

## Promotion of Lifelong Learning in Japanese Municipalities

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Japan amended its Basic Act on Education in 2006 to integrate the concept of lifelong learning which they defined as: *Society shall be made to allow all citizens to continue to learn throughout their lives, on all occasions and in all places, and apply the outcomes of lifelong learning appropriately to refine themselves and lead a fulfilling life.*<sup>1</sup>

One of government's strategies is empowering the municipalities to promote lifelong learning. The website of Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology provides the following information on the state of implementation in relation to:

- 1) Availability of lifelong learning councils at prefecture level and public policy debates related to lifelong learning in the last 5 years
- 2) State of the government unit in charge of lifelong learning in the prefecture, metropolis and municipalities' governor's office and/or education committee.
- 3) Availability of action plans to promote lifelong learning at local levels
- 4) List of cities proclaiming lifelong learning, name of proclamations and membership in national council of lifelong learning municipalities
- 5) Day of Education set by municipalities<sup>2</sup>

In 2011, 19 metropolis and over 1,000 municipalities had action plans to promote lifelong learning. This is about 60% of the municipalities. Amongst these municipalities, 86 have an official declaration on lifelong learning, many of which were adopted in municipality parliaments. Kanegasaki-town (金ヶ崎町) in Iwate Prefecture was the first to declare itself as a lifelong education city back in 1971 with a forward looking declaration. Lifelong education was declared as a means to humanistic life and culture and the town committed to:

each one, one study	ひとり	いち学習
each one, one activity	ひとり	いち活動
each one, one sports	ひとり	いちスポーツ
each one, one innovation	ひとり	いち工夫
each one, one volunteer action	ひとり	いち奉仕
any place, any time, everyone <sup>3</sup>		

The majority of other declarations were adopted after the enactment of the national law on lifelong learning<sup>4</sup> in 1990. Some leaders of municipalities have formed an alliance for information-exchange and policy research under the National Council of Municipal Leaders for Lifelong Learning<sup>5</sup>.

While enthusiasm as lifelong learning cities has dwindled in many municipalities in Japan, Matsumoto-city (松本市) in Nagano Prefecture is keeping the initiative alive and well. The city designed its second basic plan for lifelong learning with a slogan 'let's support the learning forest (みんなで育てよう 学びの森) in 2005. They have adopted the forest as a

<sup>1</sup> Basic Act on Education (Act No. 120 of December 22, 2006; provisional translation)

<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/lawandplan/1303462.htm>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.mext.go.jp/a\\_menu/ikusei/shien/1298637.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/ikusei/shien/1298637.htm) (in Japanese)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.town.kanegasaki.iwate.jp/01town/05sengen/sengenkyouiku.html> (in Japanese)

<sup>4</sup> Law concerning the Establishment of Implementation System and Other Measures for the Promotion of Lifelong Learning, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.gakushu.jp/index.html> (in Japanese)

metaphor for lifelong learning with the view that lifelong learning is still a young tree that needs nurturing by its citizens – in this case around 243,000 people. The plan conceptualised lifelong learning as based on individuals' will to learn, which cannot be forced by others: the objective of learning is clear and learning is not short-term but lifelong. Four functions of the public sector are centred around 'providing support but not controlling' the realisation of *four rights*:

1. right to learn
2. right to receive support for learning
3. right to access information on learning
4. right to contribute the learning achievement in the society.

There are *three pillars of action* are:

1. advocacy to promote learning
2. facilitation of support system for learning
3. maintenance of learning venues and networks.<sup>6</sup>

In 2012, Japan is celebrating its annual lifelong learning festival <manabi-pia> in three different cities. This might allow for more stakeholders to participate in the festival compared with past festivals, which have been hosted by one of the municipalities during the last 23 years.

In addition to the annual festival, MEXT is providing information on policy development and good practices to administrators and practitioners of lifelong learning by monthly journal and electronic news. At local level, there are also opportunities for correspondence courses for lifelong learning coordinators and seminars.

#### **Further information:**

Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2010 Pamphlet

<http://www.mext.go.jp/english/pamphlet/>

White Paper on Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2009 (English version)

[http://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/hakusho/html/hpab200901/1305844.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/hakusho/html/hpab200901/1305844.htm)

Monthly Journal on Lifelong Learning

[http://www.mext.go.jp/b\\_menu/shuppan/shougai/index.htm](http://www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shuppan/shougai/index.htm) (in Japanese)

Manaby – monthly electronic bulletin on lifelong learning

<http://www.mext.go.jp/magazine/backnumber/1263046.htm> (in Japanese)

National Council of Municipal Leaders for Lifelong Learning

<http://www.gakushu.jp/index.html> (only in Japanese)

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.city.matsumoto.nagano.jp/kodomo/syogaigakusyuu/shogaikoso.html>