

Local Government Measures Utilizing Content

— *Issues and opportunities for local government collaboration utilizing Anime, Game and eSports* —

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1. Introduction

The most important goal of regional governments is to promote the welfare of residents within their regions. As such, they must take multi-faceted approaches to solve various issues arising from that goal. One such approach is to use collaboration through eSports and content such as anime. Here, we introduce some opportunities that Yokosuka City has found and used with this approach.

2. Action plan to promote a tourism-based city

Since World War II, Yokosuka City has been built on manufacturing in industries such as automobiles and ship-building, and has more-recently been trying to shift to information and communication related industries. However, these industries are vulnerable to global conditions and with recent developments in new technologies such as automated manufacturing and AI, they are becoming industries that do not as directly result in employment.

To deal with changes in conditions such as declining population and the mind-boggling changes in the global economy and the structure of industry, it is important to diversify the structure of industry within a city. In Japan, with its declining and aging population, it will be difficult to plan for increases in permanent residents in the future, so industries that attract people from outside will be important.

Under such conditions, it will be important to cultivate tourism as a new core industry and build it into a major industry. As such, Yokosuka City has created a tourism-based city promotion action plan, identifying three main directions. The first is to develop a “Marine City” with rich marine products and leisure activities. The second is to develop a “Music, Sports and Entertainment City” that will provide excitement for everyone. The third is to develop a “City with local communities that have their own personality,” providing a base for schools and local residents to work together on various initiatives.

We plan to implement these, integrating nature, Japanese heritage, and recent history with sports, music and entertainment, strengthening our communication capabilities through synergistic effects, creating differentiation with other regions, and thus attracting visitors from groups that have not given Yokosuka much consideration in the past, such as women, families and foreign visitors.

We have various collaboration efforts with this approach at the core, which makes our local government extremely easy to work with compared to others.

3. History of collaboration measures

Yokosuka is in a good location, within an hour of metropolitan areas, but it is far enough to require a reason to go and there are other tourism sites nearby, such as Yokohama and Kamakura. As such, an extra push is needed to attract people to Yokosuka, so we have begun using content collaboration as a primer to attract new visitors.

We found that collaborations with Yokosuka City and subculture content have worked very well. There was an action plan to change the image of Yokosuka City. It was often used as the setting in game content because its image was a bit edgy, and users were familiar with many of the games.

The Yokosuka City Tourism Division began such collaborations in 2013 with the “Tamayura” Gourmet Stamp Rally. It became a must-see destination and attracted many fans through collaboration with Keikyu Railway and others.

The following year (2014), we started a campaign with a game called Ingress, which was our first game collaboration. The game used location information distributed by Google at the time and staff were playing the game, which led to a collaboration proposal and eventually to implementation.

Since then the Ingress startup team has gone independent, as Niantic Inc., and launched other applications such as Pokemon GO. Following the location-game event conducted in collaboration with Yokosuka City described above, another public collaboration event was held in 2018 using Pokemon GO.

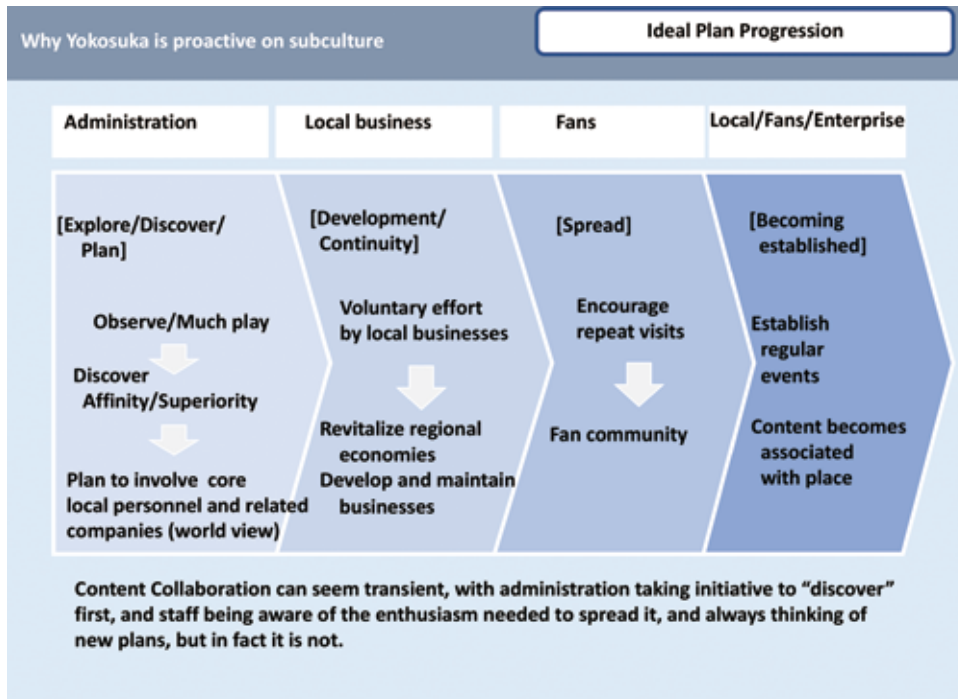
These events really raised awareness, for Yokosuka City and others, that game content has the potential to move many people.

We held about two collaboration projects per year using anime, manga, games, magazines and other media, and although Yokosuka started to get a reputation that they would try anything, staff at the Tourism Division gained experience, became accustomed to events involving copyright, and formed connections with people in the industry.

4. Lessons learned from collaboration by Yokosuka City

It is difficult to establish culture just by holding events. To create sustainable initiatives requires involvement from many

Figure 1: The administration's ideal framework for development



people and awareness of the planning process needed to gain acceptance by fans.

The administration must first take the initiative in searching for, finding, and planning events, local businesses must take-over development and continuity, and fans must help form and expand a community, establish the event, and earn a place as a must-see destination for fans of the content. The ideal process is shown in Figure 1. It is easy to think of content collaboration as transient, but with awareness of this process, even though each event is transient, we have had an increasing number of comments from publishers, that Yokosuka City is becoming known for its agility, and understanding of the various subcultures. The true value of these efforts will be shown as we continue with these initiatives.

However, if a plan ignores a global outlook, or does something that could be done anywhere, fans will soon drift away. When creating plans, we must find aspects of Yokosuka that are attractive and superior from the perspective of a fan, and build on them. Making this the highest priority and planning to appeal to the hearts of our core fans is what will draw their affection.

While it is also good for the administration to take initiative in drafting plans, the path to success is to gather as many colleagues as possible, from related enterprises, local businesses or residents, and form scrums. The eSports project was implemented based on this lesson.

5. eSports Initiatives

Based on connections cultivated in the various collaborative events conducted by Yokosuka City and the Tokyo Game Show, we studied plans to resolve various issues, and in 2019, we released the Yokosuka eSports Project, in collaboration with

partner enterprises. For this initiative we asked for collaboration in establishing eSports clubs in the city's high schools, to lend them high-performance PCs free-of-charge. As background for the initiative, PC manufacturers wanted to promote games requiring high-performance PCs, and telecommunications operators were very interested in the eSports market. The timing of these needs and the content of the plan matched, Yokosuka City made the proposal to various enterprises, and we received their endorsements. At the same time, Yokosuka City was also considering holding eSports tournaments to promote eSports culture in the city and to expand the culture of watching such tournaments.

We have proceeded, knowing that Yokosuka City alone would not be able to implement this support and there was doubt whether it was even possible, so at times, we were reminded of the importance of conveying our plans in this new field to as many people as possible, to expand our group of partners.

As we moved into education environments, we also held hearings with teachers and students who are acting as advisors, and continually worked to reflect their input into the initiative, which is described below.

6. Reasons for the initiative

We have been asked why the administration has started working in eSports. There are various answers to this, but we will describe the four main reasons here. Beyond this initiative, we want it to lead to creating new possibilities that Yokosuka City did not have before and to increase the potential of the community itself.

6.1 Expand possibilities for children

By increasing the choices for children, even by one, we can expand their possibilities in the future. It is clear that there are many different ways of learning and living, so more choices is also good.

Becoming a professional player is not the only future path for being involved in eSports, and there are many others such as working with an enterprise or event company in the eSports field, being a streamer, or a game developer.

6.2 Anyone can be involved

In contrast with physical sports, eSports are a level playing field that anyone can join, regardless of age, sex, disability, language, physical strength or other factors. This could also contribute to solving social issues. For example, introducing eSports into facilities for the elderly could promote communication between students and elderly people. From the perspective of local governments, which are highly communal, eSports bring new value in that they are highly impartial and equitable.

6.3 Create opportunities locally

With eSports, anyone can join, and a location does not have to be found. If participants can get on line, they can compete with anyone in the world, so tournaments can be held at very small scale, or covering the whole country. This is clearly not possible with ordinary sports.

6.4 Topicality

eSports is now an often-heard expression, but three years ago, the fact that Yokosuka City was working on it was newsworthy, and provided good PR that the city was agile and helped in finding interesting talent. From the initial release in 2019 till now, we have been called by various media, receiving plenty of feedback. We have also heard from several enterprises, having read some of these articles and thinking that Yokosuka City offices could be a place that would hear their proposals, and this has led to some actual projects.

7. Disadvantages and issues

A topic that cannot be separated from eSports is video game addiction. We spend much time discussing this when starting

the project, but at this stage there have not been any examples of video game dependency arising from an eSports club. Rather, we have seen scenarios where students show a surprisingly high level of awareness, such as discussing together and deciding how much time to play. We were also prepared to receive criticism from parents, but instead, we heard that parents wanted us to introduce the program in more schools.

Even so, the possibility of game addiction is not zero. As someone promoting eSports, it is also important to ensure that those involved have accurate information regarding eSports, through seminars and hearings, to give them a deeper understanding of the issues.

One issue that we sensed in running the project was that the shortage of staff in school education is a major problem. This is an issue in school education overall, not related to eSports. Even when teachers were enthusiastic and wanted to let students interested in eSports participate, they did not have time they could allocate to being advisors, there was no space or funding to do it, and no one that could lead the project. Yokosuka City would like to provide any support that it can to resolve these types of issues.

8. Support to establish high-school eSports clubs

8.1 Donating gaming PCs free-of-charge

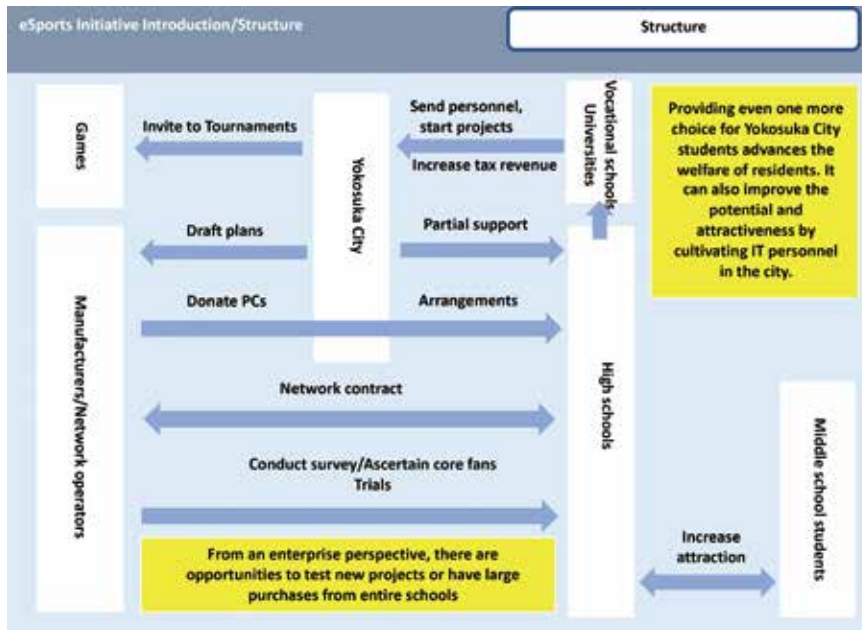
We have secured the cooperation of INTEL, MSI Computer Japan, NTT East, and TSUKUMO Inc., to provide up to five PCs, monitors and peripheral devices free-of-charge for three years to each of 13 city high schools that want to participate (Figure 2). All of these products were donated to Yokosuka City in FY2021. Currently, eight schools have introduced the computers.

We had expected that many schools would naturally come forward when the program was introduced, but in fact, very few did, and only after we started going to individual schools to recruit them and explaining the program, they began to join. When we actually spoke to them, various concerns came to the surface, such as what to do for the network connection, how to pay for the games themselves, and whether the program could be operated without a person to lead it. We spoke in detail regarding operation with each of the clubs to gain their agreement, and based on these hearings, we added the following two points.

■ Figure 2: Partner companies donating PCs free-of-charge



Figure 3: Structure for PC donations



8.2 Network installation support

Kanagawa prefecture high schools already had NURO networks for student use, separate from that used by staff, so these could be used by simply having the participating schools report it to the prefectural education committee. However, almost none of the private schools had networks that could be used for club activity, and new connections had to be arranged. Yokosuka City provided assistance for the initial costs, which were the first hurdle.

We have asked each school to bear the running costs, either through club fees or from the school's activity fees.

8.3 Support student guidance programs

Some people were happy to receive a Gaming PC, but did not know where to start with it, or have anyone who could teach the students. We realized that rather than starting completely in the dark, participants could only appreciate the attraction of eSports and set meaningful personal or club goals with training from a dedicated leader or pro.

As with other issues discussed above, it seemed that it would be difficult for schools to carry the costs of programs provided by private enterprise, so we provided support in the form of course fees, as a startup support measure.

We thought that it would be good to provide introductions to various eSports program titles through people we had met for the project, and by asking the professional eSports teams for their cooperation.

We are already conducting trials with several titles, and they are meaningful both for students to experience valuable time and guidance from pros and for businesses and eSports teams to interact with the younger generation, so we hope that we can expect even more active interaction in the future.

9. Description of eSports project

An issue for the overall eSports industry is recognition. We believe there will be business opportunities, once a culture of watching and supporting eSports spreads, and as the surrounding adults reach a higher level of understanding. Our efforts just within Yokosuka City may not have great effect, but we are working to increase the number of people that understand, even by one person.

9.1 Seminars

We have held seminars to provide accurate knowledge regarding eSports, both for businesses and for the general public. For businesses in particular, we have discussed issues such as sponsorship and cultivating a company's own team.

9.2 eSports facilities

We have taken an approach oriented to high-school club activity, but the number of PCs made available is much smaller than the number of students, and time for such activity is limited. We are also planning eSports facilities to increase opportunities to try eSports, including pre-high-school students and others who have finished school.

9.3 eSports tournaments

We have been holding eSports tournaments for high-school students since FY2020. We hope eventually to invite large-scale tournaments to Yokosuka City, but we will hold regular regional tournaments in order to establish the eSports culture in the city.

10. Future objectives

It cannot be denied that some people are still skeptical about eSports. While we are giving consideration to criticisms of

eSports, we are also actively working to gain understanding of the benefits of eSports described above, from both business people and those involved in schools.

Although we are promoting it through informational articles, SNS and other means, it still feels inadequate. We need to continue our current activity on eSports projects, while also strengthening promotional activities to attract the attention of many more people.

It is due to the interactions we have had with many businesses in the past that we have been able to start and promote these projects. By expanding our circle of interaction with people involved or interested in eSports, we have been able to support projects.

11. Issues and solutions

It is true that there are still many issues to be addressed in continuing these efforts and having them take root as part of the culture of the city. We discuss various issues and ways to deal with them below.

11.1 Projects die out due to staff changes

When personnel involved in a project change, it is difficult for new people to take over the related know-how and personal connections. It is also difficult to preserve enthusiasm and quality, so it is not unusual for projects to die out. This danger is particularly high for projects initiated mainly local governments, where personnel changes are common. To ensure a project continues, it is important to have a key person from a private enterprise as a partner for the local government organization.

11.2 Securing funding and importance of agility

Two weaknesses of projects led by local governments are the difficulty in securing funding and the inability to move quickly. For funding, a budget can be secured through crowd funding, by using municipal taxes collected from private businesses, or through sponsorships from collaborating or endorsing businesses.

Having cooperation and the driving force from a key person from a private business can help improve agility while also helping to secure funding (Figure 4).

12. Conclusion

We have described a full picture of eSports projects conducted by Yokosuka City, but another result of these initiatives is to generate new types of intergenerational interaction between students and adults. eSports seem to be able to fill-in age and generation gaps easily. We hope that more active exchange between generations, such as between students and the elderly, will contribute to revitalization of Yokosuka City in the future.

eSports can also help strengthen communication skills, such as helping senior students communicate with juniors in club activity, even though they may be worried about making those connections. It can also provide opportunities for students to contribute their own strategies, designs, plans for club activities and other ideas, which will also help them in the future.

Figure 4: Measures for securing funding



Finally, as a person in charge of eSports for the city, the focus on eSports has steadily increased in the three years since we started this project. As actual studies and reports are saying, the eSports market is expanding every year, with more and more people and companies wanting to get involved. We want to use this time, when it is attracting so much attention, to increase the number of colleagues that we can form scrums and work with. By using each of our strengths, we can build an even larger movement.

Cover Art



kyotomeishonouchi shijogawarayuusuzumi (Cooling off in the Evening at Shijogawara (Famous Places of Kyoto))

Utagawa Hiroshige (1797~1858)

Collection of the Art Research Center (ARC)
Ritsumeikan University
Object number: arcBK06-0013_008