The Emergence Activities by Tram Support Organizations and the Effect of Sustained Communications

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Abstract: For the successful adaptation of the designs of the Trams and related to them that reflect the local characteristics, activities by the supporting organizations are essential and such activities have been studied. Organizations have been promoting consistent communication within the range of their own responsibility taking advantage of their internal diversity. During its course, they are recognized as an interested party and gained uniqueness. Consequently, they became trustworthy. This suggests a successful case of citizens’ group’s efforts in urban development.

Key words: Human Behaviors, Perception, and Emotion, Service design, Co-design/Co-creation/participatory design (primary keyword), Other Design-related Areas

1. Introduction  Trams, Cities and People Living in Them

Japan’s first Tram began running in Kyoto City in 1895. At their heyday in 1932, Trams were running in 67 cities in Japan and the total length of their rails was slightly less than 1500 kilometers. With increased motorization and the polarization of urban transport towards use of either subways or buses, the number of Tram systems has now declined to a total of 18 lines in 17 cities with a total rail length of about 210 km, only one seventh of the heyday. However, as can be seen from Chart 1, efforts to make Trams more convenient and barrier-free have progressed slowly but steadily in various regions. Chart 2 lists some of the major initiatives to reduce gaps between users and builders/makers in Japan, focusing on legislation in the three areas of daily living, products and urban planning. The first policy document arguing for the need to listen to citizens’ views regarding urban planning is said to have been the National Outline of Environmental Policy issued by the Ministry of Construction in 1993. However, it was the 1999 proposal of the Ministry of Construction titled “Towards Creation of Communications-Oriented Land Administration” that indicated the specific institutional framework
for such communication in urban planning. The primary initiatives mentioned therein are: “1. cooperation and co-creation with citizens with regard to public projects, facility management and regional planning,” “2. increased accountability,” “3. enhancement of open service functionality,” and “4. promotion of research and development, etc., to support communication-oriented administration.” On the other hand, in the field of daily living, the enactment of the Act on Promotion of Specified Non-Profit Activities (NPO Act) in 1998 gave impetus to such activities nationwide in subsequent years.

2. Tram Support Organizations

2.1 An Overview of Surveys in 2002 and 2007

The present writer conducted a nationwide survey of Tram support organizations in 2002 and 2007 to investigate into their activities and objectives. Twenty organizations were selected from nearly a hundred groups, on the basis of criteria such as the continuity of the group’s activities, and whether or not a Tram system existed in the concerned region. The organizations were asked about their organizational structure, the people making up the organization, external communications, collaboration with others in the region, and other matters.

Questions and answers regarding relationship building and collaboration with others are extracted below.

To whom do you present your proposals or achievements of activities?: Compared to the earlier survey (2002), it is noticeable this time (2007) that appeals to citizens and to the local government have increased, whereas appeals to business owners have declined.

With whom do you cooperate or collaborate in your activities?: In both the prior and more recent surveys, it was found that there is a trend towards less collaboration with “local store owners” and “citizens” out of the five types of stakeholders.

What are the themes of specialization of other local NPOs with whom you collaborate in your activities?: In 2007, there was a decrease in collaboration with organizations working for a barrier-free environment, one of the three areas in which there was a high degree of collaboration at the time of the earlier survey.

Requirements of local government, Tram companies and the activist groups themselves (2007 survey only): The answers gravitated towards three items, namely, “accurate and adequate information,” “adequate motivation” and “adequate funding for activities,” but if one compares the answers for different stakeholders, one notes that for local government “information” and “funding” were deemed to have relatively high priority, whereas for Tram companies “adequate motivation” was thought to be most important, and for the organizations themselves
“information” as well as “debates and dialogue” with others were highlighted.

What issues would your organization like to work on in the future?: There is an emphasis on initiatives related to the daily lives of local people.

Matters of importance for your activist organization: Consensus-building among members and effective communications to others are considered to be most important.

3. Targets of Communication

3.1 Founding of organizations is the wellspring of sustainability

Tram support activities are joint initiatives of people with volunteer spirit such as cannot be seen in economic activities. They are the result of people with common values taking action together. The strength of “a group of like-minded people” is that it can increase its supporters and deepen its bonds within its sphere of fellow feeling. Under favorable conditions, such groups can establish organizations to share doubts or issues that previously had been pursued on an individual basis. This is typical of the Tram support organizations that were surveyed this time. After several years, wide-ranging relationships are established with others in the community, who come to trust the organization for its continuation of activities. Let us examine the case of ROBA in Fukui City, Fukui Prefecture.

A TMO (statutory town-making organization) in the city hosted a symposium on urban regeneration and public transport (2000). The participants started an activist organization, with a number of sub-committees carrying out various activities to increase public awareness of the value of public transport in revitalizing urban function, gaining empathy of the local citizenry. On the other hand, there was opposition from some businesses found to have conflicting interests (2001). Two serious accidents occurred in close succession on the local Keifuku line, such that the train line faced a crisis of survival. Through focused efforts to respond to this issue, relationships were established with other organizations in the region (2001). Discussions were continued with the prefectural and local governments, and joint appeals on the importance of maintaining the Keifuku line were made with people from all walks of life such as citizens, experts and legislators (2001). Paying attention to the results of the 2001 transport society experiment, the organization began attempts to explain its vision for better public transport, including a new railway to succeed the Keifuku line, in a manner easy for the general public to understand (2002-).

If individual acts to communicate in an ad hoc manner with the goal of raising awareness of the value of Trams could be referred to as “goal-oriented ad hoc communication,” such communication changes into “sustained communication” when formation of an organization gives continuity to action. Furthermore, ROBA continued to evolve and deepen its relations with stakeholders, always finding new themes for activism such as local bus transport, bicycling, street space planning, and issues of survival of other train lines.

3.2 Thoughts about communications with others
Some of the interviewees’ important comments on communications with others will be quoted and analyzed as follows. **Mr. Masanori Shima (RACDA Takaoka):** “We can’t let people jump to conclusions on the issue of the Manyo line, which has been a part of this region for the last fifty or a hundred years. We need to find neighborhood association presidents who understand us, and ask them to arrange discussion meetings. At the discussion meetings, we must take care to express ourselves in a way that is easily understood. The video prepared by Professor Takeyama of Takaoka College would be effective.” **Mr. Masao Oka (RACDA):** The pros and cons of using tax money often become a focal point of discussions about Tram issues. Thus, the significance of such tax expenditures needs to be explained to each individual in the community. “We worked with the people of the Hyakkien Club and the Kyobashi morning market in order to expand the range of mutual understanding. We listened to what they had to say and tried to understand. We also shared our thoughts with them. By continuing this dialogue, our mutual understanding increased.” So Mr. Masao Oka, also well known as a business person, entered into existing networks and tried to break through the deadlock by consistently explaining the benefits of Trams. **Mr. Shuichi Masamura (Angel Funding Act):** “It is pointless to talk with willing listeners. It is most important is to find ways or create opportunities to be heard by those who do not want to listen, isn’t it?” “A downtown district can only regain its original function when it is itself an attractive place and when there are means of transport to get there.” In order to get more people to understand this, it was crucial to first get people “opposed to Trams” to listen, but the message was only being delivered to people who were already sympathetic. Such contradictions were often pointed out.

### 3.3 Continuing Activities can lead to Breakthroughs

Formation of the organization made a base for “sustained communications” and continuation of activities led to opportunities to be heard by people with different values. On the other hand, the main actors in the three cases given in Section 3 are all business people playing a role in local commerce. On a non-stop, daily basis, they are building relations and meeting others while continuously engaging in economic activities to gain income. These are situations that are not apparent when they “wear their other hat” as activists supporting Tram systems. Those with whom they are connected in business have varied views; many of them have a different sense of values and do not agree about the benefits of Trams. Such connections to people with different values prevent an organization from being trapped in its own internal logic. Furthermore, these organizations will challenge themselves to engage in activities that make the most of solid ties to people with differing values, and that may progress further to breakthroughs.

### 4. Conclusions: Capabilities Needed at this Time, and the Future Direction and Ideal

The problems of local public transport are deep-rooted, and cannot readily be solved by the stakeholders or the main parties on their own, or by those trying to link the different parties together. Nonetheless, Tram support organizations around the country are trying to play a role in building trust among stakeholders through “sustained communications,” and in providing topics for discussion so that local people can believe in a bright future for their region.