

Collaboration between a University and Local Communities : A Case of Shizuoka University

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Collaboration between a University and Local Communities — A Case of Shizuoka University —¹

Kazuyuki Hizume

Introduction

This paper focuses on the relationship between a University and Local Communities working on solving various regional problems, and is based on the experiences of Japan's Shizuoka University.

First, I discuss the challenges faced by local governments in Japan. Recently, the major challenges faced by Japanese society are aging and a declining birthrate. In Japan, an elderly person is defined as an individual aged over 65 years. The percentage of elderly people is said to be the “aging rate”, namely “koureika ritsu”, and has increased to 26% of Japan's total population. The birthrate was the lowest in 2005, 1.26. And it was 1.43 in 2013.

The increasing number of aging people and declining birthrate have a major impact on the economic situation of Japan as a whole and its regional areas. In other words, because the production age population (aged 15 to 64 years) is decreasing, there is a shortage of workers.

¹ This paper is based on my PowerPoint slides presented at the International Workshop on “Engaged Scholarship and Smart Social Governance” which was held at National Chengchi University (Taiwan) on December 14 and 15, 2018.

Therefore, Japan, in 2019, is experiencing a serious workers shortage. Moreover, the increase in the number of elderly people also increases the pension and medical expenses, which has had a substantial influence on Japan's fiscal deficit.

Next, regarding this phenomenon, I discuss the challenges faced by Japan's local governments. Currently, the most substantial problem is that the economic disparity between Tokyo and medium and small sized cities across Japan. The economy and the population have concentrated in Tokyo, and the migration from the local cities to Tokyo is particularly large. The number of cases where high school graduates from local cities went to college in Tokyo, did not return to their hometowns, and continued living in Tokyo to get married and have a family is increasing.

This migration from local cities directly affects the regional economy, causing a vicious circle where migration leads to a shrinking regional economy and thus additional migration and a shrinking population. Therefore, the critical concern in today's Japanese society is how to strengthen regional economies.

Table 1 shows the number of Japanese cities by population as of Oct 1, 2015. The Japanese local government system is a two-tier system: prefectures and municipalities. For example, I reside in Shizuoka Prefecture and also I reside in Shizuoka city, the capital city of Shizuoka Prefecture.

The population of Shizuoka Prefecture is approximately 3,670,000, making it the 10th most populated prefecture in Japan. There are 35 cities and towns in Shizuoka Prefecture. The population of Shizuoka city is approximately 690,000 people.

Next, I consider the problems faced by Japan. I examine how the Japanese central government is attempting to respond to these problems.

Table 1. Local Governments by Population as of October 1, 2015

Population	Prefectures	Population	Cities	Special Wards	Population	Towns & Villages
Over 10 million	1	Over 1 million	11		Over 50,000	4
Over 5 million	8	Over 500,000	16	7	Over 40,000	16
Over than 3 million	1	Over 300,000	44	6	Over 30,000	48
Over than 2 million	9	Over 200,000	43	7	Over 20,000	95
over than 1 million	21	Over 100,000	152	2	Over 10,000	278
Under 1 million	7	Over 50,000	265	1	Over 5,000	241
		Over 30,000	177		Over 1,000	218
		Under 30,000	82		Under 1,000	28
Total	47	Total	790	23	Total	928

(CLAIR *Local Government in Japan 2015 Revised Edition*, P4)

After 2012, the second Abe administration began. The core policy in the Abe administration was “regional revitalization”. The central government and local governments have formulated comprehensive strategies aimed at “regional revitalization” and are promoting this concept.

One of the agencies in the Japanese central government is the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT). MEXT, the agency responsible for overall educational policy in Japan. It controls the national university corporations to which I belong, and also grants subsidies to Japanese universities (including national university corporations and private universities) that manage regional issues to advance “regional revitalization”; these programs are called the Center of Community (COC) and the Center of Community plus (COC+) program. These two programs are almost the same. Basically, the local universities collaborate with local governments and companies to create local employment, and promote

programs to develop the regional economy.

Shizuoka University was adopted by MEXT for the COC + program in 2015. *Figure 1* is a map, and Shizuoka Prefecture is located in almost the center of Japan. Shizuoka city is located at in the center of Shizuoka Prefecture. Additionally, Shizuoka city is between Tokyo and Nagoya. By using the Shinkansen, the duration of a trip between the two cities is an hour. Therefore, approximately 70% of high school graduates in Shizuoka Prefecture go to Tokyo or Nagoya to attend universities or find employment. The proximity between these two big cities may result in an irresistible lure for young people.

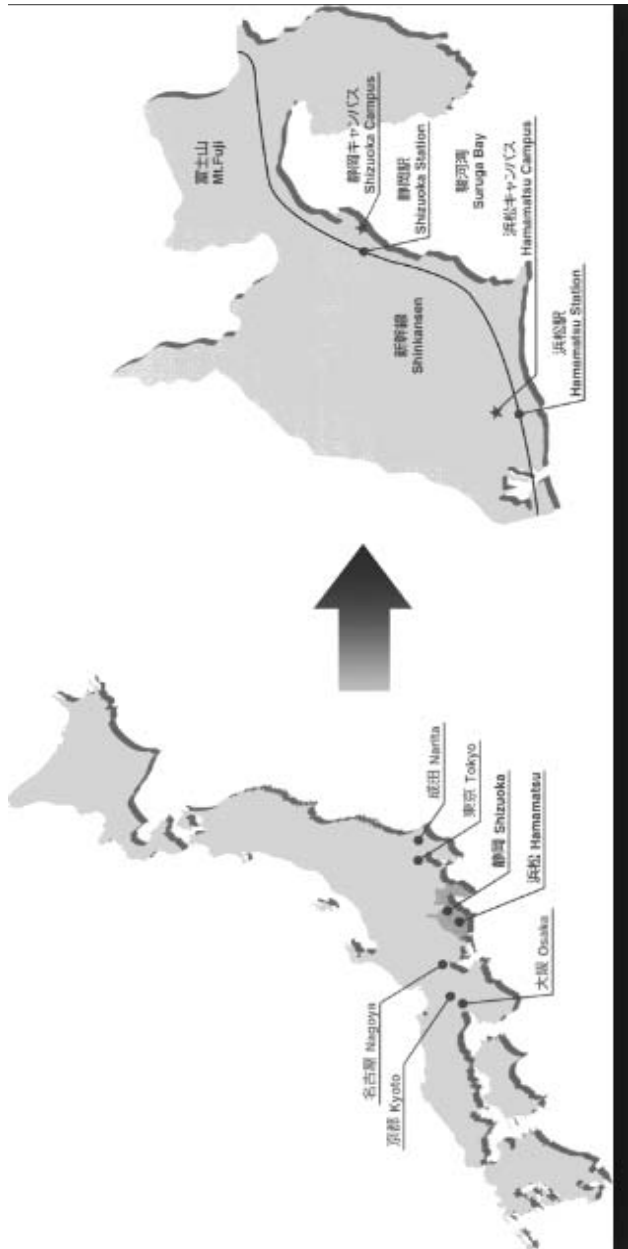
Outline of the COC + Program

In this section, I introduce the COC + program at Shizuoka University. Currently, 42 universities in Japan have been adapted into the COC + programs. The period during which this subsidy is issued is five years (2015—2019), and 2019 is the final year. MEXT seems to consider that a program continues even when the program ends.

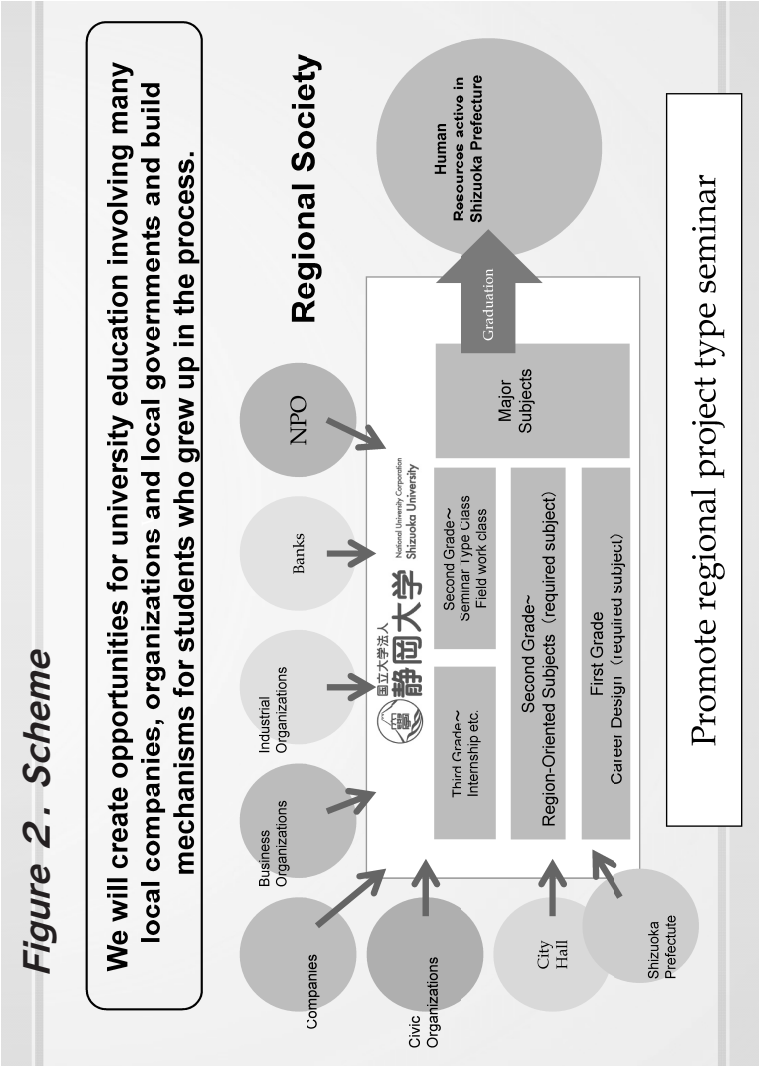
The outline of the COC+ program at Shizuoka University is as follows: (1) train human resources to support the future of Shizuoka Prefecture; (2) increase the proportion of student getting employment in Shizuoka Prefecture (i.e., increase the proportion by 10% to 50%); and (3) create a new industry. The system to promote such a program is as follows.

Shizuoka University has created an organization to promote the COC+ program, but the keyword is collaboration, i.e., a framework in which various organizations cooperate to realize common goals. As of 2018, the institutions in the region cooperating with Shizuoka University were as

Figure 1 . Japan, Shizuoka and Shizuoka University



follows: 7 educational institutions (e.g., other universities), 56 regional enterprises (e.g., banks), and all 35 cities and towns in Shizuoka Prefecture. The Shizuoka COC+ Collaboration Council has been established to regularly evaluate the promotion situation. (Figure 2)



Contents of the COC + program at Shizuoka University

In this section, I discuss a concrete program at Shizuoka University. The University introduced “region-oriented subjects” in the curriculum of the university to provide the information about the region. Then, to foster human resources active in the region, a degree program was launched within the “School of Regional Development (SRD)” in 2016. Approximately 150 students have chosen this degree program. When freshmen enter in 2019, SRD is completed until the fourth grade.

The aforementioned “region-oriented subjects” are for all the students at Shizuoka University. Further, the university is implementing a seminar called the “regional collaboration project” that applies problem-based learning. *Figure 2* shows the educational system in cooperation with the area surrounding Shizuoka University. In the first year, the subject of career design is a compulsory subject and opportunities are provided for students to consider their future professions. In the second year, students take “region-oriented subjects”. In the third year, internships are required. Additionally, students are required to participate in seminars and fieldwork starting in the second year. In addition to those subjects, students graduate after learning the main subjects of their choice. To develop these programs, a system has been established that cooperates with various local authorities such as Shizuoka Prefecture and 35 municipalities, NPOs, private enterprises, regional financial institutions and economic organizations.

“School of Regional Development” at Shizuoka University

In this section, I introduce the “School of Regional Development (SRD)”,

an educational program at Shizuoka University. Each year 50 students enter this program. The curriculum has basic subjects and applied subjects, as well as seminars and field work as compulsory subjects. The characteristics of field work are as follows:

First, the students participate in the same field and perform the same field work for 3 years from the first to the third years. Second, a team of field workers is organized beyond the specialty. There are five courses on SRD, but students enrolled in those courses intersect and perform field work. Third, students participate in the same field for several years to field work to contribute to solving regional problems.

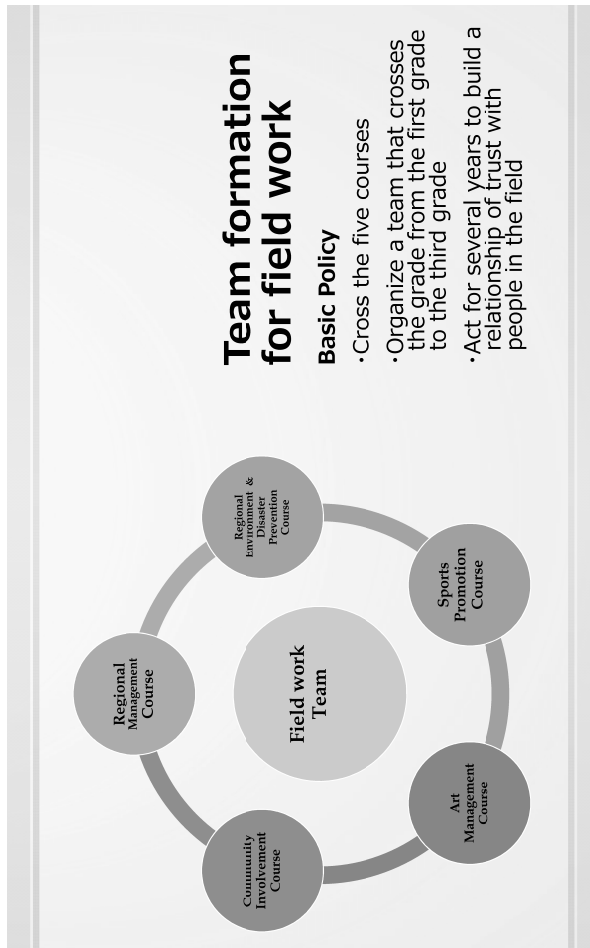
Figure 3 shows the basic policy of team formation in the field work. The five courses are as follows and are completed in the following sequence: regional management course, regional environment and disaster prevention course, sports promotion course, art management course, and community involvement course. The team formation of fieldwork is performed so that the number of students on a team is even. Notably, this policy is the most difficult task.

Figure 4 shows the area of field work currently being implemented. Recently, field work has been carried out in 13 areas inside Shizuoka Prefecture. The field work areas are divided into three categories: seven urban areas², four rural areas³, and two coastal areas⁴.

² The main problem in urban area is the decline of shopping districts. Students and the local people are starting various efforts regarding how to activate shopping districts. We are also considering what types of initiatives are required to enhance the appeal of urban areas.

³ The main problems are a declining population and an increasing aging population. Although Sakuma area once flourished in forestry, there are now areas where aging has progressed and it is becoming difficult for joint efforts in local communities. Therefore, students and people in the community are working together to discuss what

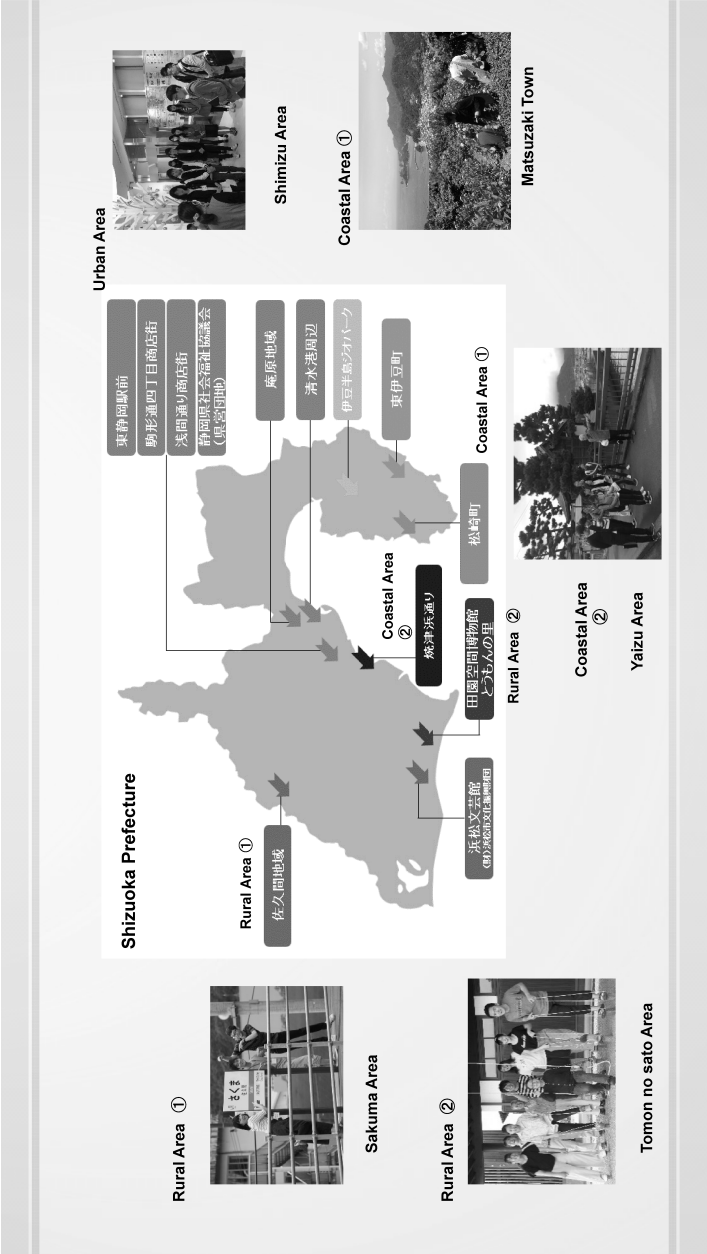
Figure 3



is needed to revitalize the declining area.

⁴ Approximately 40 years ago, Japanese government released the information from the Earthquake Prediction Liaison Meeting predicted a high probability of occurrence of a big earthquake near Shizuoka Prefecture. Since then, Shizuoka Prefecture has strengthened its preparation for earthquakes. Matsuzaki town has an especially high risk of tsunami caused by a big earthquake. Thus, to reduce the damage caused by a tsunami, there is a plan to construct a tide breakwater supervised by administrative agencies and in collaboration with the residents. Students participate in such discussions and are studying how to manage the height of the tide bank with the residents.

Figure 4



The slide shows the activity of students. Students are participating in various activities in cooperation with local people, and these field work experiences are critical for students.

Conclusion

Thus far, I have examined the current situation of regional problem-solving and the role of Shizuoka University. Finally, I summarize the results and challenges of the aforementioned efforts.

First, I discuss the results. SRD has been developing activities to use three subsidies from the COC+; however, the number of years since we started our approach has been insufficient to produce clear results. I predict that solving regional problems will take a long time. However, as students continue to participate in field work, clues to solve the regional problems are being found. Therefore, we must conduct field work continually.

Second, a relationship based on trust has been formed with the people in the area where the field work is conducted. I posit that this trust is critical because the local people and students are very friendly.

Third, and finally, is the future task. The COC + program ends in 2019. However, Shizuoka University was able to build the foundation for solving regional concerns through this program. In the future, to solve local social concerns, the scheme that was constructed must be maintained.