

Ko Yamada (2018). From “Yojo-Han” Art Center to “Untitled School of Arts”: The Possibility of a Local Art Education Network Developing from a Bedroom-sized Art Center. *Ideology*, 3 (3): 235-246, 2018

## **From “Yojo-Han” Art Center to “Untitled School of Arts”: The Possibility of a Local Art Education Network Developing from a Bedroom-sized Art Center**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In 2012, the alternative art center “Yojo-Han”, named after the popular 8.25 m<sup>2</sup> unit size of old Japanese bed-sits, was established. It is located in an art and design building in central Nagoya, in a venue of Aichi Triennale. The unit “yojo-han” symbolizes bed-sits for young people and their ambitions from the 1950's to the 80's. This name was chosen to attract visitors and students in the prime of their life. Unlike NPO-run large facilities demanding much maintenance, the art center is a small and semi-private space for public art education activities. There are four directors with equal authority for this small institution. Through well-organized scheduling, this tiny space transforms into a photography school, poetry seminar, sculpture school, graduate-level digital seminar, various workshops, streaming radio station, and other events. Most activities are weekly and open to the public. As with smart phone applications, each activity occupies the whole center when held and “Yojo-han” becomes the individual school/workshop. This paper introduces the center's activities, summarizing this format's function and its social importance in public art education. Furthermore, the concept of local networks of such unique art schools as an “Untitled School of Arts” is introduced as a system to facilitate sustainable public art education.

## **Introduction**

In 2012, the alternative art center “Yojo-Han”, named after the popular 8.25 m<sup>2</sup> unit size of old Japanese bed-sits, was established. It is located in an art and design building in central Nagoya, in a venue of the Aichi Triennale. The unit “yojo-han” was originally taken from the standard size of the traditional Japanese tea room, “chashitsu”, which implies the idea of rich imagination within a small limited space, and which also symbolizes bed-sits of the 1950's to the 1980's for young people and their dreams and ambitions. This name was chosen to attract visitors and students in the prime of their professional careers and to manifest the proactive choice of a smaller sized space. Unlike NPO-run large facilities demanding much maintenance, the art center is a small and semi-private space for public art education activities. This paper introduces the center's activities, summarizing this format's function and its social importance in art education for the public. Furthermore, the concept of local networks of such unique art schools as an “Untitled School of Arts” is introduced as a system to facilitate sustainable art education. The “Yojo-Han” Art Center is based in a room of the Chojamachi Transit Building, which houses an architectural firm, a restaurant, a bookstore, and an art and design firm. It is located in central Nagoya, the third-largest incorporated city and the fourth most populous urban area in Japan. It is situated in the “Chojamachi” area of Nagoya, and has been one of venues for Aichi Triennale, “a showcase of the world’s latest contemporary art, since it began being held in August 2010 in Nagoya City.”

## **The Structure and Format of “Yojo-Han” Art Center**

There are four directors of this small sized art center. The art center has intentionally not appointed any one director as the executive director. The four directors have equal rights to make decisions concerning the operation and schedule of the institution through democratic discussions among all the directors. There is no full time employee at the center. All directors are professional artists and educators who hold positions at colleges and art schools and for them, running the art center started from a passion for art education.

Employing full time employees to operate and efficiently run this small facility is not seen as necessary. There are no daily hours of business or days with

office hours or reception. The art center is open for weekly school sessions, seminars and the streaming radio station operated by directors. The facilities are available as a cooperative working space for meetings or as a studio for the directors, as well as for holding periodic projects or workshop sessions. All of the activities are not seen as being held “in” the art center. When each school or activity is open, the whole art center itself turns into that specific school or seminar class, and when the streaming radio is on the air, the whole center becomes the broadcasting station. When each session or activity is held, the facility itself is closed off to other purposes. At PechaKucha Night Nagoya [1] presentation session in April, 2012, the center's system was described by the four directors as being like a smartphone operating system, where the phone goes into sleep mode when it is not needed for efficiency and then turns on the entire smartphone to work as a different device through different applications that are activated.

### **Financing of “Yojo-Han” Art Center**

“Yojo-Han” Art Center is managed as a collaborative private institution. The four directors serve as these but also see themselves as donators to the art center at the same time. Each director donates 10000 Japanese yen (about 83US dollars) monthly to provide for all the necessities and maintenance of the center. Even though the average rental fee of a commercial space of this size in the city of Nagoya is about 40000 Japanese yen (approximately 330 US dollars), the Chojamachi Transit Building, where the art center is located, offers favorable terms to artists and designers with rent that is 30% cheaper than the average. [2] Due to this generous offer, all expenses such as rent, electricity and internet costs are fully covered through the director's monthly donations. Considering the average Japanese consumer spending, even without the special terms mentioned above, managing the finances of the art center with four to five directors donating would not be that difficult. Their donations are mostly covered by the class tuition they receive for the classes held at the art center. In general art centers usually secure large-scale facilities to hold numerous activities such as exhibitions, lectures at the same time. In comparison to public facilities, due to the need of a considerably large budget for facility maintenance, etc. every year, these centers often have annual trouble with securing funding to meet their

budget every year.

For example, according to the research [3] (fig.1) of Art NPO Link concerning 527 institutions which operate art and culture projects in Japan, most institutions are not able to obtain the necessary profits from their activities and need extra funding from external grants, subsidies, and donations for their operations. Even though most of institutions are not financially independent, 65.1% of them employ one to 10 full time employees. Labor cost is the main expense for their operations.

Fig.1: Number of full-time staff 2016

Number of full-time staff engaged in daily work	Number of institutions	%
0 people	184	34.9
1 people	99	18.8
2 people	61	11.6
3 people	26	4.9
4 people	25	4.7
More than 5 people	83	15.7
No response	49	9.3
total	527	100.0

Another example is the NPO-run “Awajishima Art Center” [4]. The art center was established on Awajishima Island (population: 131,912) in June of 2005. Its mission is to promote spiritually rich life and the identity as islanders, and become the base of the community while widening personal views of the world and respect of tradition. Their activities are three monthly symposiums along with events such as seminars, workshops, theater plays, exhibitions, movie sessions, music events. The number of visitors for each event varies from 30 to 100, making it as one of the largest holders of periodic art events.

According to the breakdown of their budget, [5] (fig.2) its total annual running expenses are 11,420,152 Japanese yen (about 102,700 US dollars), including labor expenses of 2,856,000 Japanese yen (about 25,600 US dollars); not including facility maintenance costs, advertising, and outsourcing. Only 26 percent of its budget is from its actual income. In contrast, 71 percent of its budget is from external grants and subsidies. This shows that even such successful large-scale art centers are dependent on grants and subsidies.

Fig.2: Awajishima Art center Profit & Loss Statement  
(April 1, 2017 - March 31, 2018)

Subject	Amount of money (in Yen)
Ordinary income	
Membership expense	15,000
Donations expense	112,330
Subsidy/Subsidy	8507,192
Business income	3081,520
Other income	321,541
Total ordinary income	12037,583
Ordinary expenses	
Personnel expenses	2,856,497
Other expenses	8,563,655
Total ordinary expenses	11,420,152
Income and Expenditure	617,431

At “Yojo-Han” Art Center, schools and classes are independent each other and financially separated from the art center. There is no standard for tuition or necessary expenditures for each of the schools. For the center each school and activity has a self-sustaining budget system and this then makes the whole system of the art center flexible. Flexibility and diversity are considered as essential elements for creative operation of the art center. Currently, three schools, PACell photography school, Mokujiiku woodcraft school, and Shi-ka-ra poetry school are run independently at the art center. The schools at the center are only run by authorized directors who understand the center’s concept and format. Workshops are run by invited professional artists and educators who share an understanding of the center's concept. Each workshop is supervised by

one of the directors. Participant's payments for these activities are sometimes dictated by the costs incurred and sometimes they are simply donations representing their satisfaction and/or financial state.

### **Mission of “Yojo-Han” Art Center**

The primary mission of “Yojo-Han” Art Center is sustainable education and the dissemination of information concerning art and creative thinking to the public in the Nagoya area. The center offers schools and activities mainly for those who are in their prime of their careers. While these students are often at the center of activity in their employment and in the median area of society, they are often not able to expand themselves culturally due to their social/family/employment responsibilities. The center is located next to a large business area in the heart of the city which makes it be easier for business professionals to come to the center on their way home from work or on holidays with their commute passes paid for by their employers. More than 80% of students at the center are college graduates and many of them are experienced professionals in their field. In many cases, those students who would like to learn and utilize the creative thinking process in their jobs and in their personal life are actually beginners in fine art studies, in terms of techniques. The classes are designed as places for state-of-the-art information and experimental production experiences with instructors, which take place through discussions and networking between students from many different professions.

“Yojo-Han” Art Center's fundamental educational concept is that art education and creative thinking are necessary not only for people of specific generations or specific positions. “Art for everyone” is not special concept for the most art centers. However, regular art centers try to offer education that “anyone can participate” to fulfill their goals. “Generality” for the public often fetters and impedes creativity. Moreover, regular business hours and general accessibility often actually exclude participation of full-time employees who are trying to advance their career.

According to a report [6] from the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, there are total of 5,571,126 students or participants in 718,000 classes at art or cultural centers in Japan. In art and culture classes, most participants are 60 to 64 years old, and the next largest group is from 15 to 19

years old. [7]

In surveys of participants in culture and art schools, regardless of age, the majority of students list their purpose of studying as “for a hobby.” [8] However, there is a substantial increase in students from the late 20’s to the mid-40’s that study “to gain knowledge for work”, “to become an accomplished professional”, or “to acquire an educational background.” It can be assumed that the active members of society in their prime prefer practical knowledge or experience to utilize in their careers.

The schools at “Yojo-Han” Art Center are designed so that they are able to offer opportunities for those who are usually separated from art education, by being specialized as graduate seminars or classes of arts to meet the intellectual interests and playful activities of the members of society in their most active years.

### **Example of the school: PACell Photography School**

PACell Photography School offers 6 weekly classes. The average total number of students for the 6 classes is 25 to 30. The core participants are in their 30’s and 40’s. All generations from 19 year olds to those in their 60’s also equally participate in each class in a similar ratio.

Since the maximum number of students is limited to 6 to 7 for one session because of the size of the center, communication is close. The students can participate in any session on Tuesday mornings, afternoons, evenings, Wednesday mornings, Thursday evenings, and Saturday (half day session) up to 4 sessions through a monthly membership fee. The instructor introduces latest trends, problems or themes from international fine art and design or photography websites and many other sources, having the students try photography methods and techniques tied to the themes. All participants share their photography work on a private page of Facebook and have online discussions and critiques. Within the page, related links and information are also provided not only by the instructor but also the students. Many of the participants often propose subjects or problems and ask questions concerning problems related to their profession as well.

### **Example of the school: Shi-ka-ra, Poetry School**

Shi-ka-ra, the poetry school offers 4 sessions in the afternoon (13 to 15) monthly, averaging 6 to 7 students participating in the sessions. Most of the participants are in their 30s. However, one of them is in his 60s and another is in her 20s. At the sessions, students read poetry from all over the world, no matter if the material is famous, obscure or anonymous. They also try to penetrate the actualities of incidents that are themselves poetic in existence. After their discussions, they write poems concerning the contents and interpretations that evolved. Last June, they held a poetry reading in a coffee shop close to a station in the business area. Shi-ka-ra also publishes anthologies periodically.

### **Example of the school: Mokujiku, Woodcraft School**

Mokujiku, the woodcraft school offers 3 sessions in the morning (10 to 12), in the afternoon (14 to 16), and in the evening (19 to 21) monthly, averaging 12 to 15 students participating in the sessions. The students of morning sessions are mostly homemakers. A variety of professionals join the afternoon sessions, such as interior coordinators, librarians, and beauticians. The evening sessions mostly consist of office workers. Some of them already have professional creative skills such as lacquering, Buddhist statue sculpturing and are students or graduates fine arts colleges. The school deals with a variety of natural woods that are usually not available in average stores. They start with easy hand-carved knives or spoons for daily use. Depending on their needs, they can choose the objects or items that they want to make. Some of them even try to make a business of their sculpturing. Party sessions are held sometimes to use their cutleries to examine how they feel and what they make with them.

### **Example of the regular workshop: Oki-Seminar in Yojo-Han**

Every Monday night, a post graduate-level, media art seminar has been held by Mr. Keisuke Oki, a media artist from Tokyo. The workshops consist of lectures on the latest technological art along with introduction to programming, or reading sessions on the latest art criticism and artist interviews in English



(English is a second language in Japan). Five to six professional artists or art college graduates from their late 20's to their 40's have been participating every week. At each session, participants deposit a voluntary donation in a saving box that looks like Mr.Oki and was created by one of participants.

### **Absence of Graduate Schools of Arts as Post Schooling for adult members of society in Japan**

Japanese Graduate schools do not function as places of adult and social educational opportunities except in a limited number of business schools for MBAs. [9] The percentage of the students 25 years or older in Japanese graduate schools is only 1.7%. In comparison to 20%, which is the ratio in the United States. This shows that adults encounter difficulty when entering and attending graduate schools in Japan. Most of students enter graduate schools directly after their undergraduate education. The first reason for this is that full time commitment is usually required because there are few colleges which offer classes in the evening or at night. At present, there are about 630 graduate colleges in Japan (May, 2015). About 300 colleges offer evening classes; however the evening classes are usually limited to only one or two majors in an entire college. [10] The second reason for this is that the choices of majors that offer night classes are limited mostly to management, economics, or medical sciences and nursing. There is only one fine arts graduate school at Tama University of Arts that offers evening courses. These two reasons show that Japanese fine arts graduate schools generally do not function as liberal arts, especially fine arts, educational institutions for adult members of society.

### **Importance of Fine Arts Education for Adult members of Society**

At present, liberal arts such as fine arts or music are not considered important subjects in elementary and middle schools in Japanese compulsory education. There are only 115 hours of fine arts and 115 hours of music for the three years of public middle school education. [11] In comparison, there are 315 hours of mathematics, 290 hours of sciences, 350 hours of Japanese language, 315 hours of foreign language, 295 hours of social sciences, and 270 hours of physical education. In 1947, right after WWII, there was 210 hours of paintings

and crafts (presently called fine arts), which was 50% of the time devoted to math at the time, 420 hours. This shows that the ratio has been reduced to 36% and average hours of fine art is about one hour per week for school periods. Over the last sixty years, the policy of MEXT, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan, gives priority to practical sciences over liberal arts and the study hours for the arts are decreasing. In such educational circumstances, it is important to create private higher or further education systems for not only youngsters like primary or middle school children but for adult members of society as well.

Since the above trend has been continuing and will more than likely be continued, changing the policies of governments around the world to influence fine arts education for youth must be seen as implausible. A more realistic approach to the achieving a true change in the recognition of fine arts would be through those adults who are not only in the center of activity in the business world and society, but also parents of the youths that are being exposed to less and less art and fine arts experiences. In creating a format for fine arts education that effectively reaches active members of society that are also parents, society as a whole will benefit from technology that is supported by aesthetic values and the creativity necessary for a more abundant life.

## **Conclusion**

Since the policies of MEXT give priority to practical sciences over liberal arts, it is hard to imagine that art education in public schools or institutions will expand by itself. It is expected that art education at private institutions will be a lifeline to maintain the ideas and authenticities within Japanese society. However, since the grants and subsidies tend to be reduced due to government policy, large-scale art centers, which are not financially independent, cannot maintain their facilities easily. It can be easily deduced that they sometimes may only fulfill their basic goals after facility maintenance. In these terms, an art educational system of small-sized independent art centers operated by financially independent professional artists and educators would function in society for a long time as a sustainable grass-roots educational movement. The system of “Yojo-Han” Art

Center can be seen as independent while expanding the recognition on validity of art in society by offering a high level professional education, even with a small facility by targeting core members of the society.

The singularity of the “Yojo-Han” Art Center is dependent upon the individuality of professional artists operating the art center, and this attracts small numbers of particular individuals who deeply enjoy the contents. In contrast to this singularity, art centers usually present their generality to the public. However, the impact on society from this may be seen as small and the number of participants has to be limited and remains small because of the size of the facility and its flexibility. For increased impact on society, “Yojo-Han” Art Center recently presented the idea of “Untitled School of Arts”, a conceptual imaginary college, a network of small-sized unique private schools that offers high level art education for adults. The goal of the network is to create a framework to change society’s consideration of the arts by addressing individual, small-sized, unique art educational institution's grass-root movements as a major presence for a conceptual imaginary school of arts. First, it aims to function as a non-commercial information site to look for unique face-to-face art educational institutions and activities in Chojamachi, Nagoya, where “Yojo-Han” Art Center is located. In 2018, the first actual school network “Chojamachi School of Arts”, was established under the concept of “Untitled School of Arts”, to realize the idea of the network. It networks small art schools in Chojamachi and is organizing an urban agricultural art project called “Art Farming” which will be held in the town in 2019 as its first mission.

The format of “Yojo-Han” can be applicable to regions and countries where the government or officials do not give much priority to the arts. Since the possibility of expansion of the Untitled School of Arts network among other cities in Japan and other countries is already being considered and suggested, it could function as an open source system for small-sized art education.

[1] PechaKucha is a simple presentation format where you show 20 images, each for 20 seconds. The images advance automatically and you talk along to the images.

The presentation format was devised by Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham of Klein Dytham architecture. The first PechaKucha Night was held in Tokyo in their gallery in 2003. ( from Pecha Kucha Night Nagoya site: <http://pechakucha-nagoya.org/globalsite>)

[2] “at home”,price list of rent for commercial space in Nagoya. Retrived from [http://www.athome.co.jp/%E5%90%8D%E5%8F%A4%E5%B1%8B%E5%B8%82%E4%B8%AD%E5%8C%BA%E9%8C%A6/jr\\_03-1\\_14\\_23-23106\\_018-lst\\_1.html](http://www.athome.co.jp/%E5%90%8D%E5%8F%A4%E5%B1%8B%E5%B8%82%E4%B8%AD%E5%8C%BA%E9%8C%A6/jr_03-1_14_23-23106_018-lst_1.html)

[3] Arts NPO link, Arts NPO databank 2016-2017, Japan , p.70

[4] Awajishima art center(2018, August 29) <http://awajishima-art-center.jp/>

[5] Awajishima art center Activity Statement 2013, 1 April - 2014, 31 March

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