

Democratic Communication of Information as explored in the Class Participative Learning in the Region (地域連携参加型)

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This years theme of the class Participative Learning in the Region, conducted by Prof. Mikako Mizuno and Prof. Neda Firfova was Culture and Art as Alternative Entrypoints for Foreign Visitors to Nagoya and was meant to explore art-related events and cultural places within the city of Nagoya and the approaches towards democratizing information distribution by using Japanese and foreign languages in their communication. Ultimately, the class had for its goal to activate students into exploring whether culture, art, and history can be equally enjoyed by the locals as well as the foreigners who can't read or understand Japanese in the city of Nagoya.

Keywords: Participation • Democratic Distribution of Information • Signage

1. Introduction

In the Participative Learning in the Region Class (地域連携参加型) of the previous year, which focused on the theme Is Nagoya a Friendly City to Foreigners, the students and teachers took walking routes in the city at locations with particularly complex sign design systems such as Nagoya Station or Sakae Metro Station. The students analyzed the inconsistencies present in the sign systems and the difficulties these could cause to potential travelers on certain routes. These experiences challenged and faced students with actual problems and activated them beyond their campus life, within the city community. This year's theme of the class was Culture and Art as Alternative Entrypoints for Foreign Visitors to Nagoya and was meant to explore art-related events and cultural places within the city of Nagoya on top of the underlining subject Is Nagoya a Friendly City to Foreigners. The students were to analyze whether these events and places were providing legible and communicable information in a democratic manner towards both Japanese and foreign audiences. Furthermore, they were to activate themselves and propose solutions to some of the problems found while being on-site.

2. General Classes

2.1. Nagoya Convention & Visitors Bureau

Traditionally, our class begins with a visit to the Nagoya Convention & Visitors Bureau, where the students hear a presentation by the Bureau's official about the strategies the City of Nagoya applies to promote itself for domestic travelers as well as visitors from abroad. Nagoya stands proud as an industrial and technology-driven center and puts these in the forefront of its promotions.

The students had time to ask questions and engage in a discussion after the presentation. Through this discussion, our class theme was once again confirmed. Art and Culture seemed to be secondary when presenting Nagoya, but furthermore, we wanted to acquire whether they can be equally enjoyed by locals and foreigners.

2.2. Nagoya Station

The reason why we visit Nagoya Station in this class is to carry out two particular walking routes inside the station. One is the route from Point A (Shinkansen Exit) to Point B (City Bus Terminal), in a way that one of the groups walks only following the signage, and the other group walks only by asking the station staff questions about how to reach Point A to Point B in English. The time is being measured and compared, with the first group arriving in 8 minutes, while the latter needs 12 minutes.

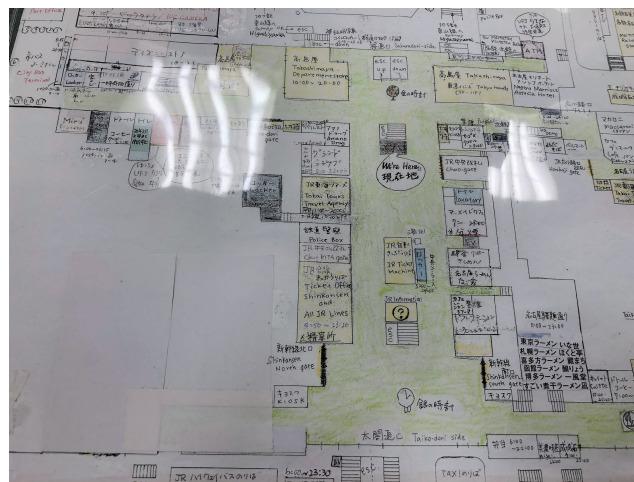


Image 1: Hand-drawn and hand-written map of Nagoya Station in English used by the station staff in the Information booth, Photo by student Sakura Matsumoto

The Second Route is from Point B (City Bus Terminal) to Point C (Meitetsu Line, Embarkation point to Centrair Airport). Along this route students follow only the signage while imagining they are travelers with suitcases who can only take elevators and escalators to reach Point C.

These exercises help the students analyze the gaps created between the designed signage and reality, and how much larger they can feel for foreign travelers.

3. Cultural Sites and Art-related Events Visited during the Class

3.1. Aichi Triennale

The once-in-three years international art event was taking place during the summer of 2019 and it was a particularly fitting event for the theme of our class and for our students to visit and analyze.

The results of their analysis were that all the promotional printed material is available both in Japanese and English. The official website was available in seven languages, covering a very large scope of the audience expected to visit the triennale. Furthermore, all the exhibited artworks had explanations and captions in both Japanese and English, and the video works had fitting subtitles. The students' conclusion was that this event can be considered to be equally democratic towards local and international audiences. The most likely reasons for that were the large scope of the event, the on-going involvement of many international artists in the event, and the strategy of the partners in the triennale organization.



Image 2: Bilingual sign of the House of Takeda, Arimatsu



Image 3: Arimatsu; Tourguide showing Utagawa Hiroshige's Narumi Meibutsu Arimatsu Shibori from the 19 C.

3.2. Arimatsu

Arimatsu, a historical site within the Midori ward in Nagoya is practically an open-air museum of the preserved tie-dying shibori textile techniques developed during the Edo Period on the Tokaido route from Tokyo to Kyoto. However, many of the travel websites in English do not list it as one of the top tourist facilities in

Nagoya, if at all. For example, it is not part of Nagoya Travel Guide's <https://www.nagoya-info.jp> 12 selected tourist facilities, as well as Japan Guide's www.japan-guide.com 15 top attractions in Nagoya nor the 7 proposed side-trips from Nagoya.

The students found that information marking the historical sites in Arimatsu was sufficiently available and legible in both Japanese and English. They discussed that Arimatsu is underrepresented as a travelers spot, and before visiting it, especially since one can reach it within a 30 minutes train ride from some of the bigger train stations in the city, they had the impression that it was way further outside of Nagoya city. Three points were observed for further improvement: Arimatsu's online presence, the possibility for Arimatsu Station itself to become a more elaborate entry to the town of Arimatsu and the possibility to experience tie-dying in Arimatsu without having to make prior appointments.

3.3. Osu

Compared to Arimatsu, the Osu area is very popular among the young local population as well as visitors to Nagoya. Unlike Arimatsu, the Osu area or the Osu Kannon temple are represented through the two above-mentioned websites. In our class, Osu was selected as an interesting location to represent various international food cultures brought on by the many restaurants and shops in the area.

Expectedly, the use of many languages was present in the shop signboards and shop windows. What the students observed as a problem was that information was communicated rather chaotically, the signage was self-made, the lettering was small and difficult to read, the maps were difficult to understand and there was no sense of unified design and organization. Furthermore, although restaurants serve different cuisines, most of the menus were in Japanese only.

4. In Conclusion

The class this year, covered three different art-related and cultural venues with various levels of information communication capacities. Some were deemed to be satisfactory in their democratic information communication to both Japanese and international audiences, but others presented with challenges of various natures. One universal solution proposal was deemed impossible, and the class length didn't allow the time for specific solutions to be proposed to all the problems.

Therefore the students decided to make one proposal for one particular case: the insufficient online presence of Arimatsu as a cultural and tourist spot Nagoya. They created an Instagram account called Friendly Nagoya (@friendlynagoya), linked with hashtags in English such as #japantravel #tourism_nagoya, etc. and uploaded Arimatsu related images that they have taken during class. Although they are not skilled social media professionals, its the media that their generation understands and uses well to communicate with friends but also with unknown peers from all over the world. This gesture replicates their will to communicate in a democratic manner, well beyond their social circles and issues of language.