

Landscape Management and Educational Programs for Citizens

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ABSTRACT

Regional development and community design has become very important these days. Especially in Hyogo Prefecture after the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake, voluntary works have become more popular. With citizen participation, environmental circumstances change a lot. It is becoming very difficult for municipal governments alone to achieve every desirable project.

NPOs made of professional members in the Hanshin area have conducted notable activities after the earthquake. At the same time it is necessary also to educate citizens for community design with greenery. These people will support their town design along with professionals.

Awaji Landscape and Horticulture Planning Academy provides an excellent educational program, an introduction and examination of which should be valuable. The main concept of the education program is to foster the growth of local community design leaders. Students appreciated the programs very much even if initially they expected a more practical program about planting than programs that teach community design.

Many people are active in their own towns to create better environments and communities. The network system "Alpha Green-Net" is functional to support graduates of the course. In the future these educational programs for citizens will become very important. Other cities are starting to have their own programs, but they are still very short term.

"Alpha Green-Net" is in the process of growing. Many members are very keen to develop their own abilities. In the future these NPOs should become independent. To help these NPOs become independent and active the educational programs should consider and teach about how to do this more in the future.

Key Words : Landscape management, Educational programs, Citizen participation, Open space, Parks

I. CURRENT ISSUES FOR THE BETTERMENT OF REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

We should think about not only the global environment but also natural resources and the communities of our towns. The current popularity of gardening started as a personal hobby boom but it

has also led to people having greater concern about their townscapes and surrounding environments. In response to this trend the roles of municipal governments are also changing.

Due to economic hard times and a surge in volunteer activities, citizen participation has changed the way of traditional government-led environmental development. Agreement between

government and citizens for decision-making in various kinds of work and the running and management of facilities voluntarily are becoming indispensable aspects of regional development.

Maintenance and promotion of city parks and open space and the improvement of public space, including privately owned space, are very important. It has become more difficult to create, preserve, and promote such open spaces only with government resources. It has been a while since the ability of the government to manage and maintain public spaces reached its limit.

1. Need to Create and Preserve Greenery Contributing to Environmental Improvement through Citizen Participation

Under the above conditions, people started to realize the need to create and preserve greenery as a means of contributing to environmental improvement through citizen participation. The Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake hit Hyogo Prefecture in 1995 causing extensive damage. To recover from this, community development through citizen participation was increasingly encouraged. Some programs, however, including one in Mano in Kobe, were already underway even before the Earthquake.

As for park planning, citizens participating in a workshop at Kamisawa Street in the Hyogo Ward of Kobe made efforts to create open space covered with greenery. Local residents, experts and members of non-profit organizations supported it.

After the Earthquake many landscape architects have banded together, building networks to start up NPOs including Hanshin Green Net, Donguri Net, and Flowers Planted in Rubble.

2. The Work of NPOs

These NPOs supported many regional movements, especially the Hanshin Green Net, which greatly helped to improve the environment of temporary houses through the distribution of flowerpots and other improvement. This and other NPOs also planted hedges of private houses, developed small parks and community gardens (Figure 1) and advised citizens on gardening and horticulture.

Voluntary activities face many difficult challenges such as defining individual and group responsibilities, staying on top of the amount of work, and the continuation of the organizations



Figure 1. Hanshin Green Net made a small community garden

themselves. The variety of volunteers' skills might bring up difficulties in continuity of work and in evaluating whether and how much money should be paid to expert participants. Government workers, in particular, cannot legally receive money in any way for their efforts. These factors make the establishment of such organizations more difficult.

The accumulation of expertise and technical skills in organizations like NPOs is indispensable. Furthermore, for citizen activities and voluntary work to be made more vital, human resources are

essential, and for that purpose more education for non-expert citizens will definitely be required. In many places courses for nurturing leaders of community greenery design have already begun.

In this report, I discuss the courses for nurturing human resources at Awaji Landscape and Horticulture Planning Academy where I teach.

II. CONTENT OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS OF AWAJI LANDSCAPE AND HORTICULTURE PLANNING ACADEMY IN HYOGO PREFECTURE

1. Main Concept and the Contents of the Programs

At Awaji Landscape and Horticulture Planning Academy, how the environment surrounding us should be in our modern life is considered and efforts are made to create living spaces and a culture that is rich in flowers and plants. For that purpose, a new field called "Landscape and Horticulture" is being implemented. The life-long study courses are aimed at fostering local leaders to create communities where nature, people and culture coexist. The course has roughly three sections including the main course which trains gardeners to lead community planning, the secondary course which gives them hands on practice in community building with flowers and plants, and the advanced course, which teaches detailed knowledge and techniques. The main course has 40 programs in the first five months. Eight programs are conducted in each month. Together with the programs in the second term of five months, 80 programs are conducted in total. The curriculum of the first five months of the main course is as follows:

The subject of the first session is "Let's start community design with plants and flowers." On the first day the classes include "Guidance" and "Community design with plants and flowers." The second day, "Basic course on plants for landscape architecture and horticulture," "Observing the campus landscape" and "Practice of planning plants and flowers." The third day is "Practice in sketching and design for townscapes."

The subject of the second session is "First steps for community design with plants and flowers." On the first day the session has "Training in planting in small open spaces." The second day, "Community design with plants and flowers, part II," "Education of environmental matters for beginners," and "Basic courses for park interpreters." The third day, "Practicing construction of small open space (Figure 2)."



Figure 2. Practicing construction of small open space

The theme of the third session is "Let's advance community design with plants and flowers." The content of the first day is "Basic course on workshops (Figure 3)," and "Community design with plants and flowers, part III." The second day is "Tour in a park looking at drawings," "Japanese climate and flowers," and "How to make things look good with plants and flowers." The third day is "Training in taking care of plants."

The fourth session's objective is "How to



Figure 3. Workshop in the class of community design

become a leader of community design with flowers and plants." "Basic course on providing information in community," and "Practice in growing plants" are the subjects included. "Tour in a model community," is the second day activity. "Basic course on workshops," is the third day.

The title of the fifth session is "Let's extend the network of community design with plants and flowers." The first day includes "Basic course in horticulture therapy" and "Community design in various towns." The second day has "Flowers and designing in our college town," "Plants and wild animals in towns," and "Training in taking care of flowers and plants." The third day, "Community design with plants and flowers, part IV," and "Discussion and an award ceremony at the end of the course."

The second half year, provides "The training course for the leaders of community design for rural areas." This has another five stages.

The theme of the first stage is "Let's start community design with plants and flowers in your region." The first day includes "Guidance" and "Community design with plants and flowers in rural areas part I." The second day includes "The vegetation and ecology of Japan," "Observing the landscape of the campus," "How to make Japanese woods useful," and "Wild animals and woods."

The third day includes "Observing woods on the campus."

The theme of the second stage is "First step for community design with plants and flowers." The first day includes "Community design with plants and flowers" and "Landscape and plants in a town woods." The second day includes "Examining an successful model town."

The third day includes "Observing and receiving the benefits of woods."

The theme of the third stage is "Striving for community design with plants and flowers."

The first day includes "Changes in the woods near a town" and "Maintenance of woods."

The second day includes "Observing woods and the practice of maintenance" and "Workshop for reactivation of woods". The third day includes "Practice for maintenance of woods on campus."

The theme of the fourth stage is "Aim to realize community design with plants and flowers." The first day includes "Our surrounding environment" and "Initiation of horticultural therapy part II." The second day includes "Practice of maintenance of farms" and "Practice of planting and moving trees." The third day includes "How to provide information to community" and "How to make waterfronts useful."

The theme of the fifth stage is "Spread community design with plants and flowers."

The first day includes "Functions of plants" and "Urban and rural in Japan." The second day includes "Practice for conducting environmental educational program." The third day includes "Community design with plants and flowers in foreign countries" and "Discussion and awards for the course."

2. Evaluation of the Programs by the Students

Questionnaires were sent out to the students and their answers were as follows:

To the question of "How would you like to make use of the lessons you learned in the future?" Their answers included: "Advance my current activities further," "Join local activities," "Create new activities," "Get more knowledge about the background of activities," "No way in particular," and "Utilize it for my work."

Their answers to the question of "Did you get self confidence as a leader?" were: "Now I have confidence, though not so much to act alone, but I can act with colleagues," "I want to join an existing group for now," "I will do within the area what I can do if asked," and "I am not confident yet."

A tendency among the students is that some prefer the technical training more, and others prefer lectures focusing on fostering leaders. However, by the end of the course most of the students leave with the impression that they were influenced more by the lectures on community design.

In research on the culture and industry of gardening in Hyogo Prefecture, graduates become very conscious of several important aspects of gardening. The first aspect that they become aware of is how plants and flowers are seen by other people. The second aspect is the importance of gardening not only by themselves but also together with other people. The third aspect is that they become aware of whether plants are suited to their surrounding environment. Some of the people who began loving gardening are apt to think about much bigger problems such as world wide environmental matters. The research showed that people who had studied about community design in school have a tendency to act more eagerly to support town environmental development.

3. Some Examples of Community Activities

There are many impressive activities carried out by those who finished the course. A housewife in Ashiya City reported that she had found a small abandoned park in her town after finishing the course at Awaji Landscape and Horticulture Planning Academy. Becoming a committee member of the town, she created a group to manage the park. In this park many wild plants were rampant and no one was taking care of it because the Ashiya City Office lacked the budget. She worked in the committee of the town and formed a group of people to plant flowers and maintain this park. Within some months she had created a beautiful community garden at the corner of the park through negotiation with the city office. In a class at Awaji Landscape and Horticulture Planning Academy, students saw this park and heard the explanation of this elderly lady. The activities of graduates like her encourage the new students a lot.

A retiree from Ikeda City in Osaka Prefecture wanted to deepen his knowledge about horticulture as a hobby. After the end of the course, he realized the importance of social activity and established an NPO to make use of local parks and to carry out community design with flowers and plants. He is working with the staff of the Osaka municipal government in his town to improve their environment through volunteer efforts. He also manages workshops and lectures inviting researchers and activists.

Another housewife living in the North Ward of Kobe who had belonged to a group that took care of flowers made efforts to open a local garden in commemoration of recovery from the Hanshin Earthquake (Figure 4). The city government approved of the "open garden" and supported it financially. Another group in Suma Ward in the



Figure 4. Open garden area in Kobe City

western part of Kobe had also sponsored an “Open Garden” before. In the first year the Kobe municipal government supported them, but since then they have had to hold the event on their own without financial aid. So they set up a small box to ask for donations in the garden. These “Open Gardens” have been successful with a lot of visitors coming. All of the core members of those groups were also graduates of the citizen course of the Awaji Landscape and Horticulture Planning Academy.

An office worker of Kakogawa City in Hyogo Prefecture established an NPO for community design with flowers and plants and is very active in planting plants at local roadsides.

A last example here to mention is a group from Akashi City. They support elderly people by sponsoring activities with plants and flowers. The members of this group are learning about horticulture therapy to entertain and teach the elderly. They visit institutions for elderly and interact with those people using flowers or making flowerbeds with them. They also visit some hospitals to conduct research on horticulture therapy. The members of this group are from all over Hyogo Prefecture. They developed a strong friendship to focus on this aim and social and career background is not important to them.

4. Activity Support

There are several ways of supporting these activities. The students who finished the main course established an NPO called “Alpha Green Net” in 1999 (Fig.5). (Alpha is the abbreviation of Awaji Landscape and Horticulture Planning Academy.) With the number of students who finish the course and join the group increasing gradually, more than 300 people are working in it now. Their objective is to design communities with flowers and plants and to promote local activities through citizen participation. In July 2001 they successfully filed an application to become a corporate body as an NPO. It will be accepted in September.



Figure 5. The committee of Alpha Green Net

One of the main purposes of this group is to encourage reactivation of community design. Another purpose is to create communities where nature and people live together. Their activities are as follows:

- 1) Improving public space with plants and flowers
- 2) Cooperating with government or other groups to do community design with greenery
- 3) Education to teach others how to promote community design with greenery
- 4) Research on how to promote community

design with greenery

- 5) Publishing news about community design with greenery
- 6) Conducting other projects to promote the above

The organization has officers and cooperatives. Cooperatives plan and undertake projects, manage money, provide public information, and so on. In every city or town they have a branch. Each branch has its own activities.

Every year the academy holds a symposium about community design with greenery through citizen participation (Figure 6). In this symposium a leading person in the field gives a lecture and the members of Alpha Green Net give reports about their activities. Gradually this symposium is becoming bigger and the members have increasing communication, information exchange and networking. There is a plan to make a human bank, a database which of people with specific skills or knowledge about landscape or horticulture.

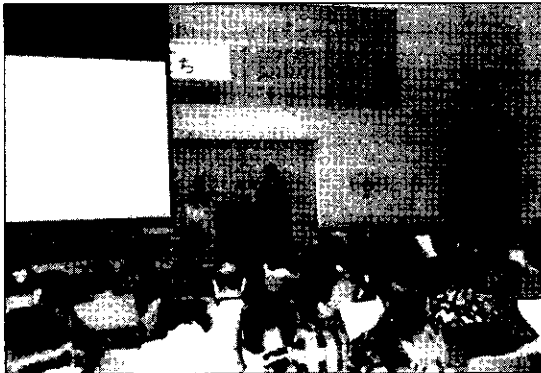


Figure 6. The symposium titled community design with greenery and us

III. FUTURE ISSUES AND PROSPECTS

1. Other Educational Cases

There are some other cities, which provide educational programs about community design with

greenery for citizens. The Osaka City government provides short programs for fostering leaders in community design. Though they are rather short in length, the government looks after the students even after the end of the course. So these leaders can work for their own towns and cities to use their abilities.

City governments are smaller, so they are closer to residents than prefecture governments. Those living in a town or city tend to feel closer to their local government. Therefore, local governments should play an active role in taking care of leaders.

Some educational programs by municipal governments like that of Kawasaki City in Kanto in the eastern part of Japan have land for practicing and training. This works very well. However once the students finish the course, usually the governments do not care for them so much, which becomes an issue now.

One of the better programs is held in Yokohama City. It is also not a long program but they provide workshops, town inspections, practice for planting, and making action programs for community design with greenery. The merit of having a school within the city is that students can easily access their own town in the class. They can easily think about and focus on the theme together because they live in the same city.

2. The Present Situation of the "Alpha Green Net"

The "Alpha Green-Net" which comprises small regional groups of residents is growing gradually now. The members living in Kobe are divided into smaller groups by ward. As the organization has grown large, it no longer functions as well. At this point it is necessary to evaluate the organization. It is important to have a support system to follow up an organization's development.

3. Issues and Future Prospects

How to develop and continue a local group is the biggest issue. Many members belong to some kind of small group to which they had been belonged since before they entered the school. It is important to have good connections and relationships with these existing groups.

Secondly, we should think about how to have good relationships with the municipal governments. The members are sometimes shy or afraid to deal with the municipal governments. They are not aware of using systems of support money, or not aware of dealing with laws. The school system should take care of those graduates to manage good relationships with governments or other groups.

The third challenge is how to become more knowledgeable in terms of technical skills of planting and planning. When people only get plant information from printed materials, it often happens that the information does not suit Japanese climates. Particularly the English Garden style is suited to cooler and dryer climates. If people simply copy those gardens, they will fail most of the time. The educational programs should consider those things, information should continue to be provided after completion and suitable plants should be examined.

The fourth theme is how to manage these activities financially independently. The Alpha

Green Net is entrusted with some of these projects. One is the project of guiding guests on the campus every day. Other activities should be taken in the near future so that this group can become independent. The independence of NPOs is very important. If they do not become independent they will not be free.

Community design has become more and more important in towns and cities. In accordance with this, educational programs to achieve this purpose are facing ever increasing responsibilities. Therefore reflection on the contents of the programs is important.

The main concept of community design should be well discussed and unrestricted development of urban areas should be reconsidered. Furthermore, environmental projects are not easy to carry on continuously. We always have to think about the purpose and methods of community design. We have to think about these matters more deeply.

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