

## A Tentative Study on the Citizens’ Deliberation/*Shimin-Tōgikai* in Chigasaki City – A Trial towards Diverse Participatory Methods

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### Abstract

This article will tentatively examine one of the most well known participatory methods, Citizens’ Deliberation/*Shimin-Tōgikai*. While this is introduced into so many local governments, it is hard to say if the importance and the indispensability for making our participatory method are functional or well examined. So, through observations, questionnaire surveys and theoretical translations, this article will show some remarkable features of Citizens’ Deliberation, although it is not a perfect solution. As a result, in regard to diverse participatory methods, Citizens’ Deliberation has strong possibilities to open discussion arenas, to formalize convergence processes of citizens’ opinion, to make shared opinion(s) among citizens, and to put aggregated experiences into the municipality.

### 1. Introduction

Since 2005, a method of Citizens’ Deliberation (CD)/*Shimin-Tōgikai* had been widely accepted in many Japanese municipalities and other local gov-

ernments for their process of citizens’ involvement and/or citizens’ participation. This is an interesting investigation according to CDPN’s survey<sup>2</sup> that more than 150 meetings had already taken place in Japan as of February 2011. It is also a great surprise for many social scientists, NGOs and even for municipality staff that the CD and its similar meetings became so famous in a short time.

Facing this situation, many reasons had been given. Some of them were concerning civil society, others were renewing municipal administration processes, establishing democratic decision-making and so forth. However, it could be said that the reason for introducing CD into municipal citizens’ participatory methods is aiming at renovating existing traditional ways of participatory culture and at renewing the current patterns in the meaning of “citizens’ society”. And last but not least, many municipal officers expected to realize more efficient methods for collecting citizens’ opinion(s). For instance, most municipalities are looking for a new and alternative path heading toward a

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<sup>2</sup> Citizens’ Discussion Promotion Network ([www.cdnpn.jp/](http://www.cdnpn.jp/))

“Democratic Decision-Making” process instead of old stiff routines.

Of course, although the CD as a new experience on the municipal level is sometimes successful as mentioned above, it is not a proof for the significant supremacy of CD compared with other participatory methods. Moreover, it also might be true that the CD’s discussion processes and its thinking/rethinking processes for the participants are not direct and perfect solutions for having well designed participatory policies on the municipal level, but are rather more important steps for realizing - and for knowing - citizens’ well discussed and collective opinion(s) on the community level. In this context, CD should be examined as an important improving process of converging citizens’ opinion(s). In short, we should rethink the merits of CD in the deliberation process. This is one of important questions of this article. And also, this article will try to draw a significant character of CD along the next question: How can we utilize CD for adequate diverse participatory methods or patterns on the municipality level.

In Chigasaki City, Kanagawa prefecture, the municipality office had been utilizing this CD method for improving their participatory process under the name of “New Democracy” and “New Public Commons” since 2009. Through designing CD in Chigasaki city and its discussion process, most of the authors are engaging in Chigasaki’s CD.

From these experiences and the rich cases of observing CDs, this series of articles are trying to examine and discuss the possibility or uniqueness of CD on the municipality level from the point of

view as a member of the steering committee. Especially, this series is including a comparative viewpoint between Germany and Japan. Along this scenario, this article tries to find out the meaning of deliberation and the importance of CD for “citizens’ society”.

## **2. Short history of Chigasaki’s CD**

### **2.1. Experiences of CD in Chigasaki city**

In cooperating with Chigasaki Municipality Office (CMO), Junior Chamber Association Chigasaki (JC Chigasaki) and the Shonan Research Institute Bunkyo University (BU), we organized a steering committee and tried to place an action research for doing CD in Chigasaki city. As for now, six times CDs had already been organized by the steering committee, which consists of the above-mentioned members. This is a rather unique style that the steering committee is working under the name of “collaboration” among those three bodies<sup>3</sup>. In the experienced six CDs, five times they were funded by CMO and the other time it was initiated by BU. Beneath, table 1 shows the series of CDs in Chigasaki city.

This is also a significant feature that six CDs in the last five years and holding them constantly is the sign of a very positive attitude of CMO for utilizing CD in establishing a better participatory method. Needless to say, the current mayor has a strong interest for doing CD, and he is showing a deep understanding of its usefulness. Additionally, through his presence at the venue of CD, participants could understand that these discussions were meaningful for their local administration, because they could feel their opinions were trans-

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<sup>3</sup> Most of the cases of CD in Japan, the collaboration usually consists of a municipality office and the local body of Junior Chamber Association. Compared with this, it is a rare case to organize a steering committee with a research institute.

**Table 1 : the series of CDs in Chigasaki city**

	Date	Issue	Participants
No.1	Oct. 31 and Nov. 1, 2009 (one and half day)	Let’s make our better life, collaborating with Chigasaki City	32
No.2	July 4, 2010	Policy of sport and citizens’ sports life in Chigasaki city	30
No.3	Nov. 7, 2010	“Machizukuri” (Urban Reconstruction) and Building Regulations	29
No.4	June 18, 2011	How can we utilize the city hall? - re-construction of our city hall	34
No.5	Oct. 28, 2012	How can we manage the evacuating place by ourselves? - To ease our fears of earthquakes	32
No.6	June 30, 2013	Our rule of “Referendum” in Chigasaki city	30

ferred to responsible persons. Under the mayor’s direction, the main division for pushing CD into a participatory method is the citizen’s autonomy promotion section, which is always distilling and negotiating the next theme from all divisions. It could be said Chigasaki’s CDs never succeeded without their effort and devotion.

## 2.2. Citizens’ Deliberation of JC style

Another key to success was a dedicated cooperation of JC Chigasaki. Mainly in facilitation of the deliberations and logistics of the meeting, JC Chigasaki is providing its informational and marketing networks every time. Mostly, the informational network was useful for realizing the Chigasaki style CD. Because, the basic know-how for introducing CD had been transferred into the steering committee through JC’s network.

What is/are the reason(s) that Japanese

municipalities tried to introduce a CD method in recently? Probably, the most important answer was that the “Junior Chamber Association, Japan (JC Japan)” had set the basic style and process of CD from the basis of the German method, “Planungszelle<sup>4</sup>”. This JC style deliberation is, of course, translated from *Planungszelle* and almost the same. However, a few features had been arranged for the Japanese. For instance, days for deliberation are fewer – usually one or two days in Japan, number of the participants are 30 - 50, honorarium for the participants is not expensive, some discussion is not including decision-making issues, etc.

There is another explanation. It could be said that it was translated and demonstrated by JC Japan, and this “visible” and understandable trial itself could realize CD to be very famous, because it was easy to implement. And of course, we don’t

<sup>4</sup> The direct translation of this German word, *Planungszelle*, is planning-cells. The main characters are having many small group discussions - these are the cells, the numbers of cells are 5 with 5 persons – so, in total 25 citizens join, honorarium for the participants, decision-making oriented, participants are sampled randomly, making a citizens’ report to the organizer and so forth.

have to forget that many other local JCs had an important role in popularizing the JC style CD. After the first CD was held in 2005 in Chiyoda ward, Tokyo, initiated by JC Japan, since then, more than 150 discussion meetings were experienced, as mentioned above. This shows that many followers, which were mostly local JCs, were taking the JC style as a basic concept of CD.

Taking the precedence features of JC style, the steering committee of Chigasaki CD had planned the deliberation as next:

- participants are 30 - 36 citizens and making six groups with 5 or 6 citizens;
- choosing 800 citizens from the Basic Resident Register<sup>5</sup> and sending invitation letters to them;
- age of participants is over 20 years;
- preparing a small honorarium (5,000 JPY) for each participant;
- duration of deliberation is one day – except for the first CD;
- short lecture(s) on the issue by an expert before starting each discussion and offering indispensable information;
- JC members are at the tables as moderators, and other staff(s) is/are sitting together for describing keywords, although they don't discuss deeply with the participants;
- the results of each deliberation are proposed to the organizer, although the results were not a formal report for decision-making (but important information for the responsible persons).

### 3. Why Citizens' Deliberation?

Let's go back to our original question. It is

rather true that CD is not a perfect solution for a democratic path for civil society and also for the participatory decision-making method of municipality offices. Even in a field of citizens' participation at the local government level, taken altogether, so many methods had already been introduced, installed and utilized – even some of them are still not formalized. They are, for example, questionnaires survey, deliberative bodies (council, committee board), public comment, workshop, citizens' jury, referendum, deliberative polling etc. Of course, and even now, CD is also one of them and aiming at establishing a better citizens' participation. However, we should try to give an answer to the next question: Why is the method of CD newly introduced and spread so widely to a local government as a participatory method? And what can we expect from this situation?

#### A) Silent majority

At the beginning, when CD had been firstly introduced in Japan, how can we involve the so-called "silent majority" into decision-making processes of local administrations, was one of the biggest problems for many municipalities. Just in time, CD was thought to break this traditional administrative culture, which was still remaining and only few persons could have a channel to say something to local administrations, and also expected to change these situations into - at least - a much more open style.

Indeed, the officers of CMO thought that they strongly wanted to have another method(s) to know "actual" citizens' opinions, although they can get many citizens' opinions at the meeting coun-

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<sup>5</sup> Originally, the steering committee should better use random sampling for choosing the participants from the list. However, facing the situation that the younger generation hardly attend CD compared with the older in Chigasaki, we made four age categories – A) 20-34, B) 35-49, C) 50-65, D) 65 over, and choose 200 citizens from each category.

ters. Concerning the word “actual”, this is just the same as silent majority for them. In short, they didn’t want to ignore the opinions declared from well-known persons, but wanted to integrate widely diverse opinions of citizens to implement adequate local policies. For this aim, the method of CD, which includes random sampling for selecting participants and discussion processes, was thought a very timely and important task.

### **B) Improving the decision-making process**

For CMO, how they could utilize the declared citizens’ opinions into their policy-making, it was important to try the new participatory method. Facing this task, continuity of CDs as a stimulus action for the municipal area is also a key to improve CMO’s decision-making process, because it offers rich educational possibilities for both citizens and CMO officers to recognize citizens’ opinions as experts of daily life.

Through the process of CD, this method can provide good possibilities to participate in local decision-making processes for the citizens, who are statistically equally selected from the list and most of them are not familiar with their municipal policy-making, although the number of participants is not so high - usually around 30 persons at one time, and the total number of participants is 187 at this moment<sup>6</sup>. And at the venue, all of the participants can take part at the actual discussion on several issues that the steering committee had prepared in advance. And they have a chance to understand the importance and indispensability of participation and also deliberation as discussed by citizens themselves. And at the same time, the staff of CD including CMO officers can find that the

deliberated opinions are meaningful to arrange/revise local policies.

It is a very positive sign to show new possibilities of citizens’ participation to citizens from CMO side and it is also a good lesson to provide adequate knowledge about the importance of deliberation for the participants. Moreover, it was very impressive to hear from CMO officers that some of deliberated opinions were adequate and important to rethink their policy, although the experts and specialists before CD had already indicated almost the same comments – and therefore, the deliberated opinions were recognized so fruitful.

### **C) Aggregation of experiences**

When the steering committee was trying to improve the participatory method of CMO by utilizing the CD process, the members of the steering committee and CMO officers were also improving their abilities at the same time. This dialectic stimulus process was estimated and originally planned into CD implementation.

In Chigasaki city, the notable results of six CDs are many compared with other municipalities, and it could be said that the “density of experiences” of CDs is still very high. This means that the members of the steering committee and CMO officers can experience one of the participatory methods, and they can watch actual citizens’ discussions on current local problem(s), although it is not a direct discussion. Moreover, the steering committee and CMO officers can easily collect good experiences and a better understanding on both planning and managing knowledge of CDs for organizing the next one. For example, after having two or three experiences for steering CDs, the

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<sup>6</sup> However, the total number of participants will increase gradually, if CMO or other steering bodies keep trying to hold CDs.

members of the steering committee had been able to work together autonomously with understanding the division of labor. The officers of the citizen's autonomy promotion section had been able to prepare adequate letters for the participants and documents for the meetings of the steering committee spontaneously.

Needless to say, this kind of "hidden curriculum" has influence on various spheres. For instance, it is also useful for convincing other officers of CMO to be the concerned parties for an administrative reform. In this way, on the governmental side, they can gradually understand the real situation of their local areas and the actual characters of citizens. On the steering committee side, CD is still expected to provide knowledge of citizens' participation through the method of CD. Mainly, members of the steering committee have rich skills of holding deliberations not only at the CD venue, but also in their communities or in their work places.

#### **D) Collaboration**

Last but not least, this is a rather rare case of Japanese experiences to organize a steering committee, collaborating of a municipality, citizens' group (e.g. JC) and a research institute (e.g. university). Usually, "collaboration" - "Kyodo" in Japanese - as a term of local government means some kinds of partnership or cooperation between citizens and local government. In this understanding, CD was originally thought that CMO could have a better relationship with citizens via CD implementation. We should say it is the first kind of collaboration, and it includes some possibilities to formalize an alternative participatory system. If so, the second is collaboration inside the steering committee, and it includes some chances to estab-

lish social environments to open municipal participatory processes.

The most important result from the above is that this collaborative membership of three bodies is achieving impartiality, neutrality and fairness for setting discussion themes, providing information to the participants, integrating participants' expressions and sayings and transferring the discussed citizens' opinions to decision-making bodies directly. This result shows us a renovated town management style. Through these merits, the steering committee was expected to be able to realize new and alternative social functions of CD and also a method of deliberation for expressing the diversity of the citizens' opinions.

## **4. Actual deliberation at the municipality level**

### **4.1. Two types of CDs**

Since the CD method was introduced by JC, we could observe that the style of CD in Japan had been divided into two types. The first type is "opinion collection style", and the second is "opinion convergence style". The original idea of *Planungszelle* in Germany is aiming at establishing a method of decision-making, and because of this reason, opinion convergence is taken as a basic function.

On the contrary, CD is rather used as opinion collection in Japan. Because there is no channel to make a decision along the results of CD, municipality offices frequently utilize CD as a participatory method. In that type, one or two convergence-oriented discussion(s) were mixed with some collection oriented discussions in one CD meeting. Anyhow, we can find many challenging cases, which are including an alternative citizens' role of collecting, or converging (or integrating) their

opinions based upon deliberation. It is very good to make our decision-making style better with well-discussed or deliberated opinions, and to have deliberation as a method of citizens' participation in our society.

CDs in Chigasaki city are also in the same situation until now. In all cases, the steering committee has been trying to promote the opinion convergence style. However, for the participants' satisfaction, at least one opinion collecting styled deliberation should be included, if the CD tries to make some integrated citizens' opinions. The reason is that the participants are fairly satisfied when they could express many things freely in an opinion collecting discussion.

#### **4.2. Participants**

In Chigasaki's CDs, 800 citizens were chosen from the Basic Residents Register for one CD each time. Since the beginning until the last CD, the acceptance rate of citizens, who said yes to join, was quite good. And in some cases, the steering committee had to make a second selection because of over-capacity of the venue. Compared with other city's cases, the acceptance rate of an invitation letter were relatively high.

With the invitation letter, the steering committee always sends a simple questionnaire to the participants about the theme of next the CD and the reason(s) to join. Through these questionnaire surveys, we could find several interesting features of participants.

First of all, the results of the series of participants' questionnaire surveys show us the wide variety of their occupational backgrounds. There are desk (office) workers, retail and service specialists, engineers, medium and small shop owners, part

time workers, pensioners, housewives and others. In order to invite a broad range of citizens and to ask them to discuss, a random sampling method or similar sampling for choosing participants of CD is working comparably better.

Second, this is the third CD's results and it realized:

- 42% of participants felt a kind of exciting impression to join, and 22% felt anxiously feeling about CD, when they got an invitation;
- 27% of participants answered CD was very interesting, 23% thought this was an important role as a citizen to join this CD, 15% felt they wanted to participate at a new challenge;

According to these findings, most of the participants showed a very positive sign to join. Thanks to these helpful participants, all CDs in Chigasaki had been realized and succeeded. However, some steering committee members explained that this tendency is caused by a strong influence of the presence of CMO. Although we didn't have done this analysis yet, this kind of influence may be an important key for the success for continuing CD. If so, it might be said there is some relation between the acceptance rates of participants and the cooperation rates toward CMO and its administration. Anyhow, cooperation rates of participants toward CD and the above mentioned positive signs may indicate a quite interesting situation.

#### **4.3. Discussions at a table**

Every time, discussions were going well. According to our survey – all participants, after finishing CD, expressed their good impressions and feelings toward CD, which was requesting participants to discuss with citizens in a totally unfamiliar situation. This is the proof to explain CD as a

meaningful method of deliberation.

This is the result of the third CD, and it shows us that:

- 28% of participants could speak more than 7 times in one discussion period (duration is 1 hour each), 55% answered 4-6 times, no one couldn't say anything;
- 72% felt the discussion was interesting, because they could listen to various ideas and thoughts, 59% said the discussion was interesting because they could listen to opinions of various generations, 52% answered they could feel a sympathy and a sense of solidarity through discussion;
- almost 90% of participants answered that their opinion(s) were built through sufficient discussion and enough important consensus.

As above, participants kindly tried to speak on the issue in their group and to understand the importance of deliberations. It is an evidence to think that participants could have a chance to speak almost equally among them at the table, because 55% of participants said something 4-6 times in one round. Of course, it is a remarkable result that a comparably high percentage of participants could feel that the discussions were very interesting, and they could find the importance of deliberations. Moreover, they could obviously realize their discussed opinion(s) via consensus building. So, it might be said that Japanese can sufficiently discuss if the discussion method is adequate and well designed.

## **5. Making a New Social Participatory Culture**

### **5.1. Community and Citizens**

How can we set our "communal" opinion through utilizing CD? This is a very important question for both citizens and the municipality

office in these days. The reason is that Japanese municipalities are trying to listen to citizens' voice carefully for establishing a more democratic decision-making process. And this is also the reason why CDs are widely spreading among many municipality offices as mentioned above.

Then, we have to think about the next questions: What is the reason for thinking about the importance of community in the age of a globalized society? And at the same time, why do we have to put our eyesight on citizens' opinion(s)? Needless to say, there are many answers. However, we can formulate four:

- First, even if we live in a globalized world, the core of our social problems is still remaining near from ourselves (e.g. daily life, welfare, environment etc.).
- Second, our current life influences the future of society and the life of the next generations in some way (energy consumption, nuclear wastes etc.).
- Third, to think about the notion of sustainability includes the reflection on capacity, continuity and consumption of our daily life.
- Fourth, we should discuss the importance of resilience of our society facing many disasters. This discussion demands us to share information.

So, many societies and communities have started their changes for a regenerative community through sharing information. In this situation, citizens will play a big role to build their shared life and clear claim(s) through deliberation.

Moreover, there are some serious problems for the municipal officers to understand this:

- First of all, most municipalities are suffering from lack of their budget in these days, and -



because of it - municipal officers are trying to have an effective method to solve their problem(s).

- Second, so many varieties of claims and requests are coming from citizens every day. Then, municipal officers have to correspond to all of them. So, a converging request is strongly needed for their efficient work.
- Third, the legitimacy of citizens’ claims brings sometimes a trouble-full situation for the officers. E.g. if the claim was not clear whether it is a discussed idea among citizens or a private request from an individual citizen.
- Fourth, it is also a confusing pattern, when a social group declares their opinion for one problem, and an other group may express a different idea for the same problem. In this case, officers want to have a well - discussed opinion.

## 5.2. Meaning of Citizens’ Opinion(s)

What are citizens expected to do for the municipality in communicative actions of citizens and municipality officials in today’s society? For instance, for declaring citizens’ opinions, citizens should establish a “common will” of their community. It may be said that this is/are “communal claim(s)”.

At the same time, a communal claim itself is very important to proceed to foster a municipal decision and to meet final decision-making through citizens’ opinion(s). However, municipality officials want to know the reasons whether the claim is meaningful, legitimate, urgent, well discussed or/and supported by citizens. This is not only for an interest-based adjustment (negotiation), but also one of the new legislation processes between the municipality office and citizens.

Moreover, through deliberation, citizens are able to have a collective “sympathy”, which would be utilized for insisting on their claim(s) as mentioned above. On the other side, municipality officials can understand the collective sympathy as a kind of citizens’ monitoring system.

Combining with some theoretical works, we can find the importance(s) of CD as beneath.

### 1) Narrative/story

Polkinghorne (1988) explained that “narrative”/story with a social context is a basic system for transform our experiences into meaningful shared resources. As he said, telling a story is one of the most important methods for organizing, ordering and integrating our own experiences. Thanks to these activities, we are able to understand the meaning(s) and to add importance to our daily and ordinary life through using story-telling. According to this idea, CD has strong social meanings for our society.

### 2) Language system

Noie (1996) explained that a story is an interesting language system for converging, communalizing and making our experiences common. So, we could gain our communal or common experiences (this might be said “our experiences”) and/or experiences of our community.

From the above two theoretical translations, we can understand possible mutual understandings through deliberation. And also, we are able to construct a collective opinion in our society.

And the function of “story”-telling is providing us two points:

- Our experienced feelings are changeable into understandable things for us. And it results that we can have a “cognitive understandable saying”.
- On the other hand, our experienced feelings are

valuable through a deliberation process, because it has been able to change into “normative”, justified and convinced reasons.

## **6. Tentative Results and Findings**

Through our experienced-based survey, we have been able to find some points as follows:

### **A) Easy to define participants as citizens**

Because of the “random sampling” or some similar methods, citizens are the same as city-dwellers. We do not need to know their backgrounds. But, it is at the same time not good to select only some citizens, who have a certain opinion on the issue. Then, if we could have a definition of citizens, the deliberated results may have legitimacy to put them into a decision-making discussion of responsible bodies. The existence of the actual discussion can help extracting citizens’ opinion, although there are some disadvantages still remaining. Anyhow, because CD has a deliberating process inside, we may be able to apply the results as citizens’ requests with their meaning.

### **B) Easy to collect discussed opinions**

As already mentioned, this is a well known saying that the opinion, which was told individually, is sometimes difficult to accept as the citizens’ opinion for municipality officers. The reason is they couldn’t count on those opinions coming from “citizens”. However, they can easily accept these opinions, if they were well discussed and certified through deliberation. Moreover, they can also understand why the opinions were transferred to the municipality. Because, the opinions were not only deliberated by citizens just in front of municipality officers, but also added their reasons through the deliberating process. In this process, the staff is rather convinced for carefully imple-

menting the policies, and the CD helps creating discussed opinions.

But, there are some disadvantages of CD.

### **a) Expensive costs**

The financial and human resource costs are relatively expensive compared with other methods. Of course, the honorarium for the participants is a part of it. However, we should consider the human resource costs that includes planning time and skills. To hold and prepare for the CD needs deep professional understanding for setting the theme and topics of deliberation. We need these potentials to hold a CD. And to train talented staff takes a rather long time. The existence of the steering committee in Chigasaki works well to foster the staff, anyway, CD is standing on a very weak base of human resources.

### **b) Difficulties of orientation**

Participants strongly want to get sufficient and adequate information. However, problems are located in too much and too less information provided before the CD. If participants were provided too much information the deliberation is already too much controlled. If it is too less, the deliberation is not well deepened.

Very tentatively, let’s summarize the importance of deliberation. This is a communication process, in which participants of CD can tell their stories to others and hear from others. And through these interactions, they can receive some meaning for their daily experiences, and they can exchange, transfer, translate and share each experience as “our experiences”. Then, these, “our experiences” work for constructing citizens’ opinions. If we could keep finding those features, CD would be a very important method to arrange citizens’ opinions. And at the same time, CD would be

a new alternative to make participatory methods richer and meaningful from the point of view of diverse participatory methods. At least, for this aim, our society should offer several participatory systems and utilize them in adequate ways and adequate timing. Of course, this process should include improving steps.

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