A Study on Expanding Citizen Participation in Niigata Prefecture through Community Living Rooms

Toshifumi Watanabe

Abstract

Citizen participation in community activities has gained popularity, especially in Niigata Prefecture. This study examines present conditions and perspectives of citizen participation in Community Living Rooms. It analyses, from the participant viewpoint, factors explaining the spread of citizen participation, using a questionnaire among local resident participants. The results are used for quantitative and qualitative analyses. Our analysis provided results with 502 episodes; classified into 27 main categories. Four major categories are Community Living Rooms, Characteristics of Human Emotion, Regional Characteristics, and Social Background. We organize them into a relational map and explain different concepts. The expansion of citizen participation, as evident in the Community Living Rooms, will increase local residents' awareness, participation, and contribution to social welfare.

Considering present trends in social welfare, in-home care is emphasized over community-based care. The focus of attention in relation to in-home care has also shifted from formal to informal service systems (Sonoda, 2003). Citizen participation has become popular since the 1980s among local residents who understand community needs and participate in local volunteer activities. The NPO (Non-profit Organization) Law, leading to the development of NPO activities, was implemented in December 1998. Since then, informal activities have mainly been organized by local residents (Yoshinaga, 1999). The Social Welfare Law was enacted in May 2000, providing the opportunity for local residents to engage in community welfare; since this enactment, their roles have become increasingly important

In Niigata Prefecture, in response to this recent movement, regional welfare activities with local resident participation in community life are becoming more common (Toyoda, 2005). In this study, accordingly, particular attention is given to the community aspect of the Community Living Rooms. We will examine, analyse, and assess these activities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the present conditions of and perspectives on the Community Living Room based on the survey carried out in September 2006, analysing the factors that help explain, from the viewpoint of the participants, how and why the Community Living Room has spread through the prefecture.

Method

We analysed the questionnaire administered to those who participated in the Community Living Room in September 2006, and examined the results in detail. It is always difficult to define the exact number of Community Living Rooms; therefore, presently we estimate this and other

Department of Social Welfare
Niigata University of Health and Welfare

relevant issues by using data from the Community Living Rooms' official website (http://tiikinotyanoma.hp.infoseek.co.jp/), which was created and operated in cooperation with the Senior Citizens Welfare Division, Niigata Prefectural Government (currently Senior Citizens Social Health & Welfare Division), and the Niigata Japan Agricultural Cooperative Association (Niigata Prefecture Headquarters of the National Federation of Agricultural Cooperative Associations). Thus, this study is based on data collected from this website.

In the study conducted within Niigata Prefecture, starting on 1 September 2006, we asked questions regarding the Community Living Rooms of participants among 323 organizations identified as providing activity services. We obtained questionnaires from 154 participants with a response rate of approximately 47.7%. We analysed all data collected and examined the results.

In order to perform a detailed analysis on why and how Community Living Room activities have widely spread throughout the city, we analysed our survey data qualitatively. We organized data by grouping them and creating correlation graphs of the groups according to the KJ method; we used this as a measure to develop an appropriate substantive theory in the study of this specific area. An inductive analysis was then performed to structure the data. Fundamentally, the KJ method provides a way to avoid preconceived notions and stereotypes while establishing an orderly system where every situation and circumstance can be classified as being suitable for the results. Grouped data from the survey can be illustrated in the first step, and move on the next step of documentation. All survey data collected in questionnaires distributed to the participants were separated into single sentences according to the topic. Each sentence counted as one episode. These episodes were categorized in groups based on standardizing the content elements; following

this, a diagram was created to illustrate the method of visualizing the interacting relationships among entities. The findings were documented and peer checked to ensure that the best possible quality was achieved. Finally, we cross-sectionally examined the results. The analysis was conducted using all questionnaire responses in order to discover how the Community Living Room activities could expand further into new regions.

When the survey was conducted, we stated on the request forms that we would not use personal information for any purposes other than this survey.

Results

Community Living Room Activities

The Community Living Room was first established in 1997 in Niigata City; its activities spread widely into various areas after this point. Even though all the Community Living Room activities belong to one category, there is a lot of variation in them, and they differ between communities due to local needs. According to the website information (Note 1), 773 organizations belonging to the Community Living Rooms had already been established as of December 2003. The Community Living Rooms are not only found within the Niigata Prefecture, but also across the nation.

The participation fee ratio, analysed and structured according to the information obtained on the websites, includes the following: 100 yen (27.9%), which is the most common rate in the group; free of charge (17.9%); 200 yen (10.3%); 300 yen (8.4%); 500 yen (6.9%); collected when required (3.9%); 400 yen (2.1%); 150 yen (0.8%); optional (0.3%); 50 yen (0.8%); and 250 yen (0.1%).

The main bodies implementing activities were also analysed. These included the following: volunteer members at 14.2%, which accounts for the largest number of participants; Agricultural

Cooperative (JA) at 12.7%; Council of Social Welfare at 9.4%; Block and Town Clubs at 8.7%; regional residents at 2.2%; senior citizens' clubs at 2.1%. Data on the remaining 29.1% were not available.

The Community Living Room activities are often undertaken in public places that people can easily reach. Participation fees, as mentioned above, are also reasonable; this enables greater participation.

Age

The ratio of age groups for participants listed on the questionnaire responses is as follows: 65 to 74 years old at 47.4%, which represents the greatest number of group participants; 75 years or more at 24.7%; 60 to 64 years old at 16.2%; 50 to 59 years old at 8.4%; and 65 years old or more at 72.1%.

Gender

The male to female rate ratio is 32.5 to 63.6%, which means that there were twice as many females involved as males.

Residence Areas

96.1% of the participants lived in the same neighbourhood or district as the Community Living Room, with only 0.6% living in other areas.

Occupation

Approximately three quarters of the participants (74.7%) were unemployed, while 22.1% held employment.

Cohabitants

The largest group of participants (29.9%) lived only with their spouse; 19.5% lived in three-generation households with their spouse, children, and grandchildren; 12.3% lived in two-generation households with their spouse and their children, while 7.1% lived with children and/or

grandchildren; 3.9% lived alone or with children; and 20.1% did not fit in the above categories

Activity Locations

Assembly halls accounted for 33.1% (51 cases); 17.5% (27 cases) were citizens' public halls; 13.0% (20 cases) were public halls; 9.1% (14 cases) were community centres; 1.3% (2 cases) were private houses; 8.4% (13 cases) were other locations; and 19.5% were unknown. Most venues were in or near areas where participants reside and could be reached easily on foot.

Dates

The schedule of regular activities had the highest rate in the third week of the month at 38.3%, followed by the second week at 24.7%, the fourth week at 22.4%, and the first week at 14.1%, indicating that activities most often take place in the middle of the month.

As for the day of the week chosen, Thursdays were the most common at 22.6%; Wednesdays 19.0%; Fridays 15.5%; Tuesdays 14.3%; Saturdays 10.7%; Sundays 9.5%; and Mondays 8.3%. As with the weeks in a month, the days are chosen were most commonly in the middle of the week, falling on Wednesdays and Thursdays in the middle of the month.

Frequency

Responses on frequency showed that 39.0% of the participants, the highest rate, met once a month, followed by twice a month (5.8%) and once a week (3.9%), with the rate dropping dramatically. The rate for the 'other' category was also high at 29.2%, indicating that many of these meetings were not regular.

Participants and Others Involved in the Activities (Multiple Answers)

The highest percentage among responses represented elderly people. Participants aged 75 or older accounted for 31.2% (48 cases), followed

by 65-74 year olds at 29.2% (45 cases); 60-64 year olds at 7.8% (12 cases); 50-59 year olds at 1.9% (3 cases); and 40-49 year olds at 0.6% (1 case).

There were also responses stating that some participants are all local residents in the village or town (8.4%: 13 cases) or infants and their mothers, primary school children, and disabled persons (3.9%), indicating that a wide range of participants are involved.

Number of Participants during Each Session

Participant numbers between 20 and 29 (36.4%) and 10 and 19 (31.2%) covered 67.6 percent of all respondents. After them, 15.6% of participants were involved in groups ranging in number between 30 and 39, where the ratio was much lower. Although the number of participants was sometimes over 40, such as between 60 and 69, 70 and 79, and over 80, the ratios for these groups were relatively low, with only one group in each case; the highest rate for the number of participants at one time was around 20.

Range of Services (Multiple Answers)

Services mainly centred on recreational activities (76.0%: 117 cases) such as gymnastics, dance, karaoke, magic, and games. Joint activities among people followed with 46.1% (71 cases) being involved in events such as tea parties or joint activities with children or welfare institutions. Hobby activities represented 28.6% (44 cases), while luncheon parties, meal preparation, or tea or coffee services occurred in 26.6% of cases (41 cases). Hobby activities include gardening, handicrafts, flower arrangement, tea ceremonies, and origami crafts. Study activities are at 26.0% (40 cases); health consultation and advice, and blood pressure measurement at 18.2% (28 cases); day trips and sightseeing and/or volunteer/comfort activities at 14.9 % (23 cases); napping at 1.3 % (2 cases); bathing at 0.6% (1 cases); and 5.8% (9 cases) did

not respond.

Pleasurable Activities (Multiple Answers)

Pleasurable activities include the following: intra-group relationships and building a sense of unity among participants at 54.5% (84 cases); recreational activities such as songs, hobby activities, handicrafts, physical exercise, games, and various events at 26.0% (40 cases); communal eating and cooking at 23.4% (36 cases); volunteering at 13.0% (20 cases); day trips and sightseeing at 10.4% (16 cases); feeling at ease and participating with ease at 7.8% (12 cases); enjoyable and having an occasion to be energetic at 6.5% (10 cases); having a place to gather at 3.2% (5 cases); pick-up services at 2.6% (4 cases); measurement of blood pressure and health consultation at 1.9% (3 cases); lecture programs at 1.3% (2 cases); providing opportunities for sharing information and meetings to communicate and share information at 1.3% (2 cases); and relaxation by bathing at 0.6% (1 case). There was no response for 5.2% (8 cases).

The Role that the Community Living Room Has Played in the Community (Multiple Answers)

The responses to the question about the role that the Community Living Room has played in the community are shown in Figure 1.

We also asked about the significance of the Community Living Room Activities and the results are as follows: 50.0% (77 cases) said that it was a comfortable place to visit, find a conversation partner, be with friends and share ideas, build friendship, and be dependent; 14.3% (22 cases) said it was a place to keep both physically and psychologically healthy; 11.0% (17 cases) said it was a place to achieve a more meaningful life; and 6.5% (10 cases) said it was a place to come into contact with other communities or other organizations and to contribute to implementing local events and revitalizing rural

areas, which touches on aspects related to community. These were followed by results such as that it was a useful place to develop better relationships at 3.9% (6 cases); a place for sharing information and obtaining knowledge at 2.6% (4 cases); developing social welfare for the elderly in the region, relieving stress, and understanding the needs of elderly people as a whole at 1.3% (2 cases); and a place for human development, government services, promoting independence, and confirming safety for elderly people living alone as a whole at 0.6% (1 case). There were no responses to this question in 27.3% (42 cases) of the questionnaires.

These two categories are interrelated with each other with respect to community participation. In both cases, the majority of responses given were that the Community Living Room was a comfortable place to be, to find a conversation partner, to make friends and share ideas, and to build friendship. The rates were 65.6% in the question about the role that the Community Living Room has played in the community and 50.0% in the question about the significance of Community Living Room activities. These rates are much higher than those found in the following survey results, where the second most frequent response was that it is a place to maintain both physical and psychological health, followed by the third, which was that it is a place to achieve a more meaningful life. The fourth most frequent response was that it is a place to be exposed to other communities or organizations, contribute to implementing local events, and revitalize rural areas. All four had the same rank in both categories, whereas it can be said that the
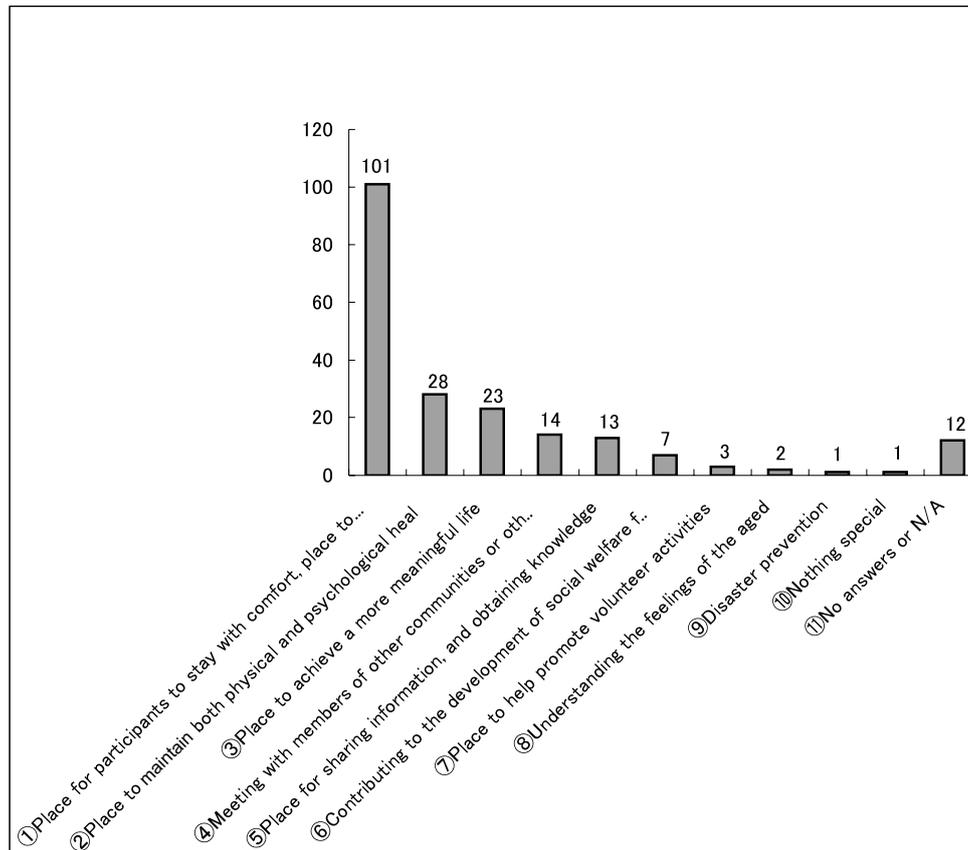

Figure 1 Roles that the Community Living Room has Played (*Multiple Answers n=154)

Community Living Room is considered as a place in the community where people can stay with comfort, find a conversation partner, make friends and share ideas, build friendship, and be dependent. The Community Living Room also provides a place to maintain both physical and psychological health, as well as a place to achieve a more meaningful life, allowing participants to be exposed to other communities or other organizations, and contributing to the implementation of local events and revitalization of rural areas.

①Place for participants to stay with comfort, place to find a conversation partner, place for all to meet and share ideas, place to be friends with each other, and place to rely on
②Place to maintain both physical and psychological health
③Place to achieve a more meaningful life
④Meeting with members of other communities or other organizations, implementing local events, revitalizing rural areas
⑤Place for sharing information and obtaining knowledge
⑥Contributing to the development of social welfare for the elderly in the region
⑦Place to help promote volunteer activities
⑧Understanding the feelings of the aged
⑨Disaster prevention
⑩Nothing special
⑪No answers or N/A

Main Reason for Participating (Multiple Answers)

The main reason for participation was a recommendation or having been asked (passive) at 22.1% (38 cases), the highest rate in the group. The reason that participants had initially come to the Community Living Rooms was not voluntary; rather, they joined the organization passively. The second reason was that participants were involved in the activities of the organization, which accounted for 19.5% (30 cases). More

specifically, the reasons can be categorized as follows: being in the position to organize and manage an organization, being a board member, and being in charge. The third reason was to promote unity in the community or to find a comfortable place to stay (active) at 9.7% (15 cases).

Additional factors are as follows: participating in a volunteer activity at 8.4% (13 cases), fostering community relations at 7.1% (11 cases), participating in society at 5.8% (9 cases), going somewhere after attending a meeting or lecture on social welfare at 3.9% (6 cases), and the convenient location at 1.9% (3 cases). There were no responses for this question in 27.3% (42 cases) of the questionnaires.

Reasons for Continuing to Participate in the Community Living Room (Multiple Answers)

The reasons why participants continued to attend the Community Living Room activities are the following: it is enjoyable and appealing at 50.0% (77 cases), and it is an opportunity to create a community among participants at 31.2% (48 cases).

The reasons given for continuing to attend were as follows: being an organizer, a board member, or a volunteer worker at 11.7% (18 cases); it is a place where everyone is willing to participate at 11.0% (17 cases); being able to communicate with the community at 9.7% (15 cases); for health concerns at 3.9% (6 cases); fostering the personal development of new volunteers when it is hard to find potential replacements at 2.6% (4 cases); and other at 13.6% (21 cases). There was no response for 26.0% (40 cases) of the questionnaires.

Description of Difficulties or Problems Encountered When Participating in the Community Living Room Activities and Solutions (Multiple Answers)

The questions asked in the questionnaire were

primarily intended to identify both good and bad practices that exist when implementing the activities of the Community Living Room. By analysing the reasons behind these practices, we can predict risk factors that would affect the efficacy and efficiency of activities. Approximately one fourth of the responses, 23.3% (36 cases), said that no problems had been encountered. There were also responses indicating that human resource issues accounted for 35.1% (54 cases) of the problems. The specific issues encountered were as follows: only a few volunteers, inability to find a successor, no one to take over as leader, or no leader. Furthermore, there were issues relating to finances and facilities at 11.0% (17 cases), including subsidies from the city government and the hope of upgrading restroom facilities. Problems in human resources for operation procedures were identified in 9.7% of responses (15 cases), where the problems were primarily support or care for those unable to continue to participate, health of participants, being unable to participate in the program, and lack of transportation to and from the facility for participants. There were also problems with relationships between participants, such as participant consciousness at 6.5% (10 cases), relationships, being self-centred, and lack of independence.

The other results were: problems with planning and execution of operations at 5.8% (9 cases), problems related to staff workload at 3.2% (5 cases), problems related to environmental issues in surrounding areas at 1.9% (3 cases), and other at 2.6% (4 cases). There was no response in 16.2% (25 cases) of the questionnaires.

Why Is the Community Living Room Successful?

This section presents the most important aspect of this study; accordingly, we performed a detailed qualitative analysis. We organized data by grouping them and creating correlation graphs of the groups according to the KJ method as a measure for evaluation. Then, we analysed the categorized data using the inductive method. At first, 136 survey data collected in questionnaires were separated into single sentences. Then, each sentence was reformatted into a single episode, totalling 502 episodes. Through this process, we excluded all episodes that were not clearly explicable. Episodes were categorized in groups based on standardization of the content elements. As a result, 27 groups were delineated, while 24 episodes could not be classified in groups due to ambiguity concerning how they would fit in the classification standards. The 27 groups are as follows: regions; located nearby and easy to reach; increase in aging population and living alone; family and nuclear family; aging; health; communication; social ties and relationships; relaxation; enjoyment; purpose in life; place to gather and place to stay with comfort; place to communicate; talking; to be alone and/or be quiet; information; generations; having time and money; related parties; costs and management; being free; leader; volunteer; frequency; participation; structuring; and expansion and continuity. The 27 groups were placed in the top category level and analysed. These groups designated as the top categories were further divided into sections, comprising the second category level. This was also divided, and some categories dropped to a lower level (the third level) while some remained on the second level.

Community.

The first category, community, can be subdivided into 32 sections on the second level. We included responses that pointed out topics such as that interpersonal relations in the community are becoming less important: there are very few chances to have daily conversations with neighbours, which was quite usual in the past; neighbours used to call on each other to have tea and chat. With regard to the formation of the Community Living Room, it can be assumed

that participants considered the founder or manager of the activity to be settled in the community when they referred to this figure being able to obtain an understanding of the community and making things easy according to the needs of the community. There are also categories depicting the effect of the Community Living Room on the region as a stimulant for developing important regional strength. This shows that the Community Living Room is an opportunity not only for participants to share their opinions and ideas but also for the community to build its regional strength.

Located Nearby and Easy to Reach.

This category was subdivided into 13 sections on the second level. A second category consisted of two larger categories that identified a geographic area where the facility is near to participants' homes and they can easily participate. That is, if the participant is physically and emotionally close, he or she will feel more comfortable attending the Community Living Room. The distance between locations is an important factor for participants, since the responses indicate that participants are unable to participate or that there is no need to participate when the facility is too far away. There were also responses stating that it was important to be able to participate with ease and have a comfortable place to gather. These responses are associated with human relations and organizational development.

Increase in Aging Population, Living Alone, and Decreasing Child Population.

This category comprises three types of articles: the increase in the aging population, living alone, and the decreasing child population. This social background helped to explain the expansion in the Community Living Rooms. Within the results, the responses noted that the elderly population is increasing, creating an elderly society. The

participants also noted there are many healthy elderly people and elderly people with resources; in other words, the number of healthy and active older people has been increasing, which emphasizes not only the growing population of elderly people but also the positive side of the older population.

There were also responses that mentioned the increasing number of elderly people living alone; the increasing isolation of living alone and spending time alone; and that there has been a declining birth rate in society. The declining birth rate is believed to have contributed to the trend of the aging population.

Family and Nuclear Family.

The category of family and nuclear family was subdivided into 52 sections in the second level. This category was the most prevalent of all the categories in the present analysis, and was also directed toward social issues. The nuclear family structure has increased markedly, and this is associated with the aforementioned factors of the increase in aging population; living alone; and the decreasing child population. In other categories, the family structures of the elderly and their relations within the family were prominent in two categories: the problem of living in solitude even when living with family members, due to elderly people's different views and interests from those of young people; and feeling alone and isolated during the daytime when nobody is home.

Aging.

In the category to do with aging, the subcategories included the notion that 'I do what I can do now in the process of getting old.' This does not present aging people as simply passive and weak; it also highlights their positive qualities. This could be a direct result of the Community Living Room program, which has been actively developed.

Health.

When we get old, we feel more anxious about our health. There are articles in this category that are directly connected to Community Living Room activities, such as: it is generally advised that older people should come into contact with more than two other people a day to protect themselves from senile dementia; there is a program to protect against senile dementia through origami or colouring books. Furthermore, the responses noted that it is interesting and healthy to do light physical exercise that fits the individual. Besides these, such categories as walking rehabilitation indicated that the respondents tried to maintain their health through activity. Moreover, there were participants who considered the activity to be aimed at protecting against senile dementia. Respondents also mentioned that they did not want other people to have to take care of them. There is a strong presumption that the Community Living Room is useful for maintaining elderly people's health, and therefore their independence.

Communication.

This Communication category is associated with the following previously mentioned categories: Community; Increase in Aging Population, Living Alone, and Decreasing Child Population; and Family and Nuclear Family. Categories that are highly relevant to communication are grouped into this category. In this, three major communication issues arise: first, family-oriented communication, that is, being unable to communicate with family members; second, region-oriented communication, that is, difficulties in dropping by and casually visiting somebody's home; and third, communication inside the saloon named acquaintances and opportunities in vivid saloon, which is the Community Living Room run by the council of social welfare. These categories reveal that the Community Living Room acts as a

coordinator to satisfy the basic needs of participants, such that individuals are able to help one another in meeting these needs.

Human Ties and Relationships.

This category differs from the Communication category, which focuses on superficial communication by means of language. In contrast, this category focuses on emotional communication, specifying that older people can help each other, and talk about whatever they want with the promise that this is in confidence.

Space for Relaxation.

The Community Living Room plays a major role in creating a relaxing space, as seen in responses such as: there is nowhere to rest my mind but here; it is a place to relieve stress; reliance on human cooperation; congenial relationships; and it is a friendly atmosphere where people can have fun while talking and sharing. There were also participants who directly responded that there are many people who look for comfort where they can find it, or I feel at ease and calm when I am with others.

Enjoyment.

In the Enjoyment category, many words such as 'enjoyable' are used in the responses, as well as other terms like 'laugh' and 'joy', and expressions like 'I can make somebody happy.' In addition, phrases that are not self-oriented, such as 'with peers' or 'with everyone', are also included. This indicates that respondents participate with pleasure in the activities of the Community Living Room.

Purpose in Life.

This category consists of words like enjoyable, but that are deeper and more emotional than the Enjoyment category. There are sentences expressing the distinct facets of loneliness and/or isolation, as well as participants' hope that they

can be free from these issues.

Place to Gather, Comfortable Place to Stay.

In this category, there are articles that describe gathering together; having a place to meet; there is no place for the aged. These articles show that the existence of places such as the Community Living Room, that can shelter and accommodate them, is meaningful to participants.

Place to Communicate.

Some participants consider these activities as rehabilitation that they have developed with others. Participation in community is supposed to provide a chance to create a larger circle of friends.

Talking.

Not only talking, but also listening is included in this category. This emphasizes the positive relationship between the person who talks and the one who listens. Through this, both partners in the communication can feel important and valid, which has significant value and meaning in their lives.

Being Alone and/or Being Quiet.

This category is reflected substantially in the characteristics of the aged population. It includes subcategories such as the following: I feel sad and lonely, and long for someone to be with; I feel lonely when I am home alone; and I am bored when things are too quiet.

Information.

Information is gained by participants in two ways: sharing between members who participate in their activities and outside sources that relate to their activities. The articles mentioned were as follows: various information services are provided by the staff at City Hall; health consultation services are provided by the public health nurse; and the president of the residents'

association or the president of aging services meets with them from time to time to explain economic activity in the village or information about community-related events or problems encountered in the village. Participants are informed of daily life information through face-to-face meetings, but not through mass media and use the information for life purposes. The Community Living Room acts as a coordinator.

Generation.

Some participants referred to an older generation who experienced the war and faced hardships at a young age as the reason for the expansion of the Community Living Room. The reason why the level of participation of this generation is high has been analysed above.

Having Time and Money.

The participants indicated that they have some pension money, and they have enough leisure time. Others pointed out that electrification should be another reason.

Related Parties.

The Community Living Room is composed of a variety of resources such as related parties, related organizations, and facilities that work with each other in developing activities. More concretely, these sources include the council of social welfare、administration (City Hall), district welfare officer, residents' associations, senior citizens' clubs, health promotion members, and ward halls.

Costs and Management.

Management of the Community Living Room, as mentioned above, was categorized according to a description of costs from the viewpoint of the participants. The organization is financially managed by member fees and local government subsidies. Decreasing the financial burden on participants is an important factor in continuing

to expand the activities.

Being Freedom.

The attitudes of the participants indicated that freedom entails the following: not being restricted by the subsidiary systems of local governments; being able to conduct activities by themselves with ease. These are important factors for expansion, as well as being common characteristics of the Community Living Rooms.

Leader.

Leadership roles are also an important factor. We can see this from results such as the following: a leader is capable; the successful setup of an organization is attributed to capabilities of a leader; the leader's diligent and attentive efforts ensure stability and achieve sustainable development. Placing trust in a leader because of his or her personal characteristics is a significant positive factor in encouraging the further development of activities.

Volunteers.

Volunteers are a vital factor for the organization of the Community Living Rooms in providing services to the community. They volunteer as drivers to transport participants to and from the facility, or as cooks to prepare meals when meetings of the Community Living Room take place. The volunteers are generally homemakers, retired hygienists, nurses, or children's nurses who are professional and experienced.

Frequency.

As discussed above, the frequency of use of Community Living Room services is not very high. This lower frequency means that both long-term management and participants will not be burdened by their obligation to the centre.

Participation.

The lower level categories are as follows: there are still people who hesitate to come forward, and men are not likely to attend. These factors reveal that the activities are not yet popular with everyone. However, they are expected to generate wider interest in the future.

Structuring.

In order to develop the Community Living Room further, systems and policy must be designed with this aim. There are two stipulations to this: the purpose of the meeting should not be determined at a higher level than the participants are able to reach; and a structure must be established to keep the dominant person from imposing his or her views on others. The continuation of what has already formed requires more energy than is used to produce it.

Development and Continuity.

In order to develop and ensure that the activities continue, participants must also learn how to play their roles. They mentioned in the Volunteers category that they discuss their experiences and share conclusions in order to determine how other participants can spend meaningful time at the Community Living Room. In developing activities, it is important to promote what has already been created. Accordingly, continuation becomes a key point.

Conclusion

Judging from the results of these surveys, we concluded that the Community Living Room has become a better place than it used to be for participants to meet in a safe environment. Based on these findings, we examined how and why Community Living Rooms have gained popularity, mainly using the 27 categories discussed above. Thus, the aim of this study was to assess qualitatively the growing popularity of Community Living Rooms. A relational map that illustrates all aspects of the structure and process is presented in Figure 2. It can be classified into
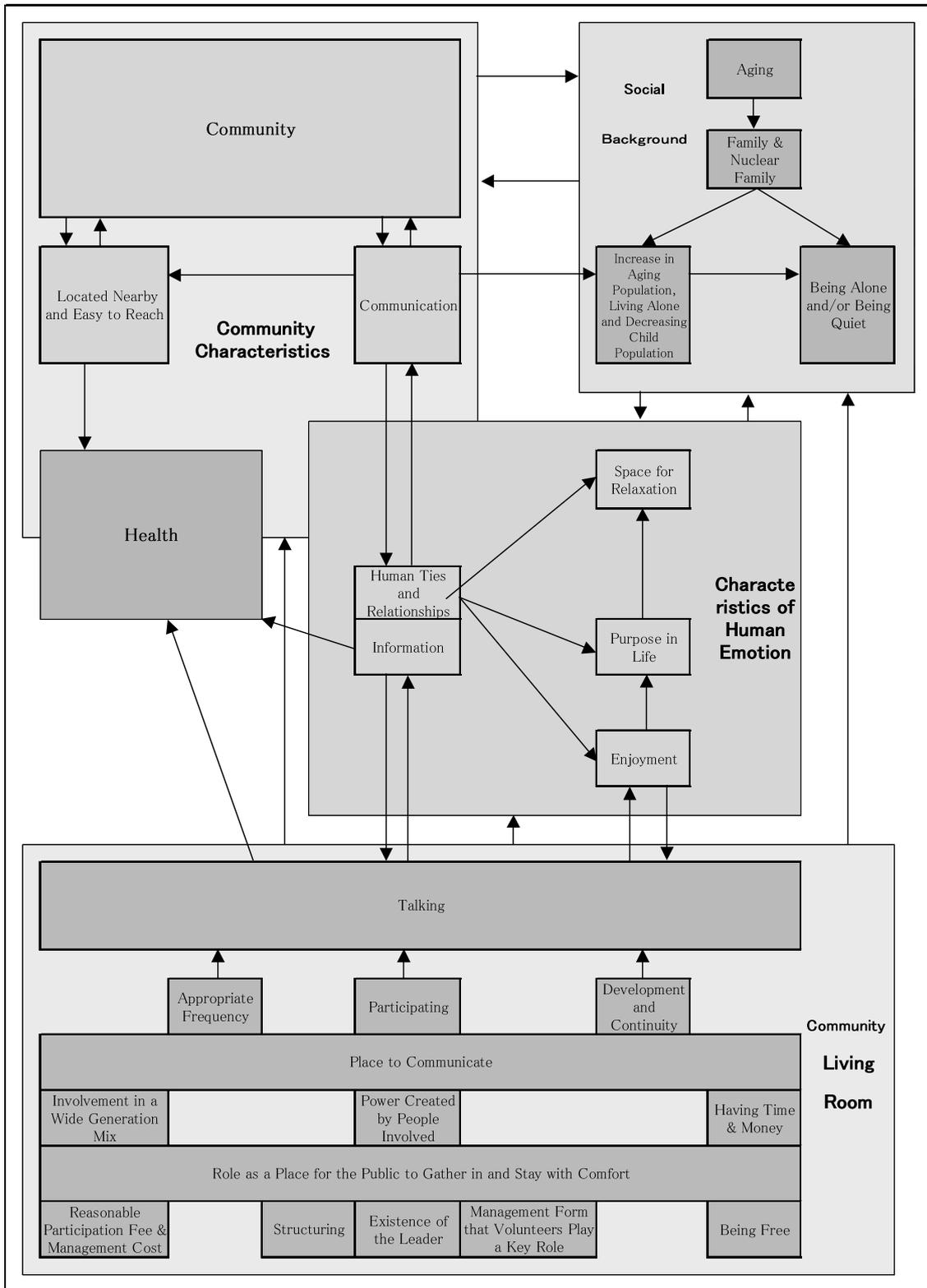
Figure 2 Correlational Relationship of Elements Expanding Activities of the Community Living Room

four major categories: Community Living Room, Characteristics of Human Emotion, Regional Characteristics, and Social Background.

The structure of Community Living Room can be optimized by focusing on the categories of cost and management; structuring; leadership; volunteers; and being free. These categories support the fundamental importance of having a safe place for participants to gather, which is a basis for the Community Living Room. With regards to costs and management, approximately 40% of the facilities charge participants a fee from 100 to 200 yen, and nearly 20% are available free of charge, as shown in the survey results. In addition, regional self-government associations provide subsidies. We also established that there should be a structure established in which the dominant person does not impose upon others. We adopt a management method where the purpose of the meeting is not determined at a higher level than participants are able to reach. Volunteers who continuously help to support and those who share their professional experiences and expertise are a necessary human resource to support the organization. The survey shows that young volunteers join in playing games, which makes the atmosphere more enjoyable. The management is not restricted to maintaining activities according to organizational and regional limits, but can easily help to establish a rapport with the participants. These factors make up the basic structure of each organization and its main activities.

The Community Living Room has become a place of friendship and understanding for everyone related to the organization. Above all, conversation is the main activity in this pleasant face-to-face interaction. Conversation represents a valuable opportunity to protect members from senile dementia and encourage them to become more conscious about others, so that they can work together for the good of everyone. Physically speaking, this activity helps to improve the health of participants in such a way that those with weak legs can start to commute on foot, so that going to the centre serves as rehabilitation, while doing origami and colouring in colouring books promotes manual dexterity. Conversation can be used as an opportunity to share information among participants and, when they consult with the public health nurse, they can get professional information. Participants can derive pleasure from each other through conversation and have a meaningful life, regarding the facility as a relaxation place. Thus, starting from the initial stage of conversation in the Community Living Room, activities promote the improvement of health, information, and pleasure, which are all related to the general health of the human mind.

Social ties and relationships will extend to areas that have not yet been considered by means of communication. The establishment of solidarity in the neighbourhoods and/or villages may enable them to achieve united regional strength. The Community Living Room creates good social effects by taking advantage of the fact that the facilities are located nearby and easy to reach.

Social background factors prompting the development of Community Living Rooms include such factors as the increase in the aging population, living alone, the decreasing child population, and the nuclear family. The Community Living Room can be used to solve these problems.

The development of activities in which citizens can participate, such as Community Living Rooms, will enhance local resident thinking so that they participate in different fields of activity. It will also encourage them to take a role in the foundation of social welfare.

Note 1: The Community Living Room website is http://tiikinotyanoma.hp.infoseek.co.jp/

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