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Carrying Out Care : An Exploration of Time and Space in Cooperative Life Design

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| メタデータ | 言語: English 出版者: 公開日: 2013-05-08 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: 鈴木, 七美 メールアドレス: 所属: |
| URL | https://doi.org/10.15021/00002488 |

Carrying Out Care: An Exploration of Time and Space in Cooperative Life Design

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In this paper, I aim to clarify the significance of having personal time to share with others in various care-related activities that create a resilient place of living without restrictions due to age, gender, and so on. First, the paper traces various lines of thinking about life's stages, including multiple perspectives on old age. Second, it describes one town suffering from aging and depopulation, where older adults aiming to revive the town's economy receive help from members of other generations as well as visitors from outside, ultimately finding happiness and a new niche in life. Third, it describes the conflicts, tensions, and differences experienced in that process, showing how care becomes multilayered given the various elements making up the town, including the forested environment, with everyone working toward the goal of regenerating the town and continuing to live there, deepening communication in leisure and free time—things that people realize clearly only as they work.

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1. Introduction: The Design of Well-being and Time

In the summer of 2010, I visited the National Graduate School of Aging, Later Life and Care (NISAL) at Linköping University in the Scandinavian country of Sweden. While there, I heard surprising comments from the director about how many people lose their vitality after retirement. After all, I had thought that older people in Scandinavian countries—where the trend is toward keeping labor time relatively short and treasuring private time—would be doing everything in their capacity to prepare for fully enjoying their free time after retirement. Sweden, with its Scandinavian-style social security, has been pushing its social security system toward promoting employment. For instance, in an effort to increase its society’s inclusiveness, the country has implemented such concrete policies as enhancing public services in areas like occupational training and adult education (Miyamoto 2009: 71–117). As a matter of fact, looking at the case of *folkskola* (people’s schools), which have developed in Scandinavia as institutions supporting lifelong education, we see that in Sweden—as opposed to Denmark, where a strong emphasis is placed on making such schools places where anyone can drop in during any stage of life (Suzuki 2007: 81–83; Suzuki, ed. 2012: 77–82)—greater consideration is given to helping people advance their careers with new knowledge and technology (Photo 1).

Still, even in Sweden, where everyone works and there is extensive social security, despite an emphasis on leading a balanced lifestyle in working years, there has not yet been enough debate on maintaining well-being—both in mind and body—after retirement. According



Photo 1 Lillieholmen Folkhögskola, a folk high school known for its education on communication with people who have Alzheimer disease (Rimfosa, Sweden, 2010)

to NISAL's director, concern has emerged recently for ensuring well-being into retirement, which is becoming a longer and longer period, and even during terminal (end-of-life) care. In terms of religiosity, Sweden differs from such countries as the United States due to its advanced secularization, and there is a conspicuous dearth of religious presence in elder care activities. Though I had initially thought differently, people in northern countries with long winters who want to support and assist their parents actually worry about their parents becoming shut-ins and are searching for new meeting points.

One reason for this concern, it can be pointed out, is society's focus on people in their prime working years. People's well-being is probably deeply linked to their not being stuck in entrenched roles dependent on their age. People who in middle age engaged primarily in such activities as child-rearing and work can achieve fulfillment in old age by escaping the trap of being only an "old person."

This paper is divided into three sections. The first traces (one school of) thought about various life stages, confirming the existence of multiple perspectives on old age. The second describes the process by which certain older adults who have come across new sources of income in old age—as well as those who support them—have found happiness and a new niche in life. The third looks at how the elements that contribute to well-being are woven together to create local culture through interaction with other people's well-being, enabled through common activities related to the future of one's place of abode. By tracing that process, I aim to clarify the significance of having all people share their free time with others.

2. The Idea of Life Stages

2.1. Emergence of the Concept of "life stages"

Looking back at how life stages have historically been perceived, a distinct change can be observed over time (Terasaki & Suzuki 1994: 60–76). In the medical writings of Hippocrates (ca. 460–370 BC), who lived in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C. and is considered the father of Western medicine, the starting point for healing activities was considered the naturalness of human beings. Human beings were defined by the balance of four qualities—wet, dry, cold, and hot—and life was divided into seven ages: infant, child, adolescent, youth, man, elderly man, and old man. These in turn were linked to the four seasons. In his "Aphorisms" (from the *Corpus Hippocraticum*), Hippocrates wrote that as far as the seasons were concerned, children and adolescents were at their liveliest and healthiest in spring and early summer, while the corresponding seasons for people in old age were summer through mid-autumn, and late autumn through winter for people in middle age (Otsuki ed. 1988: 533). He thus regarded human life as a microcosm corresponding to the macrocosm of nature and its seasons.

The "Etymologies" of Archbishop Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636), considered the encyclopedia of the Middle Ages, divides the lives of human beings into six stages. It is worth noting that for Isidore youth (*juventus*) lasted for quite a while: it began at 29, continued past the age of 35, life's midway point, and lasting until age 50. This was the period in which people finally "become able to help (*iutare*) others," like livestock and draft animals whose strength peaks at the age of 3. At the same time, Isidore saw youth as a period in which people lacked wisdom and often went astray. Youth was thus a time for "borrowing" the wisdom of



Figure 1 Johann Amos Comenius “The Seven Ages of Man”, *Sekaizue (Orbis Sensualium Pictus)*, Tokyo: Heibonsha, p. 98.

those who had reached maturity (*gravitas*) (ages 50 to 70)—“the most mature age with the most developed sense of judgment”—and of those who had entered their older years, namely people past 70, with their wealth of experience.

In the 16th century, images began to appear depicting life’s stages in visual form. In one, the “The Seven Ages of Man” in the *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (“World in Pictures”) textbook by Johann Amos Comenius (1592–1670), life is depicted as a series of seven steps, with youth at the top and the seventh stage (one’s final years) returning to the same level as that of children, having descended from the heights once achieved and finally, hunched over, leaving the steps behind (Figure 1). That depiction is far removed from one of a life cycle lived out as generations overlap; instead it depicts an individual advancing steadily toward decay. It treats people in their prime as the “norm” or standard and implies that older adult and children are peripheral, existing only to receive care from others.

The varying depictions of life described seen above point to a historically new phenomenon that has occurred in conjunction with the modern view of adulthood as life’s “golden years” (*i.e.*, the years of greatest maturity), with that age canonized as the model for human beings and citizens. This perspective is in turn intimately linked to the processes of modernization: industrialization, urbanization, increases in efficiency, and so forth. With the increasing specialization of occupations, the activities of production have become separated from the places in which people live—public and private realms being strictly divided—with people “designed” to live in specialized time-spaces according to their respective life stages. Accordingly, a distinction—one might call it a dichotomy—has been established between

those who care for others and those who receive care. A collective understanding (or fantasy) has arisen in which people in their “strong” prime years support those of other generations both physically and mentally—which is in fact virtually impossible. By extension, old age has come to be viewed as a period of decline. Childhood, meanwhile, is now seen as a period in which to prepare for one’s prime years, especially in specialized educational institutions. But all these fixations on the meaning and role of each life stage diminish people’s freedom to live their lives in the ways that they want.

2.2. Rethinking Contemporary Life Stages and Realizing the Design of Time

There are also groups of people who criticize how people have come to confine themselves to the life stage roles they have conceived. These groups choose instead to live according to their own beliefs. In the United States, the Amish—a Protestant Anabaptist sect—oppose the lifestyle of contemporary society with its incessant pursuit of efficiency, instead living without cars or electricity, rejecting public social security, practicing mutual assistance, and limiting the role of schools in children’s education (Suzuki 2005b: 88–96; Suzuki, ed. 2010: 9–13). They do not give life-prolonging treatment to the dying but rather care for them at home, with children (their own grandchildren and great-grandchildren) spending the longest time with them. When conducting my fieldwork, I read this comment in a self-introduction notebook written by a pupil at a one-room school: “My favorite thing to do is taking care of others.” That is an expression of how naturally Amish children accept care as a daily activity—one that they truly enjoy (Suzuki 2009: 91–95; Suzuki, ed. 2012: i, 12–13).

There are similar situations in which working people, in the prime of their lives, think about how they spend their time, examine their entire lives, and adjust their schedule through such things as work-sharing. I have been studying folk treatments and senior care in north-eastern Switzerland since 1997. I cannot forget how everyone I meet there talks about a “plan for using time this year.” Each year they reassess how much time they dedicate to work, which depends on their family’s makeup and their own hopes and dreams. While that becomes possible only through work-sharing, granted at the discretion of their bosses, it is regarded as a natural thing, even among medical doctors and other professionals employed at public institutions in urban areas.

People there give various reasons for shortening their labor time: staying home for several hours after returning to eat lunch so as to spend time gardening with their children, taking time in the evening to learn new skills, and so on. What people exhibited in common was the conviction that such activities would be meaningless unless they occurred at that particular time, as well as the feeling of increased “affluence” they got from shortening their labor time and managing to live off their income nonetheless (Suzuki 2005a: 364). They thus emphasized the “design of time” that best fit each stage of their lives.

Meanwhile, Denmark has a history of recommending the pursuit of leisure activities by each generation apart from their school or work activities, making a broad range of options available. After-school activities for children are based in the community and include care centers for children aged 6–9 and leisure clubs and young people’s clubs for children aged 10–18. For young adults and the working generation, there are residential folk schools offering new learning opportunities and a place to stop and take a break. Older adult, meanwhile,

can take part in activities that make use of their experience. And for the unemployed, there are places to acquire new skills. All of these are based on the idea that countries and regions are built up through the activities of their residents; meanwhile, by expanding the range of options for how to use the places and times in which people live, the initiatives have also had the effect of not restricting people to a single space (Suzuki 2012a: 77–80). According to interviews of older adults active as members of “senior committees” after retirement, they are doing important “work”—actually volunteering, for they receive no income—transforming the community by making the lives of older adults more comfortable (Suzuki 2007: 75–81). This is because, due to concrete proposals to expand accessibility—made with consideration for the well-being of older adults—they think they are supporting the vital community role of “normalization,” or accommodating people’s hopes and organizing their environments accordingly.

Thus people are not locked into activities divided between those for caregivers and those for “care-receivers.” Rather, people from several generations seek well-being by addressing their concerns about themselves, their environment and the people around them.

The next section of this chapter contains a deeper reflection on actual practices related to the future of care in the aforementioned sense.

3. Establishing an Industry to meet the Needs of Older Adult and Providing Care

3.1. New Work of Leaf Production

Based on interviews and a review of the literature, this section traces the activities of persons searching for ways to promote industry in a town located on the island of Shikoku—one suffering from progressive aging and depopulation—in a manner that is appropriate to the local environment and matches the needs of the older adults living there, aiming to help them continue to live in a community familiar to them¹⁾ (Suzuki 2005a; 2009; 2012b). It explores the kind of world discovered by those older adults—who have continued to work by taking advantage of both their own resources and those of the community—and looks at how creative ways of supporting their efforts have affected the lifestyles of younger generations as well as the very nature of the town.

The section also considers such questions as how people across different generations and differing cultural backgrounds view themselves, the people surrounding them, and their environment as they pursue care-related activities, and how those activities get linked to community design. It also explores the meaning of leisure as an element of the time and space in which people gather.

The setting of those activities is Kamikatsu-cho (Kamikatsu Town), nestled in the mountains of eastern Shikoku some 40 km (around 50 minutes by car) southwest of the city of Tokushima (Figure 2). Situated in the southeast portion of the Shikoku mountain range, the area is largely mountainous except for a few stretches of flat land, and there are terraced fields and paddies on the mountain slopes. Some 55 settlements are scattered here and there in the town, around 100 m to 700 m above sea level (Kamikatsu-cho 1979). Since peaking at 6,265 in 1955, the population declined yearly through the year 2000, after which it has stabilized at around 2,000 persons, according to the national census (Figure 3). The percentage of the

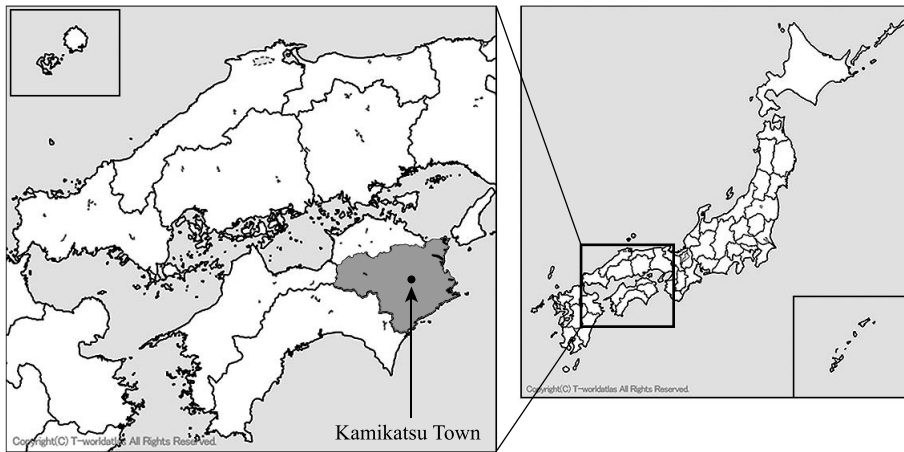


Figure 2 A Map of Kamikatsu Town of Tokushima prefecture, Japan

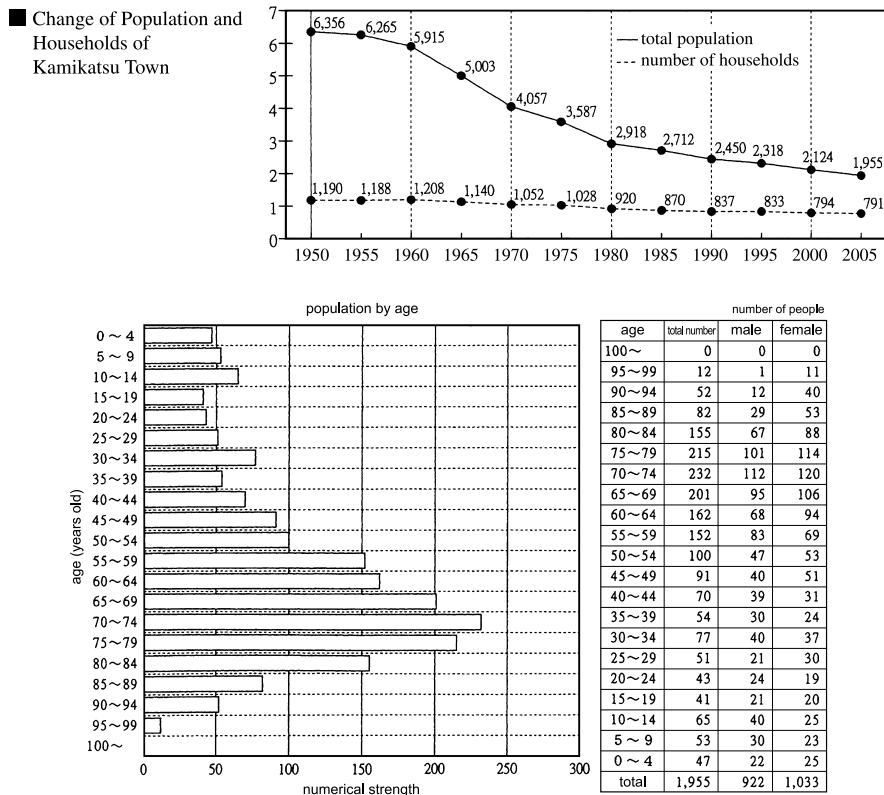


Figure 3 Census Statistics of Kamikatsu Town (Census Statistics of Japan, 2005)
Source: Kasamatsu, K and M. Nakajima, *Challenges in the Future of Mountain Village*, Jichitai Kenkyusha, 2007, p.12

town's population aged 65 or older is 49.29% in April 2010, with the trends of depopulation and aging occurring simultaneously²).

Normally, when its industry stagnates, a town becomes deserted or merges with neighboring municipalities. Instead, Kamikatsu Town has seen quite a few people return after getting their education elsewhere, as well as some new settlers. Between 1985 and 2005, there were 80 such households (with 161 people total); of those, 63 households (128 people) remained in the town as of 2005, with 15 children being born and others leaving or dying in the meantime³. A notable change, above all, has been the fact that older adults, especially women, are now working and paying taxes. As not many seniors in Kamikatsu Town are bedridden, it is known for its practice of "industry-based welfare" (Yokoishi 2007: 7, Honma 2007: 7, Oe 2008: 69, Suzuki, ed. 2009: 60).

What triggered the change in the town was the tremendous industrial slump that it suffered after its main industries—lumber and mandarin oranges (of the Onshu variety—started to become unprofitable during Japan's rapid economic growth in 1970s and 1980s, due to increasing imports and expanded production of those products in other areas of Japan, as well as to the town's unfavorable geographical conditions. A representative of an agricultural cooperative, Mr. A, was transferred from Tokushima City to help propagate new agriculture techniques in the town. While he and others explored the appropriateness of various crops, his proposals were not easily accepted by the townspeople, who had long engaged in forestry, in part because he was considered an "outsider."

In February 1981, the town bore the brunt of an unprecedented and quite localized cold snap, with the mercury dropping to -13 degrees C (around 9 degrees F) and devastating its mandarin orange orchards. Trees of the special indigenous varieties of aromatic, sour citrus fruits—such as *yuko* and *sudachi*—were also on the verge of dying, forcing great hardship upon the people. Given the scarcity of flat land, experiments with planting other crops—rice, barley, sweet potatoes, butterburs (a plant), and strawberries—brought little relief. Losing all hope, many residents turned to alcohol or developed neuroses. It thus became an urgent task to revitalize the town's economy through the establishment of a new industry. Not only farmers but also agricultural cooperatives joined with the town in a third-sector effort (*i.e.*, a public-private joint venture) to develop some agricultural product that could be easily made by seniors, especially older women (Yokoishi 2007: 160–165; Honma 2007: 70–71).

They came up with a hit agri-forestry product thanks to a conversation between several customers at a restaurant in Kyoto. One day, something deeply impressed Mr. A as he was eating dinner at the restaurant after a long day of work: he overheard some women talking happily about how beautiful the leaves were that decorated their food. He thought to himself, "Those leaves can be found all over Kamikatsu Town—do they really make people so happy?" Indeed, leaves are often placed upon *kaiseki* and other types of Japanese cuisine as a garnish, with the cooks normally obtaining the leaves themselves in the vicinity. Mr. A, however, wondered whether the demand for leaves might rise if young people came to enjoy food more, including decorative aspects of it such as the leaves. The work of picking the mountain leaves and shipping them to the market in time was perfect for the seniors of Kamikatsu Town, who were quite familiar with local vegetation. Moreover, the work did not require much physical energy and could be done while having fun.



Photo 2 An older woman packing her scarlet-tinged maple leaves (Tokushima, 2005)

Mr. A returned to the town and broached his idea with the residents, but no one took him seriously at first. Older people who had previously worked in the forestry and mandarin orange industries refused to believe that just going to the mountain, picking up leaves, and putting them in a box was “real work.” One even went so far as to say, “Selling things that grow naturally in the fields and hills would be embarrassing.” It was thus hard to persuade the older adults, who had so passionately engaged in the development of agricultural products, that “leaves could be products.”

At last, he found several farming households in the town whose female members agreed to try his plan. He loaded the various leaves collected by the women—all in their 60s—into the agricultural cooperative’s automobile, which he drove himself to Osaka and Kyoto in an attempt to peddle them at several markets. However, he could not find any buyers. Reluctantly, he made repeated visits to restaurants where leaves were actually used in cooking. Bit by bit, then, he learned how to choose and arrange those leaves that would be seasonal and those that would best bring out the flavor of the food. Indigenous leaves and branches of plants growing in the village were commercialized as ingredients in food, including the leaves of persimmon and maple trees, nandina, giant elephant ear (a kind of taro), and camellia plants and bamboo grass, along with azalea flowers and the flowers of plum, cherry and pear trees. Native grasses that were suitable as food ingredients also started to be packed and shipped (Photo 2).

Moving forward 19 years to 2005, some 300 kinds of leaves were being shipped from Kamikatsu Town, with annual revenue exceeding 250 million yen (around \$3.25 million), accounting for more than 80% of the product sold at the Osaka Central Wholesale Market. More than 150 households in the town now participate in the industry, with the average age

of the people engaged in the tasks of collecting, washing, and packing the leaves standing at around 68 (as of 2005). Many women and older adults do the work as it allows them to apply their knowledge of local vegetation, and also because of the small product volume and relatively light workload at all stages of production. They earn a monthly income of 200,000 to 300,000 yen (around \$2,600 to \$3,900); occasionally some even earn 1 million yen (\$12,700) a month. Kamikatsu Town thus exports a top-selling item produced primarily through the activities of its senior residents.

3.2. The “work” of Being Cared for

The seniors’ work may seem simple, but it is not. Just picking leaves here and there is not enough—the harvest must be planned in a way that meets market needs, with the leaves reaching the market at an appropriate time. Accomplishing all this is something that older people ought to do well, for they have seen various kinds of leaves over many years change colors throughout the four seasons on the slopes of the mountains. Still, there remained for the producers the issues of identifying exactly which leaves had were in demand, as well as figuring out a way to transport them to the market in a timely fashion.

The special efforts utilized to bring out the abilities of the older adult in Kamikatsu Town can be broadly placed into four categories, as described below.

First, it was suggested that the town’s simultaneous-broadcast wireless system, designed for use in disasters, be utilized to broadcast information to everyone involved in the leaf industry. A system was organized by which the disaster fax service could be used to disseminate information, forming a network that allowed all parties ready access to such details as requests for shipments. Information about seasonal leaves in demand, for example, can be sent swiftly and simultaneously to all farm households registered as leaf producers. Upon receipt of the fax, the producers decide whether they can make a timely delivery of the amount specified in the order, then make a phone call to the central office to place a bid for the job. Finally, they take the packed leaves to the agricultural cooperative by the specified deadline. Only if a bid is placed does the order get finalized, however, so elderly residents of Kamikatsu Town keep close tabs on the condition of the leaves growing on their mountains as they wait patiently for a fax to come in, then act very quickly to make their bid. Once, when I was interviewing one of the local women, she received a fax with an order request, whereupon she dropped everything else to concentrate on the leaves (Photo 3).

Second, a computer system—loaned to anyone who asks for it—has been developed that is easy even for older people to use. It is extremely important for the leaf producers to get timely market information—regarding such details as the products being traded, the deadlines for delivery, and prices—so they can plan what to cultivate at any given point. As these conditions change second by second, it was considered desirable to distribute the information through the network to the individual producers, who would then be able to act on it. Discussions arose about what software and settings would be most conducive to older adult unfamiliar with computers. An easy-to-handle trackball, moved with the entire palm, worked well for seniors unused to clicking a mouse. Users could send and receive information simply by rolling the trackball and moving the cursor to the desired place on the easy-to-understand, color-coded screen (Photo 4).



Photo 3 An older person considering a rush order sent through the existing system of wireless telegraphy and fax machines (Tokushima, 2005)

Third, another method of sharing information was carefully devised: Mr. A's handwritten newspaper. The paper includes detailed information about leaves and is chock-full of stories about minor events in the town. Each issue, too, is distributed by fax. The townspeople are often featured in the newspaper, and they look forward to reading about one another's activities there.

Fourth, paid volunteers provide taxi services in special zones, allowing older adult to deliver their products safely and promptly to the agricultural cooperative. The zones—called “special structural reform zones”—were approved in May 2003, and transportation by paid volunteers began in November of the same year, commissioned by the town's social welfare council. Thanks to the system, seniors who can't or don't drive can now ask for help without hesitation.

The work these older adults do involves a certain degree of support from others: getting information distributed, having easy-to-use hardware set up, and so on. Enlisting the help of young people and learning about outsiders is not considered a “miserable” or “pitiable” thing in Kamikatsu Town. Thanks to the information they access, the older adults do their own market research, making judgments about which leaves are most appropriate and delivering specified products by a given deadline. I was surprised at how actively the seniors—nearing 80 years old, with no business background—went about their work. For the people in Kamikatsu Town, building interdependent relationships in order to let others advance in their chosen field and accomplish what they want to do leads to mutual recognition and the ability of each party to secure a niche in life.

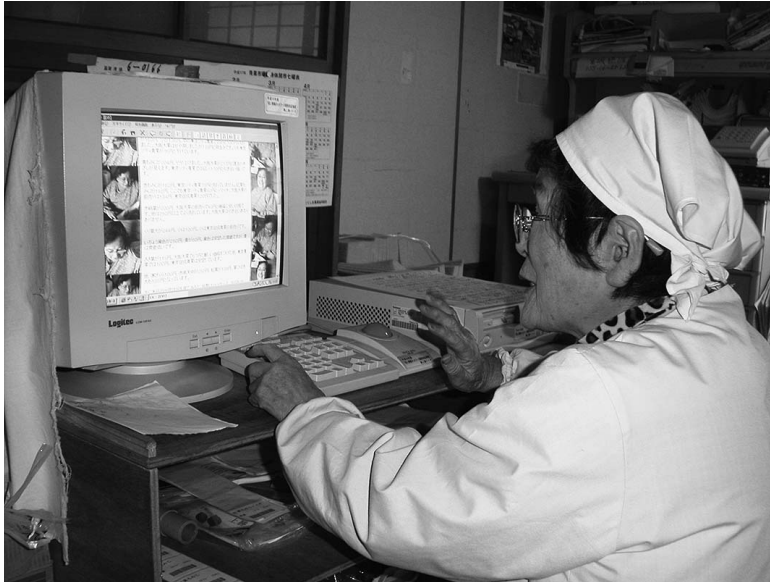


Photo 4 An older person using a computer prepared for convenience of the elderly (Tokushima, 2005)

4. Discovery of Leisure in Well-trafficked Areas

4.1. Changes in Seniors' Ways of Life: The Concept of a Future in which People “exist with visible faces”

The way of life in Kamikatsu Town changed completely thanks to the new leaf-collection industry. With the stable income older adults earned through the “easy and clean work” that took advantage of their aptitude, they were able to enhance their lifestyles and build a sense of hope for the future. The first thing they did with the extra money was to increase their avenues for amusement. For older women especially—those who had married into farmer’s families or been housewives—a whole new life began, one in which they had disposable income for the first time. A certain Mrs. B, who was 84 years old in 2005, evenly split the income she made from collecting leaves with her daughter-in-law, who helped with her work. My interviewees—happy at having earned, for the first time in their lives, money for discretionary spending—frequently commented that they used the spare money for things like pocket money for their children and grandchildren and family outings.

The second thing the elders of Kamikatsu Town did with their extra money was to invest in the future. Some planted trees that would eventually yield the types of leaves that were in high demand. Mrs. B, nicknamed “Ace,” has participated in this kind of work from the very beginning of the project, continuing to plant new persimmon trees in anticipation of future harvests. While it takes some three years from the time a tree is planted until its leaves can be harvested, she says that she looks forward to it.

The leaves have thus now gone beyond merely being things that are “plucked” to become

things that are “made.” The relation between such factors as sunlight and altitude to the color of leaves can be predicted only by those with plenty of experience. What was formerly seen as the town’s weak point—its unsuitability for planting crops because of the scarcity of flat land—is instead now recognized as its strength, for its varying altitudes yield leaves of many colors. The whole town is now viewed as “shelves in a store,” with the people totally absorbed in caring for the forest.

The third change that came about was an increase in opportunities for individuals in the community to “exist with visible faces,” with a palpable rise in the number of active interpersonal exchanges in their lives. Many of the women in particular told me that they felt for the first time that they existed with a “(more) visible face.” Although the act of organizing the leaves occurs mostly at home, the people engaged in such work never feel isolated or shut up in their houses⁴). Thanks to the information sent to them over the network, they can keep track of what their colleagues are doing and learn about the market, even while they remain at home. What especially excites the leaf producers are constant updates on their sales totals and rankings and on which leaves are hot sellers. With color-coded bar graphs depicting shipment targets and current shipment status, the leaf producers can instantly decide whether to ship seasonal items or those in constantly high demand. Every day the seniors, who say that watching the computer and getting information that way “make life worth living,” lift up the protective cloth covers on their computer screens and pay rapt attention to them. Opportunities to meet others face-to-face have also multiplied because they have common topics of conversation. The townspeople use the facilities of the town’s remodeled and expanded public inn to enjoy the hot springs there and to discuss common themes in the inn’s meeting room. Bus trips are also organized several times a year to allow the colleagues to study the value of leaves as food ornaments. On these tours, they enjoy going to restaurants that buy their leaves to see how they are actually prepared and taste dishes with the leaves in them. The leaf producers—busy as they are in their work and planning—used to follow what is known as “Awa time”⁵) (Awa being the region where the town is located), often showing up to meetings and appointments late, but now they have learned to become very punctual.

4.2. The Design of Well-trafficked Places: Different Shapes of Leisure

Changes in the lives of Kamikatsu Town’s older adult led to changes in the atmosphere of the whole town, including the lifestyles of other generations and the ways in which people interact. The volunteer taxi work that was organized to help the seniors can be done by anyone who can drive, but drivers must be within voice range of potential customers. Thanks to the introduction of the small taxi system, both older adult and younger people have expanded their interaction with members of their own family as well as others in the vicinity. These small changes have led to an increase in the number of conversations, bringing a greater sense of vitality to the town and prompting more people to think about the area they inhabit. The town’s residents can now express their ideas about their own ways of life.

The “IQ (Ikkyu) Athletes Meet” was named after the famous Buddhist priest “Ikkyu,” who held dialogues in the form of questions and answers in order to cultivate good ideas, began in 1993 as an attempt to elicit ideas from every resident. Starting in 1995, the town was divided into five districts, each with six representatives (two being women) serving on a

30-member committee that was organized to engender and share ideas about the town and its environment.

According to Mr. A, such activities comprised an attempt to “foster the spirits” of the residents (Yokoishi 2007: 165–170). Thinking and coming up with ideas is said to be a form of “play.” Apart from working to generate income, then, people created new arenas for community action, where ordinary people could experience being on the front stage (Figure 4).

The “Ikkyu-san” local grocery store, also named after the Buddhist priest, has served as the site for the new plan of cooperation between young people coming to the town from elsewhere and the town’s seniors and housewives. In light of the declining birthrate and growing proportion of older adult, getting people to relocate to rural areas such as Kamikatsu Town has been widely perceived as a way to open up new possibilities for these towns.

At Ikkyu-san, outsiders can participate in a program to purchase food cooked by the townspeople. The program enables residents to provide various foods to people from the town and elsewhere.

In the store, locals take extra portions of dishes and candy that they have prepared at home and put them on sale, labeling each with their own names. Next to the product is a small piece of paper on which they can write down such information as the product’s source, what times of year it is best to eat certain mountain vegetables, and serving suggestions. This gives both tourists passing by and newly arrived young residents information about the region’s distinctive food culture and connections with the natural environment, also encouraging exchanges with them. Furthermore, the extra money the locals earn in this way can be channeled into new creative ventures.

One person sent from a nonprofit organization (NPO) to work at Ikkyu-san as a clerk for a year is now active as a new resident. The town contributes to this person’s living expenses and provides low-cost housing—a house filled with the beautiful scent of new wood—built by a joint public-private lumber processing venture. One young person, when asked why living in the town was attractive, cited frequent advice from townspeople about how to live life. A working-holiday scheme has existed in the town since 2005, with more than 100 people participating while staying in farmers’ homes. A few of these participants have moved to the town permanently.

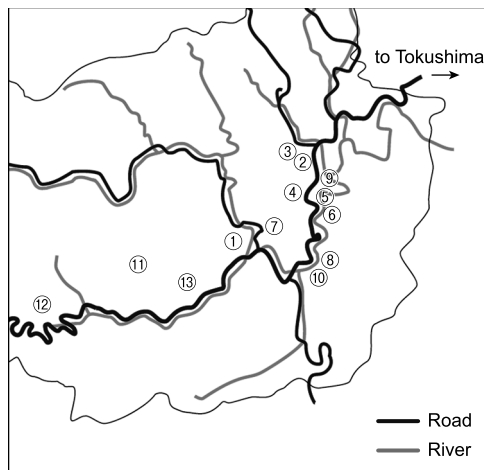
For Kamikatsu Town’s seniors, the new plan has illuminated new ways of using their leisure time, which in turn has helped them establish new jobs for young people coming from elsewhere.

Another site of newly active involvement in the community is the recycling center set up to support the town’s economy and ecology. The center is run mostly by young people who have relocated to this rural area from elsewhere, and hosts a variety of activities.

Having searched for a means of cost-free rubbish collection, an NPO now employs a Danish method, with some 80% of all rubbish recycled after being sorted into more than 30 categories. Leadership of the center was assumed by a young woman. The system features several ingenious details, such as letting people bring their rubbish in at any time, with a clear explanation of how the rubbish is to be recycled. Thanks to this system, the town is successfully heading toward its target of producing zero garbage by the year 2020 (Kasamatsu and Sato 2008). The NPO publishes a newspaper highlighting the town’s approach to ecology,



Photo 5 Residents sort garbage with help from the elderly people who manage the recycling center (Tokushima, 2005)



- ① Municipal Government of Kamikatsu Town
- ② Center for New Settlers
- ③ Residence and Office at Bōji (multiple-purpose facility using a closed school)
- ④ Wood Working Industry, Mokusan Co. Ltd.
- ⑤ Garbage Station (Recycle Center)
- ⑥ Hidamari
- ⑦ Residence and Office at Ochiai (multiple-purpose facility using a closed school)
- ⑧ Irodori Co. Ltd.
- ⑨ Ikkyu San
- ⑩ Tsukigaya Hot Spring
- ⑪ Terraced paddy field at Kashiwara
- ⑫ Terraced paddy field at Yaechi
- ⑬ Wood Working Industry, Moku Moku Moku

Figure 4 Facilities of Kamikatsu Town including new meeting points for people living and coming to the town (data from the official web site of Kamikatsu Town, 2011)

stressing the fact that having a clean town improves the image of “clean leaves.” People now enjoy more opportunities than ever before to converse with others, consulting the center’s staff as they carefully separate their garbage (Photo 5). A space called “Hidamari” (meaning a “cozy place in the sun”) has been established next to the recycle center, and is a place where

people bring unwanted items to be recycled and/or repurposed. In that small space, people use their leisure time to pass on knowledge about sewing and other crafts, and cloth remnants are transformed into new items.

5. Conclusion

In a depopulated town desiring to promote an industry that took advantage of the region's special features, the ingenious innovations that allowed older adult to participate in that industry also changed the lifestyles of other generations. The numerous developments aimed to revitalize the district and get seniors to work created a new range of activities for younger people as well, which in turn promoted interpersonal communication for everyone. Without stereotyping older adult as "objects of assistance," their participation in an activity as full members of the district resulted in their having more money to spend freely and feeling that they existed with "visible faces." Having their own money—earned through work that they were good at—led to feelings of happiness as well as to new activities, engendering what might be described as "cyclical coexistence" (Suzuki 2005a: 355, 366) or, in other words, life in harmony with the activities of other generations.

Here, having a workplace made older adult feel like they belonged, a sensation that not only brought them happiness and joy but also developed into leisure activities through which further relationships were woven. The new store selling local goods served as a physical "channel" through which young new residents and tourists entered the town. The recycling center became multifunctional in nature, setting up places for people to relax and leading to the development of indigenous products utilizing recycled goods.

These initiatives also expanded opportunities for interpersonal exchange within the town, making possible new and constantly evolving relationships.

However, it was considered important to envision not a "big town" but rather a "just-right town." The town was hesitant to turn itself into a sightseeing destination or increase its population of young people. The fluid ideal of a comfortable, "just-right" town meant always having to think about one's own existence as a constantly-changing entity in a place that is itself always changing. It meant thinking and caring for a town in which people of various positions would want to live. Sometimes that might mean excluding visitors or opposing people who are not like-minded. The act of pulling together and coordinating various stakeholders based on everyone's hopes and concerns for the purpose of energizing a town through sharing can be described as "cooperative life design." The older adults of Kamikatsu Town now speak frequently of the next generation who will take over their business. Challenges include having children return to their hometown after being educated elsewhere and enabling grandchildren to live in the town at any rate. This involves the superimposition of each generation's life cycle as the culture of the district evolves.

As far as the townspeople are concerned, the acts of supporting others and being supported by others are both seen as indispensable forms of cooperation for the purpose of realizing a comfortable everyday existence. By not fearing change and flexibly approaching the task of role sharing, people began to enjoy their ways of life. Escaping rules and roles dictated by history, culture, age, and gender, they did not sit around and wait for someone else to

initiate action, but rather acknowledged and utilized their ability to reflect on their own lives. It is that, moreover, which serves as the departure point for the creation of place of flexibility in which they want to live—that is to say, it formed the foundation for residents' well-being. The changes brought about by the work of Kamikatsu Town's seniors demonstrated to people of all ages the existence of leisure (*scholē*) time and increased the amount of time in which people could reflect together about the entirety of their lives. Having leisure time that enabled exchanges with other people also meant sharing time in which ordinary people could see one another's faces. In this town, the act of working led to the expansion of the time-space in which people lived.

When thinking about Kamikatsu Town, I am reminded of my chance encounter with a gathering of First Nations (native Canadians) on my way from Vancouver to Kamloops in western Canada. It appeared to be the beginning of a festival, with everyone standing in a big circle and being introduced individually, one after another, by the master of ceremonies. The introductions included information not just about each person's work but also about other aspects of life, including children raised and wisdom and knowledge received from others. Each person received a round of applause after being introduced. With the backdrop of the strong sunlight, the fact that everyone was applauded equally just for being alive and living their lives struck me quite vividly. It made me realize once again that it was all right just to be appreciated by others for being alive. After that, a program was planned that included dancing and eating, making the festival a sort of rite of passage in which members of the community were able to share in one another's time and move toward a "new time." Having that leisure time made it possible for them to continue collaborative activities that transcended various boundaries.

Through the personal exchanges that took place during the leisure time that people became clearly aware of only once they started working, they started to think about the life cycle—their existence as mortal beings moving through life, the creation of new life, and so forth—and "tomorrow" became an increasingly precious commodity to them. The biggest change in the lives of people living in depopulated Kamikatsu Town was probably the way in which they began to think about their future. They started to realize that it was not just their economic activities, but also the time for fun and play they gained through their new endeavors, that gave them the strength to think about the future. When they began to envision how they would use their time and money, their town became a place of opportunity to attain well-being, a place in which people of all walks of life could communicate amidst constant change.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my deep appreciation to Tomoji Yokoishi, who gave me valuable source materials through his lectures and interviews about both the town's resources and the way the town's industry was promoted by enlisting the strength of its senior citizens. I would also like to thank the leaf producers, who gave me information about their work and the ways in which it changed their lives.

Notes

- 1) I have collected information and materials from Kamikatsu Town since 2004. I conducted the interviews and participant fieldwork research in 2005, and since then I kept in touch with residents in person and by exchanging letters and e-mails.
- 2) Kamikatsu Town is a “super-aged society”. Since 1994, Japan has become a so-called “aged society,” with 14–21% of its population aged 65 or older (this succeeding its former status as an “aging society” with 7–14% of its population 65 or older). It became a “super-aged society” (21.5%) following the population estimate of 2007.
- 3) “Tokushima, a Place of Population Decline”, *Tokushima Newspaper*. 5 May, 2005.
- 4) According to a survey on social isolation in several advanced nations, Japanese were found to be the most socially isolated, in that they don’t see many people besides friends, colleagues, and family members (OECD 2005). Hiroi pointed out that the Japanese tend to draw a rigid border between their inner circle, often made of family members or colleagues, and others. While they have intimate relationships in their inner circle, they are indifferent or even hostile to “others” (Hiroi 2006: 204–214).
- 5) “Awa” is the name of the region, and people there are known for being late for appointments.

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