

My Hopes and Ideas for the Japanese Society of People-Plant Relationships

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As a student I often wondered why most of the associations in my fields of study, garden architecture, landscape planning, city planning, nature protection, were barely known to the larger public. I soon learned that these associations were not run professionally. Quite frequently their membership overlapped to a considerable degree. Complaints that more should be done were frequent but fruitless. Since the few activists had to attend ever new scheduled meetings and/or conferences there hardly was time for solid preparation of issues, let alone research which would yield results that would arouse some interest not only among the membership but to outsiders and the general public as well.

Even if there was some well arranged events, actions tended to be taken in a fairly unprofessional way. In part this had to do with the idea that such activities were considered additional to the daily work load. People were expected to pursue them after their official work hours. To some extent this had to do with the administrative structure some activists had to face which impeded them from voicing clearly the changes they considered necessary. Rather than trying to engage lay people, outsiders, those who in the minds of some of the activists were blind to the needs and interests these 'green' organisations wanted to promote, the activists seem to have felt that only they themselves, and no one else, certainly not a democratically represented public, could do the job.

In a democratically constituted society political parties structure societal life. The representatives of these political parties are elected by popular vote for a number of years and then will either become reelected or not to their various democratically constituted assemblies, councils etc. As no elected representative knows everything about which he or she must decide in a political process he or she has to rely on information created and gathered elsewhere, for example by scholars. Some of this knowledge is communicated in lobbies, that is in spaces outside the the rooms where the assemblies, the councils etc. proper meet, hence the notion of lobbyism. Some of this information is transmitted via media, such as films, radio talks, theater performances, newspapers, journals, and books. In any case the knowledge is mediated. It is processed by professionals. Hence it seems clear to me for such interests to

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become perceived at all in the complex structures of decision making in modern developed societies they need professional handling.

So if a certain societal interest, for example the interest to establish people-plant relationships,

- be it by reading about the basics of plant life for the survival of humanity,
- be it by enjoying seasonal changes in public open spaces in the course of a year by watching plants grow and blossom, such as for example cherry blossoming in Japan, or the spectacular Jacaranda blossoms in Brasil, or leaf-looking when the local conditions turn the leaves of deciduous trees into a unique spectacle of colors, as for example in the New England states of the United States of America,
- be it to enhance and preserve the wealth of knowledge accrued and displayed at botanical gardens,
- be it by active gardening at the place where one lives, as for example by growing plants in the living room or in a balcony box at a highrise apartment, or in a flower pot just outside the home, or in a community garden, or an allotment garden, or in a private garden next to one's house,
- be it by enjoying a look at plants from a bed in a hospital, or another healing institution,
- be it by sketching, drawing or painting plants and flowers,
- be it by sensing a kind of relief by having the chance to either look at or work with plants as an inmate in a correctional institution,
- be it by composing and/or performing music which relates to plant life,
- be it that one loves to receive a flower bouquet on the occasion of a professional promotion or as a permanent asset to one's office space or on the occasion of a family event or more private occasions,
- be it by instructing pupils at schools, for example in school gardens, and students at laboratories and universities,
- be it by browsing plant and seed catalogs in order to select the latest brands of bulbs and other plants which may never be bought or planted but indicate a kind of visual plant-literacy,
- be it by developing mathematical approaches which allow

the creation of plants, as in genetics and computer simulations,

- be it by staying in a hotel where the rooms and dining facilities are adorned with fresh cut flowers,
- be it by writing novels which address aspects of people-plant relations,
- be it by forming associations,
- be it by working as a botanist, a biologist, a landscape architect, a garden historian, or a farmer
- be it by waiting for and embarking trains at railway stations which offer floral embellishment,
- be it by establishing and supporting special libraries where knowledge about the history, the meaning, the use of plants and the design with plants is gathered, properly maintained, and easily made available for the public
- be it by shopping in centers where plants and flowers are major assets,
- be it by commercial production of plants in nurseries and factories,
- be it by organizing horticultural exhibitions, garden shows on local, county, state, and national levels
- be it that the feeling of usefulness of life on earth is perceived in a special way by engaging in people-plant-related activities,

wants to become represented as part of the societal process in a democracy, then those who share it need to learn and communicate that there are others who also share it. In order to secure it as a basic interest of human life they need to communicate it to those they have elected. In a parliamentary

democracy it is them who take decisions which may affect these manifold people-plant-relationships by the laws and acts they issue.

As individually active a person may be with that respect, he or she will never be able to talk to all those who need to know about or even share this interest. So one step to actively promote it is to form an association. This is what the Japanese Society of People-Plant Relationships has done. In a democracy the scholarly and public relation activities as well as the size of the membership reflect the political weight of such an association. Communication between individual members and various chapters of the association may work via letter writing or telephone calls. However, it is essentially promoted by publications, such as books and professionally made journals which appear regularly. This is why the Journal of the Japanese Society of People-Plant Relationships is edited. Such a journal may also help to attract others who have not yet heard about the association to join and become active wherever they are based.

All of this encompasses some of my hopes and ideas associated with the production of the Journal of the Japanese Society of People-Plant Relationships. May it help to make people aware of the essentials of people-plant-relationships in as differentiated a way as these can be found, not only among the people in Japan but all around the world, in order to enhance the quality of life in every respect.