Local and Contemporary: Community-Based Art Initiatives in Southern Ibaraki, Japan

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Abstract
In contrast to the nation’s capital Tokyo, Japan’s more distant urban areas are declining due to their aging populations, low birth rates and the migration of many of the remaining youth to more prosperous cities. Ibaraki prefecture, north of Tokyo, is no stranger to this phenomenon, with cities such as Joso and Toride struggling to rejuvenate their waning communities. In 1999, Toride city in partnership with Tokyo University of the Arts initiated the community-based Toride Art Project (TAP). TAP has been a model for community-based art projects, drawing participation from the city government, Tokyo University of the Arts and its citizens. Focusing on creating an artistic environment where local people are exposed to art in daily life and providing young artists with opportunities to exhibit their artworks, TAP has been actively trying to integrate urban life with the arts. Joso city is similarly faced with the problem of revitalising the city and creating visitor interest. As a response, the city government spearheaded an art initiative called Machinaka in 2006. By encouraging its citizens to interact with artists, and placing artworks in alternative spaces such as disused frameworks, antiquated buildings and open areas, Machinaka is challenging the way art is being displayed and appreciated. As more popularly known art festivals located in the rural areas of Japan such as Echigo Tsumari and Setouchi gain ground, community-based art initiatives have become vital in restoring interest in otherwise unknown localities. An examination of TAP and Machinaka will explore the operations, sustainability and challenges that such projects face.

Biography
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Introduction

Initiatives on the grass-roots level that are geared towards regional revitalisation have become popular in Japan. Due to postwar economic growth, urban revitalisation and the widespread outmigration of young people, off-lying rural areas in Japan are now facing depopulation and obsolescence (Klien, 2010). Moreover, Japan is still struggling with the effects of the post-bubble era, with its stagnant economy, declining land costs and an unsteady stream of political leaders. New solutions and policies to boost the decline of Japan’s urban and rural areas are being sought.

Population aging and decline, as well as inter-regional migration and deconcentration are the two vectors of urban transformation in Japan. The rapid decline in fertility has dramatically affected the ‘graying’ of Japan, and it has been projected that the number of Japanese over 65 years old will rise up to 29.6 per cent by 2030. In addition, the widespread migration of young people towards the metropolitan belt running from Tokyo to Osaka, also known as the Tokaido line, has left outlying areas with an aging and declining population (Sorensen, 2007). These demographic changes have prompted the Japanese government to attempt to stem the rapid decline in the areas affected, and have led to numerous regeneration projects expressed by *mura okoshi undo* (village revival), *chiiki kasseika* (regional revitalisation) and *machi-zukuri* (literally, the making of a village), which started from as early as the 1970s (Klien, 2010).

Regional revitalisation projects in Japan started with early campaigns to drive tourism to its urban and rural areas. Domestic tourism is a big industry in Japan, and travel within the country is deeply rooted in the culture. Every prefecture boasts an *okuni-gara* or a special characteristic, such as food or a cultural property, for which it is known. However, there are still areas in Japan where the likelihood of creating a tourism industry seem hardly possible and alternative methods of regeneration have come into action.

Arts-led regeneration projects designed to tackle the problem of depopulation stem from the idea of using contemporary art to create value and interest in areas that have difficulty generating these from tourism. In 2004, UNESCO launched the ‘Global Network of Creative Cities’ to stimulate comprehensive urban regeneration. Sasaki, a proponent of the Creative City theory in Japan, states that ‘(the concept) refers to a mobilisation of the “creativity” inherent in art and culture to create new industries and employment opportunities in addition to addressing problems of homelessness and the urban environment’ (2010). Additionally, Kana states that a Creative City can be defined as a ‘... city whose culture and industry are rich in creativity, [are] based on the free expression of people’s creative activities, and at the same time, are supplied with a progressive and flexible urban economic system that has moved away from mass production’ (2012: 2). In Japan, Yokohama, Kobe, Kanazawa, and Osaka profess to be Creative Cities, with Kanazawa, Kobe and Nagoya formally registered in the network (Sasaki, 2010). Worldwide, there are currently 34 member cities in seven creative industry fields such as literature, film, music, crafts and folk art (Kanazawa), design (Kobe and Nagoya), media arts and gastronomy (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2012). In Japan, social inclusion through the arts is still in its infancy, and largely motivated by the experimental practices launched in Yokohama and Kanazawa as representative models (Sasaki, 2010). Likewise, we must be careful not to push a Western ideal in the study of urban regeneration in Japan, but rather rethink how these lessons can be accommodated to suit the realities of living in these urban communities.

In considering the dilemma and proposed solution of urban regeneration through the use of arts and culture, this article discusses two cities in Ibaraki prefecture in Japan and their methods of revitalisation. It compares two arts-led initiatives in the cities of Joso and Toride, and their social and cultural impact on stemming urban decline. The southern part of Ibaraki lies at the crossroads of rural and urban life, which is reflected by its landscape; houses and farmlands lie close to each other, with the occasional odd
commercial store or family-run restaurant or business. These cities are worth examining because Toride city led the prefecture in initiating arts-led revitalisation efforts, while Joso is the newest city to implement similar measures. In comparing how arts-led initiatives fare in these cities, we can perceive how these projects have contributed to the society and became a catalyst for creativity in the community, in the case of Toride, and if its successes may be replicated in the case of Joso. With Ibaraki's accessibility to the Tokyo metropolis and affordable cost of living, these projects hold promise, given the right tools and resources. On the other hand, Japan's long history of bureaucracy in the midst of urban and regional politics have threatened its social welfare systems in this era of neoliberalism, and the businesses and families which supported social reconstruction are slowly pulling out support in these times of economic hardship, leading to the need for grassroots-led initiatives (Sasaki, 2010).

The research for this paper was done through observation, interviews and participation. I mainly spoke to the organisers, members of the municipal governments, curators, students and participants of the projects. I also derived information from the publicity materials such as pamphlets and posters, as well as online reviews, and conversations with other professors, art critics and organisers. I had initially encountered arts-led urban revitalisation efforts through field trips organised by my university to these cities, and often admired the organisation and dedication that it takes to hold these events every year. This paper aims to shed light on the impact of cultural creativity and urban strategy through grassroots movements, which have the potential of enriching the social and cultural lives of residents who are part of declining cities.

Toride Art Project
Toride is a popular bedroom community of Tokyo, linked by the JR East Joban line to Ueno, which passes through the prefectures of Saitama and Chiba before arriving in Ibaraki. The city itself was founded in 1970, and expanded through a merger with its neighbouring city, Fujishiro, in 2005. Toride has a population of 110,274 people on a total area of 69.96km². The city has also enacted an agreement with the Department of Inter Media Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts at the Tokyo University of the Arts based in Ueno. When the university opened a campus in Toride in 1999, Toride Art Project (TAP) was born. TAP became the blanket organiser for most of the city's interactions with the arts, and became a pillar in supporting the students of the Tokyo University of the Arts by providing a venue for the creation and exhibition of their works, as well as interaction with the local community. The organisation also aspires to create an artistic and inspiring environment for its residents, foster a sense of community and establish networks within the art world (Habara, 2007).

As with most Japanese cities, the hub of Toride is the area surrounding the train station. While the area near the station is busy with stores, restaurants, bakeries and other commercial establishments, much of Toride city remains suburban. Rapid population aging is one of the main concerns of Toride city, with its rate of aging at 24.8 per cent. The population decline is not helped by the elderly choosing to remain in their residences and refusing to interact in community activities. It became a priority of the city government to introduce activities that promote mutual exchange among the population (Honda, 2012). As of 2011, TAP has six core programs, which include Art in Danchi, Han-nō Han-gei, a Kids' Program, International Exchange and the new Art Assistance Program which gives support to artists and organisations in and around Toride. This paper will discuss two long-term projects, Han-nō Han-gei (which means half-agriculture, half-art) and Art in Danchi, which were actualised in 2010, the year TAP celebrated its tenth anniversary, and the Open Studio, held annually since 2003.

Interacting with Realities
The earthquake, tsunami and nuclear emergency that occurred in March 2011 have had a profound influence in Japan. TAP has incorporated art-related responses to the catastrophe, one of which was Han-nō Han-gei, led by artist Satoshi Iwama. By renting farmland and decontaminating a portion of it, the project enabled the participants to face the reality of living on radiation-contaminated ground. The project also included
talks and workshops connected to the daily life of the participants, as well as a special forum that was held in the public art gallery, Kirari, at the end of 2011. The project aims to become a platform for social innovation by including participants of all different age groups, occupations and background (Toride Art Project, 2012).

Han-nō Han-gei offered the residents and participants a non-interrogative way of dealing with the past traumas of the earthquake, and its residual effects on their daily lives. The scars of the triple disaster, along with the reality of living on contaminated ground remains among the residents of Toride, as the prefecture of Ibaraki is only 113 kilometres away from Fukushima. It is important to provide an environment that is non-threatening and close to the concerns of the locals, which TAP was able to provide through Han-nō Han-gei. A portion of the rented land was decontaminated by the staff and volunteers at first, and residents were then invited to workshops that were not related to art; one of these was a workshop related to food safety, which was able to gain the attention of the residents. This form of art therapy facilitates expression and a venue of communication which may assist in healing emotional scars (Ahmed & Siddiqi, 2006) Moreover, this project demonstrates how an arts-led initiative can provide a safe haven, providing a venue for expression that reflects the current situation of the city and answers the needs of the community.

Art in the Neighbourhood
In Japan, employees of government agencies and those from lower income brackets are eligible to live in residence complexes, also known as danchi. In 2011, TAP inaugurated ICOIINO+TAPPINO, a space dedicated to encouraging interaction between artists and residents. Located in the middle of Ino Danchi (Ino Residence Complex), it is jointly managed by TAP staff members, the residence association, local volunteers and the Division of Welfare for the Elderly of Toride city. Likewise, ICOIINO + TAPPINO also functions as an oyasumidokoro, or day centre, for the elderly residents of the city, a cafe, mini library and workshop space (Honda, 2012).

Prior to ICOIINO + TAPPINO, TAP opened TAPPINO (Toride Art Project Implementation) in an unused building near the shopping centre, three blocks away from the present location of Ino Danchi. The current location is at the centre of Ino residence complex, blending into its surroundings by occupying a vacant store. While it serves as the base for TAP member artists, its location also largely benefits the members of the community, as ICOIINO + TAPPINO hosts individual projects and research by artists that focus on works that are community related (Honda, 2012). Art workshops for children during the summer break have been held, as well as lectures and tours.

One of the projects being held in ICOIINO + TAPPINO is the ‘Tokui Bank’ (Bank of Strong Points), by the artist Takashi Fukazawa. It works by having the members save points by teaching or exchanging skills and talents with one another. Once a person has learned a new skill, he or she is able to add it to their ‘bank account’. Such projects encourage physical social networking, as well as interaction and community building.

In another project, artists Megumi Moe and Atsushi Miyata created a mini manga series called ‘House Rika chan’. The main character is a house, and new serials are posted on the bulletin board of ICOIINO + TAPPINO for children who come in to browse the mini library. In addition, TAP has begun placing new editions of the manga in elementary school classrooms in the city. This enables the children to relate the manga in their classrooms to the one they have seen in ICOIINO + TAPPINO, making the project a part of their lives. During the summer holidays, ICOIINO + TAPPINO hosted ‘Yoisho Michi’ for two days during the festival. The activities included encouraging elementary-age children to draw their favorite part of the residence complex, while calligraphy classes were organised for the adults. ‘Tokui Bank’ also brought together many participants, as each person shared a small skill or activity with their friends and neighbours. Events such as these being hosted by ICOIINO + TAPPINO prove that arts-led initiatives can be an effective way of promoting interaction among the locals, and
that it is possible for art to become part of the residents’ everyday lives. These projects not only seek to expose the residents to art, but they also benefit the society as a whole by providing care for the elderly and education for the children. TAP has become part of the fabric of society because the organisation and the locals benefit from the initiatives. In addition, TAP has strategically organised projects that bring art to the people and encourage members of society, including the elderly, to participate. In addition, by including children in its programs, the organisation has also significantly contributed to future interest in the arts.

TAP Open Studio

Two of the most important events organised by TAP are the Open Studio, which showcases the works of Tokyo University of the Art’s students and graduates, along with those of local artists, and an exhibition of artworks chosen through a nationwide competition. TAP has been holding the Open Studio program since 2003, with the aim of introducing the artists’ works to the general public and attracting tourism from surrounding cities. The themes for the Open Studio program change every year, as well as the artists who participate in it. The Open Studio program utilises available spaces in the city from conventional artists’ studios, mini galleries, parks, tents, shopping centres and unused buildings. The innovative Art in Danchi program utilises the apartment rooms in the residence complex and repurposes them into mini art galleries which feature the works of the artist who had been living in the space. In addition, several artists’ studios are also located in the housing complex, enabling both artists and residents to interact with one another. In 2009, there were 125 artists exhibiting in 58 studios scattered throughout the city, including participants from nearby cities such as Tone, Moriya, Ushiku and Tsukuba.

The Open Studio program lets viewers meet the artists and experience the space where they create their artworks. In addition, TAP organises tours to these studios, either by bus, rental bicycle or foot. Maps are handed out, and guides are also available to lead viewers to the different locales where the artists have set up their exhibitions. The Open Studio Program also sponsors an exhibition by first-grade students from the local elementary schools, as well as artworks from TAP’s International Exchange Program.

Challenges and Opportunities

Toride Art Project has revolutionised arts-led initiatives in the prefecture by generating a positive response in the community and combining support facilities with art education. The biggest factor in its success is its linkage to the Tokyo University of the Arts and its pool of artists and students who are willing to share and contribute to the community. Moreover, TAP is organised by a dedicated staff that handles its daily operations, events and schedules, as well as answering the needs of the artists and students who participate in its projects. It has steadily expanded its operations from being a community-based initiative to supporting young artists and creating an artistic environment for its residents. It has installed ICOIINO + TAPPINO, created a Children’s Program, an International Exchange Program (with artists from China, Korea and the Philippines), Art Support and Environmental Awareness.

According to Yasue Habara, executive director of TAP, funding remains a concern for the organisation. TAP was formerly funded by the municipal government, but since 2010 it has operated as a non-profit organisation. This move means that TAP will not only be able to receive support from the government for its artistic activities, but also from grant-giving bodies and corporate sponsors. Furthermore, TAP is now able to organise long-term projects such as Han-nō Han-gei and ICOIINO + TAPPINO, which require several years of operation, in contrast to focusing on short-term projects that culminate in an Open Studio event.

The success of TAP is evidenced through actively engaging artists, students, and local people. By placing the artists’ studios within the residence complex and opening a multi-purpose space where residents can interact and learn, TAP has expanded the ways in
which art can be appreciated by not only through conventional means of exhibition, but by being part of the locals’ lives. Nevertheless, when asked about the the percentage of the population that is actually aware of and engaged in the projects, the organisers admitted that they have no existing data. They also conceded that while TAP has not met any resistance from residents, some remain indifferent to the projects. In addition, with a majority of the projects being held in the housing complex, schools and studios, those who live in the greater part of the suburban neighbourhoods remain uninvolved, or choose to remain detached.

Machinaka in Joso City
Joso city is located in the southwest of Ibaraki prefecture, 55 kilometres from Tokyo. The temple Gugyouji, known as the resting place of Senhime, the grand-daughter of Tokugawa Ieyasu and founder of the Edo shogunate, is located in this city, and became known for its colourful Sen-hime festival in the Spring. The city was formerly known as Mitsukaido, but changed its named after merging with Ishige in 2006. Joso is accessible via the Joso line of Kanto-tetsudo that connects Toride and Chikusei through Shimotsuma, crossing the Tsukuba Express line at Moriya station. The city is also home to a large Brazilian population or nikkei-jin, descendants of Japanese that immigrated to Brazil, who are employed in local factories and industries.

The total land area of Joso city is 123.52 square kilometres, and mainly consists of rice fields and cultivated areas. The city centre plays host to Machinaka, an annual exhibition of artworks by artists from all over Japan. The first exhibition was staged in 2006 and continues to this day. Machinaka is largely funded by the local government, and staffed by its employees and volunteers. Hiroyuki Asakawa, an artist and representative of the project, leads Machinaka. The central event of Machinaka is the annual exhibition in the downtown area, housed in alternative spaces such as frameworks that had fallen into disuse, antiquated buildings and open areas. It is supported by smaller activities such as musical concerts and workshops for both adults and children. In addition, Joso city organises several workshops during the year to engage the population in participating in community activities, which are supported by local volunteers, as well as students from the art department of the University of Tsukuba, which is located in the neighbouring city.

The Machinaka exhibition was conceptualised with the aim of rediscovering the charms of the city, invigorating the population through the installation of public art and regenerating the old communities in the city. It is an application of the idea that if the historic urban centre is regenerated and managed effectively, it can be visualised as a common-pool property of the residents (Kana, 2012). With that in mind, Machinaka initiated a project that brought art to the city, spreading it all over the downtown area. The locales and themes change every year, but most locales remain constant due to their historical significance, such as the Nisuikaikan or the old city hall building, the public library, Gokisourenagura or the old storehouse, the now-defunct Hotoku bank building, built during the Taisho era, Seseragi park and Kansui park. In addition, artworks have been placed in old houses, stores and even storage buildings.

The placement of these artworks emphasises the concept of echoing the attractiveness of the spatial resources in the area, making intangible cultural traditions more visible and encouraging locals and participants to benefit from a shared experience (Kana, 2012). By utilising urban spaces that have fallen into disuse, or placing art in open areas, art becomes more approachable and interactive. For example, the sculpture Corocoro (2009) by Hiroyuki Asakawa resembles a simple Pythagorean device, in which participants roll a marble along a path where it pushes another to complete a full course. Placed in an open area, the artwork actively invites the public to play and interact not only with the sculpture, but with each other as well.

The Gokisourenagura is a historic storehouse built during the Meiji era in Japan in 1882. It bore witness to the prosperity of Mitsukaido during those times, when cargo ships passed by the Kinugawa river to distribute goods. This historic building is being
preserved and has been converted into an exhibition space during Machinaka. In Machinaka 2011, artist Hiroshi Kashima created paintings influenced by light and color entitled *DAI MID MUR* and *AMA SU DARE*. With their luminescent quality and quiet intensity, the paintings complemented the way light entered the structure, lending a contemporary glow to the antique space. In Machinaka 2010, the organisers utilised an unused granary, Kurosouko or black storage, to display some installations. One installation by Eiji Morimoto depicted an anthropomorphic shape made of aluminum, on a bed of dirt and soil, strewn with debris. The contrast between the smooth and shiny texture of the sculpture and the locale in which it was put was a powerful image of the irony of futurism and decay.

Machinaka has also reached out to the Brazilian community, which constitutes the majority of the foreign population. There are two Brazilian private schools in the city, and Machinaka has visited these schools to conduct workshops and educate the children about art. Likewise, the city also organises art workshops for children that are open to the public, largely staffed by students and volunteers.

**Challenges and Opportunities**

It is perhaps the perceived notion that public art can add cultural value and increase a locale’s attractiveness that has led Machinaka to focus on the annual exhibition, influenced by arts-led initiatives elsewhere in Japan such as the Toride Art Project. Machinaka’s focus on exhibiting public art is based on the idea that its adaptability gives it cultural viability. Public art not only makes aesthetic urban spaces, it is also able to deal with their social and environmental problems (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison, 2005). One of the major hurdles that the city and its organisers face is the size of the city itself. Joso city is vast, and most of it is farmland. Houses are often separated by stretches of rice fields and vegetable farms. The urban centre, though accessible by train is lacking in modern infrastructure such as shopping malls and entertainment centres. Being in Joso city, with its old buildings, antiquated shops and unused spaces, is akin to landing in a time warp.

In addition, the merger of Mitsukaido with Ishige led to somewhat of a disparity between the two in the assertion of a ‘local’ culture. Mr. Kimura, a municipal officer, noted that Joso’s lack of infrastructure has led to its remaining residents venturing to nearby cities such as Tsukuba and Toride for shopping and entertainment. Joso city’s declining population also means that young volunteers and participants are often lacking. Most of them come from nearby cities or are students of the Art Environment Support Program of the University of Tsukuba, with which the city has a cooperation agreement. Machinaka also lacks a core staff to manage the annual exhibition, as its project leader lives in a different prefecture.

The city had initially proposed building a structure, to be completed in 2012, that would serve as an artistic and cultural centre. The committee had chosen to repurpose an old former winery building. However, Noriko Hasegawa, the city mayor who had encouraged the Machinaka project and incorporated it into her platform, was not re-elected and the plans were discontinued. This also demonstrates the vulnerability of an arts-led initiative that is heavily reliant on municipal aid, as it is subject to the decisions of the electorate and budgetary constraints. Despite this challenge, Machinaka is still struggling to continue its operations. Asked whether he thinks that Machinaka will still be held ten years from now, the municipal officer replied, ‘I don’t know. We don’t even have enough people’.

**Conclusion**

The comparison of Toride Art Project and Machinaka in Joso city can be summarised in several ways. First, it is important to consider the factors that may affect the development of artistic and cultural programs in these cities, which include industry, employment, social welfare, education, environment and city administration (Sasaki, 2010). Factors in TAP’s favour include its proximity to Tokyo, the presence of big-name industries such as Kirin and Nissin Cup Noodles and its partnership with Tokyo...
University of the Arts, which has a campus in the city, enabling TAP to support its arts and cultural activities with a steady stream of talented young people. TAP is also active in the areas of social welfare and education, for example by providing care to elderly city residents through the establishment of ICOINO + TAPPINO, and by holding forums and workshops for both adults and children in schools and galleries. It has taken an active role in addressing the concerns of the local people by acknowledging their trauma and fear of the radiation caused by the failure of the Fukushima nuclear power plants due to the events that happened in March 2011. On the other hand, Joso city is double the land area of Toride and is mainly agricultural, save for a few industries such as Canon, which employs Brazilian nikkei, and has limited access to the Tokyo metropolis. It has a cooperation agreement with the University of Tsukuba, which is located in the nearby city, enabling the students of the university to experience and take part in organising arts-led initiatives, as well teaching art to children. Its participants appreciate Machinaka’s thoughtful and laudable outreach programs, which include the Brazilian schools, encouraging them to integrate into the community.

Next, the development of art and culture in a city must also be supported by government policy, organisation and social infrastructure. TAP has a dedicated, autonomous team, employed by local government, that organises its events and exhibitions. Despite receiving the bulk of its funding from the city, its recent incarnation as a non-profit organisation makes it less vulnerable to budgetary crisis, changing leadership and the whims of its electorate. TAP has also made use of its existing infrastructure, such as the Ino residence complex and its environs, as a base of operations for its staff and members. At the heart of TAP’s operation is its partnership with Tokyo University of the Arts, which lends support through its student population, whose studios are located in the city, serving as a steady supply of talent and volunteers, upholding the projects generated by TAP and in turn, promoting the works of the young artists. In contrast, Machinaka in Joso is facing several challenges in its operations, the most crucial of which is the changing administration that has resulted in the abandonment of plans to construct a cultural and artistic centre in the city. In addition, its staff mainly consists of government employees who have responsibilities other than the management of Machinaka. Its reliance on volunteers and students makes it vulnerable to changes in the availability of manpower, limiting the capability of its programs to reach a wider audience and become truly integrated into the social fabric of the community. However, its partnership with the Department of Art Environment Support in the University of Tsukuba has proved mutually beneficial, with the project gaining more volunteers and the students learning firsthand how art events are managed and conducted.

Third, the presence of architecture and transportation with which to support the activities of the program must be developed. The presence of University of the Arts’ Toride campus has greatly contributed to the success of TAP, as it continuously provides a pool of young artists and volunteers to staff its programs and initiatives. While not being able to build new structures, TAP has repurposed existing ones such as unoccupied neighbourhood stores and buildings into artists’ studios and offices. Furthermore, it utilises public space as exhibition areas and brings its programs into schools and neighbourhoods for the locals to participate in, as demonstrated by the Art in Danchi Project. Its proximity to Tokyo also makes it an attractive city for young people to move into, and for outsiders to visit. Similarly, Machinaka in Joso has artfully managed the use of its historic buildings, abandoned spaces and public areas by using them as exhibition spaces for the annual exhibition held in the downtown area. Machinaka in Joso’s major hurdle, however, remains to be accessibility and transportation; train services only go through the urbanised area, leaving much of it accessible by private vehicles only.

To be able to truly provide and ensure a creative atmosphere supported by arts-led initiatives such as TAP and Machinaka in Joso requires the cooperation of its citizens, the government, businesses and NGOs. This ensures that planned policies and programs will be implemented and not subject to sudden economic or political changes.
Moreover, I suggest that a dedicated organisation or committee whose future existence is secure should lead the management of arts initiatives. It is also important to provide physical spaces in which to support the development of creative projects, such as studios, galleries, libraries and office space for the staff, artists and members. The establishment of such infrastructure will create an environment, which is conducive to creativity and learning, and will give the population of sense of community and encourage local participation. According to Sasaki, ‘... we must also come to understand, appreciate, and preserve the tangible and intangible cultural capital inherent in the traditional urban culture of each individual city, [and] provide the social infrastructure, including real and diverse “places of creativity”, to foster and ensure the active participation of the citizenry’ (2010: 7).

Toride Art Project and Machinaka in Joso both serve as important venues supporting artists who are not part of the more established art organisations in Japan such as Nitten, which is organised by the Nitten corporation and has its roots in the Imperial Art Academy (Nihon Bijutsu Tenrankai [NITTEN], 2012). Community-based art initiatives in Japan serve as alternative spaces in which contemporary artists can display their works in a free and unconstrained environment, apart from the academic or more traditional settings of the Japanese art world. TAP and Machinaka in Joso both emphasise that art does not need to be in a gallery or a museum to be accessible. By instigating the use of available space in the locality, and encouraging interaction between the residents and the artists, these community-based art initiatives have enabled an environment that is conducive to enjoying art and creativity. The artists and students in TAP benefit by having their work exhibited and appreciated, while the residents play the leading role in organisation. In addition, nursing care support activities and educational efforts have developed the project and contributed to the quality of life in the community. The development of these projects has created a new direction for the implementation of arts-led initiatives by combining the functions of social welfare with arts and culture (Honda, 2012). Concurrently, Machinaka in Joso provides a venue to support and display the works of contemporary Japanese artists for the enjoyment of the local citizens, and the education of its visitors and student volunteers.

What Machinaka in Joso can learn from the experience of TAP is that a community-based, arts-led initiative can be successful when it combines social awareness and community-based welfare. By supporting projects such as Han-nō Han-gei, TAP has provided a much-needed psychological outlet for the trauma caused by the Japanese triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear contamination. At the same time, the project contributes to the cultural development of the residents, as it tackles issues that have been experienced by the community. This proves that art does not only belong to the confines of artists or specialists; it also reflects the community and society at large. However, Joso city sorely lacks the infrastructure that is needed to support the community itself. The city is in desperate need of basic facilities that make life enjoyable for its residents, such as a modern shopping district and better access between localities. Machinaka in Joso also needs to tap into local talent, since its population is poorly represented in the exhibition, and its local volunteers are only engaged during the annual event. For the project to become truly effective, the city needs to invest in itself. For while Machinaka in Joso was instigated with the aspirations of reviving the city, new industries and employment opportunities still need to be established. Addressing the more complex problems of the city still needs to be acted upon for if not, this initiative will simply become a band-aid solution for the real problems of the community.

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Endnotes
1 As the time of writing, the city of Ushiku is the newest locality to adopt an arts-led initiative in Ibaraki, with plans to build galleries in the near future.
2 Name changed to protect privacy.
References