

Linking locals to the global network through the IGGP

-From the discussions in the UNESCO Global Geoparks Celebration Forum-

\*Shinsuke Nakamura<sup>1</sup>, Yoshihiko Iida<sup>2</sup>, Seiichi Saito<sup>3</sup>

1.Hakusan Tedorigawa Geopark Promotion Council, 2.Operating Unit Ishikawa/Kanazawa, Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, United Nations University, 3.Japanese Geoparks Network

International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (IGGP) was launched in November 2015, giving a new UNESCO label to the Global Geoparks. Taking this chance, Japanese Geoparks Network (JGN) has organized the UNESCO Global Geoparks Celebration Forum in 23rd-24th January 2016, jointly with Hakusan Tedorigawa Geopark and Operating Unit Ishikawa/Kanazawa, United Nations University (UNU-IAS OUIK) to discuss the future direction of Japanese geoparks. Regarding the discussions from the Forum, we would like to discuss how the locals (mainly focusing on local governments) can be linked to the global network through the IGGP in Japan.

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Geopark is a local lead initiative, while it is an international initiative. In 2004, the Global Geoparks Network (GGN) was formed which lead to this new UNESCO Global Geoparks label. JGN was formed in 2007 (including the predecessor organization) which is now involving over 50 sites and over 10% of the municipalities in Japan. Without these networks, the current geopark movements could not have happened. Therefore, contribution to the network is essential. However, locals are not used to get along with international networks and even in the domestic network, there are some difficulty.

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In Japan, local governments are playing the main role for conducting geoparks, while JGN is playing a significant role for linking all the Japanese geoparks and the aspiring sites. Most of the JGN members get together twice a year during the JpGU and at the National Conference, along with the National Training Workshops, the Regional Conferences, etc. Quite amount of travel expenses are required for these meetings, which is an extraordinary situation for the local governments.

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Most of the local governments have sister cities and exchange some citizens regularly. In addition, many local governments employ foreign young people as Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) or Coordinators for International Relations (CIR). Although "international" is a yearning word for the local governments, these are almost all for contacts with foreign people. In fact, going abroad to attend an international geopark conference itself is a great project for the local governments.

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Therefore, there were not enough participation from Japan to the global network and that was the main focus in the Forum. Locals are wondering "by what" and "how" to make international cooperation. In the Forum, several possibilities were pointed out.

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For "by what", there are two points. Japan, as a tectonically active area, has various geohazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcano eruptions, landslides etc. People in this disastrous country have adopted these hazards historically, which can be more shared with other countries. Another point was the activities of JGN itself. JGN is carrying out various activities, such as public magazines, online journals, various public events and meetings, several working groups, etc. But unfortunately, these experiences are not shared enough with other countries, nor among the whole Japanese community.

For "how", 8 actions we may take immediately, were pointed out as below:

1. Networking in citizens' level or guides' level
2. Publication (For example; translating case studies of Japan into English)
3. Holding international workshops, but not individually
4. Sending evaluators for field evaluation and revalidation
5. Joining (not just reading) the process of establishing guidelines or rules
6. Sending staffs to UNESCO
7. Funding from various national bodies
8. Taking contacts with various people (not only with single channel)

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Local governments do not have enough budget nor know-how for international cooperation. But regarding the discussions pointed out, locals can seek for some ways with various partners to make the real link to the global network.

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