

# Towards the Era of a New Sense of Ownership

## - What is Ownership? -

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Today, renewed attention is once again being focused on the concept of “ownership.” First among the points of focus on this concept is the sense of ownership experienced by each individual. Individuals tackle issues and take on tasks based on the idea that they specifically concern that individual, rather than being the concerns of others. Second, the word “ownership” indicates that each individual, as the party responsible for their own life, makes their own decisions regarding the things that concern them, and lives an independent life while receiving the necessary social support. And third, “ownership” indicates the necessity for important decisions to be made from a standpoint that is close to that of the individuals who are intimately involved. Precisely because such matters are intimate concerns of ours, we pay attention to them, and respect their value.

Basing itself on this awareness of the issues, the present study involves interviews with three experts on the subject of ownership. All of the interviewees emphasize the necessity, in resolving numerous social issues, not only for action by the government and experts, but also for the participation of stakeholders including citizens, and the linkage of this with support from companies and other entities. They also point out the necessity for the provision of mechanisms and platforms to promote a new sense of ownership, the enhancement of support systems, and the existence of coordinators to connect the government, citizens, and companies.

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### Shigeki Uno

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Today, renewed attention is being focused on the concept of “ownership.” This term, which refers to each individual’s right to self-determination of their own mind and body – their desire to decide for themselves the things that concern them, has a long history. The concept can be considered to have its origin in ideas developed by the 17th-century thinker John Locke in his *Second Treatise on Government*.

According to Locke, every person has a unique right to his or her own body. It is unique to that person, and not the property of any other person. People work using their own hands and their own bodies. Given this, the work that a person naturally undertakes and the products of that work will also be unique to that person. In this way, Locke established the right of property/ownership as a foundational concept, and considered political society to be organized on the basis of respect for these individual rights of property/ownership.

However, this older concept of “ownership” is today acquiring a new meaning.

### Individual Autonomy

The first element that is emphasized in “ownership” is the autonomy of each individual, and the fact that each individual adopts an attitude of approaching their personal duties with a sense of ownership. The opposite of this, needless to say, is “other peoples’ business.” To the extent that a person feels that they have to do something because an individual in a superior position at work ordered them to do it, or feels that what they have been asked to do is not really their job (but they have no choice but to do it), that person will not be able to actively engage with the task.

By contrast, it is “ownership” to feel that an issue or a mission is “my own business,” and to independently take the initiative in tackling it. It goes without saying that for a diverse range of organizations, including companies, how to cultivate the “ownership” of their personnel or team members is an important consideration.

However, the meaning of “ownership” is not limited to the development and fostering of human resources in companies and similar organizations. We can certainly say that the “outer edge” of the meaning of this word is expanding further.

### Self-Determination and Independent Living

In the text “The Sovereignty of the Situated Subject” (Iwanami Shinsho), co-authored with Shoji Nakanishi, who has promoted the movement for the greater independence of persons with disabilities in Japan, the sociologist Chizuko Ueno indicates that all human beings, (not limited to people with disabilities), have specific needs, and that with the advent of a super-aging society, at some time every one of us will depend on others and will be unable to live without their support. However, such support will not be provided due to the warmth of these others, and still less their charity.

In addition, it is not for others, including experts, to decide the needs of any individual. All individuals have the right to decide what they need, receive the support that they need, and live independently in their particular spaces. Ueno and Nakanishi refer to this as “the sovereignty of the situated subject.”

The “ownership” seen here can be indicated as referring to the right of self-determination and the right to live independently with the necessary support from society possessed by every individual. Beyond this perspective is the ability of each individual to live as a party bearing responsibility for his or her own life. In this sense, the issue of ownership concerns all human beings.

## **Watching-Over and Monitoring by the “Owner”**

A fact of considerable interest is that “ownership” is also sometimes discussed in the context of criticism of the modern financial system. For example, in *What They Do With Your Money*, Stephen Davis, et al argue that the market will return again to its point of origin – “ownership.”

What stands out in the modern market is the extreme short-term orientation of market actors, multilayered fiduciary capitalism with many layers of financial intermediaries, and the use of financial derivatives. As a result, the connection between the owner and the company owned by the owner is weakened, and important decisions are made by people who are neither owners nor stakeholders.

We can contrast a situation of this type, in which the relationship between the owner and the object of ownership becomes excessively complicated and the connection between the two is weakened, potentially leading to circumstances in which no-one takes responsibility, with one in which, precisely because the individual is the “owner,” that person pays sufficient attention to the situation, treats it seriously, and considers long-term consequences.

Whether a company or another type of organization, unless there is an entity that watches over and monitors it as its “own,” that organization’s value will not be truly respected. If we think in this way, we can see that reducing the distance between the owner and the object of ownership may also be an important factor for “ownership.”

## **A New Sense of Ownership**

The burgeoning of this new sense of ownership could potentially see it having a wide range of applications.

The questions to be asked here are as follows: what should we do to encourage large numbers of individuals to turn towards the resolution of a diverse range of social issues with a sense of ownership? Will it be possible for every individual to live independent lives while receiving the necessary social support until the last moment of the lives? And can individuals make a range of decisions in their social setting from a standpoint even somewhat closer to the standpoint of those who have a strong relationship with the object of that decision? The ultimate goal is to build a society in which all individuals can live as the parties responsible for their own lives.

In the study presented here, we conducted interviews with three experts based on the awareness of the issues involved outlined above. All three of our interviewees have in common the fact that they practice activities in their respective organizations with a focus on “ownership,” and with a particular emphasis on relationships with diverse regions of Japan.

## **Regional Planning and Ownership in a Mature Society**

Yuki Uchida, Senior Director of RE:PUBLIC INC., has been involved in regional planning projects in Brazil and other regions around the world, following graduate-level studies in sustainable city design in Italy. She tells us here that she realized in these projects that a typical urban design process in which industry experts are expected to drive results was not adequate to the task; it was the moment that local residents themselves gained a sense of ownership or involvement through continuous dialogue and spoke about the future of their own city in their own words, that projects began to display significant forward momentum.

While top-down urban planning may have been possible in an era in which both economic and population growth were taken for granted, there is no generally-applicable urban planning model for mature societies today. Importantly, Ms. Uchida points out that it is desirable for a variety of actors, including local residents, to conduct experimental practices in their respective regions. Recently, Ms. Uchida has continued her activities in Fukuoka City and Fukui City. Ms. Uchida’s comment that “I feel that through XSCHOOL [a Fukui-based incubation program being conducted by Ms. Uchida’s company], a more public ownership that transcends individuals and projects is being nurtured” is particularly noteworthy.

## **Ownership by Local Residents and Cooperation Between Government and Companies**

Following the Great East Japan Earthquake, Mr. Retz Fujisawa of RCF, a general incorporated association, conducted surveys in relation to the provision of support for reconstruction, planned projects, and coordinated related parties. What he became aware of

at that time was that the fact that only the government could provide public services for reconstruction from the earthquake and to address other social issues represented a limitation. As a coordinator of social projects, RCF has therefore been actively working to realize well-balanced cooperation between government aid efforts and mutual assistance involving residents, bringing together initiatives instituted by the government and initiatives organized by the private sector (residents, companies, NPOs, etc.).

Mr. Fujisawa considers that what is important in his role as a coordinator of social projects is connecting the needs of the government with regard to the provision of support to residents and the needs of companies that are willing to provide support. Governments cannot focus all of their aid efforts on specific regions, and companies are not able to respond to requests for assistance in every region. His indication that this generates the necessity for a coordinator to connect the government, local residents, and businesses is suggestive. Mr. Fujisawa also points out that “community ownership,” involving residents voluntarily engaging in reconstruction-related activities, is an important key to the provision of support for reconstruction.

## **Towards a Society to Which Everyone Can Contribute**

At the time of our interview, Emi Yoneda was a Director of the Japan Professional Football League (J.League). In addition to being active as a Certified Public Accountant, she is a qualified childcare worker, and was involved in establishing a home healthcare center before she became a J.League Director. Since its inception, J.League has emphasized collaboration with local communities in concert with its football business. This is based on a belief that rather than simply conducting initiatives on the club side, involvement with the community would lead to new business development by deepening relationships with participants and collaborators in the activities. The examples that Ms. Yoneda provides of the realization of community education through the creation of employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and the provision of school meals via clubs’ participation in agricultural activities, are very interesting.

Ms. Yoneda explains that a particular environment and individual capabilities are necessary in order to more readily move forward in resolving social issues – it is necessary for large numbers of people to have the sense that they can also contribute in addition to those who have a particularly strong commitment to the subject in question. The challenge is to increase the number of people with a sense of ownership in all regions and all domains, and to transform activities in which J.League clubs are the focus into activities in which local people are the focus. Taking into consideration Ms. Yoneda’s indication of the necessity for human resources able to communicate across the boundaries between entities such as clubs, companies, governments, and NPOs, we will have much to learn from her interview in this study.

## The Potential of a Sense of “Ownership”

As we have seen above, the concept of “ownership,” which is today attracting renewed attention, is rich in possibility. In attempting to resolve numerous social issues without leaving the initiative to governments, how do we connect the participation of related parties such as residents with support provided by companies and other entities? The key is a strong sense of ownership that is shared by all parties. The important thing is that individuals feel that something is not “other people’s business,” but rather “my own business”; as a result, they will take the issue seriously and seek to contribute to the degree that they are able. Fostering this consciousness in all domains of society will be the key to ensuring that each individual is the party responsible for their own lives.

To that end, it will be essential to create mechanisms and platforms that more readily encourage a sense of ownership, enhance support systems, and ensure the existence of coordinators that connect governments, residents, and companies. Only with a foundation of this type will a new sense of “ownership” develop. Here we see powerful intimations of new possibilities for Japanese society.

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#### Shigeki Uno

Professor Uno is an Executive Vice President of the Nippon Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA) and a professor in The University of Tokyo’s Institute of Social Science. He completed a Ph.D. in Law and Politics from the Graduate School of Law and Politics of The University of Tokyo. Professor Uno specializes in the history of Western political thought and political philosophy. He took his present position following terms in positions including as an Assistant Professor in Chiba University’s Faculty of Law and Economics. He has conducted research on democratic politics in the United States, France, and Japan, centering on the thinker Alexis de Tocqueville. Professor Uno is involved in community activities in the Okinoshima Islands, Kamaishi City, and Fukui Prefecture. He received the 2007 Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities for his book *Tokubiru – Byoudou to fubyoudou no rironka* (“Tocqueville – Theorist of Equality and Inequality”) (Kodansha Academic Bunko, 2019 (Revised and expanded edition)).

# Towards Co-Envisioning and Co-Creation With Citizens

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**Yuki Uchida**

Senior Director, RE:PUBLIC INC.

I grew up in Fukui City, Fukui Prefecture, a medium-sized city with a population of about 260,000. Fukui City is a place where manufacturing takes place on a range of scales, from the manufacturing of traditional craft items like washi paper, blades and lacquerware, to manufacturing for the textile, mechanical, and chemical industries.

Based on multiple surveys, Fukui Prefecture is said to be the region of Japan where residents are the 'happiest.' On paper, this is seemingly a gratifying fact, but I personally had the impression that many residents didn't fully appreciate the city for what it was. I think there are two reasons for this contradiction. The first is that it can be difficult for citizens to recognize their situation when they are so embedded in a place. The other reason is that in these surveys, "happiness" is often measured based on objective, quantitative data (such as the number of hospitals per capita), rather than on people's subjective feelings. So in 2019, a group of newspapers and volunteers launched a project to research the subjective status of "happiness" of the prefecture's citizens, and I joined in.

I studied urban planning and architecture at university in Tokyo. Visiting several cities made me realize the multiple layers that a city is composed of. A city's foundation is the terrain that was formed over centuries. Humans then constructed buildings and roads on top of the land. Finally, the physical infrastructure is interlaced with soft infrastructure that includes industries, culture, and community. I think any city is made up of these three major layers; as these features intertwine and blend, they form a culture that is unique to the place. I was drawn to the appeal of cities as this type of living organism, and became interested in spurring creativity via the city.

I worked for a media company after my studies, but eventually enrolled at a graduate school in Italy to explore my vision of an autonomous and creative city. With Italy as my starting point, I also lived in Chile, Brazil, and Vietnam, where I was involved in regional planning projects with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, UNESCO, and other institutions.

## Envisioning and Creating a Future Together

There's a particular experience that I had in a small city in the state of Parana, Brazil, that left a lasting impression. As an intern for the state government, I was introducing a UN Sustainable City Assessment program to the state. Despite the fact that

the program was being conducted under the aegis of the state government, when it was proposed to local residents, they had countless questions – “Who will run it?,” “How will you get the money,” etc. To my surprise, there was also strong opposition to the program. I realized then that even the best program proposals may not be accepted by local residents unless they have a sense of ownership or involvement.

As a member of a graduate school team, I also lived in a small city in Parana, launching a regional project with local NGOs, government administrations, and citizens of all ages. Through daily discussions, I witnessed the residents gradually coming to talk about the future of the city in their own words; their perspectives and visions for the city steadily evolved. Even after we left the city, the program that had been proposed continued to develop autonomously through the involvement of the citizens.

What I experienced in Brazil was not a typical urban design process in which industry experts are expected to drive results. Rather, it was a design process that involving “co-envisioning and co-creation” directly with citizens; we envisioned and created a desired future together.

Through these experiences, I realized that when citizens have ownership over their city, a city has the potential to autonomously grow and evolve. This realization significantly impacted my perspective towards my work as an urbanist. It was an era where top-down urban planning was the dominating narrative: an urban plan was predicated on economic and population growth. Yet, today, we live in a different era, where many societies have become mature, no longer having any “plan” to adhere to. As a result, citizens with a diverse range of perspectives are now the main actors in driving urban development in their respective cities. Local residents are transforming their cities through experimental practices.

## **Citizen Ownership Transforms a City**

Once back in Japan, I became one of the founders of a company called RE:PUBLIC INC. The name “RE:PUBLIC” references our underlying goal to reshape the public sphere. As a “think-and-do tank,” we aim to research and design an environment that spurs innovation by connecting the private, public, and academic sectors and citizens.

The first project that we worked on was a Fukuoka City project called “Innovation Studio Fukuoka.” Under the theme “Citizen ownership transforms the city,” we designed a business incubation program that took into account the local assets of Fukuoka City. This project later became the primary program that led a national initiative, the “National Strategic Special Zone for Global Start-ups.” Putting Fukuoka citizens at the center, we planted seeds for social innovation. We first derived themes to improve the quality of life of the citizens, such as redesigning the social boundaries encountered by children with disabilities, and proposed potential businesses. We also exchanged local knowledge and insights with other countries, having collaborated with the Danish Design Center. I am confident that this exchange with Denmark, a high-level welfare state, was crucial, and gave



us the opportunity to assess the social systems and cultural contexts of each country.

Currently, I am working on a project in Fukui City, my hometown. As regional revitalization efforts progressed in a variety of locations, I witnessed a range of stakeholders mobilize to implement well-designed policies in areas with small populations across the world. Yet in Japan, experimental social innovation initiatives were being conducted mainly in large cities like Tokyo, Osaka, and Fukuoka City. There were not as many initiatives in medium-sized cities with populations of between 100,000 and 300,000, although these smaller cities play a crucial role in connecting larger cities and rural areas. I truly believed that medium-sized cities offered valuable histories, cultures, and industries that together, create a rich agglomeration of treasures. Much like smaller cities in Europe, I felt that the social and physical structures in our cities could drastically improve if medium-sized cities in Japan had a greater presence.

My colleagues at RE:PUBLIC and I therefore recognized the potential of medium-sized cities, and eventually proposed the make.fUKUI PROJECT. Funded by Fukui City, RE:PUBLIC formed a partnership with Fukui Shimbun Co., Ltd, a local publishing company, and brought together designers from Fukui and beyond. The project commenced in 2016 under the theme “Transcending regions: generating a flow of people and jobs.” Currently, we are continuing our activities as “XSCHOOL” and “XSEMI,” which we define as classrooms for the next generation of designers. We use designers as a broad term that includes the designers of projects and initiatives.

## Initiatives in a Medium-Sized City

XSCHOOL is an incubation program that explores Fukui's culture, regional features, and industries, enabling participants to create projects while gaining insights into social contexts. Individuals with unique skill-sets are recruited from all over the country and grouped with Fukui residents who are deeply involved in local industries. They gather in Fukui, or sometimes online, once a month to discuss and prototype social initiatives while sharing their diverse perspectives.

Each team is composed of individuals with diverse backgrounds, ranging from designers and architects to editors, nursery teachers, and academic researchers. Over the course of four months, each team plants the seeds for a new social innovation project in Fukui, with hopes of eventually bringing the project to fruition. I believe that what is important is to project a future in which people from different backgrounds can bring together their cultures and engage in a process of co-envisioning. Through these programs, we would place a heavy emphasis on creating a shared vision for the future of a regional community.

In fiscal year 2018, the third year of this project, we positioned Fukui's most important industry, textile manufacturing, as a starting point for exploration. When a local industry is used as a point of entry, the city is seen from a completely different angle. For example, we are able to consider the history and narrative behind the rise of the industry, and

other regional specificities that keep the industry running. In addition, the final presentation of the program attracted many residents within Fukui and audiences from outside the prefecture. A program like XSCHOOL is open and inter-disciplinary, inviting stakeholders that include design researchers, representatives of new company business divisions, local employees, students, and more.

Three years have passed since XSCHOOL was created, and I've witnessed how local businesses and residents who were initially keeping the program at arm's length have now become leaders of the program. The seeds of projects planted by XSCHOOL have come to fruition in various forms; whether it's through the launch of new businesses or the establishment of new departments within companies. Furthermore, the number of team members who have relocated to Fukui to live or work has increased.

There have been numerous positive outcomes from our program, but I think that the most important one is the program's ability to foster a community that learns and practices together. In 2018, individuals involved in XSCHOOL quickly responded to the heavy snowfalls in the Hokuriku region, when it was difficult for the government administration to implement measures. I feel that XSCHOOL is nurturing public ownership of cities that transcends individuals and projects.

In an increasingly complex society, it will become more important for diverse people to bring their knowledge and experiences together to transcend organizational frameworks. We must form collective networks, envision a future and realize the future together. I also recognize how the democratization of technology is expanding the means for realization of these visions. I want to continue to cultivate the platform I built to enact a variety changes in our manufacturing landscape, social systems, and regional networks.

\* This interview was conducted in February 2019. In fiscal year 2020, XSCHOOL is expanding its themes to explore public domains such as community medicine.



**Yuki Uchida**

Ms. Uchida is a Senior Director at RE:PUBLIC INC. She was born in Fukui Prefecture, and graduated from the Department of Architecture, School of Creative Science and Engineering, Waseda University. After her time at Recruit Holdings Co., Ltd., in 2012 she pursued her graduate-level studies in Sustainable City Design at the University of Ferrara in Italy. She has been involved in regional planning projects in Italy, Brazil, Chile and Vietnam. In 2012, she participated in an internship program conducted by a state government in Brazil, and was involved with the United Nations Sustainable City Alliance project. She also participated in the founding of RE:PUBLIC INC. in 2013. At RE:PUBLIC, she plans and manages urban business creation programs, and works with regions, companies and universities to build cross-sectoral innovation ecosystems. She is the Program Director for XSCHOOL, a classroom for the next generation of designers. Ms. Uchida is also a "Regional Revitalization Evangelist" for the Japanese Cabinet Office and a jury member for the Good Design Awards.

# Fostering Regional Ownership

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## Retz Fujisawa

Representative Director, RCF

RCF was established in April 2011 as a research organization to assist in earthquake disaster reconstruction, and is currently continuing its activities as a “reconstruction and social project coordinator,” responsible for planning reconstruction projects and coordinating related parties. We are promoting regional revitalization projects with more than 10 companies, including major beverage manufacturers and foreign finance companies, more than 30 affected prefectures and municipalities, and related ministries and agencies.

## Social Projects That Fill Administrative Gaps

The limitation, both quantitative and qualitative, represented by the fact that it is only the government that is responsible for the implementation of public services in response to various social issues, such as reconstruction following an earthquake, are becoming apparent. As a result, there is an increasing need to bring together efforts implemented by the private and civil sectors, including residents, companies and NPOs. As a social project coordinator, RCF is therefore conducting its activities with the creation of a forum for cooperation that will establish a healthy balance between government assistance and mutual assistance involving residents, and the provision of support for maintaining this forum, as its mission.

A community support project in Kamaishi City, Iwate Prefecture, provides a concrete example of RCF’s activities. Following the Great East Japan Earthquake, RCF thought that it was necessary for there to be an entity able to provide community support in close cooperation with residents, and proposed the formation of a local coordinator group that would connect residents and the government. The coordinator team maintained close contact with the residents of the area, and was involved in the revival of the Kamaishi Sakura Festival and organizing the operation of on-demand buses for people with mobility difficulties.

Taking advantage of this project experience, we proposed similar initiatives in Futaba and Okuma, towns in Fukushima Prefecture from which all residents were forced to evacuate due to the Fukushima nuclear disaster. 10 staff members provided support for evacuees from each town. In these cases, we utilized the reconstruction support staff system promoted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications to realize the projects in consultation with each municipal administration. In Fukushima, public housing was built to assist in reconstruction in different parts of the prefecture, and it was predicted that evacuees from a variety of areas of the prefecture would gather in these housing areas. We therefore

thought that we needed supporters to support community formation in each area of public housing. We solved financial problems by introducing Reconstruction Agency systems, and assisted Fukushima Prefecture in establishing a project.

We currently have 100 supporters for each 5,000 houses, and we are promoting efforts to encourage interaction between evacuees at each location.

Regional coordinators are also playing an active role in realizing the goal of reconstruction in Uwajima City, which suffered large-scale agricultural damage due to heavy rains in western Japan in 2018. Using the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications' "Community-building Business Persons" system<sup>1</sup>, we are having RCF partner companies dispatch human resources to Uwajima City. Registered at the city hall, the dispatched personnel facilitate cooperation between each of the organizations conducting activities in the area, and have also established an NPO center to function as the core of private sector activities in promoting the reconstruction of lives. The center coordinates outside support groups, citizens, disaster-affected farmers, and administrations within the region, provides support for the formulation of reconstruction plans, and promotes businesses with a view towards collaboration with companies outside the prefecture.

In addition, in fiscal 2017, in collaboration with Bunkyo-ku in Tokyo, we started the "*Kodomo-Takushoku* (Delivering Meals to Children) Project,"<sup>2</sup> which delivers food to low-income households. The aim of this project is to connect directly with the people involved and provide individual support by means of delivering food. The government and support groups in multiple regions are responsible for the procurement and delivery of food, and, in cooperation with social workers, we also provide individual support for the needs of each household.

Further to this, the "Japan Association of New Public,"<sup>3</sup> a federation of social enterprises and business-oriented NPOs that RCF was involved in establishing, supports a wide range of regions in cooperation with major companies, ministries and agencies, and local governments. Bringing together NPOs with business potential among other entities, this federation utilizes strategies such as making policy proposals to political parties and utilizing dormant deposits in order to address themes including child poverty, international development and cooperation, human resources, social careers, and social finance.

## **Six Processes for Fostering Regional Ownership**

What is important in the role of a social project coordinator is to connect the needs of the government in relation to the support of residents with the needs of companies that are willing to provide support. It is difficult for the government to focus on specific regions, and companies cannot respond to requests for support in all regions. Given this, there is a role that can only be fulfilled by coordinators that understand the three relevant parties: government, local residents, and companies. In addition, because our reconstruction projects will take more than five years, but staff from the local administrations will be replaced in

around two years, it is necessary for the coordinators to fulfill specialized functions in the provision of support for those affected by the disaster over the longer-term. The RCF also emphasizes the role of looking at overall regional support in a well-balanced manner, including the use of government agencies' support systems such as the Cabinet Office's Support for Regional Revitalization Human Resources system.

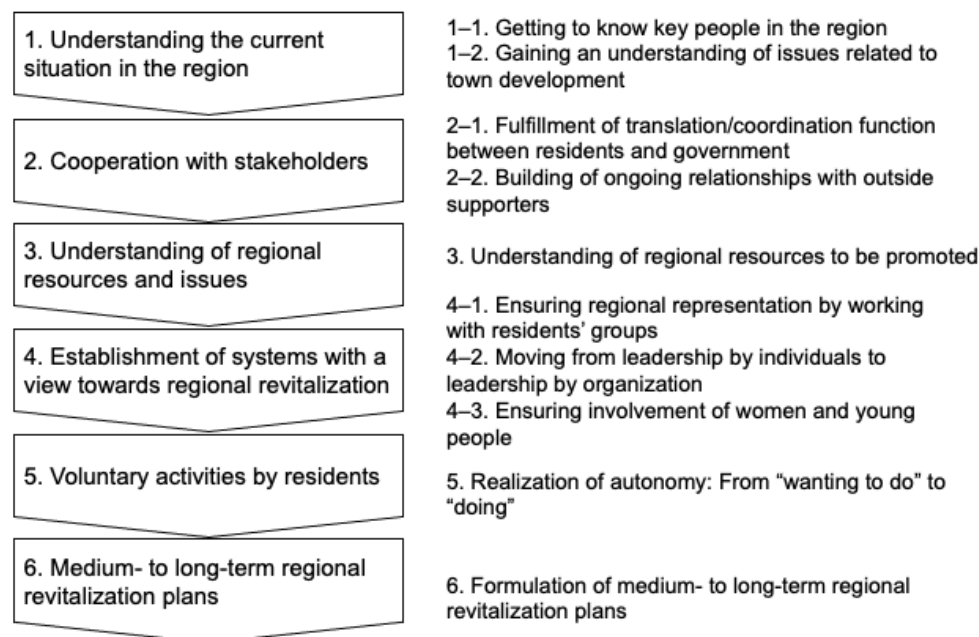
“Regional ownership,” meaning that residents voluntarily involve themselves in the provision of support for reconstruction, is an important key to reconstruction support activities. Regional ownership is fostered through the following six processes, in which coordinators are involved: 1) Gaining an understanding of the local situation; 2) Collaborating with stakeholders; 3) Gaining an understanding of local resources and issues; 4) Establishing systems looking towards the promotion of the region; 5) Involvement of residents in voluntary activities; 6) Medium- to long-term regional revitalization plans.

In attempting to grasping the issues involved in town and city development, it is important to establish relationships that promote discussion of that development in everyday conversation, by learning about the relationships of local residents, listening to the opinions of diverse people using 5W1H in order to deepen understanding of their lives, and asking wide-ranging questions. As a result of this process, we fulfill our translation and coordination function between the local residents and the government and build ongoing relationships with outside supporters, and this allows us to gain an understanding of the regional resources that we should be promoting.

With regard to gaining an understanding of stakeholders, it is important to build a relationship with the region by first building relationships of trust with key people in the region, and to think about things from the same perspective as the locals. However, this does not necessarily mean that the coordinators ingratiate themselves with the local people.

In conducting support activities, it is important to ensure regional representation via the involvement of residents' organizations. It is desirable to promote consensus-building with local community organizations such as town planning NPOs, town planning meetings, and self-governing bodies playing a central role. An organization that works together with local residents to ensure that resident organizations are provided with mechanisms enabling broad resident participation and to enable decision-making processes to be shared is also necessary. In discussions regarding medium- to long-term reconstruction and town development, we need community participation and diversity rather than speed, and it is therefore necessary to aim to ensure that this community organization is able to exercise sufficient leadership.

## Six Processes for Fostering Regional Ownership



In advancing decision-making and orienting policy in relation to reconstruction and town development activities, it is also necessary to involve women and young people in order to realize diversity and ensure that there is not a bias towards older men in the sources of administrative information. When residents' organizations that involve diverse actors understand the needs of local residents, comprehensively support the planning and implementation of town development projects, and share experiences of success, residents begin to take autonomous action towards reconstruction. The coordinators are involved in the formulation of a medium- to long-term regional revitalization plan by sharing the consultation schedule with the government and determining points of compromise.

In the area of disaster recovery, there is an increasing need for social project coordinators to promote cooperation between the government, residents, and the private sector, and to provide support for smooth project implementation. Although NPOs still possess a low level of influence, it is necessary to increase their expertise in order to enable them to play a part in this process. To that end, I believe that it will be important for Japan as a whole to make efforts in the development of human resources in order to ensure that expert NPO staff member or support specialist can be selected as a career path.



### Retz Fujisawa

Mr. Fujisawa was born in Kyoto in 1975. Following graduation from Hitotsubashi University, he worked at McKinsey & Company. Leaving this position, he operated a consulting company specializing in NPOs and social work. After the Great East Japan Earthquake, he established the RCF Reconstruction Support Team (Currently known as RCF).

### Note

<sup>1</sup> A program in which local governments accept employees of private-sector companies, etc., and utilize their expertise and knowledge in projects that lead to the enhancement of the attractiveness and value unique to the region.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the official *Kodomo-Takushoku* homepage <<https://kodomo-takushoku.jp/>>

<sup>3</sup> Refer to the official website of the Japan Association of New Public  
<https://www.shinkoren.or.jp/>

# PUBLIC Issues? Let Us Engage With Them as OURS

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**Emi Yoneda**

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Translated from an original article in Japanese based on an interview conducted in 2019.

## The History of J.League and its New Challenges

Since its establishment in 1991, J.League has expanded to encompass 55 clubs as of the 2019 season. The characteristic of the J.League organization that differs somewhat from normal business organizations is that it pursues competitiveness and the social good as missions in addition to striving for business success. “Promoting a rich sports culture and contributing to the healthy development of minds and bodies,” is one of the philosophies J.League formulated at its inception, and something that the league’s first Chairman, Saburo Kawabuchi, often emphasized as its founding principle. In accord with this principle, “Creating clubs that are integral members of the local community (including conducting activities that make a social contribution),” has been incorporated into the J.League rules, and is an obligation for every club. A 2018 aggregation of results for activities conducted indicates that all 55 clubs together have conducted more than 20,000 hometown activities.

In addition, upon its 25th anniversary, the league launched a brand called “Sharen!,” named with the league’s commitment to becoming the professional football league with the world’s highest level of camaraderie with local communities in mind. “Sharen!” (a coined word combining the concepts “Social” and “Cooperation”) is defined as collaborative social activities in which three or more parties collaborate in addressing shared social issues such as health, child-raising, lifestyles, diversity, work styles, and town development. Under the slogan “J.League wo Tsukaou,” the league is seeking to contribute to regional areas by optimally making use of its strengths in local communities. The essence of the slogan is to encourage communities to make J.League a platform for the enhancement of community engagement. It means “Let’s make the best of use of J.League.” The slogan’s underlying message is “J.League is for you, with you and for your community.”

Sports have a power to communicate due to a passion and fire that attracts people, in addition to a power to connect people. Clubs also have the ability to create plans to ensure that people enjoy themselves (a type of ability to entertain) and possess a diverse range of sports-related expertise. For example, in relation to the theme of improving the health of local people, club coaches have commenced activities to provide conditioning programs in



collaboration with local governments and companies using a scheme called social impact bonds. In this case, the clubs' expertise, power to communicate and brand identity are their strengths. They are also able to make use of "relationship capital" with the local community.

## The Meaning of Cooperation

Sports organizations have very rich ecosystems, and they are managed with great importance being placed on building relationships with the local community, including local governments. Around the organizations there are huge groups of fans and supporters, volunteers, sponsors and partner companies, in addition to related media. There are some clubs that share their values with large numbers of these affiliated individuals and entities, and which are able to put "Sharen!" into practice, increasing their influence. Clubs are organized as incorporated companies, but taking into consideration their ecosystem in the regions in which they are present, the clubs represent a public good. As entities that exist between the public and private sectors, they provide a space for activity in areas that are difficult for either the public or private sectors to tackle by themselves, and I want them to make good use of this feature.

Working in cooperation with a variety of people and organizations to address common issues in a region promotes the sustainability of that region. Clubs owe their existence to their regional communities. The transaction is not simply one-way; club activities make a return to their communities as a variety of forms of capital. Engagement with participants and collaborators in activities is deepened, mutual strengths and *raison d'être* are recognized, and this may expand into the development of a business or other initiative.

Up to the point of the launch of "Sharen!," club staff had been working their hardest with only a small number of people available, and while I talk about "cooperation," most club activities were conducted exclusively with the government or sponsor companies. I felt that there was room to expand the scope and quality of club activities. In addition, despite the fact that clubs were conducting projects with a high level of social benefit, it was sometimes difficult to perceive the theme, or information only reached people who were familiar with the club. I felt that if many more people knew about club activities, even people with no interest in club football or sports, the number of club followers would increase. Therefore, "Sharen!" stipulated that social themes should be clearly established and that activities should be conducted by at least three organizations. In doing so, the aim was to improve the quality of activities and the scope in which activities were conducted.

For example, many clubs were already involved with the agricultural sector, which is strongly rooted in specific regions. Stalls would sometimes be set up at stadiums, and in other cases, youth team members would grow agricultural products. In addition to these, there are now also initiatives such as working together with the agricultural sector in order to provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities, combining away supporter tourism with agriculture in order to create a population with a relation to the sector, and providing

school meals in cooperation with local governments as “community education.”

## **Increasing the Number of People Involved is the Path to Enriching Japan**

What was important when Sharen! was launched was to make it open and non-hierarchical. We made it possible for anyone to make proposals for plans on the “Sharen!” website 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. I myself have pursued my career with the desire to increase the number of people who have a sense of “ownership.” As divisions emerge and strains proliferate and become increasingly diverse in all domains – throughout the nation as a whole, between Tokyo and regional areas, between the elderly and young people, and between genders – increasing the number of human resources able to act based on the recognition that problems are theirs rather than someone else’s will be extremely important not only for the resolution of social issues in Japan, but also in the context of regional revitalization. Given this, it is very important that we create environments that allow the appropriate human resources to play an active role. It is also the case that involvement in these types of initiatives tends to be biased towards people with awareness of specific issues, but rather than this I thought that we needed an environment in which anyone could act when they wanted to support someone.

The slogan “J.League wo Tsukaou!” (“J.League is for you, with you, for your community”) was established to function as a means of giving people the feeling that they can also make a contribution, and allows them to more readily take a step forward. The aim is to transform activities in which the main actor is “the club” into activities in which the main actors are “members of the local community”. With regard to agricultural issues, as mentioned above, members of the general public also make proposals on the theme of food loss, among other activities.

By setting common goals and conducting activities together, relationships are created between collaborators and a community is formed. It is my hope that the feeling of contribution, the feeling that everyone can be useful to others, will make people more confident, that their growth will be accompanied by a sense of self-affirmation, and that this will lead to the formation of an attachment to the city, a sense of purpose in life, and a feeling of pride. Involvement in projects that are strongly focused on social benefit revitalizes the beneficiaries and is a source of pride for the participants. If the number of people involved increases, I think that we will be able to create a society of mutual assistance. That is the world that “Sharen!” aims for. When they turn to providing support, people who are usually the recipients of support experience a greater sense of self-affirmation because they are helping others, and we would like to work on this aspect as well. I believe that the creation of a variety of roles and spaces in which diverse people can be involved is also an important mission for J.League.

As this indicates, clubs within J.League have a communication function that creates “triggers for involvement,” and a community function that connects people. A sense of

collectivity that allows people to create together is also among the league's assets. Because of this, J.League is highly compatible with the realization of an increased sense of community ownership. Although the clubs are the main fields of activity, it will be necessary for the league to take on a hub function as a platformer, for example by disseminating information and sharing expertise. It has already commenced an initiative to enable people in Tokyo to work in ways that involve them with regional communities and clubs.

I feel that the challenge in moving forward is that there is a lack of tri-sector human resources able to promote mutual understanding between entities such as clubs, companies, government, and NPOs. It will be important to develop and secure human resources who have experience in different sectors. This is also an area in which business development is difficult, and I think that it will be necessary for the government to incorporate this type of human resource development and community formation perspective into its policies. I also believe that companies giving their employees the experience of facing real regional issues through temporary transfers or participation in projects would represent an excellent form of human resource development. Individuals may face high hurdles in changing jobs, but I think that there are various other options available, such as getting involved in ones' local area or the city in which one lives on a project basis, or getting involved in pro bono work or a side job. It would be wonderful if we could increase the number of smiling faces everywhere together with people who want to improve their region.



**Emi Yoneda (From the J.League website)**

Born in 1984, Ms. Yoneda is a Certified Public Accountant and a former Director of J.League. She joined Ernst & Young ShinNihon LLC in 2004, and was responsible for conducting audits and formulating management advisories for a variety of industries. Ms. Yoneda graduated from the Keio University Faculty of Economics in 2006. In 2013, she left her employment and co-founded Chiyeya Co., Ltd., an organizational development partner. In addition to being the Director of the Yoneda Certified Public Accounting Office, she is a qualified nursery school teacher, and was involved in establishing a home healthcare center. She was a J.League Fellow in 2017, and a J.League Director from April 2018 to March 2020. In this capacity, she was responsible for social cooperation and organizational development. The interview from which this text was edited was conducted during the time Ms. Yoneda was a J.League board member.