

Dedication: Look to Japan

Kjell Skyllstad⁺

Editor in Chief

How do we measure the quality of a city? In a recent conference a checklist or survey under the label of The Mercer quality of living report, evaluating what could be termed livable cities was presented. Living conditions in 420 cities worldwide are analyzed according to 39 factors grouped in 10 categories. The first category involves the political and social environment, such as political stability, crime and law enforcement and the last involves the natural environment, such as climate and record of natural disasters. In between are found categories like economic environment, health and sanitation, consumer goods, and housing etc.

On closer examination one discovers the reason behind the choice of these specific variables. The survey it turns out, is designed for use by the human resources divisions of large corporations to calculate so-called “hardship allowances” for senior executives posted around the world. Which goes to explain the absence of the one factor that makes cities livable in the first place – the people, as Jane-Frances Kelly points out in her article in the Sidney Morning Herald “The residents come first in a livable city.” (June 30, 2010). She finds the fundamental needs of citizens delegated to the periphery of conversations about livable cities: “This is particularly true of psychological needs, such as the fundamental need for social interaction.” And it is exactly this need for social interaction that led to urban settlements in the first place and that through the centuries have constituted the very *raison d’état* of urban living.

It may be that their record of natural disasters has disqualified Japanese cities from gaining the top positions earned by their excellent scores in the other variables. But it is in the moments when catastrophe strikes that the quality of Japanese citizenship is brought out for the whole world to see.

In a letter from Sendai published in the online Magazine ODE shortly after the earthquake and tsunami disaster (03/14/11) Anne Thomas recounts her experience in the stricken city:

“It’s utterly amazing that where I am there has been no looting, no pushing in lines... I have come back to my shack to check on it each day, now to send this e-mail since the electricity is on, and I find food and water left in my entranceway. I have no idea from whom, but it is there. Old men in green hats go from door to door checking to see if everyone is Ok. People talk to complete strangers asking if they need help. I see no signs of fear. Resignation, yes, but fear or panic, no.”

⁺ Dr. Kjell Skyllstad, Professor Emeritus, University of Oslo, Department of Musicology, Norway

But this resignation will, as in the wake of other catastrophic events of the past befalling the Japanese nation, have to give way to a determination to rebuild in the same unconquerable spirit of collaborative management and social interaction that has spearheaded the success of Japanese entrepreneurship in times past. It has been pointed out that while Western enterprises are modeled on the military structure of a top-down line of command with officers or company heads doing the thinking and the rest doing the work, their Japanese counterparts put their emphasis on *nemawashi* (consensus building) and *ringi* (shared decision making). While planning in the West is done by professional strategists, Japanese plans are generated by the whole organization. This kind of collaborative management and social interaction may be seen as the contribution of Japan to spearhead closer links between city and arts administration. And in times of natural catastrophes such ties will be vital for successful reconstruction.

In a brilliant study (*A cultural approach to recovery assistance following urban disasters*, in *City, Culture and Society I* 2010, pp.27-36) professors Shin Nakagawa and Koichi Suwa point to the experience gained from the Kobe (1995) and Yogyakarta (2006) earthquakes that the socially vulnerable are the most severely impacted by the disaster, which also tends to intensify social disparities. Art intervention then aims to help people recover themselves and reconnect socially. Earthquakes make people connect to the arts. Disasters make us return to the starting point of art, which connects the heart of one person to another and leads to healing. This is the message from Japan, a light shining in one of its darkest hours. We therefore with all our heart dedicate this volume of the JUCR to the courageous people of Japan and to our dear colleagues in search of ever new ways to building bridges for the future: Arts Management- City Management. Models for Sustainable City Renewal and Cultural Continuity.