



Case Study

Shibuya: A City That's a University

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“When we looked down at the city from above, we imagined how exciting it would be if Shibuya became a university. We envisioned the entire city functioning as one university where everyone could enjoy campus life all their lives. It definitely fired our imaginations”

Yasuaki Sakyo, the dean of the university

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Keywords

Camus, Life Long Learning, Learning Space, None Profit Organization (NPO)

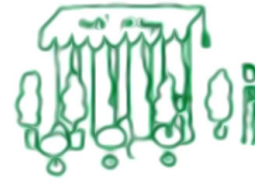
Highlights

- ❖ **How to use a city as a learning space**
- ❖ **How community cooperation aids in developing a democratic culture**
- ❖ **How a community project can function without financial support from the students**
- ❖ **How the municipality, a nonprofit, and businesses developed fruitful cooperation in Shibuya**

Abstract

The article¹ presents the Shibuya University network – a lifelong learning project in a large, bustling district in Tokyo, which offers its residents free lessons and workshops all around the city. The conceivers of the project see the urban space as a collection of learning spaces and opportunities for enriching each person's life. Through intelligent cooperation between businesses and nonprofit organisations, the project facilitators have succeeded in getting tens of thousands of people to take part in monthly lessons in unique “classrooms” such as stores, temples, building sites, coffee shops, etc.

¹ With gratitude to Gal Hadar for translating the article from Japanese and to Yasuaki Sakyo for his willingness to be interviewed and contribute photos and illustrations.



**There is no
campus at Shibuya
University.
The City is the
campus**





The aim of the project is to transform the city into a learning space for all its residents; promote civilian involvement and mutual responsibility among the residents; and turn the city into a pleasant place for them to live in, regardless of their income or age. Shibuya University strives to attain community empowerment through the awareness that every individual can be both a teacher and a student, and that all residents are entitled to lead a lifestyle typical of university students, i.e. a lifestyle characterized by curiosity and serenity.

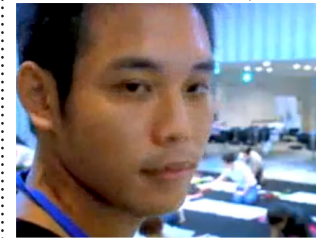
The article presents the developments that the sphere of lifelong learning has undergone in Japan since the 1960s. We will briefly review the changes that Japanese educational policy has undergone since the decision to establish a policy encompassing all residents, i.e. to enrich their lives from birth to death. The article presents the characteristics of the community centers that have been established since the time of the US occupation, especially the emphasis on the learners' autonomy and responsibility for learning, as well as on long-term processes. We will briefly review the change undergone by the Japanese adult education system in the 1990s following the recession, as well as the rise of nonprofit organizations as a leading player in the educational sphere in the early 2000s.

The article will show how the Shibuya University

Project gets the most out of existing trends in Japanese society, alongside innovations, primarily the departure from the closed classroom to the urban space and the intelligent use of resources offered by the city to all its residents. Finally, we will see that the combining of teaching and learning along with the cooperation among the municipality, businesses and nonprofit organizations are what is turning Shibuya into an educational model that is inspiring other cities around the world.

In Pursuit of the Eternal Student

“ Since Shibuya University opened its doors, this is the sixth time that the permanent workshop at Meiji Shrine has been run! For me, too, it's my third consecutive year in the workshop: The first time I participated as a student,



Yasuaki Sakyo, the founder of Shibuya University

last year as a volunteer, and this year I've been fortunate enough to be the classroom coordinator.” (a participant in the “Creating a Forest Workshop” at Meiji Shrine).

Shibuya is a bustling, popular district of Tokyo. It is a center of fashion and recreation, a magnet for young people, fashion lovers and shopping enthusiasts. It has seven universities plus one huge university that's located everywhere: the Shibuya University Network. Actually, the entire district is one big university campus. And that's not the only unusual thing it has...

Unlike other universities, the Shibuya University Network doesn't want its students to graduate quickly with a prestigious degree or diploma that will open doors for them, but rather to continue learning for the rest of their lives. In fact, the university does not offer diplomas or degrees. Enrolling in Shibuya University is free, and all the residents are welcome to offer a workshop in their field of expertise. The motto of the university is simple: Anyone can be a teacher, and any place in the city can be a campus. The goal at Shibuya is both personal and urban development: The founders hope that the university will turn the city into a friendlier place for its residents and surroundings, and motivate the residents to become more involved in politics.

The project initiators see the eternal student as a role model:

"The universities have a few things we especially like – things we'd like to provide in our city. The universities stress exploration and leisure, not the pursuit of money. They foster research and promote intellectual curiosity."

The dean of Shibuya University, Yasuaki Sakyo, says, "We thought it would be nice if all the residents of the city could experience a college atmosphere throughout their lives."

This strong desire for campus life is reflected in Shibuya's young, dynamic approach that fits our times: At Shibuya, you won't find any long, drawn-out courses with class requirements, exams or long-term commitments. Most of the "courses" are one-time workshops run in a young, fun-filled atmosphere in which the students derive immediate satisfaction and strengthen their ties with the community.

Adult Education in Japan: From Government Policy to Civilian Initiative

Japan is characterized by a successful lifelong learning system. According to the Japanese Education Law, "the country must maintain a society in which each citizen will improve his/her personality, live a full life, and be able to enjoy the by-products thereof." The lifelong learning system in Japan offers an alternative to the fierce competition over admission to prestigious universities (what the Japanese refer to as "examination hell"), but the crux of lifelong learning in Japan is spiritual development and self-enrichment, and most adults over the age of 20 who take courses don't do so for material gain or professional training.²

Since the time of the US occupation, and especially in the 60s, Japan has built many community centers with a wide range of learning opportunities for adults, primarily retirees. A 1988 survey

showed that 40.1% of the adults over the age of 20 in Japan had taken part in a learning activity during the year. In the 90s, Japan underwent a sad turn of events: The economic bubble burst, and the resulting recession doubled the number of young people who were both jobless and out of school.³ At the same time, there was an increase in hooliganism at schools, and the students exhibited worrisome empathy.⁴ The Japanese lifelong learning program, which until that time, had been very centralized and government controlled, underwent a change as a result of the budget cutbacks. The new phenomena in Japanese society led to a neo-liberal reform, which stressed competitiveness and promoted the privatization of social services. The emphasis on the Ministry of Education's educational strategy shifted from

² Clause, Stacy Marie. "Lifelong Learning in Japan: Community Centers and Learning Circles," Stacy Marie Clause, "Lifelong Learning in Japan: Community Centers and Learning Circles," Presented at the Midwest Research-to Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing and Community Education, Michigan State University, September 26-28, (2010).

³ Sawano, Yukiko. "Lifelong Learning to Revitalize Community Case Studies of Citizens' Learning Initiatives in Japan," Second International Handbook of Lifelong Learning, Springer, (2012), pp. 666-668.

⁴ Okumoto, Kaori. "The Lifelong Learning Policies in England and Japan: A Means of Building Social Capital?" Lifelong Education and Library, 3. (2003), pp. 163-187, p. 171.

the community to the schools and the children.

Prior to the 21st century, new players entered the lifelong learning arena: NPOs (nonprofits) and business corporations. As a result of reduced government intervention and the wave of volunteerism after the earthquake in the Hanshin District, the world of NPOs and volunteerism flourished. In '98, the government decided to support NPOs. "All of these things," wrote researcher Kaori Okumoto, "spurred the creation of communities as a shared interest."⁵ By 2010, Japan had some 150 citizen universities (informal educational organizations offering lectures for all ages). Some of them had been founded by a government organization, but most were the result of private initiatives. The responsibility for adult education began to shift from the government to the public.

5 Ibid, p. 173.

Shibuya: Education as a Community Development Tool

Once NPOs had entered the field of education, they were joined by Shibuya University. It was conceived and initiated by Ken Hasebe, a member of the Shibuya Council and a leader of a volunteer organization whose aim is to promote cleanliness in the district. In 2005, Hasebe presented the idea to Yasuaki Sakyo, who was then 26 and had just decided to quit his job at a large trading company and look for a job with meaning. That meeting changed Sakyo's life: In 2006, he was made the dean of the university. Then he applied to have the university granted the status of an NPO affiliated with the Tokyo Municipality. The application was accepted, and the project got underway.

Once the Shibuya University Network had been set up, the heads of the university created a desirable "picture" of the future of their city. They believe the urban cooperation that sustains the project could transform the district into a model city – one that, to a great extent, evokes the principles that emerged at the Mayors' Conference in Mexico City in 2010. The Shibuya Project

managers envisioned a place characterized by significant civic cooperation, concern for the environment, a peaceful atmosphere, respect for life and nature, mutual responsibility, and concern for residents of all ages (and pets!). Each tenet of the Shibuya creed is worded in the same catchy marketing style that characterizes the entire project. An example of this is the tenet "A city where the tourists aren't nervous."⁶

THE LOCAL ECONOMY PERSPECTIVE

In order to strengthen community relations, the university heads persuaded many local store

6 The full wish list of the founders consists of the following: "A city where the tourists aren't nervous," "Pets are regarded as residents," "All the residents assume the role of guiding the kids," "Everyone knows their neighbors by name," "The number of kids has increased more than anywhere else in Japan," "We respect the environment," "Everyone votes," "We take time to appreciate life, and we aren't hasty," "A city where you can lie on the grass in the park," "A city with art without graffiti," "Everyone takes care of the elderly," "Representatives from industry, education, administration and the public hold joint meetings." <http://www.shibuya-univ.net/english/?page=9>

owners, museum directors, transportation company managers, etc., to offer discounts or special services to the project participants. The residents' willingness to lend a hand and show interest in the project is vital to its existence, says Sakyo. "We're trying to maintain a successful balance between the profit generated by each place as a business and our use of it. For example, when we use a restaurant or coffee shop, we do so at a time when it's less busy." The students pay for the food and drinks they order during the lesson, and therefore the business gains both income and prestige. Such conditions enable the city to offer lessons at unusual locations, e.g. a reading club at trendy bars, a workshop at a three Michelin star restaurant, and even hospitality at a geisha restaurant. Shibuya's secret is its widespread use of local resources, which develops the local economy in a way that everyone benefits.

THE SHIBUYA MODEL: GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE EXISTING RESOURCES

As of 2012, the project had 20,444 students and some 700 teachers, but Shibuya University doesn't charge tuition and it only has two full-time staff members. The teachers are paid a mere



5,000 yen (about 50 euros, or 245 shekels) per lesson. The 30 part-time employees – mostly fundraisers and lesson coordinators – receive a token salary and are, more or less, volunteers (to earn a living, they work full-time in liberal professions or at companies or NPOs). Working alongside the paid employees at the network are some 150 volunteers. To pay for the countless lessons

and activities, the project managers raised funds from charitable foundations and businesses located in Shibuya itself; 20% of the expenses are covered by the city council. The cooperation among the public, business and third sectors in Shibuya has created a project that is not intended to generate financial gain but rather to help amass social capital.

TO PLANT A FOREST, TO TOUR THE FAST ROAD TUNNELS

On the third Saturday of every month, the university offers a wide range of courses with catchy names such as “A tour of Omotesando’s backyard through the painter’s life,” “From fashion to interior design – learning about the perfect match at the GAP store,” “Homeless and a tour of the city – the Harajuku challenge.” Over the years, the university has given lessons at surprising sites such as stores or public baths, and on diverse topics such as ecology and other sciences, food, agriculture, Japanese culture, the media, child rearing, health, calligraphy, international relations, art, design, theater, handicrafts, photography, and many others.

Gathering Acorns in the Meiji Shrine Forest

Environmental protection and Japanese culture are the most popular subjects at Shibuya University. Some of the special courses run every year are related to environmental protection and the beauty of nature. An example of such a lesson at a special location is the one called “Creating a Forest: Gathering Acorns in the Meiji Shrine Forest.” Meiji Jingu is a Shinto shrine built in 1920



to perpetuate the memory of Emperor Meiji and Empress Shouken. The forest covers an area of about 700,000 square meters. The workshop at the Meiji Shrine has become a tradition, and has taken place every year since Shibuya University opened its doors. During the lesson, the participants gather acorns in order to preserve and cultivate the forest. They come away from the workshop with an appreciation for the forest as a refuge from the noisy city and an awareness that “we, the living creatures, can’t live without the blessings bestowed upon us by the forest.”

The workshop in the forest beautifully reflects the

Shibuya vision: Last year, the lesson was organized by a continuing student who had started out as a student, stayed on as a volunteer in her second year, and was made a coordinator in her third year. The university’s website page advertising the workshop includes a statement from her: “Unfortunately, the seed from the first time I participated has shriveled and died. Last year, I gathered twin seeds and took them home and called them Haru and Mei. They survived unharmed for a year, and this time I think I will succeed in returning them to the Meiji Shrine. I hope that both of those trees will grow and become an integral part of the forest and eventually be a refuge for someone’s heart... if I can share this excitement – justified or not – with many others, I’ll be happy.”

Deep into the Yamate Runnel

Students who prefer a strictly urban experience are invited to attend a lesson at the construction site of the central circular route of the expressway, in the Yamate Tunnel. The teacher presents the transportation problems in the city and the ecological implications of the heavy traffic in the district. One of the volunteers in the workshop described her impressions on the university’s website. In the tunnel at Ohashi Junction, for example, the counselor’s voice echoed from the surrounding concrete. The students who tried to stand on the incline of the spiral structure

discovered first-hand that it's quite steep – something you wouldn't experience in a travelling car.

On the day of the lesson, no work was done on the Yamate Tunnel, and the students were allowed to walk to the end of it – some 30 meters underground. They learned about excavation techniques, the new outline plan, and various considerations in urban planning. “Reducing the traffic on the roads, reducing carbon dioxide emissions, protecting the ecosystem... which one of these should be given top priority? Is coexistence impossible? For the sake of the planet, we have to think about many more things,” summarizes staff-member Matsumoto Noriko. “I hope and pray for a better future.”

Old clothes as new sources for energy

An example of another successful course that doesn't suffice with a transfer of knowledge, but rather strives to bring about social and ecological change is the course on textile recycling. A lesson coordinator at the university asked a friend who produces energy from textile to give a lesson entitled “Exposing the Shibuya Oil Fields – A Strategic Meeting for Discovering New Sources for the Production of Energy.” Volunteers brought piles of old clothes and learned how to turn them into



an energy source.⁷ Like other successful lessons, this one, too, has been given several times and it has raised awareness of a broad ecological and public issue.

Can the Shibuya University model replace the academe? Sakyō isn't interested in replacing the traditional university, but definitely sees the universities in the city as part of the urban landscape. “Our job isn't related to academic research or professional education. Nevertheless, we might collaborate with a traditional university so that we can use their various resources for the sake of the ongoing learning process and community development.”

⁷ <http://shirahime.ch/2011/08/creating-a-used-clothing-recycling-system-in-japan/>

CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION

The Shibuya University Network combines existing trends in the Japanese lifelong learning culture with several revolutionary innovations. The notion that learning is a lifelong process is very common in Japan. There you'll also find the democratic approach to adult education, whereby a person doesn't necessarily need an expert teacher in order to learn, and students assume quite a bit of the responsibility for the lesson. At community centers in Tokyo, many classes are conducted in learning circles: At those centers, anyone can be a student and anyone can be a teacher. The members of the group are responsible for keeping the room clean, collecting fees, and giving announcements. One of the students in each group is the coordinator responsible for the running of the course. Many learning circles last for long periods – a decade, sometimes even two. The social relationships among the members have created in them a commitment to persevere. “The circle is like a family.” The learning process changes the student and the people around him. It's an opportunity for community cooperation, empowerment and cohesion.⁸

The Shibuya Network has adopted several

⁸ Stacy Marie Clause, 26-28.

characteristics of Japanese society. The project managers wholeheartedly support the spirit of the report published by the Lifelong Education Council:

“Lifelong learning is an energy to live a lively life. It is pleasurable to actively be involved in and communicate with the community through learning... A society in which people enjoy learning will become a better society.”⁹

THE LESSON COORDINATORS ARE PROJECT'S BACKBONE

As it is with the community centers, the lesson coordinators in the Shibuya Network are the backbone of the project. Sakyo says, “The most important component in running our lessons is the work done by the lesson coordinator. Today we have about 15 coordinators, most of whom work full-time in liberal professions or at companies during the week, and part-time in the project. Our lesson coordinators are guided by a simple principle: ‘Plan as if you were the first student.’ That’s how we want our coordinators to plan

the lessons – not as teachers, but as learners. We feel that motivation is especially important for anyone who’s learning something new. That constitutes the basis for the coordinators’ planning process: They contact the teachers, explain the project and lessons to them, and talk to them about the best way for them to communicate with the participants.”

Nonetheless, Shibuya proposes some significant changes to the customary model at the community centers. The most revolutionary change is the approach that the entire district is a learning space, unlike the learning that takes place in a closed room at a community center. Another important difference is the fact that most of the lessons are one-time workshops. Actually, Shibuya primarily offers an inspiring “taste,” a refreshing breeze in a life full of trouble and strife. In some cases, however, the workshops motivate the students to continue delving into the subject in learning circles and seminars that they themselves organize. Some of them have even planned lessons for kids in the district. In 2010, there were 10 seminars and two ongoing learning circles.¹⁰

A multiage community

Another significant difference is the youthful nature of the project, which attracts many young

people to it. In Japan, the number of adults over the age of 60 is very high: more than 20%. Many of the community centers primarily attract people in that age group, and offer activities that may last for years. Shibuya’s dynamic approach, youthful style, and up-to-date subject matter attract mostly young people. Sakyo says that, in 2012, some 32% of the students were in their 20s, about 46% in their 30s, and approximately 15% in their 40s. Most of them, by the way, are female – nearly 65%, in fact. Nevertheless, Shibuya University is trying to transform the city into a learning site and a multi-age community, and its lessons reflect that effort: You’ll find students of all ages – from college students to senior citizens [[see the film class photo]]. Part of the project includes collaboration with schools in the city, and those joint activities illustrate the potential learning opportunities for both students and teachers who usually learn in regular classrooms. Thus, for example, school groups are invited to see professionals at work, visit factories, and take part in activities carried out by NPOs and other organizations.

⁹ “Lifelong learning is an energy to live a lively life. It is pleasurable to actively be involved in and communicate with the community through learning... A society in which people enjoy learning will become a better society”. (Quoted in Okumoto, p. 174)

¹⁰ Sawano, p. 676.

Shibuya and the Four-teacher Model

The Shibuya University Project makes good use of some of the Four-teacher Model principles. The peer group fills an important role since Shibuya University places a lot of emphasis on the fact that every person has something to teach and every student can become a teacher. The project management's strategic decision to invite all the residents to learn was intended to empower the individual, strengthen community relationships, and create a world in which everything in it is an interesting and exciting learning opportunity.

Actually, not many students have become teachers in a workshop of their own. Sakyo explains that, in many cases, the courses they offered "didn't meet the students' demands," and, in other cases, residents offered to teach courses designed to promote their businesses rather than support the learning or enrich the students' lives. In many cases, lesson coordinators invite experts to lead a workshop in their field of expertise. The fact that the coordinators are the ones who choose the teachers preserves the folksy nature of the project.

The environment is also a key element in the Shibuya Network Project and one of its organizing principles. The founder of the university says that when they looked at the map of the city, the thought of using everything it had to offer for learning purposes fired their imaginations. Like many large cities, Shibuya is full of opportunities for having a good time and shopping. The Shibuya Project managers' ability to use the existing environment and see the learning opportunities in it without seeking a profit is a significant step – one that places the focus on the residents' self-fulfillment rather than their financial success.

SHIBUYA EDUCATION MODEL IS AN INFECTING VIRUS

Shibuya University operates on the principle that every resident should attain self-fulfillment in a democratic society in which people of all walks of life take an active role. The Shibuya Project managers' refreshing approach plus the fact that so many young people are involved in the project

have aroused great interest in it all over Japan and the world. Today the university has eight extensions, including universities in Tokyo, Nagoya, Sapporo, Hiroshima, Fukuoka and eastern Tokyo. Six other areas are also planning to apply the model.

Summary: What We Can Learn from Shibuya

CREATIVE COLLABORATION

One of the most significant lessons learned from the Shibuya model is the creative collaboration between the local Authority and citizen-based initiatives. At a time of education cutbacks, many government Authorities are giving way to private initiatives and allowing private businesses to take their place. And indeed, at Shibuya, too, residents can pay for courses given by trading companies (Sakyo presents a few examples of courses, especially Yuppie lifestyle courses such as wine-tasting and cooking). Nonetheless, the local Authority in Shibuya sees citizen-based initiatives as opportunities, not adversarial actions.

Sakyo says that since the municipality's tax revenues started to drop, it has been doing its utmost to run the public services efficiently. The Authority has authorized Shibuya University to assume the responsibility for 20% of the lifelong learning system in the city, and has provided it with the necessary budgets to do so. For its part,

the university collaborates with business entities and NPOs and manages to offer the public a service that strengthens the community and is available to everyone because it's free of charge. Such a process facilitates fruitful, unbiased cooperation for the entire community instead of a privatization process that is intended for high wage earners and generates income solely for the business owners.

COMBINING LEARNING AND TEACHING

Sawano believes that the key to Shibuya's success is the combination of learning and teaching. Its organizational and educational model enables the residents to benefit from other residents' connections and know-how, and cooperate with and get to know new people. Elimination of the separation between teachers and students – which is already common at community centers – and the direct meetings with experts at their workplaces turn the life experience at Shibuya into a learning journey that has no end.

Additional reference material:

The Shibuya University website in English (a nutshell version of the extensive Japanese site):
<http://www.shibuya-univ.net/english/>

Yasuaki Sakyo presents his vision for the future on CNN (YouTube):
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tc86Mkuy7sU>

Yasuaki Sakyo's vision presented in 15 slides:
<http://edition.cnn.com/2007/TECH/11/02/sakyo.vision/>

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