

Title of the Paper

Education-Based Community Development in a Depopulating Society: A Comparative Case Analysis of Japan and South Korea

Research Overview

This study examines how citizen-led intermediary organizations in rural Japan and South Korea mediate school–community relationships. Through comparative case analysis, it explores how these organizations expand participation, support community sustainability, and enable diverse actors to emerge as agents of public education within increasingly distributed and participatory governance contexts.

Purpose of Study

Rural regions across many countries are experiencing demographic decline, aging populations, and the weakening of local communities. In this context, schools are increasingly recognized not only as institutions for formal education but also as key infrastructures for sustaining community life (Tieken, 2014). While existing research has emphasized the importance of school–community partnerships, less attention has been given to the organizational actors that actively mediate, coordinate, and sustain these relationships.

This study focuses on the emergence of citizen-led intermediary organizations that operate between schools and communities in rural contexts. Rather than viewing collaboration as a school-centered or policy-driven process, this research highlights the role of locally embedded coordinating structures that enable sustained interaction

among diverse actors, including residents, migrants, and local organizations.

The study is guided by the following questions:

- How do intermediary organizations mediate relationships between schools and communities in rural contexts?
- What roles do these organizations play in expanding participation and coordinating local initiatives?
- How do such practices contribute to changes in the agents and governance of public education?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to global discussions on educational governance, particularly concerning who participates in and shapes public education. It also considers how these locally grounded practices may foster more participatory—and potentially democratic—forms of educational engagement.

Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative comparative case study design, focusing on two rural contexts in East Asia: the Tosayama area in Kochi City, Japan, and S Village in South Korea. These cases were selected as illustrative examples of education-based community development supported by intermediary organizational structures, while also offering complementary perspectives on both process and outcomes.

Data sources include document analysis, field-based reports, and existing case materials, such as local policy documents, community records, and prior research. The analysis focuses on identifying the structure and functions of intermediary organizations and examining how they facilitate collaboration between schools and diverse

community actors.

The analysis specifically explores:

- How relationships among stakeholders are coordinated
- How collaborative practices (e.g., curriculum co-creation, community initiatives) are generated
- How participation is extended beyond conventional school actors

The aim is not to generalize findings but to generate analytical insights into how intermediary organizations reshape school–community relations and contribute to evolving forms of educational governance.

Results and Discussion

The findings from both cases highlight the emergence of intermediary organizational forms that play a central role in connecting schools and communities and in supporting broader processes of local development.

In the Japanese case of Tosayama Compulsory Education School, a collaborative platform has been established that brings together school representatives and various local organizations. This platform serves as a space for sharing challenges, coordinating projects, and generating new initiatives. The practices that emerge from this platform extend beyond supporting children’s learning to include the attraction of educational migrants and the formation of “related populations”—individuals who develop sustained ties with the area through engagement with its educational initiatives. In this way, the school and its associated activities function as key drivers of both in-migration and ongoing community connection.

In the Korean case of S Village, education plays a central role in attracting in-

migration, contributing to population growth despite broader regional decline. A defining feature of this case is the active involvement of residents in the co-creation of the school curriculum, reflecting a high level of community participation in educational processes. In addition, cooperative-based social and economic systems support everyday life, including care for the elderly and assistance for newcomers. These interconnected practices form an integrated local system in which education, livelihood, and community life are closely intertwined.

Across both contexts, intermediary organizations function as citizen-led yet influential coordinating bodies that mediate relationships between schools and communities. They expand participation beyond traditional stakeholders by involving migrants, newcomers, and diverse local actors, thereby broadening the social base of educational engagement.

These findings suggest a shift from school-centered partnership models toward more distributed forms of governance in which responsibilities and roles are shared among multiple actors. More importantly, they highlight the emergence of diverse participants as active agents in shaping public education. In these contexts, public education is no longer produced solely by state institutions or schools, but is increasingly co-constructed through locally grounded, collective practices (Wenger, 1998).

In this sense, intermediary organizations not only facilitate collaboration but also contribute to reconfiguring the agents of public education, enabling more participatory—and potentially democratic—forms of educational governance. Furthermore, the cases suggest that addressing rural decline requires not only economic or demographic policies but also educational and community-based practices that

support meaningful living across the lifespan.

References

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Keywords

Educational Governance

Citizen-led intermediary organizations

School-Community Relationships

Community Sustainability

Rural Depopulation