

Creative Alliances: Regional Cultural Collaboration between the Netherlands and Japan



Beste Sevindik



September, 2024

The LeidenAsiaCentre is an independent research centre affiliated with Leiden University and made possible by a grant from the Vaes Elias Fund. The centre focuses on academic research with direct application to society. All research projects are conducted in close cooperation with a wide variety of partners from Dutch society.

More information can be found on our website:

www.leidenasiacentre.nl

For contact or orders: info@leidenasiacentre.nl

Doelensteeg 16, 2311 VL Leiden, The Netherlands



Executive summary

This report examines the dynamics between the Netherlands' International Cultural Policy (ICP) and its regional cultural collaboration strategies aimed at enhancing cultural cooperation across the Japanese regions of Kyushu, Kyoto and Kanto between 2016 and 2023. It illustrates how these frameworks serve as strategic tools in diplomacy and cultural collaboration with Japan. The Dutch government considers ICP a crucial element of its diplomacy and considers it a unifying link that connects political, economic and social issues within cultural and foreign policy. A collaborative effort of the Ministries of Education, Culture and Science, Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the ICP employs a country-specific approach and targets 23 countries, including Japan, based on factors such as foreign demand, artistic and economic opportunities for the Dutch cultural sector, artistic quality, social relevance, historic ties and foreign policy significance.

This report situates the Dutch ICP between the intersection of cultural and public diplomacy, as ICP leverages cultural diplomacy for broader foreign policy and public diplomacy goals, alongside its primary objective of enhancing the global presence and market opportunities for Dutch arts, creative industries and heritage. Initiatives such as the Holland-Kyushu and subsequent programmes spearheaded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan, in partnership with the network organization DutchCulture and various Dutch and Japanese stakeholders, illustrate a shift towards geographically focused cultural partnerships to facilitate further cultural ties in these regions, strengthening artistic exchanges and leveraging cultural events to promote bilateral relations. These efforts also exemplify the Dutch ICP's commitment to utilizing culture as a diplomatic tool. By facilitating a focused approach on regional cultural collaboration, the ICP serves as a strategic tool for the Netherlands to project its cultural image and political values in Japan.

The report includes case studies such as 2016/arita, Fuji Textile Week, Shibaura House and the Game Changer Project Tokyo, three of which are linked to the Holland-Kyushu and NL-Kanto regional cultural programmes. These case studies illustrate the long-term partnerships established by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Tokyo with various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, cultural funds, local organizations and the

private sector. The report categorizes these initiatives into two themes: regional revitalization efforts and local industries, focusing on Arita in Saga and Fujiyoshida in Yamanashi prefectures; and the concept of localizing Tokyo through collaborations with Shibaura House and the Game Changer Project Tokyo. The report finds that multidisciplinary regional cultural collaboration has:

- Facilitated sustained participation among multiple stakeholders over an extended period, rather than being limited to one-off events;
- Expanded the network of local industries and the Dutch creative sector, creating an international platform for ongoing partnerships that prioritize collaboration and foster a sense of 'we' among stakeholders;
- Expanded the Netherlands' network in Japan and provided an opportunity for Dutch public diplomacy to communicate directly with local governments, communities and the public sector in Japan;
- Enhanced the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands' positive reputation in Japan by supporting partnerships between Japanese and Dutch stakeholders and promoting projects prioritizing inclusivity, diversity and human rights.

As this report also acknowledges, defining success for regional cultural collaboration projects and ongoing initiatives can be challenging, as stakeholders may have varying understandings and expectations of collaboration. This report emphasizes that cultural collaboration requires nurturing to remain effective and encourages better documentation of these initiatives. Further research is recommended to examine critically whether the benefits of such initiatives are equitably distributed among the various stakeholders, including local artisans, designers, businesses and the broader community. Ensuring that these collaborations do not disproportionately benefit certain groups while marginalizing others is crucial for inclusive development. Additionally, the involvement of local communities, particularly marginalized groups or traditional artisans, in decision-making processes and their benefit from these initiatives should be analysed further.

Contents

Introduction	7
Methodology	9
Chapter 1. International Cultural Policy of the Netherlands and Regional Cultural Collaboration between the Netherlands and Japan	10
1.1 Culture as a Strategic Tool in the History of Dutch ICP	12
1.2 Situating ICP within the Cultural and Public Diplomacy Discourse	16
1.3 Regional Cultural Collaboration with Japan and ICP Cycles from 2017–2020	18
1.4 From Holland–Kyushu to Holland–Kyoto and NL–Kanto	23
1.5 A New Cycle of ICP: 2021–2024 and the Multi-annual Plan of the Dutch Embassy	27
1.6 The ICP and AiR Programmes	29
1.7 Overview of Case Studies	31
1.7.1 <i>2016/arita</i>	31
1.7.2 <i>Fuji Textile Week</i>	32
1.7.3 <i>Collaboration with Shibaura House, Tokyo</i>	32
1.7.4 <i>Game Changer Project Tokyo</i>	32
Chapter 2. Japanese Local Industries Merged with Dutch and International Design	34
1.8 2016/arita and Fuji Textile Week	35
1.9 ‘Win–Win’: Creating an International Platform for Mutually Beneficial Long-term Partnerships	37

1.10	Value for the Local Community and the Creative Sector: A Win-Win-Win?	42
Chapter 3. Tokyo's New Localism and its Dutch Partners: Shibaura House and Game Changer Project Tokyo		47
1.11	Collaboration with Shibaura House: NL HOUSE and nl/minato	48
1.12	Game Changer Project Tokyo	50
1.13	Facilitating Long-term Partnerships between Stakeholders and Dutch and Japanese Municipalities	51
1.14	From Municipalities to Local Communities	53
1.15	ICP Goals and Promoting SDGs	55
Conclusion		59

Introduction

Japan and the Netherlands have shared a rich history since formal trade relations were established in 1609 between the Dutch East India Company (VOC), authorized by the Dutch government, and Japan's Tokugawa Shogunate. During Japan's period of isolation starting in 1641, the Dutch remained its sole European trading partner, operating from the artificial island of Dejima in Nagasaki Bay. Dejima served as Japan's conduit to Western ideas, particularly in science, medicine and military arts. Following Japan's reopening to the West in 1853, the Dutch became trusted allies, offering guidance on modernization efforts, including naval fleet construction and civil engineering projects. Despite being nations at war during the Second World War, both countries made concerted efforts to re-establish strong diplomatic ties post-war, building on their shared history.¹ Over the span of more than 400 years, these ties have facilitated extensive cultural exchange and cooperation between the two nations.

In recent years, cultural cooperation between the Netherlands and Japan has shifted beyond leveraging their shared history to fostering contemporary relationships, as exemplified by the regional cultural collaboration programmes Holland-Kyushu (2016-2017), Holland-Kyoto (2019-2020) and NL-Kanto (2021-2023). Through facilitating and supporting such programmes, the Netherlands has strategically leveraged its International Cultural Policy (ICP) to strengthen ties with Japan.

This report will enquire into these aforementioned cultural collaboration programmes that were spearheaded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan, in partnership with DutchCulture and various Dutch and Japanese stakeholders. It will explore how the Netherlands' ICP, by facilitating a focused approach to regional cultural collaboration, serves as a strategic tool for the Netherlands to project its cultural image and political values in Japan.

The report will aim to answer three interconnected questions based on these partnerships:

¹ Klos, M. and L.Derksen (2016), *Shared Cultural Heritage of Japan and the Netherlands*, Amersfoort: Rijksdienst voor het Cultureel Erfgoed.

- How does the Netherlands employ its International Cultural Policy in Japan, demonstrated through initiatives such as ‘Holland-Kyushu’, ‘Holland-Kyoto’, and ‘NL-Kanto’?
- What role does the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan play in implementing and facilitating cultural collaboration initiatives in Japan, and how does its support contribute to the success and sustainability of these initiatives?
- What are the implications of the cultural collaboration for their stakeholders and participants, and how do these efforts resonate within their respective communities?

The first chapter will establish an overview of what constitutes ICP, how it is implemented and what goals it aims to achieve. It will contextualize the Dutch ICP within the frameworks of cultural and public diplomacy, alongside related concepts such as soft power and nation branding. The chapter will then introduce the origins of the regional cultural collaboration programmes, exploring their focus, scope and objectives. Additionally, it will examine the reciprocal relationship between policy-making and cultural collaboration, shaping the trajectory of Dutch–Japanese cultural relations.

Subsequently, chapters 2 and 3 will introduce four case studies: 2016/arita; Fuji Textile Week; Shibaura House; and the Game Changer Project Tokyo. These case studies, three of which are connected to the regional cultural collaboration programmes of Holland-Kyushu and NL-Kanto, will serve as examples of the long-term partnerships that the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Tokyo has with various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, cultural funds, local organizations and the private sector. The case studies will be categorized under two themes. Chapter 2 will enquire into regional revitalization efforts in rural areas and local industries, focusing on Arita in Saga and Fujiyoshida in Yamanashi prefectures. In contrast, chapter 3 will explore the concept of ‘localizing’ Tokyo and its international partnerships through collaborations with Shibaura House and the Game Changer Project Tokyo. Both chapters will explore the implications of these initiatives on their stakeholders, participants and communities, while investigating how the Netherlands, through its ICP and support of these initiatives, advances its objectives in public diplomacy within Japan.

Methodology

The research study employs semi-structured interviews as a primary data collection method. Semi-structured interviews are conducted ‘conversationally’ between the interviewer and research participants, utilizing a mix of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up ‘why or how questions’.²

The qualitative data collection occurred between 6 February and 16 April 2024, with in-person interviews conducted in Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague in the Netherlands, as well as in Tokyo, Arita (Saga prefecture) and Fujiyoshida (Yamanashi prefecture) in Japan. Additionally, three interviews were conducted via video calls to accommodate geographical constraints. Interviews were conducted in English, Dutch or Japanese, depending on the preference of the interviewees.

To address ethical considerations, all interviews were recorded and transcribed only with explicit consent from the participants. Each participant was briefed on the research objectives, and permission was sought to cite their contributions either by name or anonymously. Participants were selected based on their involvement with relevant case studies, resulting in a total of 19 professionals interviewed.

Interview transcriptions were generated using online transcription software and were reviewed for accuracy. Transcriptions in Dutch and Japanese were translated into English before analysis. Thematic coding was employed for the qualitative data analysis, systematically identifying, analysing and organizing emerging themes and patterns.³ This approach was also applied to analyse the primary documents utilized in this report.

² Adams, W.C. (2015), ‘Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews’, in J.S. Wholey, H.P. Harty and K.E. Newcomer (eds), *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, pp. 492–505.

³ Braun, V. and V. Clarke (2019), ‘Thematic Analysis’, in *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*, Hoboken, NJ: Springer, pp. 843–860.

Chapter 1. International Cultural Policy of the Netherlands and Regional Cultural Collaboration between the Netherlands and Japan

International Cultural Policy (ICP) refers to the policies and strategies developed and implemented by the Netherlands to manage its cultural relations and engagements with other countries on an international level. The Dutch government regards international cultural policy as a cornerstone of its diplomacy, and considers the ICP to be a unifying link that connects political, economic and social issues within cultural and foreign policy contexts.⁴ ICP initiatives encompass a wide range of activities, including cultural exchange and diplomacy, the promotion of Dutch culture internationally and support for international cultural projects.

The ICP is a collaborative effort involving the Ministries of Education, Culture and Science, Foreign Affairs, and Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. ICP documents indicate that a country-specific approach is employed to align cultural initiatives with foreign policy priorities. While the ICP is designed for global implementation, budget constraints necessitate strategic choices, focusing on countries that ‘yield the greatest added value’.⁵ The focus countries are selected based on factors such as foreign demand, artistic and economic opportunities for the Dutch cultural sector, artistic quality, social relevance, historic ties and foreign policy significance. This strategic focus prioritizes local partnerships over extensive foreign presence, targeting 23 priority or ‘focus’ countries: within Europe (Belgium/Flanders, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom); on Europe’s borders (Russia, Turkey, Egypt and Morocco); and outside Europe (Australia, Brazil, China,

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2020), ‘International Cultural Policy Framework, 2021–2024’, The Hague: MFA and Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

⁵ Ibid., p. 12.

India, Indonesia, Japan, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Suriname and the United States).⁶

According to Bas Valckx, Senior Policy Officer of the Public Diplomacy, Politics and Culture Department at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan, a new cycle or framework of the ICP is implemented every four years following an evaluation by the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB). Unlike Germany's Goethe Institute or the UK's British Council, the Netherlands does not have on-the-ground institutions, with the Erasmus Huis in Jakarta being an exception. Consequently, Dutch ICP efforts primarily operate through embassies in target countries. After the new ICP framework is announced, which happens 18 months in advance of the cycle period, each embassy in established focus countries drafts a multi-annual plan based on the demand for Dutch cultural expressions, which are submitted to the International Cultural Unit at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These plans translate the framework into practical actions tailored to each country. Once approved, the embassies are responsible for the implementation of the current ICP cycle. The IOB gathers a report from the embassies annually and submits the results to the Dutch Parliament. Despite these reporting requirements, embassies have considerable freedom to adapt to local demands and conditions.

The ICP involves a diverse range of actors from the cultural sector, with €22.5 million a year earmarked for its implementation. This funding supports various central government culture funds, cultural institutions, international cultural programmes and cultural diplomacy activities. The roles and operations of these entities vary based on required expertise, objectives and location. Many projects are conducted in collaboration with local entities, with important partners including all the cultural funds (for example, Creative Industries Fund NL and the Netherlands Film Fund), as well as institutions such as the Cultural Heritage Agency, DutchCulture and the Prince Claus Fund.

⁶ Ibid.

DutchCulture is a key partner, as it functions as a knowledge and network organization for the ICP. Although primarily funded by the Dutch government, it operates as an independent organization. Formed in 1998 through the merger of several offices, including the Foundation for International Cultural Activities (SICA), Mediadesk, TransArtists and Cultural ContactPoint, DutchCulture has since served as the primary point of contact for international artists coming to the Netherlands and Dutch artists going abroad.⁷ For instance, diplomats can refer international artists to DutchCulture for exhibitions or performances in the Netherlands. Additionally, the organization collaborates closely with Dutch embassies worldwide, supporting them with a comprehensive database on the Dutch creative sector.⁸

1.1 Culture as a Strategic Tool in the History of Dutch ICP

Culture is defined as ‘the arts (including architecture, visual art, design, new media, film, literature, performing arts and crossovers between these disciplines) and heritage (such as archives, archaeology, historic collections, monuments, historic buildings and immaterial heritage)’ in the ICP framework of 2021–2024.⁹ As well as its intrinsic value, culture plays a vital role in trade missions and state visits. As of 2019, the cultural sector contributed €25.5 billion or 3.46 per cent to the economy of the Netherlands. It supported between 330,000 and 368,000 jobs, comprising 4.1 to 4.5 per cent of the total workforce, and included 206,000 companies, which constituted 11.5 per cent of all businesses in the Netherlands. The Dutch creative industry stimulates product and process innovations across the broader economy through spillover and multiplier effects.¹⁰

⁷ IOB (2016), *Cultuur als kans: Beleidsdoorlichting van het internationaal cultuurbeleid*, The Hague: MFA.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ MFA and Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2020), ‘International Cultural Policy Framework, 2021–2024’.

¹⁰ See: Dialogic (2023), *Onderzoek naar multipliereffecten en payoff effecten in de culturele en creatieve sector*. Also see OECD (2021), *Economic and Social Impact of Cultural and Creative Sectors*, p. 3.

The ICP recognizes culture as both ‘soft power’ and economically significant, and understands that the role of culture can be seen as a means of strengthening a country’s ability to make friends and exert influence, quoting Nye’s concept¹¹ directly.¹² The quotation below by the former Ambassador for International Cultural Cooperation Arjen Uijterlinde underlines how the ICP is utilized to display Dutch political values to an international audience as part of its foreign policy strategy, and that it aims to achieve diverse foreign policy objectives, ranging from fostering intercultural understanding to promoting Dutch interests abroad:

Facilitating the international exchange of cultural makers not only contributes towards the quality of the cultural offerings, but also makes the Netherlands more attractive to tourism and foreign investors. It also contributes towards the international prestige and market share of our cultural industry abroad. By opting for specific focus countries, special calls and thematic programmes, cultural cooperation also acquires political significance. This can be done through contacts with other authorities or by awarding the power of art, design and heritage a role in intercultural dialogue on social issues. ICP is an essential part of the soft power of the Netherlands as a medium-sized country.¹³

Through initiatives such as literature readings, art exhibitions, music performances and heritage preservation efforts, Dutch diplomatic missions support and/or facilitate cultural activities that serve as opportunities to share aspects of Dutch culture, beliefs and societal norms, and to influence positively how the Netherlands is perceived by foreign publics. According to Minnaert (2014 and 2018), the history of international cultural policy in the Netherlands can be divided into four key periods, or the phases of ‘exploration’, ‘transition’,

¹¹ Nye, J.S. (1990), ‘Soft Power’, *Foreign Policy*, 80, pp. 153–171.

¹² MFA and Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2020), ‘International Cultural Policy, 2021–2024’, p. 5.

¹³ Berentsen, M. (2020), ‘International Cultural Policy (ICP) in Practice’, in *Boekman Extra 22, 50 Years of International Cultural Policy*, pp. 4–8.

‘togetherness’ and ‘divergence’, each characterized by specific policy principles and political perspectives that reflect the changing ideologies of their times¹⁴ and thus contributing to shaping the Netherlands’ cultural ‘footprint’.¹⁵

From 1970 to 1986, the ‘exploration’ phase, the ICP focused on cultural nationalism, using culture to promote national identity and international relations under the term ‘Holland Promotion’. The ‘transition’ phase, from 1987 to 2006, shifted towards multiculturalism, recognizing cultural diversity and integrating national and international cultural policies. During the ‘togetherness’ phase (1997–2006), the ICP adopted a cosmopolitan approach, intertwining national and international cultural policies and emphasizing cultural diversity as integral to Dutch identity.¹⁶

This phase saw the establishment of the HGIS-Culture Fund, jointly managed by the Dutch Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs, with an annual allocation of 16 million guilders (approximately €8 million today) supporting large-scale cultural projects in regions like the UK, France, Central and Eastern Europe and Japan. Despite its intended role as a political endorsement and financial stimulus for international cultural efforts, the arts community criticized the fund for lacking a clear commitment to artistic excellence (Boogaarts, 1999).¹⁷ They argued that the selection of priority countries seemed more influenced by foreign policy goals than artistic or cultural merit, advocating instead for collaborations focused on

¹⁴ Minnaert, T. (2018), ‘An International Perspective on Dutch Cultural Policy’, in E. van Meerkerk and Q.L. van den Hoogen (eds), *Cultural Policy in the Polder: 25 Years of the Dutch Cultural Policy Act*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 67–84.

¹⁵ Minnaert, T. (2014), ‘Footprint or Fingerprint: International Cultural Policy as Identity Policy’, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 20(1), pp. 99–113.

¹⁶ Minnaert, T. (2018), ‘An International Perspective on Dutch Cultural Policy’.

¹⁷ Boogaarts, I. (1999), *From Holland Promotion to International Cultural Policy*, in *Boekmancahier*, 11(42), pp. 368–380.

innovation and knowledge exchange. *Raad voor Cultuur*¹⁸ (the Council for Culture) also voiced concerns, noting the fund's departure from the typical independence of cultural funding bodies in decision-making processes and its alignment with broader foreign policy objectives. Despite the criticism, the Dutch ICP was 'finally considered to be an important and valuable pillar of government policy' by the end of the 1990s (Boogaarts, 1999: 9).

The subsequent 'divergence' phase from 2007 to 2012 marked a shift towards instrumentalism, with a stronger focus on the economic and strategic use of culture in foreign policy, as well as adopting a more nationalist stance (Minnaert, 2018). During this period, the Dutch cultural sector experienced a significant upheaval following the 2011 budget cuts, which targeted cultural financing, slashing €200 million from a total budget of approximately €900 million. These reductions severely impacted the production side of the arts, particularly affecting visual arts and theatre, which saw cuts of up to 40 per cent. The funding cuts led to the closure of numerous institutions, including museums, theatres, orchestras, and literary and art magazines. Additionally, the Mondriaan Foundation, the Netherlands' leading cultural subsidy provider, was forced to operate with a significantly reduced budget. As a result, many regional institutions faced closure because of the inability of municipal and provincial bodies to compensate for the loss of national funding. The rationale behind the cuts was presented as necessary austerity measures during a financial crisis, but, for many, they signalled a deeper ideological shift towards market-driven policies (Segbars, 2014).¹⁹

The 'divergence' period of the ICP stressed 'excellence', resulting in a more selective allocation of funds for international initiatives (Minnaert, 2018). Economic considerations became increasingly prominent, with cultural policy aligning closely with economic diplomacy

¹⁸ The Council for Culture is the statutory advisory body to the Dutch government and parliament in the field of art, culture and media. The council is independent and provides solicited and unsolicited advice on current policy issues and subsidy applications. See <https://www.raadvoorcultuur.nl/>.

¹⁹ Segbars, J. (10 February 2014), 'The Dutch Situation', *Platform BK*, <https://www.platformbk.nl/en/the-dutch-situation-2/>, accessed on 8 June 2024.

objectives. Notably, the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation's prioritization of top sectors²⁰, including the creative sector, played an important role in funding decisions, emphasizing the increasing focus on economic factors within cultural policy.

Since 2013, the instrumental approach has shifted towards 'complementarity', where culture is employed in contemporary diplomacy, contributing to global cooperation and sustainable development, and thus moving away from a purely economic focus towards a broader application of cultural policy in international relations. The change in the ICP discourse is exemplified by the frequent use of the term *cultural diplomacy* in policy documents (Minnaert, 2014).

1.2 Situating ICP within the Cultural and Public Diplomacy Discourse

According to Milton Cummings' definition, adopted by supranational entities such as the United States Advisory Committee for Cultural Diplomacy and UNESCO, cultural diplomacy involves using 'cultural activities and exchanges to enhance diplomatic relations by facilitating the exchange of ideas, information, art, and various cultural elements among nations and their peoples, primarily to foster mutual understanding'.²¹ Cummings notes that cultural diplomacy can serve as a means for nations to promote their national language, explain their policies and present their perspectives globally, often described as a nation 'telling its story' to the world. For Mark (2009), this definition raises questions about the distinctions between cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy and international cultural

²⁰ The Netherlands employs the "top sector" approach as a national policy strategy. Through this approach, the Dutch government supports companies developing innovative products by offering tax benefits, innovation credits, and grants. The designated top sectors include: Horticulture and propagation materials, Agri-food, Water, Life sciences and health, Chemicals, High tech, Energy, Logistics, Creative industries. <https://www.government.nl/topics/enterprise-and-innovation/encouraging-innovation>.

²¹ Cummings, M. (2003), *Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey*, Washington, DC: Center for Arts and Culture.

relations, as well as the inclusivity of ‘nations and their peoples’ within its framework. It further raises questions on how the involvement of different actors may influence cultural diplomacy, what exactly constitutes ‘other aspects of culture’, and whether the primary goal is fostering mutual understanding or whether there are concurrent objectives. Furthermore, unresolved debates persist regarding the mutuality of cultural exchanges, particularly whether asymmetric engagements still qualify as genuine cultural diplomacy.²²

Conversely, public diplomacy is defined as a country’s efforts to build and sustain relationships with publics in other societies to promote its policies and actions.²³ Studies on cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy reveal the lack of a universally accepted definition, with both terminologies’ meaning varying based on context.²⁴ Additionally, the practices associated with cultural diplomacy are named, interpreted and implemented differently depending on the country and their respective ministries.²⁵ For instance, the UK, Canada and Australia refer to these practices as ‘international cultural relations’, while Japan frames them as ‘cultural exchange’.²⁶ In the Netherlands, although the ICP is considered the country’s ‘cultural diplomacy approach’,²⁷ the term ‘cultural diplomacy’ itself remains a descriptor for using arts and culture as tools for foreign diplomacy goals, as outlined in the previous subsection.

²² Mark, S. (2009), *A Greater Role for Cultural Diplomacy*, The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael’.

²³ Melissen, J. and J. Wang (2019), *Debating Public Diplomacy*, Leiden: Brill.

²⁴ Kim, H. (2017), ‘Bridging the Theoretical Gap between Public Diplomacy and Cultural Diplomacy’, in *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, 15(2), pp. 293–326.

²⁵ Mark (2009), *A Greater Role for Cultural Diplomacy*.

²⁶ Wyszomirski, M.J., C. Burgess and C. Peila (2003), *International Cultural Relations: A Multi-Country Comparison*, Cultural Diplomacy Research Series, Washington, DC: Arts International and Center for Arts and Culture.

²⁷ Ibid.

Melissen (2011) notes that while cultural and public diplomacy share the same end goals, they differ in their means of communication, message delivery and methods of engaging audiences in dialogue.²⁸ According to Villanueva (2007), cultural diplomacy emphasizes the long-term construction and representation of people's identities through artistic, cultural and scientific fields, including educational exchanges and official narratives about national and cultural identities. In contrast, public diplomacy is more concerned with the short-term management of communication and image-making, functioning as an information agency for official communications, public relations and the country's international image. Despite their overlap, cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy require different skills, fulfil distinct objectives and operate on different timelines, and should be seen as separate yet mutually constitutive fields within traditional diplomacy.²⁹

In this context, this study situates the ICP between the intersection of cultural and public diplomacy, as the ICP leverages cultural diplomacy for broader foreign policy and public diplomacy goals, alongside its primary objective of enhancing the global presence and market opportunities for Dutch arts, creative industries and heritage.

1.3 Regional Cultural Collaboration with Japan and ICP Cycles from 2017–2020

In 2015, the Netherlands adjusted its strategy of bilateral engagement with other nations towards regional approaches in implementing its ICP. As part of the plan *New Cultural Horizons*³⁰ (2015–2016), developed by DutchCulture's then Director Cees de Graaff, five countries and regions were identified, namely India, Curacao, Russia, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Japan. This shift involved Kyushu, the southernmost and third largest of Japan's four main islands, as the focal region in Japan.

²⁸ Melissen and Wang (2019), *Debating Public Diplomacy*.

²⁹ Villanueva, C. (2007), *Representing Cultural Diplomacy: Soft Power, Cosmopolitan Constructivism and Nation Branding in Sweden and Mexico*, Växjö (Sweden): Växjö University Press.

³⁰ DutchCulture (2015), *New Cultural Horizons: Nieuw perspectief voor culturele samenwerking met vijf landen en regio's*, Amsterdam: DutchCulture.

As outlined in the project plan of New Cultural Horizons, the choice of countries and regions was informed by enquiries from the cultural sector, DutchCulture's international network and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Additionally, strategic motives and considerations of economic, geopolitical and social developments played a significant role in this selection process. The document states that in the case of Japan, the sub-programme was developed in response to enquiries from cultural and entrepreneurial networks in Japan and the Netherlands, as well as the Dutch mission's network in Japan. The goals of the programme were stated as promoting the Dutch creative sector in southern Japan and strengthening its market position, facilitating successful collaborations and showcasing the results in both countries, which were in line with the then ICP of the 2013–2016 cycle.³¹

The intended regional focus on Kyushu consisted of three main events and projects:

- Celebrating 400 years of porcelain production in Arita, Saga and a collaboration project called 2016/arita, led by Japanese designer Teruhiro Yanagihara and Dutch designers Scholten & Baijings, pairing sixteen foreign designers with sixteen porcelain manufacturers to create new products;
- The reconstruction of six nineteenth-century buildings and the completion of the Omotemon bridge, which would reconnect Deshima to mainland Nagasaki, marking the third phase of Deshima's restoration;
- An opera production, composed by Dutch composer Rijndert van Woudenberg and produced together with Via Nobel and Japanese ensemble Nomad, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the death of Philipp Franz Von Siebold, a central figure in Dutch–Japan relations in the nineteenth century.

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2012), 'International Cultural Policy Framework, 2013–2016', The Hague: MFA.

Bas Valckx, Senior Policy Officer of the Public Diplomacy, Politics and Culture Department at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan, emphasizes that the choice of prioritizing the Kyushu region was guided by ongoing collaborations in the region, such as with the Saga prefectural government. Valckx states that the two key aspects of the programme, namely the 2016/arita project in Saga and the completion of the bridge in Dejima, Nagasaki, served as pillars for Dutch cultural engagement in Japan:

The ceramics are straightforward because the resulting works are tangible. Similarly, the reconstruction of the bridge in Dejima symbolizes the long-standing relations that we have in the region. These tangible and symbolic aspects made it easy for all the partners to engage with [the programme] and understand its significance.

Following the inception of the Kyushu sub-programme, the cultural collaboration initiative evolved into Holland-Kyushu, involving more multidisciplinary projects in the region. The programme was supported and facilitated by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Tokyo, the consulate general in Osaka and DutchCulture, aligning with the new ICP cycle of 2017–2020.³² The main objectives of this policy cycle were:

1. a strong cultural sector, where international exchange and sustainable cooperation ensure increasingly higher quality, and which is recognized and valued abroad;
2. more room for the arts to contribute to a safe, just, future-proof world; and,
3. culture will be used effectively as a tool of modern diplomacy.

The third objective was underpinned by the key elements below:

- a focus on both the intrinsic, social and on the economic value of culture;
- an emphasis on the importance of exchange, networks and reciprocity: international cultural policy is more than an export policy;

³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2015), 'International Cultural Policy Framework, 2017–2020', The Hague: MFA.

- a cohesive, comprehensive country strategy, with a central role for DutchCulture and more scope for tailor-made approaches and initiatives from the field;
- a commitment to the binding role culture can play internationally, with a focus on the arc around Europe;
- support for cultural diplomacy worldwide.

According to Ian Yang, advisor for Japan at DutchCulture, Japan's designation as a focus country in the ICP allows for a broader, multidisciplinary cultural collaboration beyond heritage projects. The name of the regions coupled with 'Holland' (and later 'NL' with the changed nation-branding strategy of the Netherlands); 'sends a message' not only to the focus region and Japanese partners but also to local organizations and artists, informing them about Dutch policy and emphasis during a specific period. In line with the goals of the ICP, the aim of initiating such programmes is to strengthen the Dutch cultural sector. Despite its geographical size, the Netherlands hosts artists from diverse backgrounds. Given the limited scope of the Dutch cultural scene, collaborating with international partners in Japan and facilitating international collaborations are avenues to increase the Dutch cultural sector's influence and visibility.

As observed by Yang, the Holland-Kyushu programme revealed a significant interest from the Dutch cultural sector towards Japan, which was instrumental in Dutch policymaking from 2017 onwards. This demonstrated the impact of policy on cultural exchange and collaboration, and vice versa, which Yang characterizes as a reciprocal relationship. Yang emphasizes the importance of budgetary resources in facilitating such collaborations:

Policy coverage means budget availability, which is a very important factor for cultural projects [...] The resources need to be there. For the government, it is a practical way to facilitate and stimulate cultural exchange and collaboration. [...] Policymaking

means listening to the field and, at the end, returning to serve the field; they are dynamically connected. Without policy and funding, a lot of projects would not happen.³³

As well as the three main events – 2016/arita, the (re)construction of shared heritage in Dejima and the opera production – the programme facilitated events and workshops under the theme of ‘Innovation Meets Tradition’, including:

- The Hirado Conservation and Development Workshop

A workshop co-organized by the Dutch Cultural Heritage Agency (RCE) and the Japan-Netherlands Architecture and Cultural Association (JNACA) that aimed to define the development potential of Hirado’s historical centre by adapting methods from the Dutch Inner-City Renewal Programmes and provided policy advice based on the project’s outcomes.

- Dutch Jazz in Hirado Concert

The Amsterdam Jazz Connection, supported by the Netherlands Embassy in Japan and Hirado City Hall, held a jazz concert at the reconstructed Hirado Dutch Trading Post. This historic venue, where Dutch-Japanese trade began in the seventeenth century, was also the first place where Dutch music was played in Japan.

- Indigo: Sharing Blue Project

A masterclass, in collaboration with Crafts Council Nederland, allowed four Dutch maker-designers to take an apprenticeship with Japanese masters and explore the history of indigo dyeing, a technique popular from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries between Japan and

³³ Interview with Ian Yang, advisor for Japan at DutchCulture.

the Netherlands. The results were showcased through exhibitions in both the Netherlands and Japan.

- Sweet Hirado Project

The ‘Sweet Hirado’ project celebrated Hirado’s historical role as Japan’s ‘Island of Sweets’, where Western cultural aspects and products, including sugar, were first introduced. The project’s inspiration came from the ‘Encyclopaedia of 100 Sweets’, by the lord of Hirado, Matura Hiromu (1806–1841), featuring both traditional Japanese *wagashi* and sweets influenced by Europe and South-East Asia. ‘Sweet Hirado’ invited Dutch designers to reinterpret the book’s sweets and create new confections, as well as specially designed plates, tea bowls and related items. This collaboration involved three local sweet shops (Eshiro, Kumaya and Tsutaya) and the Matura Historical Museum.

The Holland–Kyushu programme operated throughout 2016, concluding in 2017 with the inauguration of Omotemonbashi, the new main gate bridge linking Deshima with Nagasaki city, a symbolic end mark for the programme. The event was attended by Their Imperial Highnesses Prince and Princess Akishino of Japan, and Her Royal Highness Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, along with cultural delegations, marking the significance of the occasion. According to Ian Yang, the initial success of these projects in terms of strengthening the connections that the Netherlands had in the region and the visibility of the Dutch cultural sector through the collaborative projects paved the way for the further regional cultural collaboration programmes of Holland–Kyoto³⁴ (2019–2020) and NL–Kanto³⁵ (2021–2023).

1.4 From Holland–Kyushu to Holland–Kyoto and NL–Kanto

In 2019, following the first regional cultural collaboration programme of Holland–Kyushu, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan focused its cultural activities on

³⁴ <https://hollandkyoto.com/en/>.

³⁵ <https://nlkanto.com/>.

Kyoto. With the theme ‘Opportunities Beyond Tokyo’, the Kyoto focus aimed to strengthen cultural ties between Kyoto and the Netherlands. Holland–Kyoto created new opportunities for Dutch creative makers and encouraged the Kyoto cultural scene to collaborate with these creatives and visit the Netherlands. Notable partnerships under this programme included:

- MONO Japan³⁶ Artist in Residence Programme

This programme involved Dutch designers collaborating with traditional Japanese craft makers, such as Aizu Shikki lacquerware makers in Fukushima, Sekishu Washi paper makers in Shimane, and Yoshida Shingi Shozoku, costume makers for Shinto priests in Kyoto.

- ICOM Conference: Netherlands Session

This session, held during the International Council of Museums (ICOM) Conference in Kyoto in collaboration with the Japan Museum Sieboldhuis and the Dejima Restoration Office of Nagasaki City, discussed the theme ‘Museums as Cultural Hubs: the Future of Tradition’ from a Dutch–Japanese perspective.

- KYOTOGRAPHIE ³⁷ International Photography Festival, International Portfolio Review 2019

This event, organized in collaboration with Unseen Amsterdam, brought together professionals from the domestic and international photography industry, including curators,

³⁶ MONO Japan is a platform and event to help promote contemporary Japanese craft and design and cultural exchange between the Netherlands and Japan, and was founded in 2016. See <https://www.monojapan.nl/>.

³⁷ KYOTOGRAPHIE is an international photography festival held annually in Kyoto, Japan, for professionals in the domestic and international photography industry (including curators, gallerists, photo festival directors and news media) to gather and discuss works about the contemporary photograph industry. See <https://www.kyotographie.jp/en/about/>.

gallerists, photo festival directors and news media photobook editors, to discuss works and contemporary photography.

Subsequently, the third edition of the regional programme - 'NL Kanto' - was established by the Embassy of the Netherlands to Japan in collaboration with DutchCulture and Dutch cultural funds in conjunction with the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics. Japan's Kanto region, encompassing Tokyo and surrounding areas on Honshu, Japan's largest island, was the focal point of the programme. The programme aimed to promote inclusivity, raise awareness of societal issues and foster cultural exchange through the themes of 'Inclusivity' and 'Beyond the Capital'. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the initial plan of the programme, leading to postponements and adjustments in the execution of its projects. Despite these challenges, collaborations with Japanese partners continued, some of which extended into 2023. Projects under the NL-Kanto programme included:

- Game Changer - Social Change through Paralympic Sports

Established in 2017 by the Olympic Committee of the Netherlands (NOC*NSF) in collaboration with the Japan Sport Council (JSC) and three Tokyo municipalities (Adachi-ku, Edogawa-ku, and Nishi-Tokyo City), this project aimed to improve the social position of people with disabilities in society through sports.

- SUPER T (E)market

A series of multi-disciplinary events functioning as a platform for a new generation of artists and designers. It featured a virtual collage of works by various artists and designers, curated around a musical score by Tomoko Mukaiyama, a Japanese artist/pianist based in the Netherlands, and the Dutch cinematographer Reinier van Brummelen.

- Pride House Tokyo Legacy

A project aimed to raise awareness on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) issues during the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics and Paralympic Games. The project involved hosting events, creating hospitality points and producing diverse content in collaboration with Dutch athletes and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan.

- NL House

A collaborative project between Shibaura House³⁸ and the Embassy of the Netherlands to Japan. NL House was initiated to serve as a cultural hub for Japan and the Netherlands for a limited time period. The project included participatory exhibitions, online talks and workshops aimed at promoting a zero-waste venue and fostering cultural community connections.

Cultural programmer and co-founder of Studio Future,³⁹ Vincent Schipper states that the regional cultural programme of Holland-Kyushu broke new ground in terms of Dutch international involvement in Japan by further strengthening the ties the Netherlands had in regions such as Kyushu. Schipper attributes the success of projects such as 2016/arita partly to the Holland-Kyushu programme, which enabled a different type of focus and collaboration in the follow-up cultural collaborations as well:

Holland-Kyoto allowed for the development of a tight relationship between the Dutch Embassy and KYOTOGRAPHIE. This basically came out of the success of 2016/arita. Compared to Kyoto, our involvement in Kyushu is still growing, since it is a much bigger region. Now, after six years, people from the local government say, 'The Netherlands is invested in us'. There is also interest for future projects in Kagoshima and Okinawa [...] That's

³⁸ <https://shibaurahouse.jp/en>.

³⁹ <https://www.studiothefuture.nl/>.

all because of the Holland–Kyushu programme. It was able to show on a larger scale that both sides were interested in collaborating. We want to develop further those relationships.⁴⁰

Similarly, Ian Yang states that Holland–Kyushu’s impact continues to inform and shape cultural exchanges between the Netherlands and Japan:

Now when we look back at Holland-Kyushu, I believe it created a kind of a history [...] It stimulated collaboration between the two countries and two cultural sectors and artists, and it paved the way for policymaking.⁴¹

1.5 A New Cycle of ICP: 2021–2024 and the Multi-annual Plan of the Dutch Embassy

With the new cycle of the Dutch ICP for 2021–2024, two important aspects are highlighted: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁴² and artist-in-residence (AiR)⁴³ programmes. Both have significance to the regional cultural collaboration programmes.

The main objectives of the current cycle are:

⁴⁰ Interview with Vincent Schipper, co-founder of Studio Future and cultural programmer.

⁴¹ Interview with Ian Yang.

⁴² The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a comprehensive global plan adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, aiming to address urgent social, economic and environmental challenges. It encompasses seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) designed to eradicate poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all by 2030. These goals are interconnected and inclusive, addressing issues such as climate change, inequality, education and sustainable economic growth. The Agenda calls for collaborative efforts by governments, businesses and civil society to implement sustainable practices and ensure that no one is left behind. See <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

⁴³ Artist-in-residence programmes, or artist residencies, encompass a wide range of artistic initiatives that facilitate collaboration between artists and hosting organizations, institutions, or communities. These programmes provide artists with the necessary space and resources to support their creative work.

1. The Dutch cultural sector will occupy a strong position abroad through visibility, exchanges and long-term partnerships;
2. Dutch cultural expression will be used to support bilateral relationships with other countries;
3. To harness the power of the Netherlands' cultural sector and creative industries in efforts to achieve the SDGs, particularly in connection with the Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation (*Buitenlandse Handel en Ontwikkelingssamenwerking*, or BHOS), in focus regions.

Key elements underpinning the third objective include:

- Enabling the cultural and creative sectors to contribute to achieving the SDGs through international partnerships;
- Offering opportunities for the Dutch creative sector to contribute abroad to finding solutions to challenges currently faced by society;
- Strengthening the Netherlands' image as an innovative, creative and inclusive country, in line with the new 'NL' branding.

In parallel with this new policy cycle, the Dutch Embassy in Japan's multi-annual plan for 2021-2024, titled 'Tokyo and Beyond' in the wake of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, aimed to extend cultural policy beyond Tokyo, while acknowledging that Tokyo remains the central hub for arts and culture in Japan. For the current ICP period, the Dutch Embassy in Japan has a budget of €200,000 per year to support and facilitate cultural activities and collaboration.

As the Dutch Embassy's Senior Policy Officer Bas Valckx explains, artists and organizations in Japan and the Netherlands can submit applications for grants or financial support, which are reviewed by the embassy's team every two to three months. Evaluation criteria include

alignment with the multi-annual plan and the framework of the current ICP, the feasibility of the event taking place, and consideration of previous support and progress:

We have a set of conditions that we refer to when we make decisions about the applications [...] we see our financial contribution as ‘seed money’ to trigger bigger subsidies from other parties. And in that sense, we also work together with the funds in the Netherlands since they have more financial resources and the necessary expertise [in terms assessing artistic quality] in evaluating the applications.⁴⁴

1.6 The ICP and AiR Programmes

Artist-in-Residence (AiR) programmes serve as foundational elements for larger regional cultural projects such as NL-Kanto to build upon. The Dutch Embassy in Japan promotes AiR programmes as part of its four-year collaborative plan, providing financial aid to Dutch artists and hosting AiR organizations. Beyond financial support, the embassy mediates between various AiR organizations in Japan, leveraging its communication channels to promote programmes, connect artists with relevant cultural networks, provide cultural and sociological insights, and assist with language or cultural barriers. Occasionally, the embassy also offers its facilities for presentations or exhibitions. This engagement helps the embassy to gain new cultural connections in both the Netherlands and Japan.

In partnership with TransArtists,⁴⁵ a branch programme of DutchCulture, the Dutch Embassy to Japan’s involvement with AiR programmes has evolved from occasional financial support to facilitating long-term collaborations and structural engagement, aligning with the new cycle of the ICP. This strategic focus draws inspiration from collaborations with French and

⁴⁴ Interview with the Dutch Embassy in Japan’s Senior Policy Officer Bas Valckx.

⁴⁵ <https://www.transartists.org/en>.

German residency programmes in Japan, such as Villa Kujoyama⁴⁶ and the Goethe-Institut Villa Kamogawa.⁴⁷

Heidi Vogels, AiR advisor at TransArtists, highlights that the Dutch Embassy to Japan's emphasis and support for AiR programmes has contributed significantly to the growing connections between the Dutch cultural sector and Japan. In Japan, AiR programmes are renowned for their exceptional support to international artists, a level of assistance that is rare globally. Unlike short-term exhibitions, residencies offer artists the opportunity to immerse themselves in local culture, conduct research, develop projects and engage with communities over an extended period. Vogels notes that residencies can also function as platforms to address local challenges and foster self-reflection within communities, by inviting international artists and experts for prolonged stays. This engagement encourages local communities to interact with visiting artists, opening up to new perspectives and re-evaluating their cultural practices.⁴⁸ However, a recent trend of reducing these initiatives poses a threat to their sustainability, which necessitates a continuing need for advocacy to highlight the value and potential of residencies for art, artists and local communities.

Funding for artist residencies in Japan primarily relies on local, prefectural or national project funding, which has gradually been reduced in recent years. As Vogels explains, this financial constraint makes it increasingly difficult for residency organizers to secure necessary funds, impacting both the invitation of artists and the sustainability of the residencies. This challenge is particularly acute for smaller organizations without substantial institutional backing. Since

⁴⁶ Villa Kujoyama is a French artistic institution located atop Mount Higashi in Kyoto, Japan, aimed at hosting French artists and creators in residence. See <https://www.villakujoyama.jp/>.

⁴⁷ The Goethe-Institut Villa Kamogawa in Kyoto offers German artists and creators the opportunity to live and work in Japan on a three-month scholarship. See <https://www.goethe.de/ins/jp/de/sta/kyo.html>.

⁴⁸ Koizumi, M. (2018), 'Connecting with Society and People through "Art Projects" in an Era of Personalization', in Y. Cabannes, M. Douglass and R. Padawangi (eds), *Cities in Asia By and For the People*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 177–200.

the impact of art and culture takes time to manifest, it can be challenging to justify the necessary funding.

Despite these challenges, the AiR infrastructure in Japan remains effective for Dutch artists to establish a presence or ‘foothold’ in Japan. Bas Valckx, for example, emphasizes the importance of considering the indirect and long-term benefits of supporting artists and AiR programmes in Japan, particularly in relation to Dutch ICP goals. Artists and art projects can address societal issues and offer unique perspectives that differ from policymakers’ approaches. Artistic collaboration can also be an avenue for dialogue and reflection. Ian Yang, Japan advisor for DutchCulture, notes that residencies provide international artists and researchers with insights into various topics concerning Japan and the Netherlands, and this in turn might encourage discussions and reflections on the colonial pasts of both countries.

1.7 Overview of Case Studies_

1.7.1 2016/arita

The 2016/arita project, launched by the Saga prefectural government in collaboration with the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan, focuses on revitalizing the traditional Arita porcelain industry. Situated in the historic town of Arita, which is celebrated for its porcelain craftsmanship, the initiative aimed to merge centuries-old techniques with contemporary design under the leadership of creative director Teruhiro Yanagihara and co-directors, the Dutch design duo Scholten & Baijings. This collaborative effort brought together sixteen international designer groups, alongside sixteen local porcelain producers and trading companies. 2016/arita aspired to establish the town of Arita as a global hub for creativity and sustainable business, and to ensure the ongoing cultural relevance and economic vitality of Arita porcelain on the international stage. The project was a key component of the Holland–Kyushu regional cultural collaboration programme.

1.7.2 Fuji Textile Week

Launched in 2021, Fuji Textile Week is an annual festival that celebrates the rich heritage of Fuji City's textile industry in Yamanashi prefecture. Positioned as Japan's premier textile art event, it showcases a diverse array of fabric-based works from both domestic and international creators. Founded by entrepreneurs and creative collaborators Yagi Tsuyoshi and Sugihara Yuta, the event garners support from Yamanashi prefecture and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan. At its core, Fuji Textile Week emphasizes collaboration with artists, aiming to enrich the local textile culture with diverse perspectives and to broaden its appeal. Over the years, the festival has welcomed renowned Dutch artists and design studios such as Sigrid Calon, RAW COLOR and Studio Samira Boon.

1.7.3 Collaboration with Shibaura House, Tokyo

Shibaura House is a building situated in Tokyo's business district Minato-ku. Originally established as Kohkoku Seihan Inc. in 1952, it underwent a transformation in 2011 into a dynamic venue blending corporate headquarters with a community-focused space. The Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan and Shibaura House have a long-standing relationship of more than a decade, working on multiple projects such as nl/minato and NL HOUSE, both of which were part of the NL-Kanto regional cultural collaboration programme. Shibaura House has the ambition to serve as a hub for creative culture, emphasizing art, design and architecture. It connects with international communities, hosting workshops and residencies in collaboration with embassies, and invites international groups and cultural institutions to share their activities with a broader audience.

1.7.4 Game Changer Project Tokyo

*The Game Changer Project was launched by the NOC*NSF (Olympic Committee of the Netherlands) with the aim of fostering the integration of individuals with disabilities into Japanese society, particularly in the context of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. As part of the NL-Kanto cultural collaboration programme, Game Changer sought to leverage the expertise and experience*

*accumulated by the NOC*NSF and Dutch federations in Paralympic sports and disability integration. The core focus of Game Changer was to empower sports clubs, schools and governmental bodies in Tokyo by sharing Dutch expertise, thereby enabling them to implement autonomously sports programmes tailored for individuals with disabilities.*

Chapter 2. Japanese Local Industries Merged with Dutch and International Design

Arita town, located in Saga prefecture on the Japanese island of Kyushu, has been a pivotal hub for porcelain production since 1616, when a Korean craftsman named Yi Sam-pyeong introduced the art to Japan. Over the centuries, Arita ware, or *arita-yaki*, gained widespread acclaim for its exquisite quality and craftsmanship, particularly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when it was exported worldwide, mainly through the Dutch East India Company (VOC). However, in the late twentieth century, Arita faced a confluence of challenges, including economic recession as a result of changing consumer preferences. This led to a significant decline in production and the closure of many factories and workshops. The downturn not only threatened the livelihood of the local community but also endangered centuries-old craft skills and traditions. Between 1994 and 2014, the ceramic industry in Arita declined by four-fifths, transforming the town into a ‘ghost town’ reliant primarily on ceramics tourism.⁴⁹

Similarly, Fujiyoshida’s textile industry faced its own set of challenges. Flourishing as a leading producer of *kaiki* or Kai silk fabric since the Heian period, the industry faced setbacks during the Second World War, when the demand for metal for the war effort led to the requisitioning of over 9,000 looms and other machinery from Fujiyoshida, effectively crippling traditional weaving practices and causing a loss of knowledge and technology. Although the local industry experienced a brief resurgence in textile production in the 1950s, by the 1960s, the influx of inexpensive textiles from overseas had shifted the situation drastically. Despite the implementation of modern equipment, producing high-quality fabrics like Kai silk remained both costly and labor-intensive. As consumers increasingly opted for

⁴⁹ Yonemitsu, Y. (2006), ‘Promoting Traditional Craft Industries by Incorporating Tourism: The Cases of Arita and Kyoto’, *Research Bulletin*, International Student Center, Kyushu University, 15, pp. 51–66.

cheaper imported fabrics, weaving establishments endured significant setbacks, leading to a wave of closures across the industry.⁵⁰

Globalization has exacerbated the issues faced by local industries, further reshaping notions of place, identity and community in Japan, where rural depopulation, ageing demographics and economic shifts are prevalent.⁵¹ Urbanization and Westernization have further diminished the demand for traditional crafts, while international competition from imitation goods and luxury imports has intensified.⁵² Domestically, traditional craft producers face hurdles in modernizing products, establishing new sales channels, and accessing resources and skilled labour.⁵³ Against this backdrop, a growing trend in Japan is experimental enterprises in the arts and cultural sector, which have increasingly been employed as strategies for local development,⁵⁴ of which 2016/arita and Fuji Textile Week are but two examples.

1.8 2016/arita and Fuji Textile Week

In Arita, the local porcelain industry has seen a resurgence in recent years through innovative efforts by the community and residents. These initiatives include strategic partnerships with corporations in Tokyo and the development of new luxury goods, which have helped alleviate economic challenges (Morais, 2019). Additionally, the 400th anniversary of Arita porcelain in

⁵⁰ Yamanashi Prefectural Industrial Technology Centre, interview on 22 March 2024. [Text Wrapping Break]Yamanashi Prefectural Industrial Technology Centre is a public research institute dedicated to supporting local textile production, promoting regional heritage and preserving cultural traditions.

⁵¹ See Delanty, G. (2003), *Community*, London and New York, NY: Routledge; and Favell, A. (2014), *Immigration, Integration and Mobility: New Agendas in Migration Studies: Essays, 1998–2014*, Colchester (UK): European Consortium for Political Research Press.

⁵² Yonemitsu (2006), 'Promoting Traditional Craft Industries by Incorporating Tourism'.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Morais, L. (2019), *Western Potters in Japan: Identities, Traditions and Histories from a Cosmopolitan Perspective*, Doctoral Thesis, Tokyo Metropolitan University, Graduate School of Humanities.

2016 has produced economic and cultural revitalization in the region. For instance, under the ‘Arita Episode 2’ initiative⁵⁵ of Saga prefectural government, a total of seventeen projects were developed, aiming to contribute to the region’s growth and cultural resurgence, one of which is 2016/arita.

2016/arita is anchored in two pivotal factors: the Creative Industries Agreement signed between the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan and Saga prefectural government in November 2013; and a former project called 1616/, which was led by local Arita businessman Momota Noriyuki, president of Momota Touen Corporation, a pottery trading firm in Arita. According to the prefectural government, the Creative Industries Agreement laid ‘a solid groundwork’ for initiatives such as 1616/ to take flight. It also streamlined budget allocations within the prefectural government, facilitating the implementation of subsequent projects such as 2016/arita.

On the other hand, Fuji Textile Week was launched in 2021 by entrepreneurs Yagi Tsuyoshi and Sugihara Yuta to promote Fujiyoshida’s local textile industry. The need for a textile festival arose from the duo’s conversations with local weavers in Fujiyoshida, who expressed worries about the future sustainability of their businesses in light of societal changes and economic uncertainties that were intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic. Following these meetings, the entrepreneurs identified two key challenges facing the weavers: limited opportunities to showcase their works because of travel limitations; and the high cost of participating in major exhibitions. These challenges underscored the necessity for a new approach to promote Fujiyoshida’s textile heritage and provide support to its weavers.

Both 2016/arita and Fuji Textile Week exemplify how local communities and governments are increasingly exploring innovative international projects in arts and culture to stimulate

⁵⁵ <http://arita-episode2.jp/>.

local industries and foster regional development. These efforts involve collaboration with international partners, including the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan.

1.9 ‘Win–Win’: Creating an International Platform for Mutually Beneficial Long-term Partnerships

From the Dutch perspective, a key outcome of regional cultural collaboration in these two cases is the creation of a platform that directly connects the Dutch creative sector with local craftsmanship in both Arita and Fujiyoshida. This aligns with the goals of the Netherlands’ ICP, which aims to support Dutch and international creatives based in the Netherlands in enhancing their international profile and portfolio:

The Dutch government believes that creative makers will also invigorate the Netherlands through what they bring back; creativity and innovation are important for a country to develop further.⁵⁶

Maintaining the connection between the Dutch creative sector and local craftsmanship in both Arita and Fujiyoshida relies on fostering ongoing creative partnerships. This is being achieved through follow-up initiatives such as Creative Residency Arita (CRA) and the Fuji Textile Collaborative Project. Launched in 2016, CRA is an artist-in-residency programme that offers international artists the opportunity to collaborate with local potters and craftsmen in Arita, drawing inspiration during a three-month residency from the town’s rich porcelain heritage. The programme received support from the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo, Mondriaan Fonds,⁵⁷ and the Creative Industries Fund NL.⁵⁸ Over time, it also garnered

⁵⁶ Interview with Bas Valckx.

⁵⁷ <https://www.mondriaanfonds.nl/>.

⁵⁸ <https://www.stimuleringsfonds.nl/en>.

backing from institutions such as Villa Kamogawa⁵⁹ of the Goethe Institute in Kyoto and the Embassy of Switzerland in Japan, hosting nearly 40 international artists since its inception.

On the other hand, Fuji Textile Week (FTW) launched the Fuji Textile Collaborative Project in 2023. This new initiative, developed by creative entrepreneurs Yagi Tsuyoshi and Sugihara Yuta of FTW and led by creative director Arie Rosen, focuses on business-to-business (B2B) efforts. It allows international designers to conduct research, hold exhibitions and organize talks, also during Fuji Textile Week. Supported by Yamanashi prefecture, Fujiyoshida City and the Dutch Embassy, this project aims to help the textile industry expand its presence beyond Japan. By facilitating ongoing collaborations between local weavers and international design studios, particularly in Europe, the initiative seeks to strengthen the global reach and impact of Fujiyoshida's textile heritage.

Having an international platform and business partner outside of Japan is crucial for the success of local initiatives in Arita and Fujiyoshida, as both rely on selling their products across Japan and internationally, rather than only locally. An international network is especially helpful in navigating unfamiliar territories, for example in Europe, where the target market and business practices may be unknown for local Japanese businesses. The collaboration with the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo and access to its network can address the expertise and guidance needed in expanding into these international markets.

As co-director of the festival, Sugihara Yuta points out that the extensive network of the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo plays a crucial role for FTW. Having access to a network of artists and influential individuals facilitates the reach of festivals such as FTW and their impact both at home and abroad. This blend of design and industry presents a platform for collaboration with embassies, offering both economic and cultural value to the festival:

The problem of local life in general is that we do not have a lot of communication and networking. So through this project, we tried to create a network outside of the local life and

⁵⁹ <https://www.goethe.de/en/kul/rep/kyo.html>.

outside of Japan. The goal is that one day, if we have a strong network, the business side can also flourish. We can be connected directly from a local city here to a Dutch city, for example. This is my strategy for developing the local city.⁶⁰

For Arita, similarly, facilitating this international network is essential for boosting future overseas sales of local products. Revitalizing the porcelain sector's growth is integral to Arita's overall rejuvenation:

Sales have declined by about 60 per cent over the past ten years. The purpose is to raise awareness, to revitalize and regenerate the industry. [As the prefectural government,] we had discussions on what was needed for that purpose, and we came to the conclusion that in Arita, there are a lot of craftsmen, but no world-class designers. Because the Netherlands is strong in design, we decided to invite Dutch designers and collaborate with them.⁶¹

By expanding networking opportunities for both the Dutch creative sector and local industries, these long-term relationships create social capital in the area. According to the definition of Sander and Lowney (2006),⁶² social capital is the cumulative value derived from all the social networks of which individuals are part, supported by norms of reciprocity, trust, information sharing and cooperative actions within these networks. Social capital generates value not only for those directly connected, but also for observers or individuals on the periphery of these networks.

Remco Vrolijk, the former coordinator of the CRA, emphasizes the goodwill generated by Dutch Embassy-supported initiatives, particularly in regions such as Saga, which feeds into the positive image of the Netherlands in Japan. According to Vrolijk, the Dutch government

⁶⁰ Interview with Yagi Tsuyoshi, Director of Fuji Textile Week.

⁶¹ Interview with Kitamura Rei, Deputy Director of the International Affairs Division of Saga prefectural government.

⁶² Sander, T.H. and K. Lowney (2006), 'Social Capital Building Toolkit', Saguario Seminar: Civic Engagement in America, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

strategically strengthened its ties with Arita and Saga prefecture through the 2016/arita initiative, leveraging historical connections to pave the way for ongoing programmes such as CRA. Consequently, the Dutch creative sector continues to enjoy opportunities in Arita because of these longstanding connections:

If you come to Arita from the Netherlands, you have many more entrances than if you do so from another country. Over the years, they have created a kind of situation that is very positive for the Dutch cultural sector. [...] The Netherlands has a historical bond [with Kyushu]; to respond to that was a diplomatic choice and I think it was very sensible. [...] The embassy often visits with the ambassador or other high-level diplomats to strengthen these ties. Personal ties are essential in Japan. As a result, an enormous amount of goodwill has been cultivated here in the region over the years. And yes, that pays off.⁶³

The effectiveness of these initiatives and their contribution to Dutch social capital in Japan relies on their long-term nature, given the central role of personal relationships in Japan in both politics and business. Another benefit of cultivating long-term relationships through regional collaboration projects is the interest and recognition that the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo receives from various Japanese stakeholders, including the Japanese government. In 2017, the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo won the Cool Japan Matching Award⁶⁴ from the Japanese government for its efforts in facilitating and strengthening the creative ties between the Netherlands and Saga prefecture.

Additionally, the success of the collaboration between the Dutch Embassy and Saga prefectural government with the 2016/arita project has led to enquiries from other prefectures, such as Akita and Gifu for instance, seeking similar collaborations with the Dutch Embassy. Getting recognized for 2016/arita and for promoting partnerships between

⁶³ Interview with Remco Vrolijk, former coordinator of the Creative Residency Arita.

⁶⁴ The Cool Japan Matching Award was established by the Japanese government to stimulate international cooperation among various parties such as governments, companies and universities.

Japanese industries and Dutch creatives has increased the Dutch Embassy's overall reputation in Japan:

Since we started doing the collaboration with Saga, other localities and producers in Japan have approached us for collaboration. Local governments use Saga as an example of what is possible, often referring to it positively. Our ongoing promotion partnerships between local industries in Japan and Dutch creatives have made us recognized for that.⁶⁵

One example of this interest is evident in the Dutch involvement in Fuji Textile Week. Following the festival's inception, the Dutch Embassy's support for the festival came one year later, facilitated by a mutual connection, the freelance curator Arie Rosen, who was in charge of the international artists participating in FTW. This introduction led Yagi Tsuyoshi, director of the festival, to visit the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo. The Dutch emphasis on supporting Japanese culture and local initiatives, as evidenced by the Netherlands' involvement with *2016/arita*, resonated with Yagi's own goals with Fujiyoshida:

It was very interesting to hear the Dutch perspective on a local project [...] The Dutch had this local perspective before, such as networking and trying to find ways to connect more with Japan [...] through the trading, especially from a historical perspective, connecting with products and manufacturers.⁶⁶

From the Dutch Embassy's perspective, supporting the revitalization of regional areas through regional cultural collaboration in Japan is defined as a 'win-win' situation, as it expands the reach and visibility of the Dutch creative sector and the artists involved in these projects as well as benefiting the Japanese stakeholders. This 'win-win' aspect is highly valued by the Japanese partners:

⁶⁵ Interview with Bas Valckx.

⁶⁶ Interview with Yagi Tsuyoshi.

Saga prefecture, home to Arita's industry, recognizes the care and support from the Dutch for this project and collaboration. We also observe the fruitful cooperation between designers and craftsmen. It is crucial to have a relationship that is mutually beneficial.⁶⁷

Saga officials emphasize the importance of achieving positive outcomes for all parties involved in the collaboration. This mutually beneficial aspect provides intrinsic motivation for Japanese stakeholders to sustain their collaboration:

We are keen to continue our win-win relationship with the Netherlands. Having worked together for a long time, our focus is on understanding what the Dutch side seeks from this agreement and collaboration. With mutual understanding, we maintain a win-win situation.⁶⁸

1.10 Value for the Local Community and the Creative Sector: A Win-Win-Win?

Arita's porcelain production is characterized by complex dynamics between small-scale enterprises and larger corporations. Family-owned businesses typically handle all aspects of production internally, prioritizing individuality and craftsmanship. In contrast, larger corporations collaborate with multiple artisans, which can increase production costs and pose pricing challenges. These differences extend to product development, where smaller businesses emphasize uniqueness while larger corporations focus on consistency and uniformity. Arita functions as a biotope of specialized producers involved in various stages of the production process, including glazing, clay making and painting. Merchant houses, or *shosha*, play crucial roles in coordinating these diverse entities, while some ceramic makers operate independently, managing all their processes in-house. Additionally, there are artisan-run studios such as the Kakiemon Kiln. All these businesses function within this ecosystem while interacting and influencing each other.

⁶⁷ Interview with Tsutsumi Yasuyuki, the Netherlands–Saga liaison for the Saga prefectural government.

Financial support, provided by both local and central governments, holds significant importance in the survival of this porcelain ecosystem of Arita. However, authorities adopt a cautious stance towards funding, prioritizing the promotion of innovation and international collaboration among companies over dependency on subsidies. While this strategy might encourage entrepreneurial initiative, it also leaves small, family-owned businesses particularly exposed to financial vulnerabilities. Additionally, certain companies resist the emphasis on collaboration between local and international artists as a means to drive innovation and expand market reach, thus reflecting differing perspectives within the industry.

Over the eight years of the programme's existence, Creative Residency Arita (CRA) has served as a platform for artists and designers from various backgrounds to engage with Arita, generating both positive and critical feedback from the community. On one hand, there is appreciation from the local community for the influx of new Dutch and international design ideas and concepts, contributing to the promotion of *arita-yaki* as an industry. On the other hand, there are also local voices expressing concern about the disconnect between these new ideas and the local context.

The concerns are concentrated on the tension between the creative process and turning this into commercially successful products. CRA primarily focuses on facilitating creativity, with its participating artists often more concerned about artistic expression than commercial viability. However, there is a desire from local industry for economic benefits from the collaboration, such as the ability to produce and sell resulting works. As Remco Vrolijk explains, despite the rarity of commercial success from artist-in-residence programmes globally, there are high expectations locally, adding pressure to maintain motivation for the programme. While many of the resulting pieces from the programme generate interest in the Dutch cultural sector and are purchased by museums (for example, Museum Prinsenhof

Delft,⁶⁸ Ceramic Museum Princessehof in Leeuwarden⁶⁹ and Museum Voorlinde in Wassenaar⁷⁰ in the Netherlands), transitioning prototypes into commercially successful products remains challenging. This process requires further investment and entails risks, making it an obstacle in the programme.

Despite varying opinions, creating an international platform and facilitating collaborations with designers and local industries presents an opportunity to rebrand places such as Fujiyoshida and Arita as creative centres and thus contribute to the survival of local industries and, hence, local life. Both Arita and Fujiyoshida face difficulties in transitioning from attracting short-term visitors to encouraging long-term stays, which is essential for sustainable economic growth and community development of both these places.

Collaborative projects seek to revitalize Arita and Fujiyoshida by leveraging this rebranding to attract tourists and encourage longer stays.

For instance, CRA aims to position Arita not just as an industrial town, but as a creative hub where ‘traditional techniques merge with cutting-edge technology’ to attract global creatives. According to local consultant and guide Takada Ryoji, this represents a pivotal chance to reshape the region’s identity and contribute to local life in Arita. Despite the renowned Arita Pottery Fair boosting the local economy during its week-long duration, the region faces quieter periods outside this event, impacting local employment. Initiatives such as 2016/arita and promoting the region’s history, values and creative residency programmes are crucial for redefining Arita beyond these seasonal peaks. International creatives could play an important role as ‘cultural ambassadors’ for this purpose:

[The residency] serves as a source of inspiration [for international artists and designers], yet it is uncertain if Arita fully comprehends its impact. These artists become influential cultural

⁶⁸ <https://www.museumprinsenhofdelft.nl/>.

⁶⁹ <https://www.princessehof.nl/>.

⁷⁰ <https://www.voorlinden.nl/>.

ambassadors, spreading the reputation and excellence of Arita's craftsmanship across the world. Through their works and stories, they promote Arita's strength and quality in countries like England, Germany, and the Netherlands.⁷¹

In Fujiyoshida, Fuji Textile Week (FTW) serves as a platform for the local community, in which locals can participate as contributors as well as in its management. Co-creators Sugihara Yuta and Yagi Tsuyoshi play complementary roles. Yagi Tsuyoshi focuses on strengthening industry connections, innovative fabric techniques, and integrating art and design into the project's framework. Meanwhile, Sugihara Yuta focuses on community-building and on the expansion of FTW's platform. Over the three years of the festival's existence, the duo gradually started to gain more support and opportunities from the local community:

Local people can directly join the festival. For example, our exhibition spaces are abandoned houses, as we renovate them as galleries and showrooms. This means that we have to negotiate with the local people to borrow these abandoned houses. It is important that they understand the value of this festival [...] The first two years, they could not connect well with it. But we kept on working and, step by step, local people gave us hope and opportunities to continue. I feel that they are coming closer [to understanding this value].⁷²

All things considered, it is essential to examine critically whether the benefits of these initiatives in both Arita and Fujiyoshida are equitably distributed among the various stakeholders, including local artisans, designers, businesses and the broader community. Ensuring that these collaborations do not disproportionately benefit certain groups while marginalizing others is crucial for inclusive development. Furthermore, the extent to which

⁷¹ Anti Tijan, former EKWC director, from the documentary 'Connecting Ceramics 2023', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHfMCKZdXnM&t=4s>. The EKWC is an international artist-in-residence and research centre for ceramics located in Oisterwijk, the Netherlands; see <https://ekwc.nl/en/>.

⁷² Interview with Sugihara Yuta.

local communities, particularly marginalized groups or traditional artisans, are involved in decision-making processes and benefit from these initiatives should be analysed further.

In these cultural collaboration projects, defining what success might be is challenging, as various stakeholders might have different understandings and expectations around what success entails. For instance, in the case of the Netherlands' perspective, the foremost focus remains on establishing the ICP goals, while regional Japanese governments, in the case of Saga, for example, are more focused on revitalizing the local industry and the economic benefits that they wish to achieve. According to Bedwell *et al.* (2012),⁷³ collaboration is an evolving process where two or more social entities actively engage in joint activities to achieve shared goals. This definition encompasses several core elements: the involved social entities and their relationships, the joint tasks and their reciprocal nature, the shared objectives and motivations, and the dynamic nature of the collaboration process over time. In short, collaboration has many interconnected layers and it requires effort to stay as one and to be successful.

Another point to note is that, as the nature of art is 'to provoke or at least question certain assumptions', it may interfere with the desire to foster diplomatic relations.⁷⁴ Projects that aim to balance diplomacy with artistic freedom must navigate this tension carefully to maintain the integrity of both artistic expression and diplomatic goals. Therefore, more research is needed to understand fully the interconnected aspects of artistic collaboration, commercial viability, and the involvement of local governments and embassies in projects such as 2016/arita and Fuji Textile Week.

⁷³ Bedwell, W.L., J.L. Wildman, D. Diaz-Granadoz, M. Salazar, W.S. Kramer and E. Salas (2012), 'Collaboration at Work: An Integrative Multilevel Conceptualization', *Human Resource Management Review*, 22(2), pp. 128–145.

⁷⁴ Minnaert (2014), 'Footprint or Fingerprint', p. 111.

Chapter 3. Tokyo's New Localism and its Dutch Partners: Shibaura House and Game Changer Project Tokyo

In recent years, there has been a growing desire among younger generations in Japan to relocate from major urban centres such as Tokyo, opting instead for rural areas to 'embrace a slower, less-hectic lifestyle'.⁷⁵ However, according to Yagi Tsuyoshi, co-creator of Fuji Textile Week, an interesting development is occurring within Tokyo itself: the city is becoming more 'localized', as it is being redefined as a collection of local communities rather than only a bustling metropolis. Yagi Tsuyoshi believes that a new mindset is emerging, particularly among young people, who are actively creating new cultural spaces within Tokyo. They are opening unique shops and businesses, building a sense of community that was previously lacking in the city. Yagi notes that this new cultural dynamic is not limited to domestic interactions; there is also an important role for international partners within this local mindset and changing context.

This shift also reflects how local communities are driven by changing socio-spatial functions and change from within, rather than solely responding to outside pressures.⁷⁶ The internal changes often come from addressing local inequalities or gaining new knowledge. These transformations are important because they shape how we view urban spaces, determining whether, for instance, they are seen as rundown areas needing improvement or as innovative centres worthy of public support. Local deprivation and social inclusion are closely connected, as they highlight the need to understand how these spaces and their communities can improve conditions for vulnerable populations.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Sasaki, H. (2018), 'Do Japanese Citizens Move to Rural Areas Seeking a Slower Life? Differences between Rural and Urban Areas in Subjective Well-being', *Bio-Based and Applied Economics*, 7(1), pp. 1-17.

⁷⁶ Mizuuchi, T., G. Kornatowski and T. Fukumoto (2023), *Diversity of Urban Inclusivity: Perspectives Beyond Gentrification in Advanced City-Regions*, Singapore: Springer Nature.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

In this context, Tokyo's emerging localism is part of a larger movement towards social innovation and inclusivity, supported by both local efforts and international partnerships, exemplified by collaborations such as those between the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan and Shibaura House,⁷⁸ as well as the Game Changer Project Tokyo, launched by the NOC*NSF⁷⁹ (Olympic Committee and National Sports Federation of the Netherlands) in collaboration with stakeholders including the Japan Sports Council and three Tokyo districts of Edogawa City, Nishitokyo and Adachi City.

1.11 Collaboration with Shibaura House: NL HOUSE and nl/minato

Shibaura House in Tokyo, designed by architect Kazuyo Sejima, stands out with its clear and transparent glass architecture in Tokyo's business district Minato-ku. Originally founded as Kohkoku Seihan Inc. in 1952, it was transformed into Shibaura House in 2011, blending the company headquarters with a new community space. The facility welcomes local children, office workers and international visitors, hosts cultural programmes, including cooking and English classes and lectures. Shibaura House has the ambition to serve as a hub for creative culture, emphasizing art, design and architecture because of Kohkoku Seihan Inc.'s advertising background. Shibaura House connects with international communities, hosting workshops and residencies in collaboration with embassies, and invites international groups and cultural institutions to share their activities with a broader audience.

The Dutch Embassy and Shibaura House have a long-standing relationship of more than a decade, working on multiple projects such as nl/minato⁸⁰ and NL HOUSE, both of which were part of the NL-Kanto regional cultural collaboration programme.

NL HOUSE debuted at Shibaura House from 23 July to 5 September 2021, as part of the NL-Kanto regional cultural collaboration programme. The original idea was to have a Dutch

⁷⁸ <https://shibaurahouse.jp/en>.

⁷⁹ <https://nocnsf.nl/>.

⁸⁰ <https://nllocal.net/>.

cultural hub in the framework of the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Paralympics at Shibaura House, but because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the whole set-up had to be changed. The aim of the programme was to encourage further connections between Japan and the Netherlands under the theme 'Overcoming the Present and Envisioning the Future'. For the occasion, the Shibaura House building had a temporary 'Dutch makeover', featuring Dutch cultural symbols and historical figures. The collaborative project with the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo featured online talks, participatory exhibitions and shared meals featuring Dutch dishes made with Japanese ingredients. Cultural professionals from the Netherlands and Japan engaged in online conversations discussing their activities and their ways of coping with the COVID-19 pandemic. A key feature of the event was its aim to be zero-waste, repurposing materials from the space's decoration and exhibitions into eco-bags through workshops.

On the other hand, nl/minato has been a collaborative initiative facilitated and supported by Shibaura House and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Japan since 2017. Described as an 'educational platform' by its stakeholders, the programme aims to facilitate dialogue on social, political and cultural issues, transforming Shibaura House as a space for study, discussion and citizen engagement. In partnership with the local community in Minato-ku, nl/minato hosts events covering topics such as LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality, media, sports and inclusivity.

Consequently, as part of the NL-Kanto programme in 2021, Shibaura House started a multi-year collaboration through nl/minato together with What Design Can Do (WDCD), a design platform based in Amsterdam, to team up for the international design competition 'No Waste Challenge'. This competition was open for innovative design projects from designers, entrepreneurs and students from all over the world to reduce waste and reimagine current production and consumption cycles during the project's run. Sixteen winners were selected by the international jury of What Design Can Do for each of the selected projects, receiving a €10,000 cash prize and a development programme to support their project's realization.

1.12 Game Changer Project Tokyo

Game Changer, initiated by the Dutch Olympic Committee NOC*NSF, aimed to facilitate the integration of individuals with disabilities into Japanese society, particularly in preparation for the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Part of the NL-Kanto programme, Game Changer utilized the expertise of Dutch federations in Paralympic sports and disability integration. Its primary focus was to empower sports clubs, schools and governmental bodies in Tokyo by sharing Dutch know-how, enabling them to implement tailored sports programmes for individuals with disabilities.

Rita van Driel, board member of the International Paralympic Committee (IPC)⁸¹ and project manager for Game Changer, played a pivotal role in facilitating collaboration between Japan and the Netherlands to set up this project. When Japan was awarded the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2020, the Japanese Olympic and Paralympic Committee aimed to use the Paralympics as an ‘accelerator’ to empower individuals with disabilities and promote their societal integration through sports. Seeking guidance from countries with exemplary practices in this area, Japanese stakeholders reached out to the Netherlands through enquiries made to the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo regarding disability sports and societal inclusion.

Responding to these enquiries, former Dutch Ambassador Radinck van Vollenhoven facilitated a meeting with Japanese stakeholders during a visit by representatives from the Netherlands, where Dutch practices were presented to organizations including the Organizing Committee and the Japanese Olympic and Paralympic Committee. The ambassador’s positive reception to the presentation highlighted its potential as an ‘export product’ for the Netherlands and the possibilities for a valuable collaboration with Japan. This initial connection laid the foundation for the ongoing collaboration, with the Dutch Olympic Committee extending support for the Tokyo Games following its involvement in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

⁸¹ <https://www.paralympic.org/>.

1.13 Facilitating Long-term Partnerships between Stakeholders and Dutch and Japanese Municipalities

One of the outcomes of the initiatives explained above is that they created long-term partnerships and collaborations between their various stakeholders and the Dutch and Japanese municipalities.

In the case of Shibaura House, a direct partnership was forged with the City of Amsterdam. During an nl/minato research and exchange trip in 2018, a Shibaura House delegation visited Dutch organizations and cultural spaces, including De Balie,⁸² Share Network⁸³ and refugee company.⁸⁴ During this trip, the delegation also met with Sabine Gimbrère, Director of the International Office at the City of Amsterdam⁸⁵ a partnership that still continues today.

According to Gimbrère, Shibaura House operates independently yet complements the efforts of the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo and the municipal initiatives of the City of Amsterdam. This collaboration complements Amsterdam's international policy aims that are focused on contributing to the 'city's tasks' and ensures that their efforts are beneficial and lead to tangible results for the city and its residents. As Gimbrère explains, this focus on accountability led Amsterdam to move away from formal city-twinning arrangements, allowing for more geographic flexibility. Now, collaborations are chosen based on where the most value can be added for specific tasks. The City of Amsterdam's approach is less about large projects and more about knowledge exchange, particularly in efforts to strengthen Amsterdam's positioning as an economically attractive location, often in collaboration with 'amsterdam inbusiness',⁸⁶ the official foreign investment agency of the Amsterdam

⁸² <https://debalie.nl/>.

⁸³ <https://share-network.org/>.

⁸⁴ <https://refugeecompany.com/en/home/>.

⁸⁵ <https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/>.

⁸⁶ <https://www.iamsterdam.com/en/business/amsterdam-inbusiness-services>.

metropolitan area. Seed funding is occasionally provided to support initial projects or for travel, an approach that has proven successful in fostering productive collaborations, including the partnership with Shibaura House.

From the City of Amsterdam's perspective, the partnership with the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo has proven effective, focusing increasingly on Japan from a cultural standpoint, with Shibaura House as a key partner. These collaborations enable the City of Amsterdam to complement the Dutch Embassy's initiatives and leverage existing economic relations, particularly with the Japanese community and businesses in Amsterdam. The collaboration with Shibaura House is noteworthy for demonstrating how a private initiative can engage in socially responsible projects, making it particularly valuable to the City of Amsterdam.

Additionally, the nl/minato project facilitated Shibaura House's recognition by the local government in Minato-ku, in Tokyo, through establishing a collaborative relationship aimed at implementing various programmes influenced by the Dutch input. As Bas Valckx explains, this collaboration now serves as a strategic platform for the Dutch Embassy to utilize its public diplomacy and communication strategies, and to convey Dutch values and messages to a Japanese audience. By leveraging Shibaura House as an intermediary, the embassy can indirectly engage with policymakers, who might not have been as receptive if approached directly. This indirect approach enables the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo to cultivate future relationships with policymakers and influence the decision-making processes subtly. Additionally, by providing financial support to Shibaura House, the programme enables the organization to host events and invite guests from the Netherlands, all contributing to ICP goals of increasing the visibility of the Dutch cultural sector abroad.

In this context, Shibaura House can be seen as an unofficial cultural centre for the Netherlands, highlighted by its 'NL library' on the first floor, which features books on Dutch culture, history and language. The identity of Shibaura House as a space is somewhat ambiguous, as it has been described in various sources as an 'office building', 'cultural hub' and 'community development centre'. Additionally, it is advertised as a space that can be used for commercial

filming and photography, as well as rental space for events. But what does this do to, or indeed for, its profile as a community centre in Minato-ku?

This lack of a distinct cultural profile prompted discussions between the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo and Shibaura House regarding the impact of their activities and how these contribute to the cultural profile of the Dutch Embassy in return. For instance, the collaboration between Shibaura House and What Design Can Do⁸⁷ (WDCD) has now ended after three years, since the resulting impact of the collaborative project was not enough for the expectations of WDCD.

[Shibaura House] does not have a clear cultural profile, which makes it difficult to get people to events that they are hosting, especially when it concerns events that concern unknown organizations and/or initiatives. So we have always had questions about their impact: do the activities go beyond the confines of the local community of the Shibaura area and do they have lasting effects? These are discussions that we have had – and still have – with Shibaura House and which we address and try to improve by focusing more on the communication of the activities.⁸⁸

Further research is needed into the kind of local identity and sense of place Shibaura House is aiming to cultivate in Minato-ku, and, ultimately, whether these identities truly make a difference or benefit the local community.

1.14 From Municipalities to Local Communities

The Game Changer project fostered strong collaboration among NOC*NSF, the Dutch Embassy in Japan, the Japan Sport Council and the three Tokyo districts of Edogawa City, Nishitokyo and Adachi City. A jointly authored document⁸⁹ by creators and participants of the Game Changer project demonstrates the sense of ownership among its facilitators and

⁸⁷ <https://www.whatdesigncando.com/>.

⁸⁸ Interview with Bas Valckx.

⁸⁹ <https://nocnsf.nl/en/international-projects/game-changer-project-tokyo>.

highlights the project's efficacy. It also showcases how the initiative has opened up opportunities for school children, teachers and local communities to interact with Paralympic athletes, coaches and experts.

In the document, the President of the Japan Sport Council,⁹⁰ Ashidate Satoshi, emphasizes that three Tokyo municipalities have actively implemented initiatives inspired by Dutch practices. These efforts aimed to promote inclusivity through sports, with a commitment to using the project's outcomes to drive positive social change, not only within these municipalities but throughout Japan. Project manager Rita van Driel recalls that the project initially involved only the sports sector, but van Driel recognized its potential for broader impacts in education and well-being. Van Driel advocated for cross-sector collaboration, despite initial resistance from stakeholders, who saw each other as competitors. Over time, this perception shifted, leading to a more collaborative approach among the founding partners.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders were concerned about the project's momentum because of the inability of the Dutch partners to travel to Japan. However, this challenging period instead demonstrated the project's resilience and adaptability. Through remote workshops and the dedication of Tokyo municipalities, the project continued and was extended until January 2023. According to van Driel, another potential challenge for continuation of the project was the frequent turnover of governmental positions in Japan, as the stakeholders feared that it might disrupt the project's continuity. Despite these personnel changes, the project maintained its values and importance, showcasing its organic growth and resilience. The project's network has now expanded to include education and welfare organizations. Consequently, Rita van Driel and her associates have been contracted for another three years to continue supporting and advising the project in Japan.

Anoma van der Veere, a researcher involved in the project, emphasizes the strategic approach taken by senior policymakers to adapt strategies suited to the unique contexts of each municipality. According to van der Veere, instead of simply transplanting expertise from the

⁹⁰ <https://www.jpnsport.go.jp/>.

Netherlands, they acknowledged and addressed differences in institutional infrastructures, placing emphasis on integrating local stakeholders. This approach, described as ‘strategic leveraging’ by van der Veere, aimed at tackling specific, identifiable issues and underscores the significance of involving local stakeholders.⁹¹

One of the direct outcomes of the Game Changer project in terms of facilitating an ongoing collaboration is the establishment of a Para-sports Promotion Council by the Adachi-ku Municipality in Tokyo. Installed by the mayor and comprised of individuals representing various disabilities and institutions, this initiative signifies a strategic step forward in reaching the project’s long-term goals. The council is tasked with leading the project to the next level over the next three years and their plans includes the development and implementation of a Para-sports promotion plan. According to van Driel, this progress not only enhances opportunities for sports and exercise for people with disabilities but also serves as a platform to promote inclusion across various sectors.

1.15 ICP Goals and Promoting SDGs

From the Netherlands’ perspective, the collaboration with Shibaura House and the Game Changer project align with the ICP objective of ‘harnessing the power of the cultural sector and creative industries to achieve SDGs’. By supporting initiatives that aim to foster social innovation and inclusivity through international partnerships, these collaborations can enable the cultural and creative sectors to contribute to the SDG of ‘making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’ (SDG 11) and ‘reducing inequality within and among countries’ (SDG 10).

For instance, Ian Yang, Japan advisor for DutchCulture, highlights that Shibaura House’s focus on learning from Dutch practices to tackle social challenges, an ageing society and urban design is valuable for Dutch and international creatives and artists to observe and learn from. He underscores that the sense of social responsibility in Shibaura House’s initiatives can

⁹¹ <https://nocnsf.nl/en/international-projects/game-changer-project-tokyo>, p. 13.

contribute both to local community development as well as addressing broader social issues in the Netherlands and Japan.

Project manager of Game Changer Rita van Driel observes that while many Japanese people express concerns about diversity and inclusion, they often lack a clear understanding of what they mean, a phenomenon not uncommon in the Netherlands either. As of 1 April 2024, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities came into effect in Japan, emphasizing the full participation of people with disabilities in society. According to van Driel, Japan will now make legislative adjustments to enforce stricter adherence to social inclusion, as the United Nations has criticized Japan. Van Driel points out that awareness of the UN treaty's existence is low in both Japan and the Netherlands, but it is crucial in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities. Simply ensuring physical accessibility is insufficient; genuine social inclusion requires a welcoming attitude and dialogue, the values that van Driel and her associates are working to establish through projects such as Game Changer. Continued support and including all the necessary voices and steps for a grounded collaboration are necessary for projects that promote diversity and inclusivity to have continued effects beyond fulfilling the objectives of policies.

Embassies can play a pivotal role in amplifying the impact of projects such as Game Changer. Van Driel emphasizes that the active endorsement by the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo lent credibility and legitimacy to the project's message, thereby strengthening its influence and outreach within the diplomatic community and beyond. This level of support was essential for the project's relevance and its potential to effect a lasting change in promoting inclusion and diversity, both within Japan and internationally.

From the perspective of Dutch diplomacy, it can be argued that Game Changer serves a dual purpose. First, the project is an example of effective sports diplomacy, which according to the Dutch Embassy's Senior Policy Officer Bas Valckx is a concept traditionally overlooked in Dutch diplomatic strategies until now. Unlike countries such as Australia, which extensively utilize sports to bolster their national image, the Netherlands historically has underutilized

this approach. However, Game Changer marked a shift by spotlighting the diplomatic potential of sports and presenting an opportunity for further exploration in this domain.

Second, by promoting inclusivity, diversity and human rights, the Game Changer project strengthened the Netherlands' image as an innovative, creative and inclusive country, aligning with the broader diplomatic objectives of the ICP cycle of 2021–2024. For instance, former Ambassador Peter van der Vliet describes Game Changer as 'not just a project', but as 'an introduction of a new mindset' through which the exchange of Dutch ideas and experiences can foster dialogue among Japanese stakeholders, Dutch experts and Paralympic athletes.⁹²

Bas Valckx highlights the importance of recognizing Game Changer's origins, which are deeply rooted in collaboration between the Netherlands and the Japanese stakeholders, stemming from a dialogue-driven approach. Rather than imposing predefined objectives, the Netherlands prioritized understanding the needs of the Japan Sports Council and exploring potential areas of support. This approach involved asking questions such as 'What do you need?' and 'How can we assist you with that?' This dialogical approach highlights the project's foundation in mutual understanding and partnership:

One of the most remarkable aspects was the open dialogue. This facilitated genuine collaboration because we were providing something that our partner truly required. They were convinced that they could benefit from the expertise of the Netherlands, as we were already acknowledged as a country with significant developments in the field of sports.⁹³

Game Changer created opportunities for direct interactions between Dutch Paralympic athletes and Japanese stakeholders, including individuals with disabilities, their families and local authorities. These interactions not only inspired and motivated participants but also built a sense of community. The Game Changer project's efforts to establish structures such as that

⁹² <https://nocnsf.nl/en/international-projects/game-changer-project-tokyo>, p. 18.

⁹³ Interview with Bas Valckx.

of the Para-sports Promotion Council in Adachi-ku demonstrate a commitment to creating lasting change.

Rhonda Zaharna (2022) notes a shift in public diplomacy from a state-centric, competitive focus on soft power to a broader, humanity-centred approach that emphasizes problem-solving and collaboration. Humanity-centred diplomacies prioritize the needs of human societies, highlighting collaboration and collective decision-making.⁹⁴ Zaharna argues that developing a global mindset for strengthening collaboration ‘begins with a fundamental shift in thinking’.⁹⁵ Valkcx’s observation on the ‘open dialogue’ in the Game Changer project, which facilitated genuine collaboration with Japanese stakeholders, exemplifies this connectivity advocated by humanity-centred diplomacies.

⁹⁴ Zaharna R.S. (2022), *Boundary Spanners of Humanity: Three Logics of Communications and Public Diplomacy for Global Collaboration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Conclusion

This report has examined the dynamics between the Netherlands' International Cultural Policy and its regional cultural collaboration with Japan, illustrating how these frameworks serve as strategic tools in diplomacy and cultural collaboration between the Netherlands and Japan. The Dutch government considers the ICP to be a crucial element of its diplomacy, integrating it with political, economic and social issues. This policy involves collaboration among several ministries, and it employs a country-specific approach aligned with foreign policy priorities, focusing on 23 selected countries based on various criteria, of which Japan is one of the priority countries.

The historical trajectory of Dutch ICP underscores its role as both a promoter of national identity and a facilitator of international cultural collaboration. Across distinct phases – from the nationalist emphasis of the 1970s to the economic instrumentalism of recent decades – the ICP has adapted to reflect evolving global dynamics and domestic policy priorities. Notably, each phase has contributed to shaping the Netherlands' cultural footprint abroad, leveraging cultural assets to strengthen diplomatic ties and soft power and enhance global influence.

In its cultural collaboration with Japan, the Netherlands has executed strategies aimed at enhancing cultural cooperation across regions of Kyushu, Kyoto and Kanto between 2016 and 2023. Initiatives such as the Holland–Kyushu and Holland–Kyoto programmes illustrate a shift towards geographically focused cultural partnerships to facilitate further cultural ties in these regions, strengthening artistic exchanges and leveraging cultural events to promote bilateral relations. These efforts underscore the Dutch ICP's commitment to utilizing culture as a diplomatic tool.

The case studies of Arita's porcelain industry and Fujiyoshida's textile heritage provide examples of how international collaborations can play a role in revitalizing local industries and cultural traditions in regions such as Arita and Fujiyoshida. Both regions, historically significant in their respective crafts of porcelain and textiles, have faced challenges because of economic shifts, globalization and changing consumer preferences. According to its stakeholders, the collaboration between Arita's porcelain industry and Dutch and international designers under the 2016/arita initiative facilitated economic and cultural

revitalization in Arita by increasing the visibility of Arita's craftsmanship globally and by fostering social capital, as well as creating a platform for long-term partnerships, benefiting both local artisans and the Dutch creative sector in turn.

Similarly, Fuji Textile Week has provided an important international platform for promoting Fujiyoshida's textile heritage. By addressing the challenges of high production costs and limited market access, the festival has facilitated dialogue between local weavers and international designers, expanding market opportunities for Fujiyoshida's textile industry. The involvement of the Dutch Embassy in Japan has further strengthened these efforts.

Additionally, creating an international platform and fostering further collaborations between designers and local industries by following initiatives of Creative Residency Arita and the Fuji Textile Collaborative Project presented an opportunity to reposition places such as Fujiyoshida and Arita as dynamic creative centres, crucial for the survival and revitalization of local industries and communities. Both towns encounter challenges in shifting from attracting short-term tourists to cultivating longer-term stays, which are vital for sustainable economic growth and community development. International creatives can serve as cultural ambassadors, playing a crucial role in this transformation.

On the other hand, the convergence of localism and international partnerships in Tokyo, as exemplified by the case studies on Shibaura House and the Game Changer Project Tokyo, signifies a movement within Tokyo itself to foster localized identities and community resilience.

Shibaura House plays a role in Tokyo's creative culture by offering a diverse range of cultural programmes, workshops and exhibitions that foster dialogue and creativity. Its collaboration with the Dutch Embassy under initiatives such as NL HOUSE and nl/minato exemplifies how international partnerships can promote dialogue on social, political and cultural issues. Game Changer Project Tokyo exemplifies how sports can drive social change and promote inclusivity. Focused on integrating individuals with disabilities into society, particularly in preparation for the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, this project leveraged Dutch expertise in Paralympic sports to empower local communities and foster long-term societal change. For instance, by encouraging structures such as the Para-sports Promotion Council in Adachi-ku in Tokyo, the project laid the foundation for sustainable inclusion efforts beyond the Games.

These initiatives also reflect a broader shift in diplomatic strategies towards humanity-centred approaches that prioritize collaboration and problem-solving.

However, the perceived success of these initiatives does not come without challenges. The disparity in expectations and benefits among stakeholders, the tension between artistic expression and commercial viability, and the need for sustained financial and institutional support are critical issues that must be addressed. Ensuring the equitable distribution of benefits and inclusive decision-making processes are essential for the long-term sustainability of these collaborations. Future research should continue to explore the dynamics and implications of these collaborations, aiming to optimize their economic, cultural and social impacts for all stakeholders involved.