Empathy-Based Assistance and Its Transformative Role in the Adaptive and Recursive Pathways of Collaborative Governance

16

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Abstract

A considerable number of studies in collaborative and adaptive governance have emphasized the significance of leadership, but little is known about what kinds of leadership fit well with adaptive co-management of social-ecological systems when cultural and institutional contexts are taken into account. The chapter addresses this question based on the case study of an external coordinator engaging in a rural community in southern Hokkaido, Japan, where people are striving for the conservation of a scenic lake. In reference to the adaptive cycle framework of the transformation of social-ecological systems, the case study demonstrates two distinct aspects of participation in collaborative governance, namely, 'empathy-based' and 'target-and-goal-oriented.' Specifically, the former plays a significant role in the phases of *release* and *reorganization* by prompting narrative-based co-creation among actors. The evaluation of assistants' performance is generally inclined to concentrate on the realization of defined, short-term goals, whereas empathy-based engagement is more inconspicuous and difficult to grasp with conventional evaluation schemes. In fact, empathy-based engagement provides an essential foundation for target-and-goal-oriented intervention – which appears in the foreground and attracts our attention more than empathy-based engagement. It is thus important to mobilize resources that provide empathy-based interventions that can prompt narrative-based co-creation among actors, precisely at those stages where conserved institutions need disruption and challenge.

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Keywords

Leadership · Institutional entrepreneurship · Adaptive cycle · Narrative-based co-creation · Hokkaido · Ramsar convention

16.1 Introduction

In the scholarship of adaptive governance, it has been argued that polycentric institutional arrangements and the diversity of response options, which help secure redundancy, are essential to cope with change and uncertainty and to strengthen the resilience of social-ecological systems (Folke et al. 2005). Transformability and shadow networks (Olsson et al. 2006), multilevel social learning process (Pahl-Wostl et al. 2007; Pahl-Wostl 2009), and evaluation incorporated systematically into the process (Plummer and Armitage 2007), to name a few, are some of the major prerequisites for taking advantage of such polycentricity, diversity, and redundancy, while effectively governing the processes of collaboration and consensus building among all stakeholders. Another condition to keeping such processes functioning flexibly is the presence of individuals with leadership, who can bridge among participants both inside and outside the community, can generate useful knowledge, and can orchestrate a shared vision among concerned parties (Folke et al. 2005; Olsson et al. 2006).

However, specific processes through which these conditions lead to adaptive arrangements obviously depend on cultural and institutional contexts. Based on approximately 20 case studies in local and regional environmental governance in Japan, Miyauchi (2017) argued that pluralism, including room for trial and error, is the fundamental requirement to keep a co-management process running, while remaining adaptable to change and uncertainty. This seems to correspond with the widespread emphasis of polycentricity, diversity, and redundancy in the literature of adaptive governance. He pointed out, on the other hand, "Flexible processes are hard to manage, and flexibility itself entails the risk of failing to deal with the situation properly and leading things in the wrong direction," (Miyauchi 2017: 22) suggesting that common goals, recurring evaluation, and learning are three staple "instruments" that make it possible to steer co-management processes, while securing pluralism at the same time. It is worthwhile to note that the establishment of common goals was on the top of the list here, for it has not been so frequently emphasized as evaluation or learning in discussing major conditions of adaptive governance. Miyauchi went on to argue that common goals should be provisional and flexible, being something temporarily agreeable among people involved at the time and always to be updated.

Although the reason why goal setting should be underlined has not been thoroughly explored, it is safe to assume that this conclusion reflects findings about Japanese contexts from the extensive case studies. In many Japanese rural areas, collaborative environmental governance among local actors can sometimes be quite challenging because the government and local authorities and limited stakeholders with vested interests are often influential in framing issues and setting the agenda. In

this sense, tentativeness and flexibility in goal setting, which will secure room for pluralistic values to coexist, should be prioritized in discussing prerequisites for adaptive co-management in Japan. Miyauchi further highlighted, as the fifth pillar of adaptive governance, the role of individuals who act as intermediaries among stakeholders and provide assistance for collaboration. This again is comparable to the emphasis on leadership or bridging roles in previous research, but their role and efficacy are still wide open as to how they can be adapted to Japanese contexts and remain flexible.

A considerable number of studies in collaborative and adaptive governance to date have emphasized the significance of leadership, but little is known about what sorts of leadership match other essentials for adaptive governance, with cultural and institutional contexts taken into account. In general, brokers coming from outside the community often play significant roles in helping goal setting, evaluation, and social learning to generate knowledge and networks for adaptive co-management. However, the kinds of assistance that they provide tend towards an imposition of dominant values as well as goals and visions derived from them, and evaluation and learning can merely reinforce these standards in a top-down manner. One pivotal question, therefore, is what kinds of assistance or leadership are well suited for flexible goal setting, so that pluralistic values are reflected, and multiplicity is assured, particularly in a paternalistic environment like Japanese rural communities.

In what follows, the chapter will first situate this question in relation to previous work in adaptive co-management of socio-ecological systems, then present a case study about the role of an external coordinator intervening in a local community for the support of collaboration among stakeholders who were involved in the conservation of a lake area in Hokkaido. Drawing upon the case study, the chapter will finally exhibit two distinct aspects of external assistance in collaborative governance, namely, 'empathy-based' and 'target-and-goal-oriented,' and demonstrate the inconspicuous but foundational character of the former.

16.2 Adaptive Cycle and the Role of Transformative Individuals

The importance of leadership or assistance in a broad sense has been regarded as one of the central factors in successful collaborative governance. In constructing the analytical framework of collaborative governance in their seminal paper, Ansell and Gash (2008) pointed out facilitative leadership as one of the critical variables that determine the success of collaboration. Facilitative leadership is considered to be essential for setting and maintaining clear ground rules, building trust, facilitating dialogue, and exploring mutual gains. Emerson et al. (2012) also started their list of collaborative governance drivers with leadership, which was followed by consequential incentives, interdependence, and uncertainty. Likewise, the literature on adaptive governance, since its inception, has ranked leadership as an important element in the governance of social-ecological systems (Dietz et al. 2003; Folke et al. 2005).

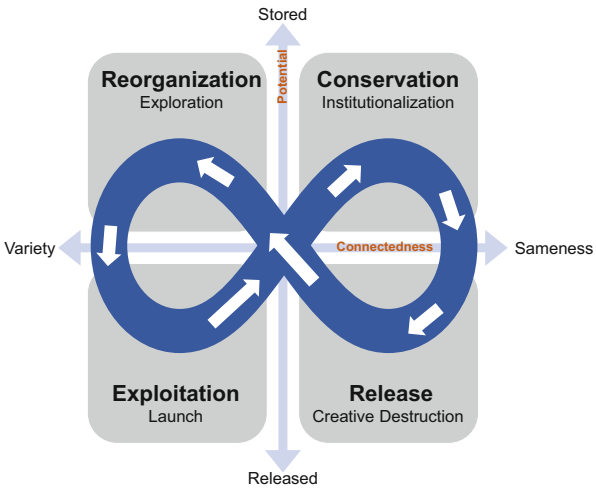

Fig. 16.1 The adaptive cycle (Source: Westley et al. 2013; Holling 1986)

In discussing the role of individuals with leadership in the adaptive co-management of process, it is helpful to have a certain perspective about how an adaptive process develops, so that we can locate their performance in context. A reliable reference in this regard can be found in the adaptive cycle framework of resilient social systems (Westley et al. 2013), which was adapted from pioneering research on the adaptive cycle of ecosystem (Hollings 1986). The idea of the framework is to describe a process of transformation using an infinity loop driven by two factors: the degree to which the system is homogenous (sameness) or heterogeneous (variety), and the degree to which potential in the system is stored or released. These drivers constitute two coordinate axes that shape four phases of transformation and innovation of socio-ecological systems: *release*, *reorganization*, *exploitation*, and *conservation* (Fig. 16.1).

Release, or creative destruction, is a period when old ideas and routines are disrupted by internal or external disturbance(s) in a system, followed by *reorganization*, or exploration, for new ideas when key individuals play a role in bringing organizations together to create common interpretations, visions, and goals that provide a novel focal point for collective action. In this stage, there emerge new organizational forms and linkages between them, which provide transformative individuals with opportunities to broker partnerships and connect diverse ideas and resources strategically. After a variety of possibilities have been explored, the process moves on to the *exploitation* phase, or launch, when different ideas or options are reconfigured into a few viable alternatives, and new kinds of social, ecological, and other forms of capital are invested to support them. In the subsequent stage of *conservation*, or institutionalization, resources become highly committed to and embedded in selected solutions in an effort to establish the innovative changes that have been launched, with room for multiplicity and pluralism rapidly narrowing.

Based on this framework, Westley et al. further discuss the role of supporting and mediating individuals in different phases of this recursive pathway. In doing so, they

adopted the notion of institutional entrepreneurship instead of leadership on the ground that it is networks of individuals, rather than a single outstanding figure, that contribute to the navigation of transformation, and institutional entrepreneurship can better describe the disaggregated and diffuse nature of individual agencies in play. They highlighted three distinct phases with different opportunity contexts while identifying the strategies and skills that institutional entrepreneurs (IEs) apply in each of them (Westley et al. 2013: 6–10), including:

(1) *Conservation* to *release*: In the face of established institutional structures that have become resistant to change and novelty, IEs try to disrupt and challenge existing institutions to acquire room for innovation. Using cultural skills such as visioning, marketing, framing, motivating, and defining, IEs in this phase encourage stakeholder participation for sensemaking. (2) *Release* to *reorganization* to *exploitation*: IEs encourage the proliferation of ideas and the recombination of resources in novel forms and work on resource mobilization through leveraging and brokering. Skills employed at this stage are mostly ones related to leveraging and brokering, like identifying windows of opportunity, building network and partnership, and connecting ideas and resources. (3) *Exploitation* to *conservation*: This is the phase when economic, social, and ecological resources are leveraged to support best ideas constructed through the preceding stages and to integrate them into the existing institutional context. IEs in this step of the recursive pathway mainly exercise political-interactional skills such as incentivizing, coalition forming, bargaining, mobilizing, and leveraging resources.

Incidentally, this formulation may well be interpreted in the similar vein as the steps of transition discussed since the early stages of theoretical development of adaptive governance. It has been argued that the transformation of socio-ecological systems consists of two phases, a preparation phase and a transition phase, with a window of opportunity linking them in between (Olsson et al. 2006). The preparation and transition phases roughly correspond to '*conservation* to *release*' and '*exploitation* to *conservation,*' respectively, whereas the second phase of "*release* to *reorganization* to *exploitation*" represents a window of opportunity, which stimulates the emergence of networks and promotes new forms of governance (Folke et al. 2005). These earlier studies did not explicitly specify the sorts of leadership instrumental in each of the three stages, although they stressed the importance of leadership throughout the entire process in general terms.

In the Japanese context discussed above, it seems that "*conservation* to *release*" as well as "*release* to *reorganization* to *exploitation*" are particularly important with regard to leadership or institutional entrepreneurship assisting collaboration; these phases require more room for innovation and flexible resource mobilization to prepare promising options that can be the target of investment in the subsequent stages of institutionalization. Based on a case study about an external coordinator's intervention in a community in Hokkaido, the following sections will explore how an intermediary actor can exercise leadership, or institutional entrepreneurship, while maintaining flexibility and redundancy for adaptive co-management.

16.3 Case: Adaptive Assistance of Collaborative Governance in a Local Community

16.3.1 Rural Community Supporters and Collaborative Environmental Governance

Over the past couple of decades, Japan has implemented policies to introduce human resources for the support of rural development, and "From subsidies (*hojokin* 補助金) to subsidiary agents (*hojo-nin* 補助人)" is a slogan that symbolizes this trend (Odagiri 2014: 135–74; Zushi 2014). It is a reaction to the situation where existing mechanisms of human support in rural areas weakened mainly due to the shrinking and aging population, and the focus of necessary support has clearly shifted from the introduction of new facilities or technologies to the cultivation of collaboration among actors in order to effectively maintain and utilize existing resources. The Chuetsu Earthquake in 2004, which caused severe damage in parts of Niigata Prefecture, triggered the introduction of such human resources into rural areas, and similar human resources have played a significant role in the reconstruction of worst-hit areas of the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 as well (Zushi and Nishikido 2016).

In the field of environmental policy, there has been a program called Environmental Partnership Office (EPO), implemented since 2004. The program is designed so that the Ministry of the Environment (MOE) entrusts to civil society organizations in each of eight districts across Japan to assist key local actors in collaboratively tackling challenges in environmental issues. The staff members of each district EPO engage with local communities as external resource persons to bridge different people and their knowledge for the purpose of promoting collaborative environmental governance; hence, the program can be regarded in a way as the environmental policy version of the introduction of assistants. The rest of this section describes the case of an EPO staff member and their colleagues who worked for several years on the assistance of collaboration among stakeholders involved in the conservation of Onuma Lake, in the southwest of Hokkaido.[1]

16.3.2 Lake Onuma and Its Water Pollution

Onuma is located in Nanae Town in the middle of Oshima Peninsula, in the southwest of Hokkaido. It is a naturally dammed lake formed by the past eruptions of a nearby volcano, Hokkaido Komagatake, blocking the flow of a river and creating more than 120 small islands (Fig. 16.2). The complex terrain created by volcanic activity and the landscape characterized by beech (*Fagus crenata* Blume) forests have long attracted visitors. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when

[1] A major part of the case study and discussion derived from it is adapted from the author's contribution to a related book in Japanese (Mikami 2017).

Fig. 16.2 Lake Onuma and Mt. Hokkaido Komagatake in late winter

Japan had just started its modern nation building, there were already a few Japanese-style hotels targeted mainly at foreign travelers, with boat tours around the small islands fascinating them. After the railway was opened at the beginning of the twentieth century, the prefectural government launched a plan to develop the area as a prefectural natural park, and it became a quasi-national park[2] in 1958 under the new national park system revised after World War II, attracting a lot of tourists as one of most picturesque sights in Southern Hokkaido.

However, the scenic spot has faced a decrease in the number of tourists after the collapse of the bubble economy in the 1990s, with the number of tourists visiting the town declining since 1991. In the background, water quality deterioration of the lake has been a major issue since the 1980s; eutrophication has caused *aoko*, the overgrowth of cyanobacteria. According to ongoing water quality inspections by the authorities, water quality has almost always exceeded safe environmental standards since 1980. People in the tourism and fishing industries as well as the authorities have long been concerned about the pollution.

[2] A quasi-national park is the official translation of *kokutei-koen* (国定公園), which the Minister of the Environment designates as a prominent natural landscape comparable to those found in national parks. Prefectural governments are responsible for the administrative management of quasi-national parks whereas the MOE manages national parks.

Although it is not easy to determine the cause of eutrophication in closed waters, a study suggested that, in the total pollutants flowing into Onuma from its catchment area, about 50% of nitrogen and 45% of phosphorus were derived from livestock, and that as much as about 80% of both nitrogen and phosphorus were estimated as agricultural-related loads (Tanaka 2005). Located in Japan's most important agricultural region, Hokkaido, Nanae Town boasts a robust livestock industry along with neighboring towns and cities; in particular, beef cattle production around Onuma has expanded remarkably. For instance, a major livestock corporation operating in the area, has increased the number of beef cattle tenfold to 14,000 over the last three decades.

The environmental impact from livestock farming is a widespread issue throughout the country. Due to the increasing scale of the industry and labor shortage in it, it has become more and more difficult to utilize manure as compost, and water pollution and malodor caused by livestock waste have spread in many places. In 1999, a national law was enacted for the purpose of promoting proper management and disposal of domestic animal excrement. In Onuma, measures have been taken to prevent the outflow of livestock wastewater and to promote the reduction and utilization of livestock waste to farmland. The local community tried to remove the nutrient salt by creating retention and retarding basins and planting reeds along major streams flowing into Onuma, with some positive effects having been obtained. However, the situation has long been far from total restoration of water quality, and there has been distrust and tension between the parties concerned, including people in the fisheries, livestock farming, and tourism industries, over causes of and effective solutions to the pollution.

16.3.3 Listening to Key Actors and Identifying the Problem

In response to this situation, a staff member of the EPO Hokkaido set about playing a coordinating role among the key actors of Onuma, and it represents an example of transformative agency in adaptive environmental governance. The intervention was carried out as a part of EPO Hokkaido's project to develop examples of good practice in "local collaboration for a sustainable society." In the project, the staff members of EPO Hokkaido were sent to a few sites picked up from across Hokkaido, where people were facing challenges in collaborative environmental governance, and Onuma was chosen as one of these sites.

The staff member started her activity as coordinator of the EPO project in Onuma in the spring of 2009 and, at first, listened intensively to key local actors such as administrative officials, fishers, dairy farmers, nature guides, and researchers who have tackled the water quality problem in Onuma. In the first couple of months, she interviewed about ten people and was overwhelmed by "a confrontational mood that was hard to ameliorate because the people inside were really serious about the

regeneration of Onuma and were against each other."[3] She continued interviews with stakeholders to grasp the factors underlying the conflict over the water pollution and sorted out the causes of pollution such as "decline in filtration function by forest," "sediment influx," "domestic wastewater," "livestock manure," "pond smelts," and "motorboats" and linked these factors with organizations and persons directly related to them. As a result, it became obvious that most stakeholders, in some way or other, were responsible for water pollution as well as involved in efforts to improve it. She also noticed that the parties concerned did not sufficiently understand what others were doing; for example, local livestock industry members were more likely to be regarded as a major factor of water pollution, but other stakeholders do not necessarily understand the mitigation efforts taken by livestock farmers, and vice versa. It gradually became clear that a major problem underlying the water-pollution problem was insufficient engagement, dialogue, and mutual understanding among the concerned parties.

16.3.4 Ramsar Convention Introduced as Means

At the same time, the coordinator came to think it quite challenging to promote dialogue only inside the community, where major stakeholders had fallen into a state of mutual distrust, and she thought it effective to introduce a trigger from the outside world. After a few months of searching for a potential source of external stimulus, she came up with the idea that the registration to the Ramsar Convention might be a means for prompting constructive dialogue. The Convention is an intergovernmental treaty for conserving and promoting wise uses of wetlands and their resources by registering important wetlands based on a set of criteria in terms of the uniqueness of wetland types or biodiversity; as of October 2018, there are 52 registered wetlands in Japan. One day, the coordinator spoke to an expert whom she had known well, and she asked him for advice whether there was any possibility of registering Onuma as a Ramsar site. The expert, known as an authority in wetland research and nature conservation, was serving as chair of an MOE committee to recommend the Ramsar Convention registration candidate sites in Japan. He said that Onuma could be a potential Ramsar site and advised her to be ready for future opportunities by gathering and organizing supporting materials that were to be required in the official review process for registration.

Apart from this local move, the National Biodiversity Strategy formulated by the Japanese government in 2010 specified the target of registering six new wetlands in the country by the time of the COP 11 (the Eleventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties) of the Ramsar Convention in 2012. Based on this target, the MOE began work on registering one site in Hokkaido, and after consultation with the expert committee, in September 2010, the MOE added Onuma to the list of national

[3] The coordinator's comments in this chapter are quoted from the author's interviews conducted four times in Sapporo from April 2014 to July 2016.

candidate sites for Ramsar wetlands. While there is no clear evidence that the conversation between the expert and the coordinator in 2009 had any concrete impact on the MOE's decision, at the same time, it might well be assumed that the coordinator's idea of utilizing the Ramsar Convention as a means to promote constructive dialogue in Onuma was a contributing factor toward realizing the nomination.

Internationally, registration under the Ramsar Convention is possible if any of nine key criteria is met. Onuma was listed on the MOE's list of potential sites because of its unique landscape with the small islands in the lake and surrounding beech forest. In addition to meeting the international criteria, there are two more requirements for registration within Japan; that is, the guarantee of conservation by domestic legislation and explicit approval by the host community. In the case of Onuma, which is a quasi-national park, conservation status is already legally secured; thus, it was crucial whether the people in Nanae Town would agree to the plan. After the MOE policy to add Onuma as one of the Japanese candidate sites for Ramsar registration at the Ramsar COP 11 in 2012 became clear, the EPO coordinator then assisted the MOE and town officials as well as other key actors with the local consensus building process, which advanced fairly smoothly, and, in August 2011, the mayor of the town, on behalf of the residents, officially informed the MOE of the local wish to register Onuma under the Ramsar Convention.

In parallel with this process, the coordinator continued to visit and listen to key local actors. At that time, she traveled for a few hours from Sapporo, the prefectural capital where the EPO head office is based, to Onuma once or twice a month, repeatedly visiting one of the leaders of local dairy farmers, and she was gradually accepted by him and could talk about the significance of the Ramsar registration. At the same time, she and her colleagues also helped local stakeholders design the organizational framework for conservation after the registration. Rather than building a new facility such as a visitor center, the parties involved sought to launch a forum where existing actors in the area could participate and discuss issues regarding the conservation and wise uses of Onuma. It was quite difficult to reach consensus, particularly about who should be the regular members of this new forum, but with the advice and assistance of the EPO coordinator and her colleagues, they finally reached an effective conclusion. In the spring of 2012, local citizens, together with local authorities, set up the Onuma Ramsar Council, which was composed of twelve representatives from different local stakeholder groups such as tourism, fisheries, nature conservation, and neighborhood associations.

16.3.5 Ramsar Registration and Its Aftermath

The registration of Onuma under the Ramsar Convention was officially decided at the COP11 held in Romania in July 2012, and, in the following month, a commemorative ceremony was held in the town. A nature guide who runs a small hotel on the lakeside was elected as chair of the Onuma Ramsar Council. Now that Onuma was registered under the convention, the opportunity to mobilize outside resources, such

Fig. 16.3 An observation tour on Lake Onuma

as grants for environmental conservation and education, greatly expanded. The Ramsar Council embarked on new projects with the support of charity funds, including the publication of a nature observation guidebook of the area, an environmental learning program for schoolchildren, and exchange programs with other registered wetlands (Fig. 16.3). These projects clearly took advantage of the chair's expertise as a nature guide based on his experience over more than a couple of decades.

At the same time, stakeholder dialogue was still far from smooth or constructive, with their disagreement over the causes of water pollution persisting. In the council meetings, arguments often occurred, and the chair often had to personally take the brunt of criticism such that he finally found the situation unbearable and stepped down after about a year and a half in office. For some members of the local community, there was an impression that the move toward the registration was a bit too sudden in the first place, although the general attitude of the town was quite positive about the registration itself. The Ramsar Convention did not necessarily turn out as an effective "means" for engendering constructive dialogue in the community.

In this situation, the coordinator once again started to engage in Onuma, where a newly elected chair was trying to reconstruct the council. She started to visit key actors and listened to them as she did when she first began to engage with the community 5 years ago without any specific short-term goals or predetermined outcomes. She visited and talked to the key actors in and around the Ramsar Council,

sometimes listening to and discussing with them for a few hours about what lay underneath the arguments in the council meetings and what they thought about the future of the community. The coordinators' involvement in Onuma, from the beginning, was not predicated on the goal of registration under the Ramsar Convention, but rather on the understanding of local issues by engaging with key actors, including fishers and farmers. Such an approach was highly appreciated by local stakeholders, and later in the process of the Ramsar registration, as some key officials of local authority and the MOE noted, she provided a "buffer" between local authorities and people in the community, "helping people understand the significance of the Ramsar registration."

With the assistance of the coordinator and her colleagues, the new chair started to take the initiative in involving women and young people, who had rarely participated in the council or in past discussions on the conservation of Onuma. The council launched new projects such as the development of restaurant menus using local agricultural products and the training of younger tour guides. The council also became a member of the official conference for the conservation of Onuma, which had been composed exclusively of public bodies and industry stakeholders. On behalf of the council, the chair participated in the discussions on the revision of the town's Onuma Conservation Plan and succeeded in adding a new clause on the promotion of community engagement, partnership, and learning, which the council are trying to advocate using the Ramsar Convention. Regarding the problem of eutrophication of the lake, environmental standards for chemical oxygen demand (COD) was achieved for two consecutive years in 2011 and 2012 although this situation returned to one of COD impairment in 2013, and there has not been dramatic improvement since. Nonetheless, the Ramsar registration and the activities of the council certainly have been creating an atmosphere of collaboration with the new moves emerging.

16.4 Analysis and Discussion: Empathy-Based Assistance of Collaborative Governance

Looking back on the EPO coordinator's engagement in Onuma, the following several stages can be observed in terms of the adaptive and recursive pathways of collaborative governance referred to in Sect. 16.2. In the first stage, which can be regarded as a *conservation* to *release* phase, she was sent to Onuma as part of EPO Hokkaido's project on "local collaboration for a sustainable society," and she came to deeply understand that there was a chronic conflict among parties concerned over the causes of water pollution, thinking about how it was possible to help promote collaborative governance. She started her engagement with the community by visiting and listening to local key actors involved in the issue and tried to untangle it. She found out that one of the major challenges was the absence of a forum where local people could trust that they had continuous dialogue on the issue.

The next stage can be thought of as a r*elease* to *reorganization* to *exploitation* phase when the coordinator found it crucial to introduce a stimulus from the outside

of the community to break the deadlock. After having searched for some time, she came up with the Ramsar Convention as a "means" for promoting collaboration and dialogue among conflicting stakeholders. She communicated this idea to an external expert who was influential in selecting candidate Ramsar sites in Japan. In this phase, the coordinator was connecting ideas and resources and tried to identify a window of opportunity which stimulates the transformation of governance.

The idea of Ramsar registration started to move ahead after a while, seemingly, as a result of the intermediary work of the expert. This represented the opening of a window of opportunity, leading to the third stage of *exploitation* to *conservation*, generally when selected ideas are implemented and integrated into existing institutional settings. In this phase, the coordinator and her colleagues worked to mobilize resources to realize the registration and help the local community set up the Ramsar Council.

The registration of Onuma under the Ramsar Convention was a transformation of governance in that key actors sat at the new table of the Ramsar Council in service to the environmental restoration of Onuma, but dialogue among them was less than smooth and fruitful at the beginning. The fact that the coordinator then tried to challenge the situation by having direct dialogue with key actors to break the deadlock demonstrates that adaptive transformation went into another cycle and looped back to the first phase: *conservation* to *release*. Positive moves under the new chair of the council might be interpreted as *reorganization* and *exploitation,* which led to the amendment of the conservation plan of Onuma as another institutionalization.

Getting back to the point raised earlier in Sect. 16.2, let us now consider what is essential for assistants' roles played in the phases of *conservation* to *release* and *release* to *reorganization* to *exploitation.* A glance at past works in Japanese environmental sociology, which most of the editors and contributors of this volume specialize in, will probably provide useful perspectives to discuss this question, for a not inconsiderable amount of the literature has discussed how researchers as external resource persons are able to engage with communities in order to assist collaborative environmental governance. To put it simply, previous research in this regard can be summarized in two approaches. The first is to deepen understanding of and empathy with local people without judging their activities from external values, and the second is to comprehend an overall picture of the core issues in the community and thence to help launch concrete projects that address the issues, often subsidized with outside grants and having clear, short-term targets.

In theory, we can distinguish these two approaches by naming the former 'empathy-based' engagement,[4] and the latter 'target-and-goal-oriented' one, while these are often intermingled with each other in the real-world settings. For example, some environmental sociologists demonstrate both of them simultaneously by

[4]The word 'empathy-based' is meant as a working equivalence to the idea of '*yorisoi-gata* 寄りそい型' in Japanese, while 'target-and-goal-oriented' more directly corresponds to '*mokuhyo-shiko* 目標志向,' both of which the author originally developed in Mikami (2017).

settling in local communities as 'residential researchers' (Sato et al. 2018), taking full advantage of their professional skills to listen empathetically to local people while assisting in promoting collaboration among key actors (Chino 2009; Kikuchi 2008; Sato 2008). Others start from the empathetic aspect and gradually expand their activities with strategic targets such as 'regional revitalization' in the medium or long terms (Suzuki 2014).

Although the distinction between empathy-based and target-and-goal-oriented engagement might be less than explicit, it can nevertheless serve as a framework for discussing the assistance of collaborative governance in general as well as environmental sociologists' engagement with practice; that is to say, there can be two types of assistance of collaborative governance: empathy-based and target-and-goal-oriented. In the reconstruction process from the Chuetsu Earthquake in 2004, it was found that plenty of 'incremental assistance,' by sharing time and experience with anxious residents to deeply understand their needs, was indispensable before becoming ready to start 'multiplication assistance,' which often involved subsidized projects from outside the community (Inagaki et al. 2014). 'Incremental assistance' can be said to correspond to the empathy-based and 'multiplication assistance' to the target-and-goal-oriented assistance, respectively.

Apart from collaborative local governance, research and practice in social work also suggest the potential of an empathy-based approach in which welfare specialists dare to show an 'attitude of ignorance,' listening to their clients as a way to break away from the fixed framework of what the "problems" are (Arai 2014). Instead of providing professional analysis or intervention, what specialists are supposed to do here, particularly at an early stage of their support, is to stay with clients and listen empathetically to what they say, waiting for 'alternative narratives' to emerge. This narrative approach to social support suggests the significance of a kind of empathy-based approach as a crucial and underlying kind of support.

The importance of narrative cannot be overemphasized when discussing the nature of empathy-based support. Exploring the possibility of support without active interventions, Arai (2014) emphasizes the importance of listening to clients' little voices and renouncing suppressive frameworks that experts tend to impose on them, and this approach resonates with the emphasis on listening to people in environmental sociologists' engagement with local collaborative governance. What experts or external supporters are doing here can be better grasped using the notion of knowledge 'co-creation' (Mauser et al. 2013) rather than 'support' or 'assistance' in that they suspend their expert ways of thinking, listen carefully to what clients, residents, or stakeholders say, and try to co-design and -produce ways forward based upon their narratives. It is safe to say that narrative-based co-creation is an integral part of empathy-based engagement.

The question here is in what circumstances such narrative-based co-creation or empathy-based engagement is particularly helpful and when it is supposed to make way for more target-and-goal-oriented forms of engagement. To discuss this point, let us revisit the case of Onuma in terms of empathy-based and target-and-goal-oriented engagement. In the first phase of the EPO coordinator's intervention, *conservation* to *release*, it is obvious that empathy-based engagement was

predominant as she visited and listened to local people repeatedly without introducing or imposing any predefined targets. It was after this process of narrative-based co-creation that she finally put together the entire picture of issues regarding water pollution and found out that one of the major challenges was the absence of a table for dialogue. The next phase of r*elease* to *reorganization* to *exploitation* can be characterized as the mixture of empathy-based and target-and-goal-oriented approaches. The coordinator was still open about short-term targets and searching for a stimulus that would prompt key actors to launch a table for discussion, finally finding out the Ramsar Convention as a solution. After a window of opportunity opened in the next phase of *exploitation* to *conservation* – i.e., the promotion of Ramsar registration – the role of coordinator and her colleagues shifted toward more target-and-goal-oriented engagement, concentrating on the short-term goal of successful registration. However, after the Ramsar registration was realized, the situation came back to the original phase of *conservation* to *release*, when the coordinator applied empathy-based approaches again to help find a way for the Ramsar Council to get out of deadlock.[5]

According to the case study, empathy-based engagement involves things like visiting key actors in the community, spending time together, and listening carefully to their narratives, although it is not necessarily possible to formulate its components in a systematic way. The coordinator visited some of the key actors' workplaces and listened empathetically to them sometimes for several hours, and she says she participated in events that other local actors organized and spent time together and gradually develop a trustful relationship with them. It can be regarded as a very inefficient approach in one sense, particularly if we look at things only in terms of the target-and-goal-oriented perspective, where it is paramount to achieve a predetermined goal in a limited amount of time.

Looking back at the processes of her intervention in and engagement with Onuma, the coordinator clearly explained her intention why she started with what we call empathy-based support. She said, "In order for an outsider to be involved in a community, it is necessary to carefully identify key local actors and understand their mutual relationships." This was her firm belief before she had started to engage in Onuma, but she said that her experience in the stricken area of the Great East Japan Earthquake had made her belief stronger. She visited an affected area in Miyagi Prefecture as a volunteer every month from May 2011 to the beginning of 2013, and participated in the earthquake disaster reconstruction, while she worked on Onuma as a staff member of EPO Hokkaido. What particularly made an unfavorable

[5]The EPOs' staff themselves have conceptualized their methodology of intermediary support as '*banso shien* 伴走支援', i.e., accompanying support, in which "supporters think together with local clients through trial and error and prompt them to think and act spontaneously, in order to promote transformations for the attainment of goals by adhering to the process" (Mizobuchi 2018, p. 30). Building upon their experience in a number of EPO projects across the country, they further formulated their roles in supporting collaborative governance in local communities as 'change agents' such as catalysts, solution givers, process helpers, and resource linkers, in reference to Sato and Shimaoka (2014).

impression on her was that some of the supporters who were "experienced" in post-disaster reconstruction acted so confidently that they imposed their past "successful" experiences and seemed to do more harm than good, disrupting personal relationship in the community, for example. Having observed the reality of support in the local community, "I came to think that it is a very 'risky' enterprise to engage in a local community."

From what has been discussed in this section, it follows that the empathy-based and target-and-goal-oriented phases do not link with each other in a simple, linear manner of starting from the former and shifting toward the latter if things proceed well. Let us recall the fact that, after the Ramsar registration, discussion in the newly established council was less than smooth or constructive, and the coordinator searched anew for a breakthrough with empathy-based intervention. This response may well be partly interpreted as a reflection of her experience in the Great East Japan disaster area, but more generally speaking, it demonstrates that there can be a stage where empathy-based engagement is required after target-and-goal-oriented intervention has finished its role as the adaptive cycle starts over from the *conservation* to *release* stage.

Once a window of opportunity opens up and a clear goal is established, target-and-goal-oriented engagement comes forward to mobilize and leverage political and economic resources toward the short-term target, and the outcomes of such target-and-goal-oriented assistance are often quite visible. Therefore, the evaluation of the effectiveness of assistants' performance is often inclined to concentrate only on this phase. On the contrary, empathy-based support is more inconspicuous and difficult to grasp with objective, explicit measures of evaluation, but narrative-based co-creation derived from it provides an essential foundation for target-and-goal-oriented intervention. The two forms of support are interrelated with each other, and we should particularly give notice to the empathy-based aspect of engagement as a subtle but necessary basis for target-and-goal-oriented support that usually appears in the foreground and attracts our attention. In practice, it is important to mobilize resources to provide empathy-based interventions that can prompt narrative-based co-creation, especially at the stage where elements of the conserved system need disruption and challenge.

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