<Research Notes>

NPO Recovery Support for Foreign Residents after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake: A Case Study of Takatori Community Center in Kobe

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ABSTRACT

This is an ongoing study investigating how the NPO Takatori Community Center has been supporting foreign residents in the community since the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. The authors have, so far, interviewed its three directors and one staff member. Some of the findings are: the importance of community oriented activities, joint ventures of the plural leaders, and multicultural mediating power.

KEYWORDS: Earthquake, Recovery Support, NPO, Foreign Residents.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article briefly outlines our ongoing research concerning the role and the management of Takatori Community Center (hereafter called TCC), an NPO that has been providing recovery support for foreign residents in Nagata Ward of Kobe City in the wake of the devastation caused by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. At the time of the 1995 quake, 8.0 % of the residents were foreigners, mostly Korean-Japanese (Zainichi Korean), Vietnamese and Chinese (Kanaji, 2008).

‘Recovery’ in our study does not mean reverting to the previous way of life, but building a more beneficial social structure than before. Our research sheds light on how TCC has been working to create a stronger multicultural community, one of people with different cultural backgrounds supporting one another and working together.

Our study follows the recovery support process initiated by TCC and carried out for the last seventeen years. We analyze its contributions to multicultural relations in the community based on interviews with its three directors, Mr. Hiroshi Kanda (Representative Director, Head Priest of Takatori Catholic Church from 1991 to 2007, hereafter K), Mr. Junichi Hibino (Senior Managing Director, hereafter H), Dr. Shizuyo Yoshitomi (Senior Executive Director, hereafter Y) and Dr. Hiroshi Kanaji (a former TCC staff member), as well as on other relevant research concerning TCC and other recovery activities. Our focus is threefold: first, to clarify some of the basic principles of TCC that make it sustainable; second, to illustrate the characteristics of the plural leadership model of TCC; third, to

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analyze the 'multicultural mediating power'\(^1\) connecting the various people and organizations in the community.

2 OVERVIEW OF TCC

Takatori Relief Base\(^2\) (the original name of TCC) was born “accidentally” the day after the earthquake, at the premises of the burnt-down Takatori Catholic Church led by Father K. A bonfire that was kept burning at the site attracted many volunteers and other people from far away. The number of volunteers increased day after day and the church eventually became a base for relief efforts. The rescue work developed in various directions as the needs of the earthquake victims changed over time, such as preparing warm food for victims, removing furniture from collapsed houses and giving accurate information to those who had problems in understanding the information in Japanese, which was necessary in order to locate and apply for support. One of the major innovations was the launch of a community FM radio station soon after the quake, which transmitted necessary information in Vietnamese and Korean.

Takatori Relief Base changed its name to Takatori Community Center in 2000 and continues to work for the community, creating structures and activities in which people’s nationality, age or various handicaps are not cause for exclusion from full participation\(^3\). TCC is currently comprised of ten groups targeting different people in the community, including the Multilingual Community Broadcasting Station called FM WaiWai, which has programs in ten languages, and the Multilanguage Center FACIL, which offers translation services in 28 languages, World Kids Community, Hyogo Latin Community, NGO Vietnam in Kobe, the Asian Women’s Empowerment Project, Leaf Green, which supports elderly and handicapped people, Noda-Kita Furusato Net, which helps the community network in the area, Hyogon Tech, which offers IT support, and the AMARC Japan Council, an international NGO of community radio stations. We consider TCC as a successful NPO that has maintained its initial purpose and vibrant activities, while at the same time it has transformed its organizational construct throughout its development.

Photo 1: Takatori Catholic Church which houses TCC

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1 See Matsuda (2009) pp. 57-58.
2 The original name was ‘Takatori Church Relief Base,’ but ‘Church’ was later dropped from the name.
3 Kanda (2001). Available at WWW: <http://www.pure.ne.jp/~ngo/terakoya/2001shiminbo/05kanda.html>.
3 CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE DATA: IN VIEW OF CONSTRUCTING A MULTICULTURAL COMMUNITY

3.1 Basic principles of TCC

3.1.1 A shared vision toward the people who require different support from the majority

“Extend help up to the last person” was the slogan of TCC in their recovery activities. It meant we shouldn’t forget those who may require different support because of various differences or handicaps, those who tend to be left out when general public support is given. One of the targets was those who needed more support than others to obtain public relief and recovery support because of language difficulties and other cultural barriers.

3.1.2 An integrative approach toward local community for both Japanese and foreigners

Whereas many organizations specialize in the support for foreigners, TCC emphasizes equal treatment and activities for both Japanese and foreigners in the local community. For example, the support for foreigners led to aid activities for elderly people who need more support and for stimulating the renewal of the local market after the earthquake with the help of multicultural stalls run by Vietnamese and Filipinos.
3.2 Plural leadership model

A unique aspect of TCC is its plural leadership style. Each of the ten groups making up TCC has its own leader. H and Y are in charge of more than half of the groups as leader, including FM WaiWai, FACIL, World Kids Community and AMARC, which are grouped as ‘Multicultural Pro Cube’. There are no strict hierarchical relationships among the leaders, but each person has his/her clear role depending on the situation and each person’s individual abilities. This enables members to establish wide networks while maximizing their effectiveness. Thus, because Y has good connections with government authorities and is good at managing finances, she takes care of those activities; because H has strong commitments to various social issues and cultivates ties with active supporters of those issues, he works in those areas; because K is the representative director of TCC and good at connecting and taking charge of groups of people, he takes responsibility for most group activities. This portrays a ‘joint-venture’ model of plural leaders.

In order to operate this model, there is constant, family-like communication among the directors and the staff members in an intimate and relaxed atmosphere, often over meals and drinks. The decision-making style is normally a ‘circular (mawashi) style’, but when there is a pressing matter, strong leadership takes over in a ‘straightforward (tooshi) style’, leading to quick action (Kume, 2006). The decision by the directors to establish the FM radio station was a prime example of this tooshi style.

3.3 Multicultural mediating power to connect local foreign residents and the wider community

‘Multicultural mediating power’ implies an ability to connect many people and organizations of different cultural backgrounds, which have the same interests and needs, in order to pursue the same goals. It requires an ability to disseminate information about what they are trying to accomplish to stakeholders and to the general public, the sensibility to grasp diverse community needs, the empathy needed to build trusting relationships, and the creativity to design attractive strategies.

TCC is well connected with various outside organizations and continues to be supported by numerous volunteers, even seventeen years after the earthquake. It has been very successful in connecting local foreign residents not only with the local people but also with various government organizations, NPOs, and global organizations, such as an international community radio network. Appearing immediately after the earthquake, Multi-lingual Community FM WaiWai was an ingenious creation that attracted wide-spread attention and media interest. The multilingual translation services by FACIL match the needs of its diverse community so well that it has subsequently become a community business, which sustains TCC’s long-term financial needs. Some foreigners now are not only aid recipients, but are participants and leaders in some of TCC’s programs. TCC has been empowering people of different cultural backgrounds, such as Vietnamese, Koreans, Filipinos, Brazilians and Peruvians in the community, to become active partners and has been contributing to changes in the roles of foreign residents in their communities. Multicultural participation has also made the organization more flexible and creative.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

TCC functions as a ‘platform’ or a meeting place for all those interested in connecting with others who have similar agendas and missions concerned with community development. The place, the clear mission, and the people who initiated, organized and led the activities, taking care to include everyone in need regardless of her/his background, disabilities or circumstances, were the keys to the creative synergy of the different cultural groups.

This case study illustrates only a small part of one NPO. Continuing this study, we will attempt to uncover ideas and innovations that can be used by other NPOs who have a similar vision,
particularly in the Tohoku area where many new NPOs should help in the recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake.

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