



Mega Sporting Events and Regional Revitalization — Host Town Initiatives and Challenges

The Host Town Initiative of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games uses interaction with participant countries during pre-games training camps for regional revitalization. This article looks back at the experience of the 2002 FIFA World Cup, introduces projects that look past 2020, and investigates what conditions enable these projects to produce results.

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1. Introduction

Compared to other mega sporting events that have taken place in Japan, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games (Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics) have one main distinctive feature: an initiative to use the games in regional revitalization around Japan. At present, the most significant project is the Host Town Initiative, which is led by the Cabinet Secretariat's Headquarters for the Promotion of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games.¹

First, this article will explain the Host Town Initiative. After that, it will look back at the experiences of regions that hosted training camps for various national teams taking part in the 2002 FIFA World Cup held in Japan and South Korea, and how that influenced regional revitalization. This is because the core of the Host Town Initiative is interaction with participant countries and regions through the holding of pre-games training camps. Lastly, it will refer to notable examples from the Host Town Initiative and consider the initiatives and challenges involved in taking advantage of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics for regional revitalization.



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2. The Host Town Initiative

After the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics was decided in September 2013, the construction and renovation of Tokyo sports facilities to serve as venues for the games moved ahead. Athletes from

¹ This article discusses regional revitalization related to the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games that could be created by municipalities across Japan via typical initiatives such as offering to host training camps for participant countries and regions. For that reason, I interpret regional revitalization broadly to include: the creation and development of initiatives with economic effects (sports events and sports organizations); increase in the number of people involved in interaction (such as more domestic and international tourists); more people becoming involved; and promoting efforts to realize a coexistent society through understanding of parasports.

205 countries and regions will take part in the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. The Olympics will include 33 sports and 339 events, while 11,090 athletes will take part. The Paralympics will feature 22 sports, 539 events and 4,400 athletes. Although the games will center on Tokyo, they would be impossible without locations all over Japan accepting pre-games training camps. Also, considering the large numbers of tourists due to visit from overseas, the games are an excellent opportunity for regional revitalization in different places.

In August 2014, the Japanese government announced the Host Town Concept (at the time named the “Host City/Town Concept”), declaring that they would invite and support regional authorities to act as hosts from participant countries and regions. The government was looking to the “one school one country” initiative from the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics (when elementary and middle schools each studied and supported a particular country or region), and also the effects of the training camps for the 2002 FIFA World Cup, which are covered later in this article. The aim was to create a situation where it would be easy for interested municipalities to serve as hosts for participant countries and regions, and also to spread the effects of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics to regions across Japan.

At the end of September 2015, financial support measures were announced, such as covering half the costs for exchange initiatives with participant countries and regions through a special local grant tax. In January 2016, during the first registration of host towns, 44 projects from 25 prefectures were decided. Registration continued regularly, and at the end of October 2019 the 16th registration concluded with 392 registrations, 464 municipalities, and 156 countries and regions.

The initiative, which is promoted by the Cabinet Secretariat Olympics and Paralympics HQ, includes three main types of interaction: (1) pre and post games interaction with games participants; (2) exchange with people from participant countries; (3) interaction between Japanese people and Olympians/Paralympians. Although many municipalities are interested in the pre-games training camps, accepting a camp is not compulsory and focusing on interaction after the games is also recommended.

In order to increase the number of host town municipalities, the Cabinet Secretariat Olympics and Paralympics HQ established two frameworks for efforts within the Host Town Initiative. The first was the September 2017 “Arigato” Host Towns for Supporting Reconstruction. This promotes interaction between three prefectures hit by the 2011 disasters (Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima) and overseas countries and regions that supported them after those disasters. For cities, towns and villages that were unable to hold pre-games training camps due to lack of money or facilities, by the end of October 2019, 27 projects had been registered that involved other kinds of interaction (such as visits by athletes after the games).

The second was the November 2011 Host Towns of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society, which promotes efforts to focus on the realization of a coexistent society in connection with the Paralympics. In welcoming the Paralympians, efforts to realize a coexistent society across Japan will be accelerated and carried past 2020. In May 2019, the Leading Coexistent Society Host Towns were decided when the Cabinet Secretariat Olympics and Paralympics HQ recognized a number of municipalities that were especially progressive and showed particular leadership through efforts to implement universal

design community development and barrier free attitudes. The Secretariat made use of initiatives by relevant ministries and involved organizations to give focused support.

If applications for pre-games training camps continue, it is likely registrations will increase in number. Many athletes from participant countries and regions will visit the Host Town municipalities, contributing greatly to a lively games as the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics take place. If interaction with citizens takes place there will also be an increase in educational effect.

On the other hand, for now it's hard to see how becoming a host town will actually affect regional revitalization efforts in such areas. While there are municipalities actively implementing initiatives with an awareness of their relationship to the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, there are also registered host towns where it is difficult to see initiatives that make use of the decision to hold pre-games training camps. So, how can the promotion of the Host Town Initiative be tied to regional revitalization in such municipalities? Next, this article will look back at the experience of the 2002 World Cup.

3. The 2002 World Cup and regional revitalization

When implementing the Host Town Initiative, the Cabinet Secretariat Olympics and Paralympics HQ referred to examples of regional revitalization from when pre-competition training camps were held for teams participating in the 2002 World Cup. An outline of those follows.²

For the 2002 World Cup, ten Japanese cities became venues, and a number of splendid soccer fields were constructed. Alongside the actual venues, there were also regions that attracted attention during the World Cup. Those were the regions that hosted training camps for the national teams.

After the World Cup qualifiers, the finals took place. About half of the participating countries had group matches in Japan. The competition to hold training camps created and increased enthusiasm for the event. The groupings were decided the previous year (December 2001); and although there were some regions unable to attract training camps because teams didn't have group matches in Japan (and despite the regions expending considerable energy), there were also cases where training camps were decided without great effort, because the regions managed to win the hearts of the diplomats and team captains that chose the training camp locations. In the end, 23 regions (25 municipalities) were chosen as locations for training camps. Although most of these had not decided in advance on measures to use the training camp hosting for regional revitalization, the result was that several regional revitalization "patterns" emerged. In this article they are divided into three kinds and introduced below.

One is when hosting a training camp is linked to measures already in place. The village of Nakatsue (now Hita City) in Oita Prefecture suddenly became well known when it hosted a training camp for the Cameroon team. The Taio Sports Centre was equipped in an effort to become a Kyushu

² Regarding the influence on regional revitalization of training camps before the 2002 FIFA World Cup held in Japan and South Korea, see the following paper. "The process of creating a "soft legacy" in locations with training camps for the 2002 FIFA World Cup in Japan and South Korea — analyzing the examples of four locations that created a "soft legacy". Matsuhashi Takashi, Regional Revitalization Research, Volume 8, March 2017.

equivalent to Sugadaira (a well-known sports center in Nagano Prefecture); and its usage rate greatly increased because of the Cameroon training camp. The Taio Sports Centre was built on flat land between mountains created from rubble from the Taio gold mine (known as Toyoichi pre-WWII). It was the result of an important policy measure: the village using a local resource for regional revitalization; i.e. the “flat land on top of the mountain” bequeathed by the gold mines.

The town of Ozu in Kumamoto Prefecture successfully bid to hold youth soccer matches (high school) alongside the 1999 National Sports Festival of Japan, the second to be held in Kumamoto, and built four natural grass soccer pitches. While the town was exploring how to make use of the facilities, it successfully attracted a training camp for the Belgium team. (Although, in the end, a pitch within Kumamoto City was used, there was a lot of interaction during the training camp, and links between the people of Ozu and the Belgian players continued past 2002.) The soccer seeds that the town planted during the National Sports Festival blossomed through attracting the training camp and Ozu developed into a soccer town.

The second pattern was when training camps led to the creation of clubs that tapped the energy of citizens and local companies, serving as a promotional tool for the area. The city of Matsumoto in Nagano Prefecture hosted the training camp for the Paraguay team (at the time, the team captain was José Luis Chilavert, a goalkeeper who was famous for his free kicks). But in order to support the training camp application, and to enable partnership with a J-League club, volunteers from the Matsumoto Junior Chamber International and the Matsumoto Chamber of Commerce worked together to create a professional soccer club in the prefecture. The Matsumoto Yamaga F.C. team was created on the back of the network built via this enthusiasm. In 2012 it joined the J-League and the 2015 season saw it promoted to the top J1 League. Without a doubt, the creation of this J-League club was a legacy of holding the training camp.

The city of Mimasaka in Okayama Prefecture hosted a training camp for the Slovenia team at the local Yunogo Onsen and at a rugby/soccer ground in Okayama Prefecture. As part of the bidding process to host the training camp, Mimasaka (then a town), Okayama Prefecture, and the Japan Football Association, cooperated to work on community building through soccer, even after the training camp, and the women’s soccer club Okayama Yunogo Belle was created. The players practiced and took part in games while working at local companies and onsen facilities; and when the 2011 FIFA Women’s World Cup was held in Germany, two of the club’s players were part of the Japan team that won the competition.

The third pattern was when local sports organizations made the training camps an opportunity for growth. In the city of Izumo, Shimane Prefecture, an NPO named Izumo Sports Promotion 21 was set up in 1999 to promote sports in the city: a sports facilities management project and the Sasakawa Sports Foundation’s “Challenge Day” event. In 2002, this became the office of the Izumo Camp Support Club, which supported the Ireland team, and the number of registered supporters grew to over 3,000. This organization was an important step for the promotion of sports in the region.

The city of Tokamachi in Niigata Prefecture hosted a training camp for the Croatia team. Many volunteers supported the camp, and the network that was formed at that time was the base for the

Neige Sports Club (a general regional sports club created later) and the Tokamachi Sports Commission.

So, what lessons from efforts to link the Host Town Initiative to regional revitalization can we learn from the 2002 World Cup? Let's think about that via the three patterns mentioned above.

The first pattern is when activities are used as a chance to further existing measures. The Olympics and Paralympics are events that include various elements: not only the promotion of sports, but also understanding and adaptation to international society and a coexistent society, economic exchange, tourism, food culture, the promotion of traditional culture, and more. It is important to find elements that suit policy for each region and use the events as an opportunity to further them. In this article, I include the examples of Misawa City in Aomori Prefecture and Osaki Town in Kagoshima Prefecture. Misawa, as part of its policy to realize a coexistent society, won a bid to host a training camp for the Canada wheelchair rugby team. Osaki is using becoming a host town to increase the usage rate of the Japan Athlete Training Center Osumi (a specialist track and field training facility built in the town) and to promote sports tourism.

The second is when, during the run up to the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, those undertaking activities as part of the Host Town Initiative are supported within citizen and private sector organizations. Although the Host Town Initiative is led by the government, after 2020 official involvement is likely to relatively decrease. In order to make activities sustainable, it will be important to support and increase the number of involved people from outside government. In this article, I include the example of Yamanako in Yamanashi Prefecture. The village of Yamanako will host both the cycling road race and also a pre-games training camp from the French cycling team as a host town. In an attempt to use this to become a well-known location for cycling, the Yamanako Cycling Team was created, and various initiatives involving local residents are taking place.

The third is when, during the run up to the Olympics and Paralympics, preparations are made for "receivers" (related projects or organizations) of measures and activities to tap the energy of citizens and companies around the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, and connect that to the future. At present, it is difficult to discern which Host Town Initiatives fit which of these patterns. As with the examples of regions that linked the hosting of 2002 World Cup training camps to regional revitalization, it is vital to lay the groundwork before camps take place. Even in the case of municipalities that haven't yet started actual projects, it is important for them to move ahead with preparations focused on the period after the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics.

4. Initiatives across Japan that look past 2020

As we consider the experience of the 2002 World Cup, here are three examples of host towns with initiatives that look past 2020.

4.-1 Misawa City, Aomori Prefecture: hosting Paralympians to promote a coexistent society

Misawa in Aomori Prefecture has some of the most active projects among the Host Towns of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society. The city is located in the east of Aomori Prefecture toward the Pacific Ocean, and is known for having a US military base.

The Host Town of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society initiative is part of the Paralympic-linked movement, and is said to have a different effect on Japanese society than events featuring able-bodied athletes, such as the Olympics and Rugby World Cup. The important message of parasports is the idea of customizing sports for that time, that situation, and the participants at that time; something that synchronizes with the concept of a coexistent society.³ It also leads to regional renaissance and community building. It is effective precisely because it takes into account each region's rules and ways of getting things done.

The city of Misawa hosted a pre-games training camp for the wheelchair rugby team from Canada. It started to consider activities in 2014, the year after the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics were decided. Facing the local effects of a low birthrate and aging society, and as it reviewed its overall planning that aimed to create a city when everyone could live happily, Misawa explored how it could be involved with the Tokyo games. When the city held an event for people to experience parasports as part of its activities related to the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, it encountered the parasport concept, which is designed to enable a diverse range of individuals to take part. After this experience of the common ground between the city's aim of realizing a coexistent society and the Paralympian vision, it applied to host a pre-games training camp for one of the Paralympic national teams to contribute to local community building. Three training camps for the Canada wheelchair rugby team have already taken place in Misawa. Through interaction with athletes, there were positive effects — especially in city elementary and middle schools — and work has started on making public facilities barrier free. Misawa was registered as a leading Host Town of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society in May 2019, creating an environment where it was much easier to work on “universal design community building” and “projects to create barrier free attitudes.” Via the Canada team training camp, young children became active without fear of disability, high school students experienced worthwhile activities in the inspirational international exchange arena, and volunteers became active as they found connections with community initiatives.

On the other hand, city officials have realized that citizens' barrier free projects and efforts to make facilities barrier free have, so far, only been linked to the training camps, and that it would be hard to say they have permeated the city as a whole. The 2020 pre-games training camps and the games themselves will be a huge opportunity to create a ripple effect among large numbers of citizens, so preparation for that is vital.

4.-2 Osaki Town, Kagoshima Prefecture: Making use of a former school site and hosting the Taiwan team

The town of Osaki is located in Eastern Kagoshima Prefecture on the Osumi Peninsula. Known as Japan's top recycling town, it won the Deputy-Chiefs' Award (from the Chief Cabinet Secretary) at the 2019 Japan SDGs Awards. It also has a thriving eel farming industry. Osaki is working on a project

³ In the case of Olympic sports, athletes make their strategy and tactics to adapt to rules and equipment. In parasports, however take part in sport after the rules and equipment have been customized according to the limitations of physical ability. Although there is no difference to the Olympics in the sense that events take place as competition for gold medals, the way that the rules and equipment is determined is different to in Olympic events.

to make the town a well-known location for track and field. The key facility for this project is the Japan Athlete Training Center Osumi (JATC Osumi), a Kagoshima Prefecture specialist training facility for track and field that started operation in April 2019. It is fully equipped with fully heated and air-conditioned 150-meter straight and 400-meter circular tracks, a throwing practice field, training machines, and other facilities. With a large amount of equipment needed for track and field, it provides one of Japan's best training environments.

As it went ahead with the construction of JATC Osumi, Osaki became the host town for athletics teams from two nations: Taiwan and Trinidad and Tobago. It was registered as a host town for Taiwan in December 2017 and as a host town for Trinidad and Tobago in April 2019. Both countries looked at using JATC Osumi for pre-games training camps, and in early 2019 Osaki was registered as a host town for Trinidad and Tobago and a training camp was arranged. In May 2019, the Trinidad and Tobago team visited Osaki for five days to hold a training camp for the IAAF World Relays Yokohama 2019, at which they'd win the men's 400 m relay event. In September the Taiwan track and field team visited for a 15-day strengthening camp.

The construction of JATC Osumi wasn't decided based on the timing of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, but had been under consideration for some time. The principal aim in constructing the facility was regional revitalization through hosting residential training camps for domestic and overseas track and field teams, while making use of the warm winter climate of the Osumi Peninsular and the fully air-conditioned indoor practice space. JATC Osumi was built on the former site of a prefectural high school and accommodation facilities were built on the adjoining former site of a municipal middle school. What's more, to target the long-distance team residential training camp market too, the town looked to its Kuninomatsubara area, creating an all-grass cross-country course within Matsubara, with the result that many long-distance teams visited to hold winter training camps. In total, 18,507 people used JATC Osumi between April and August 2019. Track and field representatives in Taiwan and South Korea (who could take flights to Kagoshima airport) were included as target clients for residential training camps; and in the case of the Taiwan track and field training camp, it seems that the strong appeal of the facilities was an important factor. Taiwan also imports eel fry, so developing interaction was necessary from the perspective of bolstering economic activities too.

At present, the town of Osaki handles host town related residential training camps, maintaining close contact with JATC Osumi, the accommodation facility and practice area that is located in the town. As overseas teams and top domestic teams visited the town, an around thirty-strong team of volunteers from inside and outside the town (known as the Osumi Athlete Support Team) was created to support residential training camps. These members include leaders of the project to make Osaki a well-known location for track and field. The volunteers do things such as support the camp and clean running routes, and they also run with the athletes themselves. An intricate support network is now developing for the tasks that the authorities and various facilities would not be able to handle themselves.

4.-3 Yamanako Village, Yamanashi Prefecture: community building based on being an event venue

The village of Yamanako in Yamanashi Prefecture is a host town for the French team, the location for a pre-games training camp for the French cycling team, and also an event venue. The cycling road race will start at the Musashino Forest Park (Fuchu City, Tokyo), head west to make two circuits of the road that circles Lake Yamanako, before finishing at Fuji International Speedway.

During the process of attracting the pre-games training camp for the French cycling team, the former professional cyclist Tom Bossis worked as an international exchange staff member for Yamanako village. He is 26 years old and came to Japan to spend one year as a foreign student at Chuo University. Following this, with an eye on becoming a host town for the French cycling team and becoming the location for the Olympic course, Bossis and other volunteers worked with village authorities to start work on creating a well-known location for cycling.

The Yamanako Cycling Team (a general incorporated association) was created in February 2019. Within this, the Yamanako Cyclisme Formation aimed to become a professional cycling team and the Yamanako Cycling Club was set up for anyone to take part. The Yamanako Cycling Base was prepared as a key facility and opened in the spring of 2019. From the first year of its founding, the Yamanako Cyclisme Formation has been active and taken part in various competitions. Although the cycling race facilities are not yet complete, preparation work is ongoing.

In November 2019, the Yamanako Cycling Classic race took place, featuring many amateur and professional cyclists. This was modeled on Japan's top cycling event, the Japan Cup Cycle Road Race, which takes place in the city of Uchinomiya. The Japan Cup was established in 1992 as a memorial race of the 1990 UCI Road World Championships, and has continued since. At the closing ceremony of the Cycling Classic, Bossis (who was working as the general manager of the event, having only just switched from being a competitor to being a staff member) stated an intent to develop the event, make it a legacy of the 2020 games, and boost the village as a well-known location for cycling. Looking towards 2020, the village is now likely to augment its facilities and various events. As part of that, it will be important to gain the cooperation of the many existing accommodation and food and drink businesses, and the village will need to build up expertise.

5. How to link to post-2020

In this article, by looking at examples of how holding pre-games training camps for teams participating in the 2002 World Cup linked to regional revitalization, I considered the conditions for producing results as a host town for the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. I looked at three examples of municipalities that appear to have met those conditions and introduced their activities up to the present day. Having compared three examples, I believe it is the activities of Misawa City that provides the most useful reference for many municipalities. I am sure that the “coexistent society” is an important term for many of them too. The starting point for Misawa was finding a connection between a key facility and sports events; and this has supported their activities until today. For the town of Osaki, the premise behind its host town initiative was to use its warm climate and cutting-

edge sports facilities as a tool to attract sports residential training camps. Meanwhile, the village of Yamanako used work by unusual individuals and by volunteers to create their initiative from “zero to one.”

What all three examples seem to have in common is consistency with existing measures and ongoing cooperation with, and development of, private sector projects. The mainstay of existing measures was for Misawa, the realization of a coexistent society; for Osaki, the promotion of sports tourism; and, for Yamanako, the creation of tourism contents. Just like these, there are other examples of using involvement in Host Town Initiatives to revitalize older measures.

In the three examples, municipalities cooperated with private organizations; and for Misawa that included large companies as sponsors and the recently formed Misawa Athletics Association (a general incorporated association). On Misawa becoming a host town, the Misawa Athletics Association expanded its activities and tapped its resources to draw parasports. In Osaki, there is a support team made up of designated managers from JATC Osumi, accommodation facilities that put up athletes, and private volunteers. In Yamanako, the Yamanako Cycling Team was established and worked closely with the village on various initiatives. Among the examples of linkage between training camps for the 2002 World Cup and regional revitalization, private companies have played an important role in making activities happen. This is an important hint to how to link the Host Town Initiative to regional revitalization.

Although there are some regions with various initiatives, there are also many municipalities that have only vague plans, despite the decision for them to host pre-games training camps. These are cases when the municipalities successfully register as host towns, sign agreements and memorandums with partner countries on hosting the camps, then soon after the pre-games training camps are decided, activities halt. From the perspective of linking the camps to regional revitalization, it seems that they are not taking necessary action to deal with the various problems facing them, but we should consider that there is still time. Looking back at examples from the 2002 World Cup, real work on “legacy” linked to regional revitalization only started from the beginning of 2002 (the World Cup was held from May 31, two months earlier than the Olympics). There are also some cases where the excitement that arose between the pre-games training camps and the actual World Cup led to the activities that followed. It may be that unseen preparations are taking place even in regions where the Host Town Initiative is not being proactively implemented. By purposefully implementing activities in 2020, before and after the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics, it should be perfectly possible to create activities that link to regional revitalization.

One attractive feature of sports-based activities is that it is easy to make world class connections. Using that feature well creates empathy and cooperation from many people; and makes it possible to coordinate action. The Host Town Initiative is an unparalleled opportunity for top athletes from around the world to visit different parts of Japan and make connections. Regions that have registered as host towns should make good use of this opportunity, according to the particular issues they face.

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