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Emerging Policy Entrepreneurs and Their Potential After the Great East Japan Earthquake

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This study highlights new facts regarding the rise of local human resources during the policy decision process by reviewing policy entrepreneurs active in areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Specifically, the study reviews these stakeholders concerning the definitions and frameworks of prior research as well as the discussed development of policy entrepreneurs. A policy entrepreneur has been defined as “an energetic actor that conducts collaborative efforts within and around the government to promote policy innovation.” This study provides a comparative analysis of how the five strategies, as a requirement for establishing policy entrepreneurs, have been used to implement policy changes. Two cases are selected to confirm the extent to which they have utilized their respective strategies. The results reveal that both individuals have become active at their respective national and local levels by adopting the five strategies, despite there being differences in the extent of adoption. The recognition of the new existence of “policy entrepreneurs” could offer great support and identity to NPOs in disaster-afflicted areas. Promoting policy entrepreneurship could present a powerful message from the disaster-afflicted areas in Tohoku that could be shared with the entire nation of Japan, particularly considering recent times, when innovation has become necessary in Japan’s public domain.

Keywords: policy entrepreneurs, policy innovation, public policies, nonprofit organizations

1. Introduction

Ten years have passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake. Although many tangible elements have been restored, many intangible aspects continue to have problems. Furthermore, it has been difficult for the central government to propose and implement appropriate policies in accordance with differences in actual conditions among the various affected areas.

In this situation, non-profit organizations (NPOs) and other organizations working on-site have acted as “bridges.” In some cases, these stakeholders have been

able to actualize policies that were truly necessary for the effective reconstruction of the different areas affected by the disaster. In addition, there were some examples of the “people from the outside” working in the disaster zone ultimately migrating to and settling in the area. Such specific and personal involvement has led to the relevant policies being refined and executed through effective administration, while cooperation between the local residents, administration, and operators was established. In this study, these “bridging stakeholders” are jointly referred to as “policy entrepreneurs,” and the study pays attention to this “entity” through reflecting back on and examining the decade that followed the disaster.

The presence of “policy entrepreneurs” has been studied since the 1980s, mainly in Europe and the United States. In more recent years, the concept of “policy entrepreneurs” has also begun to be used in Japan. Despite an increase in such research in the Japanese context, few research papers currently exist, and no papers would have been available for review by NPO leaders as policy entrepreneurs. In terms of actual practice, a decade has passed since the Great East Japan Earthquake, and the afflicted areas still need to achieve both creative reconstruction and local innovation. The areas also need to accurately capture the local characteristics and challenges present within them, and thus they require effective policies that can be implemented in an environment that has seen diminished financial resources.

Indicative of a trend among practitioners, the Policy Entrepreneur’s Platform, established in November 2019, has begun to gain recognition, even in Japan. There were nearly 800 attendees at the 2020 Policy Entrepreneurship Symposium, which was held online. There, the importance of the institutionalization and adoption of policies stemming from NPO activities was confirmed.

Therefore, the existence and role of “policy entrepreneurs” is believed to be crucial to the formation of a sustainable local community in the future. For this reason, this study has highlighted new facts regarding the rise of local human resources during the policy decision process by reviewing policy entrepreneurs who were active in the areas affected by the Great East Japan Earthquake. Specifically, this study reviewed these stakeholders in relation to the definitions and frameworks of prior research. Based on what was found in this prior research, this study



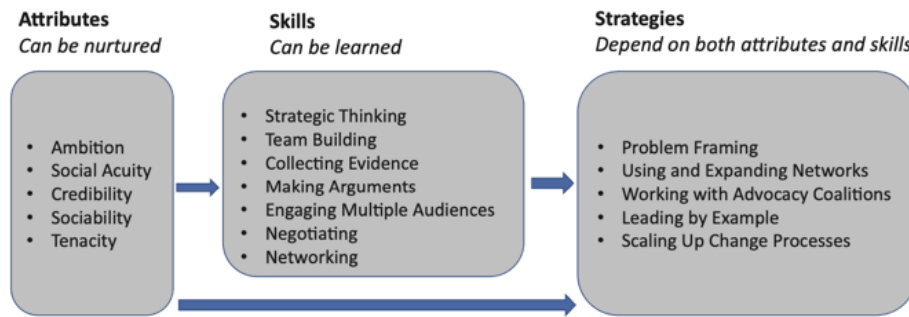


Fig. 1. Common attributes, skills, and strategies of policy entrepreneurs [3].

also discusses the feasibility and development of policy entrepreneurs.

2. Previous Studies

Since the concept of policy entrepreneurship came to the fore in the 1980s, research into this human resource and its impact on policy has been advanced. In an earlier study on this topic, it was noted, “A policy entrepreneur could be either outside the government, in an elected or appointed role, or in an interest group or research organization. However, entrepreneurs are characterized as having the attitude of investing their resources of time, energy, reputation, and sometimes money in anticipation of a future return [1].” Furthermore, it stated that “a policy entrepreneur has the role of garnering attention to issues and policy thinking [1], as well as connecting these issues to politics in order to clarify them on a governmental agenda.” In more recent years, a policy entrepreneur has been defined as “an energetic actor that conducts collaborative efforts within and around the government to promote policy innovation” [2].

In general, politicians who aim to change policies are more likely to make policy changes and/or take actions that favor their own elections in the short-term over long-term future returns. Policy entrepreneurs are distinct from such politicians. By summarizing past research, there is evidence that the attributes inherent in policy entrepreneurs include “ambition,” “social insight,” “reliability,” “sociability,” and “tenaciousness.” Skills associated with policy entrepreneurs include “thinking strategically,” “building teams,” “gathering evidence,” “engaging in discussion,” “involving multiple bystanders (groups),” “evidencing negotiation ability,” and “networking.” Specifically, effective policy entrepreneurs tend to implement five strategies: (1) framing problems, (2) using and expanding networks, (3) working with advocacy coalitions, (4) leading by example, and (5) scaling up change processes [2] (Fig. 1).

There have been few studies on policy entrepreneurs in Japan, and these stakeholders were only briefly introduced in papers by researchers [4, 5]. For example, policy entrepreneurs were only referred to at an early stage, and it was mentioned that “private, not-for-profit (NPO),

stand-alone think tanks will play the role of a ‘brain’ in the NPO and private sectors. To extend this metaphor further, it can be said that there is currently ‘no brain’ in NPO and private sectors in Japan.” The absence of “intellectual and policy-superior policy entrepreneurs” in Japan has also been noted when the country has been compared with other Asian nations [4]. Similarly, the vulnerability of think tank functions in Japan has been discussed [5], with policy entrepreneurship defined as “the ability to verify and analyze the state of public policy based on appropriate information and data, explore new ideas and policies, and influence society and the world by involving a wide variety of professions and layers of interests so as to realize such public policies.”

3. Case Studies

This study provides a comparative analysis of how the five strategies [2, 3], as a requirement for the establishment of policy entrepreneurs, have been used to implement policy changes. Two case studies are used to confirm the extent to which they have utilized the respective strategies.

To this end, Retz Fujisawa was selected as representing a “national” policy entrepreneur. Fujisawa has worked with the government and has succeeded in changing policies. Additionally, Takuma Kato, the Executive Director of the Maru Office, was chosen as an example of a “local” policy entrepreneur who has succeeded in changing policies at the local level. Each individual’s activity has been reviewed and a comparison made between them in light of the strategies used by policy entrepreneurs, as described in the following section. Analytical data were collected from both the literature reviewed and from individual interviews.

3.1. Case 1: Retz Fujisawa (Representative Board of the General Association of the “Revalue as Coordinator for the Future!”)

After working for the Earthquake Volunteer Collaboration Office of the Cabinet Secretariat during the Great East Japan Earthquake, Fujisawa established the RCF Reconstruction Support Team (currently known simply as

the RCF). He promotes disaster area reconstruction support projects in cooperation with local governments, residents, local companies, and NPOs. The RCF describes its vision as creating “a society that continues to create value for the future, based on social issues.” The organization’s mission statement is “to create people, cities, and industries as a social business coordinator, along with a transformative player.” A social work coordinator is defined by the task of creating value for the future, based on the issues facing society. The main tasks associated with such coordination are (1) promoting reconstruction caused by disasters and implementing social problem-solving projects by coordinating the business, public, and social sectors; (2) providing project support and grants/funding; and (3) practicing information collection, analysis, and dissemination [6].

Furthermore, two achievements of policy entrepreneurs should be noted. The first is the “community support” that is offered in disaster-stricken areas. At the beginning of the reconstruction effort after the Great East Japan Earthquake, focus was placed on restoring tangible elements that had suffered devastating damage. However, in areas where there were many elderly people and where many local communities remained, ideas that were different from those behind previous disaster support efforts were needed. Therefore, the RCF proposed and implemented the formation of a group of coordinators to provide community support in close proximity to and working with residents in the city of Kamaishi, Iwate Prefecture. It should be noted that “the success model of this project has since developed beyond the city of Kamaishi and expanded to the various municipalities of Iwate Prefecture, as well as to the entire Tohoku region. In addition, community support has been emphasized as one of the pillars of the government’s restoration policy” [7]. This experience has since been used to conduct industrial development with the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) in 12 additional municipalities along the coastal area of Fukushima.

The second project is “WORK FOR Tohoku.” Although this project is related to the abovementioned community support project, there was an additional need for community support in Tohoku, when there was an overwhelming shortage of experts. Therefore, the RCF collaborated with the Nippon Foundation to initiate a human resources support program for Tohoku in the form of cooperation with the Reconstruction Agency. Through this effort, 166 human resources were dispatched to companies across different areas of the Tohoku sites over a 3-year period.

3.2. Case 2: Takuma Kato (Director of the Maru Office)

As a result of the Great East Japan Earthquake, Kato began engaging in volunteer activities in the Karakuwa District of Kesennuma, Miyagi Prefecture. Subsequent to his initial efforts, in 2012, he migrated to this district and established a community-building society, named

Karakuwa-Marū. Together with local residents, Kato engaged in such activities as creating free newspapers to re-examine the appeal of the local communities. Between 2013 and 2015, he worked as a temporary staff member, i.e., as a reconstruction support worker, in the city of Kesennuma. In 2015, Kato established the Maru Office as a community-building company and launched its activities. The vision of the Maru Office is to create “societies where excitement is produced from across and within all local areas.” Its mission statement is “To become the instigator of learning, i.e., the local manager, that creates a system for nurturing the next generation present in local communities.”

The company mainly operates the Migration Support Center (MINATO) after having been commissioned by Kesennuma, and it additionally operates the Community Development Practice School, Numa College, a human resource development project aimed at the youth. In addition to these projects, the company operates the Educational Partner Project, known as the Jimoto Maru Maru Seminar [8].

Two primary achievements should be mentioned in relation to the company as a policy entrepreneur. The first is the human resource development of young people. This development formed as a result of the business for which Kato was responsible during the initial 3-year period when he worked as a reconstruction support worker. After holding discussions with the municipal officials who set up the project in 2016, it was concluded that the operation should be outsourced in order to avoid it being significantly affected should there be a change in the person in charge. The operation was ultimately commissioned to the Maru Office in 2017 in the form of a voluntary contract [9].

The second is the company’s exploratory learning-support project. This project was commissioned by the city office in 2020 as part of the activities of the Local Maru Maru Seminar. Previously, support for integrated learning was carried out voluntarily at Karakuwa Middle School from approximately 2016. Based on the success of that initial program, Kato drafted a plan to expand this project to the whole area of Kesennuma in 2019. He, thus, consulted a prefectural council member acquaintance who helped the members of the prefectural assembly to set up a meeting with the mayor of Kesennuma. Thereafter, a discussion was held to include the superintendent of the board of education. Once this process was complete, Kato was commissioned to begin carrying out the project in two schools, which would be used as models from 2020. The company plans to expand this project further in 2021.

4. Discussion

4.1. Problem Framing

As noted previously, Fujisawa believed that the need for community support in the disaster areas should be conceived differently from that of disaster support offered

previously. However, “the central government, which holds the financial resources of the reconstruction policy, implemented a top-down and precedent-based policy that did not necessarily reflect the actual circumstances and regional differences, as they examined the reconstruction policy based solely on past achievements” [10]. Therefore, while stating the need for the public, private, and non-profit sectors to engage in the restoration of affected areas by cooperating with one another, Fujisawa also opined that there was no function or idea currently available to connect these entities [11]. Fujisawa [10] thus framed the problem as a need to find “the right method that emphasizes the failure of the current policies.”

Kato, in turn, stated that by facilitating human development through education, it is possible to frame the problem as increasing the sustainability of the local community. Through this framing, Kato was able to engage in policy discussions not only with educational committees but also with the Earthquake Recovery and Planning Division. Such collaborative discussions are thought to have been conducted in order to “elicit guidance from relevant parties beyond the direct scope of the problem.” Meanwhile, the education committees and similar entities are believed to have aimed to form a consensus by focusing specifically on the problem in terms of education.

4.2. Using and Expanding Networks

By using a large company’s network effectively, Fujisawa was able to accomplish various important goals. Although much aid was needed from companies that wanted to provide support in a way connected to their operation, it was difficult for a single company to establish a relationship with the local community. For this reason, there was an increased need for coordinators to establish this relationship. It should be noted that the criteria of NPOs are often different from those of the companies with whom they are cooperating, as their goal is often to resolve social issues. Therefore, Fujisawa formed collaborations based on mutual recognition of the differences present among the stakeholders [11].

Similarly, Kato stated that his foundation was formed through his ability to build relationships with several government officials over the three years of his career as a reconstruction support worker. He also said that he had repeatedly met with local key persons in order to enhance internal connections and build relationships. As a result, he learned in what order and to whom we should make policy recommendations to make them come true.

4.3. Working with Advocacy Coalitions

Fujisawa succeeded in building a network when he assumed the position of a part-time policy investigator at the Reconstruction Agency. From this position, Fujisawa stated, “The local government is struggling with how to proceed with the reconstruction plan amid a lack of human resources” [12]. Fujisawa also noted, “If we understand and communicate the rules of the government to people in terms they understand, I think it’s rather open.”

In comparison, Kato stated that his activities in the Karakuwa District immediately after the earthquake developed his ability to “use politics.” Specifically, he noted, “In the narrow world of the Karakuwa Peninsula, it was important to promote the project I wanted to execute without creating enemies. I learned how to talk to different people and how to make my thoughts take shape in situations where I would not be able to form anything if I made the mistake of bringing the proposal to the table.” The experience he obtained during this process was also strongly displayed in his subsequent engagements with administration. For example, when making policy recommendations to mayors, Kato also established the site of the discussion by going through the prefectural council members.

4.4. Leading by Example

Fujisawa developed projects by engaging with the central government and based on his success in basic municipalities. As he stated, “NPOs develop projects that have not been taken up by the government, present a successful model, and are accepted and institutionalized by the government. Thus, it has become an era in which NPOs greatly influence the solving of social issues through policy formation” [7].

The Exploratory Learning Support Project, Kato’s current focus, originally started at Karakuwa Middle School as a volunteer project and then advanced by obtaining grants from organizations, including his own. On the basis of the achievements made in this area, Kato successfully took over the “Exploratory Learning Support Project.”

4.5. Scaling Up Change Processes

Fujisawa said that “structuring” is important in order to “scale up” projects. Specifically, he noted, “Dry theoretical argument is sought after rather than ‘sentimental’ relationship building” [10].

Kato’s exploratory learning support project, in turn, started at just one school, Karakuwa Middle School, before it was adopted as one of the city’s projects. This project was expanded to two schools in 2020, and relevant stakeholders are now considering introducing it into 25 elementary and middle schools across the city of Kesenuma over the next 5-year period. With a view to connecting the education in middle and high schools, Kato has participated as a member of a group sponsored by Kesenuma, the Study Group for Examining the State of School Education, which examines the ideal state of high school education. By creating a new model of education in Kesenuma, Kato is able to explore the expansion of transformations in other districts, such as by taking the role of advisor.

The importance of institutionalization and policy making in relation to policy entrepreneurs starting from NPO activities is beginning to be discussed in Japan. While this concept has been studied globally, it is spreading more slowly in Japan. In this section, two entrepreneurs who

have succeeded in promoting policy change were used as case studies, and a comparative analysis was conducted by focusing on five strategies associated with the establishment requirements for being a successful policy entrepreneur. The findings presented in this section made it evident that both individuals became active in their respective national and local levels by adopting the five strategies, although there were differences in the extent of adoption. It was also suggested that it is important for the government to have a function to realize local issues as policies based on proposals from NPOs working in the field.

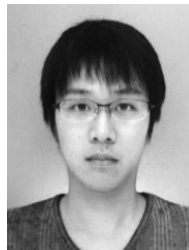
5. Concluding Remarks

In the process, many managers and intermediary support organizations have repeatedly asserted that it is essential for them to turn their activities into businesses to make them sustainable. One of the reasons behind this is that “social entrepreneurship” and “social business” have become more widespread in Japan. However, no matter how much ingenuity is put into them, not all social issues can be solved through social business. On the contrary, some things, such as social capital, which is the connection between people, and the well-being of each individual are lost by turning everything into a business, and this cannot be reversed sustainably. This led to denial of my own business and self-denial, thinking, “I’m not good enough to make money.” This led to denial of my own business and self-denial, thinking, “Am I not needed by the world?” In such a situation, recognizing the new existence of “policy entrepreneurs” will provide them with a great source of strength and identity. It will be a great message from the Tohoku disaster area to the whole of Japan at a time when Japan’s public sphere needs innovation. Future research questions include under what circumstances policy entrepreneurs emerge, and who can become policy entrepreneurs.

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