COMMUNITY DESIGN PROCESS TO REGAIN PEOPLE'S EXPRESSION
The Case of the Collabortative Art Project at "Izumi no Ie"

Naoki Kimura, Masato Dohi, Sanae Sugita and Shutaro Koyama

ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the collaborative art project conducted at a welfare facility called "Izumi no Ie" in Setagaya, Tokyo. Focusing on the 8-month process and its results, we will describe how the participatory program should be designed and how the designers should play their roles. Izumi no Ie is a home and workplace for people with physical disabilities. Approximately 60 people are working and 40 of them are also living in this facility. Many of them have lived here for a long time (as many as 19 years on average) with little contact with the local community. The facilities of Izumi no Ie, which were built 40 years ago, are also old. We conducted a series of collaborative art workshops from May to December 2003, and designed the common spaces at Izumi no Ie. Our workshop team mainly consists of university students at Tokyo Institute of Technology. In addition to design the spaces that brought light to the old facilities, we aimed to encourage the people to show their individuality and self-expression, through the process of changing their living spaces with our team. Our workshop team discussed what kind of program would be necessary and how we should play our roles to achieve our objectives. In the process of design the mural, canopy, and the garden, we learned that we needed a participatory design process in which people's creative power is recognized. We also realized how we could inspire people to change through the process of space design.

INTRODUCTION

This paper reviews the collaborative art project conducted at a welfare facility called Izumi no Ie in Setagaya, Tokyo. This project, in collaboration with the facility staff and residents, allowed us to rediscover the power of the community design process. Focusing on the 8-month process and its results, we will describe how the participatory program should be designed and how the designers should play their roles.

Izumi no Ie is a home and workplace for people with physical disabilities. It was built in 1964 as a social welfare facility in Setagaya, Tokyo. As of March 2003, 65 of the residents are working and 47 of them are living in the same building. The five-story reinforced concrete building was built 40 years ago and looks very old. Although it does not have enough facilities, there is no hope of rebuilding it for budgetary reasons. The primary activity in the residents' daily lives at Izumi no Ie is to work as subcontractors and to meet the product delivery deadlines. Many of them have lived there for a long time (as many as 19 years on average) with little contact with the local community.

At the pre-workshop meeting, one of the staff at Izumi no Ie pointed out the problems within the institution. The facility lacks living spaces, and is not ideal for respecting privacy. What is of more concern is that the people who have been isolated from society for a long

time may have lost their independence and self-respect. In addition, Izumi no Ie is expected to close or to be scaled down for budgetary reasons. As a consequence, the people will have to become independent from the institution.

In this Collaborative Art Project, we planned to design the common spaces at Izumi no Ie through a collaboration with the residents. Our workshop team mainly consisted of university students at Tokyo Institute of Technology. In addition to designing spaces that brought light to the old facilities, we aimed to encourage the people to show their individuality and self-expression through the process of changing their living spaces with us.

PARTICIPATION PROCESS

We started the workshop program in May 2003. By January 2004, we had completed 2 terms of the workshop program. Through the 8-month program, we conducted 9 workshops for discussion and design, and 8 days for painting on the facilities.

The Term 1 Workshops: Planning Process

In the first and second workshop programs, we gathered the residents' wishes and talked about what we are going to change. During the first program, we took a tour around Izumi no Ie with the 10 residents (assigned by the facility)

and discussed how they wished to change the spaces. At the beginning, participants didn't talk much about their ideas. But after going on the tour with us, they started to talk about their wishes towards the living spaces, particularly when they sat around the sketch plan of Izumi no Ie that we had prepared. We were able to gather many ideas that would bring light to the old facilities.

The ideas were suggested for various parts of the facilities. Voting took place during the second workshop program, and the courtyard was selected as the stage for our artwork. The courtyard was surrounded by buildings and a corridor. Traditionally, it has been used as a storage space or a path, and did not attract residents' attention. But it has been located in a visible area from their workroom, living room or bedrooms. People wanted to change this place into a common garden which they can see and spend time in. We decided to make the building wall, storehouse, and the corridor our art canvas.

The Term 1 Workshops: Design Process

From the third program, we started to draft the design of artwork to be painted on the facilities. The residents and our team had discussed the rough image of the design earlier, but how to actually produce the design was still a big issue. Our workshop team conducted various brainstorming discussions about the program. How can we bring out the residents' self-expression in such a limited time? What kind of collaborative work can we share with the residents? How can we draft the design with people who are not familiar with art production? As a result of the discussions, we decided to ask all the participants to draw a picture on a sketchbook and to create a collaborative collage using everybody's picture. We handed out sketchbooks to the residents, including those who had not participated in the workshops before. Two weeks later, many design sketches, which revealed people's individuality, were collected.

Ever since the collage workshop started, people who had been solely engaged in the everyday facility activities, began to join our project. Participants drew collage designs, combining all the residents' pictures and concepts as important elements for the collaborative product. Going through these processes, we finished drawing the design plans for the murals, corridor, and roof.

The Term 1 Workshops: Painting

After the completion of the design process, we worked in the courtyard to paint. During this painting stage, more and more residents came out and joined to help with the walls and roof. We washed the walls, drew drafts on the walls, and painted the murals. We also painted on the tiles and flowerpots. On the transparent corridor roof, we used colored film instead of paint. We completed the artwork in a week.

The Term 2 Workshops

The Term 2 workshops were conducted from October to June. As a result of the discussion with the residents, we continued to work in the courtyard. People expressed additional interest in having some space for rest, as well. In these series of workshops, we not only continued painting the artwork but also focused on creating a useful common garden with a new wooden deck and benches.

By that time, our workshop team and residents had built a relationship that allowed discussions at an equal level. At times, we had ambitious debates about the design plan. At other times, residents even supported us when we needed some help. Members of the original construction team offered their special skills for laying concrete and paving when we built a wooden deck and a slope.

By the end of this process, the residents' courtyard was surrounded by various pieces of artwork and people were able to see them from the new deck space.

PARTICIPATION PROGRAM

It was the third and fourth workshop programs that stimulated the hottest discussion among the team members. The main concern was how we should create the design of murals and other artwork. At our program design meeting, ideas such as the following came up: a) elect the best design among those made by several groups, b) the workshop team will let people draw sketches and make a collage, or c) let people draw sketches and make a collage together. If we wanted to guarantee the realization of the design, it would be less risky to let the people select a collage drawn and made by the workshop team. But in order to respect the purpose of our project, to encourage people to regain their self-expression, we need to put the act of designing into the hands of the residents. In this case, there is a risk that the creation of the design will not be completed with such limited time. Our concerns were whether they would be able to draw their own images of art or not and how we could make a collage design together.

Finally after numerous discussions, we chose to stick to our original purpose and let people draw and make a collage together, despite the anticipated risk. As a result, the residents drew what they wanted to express, beyond our expectation. Although the collaboration was not easy, we were able to make the collage together successfully. People showed their self-expression, as a result of our ultimate choice based on our trust in the people's creative power.

WHAT CHANGED THE PEOPLE?

The collaborative work didn't necessarily start with the residents' approval at the beginning of this project.
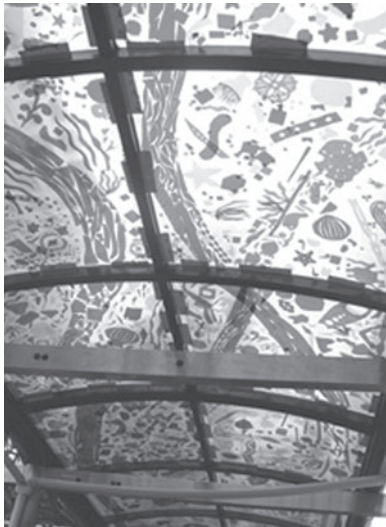
Including the first 10 participants who were assigned by the facility, most of the people at Izumi no Ie felt uncomfortable with the project that would disturb the order of their daily lives and tasks within the institution. Very few people responded positively to our initial invitation and there were even voices of opposition at the beginning. But that changed little by little as the workshops moved forward. After two or three workshops, the first 10 participants began to express their opinions actively. Also, people who had been engaged in their daily work began to come and see our work. Some people temporarily stopped their work to join us. The design process was challenging and interesting for us, too. After the collaborative design process, many residents and our team built a relationship that allowed discussions at an equal level. As a result, about half of the residents joined our project of their own accord.

Not all residents at Izumi no Ie participated in this community design process and regained their self-expression. However, we have discovered that a program that is carefully structured based on our trust in people's creative power can bring out people's independence and self-expression. In such programs, we need to work with people on equal terms and to enjoy it.

Through this experience, our workshop team members have changed, as well. Most of the students had no experience working with people with disabilities before this project. At first, we had concerns and questions about how we could work together and what we should support. However, as we proceeded with our project that relied on people's independence and self-expression, our support transformed into an equal relationship with the residents. People taught us the meaning of an equal process.

FEATURES OF COLLABORATIVE DESIGN

In the design process, we put the act of design into the hands of the residents and not only enjoyed the creation of space but also shared an aesthetic value. As a result of this process, all the artwork drawn in the courtyard revealed all the participants' personalities (refer to Figures 5-7). The design that had been drawn by multiple people, so called amateur designers, offers features different from those of works drawn by one talented

artist. Our participants' design has a collaborative rhythm, in which each piece intertwines together.

We also realized that we need some level of design skills to produce the plan that contains various senses of values. That is, to find elements of excellent designs made by people, to lead people in sharing the aesthetic senses, and to find an answer that allows various aesthetic values to exist together.

For example, among the design group for the mural on the building, while some residents wanted to draw in bright colors, others preferred quiet tones. As a compromise, both bright and quite colored parts were arranged within the mural. Also when the corridor group was drawing the collage by trial and error, features of each plan had to be respected while deciding the design.

DIFFICULTY OF CONTINUAL IMPLEMENTATION

Originally, this project did not start with full approval from Izumi no Ie. In order to implement a successful community design process within a social welfare facility that is run under its existing operations and structure, it is imperative that we have facility staff who share the same passion to change the situation of the facility. Our art project was realized thanks to the support from some members of the staff. But there is always the risk of termination if the facility's position changes. If those staff cannot stand by our side due to any internal reasons, it would be very difficult to work in the facility. Between the first and second terms, we had this particular problem ourselves, but we managed to resume the project, as a result of intense discussions with the staff of Izumi no Ie. This problem will be inherent in such a project that tries to change the existing values and system, which we will continue to face in the future.

CONCLUSION

Community designers can choose from various communication styles. When we select the most open group process without fear of risks, people start to express themselves. When we put the act of design into the hands of the people, we can create designs that allow each aesthetic sense of the people to intertwine together.

It would be too soon to say that Izumi no Ie has changed in only the eight months of our project period. We learned the difficulty of sustaining our collaborative project within an institution run by its own existing system and structure. But this project convinced us that the people, who have been isolated from society for a long time, can regain their own expression and enjoy the creation of new space through adequate community design processes.

INVOLVING COMMUNITY IN THE CREATION OF GATHERING PLACES

Milenko Matanovic

ABSTRACT

The Community Gathering Places program helps realize a vision of healthy and vibrant communities where people take responsibility for creating meaningful, art-filled environments that foster respect and safety among neighbors, nurture young people, integrate beauty and encourage citizenship.

INTRODUCTION

Since it incorporated in 1986, Pomegranate Center experimented with moving art out of the conventional "art" environment of studios, galleries and museums and into the street, the workplace, and the market square. We wanted to demonstrate how artists can work outside the narrowly defined world of art and actively involve ourselves in building better communities. From the beginning, Pomegranate Center has dedicated itself to linking art with social and environmental issues. We strive to connect justice with beauty—concepts that often exist in parallel universes. When we bring them together, the result is greater social vitality.

Pomegranate Center has committed itself to link concerns and disciplines that often exist in separate mindsets. We believe that the complex problems facing contemporary communities can not be solved from any single perspective. Economy, environment, education, the arts, urban design, civic involvement, ethics–these must function together in a coherent system. To promote one interest category at the expense of the others is to do little more than move a problem, and its pain, to a different part of the community. The question is not whether economics is more important than the environment, or education more than the arts, etc. They are all important. The challenge is see their interrelationship and get them working together.

Pomegranate Center's philosophy has been founded on the conviction that the real potential of a community lies in the spaces between interests, disciplines and ideologies. Creation of physical gathering places emerged as a specific and concrete strategy to practice this more holistic philosophy.

WHAT IS A GATHERING PLACE?

A gathering place is a space for the entire community—what used to be called the commons. It usually occupies an