

5. Towards a Creation of the Community Power Assessment Tool



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Thus far, the Forum for Community Power has visited “Vibrant Communities” that have produced results in community revitalization, and heard from community leaders who have strived to revitalize their communities. Many of these Vibrant Communities had made the most of the climate and traditions unique to their region as the “community treasure” in building their community. It is our hope that we extract the essence of community revitalization from these successful examples and create a model so that we may be able to present some hints to those who are confronting the obstacles and struggling to revitalize their own communities. Through systematic review of the common variables among successful community revitalization cases, and through creating a series of assessment tools, we are trying to provide a resource that may be used at various phases of community revitalization. When there are difficulties, or when developing the next steps, we hope that our tools can be of use in bringing attention to the variables needed in community revitalization.

Through Our Visits with the “Vibrant Communities”

In creating the Community Assessment Tool, let us do a case analysis of the “Vibrant Communities” that the Forum for Community Power has visited, observed, and have interacted. Since 2013, the Forum for Community Power has accumulated case studies on community revitalization measures through visiting the following twelve communities, including ten communities in six prefectures in Japan and two communities overseas. The Vibrant Community Observation Study Summary provides a summary of the parties undertaking revitalization, the contents of revitalization measures, and results. Firstly, this shows that operation is largely split between the private sector and the municipal governments, and in the case of the former, most have been farmers. Even when projects have been undertaken by farmers, many cases involve coordination with municipal governments, and the same is true with municipal-led projects where many involve coordination with the private sector.

Secondly, there were many cases of environmental conservation agriculture linking with the cities as a common content of a community revitalization measure. Producer-consumer partnerships and green tourism are a few of the ways in which the community interacts with the cities, and these illustrate how urban residents see value in sustainable and environmental conversation agriculture and are supporting rural areas through economic means but bypassing the market economy. Lastly, what the chart shows as achievements and results of community revitalization are stabilization of agricultural operations through expanding the sales channels for the produce, and the increase in those visiting and settling in the community. We can conclude, then, that a virtuous cycle of promoting the environmental conservation agricultural efforts that utilize the “community treasures” to city dwellers who value them, the community receiving more visitors and settlers as a result, and this leading to more venues for selling the produce can be considered a model case for community revitalization.

Considering the Different Roles of the “Happiness Indicator”

When measuring the results of community revitalization, “Happiness Indicators,” which have been created in many places recently, can serve as a reference. Happiness indicator measures how an environment to live happily has been developed, and the aforementioned GNH concept by Bhutan is one such indicator that is well known. Since the 2000s, state governments in the United States and Australia have created their own indicators, and have adopted policies based on the results of resident surveys using such indicators. Since 2010, municipal governments in Japan have begun creating their own indicators as well. Among such municipalities is Arakawa Ward in Tokyo Prefecture, whose current mayor who believes that “the ward government is a system to make its citizens happy.” Under his leadership, the Research Institute for Local government by Arakawa City (RILAC), which the Forum for Community Power visited in August 2014, created the Gross Arakawa Happiness (GAH) Indicator, and continue to conduct research that can affect policy. GAH consists of the following six areas: 1) health and welfare, 2) parenting and education, 3) industry, 4) environment, 5) culture, and 6) safety and security. An umbrella indicator titled “Degree of Sense of Happiness” ties all six together.

At CSO Network, we analyzed eight happiness indicators from the world and six from Japan, and found the following six as common areas appearing in many indicators: 1) income and employment (economy), 2) health and welfare, 3) parenting and education, 4) environment, 5) culture, and 6) regional community. This framework overlaps almost exactly with GAH. Generally speaking, income, employment, and other economic aspects tend to gather attention as a result of community revitalization. However, it can be concluded that when an environment is created where happiness can be felt in a more multi-faceted way – such as in health and welfare, parenting and education, or culture – people settle or flow into such communities, and sustainable community becomes a possibility. On the other hand, those who want to continue to live in a rural community may prioritize different sets of variable in a region, such as the environment or the regional community ties, than their urban counterparts, and the creation of a regional-specific unique happiness indicator can help in the community revitalization process. We take these different roles of happiness indicators into account, and in the future, we would like to ask for feedback from those engaging in community revitalization who have actually used the Community Assessment Tool as we continue to mold our assessment tools.