INVIGORATING COMMUNITIES, DESIGNING FOR INCLUSION
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Kyoto, a city of 1.5 million people and Japan’s traditional seat of culture, faces challenges familiar to many American cities. At the top of the list are the revival of downtown commercial districts and the inclusion of economically depressed “outsider” groups.

So it was natural that Japan Society’s U.S.-Japan Innovators Network should hold a two-day retreat in Kyoto, bringing together architects, urban planners, and leaders in culture and civil society from the United States and Japan to share ideas on urban revitalization, social inclusion, the role of arts and culture in stimulating local economies.

The two-day retreat, Invigorating Communities, Designing for Inclusion, was held in collaboration with the Keikan Machizukuri Center in Kyoto, and was
followed by a public symposium where American participants discussed their work in revitalizing communities in the United States.

The retreat and symposium were inspired by ideas that arose from the U.S.-Japan Innovators Network’s second retreat, *(IN)SIGHT: Bridging Gaps* (Tokyo 2007), and recommendations made to Japan Society during its third retreat, *The Next Phase: Innovators Network (IN)*.

The Kyoto retreat began with a walking tour through the Kamo River area, with some emphasis on Higashisanjo, a predominately *burakumin* (a Japanese social minority group) neighborhood, and the Kiyamachi entertainment district, a historically popular entertainment area that has deteriorated.

This provided participants with a first hand look at some of the ongoing issues—commercial and entertainment revitalization, education, crime and beautification—related to the revitalization of depressed communities in Kyoto. The walking tour was followed by a day and a half at the Kyoto Keikan Machizukuri Center intensely discussing each others’ experiences, successes, and ongoing challenges in four sessions:

- **The Economics of Community Revitalization** - Once commercial activity dies in a community, how do you revive it? And once you’ve revived it, how do you make it sustainable, while making sure the original community does not get chased out as a result of over-gentrification?

- **Community Inclusion: Working with “Outsider Groups”** - Whether working with low-income minority communities in San Francisco or Houston, or NEET (Not currently engaged in Employment, Education or Training) and people at the bottom of the social pyramid in Japan, the challenge is the same: How to give the dispossessed a voice and a vested interest in the larger community.

- **The Role of Arts & Culture in Community Renewal** - A strong magnet for cultural communities is important for the health of all urban areas. Strong cultural communities attract people, tourism, new businesses and business investment.

- **Financing Community Innovation** - Whether in Japan or the United States, obtaining financing is a constant challenge for entrepreneurs, both social and business, working in community revitalization.
Each session featured two participants presenting his or her ideas, challenges, and/or successes on the subject at hand, followed by extensive dialogue among all the participants. From these discussions we uncovered a number of important steps for community revitalization and some poignant observations:

- **Important Steps to Community Revitalization/Innovation:**
  - Change negative perceptions/mind-set.
    - Break the emotional barrier.
  - **Use the media to get the word out.**
    - Tell your story to people all over the world.
  - **Build partnerships to increase social network.**
    - Create greater opportunities for outreach and support.
  - **Create new or strengthen fading values.**
    - Foster a community that cares and wants to be involved.

- **Interesting Observations:**
  - "Outsiders" are not bound by the status quo, bring fresh perspectives, and can affect change.
    - Invite outsiders to be involved in the design process.
  - **Economic hard times can increase opportunity in community revitalization/innovation.**
    - People are more willing to try new, riskier ideas when things look bleak. The freedom to make mistakes, learn from them, and try new and daring things are critical.

During the final wrap-up session a number of people voiced their desire to continue discussions and collaborate with each other. Discussions started in Kyoto are continuing:

- **Jeanne Giordano** and **Limbon** are interested in forming an urban development “swat team” to create a revitalization blue
print for Kyoto.

- **Tomohiko Okabe** and **Villy Wang**, representing organizations that have successfully used the video arts, are interested in deepening their relationship to build more effective means for using the media to empower people and change negative perceptions.

- **Taneo Kato** is interested in collaborating with **BAYCAT** and is interested in the Tenement Museum’s unique business structure.

- **Limbon, Ruth Abram, Jeanne Giordano, Katsuhide Takagi**, Manager of the Department of Preservation, Kyoto Keikan Machizukuri Center, and **Japan Society staff** will meet in January 2008 to discuss future collaboration on historic preservation and community revitalization.

For more on Upcoming Events and Innovators’ News, visit the Innovators Network website: [http://innovators.japansociety.org/](http://innovators.japansociety.org/)