

Exploring Ecological Democracy in Japan

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Abstract

We established the Ecological Democracy Foundation in October 2016 to spread understanding of ecological democracy in Japan and practice it with people. For its establishment, we have conducted two activities – discovering ecological democracy in Japanese grassroots activities and getting supporters for the establishment. In this course of these activities, we found 4 key phrases to explain a principle, value, method and practice of ecological democracy. In this paper, we analysed reactions to each of key phrases and considered how people can understand and accept the concept of ecological democracy. Judging from the reactions to the key phrases, many Japanese people seemed to understand the logics of the principle and value of ecological democracy but were not ready to accept the idea. On the other hand, the key phrases for method and practice were welcomed.

Keywords: ecological democracy, Ecological Democracy Foundation, key phrase

1. Introduction

After the Great East Japan earthquake in 2011, a nuclear power plant in Fukushima melted down and exploded with a lot of radio-actives spread around the area. Today, thousands of people are still evacuating and an area of 337 km² surrounding the plant is still prohibited to enter. In addition, the power plant is not yet under control. In terms of the public opinion, a poll conducted in 2015 showed that more than double were against the restart of any nuclear power plant than those who were for. However, a nuclear power plant in Kyushu was restarted only within four years from the disaster by Japanese Government. This devastating situation is completely opposite to the ecological democracy.

“While I am overwhelmed by the despair around us ... ecological democracy takes roots, sprouts, and blooms here and there!” – wrote Randolph T. Hester in his book. So, we have decided to explore ecological democracy in Japan.

¹ Hester (2006), p.419

In order to discover ecological democracy in Japan, we asked five civil organizations to look into their own activities and try to find ecological democracy with us. The process started with explaining to them what is ecological democracy, and we together looked at their activities and tried to give expression to the ecological democracy that was found in these activities. This challenge to discover ecological democracy in grassroots activities and give expression to it is now taking shape. The methodology that has been developed is that an observer describes grassroots activities in the form of monologue and puts them into the cycles of society and nature.

Going through this process, we found that the first step – to explain to civil organizations the concept of ecological democracy that needs to be discovered in their activities – was very difficult. Because they had their own goal and their activities were designed for that goal, it was almost impossible to make them convinced that their activities had another value from the ecological democracy viewpoint. We have learnt that they can accept this idea after finding ecological democracy in their activities together with us and seeing the expression of it.

While trying to discover Japanese ecological democracy, we began to prepare for the establishment of the Ecological Democracy Foundation from April 2016. The Foundation was established in October as an organization to put ecological democracy into practice in Japan. One of the important strategies for the establishment was to get its supporters. Today around 150 people have become supporters of the establishment of the Ecological Democracy Foundation, but it was not easy to make them understand what is ecological democracy since no one knew or even had ever heard of it. Getting their understanding had an important meaning.

Through these two activities – discovering ecological democracy in Japanese grassroots activities and getting supporters for the establishment, the Ecological Democracy Foundation was born to spread understanding of ecological democracy in Japan and practice it with people.

In the following chapter, the sequence of events which affect the establishment of the Foundation is explained focusing on the transition of its supporters and projects. The third chapter introduces the goal, vision and the structure of ten programs of the Foundation because these reflect the local adaptation of ecological democracy in Japan that has been developed through the feedback from 150 supporters and five civil organizations. The fourth chapter examines key phrases the Foundation uses to explain ecological democracy and people's reactions to them. This uncovers critical strategies for the acceptance of ecological democracy in Japan. Finally, the fifth chapter argues the possibilities and significances of spreading ecological democracy in Japan and considers how it can be locally adapted in different countries such as China, Taiwan, Korea and the United States. The result of this

paper is one of the strong tools for ecological democracy to overcome anti-ecological democracy policies.

2. Sequence of events towards the establishment of the Foundation

To confront short-term profiteering of global capital and a shallow democracy that causes tragic situations, the Ecological Democracy Foundation has established in Japan in October 2016. This Foundation is supported by 150 persons including researchers, administrative officers, and members of NPO and NGO who engaged in the realization of an inclusive and environment-oriented society (of which the authors are its core members). This chapter briefly explains how this foundation was established through the sequence of events.

Initially, the discussion concerning the establishment of the Foundation started with 4 persons who share the same aspiration toward ecological democracy. In the beginning when we started the argument, because we have been took part in some civic activities, such as ARCH² and SPOON³, we reconsidered them from the perspective of ecological democracy and devoted ourselves to deduce the critical issues for their further improvement. After that, we gradually moved to the discussion relating to the idea, articles of incorporation, and action plan of the Foundation resulting in the creation of the Business plan ver.0.

Then it entered the stage of inspection. In order to examine our Business plan, we started to go outside and meet researchers and specialists in a wide variety of field, such as urban planning, community design, architecture, welfare, law, and natural environment. They checked it from several aspects sometimes in a strict manner and sometimes kindly, and we improved the Business plan each time. Through these meetings, we got some Foundation's supporters and they reached 26 persons in the end.

Finally, it attained the stage of development. In this stage, we mainly focused on getting the Foundation's supporter from citizens spreading out the idea of ecological democracy. We held the orientation meeting several times, and tried to make the concept clear to meet the Japanese situation, attitude, and activity. At that time, we also launched some of the Foundation's projects antecedent to its establishment. For example, "Ecological Democracy interactive monitoring project" began in August with 20 participants, "Study session on Ecological Democracy" was held in September with 50 persons, and "Ecological Democracy observation project" has been running since August discovering several good practices and creating strong ties between us. They really contributed to increase our supporters and made the idea of the Foundation rich. In fact, we obtained many key phrases of Japanese ecological

² "ARCH (*Advocacy and Research Centre for Homelessness*) is a small, research-based organisation whose primary purpose is to improve and strengthen the entire homelessness sector in and around Tokyo." (cited from the web site of ARCH; <http://archcd.wixsite.com/arch/about-us-en>)

³ "Team SPOON was formed under the concept of raising urban residents' consciousness of being a part of the ecosystem by raising recognition of the Black-faced Spoonbills." (cited from the web site of SPOON; <http://spoonprd.wixsite.com/teamspoon>)

democracy from the above projects, which explained in Chapter 5 in detail. At the end, just before the kick-off party on October, we completed our Business plan ver.8.4, got 129 supporters, and succeeded the establishment of the Foundation.

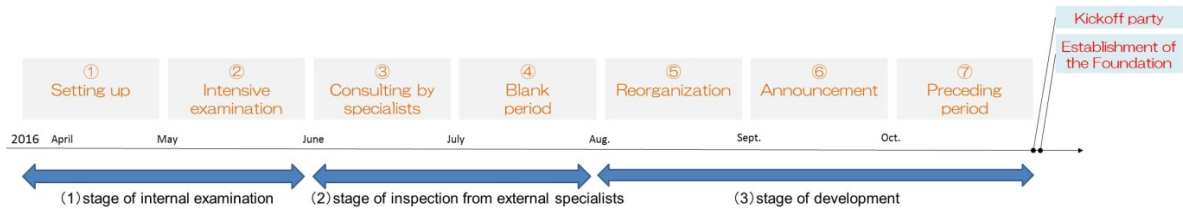


Figure 2.1. Timeline of the events towards the establishment of the Foundation

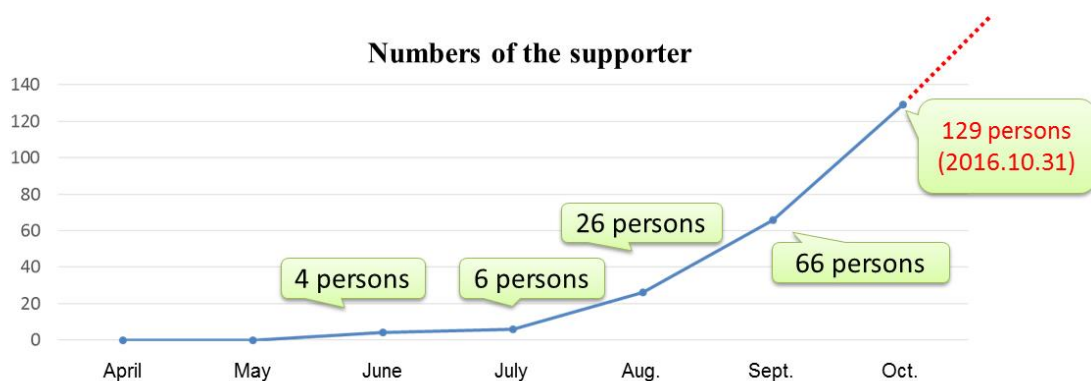


Figure 2.2. Numbers of the Foundation's supporter

3. Establishment of the Ecological Democracy Foundation in Japan

To illustrate the general contents of the Foundation, this section is organized as follows: Subsection 3.1 states the aim and vision of this foundation, and Subsection 3.2 describes the contents and current status of its primary projects.

3.1. Vision and goals of the Foundation

After some deep considerations and discussions, the Foundation has created its vision and four goals.

<Background>

Human beings are part of ecosystems, and human society was once operated as part of the nature within ecological cycles. With the significant development of scientific technology and economy, however, activities of human society have gone beyond natural cycles. The gap between “humans as biological creatures” and “humans living in contemporary society” is now widening as a consequence. Under such circumstances, nature and ecosystem conservation efforts, as well as tenacious attempts to achieve a diversified society where

people live with the socially vulnerable, are flourishing and deepening. Activities of ecology and democracy are often carried out separately, but it is not sufficient to approach the current issues of our society in a highly specialised fashion. Ecological democracy connects these activities. It is a principle, value, method and practice which lead to a world where ecological and democratic ideologies meet each other, and where our pleasure of living with nature and joys of living together with other people are intertwined. Ecological democracy relocates our society and cities within ecosystems. Ecological democracy allows the nature and ecosystems to function as the seeds of people's cooperation. Ecological democracy consciously connects movements of seeking people's participation and contribution to the society and social diversity with local nature and ecosystems. Thus, there is a desperate necessity to propose and implement methods of connecting various fields and addressing issues of nature and society together as a whole, while pursuing the possibility of ecological democracy and appealing it to the society. This is why we established the Ecological Democracy Foundation.

<Vision>

To achieve the world where people respect each other and their cooperation as well as nature which has to be consoled and feared by ourselves, being proud of the fact that only human being has developed the faith (freedom, equality, and peace) and the fact that human being is a part of nature.

<Goals>

1. To create the new thought, value and world called ecological democracy that leads us to bear with one another being conscious of the connectedness of nature and society
2. To inform that only human beings are capable of integrating the nature and society
3. To correlate improving the nature with healing the society and vice versa consciously
4. To put ecological democracy into practice from daily life to international politics

3.2. Contents of the primary projects

Currently, the foundation divides the projects into 3 categories in order to approach our vision multidirectional.

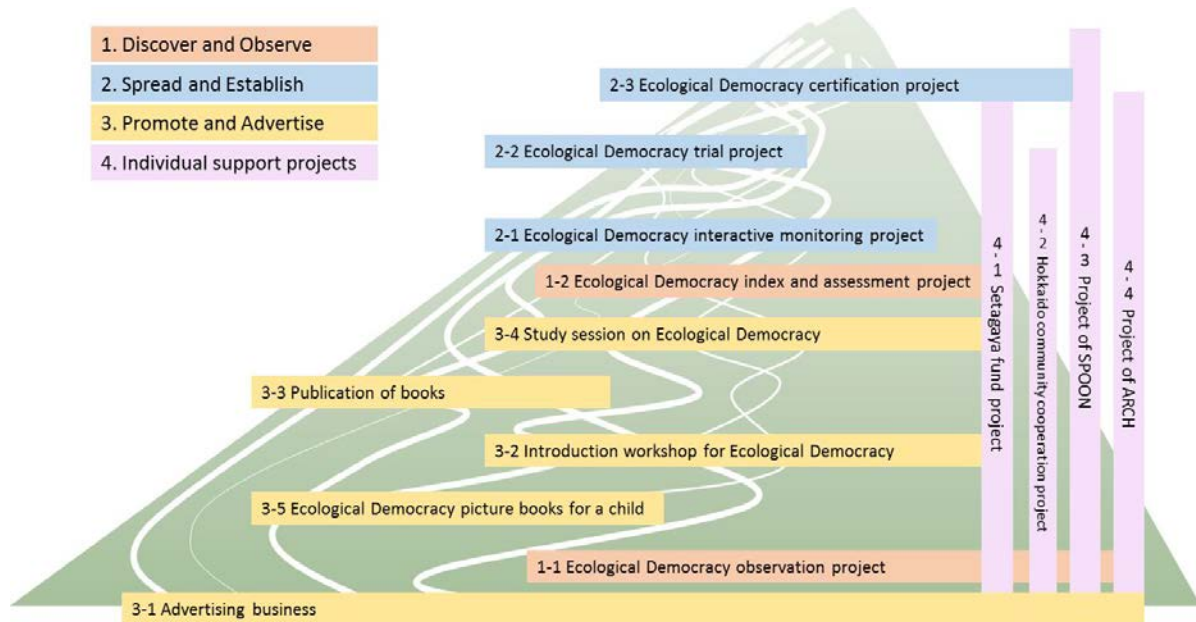


Figure 3.1. The relationship of the Foundation's primary projects

1. Discover and Observe

Ecological democracy takes root, sprouts, and blooms on all sides. However, in most cases, even its practitioners do not realize the values. So, we should discover and observe good practices of ecological democracy with citizens carefully, and respect them splendidly.

The following projects are the most fundamental works to merge the activities and to form the ecological democracy in Japan.

1-1 Ecological democracy observation project

This project intends to discover and collect the ecological democracy all over Japan, where the practitioners working up with a case study. Its ultimate goals are to make everyone understand the ecological democracy, and create a condition that citizen can discover it by themselves.

1-2 Ecological democracy index and assessment project

This project is planned to create the evaluating method to measure an expression level of ecological democracy, a ratio of the interrelationship between nature and society, and a degree of diversity and creativity of each activity. This index would be advanced as we accumulated many sampling and conclude the principles design of ecological democracy.

2. Spread and Establish

In order to spread and set up the ecological democracy widely, we are going to pursue people to become familiar with the ecological democracy, train the specialist who can handle ecological and social issues at the same time, and design the city model for ecological democracy.

2-1 Ecological democracy interactive monitoring project

In this project, participants read a particular chapter of “Design for Ecological Democracy (Randolph T. Hester, 2006, The MIT Press)” per week, and discussed it with other participants on the internet as a small group seminar. This seminar lasts for 5 months in total to complete every part of the book. Through the seminar, this project aims to make the participants well-understand the ecological democracy and interact with the others.

2-2 Ecological Democracy trial project

This trial project is a kind of consulting business for a local government, which will reduce extra costs and increase multiplier effects concerning environmental and social policies and projects. Above all, its purpose is to let the citizens feel how the ecological democracy is rich and enjoyable.

2-3 Ecological democracy certification project

Through field trips all over Japan, the foundation will find many activities which embodied the ecological democracy. In this project, we intend to certify them as a good practice of ecological democracy and create the platform where their practitioners can ensure, learn, support, and collaborate with each other.

3. Promote and Advertise

To share and practice the ideas, value, and method of ecological democracy in the whole society, we are going to carry out an introduction workshop, study session, and publishing.

3-1 Advertising business

Using web services and medium, this project is going to promote and advertise the ecological democracy and the foundation. In particular, contacts some CSR activities of a private company concerning environmental business as well as held a lecture and workshop in a school and municipal office.

3-2 Introduction workshop for Ecological democracy

A business card just shows your position in a business. Unlike this, the Ecological Democracy Card reflects your position and assurance both in ecology and society. This project is planned to spread out this new card through some workshops which confirm human beings are part of ecology and democracy.

3-3 Publication of books

The publication of the Japanese translated book “Design for Ecological Democracy (written by Randolph T. Hester, translated by Dohi Masato)” has been decided formally. This book will become the theoretical backbone of our Foundation to inform the route for creating a better world through a design for a daily life. In addition, this business is going to plan and publish the ecological democracy case studies, picture books, and so on.

3-4 Study sessions on Ecological democracy

In order to learn the diverse value of ecological democracy in relation to the Japanese version publication of “Design for Ecological Democracy”, this project delivers a study session in public, by inviting well-known researchers and practitioners in various fields.

3-5 Ecological democracy pictures books for a child

“Is ecological democracy difficult?” No, it is not. This project intends to create a picture book for a child to make them understand and like the ecological democracy cheerfully.

4. Key Phrases in the context of Japanese Ecological Democracy

We had some opportunities to meet many people in establishing the Foundation and explained the concept of ecological democracy. At the same time, we tried to find the ecological democracy around us in Japanese contexts as the ‘Ecological Democracy observation project’. In particular, ARCH and SPOON are one of the good practices of ecological democracy in Japan, and from the first stage, we referred to them frequently to create the Foundation’s schemes.

In this course of activities, we found several key phrases, which we believe, comprehend the situation of the native ecological democracy in Japan and would be an important idea to consider the Foundation’s future projects. In addition, we have already discussed these phrases as well as the concept of ecological democracy with our Foundation supporters and noted down how they react.

This section will review the 4 important key phrases and the reactions from the supporters one by one. Identifying both positive and negative opinions and the last part (Subsections 3.5) considers the characteristics of ecological democracy in Japan and how we should deal with them to manage the Foundation.

4.1. Key Phrase 1; “Compassion flows from person to person as an ecology that only human has developed.”

First of all, through a long-term observation of Japanese ecological democracy, the key phrase 1: “Compassion flows from person to person as ecology that only human has developed” has come to our mind. Through a long survival historical in nature, human has developed Sympathy and Compassion as the essential aspects of ecology. The origin of the flow of ecology arises inside the human being when faced social or environmental issues. This flow will become larger and larger as it gains more compassion from their family, friend, and colleagues. Finally, it pours into society - making democracy to ecological democracy.

Then we ask our Foundation’s supporters, whether it would be adequate for notifying the concept of ecological democracy in the very first orientation meeting of the Foundation. In our explanation, we referred to ARCH and SPOON to illustrate the key phrases with an example. However, with our disappointment, the reactions were negative for the most part.

Many participants pointed out that even though the mechanism demonstrated by that the key phrase can be found in the activities of SPOON, it cannot be applied with the same mechanism in the ARCH's activities. In particular, they seem to reject or feel difficult to find out ecological element named compassion from the homeless issue and do not support for the expression at all. After this orientation meeting, as a result of their negative reactions, we astonished and it took about 2 weeks to overcome it.

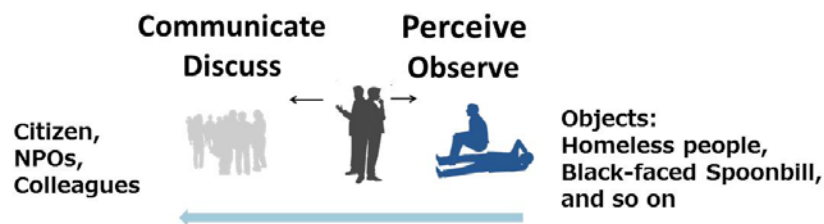


Figure 4.1. The mechanism of the flow of compassion

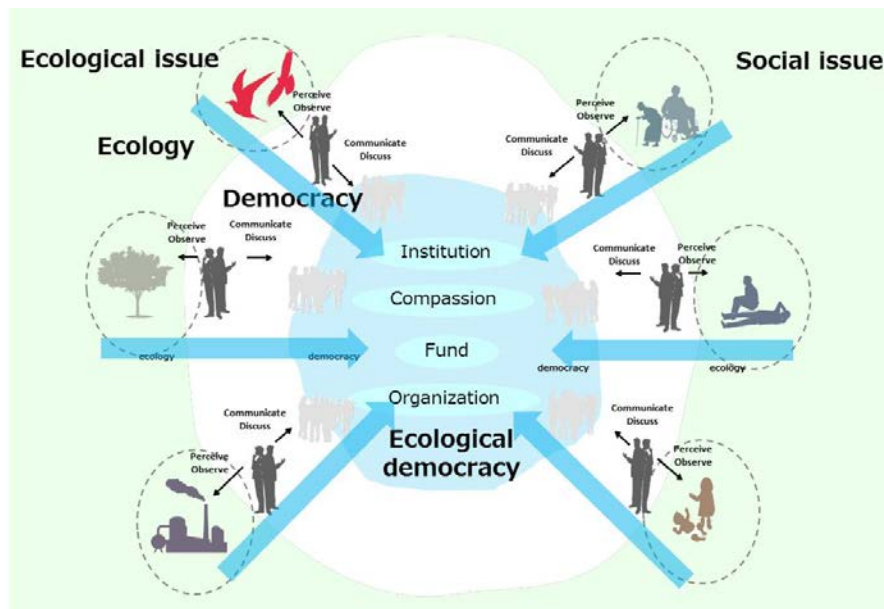


Figure 4.2. The image of the transition from democracy to ecological democracy

4.2. Key Phrase 2; “When we improve the society, the nature heals. When we improve the nature, the society heals.”

Secondly, we have come across the key phrase 2: “When we improve the society, the nature heals. When we improve the nature, the society heals.” (In Japanese, “improve” and “heal” have the same pronunciation: *naosu*). We realized this mysterious interrelationship empirically and do not have any theoretical explanation.

After a while, we hold the next orientation meeting and observed the supporter's reactions. At this time, we were surprised, almost all of them agreed with it without an apparent reason. They mentioned that it was easy to imagine and understand what is to be

conveyed by this phrase instinctively, representing the greatness of both ARCH and SPOON activities. These positive reactions reassured us and this phrase turned to be the most useful and frequently used to explain ecological democracy.

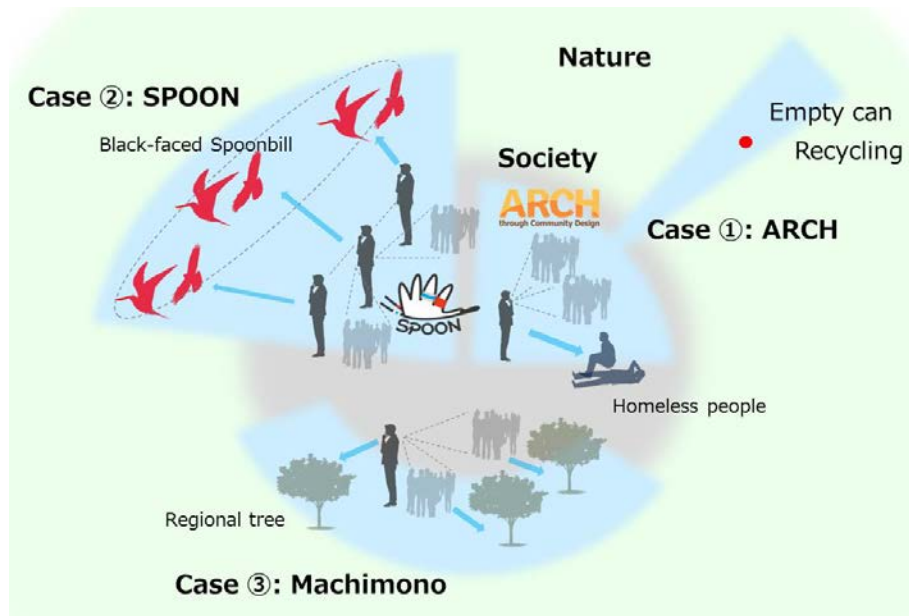


Figure 4.3. The interrelationship between society and nature through the activities

4.3. Key Phrase 3; “Ecological democracy takes root, sprouts, and blooms here and there”

Thirdly, when we reviewed the epilogue of the book “Design for Ecological Democracy”, we found the key phrase number 3: “Ecological democracy takes root, sprouts, and blooms here and there”. Actually, it is a funny pronunciation in Japanese; “*Ecodemo* (ecological democracy), *kokodemo* (here), *asokodemo* (there)”. So, this phrase, especially, is easy to pronounce, repeat, and remained for Japanese, giving us the hope of developing our Foundation.

As we expected, most of the supporters seem to like this phrase. In particular, many practitioners were delighted when they realized that there are a lot of people who act vigorously with the same faith as them. It creates the atmosphere of hope and reinforces our optimism.

4.4. Key Phrase 4; “Human beings equipped with democracy meet again ecology and obtain the 5 values of ecological democracy; liberty, equality, peace, compassion, and art”

Lastly, just before the opening ceremony of the Foundation, we attained the key phrase 4: “Human beings equipped with democracy meet ecology again and obtain the 5 values of ecological democracy; liberty, equality, peace, compassion, and art”. Originally, human beings literally live in nature as part of ecosystems, and console and fear it. However, the arrival of modern society gradually enabled us to take off from it. We continued to develop

the territory which prevents the rule of nature and created a modern society. At the same time, we have formed a government called democracy which gives us liberty, equality, and peace. Nowadays, confronting with global environmental issues, we started to realize the importance of nature. Equipped with democracy, the increasing number of people is a beginning for the return of nature which brings the value of compassion and art. So, in the end, there are 5 values in this term: liberty, equality, peace, compassion, and art.

Generally, the supporters' reactions toward this phrase were divided into two categories. Some researchers were completely for the value of ecological democracy and the others had no interest in this phrase. Now we are discussing about the suitable expression which attracts Japanese with its followers to deepen the ecological democracy.

4.5. Characteristics of ecological democracy in Japan

Using several key phrases, we have discussed the idea, value and practice of ecological democracy with many Japanese researchers, practitioners, and citizens. As can be seen above, the reactions were diverse depending on the phrases. In the first and fourth phrase, we explained ecological democracy logically focusing on its mechanism and result. In fact, we tried to provide as many examples as possible and developed the theory based on the fact. However, our general impression is, Japanese have few interest in it. On the other hand, in the second and third phrase, we showed the future image of ecological democracy concerning its phenomena and future vision. At this time, we rarely mention their reason and provided several images instead. As a result, most of the supporters accepted the concept of the Ecological Democracy Foundation instinctively.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Since April 2016, we have spent seven months thinking practically about ecological democracy. Thinking practically means two things. The first is about in what way we could spread ecological democracy in Japan and make a city in which liberty, equality, peace, compassion, beauty and joy are blooming. The second is about by what kind of explanations Japanese people, especially those who support us, could understand ecological democracy when they have never heard of it. An explanation of the idea that is easy for Japanese people to accept is vital for spreading ecological democracy in Japan.

In our effort to find a way of explaining the concept, it became clear for us that ecological democracy was a principle, value, method and practice at the same time. We consciously tried to explain ecological democracy from these four aspects and pursued a key phrase for each of them. Judging from the reactions to the key phrases, many Japanese people seemed to understand the logics of the principle and value of ecological democracy but were not ready to accept the idea. They showed scepticism to the new idea and reacted in a cautious manner. On the other hand, the method (key phrase 2) was welcomed. Many,

if not most, commented that they were deeply convinced by the phrase despite the fact that it only described a phenomenon and did not explain logics behind. Also, the Japanese version of the third phrase “*Ecodemo, kokodemo, asokodemo*” received a warm welcome, perhaps thanks to its humour to some extent. People enjoyed it and saw hope in this encouraging idea that ecological democracy is already sprouting here and there. We need to respect and value these attitudes in order to realize ecological democracy in Japan. Brushing up the way of explanation will in turn contribute to the future implementation of our projects. In the projects we have already started (observation project and monitoring project), we are witnessing people learn the effectiveness of ecological democracy methods and start to understand its principle and value on the ground of their acceptance of the methods.

The journey of the Ecological Democracy Foundation has just started. We will keep working to spread ecological democracy in Japan and try to make a world where liberty, equality, peace, compassion, beauty and joy flourish. Can our ecological democracy rise up as a flock of small nightingales and change the world? We would appreciate your attention and support to our activities.

Also, we would like to learn ways of spreading ecological democracy in other parts of the world. Just like we have presented here our experience of the first seven months, we would like to exchange local wisdom and experiences with every one of you.

References

Randolph T. Hester , 2006. Design for Ecological Democracy, The MIT Press