

Overview of the Survey on Residents' Consumption in Minato City

In FY2015, the Minato Policy Creation Research Institute conducted a questionnaire survey about consumption on residents living in mid- to high-rise housing complexes in Minato City. Here, we will introduce some of the contents extracted from the Report on the Survey on Residents' Consumption in Minato City (Japanese edition published in March 2016), including an overview of the survey, characteristics of the survey, survey results, and implications of the survey results.

1. Overview of the survey

The objectives of the Survey on Residents' Consumption in Minato City were, firstly, to gain an understanding on the consumption on fresh foods and daily necessities among residents of mid- to high-rise housing complexes, which many Minato City residents live, and secondly, gain insight into the actions demanded of merchants in Minato City in response to the current situation of consumption among Minato City residents.

As everyone is well aware, a large number of private housing complexes have been constructed in Minato City in recent years, and the population is on the rise. These private housing complexes are located in different areas, such as inland areas where the traditional townscape and shopping districts remain, and waterfront areas that have been newly developed by man. Old housing complexes also exist in Minato City, and there is a high ratio of households with senior citizens in some public housing complexes. Shedding light on the shopping patterns of residents in such housing complexes, as well as the problems they face in their everyday shopping activities, can contribute to improving the lives and welfare of Minato City residents in the future. It also holds great significance with respect to the commercial activities of merchants in the region.

To that end, the survey was conducted on households in mid- to high-rise housing complexes in Minato City (both private and public housing). The questionnaire was distributed to all households in the targeted housing complexes, and the completed forms were collected by post. A total of 8,665 sets of forms were distributed, and responses were collected from 2,757 households (2,041 households in private housing, 713 households in public housing, and 3 households with unknown housing category) (Response rate: 31.8%). As some of the targeted housing complexes housed a large number of foreign residents, apart from the Japanese language forms, English survey forms were also distributed at some of the housing complexes. However, the number of English forms returned was extremely small.

The survey items included an overview of the household/head of household (age, number of people in the household, income, etc.), purchase of everyday necessities and considerations when making the purchases (vegetables, meats/fresh fish, alcohol, medicine/toiletries, daily necessities), recognition of

and demands toward shopping districts in the vicinity, gift certificates that can be used across Minato City, dining out and considerations when dining out, and online shopping. Free response fields were also included to allow respondents to write down their opinions freely.

2. Characteristics of the survey

The following are the characteristics of this survey. Firstly, the survey population included a large proportion of respondents living in private housing complexes, which is steadily increasing in Minato City, as well as households with senior citizens who required social assistance. The survey results offer a realistic sketch of one of the facades of the current situation in Minato City, and serves as valuable data for reviewing issues in Minato City.

Secondly, while the scope of the survey covers the actual situation of consumption among residents in mid- to high-rise housing complexes, the results of the survey could also provide hints to the potential for development of local retail stores and shopping districts that have existed in Minato City from a long time ago. There are many points that local retail stores can consider based on the lifestyles of residents in mid- to high-rise housing complexes and the changes in their behavior and attitudes toward consumption.

Thirdly, in this survey, the Minato Policy Creation Research Institute placed an emphasis on analyzing the survey with a view toward the “ground,” based on the actual conditions in the local community. To that end, efforts were made to ensure that on-site visits to the mid- to high-rise housing complexes were targeted as the survey population were conducted, in order to gain a real sense of the situation in the respective areas by actually seeing, hearing, and sensing what was going on. For example, through such field visits, the Institute recognized the importance of mobile vegetable stalls that have been selling vegetables at a certain public housing complex two days per week for more than 40 years. By actually going into the field for research, we are confident that we will be able to gain information about the distances between housing complexes and shopping districts, as well as what and how are being sold at the retail stores. The survey forms were drawn up by utilizing the results of such local visits and site inspections.

3. Organization of the survey report (Japanese edition)

In the survey report (Japanese edition), Chapter I covers the objectives and overview of the survey, Chapter II touches on the situation in the local communities in Minato City, and Chapter III shows the data for the basic tabulated results categorized by private and public housing. Private and public housing are characterized respectively by the age of the housing complex, number of years the resident has lived there, age of the head of household and presence of senior citizens, form of income, and income standards. The results showed that such characteristics also have an impact on residents’

purchasing behavior.

The survey was also conducted from various perspectives with regard to the everyday purchasing behavior of the residents, such as the places where they regularly shop for vegetables, meats, alcohol, medicine/toiletries, and everyday necessities, the time periods that they shop during, shopping frequency, availability of shopping districts nearby, and their demands of shopping districts and individual stores in the neighborhood.

Furthermore, questions were also raised about their dining out and online shopping habits. With regard to online shopping, the results showed once again that the Internet is already used for purchasing various products, and that the scope of online shopping is expected to continue expanding in the future. The Internet is gradually opening up new possibilities in terms of the shopping styles for individual households, and will inevitably have an impact on existing stores and shopping districts in the local community.

For Chapter IV, an analysis was carried out for the free responses. One of the characteristics of this survey is the fact that the number of free responses made up close to half of all the responses. Many of the free responses touched on problems related to the current shopping conditions, and revealed that shopping conditions may not necessarily be ideal even in Minato City, which is located in the heart of a metropolis. As we will explain later, the situation in Minato City today is such that there are two sides to shopping-related problems—one is the aspect of “despite being in the heart of a metropolis,” and the other is the aspect of “because of being in the heart of a metropolis.”

In Chapter IV, the free responses were categorized by question and area, and the respective characteristics were revealed. This section provides an introduction to the frank opinions of the local residents, and offers an interesting insight into the various problems confronting residents in their lives in the respective areas.

Cross tabulation of the survey results were carried out in Chapter V. The themes covered in the cross tabulation were: age of the head of household, household income, private housing complexes in the waterfront areas and inland areas, type of household, availability of shopping districts nearby and frequency of use, premium gift certificates, and means of transportation.

The age of the head of household highlights the differences in purchasing behavior among the different age groups, while household income highlights the differences in purchasing behavior among the different income groups.

The number of stores and eating and drinking establishments around the residences surveyed differed between the waterfront area, which is a new development site, and the inland area, which is an

existing residential area. The differences in the conditions of these neighborhood areas were also revealed in the results of this survey.

As for the types of households, the households were categorized into five groups (single household with head of household aged 64 and below, single household with head of household aged 65 and above, single-income household with two or more persons and head of household aged 64 and below, double-income household with two or more persons and head of household aged 65 and above, and household with two or more persons and head of household aged 65 and above), based on the following criteria that is expected to have an impact on purchasing behavior: age of the head of household, number of people in the household, and household income format. The characteristics of the purchasing behavior in each category were then examined. As lifestyles differ depending on the type of household, the results showed that lifestyle also has an impact on purchasing behavior.

With regard to the availability of shopping districts nearby, an analysis was carried out to find out if there were any differences in purchasing behavior depending on the residents' awareness of the availability of shopping districts nearby, and whether those who thought that there were shopping districts nearby actually went to the shopping districts, and whether this resulted in differences in purchasing behavior.

As for gift certificates that can be used across Minato City, differences in the degree of use of such certificates were considered from several perspectives, including the age groups of the heads of households and the number of years they had been living in their residences. In addition, the characteristics of their current use were also examined.

Regarding means of transportation, the differences in the means of transportation used when going shopping were analyzed based on points such as area of residence, shopping frequency, and shopping time period.

4. Implications of the survey results

The targeted areas for the survey are areas in Minato City with a large number of large, medium, and small-scale housing complexes. The survey results threw up various issues and points about the diversity in the age groups, family compositions, and lifestyles of residents in Minato City, the unique characteristics of each district, and the impact of changes in the social environment. The following is a summary of the key observations that emerged.

(1) Diverse lifestyles and diversification of consumption

For many of the public housing complexes included in the survey population for this survey, residents were required to fulfill certain income ceilings or other criteria in order to live in the

complexes. On the other hand, among the private housing complexes, there were many cases where there was a higher proportion of households with substantially higher income levels, due to the rental price for rental apartments or sale price for apartments on sale. As a result, as shown in the data analysis, the respective characteristics of residents living in public and private housing were revealed through household income. However, even for residents in the same income group, there was great diversity in their age groups, household income (salary, pension, etc.), number of people earning income in the household (single-income, double-income, etc.). Of course, their respective lifestyles were also different.

The diversity in lifestyles has an impact on various points related to their actual shopping habits, such as the time period in which the main shopper in the family goes shopping, shopping frequency, shopping location, points of consideration when shopping, frequency of dining out and points of consideration when dining out, and use of the Internet. While there are similarities across different generations, there are also differences brought about by differences in lifestyles even within the same generation. The diversity of lifestyles is contributing to the diversification of purchasing behavior, as well as to the diversification of the styles in which products and services are provided.

Amidst the diversification of the styles in which products and services are provided, the Internet is experiencing the greatest growth in recent years. The percentage of all households that make purchases via the Internet more than once a week exceeds 20%, and reaches 40% among households where the head of household is 44 years old and below. Although the speed and breadth of growth are not uniform for each age group, type of household, and product, online shopping is expected to continue expanding going forward, and is expected to have an impact on the purchasing behavior of Minato City residents.

Aside from such major trends, there are also points with important significance to specific groups, such as the mobile stalls. The mobile stalls are ranked second after the neighborhood supermarket as the place where residents of public housing complexes purchase their vegetables. Among the public housing complexes included in the survey population, there are residences that do not have greengrocers or supermarkets in the vicinity. In such districts, mobile stalls serve a particularly indispensable role to the elderly. Although their numbers are not large, the demand for services that can offer such stable and continuous supplies in such a pinpoint style, to fulfill this demand that actually exists, cannot be overlooked.

(2) “Problems faced despite being in the heart of a metropolis,” and “problems faced because of the location in the heart of a metropolis”

Minato City, which is situated in the heart of a metropolis, is regarded as an area that offers great convenience in aspects of everyday life. However, the results of this survey showed that residents face various problems in the course of the shopping activities that are vital to their everyday lives.

In particular, as Chapter IV shows, we cannot overlook the fact that the number of free answers makes up about half of the total number of responses. The contents of the free responses also cover a wide range of topics, including the problems faced by areas with a small number of neighborhood stores, problems faced by households with children and households with senior citizens, the selection and quality of products, and problems related to access to shopping locations.

For newly developed housing districts such as Konan and Daiba, in comparison with other districts, there were relatively more opinions about the lack of products residents want or need, as we have seen in the analysis of free responses in Chapter IV. Particularly in Konan, close to half of the respondents brought up this problem in their free responses.

There are supermarkets close to the residential areas in both the Konan and Daiba districts, so it is not necessarily true that there are completely no stores available. However, as the residents expressed in their free responses, there is lack of a concentration of diverse stores that can serve the shopping needs of residents in the local community. In the large-scale developments, many of which are high-rise housing complexes, there is seldom sufficient space to incorporate a diverse range of stores for consumers of the local community, such as those that are found in existing residential areas. This is a “problem faced despite being in the heart of a metropolis.”

On the other hand, different problems emerge in inland areas with a large number of stores, and where there are shopping districts. In the vicinity of offices in inland areas and shopping districts in downtown areas, there are many cases where the shopping districts and commercial areas put effort into attracting office employees and tourists, rather than into offering convenience to residents of the local community. There are many cases where residents living near to shopping districts with a concentration of Japanese-style bars oriented toward office workers and students observe that “there are no shopping districts.” This is a “problem faced because of being in the heart of a metropolis.”

This highlighted anew the double-faceted problem of the consumption lifestyle of Minato City, with “problems faced despite being in the heart of a metropolis,” and “problems faced because of being in the heart of a metropolis.”

(3) Shopping districts

Although there are differences by district, it cannot be said that shopping at the shopping districts is the main way through which many of the residents in this survey purchase fresh food and daily necessities. Neighborhood supermarkets and mass retail outlets have an overwhelmingly strong presence as the place where such items are purchased, with the exception of medicine and toiletries. For vegetables, meats, and fresh fish, neighborhood shopping districts and individual stores occupy

a lower position than home delivery services and online retailers (other than for these neighborhood stores and individual stores).

Furthermore, there are also more than a few cases where shopping districts are not identified as existing spaces even when they are available, and there are not many residents who use the shopping districts frequently even when they identify the presence of these shopping districts (Chapter V). Based on the free responses, there are also residents who feel that shopping districts are oriented toward tourists and external customers, rather than toward the local residents.

Although we were not able to obtain a direct response about the issues related to shopping districts in the future through these survey results, there is a need to pay attention to the following points.

Firstly, there are reasons for the decline in residents' awareness of the presence of shopping districts, and the decline in their use of the shopping districts. As described earlier, (putting reality aside), shopping districts have to adapt to the significant changes that are continuously taking place, such as the decline in awareness of shopping districts as places where local residents purchase fresh food and daily necessities, the diversification of competitors (other than supermarkets, home delivery services, online retailers, etc.), and the diversification of lifestyles and needs of consumers (the differences in lifestyles among the types of households and age groups are quite significant).

Secondly, however, residents' have not entirely given up on shopping districts and local retail stores. While there are shopping districts and local retail stores that are able to meet the consumption needs of residents, such consumption needs are becoming increasingly diversified and decentralized amidst the diversification of lifestyles, making it difficult for such shopping districts and stores to exist as a concentrated cluster. Therefore, it is necessary to understand and organize the increasingly diversifying and decentralizing consumer needs, and to respond to them in a strategic manner.

Thirdly, close to half of the respondents answered that they "often go to" or "sometimes go to" events and festivals organized by shopping districts in their neighborhoods, indicating that there is a point of contact with the residents. However, there are no links between the shopping street as a venue for events and festivals, and the shopping street as a place for everyday shopping. This gap is emerging for the shopping districts of today.

It is not possible for shopping districts to be reborn in the same form that they took during the Showa era, and there is also no need for them to do so. In order for shopping districts and local retail stores to survive in Minato City, which many people visit for work and sightseeing, expanding businesses with a focus on people outside of the City is also an important strategy. However, the presence of shopping districts and local retail stores that can meet the consumption

needs of local residents is also indispensable to the local community. They are also becoming increasingly important to Minato City, with its growing number of new residents. There is a need to consider a desirable direction for the future lives of the local residents, for the business activities of shopping districts and retail stores in the local community, and for the prosperity of Minato City.

5. Future issues

In conclusion, we would like to look at the surveys that will be required in the future based on this survey.

As described above, based on the premise of the purchasing behavior and consumption awareness of residents living in mid- to high-rise housing complexes in Minato City that have been revealed in this survey, there is a need to consider a desirable direction for the lives of local residents, for the business activities of shopping districts and retail stores in the local community, and for the prosperity of Minato City in the future.

To achieve that, it is necessary to grasp an understanding of the current situation of shopping districts and local retail stores in Minato City, which had served as spaces for providing products and services.

The shopping street survey has been conducted for Minato City and Tokyo to date, and a considerable volume of data has been accumulated. There are plans to proceed to the next step while making use of this accumulated data, and utilizing the methods necessary for capturing the current situation more realistically.