

## Relationship between peoples' local actions and traditional museums – case study on Miura Peninsula Ecomuseum as the network to integrate local resources in the area

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**ABSTRACT:** Good relationship between traditional museums and participative activity of local people is an important element for composing an ecomuseum, but many ecomuseums in Japan had poor relations with established museums and museology. Unfortunately, museums aiming to become community-oriented with the focus set on the local area and local people are generally in the minority in Japan. We are trying to describe how the collaboration between museums and local groups should be done and what is needed by surveying the conditions and consciousness of experts and enthusiasts in Miura Peninsula Ecomuseum. The ecomuseum is mainly composed by local peoples' activities and there the advantages of the relation and cooperation would be showed.

### 1 INTRODUCTION: MUSEUMS AND ECOMUSEUMS IN JAPAN

#### 1.1 *A challenge faced by Japanese Ecomuseums*

P. Davis wrote a paper discussing about Japanese ecomuseums in his paper titled "Ecomuseums and the Democratization of Japanese Museology" (Davis, 2004). The democratization is one of the significance of ecomuseums in Japan, most of which are organized by local peoples' activities and depend on voluntary works with poor collaboration with museums, scientists and academic institutions.

Once I have pointed out 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 exhibition facilities only. 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 in the social significance and role of museums is in a vulnerable position.

The actual situation of ecomuseums' activities are also weak at the point of museology according to data of national survey by us (presented by Ohara at the seminar of ecomuseum at

AIJ with Hugues de Varine on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2011). The survey was done in 2007, which questionnaire contains 36 items of checklist based on the article by Corsane, Davis and Italian ecomuseums (Corsane, 2007). The mail survey were sent towards 117 ecomuseums and similar organizations and we got 46 ecomuseums all over Japan. In the result, the weak point in Japan are considered at some items which are conducted by a few ecomuseums. Three items are characteristically founded as weakness. They are "Does the ecomuseum encourage collaboration with local craftspeople, artists, writers, actors and musicians?", "Does the site encourage an on-going programme of documentation of past and present life and interactions with environmental factors?" and "Does the ecomuseum promote multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to research?" These items mean the important works of museum of fine art and researches as advanced role by museums.

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). It is just a case of the museum being used in regional study. 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 ecomuseum 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 ecomuseum representatives and museologists is somewhat difficult to achieve.

### *1.2 Case study on Miura Peninsula Ecomuseum : Structural Model*

The components of the ecomuseum are a set of heritages, i.e., cultures, nature, industries, that have been supported by citizens' movements in the region. A network linking the site of each heritage forms the ecomuseum. The role of the ecomuseum headquarters is to help each site network with one another in an effort to promote and support their activities.

Examples of sites are as follows: a limited area serving as a home to local heritage, a museum packed with collections, a small district, i.e., settlements, or folkways specific to a certain area. Possibilities for the dimensions and targets of the sites are virtually infinite. In addition, there is no hierarchical order among the sites. Once part of the ecomuseum, they should cooperate with each other on an equal footing with equal rights.

To function as an ecomuseum site, there has to be not only heritage or geographical location, but also definite local peoples' efforts inherent to the area. Our definition of ecomuseum is the comprehensive unit "Partner" that combines the heritage on each site and activities carried out at local level. That is, the ecomuseum is formed with a collective entity of Partners.

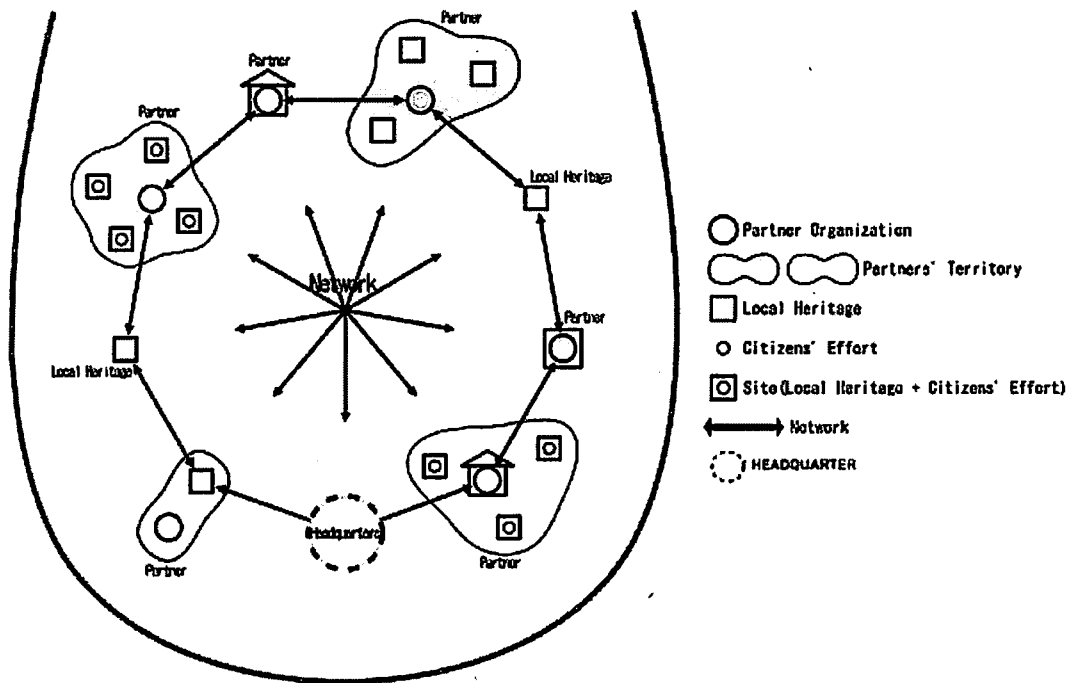


Figure 1. Composition of Miura Peninsula Ecomuseum

### 1.3. Maintaining facilities and local heritages on each Partners, and community participation

As in the case with the running of the ecomuseum network, community participation in the maintenance of buildings and facilities for regional heritage sites becomes indispensable.

However, the majority of partner organizations running such sites do not exist for the sake of the ecomuseum alone; they also engage in a variety of non-museum activities. Suppose that there is a group whose main activity is the conservation of a cityscape. Given its specialization, the role that the headquarters of the ecomuseum should embark upon is to support the group with training, data collection, and research so that they can carry out activities for the museum in a well-balanced manner.

Here, the group is making a partial contribution to the ecomuseum while being active independently. Upon its entry into the ecomuseum network, it would be wrong for a Partner to set its prime focus on the ecomuseum efforts alone or to become a cog in the wheel of the ecomuseum. Rather, the Partner should carry out self-organized activities, some of which could be for the ecomuseum. The immediate challenge of the ecomuseum upon its creation is to win the understanding and agreement of local people on this point.

### 1.4 Organization and Activities of MARUHAKU Liaison Council of Ecomuseum Miura Peninsula

In 2005, MARUHAKU liaison council of Ecomuseum Miura Peninsula (we will call it just MARUHAKU below) started its activities aiming at realizing Ecomuseum in the peninsula as an attempt to connect these action groups. At the time, the prefectural administration center (Yokosuka-Miura district administrative center in Kanagawa Prefecture) and the foundation (KIF : Kanagawa International exchange Foundation) worked as a secretariat to do the planning of each activity with organizers. They discuss it in the liaison council, and member groups and public administrations cooperate to perform the activity.

It consists of the members made up of municipalities (4 cities and a town), public organization relating administration (Prefectural Administration Center and KIF Foundation) and local peoples' activity groups (max. 50 groups, 30 groups in 2012), the advisors (2 learned people), and the organizers (4 people) chosen among the member groups.

Thus, Miura Peninsula Ecomuseum is just mainly composed by local activity groups as "partners" that mean not specialists of museology but lay people, citizens living there or enthusiasts for community development. They are some helped by municipal and private museums in the region, but there are no network of museums in the area of ecomuseum.

Some museums have been strongly supporting local activities in the community. In particular Yokosuka City Museum has held a lot of workshops with their local people. The museum is famous of educational program and study with citizens' participation. (Takibata, 2004)

MARUHAKU aims at "promoting the creation of a learning environment to study a region comprehensively, the activation of the region, and the development of an attractive region by groups which perform ecomuseum activities in each region interacting and cooperating with each other, administrative institutions and so on."

Now, it performs the activities below and more.

- Plenary meetings

- Holding tours (visit sessions)

Until spring of 2011 when the governmental economical support was stopped, the following activities had been annually done.

- Holding forums (interactive events)

- Issuing quarterly brochures and newsletter

- Creation and management of a website

- Making guidebooks (four books published in 2007-2010)

## 2 METHOD OF SURVEY

Miura Peninsula Ecomuseum (MARUHAKU) is now composed by from old community groups to young ones organized for special theme. There are around thirty partners in the network. Municipal and private museums are helping the activity of ecomuseum, but they didn't manage the ecomuseum.

We surveyed all the museums and visitor centers in the area of Miura peninsula ecomuseum about their status and consciousness' of relationship with peoples and ecomuseum network. Both of museums and local peoples' groups were surveyed of their ideas and actual conditions for mutual collaboration.

### 2.1 Mail survey of questionnaires

Questionnaires were distributed to 60 museums in different locations in the area of Miura peninsula to survey their impressions and awareness of ecomuseum and responses were received from 24 museums (Response rate: 40%).

### 2.2 Interview

We interviewed with three of the respondent museums and with seven local peoples' groups that belong to the ecomuseum.

Interviewee of museums are curators from various kinds of museums, which are Town museum (Hayama Shiosai Hakubutsukan), City museum (Yokosuka Jinbun Shizen Hakubutsukan) and Prefectural museum of modern art (Kanagawa Kindai Bijutsukan).

And interviewee of local groups are key persons or activists with responsibility on groups for history, cultural heritage, tourism, geology, natural environment, famous poet and community development.

### 3 RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE TO MUSEUMS

#### 3.1 The recognition of ecomuseum

Most museums answered the "I know its name and outline but have never participated before", followed by "I have seen its data and guidebook before" and "I have never even heard of it".

MARUHAKU ecomuseum has not been very well known to the neighbouring museums. Part of the reason is that there are little people who are intimately involved with ecomuseum.

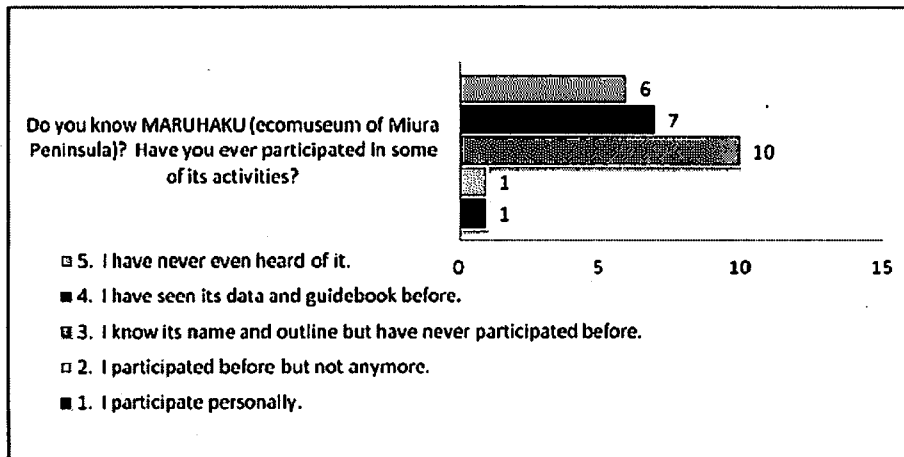


Figure 2. Recognition of MARUHAKU (ecomuseum)

#### 3.2 What the museums are in need

Most museums answered the "Funds", followed by "More visitors" and "New ideas".

By joining in the ecomuseum, the museums will have the citizens spread the information among them to obtain new visitors to the museums. The "new ideas" could also be obtained sometimes by getting involved with other groups.

Ecomuseum cannot support directly the economical issue of museum organization, but can strengthen the social capital among the local peoples.

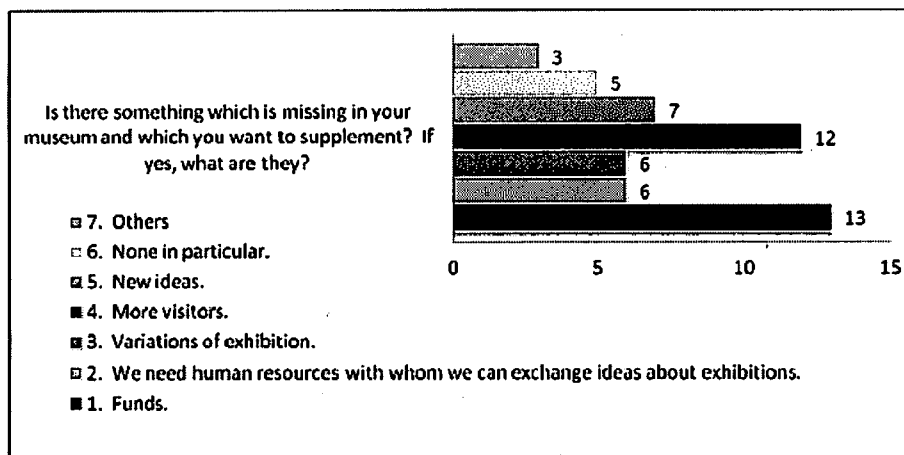


Figure 3. Need of museums

3.3 Advantage which local people think to cooperate with ecomuseum

Most museums answered the "many people can know more about the museum", followed by "Collaboration with ecomuseum" and "Preservation of cultural heritages". The expectation of "Collaborative studies and researches" were few answered.

Table.1 Advantage to cooperate with ecomuseum

museum ID	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
We can make exhibitions and events in coordination with ecomuseum.			○										○	○				
Many people living in the area can know more about our museum	○	○		○		○		○					○					○
Collaborative works between museums and local groups					○						○			○	○	○	○	
Preservation of cultural heritages	○			○				○	○	○								
Collaborative studies and researches				○						○								
Publication			○															
Others																○		
N.A.							○					○						

3.4 Reason for not being involved with ecomuseum

It's not that the museums currently uninvolved with ecomuseum are particularly reluctant to get involved.

The reasons why they are not involved with ecomuseum are mainly no opportunity to get together and shortage of manpower for the additional works.

On the contrary, many museums were of positive opinions about cooperation with ecomuseum saying that, if they could afford to, it's all right to join in the events that are planned by ecomuseum.

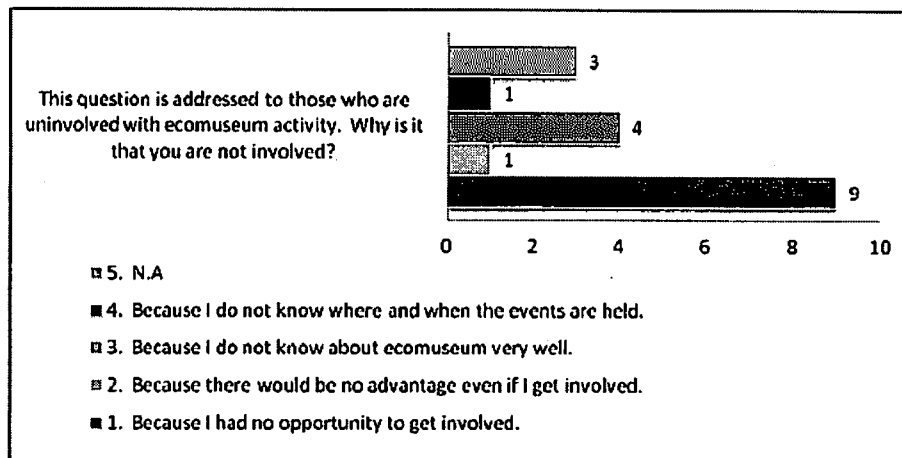


Figure 4. Reason for uninvolved

### 3.5 Collaboration with local peoples' groups

According to the results of questionnaires many of respondents answered “not involved with ecomuseum”, but it was revealed through interviews that, actually, they were individually involved with several local peoples' groups who are members of ecomuseum. This means that, even though the museums are cooperating with individual groups, they are not aware of being involved with ecomuseum network. It is important for gaining advantages that each groups might reconfirm themselves to being mutually connecting each other.

## 4 ADVANTAGES OF COLLABORATION FOR MUSEUMS AND ACTIVITY GROUPS BY THE NETWORK OF ECOMUSEUM

### 4.1 Advantage for both sides

Holding and participating in the cooperative projects and the events such as eco-tours bring about the opportunities to get involved with the local peoples' groups with whom there has been no relationship before.

### 4.2 The advantages for the museums

While the museums have wide knowledge about living animals and plant life in whole area of the prefecture or the city, they have had little discovery pertaining to their own regions.

On the other hand, since the local peoples' groups know very well about their regions, we can have them use the museum as the place of study taking the cues from what was newly discovered.

Through the cooperation of the local peoples' groups, the problem of understaffing in the research and studies can be solved by their volunteers.

### 4.3 The advantages for the local peoples' groups

They are able to obtain the information about the method of activities, and to learn professional knowledge.

## 5 OPINIONS FROM LOCAL PEOPLES' GROUPS

Without some opportunity, the local peoples' groups could not get involved with museums. And, by the opportunity, it means that there are either some museum officials or acquaintances

of the officials among the members of the groups. It was found that, due to the absence of such key persons, many of the groups were unable to be involved with their neighboring museums even where they want to get involved.

## 6 OPINIONS FROM MUSEUMS

Curators of local municipal museum said, "We believe that ecomuseum is meant for the local museums to investigate their regions on their own initiatives to turn the whole region into a museum in its entirety, starting the activities from the standpoint of where the value of nature is and what of the local cultural heritage should be bequeathed, and in coordination with other museums as well as with the groups and individuals who possess the expertise.", "Even when various local activists or local peoples' groups gather together, the reality is that such a meeting often ends up just as a tea party, making no further progress but hovering at the level of mere exchange of information.", "It will be essential to have the grass tops who are local experts, such as curators or educators of museums, and able to take leadership role. However, the reality is that all museums suffer the shortage of human resources and have their hands full with what is around them."

## 7 CONCLUSION

Regarding Miura peninsula, ecomuseum is effective system to create an "acquaintance" foundation for each person participating the activities among the network. It is a great meaning of the network building that the liaison council of ecomuseum exists as "a place to learn a region comprehensively". (Ohara,2008b,2009)

An individual member can take in a new point of view to know the region through the ecomuseum activities. Also, we can regard it as one of ecomuseum's meanings that people learn how to perceive the region comprehensively from various directions beyond a field or a point of view. Not only the communication among activity groups, but connecting with museums or scientific organizations can afford strong meaning of ecomuseum.

Also, the ecomuseum activities are considered to have huge potential as a way of lifelong learning and in promoting health for elderly people as many of the senior citizens who participate in ecomuseum have told that they became more motivated in life and more active outside their homes after joining the activities. Museums must give the good environment for the adults as a lifelong learning centre.

Many people considered that the cooperation between museums and local groups is very effective to empower the knowledge of region. But actually manpower and budgets are poorer than ideal situation.

Some said, "We have communicated and had relationships with museums/ local groups since before." But their connections are mostly "one to many", for instance, a museum has many repeaters and friends of museum, or a person has many favorite museums to visit. The "many to many" connection is preferred to making network. Just the pin-point connection of them is not effective to develop themselves.

It would be important that, when the local peoples' group and neighbouring museums attempt to coordinate their activities in the future, they do so while being fully aware that they are working together with whole ecomuseum network.

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