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Co-producing the Men's Shed concept in Japan: A participatory action research study

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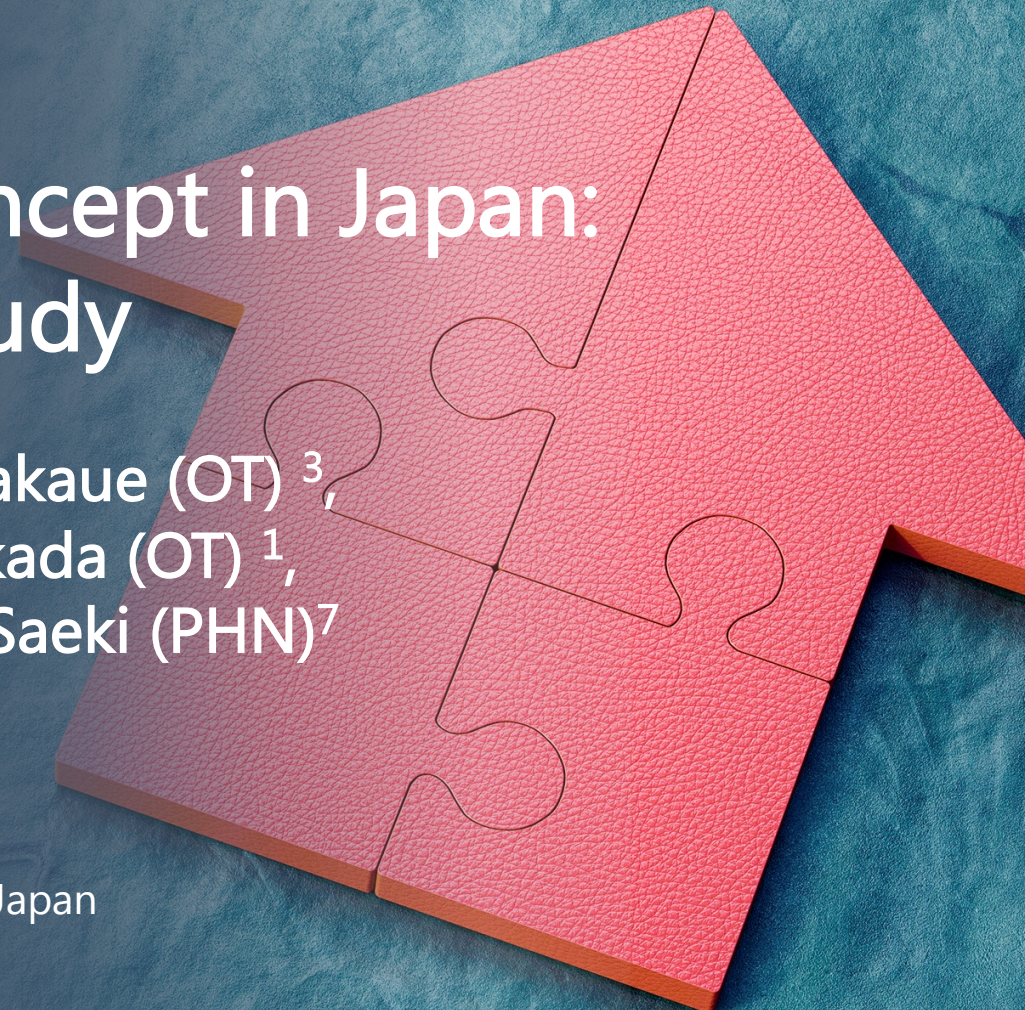
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Introduction / Rationale:

Why study Men's Shed formation in Japan?

- Men's Sheds have been described as **a promising community-based approach to support older men's social participation and wellbeing** (Milligan et al., 2016; Hansji et al., 2015).
- From an occupational science perspective, Men's Sheds can be understood through three interlinked elements: **Place, Doing, and Belonging** (Martin et al., 2008).
- They provide a place to gather, support **doing and learning together**, and foster **informal peer connection**.

Men's Shed



Place

A community space for men



Doing

Shared activities



Belonging

Informal peer connection

Objective

- Men's Sheds are **still relatively new in Japan**.
- We know little about how they are formed and sustained in practice, especially how occupational engagement shapes: **governance, co-production, and empowerment**.
- This study explores **the dynamic process of Men's Shed formation in Japan** and **how occupational engagement contributes to co-production and empowerment**.
- Provides a process-based understanding relevant for occupational science and community practice.

Overall project timeline

Preparatory
Committee
began

Preparatory
Committee
concluded

The Men's
Shed officially
launched

Oct. 2022

Jun. 2023

Mar. 2024

Apr. 2024

Mar. 2025

Mar. 2026

Research Design:
Participatory Action
Research (PAR)
(Stoecker, 2023)

Qual

- Individual interviews
- Sapporo (n=41)
- *Not limited to later members

① GTA

Qual

- Preparatory Committee
- Participatory observation
- Meeting records

② Ethnographic fieldwork + RTA

Quant

- MRI
- Eye tracker
- Questionnaires

Qual

- Around 40 members
- Participatory observation

Quant

- MRI
- Questionnaires

Qual

- Individual interviews

Qual

- Around 40 members
- Participatory observation

Quant

- MRI
- Questionnaires

Qual

- Individual interviews

③ Mixed Methods Intervention Design /
Non-randomised Controlled Trial
(Intervention group: n=35; control group: n=37)

Zoom-in: Preparatory committee timeline (Jan 2023–Apr 2024)

Jan. 2023

• Searching for a venue and core community members
Consulted local agencies and requested introductions

Jun. 2023

• Preparatory committee launched

- *Core team: 7 community men + 1 supporting professional (older-adult services) + 2 OT researchers*
- *1–3 meetings/month + discussions via LINE (group chat)*

Monthly coordination meetings with health and social care organisations

Jan. 2024

• Recruiting Shed members from the wider community
Info sessions and neighbourhood circulars

Mar. 2024

• Preparatory Committee concluded

Apr. 2024

• Official launch of Sapporo Men's Shed "Pokke-Kotan" (41 members)

Data & Analysis

Data sources (Jan 2023–Apr 2024)

- **Fieldnotes: 237 cumulative days** (participant observation) , including key observations from group messaging (LINE)
- **Meeting records:** preparatory committee meetings + coordination meetings

Analysis & quality

- **Qualitative analysis using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)** (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2022)
- Triangulation across sources + reflexive memoing / peer debriefing
- Ethics approval: IRB No. 23–35

Results: Three Themes



1. Negotiating Men's Shed Meaning
(community ↔ members)
2. Oscillating governance dynamics
(top-down ↔ democratic)
3. Formation-as-occupation and empowerment
(doing formation together)

Together, these themes show that the Shed was co-produced through an ongoing formation process.

Results: Theme 1 — Negotiating Men's Shed Meaning



Co-Produced Men's Shed in Japan

A locally meaningful and legitimate concept
Not implemented—co-produced through negotiation.

Results: Theme 2 — Oscillating governance dynamics

Top-Down Decision-Making

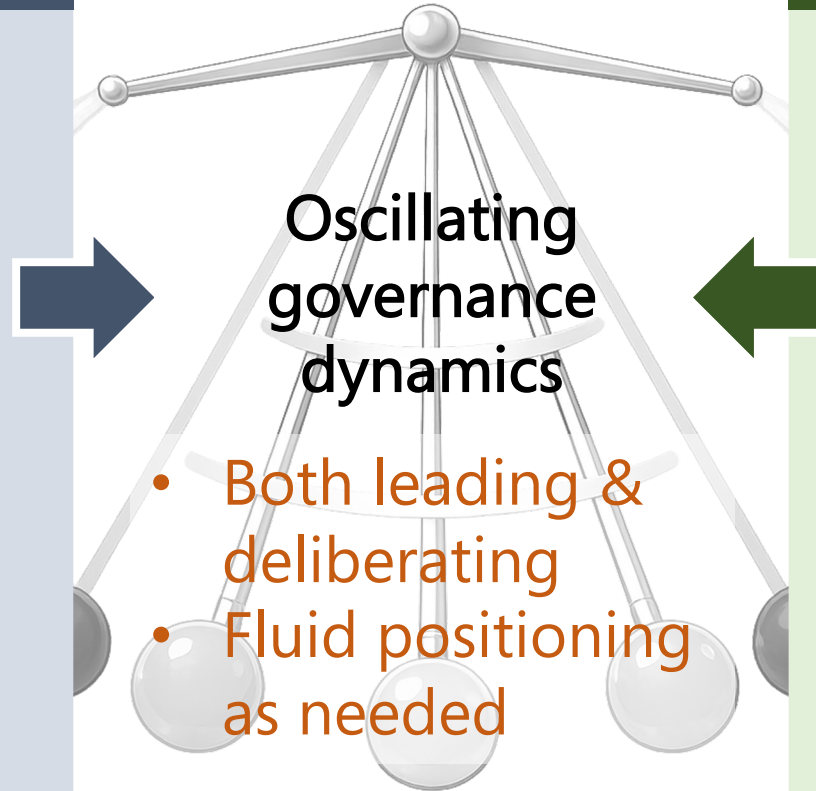
- Efficient and speedy structure
- Role concentration → streamlining and momentum

"We have limited time until April, so we need to decide priorities today."

Shed member (prep meeting, Feb 2024)

"I'll handle it."

Shed member (meeting note, Aug 2023)



Democratic Decision-Making

- Equal voice for all members
- Agreed by consensus in meetings

"Our founding principle is to respect different ideas and opinions."

Shed member (group message, Feb 2024)

"Wouldn't it be best to discuss and reach conclusions through all seven members?"

Shed member (prep meeting, Jul 2023)

Results: Theme 3 — Formation-as-occupation and empowerment

Shed formation itself became a meaningful occupation, fostering engagement, relationship-building, and sustainability.



- *“Doing it together is fun...it makes me feel motivated.”* Shed member (activity note, Oct 2023)
- *“Let’s build a base for that.”* Shed member (group message, Feb 2024)
- *“We realised our researchers’ meetings were no longer necessary.”* Researcher reflection (fieldnote, Apr 2024)
- *“I want to help protect it (the shed) when that time comes.”* Shed member (message, Mar 2024)

Conclusion — A co-produced formation process

Key message

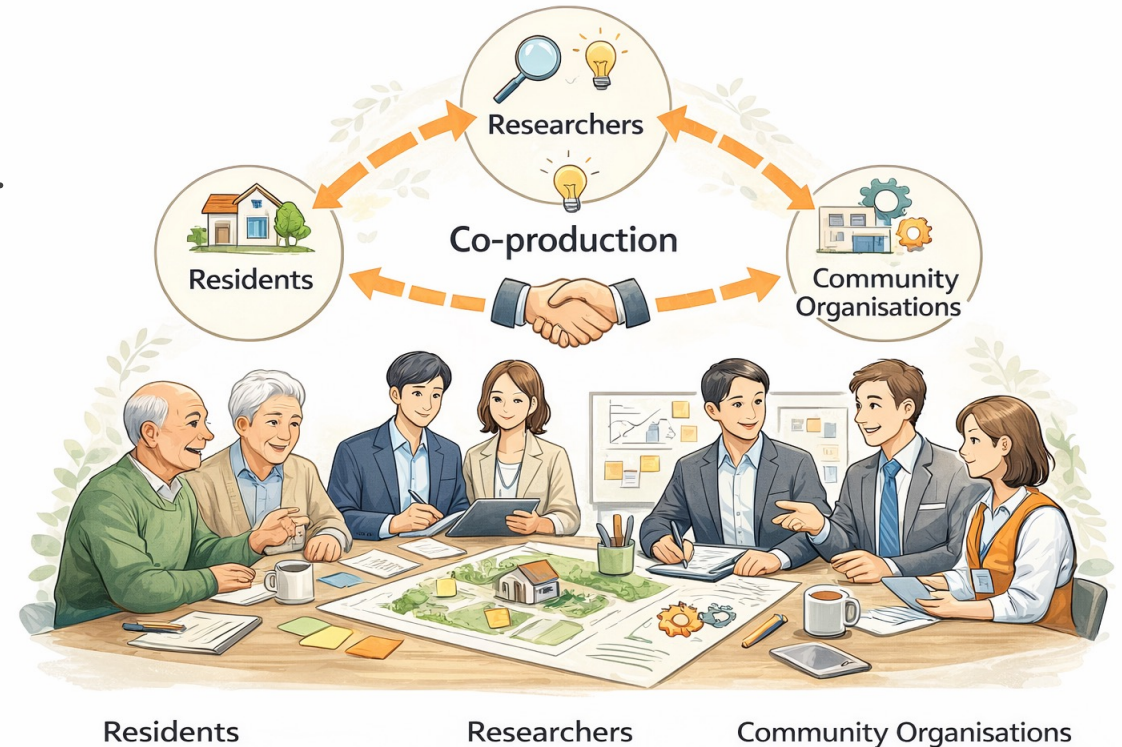
Men's Shed formation in Japan was not simply implemented—it was co-produced through ongoing negotiation and occupational engagement.

How the Shed evolved (Three themes)

1. Negotiating Men's Shed meaning
2. Oscillating governance dynamics
3. Formation-as-occupation and empowerment

Takeaway

Together, these themes show that formation itself became an occupation, supporting engagement, relationships, and sustainability.



Significance to Occupational Therapy & Occupational Science

Link to Stoecker's knowledge–action–power model (2023)

- **Knowledge:** shared understanding of “what a Shed is” (Theme 1)
- **Action:** collective decisions and practical organising work (Theme 2)
- **Power:** increased member agency and ownership (Theme 3)

Contribution to OT / OS

- Occupational engagement can **enhance empowerment** and **shape social relationships** during community formation.
- Offers a **process-based explanation** of how community initiatives become locally meaningful and legitimate.
- Provides insights for **community-based occupational practice**, beyond individual-level outcomes.

