accessed: 1 May 2019) <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/tiiki/kouzou2/kouhyou/031222/023.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Based on the research by the Welfare Planning Section, Toyama prefecture.

<b>BEFORE the Zone</b>	Approved LTCI day homes	Approved day homes for physical disability	Approved day homes for mental disability
Adult with physical disability	✓	✓	✓
Adult with mental disability	×	✓	✓
Child with disability	×	×	×



<b>AFTER the Zone</b>	Approved LTCI day homes	Approved day homes for physical disability	Approved day homes for mental disability
Adult with physical disability	✓	✓	✓
Adult with mental disability	✓	✓	✓
Child with disability	✓	✓	✓

Figure 1. Before and After the Zone (deregulation)

The Toyama model has several weaknesses. There is anxiety among caregivers regarding the shared services provided to the elderly and the disabled, about how they can provide appropriate care for disabled users, whose conditions are diverse. Recently, an increasing number of people with mental disabilities have been accepted, and this seems to cause minor problems due to their unstable physical condition. However, as many of the owners and care staff working at the homes have professional nursing care experience, they have not had any serious incident to date.

Although the impact of the passionate negotiation led by Soman, the founder of the Toyama model, was considerable, the decision of the Toyama city government was critical for introducing the new subsidy program. The role of the Toyama prefecture government was also important for the Special Zone application, where the application team consisted of three cities and two towns, and the prefecture coordinated it. The prefecture government also enthusiastically led to the nationwide diffusion of the model.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> According to interviews with Toyama city government officials, led by the author, the then Diet

The Toyama model of daycare is characterized by its ability to bridge the gap between existing policies. Its uniqueness is in the hybrid system, funded by the national policy regimes of elderly care as well as adults and children with disabilities. For care providers, whether they choose the Toyama model, they can be funded per head either way. However, they seem to have an incentive to choose the Toyama model as it helps them implement a flexible business style. Once they are approved as care providers for the LTCI, choosing the model requires no additional effort. This case can be evaluated to inform the universalization of the Toyama model. Recently, the Toyama model of care homes has been in demand for children with disabilities, which can be easily neglected, as parents tend to avoid placing their children in facilities for adults; however, they prefer the Toyama model care homes for after school supervision. There is an expectation of meeting this increased demand if the Toyama model of daycare becomes more prevalent and universalized.

## 5. Findings

This paper examines the process by which local government policy innovation in the social care field has been scaled up to the whole country. The final section discusses a few general points that can be learned from this case. First, an analysis of the Special Zones policy as a scale-up scheme is needed. In general, many central government subsidies had started and, in a few years, terminated. These are not always welcomed by municipalities because they require the submission of several documents and are subject to strict conditions. Due to the boundary effect in public administration (commonly referred to as “sectionalism” of Ministries in Japan), there are severe limitations around the use of specific subsidies for a specific purpose, approved by a particular section of the Ministry, for a different purpose, even if it is closely related. Therefore, this kind of subsidy is difficult to use for projects that fall between existing public administration boundaries.

As shown in this paper, there are policy innovations beyond those of existing administrative divisions and, like the Toyama model, some of which can allow local governments to address administrative obstacles. The Special Zones scheme can be used to scale up niche policy experiments. The uniqueness of this case is that it was a bottom-up challenge, rather than the top-down directive of the central government program,

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member elected in Toyama was the ex-bureaucrat of the then Ministry of Labor and, with the then Governor of Toyama prefecture, would also have an impact on the application of the Zone.

which made use of the Special Zones scheme and finally had an impact on the existing regime.

Notably, the role of the Toyama prefecture government (regional government) was essential for the scale-up process. In Japan, prefecture governments are said to be “closer” to the central government (Ministries) than to those of cities and towns. While there are plenty of cases where cities and towns have a direct connection to the central Ministries and utilize the direct subsidies from them, the prefecture government’s role in actively coordinating the program was indispensable in Toyama’s case. When it came to be institutionalized as a national policy, the Toyama prefecture government played a key role in bridging the local niches and national regimes. In fact, this role had a particular impact because it concerned the welfare sector regime, where national policies tend to be strong and stable. Presuming that prefecture governments, as supporters of central Ministries, sometimes become a barrier to municipalities’ entrepreneurship, this case was impressive.

At the central government level, the Special Zones are used for policy experiments, where a successful niche policy would be supported by the Cabinet Office and expanded nationwide when the Ministries in charge had previously rejected it. Local municipalities and the prefecture government attempt to have the Cabinet Office apply pressure on these Ministries. However, the Ministries seem to have an informal interest in what happens in the Zone, because this kind of experiment is also useful for them.

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