

Regional Vitalization through Art: A Case of Seashore Museum in Japan

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Summary

Regional vitalization activities through art can produce special effects to regional people/community. They are quite different from the ordinary effects by promoting regional businesses or encouraging regional industries by, for instance, inviting large factories to regions. Because art itself has a function to operate to people's feeling or some kinds of spiritual status, it can produce emotional vitalization, such as encouraging a sense of solidarity of regional community or passion for social activities of regional people. This paper describes one unique activity of Seashore Museum in Kuroshio-city, Japan, and how it has operated to regional people through statistical studies by questionnaire and qualitative study by interviewing. As a result, it was clarified that the activities have mentally encouraged regional people for over twenty years. Because the concept of Seashore Museum is based on self-identification and self-confidence of regional people, the style of movement has currently proliferated into many regions in other countries like Mongolia, Brazil, and USA.

Keywords: regional vitalization, art, Seashore Museum, Japan

1. Introduction

Regional disparity is one of the most serious social issues in Japan, as well as in many other countries. Many rural regions have problems not only on economical stagnation but also on many other aspects such as depopulation, aging, and dismay by lower profitability of agriculture/fishery, sluggishness of tourism. As well as economical depression of regions, emotional/mental depression of regional people has become a large obstacle for advancing local society.

Matsui and Yamagami (2006) have pointed that, in Japan, a movement called as "One Village One Product (OVOP)," is very popular as one of the measures to encourage powerless regional people. It was initiated in Oita prefecture in 1979, and the idea is that to develop one item as a special product of region is a very realistic effective manner for encouraging stagnated regions. As a matter of fact, this movement has rescued many villages. For many powerless villages without any excellent business

resource like abundant natural resources, large factories or advanced technologies, the movement to develop their own specialty food or craft item is not so difficult to initiate and participate. Therefore it is a realistic manner to advance powerless regional community. Because of its' realistic manner, it have also been pointed that the movement has proliferated into other foreign countries in Asia and Africa. One example is "One Tambon One Product (OTOP)" movement in Thailand, the other examples are a movement in Malawi, Africa, and a project in Bayankhongor in Mongolia.

It was said in these many cases that the important thing for encouraging powerless rural regions is to take a step forward by encouraging regional people. Because the people those who have been in lower economical stage for a long time are emotionally depressed, the first step to change the situation is so important. Even if the economical effect of the first step is not so large, the experience of advancing their situation will make them more confident and positive, and thus vitalized for future progress.

In order to encourage regional people emotionally/mentally, some activities through art has been recently focused on. Because art itself has a function to operate to people's feeling or some kinds of spiritual status, it can play a role of emotional vitalization, such as encouraging a sense of solidarity of regional community or passion for social activities of regional people. In that sense, regional vitalization through art can produce special effect to regional people/community, which cannot be produced by ordinary measures of vitalization like promoting regional businesses or encouraging regional industries by for instance, inviting large factories to regions.

This paper focuses on regional vitalization through art in the view point of how different it is from ordinary vitalization. The goal of this research is to find out the clue to encourage regional people emotionally/mentally and advance regional community for vitalizing themselves.

2. Research Framework

The object of this research is "Seashore Museum" in Kuroshio-city in Shikoku-island, Japan. The museum was established only with one million yen (almost equivalent to twelve thousand US dollars) in a very unique way and the success of this movement infers the clue to encourage regional people.

The major research question in this paper is "why and how art can encourage regional people/community so effectively." By observing and carefully analyzing the

case, imprecations for the research question will be indicated.

Statistical approach by questionnaire and empirical qualitative approach by interviewing to the key persons of the movement will be taken for analyze the phenomenon.

3. A Case of “Seashore Museum”

Seashore Museum in Koroshio-city in Shikoku-island, Japan, was established in 1989, over twenty years ago, only with a small budget of one million yen (approximately twelve thousand US dollars). At that time, the region was so poor that they could not build any expensive museum. However, the regional people were seeking to have their own museum by themselves. So, it was thought to be a miracle that a local museum could be built by such a small amount of budget, because usually they need over several hundred million yen as a budget for it.

The trigger of establishing Seashore Museum was that one photographer in Tokyo was aiming to hold an exhibition in Shikoku-island. A certain designer named Makoto Umebara proposed him to hold an exhibition by printing a photograph on a T-shirt by silkscreen-print technique and hanging those T-shirts on the ropes stretched between the poles on the seashore of Kuroshio-city. Because they did not need to build a gorgeous building of museum in this system, the idea was so realistic for them to have their own museum with such a low budget.

Umebara and other staffs, including regional town officers and younger volunteer members of vitalizing region, were discussing about the idea to reach to the key concept of “Seashore Museum,” as a symbol of vitalization movements. They mentioned that this natural museum exhibits the beauty of region itself, and that is, anything in region is a beautiful artwork shown in such a museum. The footprint of birds on seashore is one artwork, the feature of a whale jumping in the horizon of the sea is another, and driftwood on the seashore is the other artwork of regional nature, they said. The museum is a great device to show us the beauty of region and the seashore in Kuroshio-city is a great museum to exhibit how all things in region are beautiful, they thought.

So, they installed T-shirts exhibition on the seashore and called it as an event in “Seashore Museum.” The event of T-shirt exhibition was only one event hold in Seashore Museum and many other events were hold in the museum, such as an exhibition of quilt-art, an exhibition of sand art (sculptures made by seashore sands), an exhibition of driftwood, and so forth. This unique museum has been getting very

famous in Shikoku island and Japan, and eventually over ten thousand people, including some people from Tokyo or even from abroad, visited there every year in a very short period (several days in every May) of exhibition. Over 50% of the visitors are the people who visited there over twice.



Fig. 1 Seashore Museum in Kuroshio-city



Fig. 2 Silk-screen-printed T-shirts hanged on ropes on the seashore

4. The effect of “Seashore Museum”

By this event and the existence of Seashore Museum, Kuroshio-city became very famous and, as a result, many of regional people in Kuroshio became proud of them and were emotionally encouraged by this movement.

In addition to that, currently, the movement has proliferated into other foreign countries such as Mongolian, Brazil and USA (Hawaii). As a matter of fact, the Mongolian people held a T-shirt exhibition in grassland in Mongolia twice. They called the event as the activity of “Grassland Museum,” named after “Seashore Museum.” The point is that the concept of Seashore Museum was accepted and evaluated in Mongolia as a universal concept for encouraging regional people. The basic message of the movement is “We, regional people, are ourselves beautiful and our region is also beautiful, even though the economical situation is not so good. We love our region. Our museum exhibits us our beauty as artworks.” By the trigger of the proliferation of the event, the local communities of Kuroshio-city and Mongolia have been establishing relationship with each other and making a friendship. The mind of regional people has been open up through the event.

Some researchers and students of Kochi University have studied about the effect of Seashore Museum through questionnaire in 2000~2002. They were focusing on which kind of effect was dominant for the regional people, in the comparison of economical aspect and mental aspect. According to their report, the regional people were thinking the dominant effect of Seashore Museum was getting high reputation/prestige of the city for the nation. In mental aspect, they were so pleased by that their hometown became famous and popular in nation-wide.

That was an interesting result to know the consciousness and the mentality of regional people. To confirm the stability or the change of the result, we examined the status by similar statistical approach to the regional people and additional interviewing to the key persons of the movement.

The questionnaire research was hold in the event place of T-shirt Exhibition in Kuroshio-city in the period of the exhibition, from May 1 to May 5th in 2010. The questionnaire was given unintentionally selected visitors of totally ninety people. The rate of answering was 95% and the answers of 85 people were collected. The result of the questionnaire is described as follows.

(1) Effect of activities

Question: For what the movement of Seashore Museum is mostly effective? Please select the dominant effect among the following elements; 1) advancing reputation/prestige of Kuroshio-city 2) vitalization for regional people, 3) education for younger generation in region, 4) encouraging industries/economics 5) something else.

Result: 1) reputation: 51%

2) vitalization: 32%

3) education: 4%

4) industries: 2%

5) something else: 0%

6) void: 11%

For the question of "How large the effect on regional reputation is? Please select the level as, very large, large, medium, small very small?" the people answered as: very large 42%, large 54%, medium 1%, small 1%, very small 0%, and totally 96% of all positively agreed of this factor. That is, most of the people are thinking that Seashore Museum was so effective for making the reputation of region so good.

Also the question on the residence area for the answering people was analyzed related to the above question, all of the people who are living in Kuroshio-city positively agreed of the factor of reputation. Therefore, the regional people are supposed to think that the movement is effective for advancing the reputation of the city and they seemed to be proud of it.

The previous research by Kochi University ten years ago indicated the same tendency. This means that the regional people's mentality and consciousness are stable for a long time, and the movement has been effective for encouraging the regional people's pride and confidence by advancing the reputation/prestige of the city itself.

Also, it was clarified that regional people have not been conscious about the effect for industries. This infers that the movement could not have increased the income of regional people in reality but the people have not been care about it.

Because selection tree of the questionnaire was designed as there are two different selections of vitalization and encouraging industries, the answering people might think that vitalization is different from encouraging industries and the connotation of vitalization was more spiritual aspect in this case.

So the result infers that the people are thinking that the movement was not so effective for encouraging industries and increasing income of regional people, so far.

Also the question on the age for the answering people was analyzed related to the above question, most of the people who are twenty's and thirty's answered the first element

(advancing the reputation of kuroshio-city) is dominant. These generations has been grown through the period of the movement, and thus the fact that the movement has been continued over twenty years might cause this result,

(2) Hometown feeling

Question: Do you have a strong feeling of hometown? How strong is it? Please select the level as: very strong, strong, medium, weak, very weak?

Result: 1) very strong: 27%

2) strong: 45%

3) medium: 20%

4) weak: 5%

5) very weak: 1%

6) void: 2%

In this case, the fact that most of the answering people come from countryside, not from metropolitan like Tokyo might affect to the above result, because usually the urban people in metropolitan like Tokyo don't have a strong feeling of hometown.

70% of the answering people are living in Kochi prefecture or Shikoku-island, so that most of the answering people were regional people.

Additional Question: What was the dominant factor to grow your hometown feeling?

Result: 1) friendship with regional people: 36%

2) family or relatives: 27%

3) friendship with the people living in outside of your town: 7%

4) joining in the activities of regional vitalization: 7%

5) something else: 5%

6) void: 18%

Also the question on the residence area for the answering people was analyzed related to the above question, 76% of the people who are living in Kuroshio-city positively agreed of the factor of reputation.

The result indicates that hometown feeling is not grown through regional vitalization activities like Seashore Museum but raised through communicating with regional people. We examined this tendency by another study of interviewing to the people who moved from metropolitan area to regions. For the question on the reason why you moved from the urban area to the rural area, most of them answered that they were attracted by the warm and primitive mentality of regional people. That is, the important factor of producing hometown feeling is the attractiveness of regional people.

5. Analysis and Discussion

The result of questionnaire indicated the following propositions:

- 1) The dominant effect of Seashore Museum movement has been “advancing the reputation/prestige of Kuroshio-city” for ten years long, and the regional people have been thinking the movement were effective in such a spiritual aspect, not in economic aspect like encouraging industries.
- 2) Regional people have a strong feeling of hometown and this feeling has been grown through daily relationship with regional people, and has not been grown through regional vitalization movements/activities themselves. Hometown feeling seems to be based on long-term daily relationship with people, not on specific activities.

To study the feeling of regional people further, five key-persons of Seashore Museum were interviewed about their feeling and thinking in detail.

Through the interviewing, they mentioned that the people in Kuroshio-city had been strongly proud of themselves and regional culture before the events of Seashore Museum. One reason is that they were educated the significance of self-confidence and respecting regional culture through primary school and junior high school in the region. The teachers educated that they have a respectable person named Akatsuki Kambayashi who was born and grown in Kuroshio-city and became a famous novelist in Japan. He has written many excellent novels in Meiji- period after modernization of Japan. He mentioned “A flower which is lying on the ground is more beautiful than another flower which is blooming in the twig of the tree,” which means “regional culture is more important than urban culture for regional people.” The people in Kuroshio-city have been respecting this word and have established a memorial stone with this word on the seashore of Kuroshio-city.

The interviewed persons suggested that such education and culture grew the regional people and that is one important reason why the movement of Seashore Museum has been successfully continuing for over twenty years.

This infers that some kind of basis of hometown feeling and respect for regional culture should have established in regions historically before regional vitalization movements/activities as a basis for the success and continuation of the activities/movement.

6. Conclusion and future study

Establishing Seashore Museum is a unique activity of regional vitalization. Instead of building a large physical museum, the people in Kuroshi-city in Shikoku-island, Japan, has installed exhibition by T-shirts on the ropes on the seashore. Because of low cost and uniqueness of the museum, it was so easy for regional people to initiate, participate and continued the movement. Because of the easiness of movement, and also the concept of it to respect themselves and be proud of themselves though exhibitions are universally acceptable for many other rural regions in many countries, the movement was proliferated into many other regions including abroad.

To clarify the effect of this movement to the regional people, statistical study by questionnaire and qualitative study by interviewing were done for the regional people.

The result of questionnaire indicated the following things:

- 1) The dominant effect of Seashore Museum movement has been “advancing reputation/prestige the Kuroshio-city” for ten years long, and the regional people have been thinking the movement were effective in such a spiritual aspect, not in economic aspect like encouraging industries.
- 2) Regional people have a strong feeling of hometown and this feeling has been grown through communicating with regional people, and has not been grown through regional vitalization movement/activities. Hometown feeling seems to be based on long term daily relationship with people, not on specific activities.

Also the result of interviewing infers that some kind of basis of hometown feeling and respect for regional culture should have established in regions historically before regional vitalization activities/movement for the success and continuation of the activities/movement. This infers that some kind of basis of regional culture may be needed for initiate vitalization movement even if the style of the movement is easy to accept.

Regional vitalization through art has potential for encouraging regional people emotionally and mentally, and also regional people can open their mind to out-side people though art events. Even for regions without excellent business resources, art can be in a sense one convenient tool for encouraging.

The future studies should be done to pursue the detailed conditions for the effectiveness of movements and to induce more universal imprecations for solving the issue of regional disparity and regional depression.

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