

CREATING DEPTH-INFUSED CITY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS / TOYOOKA THEATER FESTIVAL



AGENDA 2030 - SDGs



CULTURE 21 ACTIONS - COMMITMENTS

1. CULTURAL RIGHTS
3. CULTURE AND EDUCATION
5. CULTURE AND ECONOMY
6. CULTURE, EQUITY AND SOCIAL INCUSION

**CROSS-SECTORIAL, TRAINING, ATTRACTIVENESS, PROMOTION,
IDENTITY, ACCESS, CREATIVE INDUSTRIES, GROWTH, TOURISM**



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1. Toyooka and culture

Toyooka City is located in the Hyogo Prefecture and has approximately 77,000 inhabitants. The city is bordered by the Sea of Japan to the north, and the Maruyama River flows through the center of the city.

The city suffers from a population decline, especially among young people. Therefore, one of the city objectives has been to increase the number of young people who choose to live and settle in Toyooka by creating a “value of living in Toyooka”. More specifically, Toyooka aims to become a “Local & Global City”, respected and honored around the world, with local and unique values to the region despite its small population size.

ONE OF THE CITY’S OBJECTIVES IS TO MAKE TOYOOKA A “LOCAL & GLOBAL CITY”, RESPECTED AND HONORED AROUND THE WORLD, WITH A GROWING YOUTH POPULATION AND UNIQUE VALUES DESPITE ITS SMALL POPULATION SIZE.

2. Goals and project implementation

2.1. Main aim and specific goals

Toyooka City is striving for a sustainable community with a primary focus on combating population decline, especially youth. The aim is to create a compelling “value proposition for living in Toyooka” that attracts and retains young residents. The City Government is promoting “Depth-infused city community development through performing arts” as one of the policies of the “Second Phase of Toyooka City’s Comprehensive Strategy for Local Development” (since 2020) to achieve the aforementioned goal. In this regard, the Toyooka Theater Festival is one of the leading projects.



Photo credit: ayaka tomokane

2.2. Development of the project

The Toyooka Theater Festival, a leading project of “depth-infused city community development through performing arts,” held its first edition in September 2020. It had the mission of enhancing the value of the city and creating a venue for diverse and open expression, and has established a program of performances of performing arts works. The festival is held as a fringe-type international theater festival that allows diverse artists from Japan and abroad to participate and promotes sustainable community development, revitalizes the local economy and the creation of new services. Its themes are: dialogue, solidarity and evolution.

The first edition of the Festival was marked by the COVID-19 restrictions. In 2022, the Festival held 96 programs with the participation of 77 groups from Japan and abroad, and an audience of 18,250 people. In addition, the Professional College of Arts and Tourism conducted on-site practical training, with 131 students. The 2023 Festival was further expanded in scale, with 90 organizations participating and 111 programs. The total number of visitors reached a record high of 23,647.

Initiatives were implemented to ensure an inclusive theater festival, making it accessible and enjoyable for individuals from all backgrounds, including those who may have faced access challenges in the past. To promote daily universal accessibility, the Festival offered childcare services, multilingual support and barrier-free access. Many performances were available for free to high school students and younger, encouraging participation from young audiences.

Mechanisms were implemented to connect artists, audiences, and the local community, such as recruiting support staff to attract and facilitate interaction with individuals from the local community that had little prior involvement with theater. Starting from the Toyooka Theater Festival 2023, a multipurpose space called the “Meeting Spot” was established where visitors, artists and locals could interact and exchange. Moreover, several international artists participated in the 2023 Festival, also having a higher overseas audience following the opening of an English website.

The Toyooka Theater Festival collaborates with private companies and individuals not only for sponsorship but also to jointly promote certain projects. For example, JR West and the Professional College of Arts and Tourism collaborated to operate a sightseeing train that offers theater performances on board. The Festival also collaborated with local companies to create and sell original collaborative goods. Moreover, the Toyooka Theatre Festival Executive Committee consists of the surrounding local governments, organizations that support cultural and artistic creative and civic activities, the Toyooka Chamber of Commerce, and organizations promoting tourism in the city. Also, this Festival is possible thanks to the collaboration of various entities including government bodies, private organisations and non-profit organizations.

The festival also aims to stimulate local economy. Dedicated personnel are appointed to manage local currency and mobility services .

A local currency system have been introduced to encourage spending at local businesses, with an increasing number of participating stores and users each year. The Festival Night Market, featuring a variety of food and beverage stalls, locally-made products and crafts, was held as part of the program. Utilizing furniture and utensils from a closed elementary school and offering remote sign language interpretation services on certain dates, the market attracted a total of 5,087 visitors, creating a space for diverse interactions among local residents, artists, interns and tourists. The 2023 Toyooka Theater Festival is estimated to have contributed approximately 190 million yen to the local economy.



**THE TOYOOKA THEATER FESTIVAL IS A LEADING PROJECT OF THE
LOCAL POLICY “DEPTH-INFUSED CITY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
THROUGH PERFORMING ARTS”.**

3. Impacts

3.1. Direct impacts

At the Toyooka Theater Festival, residents of Toyooka City and nearby areas not only enjoy performances as audiences but also actively participate as performers of all ages, enriching the festival's diverse programming. Regarding the cross-cutting impacts of the project, the festival meets the needs of local residents in the tourism sector and has a cross-sectoral impact on the local economy and tourism. The 2023 Toyooka Theater Festival questionnaire revealed that about 50% of attendees from outside Toyooka City visited for the first time due to the festival, and approximately 70% expressed a desire to return. The estimated tourism expenditure based on the survey was around 110 million yen.

In terms of cultural impact, the project has also influenced the local government's approach. Applied theater techniques, like theater workshops, have expanded into welfare programs and education in Toyooka City and surrounding municipalities. This signifies a shift towards utilizing arts and culture as tools for community development.

In addition, the festival provides invaluable opportunities for students at the local Professional College of Arts and Tourism to engage in practical internships. They learn international festival management first hand under the guidance of seasoned theater professionals. As mentioned above, some theater techniques (such as theater workshops) have expanded into welfare programs and education in Toyooka City and surrounding municipalities, which signifies a shift towards utilizing arts and culture as tools for community development.



Photo credit: ayaka tomokane

3.2. Evaluation

The Toyooka Theater Festival conducts visitor surveys at each performance venue, utilizing both paper-based questionnaires onsite, as well as inputs collected through a web form. The 2023 Toyooka Theater Festival visitor survey garnered approximately 1,700 responses, covering a range of 25 items including attendees' places of residence, modes of transportation, length of stay, and budget allocated for attending performances. Some results were:

- » Approximately 40% of attendees are local residents. Among attendees from outside Toyooka City, approximately 50% visited the city for the first time due to the Festival.
- » Around 50% of attendees engaged in sightseeing activities in addition to attending performances.
- » Approximately 70% of respondents expressed a desire to visit Toyooka again.
- » The estimated tourism expenditure derived from the visitor survey is around 110 million yen, with an economic ripple effect of 190 million yen.

Furthermore, research conducted by professors from the Professional College of Arts and Tourism, a collaborating institution, has been presented on the linguistic and touristic aspects of the Toyooka Theater Festival.

3.3. Key factors

The Toyooka Theater Festival, debuting in 2020, has witnessed annual increases in attendees, participating artists and covered areas. In 2023, it achieved unprecedented attendance and economic impact, showcasing performances that leverage cultural resources from the natural environment, including Noson Kabuki (farmers' Kabuki) stages and Toyooka City's scenic landscapes. These successful initiatives have contributed to the region's achievement of a longstanding goal: the establishment of the "Professional College of Arts and Tourism," the first four-year university in the area. Since its inception in 2021, the college has maintained a high application rate, symbolizing the culmination of efforts to promote arts and culture in the region.



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3.4. Continuity

“Creating Depth-infused city community development through performing arts” is positioned as one of the policies in the “Second Term Comprehensive Strategy for regional revitalization projects in Toyooka City”, and efforts will continue to be made in this regard.

In addition to this initiative, financial support is received from the national government in the form of the Local Revitalization Promotion Grant. Furthermore, the “Toyooka Theater Festival” receives subsidies related to cultural tourism from the Agency for Cultural Affairs.

In order to replicate the project in other local governments, it is important to undertake initiatives that leverage the region’s unique resources.

THE FESTIVAL OFFERS INTERSHIPS TO STUDENTS FROM THE LOCAL PROFESSIONAL COLLEGE OF ARTS AND TOURISM, AND PROVIDES SPACES TO MEET AND EXCHANGE, SUCH AS THE MEETING POT.

4. More information

Toyooka was a candidate for the sixth UCLG – Mexico City – Culture 21 International Award (November 2023 – March 2024). The jury for the award drew up its final report in June 2024, and requested that the Committee on Culture promote this project as one of the good practices to be implemented through Agenda 21 for culture.

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