

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION in ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION** **---Prospects of Asian countries through Japanese Experience---**

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### **Introduction**

At present, it is necessary to use the method of public participation (hereafter PP) in a series of policy process, namely, planning, implementation and evaluation of any development project in European countries. In the case of Japan, how is the level of public participation being conducted?

When we consider the methods to solve environmental problems, we tend to pay much attention to public awareness and environmental education (hereafter EE), which can directly contribute to improve our daily life. In Japan, a bill to raise public awareness and promote EE was passed last year. It placed great stress on the necessity and importance of promoting EE, not only in schools and companies but also in local communities.

Systematic EE can be conducted at schools mainly by teachers with high level skills. Therefore, schools may play a key role to further promote “PP in EE” by strengthening the relationship with communities. In this article, “PP in EE” means the participation of residents from communities, as well as students from schools in the field of EE. In order to verify the conditions of “PP in EE,” we must consider social aspects; above all, the environment surrounding teachers at school level, the existence/capability of neighborhood and social associations at the community level such as NGOs/CBOs, and potential to accept EE as a formal or non-formal subject at the school level (flexibility of decision making at school’s administrative level).

I am conducting surveys about EE in three counties, Japan, Indonesia and Bangladesh. The two countries, other than Japan, do not have a long history regarding the adoption of EE at schools. Therefore, with attention paid to the above three indexes, I would like to explain which community affairs have changed during the last 30 years in Japan in the first chapter. The present conditions of EE at Japanese schools will be discussed in the second chapter. The last chapter is related to the prospect or possibility of “PP in EE” for the two countries, referring to Japanese experience.

### **1. Present Situation of PP in Japan**

#### 1) Traditional social associations at the local community level in Japan

Japan has neighborhood associations in its traditional local communities, which still exist virtually in all parts of Japan. Its organizational characteristics are holding comprehensive functions, such as a “friendship” functions (sports events, festivals, congratulatory and condolence events, etc.), common defense functions (fire prevention, crime prevention, cleaning, etc.), environmental improvement functions (maintenance and management of drains/sewers, street-lights and roads), supplementary functions for the government (distributing/delivering government notices, collecting insurance premiums, cooperation in fundraising, etc.), pressure-group functions (petitions, requests, etc., to central and local governments), and neighborhood integration and adjustment functions.

It is clear that the function of neighborhood associations differs from that of modern organizations such as enterprises and campaign groups, which have clearly limited purposes. Although membership of the former is “voluntary” in principle, all households are meant to subscribe, as the majority do.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Susumu KURASAWA, Discussions on Community – local communities and public movements(in Japanese), Housou Univ., 1998.

## 2) Dissolution of traditional local communities

During the period of rapid economic growth, weakening or dissolution of local communities progressed. In the background were following various changes:

### \*Concentration of population in urban areas:

In 1940, 38% of the population lived in urban areas. In the 1950s and 1960s, extensive new residential areas around big cities became inhabited by both former residents, who were primarily local inhabitants of nearby small towns and agricultural settlements, and new residents, who were primarily a new white-collar class known as “*danchi-zoku*,” conflict between the two sometimes occurred. This was also a period when numerous residents’ movements arose.

The growth of new residential areas in the suburbs gave rise to large numbers of people with long commutes to city centers. While resulting in urban problems such as “commuter hell,” this also made the white-collar lifestyle the norm, with people rising early and returning to suburban residences late at night. In local communities that revolved round white-collar males, many people came to have virtually no interest in or relationship with traditional forms of the local community. This is why the problem of community arose as a major social issue in the 1970s.

### \*Expansion in sphere of daily life:

This includes technological innovations in transport, dramatic progress of motorization, spread of TVs and telephones, diversification of manufacturing, and rising consumption levels. The above led to the elimination of the closed nature of communities, and reduced the degree to which people were dependent on the closed communities, both physically and psychologically in their daily lives.

In addition to the above, as their daily lives have come to occupy wider and more diverse spheres, various types of functional organizations have mushroomed, including such associations that replace the functions previously fulfilled by local communities. The number has increased and their functions have expanded. Their level of political awareness has become increasingly high. Consequently, neighborhood associations have retreated from the scene.

At the same time, we must not forget the fact that the amount of tax revenue collected for the central and local governments increased because of rapid economic growth, by which the function of security and fire extinguishing activities of neighborhood associations was removed. The functions and roles which neighborhood associations have played, now, tend to become less required. Hence, their decision making field has narrowed and their supplemental function to local governments has increased.

## 3) Appearance of NGOs in 1990s

Turning points in communities have come into existence from the 1990s. Anti-construction or protest movements towards a series of large sized public works like atomic power plants, dams, reclamation of tideland and final disposal area of wastes, continued during the 1980s and early 1990s. The prime movers are NGOs.

In the 1990s, Japan, as well as the rest of the world, turned her eyes toward the protection of environment, influenced by the 1992 Global Summit and other UN decisions. Local governments, which have adopted a top-down style for policy making in the past, may gradually permit the public and NGOs in its process.

## 4) PP in Policy Making Process of Local Governments in Japan

Nowadays, it is distinct that most local governments follow PP approach for decision making, as shown by data that indicates that 79.9% of 1,094 local governments adopt the method of PP. All cities with a population of more than 200,000 did this in February 2003. The methods of PP include questionnaires, hearings, public meetings, councils consisting of residents, workshops, public comments, e-conferences, etc.

Workshops are popular, accounting for 46.8% of the total. The target projects with workshops are hardware urban planning like facility preparation plans and master plans for urban planning, but recently environmental basic plans, local government basic regulations, public participation regulations and

promotion of regulations for citizens' activities have gradually been added<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. Environmental Education in Japan

As shown in the last chapter, PP has become popular in the decision making processes of local governments in Japan. In this chapter, we will examine the extent of "PP in EE" in Japan.

### 1) Roots of EE in Japan

It is well known that EE has spread quickly after the 1970s in developed countries. In Japan, the second half of the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s was a decade when a rapid industrialization was not controlled strictly by regulations and rules, and caused pollution problems, claiming many victims in Japan. Minamata disease is famous worldwide for a large number of deaths.

Since the late 1960s, as a step to tackle the pollution problems, progressive and active teachers in most cities, including Minamata, started to educate their students about the mechanisms of pollution, sometimes through criticisms of government policies. Therefore, the target of the study of those days was mainly limited to urban type pollution issues. This may be recognized as a root of EE in Japan.

However, the target number was not relatively big, because the contents of their EE were often criticized and oppressed by the central government, as well as the local Boards of Education. After the 1980s, when Japan restored normal environment by introduction of strict pollution control, the influence of urban pollution style on EE tended to decrease.

### 2) Objectives of EE adopted in Belgrade Charter, 1976

It is often said that environmental education is an important means of preserving the environment, as it involves changing the awareness and behavior of individuals who cause environmental problems.

There are several internationally recognized objectives of environmental education. These are as follows:

- "Interest": To have social groups or individuals, through assistance to them, acquire interest in and sensibility to the environment as a whole and environmental problems;
- "Knowledge": To have them acquire a variety of experiences and basic understanding about the environment and environmental problems;
- "Attitude": To have them acquire values and considerations for the environment as well as the willingness to actively participate in the protection and improvement of the environment;
- "Skills": To have them acquire the skills necessary to identify and then solve environmental problems;
- "Participation": To provide them with opportunities for active participation in all levels of activities to solve environmental problems.

### 3) Present Situation of EE at schools

Since the late 1980s, global environment problems (global warming, destruction of ozone layer, deforestation, acid rain and crisis of bio-diversity, etc.) have become well known throughout the world. To facilitate the students' consideration of such problems at the school level, the Ministry of Education of Japan decided to publish new guidelines on EE. At present, the "Period for Integrated Study" (hereafter PIS) was introduced to the curriculum of schools (about 100 hours per year). Its' objective is to raise the skill of students enough to solve problems which may be faced in the future. Therefore, the method of teaching has changed drastically. The previous method was to give necessary information or knowledge, but has now turned to facilitate students by adopting participatory approaches of learning, such as both direct observation with activities and interviewing.

The important factors for "PIS" are as follows: (1) Teachers must play the role of facilitator; (2) Teachers must acquire information about human resources in which local persons can be made use of as guest teachers from local communities and try to keep close relationships with them; (3) Students must go outside of schools to discover methods to solve problems; (4) Schools and communities should combine their ties through "PIS." So far, the place of learning was school, but now local communities (neighborhood area) are added.

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<sup>3</sup> Masaharu ITO, 'Method and Evaluation of Public Participation – method of public participation like workshop and validity', *Chiiki Kaihatsu(Regional Development)*, vol.471, Dec. 2003, 72p.

The thematic field for “PIS” consists mainly of the next five elements, namely, environment, international understanding, IT, welfare, and human rights. In general, most schools focus on the environmental field. According to a survey in Kitakyushu, Japan, about half of the schools selected the environmental field as their “PIS.”

However, on a theoretical level, the objective of “PIS” could not be achieved as much as expected. The following reasons are much related.

a) Role of teachers:

Teachers are required to support the learning of students as facilitators and keep strong ties with the communities with a purpose to look for and negotiate with persons who are applicable to educate students as guest teachers during the “PIS” class. But, teachers are always busy for preparation of other subjects and other various kinds of works.

In general, as they are likely not to have interest in the communities, they do not take part in events such as festivals of even their own locality and cannot build the necessary human networks in the communities. At the same time, it can be often pointed out, that they cannot receive enough time for training as facilitators. Another difficulty is the fact that highly evaluated EE guidebooks for teachers have not been published.

b) Weakness of unity among community members:

As stated in the previous chapter, prior to the time of rapid economic growth, communities united themselves through social associations like neighborhood associations, fire brigade youth groups, women’s associations and children’s groups. However, present communities do not have much relation with personal life due to reduction of original functions.

Even though facilitation/negotiation skills of teachers were poor, the existence and availability of strong community unity could have helped teachers to provide both information on human resources and support for “PIS.”

3) Policy Implication

Considering the above situations in Japan, policy implications might be given to promote “PP in EE” in Japan. In such a case, we must identify the proper roles for stakeholders.

a) NGOs’ role:

To make effective use of NGOs, which acquired know-how and skills for facilitation, as well as knowledge, of EE; such talented NGOs are small in number, so they try to devote themselves to support teachers. If they have enough time and human resources, staff can be dispatched to mobilize members of the communities.

b) Teachers’ role:

To have time enough to acquire the skills of facilitation and learn the contents of EE with support from the Boards of Education and NGOs; to try to develop interest in communities and identify key persons to help EE programs in schools.

c) Neighborhood Associations’ role:

To change the feudalistic character of associations to become more liberal and democratic, with the help of NGOs; nowadays, as certain kinds of problems other than that of the environment, threaten security inside the neighborhood and isolation of the aged tends to occur, a new type of community unity is required. In this process, the associations can also give support to schools.

d) Administrative bodies’ roles

To give full support to teachers in terms of time and budget for training for activity making and publishing of basic guidebooks for EE with the help of talented NGOs; to adjust their differences of opinion among the concerned administrative bodies like the Department of Environment, Board of Education, and so on.

**Conclusion:** Prospects and possibility of penetration of “PP in EE” in Indonesia and Bangladesh

Referring to the above case of Japan, we will give some concluding remarks on prospects of “PP in EE” in

Indonesia and Bangladesh. Indexes adopted here are “Environment surrounding teachers at school level,” “Existence/capability of social association at community level,” “Possibility to accept EE as a formal or non-formal subject at school level (flexibility of decision making at its own administrative level of school),” and “Perception and sense of people toward waste.”

1) Environment surrounding teachers at school level

Salaries for teachers in both countries are not sufficient. Therefore, after class is over, teachers are likely to engage in part time jobs. But there are also some teachers with much time to allocate for the purpose of obtaining EE knowledge and skills.

2) Existence/capability of social association at community level

Indonesia has well organized social associations like RT/RW, PKK group (women’s group), and Rumaja (youth group). They try to achieve the aims and observe the rules of their organization; on the other hand, Dhaka, Bangladesh, has no neighborhood association, but small scale NGOs try to keep ties with local people in the field of house to house collection of garbage. However, horizontal relationships among local residents in the same area have not been formed.

3) Possibility to accept EE as a formal or non-formal subject at school level (flexibility of decision making at school’s administrative level)

This can be easily conducted in both countries because of their flexible school management, as compared to Japan.

4) Perception and sense of people toward waste

This is a very important issue for teachers to make students conduct activities on urban waste. The difference depends on the social norm of both countries regarding waste. The perception and sense of children and adults in Indonesia toward waste are lower than that in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is likely to have more influence from Hindu religious values/concepts of “purification and pollution;” therefore, people, including children, of high economic and social classes try to keep much distance from garbage and waste.