
Integrating Arts for Better Human Life

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini membahas regenerasi masyarakat kota berbasis seni melalui kegiatan budaya dalam masyarakat itu. Dengan kata lain, kajian ini difokuskan pada isu inklusi sosial bagi mereka yang cenderung terpisah dari kehidupan masyarakat pada umumnya, seperti orang cacat, tuna wisma, kelompok minoritas etnik, minoritas gender dan lain-lain. Isu ini menjadi semakin serius terutama sejak krisis keuangan pada tahun 2007. Globalisasi seringkali merugikan kelompok-kelompok tersebut. Misi utama kita adalah melindungi mereka dan memecahkan masalah tersebut. Penelitian ini dapat memberikan kontribusi terhadap penciptaan masyarakat yang lebih baik, yang akan menjamin kehidupan yang lebih baik. Hal ini harus dipandang sebagai sinergi antara pendidikan sosial dan manajemen kemasyarakatan. Kasus di Jepang dibahas di sini, tetapi pembahasan ini sebaiknya disesuaikan juga dengan kasus-kasus di tempat lain.

Kata kunci: inklusi sosial, pendidikan sosial, krisis keuangan, manajemen kemasyarakatan, minoritas gender

The financial collapse, which began in 2007, has today developed into an unprecedented global crisis and it is a widely known fact that at the national level and local level as well, the housing and employment sectors have suffered particularly devastating blows. As in the collapse of the bubble economy in Japan at the end of the 1980s, the region-wide Asian financial crisis of 1997, and this most recent downturn, it can be said that the East (and South-east) Asian region has over the last twenty years continued to be jostled about socially and economically by the neo-liberalist principle of competition. Deregulation and privatization have become one and indivisible and the results of globalization, which pursues market expansion and entrusts most economic activities to multi-national corporations, have placed massive strains and burdens on society. These issues have been even more conspicuous in regional cities and, moreover, have directly affected individuals in socially disadvantaged positions, such as non-permanent employees, etc. The results of this situation have generated massive increases in the receipt of social welfare funding and, combined with dramatic decreases in tax revenues, the finances of local governments have been severely diminished.

During the period of deep social and economic depression described above, culture has commonly been excluded from public policy. Namely, an era in which culture has been treated as a supplementary policy and welfare policy has been taken as the primary mode of response to crisis has continued for a long time. However, in this article, I will offer doubts about the trends identified above and new suggestions regarding the role of culture. This article is one that aims to establish a model of urban regeneration and urban social governance that centers on culture which is related to social inclusion.

To begin with, the mode of thinking which views culture as the primary engine driving urban regeneration is not a novel one. That mode of thought is widely known as 'Creative Cities Theory.' The concept of 'Creative Cities' is an attempt to utilize the creativity possessed by arts and culture in the production of new industries and employment, employ it to resolve urban problems, such as homelessness and environmental, and thereby variously regenerate cities. Several creative urban models were devised in Europe during the second half of the 1990s on the basis of experiences accrued through the 'European

cultural cities (European cultural capitals)' project, which was implemented by the EU in 1985 and achieved significant results. In addition, the concept of 'Creative Cities' gathered attention through the writings of Peter Hall (1998) and Charles Landry (2000) and entering the twenty-first century, through the work of Richard Florida (2002), the idea spread not only to North America but also throughout the globe and its impact reached Japan and other parts of Asia.

In 'Creative Cities Theory,' from the directions concerning the creation of the new cultural industries suggested by Florida and the urban regeneration, which includes in its field of vision social inclusion, stressed by Landry and Masayuki Sasaki (2001), we can discern two broad thematic strains. In this article, however, I will focus on the latter strain. This article is one that aims to contribute to the social inclusion strain of 'Creative Cities Theory,' which seeks to regenerate cities from the bottom of society through the utilization of the creativity of arts and culture.

Based on the above premise and aims, this article is composed of the following components: Able art movement; The collaboration between the city and arts NPOs; the shift to social inclusion-model art projects in Osaka; Arts and social inclusion; Towards regeneration of society of new kind.

Able Art Movement

Able art was advocated by Mr. Yasuo Harima, the director of the welfare facility "Tanpopo no ye" in Nara City, which is close to Osaka City, 30 minutes by train. Art activities involving handicapped people started gaining force in Japan in the 1980s, centered on welfare facilities. But documentary sources indicate that pioneering efforts began in the 1960s; among them, the Mizunoki Workshop in Kameoka (Kyoto) is particularly worthy of notice. Japanese painting artist Chuichi Nishigaki started drawing classes at Mizunoki Workshop in the late 1960s. Today the artworks created here are internationally acclaimed.

This activity inspired Mr. Harima. The expression, "Able Art", appeared for the first time at

"Able Art Festival 95", which was held in Osaka in 1995. This festival showed a wide range of arts by handicapped people such as painting, sculpture, *sho* (書), narration, puppet theatre, and music. It is worthy of special mention that Japanese representative enterprises like Toyota, Panasonic, Kansai Electric, Sanyo, and so on sponsored this event. Among them, Toyota has held an "Able Art Forum" more than forty times throughout Japan until 2000. With such enlightened activities, the expression "Able Art" appeared in the encyclopedia of contemporary words in Japan.

Able art was widely noticed in 1997, when an exhibition was held for the first time at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, which is the representative public museum in Japan and, because of it, the museum is known as an authoritative space.

The exhibition demonstrated that art by the handicapped seeks a different kind of existence from what is known as modern art and, furthermore, that it necessitates a reappraisal of art's role in society and impact on it. This revelation sparked a strong public response, and the art world came to focus attention on these works as well. It was from around this time that the term able art was introduced in various contexts.

Now in the 21st century, the able art movement has come onto quite a new dimension, which is a new project, "Art, Human Beings and Community" started in this context in 2000. Here a community is regarded as a big gallery, and various spaces change into those of able arts during a one or two weeks' exhibition period. Such an idea is not new, but there has been not a case in which arts by handicapped people were inserted like this. Since many handicapped people join the project, the infrastructure of the community is required to change to a temporarily barrier-free system. Because of this, the people of the community not only lend the space but also discuss many things together for understanding this project, and as a result, their consciousness changes in this process and the community may totally change. The independence of handicapped people is promoted by selling their works and the art market for them becomes bigger. The motto of able arts can be shown as following.

1. Resolve social problems by utilizing the arts
2. Rebuild a community by utilizing the arts
3. Establish the identity of citizens and empower them
4. Social inclusion by utilizing the arts

Able arts movement has focused on mostly visual arts since its birth, but it has been recently changing. "Able Arts on Stage" program, which promotes performing arts including music, dance, theatre arts and so on, was started in 2004. I have joined this program since then and produced a collaborative performance piece, "Sir Thomas" with intellectually handicapped people in 2004. This project is also developed more and its possibility would be much bigger in the future.

The Shift to Social Inclusion-Model Art Projects in Osaka

In this section, I discuss the case study of one of the 'Shinsekai Arts Park Project,' in Osaka, an organization known as the Voices, Words, and Hearts Room, or Cocoroom.

Festival Gate, the facility in which the Cocoroom was located, was by chance adjacent to western Japan's largest day laborer district, an area commonly known as Kamagasaki. This coincidence became a major advantage to the NPO groups that were located at this place. That advantage can be observed in the determination made by the Cocoroom after they were informed in 2006. In Osaka, Kamagasaki area is popularly viewed as 'a dangerous and dirty district' and the 'ghetto of Osaka.' As a result of the construction boom and heightened labor demand that accompanied the 1970 Osaka International Exposition and the bubble economy, Kamagasaki became a district where day laborers worked and lived and there was a preponderance of single men. Presently, measures to deal with the aging of that population has become an urgent welfare problem and inversely proportional to the crushing drop off in employment opportunities, the frustration, dissatisfaction, and stress of the resident population is mounting. Welfare recipients and homeless people are also numerous. Certainly, it can be said that the asymmetries of the neo-liberalist economy are concentrated here.

Until Cocoroom representative and poet Ms. Kanayo Ueda decided to establish a base of activity here, she had not paid any special attention to Kamagasaki. However, during the course of her activities in the area, she came to notice the power possessed by the area. The problems of poverty and the working poor became apparent and as the number of people experiencing financial hardship and other livelihood-related issues increased, the numbers of individuals who had fallen on hard times who visited the Cocoroom increased commensurately. Ms. Ueda, who had until then made the expression of words in the form of poems her life's work, came to feel that the job of the Cocoroom was to listen to the words of the struggling individuals who visited the NGO. Among those who visited the Cocoroom was a student contemplating suicide who came for advice, etc. and although the function performed by the Cocoroom cannot necessarily be considered cheery, while receiving the visits of young people who had lost their jobs and were living as recluses, etc., Ms. Ueda was reminded of a line from a poem, "when one has become ready to give up on life, that which becomes the small light of life." She borrowed that idea and sublimated it into the philosophy of the Cocoroom. On the basis of that notion, to Ms. Ueda, Kamagasaki, which was plagued by a wide-range of welfare-related issues, including a weak economy, homelessness, and the problem of an aging population, came to be seen not as a disadvantageous location, but rather as a place where the light from which a new value could be born was shining. In addition, by introducing art into that context, the Cocoroom established communications with those who visited the NGO and also began carry out support activities in an effort to promote mutual communication among visitors and between visitors and general society. Let us introduce one example of a social inclusion-type art activity of the Cocoroom.

That activity is the support of the senior citizens storytelling troupe *Musubi*. The median age of the members of the troupe is 77 (in 2009). The *Musubi* troupe, which is comprised solely of elderly men who live in Kamagasaki, has seven members, of which six have experienced homelessness, and currently, while receiving welfare assistance, the members live in a welfare-style apartment house. They are

typical Kamagasaki residents. Their brand of *kami shibai*, a form of Japanese storytelling using paper illustrations, is unique. In *kami shibai*, or paper drama as it is often translated, the performers normally share the speaking parts and tell a story using illustrated cards, which they reveal one by one in a fixed order. However, in *Musubi* one person performs the narrator's part so and other members perform the lines of the characters that appear in the story. Moreover, the performers sometimes dress up and completely take on the form of the characters that appear in the story and act out the actual performance. What is more, the performers often change forms during a performance and act out all the parts, from the young girls and maidens to ogres, and because they sometimes omit lines and make mistakes, the audience never stops laughing. Flexible performance techniques, in which these elements are intermingled, transcend the conventional boundaries of *kami shibai* and are even experimental. Not simply an established form of comedy, *Musubi* performances are characterized by a freshness that makes the audience feel as though they are observing art. In 2007, the *Musubi* troupe was invited to London where they participated in an international homeless art festival called the "Ten Feet Away International Festival." Their performance there won the applause of the audience.

The Cocoroom's support activities toward *Musubi* were socially inclusive in form lies in the fact that through the medium of art they placed people who were likely to sever their relations with society on the path via which they could secure circuits linking themselves to society. In this case, the men that they assisted were former homeless persons, who were members of a group of elderly men received welfare assistance and were living in welfare apartments. These men, who had formerly held occupations, but for some reason or another had been forced into homelessness and only with great difficulty had entered a welfare apartment, had been deprived of their pride and confidence and lacking somewhere to turn had all been isolated and on their own. On the basis of a polite, respectful relationship with those individuals, Ms. Ueda determined that she began to provide support by finding them work, such as performances, etc. Sometimes they perform in front of more than 100

people and the lifestyle of these men, which has been discussed frequently by the media, including on television and in newspapers, etc., has changed dramatically. The members always gather at an open-house style office, where the door is always open and visitors are never refused. As before, they are unable to overcome their need for welfare support and move out of the welfare apartment in which they live, but the fact that they are certain of their *raison d'être* and now possess a connection to society is to the parties concerned a major accomplishment and an asset.

What is more, in addition to *kami shibai* performances, on their own initiative the members of *Musubi* help out at local nursery school and elementary school events and participate in clean-up activities, etc. and have begun to realize their intention of contributing to society. Through *kami shibai* performances and volunteer activities, *Musubi* has connected these seven men to society. What Ms. Ueda seeks is to facilitate the creation of these sorts of independent, self-help-style activities through art. The construction of networks, which inclusively connect people who tend to be excluded from society, is the work of the Cocoroom.

Arts and Social Inclusion

Here we would like to think of it in a wider sense that it is not a unitary problem, poverty, but a pluralistic problem, in which factors of deprivation and severance of social solidarity are combined or accumulated. This pluralistic problem implies economical, social and political levels. Excluded people are isolated or hurt their human dignity as independent personalities so that they lose certain motivation to live or positive way of thinking. To come to grips with a problem of social inclusion means that a process of social exclusion is traced backward. In this process, macroscopic reform of social system and policy for conquering economic, social and political factors is required, but a supporting scheme for rebuilding positive identity of each person to recover his human dignity is also necessary. Solution of structural and systematic problems in social level and recovery of identity in personal level are simultaneously promoted by expected policies and individual actions.

I think that arts can play an important role in the latter problem, rebuilding such personal identity. It is humiliating for one, who has had a job and engaged in ordinary social life, to be given a livelihood protection and stay at welfare accommodation after sleeping rough. This situation causes them lapse of self-confidence and decline in desire. There might be a case that one falls in an alcoholic poisoning to die alone. Their homes seem to be a cemetery of lives. However, *Musubi* people, who obtained a tool for self expression, *kami shibai*, took back brilliant lives once again, even though it were so tiny, and found their lives worth living. It is very important that *kami shibai* brings a channel of communication for each other and other members of community. Most people in Kamagasaki are day laborers at the bottom of Osaka City, but are not united as a social class. They live together with the very small personal network, and their solidarity is weak. Of course, they are not united to outer society, too. In such condition, *Musubi* becomes to function as an important one of communication channels in Kamagasaki community. Speaking about economics, *Musubi* people are still poor. Incidentally, their performances in 2009 numbered 35. Because this only breaks down to two or three performances per month, this is insufficient to significantly supplement their livelihoods. It is difficult to earn enough money only by artistic activity and to be independent artists. In this sense, such activity still has difficulty to be an opportunity for independence and finding work. However, it proves that it could be a great power to recover their self-confidences. They can get a small amount of performance fee in the present, and have a plan to be more independent; partly getting income from performance and partly depending on social welfare in the future, I hear.

Able Art projects aim at combining a community with estranged people in it by utilizing arts as media. Mr. Harima believes that sensual appeal is more powerful and sustainable than logical appeal to a society. Of course, arts have various dimensions of power. Arts can empower handicapped individuals. When I created a performance piece, "Sir Thomas", with intellectually handicapped, I was surprised in their endless power and imaginative creativity. During the session, I

observed that they became conscious of their own roles, and this led them to build each identity a little. This is not re-establishment but first establishment of identity as social beings. In addition, arts wipe out the negative image of handicapped and reform the society to symbiotic one, in which handicapped and non-handicapped people understand and live together. This is a big mission of arts, which is really expected in the community. This is a process, in which handicapped people become independent, socialize by themselves, and furthermore, produce the society, in which handicapped can be properly recognized and respected as praise-worthy artists. Able Art can be socio-cultural resource for the community people, and it is meaningful to exploit and manage it. The community is forced to change both its conceptual and physical phases, and as a result, the community serves as a saucer of social coexistence.

We do not have any general theory of arts and social inclusion yet. Each project has its own proper context. The successful case shows that it was fairly realized in close touch with the given context of community. In another word, community allows or accepts such arts mission. Arts cannot exist alone, and absolutely require audience (receiver), which is community in this context. We should construct an interactive linkage of artists and community in order to build such society.

Towards Regeneration of Society of New Kind

Prof. Ikuro Nakagawa wrote (2001), "The securing and realization of the cultural rights of individuals who stand in the position of social minorities and the socially disadvantaged, regardless of the fact that this is a vital issue, as an issue it is difficult to make tangible. Therefore, in meeting the cultural needs of communities, entrepreneurs' observations of the cultural base and cultural condition of a community alone are insufficient, the self-determination of citizens residing in the community is also indispensable." (Ito and Nakagawa, 2001, p.170) As I already noted, the NPO activities and the citizens of the Kamagasaki area, who were directly impacted in various ways by neo-liberalist economic activities encountered one another the fact that out of that encounter arts-based methods of social inclusion

were generated is a distinctive characteristic. Community recovery and regeneration is certainly a problem that the government must take on, but because in Kamagasaki art was employed to take on part of the problem, in Japan it became a pioneering case. Therefore, to local society in Kamagasaki the cultural activities carried out there were not “supplementary,” rather they overlapped with welfare measures and were undoubtedly activities that functioned as social capital. Moreover, culture is not simply a tool, rather as we saw in the example of *Musubi*, it gives birth to new experimental modes of expression. Viewed from the perspective of cultural creation, that is the birth of new opportunities and resources and is something that has been noticed from the arts side as well.

The collaboration between NPOs (citizen activity) and the government has been reached inside of an equal relationship and with shared problems and sometimes it contributes to the construction of a social system in place of the government. As a matter of course, what we aim for is not the generation or realization of one specific kind of policy. Rather, our aims lie in providing a diverse range of options. A pluralistic society reflecting a multiplicity of values in which the subjectivity of citizens and diverse modes of citizen life are demonstrated lies in the field of vision of arts NPOs and that view is the most basic quality they shared with the government. In that sense, more so than the conventional viewpoint community art, the position taken by the arts NPOs of Kamagaski is more in line with the needs of the community and can, therefore, be said to be the Japanese equivalent of community cultural development (CCD), a concept that was proposed by the councils in Australia.

As I noted in the introduction, since 2007, Japan, like many other nations around the world, is facing an unprecedented economic crisis. In addition to deepening the level of impoverishment experienced by city residents in their daily lives,

this crisis has placed heavy financial constraints on the central government and of course regional and local governments as well and while authorities across Japan have emphasized economic and welfare policy, cultural budgets have been slashed. Namely, cultural policy still remains a secondary domain. *Vis-à-vis* this situation, this article has attempted to focus on issue of the social governance of culture, particularly at the citizen level. Such cultural policies referred to herein are policies that, in intimate connection with the economy and welfare, can contribute to the construction of a social structure that provides strength to people at the bottom tiers of society and reduces social disparities. In cultural policy, what is important is recognizing the power of culture and creating a structure within which it can be cultivated as social capital. It is my hope that the various insights presented in this article will benefit future efforts to formulate cultural policy not only in Japan, at the same time, it is perhaps possible that the insights offered herein could be applied to other city's in the world facing similar problems as well.

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