

## **The Place Where Local Communities Arise**

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I have always been shy and unable to express my opinion. However, through my experiences of listening to funny conversations on the radio and sharing information on school broadcasts I became aware of the warmth and joy of human connections and have recently been able to overcome my shyness.

Through these connections with people, I became interested in local connections and the appeal of my local community.

Roses are famous in my city, and they are the reason why I decided to explore my local community, Fukuyama. Even though Fukuyama has such beauty, my friends from other cities don't know anything about it. If you happen to look at the tourist information pamphlet for the city of "Roses" there aren't even any pictures of roses on the cover. I realized that the community itself lacks the ability to promote its beauty and I thought that more residents should perhaps take the initiative in promoting the uniqueness of the area that they call home.

That is why last year, I went to Seattle and Portland in the U.S. where locals are deeply involved in community development. I visited farmer's markets which are actively engaged in and supported by local residents.

Matt Kelly is the director of Queen Anne Farmer's Market. QAFM is the only independent market in Seattle. He kindly gave me his time and I was able to hear some interesting stories about the local community. I asked him, "why did you decide to open the market in that particular area?" and he replied, "It is close to places where people gather, like parks and schools, and where I can feel the flow of the community." I felt that those community spaces, where people gather, were closer to the locals than I had thought.

The people I met at the market were open-minded and welcomed me into their community, even though I was a stranger. In addition to this, many people said they liked the kindness everyone showed and the natural surroundings. I found that many people were attracted to the things that have existed in that area for a long time. However, there were some people who said that they needed more government support for local events and businesses.

Recently there are some interesting projects for town development in local governments in Japan too. For example, in Fukuyama, there is an interesting project called the "Machizukuri Passport Project", in which people can get points by participating in targeted community activities and receive rewards when they collect those points.

Such projects are realized through the awareness and feelings of the residents. A "Rose Mind" of "compassion, kindness and mutual help" is deeply rooted in the local residents. This is fostered among the residents through various community development projects.

Japan has a "spirit of mutual help" and an environment in which families are very

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close. However, there is a barrier between people, which limits us to superficial exchanges. To break down these barriers, what we need to do is JUST VISIT MORE PLACES.

Japan already has its own culture, festivals, and food, which are rooted in each region. Furthermore, there are unique projects being carried out in each region. I believe that visiting various places helps us to discover the attractive characteristics of that region.

I have one thing that I remember from the director's interview. "You can contribute to the community by enjoying yourself, by visiting various areas."

I believe that visiting different regions, getting in touch with local cultures and enjoying conversations with locals will create new connections and communities.

I would like to start conversation by visiting and enjoying other regions with my friends. I want my friends in Kure to take me to a café where I can see the sea.

Of course, I would introduce them to Roses as well.