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PURSUIT OF PATTERN LANGUAGES FOR SOCIETAL CHANGE

A comprehensive perspective of current pattern research and practice

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Patterns for Community Innovation by Empowering Indifferent People: Practice of Sabae City Office JK-section

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In this paper, a pattern language for community innovation by empowering indifferent citizens is proposed. In civic collaboration activities, it is important to involve people who are indifferent to such activities so that local government can take diverse values into consideration. One of the authors developed a project called Sabae City Office JK-section; the project includes local high school girls who are indifferent to community design. This project has succeeded in getting indifferent people to participate and has achieved civic collaboration from its outset in 2014. In this paper, the project is introduced and its factors of success, which we call "loose communication", were analyzed. From interviews with JK-section and Sabae city officers, we created a pattern language for community innovation by empowering indifferent citizens. The pattern language has 12 patterns; a summary of each is presented.

Local revitalization; Community Innovation, Civic Collaboration; Loose Communication

1. Introduction

In Japan, local communities experience a number of problems, such as a declining population, which is the consequence of declining birth rates and an aging local population because of the youth migrating to cities; the latter is the cause of the Tokyo centralization and the weakened local economy. Accordingly, in 2014, a government committee reported the possibility of 896 local communities disappearing by 2040; that is, 50% of all the communities (Masuda, 2014). Consequently, in Japan, local revitalization, which is the notion of designing sustainable local communities, is an urgent task. The Japanese Government established the Ministry of Overcoming Population Decline and Vitalizing Local Economy, and has developed policies and supported local governments.

What is important to realize is that local revitalization does not only comprise money, temporary staffing and/or information dissemination, which are supported by government, but also spontaneous activities of communities. In his career, Christopher Alexander emphasized the importance of participation. According to him, it is ordinary people who are best able to manage the organic growth of the community because they are most familiar with what they want or need in their community (Alexander, 1975). Therefore, it is of paramount importance to design sustainable local communities in which residents who live in the communities can participate.

Despite its importance, it is difficult to involve people who are indifferent to such community design. People who currently participate in community design are local government workers and those who already have an interest in such activities. However, because of the diverse and complicated demands of communities, the participation of these people alone has limitations; the majority who are indifferent to such activities do not get involved. In order to realize innovative community design, it is necessary to involve indifferent people, empower them and use their power; many local governments are deliberating about such a method.

Accordingly, in this paper, our project to design communities by empowering indifferent people and a pattern language for this undertaking is presented.

2. JK-section Project and Loose Communication

One of the authors, Wakashin, proposed an experimental community design project in which ordinary local high school girls who have been indifferent to such activities can participate. The project, referred to as JK-section project, is in Sabae city office (Wakashin, 2015).

In this section, the project and the style of loose communication, which we consider to be a key concept to achieve such a project, are presented.

2.1. Sabae City Office JK-section

Sabae is a small city in the northern part of Fukui prefecture with a population of approximately 70,000. In Sabae, there have been many policies or cases about civic collaboration during the past 15 years. However, usually the people who participate in such local activities are earnest residents who are interested in such activities or problems; and gradually, in Sabae, participants become standardized. These participations are important, but it is also necessary to involve people who are indifferent to such activities, so as to discover diverse values. Accordingly, Sabae city office explored and searched for open activities so as to involve more diverse residents.

Accordingly, in 2014, one of the authors, Wakashin, proposed and developed "Sabae City Office JK-section" with the Sabae city office; a project to involve local high school girls who have been indifferent to local activities (Figure 1). JK is a slang term for high school girls (Joshi-Kousei, in Japanese). JK usually appears to be the furthest from local governance or public works; in fact, most of them have no interest in such activities. Despite that or for that reason, city office considered that JK could devise and plan innovative ideas building on a unique sense that adults like city officers or earnest people don't have.

JK-section is composed only of Sabae high school girls; it started with 13 members in 2014. In its second, third and fourth years, it had 16, 21 and 39 members, respectively. In JK-section, the girls brainstorm ideas by themselves based on their problems and/or needs that they experience in their daily lives. Furthermore, they design projects and plan to solve or achieve them. Subsequently, they execute those plans in collaboration with Sabae city office and other Sabae communities.

For example, by collaborating with local IT engineers, they developed a smartphone application that allows one to check the availability of seats for the personal study desk in Sabae library. This idea was derived from their needs: they wanted to make convenient use the local library. This led to the improvement of the original seating reservation system, which was inconvenient even though adults had not noticed it. The system proposed by JK-section was achieved by using sensors; the data thereof is published as open data by the local government and can be checked by means of the smartphone application.

Another example involved the improvement of the bus schedule: JK experienced the problem of almost arriving late at school because local busses arrived at school a mere two

minutes before school started. Accordingly, they proposed improving the bus timetable to the mayor.

They have also achieved various other projects such as planning camping events, meeting with high school girls from other cities, designing spectacles, baking cakes and performing public relations activities for the fire department in conjunction with the local fire department.

Figure 1: JK-section in Sabae city office

2.2. Loose Communication

In the JK-section project, they value a type of communication style called loose communication (yurui-communication, in Japanese). Loose communication generates a laidback and relaxed atmosphere where there are no given purposes or goals; involves people without compulsion and power structures; and makes a loose, but strong relationship by collaborating with each other.

In loose communication, there are no given purposes or goals such as strict debates or meetings. There are agendas and proceedings in ordinary meetings so as to facilitate the meetings. This is to ensure that the meetings proceed as planned and that they are not disrupted by those who want to pursue their own agendas and cause disruptions. However, if personal ideas and agendas are not taken into account, innovative ideas might not be

generated. Furthermore, rigid formal meetings may lead to boredom and exclude those who have no interest.

On the other hand, because of the loose communication of JK-section, there are no goals or formal rules in their meetings. They chat away completely freely without any restrictions; it resembles break time at a school and they are not concerned or affected about who is at the meeting, including the mayor. According to one of the members, approximately 70% of meetings are devoted to chatting about unrelated topics such as school life, club activities and boyfriends. In JK-section activities, such unrelated chatting is allowed and through such chatting, they explore the daily problems of their own community and gradually, chatting evolves into brainstorming ideas so as to solve the problems. Such aspects of loose communication in JK-section results in them thinking that their daily life and city public works are contiguous; this ensures that participation in activities is easy and fun.

Members of JK-section experience the activities as fun and thus, they participate and act spontaneously without any compulsion; this is another aspect of loose communication. Usually, in local activities in which there is civic collaboration, city officers teach citizens how to think about local development because of their greater knowledge thereof. This relationship in which the officers have more power than the citizens may make the latter feel that participation is being forced.

However, in JK-section, city officer or other adults do not teach or give advice about the activities; rather, JK members think and chat about them by themselves. City officers do not do anything until JK members ask for help. Instead of teaching or advising, they also chat with JK members. By building such relationships, JK-members come to Sabae city office after school casually and on their own accord; it is much like going to McDonalds. Fostering spontaneous participation through chatting rather than teaching and/or forcing participation characteristic of a typical power structure is one of the important features of loose communication. In JK-section, through such loose communication, they collaborate with each other and generate many projects; loose but strong relationships result.

Through this JK-section project in Sabae, we developed a hypothesis, namely, loose communication is fundamental to involving and empowering people who are indifferent to local activities. Furthermore, it ensures more diverse participation and helps achieve community innovations. As a result of the success of this project, we have now started a new project for designing civic collaborative activities like JK-section in other local communities. Furthermore, we have developed a pattern language from the JK-section project for designing civic collaborative projects by empowering indifferent citizens.

3. Patterns for Community innovation by Empowering Indifferent People

We developed the pattern language for community innovation by empowering indifferent people. We created this pattern language from the JK-section project. This pattern language expresses how to design a system of loose communication that involves indifferent people in developing civic collaboration projects.

We conducted mining interviews with JK-section members and Sabae city officers who are in charge of them so as to discover the practical knowledge to achieve such a loose and innovative project. The mining interview is a method to find the seeds of the patterns from one's best experiences. We employed the Mining Interview Patterns that are utilized in mining interviews (Iba and Yoder, 2014; Sasabe et al., 2016). In order to obtain the seeds of the patterns, we conducted two mining interviews; one was with Sabae city officers who were in charge of JK-section and the other with 11 JK-section members (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Mining Interview
(Top: with Sabae city officers; Bottom: with JK-section members)

Through the mining interviews, we created a pattern language for local innovation by empowering indifferent people. The main target of this pattern language is the local government who wanted to design a project in which indifferent people can participate. At present, there are 12 patterns, which are categorized in three groups.

The first group of patterns concerns developing chatting places and contains four patterns: Pastured Chatting, Daily Atmosphere, Curious Zone, and Relieved Place (Table 1). The sec-

ond group of patterns deals with chaotic discussions and contains four patterns: Divergent Emotions, Wait Thoroughly, Casual Sense and Pieces of Ideas (Table 2). The third group of patterns involves managing a project and contains four patterns: Consider Together, Trust and Leave, Connection with Communities, and Unity with Differences (Table 3).

No.	Pattern Name	Pattern Illustration	Summary
1	**Pastured Chatting**		You want to involve indifferent people in your project or activity. Too much preparation or control in meetings will make your project rigid and boring for them. Therefore, develop your project in a relaxed mood and let them chat as they would at break. Free and loose chatting generates new ideas.
2	**Daily Atmosphere**		You want your project to be conducted in a relaxed atmosphere. If the place you hold meetings at generates rigidity like the conference room of city office, participants will get nervous. Therefore, ensure the atmosphere is like daily life for participants. For example, put out snacks or sweets, and/or play music.
3	**Curious Zone**		If participants think that the activity has a correct answer, they will try to find or to be taught the answer and become passive. Therefore, tell participants that the activity does not have any correct answer and you welcome novel ideas. Then, they will become more active and think they can think and speak freely.
4	**Relieved Place**		Participants are in various positions in their other communities like schools or workplaces. If you evaluate or rate them, they will worry about their positions or evaluations at the other places and will not be able to think or speak freely. Therefore, associate with them as people who are gathered for your activity, which means that will not mind positions or evaluations.

Table 1: Patterns in Making Chatting Places category

No.	Pattern Name	Pattern Illustration	Summary
5	**Divergent Emotions**		If you try to make agreements at the beginning of a discussion, the meeting will end up without any questions or a sense of incongruity of participants. Therefore, ensure participants share their personal emotions with each other.

6	Wait Thoroughly		In the meetings, sometimes the discussion may become heated and confused. If you intervene in such chaotic situations, their identities will be impaired. Therefore, wait patiently for them to improve their feelings of satisfaction.
7	Casual Sense		You want participants to come up with unique ideas that are unexpected for city officers like you. Therefore, welcome ideas from the casual sense that they experience in their daily life. Since those feelings are personal, the ideas may be inconceivable.
8	Pieces of Ideas		In the meeting, participants cannot propose a detailed plan because they are amateurs at town planning. However, they can chat and speak from their unique casual sense. Therefore, recapture their chats as pieces of ideas and combine them. Many a little make a mickle.

Table 2: Patterns in Dealing with Chaotic Discussions category

No.	Pattern Name	Pattern Illustration	Summary
9	Same Worry		If participants have problems and you give some answers to them, they may think you know everything and become passive. Therefore, as a person who has the same problems, be worried with participants and consider solutions together.
10	Trust and Leave		If you control your project or teach participants how to act, they become passive and get bored. Therefore, trust participants and leave activities to them. Your reliance makes them active and builds relationships of trust.
11	Connection with Communities		Even though participants are active, they have limitations of realizing their plan by themselves because they are amateurs. Therefore, connect them with other teams who also live in the same communities and can help your project, within your connections.

12	Unity with Diffe-rences		If diverse people are involved in your project, participants do not always have the same feeling and share the same direction. Therefore, allow difference of opinions and build unity.

Table 3: Patterns in Managing a Project category

4. Conclusion

In this paper, the JK-section project in Sabae was introduced. It is a project involving indifferent people so as to achieve local innovations. Subsequently, from the project, we proposed a pattern language for local innovation by empowering indifferent people; in this paper 12 patterns were presented.

We have just started a new community design project in which indifferent people participate at Nogata in Fukuoka prefecture. In this project, we intend to apply our pattern language and support them so as to achieve community innovation like the JK-section project. We will also update our patterns through this process.

Our other aim is to develop the pattern language to pursue the style of loose communication, proposed in this paper. In recent years, several studies have been conducted on new dialogue methods or communication styles such as Open Dialogue in the psychotherapy domain (Seikkula and Olson, 2003); one of the authors proposed a pattern language for it (Iba et al., 2017). There are many similar points between open dialogue and loose communication. It is our intention to study these new styles of communication or dialogue in the future.

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We live in a time of social and cultural change.

Old patterns are losing their validity and relevance new patterns are needed and in demand.
We need a new approach which can formulate, generate and engage such patterns.

The pattern language approach of Christopher Alexander serves this purpose - the interdisciplinary and participatory building blocks for societal change.

The PURPLSOC 2017 conference contributions cover 25 domains - from anthropology and automation to political science and systems science - for a comprehensive perspective of current pattern research and practice.

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