

“Communities-of-Practice”: Creative Resources, Collaborations and Processes in Community-Based Revitalization Projects in Japan

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Introduction

Across Asia, particularly in Japan, Thailand, and Indonesia, we see an increasing number of community-based development programs experimenting with collective learning and creative problem-solving toward common goals. In Japan, the growth of community-based initiatives has been closely aligned with its post-modernisation history of urban, welfare and civic reform. These initiatives, linked with ideological terms such as self-determinism, autonomy and direct-democracy, are often focused on encouraging growth and revitalization that originates from within communities and which emphasize their worldview and livelihood choices.

In Japan, issues such as large-scale natural disasters, the under population of rural areas, and the degeneration of rural economies have been the main impetus for the growth in community and locality revitalization initiatives over the last 30 to 40 years. These, in turn, have led to an increase in the formation of non-profit organizations to provide a range of services that include coordination, networking, fund-raising, management, training, research, and more.

I chose to examine this phenomenon by observing a select number of such social experiments in Japan, which may be categorized as “communities of practice”. Wenger (1998) defines a community of practice as a group of individuals participating in communal activity, and experiencing as well as continuously creating a shared identity through engagement with and contribution to the practices of their communities.

My interest in communities of practice stems from my own work as a community-based cultural worker and arts educator who works both in rural

and urban environments. While working with local communities in cultural conservation and development, I discovered that the sustainability of community-based initiatives was dependent on the cohesion, commitment, and collaboration of all parties—funders, coordinating organizations, and the local community. I was interested in examining how the various parties work together and what creative and innovative processes and strategies were being employed to build and sustain participation.

The Impact of Super Growth on Post-war Japan

A brief summary of post-war Japanese economic history explains the shift of emphasis from exogenous to endogenous growth models. Following the shattering experience of the Second World War, the Japanese were anxious to experience an economic recovery and to reintegrate themselves into the global economy. The Japanese government mobilized and directed funds to key industries in order to fast-track economic growth measured in terms of GNP. An externally motivated, exogenous model of development was adopted, which introduced capital and resources from outside the region to develop large-scale projects in the steel, mechanical, and chemical industries. Within 50 years of the war, (specifically between 1960-1973), the Japanese economy experienced unprecedented growth and a meteoric rise in its economic position to become the second largest economy in the world with the highest per capita GDP by 1980 (Otsubo 2007).

In the mid-1980s, a speculative boom developed, driven by expansionist competition amongst companies and the banking sector, and by the economic stimulus measures taken by the government. The situation was aggravated by a lack of sound corporate governance both in non-financial and

financial entities, and the lack of a systematic adaptation of traditional norms to the demands of the free market (Otsubo 2007).

In late 1980 the economic bubble popped and Japan's economy fell into recession. The period from 1991 to 2003 was perceived as the "Lost Decade", as growth rates slowed from 3.8 in the 1980s to almost zero in 1993, while unemployment rates rose to about 5.5% (Obutsu 2007). On the upside, the period of rapid growth raised income levels, access to education, and lifespan; but, on the downside, some significant distortions developed. The period of rapid growth also brought about significant problems in society, such as (1) overpopulation in metropolitan areas and depopulation in rural areas, (2) the weakening of social cohesion in community and family units, (3) environmental degradation such as the devastation of fields and forests; air, water, noise and waste pollution, and 4) a decline in rural vitality (Otsubo 2007).

Several economic and social development plans were devised to tackle these problems mainly arising from three-quarters of the population being huddled in cities in the 1970s. The Special Act for Revitalizing Depopulated Areas was passed as a ten-year policy measure in 1970. Public investment and grants were used to open new towns to ease excessive concentration in large urban areas and for regional improvement in the rural areas to counteract regional disparities.

An Alternative Development Model

Endogenous development in Japan goes back to the pre-war period, but...it firmly took root in society when we entered the 1970s expressed by words such as "locality making" (*machizukuri*) and "village awakening" (*muraokoshi*). Endogenous development started out as an alternative approach among regions which were being left behind during the high economic growth period or affected by its failures (Miyamoto 1989).

One such example of the autonomous processes of regional development and locality-making is the

"one village one product" scheme in prefectures such as Oita. New policies and sustained political efforts encouraged communities throughout the country to develop regionally organized social, physical, and entrepreneurial initiatives using local indigenous resources.

Regional economist Miyamoto Kenichi further defined the essence of endogenous development thus:

A regional development, which in the hands of local administrations is improving the citizens' welfare while pursuing the development of an economy rooted in a culture where regional companies, associations, other bodies, and individuals form the plans based on their own learning, originating in independent technological development, and preserving the regional environment while making rational use of the resources... (Miyamoto 1989).

Throughout the 1980s, the endogenous development model was highlighted as a kind of bottom-up, problem-solving approach, seen to go hand in hand with the reform of the business, government and household sectors. Self-reliance and self-determinism were key concepts emphasized in economic, welfare, and education policies.

By the 1990s Japan had adopted a middle road in its development policy, supporting the co-existence of both the exogenous and the endogenous socioeconomic models of development.

The Growth of Community-Based Initiatives

Endogenous development has gained momentum in Japan through various interpretations and buzz words such as area revitalization, locality-making, creative cities, and community collaboration. More recently it has been harnessed in planning for disaster recovery and an aging population. The principles of endogenous development have, to a certain extent, been absorbed and activated by small players such as local governments, academic institutions, non-profit organizations, and local communities.

Although there is now heightened sensitivity toward community building and locality making among proponents of the endogenous growth model in Japan, developing a cohesive community committed to a common goal is a complex undertaking. Developing communities of practice requires well-orchestrated, multi-stakeholder participation.

In practice, two levels of action exist: a larger plan supported by government policy and funding, and the realization of the abstract policy through small and medium-sized grassroots projects implemented in specific localities, the latter eagerly supported at the local and central levels by research, policy frameworks, and funding.

The endogenous development model is used to tackle a range of issues affecting localities all over Japan. These include:

- The decreasing population and underpopulation
 - Employment insecurity
 - Vacant buildings and abandoned agricultural lands
 - Imbalance between hard and soft infrastructure
 - Service provision for the aged, those with special needs, etc.
 - Disaster recovery
 - The weakening social fabric in communities

The problems outlined above are interconnected and cannot be resolved in isolation. They require an integrated approach to problem solving that recognizes the interconnectedness between the political, social, physical and economic dimensions. Endogenous development takes a socio-spatial view of growth, paying special attention to the historical, ecological, livelihood, cultural, and social settings of each settlement. Some experiments in endogenous development, however, tend to ignore the social and environmental dimensions, and focus on developing economic autonomy and self-sufficiency.

This study examines projects that prioritize community building and cohesion, as well as community commitment to shared learning as a prerequisite for sustainable endogenous growth.

A Case Study Approach to Communities of Practice

The focus of this preliminary study is on the collaborators involved in small-scale revitalization efforts in Japan and their practice. Categorized as an informal community of practice, these coordinator/support organizations, stakeholders and the local community will be described along with how they engage mutually in a joint initiative, where all parties develop and share the capacity to create and utilize communal knowledge toward a common goal.

According to Wenger (1998), a community of practice may be defined along three dimensions:

- **What it is about**—its joint enterprise as understood and continually renegotiated by its members
- **How it functions**—the relationships of mutual engagement that bind members together into a social entity
- **What capability it has produced**—the shared repertoire of communal resources (routines, sensibilities, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, etc.) that members have developed over time.

The study was conducted between February and July 2013 and covered a total of eight coordinator organizations that work on the ground with community, and five support organizations that provide intermediary services, either to coordinator organizations or to community groups. Some of the organizations mentioned in this study are located within the cities of Tokyo and Kyoto, while others are located in satellite towns or villages outside the city.

Of these 13 case studies of communities of practice, a select number of cases will be used to illuminate and explicate some of the creative approaches and strategies of engagement.

Methodology

As this study is focused on examining creative collaborations, resources, and processes in community and locality revitalization efforts, two main criteria were set for the selection of case studies:

i) ongoing revitalization initiatives or projects that display the specific characteristics of being locality-based and/or have a strong component of stakeholder and community participation

ii) initiatives that use a creative approach in community or locality revitalization.

Organizations were selected based on recommendations provided by Japanese community-based practitioners. These practitioners also provided translation services where necessary. This proved especially useful as they were well-networked and able to provide an insider view of the historical development and growth of the organizations.

A practice-orientated framework was used to locate the resources and grasp the mechanics of creative collaboration and processes in community-based revitalization initiatives. Interviews were conducted with organization leaders or project directors to become acquainted with the organization's objectives, structure, projects, and activities, as well as processes and strategies used to engage community and to collaborate with stakeholders. Where possible, locality visits were made to view the practice site and any ongoing activities. Content analysis was also conducted on supporting secondary source materials such as blogs, websites, reports, articles, or impact studies, describing or documenting the organization or its initiatives.

The data collected were synthesized into case studies, which were then collectively analyzed for characteristic features that enable and facilitate creative collaboration and participation.

Limitations of the Study

Although similar small community-based initiatives can be found all over Japan, the time factor limited the cases to organizations located in and around Tokyo and Kyoto. The study is not intended to be geographically representative, but as a starting point for further investigation.

In this paper, only relevant excerpts from the sample case studies are extracted to illustrate a point. More information on each organization's structure and its multifarious activities can be accessed through websites and blogs related to the organizations.

A general framework of the observed practices has been derived following the analysis of creative collaborations and processes, which does not necessarily apply strictly to every case study, but serves to capture and highlight the essence of creative and innovative approaches that have developed through communities of practice.

Summary of Selected Case Studies

Two categories of organizations have been identified, each serving quite distinct roles of coordination or support. However, in some exceptional cases, organizations had overlapping roles.

a) Community/Locality-Based Coordinator Organizations

A coordinator organization conducts projects on the ground, directly involving community. They translate the needs of the community or policymakers, and facilitate the execution of the abstract into concrete projects. They generally work in collaboration with funders, policymakers, government, industry practitioners, and the community to achieve some specific goals and outcomes through what could be short or long-term projects.

Community/Locality-based Organizations				
Organization	Selected Project	Issue(s)	Project Aim/ Objective	Parties Involved
<u>Toride Art Project Office</u> NPO	<u>Art in Danci</u> : long-term art projects with apartment residents	Sustaining vitality in underutilized urban apartment building with elderly residents	Facilitate community interaction. Creative place-making.	Initiators: Arts NPO, artists, academics, city government Participants: Resident community and artists
<u>Yanaka no Otakke</u> NPO	<u>Monthly Programs With Town Residents</u> : tea tasting, study sessions,	Sustaining vitality of old, historic settlement located in the midst of urban Tokyo	Facilitate community interaction and networking. Creative place-making.	Initiators: Arts & culture NPOs, artists, city government Participants: Resident community, students and public
<u>Social Kitchen + Hanare</u> NPO	<u>Working Group</u> : Citizen-initiated projects, discussions, study sessions	Lack of practicing communities promoting democracy and fair economy	Promote social activism and autonomy among citizen groups	Initiators: Arts NPO Participants: Citizen groups, artists
<u>Asahi Arts Foundation</u> Corporate Foundation	<u>Asahi Arts Festival (AAF)</u> : Arts projects with local communities culminating in a series of nationwide events/festivals.	Disconnect and break in social ties among members of local communities	Encourage community networking and co-operation.	Initiators: Corporation foundation, arts NPOs, Artists. Participants: Artists, citizen groups
<u>Oki Art Trial</u> Non-registered Executive Committee	<u>Art Festival</u> : Community-run festival on a theme <u>Art Exhibition</u> : Artist-run exhibition using local site/resources	Out-migration and depopulation on Oki island	Revitalization of community and communal spaces	Initiators: Community leaders, individual artists Participants: Artists, citizen-led committee, community
<u>Kodomo Art</u> NPO	<u>Regional Exchange between Town and Countryside</u> : Experiential, intergenerational exchange program involving elementary children and parents.	Urban rural disconnect	Introduce rural lifestyle, indigenous resources, skills and knowledge to urban children. Revitalize rural-urban connectivity.	Initiators: Arts NPO, prefecture government Participants: Urban & rural families Adults & children from regional, rural, & urban communities
<u>Homes vi</u> NPO	<u>Community gathering house and website</u> : Community meetings, workshops and mapping	Poor community cohesion	Initiate community interaction and community-led activities	Initiators: NPO, city government Participants: Residents

Table 1: Summary profile of selected coordinator organizations

b) Intermediary Support Organizations

A second category identified was that of organizations providing intermediary and support services. These may be registered as NPOs or foundations, or as an independent arm of a government agency. Support organizations play a critical role in networking and connecting players such as NPOs, industry partners, funders, researchers, government agencies, artists, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. They often provide crucial services that contribute to the development of cultural workers and build capacity by creating platforms such as talks and forums for learning and sharing, between and across different players. Support organizations also play an advocacy role to promote and raise the profile of organizations involved in community-based initiatives.

Observations and Findings:

From the analysis, I identified the presence of three characteristic dimensions in these endogenous revitalization initiatives that defined them as communities of practice.

- i) a joint initiative
- ii) developed through the mutual engagement of participants
- iii) the capacity to create and utilize communal knowledge and resources toward a common goal.

The three dimensions evolved through distinct approaches that provide insight into how integrated and collaborative soft structures can be developed through the convergence of creative resources, collaboration, and processes in relation to a specific goal.

i) Joint Initiative by Multi-disciplinary Players

The case studies demonstrate how community and place revitalization is a joint initiative involving a wide range of players with a clear convergence of disciplines and of public-private partnerships.

Coordinator organizations managing community or place revitalization are often registered as non-profit organizations, or function as a formal committee recognized by the community or local authority. Manned by a smallish working team of two to five full-time or part-time staff, the NPOs are usually overseen by a board or executive committee consisting of mixed professionals from academia, community, industry, and government. Additionally, the coordinator organization may be peripherally supported by volunteers from the local community, student interns, community leaders, or local authorities committed to change.

On a personal level, players from the various fields and disciplines see themselves as cultural activists interested in improving physical conditions, community well-being, social capital, or economic opportunities through their expertise or experience. On a professional level, they contribute their skills as artists, managers, or academics to further their practice in the challenging atmosphere of the public domain. While working together to achieve the goal of the initiative, they also simultaneously fulfil their own institutional or personal agendas.

Case Study Illustration:

Toride Art Project (TAP)

For the Toride Art Project (TAP), Toride residents, Toride City authorities, and the Tokyo University of the Arts have been working together since 1999. TAP aims to develop Toride as a cultural city by supporting young artists in their practice and disseminating their work, while providing residents with opportunities to interact with art (<http://www.toride-ap.gr.jp/en/>). Its main sponsor is a private corporation, East Gas Co. Ltd. The coordinator organization is mentored by an academic who teaches arts management at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music.

Intermediary Support Organizations				
Organization	Selected Project	Fundamental Need	Project Aim/Objective	Parties Involved
Asahi Arts Festival Network (AAFN)	AAFN Conference- National level gathering of artists and NPO's involved in AAF	Isolation of regional artists working in community	National level networking, sharing, and learning platform	Initiators: Corporate foundation and independent production company Participants: Arts NPOs that participated in the Asahi Arts Festival
Arts NPO Link	National Arts NPO Databank Regional Arts NPO Forums	Lack of intermediary services for arts and culture related NPOs	Platform to support and promote the interests and needs of arts related NPOs	Initiated by: Arts NPO and corporate foundations Participants: Arts & culture NPOs
Higashiyama Artist Placement Service (HAPS)	Consultation and support for space, exhibition, industry networking, Curation, and placement.	Lack of career development services for artists after graduation	Provide career management& development& support for emerging artists	Initiators: City government, professionals, academics Participants: Artists and art community
Kyoto C ommunity Collaboration Centre (KCCC)	Professional advice, networking, seminars, database on local community development Surveys, research, and consultation on building & landscape conservation	Missing management between policy and execution	Community development and collaboration for the preservation of the local landscape	Initiators: Conservation NPO, municipal government Participants: Local residents, business enterprise, municipal government, professionals, university students

Table 2: Summary profile of selected intermediary organizations

The Higashiyama Artists Placement Service (HAPS)

The Higashiyama Artists Placement Service (HAPS) is an NPO established in 2011 and headed by an executive committee and advisory board. The organization's aim is to provide intermediary services that support, promote, and create opportunities for emerging and established artists to found their careers within the Kyoto prefecture. Supported by Kyoto City, its partners are the Kyoto Center for Community Collaboration, the Higashiyama Council of Social Welfare, and a citizens-led Community Renovation Committee. Committee members include curators, critics, journalists, arts administrators, professors, department chiefs from the Kyoto City government, and others. Its three full-time staffs are young graduates of arts management and art history.

ii) Mutual Engagement through Collaboration

What distinguishes these creative cultural activists is that they venture beyond formal spaces such as galleries and universities into communal spaces, public buildings, and homes, and move beyond their professional community to collaborate with new partners and with lay-people from all walks of life. In response to context and culture, they experiment with new forms and approaches using an expanded array of tools and resources available in the environment.

Engagement with community forces the artists to shift their concept of art as self-expression through a physical object or performance, to art as communicative exchange and cultural expression. Community engagement forces the academics to shift their focus of research from increasing the stock of knowledge, to the application of knowledge

Key Roles Played by Collaborating Individuals and Institutions		
Role / Type	Does what?	Where from?
Theory-creative key person	Provides vision and structure to initiative	University/Private sector/Corporate
Practice-orientated key person	Leads the team	Local community/NPO
Policy-making key person	Advocates for policy change	Local Government/Local Community
Matchmaker/Networker	Network, provides intermediary services	NPO/University
Funder	Provides financial support	Corporate/Government/University
Local authority/Agencies	Provides technical support	Government
Project manager	Production, administration	NPO
Creative innovator (Artists/ Programmers/ /Entrepreneurs)	Conceptualizes and facilitates projects on the ground	University/Private sector/ Freelance graduates
Researcher	Research, analyze, evaluate, make recommendations	University
Participating Community	Participate as team players and provide resource, and information	Community/Newcomer residents/ Visitors

Table 3: Players and their roles in collaborative community initiatives

to solve new or existing problems. Project managers find themselves working in a project with an undefined end where the goals may be intangible.

Rather than create an insular network of professionals, they instead choose collaboration, requiring creative and critical thinking across disciplinary boundaries and outside the narrow hierarchies of specialization. It was not surprising, therefore, to find cases of artists facilitating lay citizens to redesign their spaces, or artists working with researchers to devise creative means of data collection. All possess a set of skills—administrative, diagnostic, reconstructive, and creative—but all use different modes of operation.

Each player holds a specific role in the joint initiative. These players contribute from their professional position, experience, and/or expertise as parts

of a whole. In the process of collaboration and working toward a common goal, players indicate that they became respectful and aware of the many types of knowledge and wisdoms of each other, and developed an increased awareness of the connectivity between place, use, and people. The initiatives, therefore, display an integrated utilization of knowledge, skills, and resources.

The table below summarizes some of the key roles played by collaborating individuals and institutions. The terminology for leadership roles is adapted from Tsurumi (1989) who makes a typological distinction between “theory-creative key person”, “practice-oriented key person” and “policy-making key person”.

Case Study Illustration:

The Tokyo Artpoint Project is a program strand under the larger Tokyo Culture Creation Project launched in 2008 by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture. The project fosters collaboration between arts and culture organizations, and relevant NPOs to promote Tokyo as a city of arts and culture.

The Tokyo Art Point supports art projects created through the collaborative efforts of artists and residents. The NPO **Yanaka no Okatte** (Yanaka Arts Project) is an example of a participatory arts program funded by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and the Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture, that brings artists and citizens of a small town together to create a cultural and creative hub. Activities are decided upon collectively and are often carried out in public buildings and spaces.

Yanaka no Okatte also collaborated with the Taito Cultural and Historical Society which specializes in the revitalization and conservation of the historical townscape, to give a new lease of life to a vacant heritage building by locating its office and activities in its premises. Residents participating in cultural activities also take responsibility for the building’s weekly upkeep.

iii) Development of a Shared Repertoire of Communal Resources

Through their period of experimentation and practice, these communities of practice have developed distinct communal resources and knowledge related to the community building process. These include the development of human and social capital, the development of an intervention procedure, and a range of strategies for engaging community participation.

a) Development of Human and Social Capital

Capacity building and networking are taken seriously to provide continuous growth and the development of knowledge and skills, and to build new human and social capital. The case studies reveal how nurturing and capacity building occur through three main channels:

- Mentorship: Experienced local leaders, academics, and practicing professionals in their 40s-60s act as mentors to the younger generation of cultural workers in their late 20s to 30s.
- University-community engagement: Extra-curricular voluntary activity and field internships provide students exposure to working in or with community. Some undergraduate and post-graduate courses encourage students to work in interdisciplinary clusters in an adopted locality in cooperation with authorities, agencies, or NPOs as a form of field research.
- Supporting organizations provide training courses and organizes network meetings, sharing sessions, and exposure trips as capacity building platforms.

In some cases, capacity building and networking activities are extended to include community with the intention to develop follow-up agents from within communities who can maintain or grow the initiatives after the coordinator organization has withdrawn. Social capital has also been documented in the form of directories that carry the profile of cultural workers or community-based organizations.

Case Study Illustration:

The **Tokyo Art Point** project supports internship and art projects created through the collaborative efforts of artists and residents. It simultaneously provides management courses, research, and networking forums for emerging artists and arts managers working in community. It aims to build a management cycle that will eventually enable the community-based arts projects to become sustainable by evolving into a non-profit organization.

Several outstanding community-based arts NPOs in Japan are coordinated by former “graduates” of the Tokyo Art Point Internship program. Two such organizations, the Yanakano Okatte and the Toride Art Project Office, started off as student internship programs in community and evolved into non-profit organizations with interns choosing to stay on in the locality. When interviewed, the Yanaka-no Ottake staff (dated May 26, 2013) highlighted the influence and inspiration received from educator-mentors or artist-mentors who helped give direction and meaning to their work.

b) Development of Intervention Procedure and Strategies

The diagram below adapted from Zinggl (2001) attempts to capture the procedural steps used in the process of intervention into community and locality.

In summary, the locality, themes, and issues are identified by a community group or government agency. A coordinating agency or institution is invited or makes an offer to work in collaboration with the community to improve the situation. Target agencies, sponsors, and other relevant personnel are brought on board as collaborators. If necessary, research and mapping are conducted to diagnose the problem situation. Based on an understanding of the root causes, recommendations are then made. Intervention methods and strategies are selected and the intervention process begins.

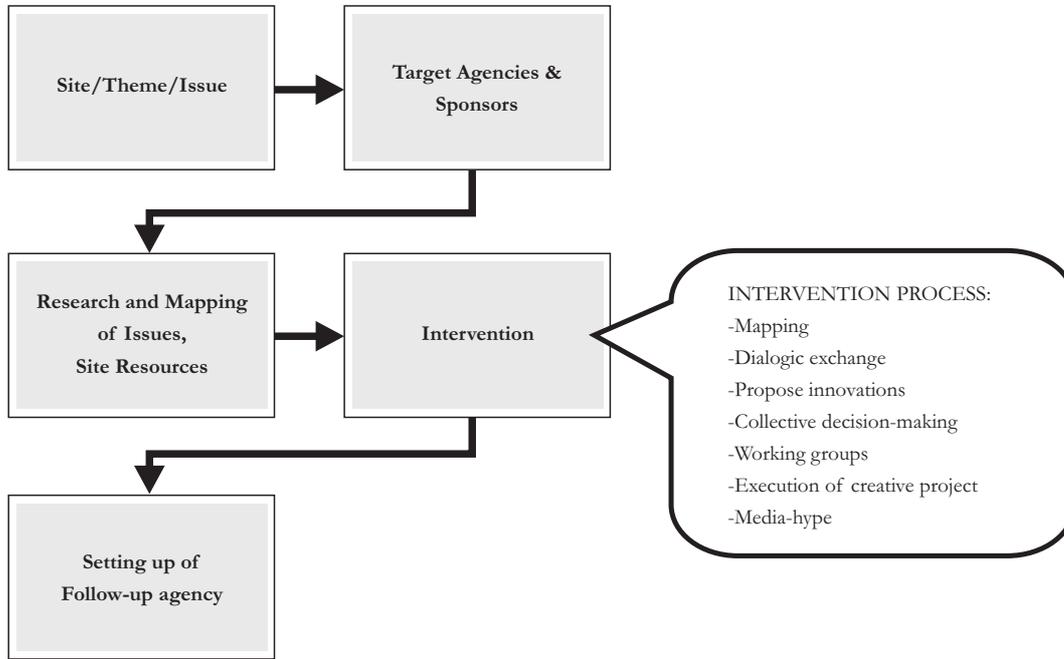


Table 4: Summary profile of selected intermediary organizations

The strategies used during the process of intervention are best understood as a process of reciprocity or dialogic exchange involving coordinating organizations, stakeholders, and community. During the intervention process there is less concern with tangible outcomes and more emphasis on the collaborative process that can transform the consciousness of the interveners and the co-participants. Dialogic strategies are employed to facilitate community to become more coherent in their views. With increased understanding of viewpoints, collaboration becomes more reciprocal and mutual education can take place.

Dialogic strategies that encourage dialogue, sharing and learning are prominently and continuously utilized throughout the project duration. Some of these strategies include:

- Sharing of spaces
- Sharing of platforms (interest-based working groups, brainstorm, discussion, forum)
- Participatory research, mapping, idea generation, management, and execution
- Collective reasoning and responsibility
- Collective action for change

Finally, if sustainability is a goal of the initiative, then a follow-up agency is set-up and trained to ensure maintenance or further development of the initiative. It is common practice for the project and its processes to be documented and archived in blogs and websites, as well as published as good practice examples and also as a means of sharing the communal knowledge that has been developed.

Case Study Illustration:

One of the projects initiated by the Toride Art Project, “**Art in Danci**”, is situated in an apartment complex and involves artists working to devise and develop projects together with residents using longer term strategies. The many vacant lots in these apartment blocks hold little attraction to young people and are occupied predominantly by the elderly. The project takes cognizance of the changing context of apartment living and looks at art as a source of innovation to revitalize the apartment communities.

Talent/Skill Bank Project

In this art project, the artists set up an interactive installation that is based on the concept of a bank where residents are able to ‘bank in’ their abilities/ talents and “withdraw” another person’s ability or talent for use. Residents provide their particulars indicating their skill set on a deposit slip prepared by the artist, which is then banked into a deposit box.

A “bank man” (initially a role played by the artist then later by a resident) collates the talents according to themes in books/folders placed in the community café. Residents browse through what is fundamentally a skills directory of their fellow residents. The bank man facilitates necessary arrangements for those who deposit and those who withdraw. Requests coming from individuals as well as from groups have ranged from playing an instrument, to sharing stories, to solving a computer problem.

The art project is an ingenious way to get residents to interact with each other face to face, with the goal of nurturing a cooperative culture of sharing of skills, talents, and knowledge, and building social capital.

Conclusion

Communities of practice and their modus operandi are a form of cultural capital that should be factored into the larger concept of place-making

in endogenous development. This study has shown that the concept of communities of practice is a suitable paradigm for studying the phenomenon of collaboration between stakeholders and community, and their reciprocal social and collective influence to generate communal capacity and communal knowledge.

The case studies reveal an awareness in post-industrial Japan of the need for community revitalization and how Japan has made significant investment into building communities of practice to yield social and economic benefits. The Japanese approach prioritizes community structure and cohesion as core aspects of endogenous development and views the community of stakeholders and residents as the driving factors for change. The case studies also demonstrate how human dynamics and creativity can be harnessed for the improvement of social structures and resource development. Healthy social structures are important for the purpose of protection of place, rights, and livelihood; yet, the strengthening of these social structures while ensuring that they maintain their pliability and dynamism, remains a challenge.

The many on-going experiments throughout Japan provide insight and suggest possible replicable models on how social structures and local resources can be strengthened at the local level. Modelling these experiments may work in a homogenous context, but may not be applicable in other countries, given the difference in socio-historical and economic specificities. Rigorous academic research and a more encompassing study of endogenous development in Asia are required in order to develop a theoretical framework that provides a deeper understanding of the structures and processes of community building in the context of revitalization and how it can help improve social, environmental, and economic vitality. Of particular interest would also be a study of the relationship between endogenous development and exogenous development within countries, to observe if the relationship between the local and the global is fluid and porous or discordant and contentious.

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