

The Role of a Community-based Organization in Promoting Anime Contents Tourism in Takehara City, Hiroshima, Japan

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Abstract

This study focuses on the role of NPO Network Takehara, a community-based organization, in mediating between an anime production company and the local community to promote anime contents tourism in Takehara, a city in Hiroshima Prefecture, Japan.

Anime contents tourism, which attracts tourists to visit the locations featured in animes, has been one of the popular tourism trends in Japan since the late 1990s. In Takehara City, NPO Network Takehara has assumed a key role in developing anime contents tourism. Since 2010, it has collaborated with anime production companies and assisted in developing the TV anime series *Tamayura* (『たまゆら』, 2010-2016), which focused on the emotional development of high school girls in Takehara. By utilizing this anime's content and local resources, NPO Network Takehara has succeeded in promoting tourism in their city.

Drawing on an interview with the executive director of NPO Network Takehara, Mr. Yasushi SADO, and related academic research on anime contents tourism in Japan, this study discusses the challenges, achievements and lessons learned from mediating activities such as assisting the anime director with story development, helping the Takehara community promote events and tourism, collaborating with local industries and the anime production companies to develop local products, and building the recognition of *Tamayura* as a symbol of the community.

By evaluating the mediating role of NPO Network Takehara, this study highlights the importance of community-based organizations as mediators in promoting anime contents tourism. By utilizing local knowledge for anime production and promotion, coordinating informal human resources in the city, and working for the long-term public benefit of local residents, such organizations are striving to find ways to develop tourism for the future of their local community.

Keywords: anime, contents tourism, Takehara, *Tamayura*, community-based organization

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1. Introduction

Anime contents tourism, or anime-induced tourism, has become one of the popular tourism styles in Japan following an increasing number of animes featuring real-world locations. It began with the great popularity of the anime *Lucky Star* (*Raki☆Suta* in Japanese), produced by Kyoto Animation in 2007, when many fans rushed to Washinomiya Shrine in Kuki City, Saitama Prefecture, which was the model for the imaginary shrine where the anime's protagonists live. Spurred by the success of *Lucky Star*, other local communities in Japan started to use anime for the development of anime contents tourism in their cities (Okamoto, 2011). Many Japanese cities and community-based organizations are now collaborating with anime companies to develop and promote animes (Horiuchi & Koyama, 2014). Tourism to visit locations featured in animes has thus become a mass social movement called *seichi junrei* or "anime pilgrimage."

This study focuses on the role of NPO Network Takehara, a community-based organization, in mediating between anime production companies and the local community to promote anime contents tourism in Takehara, a city in Hiroshima Prefecture, Japan. Drawing on an in-depth interview with Mr. Yasushi Sado, executive director of NPO Network Takehara, which was conducted on March 20, 2016, and related academic research on anime contents tourism in Japan, this study discusses

the lessons learned from the challenges and achievements of his organization's mediating activities. The interview was conducted in Japanese and translated into English by the researcher.

The paper begins by providing some background information on Takehara City, NPO Takehara, and the phenomenon of anime contents tourism. It then discusses the NPO's assistance in coordinating stakeholders' expectations for anime production during the initiation period. Then it explores its role as a bridge between the anime production companies and the local community. The NPO provided local knowledge of daily life in Takehara for the anime, and it utilized the new knowledge that the anime production companies created for the local development. Next, the paper discusses the NPO's struggles in promoting anime contents tourism in Takehara and controlling overdevelopment, seeking harmony among local residents, companies and the fan community. The paper concludes by summarizing NPO Network Takehara's activities and highlights key aspects of the role of community-based organizations in promoting anime contents tourism.

2.1 Tamayura, Takehara City and NPO Takehara

Takehara city is a small city located in Hiroshima prefecture, which has a population of 26,999 in 2015 (Takehara City, 2016) (Figure 1). The city has long history as a

residential area of famous merchants and intellectuals from the Edo era, and keeps their old houses as historical district. Because of its historical landscape, Takehara city has been

called “little Kyoto in Hiroshima” but the number of tourists to visit Takehara was not so high before the boom of *Tamayura* anime contents tourism.



Figure 1: Map of Takehara City, Hiroshima Prefecture, Japan.

Source: Copyright Free Map Modified by Author

Since 2010, NPO Network Takehara has collaborated with the anime companies TYO Animations and Shochiku Co.,Ltd. (松竹) to assist in the development of their anime series *Tamayura* (2010-2016) (Furomoto, 2012). This series focused on the emotional development of high school girls in Takehara City (Figure 2). The heroine, Fuu Sawatari,

is a high school student who loves to take photos. The storyline mainly focuses on her everyday life among her friends and the local community. By utilizing this anime and local resources, NPO Network Takehara has succeeded in promoting anime contents tourism in their city.



Figure 2: Takehara City, as depicted in the anime *Tamayura*.

Source: TYA/Tamayura Production Committee (2013). Copyright 2013 by TYA/Tamayura Production Committee. Reprinted with permission.

NPO Network Takehara was originally established in 2003 by local residents to promote community development by utilizing Takehara's historical district. It conducted field research on abandoned houses in the historical district, and coordinated the houses for community development events and projects (NPO Network Takehara, 2013). The policy of this organization is decided by an annual general meeting with all members, and general activities are managed by a steering committee composed of one executive director and six to eight directors, including notable local residents such as

the chief librarian of the city library, the president of a sake factory, shopkeepers, and representatives of Takehara's junior chamber (Hiroshima Prefecture 2011; NPO Network Takehara, 2013a).

According to Furomoto (2012), when anime production companies first contacted Takehara City Council to ask for assistance in producing the anime *Tamayura*, the council did not respond immediately. After hearing about this situation through informal channels, NPO Network Takehara contacted the companies and later took on the task as a

community development project with the aim of utilizing the city's historical district. The program to promote tourism promotion via the anime *Tamayura* is regarded as one of the organization's main activities, and has the largest budget (NPO Network Takehara, 2013b). As visitor numbers increased from 150,000 in 2010 to 27,000 in 2011, NPO Network Takehara received an award for its promotion of anime tourism from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (2012, p. 24) in 2012.

Takehara City now attracts many young tourists who love the anime *Tamayura*. They come to Takehara from all over the country to see the locations from the anime and take photos from the same angles as in scenes from the anime (see Figures 3 and 4) They enjoy feeling like they are sharing the same atmosphere and scenery of the protagonists in the anime they love.



Figure 3: Young tourists taking photos at Shorenji temple.



Figure 4: Shorenji temple in the anime *Tamayura*. Image reproduced from the opening scene of the film *Tamayura: More Aggressive*.

Source: TYA/Tamayura Production Committee & Sato (2013). Copyright 2013 by TYA/Tamayura Production Committee. Reprinted with permission.

2.2 Contents Tourism Studies

While there are many studies on contents tourism in the world, most of them focus on films rather than animes. Academic research on film-induced tourism increased around the 1990s in the United States and England. Riley, Baker, and Doren (1998) studied the economic impact and tourists' behaviors in the locations featured in famous American films during the 1990s, such as *Gettysburg* (1993), *Dances with Wolves* (1990), and *Field of Dreams* (1995). They proposed that people visit the film locations not only because of their natural attractions, but also because they relate to the content of the films, such as the storylines, exciting sequences, and human relationships. Furthermore, in their study of film-induced tourism based on the fantasy film franchise *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003), Buchmann, Moore, and Fisher (2009) questioned why tourists travelled to New Zealand, which was simply the location used for the imaginary world of the films. They described it as "existential authenticity," as tourists visit New Zealand to seek an "authentic" location where they can picture the connection between the filmed and imaginary locations of *The Lord of the Rings* (Buchmann et al., 2009, pp. 244-5).

Anime contents tourism research began in Japan after the *seichi junrei* movement that arose from the anime *Lucky Star*

in 2007. Okamoto (2011) provided a general view of anime contents tourism in terms of the fan community. There are several studies on anime contents tourism in Takehara in terms of its economic impact on the local community (Horiuchi & Koyama, 2014), or the relationship among the local community, fans, and the distribution company (Furomoto, 2012, 2013). Nishida (2016) also pointed out the interpenetration of the anime and real worlds, by using Takehara as a case study. An anime can now cross over the boundary into the real world by utilizing real locations.

Most studies have focused on the fan community, but a few have examined the role of local organizations in anime contents tourism from the aspect of organizational management, such as providing attractive local knowledge to producers, coordinating local cooperation, and arranging related events. These studies describe the organizational formation process and functions for promoting anime tourism, but they face the risk to underestimate the organization by losing their holistic and strategic view in local development. Therefore, this study also focuses on how a local community organization mediates with stakeholders from organizational management. Furthermore, it examines self-evaluation, strategies, and thoughts as meditators to coordinate anime contents tourism in the context of the local development policy as a whole.

3. Initiating Anime Contents Tourism: Aligning Expectations among Stakeholders

In his interview, Sado explained NPO Network Takehara's activities in mediating between the local community and anime production companies to develop anime contents tourism. Actually, NPO Network Takehara was the first to decide to promote tourist attractions through the anime *Tamayura*, as local residents had a bad impression of contents tourism from prior experience. In the 1980s, before the *Tamayura* production companies came to the city, Takehara had accepted the filming of *Toki wo kakeru shōjo* (『時をかける少女』, 1983), directed by Nobuhiko Obayashi (1938–), which is now very famous and popular as one of the “Onomichi Trilogy” (尾道三部作). However, Onomichi City,² where Obayashi was born, benefited from most of the fame and the tourists generated by the film:

Most of the scenes of *Toki wo kakeru shōjo* were filmed in Takehara by Nobuhiko Obayashi. Even though 80 or 90 percent of the entire film was filmed in Takehara, the audience

misunderstood and thought the film had been made in Onomichi City. Because the name of Takehara was not clearly indicated in the film, tourists did not come to Takehara even after the film's release. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

Therefore, when the anime companies came to the city, NPO Network Takehara was not very eager to join the project. However, when Sado saw the rough sketches for the anime in which detailed town landscapes had been drawn, he changed his mind and decided the anime could be used to promote historical sites in the city (see Figures 5-6):

At first, we saw the rough sketches. In the sketches, Hinomaru photography studio and Horikawa's okonomiyaki restaurant were drawn precisely. In addition, the name of Takehara City appeared in the anime without any changes. . . . So, we decided to join the project. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

² Onomichi City is located around 15 km east of Takehara in Hiroshima Prefecture, facing the Inland Sea.



Figure 5: Hinomaru photography studio in Takehara.



Figure 6: Hinomaru photography studio in the film *Tamayura: Hitotose*.

Copyright 2011 by TYA/Tamayura Production Committee. Reprinted with permission.

Source: TYA/Tamayura Production Committee, and Sato (2011)

For NPO Network Takehara, assisting in the making of *Tamayura* was just an experimental project to promote tourism in Takehara, but their mediation did not start well. Since the local community expected to promote tourism in their city, for their first meeting with the anime production company, NPO Network Takehara brought tourism information on local historical sites. However, the company refused to use this information in the anime:

At the first meeting, we brought data and pamphlets to negotiate with them [the anime production company] to use historical buildings in the anime. They said, “this is not a promotion film for the local development of Takehara, but a story about high school girls. Have you ever seen high school girls enter historical buildings? They probably do not frequent such

places.” After this response, we never discussed this topic again. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

Since the expectations of the local community were rejected from the beginning, NPO Network Takehara had to bring into line the local community’s expectations for tourism development and the objectives of the anime production companies more realistically. As the result, NPO Network Takehara decided to follow the will of the anime production company and drew a compromise from the local community based on two points. First, Junichi Sato (1960–) is a well-known anime director (see Nishida 2017, p. 45). Before the meeting, Sado researched Sato by watching all his works, which included many famous animes such as *Sailor Moon*, *Sgt. Frog (Keroro gunsou in Japanese)*, *Kaleido Star*, and *Aria*. Second, the detailed rough sketches that impressed Sado were made by digital tracing, which is one of the favorite techniques of Sato’s production team. The production team developed their unique expression by employing digital photo tracing techniques in animes, such as their depiction of Shimo Kitazawa Ward, Tokyo, in *Someday’s Dreamers: Summer Skies (Mahōtsukai ni taisetsu na koto: Natsu no sora in Japanese)* in 2008 (Kinema Junpo Film Research Institute, 2011, p. 100). This technique to capture the landscape saved time and costs in drawing

the setting of animes, and also assured the “authenticity” and “reality” of model location sites in anime contents tourism. NPO Network Takehara accepted that the director would not use their tourism information because he would still use detailed settings that could easily be identified in Takehara by the audience.

This compromise was probably meaningful in progressing anime contents tourism in Takehara. NPO Network Takehara provided an opportunity to show Sato’s ability to create new and attractive meanings to Takehara through the anime by seeking a compromise with the local community’s expectations. The elements that a local community needs for the development of ordinary tourism, such as beautiful scenery or historical streets, may not be appropriate for promoting anime contents tourism. Even an insignificant building or street could be made significant by simply being featured in an anime. The local community and mediators need to understand this instead of expecting to promote particular sites for their own interest without considering the context of the anime itself.

4. Utilization of Local Knowledge to Make Attractive Anime

By allowing the director to take the initiative in making the anime, trust between NPO Network Takehara and the anime production companies was gradually fostered.

Basically, NPO Network Takehara assumed the role of providing local information about everyday life in Takehara City (i.e. local knowledge), only if the director wanted the information for story making. Sato and his staff visited Takehara to take photos from December 2009 to 2011, during which Sato closely communicated with Sado. For example, following Sato's request, Sado provided insight into the life of local high school girls. His own daughter was in high school at the time, and she and her friends became Sato's informants:

Director Sato wanted us to provide an opportunity to listen to high school students talking about their daily life or memories of their junior high school days in Takehara. At that time, my daughter was in the second year of high school, so we provided an opportunity for her and her friends

to have a chat with Director Sato. They talked about their daily lives, their feelings, and the places where they usually hung out in the city. For example, they said they do not go to the city's main shopping street . . . and in junior high school they had trained hard to row a cutter boat. The episode of rowing a cutter boat was adopted for use in the anime. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

In addition, in *Tamayura*, a local festival called Dōkei no Michi (憧憬の径) was featured to reflect the hospitality of Takehara (see Figure 7). Dōkei no Michi had been installed by NPO Network Takehara a decade ago and continues to be a local festival. Director Sato focused on the feelings and behaviors of local residents not only during the festival itself, but also during the preparation phase.



Figure 7: A poster for Takehara Dōkei no Michi, a festival held in collaboration with *Tamayura* in 2012.

Source: TYA/Tamayura Production Committee (2011). Copyright 2011 by TYA/Tamayura Production Committee. Reprinted with permission.

The knowledge of everyday life, local customs, and festivals that NPO Network Takehara provided was effectively used as attractive points in the anime. NPO Network Takehara maintained a stance of giving Sato the initiative and continued to provide the local knowledge he asked for. Thanks to their collaboration, the anime *Tamayura* was filled with local character and atmosphere. In this way, a community-based organization can help to provide valuable insights into local life to help production companies create “authenticity” in an anime, which also means that fans will not be disappointed later when

they visit the original featured locations in order to connect with the anime more closely.

5. Promotion and Control of Anime Contents Tourism

After *Tamayura* was first released by OVA (original video animation) in 2010 and then broadcast on TV in 2011, *Tamayura* fans started to visit Takehara to see the locations featured in the anime. This was the beginning of anime contents tourism in Takehara. As the number of visitors increased, NPO Network Takehara faced various issues like local development, landscape conservation, lack

of human capital, and copyright. Since NPO Network Takehara is a community-based organization, it adopted a strategy of utilizing local tourism resources, human capital, and community ties, which they selectively combined with external assistance from Shochiku and the fan community to avoid the overdevelopment and destruction of the landscape and community ties of Takehara City.

5.1 Capitalizing on Nostalgia and Hospitality

In order to promote anime contents tourism, NPO Network Takehara coordinated the local resources that Sato's production team created or rediscovered through the anime production. Sado explained that young fans of *Tamayura* visit Takehara to experience the "exotic nostalgia" of Takehara:

I guess it is maybe so that they can see the landscape they have never seen. Director Sato also loved the landscape of this city very much. In addition, the hospitality of the residents is important. When the director first came to Takehara, the local residents warmly accepted him and told him various tales of this city. This hospitality may attract visitors. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

Sado noted that tourists can experience a combination of feeling a sense of the exotic as well as nostalgia for Japanese community hospitality in Takehara. Takehara has historical streets from the Edo era, which most Japanese people are familiar with because it is a part of their communal memory. At the same time, they feel like they are visiting a world different from the present modern world in which they live. Thus, the director effectively tapped into the nostalgia that is felt for traditional everyday life. In the anime, he symbolically used the message of "Welcome back" to arouse the audience's nostalgia.

The viewpoint of Director Sato sometimes surprised us. The main theme of *Tamayura: Hitotose* is "welcome back." This word was written in front of Takehara station, but nobody, even Takehara residents who use the station every day, knew there was such a message on the road. The director found in this message Takehara's hospitality of welcoming back visitors to the city. It was wonderful to focus on the ordinary everyday life of Takehara. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

The anime reminded NPO Network Takehara of the value of this "exotic nostalgia" of Takehara. They used the nostalgia as a tourism resource to attract young tourists.

We named the first promotional events of *Tamayura* in Takehara “Welcome Back to the Heart-Warming City, Takehara.” We proposed that there were real landscapes in Takehara with the same heart-warming atmosphere and kind residents as in the anime. I think this kind of city promotion was naturally accepted by young tourists. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

NPO Network Takehara provides a sense of “exotic nostalgia” to young people who hope to experience a heart-warming old community that they have never seen, drawing on the image of a city of gentle people, which the anime *Tamayura* has created. Young tourists want to experience the nostalgia and hospitality in the anime, and the Takehara residents satisfy their needs.

Furthermore, NPO Network Takehara coordinated local human capital in Takehara for encouraging fan community to contact community hospitality by utilizing its communal ties. Since NPO Network Takehara was composed of local residents, they could engage in informal collaboration with key persons in the local community to welcome newcomers.

NPO Network Takehara had an advantage in that they could coordinate with official organizations or anime companies, but they were at a disadvantage when it came

to managing events with fan community. Therefore, young leaders of the Takehara community managed the Momoneko-sama Festival, a *Tamayura* fan community festival operated by Takehara shopping street, while NPO Network Takehara provided support as a coordinator.

The Momoneko-sama Festival is run by the young generation such as Mr. Imai of the shopping street or Mr. Horikawa of Horikawa okonomiyaki restaurant. They are good at accepting new things and work hard, but they are not good at coordinating with external agencies. So, we assumed the role of coordinating with external agencies. However, we do not do anything anymore because they have already learned how to manage the festival very well. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

Being a community-based organization, NPO Network Takehara had the advantage of being able to coordinate local resources and human capital to promote anime contents tourism in their city. Through these activities, the nostalgia and hospitality that the anime rediscovered are capitalised as local resources to attract the visitors. As a result, clear public images were formed of a heart-warming old community welcoming outside visitors as though they were long-lost relatives coming

home and enjoying a festival together. Since the imagination of visitors is a main driving force in anime contents tourism, this mixture of public image formation and actual practices of mobilizing local human capital and resources was perhaps one of the most effective aspects of tourism development.

5.2 Local Product Making and Copyright Issues

NPO Network Takehara also mediated between local *Tamayura*-related businesses and the anime production companies. However, it was hard work to manage because of quality control issues, as Shochiku holds the *Tamayura* copyrights.

Local product making related to *Tamayura* actually started from the necessity of funds to manage *Tamayura* promotional events in Takehara. In the beginning, Shochiku negotiated with the city council and NPO Network Takehara to share the financial cost of *Tamayura* promotional events in Takehara. As they did not have enough funds to support the events, NPO Network Takehara negotiated with Shochiku for permission to sell anime-related products such as posters, cards, and clear folders to raise funds to promote *Tamayura* in Takehara. Shochiku permitted NPO Network Takehara to produce these goods only in Takehara without any copyright royalties. This system functioned very well.

NPO Network Takehara did not have much money [for promotional events]. The city's tourism association also did not allow us to use their budget. Therefore, we asked Shochiku for permission to produce and sell anime goods to raise funds for the promotional events. We asked members of the executive committee [of NPO Network Takehara] to accept this project by planning a pay-off period within one year. Surprisingly, we succeeded in raising funds in three months with a profit that was several times more than the original amount of the investment. We found it functioned well, so we continued to operate several events after this. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

After this success, Shochiku prohibited NPO Network Takehara from making any more stationery since Shochiku decided to produce such products themselves, but they still allowed the production of local *Tamayura* products in Takehara only, such as salt and sake. However, Shochiku controls the quality of all *Tamayura* products. NPO Network Takehara worked to mediate between Shochiku and local companies to produce collaborative products, but most of the local companies gave up making them because they felt Shochiku's quality control was too high. In Takehara, there are now only two

or three companies that still produce local *Tamayura* products.

[Quality control] is very strict. If we designed a new *Tamayura* product, it is very hard to pass their quality control checks. Therefore, we now just use the pictures that Shochiku have provided us without any changes. That makes it much easier to pass the checks by Shochiku. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

Since Shochiku strictly controlled the copyright of *Tamayura*, NPO Network Takehara had to work hard to mediate between Shochiku and local companies. In the end, their efforts were not successful and NPO Network Takehara stopped mediating on copyright issues altogether. Thus, copyright issues and local product making can pose a significant hurdle for local communities. A community-based organization can help to negotiate reasonable terms to enable local companies to develop products that are profitable while still complying with the anime company's quality control and copyright guidelines. More research is required in this area to make the development of anime-related products a more feasible activity for a local community.

5.3 Landscape Conservation

The conflict between landscape conservation and promotion of anime contents

tourism was a big issue for NPO Network Takehara. As NPO Network Takehara was established to conserve Takehara's historical district, it was hard for them to accept new development for anime contents tourism. However, to promote business and tourism related with anime, NPO Network Takehara received several offers for the development of the historical district. Regarding this issue, NPO Network Takehara is employing the concept of zoning. There are basically two zones in Takehara: the historical district and other areas. In the historical district, they decided not to allow any changes in order to protect the tourism resource of "exotic nostalgia"; conversely, they invited development in other areas, especially on Takehara shopping street.

We received many offers for anime cosplay events or anime-related events in the historical district. But, there are many visitors who are not related with the anime in the historical district. As we understand that cosplay events are not suited to the atmosphere of the historical district, we decided not to allow these events to be held there. There was an offer to put statues of *Tamayura* characters on the streets of the historical district, but we did not accept it. . . . However, the shopping street is different. The Momoneko-sama Festival has been held every year in the Takehara

shopping street in front of the station because the area is outside the historical district. We allowed this festival

to be held freely there [see Figure 8]. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)



Figure 8: Momoneko-sama Festival 2015 on Takehara shopping street.

Source: TYA/Tamayura Production Committee (2015). Copyright 2015 by TYA/Tamayura Production Committee. Reprinted with permission.

Statues of anime characters are now installed in many sites that are famous for anime contents tourism in Japan. For example, in Sakai-Minato city in Tottori Prefecture, which is one of the famous destinations of anime contents tourism, there are anime statues all over the city. However, Sado emphasizes the significance of landscape conservation for anime contents tourism.

The reason why we do not allow the development of the historical district is that we think it is better for anime contents tourism that way. Because tourists visit Takehara to see the same

scenery in the anime, the landscape should not be changed. If we put statues of anime characters on the street, they would make the landscape look completely different from the scenes in the anime. Therefore, we should not conduct town planning by depending on the anime too much. By conserving the original landscape that is drawn in *Tamayura*, we can conserve the historical district so that tourists can always enjoy the same landscape of the anime whenever they visit Takehara. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

NPO Network Takehara regarded the historical district as a core area that should not be changed. Sado believed that anime tourism is suitable for the conservation of the landscape and low-cost development of tourism. Conversely, the shopping street was selectively chosen as a developing area in Takehara, following the will of the younger generation in Takehara. The shopping street has now been completely renovated as a shopping arcade with pink paint and signs of new shops in *Tamayura* style. In this way, a city does not have to completely transform its landscape in order to pander to the perceived needs of anime contents tourism. Rather, development should be planned selectively

to maximize returns without losing the city's historical character or atmosphere.

5.4 Local Residents' Recognition of *Tamayura* as a Symbol of Their City

NPO Network Takehara also tried to promote *Tamayura* as a local symbol of the hospitality of Takehara. Sado hoped that many Takehara residents would be proud of *Tamayura* representing Takehara's hospitality and beautiful landscape. The city council also uses *Tamayura* on the front page of its city bulletin and its tourist promotion website (see Figures 9 and 10). The young generation of the shopping street association is managing the Momoneko-sama Festival.



Figure 9: The front page of the bulletin of Takehara City in September 2012.

Source: Takehara City (2012).



Figure 10: Sample itineraries for Tamayura fans, created by Takehara City, as displayed on the city's tourism website.

Source: Takehara City (2015).

However, the senior citizens in Takehara felt it difficult to accept *Tamayura* as Takehara's symbol. Sado suggested that this was because they labelled the anime as something only an Otaku watches, as they saw many young *Tamayura* fans visiting Takehara.

Probably, senior citizens have never watched *Tamayura*. The first TV series was broadcast at two or three o'clock in the middle of the night. However, the second TV series was broadcast at lunchtime after the popular singing program *Nodojiman* on NHK [Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai, or Japan Broadcasting Corporation]. It was a special schedule for Hiroshima viewers only, not nationwide. There are many

people who watched the second anime series, but nobody watched the third series in the theatre. Local people do not buy DVDs and Blu-ray discs to watch *Tamayura*. Local people just know there is an anime that features Takehara. They are not connected with *Tamayura* directly, but there are good relationships with young people who come to Takehara, and the local restaurants and cafés have become places for communication between the fans and local residents/owners. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

NPO Network Takehara felt it was a challenge to change senior citizens' conservative

stance. The city council, shopping street, related shops, and younger generation were supportive of *Tamayura*, but senior citizens just recognized it as an anime about Takehara. Therefore, there was a gap among the local residents in their perception and acceptance of *Tamayura* as a symbol of their city.

6. Conclusion: The Story of Takehara Continues Beyond the Anime

Since NPO Network Takehara is a community-based organization, it utilized local resources such as local knowledge, informal human capital, community ties, and historical heritage in promoting anime contents tourism for local development with maintaining local culture. In addition, one of the outstanding characteristics of NPO Network Takehara's role is the way in which it effectively coordinated the ideas of the local community and of the newcomers for the development of Takehara City. It utilized communal values such as nostalgia and hospitality, which the anime highlighted, to create new and positive public images for the city for visitors. In contrast to the old development mentality that is dependent on hard infrastructure, NPO Network Takehara's development of anime contents tourism coordinated local resources and capabilities, providing a totally different view of tourism.

By evaluating the mediating role of NPO Network Takehara, this study shows the importance of community-based organizations as mediators in promoting anime contents

tourism. As a community-based organization, NPO Network Takehara has the advantage of:

1. utilizing local knowledge for anime production and promotion;
2. coordinating informal human capacity in the city; and
3. working for the long-term benefit of local residents.

Conversely, NPO Network Takehara faces the challenges as follows:

1. a small budget,
2. less bargaining power with anime production companies and the city council; and
3. less official influence over senior citizens.

Finding ways to overcome these problems is very difficult. However, NPO Network Takehara at least succeeded to support local development in Takehara by effectively mediating between the promotion and resistance against overdevelopment of the anime tourism for the local community.

Finally, Sado discussed the future of anime contents tourism in Takehara because *Tamayura* will end in 2016, marking a significant turning point. Since many interesting animes are created in Japan every year, anime contents tourists may change their destination. Sado explained that the end of the anime is not such a big problem for NPO Network Takehara, as "our objective is to let people know the

attractiveness of Takehara through *Tamayura*.” He was also happy with NPO Network Takehara’s achievements:

Most of the visitors who came to Takehara to see the locations of *Tamayura* had not known much about Takehara before watching the anime. However after their first visit, many of them became repeat visitors. We have a guest notebook of visitors. In this, they wrote the number of times they visit Takehara. Some of them have come more than 20 times. They wrote that they had grown to love Takehara from watching *Tamayura*. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

These messages from visitors encourage NPO Network Takehara’s dream, as Sado added:

As many animes are now being produced every year, *Tamayura* may be forgotten in the flood of upcoming new animes. However, if young people have gotten to know the attractiveness of Takehara City through *Tamayura*, a few years later, when they get married and have children, they will bring their family back to Takehara. We dream that young couples with children will come back to

Takehara, saying “I know Takehara has nice landscapes and hospitality,” even if the anime may have been forgotten by that time. We can see indications of our dream. When anime contents tourism first started, there were many young tourist groups that were easily identified as *Tamayura* tourists, but recently there are family groups, as some of those young tourists have returned with their children to Takehara. (Sado, personal communication, March 20, 2016)

NPO Network Takehara regards the anime *Tamayura* as simply a gateway to introduce people to the attractiveness of Takehara City. The main strategy of NPO Network Takehara continues to be to believe in their local resources and to find ways to utilize them to develop tourism for the future of their local community.

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