

TOSAYAMA TAKE-AWAYS

Bamboo Module-making Towards Redefining the
Value of Traditional Lifestyles between Rural
Japan and the Philippines

A Report on Tosayama Leg

EDAYA CORDILLERA team, through their bamboo workshop module-making project with the Tosayama Academy, got the chance to a visit to the Tosayama Village in Kochi, to interact, immerse, and understand the culture and the people of the village. It was less than a week's visit but a lot of things happened, and a lot of thoughts transpired. We meet up with our Japanese team counterparts and through their efforts, we got to understand a bit of their culture, the peoples' way of thinking and how it affected their behavior, community relationships, and how they relate to the world outside them. It also gave us the chance to see the "struggles" the community is facing now and hear their voices. It was all in all a combinational of fun, realizations, of educational experiences, of new things and things that remind us of something, and a lot more. And I would like to share how all these have left an impact in me.

The team members (Philippine side)

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JAPAN SIDE:

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Thoughts on Tosayama, its nature and its people

I would like to start this section by pointing out that undeniably, Tosayama is a charm in so many ways and it was just so easy to fall in love with the place. The drive from

Kochi City to Tosayama Academy gave me the chance to feed my eyes with the rich nature of Tosayama -- its bursting colors of green, its cool and unbelievably clean rivers that calls you to a dip, the long stretches of bamboo along the way, and not to mention the sakura trees and their falling petals which did magic to everyone's heart. It was a very smooth drive, with everyone noticing different kinds of sceneries and slowly becoming impressed already with what the community has. Arriving to the where we're headed and getting off, I immediately felt the silence, peacefulness and serenity of the village and that already gave me the feeling that I'm going to love it there. The Tosayama Academy team were nothing short of hospitality and I get amazed every time at how they do things. I knew then that this was going to be fun. After settling down, we started to work.

Arrival

We arrived in Tosayama Village in the morning and met with the entire counterpart team from Tosayama. After settling things down, we got down to business. We were given briefing about the roll of activities we will be having for the next few days and the expectations.



Image 1: First team table introductions.

The Ice-breaker

Of course, company introductions wouldn't be missed since it was our first time meeting everybody. To let go of the "walls" in between the two teams, we did the "creating string web" ice breaker. What happens is that a ball of string gets passed on from one person to another and the one who receives the string will have to tell the group their hobbies, favorite spots in the world and something interesting about themselves. The catch is while the ball of string is being passed around, everyone who touches the ball of string gets to hold a portion of the string so while the ball of string is going around, a web is being formed that creates the connection between all the participants in the circle.



Image 2: Creating the web

After the web, we did a mini-theatrical spirit sharing inspired by a fusion of Cordilleran (Cordillera is a mountainous region in the Northern part of the Philippines which is the home to various ethnolinguistic groups) dances. We imagined we are part of nature and moved with nature imitating the movements of the elements of nature through Cordilleran dances. The following photos depict some of the movements created.



Image 3: The Cordilleran Nature Spirits

When we started talking about ourselves and sharing our backgrounds and experiences, it was no surprise to know that the entire team is diverse which was good, but it was also amazing to discover that despite these differences, there are similar things shared among two, three or more individuals. It gave me the feeling that this is not far from home. And so, things started rolling. We then moved on to setting goals and defined our aims and objectives to get everybody's thoughts considered. (We have been joined by a representative from the Toyota Foundation whom we met in Harimayabashi Guesthouse, who was there to observe and see if things are within perspective.)

The Project History

TosayamaxEDAYA Partnership Story

The story of how the project came to be was then introduced by Ayaka Yamashita, co-founder of EDAYA and Kan Yamamoto, co-founder of Tosayama Academy. She narrated that when she was a finalist in the Ben and Jerry's Join Our Core competition (2015), she met with Kan Yamamoto who was also a finalist and both decided to strike up a partnership, opening up the possibility of working together in the future. When Toyota Foundation's Call for Proposal opened, Ayaka and Kan knew then that they could create something together. Thus came the Bamboo Module-making Towards Redefining the Value of Traditional Lifestyles in Rural Japan and the Philippines. Both also introduced their organizations, EDAYA and Tosayama Academy.



Image 4: Ayaka Yamashita talks about EDAYA and its inspirations.



Image 5: Kan Yamamoto tells the Tosayama Academy story.

Also, to foster better understanding and to provide a sketch or a background of how each of our communities are like (especially that most of the members of the Philippine team are first-timers in Tosayama and the Japan team never went to Kalinga), representatives of each team reported on bamboo profiling, bamboo uses, community demographics and the likes.

The Cosumo Kobo

During the first day, we were also given the chance to visit a bamboo processing factory in Tosayama. Cosumo Kobo is a manufacturing and sales of bamboo products company and it was plainly amazing to see how bamboos evolve machine after machine and one process after the other. Our guide, showed us how the bamboos are dried, how they are cut, how designs are made, and how the bamboos became the products they turn out to be and then widely exported around the country. It was amazing to see how the workers seemed so lax operating the machines, doing the cutting, making of holes, and the likes. The company guide also showed us end products such as the “lunchbox”, the table, brush handles, and the likes, which are all made of bamboo. One of the most impressive was the bamboo sheet, which was thin as paper, maybe even thinner. It was amazing how they can produce such quality.



Image 6: Bamboos, perfectly cut, drying under the heat of the sun.



Image 7: A board from bamboo, meticulously glued together, achieving that smooth surface.



Image 8: A bamboo "lunchbox"



Image 9: "And this is how to perfect the bamboo sticks..."



Image 10: Bamboo brush handles created by Cosumo Kobo (after handles are created, they get shipped to another company for the bristles).

Through the interaction with Cosumo Kobo, we learned that nowadays, one of the problems in the community is the management of their bamboo forests. There are some forests which are not being well-kept by their owners. There is not much threat as to whether the community will run out of bamboo in the near future but there is a struggle as to the procurement of quality bamboo materials. Later on, we will find out that there were also conflicts between bamboo forest owner and bamboo processing and manufacturing company.

The Monto Studio

After a visit to the Cosumo Kobo, Kan Yamamoto also invited the group to his workshop (which was just a few steps away from Cosumo Kobo) to show us how he

does the coal processing as well as show us some of the impressive toys and amazing artistries in store. He says that his workshop has been an inheritance from an elderly who used to own the workshop. Seeing that Kan will treasure and use for good the tools in the workspace, he decided to hand it down to him. Kan then made good use of the place and turned it to Monto Studio. At present, Kan has a group/community working together to make the coals.



Image 11: Wood products from the previous owner.



Image 12: More wood blocks.



Image 13: Charcoal under process.



Image 14: Team in front of Monto Studio.

The Bamboo Forests

After a thrilling visit to the factory and Kan's Studio, the group's next stop lead to the bamboo forests of Tosayama. [Along the way, we got to literally just pluck some plant leaves and tried tasting them. Some of them proved likeable to the taste buds while others offered a rather interesting tang.] The bamboo forests gave offered to us a collection of different species of bamboo found in Tosayama. But the more interesting part is that it showed us two different situations in the community. We got to see some forests which are not at all being maintained by the owners, but we also got the chance

to see some forests which are well-kept by their owners. Some of the people even do volunteer to help the owners keep their bamboo forests well taken care of. Some reasons mentioned why no maintenance are taking place in some of the bamboo forests would include lack of manpower, lack of financial capacity, or maybe absence of interest.



Image 15: The Tosayama bamboos.

Then, as mentioned in the previous section, a story about a conflict between the bamboo processing company and the bamboo forest owner has been mentioned. Issues like no payment given to the owner for the bamboos cut and quality of the bamboos being sold does not meet the standards of the company surfaced from both sides.

The Tosayama Academy Food Processing Center

The team also got the chance to visit the food processing center of the Tosayama Academy where organic food products are being produced by Tosayama Academy fellows. The place offered a panoramic view of the lush green mountains of Tosayama which reminded us so much of home. At the center, we got to taste the invigorating ginger tea and was introduced to a citrus variety that is common in Tosayama and is one of the main produce and ingredients in their food product – the yuzu. The yuzu

looked exactly like one variety of Philippine citrus fruit but it was unexpectedly much sour than the ones we have in the country. But it was good in itself. The yuzu, alongside other produce, are being used in the production of jams, bread, candies among others, which are being marketed within the entire Tosayama. This reminded us of the livelihood projects present in small communities in the Philippines where fruit products and other harvests are also being utilized by community people and are being turned into other products such as jams, candies, and other food products.

The Story of the Community Elder

One of the things we always look forward to is engaging directly and deeply with community people. Listening to the wisdom of the elders is one special thing that always leaves us with an amazing impact. Thus, talking with the community elder Shu-san was both enlightening and inspiring. At one point, we got so inspired by how big his heart is for his community and how he always has his eyes set on staying with his people. Shu-san also has a place that is worthy to be considered a cultural, it containing and featuring old tools and paraphernalia, most of which are no longer being seen at present. Some of these include traditional bamboo tools both in farming and tools used in a daily basis, as well as an old vinyl record player, and an array of different implements. Undeniably, his museum-worthy collections and the stories behind them are awe-striking, but what hit us most are his stories. Along with what we heard from Tosayama Academy members, Shu-san reinforced one of the concerns faced by the community (which is also something that we learned and noticed from various trips to the rural areas of Japan) which is basically the alarming decrease in the number of young people who choose to stay in the community (more of this in the following sections).



Image 16,17: Shu-san was so accommodating and his joy and energy has been contagious! Shu-san sharing his story to our circle.

The Community Party

And of course, one of the things everybody looked forward to is the community party which would mean meeting some of the community people, talking to them and basically sharing each other's cultures. When the community people started arriving, it was slowly becoming more obvious that the ones who are joining us for the party are the middle aged and above. And this seems to reinforce the idea shared by Shu-san that younger generations are already leaving the community for the cities. So, drinks are opened, delicious food is served, and everybody started making small chats. It was a little hard for the Philippine team to communicate because of the language barrier (most of the community people do not speak in English), but it did not hinder the fun. Exchange of small stories happened and everybody were in a glee mood. As a treat to the community people, the Philippine team gave a sample of some Cordilleran and Japanese songs accompanied by the bamboo musical instruments, guitar and drums as well as a taste of a Cordilleran dance. The Philippine team also gave everybody present a chance to beat the musical instruments and dance with the Cordilleran spirit. It was a fun-filled night and one for the books. Below are some of the photos.



Image 18: Overflowing with food and drinks



Image 19: Dancing with the "*balingbing*"



Image 20: Sampling with the "*balingbing*"



Image 21: Music with bamboo musical instruments and guitar.



Image 22: Sealing the relationship with a good "*kampai*!"

The Workshop Proper

This is where the most serious part comes in. After slowly trying to understand the purpose of this workshop by looking back at the goals and objectives expressed in the original proposals, each of the members were encouraged to slowly and deeply try to analyze and give sense to the words and the statement itself. Each were tasked to find the words that seem vague in the statement, and after all the words are up in colored sticky notes, they were grouped according to recurring themes/context. The team then decided to agree to identify which of these words need immediate clarification and definitions in order to foster better understanding of the program in itself. From the votes, three words which needed speedy characterization were identified and taken out. Rural, culture and platform.

Everyone then sat down on a circle and the workshop to give portrayal to these words started. A wide sheet of white paper is in front of everybody and everyone gets a pen with the instruction to write anything that comes to mind when the words identified above are mentioned. Everybody wrote their own ideas and then each of the members were given the chance to explain their ideas according to their own context, finding citations from their own backgrounds. It appeared then that differences in interpretation existed which made it important to clarify these things. Then, recurring ideas or themes have been grouped/classified and then basing on the results of the discussions, the team tried to create a statement that makes sense by bringing together all or most of the ideas written in the paper. This went on for three rounds having three

words that needed definition. Each of the rounds took time because everybody wanted to completely comprehend the understanding of another and somehow, reach a consensus. At the end of the workshop, the team was able to come up with unique definitions, even after some unavoidable heated discussions which is part of the workshop. So here are the definitions:

Rural is a special unique home for people living closer with nature.

Culture is rootedness and being flexible with a sense of value.

Platform is a framework that encourages people to act.



Image 23: The workshop process.

Tosayama Academy x EDAYA consensus!

CULTURE is rootedness and being flexible with a sense of value!

PLATFORM is a framework that encourages people to act!

RURAL is a special unique home for people living closer with nature!

BAMBOO

Image 24: EDAYAxTosayama consensus

In between the discussion, we got the chance to attend a community celebration and sampled pounding of the sticky rice, as well as some of the delicacies being produced by the community people on the spot. This was followed by a nice and serene lunch by the river. Over dinner, we received a nice surprise from Tomonori-san, one of the guests during the party, who brought some of his strawberries as a treat to the group. Then the team were serenaded by a fusion music of cello, guitar and dyembe. Short tutorials also happened with Japanese team learning about bamboo musical instruments and the dyembe, and Philippine team trying on the cello.



Image 25: Community people pounding and preparing traditional delicacies; and a nice lunch by the river.



Image 26: Fusion music. Edgar Banasan (guitar), Yujiro Satake (cello), Raffy Kapuno (dyembe).

A Visit to Wakana's House



Image 27: Wakana's House, her indigo plants, and dye cooking facility.

The team also had the privilege to visit the house of Wakana Fukuda, one of the members of the Japan team. What was interesting about the house is that it still sports traditional Japanese house design and complete with an “altar” and a wide area that is very ideal for gardening. Wakana also showed the team some of her indigo plants and told us how she makes fabric dyes out of plant extract. Wakana not only produces dyes but also spins yarn and make fabric out of them. It was a complete process from beginning to end.

Idea-Sketching

One of the main highlights of this workshop would be the Idea-sketching. Because one of the goals the team identified was to create a prototype or at least an idea of a manual or activity that aims to introduce a new culture with the bamboo as its prime material. All the team members were then tasked to sketch at least one unique idea that carries

the potential of it being applicable and scalable in Asia. The group was able to generate over 20 interesting ideas and each member was given a few minutes to explain this idea to the group. After the explanations, the group decided to choose which of these ideas they think best lead to achieving the goal. Two ideas have been selected and everybody agreed to finalize the decision and create the prototype during the Philippine leg of the workshop.



Image 28: Members of the team looking at the ideas produced during the Idea-sketching sessions.

Image 29: Edgar Banasan explaining his ideas to the group, one of which was selected as a prospect idea for prototyping.



Elementary School Visit



Image 30: Philippine team serenading the children with a traditional Cordillera song.

The Elementary School Visit was the one last activity the team did before the Philippine left for home. The team visited an elementary school and got the chance to bond with some grade school pupils. Television networks and newspaper correspondents from all over Tosayama came to cover the activity which made the team feel a bit overwhelmed. The interaction started by showing some photos of community, school and school

children in Kalinga (a province in the Cordillera) which elicited comments from some school children who noticed the similarities between the photos being shown with the

situation they have in the community. To break the ice as well as show a sample of language diversity in the Philippines, members of the Philippine team were asked to translate a single word into 4 different Filipino languages. This amazed the students because they know that unlike Philippines, Japan has a single language that is understood by everybody on the land. Then, the team also taught a simple traditional song to the children and to make the activity interactive, the students were divided into 4 groups and were assigned a facilitator who taught them the song and urged the group members to create an action for the song, which they each presented as a group. Students were also given the chance to ask questions from the members of the Philippine team about anything they wanted to know about the country, the people, the culture, the mindset, etc. Then, a short workshop on bamboo instruments was introduced to the children so they got to try playing with bamboo musical instruments.



Image 31: Edgar Banasan and Raffy Kapuno interacting with the children with the "*bagbagto*" song.



Image 32: Children trying on the bamboo musical instruments.

Before the workshop finished, some of the students gave their thank you message to the entire team and everybody did “give-me-five” with the team. It was also the start of a new relationship because there was a promise that the students will create video messages for the children in Kalinga and vice-versa. It was such a nice way to end the trip.



Image 33: A final photo session with the school's administration and staff.

Conclusion

Everything that transpired during the entire workshop has been fun, engaging, informative, pleasantly surprising, educational and worth remembering. The sakura, spring, the delicious food, the onsen sessions, the wild boar for dinner, the serene nature and environment, the very warm heart of the people and the accommodating community, the talk with the elders which provided a deeper



Image 34: The stars of the kitchen! They were responsible for all the delicious meals on the table.

understanding of life in the community, the drinks poured, the children's laughter, the music and dance, and everything else in between which is already hard to mention individually, are all worth remembering. Each experience, each moment, gained and spent in the tranquility of Tosayama will always be etched in the memory which now brings the hope for a longer, stronger relationship between each communities. Tosayama has been a pleasure to visit!



Image 35: Final photo session with the team and mothers! Thank you!