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4.5 CHALLENGES OF JAPANESE ECOMUSEUMS IN THE BEGINNING OF 21ST CENTURY. GENERATIVITY OF ECOMUSEUM

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After the infancy of ecomuseum in Japan

The term "ecomuseum" was generally introduced in Japan in the mid to late 1980s, coinciding with the burst of the economic bubble. It was a period when increased spending on projects of public works in rural areas induced both by capital concentration in cities and consequently inflated urban economies were being reviewed. Up until then, different types of museums were built one after another in various regions; cookie-cutter exhibition facilities were constructed in towns and villages as tourist attractions. Once built, they entailed large maintenance costs. Local governments, weary of their burden, came to realise with much regret that the facilities were no longer needed.

At the same time, interest and momentum for self-directed revitalisation of local economies and communities started to rise. Once into the 1990s, many municipalities grew rapidly interested in the ecomuseum, since it did not require the building of facilities.

So we can say that the 1990s was the infancy of Japanese ecomuseums, and now after two decades passed we have got small experiences. The first ecomuseum of the country was established in 1989. It is in Yamagata prefecture (northern part of Japan), and it is called *Asahi-Machi Ecomuseum* (Ecomuseum of Asahi town).

JECOMS as a national network of ecomuseums

Japan Ecomuseological Society (JECOMS) is the association of the national network of ecomuseums, established in 1995, founded by over 80 individuals who are interested in the future movement of museums, cultural diversity, community, town planning, nature conservation, and so on. The movements and interests in collaborating with the network increased little by little, and now less

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than 100 movements or organisations are regarded as ecomuseums in the country. Not a few activities were born and disappeared, of course.

JECOMS is the only society for ecomuseums which comprises both individual members who want to study or shape their ecomuseum and corporate members who want to manage or aim to establish ecomuseums. Despite our ambitions, I think that we are yet to make a strong network. The number of members was 350 at the peak in the end of the 1990s, but now 180 individual members and 10 corporate ones still remain. The society is not led by an organisations of ecomuseum but mostly by individuals such as researchers, municipal officers, architects, planners, teachers or enthusiasts. We have held annual meeting and once a year we publish a scientific journal. Since we have not made any political actions, politicians and national agencies have almost been indifferent to ecomuseums and its social efficiency.

Weakness of Japanese ecomuseums

In order to understand the weak point in the actual situation of ecomuseums' activities, we have done a national survey (presented by Kazuoki Ohara the 8th of March 2011, at the seminar on ecomuseums at the Architectural Institute of Japan with Hugues de Varine). The mail survey was done in 2007, and the questionnaire contained 36 items of a checklist based on the articles by Gerard Corsane and Peter Davis and the example of Italian ecomuseums (Corsane et al., 2007). We do not have any official list of ecomuseums in Japan because the definition of it have not been confirmed, but we looked for their names and addresses in books and on the websites. The questions were sent towards 117 ecomuseums and similar organisations on postal mails and we got replies from 46 ecomuseums all over Japan.

Thanks to the result, we have highlighted the 3 weaknesses in the ecomuseums in Japan. They are:

- does the ecomuseum encourage collaboration with local craftspeople, artists, writers, actors, and musicians?
- does the site encourage an ongoing programme of documentation of past and present life and interactions with environmental factors?
- does the ecomuseum promote multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to research?

These items show the important works of scientific and fine arts museums that carry out researches in collaboration with institutions and established museums. We should work more with traditional museums and research institutions in each area.

Challenge faced by Japanese ecomuseums

Peter Davis discussed about Japanese ecomuseums in his paper titled "Ecomuseums and the Democratisation of Japanese Museology" (Davis, 2004). The democratisation is a one of the significance of ecomuseums in Japan, most of which are organised by local peoples and depend on voluntary works with poor collaboration of museums, scientists, and academic institutions.

Once I have noticed in reviewing Japanese brief history of ecomuseum that many ecomuseums in Japan had poor relations with established museums and museology (Ohara et al., 2005). Unfortunately, the majority of museums in Japan are unusual because they are more for tourists than for local people. As such, the local people do not find them easily accessible. Also, despite their original role as research and training grounds, there is a general misunderstanding that the museums are only exhibition facilities. Given this, the Japanese traditional museums all too often end up becoming storage for old things, attractions for tourists, souvenir stores or display galleries. These indicate that the definition of museum is not rightly understood and that museology dealing on the social significance and role of museums is in a vulnerable position.

In the meantime, traditional museologists regard the ecomuseum as an activity for regional development that is alien to the museum. Some say that the ecomuseum is founded not on museology but on regional study (Kato, 2004), as if the museum was being used in regional projects. The dominant view among them is that the ecomuseum is one thing and the museum quite another. Very few take an interest in the latest moves of ecomuseums. Museums aiming to become community-oriented with the focus set on the local area and local people are in the minority in Japan.

On the other hand, some of the ecomuseums' advocates also create problems. With too much emphasis placed on differentiating themselves from the conventional museums, they argue as if the ecomuseum is something that negates the traditional museum; some even disrespect the traditional museum approach. The reality is that sound, full-scale cooperation between ecomuseums' representatives and museologists is somewhat difficult to achieve.

A new challenge: "authorising"

One of the new challenges of ecomuseums in Japan is "authorising". Some ecomuseums have changed their name since they had got the certification to use other names like "geopark" or "ecopark", which are authorised by big or famous organisations. Two geoparks (Toya-Usu and Aso) out of eight in the country are registered in the Global Geoparks Netweok (GGN) under UNESCO, that were originally ecomuseums, and other two (Katsuyama and Kirishima) under the Japan Geopark Committee (JGN). The Ecomuseum of Toya-Usu changed the name into

"geopark" from "ecomuseum". Also we call "ecopark" a registered area under UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB), and one (Yaku Island) of seven in Japan was originally supported by an ecomuseum project. The projects supported by municipalities and the ones with popular big names are the ones that have more attractiveness for people. Some local governments competitively want to get the registration as UNESCO World Heritage Site. We know in the concept of it that *«ecomuseum does not need to be authorised»* as Georges-Henri Rivière said (Rivière, 1979). It must be free from any power, but many Japanese people still like authorising which might bring them power with a famous name. Despite the change of the name or subsidy, the local people's activities are never changed nor sustained. There are no changes on the base and nature of eco-museums.

In particular, in my country, one of reasons why they seek for power may be that many ecomuseums have been led by local projects for revitalising community in rural area, not by museum's people. Sometimes ecomuseum has been expected as a trump card for a small municipality.

Mostly all the ecomuseum projects, even the municipal ones, are based on only short term projects with small budgets, for instance only for making maps or guidebooks. Their activities are supported by voluntary works of local people. We have no laws or no legal foundations for ecomuseums in Japan; financial sustainability is also a problem of our ecomuseums. Many ecomuseums in Japan have been voluntarily founded by local small associations with less or no financial support from municipalities. The generation has changed and the sons or heirs of the activities often give up maintaining the association if they do not have the money for operating.

Municipalities might desire to vitalise those ecomuseums as attractive tourist resorts commercially by using catchphrases. No one can flatly ignore the current status of commercial revitalisation trend. It is essential to set up the long range goal and plan, just not to rely on tourism revenue for local economic gains that usually turn out to be short lasting.

Case study on the activity of Okusu Ecomuseum for the preservation of cultural landscapes

As part of the ecomuseum network in Miura Peninsula in Kanagawa prefecture, the "Okusu Ecomuseum Society" tried to develop an ecomuseum project in Okusu district, located in the western part of Miura Peninsula, which is the model district of regional activities. The foundation supported the Society until the latter became self-sustainable.

The theme of the Society was set up as "Uncover, utilise, and pass on the region's nature, history and culture". The territory, Okusu, with nature remaining unharmed to a considerable degree, is a district of scenic beauty surrounded

by water and mountains. However, due to its poor accessibility by public transportation, the local people feel that they are isolated from the city areas.

As nature and pieces of history are being lost due to the changing environments, the local people wish to conserve their rich environment, to become familiar with the area and pass down the beauty of the region to the next generation. As a starter, a "Study session in the Okusu district" was organised in August 2001, and as a result, the Society was officially inaugurated by 15 core members in April 2003. The group achieved solid growth and was able to carry out research and a symposium on the legendary stone, together with the nature watch groups in Okusuyama Mountain and Maeda River, as well as other museums and schools. It also took part in the restoration of historical resources, i.e., *Nagayamon*, a big wooden gate combined with row house building.

The walls and roof of the old gate building *Wakamei-ke Nagayamon* needed to be repaired because of suffering from having been weather-beaten for a long time. The beautiful building with deep cultural history was privately owned, but needed a considerable amount of money to be maintained. The ecomuseum group set a funding system for the repair, and they managed to reform the building by collecting money from local people and collaborators in 2004. The private asset had turned into a common asset. The ecomuseum is an effective method to preserve local cultural heritages like this case (Fig. 1).

Case study on the generativity of Achi village Ecomuseum

Achi village in Nagano prefecture has around 6,800 inhabitants and contains a big hot spring touristic area, *Hirugami Onsen*, visited by 800,000 people per year. The village has an old history as an important post town on an old main road in the central area in Japan.

The project of an ecomuseum in this small village started up in 2008, the same year of construction of the visitor centre. Local people have quickly made associations to interpret their own local culture among the villages of each district. A lot of actors are still active to explore, learn, study, show, make panels and guidebooks, and interpret their local culture. The Ecomuseum has grown in this decade with the participation of a lot of local inhabitants.

The Ecomuseum activities are considered to have huge potential as a way of lifelong learning and in promoting health for elderly people. Many of the senior citizens have told that they became more motivated in life and more active outside their homes after joining the Ecomuseum activities.

In particular, the elderly people get a feeling of satisfaction through telling their history and local culture to the little children or the young people. We consider the motivation to participate in the Ecomuseum activities to come from generativity.

Generativity is the adult's concern for and commitment to the well-being of

youth and subsequent generations of human beings, as evidenced in parenting, teaching, mentoring, and other activities and involvements aimed at passing a positive legacy on to the next generation (Erikson, 1963). Generativity is also the emerging desire in adulthood to care for younger and future generations. People tend to express a conscious concern for future generations in a variety of ways, the most common of which is the need to create a legacy through passing on knowledge. We think that generativity should be a basic desire for people in local community who perform for ecomuseum. McAdams developed the Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS) to measure the generativity of people (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). The LGS scale asks the respondent to rate each of 20 statements on a 5-point continuum from the statement "never applies to you" (1) to "very often or nearly always applies to you" (5). Each was designed to get at the extent to which an adult expressed generative concern.

We made a mail survey to 1,046 inhabitants randomly chosen among the population of Achi village in 2012, and we got 190 answers (18.16% response rate). At first, we have analysed the difference between people who act as a member of an ecomuseum group (n=19) or not (n=169). As a result, the active people have higher score of average of LGS (3.24) than the inactive people (2.82). It seems that the generativity among ecomuseum participants is stronger than the others. In this result, the number of considered active members was very modest, therefore, we attempted to include less strict criteria, thus raising the examined sample.

The Figure 2 shows differences between (a) who has consciousness about ecomuseum interpretation (n=77) and (b) who has not (n=106). Group (a) answers includes 1) I have done any interpretation before, 2) I want to be taught by someone about local heritage in Achi village, and 3) I want to become an interpreter introducing the local heritage of Achi village. Group (b) contains the people who answered 4) I do not know any heritage that should be introduced to any visitors in this village, and 5) I do not have any interests or corresponding.

It is clear that the conscious group has high score of LGS in most of all items; we can show the strong correlation between generativity and the activity of the Ecomuseum. The activities and participation are effective to strengthen the generativity. The more actively local people participate, the more sustainable the community grows.

Conclusions

Japanese ecomuseums have been increasing and developing from 1980s, but many changed because of political, social, and economic surrounding circumstances. JECOMS has been supporting the networking among the activities of ecomuseums since 1995, but it mainly depends on individual members. Since most of Japanese associations of ecomuseum are supported by voluntary works

of local people, they are extremely vulnerable.

One of the weak points among actual situations of ecomuseums' activities is the collaboration with other scientific organisations. We should work more with traditional museums and research institutions in each area. JECOMS, as the community of Japanese ecomuseums, is not only needed to stronger its base, but also to try to connect openly with the other networks.

It is important to survey the activities of networks like the Italian *Mondi Locali* or French *FEMS* which support the communication and mutual instructions. It should also be better for our vulnerable ecomuseums to get law recognition or legal authorisation.

Ecomuseums in Japan have been depended on people's local works, but recently some municipalities have renamed or changed the position of their ecomuseums. Some municipalities are seeking a big name by attracting many people as visitors. Some ecomuseum projects changed the name to geopark or so. Despite the change of the name or subsidy, the local people's activities have never changed and are still now sustained. There are no changes on the base and nature of ecomuseums.

From the case study of *Okusu Ecomuseum*, we understood that local people could help performing in the ecomuseum projects of preservation of old building which partially form the cultural landscape of the region. It was a community based project for repair work without municipal subsidy, and the building shifted from a private asset to a common area.

The energy of local people might come from their generativity which is a primitive passion of human beings to hand down or inherit to the next generations. Actually the generativity score of active people of ecomuseum is totally higher than the others.

Now we want to know how and we should inspire the implementation of the inheritance that our ecomuseums can pass to the next generations. As the personal scores of the individuals involved in the ecomuseum are higher, the association of individuals should encourage the collective generativity.

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Fig. 1 - Nagayamon under repair work (left), and after repairmen (right) (photograph by Okusu Ecomuseum).

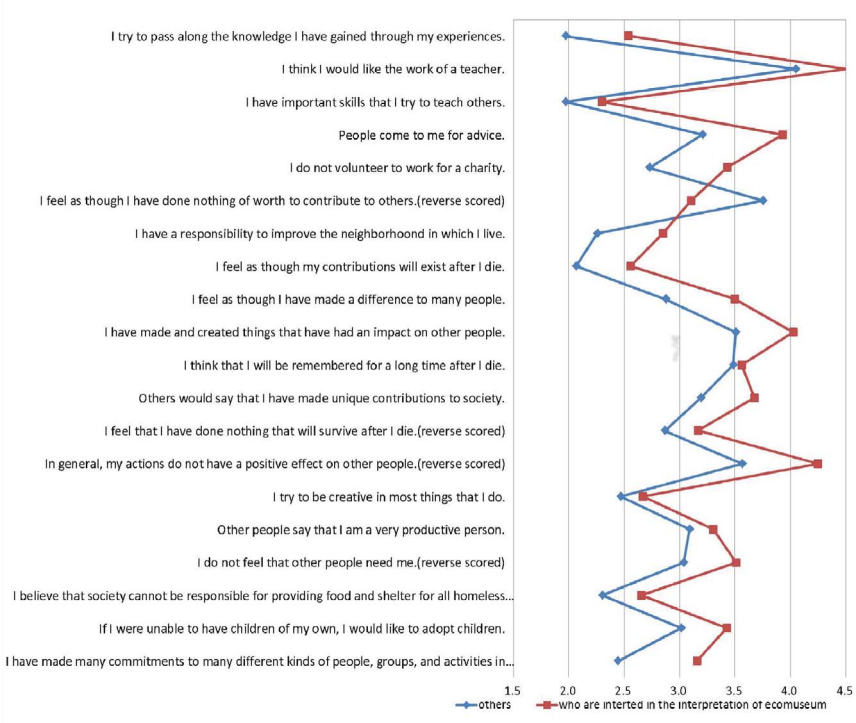

Fig. 2 - LGS scores on Achi Ecomuseum.