

The History and Challenge of Citizens' Participation at the Osaka Museum of Natural History

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This presentation examines the history of citizens' participation at the Osaka Museum of Natural History (OMNH) to consider how citizens can participate in museum activities and support the museum. In Japan, OMNH is one of the oldest natural history museums citizens have involved in its operations. What kind of people has engaged? In what areas of museum activities have they participated? Answering these questions will be a hint for the museum to create a "new partnership." The following descriptions come out of the analysis of published materials (mainly articles from past issues of "Nature Study,") interviews of relevant peoples and participant observation in the museum activities.

OMNH started in 1950 without having its building (its first name was Osaka Municipal Museum of Natural History). Tsutsui Yoshitaka, the first director of this museum, started a museum supporters' group in 1955 consisted of such intellectuals as scientists, teachers, and amateurs (so-called "merchant scholars"). They joined the expeditions, helped museum extension, and published "Nature Study," a monthly journal for citizens. They supported the director to acquire half of an old schoolhouse at Utsubo for the museum.

After the museum moved to Utsubo, five museum professionals were employed. They changed the name of the supporters' group to "Osaka Society for the Study of Natural History." As museum professionals led the educational activities, the supporters' group became inactive. However, more and more citizens participated in educational activities as their children also joined the nature observation and collecting tours. Moreover, Isamu Hiura, one of the museum professionals, eagerly led citizens' study circles, more and more new museum fans visited the museum. During the Utsubo period (1958-1973), the museum professionals concluded that "Museum Friends" in Japan should be a users' group.

Many members of the study circles donated their specimens to the museum, and they became influential members of the council of "Osaka Society for the Study of Natural History." In this period, 90 percent of its members were men, and about half of its members were young people. Some female members were volunteer assistant.

We have good reason to think highly of the joint researches at Osaka Municipal Museum of Natural History because citizens played essential roles in it. However, during the Utsubo period, the functions of the citizen in the museum were limited (that is, doing joint researches, collecting specimens, and the supply of human resources).

In 1974, the museum transferred from Utsubo to Nagai Park. The new building opened, it had a different name, OMNH and “Osaka Society for the Study of Natural History” was changed its name to “Friends of Osaka Museum of Natural History.” About 28 percent of this “Museum Friends” worked schools and universities. At the time, museum professionals hoped that “Museum Friends” would be a beginners’ group. They organized study circles that were expected to do research. Some of the study circles led by Isamu Hiura published lists of collections about Entomology. Many members of the study circles donated their specimens to the museum and became influential members of the council of “Museum Friends.” The membership of “Museum Friends” increased gradually from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, as the council members worked hard and managed well. Some citizens began to organize a new independent research group and proposed a series of events of the “Museum Friends,” after they worked with museum professionals. Other citizen began to even extend his activities to the school education and the local community.

Since the late 1990s, it was not council members but the museum professionals that mainly led the activities of the “Museum Friends,” because most of the council members became busy with their work as office workers or teachers. The museum professionals brought the Internet revolution to the museum community, and in 2002 they overcame the financial difficulties of “Museum Friends” by incorporating it into a non-profit organization (Osaka Natural History Center.)

From the late-2000s recession, the City of Osaka (the establisher of OMNH) introduced the New Public Management (NPM) approach to city museums. The NPM involves policy evaluation, PFI (Private Finance Initiative), Designated Administrator System, Incorporated Administrative Agency system, market testing, etc. In 2006, the City of Osaka introduced OMNH Designated Administrator System, and reported that the best management system was Incorporated Administrative Agency system to keep the collections continuously, secure mid-and-long term projects continuity, ensure upholding the reputation of operation. From April 1, 2019, the group of museums established the City of Osaka undergo the transition from Designated Administrator System to

Incorporated Administrative Agency system. The museum professionals, the staff of the non-profit organization, have remained in OMNH to join up with new young members. While at the same time, many old high-level amateurs, including retired professionals, have supported the museum by classifying the specimens.

When the museum did not have an original building, intellectuals supported management and projects as supporters literally. After the museum acquired building and professionals, they reorganize supporters' group to the society for the study, and eventually to the "Museum Friends" that means users' group and the functions of the citizen in the museum were limited. From the late-2000s recession, the museum has faced financial hard times. To success the participation of various citizens including corporate citizens, it will be necessary to broaden the users and users' role—this means that OMNH needs backing from not only the museum community but also a wide range of "the public" to encourage social equality and fundraising. To broaden users will also be necessary to the conservation of the natural environment.