

Fostering Transformative Agency through the Commoning of Knowledge and Skills: Creative Hobby Activities of Elderly Women Engaged in “Okan Art”

KAORI YAMASHITA

Konan Women’s University

kyamashita@konan-wu.ac.jp

***Abstract:** This study investigates the development of transformative agency through the commoning of knowledge and skills in the creative hobby activities of elderly women who engage in “Okan Art,” a form of simple, humorous handcraft that originated in postwar Japan. While previous lifelong learning activities have often focused on individual acquisition of knowledge and skills, this research shifts attention to the collaborative and generative process of sharing and reusing knowledge and skills within a community context.*

Based on action research conducted from 2009 to 2024, the study explores how Okan Art artists form individual and collective transformative agency through exhibitions, workshops, and cross-group collaborations. Drawing on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), especially the Fourth Generation framework, and Transformative Agency by Double Stimulation (TADS), the research analyses how contradictions within creative practices and social interaction serve as first stimuli, and how new perspectives or collaborative actions function as second stimuli.

Findings suggest that through the commoning of knowledge and skills, elderly women not only created handicraft works but also actively participated in place-making inclusive spaces for intergenerational exchange. Over time, they came to recognise their own craft styles as valuable regardless of skill level and assumed roles in transmitting the joy and freedom of making to others. This study concludes that Okan Art, often overlooked due to its informal and self-taught nature, holds potential for reimagining lifelong education in line with Fourth Generation Activity Theory. Future directions include the introduction of formative interventions such as Change Laboratory sessions to further examine transformative learning processes.

Keywords: *Transformative Agency/Commoning/Lifelong Learning/Okan Art/Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)/Transformative Agency by Double Stimulation (TADS)/Change Laboratory/Fourth Generation Activity Theory/Elderly Women/Handicrafts/Hobby Activities*

1. Background and Purpose

Japan is currently facing a rapid decline in population alongside an increasingly aging society. In this context, there is a growing need to harness the potential of every individual as a diverse agent in sustaining and developing society. Elderly people, in particular, possess a wealth of knowledge and skills cultivated over the course of their lives, and sharing this with younger generations and local communities is critically important for building a sustainable society. While lifelong learning initiatives in Japan have tended to emphasise the acquisition of knowledge and skills, it is now essential to go beyond individual accumulation and instead promote practices of sharing—commoning—that enable the elderly to become active contributors to society.

One such practice is “Okan Art,” a form of whimsical, handmade crafts using familiar materials, which gained popularity in Japan in the late 1960s and continues to be created mainly by women in their 60s to 80s. Across the country, in community centres and elderly care facilities, women artists gather to enjoy making crafts together and teach each other how to create them. These collective spaces play an important role in enhancing the participants’ motivation and encouraging the continuity of their creative engagement. However, such activities often remain within the boundaries of personal or friendship-based networks and rarely develop into more socially visible practices. For example, few groups move towards independently organising and hosting exhibitions, and thus the practice has not yet become fully established as a space for self-expression and public engagement by the elderly.

In 2007, the author began identifying and engaging with creators of Okan Art and discovered that many women in their 60s to 80s were enthusiastically involved in these creative activities. This led to the insight that these creative sites could potentially function as spaces for lifelong learning, where the elderly could actively organise and present their work. Since 2009, the author has collaborated with these women to host an annual “Okan Art Exhibition.” Over time, as they shared their knowledge and skills with each other, the artists became increasingly proactive in planning and organising the exhibitions themselves.

This study is an action research project that focuses on the practice of commoning knowledge and skills through the creative hobby activities of elderly women who make Okan Art. The aim is to clarify how transformative agency develops both individually and collectively within these practices. While the study did not initially adopt Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a theoretical framework, it became evident through the course of the practice

that CHAT offers a powerful lens for analysing the formation of transformative agency at both the individual and collective levels.

Accordingly, this study adopts a CHAT-informed perspective to examine how the commoning of knowledge and skills contributes to the development of transformative agency. Specifically, it seeks to identify the conditions under which transformative agency emerges in the process of commoning.

Clarifying the relationship between commoning and transformative agency offers new insight into how knowledge and skills can be reframed as commons through co-creative learning and practice, contributing to the advancement of lifelong learning that is open to society. This perspective resonates with Yamazumi's (2022) critique of the tendency in current educational discourse to reduce learning outcomes to exchange value. In contrast to recent trends in lifelong learning and reskilling, which often frame knowledge and skills as tools for career advancement or economic self-reliance, this study is grounded in Yamazumi's argument that recognising the use value of one's knowledge and skills enables human flourishing and transformative engagement with society. Therefore, this study positions the commoning of personal knowledge and skills as a key concept in envisioning lifelong learning from the perspective of the fourth generation of activity theory.

2. Review of Related Literature and Positioning of This Study

2.1 Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) originates from the work of the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, which is known as the first generation of activity theory. It was further developed by his successors, including Leontiev, forming the second generation, and has since evolved through theoretical contributions led by Engeström into the third and fourth generations.

The first generation of activity theory focused on the mediated nature of individual cognitive development. The second generation extended the unit of analysis from the individual to collective activity, enabling the analysis of shared practices. The third generation introduced the notion of interactions and networks between multiple activity systems as the new object of analysis. In parallel with this theoretical development, the Change Laboratory was developed as an interventionist methodology to transform activity through collaborative reflection and expansive learning.

In the fourth generation, CHAT has been applied to global-scale issues such as homelessness, educational inequality, and climate change. This has led to the emergence of Change Laboratory practices that connect local-level activities with institutional and policy frameworks at national and international levels. As a result, the theory now supports forms of collaboration and transformation that go beyond the boundaries of existing organisations and institutions, deepening the connection between theory and practice.

CHAT is characterised by a focus on contradictions inherent in activity. These

contradictions are seen as sources of change and development, where participants expand and transform the activity itself. In Engeström's theory of expansive learning (1987), human activity is conceptualised as a system composed of mutually mediating components—such as object, mediating artefacts, rules, division of labour, and community—represented in the activity system model. The ability of participants to reconfigure these elements in response to contradictions is conceptualised as transformative agency.

Furthermore, Transformative Agency by Double Stimulation (TADS), a concept proposed by Sannino (2015a, 2015b), is a significant theoretical development within the fourth generation of CHAT. TADS describes the process through which individuals or groups facing contradictions or challenges activate transformative agency by mobilising a first stimulus (the recognition of a problematic situation) and a second stimulus (a new mediating artefact or perspective to work through the conflict). This framework offers a detailed lens for understanding transformative agency as the capacity to reconfigure the components of an activity system.

2.2 Bridging Commoning and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

In this study, the concept of commoning is understood not as the commons in its static form but rather as a generative process through which the commons is collaboratively created and sustained. The theoretical foundation of commoning lies in the broader discourse on the commons, originally referring to shared land or resources. Early debates in commons theory include Hardin's (1968) *Tragedy of the Commons* and Ostrom's (1990) *Governing the Commons*. In response to such perspectives, Linebaugh (2008) proposed the concept of the commons as a verb, coining the term commoning to emphasise the active and social dimension of creating and sustaining shared resources.

Mori (2022), citing Bollier (2020), who states that “It is less a noun than a verb” and “the commons must be understood as a living social system of creative agents,” describes commoning as follows: “If we are to distinguish commons from commoning, then commons refers to something tangible or symbolically imagined, a nameable entity or framework; commoning, on the other hand, refers to the ongoing practice of those who seek to continuously generate the commons, along with the relational dynamics inherent in that process.” Mori further notes that “commoning is relational, generative, and requires continuous negotiation.”

Yamazumi (2021), in his exploration of education within the framework of the fourth generation of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, argues for the need to reconceptualise schools as commons—spaces of collaborative ownership that enable equitable and inclusive learning among children. Drawing on Linebaugh's (2008) concept of commoning, he suggests that social practices aimed at realising such educational forms can be understood as acts of commoning the school.

This study applies the concept of commoning to the context of lifelong learning through creative hobby activities within the framework of fourth-generation CHAT. It departs from conventional commons studies that focus on land or spatial resources, and instead centres on human resources—namely, the knowledge and skills held by individuals participating in the activity. A distinctive feature of this study is its focus on the process in which individuals common their personal knowledge and skills with others, and on analysing how this process fosters transformative agency both individually and collectively.

3. Methodology

This study is based on data collected from ongoing practices of the Okan Art initiative, which has been active since 2009. The data includes activity records and transcripts from semi-structured interviews conducted with participating artists. Since 2007, the author has been identifying women who create Okan Art and has carried out action research by collaboratively organising an annual exhibition dedicated to Okan Art (hereafter, “Okan Art Exhibition”) with the artists since 2009. From 2022 onwards, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the artists, and life graphs were created based on these interviews (Yamashita, 2024, pp. 162–183).

Within the framework of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 1987), transformative agency is defined as the capacity of subjects to modify the components of an activity system in response to contradictions. Based on this perspective, this study analyses the utterances of six artists obtained through interviews. Using the activity system model (Engeström, 1987), it focuses on changes in the components of the individual and collective activity systems observed during the process of commoning knowledge and skills. It then explores the factors that led to the emergence of transformative agency in these contexts.

4. Okan Art Practices and the Artists

4.1 History of the Okan Art Practices

In 2005, the author established the group called Association Crazy about Citamatiretro to explore and promote local resources in the southern areas of Hyogo and Nagata Wards in Kobe City, which had suffered devastating damage in the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (see Figure 1, Figure 2). This area is a typical downtown (traditional working-class district) in Kobe, where homes, family-run shops, and small factories coexist. The author visited individual shops, factories, and houses that had survived the disaster and identified the knowledge and skills held by their owners. From 2005 to 2011, monthly community tours (see Figure 3) were held to showcase these local resources and share the unique charm of the neighbourhood.

It was during these tours that the author encountered the handcrafted works

now referred to as Okan Art (Yamashita, 2020, pp. 24–45) (see Figure 4). The term Okan is Kansai dialect for “mother,” and Okan Art refers to handcrafted works created by mothers. Many of the handcrafts discovered during the tours were similar to those gifted to the author by elderly women in the neighbourhood. Most of the artists identified through these visits belonged to the generation of the author’s grandmothers rather than mothers. They created their works during spare moments in daily life, often in a wholehearted manner.

The works typically include items such as dressed-up Kewpie dolls, towel animals, and shell-decorated accessories—creations that use familiar, low-cost materials and can be completed in a short amount of time (see Figure 5). These types of crafts were popular in the second wave of post-war handcraft



FIGURE 1 KOBE City and TOYOOKA City



FIGURE 2 HYOGO and NAGATA Ward in KOBE City



FIGURE 3 Community Tours in HYOGO and NAGATA Wards



FIGURE 4 Okan Art Displayed in a Shops Visited during the Community Tour

culture in Japan, particularly between 1967 and 1986, when handcraft kits and books were widely sold. This movement was characterised as the “simple and easy handcraft” trend (Yamasaki, 2020, p. 295). The author began encountering many of these works during the tours—creations made and gifted to regular customers, friends, and neighbours (Yamashita, 2018).

From 2007, the author began identifying artists of Okan Art and, starting in 2009, began organising annual exhibitions under the title Okan Art Exhibition (see Figure 6), hosted by Association Crazy about Citamatiretro. As the exhibitions continued, the author (as organiser) encouraged the discovered artists to exhibit their work, and over time, a community of artists gradually formed. Initially, the artists did not know each other, but from 2018 onwards, they began attending meetings held a few months before the exhibition and became involved in its planning and operation. Through this collaboration, a group identity emerged.

Table 1 lists the participating artists involved in the Okan Art initiative. Of the artists who joined in 2009, three have since retired due to age or death. The current Okan Art Group consists of seven active artists and two staff members, including the author.

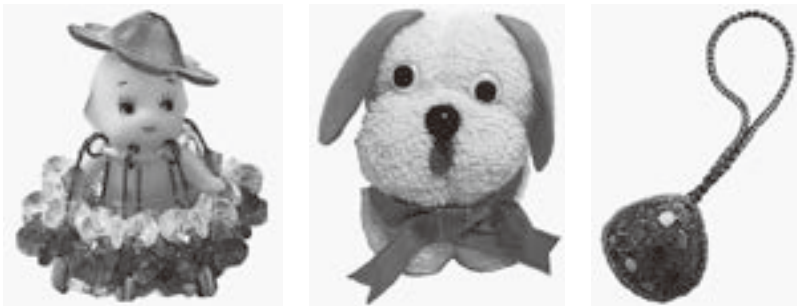


FIGURE 5 Handicrafts Referred to as Okan Art



FIGURE 6 Okan Art Exhibition (Left: Monthly Meeting, Middle: Exhibition installation Right: Okan Art Artists)

TABLE 1 List of Okan Art Artists

Artist	Age (As of 2024)	Type of Handicraft	Year of Participation	Age at Time of Joining	Reason for Joining
A	-	General Handicrafts, Art Flowers	2009-2020	77	Discovered by organiser
B	-	Knitting	2009-2014	70	Discovered by organiser
C	-	Knitting, Wood Carving, Oshie (Padded Pictures)	2010-2015	82	Encounter with A
1	84	Dressmaking, General Handicrafts	2011-present	71	Invitation from C
2	74	Knitting, Small Crafts	2014-present	64	Encounter with A
3	74	Knitting, Crafts	2014-present	64	Encounter with A
4	69	Dressmaking, Small Crafts, Illustration	2014-present	59	Invitation from B
5	80	Knitting, Small Crafts	2016-present	72	Invitation from 1
6	74	Knitting, Small Crafts	2024-present	74	Invitation from 2

4.2 Artists Creating Okan Art

4.2.1 Process of Participation in Okan Art Activities

Figure 7 illustrates the participation trajectories of nine artists in the Okan Art Exhibition. In the first exhibition held in 2009, Artist A and Artist B took part. Both were discovered by the author during the community resource discovery tours. Artist C met Artist A at the first exhibition and subsequently joined the second exhibition held the following year.

Artist 2, who visited the third exhibition, encountered Artist A and discovered that her childhood best friend was Artist A's daughter. This led her to invite her old friend, Artist 3, who began participating in the sixth exhibition. Artist 4 was a local resident living near the handicraft salon where Artist B had, following the closure of her bottled juice factory in 2007, been hosting weekly exhibitions, sales, and classes featuring handmade crafts. Invited by Artist B, Artist 4 joined from the sixth exhibition onward.

Artist 1 was invited by Artist B, who had been one of her customers at the handicraft shop where she worked, and began participating in the second exhibition. Artist 5, whose child was in the same school year as Artist 1's and who

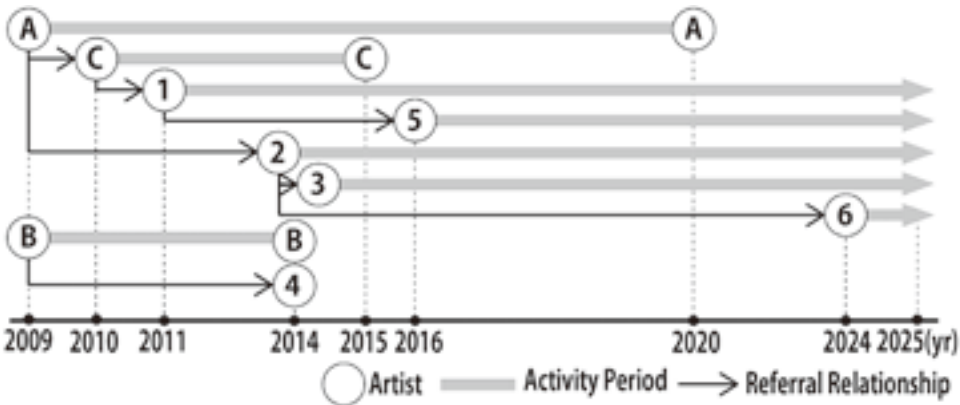


FIGURE 7 Artists'Participation Process in the Okan Art Exhibition

belonged to the same women’s association, was invited by Artist 1 and joined the eighth exhibition. Artist 6 was invited by Artist 2, her former high school classmate, and joined the sixteenth exhibition.

4.2.2 The Artists’ Lives and Creative Journeys

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between March 2022 and April 2025 with six artists, aged between 70 and 85 as of 2025, to explore their life histories and creative practices.

Artist 1: Life and Creative Journey

Artist 1 (born in 1940) began developing an interest in dressmaking in her early teens when she started mending her school uniform due to her mother’s deteriorating eyesight. At the age of 18, she began working for a company in Osaka while attending a dressmaking school nearby, completing the course within a year. After getting married, she took up home-based work to pursue her passion for sewing, eventually learning hand knitting and traditional Japanese sewing.

In her 40s, she began helping at a friend’s craft shop and started working there full-time at the age of 45. Through this experience, she developed a broad range of knowledge and skills related to handicrafts, from materials to crafting techniques. After retiring in 2008, she was invited by local women’s associations and craft groups to teach small handmade items.

As she recalls: *“There were workshops organised by manufacturers too. I used to go to those, take their courses, and it was almost like getting certified, you know? Once I got the hang of it, I could teach others a little.”* She began teaching the craft techniques she had acquired through these courses, preparing DIY kits that allowed anyone to complete a piece easily and enjoyably in community workshops.

Artist 2: Life and Creative Journey

Artist 2 (born in 1950) grew up watching her mother do piecework sewing and knitting at home. In high school, she joined the art club, where she focused on design, lettering, sketching, and oil painting. Although she aspired to enter an art university, her father’s retirement meant she had to abandon that path. Nevertheless, she pursued contemporary art while working, receiving sketching instruction from a professional artist. After giving birth to her first son, she continued sketching in her spare time and began knitting children’s clothes.

At the age of 62, she became a staff member of the Kobe Federation of Women’s Associations. In 2012, while researching community workshops, she visited the Okan Art Exhibition and met Artist A—one of the pioneers of Okan Art in Kobe—who taught her how to create Okan Art pieces.

Artist A had previously worked as a craft instructor at a major department store and was known for her high skill level. Yet, she focused on making craft kits that allowed anyone, even beginners, to experience the joy of creation with minimal burden, often running sessions in care facilities. Inspired by Artist A’s

emphasis on creative freedom rather than perfection, Artist 2 began creating her own works, aiming to pass on that same sense of open, playful making to others.

Artist 3: Life and Creative Journey

Artist 3 (born in 1950) grew up watching her mother sew embroidered tablecloths and clothes as part of a local craft circle. Her creative journey began in primary school when she gifted a hand-embroidered item with initials to her close friend—now known as Artist 2. Taught knitting by her mother, she began leather crafting, which was popular at the time, at the age of 23. At 25, she received a knitting machine and started machine knitting, also attending dress-making classes for about a year.

However, from the age of 33, her work commitments prevented her from engaging in any creative activities. After retiring at 59, she began learning glass art. At the age of 60, she reconnected with Artist 2—her childhood friend—at a primary school reunion. Through her, she met Artist A, the mother of another mutual friend, who taught her how to create Okan Art. She recalls the phrase Artist A often used: *“If you learned how to make it today, you’re a teacher from today!”* This playful encouragement inspired her. Now, together with Artist 2, she is committed to creating works that express freedom and joy, and to sharing that spirit with others.

Artist 4: Life and Creative Journey

Artist 4 (born in 1955) was born with a hearing impairment and spent much of her childhood knitting alongside her grandmother, who did piecework making baby hats and socks. Her father also made small toys using silk cocoons, so she grew up in an environment surrounded by handmade objects. At the age of 14, she began working at a silk-reeling company where she learned traditional sewing techniques. She later learned to use sewing machines and knitting tools, and took on home-based work.

From the age of 53, inspired by her father’s ongoing toy-making, she began creating small handicrafts herself and started teaching workshops for the deaf and hard of hearing. At 57, she opened a combined home workshop and exhibition-sales space. She continues to teach handicrafts to hearing-impaired seniors.

She explains her motivation: *“When I was little, I stayed at home a lot. I don’t want hearing-impaired older people to do the same. Dementia gets worse when you’re isolated. I’ve been through hard times myself—being bullied and all—and I don’t want anyone else to go through that. That’s why I teach crafts.”* Her work is rooted in both personal experience and care for others.

Artist 5: Life and Creative Journey

Artist 5 (born in 1944) spent her childhood caring for her younger sister, who had a mild disability. In junior high school, she began making clothes for dolls

as gifts for her sister—this marked the start of her creative life. After graduating from nursing school at age 20, she purchased a sewing machine and a knitting machine, and while working as a nurse, she also attended a knitting school for two years.

Later, she continued to learn hand knitting on her own and participated in local bazaars and did home-based piecework. At the age of 70, she joined a women's association handicraft class led by Artist 1, who invited her to join both the craft circle and the Okan Art Exhibition.

Reflecting on her experience, she shared: *"There are people of all generations who come to the exhibition—and I think that's such a good thing. I really enjoy it! Not just young folks, but older ones too. And I love interacting with visitors, though I'm not quite sure why I enjoy it so much. I even explain other people's works sometimes!"* For Artist 5, the opportunity to connect with visitors from diverse age groups is one of the most rewarding aspects of participating in the exhibition.

Artist 6: Life and Creative Journey

Artist 6 (born in 1950) was raised by her father after her parents divorced. He made clothes for both dolls and for Artist 6 herself. In high school, she developed an interest in literature and theatre, which she continued after graduation through participation in a theatre troupe and by publishing a literary magazine for around 20 years as part of a local writing community.

While working as a care manager in a residential care facility, she began writing scripts for the in-house theatre group and designed simple crafts for residents to create together in the craft group—drawing on her background in literature and drama.

After retiring at 70, she began volunteering at a local community centre, where she now teaches handicrafts. At the age of 74, she visited the Okan Art Exhibition at the invitation of Artist 2, a classmate from high school, and subsequently joined the activities.

She reflected on the experience: *"At 70, you don't expect to make new friends, right? Normally you wouldn't think that. But now I feel like I'm meeting more and more new people. It's amazing, really—being able to join a group like this after turning 70."* Artist 6 values the sense of connection and community she has found through the activities.

5. Transformative Changes at the Collective and Individual Level through "Commoning"

5.1 Changes through the Okan Art Exhibitions

The Okan Art Exhibitions, held annually since 2009, were initially organised entirely by the author and other staff members up until the 7th exhibition in 2015. From the 8th exhibition (2016), younger staff members who were fans of Okan Art joined the team and helped with preparations. However, for the 10th exhibition (2018), the venue was not a pre-prepared space as in previous years,

but a former Chinese restaurant whose interior renovation had been halted. The participants had to clean the space and manage the electrical wiring themselves.

This experience became a significant turning point, especially for artists who had joined at different times and through different connections, as it prompted them to see the exhibition as something they were building for themselves. In preparation for the event, the artists took the initiative to clean the space and arrange the layout of the display tables(see Figure 8). Since that exhibition, they have taken an active role in planning, setting up, and dismantling the venue—marking a shift towards collective involvement.

Artist 3 reflected on the transformation: *“2008’s exhibition really changed everything for us. We had to go in and clean, you know? It became a space where we had to set things up ourselves. At other venues, you’d just be told, ‘Here’s your spot,’ and all you had to do was show up and sit tight. But this time, we had to start from scratch—even cleaning the place.”*

“I think that’s when everyone started realising, even if it’s just one small thing, we each had to do our part. I mean, you just can’t rely on others forever—you’ve got to take responsibility for your own role. I feel like many of us finally reached that point and started saying, ‘This is my thing too.’”

Artist 2 also recalled: *“I think it really started in 2018. That time, in the old Chinese restaurant that was still under renovation—we all moved tables around together, thinking about each other while setting up the space.”*

At the 10th Okan Art Exhibition in 2018, the artists’ portraits and “life graphs” were displayed alongside their works (see Figure 8). In preparation for the event, the author conducted life history interviews with each participant. Although earlier exhibitions had also included statements about the intent behind the works, this was the first time the focus shifted clearly to the artists themselves. As a result, many artists began to see the exhibition as a space where they were in the spotlight.



FIGURE 8 Clean-up of the Venue and the Artists’ Portraits for the Okan Art Exhibition in 2018

Artist 3 reflected on this moment: *“It made me happy, really, to be in the spotlight like that. To feel seen and recognised. Having that kind of spotlight put on you... it helped me start noticing what was going on around me too. Being recognised—having that light shine on you—it really gave me confidence.”*

Analysis Using the Activity System Model

Yamazumi (2021) describes second-generation activity theory as illustrating how “object-oriented activity is realised not only at the individual level but also at the collective level,” and highlights how it clearly distinguishes between individual actions and collective activity.

In the early years of the Okan Art Exhibitions (from 2009 onward), the author and staff members borrowed works from the artists and managed the exhibition entirely. From 2013 to 2017, although the artists began attending monthly meetings a few months before each exhibition, the planning, setup, and takedown were still carried out by the staff.

In 2018, following the experience of preparing the former Chinese restaurant venue and the shift in focus toward the lives of the artists, the group began holding meetings throughout the year. Artists themselves took on active roles in the planning and setup of the exhibitions.

From the perspective of the activity system model, artists initially engaged in the exhibitions as individuals (subjects) who created works (mediating artefacts) for the purpose of display and sale (object) (see Figure 9-a). However, the shift in 2018—when the artists began to see the exhibition as their own space—marked the formation of a collective (community) involving both artists and staff. New elements were introduced, such as attending regular meetings (rules) and distributing responsibilities among members (division of labour), redefining the object as the collaborative realisation of the exhibition (see Figure 9-b). This signifies the transformation from individual acts to collec-

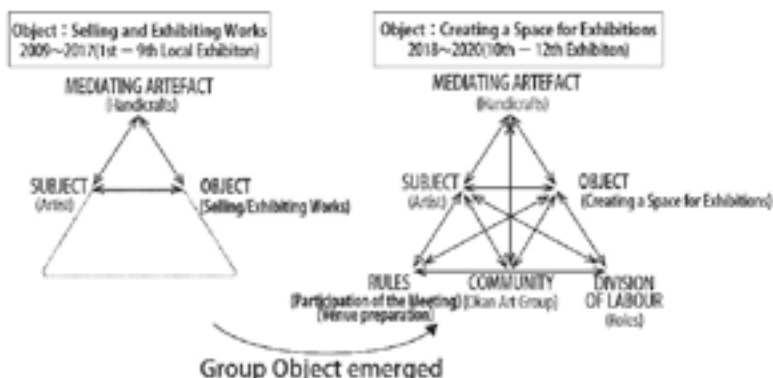


FIGURE 9-a

FIGURE 9-b

FIGURE 9 Change in the Activity System Model

tive activity.

5.2 Changes at the Collective and Individual Level through Okan Art Activities

During the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, the group continued its activities using online tools alongside in-person meetings. In June 2020, a joint exhibition in Kobe on the theme of COVID-19 was held, and four artists participating in the Okan Art initiative created and displayed works based on “AMABIE”—a mythical creature believed to ward off disease. This was the first time the artists had worked on a common theme, providing them with an opportunity to better understand each other’s creative styles (see Figure 10).

In August 2020, a joint exhibition combining contemporary art and Okan Art was held in Kyoto. Artist 2, who had engaged in contemporary art in her youth, participated in the installation process alongside a group of contemporary artists. She was deeply impressed by their approach of mixing Okan Art and contemporary art in the same space, rather than separating them. Inspired by this, she proposed a new exhibition method for the 2020 Okan Art Exhibition: instead of displaying each artist’s work on separate tables (see Figure 11), all works would be mixed together on a single display table (see Figure 12).



FIGURE 10 “AMABIE” Guardian Figures Created Around a Common Theme (During the COVID-19 Pandemic)



FIGURE 11 Individual Displays on Separate Tables



FIGURE 12 Mixed Display on a Single Table

In October 2020, in addition to the annual exhibition, a new initiative called Okan Art University began, with members gathering monthly to share their skills. Each artist took turns leading workshops to teach others their signature creations. Through these workshops, members not only continued making new pieces, but also gained a deeper understanding of each other's styles, the challenges involved in each technique, and the uniqueness of their peers.

As a result, when all works were displayed together on a single table, the artists became able to explain not only their own works but also those created by others to visitors. Additionally, they began voicing suggestions for how the overall exhibition space should be arranged and how visitors might best engage with it.

This monthly exchange through creation and conversation has turned Okan Art into a shared place for knowledge, skills, creative ideas, and presentation.

Artist 2 remarked: *"We started creating under a shared theme and mixing all the pieces together on one table. I think that's when we all began being able to explain each other's work more clearly. And when people came by who wanted to buy something, it felt like our collective thoughts were getting through to them."*

"When we all made the "AMABIE" pieces together during the pandemic, that really kicked off a lot of shared creation. It became fun—less about individual ownership and more about making things together. At first, we all made things to sell, right? But now it's not really like that anymore. It's more like we're making something to surprise or delight others. To create something meaningful, in our own way."

Artist 3 said: *"This year, we started putting everyone's works together in the centre. We all began to understand each other's styles and could explain someone else's piece too. When you've been taught by others, you naturally start understanding what their work means."*

Artist 5 reflected: *"Unlike a bazaar, the Okan Art Exhibition really needs the visitors' gaze. At a bazaar, you're just focused on selling your own stuff. But here, it feels nice when someone looks at your work and says, 'That's cute!' Sometimes I'll explain how to use someone else's piece too—I just enjoy doing that."*

"Looking at other people's works is fun too. Before, each table was separate, so you had to go around one by one. But when everything's laid out all together, you can see it at a glance. I love that. And when I see my own piece among everyone's, it makes me happy."

Artist 1 remarked: *"Okan Art is half play. It's fun. Sometimes money comes in while you're having fun—that's nice, right? And I get to learn new things from new people and friends. So many ideas come to me. Like Artist 4, she always teaches me something new. She's got such brilliant ideas. Honestly, I get so much out of this—so much information, inspiration."*

Artist 4 said: *"We all do it in our own way—it's casual, you know? Like, 'If I add this here, it'll look cute,' or 'This part's a bit off,' and we can talk about that. It's fun. I want to try out more unique designs too. Everyone has their own style. We're all doing it our own way, but that's what makes it interesting. You get to see all kinds of designs you've never seen before—and I want people to see that."*

Analysis Using the Activity System Model

Since the formation of the Okan Art Group in 2018, the collective aim has been to create and sustain the exhibition space. However, since 2020, the launch of the monthly Okan Art University has expanded this goal. While the exhibitions were initially perceived as similar to handmade markets—with artists mainly focused on selling their work—ongoing interaction in workshops and exhibitions began to shift this view.

Artists began to realise the importance of cooperation, how to present their works, and how to make exhibitions more enjoyable for visitors. In other words, the object of the activity changed—from merely creating a space for the Okan Art Exhibition to a shared goal of enhancing the quality and meaning of the exhibition itself (see Figure 13-b).

Moreover, at the individual level, it became clear that the artists had begun to develop goals beyond the initial aims of exhibiting and selling their works. For example, Artist 1, who teaches handicrafts in women’s associations and craft circles, and Artist 4, who is deaf and teaches handicrafts to other hearing-impaired individuals, both value the rich ideas and knowledge shared among members of the Okan Art community. They actively gather new information about crafts through this collective practice. Artist 4, in particular, looks forward to presenting her latest creations and receiving feedback from her peers.

Artists 2 and 3, who learned how to make Okan Art from Artist A, have continued their creative activities in order to share the free-spirited and joyful approach to craft that they learned from her. Meanwhile, Artists 5 and 6, who had long careers before retiring, express joy in meeting new people and forming connections through their participation in the Okan Art activities during later life.

Taken together, these accounts illustrate that, within their diverse life circumstances, the artists have come to see the Okan Art activities as spaces



FIGURE 13-a

FIGURE 13-b

FIGURE 13 Change in the Activity System Model

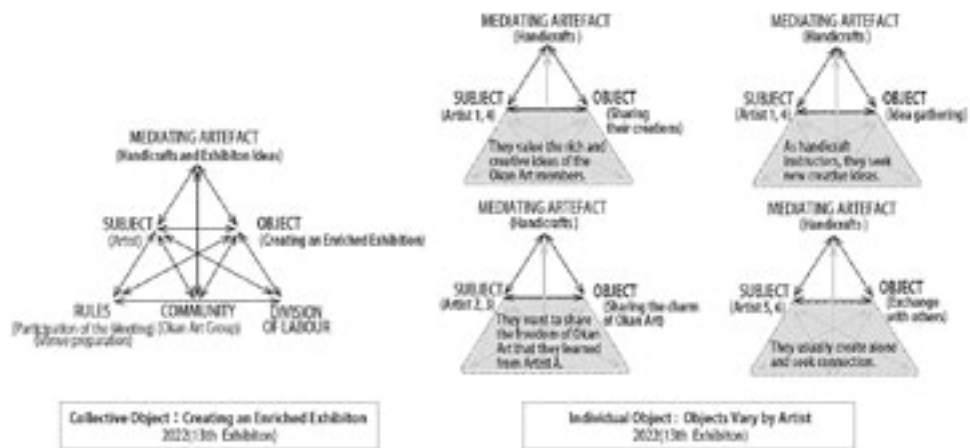


FIGURE 14 Group Object and Individual Object of Okan Art Artists

where they can access new information, gain fresh ideas for their creations, showcase their work, and engage in meaningful interactions with new people (see Figure 14).

6. Changes at the Collective Level through Exchanges with Other Creative Group.

6.1 Exchange with the Toyooka Tsukuru Yorokobi-kai

The Toyooka Tsukuru Yorokobi-kai (Joy of Creation Group) is a group founded in 2022 by five women who serve as representatives of handicraft and cooking circles affiliated with the Community Centre in the Kokufu District of Hidaka, Toyooka City, Hyogo Prefecture (see Table 2). Aiming to form a relaxed, cross-group creative community, they have held biweekly gatherings to share information and collaboratively create works for sale, while also serving as the executive committee for an annual exhibition. As part of the “2022 Hyogo Prefecture Community Revitalisation Programme in Collaboration with Universities,” the Toyooka group and the Okan Art Group in Kobe have jointly

TABLE 2 List of Artists in Toyooka Joy of Creation Group

Artist	Age (As of 2024)	Type of Handicraft	Year of Participation	Age at Time of Joining	Reason for Joining
a	70	Knitting, Patchwork, Pressed Flowers	2022-present	75	Invitation from Community Centre
b	69	Knitting	2022-present	68	Invitation from Community Centre
c	67	Knitting, Small Crafts	2022-present	80	Invitation from Community Centre
d	86	Knitting, Dressmaking	2022-present	69	Invitation from Community Centre
e	69	Patchwork, Knitting, Small Crafts	2023-present	68	Invitation from c

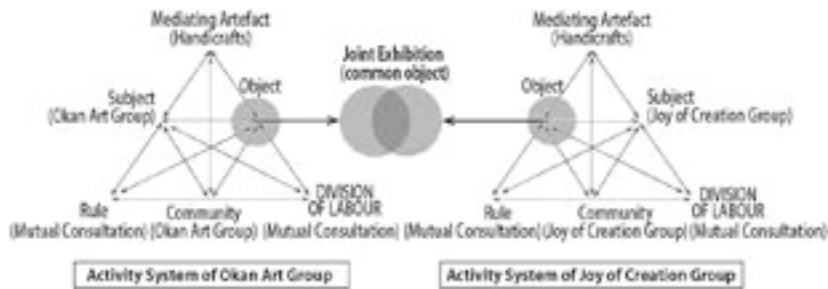


FIGURE 15 Common Object of Okan Art Group and Joy of Creation Group

TABLE 3 Activities and Transformations of the Okan Art Group and the Joy of Creation Group

Date	Event Name	Type	Description	Transformations in Each Group	
2022/1/10	1st Exchange Meeting	Exchange Meeting	Introduced Okan Art works to the Joy of Creation Group and proposed a joint exhibition.	KOBE	The Okan Art Group realized that they had not previously embraced the 'joy of creation' perspective, which was central to the activities of Toyooka artists.
				TOYOOKA	Toyooka artists understood the familiarity and accessibility of Okan Art, but decided to name the exhibition 'Joy of Creation' instead of "Okan Art."
2022/6/6-8	1st Joy of Creation Exhibition	Joint Exhibition	Artists from the Okan Art Group and Joy of Creation Group held a joint exhibition.	KOBE	The Okan Art Group realized that their method of mixing artworks from different artists in exhibitions was unique compared to conventional exhibition styles.
				TOYOOKA	Toyooka artists experienced selling their works for the first time and decided to form a group called the "Joy of Creation Group."
2022/11/27	Groups Exchange Meeting	Exchange Meeting	Various groups in Toyooka exhibited their works, explained creative intentions, and participants supported them with fans and bells while giving feedback.	KOBE	The Okan Art Group had the opportunity to engage with various groups for the first time.
				TOYOOKA	For the artists of the Joy of Creation Group, although activities were conducted as a group, it was their first time presenting their works and exploring their creative intentions directly to participants, gaining experience in receiving support and encouragement from others.
2023/1/6-8	2023 Okan Art Exhibition	Joint Exhibition	The Joy of Creation Group participated in the Okan Art Exhibition held in Kobe, exhibiting and selling works.	KOBE	During the Okan Art Exhibition, the group thought about layouts for displaying and selling works by other groups for the first time.
				TOYOOKA	The Joy of Creation Group experienced successfully selling collaboratively created works at the Okan Art Exhibition.
2023/6/11	New Work Showcase Exchange Meeting	Exchange Meeting	After observing a handicraft activity site, artists from both groups showcased new works and created towel animals for the next exhibition flyer.	KOBE	The Okan Art Group and the Joy of Creation Group shared the common goal of creating works to be featured in the flyer for the joint exhibition and gained the experience of producing collaborative artworks.
				TOYOOKA	
2023/1/28-30	2nd Joy of Creation Exhibition	Joint Exhibition	Artists from both groups jointly held an exhibition.	KOBE	The Okan Art Group devised ways to mix artworks from different artists to enhance the fun of the exhibition at the Joy of Creation Group's exhibition.
				TOYOOKA	The Joy of Creation Group exhibited works with explanations of the artists' creative intentions for the first time.
2024/2/5-11	1st Exchange Exhibition	Joint Exhibition	Several handicraft groups in Kobe City held a joint exhibition together with the Okan Art Group and the Joy of Creation Group.	KOBE	The Okan Art Group worked on creative display methods to better convey the charm of their works.
				TOYOOKA	(No visit to the Joint Exhibition)
2024/3/30-31	2024 Okan Art Exhibition	Joint Exhibition	The Joy of Creation Group exhibited and sold works at the Okan Art Exhibition in Kobe.	KOBE	In the Okan Art Exhibition, they designed layouts that would effectively convey the appeal of the Joy of Creation Group.
				TOYOOKA	The Joy of Creation Group experienced an increase in sales compared to the previous year by selling collaboratively created works.
2024/6/30-7/6	3rd Joy of Creation Exhibition	Joint Exhibition	Artists from both groups jointly held an exhibition.	KOBE	The Okan Art Group held the experience of organizing a workshop for the first time at a joint exhibition held in Toyooka City.
				TOYOOKA	The Joy of Creation Group organized multiple workshops aimed at children.
2025/2/9	Work Enrichment Exchange Meeting	Exchange Meeting	Artists explained their creative intentions, and participants cheered with fans and bells while giving comments and questions.	KOBE	The Okan Art Group found their purpose: to convey the fun of making works.
				TOYOOKA	While initially focusing on selling works, the Joy of Creation Group discovered the joy of giving their works as gifts.
2025/3/6-8	2nd Exchange Exhibition	Joint Exhibition	Multiple handicraft circles from Kobe City, along with the Okan Art Group and Joy of Creation Group, held a joint exhibition.	KOBE	The Okan Art Group continued to innovate display methods to convey their creativity and started influencing other groups regarding exhibition styles and workshop ideas.
				TOYOOKA	(No visit to the Joint Exhibition)

held seven exhibitions and four exchange meetings between 2022 and 2025 (see Figure 15).

Table 3 summarises the exchange activities conducted between 2022 and 2025 and the changes experienced by each group. In July 2022, before the formation of the Toyooka group, the Okan Art Group from Kobe visited Toyooka City and held the first exchange meeting with local artists there. During the event, participants showcased their works and discussed the title and content of a joint exhibition scheduled for the following month. It was the artists from Toyooka who named the exhibition Tsukuru Yorokobi-ten (“The Joy of Making Exhibition”), which was held in August 2022, with assistance from the Okan Art Group in setting up the venue. In the debriefing after the exhibition, the Toyooka artists decided to formally establish the Tsukuru Yorokobi Association as a group. In January 2023, the Tsukuru Yorokobi Association participated in the annual Okan Art Exhibition held in Kobe, where they both exhibited and sold their work.

Over the course of three years, the two groups have jointly organised and participated in: the Tsukuru Yorokobi Exhibition in Toyooka (once annually), the Okan Art Exhibition in Kobe (once annually), and an exchange meeting (once annually).

In February 2024 and March 2025, both groups participated in larger-scale joint exhibitions involving multiple handcraft groups, thereby expanding their network and gaining opportunities for broader exchange.

6.2 Collective Transformation through Boundary Crossing Changes in the “Tsukuru Yorokobi-kai” Group in Toyooka

The Okan Art Group in Kobe has long sold their works at exhibitions, saving 20% of the profits to fund future exhibitions. At the first Tsukuru Yorokobi Exhibition, the group from Kobe exhibited and sold their works, while the creators in Toyooka did not yet engage in sales. However, witnessing the Kobe group’s activities, the Toyooka creators decided to form their own group, Tsukuru Yorokobi-kai, and chose to include sales at their second exhibition. Since then, they have held twice-monthly gatherings to co-develop products, selling them at the exhibition and saving the proceeds to support future group activities (see Figure 16).

While the Kobe artists, working individually, naturally displayed their names on their pieces, the Toyooka creators—who had previously exhibited only as part of hobby groups and under group names—had never had the opportunity to show their work under their individual names. As a result, they were initially hesitant to label their pieces individually. In contrast to the Okan Art Group, where each artist sells their own work under their name, the Tsukuru Yorokobi Group engaged in a collaborative process that drew on each member’s strengths and skills to co-create and sell works as a group. Although individual names were not displayed, this shift can be seen as a meaningful step in which the Toyooka artists began to recognise and highlight individual knowledge and skills.

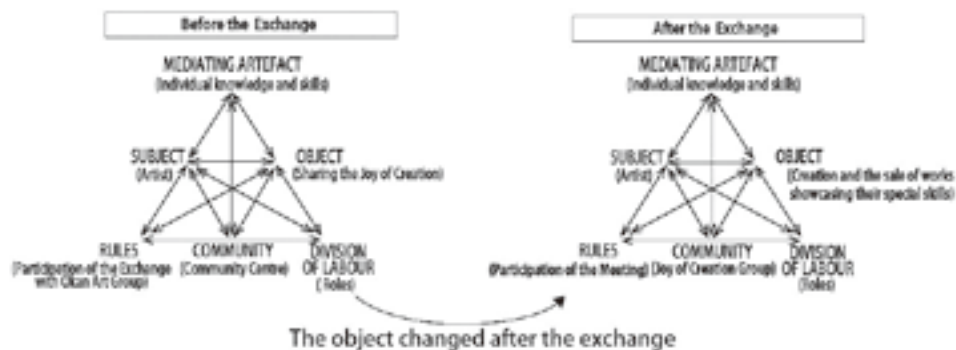


FIGURE 16 Changes in the Activity System Model of the Joy of Creation Group Before and After the Exchange

Artist a, Tsukuru Yorokobi-kai

“Interacting with the Kobe group was so inspiring—I learned a lot by imitation. I used to think I was too unskilled to sell my works, but I started to feel that maybe I could, and that’s thanks to them.”

Interviewed university student

“Unlike creating freely for oneself, the works at Tsukuru Yorokobi-kai are discussed from the perspective of ‘what would appeal to a buyer’. That led to more conversation and collaboration. The group now shares sales results, which seems to give everyone a shared sense of purpose and reward.”

Artist 1, Okan Art Group

“Three years ago, they weren’t selling anything. I actually encouraged them to give it a try, and by the second joint exhibition, they were already selling! It’s fun to make things and even more joyful to give them away—but having someone actually buy your work, even when you think it’s not good enough, really builds confidence.”

Artist a, Tsukuru Yorokobi-kai

“In the second year, we started gathering regularly, exchanging opinions and making things together. We also began selling. The meetings—twice a month—have become something I really look forward to. I even adjust my schedule to make sure I can attend. The atmosphere has become really fun.”

Changes within the Okan Art Group

The artists in the Kobe-based Okan Art Group had traditionally worked as individuals, participating in exhibitions with the clear purpose of displaying and selling their works. In 2018, however, while preparing for the Okan Art Exhibition, the shared task of cleaning the venue sparked a shift toward a collective goal—organising the exhibition itself.

In 2022, the group began exchanges with the Tsukuru Yorokobi Association in Toyooka. The Toyooka group had been formed around the shared purpose of “conveying the joy of making to others.” Through this collaboration, the Okan Art artists began to realise that they had never approached their exhibitions with that mindset. Interacting with the Toyooka group and their works also prompted the Kobe group to reflect on what defines Okan Art and what makes their group unique.

In the field of handicrafts, skill level is often considered a key measure of quality. Okan Art, however—known as “simple and easy craft”—has often been dismissed by mainstream craft communities. In fact, when the group once sought to hold an exhibition in a department store, their request to display works in the craft section was rejected.

Some Okan Art artists have spoken of this unspoken hierarchy in the craft world, pointing to formal qualifications as one factor. While acknowledging that their work is “self-taught”, they remain proud of their unique styles and have no intention of compromising their creative values. These reflections point to a defining feature of Okan Art: a space where personal style and originality are valued over technical mastery.

Artist 4 commented: *“Everyone in Okan Art does things in their own way, and that’s what makes it so interesting. You’ll see a design or material and think, ‘Wow, I never would’ve thought of that!’ Even making the same thing together can be fun—seeing how someone else approaches it. The craft group I used to be in wasn’t like that. Everyone brought what they wanted to make and just worked on it. It felt really closed off—no one shared ideas or interacted. There was no spark.”*

As a result of these reflections, the Okan Art Group came to re-acknowledge that Okan Art is a form of accessible handcrafting—using familiar materials and welcoming all skill levels—created for the sheer joy of making. Motivated by a desire to share that joy with others, the group began organising workshops featuring simple projects like towel dogs that could be made without needles or thread. These workshops have been held at facilities for children, junior and senior high schools, universities, and city halls. They also began participating in more collaborative exhibitions with other groups (see Figure 17).

Table 4 presents a timeline of the Okan Art Group’s activities. Black circles indicate workshops and joint exhibitions. Notably, the number of such events increased after the collaboration with the Tsukuru Yorokobi Association began in 2022.

Artist 3 reflected on the impact of the exchange: *“Up until now, I’d just been doing the things I was taught. But through what the folks in Toyooka said about the ‘joy of making,’ I started asking myself—why do I make things? They really made me realise something: if there’s no joy, you won’t create anything at all. That hit me hard.”*

In addition to the annual Okan Art Exhibition, an increasing number of joint exhibitions with other groups have offered new opportunities for reflection. During the setup of these collaborative events, the artists began to realise that the Okan Art Group’s approach to display was noticeably more flexible

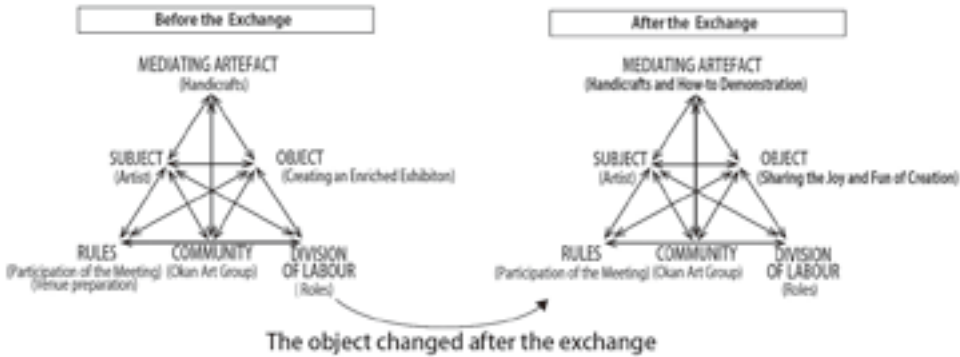


FIGURE 17 Changes in the Activity System Model of the Okan Art Group Before and After the Exchange

TABLE 4 List of Okan Art Activities (Exhibitions and Workshops)

Year	Event	Location	Type	Exchange with Others	Year	Event	Location	Type	Exchange with Others
2008	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	Joint Exhibition of Contemporary Art and	KYOTO	Traveling Exhibition	(1)
2009	2nd Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	Children's Festival	OSAKA	Traveling Exhibition	(2)
2010	3rd Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	Okan Art Exhibition in Tokyo	TSUKUBA	Traveling Exhibition	
2010	Joint Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	1st Tsukuba Joint Exhibition	TSUKUBA	Joint Exhibition	(1)
2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition	
2010	1st Tsukuba Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition	
2010	1st Tsukuba Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	Children's Workshop	KOBE	Workshop	●
2010	2nd Tsukuba Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	2nd Tsukuba Joint Exhibition	TSUKUBA	Joint Exhibition	(1)
2010	2nd Tsukuba Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	High School Student Workshop	KOBE	Workshop	●
2010	2nd Tsukuba Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	Station Exhibition	KOBE	Traveling Exhibition	
2010	2nd Tsukuba Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	Community Bus Interior Exhibition	KOBE	Traveling Exhibition	
2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	1st Exchange Exhibition	KOBE	Joint Exhibition	(1)
2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	Artist High School Student Workshop	KOBE	Workshop	●
2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition	
2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	1st Tsukuba Joint Exhibition	TSUKUBA	Joint Exhibition	(1)
2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	High School Student Workshop	KOBE	Workshop	●
2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	Joint Art Festival	KOBE	Traveling Exhibition	●
2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	Joint Exchange Exhibition	KOBE	Joint Exhibition	(1)
2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition	
2010	1st Okan Art Exhibition	KOBE	Exhibition		2010	1st Tsukuba Joint Exhibition	TSUKUBA	Joint Exhibition	(1)

compared to that of other groups.

At the joint exhibitions with the Tsukuru Yorokobi Association, members of the Okan Art Group took the initiative in arranging the displays so that works from both groups were intermingled. Through this process, they gradually came to see themselves as carriers of the free-spirited and playful nature of Okan Art, and began embracing the role of conveying that spirit to others.

7. Fostering Transformative Agency through the Commoning of Knowledge and Skills: A Bridge to Fourth-Generation Activity Theory

In conventional commons theory, the commons are often conceived as the overlapping space between the public and the private. In contrast, this study positions the commons as the outcomes of co-creative processes built on individually shared knowledge and skills. It defines commoning as: the process of sharing knowledge and skills, and the process of creating something using that

shared knowledge and skill (see Figure 18).

Exhibitions, workshops, and exchange meetings function as places where such commoning takes place. Through commoning, individuals come to recognise the value of their own knowledge and skills via feedback from others—whether through being helpful to someone else or being recognised for their contributions. Beyond the creation of objects, commoning also enables the collaborative creation of spaces for making and sharing.

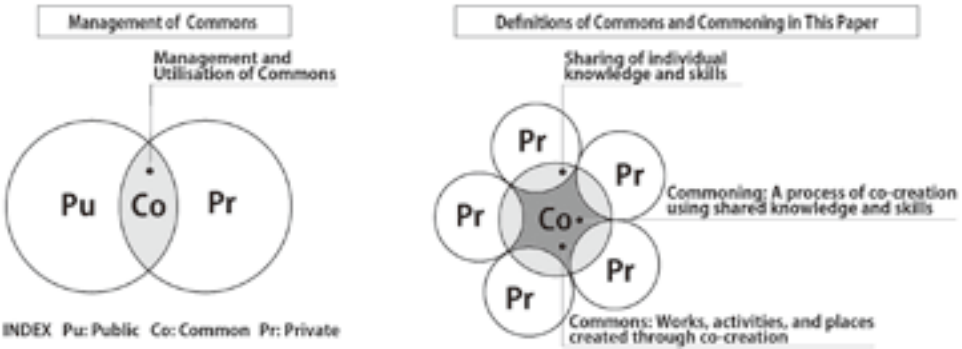


FIGURE 18 Conceptual Diagram of the Commons in General and the Concept of Commoning in This Study

This kind of space-making is often entangled with external factors, which means participants frequently encounter contradictions. These contradictions, in turn, stimulate the exercise of agency. In discussing Transformative Agency by Double Stimulation (TADS), Sannino (2015a) states that it concerns: “how people form willful actions aimed at changing their circumstances and shaping their uncertain futures.”

She explains that a first stimulus arises in the form of problem recognition, while a second stimulus—a new mediating artefact or perspective—is adopted to interpret and evaluate the situation, leading to decisions and transformative action. Furthermore, she writes: “Double stimulation thus is not only an experimental method, but also a principle of volitional acts which constitute the path to transformative agency” (Sannino, 2015b).

The evolution of the Okan Art activities from 2009 to 2024 can be understood in four stages, each involving a shift in the group’s objectives (see Figure 19).

Stage 1

In response to the first stimulus—an unprepared exhibition space—the artists undertook cleaning and ultimately held the exhibition themselves. When the display method was shifted to highlight not only the artworks but also the artists, this prompted them to view the exhibition as “their own space.” As a result, they began actively taking part in the setup and takedown of the event,

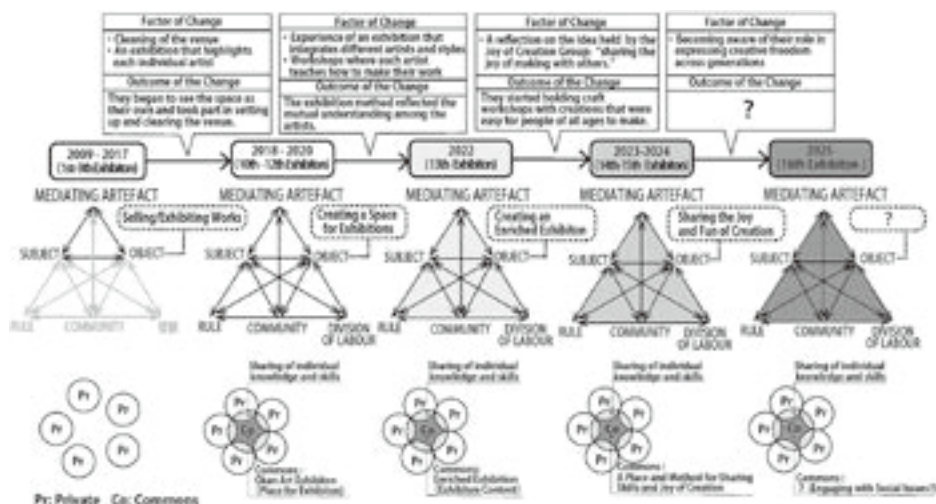


FIGURE 19 Changes in the Activity System Model of the Okan Art Group Through "Commoning"

responsibilities previously handled by staff. It is possible that the first stimulus in this stage was an unconscious anxiety about the inability to hold the exhibition in the future.

Stage 2

Artist 2, who had previously engaged in contemporary art, was inspired by an integrated display method that combined Okan Art and contemporary art. This discomfort with the traditional, individualised display approach served as the first stimulus. In response, a new method was introduced where all works were mixed on a single table. Furthermore, in response to the first stimulus of not knowing enough about others' works, the artists began to exchange knowledge and understand one another's creations—eventually becoming able to describe others' works to visitors.

Stage 3

In the third stage, through the exchange with the Tsukuru Yorokobi Group, Artist 3 realised that the group had not previously embraced the idea of "sharing the joy of making with others." Artists 1 and 4, who had already been teaching handicrafts, Artist 2, who wished to communicate the free-spirited nature of Okan Art, and Artist 5, who found joy in interacting with others, all agreed with this idea. Together, they began organising workshops to teach how to make "towel dogs," simple crafts that anyone could create. Artist 3 realised that, unlike Artist A—who had taught her Okan Art—she herself had not been passing on the joy of making to others. This realisation can be considered the first stimulus. In response, the workshops teaching towel dog-making were

introduced as a second stimulus to overcome this challenge.

The gradual expansion of perspective from the individual to others between the first and third stages was driven by new realisations gained through interactions with others. In the first stage, artists merely provided their works with no engagement with others. In the second stage, interactions began with the author and staff members, and in the third stage, exchanges with fellow artists deepened. By the fourth stage, interaction with other handicraft groups was added. Through these interactions, artists consciously or unconsciously began to recognise contradictions, which acted as the first stimulus. In response, they changed the objectives and components of their activities, which led to the emergence of transformative agency at both the individual and collective levels.

Particularly, the shift from the third to the fourth stage—marked by a growing inclination toward collective practices aimed at supporting others’ creativity—suggests the potential realisation of fourth-generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), in which activity systems pursue socially meaningful objectives.

Regarding Fourth-Generation Activity Theory, Yamazumi (2021) states: “When learning, education, and schooling radically engage in the formation of human beings capable of constructing alternatives to capitalism—transforming human activity, organisations, and communities—new forms of education and educational research based on Fourth-Generation Activity Theory will emerge.” This idea can be applied to the field of lifelong education examined in this study. While lifelong education often takes the form of community-based learning activities, many of these initiatives still primarily focus on the acquisition of knowledge and technical skills.

As Yamazumi (2021) points out, Fourth-Generation Activity Theory draws attention to how “organisations and institutions are inherently contradictory, possessing both exchange value and use value, being both controlled by proprietary interests” (Engeström, 2009). Based on this view, the theory seeks to uncover new possibilities through confronting and overcoming such internal contradictions.

In this light, the shift from the private ownership of knowledge and skills to the commoning of those resources through interaction with others—and thereby opening them to society—can be seen as a form of lifelong learning that creates alternatives through the exercise of transformative agency. Such practice may represent a new form of lifelong education grounded in Fourth-Generation Activity Theory.

Addressing social issues through Fourth-Generation Activity Theory requires collaboration with diverse groups across multiple levels—local, municipal, and national. In the case of the Okan Art activities, group-based practices at the local level have begun to serve as reference points for lifelong learning initiatives in Hyogo Prefecture. Starting in 2025, the group plans to expand its activities by collaborating with community centres across the prefecture, engaging with various local hobby groups to co-develop initiatives aimed at addressing

regional challenges and revitalising local communities.

8. Conclusion and Future Directions: Towards the Introduction of the Change Laboratory

The processes by which transformative agency develops at both the individual and collective level can be further analysed by examining their relationship with the cultural and historical contexts that lie behind the activity system model—contexts that often remain invisible. For instance, the artists’ life histories and the content of their creative practices offer valuable insights into these underlying dynamics. Moving forward, it is necessary to deepen the analysis of how transformative agency is formed, not only through Okan Art activities, but also through the broader daily practices and lived experiences of the artists themselves.

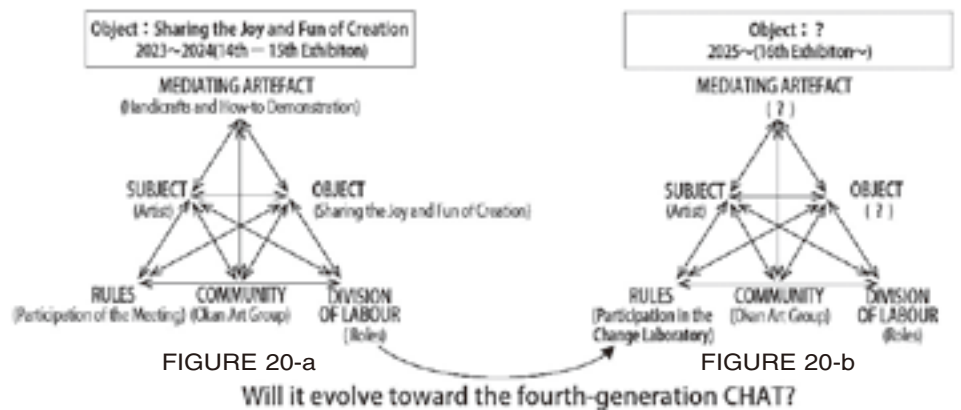


FIGURE 20 Will the Object Evolve Toward the Fourth-generation CHAT?



FIGURE 21 1st Pre Meeting of Change Laboratory Feb, 2025



FIGURE 22 Sharing of Individual Activity Objects

Although this study did not originally employ the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as its theoretical framework, future research will aim to bridge toward the Fourth Generation of CHAT (see Figure 20-b). This will involve introducing theoretical frameworks such as the Change Laboratory (see Figure 21, 22) and Transformative Agency by Double Stimulation (TADS) to conduct formative intervention research based on CHAT. Through these approaches, we aim to further explore the meaning of activities in which individuals collectively common their knowledge and skills—contributing to a more robust understanding of transformative agency within the framework of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory.

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