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Japanese Local Community as Socio-Structural Resource for Ecological Lifestyle

Abstract

The Fukushima nuclear disaster re-placed in more severe way on the agenda of Japanese society the question of the re-evaluation of an ecological consumption and lifestyle. This article studies the specific features and the development of the environmentally minded lifestyle in Japanese local communities; the enterprising social actors who help disseminate it and spread its values; and the particular way of implementation of well-established global practices in local Japanese conditions. The purpose of the text is, in proceeding from the concept of ecological lifestyle, to determine the local community as vital socio-structural resource for promotion of ecological consumption in Japan.

Key words: local community, lifestyle, *teikei*, consumer co-operatives, urban farming.

Local community as important socio-structural resource of Japanese society

According to famous Japanese author and illustrator Taro Gomi:

“While the twentieth century was an age of nations, the twenty-first century is an age of regions and local people”.¹

I am following the idea that the 21st century is the century of local communities, for the activity of the enterprising social actors of those communities is the fundament of civil society. In postmodern society local people have at their disposal much greater and more varied possibilities for choosing a lifestyle for themselves, their family, and for the neighborhood they live in.

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¹ Taro Gomi, ‘Interview with Mr. Taro Gomi’, *The Japan Foundation Newsletter*, Vol. 31, No. 4, 2006, p. 3: https://www.jpff.go.jp/j/publish/periodic/jfn/pdf/jfn31_4.pdf (accessed 29.05.2016).

As early as the 1960s, Japan was among the developed countries in which ecological lifestyle became a focus of public attention. Its popularity and spread were the result of the activity of civil society, of the structures and activities of local communities and their enterprising social actors, as well as of measures taken by state institutions.² Japan has a developed and functioning policy for environmental protection and functioning laws for the application of that policy. But despite the achieved results, many problems still exist, provoking the criticism and protests of civic movements.

The natural disasters and the ensuing nuclear crisis in Japan after March 11, 2011 tragedy, have re-placed on the agenda of developed and developing countries alike the issue of nuclear power plant safety, but likewise the more general question of the value of an ecological lifestyle. The country's tragic experience with the atom bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the popularity and importance of the ecological lifestyle, are circumstances that make the March 11, 2011 nuclear accident tragedy even harder to explain and come to terms with. This is a country that has undergone the nightmare of atomic bombing and is particularly sensitive in its mentality and culture to the risks of nuclear energy, yet obtains one third of its electricity precisely from nuclear power stations. To make matters worse, one fifth of the earthquakes taking place in the world occur on its territory, and are often followed by tsunami waves posing the question about high level of ecological risks concerning the country. In Japan earthquakes are part of daily life but until Fukushima nuclear disaster the risk of technological development, in particular the social processes of perceiving, of viewing and making sense of risk were in the periphery of social debate about Japan's future.

“The causes of the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station not only include technical failures and systematic and administrative failures, but also a set of factors that can be termed societal failures”.³

² Maya Keliyan, *Stil na život na lokalnata obshtnost: Savremenna Yaponiya* [Local Community Life Style: Contemporary Japan], Varna: Alex Print, 2010, pp. 94–95.

³ Mindy Kay Bricker (ed.), *The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station Disaster: Investigating the Myth and Reality by the Independent Investigation Commission on the Fukushima Nuclear Accident*, London and New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 51.

The development of technology, of the IT sector in particular, has given rise to the dangerously illusory idea that nature and man-made technology are under control, and that what has not taken place during the past centuries will not take place in the future. In a number of countries, among them Japan, a serious additional cause for the extent of damages coming from the destructive power of nature, is human error. The latter is often linked with economic interests, and with corrupt practices tying political elites to economic structures: data indicating this connection were presented and discussed after the Fukushima nuclear incident.

I am following the belief that the **social structures of Japanese society create, maintain, and stimulate considerable social resources** for dealing with socio-economic difficulties. These resources have been used multiple times in Japanese history and **local community** is one of them. It is also significant collective enterprising social actor for promotion and dissemination of values and practices of ecological lifestyle.

This paper studies the specific features and the development of the environmentally minded lifestyle in Japanese local communities; the enterprising social actors who help disseminate it and spread its values; and the particular way of implementation of well-established global practices in local Japanese conditions. The purpose of the text is, in proceeding from the concept of ecological lifestyle to determine the local community as **vital socio-structural resource** for promotion of ecological consumption in Japan.

Local community and its lifestyle in postmodern society

The **approach** applied to the lifestyle of local communities lies within the research field of **social stratification**. In this study I proceed from the traditions of the classical names in this problem field, such as Weber and Veblen, as well as on the work of Bourdieu, Featherstone, and Jameson, on authors such as Savage, Butler, Longhurst, Sobel, Zablocki, Kanter, Chaney, and others. Local community is a form of coexistence, a form of co-affiliation of individuals living in a network of social relationships; it has a specific social structure; its members perform socially significant activities within a clearly defined territory that they inhabit. What is important here are not so much the physical and geographic characteristics of that territory, but the **nature and quality of the social relationships** that define the local community. The

boundaries of the community, both **real** and **symbolic**, are especially important, for they serve to **mark the membership and affiliation** of the individuals included in it. The term “community”, as likewise “local community”, may be descriptive or it could refer to values and norms.

Japanese society has a **developed community culture**, which has been preserved over the centuries and continues to perform an important role and function even now, in postmodern society. In Japan there are certainly **strong social bonds** between individuals within the framework of the group to which they belong, between the communities and society at large. Japan is a **communitarian society**,⁴ in which **social responsibility and duty** towards the group and the community are of paramount importance, despite the intense current of individualism that comes through Western influence. In fact, this trend is not only a result of foreign influence but also of the impact upon society and its structures of modernization, industrialization, urbanization, mass culture, post-modernization, and the social transformations all of these provoke.

I am arguing that, despite the close proximity between the concepts of **lifestyle** and **way of life**, the two are **not synonymous**. Unlike “way of life”, “lifestyle” emphasizes the **activeness of the agent** and the **choices** he/she makes among the various options at his/her disposal. Lifestyle is a characteristic and distinctive way of life. Since social-group formations are active in their lifestyle and can choose it, lifestyle is a significant indicator of their status. In modern societies it is a result of their activity; through it they delimit themselves from some social-structure formations and draw closer to others. The way of life, unlike lifestyle, is **determined by the social-group status** of individuals and groups, and is a **result** of that status.⁵

It is assumed that **lifestyle of the local community** is an integral unity of specific, typical and distinctive activities carried out by the social actors (individual and collective) and structures of that community, activities carried out apart from paid labor (i.e. on a voluntary basis); some of these activities may be freely chosen (preferred), others may be pursued out of necessity (i.e. obligatory), still others may be initiated by its members and their organizations; it

⁴ In the sense of the use of the term “communitarian” by Etzioni, see Amitai Etzioni, *The Essential Communitarian Reader*, New York: Roman and Littlefield, 1998, p. xiii.

⁵ Keliyan, *Stil na jivot...*, pp. 22–24.

includes the evaluations, attitudes and satisfaction derived from all these activities. Lifestyle also plays a **structure-determining role** with respect to the **local community**: ever since the emergence of postmodern society, not only individuals but the organizations and communities formed by individuals have enjoyed much greater freedom and have a growing possibility to choose their lifestyle; in turn, that lifestyle defines their position in the social structure of society.

Lifestyle acquires the characteristics describe above at a definite stage of social-historical development, more precisely, in postmodern society which distinctive features are presented in the works of authors C. Wright Mills,⁶ Baudrillard,⁷ Lyotard,⁸ Jameson,⁹ Featherstone¹⁰ and others. Postmodern society is based on a **new type of social structuring**, in which lifestyle plays an important and decisive role, and **local communities** have an increasingly important presence and role in public life in general.

Ulrich Beck established the issue of **risk**¹¹ as a central to postmodern society (in his own terminology – late and “reflexive” modernity). The health and environmental concerns are particular dimensions of risk society stemming from the widespread use of chemical, pesticides, and by the danger of radioactive contamination, like after Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident.

“By risk I mean above all radioactivity, which completely evades human perceptive abilities, but also toxins and pollutants in the air, the water and food-stuff, together with the accompanying short- and long-term effects on plants, animals and people”.¹²

Post-modernization poses significant challenges for local communities, but does not bring them to loss of identity and provides them with new means and possibilities for dealing with their problems.

⁶ See: Charles Wright Mills, *White Collar*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1951.

⁷ See: Jean Baudrillard, *La Société de Consommation*, Paris: Gallimard, 1970.

⁸ See: Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979.

⁹ See: Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. London: Verso, 1991.

¹⁰ See: Mike Featherstone, ‘Perspective on Consumer Culture’, *Sociology*, Vol. 24, 1990, pp. 5–22.

¹¹ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Toward a New Modernity*, London: Sage, 1992, p. 35.

¹² Beck, *Risk Society*..., p. 22.

For instance, the development of technologies, especially information and communication technologies, which are making our societies increasingly global, can simultaneously be used as means for preserving local specificities, consolidating and even popularizing the local lifestyle beyond the boundaries of the community, thus effectuating a sort of “globalization of the local”. But how and how much the local communities will inscribe themselves in the postmodern environment and **cope with the challenges** of that environment will depend on the **social structures** of the concrete society.

Apart from the formal, institutionalized, and legally established structure, the Japanese local community also creates a **functioning network of informal structures**, which build up, maintain, and develop certain types of **relationships** between members. The informal structures express the “moral rules” of the community, which the members are required to observe. These rules are an informal “institutionalization” of its principles, its tradition, which, due to the symbiosis of the value aspect and the “semi-institutional” aspect, are passed on through the centuries and, today, acquire a modern meaning.¹³ The informal structure of the local community, established in Japanese tradition and functioning today, is called *chōnaikai* (町内会) which literally means “neighborhood association”. In some regions it is known as *jichikai* (自治会), a designation that emphasizes autonomy, unlike the official administrative institutions established through law. In villages these structures are known as *shizenon* (自然村), i.e. a spontaneous/voluntarily hamlet’s community. In 2013 there are about 300 000 such neighborhood associations in Japan.¹⁴

Such informal structures have been formed in settlements of all sizes, ranging from villages to megapolises;¹⁵ they are led by an informal council, headed by *kuchō san* (区長さん), or “community leader”. The latter, as well as the other members of the informal council, work on a volunteer basis, without pay, and are elected by the local households for a mandate of 4 years. The informal structures, councils,

¹³ Keliyan, *Stil na jivot...*, p. 60.

¹⁴ Robert J. Pekkanen, Yutaka Tsujinaka and Hidehiro Yamamoto, *Neighborhood Associations and Local Governance in Japan*, London: Routledge, 2014, p. 1.

¹⁵ The difference between these structures as they exist in small settlements and in megapolises lies in the ways of participation in their activities and in their functions for the life of the settlement.

leaders, and their activity have for many centuries served as a resource for mobilizing not only the local communities, but Japanese society in general; parallels may be drawn between their “spirit of enterprise” and the Protestant ethic.

The recognized **importance and popularity of an environmentally oriented lifestyle** started growing in the developed Western societies as well as in Japan in the 1960s and has continued to grow. The questions regarding the quality of life, the re-evaluation of the positive and negative aspects of a highly urbanized lifestyle, social and environmental risks, and the value set on food safety and reliability became important. Since then, the ecological products and a clean environment have gradually come to be perceived as part of a positional consumption and lifestyle, and in this process has become increasingly important the role of the expanding and increasingly stable middle strata.¹⁶ **Positional consumption** is generally associated with that of rare and valued goods, of products of limited availability, which hence directly mark the specific dimensions of social inequality in different societies.¹⁷ What is attainable for some social groups and strata proves inaccessible for others. Positional goods¹⁸ are those products and services that are prestigious due to their limited supply; they may represent a material or social “rarity”, being of a limited availability that is often artificially maintained. Their positional quality is “socially sanctioned and legitimated”.¹⁹

Gradually social progress transforms goods, products, and services that were once generally accessible into positional ones. On the basis of this conception regarding positional goods and consumption, I am coming to the notion of “positional lifestyle”. The latter is a socially observable symbol of social group status: in this notion social group formations are distinguished in a socially significant way from others due to the corresponding distinctive, characteristic, and typical consumption and leisure patterns, oriented to rare and highly valued products and services. This lifestyle is characteristic above all of the

¹⁶ Maya Keliyan, *Yaponiya i Bulgaria: Modeli na razsloenoto potreblenie* [Japan and Bulgaria: Stratified Consumption Patterns], Sofia: Valentin Trajanov, 2008, pp. 32–33.

¹⁷ Fred Hirsh, *Social Limits to Growth*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 27.

¹⁸ William Leiss, ‘The Icons of the Market-Place’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1983, pp. 10–21.

¹⁹ Mike Featherstone, ‘Lifestyle and Consumer Culture’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, Vol. 4, 1987 p. 62.

high strata, which have at their disposal the necessary resources for maintaining it.

But in Japan, gradually, thanks to the enterprise and initiative demonstrated by various active social groups and local communities, some products and services like organic food that were previously considered to be positional commodities became accessible to wider social strata.²⁰ What is the **role** of Japanese **local community** for the **transformation** of organic food to product, accessible and affordable to wider social groups?

Teikei, local community and ecological lifestyle

With the expansion of mass production and mass consumption, artificial fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides came to be increasingly used in agriculture. Villages and agriculture departed more and more from their natural characteristics, and mass consumers had to forget the taste of natural foods. Organic products and clean environment came to be prestigious commodities that only the highest strata could afford (apart from the producers themselves and their families). As a result of this, and in reaction to these processes, **community supported agriculture** has developed in the last five decades and more within some of the developed postmodern societies of Western Europe, as well as in Japan. This term denotes the practice by which **farmers provide organic agricultural products**, such as vegetables, fruits, milk, eggs, meat, **directly** to the consumers, without the mediation of the market. In Japanese the term for this is *teikei* (提携), which emerged in the beginning of the 1960s, almost simultaneously with its beginnings in Western Europe. Its appearance was connected to the growing popularity of organic products, a trend that was a response to growing urbanization, to the covering of agricultural lands with buildings, and to the use of artificial fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides for intensifying agrarian production. The movement in Western Europe was initiated by groups of cooperating consumers and farmers in Switzerland and what was then West Germany. They set up joint capital in order to support the

²⁰ Maya Keliyan, *Consumption Patterns and Middle Strata: Bulgaria and Japan*. PECOB (Portal on Central Eastern and Balkan Europe), Bologna: University of Bologna Press, 2012, pp. 132–133: <http://www.pecob.eu/Consumption-patterns-middle-strata-Bulgaria-Japan> (accessed 29.05.2016).

producers who were developing the so-called biodynamic agriculture, i.e. organic crop production and animal breeding.

In Japan this movement arose independently of its West European counterpart, but it was engendered by the same causes and involved the same values. In 1965 a group of Japanese mothers, concerned about the quality of the products going into their children's and family's food, organized the first *teikei* groups for obtaining ecological fresh milk.²¹ In 1971 the Japan Organic Agriculture Association (JOAA) was created. As defined in its documents, *teikei* is

“[...] an idea to create an alternative distribution system, not depending on the conventional market [...] The Japanese organic agriculture movement started with this ‘teikei’ system”.²²

It is a system for food provision in which producers and consumers interact. Both sides take part voluntarily with their labor, their financial resources; they often invest joint capital in order to facilitate activities. The movement was a result of self-initiative and self-organization of producers and consumers: it was created without the participation and control of the state and of state institutions; it was also outside existing commercial organizations and consumer co-operatives. In its conception, character, and effectuation, *teikei* is a new philosophy of consumption, but also of lifestyle, both for the producers and for the consumers.

One of the characteristics of modern consumer society is its formalized relations between traders and clients. These relations go beyond the borderline of personal contacts, and trust is shifted from the individual to the institution that he/she represents. In postmodern societies, however, we observe a return to informal contacts, to mutual trust between seller and client, and civic organizations provide good conditions for this to happen. High civic activity and inclusion in the activities of local communities are typical for the Japanese lifestyle.

According to a representative survey of leisure time conducted by the Japan Statistics Bureau in 2006, 26% of Japanese take part daily in voluntary activities. Volunteers most often take part in activities for

²¹ Similar organizations, influenced by the already existing European and Japanese ones, were created in USA, but only two decades later, in 1984.

²² Japan Organic Agriculture Association: <http://www.joaa.net/english/teikei.htm#ch3-1> (accessed 29.05.2016).

assisting local communities; 14% of Japanese are active daily in their neighborhood.²³ The high degree of civic activeness and inclusion in the life of local communities is a solid basis for the creation and development of independent consumer associations like *teikei*.

Teikei is a new social-economic model for food production and consumption: through it, consumers and producers unite efforts in order to protect their common interests more effectively. Farmers stand a greater chance of surviving, because they have constant clients and are incited to grow ecological produce. Consumers feel sure about the quality of the foods, and informal relations of mutual trust and cooperation exist between them and the farmers. *Teikei* is also connected with a new lifestyle based on ecological values, enterprise, cooperation, trust, and civic activeness.

The experience and traditions of above mentioned **informal structures of Japanese local communities facilitated the creation** of other, different organizations, which rely on voluntary participation and the labor of its members: such are the *teikei* groups. Thus traditional structures have **contributed to the development** of postmodern ones and are an important aspect of postmodern lifestyle.

The producers of ecological agricultural products play a decisive role in this movement. They are called “new farmers”, and I was able to study them in the course of five empirical sociological surveys²⁴

²³ *Statistical Handbook of Japan for 2009*, Tokyo: Statistical Research and Training Institute at Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication, Statistics Bureau, 2010, p. 182.

²⁴ These surveys were done in the framework of the programs of the Sociology Department of Kyoto University. The first of them was conducted from October 1994 to March 1995 and dealt with “*Contemporary Japanese Village: Economic Activity, Social Stratification, and Value System*”. The fieldwork took place in three villages of Shiga Prefecture, in a village near to Nagoya, and in a village in the Tamba region of Hyogo Prefecture. The number of interviewed persons was 30. The surveyed were farmers, heads of village communities, leaders of informal and official structures; leaders of Japanese agricultural co-operatives at local level, at village level, and at prefecture level. In the second survey, conducted from July 1997 to January 1998, “*The Role of Village Communities in Contemporary Japanese Agriculture*”, 20 people were interviewed, including farmers and leaders of two rural communities within the territory of Ōe, a small city in the northern part of Kyoto Prefecture, as well as local administrators of the municipality and the management of the agricultural co-operative. The third survey – “*Local Initiatives and Lifestyle of Japanese Municipalities*” was conducted in 2004–2005 in Mie Prefecture and what were then the municipalities of Kumano, Owase, and Kiwa. About 30 people were interviewed, including farmers, leaders of rural communities and local administrators. Fourth survey was conducted in the area of Kumano city during

conducted in Japanese villages in the period 1994–2013. For the new farmers, this mode of farming is more a means for practical fulfillment of their ideas about a lifestyle in harmony with nature, than something done out of respect for family traditions. They are occupied full-time in agriculture²⁵ and do organic agriculture. With regard to their form of occupation and the values and lifestyle they share, they differ entirely from the “traditional farmers”, those who use artificial fertilizers and chemicals.

Interviews showed considerable differences existing between the attitudes of farmers who do organic agriculture and the others with regard to the ecological aspect of agricultural produce. “Traditional farmers” are also of the opinion that polluting the produce with nitrates, herbicides, and pesticides is one of the gravest problems of Japanese agriculture; but they believe this is an **inevitable evil**, because modern production cannot get by without chemicals. Some respondents were even convinced that to refuse to use such means would be tantamount to turning one’s back on progress and the achievements of modern civilization, would mean reverting to the times of hard drudgery in the rice fields, low yields, and a primitive rural life.

The number of “new farmers” is small, but slowly growing; the respondents are mostly young people, but one of the serious problems facing *teikei* is the aging of farmers, engaged in it. Their political views are connected with those of various ecological organizations; recently the influence of new farmers has been growing, especially among young and highly educated new middle strata representatives. They take an active part in NGO activities, while the development of IT enable them to create and maintain virtual communities with their consumer clients and with colleagues from the country, and even with some researchers who are studying their experience. All the interviewed “new farmers” believed that organic agriculture was not simply a way of agricultural production but a social movement with a philosophy of its own. The

2012–2013 with 21 respondents on the topic of “*Local Communities in Kumano: Local Initiatives, Traditions and Protection from Natural Disasters*” and fifth survey was on “*City farming in Kyoto: Case Studies in Ichijoji and Kamigamo*” during which 18 people (local farmers and residents) were interviewed. In all surveys, the information was gathered using 5 different questionnaires, according to the particular features of the respondents; and the *case study* method was used. The results are not representative, but they do contain useful information that permits drawing conclusions about the problems and development of Japanese villages and agriculture.

²⁵ They do not work in any other sector of the economy.

teikei groups are not only a center of ecological consumption but also connected with a lifestyle oriented to harmony between society and nature in postmodern Japanese society. The surveyed farmers indicated the importance to them not only of ecological food production and the preservation of nature, but also of upholding and disseminating the ideas, values, and specific lifestyle related to these. These farmers organize consumer groups with clients of their produce, maintaining close and immediate contacts with these groups: they are facilitated in this by IT. In addition to rational market relations, there are also relationships of cooperation, mutual help, and emotional links between the farmers and the consumers. The consumer group usually consists of residents of large cities who buy ecological food directly from the producers. In order to achieve successful economic activity and normal reproduction of these farms, a consumer group should consist of about 50 people. Attaining cost effectiveness of these farms usually requires the combining of vegetable growing with raising poultry. For all the interviewed farmers in this category, the practice of organic agriculture was a source of pride and self-esteem. They are people with a higher education, and some of them were born in cities and were not of a farmer family background. Their orientation to organic agriculture and involvement in *teikei* has been aided by civil society structures and some NGOs. In turning to organic agriculture, they have been motivated above all by their ecological ideas and views, for in itself organic farming does not give them economic advantages over the traditional farmers, those who use chemicals, pesticides, herbicides, artificial fertilizers, etc. The “new farmers” are concentrated in regions near the megapolises, in the more developed industrial rural regions, and not in the traditional and conservative rural communities, where it would be hard for them to find adherents and consumers for their produce. These farmers and the *teikei* groups linked to them contribute to the growing popularity of the ecological lifestyle.

In some cases spontaneous organizations of producers and consumers are created and maintained with the **direct support of the informal village councils** mentioned above. For instance in the village of Hyogo Prefecture, in the Tamba region, at the initiative of the *kuchō san*, the building of a closed-down factory was refurbished into a workshop for pickle production.²⁶ The workers here are pensioners,

²⁶ This village was visited during the fieldwork in February 1995.

who apply local recipes and use organic vegetables that they grow on their farms. They are in constant contact with groups of producers in Kobe, who are regular clients for their produce.

In other cases *teikei* can rely on the help of supporting local administrators, as in Kumano municipality, Mie Prefecture. One of the active *teikei* members is a local farmer producing organic tomatoes for clients in the big cities in three neighboring prefectures (Mie, Wakayama and Nara); these customers are organized in consumer groups. An enterprising local administrator uses his personal contacts to organize consumer groups that buy up ecological production from pensioner farmers; he does this on a voluntary basis and entirely apart from his professional duties. These pensioner farmers themselves do not have the resources, skills, experience, and contacts needed to create such a group (the new farmers do have all these). But, as the respondent shared with the interviewer:

“They are increasingly active as producers, and their efforts are worth supporting, especially as they grow tasty fruits and vegetables, the kind that city dwellers cannot find in stores”.

Basing on the above mentioned surveys’ results we can assume that the civic **activeness of producers, consumers, enterprising social actors, and informal structures of rural communities**, has proven a **significant factor** in the formation of an ecological lifestyle in Japan. In the words of the same local administrator:

“If it weren’t for *teikei*, consumers in the bigger cities, and not only them, would long since have forgotten the taste of real, natural food”.

Because there was a growing demand for organic products provided straight from the producer, and since the share of still active pensioners able to produce them was also growing, the respondent planned to leave his work in the municipality and devote himself entirely to organizing *teikei*. The popularity and expansion of this movement requires more than volunteers: it needs special experts, professionals, and managers. Its leaders, both the formal paid workers within its structures and the volunteers helping informally in its activity, are mostly representatives of the middle strata. They have the necessary education, training, and experience for organizing and managing it; they also have the needed civic initiative and spirit of enterprise, the lifestyle in which post-materialistic values are of decisive importance.

After radioactive contamination caused by disaster in Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, bio-products, through *teikei*, provide consumers with reliable food that is safe from radioactive contamination. But the farmers in the prefectures affected by radiation, who were previously part of these groups, are now losing their businesses and the clients with whom they had developed relations of trust and support over many years. Their clients can no longer support their farming activity, and these producers are not only losing their livelihoods but also the possibility for following their philosophy of life connected with environmental values and a lifestyle in harmony with nature.

Consumer co-operatives: access of various social groups to an ecological lifestyle

Consumer co-operatives play an important role in Japanese society and in the latter's ecological lifestyle. Local community structures are actively involved in their customer groups. Consumer co-operatives have a long tradition: their predecessors date back to the late 18th century; first co-operative shops modeling the Rochdale Pioneer's Society were set up in Tokyo and Osaka in 1879. The structures of the best known among them, Co-op Kobe, were created in early 1920s.²⁷ In 1948 the Consumers' Livelihood Co-operative Society Law was enacted; the Japan Consumers' Co-operative Union (JCCU)²⁸ was established in 1951; the Revised Co-op Law was enforced in 2008,²⁹ but various forms of co-operatives are basically regulated by different laws and by-laws. By the end of 2014 they numbered 571, encompassing 27,8 million members, which amounts to about 22% of the country's population.³⁰ The members of community based retail consumer

²⁷ In 1921, the pioneer of Japanese co-operative movement – Toyohiko Kagawa established Kobe Consumer Co-operative and Nada Consumer Co-operative (later they were merged and became Co-op Kobe) in Kobe.

²⁸ This organization is federation of consumer co-operatives in Japan at national level. All its member co-operatives operate their businesses independently of each other and currently JCCU represents 571 co-operative societies.

²⁹ Japanese Consumer Co-operatives: <http://jccu.coop/eng/aboutus/history.php> (accessed 29.05.2016).

³⁰ *The Coop 2014 – Facts and Figures*, Tokyo: JCCU, 2015, p. 3: <http://jccu.coop/eng/public/index.php> (accessed 29.05.2016).

co-operatives³¹ are 74% of all co-operative members with annual turnover of 3 365 billion yen for the same fiscal year. The biggest community based co-operatives are Co-op Mirai (operating at Chiba prefecture, Saitama prefecture and Tokyo metropolis) with 3 156 million members and turnover of 370 211 million yen, followed by Co-op Sapporo with 1 543 million members and turnover of 268 259 million yen and Co-op Kobe with 1 677 members and turnover of 243 807 million yen.³²

“While in many other industrialized countries consumer co-operatives are struggling to survive and find a meaningful role, these organizations are thriving in Japan”.³³

Since the 1960s, consumer co-operatives in Japan have grown in popularity, for society has become increasingly mindful of the quality of foods and of consumer rights, which, in co-operatives, are much better ensured against the vicissitudes of the market. On the one hand, they have a large potential to influence community lifestyle, and on the other hand, they rely on local communities’ informal structures and on their initiative local actors. The trade practices of consumer co-operatives are periodically updated in order to withstand the competition of market and to preserve the trust of clients. In order to keep the old customers and attract new ones, these co-operatives offer commodities of tested and proven quality, and relations of mutual trust have grown between the sellers and buyers.

Although the co-operatives exist as structures at central, prefecture, and local level, the various kinds of co-operatives are closely interwoven in the life of groups and **communities**, especially **local** ones. They represent a significant part of Japanese trade, are actively present in all trade spheres, offer all imaginable products and services, as well as conveniences and facilitations for their members. As a rule, membership requires participation through capital contribution, which is usually a small sum; in some cases membership fees are also paid. The

³¹ Community based retail co-operatives serve local residents through home delivery, store and catalog sales.

³² *The Coop 2014 – Facts and Figures...*, p. 5.

³³ Ruth Gruber, ‘The consumer co-op in Japan: building democratic alternatives to state-led capitalism’ in *Consumption: Critical Concepts in the Social Sciences*, Daniel Miller (ed.), Vol. 2, London and New York: Routledge, 2001/1999, p. 308.

co-operatives apply many modern forms, such as: catalogue trade, regular reductions, periodical sales, home delivery on demand, even when clients are absent from home,³⁴ as well as other facilitations for consumers.

In **local communities**, **groups** of five to seven households are usually formed; these are called *han*.³⁵ They encompass co-operative members who take turns in preparing special lists of the weekly products each household will need. The goods are delivered, as a rule, once a week, and every six months the co-operative sends to its members' lists of all the products they have ordered in the preceding period. Customers' orders arrive in the co-operative one week in advance, so that the distribution centers might prepare to deliver perishable foods and the latter might not remain long in warehouses or refrigerators. *Han* groups purchase **collectively** and their members discuss such important lifestyle problems as food safety, health issues, children's education, and quality of life.³⁶

Original concern of local community based *han* groups are food safety and environmental issues which are "articulated through a collective impact on production, distribution, and consumption of food products".³⁷

As a rule these groups are connected with local community informal structures and infrastructures; they are an integral part of *chōnaikai* and usually they use *chōnaikaikan* (町内会館) or *jichikaikan* (自治会館) –

³⁴ In the backyards of one-family homes and in between-floor spaces of residential buildings there are small storage spaces with refrigerators in which suppliers leave the ordered goods. Orders are made by telephone, Internet, and, very often recently, by mobile phones. This way of ordering saves time and facilitates employed women in particular, but is popular among housewives as well.

³⁵ Japanese Consumer Co-operatives: <http://jccu.coop/eng/business/home.php> (accessed 29.05.2016).

³⁶ During recent years individual home delivery services raised in popularity but they have not reached the volume of collective purchases: for the year 2014 the sales of the former are 1 120 billion yen compare to the 1 697 billion yen for the later – *The Coop 2014 – Facts and Figures...*, p. 5.

³⁷ Ann Hoyt, 'Consumer ownership in Capitalist Economies: Applications of Theory to Consumer Cooperation' in *Co-operatives and Local Development: Theory and Applications for the 21st Century*, Christopher D. Merret and Norman Walzer (eds.), Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2004, p. 279.

the neighborhood association club for their gatherings as a “logistic center” where they receive and distribute ordered purchases.³⁸

In general, women are active members of the consumer groups formed around the consumer co-operatives and/or around the organization structures of agriculture **supported by local communities**. This fact is understandable, for most women are housekeepers, and theirs is the main responsibility to care for the consumption of family members.

Another typical example of civic activity of mothers and women is their participation in the Consumer’s Co-operative Union, called *Seikatsu Club* (生活クラブ) in Japanese this means “lifestyle club”.³⁹ This union includes 32 co-operatives on the territory of 21 prefectures and has a total of about 349 110 members for 2014, organized in approximately 100 000 *han* groups. Most of its members are women, active in their local communities’ structures. The total value of supplied consumer materials for the same fiscal year is 81, 82 billion yen.⁴⁰

The Union was created in 1965 and, similarly to the *teikei* that was developing at the same time, it initially provided its members with fresh milk produced without chemicals and at low purchase prices. This co-operative has a strong environmental orientation, and strives to strengthen clients’ trust in the purity of offered products; it is well-known for its large-scale environment protection activities. *Seikatsu Club* has been conducting regular campaigns for providing more information to consumers regarding the harmfulness of genetically modified products. Among co-operative priorities are delivery of bio-products: eggs, meat, vegetables and fruits, as well as supplying regular information on the quality and origin of the goods offered to its members.

Intense competition on the Japanese market not only stimulates consumer co-operatives but also incites merchants to apply new practices for guarding their position on the market. In early 1970s, the

³⁸ Activities of such groups were studied during 2012–2013 in the framework of the “*City farming in Kyoto: Case Studies in Ichijoji and Kamigamo*” research, as well as during 2015–2016 in local community in Katsurakazaka, Kyoto.

³⁹ Seikatsu Club Consumers’ Co-operative Union: http://www.seikatsuclub.coop/about/rengo_about_e.html (accessed 29.05.2016).

⁴⁰ *Think and Act Data Book*, Tokyo: Seikatsu Club Consumers’ Co-operative Union, 2015, p. 12: http://seikatsuclub.coop/about/pdf/web-SCAnnualReport2015_English.pdf (accessed 29.05.2016).

above-mentioned JCCU in order to provide safe and secure food production to its customers developed a specific type of community supported agriculture, called Co-op *Sanchoku*. Its basic philosophy, principles and practice are similar to these of above described *teikei*, but former relies not only on local community, but also on organizational structures of co-op.

The consumer co-operatives and their structures, as part of its social contribution to the local communities, take part in volunteer activity for helping people who have suffered from different kind of disasters. After Great East Japan Earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant disaster JCCU launched “Co-op Action Campaign” on the reconstruction assistance of the affected areas and supporting victims. They deepened ties and expended network with the local community and strengthened its participation in the community development. According to JCCU data over 640 million yen is expected to be raised in the “Life support fund-raising” till the first half of 2015 and 58 000 of its members participated in the volunteer activities during 2015 in the affected areas.⁴¹ During the peak time of voluntary activities in 2011 the number of volunteers was around 970 000. Co-operatives support the sales of agricultural products from the stricken areas and carry on the children recreation project. They also initiate activities connected to providing better information about radioactive contamination of foods, the air, the water, and the soil, and about the wider use of renewable energy sources for the production of electricity. For example, *Seikatsu Club* has continued to carry out through testing of residual radioactivity in food immediately after the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant accident.⁴² Facing up the public anxiety and multiple risks concerning radioactive contamination, the co-op set autonomous safety standards based on the data accumulated in the tests.

JCCU also assisted disaster stricken area after massive earthquake close to Kumamoto, the island of Kyushu on April 14 and 16, 2016. Co-operative staff of 41 people was dispatched to assist the local people and large amount of supplies were sent as donations to the victims.⁴³

⁴¹ *JCCUNews*, 3 March 2016, p. 1: http://jccu.coop/eng/jccunews/pdf/201603_jccunews.pdf (accessed 29.05.2016).

⁴² Since the accident till the end of 2015 the co-op conducted 83 849 tests *Think and Act Data Book...*, p. 1.

⁴³ *JCCUNews*, 4 March 2016, p. 1, http://jccu.coop/eng/jccunews/pdf/201604_jccunews.pdf (accessed 29.05.2016).

Urban farming

Japanese society is highly urbanized, but along with the typical trends of a postmodern society, certain social phenomena can be observed in it that, at first glance, seems incompatible with post-modernity. For example in Kyoto,⁴⁴ alongside the symbols of postmodern urban culture and environment, such as smart restaurants, fashionable boutiques, hotels and recreation complexes, expensive residential buildings, one can see paddy rice fields and plots of land planted with vegetables.⁴⁵ These are the result of urban farming – *toshi nōgyō* (都市農業) which, though not a widespread practice, is visibly present as an “exotic” social phenomenon amidst the postmodern urban environment all over Japan.

According to the Census of Agriculture and Forestry, conducted in 2010 by Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), in fiscal year 2010 there were 636 000 urban farm households, accounting for a quarter of Japan’s total farm households, cultivating 658 000 hectares or 14% of the nations’ total cultivated land. The average size of urban plots is about two third of average rural farm land; urban farms produce mainly vegetables and rice, and commercial urban farms with annual sales at 7 million yen or more produce mainly vegetables (open field or grown in facilities like greenhouses, etc.).⁴⁶ The results from “Survey on Consciousness/Intentions about Sustainable Use of Food, Agriculture, Rural Area and Fisheries Resources”, realized in May 2011 by MAFF show that more than three quarters of respondents consider urban farming successful in supplying fresh and safe farms products, and about two third of questioned Japanese think urban farming is providing healing green spaces. According to the data from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government survey from 2009 on “Agriculture in Tokyo”, more than half of Tokyo residents (56%) are willing to experience urban farming, younger people are more willing to do so (about two third for those in their 20s and 30s, compared to 54% for people in their 50s and

⁴⁴ I mention Kyoto because my research on city farming was conducted in two suburban local communities in the old capital.

⁴⁵ Like in Northern part of Kyoto around Kitayama street or on the North-East around Shirakawa street.

⁴⁶ *FY2011 Annual Report on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas in Japan*, Tokyo: MAFF, 2012, p. 27: http://www.maff.go.jp/j/wpaper/w_maff/h23/pdf/e_all.pdf (accessed 29.05.2016).

46% for respondents over 60 years old).⁴⁷ The quoted data confirm that urban farming is **beneficial** for the local community and society, because it is a source of fresh and safe products, cultivated with less chemicals; it educates urban residents and raises their awareness about the importance of agriculture and food safety. Urban farming is playing **multifunctional role in local communities**: except its basic function of reliable food supply, it also offers disaster prevention space at emergency and peaceful green space. Through agricultural experience urban residents seek health improvement and better quality of life closed to the nature.⁴⁸

According to Kunio Tsubota “the less urban agriculture remains, the more urban residents appreciate it. Municipalities offer more assistance to urban agriculture, appreciating its multiple functions and externalities”.⁴⁹

The cases described below were observed in the period 1994–2013. Some of these farms have been decreasing with each year: farmland is changing its purpose and giving place to parking lots, some of which later become residential buildings. But despite this understandable transformation, most of the farms observed by the author in 1994 were still functioning and unchanged nineteen years later, in 2013.⁵⁰

Considering that agricultural labor is generally not prestigious or attractive to many people,⁵¹ especially to the younger generations, it is hard to explain the “city farmer” phenomenon in Japanese cities, especially in the old capital Kyoto, known for its “sophisticated”, elegant way of life. The **causes** of this trend, of course, are numerous

⁴⁷ *FY2010 Annual Report on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas in Japan*, Tokyo: MAFF, 2011, p. 43, http://www.maff.go.jp/e/annual_report/2010/pdf/e_3.pdf (accessed 29.05.2016).

⁴⁸ *FY2014 Annual Report on Food, Agriculture and Rural Areas in Japan*, Tokyo: MAFF, 2015, p. 23: <http://www.maff.go.jp/e/pdf/fy2014.pdf> (accessed 29.05.2016).

⁴⁹ Kunio Tsubota, *Urban Agriculture in Asia: Lessons from Japanese Experience*, p. 14: http://www.agnet.org/htmlarea_file/activities/20110719103448/paper-997674935.pdf (accessed 26.05.2016).

⁵⁰ I visited these farms again during 2015 and 2016, just to observe their activities without conducting special research.

⁵¹ The interviewed urban farmers shared their disappointment with the fact that some of the townsfolk ignore the farm labor, looking down on farming as the work of the three Ks – in Japanese *kiken* – 危険 (dangerous), *kitanai* – きたない (dirty) and *kitsui* – きつい (hard).

and varied. Most generally they can be grouped into **financial-legal, economic, socio-cultural, and value-normative causes**.

The **financial-legal** causes are related to the tax laws currently in effect, which stipulate that the taxes put on land used for agricultural purposes in the regions around Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya are much lower than those on land used for other purposes, such as parking lots, residential buildings, commercial buildings, offices, etc.⁵² According to the law passed in 1991, when land in such an area is worked for agriculture, thus benefiting from lower land taxes, it can be used as such and retain its status for at least 30 years.⁵³

Urban farming is a source of **revenues**; these may be in kind or in cash and are the main **economic cause** for this trend. Such urban farming provides fresh, tasty and safety products for consumption by family and friends, and, in less frequent cases, for sale on the market.

The interest of consumers in the produce of urban farms among certain strata of the Japanese cities is directly connected with the **values of, demand for, and norms of, a healthy lifestyle**. Some housewives have preferred to buy vegetables **directly from neighbors** who grow them on their urban plots. Most of these crops are grown with environment friendly technologies, for city farmers are oriented to farming with less chemicals, pesticides, and herbicides.

For some owners of farmland in the big cities, agriculture is a **hobby** that makes their leisure time more meaningful.

Within urban farming there are **subsistence-oriented farms** and **market-oriented farms**. The vegetables produced in urban farms in Kyoto are called *kyōyasai* (京野菜), meaning “Kyoto vegetables”. They are considered particularly tasty and suitable as ingredients in local dishes – the Kyoto cuisine is renowned as the most sophisticated

⁵² The government policy toward urban agriculture and especially concerning urban farm land taxation has been controversial and ambiguous during decades after high economic growth. Farm land in urban areas was divided into urbanization promotion area and urbanization control area and taxes depend on the category of land, as well as urbanization promotion area and urbanization control area and taxes depend on the category of land, as well as on region, etc.

⁵³ On April 22, 2015 was promulgated new Japan’s Urban Farming Promotion Basic Act (都市農業振興基本法案). The new Act obligates national and local governments to promote urban farming: http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_gian.nsf/html/gian/honbun/houan/g18902005.htm (accessed 29.05.2016), in Japanese.

culinary tradition in Japan. Northern part of Kyoto, especially Kamigamo is well-known for such kind of production.

During field work on urban agriculture in Kyoto 2012–2013, I studied two urban farms, one in Ichijoji (North-East part of Kyoto) and the other in Kamigamo area. The farm in Ichijoji was run by middle aged couple and this in Kamigamo – by extended family with two generations living and working together. In both farms they grow rice, various vegetables, like cabbage, lettuce, carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes, onion, eggplants, zucchini, also fruits like strawberry, etc. Farm in Kamigamo was well-known for its *suguki* pickle.⁵⁴ Ichijoji farmer's wife every morning delivered ordered fresh vegetables to the neighbors. Kamigamo farmers also sold some products in neighborhood but their main customers were supermarkets and traditional restaurants.

In some cases residents of a **local community** cultivate plots jointly, because these households shared common lands in the past and this practice has been preserved to this day. In these cases, urban farming serves as a mean for **consolidating community spirit**, which in cities, especially big ones, has generally lost the importance and strength it once had there or still has in villages. The community works the whole farm plot, and each family cares for a certain portion designated by a sign with the inscribed name of the family. Such plots are usually used for vegetables and fruits, for instance eggplants, cabbage, tomatoes, cucumbers, strawberries, crops that are easily divided into sections and need less space to supply the needs of a family. Urban farming gives city dwellers, including **children**, the possibility of becoming familiar with traditional agricultural practices. They can observe the yearly cycle of rice and vegetable growing by merely looking out their windows or walking in the streets by the plot. Some schools in suburban areas also develop such kind of farming practices, for example like secondary school in Katsura, Kyoto. Students groups cultivate traditional local vegetables typical for the area; some of them are used for preparing school meals; others are sold to local residents even to the local shops. They also regularly walk the streets in the neighborhood inviting locals to buy vegetables directly from their cart. Tradition of street sales of

⁵⁴ Every suburban farm in Kamigamo keep in deep secret its special receipt for preparing *suguki* establishing something like a “brand product”.

urban farming products still exists in Kyoto, although it is practiced to a lesser degree than years ago.⁵⁵

On the one hand, urban farming uses various **resources of the local community**: land, informal structures and organizations, irrigation channels, etc. All this local resources make city agriculture's existence possible. On the other hand, **urban agriculture is valuable resource for local community**, providing reliable food, green space and possibility for ecological lifestyle. The produce of this farming is used in the ritual of **gifts exchange** between neighbors, a practice that is important for **maintaining mutual relations** between the families of the local community, and strengthens the **feeling of belonging** to that community.

Ecological values and civic activeness of local community

In concluding this article it is worth to emphasize that the nuclear accident in Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant has its global impact: it is shaping how nuclear energy is perceived globally. Something more, it is shaping the way ecological lifestyle is re-concerned in Japan and in the world. The activities of civil society, local communities, and enterprising social-group actors in Japan, the examined characteristics and traditions of the ecological lifestyle, strengthen the conviction that Japanese society does have the necessary social-structure resources, experience, and determination to deal with the challenges and difficulties it is undergoing. Basing on the conducted analysis we can assume that local community is vital socio-structural resource for promotion of ecological consumption in Japan.

The devastation of March 11, 2011 brought about, albeit in a tragic way, a clear awareness of the importance of the ecological lifestyle for the quality of life in general. In the global world of today it has become urgent and unavoidable to rethink the predominance of economic and political priorities over the ecological ones on which our existence ultimately depends. Analyzing local people activities we discover that initiatives and organization of citizens from different social groups and strata are an important resource for achieving this vitally important task of contemporary societies.

⁵⁵ Farmer's wife from above mentioned urban family farm in Kamigamo sometimes also was selling vegetables in this way, on the streets of North and Western part of Kyoto where this form of trade is permitted by Kyoto municipality.

We can generalize that with its environmental initiatives, the local community has asserted itself as an important locus, resource and **center of an ecological lifestyle**. Through this function and role it plays, it determines to a great degree the face of postmodern Japanese society. An important, distinctive trait of contemporary Japan is the enterprising lifestyle of its local communities, with their enterprising actors who use the resources of tradition for achieving socially significant postmodern goals, like ecological consumption and lifestyle of its local communities, with their enterprising actors who use the resources of tradition for achieving socially significant postmodern goals, like ecological consumption and lifestyle.