Participation and Social Capital: Some Lessons from Experiences of a Small Village
Satomi Tani

1. The Emergence and the Evolution of Participatory Politics

In 1970, Carole Pateman, a professor at Sydney University, Australia, wrote a small book, Participation and Democratic Theory, which soon became one of must-read books in the field of political science. At the beginning of this book, she wrote as follows: During the last few years of the 1960s the word 'participation' became part of the popular political vocabulary. Indeed, industrialized countries saw massive surge of protest politics such as students' movements, anti-war demonstrations especially in the United States, and minorities' insurgent activities. Facing such political turbulence, many people thought that representative democracy based on election was not fully responsive to people's diversified voices in the post-industrial era. Thus, direct participation in various aspects of political process was ardently advocated. For example, the anti-poverty program initiated by the Johnson administration included a provision for the 'maximum feasible participation' of those concerned. Newly established Office of Economic Opportunity introduced Community Action Program as its core program, and promoted citizen participation in policy-making process at the community and neighborhood levels.

Even in Japan, where voters were long viewed as obedient to authorities, many attempts by active citizens to have their voices and opinions directly heard by policy-makers at both national and local levels suddenly appeared on the horizon in the latter half of the 1960s. Some people organized themselves to press the local governments to solve the shortage of day-care center. Some marched into the city hall to make policy-makers to deal with the issue of their deteriorating residential environments. Serious water and air pollutions of that time caused by uncontrolled growth of Japanese
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The economy fired the fuel. Almost everyday, newspapers and TV news programs reported about boycotts, sit-ins, demonstrations, gatherings, and petition activities seen here and there in the country. Those attempts to influence policy-making process directly soon came to be called 'jumin undou' — movements by local residents, and 'shimin-undou' — citizens' movements, stimulating to develop more institutionalized ways of direct democracy. It is natural, therefore, that Japanese people became familiar with the word "participation" in the early 1970s, too, though some people from conservative camps showed explicit hostility to such a new concept.

This unexpected activism among voters and surge of arguments on participation never failed to attract politicians’ attention as well as political scientists. Some progressive politicians tried to institutionalize participation practices. Ichio Asukata, the then mayor of Yokohama, declared to regularly hold gatherings participated by ten thousand voters in order to directly listen to their voices. Political scientists also rushed toward this new subject, and started to do research in it theoretically as well as empirically. In fact, Japan Political Science Association titled its annual review of 1974 as 'Theory and Reality of Political Participation'. This means that participation acquired academic legitimacy in Japan.

In those days, the word "participation" was interpreted in Japan as direct engagement by citizens in policy-making process in a broad sense. But in the United States, some leading political scientists such as Samuel Huntington and Sydney Verba began to widen the concept of participation to embrace more indirect type of political participation. Needless to say, the most classic type of indirect participation is election. Later their opinion became accepted by many political scientists not only in the United States but in other industrialized countries, including Japan. Today, political scientists tend to see participation as any form of voters' activities aimed at affecting policy-making. This is the reason why I separate participation into two types, that is, electoral participation and non-electoral participation.

2. Declining Voter Turnout in Many Countries

Election is the main instrument to function any representative democracy. In spite of its critical importance, it is the easiest, cheapest, and most understandable channel of political participation. A fair and free
election system gives people the final say that the strongest government could not resist. This is part of the reason that it took long time for political science to pay attention to participatory activities other than voting. I do not have many things to say here about electoral participation partly because it has been intensively studied worldwide for long time with extremely sophisticated methods of analysis, and partly because I am not specialized in this area. But I would like to talk about an issues that election-study specialists have not argued much. The issue is the declining voter turnouts of major countries.

As Figure 1 and Table 1 indicate, average voter turnout rate of voting age population in the OECD nations except Scandinavian countries started to decline in the 1970 significantly. This is partly due to more obvious decline of party membership in those countries. In the United States, the decline of turnout rate of voting age population started earlier than other

![Figure 1](image)

**Figure 1** Turnout Decline in the OECD Nations (excluding Scandinavia)
### Table 1  Voter Turnout Rate of Lower House Elections in Major Countries (%)

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(1) West Germany only before 1990
(2) Runoff Elections of the Lower House, not Presidential Elections
(3) Turnout of Voting-Age Population

Source:
- Asahi Shimbun
developed nations, and has been more conspicuous. In a midterm election, only one third of voters go to polling place nowadays. Even in a presidential, general election, turnout rate remains close to the fifty percent threshold. In other developed countries, turnout looks better than in the United States. But it should be noted that, except in Scandinavia, those countries also started following the wake of the United States to some extent in the 1980s or 1990s. For example, the United Kingdom, whose voters participated in parliamentary elections enthusiastically in the 1970s, had the record low turnout in the 2001 general election. And the last general election in May, 2005, did not show impressive improvement. In Canada, turnout rate declined in one election after another since 1988, reaching to the level of slightly above sixty percent in 2004. In France and Germany, the decline of turnout is not as linear as in Canada with sporadic up-and-downs. But their general trend in terms of voter turnout is not very different from those in other countries. With such poor turnout in national elections, one could not expect better turnout in any special election in most part of these countries. One of my questions here is how we can productively or hopefully discuss participation in other forms than election given the fact that the easiest way of participation tends to be neglected by people.

Voters’ reluctance toward electoral participation is often much more obvious on the local level. In Europe, local elections are usually held on days different from national-election days. One might assume, therefore, that a local election is less affected by what causes vote-swing in national elections. But the fact is opposite. In many cases, vote distribution among political parties is greatly affected by parties’ popularity at the national level. This means that local issues do not play a big role in local elections. To put it in another way, people tend to neglect local issues. And voters’ low interest in local public affairs almost inevitably makes turnout rate in local elections very low. Even in England, a country often viewed as the homeland of local government, voter turnout was below forty percent in most local elections as early as in the 1970s.

Generally speaking, Japan has an experience similar to those of its European peers in terms of the decline of voter turnout. Japan kept modestly high turnout rate with minor exceptions, between seventy percent and seventy-five percent, until 1990. But turnout suddenly started to plunge
to a level close to sixty percent in the 1990s. It is true that the last general election held in 2005 showed an unexpected rebound of turnout rate, bringing the percentage from 59.9 back to 67.5. Few people anticipate, however, that Japan will reconstruct its turnout performance. Indeed, in the mayoral election held in Okayama one month later than the 2005 general election, the turnout rate was 43.3 percent, the third lowest record of the city. Okayama, a city with more than six hundred thousand people, saw a sudden and big decline of its local election turnout in the 1980s. Okayama is not exceptional. Many other cities and prefectures in Japan have similar experiences. Nowadays we sometimes see turnout go down even below thirty percent in local elections.

In Japan, national elections are managed by the election administration division of the Ministry of General Affairs, and local elections are handled by the Election Administration Board of each local government. What might be a little funny to foreigners is that those organizations are expected to make efforts to boost election turnout. One of the most common practices is to fly an advertising balloon over the city hall or prefectural government's structure, with a big banner saying, for example, "December the second is the polling day of the next general election. Voters, never fail to cast your ballot!" Some election administration organizations use bandwagons to attract voters' attention. Some resort to parades of beautiful ladies hoisting placards that also read, "Let's go to your polling place on such and such day!" Bystanders often feel strange because such a bright and flowery march is usually followed by solemn-faced bureaucrats and city clerks wearing suits in dark colors.

These advertising activities of election administrators in Japan have a long tradition. Unfortunately, however, their efforts do not seem to have significant impact on voters. Miserable results in many elections explicitly show that they have been ineffective. In the United States, about half of the voting age population does not participate in a presidential election, though people could never avoid year long nation-wide campaigns, incredibly sophisticated selling tactics of spin-doctors, and intensive media coverage of the candidates. Is there really any effective way to induce voters to bother to cast their ballots? Some measures to facilitate voting such as extending voting time and liberalizing absentee balloting may make people feel easier
to vote. Some people say that the implementation of these measures in Japan has contributed to the improvement of turnout. But it is certain that their effect has been very small, if any. How about, then, the introduction of an all-mail ballot system such as one that Oregon adopted several years ago? It is said that vote-by-mail of an Oregonian type can enhance turnout rate ten percent at the highest. At the same time, however, no one can eliminate the possibility of fraud, coercion, and intercept of ballots because votes are cast inside voters' homes, rooms of nursing homes, and other places unattended by election workers, and just put in mailboxes carelessly. As a political scientist who conducted a research about advantages and disadvantages of mail-in ballot system writes in his report, voting by mail is not a panacea for declining participation and should not be adopted solely for this reason.

By arguing this way, I do not mean to say that the decline of electoral participation is inevitable, though I do not think we can find any easy way to tackle the problem. In my opinion, the theory of social capital can offer us some suggestions. Robert Putnam, the leading scholar in the research of social capital, calls attention to the fact that the decline in turnout is less marked in Scandinavia than elsewhere. He says that the welfare state has helped sustain social capital, and that the accumulation of social capital motivates people to participate in political life as well as social activities.

Simply put, social capital is a kind of value produced by social or associational networks that are based on horizontal relationship and are outward looking. Interacting among each other in such milieu, people develop the norm of reciprocity and the sense of trustworthiness. Generally speaking, associational life with these norms encourages cooperative interaction, fosters positive attitude toward engagement in social and public affairs, and teaches the skill and importance of compromise. It also makes people more sensitive to the quality of social and public life. In another words, social capital makes people more interested in collective conditions in the society. This explains why voter turnout remains high in Scandinavia. There, welfare state policies have directly or indirectly produced various opportunities of associational life, which has stimulated people to pay attention to social and political affairs. Needless to say, social capital is not monopolized by welfare state. Putnam gives us a good example of the G.I.
Bill. As well known, this bill was originally introduced by the Roosevelt Administration in 1944. G.I. Bill, which provided free university education for American military veterans after World War II, powerfully boosted social capital in that generation, by increasing rates of young people with higher education background and thus the inclination toward social participation among the sons of the lower middle and working classes and by reinforcing a norm of reciprocity⁹.

Part of social capital is historically formed and accumulated in a society. Some societies successfully amplify social capital through their long history. Some societies lack historical experiences of the production of social capital. On the other hand, governmental programs also can contribute to the supply and reinforcement of social capital, as the example of G.I. Bill shows. I do not think that there is an easy way to resolve the problem of shrinking voter turnout. But social-capital-friendly programs and practices of the government can be remedy for the problem at least to some extent. I will keep the potential of social capital in mind when I talk about non-electoral participation. Hereafter, I use participation only for non-electoral participation to avoid lengthiness. Then I will confine my argument to public participation at the level of local government in Japan.

3. Participation-Friendly Leadership: A Story of a Small Village in Japan

Today, the amazing development of communication technology allows us to try various forms of participation that were completely unknown a decade ago. Among them are e-voting, e-referendum, online deliberative poll, and civic forum in cyberspace. These newly invented participation tools can be embraced by an umbrella name, e-democracy⁹. E-democracy will enlarge the potential of public participation in the twenty first century. But I refrain from arguing about e-democracy here. It is not only because I am weak at internet technologies. The internet can connect a citizen and an official instantly. But the flipside is that it defuses junk information and malicious statements instantly, too. People can easily obtain important data from the government through the internet. But one will cast his vote more often on the spur of the moment through the internet than in a polling booth. To me, it seems too early to assess the advantages and disadvantages of
e-democracy. I also avoid discussing up-to-date methods of participation such as citizens' juries, service user forums, issue forums, and visioning exercises. Instead, I will look at some experiences of a Japanese municipality hereafter. To me, its experiences are suggestive when thinking about non-electoral participation. But first, I should briefly explain the local government system of Japan.

Japan is a unitary country, not a federal one. That is, there is no polity that has its own constitution below the national level in Japan. Thus, the national parliament monopolizes the power to enact laws. At the same time, however, the Japanese constitution orders the national government to respect the principle of local autonomy. It is this constitutional arrangement that brings to Japanese local governments significant jurisdictions to enact by-laws and deal with local and regional affairs based on their own ideas. Today, Japanese local government system has a two-tier structure. At the regional level, Japan is divided into forty-seven prefectures that have their own governors and assemblies. At the local level, there are about one thousand seven hundred municipalities with their own mayors and councils. The number of municipalities used to be more than three thousand before the turn of the century.

Exactly speaking, municipalities are classified into four categories: Village, town, city, and metropolitan borough of Tokyo. The Japanese word for village, town, and city respectively has dual meanings. Usually, each city is a combination of one urbanized area or two and surrounding hamlets. In one context, village means a small collection of houses, shops, and structures. In another, it means a rural municipality that usually contains some or many hamlets. Let me take an example. The city of Kurashiki, about four hundred miles west of Tokyo, and eleven miles west of Okayama, contains four geographically independent cities with more than one hundred thousand people, several middle and small-sized cities, and numerous villages. So if the City of New York were in Japan, I am sure that it would contain the entire Long Island and Rockland County. Even West Point might be within the city limit. There are slight differences of the degree of autonomy among village, town, city, and metropolitan borough as a political and administrative unit. But here all of them are called municipality in order to avoid unnecessary complication. It is a story of a municipality that I am telling about hereafter.
The name of the municipality is Sawauchi\textsuperscript{[11]}.

Sawauchi is located in a mountainous area of Iwate Prefecture, one of the most northern prefectures in Japan, and consists of twenty-three villages\textsuperscript{[12]}. Its territory is very wide, of course by Japanese standard, eighteen miles by ten miles. But cultivable land in it has been limited by surrounding mountains. This is why Sawauchi used to be called the Tibet of the region\textsuperscript{[13]}. Its component villages are scattered along a narrow valley. Now Sawauchi has about four thousand residents. But what I am dealing with here is not today's Sawauchi, but the Sawauchi of half a century ago. Its story here begins from 1957, when only twelve years had passed since the defeat of Japan in the World War II. At that time, Japanese economy showed steady recovery from the damage caused by the war. But Japan was still far behind the United States in almost all aspects. There was no express way, or free way in Japan. Most family lived with no telephone, refrigerator, and TV set, not to mention car. In most rural areas, especially those in northern mountainous areas, many people were forced to live in severe poverty.

Sawauchi was no exception, all the more so because Sawauchi was cut off from other municipalities by deep snow in winter. Usually, Sawauchi is completely covered by snow of about ten feet in depth from late November through early April. During long winter, villagers saw no car running on Sawauchi's unpaved roads. They were unable to find ways to make money in Sawauchi except earning a few dollars a day through charcoal production in nearby mountains. So many adult males used to go to big cities like Tokyo for temporary jobs before the beginning of winter. It is no wonder, therefore, that few doctors wanted to settle down in Sawauchi, a village where not a few people were too poor to bear medical expenses. When a villager gets sick in winter, he or she had only two options: Just to stand the pain and fever or to be conveyed to the nearest clinic by a wooden snow boat pulled by a couple of men plowing through deep snow. But the latter way took more than ten hours, forcing the patient to endure an uncomfortable ride shivering with cold wind for very long time. Moreover, seeing the doctor itself meant an unbearably heavy financial burden to poor people. It is the infant mortality rate of Sawauchi that eloquently tells how miserable villagers' circumstances were in those days. Needless to say,
infant mortality has been generally viewed as one of the best indices to measure the degree of civilization of a society. The infant mortality rate of today's Japan is 3.2 per mil or per thousand, and that of the US is 7.8 per mil. But that of Sawauchi was as high as 69.6 per mil in 1957 (See Table 2). This means that seven out of one hundred newly born babies died in less than one year since their births. But people were unable even to dream of better life, overwhelmed by extremely heavy snow and steep mountains surrounding them, except one person. It is this exceptional person that changed Sawauchi dramatically. His name was Masao Fukazawa.

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*1998

Source:
Fukazawa has long been viewed as one of trailblazers of Japanese welfare policies. But here I try to see him in a different light. Fukazawa was a director of a Japanese coal mining company in China until the end of the war. Then he returned to his home village eight months after the war to become a rice raising farmer, deeply ashamed that he had contributed to government’s war efforts and crimes, if unintentionally. A few years later, he was invited by a big ship building company, and started to work as a director of the company. But this lucrative job did not keep him long. Four years later, he quit the job and became a farmer again in Sawauchi. He worked very hard on his tiny rice fields, and came to realize how harsh villagers’ life was, though the turbulence caused by Japan’s defeat in the war was over in most part of the country. His talent and high educational background, however, did not go without being noticed in poverty-haunted Sawauchi. City hall, which was desperately looking for a talented administrator who would satisfy with cheap pay, began to persuade him to become the bureau chief of Sawauchi’s education board. Thus, he began to work for the city hall to see various problems of Sawauchi’s primary schools and junior highs such as pupils’ poor nutrition, eye diseases rampant among children, and poorly-lit classrooms. Then he was appointed to the vice mayor, and obtained a big picture of Sawauchi. His resentment towards people’s misery in his municipality was intensified to make him believe that Sawauchi needed to change drastically. Thus he made a decision. In 1957, Fukazawa ran for the mayoral election of Sawauchi and successfully took power. His election platform was very simple: I promise to save villagers’ lives. Seeing a baby dying one after another soon after their birth, Fukazawa was convinced that improving health conditions of villagers had to be given the top priority among municipal programs. But the first thing he did as a mayor was purchasing a bulldozer by squeezing the poor budget of his municipality.

The Japanese imperial army did not even know what a bulldozer was like. Whenever its airfields scattered over Japan and islands floating on the Pacific Ocean were bombed by American planes, the imperial army had to take long time to fix them by human hands and primitive machinery. So bulldozer was an expensive and cutting-edge machine introduced from the United States after the war. Villagers got stupefied, seeing a rattling
bulldozer slowly moving on the unpaved road in front of the city hall. They soon nicknamed Fukazawa “bulldozer mayor” sarcastically. But it did not take long for them to be hit by another surprise, a big surprise with joy. When Sawauchi was covered by snow, the bulldozer started plowing snow on the street. Even after the depth of snow reached ten feet, it continued to clear the main road that connected central Sawauchi and the nearest railroad station that used to be inaccessible to villagers in winter. Sawauchi succeeded in securing traffic to link it with the outside world even in the season of deepest snow for the first time in its history.

Fukazawa’s struggle with snow was intensified next year. He bought another bulldozer and took a lease of a few more. In winter, these bulldozers together shook Sawauchi, clearing snow from roads that connected twenty three villages each other. In terms of traffic, deep snow was perfectly concurred. Villagers were deeply moved and began to change their passive attitude toward their circumstances. They learned that there was a way where there was a will. This was what Fukazawa wanted most to happen while struggling with snow and the tight budget of his municipality. He thought that any of city hall’s efforts would be ineffective unless its citizens had positive attitudes toward their own future. Fukazawa’s effort to cheer up villagers was, therefore, not limited to the battle with snow. For example, he succeeded in increasing Sawauchi’s rice production by using his bulldozers to convert wasteland into fertile rice fields with reliable irrigation canals. No one called him “bulldozer mayor” any more.

The most important effect that Fukazawa pursued through the introduction of bulldozers was, however, to improve the health conditions of villagers. Actually, the clearance of snow from roads and streets enabled the city hall to transport patients to the municipal clinic and distant hospitals all year round. In those days, the city hall used its vans as ambulances in emergency cases. Municipal health promotion nurses, who British people might call district nurses, were able to visit villagers’ homes with pregnant women, babies, patients, and old persons much, much easier than before by motorbikes. And doctors…. Wasn’t the municipal clinic empty? Ironically, the only doctor who worked for the clinic for a few years resigned soon after his first mayoral election, leaving villagers with no doctor at hand again.
Fukazawa strenuously visited large hospitals and medical schools in his region for doctors. Finally, he successfully persuaded professors at the medical school of prestigious Tohoku University, his alma mater, to send a few doctors to Sawauchi. Since then, Sawauchi has never been doctorless anymore. Later, he converted the municipal clinic into a hospital, and built a branch clinic in a village that was distant from the hospital. He also succeeded in obtaining permanent medical supports from a large hospital in the neighboring Akita Prefecture.

The measures mentioned above were only the beginning to Fukazawa. His philosophy was that the core promoter of municipal health programs had to be villagers themselves. Metaphorically speaking, the doctor can not save his patients effectively, if they do not care of themselves and refuse to take prescribed pills. They had to be more motivated to make themselves healthier. Fukazawa expected them to emancipate themselves from superstitious conventions and indifference to their own health conditions by having them acquire at least entry-level hygienic and nutrition knowledge. He expected them to positively take advantage of opportunities and services provided by the city hall. He expected them to spontaneously get involved in municipal programs. And he expected them to be more demanding toward the city hall, encouraging and organizing villagers’ forums. He did not use the word “participation” because using this word in the context of political life was unknown to the Japanese in those days. But the essence of his philosophy was a kind of participatory democracy.

Of course, it was almost unrealistic to expect villagers, especially on an early stage, to spontaneously participate, or get involved, in municipal programs. They needed to be educated to some extent, and offered easy ways to have their voices heard by the municipal government. For these reasons, Fukazawa asked a person from each of Sawauchi’s twenty-three villages to be the public health contact for the village. A village contact was the synapse of communication networks that connected each home and the municipal government including the city-run hospital. First, the contact of a village was expected to convey villagers’ demands, concerns, questions, and opinions to the relevant municipal sections. The second role of a public health contact was to act as an aid for the municipal government in its public health activities at the grass-root level. For example, he or she was
supposed to arrange lectures for villagers at the village community center to learn how to improve early childhood and old persons' hygienic conditions under the guidance of a health promotion nurse sent by the city hall. Then he or she explained municipal hygienic policies and health check programs in plain terms at villagers' gatherings.

Then Fukazawa increased the number of municipal health promotion nurses, and provided motivated girls with scholarship to enter the nursing school of the prefecture. Japan has a long history of health promotion nurse called “hoken-fu” in Japanese. Many of health promotion nurses are related to the Japanese state-run health insurance system, which are implemented by municipalities at the daily-life level. Thus every municipality has its own health promotion nurses. The job duties of a health promotion nurse is wide-ranging from primary healthcare nursing, consultation and advising on health problems, educating people to sharpen their sensitivity toward hygienic and nutrition issues, to activities of visiting nurses. In Sawauchi, Fukazawa required them to play some more roles. He saw them as policy advisers not only in the field of public health but in many other fields because nurses always mingled with villagers and knew many aspects of their life. He respected their opinions not only as suggestions based on their expertise but as feedbacks from ordinary villagers. Needless to say, he well listened to his people’s voices, too. In a sense, he conducted service satisfaction surveys through nurses and city employees. Gatherings of villagers such as those of young mothers organized by municipal nurses in order to increase their hygienic interest and knowledge, on the other hand, may be able to be interpreted as a rudimentary form of neighborhood forum.

On the other hand, Fukazawa set up a public health committee in his government. The committee consisted of Fukazawa himself, a few councilors, municipal officers in charge of public health and welfare programs, doctors of the municipal hospital, some of health promotion nurses and school nurses, and a couple of villagers. The main role of this committee was to discuss Sawauchi’s hygienic problems, public health programs, and related issues, including mayor’s pet policies. Fukazawa used to ask for committee members’ comments on his ideas. The committee also provided policy-makers with learning and training opportunities by inviting
outside experts as instructors and having their own workshops. Then, it kept close relationship with village hygienic contacts to instill its main arguments into villagers.

Japan is not as association-oriented society as the United States. In the early post-war era, associational activities were less common than in nowadays. Still, researchers of the University of Michigan found many associations acting in a small village near Okayama when they conducted intensive research on Japanese rural life in the mid-1950s. Sawauchi was no exception. Fukazawa saw great potential in such associations as women’s associations, organizations for agricultural development, charcoal producers unions, youngsters’ clubs, PTAs, and 4H clubs, and tried to cooperate with them in his efforts to solve Sawauchi’s diverse problems. He also bolstered or created some continuing education groups such as young wives associations. A young wives association consisting of young mothers and expectant mothers had meetings to learn about various subjects like desirable nutrition for babies and children, cooking for better adult diet, entry-level preventive medicine, and writing skills to express their own wishes and opinions. Stimulated by Fukazawa’s initiative, associations and groups in Sawauchi became motivated to engage themselves in more independent activities as well as in tying up with the municipal government. For example, in many hamlets, villagers started to cooperate in enriching their rice fields by introducing better soil massively from surrounding mountains and digging irrigation ditches by themselves. In some villages, groups of young farmers held workshops to learn book keeping and agricultural management, issued tabloids, and traveled to observe advanced agricultural experiments in other prefectures.

In spite of Fukazawa’s efforts, there was still a big obstacle to villagers’ well-being. It was money. Impoverished villagers were not able to become wealthy overnight. It is true that they were covered by the state-run health insurance. But the insurance actually covered only fifty or seventy percent of a medical bill. People tended, therefore, to hesitate to see the doctor, unless they felt very sick. Needless to say, such an attitude could be very serious when patients were babies or old people. Fukazawa decided to remove this obstacle. He persuaded the municipal council to approve his new policy that offered free medical treatment to infants and old people because
they were most vulnerable to diseases. Exactly speaking, the municipal government began to bear the part of medical expenses that the insurance did not cover. Before him, no one hit upon such an idea as the provision of free medical treatment by a local government in Japan. Later, however, most municipalities in Iwate Prefecture followed this experiment of Sawauchi.

This program made young mothers feel much easier to take their babies to the municipal hospital and clinics. The waiting room of the hospital began to be converted into a chatting room for old people with slight illness. Generally speaking, patients have been treated on a first-come-first-served basis in Japan, not being required to have an appointment with the doctor. This is why old people rushed to the hospital and enjoyed chitchats for long time with other patients while waiting his turn in the room. In this way, Fukazawa’s free medical treatment program also played a role of preventive medicine, reducing the number of serious patients.

With Fukazawa’s ideas and leadership, Sawauchi started to change rapidly. The best index of the change was the quick decline of its infant mortality. Fukazawa himself wished to reduce the rate by two thirds in ten years when he was elected to be mayor in 1957. But the pace of its decline was far beyond his expectation. In 1959, the infant mortality of Sawauchi declined to 27.2 per thousand from 69.6 in 1957. Then in 1962, the municipality attained the amazing record of zero. Another good index of Fukazawa’s contribution was the fact that the amount of rice produced in Sawauchi increased by four times in less than a decade. He succeeded in making his villages healthier, wealthier, and brighter, with his excellent leadership, and by encouraging people to participate in municipal programs. No doubt he saved many lives through his administration, though he did not succeed in saving his own life. He died of cancer near the end of his second term at the age of fifty nine. It was January 28, 1965.

I do not mean to idealize Fukazawa too much. Indeed, the rice consumption of average Japanese began to decline around the time when Fukazawa passed away, shadowing the hope of rice farmers in Sawauchi. Many young people moved to urban areas for better jobs, inspired by the high-speed growth of Japanese economy. The population of Sawauchi was over six thousand when Fukazawa was elected as mayor. But it is only four
It is obvious that Fukazawa did not fully understand the profound metamorphosis of the Japanese society that was going on during his mayoralty. Moreover, it was a story of a small, rural municipality when Japan was still on the early stage of its post-war democratization. It is dubious that Fukazawa could have been equally successful in a highly urbanized area of a post-industrial society. We can still derive, however, some lessons from the experiences of Fukazawa’s Sawauchi. First, Fukazawa’s efforts to motivate people in municipal programs not only augmented their human resources such as knowledge and skills but produced social capital by connecting them through various opportunities. In the other hand, Fukazawa’s orientation to the cooperation with local associations contributed to the increase their own social capital by strengthening their activities and ties among their members. As Putnam says, most fundamental to the civic community is the social ability to collaborate for shared interests. This ability is the core of social capital. Fukazawa was certainly a man with leadership. But he could not have improved Sawauchi so quickly, if villagers had not had shared interests and goals with him and among themselves. Fukazawa increased and produced the social capital of Sawauchi without knowing such a notion.

The second lesson is on the combination of leadership and participation. Generally speaking, arguments on participation focus on the side of those who participate and methods to be used. There, the word "leadership” tends to be seen as undesirable because it often conjures up the image of people who are passively led by a superior person. Fukazawa’s case, however, shows that the conciliation between leadership and participation is possible, and even desirable in some cases. It is obvious that Fukazawa had great ability to think outside of the box. With innovative ideas, he reached his goals in a short period. Needless to say, an autocratic leader could enforce people to build a huge structure efficiently, too. But an autocrat could not make his subjects animated and expect them to behave more independently. Fukazawa was the exact opposite of an autocrat. He never advocated his goals in a dictatorial way, but tried to encourage people to involve in his projects, motivating those who were dormant in poverty. He welcomed his subordinates’ ideas, and looked for inputs from people as in the case of his public health committee. His friendly attitude stimulated villagers’ interests.
in their own issues, and increased their participation in meetings and workshops sponsored by the municipality. It may be better for us, therefore, to view him as an excellent mentor or coach rather than a talented leader in some phases.

Third, Fukazawa's unintentional mentorship and his contribution to the increase in social capital brought up many leaders and activists in various fields to later Sawauchi. For example, Fukazawa's successors executed leadership in a respectful way though Sawauchi had been notorious for its sterile political strives before Fukazawa took power. Motivated young farmers mentioned earlier developed innovative methods of rice growing in chilly areas and stimulated the entire Sawauchi. In 1967, one of them acquired the Japan's best rice producer award of the year. Later, some of them went to northeastern China to instruct Chinese people how to improve rice growing, and their leader was nominated to an honor citizen of the province for their great contribution to the region. By inspiring people to get involved in municipal programs, Fukazawa offered a plenty of training grounds for future activists just like settlement houses built in many American cities from the late nineteenth century to the early twenty century provided young workers with plenty of training opportunities, and brought up future social reformers such as Eleanor Roosevelt and public spirited business leaders like Walter Sherman Gifford of AT & T.

Of course, building up social capital and raising participation-oriented people does not necessarily require talented leaders. A small or modest sized group with no clear-cut leadership can also cultivate fertile soil for them. Experiences of I-ida offer a good example. I-ida is a city with about one hundred thousand people in the middle of large Ina Valley that locates in central Japan. Fortunately, it was not bombed during the World War II. But a tragedy hit people of I-ida soon after the war. On a spring day of 1947, a fire that broke out at a corner spread rapidly, blown by strong wind, and burned out three fourths of the city. After this big fire, the city hall divided the city into four parts by two wide firebreaks, one running east and west, and the other from north to south. Those firebreaks were also used as streets, but central parts of them were left unpaved because the traffic need of the city was still small in those days.

Five years later, the principal of Higashi Junior High of I-ida happened to
visit Sapporo, the largest city of Hokkaido Island to see streets lined by trees with flowers. After coming back home, he told his students about beautiful streets of Sapporo, comparing to I-ida’s bleak landscape with the remains of the big fire still seen here and there. He also mentioned a story of a city in Europe that he had read in a book. In that city, streets were lined with apple trees. So streets were flowered in spring and full of apples in fall. The students who listened to him were moved by his story, and became eager to see streets of I-ida lined with trees. Before long, some of them had meetings several times to discuss how to get their streets lined with trees and what kind of trees to be planted, concluding with their decision to plant apple trees in the middle of one of the firebreaks of the city by themselves and to petition the city hall for its permission.

At first, the city hall rejected their petition. Not a few citizens said that students’ plan was unrealistic. But finally their enthusiasm overwhelmed objections. Then they chipped in for their dream, dug holes in the middle of a nearby firebreak removing debris patiently, and planted twenty small apple trees in line. In order to organize care-taking activities for trees such as pruning, disinfection, and fertilization, the student union of Higashi Junior High set up a special standing committee, making it possible for their activities to keep going for long time. Seeing the trees bear flowers next year, various associations such as the junior high’s PTA, the local lions club, and I-ida’s young entrepreneurs’ federation started to help the students and established a joint organization to support their care-taking activities. News papers wrote favorably about their apple-tree line, too. By the time when the trees bore hundreds of fruits after students’ long efforts, the story of their apple-tree line gained even nation-wide popularity. Toward the end of the 1960s, however, the motorization of I-ida made some people hostile to the apple tree line. They loudly demanded that the central part of the firebreak where apple trees were planted be converted into parking space, causing city-wide dispute over the usage of the place of the tree line. Looking at the dispute, the city hall sent questionnaires to its government monitors chosen from citizens, and found that sixty-seven percent of them were against the conversion of the tree-line area into parking space. The city hall decided, therefore, to preserve the line as it was.

What was important was that people’s interest in the tree enhanced by
this dispute expanded to various aspects of city life, directly or indirectly stimulating new associational activities such as the puppet festival promotion committee of I-ida and downtown redevelopment associations as well as traditional ones like PTAs and the lions club of the city. The apple-tree line itself has been enlarged and the whole area of the firebreak with the tree line is being converted into a spacious downtown public park. Today, we see many of city leaders and subleaders of those associations more or less have experiences of getting involved in the creation and preservation of the apple tree line. The present mayor himself was one of the students who planted apple trees in the firebreak half a century ago.

Conclusion

Putnam says that in the successful efforts to establish playgrounds, civic museum, kindergartens, public parks, and the like in the American Progressive Era, an important part of the rationale was to strengthen habits of cooperation, while not stifling individualism\(^{21}\). Generally speaking, the Japanese are not as individualistic as Americans. But the examples of Sawauchi and I-ida tell us that Putnam’s remark on the importance of cooperation experiences is also appropriate to Japan to a great extent.

Whether it is started by a leader or by a voluntary organization, a cooperative activity produces social capital, which in turn is invested in further cooperative and associational activities. In this way, the accumulation of social capital enables a society to pursue shared goals more efficiently and more creatively. In I-ida, cooperation activities by students to make a firebreak lined with trees finally led to the construction of a spacious public park in downtown half a century later. In Sawauchi, Fukazawa led his government with innovative ideas. At the same time, he stimulated lots of cooperative activities, producing social capital abundantly. This combination of ideas and social capital brought significant improvement of the entire municipal life to Sawauchi in a short period.

There is one more lesson worth mentioning here. The fact that Fukazawa dramatically changed Sawauchi through his municipal government suggests that governmental activities can be a good source of social capital. Indeed, the G.I. Bill of the Roosevelt Administration prepared the later massive production of social capital in the United States. It is reasonable, therefore,

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that Putnam attributes high turnout rate in Scandinavian counties to their welfare policies. Of course, building up social capital is often time consuming. In order to prompt public participation, therefore, we need a long perspective of our society as well as inventing practical tools for participation.


(8) Ibid., p. 414.


(10) As for other innovative approaches to citizen participation in Britain, see the following: Birch, Deneiza, *Public Participation in Local Government: A Survey of Local Authorities*, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2002.


(12) Exactly speaking, Sawauchi as an independent municipality ceased to exist in November, 2005. Sawauchi and its neighboring municipality Uta merged into a new Nishi Waga City at that time.


Precisely speaking, patients had to still pay for hospital charge and doctor’s home call. Fukazawa wanted his free medical treatment policy plan to cover these expenses. But feeble fiscal capacity of his village did not allow him to realize his original plan thoroughly. See, Maeda, Nobuo, op. cit., pp. 59-61.


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