

Subnational participation in extra-national policy solutions:

Kitakyushu City as an intermediate agent in policy coordination

Yasuo Takao

Curtin University

Department of Social Sciences and Security Studies

GPO Box U1987

Perth, WA 6845

Australia

Telephone 61 8 9266 3325

Email y.takao@curtin.edu.au

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Abstract

The growing challenges of environment and sustainable development stretch across scales of geographic space and require action at multiple levels of jurisdictions, such as individual level, community level, national level, and global level. Multilevel governance and cross-scale coordination will open up opportunities for a variety of stakeholders to participate in decision-making. While potentially increasing the capacity of governance, the cross-scale and multilevel approaches may face a difficulty in policy coordination created by the plurality of stakeholders and be attended with organizational complexity. This article will examine the potential of subnational participation to make a policy choice, mediated by local governments, to be congruent with global strategies and national mandates in a consistent way. To this end, it will bring a new perspective to Kitakyushu City's experience in Japan as a heuristic test case study. My claim is that subnational actors occupy a strategic position to straddle the division between state and society, between the centre and the periphery, and between the domestic and the foreign so they can act as an intermediate agent in reconnecting local action with national policy and turning global strategies into local action for problem solving.

Keywords: local government, international cooperation, policy coordination, *hierarchized* tiers, *de-hierarchized* spheres, Kitakyushu

In the late 1970s, Chadwick Alger (1977) pointed out the importance of the subnational level of participation in the policy solutions of global issues. Yet he argued that the territorial constraints of state authority had prevented subnational actors from participating in

international cooperation (Alger 1988). In the late 1980s, we began to witness a marked upsurge of subnational participation in transnational networks to solve problems neglected by the state. A significant number of scholars investigated a substantial amount of this occurring in Japanese local activities, although their approaches were largely descriptive. These scholars presented some interesting findings that Japanese pioneering local governments came to understand themselves as direct participants in global policy strategies while most local governments had primarily implemented national level development assistant projects (Banba1986; Yabuno 1995; Yoshida 2001; Jain 2005; Nakamura, Elder and Mori 2011).¹ Their research focus lies on the dichotomous understanding of autonomist and state-centric policy solutions on the part of subnational participation. In my view, however, subnational autonomy and state-centric policy solutions in the areas of international development and environmental cooperation are not mutually exclusive. Subnational government occupies a strategic position to straddle the division between state and society, between the centre and the periphery, and between the domestic and the foreign. This article will examine the potential role of subnational actors in decentralized policy coordination and as intermediate agents, in order to bring greater policy cohesion amid all the divisions.

Why is it worth knowing subnational level of participation?

Due to a fluid patchwork of overlapping jurisdictions over global issues, there is a growing need to provide a venue for policy coordination for problem solving. The merit of including subnational governments to take up a decentralized coordination role in international development and environmental cooperation can be presumed on the basis of a number of grounds: subnational government has a permanent physical infrastructure and multi-task jurisdictions (Norton 1991: 22); subnational government has national institutional channels (i.e., political access, leverage, and opportunities) through which to pursue their local interests

(e.g., Bomberg and Peterson 1998: 221-23); subnational government is open to a range of popular interests which are less represented within the corporatist sector at the national level (Saunders 1984: 28); subnational government can be pragmatically competent to deal with policy problems in the immediate area but also motivated by its concerns for local experience (Tuan 1977; Collin and Collin 1998); subnational government is potentially willing and capable of contributing, even without national supervision, to the national policy-making process as well; local government takes part in transnational coalitions, externally to influence multilateral rule-making or internally to promote cooperation with other subnational and societal actors (Bomberg and Peterson 1998: 229; Betsill and Bulkeley 2006); subnational government has been targeted by the United Nations for promoting the decentralized functions of global governance.² Subnational government is thus potentially capable of acting as an intermediate agent to overcome difficulties in policy coordination created by the plurality of stakeholders and may also be attended with organizational complexity. It is important to note that, despite the structural position shared among subnational governments, their ability to exploit it for policy coordination depends on human agent effects among the different levels of organization, financial resources, political autonomy and political influence of subnational governments.

In what ways do subnational actors participate?

There is a conventional typology of two institutional approaches to the subnational level of participation in the resolution of global social issues. The first category is *state-centric governance* in which national government does not formally recognize the legal right of subnational authorities to represent themselves at the international level (Marks 1996: 31–32; Bomberg and Peterson 1998: 227–28; Skelcher 2005: 94). In essence, national policy either regulates or enables subnational level of participation. In this process, the participation is

legitimized by domestic benefits rather than sharing the costs of problem-solving beyond national borders (Taylor 1983; Moravcsik 1993). Subnational authorities have primarily an implementation role to play if national mandates are to be met within the context of international obligation (Aall et al. 2007). The second one is *autonomist governance* in which national government gives subnational authorities the right to legitimately represent themselves at the international level and contribute to global problem-solving and multilateral policy-making without national supervision (Hooghe and Marks 1996: 73–82; Marks 1996: 31–32; Bomberg and Peterson 1998: 223–27). National government institutionally empowers subnational authorities as autonomous actors.

In Japan, the policy areas of international development and environmental cooperation are institutionally state-centric as the national government extends incentive schemes as well as top-down policies towards subnational governments. Since the late 1980s, some pioneering Japanese local authorities, such as Kitakyushu, have managed their activity in the area of international environmental and development cooperation, both through the Local Allocation Tax (national general grants) and ODA (official development assistance) funding from the national government as well as their independent revenue-generating sources. In 1992 Japan introduced new aid guidelines (the 1992 ODA Charter), refocusing its foreign aid towards environmental and “softer” types of aid such as poverty alleviation and social infrastructure such as educational and medical facilities. In 1999, given these issue areas in which local authorities had accumulated experiences and expertise, the national government formally began to promote the *kokumin-sanka gata* (community participation model) that would involve local authorities in international cooperation programs. This model of decentralized international cooperation, in which local governments take up a key role, was also recognized by Japanese aid agencies. There are two main channels, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (known as Home Affairs, until 2001), through which national funds are provided to extend local know-how and experience to developing countries.

One would expect that the Japanese unitary system is more approximate to *state-centric governance*. But once attention is directed towards the boundary between domestic and foreign affairs, the static typology of governance cannot easily account for the dynamic processes of real life experience at the subnational level. Some Japanese local governments, while mobilized across institutional boundaries of polity, voluntarily participate in the policy area where domestic and foreign issues converge (Kerr 1983: 3; Rosenau 1997: 5), either due to a lack of support from the national government or in the absence of national regulation. Without the familiar ground of institutionalized rules or the right to legitimately represent themselves at the international level, local governments find a way through non-institutionalized or informal channels to move across levels of government and deal directly with a transnational network of local governments, non-state actors and supranational actors in a rather *ad hoc* fashion (Takao 2013: 62–64). These local governments interpret the role of the opportunity structures and adapt them to meet their own locally specific needs without, normally, completely superseding the hierarchical order of territorial jurisdictions.

What roles do subnational actors play?

Unless being an active part of national policy, subnational authorities have no mandate for international development work and international environmental cooperation. In these areas, nonetheless, subnational authorities have a potential to take up an intermediate role between *hierarchized* tiers, and at *de-hierarchized* new spheres, of authority through the very

process of policy learning and coordination (Rosenau 1997; Andonova et al. 2009). In the hierarchical order, subnational authorities act as an agent whose power is delegated by national authority in a hierarchical, principal-agent chain-of-command where the agent is accountable to the principal, and at the same time, for democratic localities to function, they rely on public engagement, namely a venue whereby the general public participates in exacting accountability through a form of social responsibility. They also understand themselves as being agents in achieving national goals within the context of international obligations. To ensure accountability for maintaining their congruent actions with local needs, national mandates, and global strategies, subnational authorities engage in the area of international environmental and development cooperation as national authority actively gets involved in the support of these activities. National authority can still accept and reject the subnational level of participation international environmental and development cooperation.

In the de-hierarchized spheres, inter-subnational flows dominate the processes of joint problem-solving and policy coordination as subnational authorities seek to absorb the underperformance or failure of national government across both sectors and jurisdictions. Subnational authorities continue to individually or collectively generate governance capacity, which is organized around decentralized networks between a variety of governments and other actors active in a joint domain (Kern and Bulkeley 2009; Gustavsson et al. 2009).³ Joint problem-solving has a basis of both domestic and transnational dimensions. Subnational authorities, as potential partners of civil society groups, are expected to assure individuals' health and welfare in local communities, as they wish to provide cohesive and coordinated responses to a changing relationship between business and civil society. Beyond the inter-subnational flows of policy learning from other subnational authorities at the domestic level, one way to assure such a policy cohesion is through their development of and participation in

transnational networks. These networks of subnational authorities are mostly used for policy learning yet they could develop advocacy coalitions with active members who share specific policy objectives in a policy subsystem to promote their interests in international rule-making (Bomberg and Peterson 1998: 229). Subnational authorities seek to implement a cohesive policy that would meet the globally acceptable bounds of regulatory policies as well as specific local needs. The intermediate role by subnational actors is promoted by a recognition that local developmental and environmental problems require global strategies, and globalized issues need local action (Dyer 1994; Litfin 2000: 239).

How do subnational actors promote policy cohesion?

In their attempt to take up a role in decentralized international cooperation, subnational authorities serve to establish a coordinated connection between *hierarchized* tiers and *de-hierarchized* spheres. From the viewpoint of state-centric governance, they naturally draw attention to the gate-keeping capacity of national authority. National government still can accept and reject international agreements and is often in charge of the final decisions on the allocation and monitoring of government funds. The creation of such a coordinated connection thus needs to be centered around the opening and closing of political, policy, and polity opportunities at the national level.

To enhance the political feasibility of policy solutions in the de-hierarchized spheres, subnational authorities, as part of the state apparatus, not only avoid completely superseding the hierarchical order of territorial jurisdictions, but also gain national political access (politics). The coordinated connection is seized by subnational authorities' political mobilization that has influence on national government to formally endorse and fund the policy solutions. In order

to steer decision-making arrangements (policy), subnational authorities persuade national policy elites with their decision-making competences as national government does not automatically lead to a dominating position or to full control over agenda-setting and decision-making powers. Decentralized international cooperation is not simply complementary to foreign aid by engaging in assistance activities that are nationally defined, but rather subnational authorities take initiatives on a trans-local basis in response to some sense of common local problems, crossing borders. The structuring of political institutions (polity) is addressed by political mobilization and policy-making. Subnational authorities are not uniform entities but occupy their specific position in a given political system, with different levels of resources. The central issue boils down to subnational authorities' willingness and capability of contributing to establishing a coordinated connection between hierarchized tiers and de-hierarchized spheres. They are not equally sensitive to the discretionary political opportunities or the institutionalized policy opportunities. Subnational actors, whose institutional positions are constantly adjusted by political mobilization and policy-making, need to interpret such opportunities and fit them to subnationally-initiated national objectives, in order to connect de-hierarchized solutions with national policy.

My claim is that subnational actors occupy a strategic position so they can act as intermediate agents in reconnecting local action with national policy and turning global strategies into local action for problem solving. In the context of their structural position, a de-hierarchized to hierarchized flow of policy coordination is politically feasible when decentralized international cooperation comes to produce short-term results on specific policy issues and reflect the influence of electoral and party competition at the national level (Schattschneider 1960: 20; Wlezien 2005) or place a country's international reputation under foreign pressure (Risse and Ropp 1999: 245). That being the case, national authority is likely to enable the subnational level of participation in decentralized international cooperation. Otherwise, inter-subnational

flows are likely to dominate the processes of policy coordination. Specific policy issues, such as environment, social/cultural, and disaster management, addressed by the subnational level of participation tend to have a dimension of “soft politics” in the sense that national governments are very reluctant to invest in these issue areas as they tend to address themselves to higher electoral priorities at the national level. By contrast, at the level of policy-making, a de-hierarchized to hierarchized flow of policy coordination is more likely. This is simply because national government in any political systems depends to some degree on subnational authorities for the success of agenda-setting and decision-making to seek its desired policy outcomes (e.g., Charbit and Michalun 2009; Hoogh and Marks 2001: 69-80). When subnational authorities take their own initiatives, especially those beyond the reach of national government, on a trans-local basis in the policy solutions of common local problems, national authority could recognize the benefits and importance of the centrally unmanageable tasks and adopt them as part of national policy implementation. On the other hand, trans-locally initiated projects are less capable of ensuring their sustainable financing; national government's funds are often the primary sources of financing those projects (Takao 2013: 65). To establish a coordinated way of policy cohesion between hierarchized tiers and de-hierarchized spheres, subnational authorities may exercise discretionary power over national funds by acting as a credible provider of policy innovation and expertise, something which national government has never been capable of providing.

The following section will use a decentralized analysis whereby the link between individual agents and structural transformation is of crucial importance to look beneath the aggregate relationships to more qualitative evidence of localized motives for policy integration between different levels and spheres of authority. It will illustrate how subnational actors individually or collectively are able to interpret the opportunity structures of their strategic position and fit it to the locally specific needs to be congruent with national policy and global strategies. In so

doing, I will examine the potential role of subnational governments in policy coordination across scales of geographic space and at multiple levels of jurisdictions, by conducting a heuristic test case study of Kitakyushu City's experience in Japan.

Insert Figure 1 here.

City of Kitakyushu in the state-centric unitary system

Kitakyushu municipal government is by far the most active in decentralized international cooperation among Japan's local governments. The city, with more than 30 years' experience in this area, appears to have an exceptionally strong commitment to decentralized international cooperation. The municipal government has skillfully served to establish a connection between hierarchical tiers of authority (i.e., distribution of national decision-making competencies to Kitakyushu) and de-hierarchized new spheres of authority (i.e., its decision-making competencies shared with societal actors and local business and with overseas counterpart organizations) for problem-solving to meet locally specific needs. Nonetheless, Kitakyushu's financial capacity is the second worst among twenty Japanese cities with a population greater than 500,000. Why and how does the city get involved in decentralized international cooperation?

Kitakyushu as an intermediate agent in the hierarchy of territorial jurisdictions

In 1963 Kitakyushu was municipalized in the midst of industrial pollution by the amalgamation of five cities. In the 1960s, the present area of Kitakyushu developed into one of the four largest industrial zones in Japan, accounting for over 5 percent of Japan's industrial production. Many of its residents were surrounded by large factories involved in chemical, iron and steel. In 1965

the Shiroyama district of Kitakyushu recorded the worst air pollution on record in Japan (City of Kitakyushu 1997, 3). In 1966 the Bay of Dōkai in Kitakyushu recorded a high of COD (chemical oxygen demand) 36mg/l, and was now called the “dead sea” (City of Kitakyushu 1997, 3). The bay was highly contaminated by industrial and domestic wastewater. In 1964 Japan joined the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with extensive reservations to capital liberalization. In order to meet the challenge of inevitable capital liberalization, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) began to work on large-scale mergers in key industries for greater international competitiveness. One of the major outcomes was the 1970 merger of Yawata Iron & Steel Co. and Fuji Iron & Steel Co. to become Nippon Steel in Kitakyushu. In 1973 the former MITI Vice-Minister became president of the world's largest steel company while all the chief executives of the company were former bureaucrats from the ministry (Johnson 1982, 277–283). This situation was a double-edged sword, with the beneficial effects of improved access to national funds to be offset by the potentially adverse effects of bureaucratic influence on Kitakyushu's municipal government. In the late 1980s, Mayor Kōichi Sueyoshi (1987–2007) of Kitakyushu, a former national bureaucrat of the Construction Ministry, was creating, through the pipeline to the national bureaucracy, a legacy of winning national subsidies for Kitakyushu's projects, such as the Eco-Town project in 1997 and the Smart City project in 2010, to gain the goodwill of local residents.

The merged Nippon Steel was by far the biggest local employer (employing nearly 50,000 people) in Kitakyushu, but its advantageous position was about to dissolve due to the health effects caused by industrial pollution. A public sentiment of anti-industrial pollution in urban areas across the nation expanded the scope of the conflict to party and electoral competition at the national level. In 1970 the National Diet passed radical improvements to the existing government countermeasures against a wide range of environmental pollution, pledging the steepest reduction of environmental pollutants (Broadbent 1998; 123-124). In 1971, as a

Kitakyushu pollution prevention ordinance was enacted, the city created an Environmental Pollution Control Bureau to implement a range of environmental regulations. In 1985, an OECD environmental report introduced Kitakyushu as “a city that was transformed from a gray city to a green city” (OECD 1985, 29).

Kitakyushu Eco-Town was the first Eco-Town in Japan approved by the national government in 1997. The Kitakyushu project was presented as “Asia’s International Resource-Recycling and Environmental Industry Base City” (GEC 2005, 29–41). The municipal government saw itself as a contributor to the national mandate of “international contribution” (*kokusai kōken*) while coordinating stakeholders’ needs and issues at stakeholders’ meetings and briefings for residents (GEC 2005, 37). The city also established the Eco-Town Center so that the center would be used to hold the operation of all their facilities accountable to the citizens and to encourage citizens’ involvement in the Eco-Town Plan. **The Kitakyushu Eco-Town became the largest project in Japan, with 29 business facilities, 16 research institutions, 1,300 employees, and an investment amount of over US\$ 0.6 billion in 2012 (JMOE 2012).** Kitakyushu has developed its cooperative relationship with the national government to provide its environmental management experience at the local level, which had been formerly unattended by national ministries.

Japan’s industrial policy on large-scale mergers remained a strong top-down national undertaking to facilitate the provision of public goods with a “corporate bias,” which was to retain the power of national decision-making and insulate itself from popular pressures. Yet the hierarchical order of exclusive jurisdiction over industrial policy provided the multi-task jurisdictions of Kitakyushu with channels to national grants and subsidies. By contrast, other issue-specific policy opportunities in Japan can be quite diverse in their structures. Unlike industrial policy, a large proportion of pollution-control policies in Japan are not driven by a

strong top-down national undertaking, since national policy often enables the local level of participation under a delegation of decision-making power to local governments.⁴ Even if there is no clear delegation, the absence of national regulation or national government's inaction creates a window opening for proactive environmental policy at the local level. Once strong public opinion and high policy salience expand the scope of the conflict for electoral competition at the national level, the coalition of conservative politicians, bureaucrats and big business are likely to respond to public preferences. Indeed, by the mid-1970s when the political climate of anti-industrial pollution had provided a clear signal to policy makers, the national government incorporated most local environmental policy innovations into its nationally led platform. In this context, the Kitakyushu municipal government, while seeking to bring material benefits from the national government to its local communities, also played an intermediary role in making business interests more responsive to the needs of local residents, thus fostering the legitimacy of policy-making.

Kitakyushu as an intermediate agent in the de-hierarchized spheres of authority

In the early 1990s, Kitakyushu received worldwide praise for its collaborative achievements of restoring the environment and its preventive environmental efforts winning the Global 500 Award (presented by the United Nations Environment Programme in 1990). By 1990, however, acid rain began to affect all parts of Japan. Japanese government, researchers and newspapers reported that China's coal-burning power plants had caused acid rain affecting Japan (e.g., JEA 1997), although the Chinese government did not accept this finding. In 1991, as local residents in Kitakyushu recognized that acid rain was the most pressing transnational air pollution problem, the city held the International Conference on Acid Rain in East Asia. In 1992 the Environmental Cooperation Center was created as part of a non-profit organization, the Kitakyushu International Techno-cooperation Association (KITA), in response to the

recognition that the domestic “Kitakyushu Method” alone could not cope with the spillover effect of environmental degradation.⁵ Residents in its Chinese sister city Dalian were faced with their limited capacity to deal with air pollution from the massive combustion of raw coal and extensive water contamination from thousands of new small enterprises (City of Kitakyushu 1998, 177). Kitakyushu dispatched to Dalian 49 pollution control experts in 1993 and another 36 experts in 1995 in a bid to develop a trans-local network through their joint seminars on environmental control (City of Kitakyushu 1998, 177). The de-hierarchized spheres were set to expand to a transnational dimension.

By the early 1990s, Dalian was a state-designated city as well as one of the fourteen Chinese Coastal Open Cities where local residents experienced every imaginable environmental problem. At the China-Kyushu symposium on environmental technology, held in November 1993, Isao Mizuno, director-general of the KITA, proposed establishing a “Dalian Environmental Model Zone” through joint efforts of Kitakyushu and Dalian. In January 1994 China’s NEPA adopted as a priority project this proposed idea, which was expected to have nationwide influence on other localities in China. On his visit in September 1994 to China, the mayor of Kitakyushu received an official confirmation for supporting the Model Zone project from both vice-Premier Zhu Rongji and NEPA Director General Jie Zhenhua (City of Kitakyushu 1998, 177–181 and 217-18; KITA, 2001, 230–237). The Kitakyushu side was preparing to provide the project with its experience and expertise on pollution control and prevention and began to engage in diffusing its policy measures to the coastal city located across the Yellow Sea, in order to solve the cross-border problems of acid rain. Both cities shared a common goal of environmental risk reduction and frequently exchanged information. The coalition of Kitakyushu city officials, KITA members, local business, universities, residents’ groups, and Dalian city officials was not simply complementary to national governments by engaging in assistance activities that were centrally defined, but rather took

initiatives on a trans-local basis in response to some sense of common local problems, crossing borders. This transnational coalition encouraged the extensive participation of local communities in the development process of the Model Zone project. In this respect, the considerable scope of participation enhanced the accountability of the Model Zone project towards local communities in both cities. The key basis of success lies in Kitakyushu's ability to act as an intermediate agent in bringing the two cities together for cross-fertilization of their mutually reinforcing needs (Kido 2000; Teraishi 2000).

Geographical proximity, which facilitates cross-border cooperation, is the natural criterion of partner selection. A case in point is the inter-municipal cooperation between Dalian and Kitakyushu over pollution control. Geographical proximity is strongly related to the development of international environmental cooperation, providing both opportunities and incentives; it is one of the most important factors driving trans-local activities. Yet as international environmental cooperation has become part of global strategies for environmental risk reduction, the linkages of trans-local relations have revealed different geographical orientations, with special focus on North–South issues. International environmental cooperation has been seen as a site for dialogue to tackle the North–South divide. In this respect, geographical proximity could undermine the normative commitment to solve the North-South divide, since Northern counterparts are partly driven by their immediate concerns about the transboundary spillover effects across the geographically adjacent areas. Given inequalities in terms of material, financial and human resources between Northern and Southern counterparts, the smaller material benefits of Northern partners also appear to compromise the criteria of partner selection. To overcome this disincentive, Kitakyushu's leaders found a natural business niche: using local environmental expertise to benefit from international cooperation. In the late 1980s, Mayor Sueyoshi identified locally accumulated environmental technologies with great business potential for Kitakyushu's revitalization. He

proposed a strategy to couple environmental policy with business opportunities (Sueyoshi 2002). Since then, the mayor and community leaders of Kitakyushu had nurtured the development of environmental business undertakings aimed at greatly benefiting both Kitakyushu and its partners in developing countries. They claimed that "Promotion of international environmental business" would develop a compatible way of balancing the normative commitment to North-South solutions and commercial self-interest (Hakozaki 2011).

In the area of water management, for example, Kitakyushu has been sharing waterworks technology with Asian cities as part of its initiative to improve water standards and human health. Kitakyushu's Water and Sewer Bureau has been involved in waterworks projects in Indonesia, Vietnam and China. The case of Cambodia's capital of Phnom Penh has been a success story. In 1991 the Paris Peace Agreement ended Cambodia's civil war, yet the nation was not completely at peace. Two years later, the Phnom Penh Water Supply Authority (PPWSA) was able to supply water through the city's waterworks to only 25 percent of the city's population. In 1999 Kitakyushu agreed to share its waterworks expertise with and dispatch skilled experts to Phnom Penh. In the same year, the city began to provide the expertise and specialists for the installment of a block system of gridded and separated distribution pipes to detect water leakages. The pipes were often tampered with and Phnom Penh was still fraught with danger (City of Kitakyushu 2012: 3). **By 2006, the international water cooperation, as compared to 1993, stood out as crucial to achieving the outstanding results: the percentage of households in Phnom Penh served by the PPWSA increased from 25 percent to 90 percent (City of Kitakyushu 2012: 2; Naruse 2014: 9). The success has attracted much attention from other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) nations.**

Kitakyushu's role in policy coordination between hierarchized tiers and de-hierarchized spheres

China's National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) became an independent state organization in 1984. It recognized the financial losses caused by pollution but found a difficulty in handling the localized development with little capital for environmental management (Smil 1996; Vermeer 1998). Vice-Premier and NEPA Director General officially confirmed support for the Dalian Environmental Model Zone project but financial support was not forthcoming. The inter-municipal coalition of Kitakyushu and Dalian had limited financial resources and staffing for making the master plan of the Model Zone. In August 1994 both cities thus agreed further that they would ask the Chinese officials to discuss fund-raising with the Japanese government (Kido 2000). In September 1995, the Chinese government subsequently made an official development assistance (ODA) request for its Dalian Environmental Model Zone projects to be funded by the Japanese government. This request coincided with Japan's effort to delink the controversial commercial aspect of Japanese aid. Since the early 1990s when the Japanese government introduced new aid guideline - the 1992 ODA Charter, Japan refocused its foreign aid toward "softer" types of aid such as environmental protection to improve its poor reputation. In February 1996, the Japanese government pledged ODA funds to China for the project of the Dalian Environmental Model Zone. Never before had such trans-local initiatives been adopted as ODA projects at the national level (Kido 2000; Teraishi 2000). This turned out to be the first successful case in which city-to-city environmental cooperation aligned with Japan's large-scale ODA. The city-to-city effort grew into a project worth over US\$300 million.

The network of Kitakyushu and Dalian functioned as a trans-local advocacy coalition towards seeking out financial resources from the Japanese through China's leverage (see Keck and

Sikkink 1998: 23-24). The trans-local contacts amplified the demand for financial support for the Dalian Environmental Model Zone and echoed back their concerns into the domestic arena. Neither of the cities could have done this alone. Their network allowed each city to reach beyond its own capability to advocate and instigate changes in a synergized way. The considerable scope of participation enhanced the accountability of the Model Zone project towards local communities in both cities. Kitakyushu's ability to act as an intermediate agent brought the two cities together to reconnect their horizontal relationship with the funding from the national government ODA in the tiered, hierarchical structure.

Kitakyushu not only gained access (provided by the two main sources: the ODA funding and the Local Allocation Tax) to finance its international cooperation projects themselves, but also successfully received national funds (granted by the two main channels: the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry [MITI until 2001] and the Ministry of the Environment) to build its environmental business capacity and to carry out various public work projects, including creating a hub of human resource development. In this process, the most important fact is that the Kitakyushu projects were not only an active part of national policy, but also horizontally spread its own initiatives to other parts of Asia through the creation of environmental businesses. The municipal government acted as a pivot that allowed the connections between *hierarchized* tiers and *de-hierarchized* new spheres of authority. Jun'ichi Kawasaki, chief of the planning division of Nippon Steel, which was an active participant in the agenda setting process of Kitakyushu Eco-Town, credited the mayor's success in negotiating with the MITI to receive a cost-sharing national subsidy for developing "environmental industry" (Kawasaki 2012: 44). The national government subsequently promised the city to cover 50 percent of the project costs for developing material assets and equipment ("hardware" grants) and networking, information and promotional organizations ("software" grants).

Following, for example, the previous experience with Phnom Penh, Eco-Town enterprises continued to supply safe water to other ASEAN nations. In 2013 Hai Phong City (Vietnam) decided to introduce Kitakyushu's Upward Biological Contact Filtration (U-BCF) processing techniques in a small-scale treatment plant. This advanced treatment method, which was jointly developed in 1997 by Kitakyushu's Water and Sewer Bureau and a private company Kobelco Eco-Solutions Company, lowered operation costs as biological decomposition happened without any electric power or any chemicals (Yayama 2014). **The pilot water filtering project using U-BCF processing techniques was successfully installed and operated in Hai Phong. The Japanese government accordingly decided to grant ODA US\$15 million to Hai Phong to introduce U-BCF technology to main treatment plants.⁶ Hai Phong's pioneering project has spread U-BCF technology from one city to other cities in Southeast Asia. Beyond its immediate concerns about the transboundary spillover effects on the city, Kitakyushu demonstrated that subnational authorities could take part in environmental initiatives to settle the normative commitment to the North-South division.** Kitakyushu's key players, such as Hiroshi Mizoguchi, director of KITA's Environmental Cooperation Center, and Reiji Hitsumoto, director of the municipal office for International Environmental Strategies, felt a responsibility to utilize their accumulated human capital and local experience, particularly when Kitakyushu's environmental enterprises were expected to produce financial gains from international cooperation while local communities in developing countries were reducing environmental risks (Mizoguchi 2007; Hitsumoto 2012). In other words, economic utility-based considerations can also embrace ethical ones. As Mayor Sueyoshi, a former national bureaucrat, was able to acquire a high degree of bargaining leverage with national ministries, Kitakyushu served to further establish a connection between hierarchized tiers and de-hierarchized new spheres in a global North-South context.

One of the most interesting findings from this case study is how Kitakyushu's policy-makers drew lessons from their experience with Asian cities. This can be found in the process of policy learning from simple technology transfer to socio-technical export. Today, in their view, the process of technology transfer to the counterparts should be an integral part of solving the interdependent problems of health, environment, wealth, and social relations rather than merely physical transfer of technology (Hitsumoto 2012: 17-24; City of Kitakyushu 2015). Technical know-how itself is neutral but technological artefacts need to be embedded within the social and cultural fabric of communities in developing countries, with implications for the hardware to be used and adapted to local conditions. In the past, Kitakyushu's international environmental cooperation has established the trans-local network through the transfer of environmental technologies the city had developed through the solution of pollution problems and manufacturing processes. Now the Kitakyushu Asian Center for Low Carbon Society,⁷ in cooperation with private firms, universities and citizens' groups, is moving towards not only transferring technologies, but support for building green cities in Asia. The municipal government has adjusted itself in the light of new information, experience, or changing strategic considerations to address climate change. Kitakyushu's feasibility studies towards environmentally sustainable cities in Asia involve the public and local authorities with environmental, social and economic responsibilities as part of the trans-local process in an integrated way.

Over the past decade, Kitakyushu has been also demonstrating its coordination initiative to promote the Kitakyushu's version of sustainable energy for all in Asia and the Pacific. In 2010 the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI - formerly MITI) called for the Smart City projects and Kitakyushu was selected as one of the four cities that benefited from METI

subsidies (worth US\$ 100 million from 2011 to 2014). In the Kitakyushu's Smart City project (known as the "Kitakyushu Smart Community Creation Project"), 77 companies, which were brought together by the municipal government for 26 projects, intended not only to use their past experience and human capital accumulated in energy management, but also to develop a Kitakyushu-version smart grid system for international environmental business (FAIS 2016). The participants experimented with a low-carbon pilot community to apply specific energy management systems to the Higashida district of Kitakyushu from 2012 to 2014. These systems allowed individual buildings and households to work through the mechanism of "dynamic pricing" to reduce strain on the smart grid. The dynamic pricing was based on the use of real-time incentives, which were provided by the ability of individual participants to instantly adjust their consumption in accordance with variable rates (in supply-demand conditions), especially at times of high demand. It was reported that the dynamic pricing mechanism achieved a reduction in peak-time energy demand of over 20 percent from summer 2012 (20.2 percent) to summer 2013 (21.2 percent) and realized a CO₂ emissions cut of 28 percent for households and more than 50 percent for the business sector in 2012, as compared with emissions levels at the entire area of Kitakyushu in 2005 (City of Kitakyushu 2016). The Smart City project found that the key problem lied in improving the capacity for end-user energy management on a per-user basis (City of Kitakyushu 2016). In 2016 one of the participants, Fuji Electric Co., began to promote a smart grid technology demonstration project in Panipat City, the Haryana State of India.

Kitakyushu's policy-makers have come to see themselves as direct players in global strategies for climate change. The city aims to achieve by 2050 a 50 percent reduction in CO₂ emissions compared to 2005 levels, and to offset 23.4 million tons of carbon emissions generated by socio-technical transfer from Kitakyushu to developing countries (City of Kitakyushu 2009).

This initiative is taking place through the Kitakyushu Initiative Network with 62 cities in 18 Asian countries. It is important to note that the emissions reduction plan is not completely bypassing the established central-local relations of hierarchical jurisdictions. Kitakyushu's policy-makers are carefully linking their initiatives with national policy. In 2015, as part of Japan's national Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM)-based project, Kitakyushu has been organizing a project to reduce GHG emissions in the major sectors of energy consumption in Surabaya (Indonesia).⁸ Kitakyushu's applications for this project will be submitted in fiscal year 2016 or 2017 to the Ministry of the Environment for equipment aid, and to the JICA overseas investment and financing with a scale of over one hundred million US dollars (IGES 2014, iii).

Public support for Kitakyushu's participation in decentralized international cooperation

Perhaps the most fundamental precondition for local governments' international cooperation is public support or taxpayers/voters support. Some local authorities, such as Kitakyushu, have been involved in international development and environmental cooperation and gone beyond what is mandated under national policy. It is safe to assume that part of the ability to be involved stems from public support. Engaging the wider community in dialogue at an early stage can help local governments communicate the motivations for their international activities, ease the concerns about no direct benefits to the average taxpayers, and secure public acceptance. **Not surprisingly, a survey on climate change and developmental cooperation, conducted by the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) in 2010, showed that over 50 percent of adults (685 respondents) in Kitakyushu supported the municipal activities to help developing countries address environmental problems, "even without direct benefits to the citizens' own city" (Nakamura and Elder 2012, 18).** It is important to note that efforts to

engage the general public in decentralized international cooperation take many forms, yet in the policy area of Kitakyushu's international environmental cooperation, "engagement" is a means toward acceptance rather than direct participation.

In 2003, to adapt the local experience to the notion of sustainable development, the city called for ideas and opinions from citizens from different fields and sectors to create a new environmental plan for both local coordination with national policy and local adaptations to global sustainability strategies. In October and December 2003, hundreds of stakeholders gathered from representatives of different groups (citizens, government, industry, and academia) and exchanged their ideas and opinions at the Multi-Stakeholders Forum on the World Capital of Sustainable Development (Hitsumoto 2012: 8; Hakozaki 2011). In the final version of this grand plan, three basic objectives were formulated on a basis of building sustainable cities to pass on to the next generation. These objectives are the creation of sharing "symbiosis" among all stakeholders, the pursuance of "green growth" through compatibility of the environment and economy, and the enhancement of the city's sustainability. In response to the grand plan, 250 concrete projects have been taken by integrating city's different policy areas ranging from those that cover the environment and economy, through the promotion of employment, to international environmental cooperation (Mizoguchi 2007; Hakozaki 2011). The 2010 IGES survey indicated that nearly 90 percent of 685 respondents in Kitakyushu "agreed" or "somewhat agreed" when they were asked if the city "should continue international environmental cooperation" (Nakamura and Elder 2012, 5). The public engagement activities in Kitakyushu seem to help the local residents have a better understanding of decentralized international cooperation. The results of the survey demonstrate a significant correlation between public awareness and support: "the more the citizens were aware of, or had knowledge of, the city's international environmental cooperation projects, the more clearly they supported

the city's continuous cooperation" (Nakamura and Elder 2012, 5). Both the survey results and Kitakyushu's historical experience of international cooperation strongly suggests that linking the city's international cooperation with the promotion of local business is a way of gaining the goodwill of the taxpayers/voters. Given Kitakyushu's shift from technology transfer to socio-technical export to promote a low-carbon society in developing countries, the municipal government is expected to play an even greater coordination role in cross-scale/multilevel policy solutions among various stakeholders.

Conclusion

Different institutional approaches to decentralized international cooperation provides subnational actors with distinctive channels for political mobilization and policy-making. In the EU, over time subnational authorities have developed multiple channels of institutional representation at the supranational level. In contrast, the Japanese government has neither regulated extra-national channels for sub-national level of participation nor institutionalized such channels for empowering local governments. Despite the state-centric gate-keeping capacity, however, we have witnessed Japan's ongoing trans-local cooperation. One persistent challenge is to understand the factors which enable such subnational actors to take up a key role in international cooperation. Kitakyushu's experience suggests a number of potential causal links for decentralized international cooperation that focus more on actor-specific than structural explanations. If local governments are required to decide whether or not to engage in international activities at their discretion, then factors internal to agency, such as fiscal capacity, resourcing, past experience, prior beliefs, political leadership, and public support can be more influential determinants than external opportunity structures such as international recognition, domestic constitutional positions, and national policy. Human agents are

influential to the extent that they individually or collectively interpret and adapt the external opportunity structures to local needs. If there are any incongruities among equally capable agencies in regards to the interpreted external opportunity structures, then the sources of these incongruities are likely to derive from subnational actors' probable motivations and purposes. Therefore, in the state-centric forms of governance, if there is any likelihood of voluntary participation by subnational authorities in international development and environmental cooperation, factors internal to agency are necessary conditions, which are promoted or constrained by external opportunity structures. Kitakyushu, which suffered from severe pollution and overcame it, has demonstrated an ability to use its accumulated technologies and human capital for environmental improvement in developing countries. The potential economic benefits helped to legitimize Kitakyushu's involvement in decentralized international cooperation.

Even within the unitary system of Japan, the governance of *hierarchized* tiers coexists with that of *de-hierarchized* new spheres within the same overarching polity, but this coexistence reflects different ways of addressing locally specific conditions and needs. Local needs and adaptive capacity continue to ensure difference and diversity among the more self-motivated local governments, in contrast with weaker local governments that remain over-dependent on national supervision. The unitary system, which imposes institutional constraints on local government's competence, is unable to flexibly respond to policy issues, especially those crossing the exclusive jurisdictions of government. In a form of weak *state centric governance*, as seen in this case study, the nationally led framework embedded within institutional boundaries fails to either regulate or enable subnational level of participation in decentralized international cooperation. The territorial state tends to have a difficulty of providing an integrated set of policy solutions over the inter-jurisdictional spillover effects of a given policy

issue by unbundling functions to different governance levels and spheres. Either due to a lack of support from the national government or in the absence of national regulation, the boundary spanning behavior of capable subnational authorities could reach out to overseas subnational actors and non-state actors for policy solutions. Some pioneering subnational actors are more willing to exploit the opportunity structures than others; not all policy makers are equally sensitive to the same information. In this respect, Kitakyushu was capable of experiencing de-hierarchized new spheres where its activities were neither confined to a fixed scale nor to a rigid hierarchy of government tiers. The city interpreted the role of the opportunity structures and adapted them to meet their own locally specific needs without completely superseding the hierarchical order of territorial jurisdictions.

One of the most important findings of this study is that Kitakyushu was an intersecting actor in multiple spheres of authority spanning many jurisdictions for coordinated action. The real life experience of Kitakyushu within the unitary system of Japan was based on the connections between hierarchized tiers and de-hierarchized new spheres of authority. At the political level, the local government and stakeholders engaged in decentralized international cooperation were hardly able to increase the policy salience and expand the policy area for electoral competition at the national level, yet they saw the national government become highly prone to international pressures in the policy area. At the policy-making level, they were able to persuade the national government to recognize the transnational network as a better place for practical policy solutions. Under these circumstances, the city was capable of effectively engaging in international activities by using a number of avenues for cross-fertilization of different institutional frameworks. At the hierarchical tiers of authority, the city's activities had largely been an active part of national policy and thus quite successful in receiving national funds. Nonetheless, they had not been simply complementary to already existing national policies,

but rather taken their own initiatives in response to locally specific needs and problems, which had been left unattended by national ministries. As the territorial state had difficulty in taking cross-scale and multilevel approaches to international development and environmental cooperation, Kitakyushu demonstrated that subnational authorities in the statist tradition could take part in environmental initiatives to settle the normative commitment to the North-South division. While acquiring a high degree of bargaining leverage with national ministries, Mayor Sueyoshi, a former national bureaucrat, was able to show that the utility-based considerations of international environmental business can embrace ethical ones. The city facilitated the trans-local process of subnational actors to respond to local needs and global strategies, while national ministries depended on the city for the successful implementation of national policy and tolerated a measure of local flexibility to meet locally specific needs. Kitakyushu served to establish a connection between hierarchized tiers and de-hierarchized new spheres in a global North-South context.

The focus of local government's participation in international cooperation has been on *voluntary* activity. The biggest challenge local governments face for maintaining and strengthening their involvement in the activities is to ensure accountability to taxpayers/voters and diverse stakeholders. Public acceptance is a necessary condition. Challenges to enhancing accountability may come from overlapping jurisdictions. While government authorities at hierarchical tiers have a permanent physical infrastructure and multi-task jurisdictions, actors in *de-hierarchized* new spheres participate in fluid policy networks and have overlapping jurisdictions over a single-purpose policy (i.e., weak democratic anchorage). Unlike the formal governance of hierarchical tiers, the de-hierarchized governance network generally emerges in the absence of institutionalized rules and principles and takes shape to meet a single-purpose policy need on an *ad hoc* basis (i.e., institutional void). This study suggests that a local

government, operating in its multi-task jurisdictions, has a potential to jointly enhance accountability to both vertical, hierarchical tiers and horizontal, de-hierarchical spheres. In the case of Kitakyushu's international cooperation, accountability was oriented to network stakeholders in *de-hierarchized* new spheres while directed towards the general public at the municipal level. The multi-task jurisdictions allowed local residents to hold the municipal government accountable for its international activities as an integral part of multi-task delivery. Kitakyushu worked hard to rebrand itself as a center for environmental technology transfer to Asia. Linking international cooperation with overseas business development was a way of rendering Kitakyushu's participation more accountable to local residents. The potential economic benefits enabled the municipal government to take part in the credibility of the entire plan of international development and environmental cooperation. Kitakyushu also provided localities in developing countries with the external liaison structure to manage joint operations since Southern partners were geographically distant as well as possibly hampered by cultural and language barriers. To focus on long-term outcomes, Kitakyushu sought to increase participatory accountability by facilitating the involvement of all sectors of the community on both sides.

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¹ In this article, the term 'local government' is used to denote subnational governments of the Japanese two-tier system: municipalities and prefectures.

² In practice, since the 1992 Earth Summit recognition of subnational governments as key players in global sustainability strategies, the areas of development assistance and environmental cooperation have become a focal point of decentralized international cooperation activities. The 2000 Millennium Development Goals, which identify local authorities as crucial actors in tackling poverty challenges, have created a further legitimate setting for sub-national involvement.

³ In the early debate on transnational politics, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (1974: 41) confined the concept of transnationalism to the activities of nongovernmental actors, differentiating from those of “transgovernmental actors” or “sub-units of governments on those occasions when they act relatively autonomously from higher authority in international politics.” According to Thomas Risse-Kappen (1995: 9), however, the interactive relations of government actors across national boundaries can be considered transnational “when at least one actor pursues her own agenda independent of national decisions.” The necessity of this redefinition suggests that the distinction between state-based actors and nongovernmental actors has become blurred as sub-national government actors look to transnational networks to gain support in the absence of national government action. Actors in the de-hierarchized spheres of subnational governments may include: international organizations, NGOs, advocacy and research groups, the media, and consumer organizations.

⁴ According to Air Pollution Control Law of 1968 and Water Pollution Control Law of 1970, a wide range of countermeasures is prescribed, including reporting on construction or installation of emission sources, setting permissible pollutant discharge standards from the emission source, regular guidance and on-site inspections of factories and businesses, and enforcing the law. Local governments are responsible for taking these measures. There are many cases in which, reflecting location-specific conditions in individual localities, discharge standards imposed by local ordinances are much stricter than those prescribed in the national laws.

⁵ The KITA was established in 1980 as a non-profit organization under the joint auspices of the Kitakyushu Junior Chamber, the Kitakyushu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Western Japan Industry Club, in collaboration with Kitakyushu municipal government and Fukuoka prefectural government. Its mission was to contribute to the promotion of international cooperation at the grassroots level by providing training opportunities for technology transfer, research and development and up-dating of training materials.

⁶ Material provided by Consulate General of Vietnam in Fukuoka, Japan on October 9, 2015.

⁷ In 2010 the city has created the Kitakyushu Asian Center for Low Carbon Society, to act as a key organization dedicated to promotion of local economies through a commitment to carbon reduction projects in Asian societies.

⁸ The JCM is a carbon crediting mechanism through which Japanese companies can earn carbon credits by investing in technology to cut greenhouse gas emissions in developing countries.
