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Title

How to foster social innovators through collaborative classes and projects? Case study of cross-sector collaboration in Tohoku after the disaster

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to pursue effective strategies and educational approaches to foster social innovators for the next generation who can tackle with social problems in community and to create new social values. After the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, many classes related to disaster reconstruction and related volunteering activities were developed through collaboration of different sectors.

Literature introduced cases of nonprofits to tackle with various social problems after the disaster (Yamazaki 2017). Yamazaki and Takeuchi (2016) have examined why many Harvard Business School Students have come to Tohoku after the Earthquake and what they learned through the field study. However, very few literature exists relating to the whole picture of how these collaborative courses have been developed and impacted on students and communities for social innovation.

Therefore, this study aims to grasp a whole picture of collaborative courses and projects to develop social innovators for the next generation in Tohoku, Japan, which was afflicted by the Earthquake and has been tackling with vast social problems emerging since then. Nonprofits in collaboration with universities have provided many opportunities for students to engage in volunteering activities and disaster reconstruction efforts and beyond.

Literature review, data collection, case studies were conducted to grasp a whole picture of the collaborative interaction among different sectors. Case studies of classes and youth development projects were conducted through action research, participatory observation and interviews. Several cases of classroom initiatives were introduced through the collaboration among nonprofits, government and university such as Tohoku University, which was afflicted by the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. Service-learning, project-based learning, active learning were found to be the main approaches to develop civic minds and orientation for interest and action for civic participation among the students. Through the classes, they developed leadership skills, teamwork,
compassion and innovative ideas, and some created nonprofit organizations with their own mission to tackle with problems faced in communities.

The author has developed a course of “Nonprofit-Government Partnership: Let’s think about ideas to solve community problems” was developed through a nonprofit organization, City of Sendai, and Tohoku University. This is a basic course for freshmen across departments. The process of collaboration to develop the course, how different actors thought and collaborated and interacted, and what were the outcomes and challenges of the collaboration were examined. Moreover, two projects were examined which were aiming to foster youth for social innovators. They were developed through the collaboration among big corporation, nonprofit organization and local government in collaboration with universities. How the classroom were connected and matched to the collaborative projects such as Future Sendai Marathon were also introduced.

Through the study, Tohoku Area has become a platform for the young generation to find and tackle problems and solutions, and create new social values, and to become social innovators rooted in local communities. The challenges were found to be sustainability and creation of ecosystem and change of awareness of community residents. Implications for collaborative governance, leadership, social innovators were discussed to further development.

**Keyword**

collaboration, social innovator, education