

## **Bridge the Gap Between Local Governments and Communities: Key Factors in Generating Community Involvement in the Historic Preservation District in Japan<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

Since 1795, 106 districts in Japan have been selected as Important Historic Preservation Districts (Juuyo dentouteki kenzoubutsugun hozon chiku [Juudenken]). The system for protection of cultural properties enables the local government to name a "Preservation District" and allows for the development of a preservation plan based on local ordinances. Moreover, the well-organized, bottom-up networks, which are groups for community development activities on the basis of local participation, play an important role in raising awareness and conducting several preservation projects in their own towns.

This study mainly focused on cultural resources management in the local community. The system, which possibly bridged the gap between the local authorities and the community, was revealed. Fifty non-profit groups and active citizens, who were engaged in an advanced stage of community participation in Juudenken, were selected to be interviewed. The results then were analyzed using STAT program. The significant associations were shown by mapping the associations related to the public process of community involvement. Each variable had its own significant meaning and contributed credible indirect association to community involvement. The network mapping indicated that balancing the local economy and technical conservation was important in generating community involvement, which provided a model on how local authorities and communities could articulate and maintain their own cultural resources.

**Keywords:** Cultural resources management, Historic preservation district, Local government, community

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is the result survey of a research series "Bridge the Gap between Local Governments and Communities" which is granted a financial support from SUMITOMO foundation in fiscal year 2012.

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## **Introduction**

An increase in uncontrolled urbanization and rapid transformation of society, particularly in historic urban areas, has caused unexpected consequent damage to the value and significance of historic areas in Japan. There is a need for appropriate cultural resource management as a result of modernization in historic districts, in which management would ensure the equitable right to access the cultural resources and to balance and maintain the socioeconomic and cultural values in their setting. Since the popularization of the decentralization ideology and local government reformation, civil participation is one of the most crucial features in small-scale cultural heritage management.

### **System for Protecting the Historic District**

The Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings (Dentouteki kenzoubutsugun hozon chiku [Denken]) was introduced in the Law for Protection of Cultural Properties (Bunkazai hougohou) in 1975 (Asano, 1998). This system enables the local government to determine the conservation zone in the city planning and to allow the development of a preservation plan based on local ordinances. Furthermore, when the properties possess an especially high value to Japan, a particular area will be selected as an Important Preservation District for Groups of Traditional Buildings (Juuyo dentouteki kenzoubutsugun hozon chiku [Juudenken]). Since then, 106 historic districts throughout the country were selected as Juudenken.

A Denken is a high value place consisting of a group of traditional buildings, which form historic beauty, and is integrated with the surrounding environment. Each municipality is able to determine their own Denken and to develop a preservation plan based on local ordinances. They then conduct necessary projects according to the preservation plan (Agency of Cultural Affairs, 2012). A municipality, together with its citizens, encourages stakeholders to consider a substantial degree of conservation. The

Juudenken selection process represents the only bottom-up process in the Cultural Properties Preservation Law. Moreover, well-organized bottom-up networking like the Town Management Center (Machizukuri Centre) is also playing an important role in raising awareness and in conducting many preservation projects in their towns. This networking is an outstanding model for how local authorities and communities can articulate and maintain their own cultural resources.

### **Community Policy and Heritage Preservation in Preservation Districts**

The community policy in Japan was developed in the 1970s. Neighborhood associations (Chounaikai) were formed, allowing the local community to participate and engage in a wide range of activities in the municipality (Nakagawa, 2011). The NPO Law was passed in 1998. Small- and medium-sized civic groups are able to incorporate, and therefore to own and manage assets and contracts in their corporate name. NPOs are a third party who engage and participate in various dimensions of local-level municipal activities and empower all stakeholders. Japanese NPOs played a crucial role in providing relief and working with devastated communities. Their effective and prompt response, along with the massive volunteer effort, generated political pressures to make it easier for NPOs to operate in Japan. The surge in volunteerism is interpreted as a sign that a sense of community is alive and well in Japan (Kingston, 2013).

Recently, bilateral cooperation between the government and property owners has made the preservation and utilization of cultural properties possible. Due to a wide variety of cultural properties and an increase in public interest, the Agency for Cultural Affairs launched the Cultural Properties Utilization Model Project by NPOs in 2006 (Agency for Cultural Affairs, 2008). Over many years, several projects have been implemented. NPOs became a mediator, manager of the historic buildings, organizer of events utilizing cultural properties, making connections, and developing public relations. The paradigm that conservation is a matter of national agenda has already shifted.

The role of community participation is to change the paradigm in cultural resource conservation at the local level. Consequently, local commitment, action, and/or participation can have a greater impact on public policy. It is important to allow stakeholders to actively participate, identify, share, and express their demands for utilization of cultural properties. An effective management program is needed to balance the different needs and uses of cultural resources. Thus, this study intends to reveal the local-level cultural resource management in Juudenken as a model and to find networking associations that bridge the gap between legitimate powers of local authorities and the owner/user/creator of cultural properties.

### **Research Methodology**

Eighty-five NPOs and active citizen groups were selected by a purposive selection process from 106 Juudenkens throughout Japan. The selected groups were determined to be outstanding models of how a group of local residents deal with local authorities in the realm of conservation. The quantitative data collection was conducted using postal questionnaires, which were completed in Japanese. This survey mode was selected because Juudenken are located throughout the country. From 85 selected groups, the data set contained 50 responses; 2 questionnaires were returned as undeliverable and 1 was returned but not completed because the organization had stopped working with the Juudenken (table 1). The survey was conducted from August 2013 through February 2014. Ten questionnaires were only partially completed.

Table 1

*Sample and Response Rate of the Survey*

<b>Sample</b>	<b>Undeliverable</b>	<b>Refusal</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>Responses Containing Missing Data</b>
<b>85 (100%)</b>	2 (2.35%)	1 (1.18%)	50 (58.82%)	10 (20.00%)

The questions were designed for the variety of groups, resulted in a skewed distribution of responses. Consequently, a nonparametric correlation method was used for statistical testing and analysis. Pearson's chi-squared test for k independent samples was selected to test correlation among variables. The questions covered two important domains to capture relevant factors in: organizational structure (table 2) and actions related to the utilization and preservation of cultural properties (table 3). The first set of questions asked about the membership characteristics of the groups, which included gender, age, and occupation. Another domain asked about the local conservation activities, necessary social-networking skills, continuing local activities, the state of community involvement, and training activities. The statistical relationships between variables were examined by using the chi-square test, to determine any significant links in the participatory process.

Table 2

*Description of Variables in Organizational Structure*

Variables	Description of Variables
<b>Membership</b>	Number of members of the targeted local NPOs or active citizen groups
<b>Gender</b>	Members classified by gender.
<b>Age</b>	Member age grouped into the following 5 ranges; 20-30 years, 30-40 years, 40-50 years, 50-60 years, over 60 years. Both scale and binary variables were used.
<b>Occupation</b>	13 professional categories: Professional and technical; Manager; Government officer; Merchant; Service; Craftsman and artisan; Security; Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries; Transportation and communication; Student; Housewife and househusband; Volunteer and retiree; and Other.

Table 3

*Description of Variables in Utilization and Preservation of Cultural Properties*

Variables	Description of Variables
<b>Conservation activities</b>	<p>According to “The Law on Maintenance and Improvement of Historic Landscape in Community (<i>Chiiki ni okeru rekishiteki fuuchi no iji oyobi koje ni kansuru houritsu</i> [<i>Rekishimachi tsukuri hou</i>]),” municipalities are ordered to create a “Plan for the Maintenance and Improvement of Historical Scenic Beauty (<i>Rekishiteki fuuchi iji koje keikaku</i>).” The questions asked about the availability of basic measures in the utilization and conservation of cultural properties in the 2012 fiscal year plan, classified into 10 common activities:</p> <p>1) The current and future state of the preservation and utilization of cultural properties, 2) Repair and maintenance of cultural properties, 3) Facilities used for preservation and utilization of cultural properties, 4) Preservation of the environment surrounding the cultural properties, 5) Disaster prevention for cultural properties, 6) Promulgation and education of the utilization and preservation of cultural properties, 7) Handling of buried cultural properties, 8) System for the municipality to use in the preservation and utilization of cultural properties, 9) Structural improvements and plans for the residents, NPOs, and various organizations that are involved in the preservation and utilization of cultural heritage, and 10) Other.</p>
<b>Social networking skills</b>	<p>In working with the community in a variety of roles (Zastrow, 2013), the groups are expected to be knowledgeable and skillful. The questions asked about the availability of necessary social networking skills and their knowledge of a variety of roles, which were classified into 5 comprehensive skills: 1) Enabler, 2) Facilitator, 3) Coordinator, 4) Negotiator, and 5) Academic supporter.</p>

Table 3 (Cont.)

*Description of Variables in Utilization and Preservation of Cultural Properties*

Variables	Description of Variables
<b>Continuation factor</b>	Developed from the 5 points of Participatory Community Development Project ( <i>Machizukuri shimin jigyou</i> ) (Shigeru, 2011), the questions asked about the factors that encouraged local residents to participate in conservation activities. The activities were classified into 7 factors: 1) Increasing social awareness of the environment and community improvement, 2) Increasing economic power, 3) Solving the area's problem by themselves, 4) Being able to speak opinions about community development, 5) Knowing people with a variety of knowledge and experiences, 6) Being able to deepen friendships between members, and 7) Other.
<b>Community involvement</b>	The level of community involvement was developed from the 3 degrees of "nonparticipatory," "tokenism," and "citizen power" in the eight-rung ladder of participation (Arnstein, 1969). The questions asked about volunteers' and active citizens' attitudes towards the local authorities in community involvement in the activities related to the preservation and utilization of cultural properties. Participation was measured by ordinal variables with three categories from delaying progress to enabling quick progress.
<b>Training activities</b>	In preservation of cultural properties, the training of human resources with a specific knowledge and direction is necessary (Sekine, 2010). The questions asked about the experience of participating in some type of seminar, training, workshop, or conference on the conservation and utilization of cultural properties.

## **Results**

The first domain of the survey revealed the organizational structure of the local NPO and/or active citizen group. The groups had more than 5,981 members in total. The smallest group had only 4 members while the three largest groups had more than 500 members. The Juudenken, are varied in terms of location and context, town population and citizenship, local ordinance and its authority, urban features and membership requirements, and value and significance. The diversity in groups caused the number of members to differ. The variety in the number of members in the various organizations does not indicate that anything in the Juudenken was affecting any group's existence or operation.

The groups' rich diversity was also related to the group members' wide ranges of age, sex, and occupations. Only 6% of the members who actively engaged in the NPOs' activities were in their 20s. The percentage increases in the older age groups. Not surprisingly, over 50% of the members were over age 60. Likewise, across the different groups, the gender distribution was almost the same. Men were significantly more likely to participate in the program than women. Over all groups, women comprised 32% of the groups' membership.

Another significant piece of data was the occupations of the members in the targeted local NPOs and active citizen groups. Of 5,981 members, the three most common occupational areas were housewife or househusband, merchant, and service (Figure 1). The availability of professional expertise (Figure 2) in relation to the size of the group, differed by the size of the group. At 37 sites (of 50), government officers took part in the organization, while managers and professionals & technicians took part in 35 and 34 sites, respectively.

Figure 1

*The organizational structure of the local NPO and/or active citizen group*

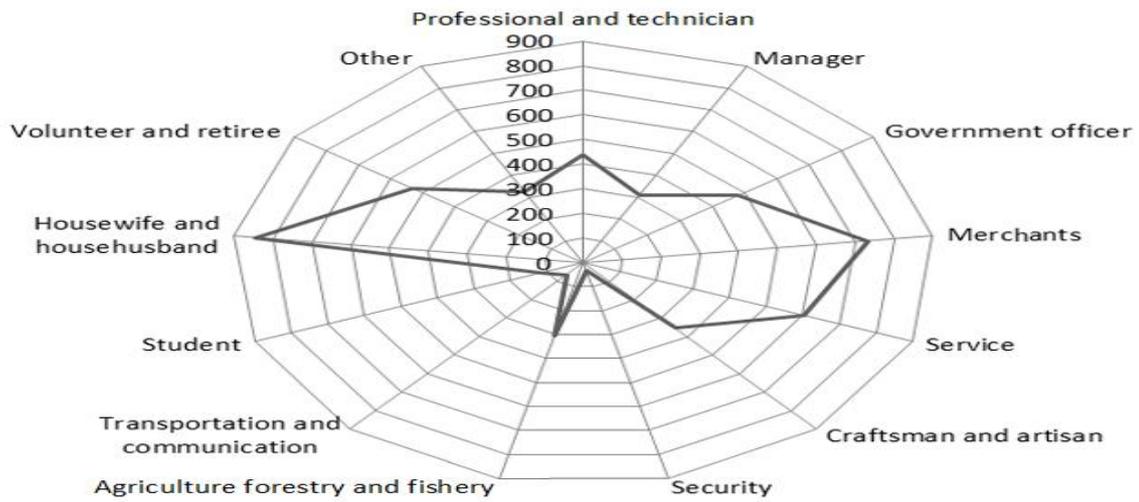
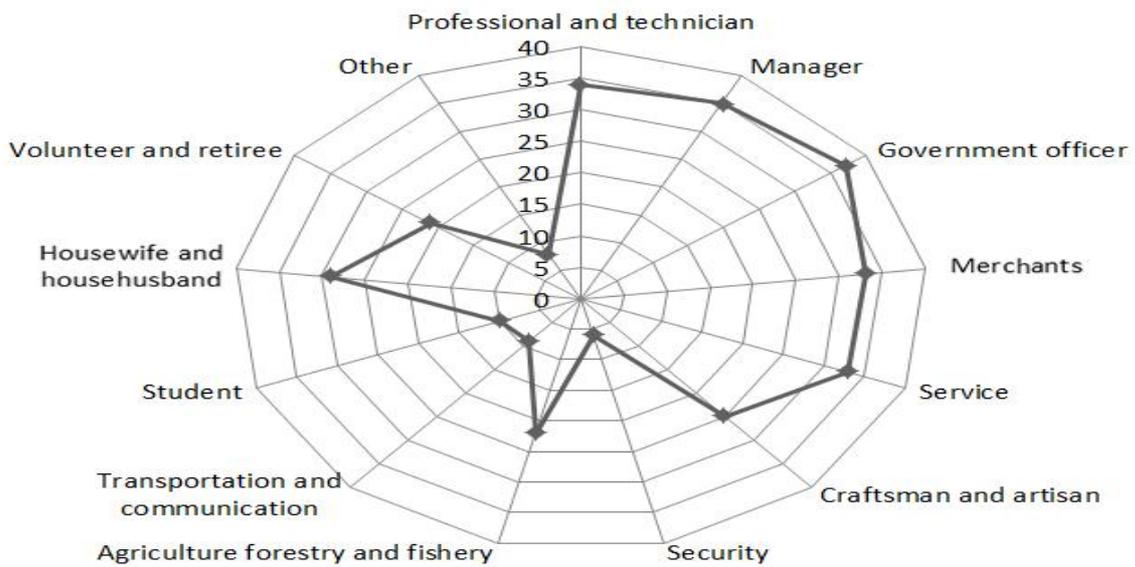


Figure 2

*The availability of professional expertise in relation to the size of the group*



Each organization consisted of members from several different professions. Government officers were members of most of the local organizations. This might support the hypothesis that the relationship between local NPOs and their local authority is up to the people who participate. The results showed that there are a great variety of stakeholders who are actively engaged in dealing with conservation issues in Juudenken, despite the fact that all of the Juudenken were governed by the same regulations and operational system.

The second domain asked about activities related to the utilization and preservation of cultural properties. It reported qualitative components of the organizations through quantitative questions. The following questions were asked: Availability of conservation activities in the 2012 fiscal year, Necessary social-networking skills and knowledge, Factors for local residents to participate in conservation activities, Volunteers' and active citizens' attitudes towards the local authorities in community involvement in the activities related to the preservation and utilization of cultural properties, and Participation in seminars, trainings, workshops, or conferences on the conservation and utilization of cultural properties. These results are shown in Table 5-9.

Table 5  
*Conservation Activities in the 2012 Fiscal Year (N= 50)*

	<b>Conservation Activities</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Current and future state of preservation and utilization of cultural properties	32	64.0
2	Repair and maintenance of cultural properties	21	42.0
3	Facilities used for preservation and utilization of cultural properties	11	22.0
4	Preservation of surrounding environment of cultural properties	25	50.0
5	Disaster prevention for cultural properties	9	18.0
6	Promulgation and education of the utilization and preservation of cultural properties	30	60.0
7	Handling of buried cultural properties	2	4.0
8	Current and future involvement of the municipality in preservation and utilization of cultural properties	26	52.0
9	Structural improvements and the future situation of residents, NPOs, and various organizations that are involved in the preservation and utilization of cultural heritage	21	42.0
10	Other	4	8.0

Table 6  
*Social Networking Skills and Knowledge (N= 50)*

	<b>Social-Networking Skill and Knowledge</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Enabler	33	66.0
2	Facilitator	23	46.0
3	Coordinator	23	46.0
4	Negotiator	8	16.0
5	Academic supporter	27	54.0

Table 7

*Continuation Factors for Local Residents (N = 50)*

	<b>Sustaining Factors</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Increasing social awareness regarding the local environment and community improvement	28	56.0
2	Increasing economic power	29	58.0
3	Solving the area's problems by themselves	17	34.0
4	Being able to speak their opinions about community development	15	30.0
5	Knowing people with a variety of knowledge and experiences	24	48.0
6	Being able to deepen the friendship between members	23	46.0
7	Other	8	16.0

Table 8

*Volunteers' and Active Citizens' Attitude Towards the Local Authorities in Community Involvement in the Activities (N= 48)*

	<b>Community involvement</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1	Enabling progress	4	8.33
2	Sometimes enabling progress, sometimes causing delays	27	56.25
3	Causing delays	17	35.42

Table 9

*Participating in Seminar, Training, Workshop, or Conference on the Conservation and Civilization of Cultural Properties (N= 50)*

Training activities		Site	Percentage
1	Yes	44	88.0
2	No	6	12.0

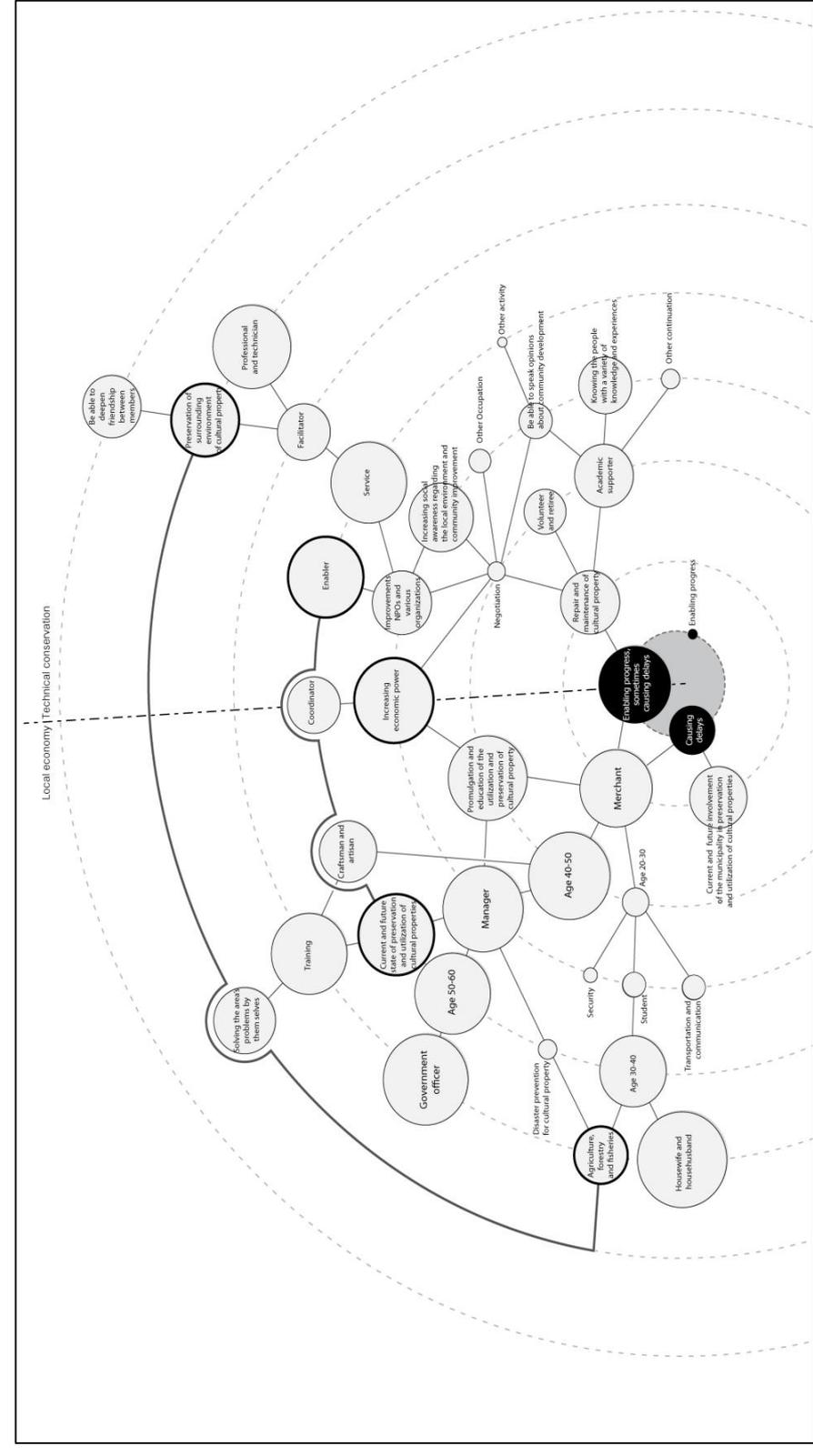
Each question contained several detailed solutions to explore the reality of targeted local NPOs and active citizen groups. These variables were tested by using Pearson’s Chi-square test for cross-tabulated data.

The analysis considered 45 variables from among the two domains. Although the analysis did not consider the direction and strength of the associations, the significant associations implied a relationship between community processes and community involvement. The analysis revealed 47 significant associations between two domains: the organizational structure and its effect on utilization and preservation of cultural properties. The variety of groups of local residents, the impact of conservation activities, social networking skills, continuation factors, and training activities were meaningfully connected.

To prioritize the community involvement-centric networking, the significant associations were shown by mapping the associations related to the public process of community involvement (Figure 3). All variables have been connected by significant associations and identified in 7 layers of rings, illustrating the statistical analysis. The frequency of each variable was represented by the size of bubble

Figure 3

Public process mapping in relating to conservation participatory; 7 ring layers, 47 significant community involvement-centric networking associations



Central to the attitude towards the local authorities in community involvement in the activities, “enabling progress of involvement” was not associated with any other variables in a statistically significant way. However, “sometimes enabling progress, sometimes causing delays” was statistically significantly connected to the occupational categories of “merchant” and “repair and maintenance of cultural properties” in the immediate layer, while “causing delays” was statistically significantly connected to “merchants” and “current and future involvement of the municipality in preservation and utilization of cultural properties.” From this point deep in the circle, each single variable created its own self-centric association with closely related variables and revealed indirect associations with the involvement accordingly.

The core of network mapping, which is degree of community involvement, first divides the immediate environment into two major legs; “merchant” and “repair and maintenance of cultural properties”, then extended outward according to its statistical significant. Each leg enables us to interpret the cycle into two important aspects: one is local economy related variables, on the left, and the other is related to technical conservation. Both were linked by 3 key points: 1) Increasing economic power, 2) the association of “current and future state of preservation and utilization of cultural properties” and “enabler skill,” and 3) the association of the “agriculture, forestry, and fisheries” occupation and the “preservation of the surrounding environment of cultural properties” activity. These links were an important mechanism to signify how local organizations in Juudenken can articulate and maintain participation through several factors.

## **Discussion**

Juudenken is an outstanding model to demonstrate how local authorities and communities can articulate and maintain their own cultural properties based on a participatory process. As an exemplary prototype, the mapping of the public processes relating to conservation participation was represented by how local NPOs and/or active citizens bridged the gap

between the local authority and the community. Several methods and activities were incentivized, whether intended or not, to achieve the community's vision and engage all of the stakeholders in both conservation and a development plan. A variety of actions in the management plan were needed in order to create the link to fulfill the comprehensive requirement in a specific area.

Balancing economic development and conservation is required in community based cultural resources management. The network mapping indicated that balancing the local economy and technical conservation was important in generating community involvement. When considering why local residents participated in the activities, increasing economic power and social awareness about environment and community improvement were the two most common responses. This data supported a sustainable social and economic development ideology that reflects the changing role of urban historic areas as a way to synergize socio-economic development and conservation strategies. This process is necessary to identify the new policies and the resource stream necessary to maintain the historic urban landscape in a sustainable way (UNESCO, 2011).

These data describe the richness of the cultural preservation processes with a large number of variables. The immediate environment seems to be more crucial to community involvement than external forces. However, no single variable alone could generate participation. Therefore, several variables were considered as part of the process of achieving community involvement. Although this study was limited to providing the opinions of the local mediators alone, if it had been considered with the opinions of government officials, the results might lead to another conclusion. However, using the Juudenken, the local residents could increase their power and do something for their town on their own, instead of waiting for government officials to do the work. Data from this study should lead to another step of heritage management in historical districts. In the end, if the historical districts become livable, cultural tourism will follow.

### Funding acknowledgments

The paper is the result survey of a research series “Bridge the Gap between Local Governments and Communities” which is granted a financial support from SUMITOMO foundation in fiscal year 2012. The paper attempts to reveal the existing condition of system and mechanism between local community and government authority in managing of cultural properties in Japan.

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### Biographical Notes

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Date of the submission: 2014-09-24

Date of the review result: 2015-01-28

Date of the decision: 2015-02-03