

THE EMERGENCE OF AN ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC SPACE IN CONTEMPORARY JAPAN: THE (TRANS) FORMATION OF CIVIC MOVEMENTS IN A WORKING-CLASS DISTRICT IN OSAKA

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This chapter aims to explore the emergence of a new form of public space in precarious Japan by ethnographically examining the formation and transformation of social movements in Kamagasaki, a working-class district in Osaka. Since the 1990s, Japan has become a divided society: having lost their belief in postwar order based on the seamless linkage of family, school and company, Japanese citizens have been left with bewilderment by the infiltration of neoliberalism. This study shows that activism in the most excluded district has, paradoxically, offered an alternative form of self-reliance and solidarity through the assemblage of various forms of publicness. On top of counterspace that creates work and residence for the homeless, as well as the public sphere where their unheard voices can be represented, the third public space or *ibasho*, in which their self-worth is confirmed, emerged, whereby they could avoid being isolated and become self-reliant. Given that *ibasho* spreads to diverse domains such as education, the labor movement, and community development in Japanese society, it can be said that it is moving to the next stage, where one aspires to compatibility between freedom and stability.

Keywords: public space, social circulation model of postwar Japan, neoliberalism, the homeless, self-reliance

1. Postwar Japanese Order and Public Spaces

This research aims to explore the emergence of a new form of public space in contemporary Japan by taking a close look at the formation and transformation of social movements in Kamagasaki, an area known as *yoseba* and *doya-gai*, a district

associated with day laborers and single-room-occupancy hotels, in Osaka. Since the recession that started in the 1990s, Japan has become a precarious society (Allison 2013, 22–34), having lost their belief in a postwar order based on the linkage of family, school and company, Japanese citizens have been left with bewilderment due to the infiltration of neoliberalism into every corner of society. This study suggests that, ironically enough, activism in the most excluded district has demonstrated an alternative form of self-reliance and solidarity by creating the assemblage of various forms of publicness.

In postwar Japan, social stability was guaranteed through a functional linkage between family, school, and company, i.e., the “social circulation model of postwar Japan” (Honda 2019, 164–166). The model first relied on a thorough gender division within the nuclear family. It was considered desirable for men as the breadwinner to work long hours at their company and make a living for their families (Dasgupta 2017). For women, the expectation was to be a stay-at-home mother and take care of their children and elderly parents and work only part time so as not to interfere with the housework duties (Vogel 1998; Borovoy 2005). Children were taught that if they obeyed their teacher’s instructions and studied diligently in school, they could smoothly advance to the next life stage such as high school, university, and regular work (Kido 2019). Even if new employees did not have any specific skills, they could get on-the-job training at the workplace. The company then ensured new graduates lifetime employment; in exchange, they were expected to be fully committed to the company and they could plan to form their own families (Mouer 2009). In other words, by the 1990s, Japan was a “membership society” in which one could be guaranteed social security only when one belongs to family, school, or company as a regular member (Kido 2019, 392).

As the overheated stock and real estate markets collapsed, however, due to policy failures in the early and mid-1990s, Japan faced “three lost decades,” heralding the end of the 100 million-total middle-class society (Yoshimi 2019). Above all, the labor market has been liquidated as companies no longer guarantee lifetime employment, recruiting increasing numbers of non-regular workers. As the term “working poor” alludes, it is difficult to make a living regardless of how assiduously one works as a non-regular employee (Kadokura 2006; NHK Supesharu Wākin-gupua Shuzaihan 2010). Even if finding seemingly regular work, one is vulnerable to harsh personnel management in a “black corporation” (Asahina 2021).

As women’s participation in the labor market gradually increased, it became unreasonable for them to be responsible for all house chores. In addition, the ratio of non-regular male workers rose from 8.8% in 1990 to 22.2% in 2020 (Naikakufu 2021), making it impossible for men to solely play the breadwinner role. Moreover, the school-mediated employment placement system failed to provide graduates with stable work due to the fluidization of the employment structure (Honda 2004).

In other words, the social compact based on the close connection of family, school and company in postwar Japan had begun to collapse.

Meanwhile, since the 2000s, it is the neoliberal ideology and system that has replaced the social contract. Neoliberalism is an ideology that encourages not only the state to promote free economic activities through deregulation, but also requires one to become the *homo oeconomicus*, one who "is not the man of exchange or man the consumer" but is "the man of enterprise and production" (Foucault 2008, 147). In the logic of neoliberalism, individuals must "be reflexive managers of their abilities and alliances" (Gershon 2011, 539). "[R]elationships under neoliberalism" are redefined as "a business partnership" in which governments, employers, and individuals should take their respective risks (ibid., 540): "Under liberalism, the idealized social contract ensures that individuals give up some of their autonomy in exchange for some security, economic or otherwise," whereas "under neoliberalism, relationships are two or more neoliberal collectives creating a partnership that distributes responsibility and risk so that each can maintain their own autonomy as market actors." Here "freedom" becomes equated with "the ability to act on one's own calculations" of risks. As a result, one should be responsible for the results of one's choice and can only blame oneself for one's failures.

Since the late 1990s, the Japanese government has promoted the logic of self-responsibility in terms of economic independence (Nakamura 2010). In the 1999 advisory council report, *Strategy for Economic Regeneration in Japan*, for instance, it proposed "a creative competitive society based on self-responsibility and efforts for self-reliance" as the future direction of Japanese society (Kēzai Senryaku Kaigi 1999, 64). This neoliberal conceptualization of self-responsibility and self-reliance has undergirded plans and laws regarding assisting the disadvantaged such as the *Act on Special Measures for Supporting Self-reliance of the Homeless* (2002), the *Youth Self-reliance and Challenge Plan* (2003), *The Handicapped Self-Reliance Law* (2005), and the *Act for Supporting Self-reliance of the Poor* (2015), to name a few.

As a result, the logic of self-responsibility has permeated every corner of Japanese society. It was often said, for example, that those known as freeters, young workers who hop from one non-regular job to another, should manage employment insecurity on their own because they chose the unstable job to pursue their desires (Honda 2005; Toivonen and Imoto 2012). NEETs, youth who are not in education, employment, or training, have been accused of being reluctant to work (Genda 2007; Toivonen 2012).

This harsh criticism of the work morale of the younger generation cannot be justified, however, given that the "employment ice-age generation" who graduated from school in the late 1990s and early 2000s encountered structural difficulty in seeking regular work because Japanese companies protected the employment of existing regular employees by stopping hiring new employees as regular workers

(Genda 2003). Nonetheless, freeters internalized the logic of self-responsibility to the extent that they blamed themselves for failing to realize a normative life course and ideal masculinity (Cook 2013). Furthermore, they either strove personally to address the difficulties of life (Masuda 2015) or chose to exclude themselves from society so as not to be humiliated (Imai 2018).

Meanwhile, an alternative form of sociality which is neither collectivist nor neo-liberal has been explored in Japanese civic society (Hashiguchi 2011; Allison 2013; Kim 2016; 2018).¹ This is also the case in Kamagasaki. Men who used to look for day-laborer jobs in Kamagasaki, typically construction work, were those who were undereducated and disconnected from their families. In short, they were isolated from the three core institutions in postwar Japan. When the economic downturn in the 1990s led to the shrinking of the construction industry, they consequently failed to find work and could not help falling into homelessness because they had neither familial ties to rely on nor educational credentials to mobilize. They were often blamed, however, for their laziness because they spent the daytime sleeping or drinking alcohol on the street when they could not find work during the day or after walking around the city to collect empty cans overnight.

Due to the discrimination that day laborers and homeless people face in Japanese society, a series of social movements in Kamagasaki have tackled the limitations of the postwar system. In the 1970s and 1980s, for instance, there were examples of labor activism to improve the working conditions of day laborers and volunteer activities to help the homeless, such as night patrols and free soup kitchens (Haraguchi 2011a; 2011b). Since the 1990s, social movements in Kamagasaki have developed into a variety of civic engagements, such as provisions for work and shelter for rough sleepers, bottom-up community development, and the creation of a safe space for welfare recipients. This research examines these transformations of social activism in Kamagasaki since the 1990s to understand the redefinition of self-reliance and sociality in contemporary Japan.

Cassegård (2014) presents a useful framework for understanding the reconfiguration of public spaces and spheres in Kamagasaki. While identifying contestation and bracketing as two characteristics of publicness, he categorized the relationship between the public sphere and public space into four dimensions: the classical public sphere, a space of sociality, counterspace and no-man's land.² Illuminating changes

¹ Through her long-term fieldwork in Kotobuki, Yokohama City, which also used to be a day-labor market and had turned into a welfare town, Kim (2016; 2018) described a variety of activities to link the living and the dead with the notion of "necrosociality." While this research is in line with Kim's, in that both explore a new form of solidarity in yoseba and doya-gai, the former is differentiated from the latter by examining this subject in the spatial construction of public spaces and spheres.

² According to Cassegård (2014), the classical concept of the public sphere is a place of de-

in the public sphere and public space in Kamagasaki since the 1990s according to Cassegård's conceptualization, this research aims to demonstrate that a new form of self-reliance and solidarity is emerging in contemporary Japanese society.

This chapter is based on fieldwork which I have conducted in Kamagasaki since 2012.³ During the fieldwork, I visited several non-governmental organizations in this locality, interviewed staff members of the organizations, and participated in their workshops and programs. I took part, for example, in night patrols for rough sleepers and art-based outreach programs for recipients of public assistance, both off-line and online. In addition, to cover what had been done before the 2010s and what takes place when I cannot go to Japan in person, I not only reviewed the extant literature on the locality but also made the most of news/magazine articles, reports, surveys, and documents produced by local activists, organizations, and governments, as urban anthropologists often do (Jaffe and de Koning 2016, 14–18).

2. The *Airin* system and no-man's land

Today, Kamagasaki is a welfare town where aged men live, relying on *sêkatsu hogo*, the public assistance system in Japan. Table 1 shows the demographic structure of Kamagasaki in comparison with that of Osaka and Japan in the 2015 Population Census. In Kamagasaki, males in the population account for more than 80%, there are 1.13 residents per household, and the proportion of those 65-years-old and older is slightly higher than 45%. In addition, the number of public assistance recipients per 1,000 people averages 382. These statistics illustrate how disproportionately concentrated poor, single, and elderly men are in this narrow urban district.

The population structure in the 1960s completely differed, however, from that of the 2010s. It was estimated that approximately 50,000 people lived in Kamagasaki, including day laborers who seldom registered as residents (Ôsaka Shakaigaku Kenkyûkai 1961a, 79–80). Half of them lived in flophouses and the other half lived in barracks and rented rooms, though there were no differences in educational qualifications and employment statuses among the residents regardless of their

liberation through which supposedly equal subjects seek to reach agreements on issues. The space of sociality is a public space where people are expected to follow social norms and respect others' rights. A counterspace is a public space in which resistance takes place, allowing the voices of the excluded in the mainstream public sphere to be heard. No-man's-land refers to a public space which the marginalized occupy and live freely regardless of social norms or individuals' pasts and statuses.

³ Relying on this field research, I have published journal articles in Korean (Park 2013; 2014; 2017a; 2017b; 2020), which addressed one aspect of public spaces in Kamagasaki respectively. For this chapter, I not only updated the ethnographic data but also highlighted the relationships of public spaces.

Table 1. Profiles of the Population in Kamagasaki, Osaka, and Japan in 2015

	Kamagasaki	Osaka	Japan
Population	21,447	2,691,185	127,093,745
Male Population	17,345	1,302,562	61,841,738
Female Population	4,102	1,388,623	65,253,007
Male Ratio (%)	80.9	48.4	48.7
Household	18,931	1,354,793	53,331,797
Population/Household	1.13	1.99	2.33
Size (km ²)	0.62	225.21	377,975
Population Density	34,592	11,950	341
Rate of the Aged (%)	45.1	25.3	26.6
Welfare Recipients	8,377 (Feb 2016)	113,543 (March 2019)	2,174,331 (March 2015)
Rate of Welfare (‰)	382.0	50.7	17.1

Source: *The 2015 Population Census*

residential facility. More than 80% of residents only completed their mandatory education and managed to live through unskilled labor, working as day laborers, peddlers, and shoeblacks, for instance (Ōsaka Shakaigaku Kenkyūkai 1961a, 80–82; Ōsaka Shakaigaku Kenkyūkai 1961b, 114–117).

There was a clear difference in the household structure between the two types of residence. More than 70% of those in flophouses were single, while the corresponding proportion of those in barracks were married couples with or without children (Isomura 1962, 148–151). The gender ratio of the population, according to resident registration lists, was therefore almost in balance by the mid-1960s (Mizuno 1993, 229). From the 1950s to the early 1960s, the number of residents per household also fluctuated between three and four (Hosokawa 1965, 13). Kamagasaki in the 1960s was therefore not a neighborhood with a disproportionately high concentration of single males.

It was instead a “complex shantytown consisting of various types of slums with diverse features and functions” (Ōyabu 1965, 111–114). On the one hand, it was a “flophouse-street slum” where “unskilled workers stayed as a new workforce of urban industries such as shipping, transportation, and construction during postwar economic growth.” On the other hand, it was a “complex slum” where “temporary dwellings, barracks, low-quality apartments, and other poor housing facilities for ragpickers, day laborers, and craftsmen were concentrated along with flophouses.”

The “riots” of day laborers and subsequent administrative measures consequently transformed Kamagasaki from an urban slum into the largest day labor district in Japan. Since the first “riot” occurred in 1961, day laborers had frequently

disrupted streets to resist harsh working conditions and discrimination (Shirahase 2017, 17–20). In response to these “riots,” the Osaka Prefecture Police Headquarters, Osaka City Government, and Osaka Prefecture Government designated Kamagasaki as the Airin District in 1966 and took extraordinary measures for security, welfare, and labor issues, respectively (Haraguchi 2003, 36–40).

These three governmental agencies mobilized various technologies of power, such as surveillance, discipline, and spatial governmentality alternately, thereby governing the floating and “dangerous” population of day laborers. The Police Headquarter installed, for example, surveillance cameras throughout Kamagasaki and made efforts to crack down on union activities (Shirahase 2017, 28–36). The City Government also acted to separate poor families with children from single day laborers by minimizing the family-type housing supply in Kamagasaki and providing the former with an opportunity to relocate to public housings outside of the district (Mizuuchi et al. 2003, 373–374).

It was the laborer recruitment policy of the Prefecture Government and the national government that played a decisive role, however, in changing Kamagasaki to a male-dominated day labor market (Ebi 2011, 211–216). They recruited men from all over the country to prepare for the 1970 World Expo in Osaka. Facing constant shortages in the workforce, the national and local governments decided to build the Airin General Center in Kamagasaki, finally opening it in 1970. In the center, worker recruitment and job seeking were implemented on a daily basis. As such, the center made it possible to bring single young men from all over the country to Kamagasaki.

As a result, the *Airin system* was established in the 1970s: the city and prefecture governments concentrated day laborers in Kamagasaki and took advantage of their labor power while providing these workers with only a minimum level of welfare service (Ikuta 2007, 24). In 1971, for example, Osaka City Central Rehabilitation Counseling Center, which had been designed to manage vagabonds immediately after World War II, was relocated to Kamagasaki, providing day laborers consultations for public assistance, lending them cash, and offering them shelter during the year-end and New Year holidays when all public facilities were closed (Mizuuchi 2004, 35).

During the same year, the city of Osaka, Osaka Prefecture, and the Osaka Construction Industry Association also started to give day laborers a bonus twice a year (Ôyabu 1980, 56–57). The Osaka Prefecture also paid unemployment benefits for daily workers. If day laborers were able to work for more than 26 days in two months, they could receive unemployment benefits of up to 7,500 yen for a maximum of 17 days in the following month (Fujii 1999, 21).

Despite the presence of public services for poor families with children in Kamagasaki, most administrative measures gradually converged on the

governance of a homogeneous population of single male day laborers. Like containment measures to prevent viral infection, the above-mentioned measures aimed to “*seal up* the source of the potential social infection by ‘concentrating’ or ‘containing’ supposedly deviant elements inside the yoseba” (Gill 2001, 185, *italics in origin*). While making the most of the flexibility of day labor, the *Airin system* was designed to protect the rest of society from the cultural risk of contaminating the norm of the nuclear family as well as from the physical risk of “riots” by concentrating single and vagabond-like men in the district.

The transformation of Kamagasaki into a masculine place also resulted from the selective interaction between the built environments in Kamagasaki and the disposition of male day laborers. As the demand for day laborers in the construction industry increased in preparation for the 1970 Expo, the owners of flophouses renovated their lodgings, creating smaller rooms intended for a single guest (Mizuno 1993, 230–231; Hirakawa 2011, 128–129). Although the total number of flophouses remained constant, the number of possible guests increased from 18,820 in 1965 to 22,896 in 1970 (Haraguchi 2003, 138). Families with children could no longer, however, stay in one.

Juichi Ōyabu (1981, 17, 101), a sociologist who had studied Kamagasaki since the 1960s, mentioned that day laborers are “not the type to adapt well to the social world and group life and do not get along well with others in the *Airin* district” and that they “seem to be unable to get out of loneliness even though there are so many people on the street in the area.” Tamao Terashima (1974a, 286–287), a poet who worked as a day laborer in Kamagasaki, also observed the phenomenon of many Kamagasaki workers having a habit of talking to themselves because they had no one else to talk to in their small rooms. The individualization of the living space further isolated Kamagasaki workers who were already disposed to be separate from others.

Even considering their isolation in a small and single room, it may be odd to find that day laborers in Kamagasaki could not talk to their colleagues who were facing the same harsh situation. This may be understandable, however, given that they were regarded as “a loser in a fair competition” and “only blamed themselves” because they failed to achieve affluence and join mainstream society despite nationwide economic growth (Hirakawa 1993, 180–181). When “it was not uncommon for salarymen to receive a premium of 500,000 yen at the end of the year,” day laborers “only gained 4,200 yen as a bonus” and “managed to survive by selling 400-cc of blood for only 1,400 yen” (Terashima 1974a, 287). Japanese day laborers experienced “hidden injuries of class” identically to manual workers in the United States (Sennett and Cobb 1993). They were therefore reluctant to share their past or even their name with their colleagues.

These day laborers preferred to lead a solitary lifestyle even when they ate out and took a break. In the late 1970s, Kamagasaki had more than 600 restaurants, including taverns, bars, teahouses, and room salons, and more than 30 gambling houses offering games such as pachinko and mahjong (Ōyabu 1980, 42). In their small room without a kitchen, bathroom, and toilet, they could not rest after hard work and had no choice but to “drink alcohol at a bar near the construction site and come back to Kamagasaki and sip another glass of alcohol during dinner,” and then “read a book in the flophouse, visit a cheap coffee shop to watch TV, or enjoy playing pachinko and watching performances of itinerant actors” (Terashima 1974b, 47). In short, the ways in which day laborers spent leisure time in Kamagasaki were all individualized.

Even eating out and drinking were lonely acts in Kamagasaki. Terashima (1974b, 49) added: “There is no better place to see that Kamagasaki is a place of solitude than at a restaurant” because “there is no conversation other than the hasty voice of ordering and paying, like simple codes. Workers always feel forced to live while rushing to eat.” There was no solidarity among day laborers through commensality.

It is noteworthy that the habits of eating out and drinking of day laborers are distinguished from those of salarymen. Salarymen are not merely regular employees with a monthly income but are breadwinners and full-fledged adults who are responsible for their families as well as themselves (Kelly 1993; Roberson and Suzuki 2003; Dasgupta 2017). While having dinner and drinking alcohol together after work, they confirm that they are regular members of a company despite differences in status (Allison 1994). As such, they evince the hegemonic form of masculinity in postwar Japan, which is predicated on one’s membership in one’s family and company. In contrast, day laborers in Kamagasaki embody a marginalized form of masculinity because they are neither a member of a family nor a company. Instead, they manage to help themselves without any affiliation: they are the farthest beings from the normative ideal of masculinity in post-war Japan.

By the 1990s, therefore, Kamagasaki had become a no-man’s land. On the one hand, it was governed by specific technologies of power which were only applied to single, male day laborers. They were under constant surveillance and received minimal welfare services. On the other hand, within the district, unless they rioted, they were rarely interfered with by the police, even when they drank alcohol during the daytime and gambled on the street. They were free to the extent that they were isolated. The fact that “riots” did not take place in the mid-1970s and 1980s demonstrates how effective the *Airin system* was in maintaining the no-man’s land.

3. Homeless activism and counterspace

Since the early 1990s, when the Japanese economy began to decline, the *Airin* system has been fundamentally transformed. It was not a system in which the state and local governments sufficiently provided day laborers with a social safety net but was rather one based on the premise that the economy would continue to grow, and individuals could then earn income through labor, just as the social circulation model of postwar Japan had assumed.

As mentioned in the previous section, the unemployment benefit system worked only when day laborers could find work more than 26 days in two months. Due to the downsizing of the day labor market, however, the number of day-laborer unemployment insurance holders plummeted. According to *Airin Regional Data*, updated on 2 April 2018 by Sen Arimura, the secretary general of the Kamagasaki Regeneration Forum, the number reached 24,458 in 1986 but decreased to 14,257 in 1998 before falling to 853 in 2018 (email communication with Sen Arimura on 15 August 2020).⁴ As a result, the *Airin* system became futile with regards to ensuring the social well-being of day laborers.

The day labor movement in Kamagasaki became ineffectual as well. In the early 1970s, Kamagasaki's labor movement conducted a series of campaigns to expel employers who did not pay wages or who abused workers (Haraguchi 2011b). In the mid-1970s, however, the movement launched a campaign to expand workers' welfare benefits and economic share against the constant economic growth. Accordingly, their wages were raised every year in the 1980s when workers in the construction industry were needed due to the nationwide boom in mass public projects and resort development (Koyanagi 1993, 84–85). In 1981, the average wage of Kamagasaki workers was 5,500 yen per day. Yet, from 1981 to 1987, the wages increased by 500 yen every year and from 1988 to 1991, by 1,000 yen every year. As a result, in 1992, just as the recession was about to start, the average wage of day laborers reached its peak of 13,000 yen. The labor union movement could achieve such economic gains due to the sustained growth of the Japanese economy until the early 1990s.

When the economic bubble burst, however, the labor movement could no longer function as it had. According to the Nishinari Labor and Welfare Center, the average number of recruited workers daily reached an all-time high of 5,207 in 1989 (Nishinari Rōdō Fukushi Sentā 2015, 7; email communication with the Center on 12 July 2022). In 1993, however, the number dropped to 2,625, fell below 2,000

⁴ I used the real names of two research participants such as Sen Arimura and Kanayo Ueda, whose activities in Kamagasaki are well known through their own publications or appearances in the mass and social media. I received their consent for this matter. I used pseudonyms otherwise.

for the first time in 1998, and receded to less than 1,000 in 2014 and 600 in 2020. In other words, Kamagasaki's day labor market had shrunk to one ninth of that during its heyday over the past 30 years. As many day laborers, particularly aged ones, could not find work and became homeless, demanding higher wages from businesses became inconceivable.

In fact, homelessness has always existed in Kamagasaki given that it is impossible to find work during harsh weather due to the nature of the construction industry. Various volunteer organizations have carried out support activities for rough sleepers since the 1970s. The daily average number of rough sleepers around Kamagasaki surged, however, making these extant volunteering practices pointless. In the early 1990s, there were approximately 300 homeless people around Kamagasaki, but by 2000 the number had increased to about 1,200 (Ōkura 2011, 11). Thus, none of the existing administrative measures, labor movements, and volunteer activities, that had ensured the safety of the Kamagasaki population, worked properly.

In the fall of 1993, the leaders of the day labor union, a religious group, and a medical outreach organization formed an anti-unemployment association to tackle the increasing number of homeless people. The association set out the two main goals of offering work and securing accommodation for day laborers who became homeless. It pressured the Osaka City and Osaka Prefecture governments to take urgent measures for the homeless by protesting on the street and in front of local government buildings as well as by making policy proposals to local and national governments. In short, it created a counterspace for the homeless in Kamagasaki.

In 1994, the association asked that the Osaka City and Osaka Prefecture governments permit the homeless to stay in the Airin General Center at night (Matsushige 1999). When the local governments provided the association with hardtack and blankets, it distributed them to approximately 500-600 homeless people staying overnight in the center. In November of 1998, it rented a vacant lot owned by the local government in Kamagasaki, where it installed large tents capable of housing nearly 200 homeless people at night. The association bought the tents and beds, and former day laborers built temporary accommodations for themselves. Through struggles against and negotiations with the local governments, the association finally opened two shelters: the Imamiya Shelter with 600 beds in April of 2000 and the Haginochaya Shelter with 440 beds in February of 2004.⁵ As such, it provided the homeless with the minimum accommodation by which they could avoid staying on the street at night.

⁵ In 2015, the Haginochaya Shelter was renovated and became the Airin Shelter with 450 beds, while the old Imamiya Shelter was closed. Homeless people can stay at night and day in the new shelter.

Meanwhile, in November of 1994, the association ran a public employment project for those aged fifty-five or older, funded by the Osaka City and Osaka Prefecture governments, thereby providing temporary jobs to elderly day laborers and homeless people who could not find work on the day labor market. Those who registered for the public employment project had various jobs such as cleaning the Airin General Center; managing parking around the center; cleaning local parks and schools; and painting preschools, bus stops and rides on the playground. These workers received 5,700 yen per day.

Because there were not enough jobs for all registered members, workers had to take turns. Initially, one had only 12 opportunities to work a year. Owing to the endeavors of the anti-unemployment association, however, the number of work opportunities steadily increased whereby one registered member has been provided with 70 opportunities to work annually since the 2010s (Nishinari Rōdō Fukushi Sentā 2012). Although the average income that one can earn per month through this public employment project amounts to only about 30,000 yen, it is an indispensable source of income for the aged homeless who are unlikely to find work on the day labor market.

The association reached a critical turning point in 1999. Some of its members decided to establish a non-profit organization called the Kamagasaki Support Organization (the KSO hereafter). They aimed to improve the social treatment of rough sleepers and those who are likely to become homeless and assist their self-reliance. Despite internal opposition by those who felt that the NPO might restrict the activities of the association to helping homeless people in place of local governments, they persuasively insisted that the NPO should be established to run the public employment project and the shelters on its own and actively implement other projects as well for the homeless.⁶

Since its establishment, the KSO has strengthened its activities to ensure the safety of the homeless rather than resisting local governments. In 2000, the KSO reshuffled its organization into three departments: employment assistance, shelter management and consultation. While the first two departments were responsible for running the existing tasks, the consultation department provided advice to registered members of the public employment project, to shelter users, and to other people in need. As such, the KSO strengthened its role in helping rough sleepers and day laborers 65-years-old and older receive public assistance and escape from living on the street.

The NPO redefined its identity from "an organization that realizes achievements gained through struggles with local governments" to "an organization that

⁶ Because it was not a corporate body, the anti-unemployment association was entrusted with the public employment project and shelters via a welfare corporation in Kamagasaki.

develops various assistance projects while bridging the gap between existing systems" (Kamagasaki Shien Kikō 2010, 12). Owing to these efforts, the number of people escaping homelessness has increased dramatically since 2008; more than a third of the 2,236 members in the public employment project in 2009 became welfare recipients (Kamagasaki Shien Kikō 2010, 16). The KSO has continued to make efforts to encourage the aged homeless to join the welfare system. From 2016 to 2019, the number of the recipients amounted to 67, 75, 86 and 90 respectively (Ōsakashi Fukushimayoku Jiritsushienka 2019, 11). As a result, the number of homeless people around Kamagasaki decreased from nearly 1,200 in the early 2000s to about 600 in 2010, falling to approximately 400 in 2019.

In addition to helping the aged homeless obtain public assistance benefits, the consultation department offered them advice regarding pensions, debt and residential registration. It also helped to facilitate communication between public officials and shelter users, and conducted regular health checkups in cooperation with medical support organizations. Moreover, it paid regular visits to public assistance recipients living alone in apartments or staying in hospitals to assess their health and living conditions. Even for recipients who did not have the habit of responsibly managing money or taking medicine on a schedule due to their unstable lifestyle as day laborers, it managed welfare benefits on behalf of them and helped them take their medication regularly (Interview with Satoshi Fukushima at the KSO, 15 February 2013). As such, the KSO played a pivotal role in governing this unstable and vulnerable population of rough sleepers and welfare recipients.

The KSO did not merely stop, however, at supplying welfare services to the homeless in place of local governments. Instead, it implemented the public employment project with the ability to encourage aged rough sleepers to find relationships with society (Okino 2009). The project has been organized to take turns working with the same members as a unit for one year. As a result, a bond could be formed between the members in the work unit. Some homeless people also took on the role of leaders in the work unit.

In the 2007 and 2009 surveys of members registered in the project, they were given the following question: "How does work in the project help you?" Those surveyed considered that the work mattered because it increased their motivation to work, giving them a sense of participation in society, and allowed them to form relationships with colleagues (Kamagasaki Shien Kikō 2010, 30–31). The proportion of respondents appreciating the social significance of the project also increased by 10% from 2007 to 2009. They therefore highlighted the importance of "relating themselves to society" as much as that of continuing to work and earn a small amount of income (*ibid.*, 50).

The KSO also expanded its activities in 2013 toward "making Kamagasaki a neighborhood where anyone can work together with others" (Kamagasaki Shien

Kikō 2013, 1). Announcing “regardless of whether one is homeless or not, working means more than earning income or making a living,” it aimed to create conditions in which “one can recover from the suffering of isolation by working for others and obtaining the dignity of one’s work.” For this purpose, the KSO encouraged those aged 55 and over in the public employment project to learn skills such as cleaning, gardening and painting. It also held job placement workshops and helped middle-aged job seekers find regular work in elderly care and building cleaning markets. It also launched the Employment Support Project for Airin Unstable Workers in cooperation with Osaka Prefecture, with the goal of helping those under the age of 55 achieve self-reliance by starting an internship and taking simple jobs. Therefore, it can be said that the KSO has striven to help the disadvantaged, either old or young, become self-reliant and involved with society through working.

It is noteworthy that several actors, both in and outside of Kamagasaki, made it possible for the KSO to implement all these activities and for the excluded to become self-reliant and socially connected. These achievements would have been impossible had it not been for the volunteers, local business owners and local governments which helped the homeless leave the street and set up decent living conditions. Some owners of single-room occupancy hotels allowed homeless people, for example, to apply for public assistance benefits using the address of the hotels, and they did not require deposits or rent until they were approved for the benefits (Interview with Kiyoshi Tanaka, 16 February 2013). Furthermore, these owners transformed their hotels into *sapōtibu hausu*, supportive houses, which provide aged public assistance recipients with care services. Without such cooperation from business owners, the KSO could not have helped rough sleepers and other disadvantaged people find affordable housing and stay connected in Kamagasaki.

In summary, in the aftermath of the economic recession in the 1990s, homeless activism in Kamagasaki created a counterspace by pressuring local governments to provide an increasing number of rough sleepers with work and shelter. As it transformed into an NPO in the 2000s, it functioned to implement homeless support projects while maintaining cooperative relationships with local governments and local business leaders. This change in homeless activism in Kamagasaki does not mean that it has declined. Instead, it suggests that it achieved a form of publicness in which both the counterspace and public sphere were closely intertwined, thereby developing an effective pathway toward empowering the disadvantaged to feel connected and independent through work.

4. Community development movement and the public sphere

In the late 1990s, when the anti-unemployment association was about to turn into the KSO, a community development movement appeared in Kamagasaki. The Kamagasaki Residential Problem Workshop played a significant role in launching the movement (Arimura 2000, 93). Formed in October of 1997, the workshop intended to study HABITAT II of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. It consisted of employees of the Nishinari Labor Welfare Center, experts in housing issues and community development, Osaka City officials, and owners of single-room-occupancy hotels.

The workshop argued that the community development movement should “not just aim to solve homeless problem, but to create a community in which they can continue to live until they age” because the problem “will not stop at helping the homeless find housing but is actually related to many social and welfare issues which take place after they obtain public assistance benefits” (Ogura et al. 2008, 32). In other words, this movement sought not only to help the homeless to get off the street but also to create a social environment they could inhabit with other residents in Kamagasaki.

To incorporate a variety of people into the community development movement, the workshop reorganized in 1999 and became the Kamagasaki Regeneration Forum, creating the Community Development Plaza, a public sphere where individuals could assemble to discuss and propose a vision for Kamagasaki. The forum held the plaza on the second Tuesday of every month to find ways to make Kamagasaki a sustainable community. Anyone could participate in the plaza as an individual regardless of one's affiliation, thereby overcoming the barriers between several organizations in the community. As of August of 2022, the forum held the 224th plaza, including regular and special meetings. In the public sphere, numerous ideas and plans to solve the homeless problem and create an inclusive community were discussed.

In 2000, for example, the forum planned to expand the number of supportive houses (Fujita 2004). Facing a decline in the number of guests, because day laborers fell into homelessness and could not afford to pay for lodging per day, owners of single-room-occupancy hotels changed their lodgings to apartments for public assistance recipients. Because these apartments were not welfare facilities, however, they did not have any staff to assist the aged occupants. The supportive houses provided them with several types of support such as round-the-clock staffing, safety confirmations, counseling, monetary management, medication management, health checkups, and registration assistance for long-term elderly care insurance. Sen Arimura, the secretary-general of the forum, persuaded the business owners to remodel their hotels into supportive houses. Thanks to such efforts, there are currently eight supportive houses in Kamagasaki.

In addition, the forum tried to expand the scope of people participating in community development. Above all, there was a need to improve the relationship with local associations to redefine the relationship between day laborers, homeless people and residents. To this end, in 2002, Kiyoshi Tanaka, who as an owner of two single-room occupancy hotels and a supportive house in Kamagasaki, had already participated in the forum, rebuilt the local association where his supportive house was located, becoming the chairperson of the local association. He made efforts to formulate a favorable relationship between residents and public assistance recipients in Kamagasaki. He gave the elderly in his supportive house, for example, an opportunity to prepare for events at a daycare center affiliated with a Catholic church. Through these events, public assistance recipients could form close relationships with children and teachers at the daycare center.

The forum also organized a public meeting in order to study the *Homeless Act*, with chairpersons of local associations in Kamagasaki in attendance. Kiyoshi Tanaka (Interview, 16 February 2013) emphasized the significance of the meeting by saying: "Before studying the act, many people thought it would be okay if there were no homeless people in this neighborhood. However, even if they disappear from this neighborhood, they are just moving to another place and sleeping on the street. The chairpersons as well as I became enlightened." In July of 2003, those in the meeting issued a report to support the self-reliance of homeless people. With the cooperation of local associations as well as religious volunteer groups, the forum helped set up a foundation to develop trust among various actors in the community.

The forum still had difficulty communicating, however, with local governments. While it had an opportunity to conduct a joint research project with another community development group, the forum could develop relationships with local governments because the community development group conducted a series of projects with the support of the city of Osaka from 2005 to 2009 to improve environments around local elementary and middle schools (Nishinari Kuyakusho 2012, 4).

In the meantime, the community development group, composed of local leaders including chairpersons of residential associations, also needed to create relationships with day laborers and homeless people through the forum. Plans included relocating stalls along the wall of a local elementary school, some of which were suspected of selling drugs to day laborers and rough sleepers and handling stray dogs on the street. Osaka City authorities were found to be reluctant to deal with these problems. Even if the group asked the local government to control the unowned dogs, it was told that some dogs could be taken in by the day laborers and rough sleepers, and that the local government was unwilling to intervene in the issue worrying about a "riot" (Interview with Kiyoshi Tanaka, 16 February 2013).

In July of 2008, the community development group and the forum cooperated to create a venue for local solidarity and launched the Tentative Extensive Network for Haginochaya Community Development. It included organizations close to local governments, such as business organizations as well as those close to rough sleepers such as outreach groups, NPOs and labor unions (Terakawa 2012). It became another public sphere in which these local organizations could remain loosely connected while the forum played a vital role in its operations. The tentative extensive network held a meeting every second Friday each month to discuss local issues.

In comparison with the forum, which focused on forming trust relationships and developing ideas necessary to improve Kamagasaki by holding the plaza, the tentative extensive network played a significant part in reviewing and implementing these ideas. It removed the stalls next to the elementary school, for example, without any disruption, reclaimed local parks that had long been abandoned, and handled stray dogs without any trouble related to homeless people. Based on these advancements in community development, it drew up a comprehensive community development plan in 2010.

As such, the forum and the tentative extensive network formed a public sphere in Kamagasaki. The public sphere emerged initially in the plaza held by the forum, where individuals freely discussed various ideas pertaining to local issues. These individuals who built mutual trust in the plaza persuaded the leaders of local associations and volunteer groups to create the tentative extensive network. Since it was an assembly of leaders in each organization in Kamagasaki, the tentative extensive network could transform the ideas discussed in the plaza into concrete measures. The public sphere in Kamagasaki therefore had a dual structure which linked individual engagement and organizational involvement, thereby promoting a foundation for community development.

The fact that the comprehensive community development plan was already prepared through a bottom-up process in the public sphere began to matter when the Mayor of Osaka announced a redevelopment plan called the Nishinari Special Zone Initiative in January of 2012 (Suzuki 2016). As the Mayor planned to integrate Osaka Prefecture, the city of Osaka, and the city of Sakai into one regional unit, he had no choice but to improve the living environment of the Nishinari ward including Kamagasaki. Otherwise, no wards in the city would have been willing to be integrated with the Nishinari ward. Thus, when the initiative was initially announced, there were concerns among activists in Kamagasaki that a top-down urban redevelopment might proceed (interview with Sen Arimura, 12 February 2013).

Contrary to these concerns, however, the initiative has been carried out in line with demands from the community because local leaders could be involved in designing the initiative (Suzuki 2013). From June to September of 2012, they

attended 12 meetings in which they proposed detailed plans for the initiative. In October of 2012, they submitted a report to the Mayor which contained various measures for the ward, and particularly Kamagasaki, including urgent measures for homelessness, local welfare, tuberculosis and security issues; mid-term measures for education, domestic tourism and art promotion; and long-term measures for the remodeling of the Airin General Center and redevelopment around Shinimaya Station. Many of these plans had been already included in the comprehensive community development plan proposed by the tentative extensive network.

Thus, the first stage of the initiative project (2013–2017) was implemented in a bottom-up process. In 2013, the Area Management Council was set up in which both Osaka city officials and various leaders in Kamagasaki participated to decide on and implement specific projects for the initiative. To collect a broad range of public opinions from citizens living in or interested in Kamagasaki, the Town Hall Meeting for Reviewing Community Development in Airin District was also held six times from September to December of 2014. Estimates ranged from 80 to 160 citizens who attended these meetings, discussing several issues regarding parks, municipal housing, medical facilities, revitalization of stations and labor facilities. So as to listen to the opinions of those who could not attend the meetings in person, interviews were conducted with residents of public housing and shelters. Finally, to synthesize all the opinions in the council and the meetings, city officials and local leaders launched the Airin Community Development Committee. As such, a broad and inclusive system of consultation and implementation for community development in Kamagasaki was established. This system continues to work in the second stage of the initiative (2018–2022) to make Kamagasaki a community in which anyone has the opportunity to restart their life.

Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that the greatest achievement in a series of community development movements in Kamagasaki was to successfully create a venue for local governments, residents, and various organizations to move beyond deep-rooted confrontations and share opinions. Owing to the bottom-up approach to community development, despite the concerns of day laborers and rough sleepers (Marr 2020), all the main facilities, such as the Airin General Center, the Airin Public Employment Security Bureau, Haginochaya Public Housing, and the Osaka Community Medical Center, are due to remain in the district while the initiative continues. In particular, the center is scheduled to be remodeled to not only accommodate the needs of day laborers, but also to meet the demands of other marginalized people, such as children, women, sexual minorities and foreigners. Without the public sphere created by the forum and the tentative extensive network and the subsequent liaisons between activists, welfare recipients, local leaders, and public officials, such an inclusive and comprehensive community development could not have been achieved.

5. Art-mediated outreach programs and ibasho

Since the 2000s, the physical situation of Kamagasaki has significantly improved as elderly homeless people receive public assistance benefits and the bottom-up and inclusive community development program is flourishing. Public assistance recipients who escaped homelessness ended up isolated, however, in their small rooms. Although urgent economic and residential problems have been resolved due to the welfare benefits and other measures, the former rough sleepers are often socially cut off, facing the possible outcomes of isolated deaths, alcoholism, and gambling or even a return to homelessness.

Running a café, guesthouse, and bookstore in Kamagasaki, Cocoroom offers art programs to create a link between public assistance recipients and society in Kamagasaki (Ueda 2016, 19). The name of this NPO is an acronym of its Japanese name, *koe to kotoba to kokoro no rūmu*, which literally means “a room for voices, words, and hearts.” It prioritizes expressing one’s ideas and emotions through language and other mediums over high-class works by artists. By doing so, it aims to create a place to overcome “the toughness in life” (Amamiya 2007).

Kanayo Ueda, a poet and representative of the NPO, was unrelated to Kamagasaki until the city of Osaka launched the Art Park Project in Shinsekai, located next to the day-labor district in 2002.⁷ She decided to take advantage of this project, which promised to lease unoccupied stores in a public building to artists without charging rent and utility fees for ten years. In 2003, she opened a café in the building and set up the NPO the following year. As she held diverse types of art events such as poetry readings, plays, dances, and band performances, she came to know activists from Kamagasaki who happened to hold meetings at the café. She eventually learned about Kamagasaki’s dire situations and social prejudices against day laborers and homeless people in the community.

Realizing that there were no art-related activities in Kamagasaki, Ueda thought that there might be homeless people who were interested in art. She did not intend to, however, quit her art activities and start supporting the homeless. Instead, she wished to become involved in Kamagasaki through art. Cocoroom helped the Musubi, a picture-card show group consisting of public assistance recipients to, for example, continue their performances. It also documented the words and memories of those having lived in Kamagasaki in books and films. Despite all these significant activities, the NPO ran the risk of closing the café because the city of Osaka abruptly decided to stop the art park project due to financial issues.

⁷ The following descriptions of Cocoroom and its activities were based on three interviews with Ueda in 2013 and 2015 as well as her publications and other literature on the NPO. For brevity, the dates of the interviews (15 February 2013; 28 January 2015; 1 February 2015) are omitted in the following section.

Ueda decided to relocate the café to Kamagasaki in 2008 because she believed that she could not have run the NPO without “the power of place” accumulated in Kamagasaki (Kotane Sēsaku Iinkai 2008, 36).

When Cocoroom was re-opened on a corner of the shopping district in Kamagasaki, Ueda found that the number of homeless people had decreased, and that the number of public assistance recipients had increased. Taking into account this changing local context, she launched various programs in which the elderly in Kamagasaki could participate. Cocoroom held, for example, a monthly workshop where the aged had a chance to express their thoughts and feelings by writing poems, drawing pictures or doing calligraphy. Ueda endeavored to hold these monthly workshops in various facilities in Kamagasaki because she realized that aged welfare recipients had difficulty in accessing the café which was located at the eastern edge of Kamagasaki. Through all these outreach efforts, she prioritized the idea that people should be able to frankly express what they wanted to say and pay attention to what others say. Moreover, she aimed to explore the possibility of allowing multiple voices to be heard and then enabling people to recover from difficulties in life on their own rather than being caught in the relationships between donors and recipients.

In line with these workshops, Cocoroom launched Kamagasaki Art University in 2012,⁸ because Ueda wanted the elderly to find a regular lifestyle by attending art workshops more often than merely once a month. During the first term, from November of 2012 to February of 2013, the university offered a total of 42 courses regarding expression, poetry, philosophy, calligraphy, astronomy, religion, emotion, art, and guidance, two or three times a week. These lectures were given to anyone for free by a poet, a geographer, an astronomer, a musician, nurses, a calligrapher, and various artists who sympathized with the significance of the university. During the first term, 184 students were enrolled, and 576 people in total attended these classes. Most of the students were single elderly men who were public assistance recipients. There were also those who had difficulties in life, were interested in Kamagasaki, or wished to learn how to facilitate art programs.

Classes at the university have become a place for participants to reveal themselves and communicate with others in several ways. The poetry class, for example, which was offered by Ueda herself was conducted and had two participants pair up and write a poem based on a story they had heard about the topic of the day. The expression class always aimed to allow participants to reveal themselves as much as possible through words and bodily movements. The geography class was run by a professor at a local university; as he explained Kamagasaki’s history,

⁸ It should be noted that this is not an authorized institution for higher education at all despite it being referred to as a university. It is a series of free and art-based outreach programs.

participants in the class worked together to draw its past, present and future on a map.

Cocoroom has been holding the Art University every year since 2012. In the second term, from September of 2013 to March of 2014, a total of 60 courses were offered, and the cumulative number of participants reached 1,114 (Ueda and Ueda 2014, 63). In August of 2014, it officially participated in the Triennial held in Yokohama to present poems, calligraphy and paintings by the university members. Since 2015, it has organized all the programs in two terms and has launched graduate courses as well. In addition, in February of 2015, and January and October of 2016, the Kamagasaki Opera was held to showcase the activities of the university in cooperation with a local university and a homeless activist from the United Kingdom. Even after the COVID-19 crisis arose in 2020, the university continued in various forms, offline or online.

All these activities at the university were consistent with what Cocoroom had done thus far in that they were predicated on the idea that voices that have seldom been heard should be raised by the elderly themselves rather than through other representatives (Ueda, Mogi, and Ueda 2013, 30). The university aimed to create a place where "one's ideas can be frankly expressed by trustful people in the same space and feeling can be relieved beyond a fixed relationship between supporters and the supported or between teachers and students" (Ueda et al 2013, 26). Through art-mediated practices, Cocoroom has produced a "third place" (Oldenburg 2001), or *ibasho*⁹ where the excluded from school refusals and dropouts to unemployed youth, public assistance recipients, the homeless, the disabled, and single parents are welcomed, respected, and empowered, thereby regaining their own self-worth (Fujiwara 2010).

Tomu Arai, a staff member who worked at Cocoroom from 2012 to 2017 (interview, June 28, 2016), noted that "those who are cared for usually feel sorry, but the aged who come here think that they are supporting or cheering on Cocoroom." "Because they do not think that they are cared for, they can go in and out without any burden" he added. Therefore, "Cocoroom only plays a role in releasing what was being formulated in their mind rather than pulling out what the aged have not expressed for 40 years, and in the process, it looks forward to seeing interesting works produced."

In addition to the aged welfare recipients, instructors and participants who came from outside Kamagasaki felt empowered at the art university. A professor of astronomy recalled, for example, that the participants could be neither astronomers nor donators for the research on science, but that he re-experienced the

⁹ *Ibasho* literally means a place in Japanese, but it often implies a space where the excluded can feel respected and empowered.

joy of studying it while collaborating with these novices at the art university (Ueda and Ueda 2014, 55). A college student who visited Cocoroom to draft a senior thesis about the NPO initially thought, "It is impossible to have a serious conversation between people who have nothing in common with me at all." Finding that some people paid close attention to his story at the art university, however, he realized that "accepting something unknown may contribute to creating an environment where I can live without hardship" (Ueda and Okamoto 2011, 33).

In contrast to the idea of "membership society" mentioned in the introduction (Kido 2019, 392), Cocoroom, as a form of public space, is different from family, school, and company which guaranteed lifetime stability to their members in return for their commitment to the institutions. Meanwhile, the public space which Cocoroom has cultivated can be said to be an autonomous space to support "loose connection or flexible participation" (Ueda and Okamoto 2011, 34). A part-time lecturer in his mid-40s attended, for example, the art university classes and defined Cocoroom as "an intimate and yet public place where one can realize that one is needed and recognized by others" (Ueda and Ueda 2014, 57). He elaborated on his definition by saying that Cocoroom was "a place full of relief, comfort of mind, freedom, joy, and smiling faces," but was at the same time "a place where one could escape from exhaustion in the mind and body resulting from the entanglements of human relationships."

The phrase "an intimate and yet public place" properly captures the dual functions performed by Cocoroom as *ibasho*, that is, a public space in which one can formulate relationships between people with the help from others, and simultaneously which enables individuals to maintain their own autonomy without completely relying on others. In such a safe place, the significance of self-reliance is therefore distinguished from that of self-help in various neoliberal policies and discourses. Instead of pressuring individuals to take risks and the responsibility for the results themselves, it suggests that one lives in relationships on which one does not completely depend, and yet on which one cannot help depending. Ueda explained the relationships of "not being dependent and yet dependent"¹⁰ as follows:

There are two types of *jiritsu* in Japanese: self-reliance and autonomy. We are aiming, however, for the latter. People cannot live alone. We are human beings who live in relationships while helping each other. I once hated such intimate relationships, and helping others, so I tried to escape from them. What matters is how to maintain autonomy while

¹⁰ This phrase came from a poem written by a poet listening to a life history of a day laborer in Kamagasaki. It was also used for the title of a documentary made by Cocoroom on Kamagasaki day laborers. For more information, please refer to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tudnTcz1jCA>.

hanging out with others. I think the double meanings of self-reliance and autonomy are concerned with whether we can say “help me” to others when we are in a difficult situation. Who can live without relying on other people? (1 February 2015)

In summary, Cocoroom creates an alternative type of public space in which “it is taken for granted that one may fail” and where “even one who fails can stand on one’s own while someone, if not everyone, strives to help him or her” (Ueda and Ueda 2014, 42). On top of work and residence for the excluded as well as the public sphere where various ideas are fully discussed to help them, what Cocoroom has done indicates that they can avoid being isolated and stand on their feet when they find another public space or *ibasho* where their self-worth is respected.

6. The assemblage of publicness in Kamagasaki and the future of Japanese society

The transformations of Kamagasaki over the last 30 years reveal that several forms of publicness have worked in coincidental and complimentary ways. The counter-space which resulted from the combination of the labor movement and volunteer activities was indispensable for guaranteeing rough sleepers a minimum level of work and shelter, and eventually public assistance benefits. The public sphere which was initiated by a series of community development movements along with residents and local governments made a great contribution to the redevelopment of Kamagasaki, which could be implemented in inclusive ways.

The counterspace and the public sphere were not sufficient, however, even if both were indispensable, to encourage the homeless and public assistance recipients to become social and self-reliant beings. The welfare system and inclusive community development could not completely prevent aged welfare recipients from being isolated in their tiny rooms. Instead, they needed an alternative public space between no-man’s land and the space of sociality, i.e., *ibasho*, in which they could be connected to others but at the same time represent themselves on their own.

In Kamagasaki, such a new public place emerged from art-based outreach activities. On the one hand, *ibasho* straddled both realms, having one foot in the no-man’s land because it encouraged the least educated to produce their own artwork, which did not have to be high culture. In this sense, all the art activities within *ibasho* were free from the normative idea of art in society. On the other hand, however, expressing one’s own ideas must not violate the normative way of social interaction. Rather than speaking out in one’s voice recklessly, one had to respect others’ voices, as one is supposed to do in the space of sociality such as public parks. People can consequently be mutually supported and connected. In

Kamagasaki, art-related practices contributed to creating *ibasho*, a public space where the former homeless could represent themselves freely while following the rules and respecting others.

In recent years, creating *ibasho* has spread across various sectors throughout Japan. Residents in remote areas build, for example, a meeting venue where they can interact with one other (Allison 2012, 364–365). Community labor unions not only work to improve employment conditions, but also create a comfort zone for workers, who are mentally suffering from non-regular employment, to regain their self-esteem (Hashiguchi 2011). Schools which have a high percentage of dropouts offer a safe space in which disadvantaged students can build up trust with adults other than teachers and continue to stay until graduating (*Ibasho Kafye Tachiage Projyekuto* 2019). Urban youth venture to live in share houses where they aspire to find both social ties and independence (Grinshpun 2022). These examples of the spreading of *ibasho* across fields do not mean that they are superior to other forms of public spaces. Instead, it indicates that Japanese society is moving to the next stage, where one aims to achieve a new form of solidarity and self-reliance or aspires to compatibility between stability and freedom.

While the social circulation model of postwar Japan provided Japanese citizens with a sense of security, it also pressured them to be subordinate to the organizations of which they were a member: they felt secured and yet constrained. The neoliberal reconfiguration of Japanese society gave some individuals a chance to be free from such organizational shackles and be rewarded by their merits, while, however, instilling in others a sense of precariousness, with the heaping of all the responsibility of the results from their choices. There was a division between winners and losers. Neither of these two systems can be suitable for the needs of those who wish to achieve the value of both freedom and security simultaneously.

This research suggests that civic engagements in the most disadvantaged community offer an alternative path of self-reliance and solidarity by forming multiple layers of public spaces. The development of social movements in Kamagasaki demonstrated that day laborers and welfare recipients could become autonomous in society only when they were economically supported, legitimately represented and equally empowered through the assemblage of various forms of publicness.

As of 2022, Kamagasaki is in the middle of a great transformation. A top-notch hotel opened over the border of Kamagasaki, which might accelerate the ongoing gentrification around the train station and result in the expulsion of homeless people from this community. In fact, approximately 20 homeless and activists, who were concerned about being expelled from the community, occupied the Airin General Center which was scheduled to be remodeled to make it more earthquake-proof. Thus, it remains to be seen whether Kamagasaki continues to exist for the excluded.

The postwar development of social movements in Kamagasaki proves, however, that the community has enhanced the capacity to embrace the most excluded in Japanese society. Despite the threats of gentrification and redevelopment, it is believed that activists, residents, business owners and public officials will take advantage of the accumulated capabilities in Kamagasaki and recreate the center as a form of *ibasho* for all, i.e., a place of inclusion to cater to various people including children, women, and foreigners as well as day laborers and the homeless. Such public spaces are appearing and are yet still desperately needed to respond to the precarity prevailing in twenty-first century Japan.

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