

CITIZENS' ACTIVITIES PERTAINING TO THE PURIFICATION
AND RENATURALIZATION OF LAKE SUWA

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Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

I specialize in American and European languages, literatures, and cultures at university, but today I will speak as a citizen of Suwa belonging to an organization called the Suwa Environment and Town-Planning Discussion Group.

There are several different groups of citizens small and large in this area that are concerned with the lake environment problems, as I will tell you later. But my presentation will concentrate on the activities of our group mainly because I know it very well. In addition, ours is the most recently established, and perhaps the most comprehensive in its kind, although I am afraid I may sound a little bit boastful. My paper will discuss such topics as the social background, the basic principles, guidelines, activities, and possible future impact on the community of our organization.

The large-scale projects for the purification of Lake Suwa and the flood control by embankment have long been carried out mainly by Nagano Prefecture. Among the typical projects they have

executed so far are the construction of the Lake Suwa watershed sewage system and the concrete embankments of the rivers and the lake. It goes without saying that six local administrations in the Larger Suwa District tried in their own ways to improve the lake environment by, for example, constructing the community sewage systems. However, it is quite obvious and natural under the Japanese political system that the prefecture has been taking the largest responsibility for the purification and water control of the rivers and the lake.

On the other hand, the people living around the lake have been enjoying the beautiful sight of the lake, as well as gaining economic profits from it by way of fishing and tourism for quite a long time. It is very natural, therefore, that a considerable number of people have been worried about the water pollution and the deterioration of the shores, trying to do something useful to improve the lake environment within their abilities. There have been the consumers' organizations, for instance, which try to banish synthetic detergent; there were the environmentalists' groups which objected to the concrete banks and tried to protect the original ecosystem on the waterfront; there have been the groups of JC and school children which have contributed a great deal to clean the shores by taking away rubbish and empty cans.

But it is also true that most residents in this area have been the so-called silent majority who have little chance or will to play the important part in the improvement of the lake environment.

Now let me look back upon the progress of the lake purification projects here very briefly. The serious pollution started in early 1960's and it

was rapidly aggravated because of the increase of the population and industrial activities as well as the modernization of life style in the area. In the middle 60's the prefecture made the first comprehensive investigation of the water pollution of the lake, and in 1966, they decided to construct the Lake Suwa watershed sewage system on the basis of the previous investigation. In 1972, more than 10 years since the beginning of the obvious water pollution, the construction of the sewage system was approved by the central government as an urban planning project. On the first of October 1979, part of the sewage system came into use, but the completion of the system, which was scheduled in 1990, will be postponed until 1995, far behind the original schedule. Therefore, we have to wait still five more years before the completion of the system. But at the same time there is indeed evidence of the gradual improvement of the lake water since the partial use of the system; for example, according to a prefectural investigation, the COD in 1986 was 8.1 ppm, while in 1989 it came down to 5.8 ppm, which is, however, still 1 point higher than the temporary target value in the Japanese Lake Law.

No matter what the figures tell, we are not satisfied with the progress of the lake water purification. In the first place, there has been no remarkable improvement in the past 25 years or so as regards the awful sight of the lake covered with the green microcystis, the bad smell caused by the same plankton, and the deplorable view of the shore caused by the rubbish and empty cans. In addition to these, we have a problem of the Yusurika or chironomus. When we are faced with these realities, we sometimes become very pessimistic about the future of the lake.

In the second place, the speed of the improvement of the lake water is too slow to meet the expectation of most citizens, even though there is a hopeful sign as far as the data is concerned. If the starting point of the purification activities can be set in 1966, when the first comprehensive investigation was done, we have had to wait for 25 long years in vain. So many years and so little achievement!

By the way, please permit me to talk a little bit about myself. I was born and bred here in Suwa and have spent most of my life in this town. People of my generation could swim in the lake until we were junior high school students. It is the dream of many people here to swim in the lake again. But we are beginning to fear now that if we cannot accelerate the rate of improvement of the lake environment more drastically, we may not be able to swim there before we say good-bye to this world.

Apart from my personal matter, a small group of Shinshu Univ. teachers, Dr. Okino, Dr. Watanabe of the Fiber Dept. and I, recently made a trip to Germany to inspect several lakes in Bavaria such as Chiemsee, Starnberger See, Tegernsee, and the like. We noticed there that it took them about four years to make the necessary investigations and thorough planning for purification, and about six years to complete the whole sewage systems and waste water purification plants, and that after the construction of those facilities and the renaturalization processes of the shores they attained a high level of the water purification so quickly that people can swim in all of these lakes now. In addition, we are impressed by the fact that they bore much less expense to do that than in Suwa.

Of course it is not right to make a simplistic

comparison, because there are a lot of differences in the quality of the water, the shapes of the lakes, the populations and the ways of living around the lakes between the two countries. Still, we cannot help feeling that there is something wrong about our way of doing the whole job, because it is too slow and too ineffective. And more and more people in this district are now beginning to feel that we should do something more actively to promote the purification of the lake, at least we have to give a push to the local governments and make proposals of our own, instead of merely waiting for the result of their projects. Here is the starting point of our citizens' movements.

The Suwa Environment and Town-Planning Discussion Group (SETDG) was established on the 13th of October 1989. It was a kind of byproduct of the Japanese-German Environment and Town-Planning Seminar which was held in Suwa City in May last year. This seminar was largely planned, financed and executed by the citizens themselves in this district under the sponsorship of Goethe Institute Tokyo and Suwa City. We invited two prominent professors (specialists in water technology and in urban design) from Germany, and held a series of discussions about lake and waterfront problems, resort development and town planning problems for four days, and on the fifth day we had open lectures by the two professors. In the beginning, we organized the executive committee to carry out the seminar; then we divided the members of the committee into six small groups as such: 1. Lake Suwa and its waterfront, 2. resort development, 3. road and traffic systems, 4. shopping districts, 5. industrial districts, 6. residential districts,

historic districts and parks. About 200 citizens of Larger Suwa participated in this event as members of the committee. Obviously, there has never been such a self-initiated, self-reliant citizens' activity concerned with such comprehensive community problems in the history of this area if you don't mind my little boasting again. The success of the seminar gave us greater confidence as well as knowledge and perspective about the environmental and town-planning problems we face in our home country. Most of the members wanted to maintain the organization even after the seminar, so we formed a new citizens' group which will tackle the same problems as we discussed in the seminar. This is how the Suwa Environment and Town-Planning Discussion Group came into being.

The basic principle of our Discussion Group can be summarized in the catch phrase "From economy to ecology." We would like to create a town where the natural environment is well-preserved and human life itself, not merely economic efficiency or benefit, is more respected. In such a society, we will pay more tender attention to older people, children and handicapped persons as well as the natural environment around us because that kind of community is more comfortable to live in for most human beings.

Secondly, we set up the five basic guidelines of our organization: 1. We are to promote our volunteer activities positively upon the recognition that the central element of the communities are their citizens. 2. We are a group of the citizens, by the citizens, for the citizens, having no connection with particular political parties, ideologies or benefit

organisations. 3. any citizens who agree to our basic principles and guidelines can join the group as a member with equal rights and responsibilities. 4. We will take part in the local decision making process as much as possible and cooperate with administrations through studying our problems, making proposals and taking necessary actions. 5. Although there may exist some disparities or confrontations in opinions among the members, we will always try to reach agreement patiently by respecting each other's opinions and cherishing our comradeship toward others.

We have about 140 members now. The financial basis of our organization is the annual members' fee, which is 3000 yen per individual. The most important decisions are to be made at the general meeting, below which there is the directors' meeting. Our president is Mr. Masao Fujiwara, who is present here and will answer any questions about our activities later if you have any, and we have 4 vice presidents. Below the directorate there are three different sections, that is the Executive Office, the Expert Section and the Planning and Research Section. The most important section is the second one, the Expert Section, which consists of the six different sub-groups which I mentioned above; each of the groups has its own leader and sub-leader. In the second general meeting held in February this year, we decided on what kind of activities we have to engage ourselves in during this year. One of the major activities is that each expert section group should study its own problems, and sum up the proposals to be submitted to the local governments as well as to the fellow citizens before the general meeting that was held in July, when those proposals would be propounded by each

group and discussed by the members. After the meeting, the Planning and Research Section would arrange and sum up those proposals, which would be finally discussed by the leaders and directors again before they are submitted to the people concerned. We have actually finished almost all the procedures of these activities except the last two, that is the final discussion and the submission of these to the people concerned. Beside these activities, we held what we call our lake-watching picnic in May, and from June to July some of the members went to Germany to do some researches and inspections at the rivers and lakes in the Ruhr area and the Bavarian area.

There are about ten important proposals as regards the environment and town-planning. Although the final decision will be made on the 12th of September, I will show you the first two proposals which are directly related to today's theme, lake environment problems.

1. We will propose to Nagano Prefecture as well as to the Larger Suwa local governments that they should make it one of the central policies to carry out the thorough purification project on the basis of the strict yearly programs so that we will be able to swim in the lake at the latest in the year 1998, when the Winter Olympic Games is expected to be held in Nagano Prefecture. We will especially emphasize that they should try seriously to raise the sewage connection rate (which is now nearly 60%) up to 100% by that time and to complete the advanced treatment system to remove nitrogen and phosphorus as soon as possible.

2. We will propose that they should work out the technology of the embankment most suitable for the rivers, irrigation channels and the lake itself with the close cooperation of experts in

different fields, and that they should gradually take away the concrete banks to restore the more natural shores. It will be a good idea to form sandy beaches and nature preservation areas in some parts of the shores. We will also propose to start an informal experts' committee to discuss more fully the complicated problems of the renaturalization of the waterfront.

Finally I would like to emphasize once again that we have waited for the purification of the lake more than 25 years in vain. It is entirely impossible, we believe, to enjoy a high standard of living, much less a high quality of life, however rich you may be, if you live on a lake or rivers whose water is polluted and stinks a lot. Nobody could make an excuse in our country that we are too short of money and technology to improve such a condition. What is questioned here is, however, not merely a matter of money or technology but a matter of the decency and dignity of man. Thank you very much for your kind attention.