

CONNECTING THE UNCONNECTED

Fifth annual TEDxTokyo draws 15,000 live and virtual participants

By Brandi Goode

Many *ACCJ Journal* readers may not realize that Tokyo was the first site of TEDx forums, the international version of the annual conference launched in California in 1990. TED (short for technology, entertainment, and design) talks strive to bring together creative ideas in business and beyond, catering to an audience of entrepreneurs and “curious souls.”

This year’s one-day conference took place on May 31 at Shibuya Hikarie, under the theme “Connecting the Unconnected.” The following two presenters travelled from the United States with inspiring messages for Tokyo innovators.

Mutualism in nature and business

Social enterprises are defined as organizations that apply commercial strategies to maximize improvements in human and environmental well-being, rather than maximizing profits for external shareholders. Amanda Joy Ravenhill runs one such enterprise, called Project Drawdown.

As a social entrepreneur, she has an interest in bio-mimicry—when design is inspired by nature. This process can also be seen in business, Ravenhill said, as enterprise often follows innovations in biology. Plants interact through beneficial fungal roots underground, which connect with fungus to create symbiosis, or mutualism.

Social enterprises thrive on mutualism, and follow a business model in which producers partner with customers, suppliers, and even

Social enterprises ... partner with customers, suppliers, and even competitors to create shared value.



Marian Goodell helped spawn the Burning Man Project to foster creativity and collaboration.

competitors to create shared value. They are often more innovative and collaborative than governments or private entities, and can still be quite profitable. “Interdependence means solutions for the world,” Ravenhill emphasized, pointing to prosperous social enterprises such as New Leaf Paper, an Oakland-based sustainable printer.

Burning Man goes global

Marian Goodell has worked for Burning Man since 1996. This nine-day annual gathering in the desert of Nevada draws 70,000 attendees, and consistently has to turn people away. Its mission: to help people live more creative, connected lives.

In 2011, a non-profit was created to take the “burners” culture to the world, and the Burning Man Project was born. The first Japan event was held last year on a beach in Chiba, and attracted

250 people. Goodell noted many Burning Man links to Japanese culture.

“We hope to cause a cultural shift in the way people relate to each other and what they bring back home to everyday life,” the CEO said. The Nevada event is based on minimal infrastructure; there are no food stalls or beer stands. Rather, there is only “radical self-reliance and self-expression, where all content is brought by participants.” In the “city,” which has its own airport and radio station, people are encouraged to create, collaborate, and connect.

“In our daily lives we’re driven by making and spending money, with no space to be experimental. Burning Man then becomes a living laboratory,” she said.

“If you gave yourself permission to be more creative and connective, what would your story be?” •

All 2014 presentations can be viewed at: www.tedxtokyo.com