

The G8 Summit as "Local Event" in the Hokkaido Media

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The livelihood of Iwahara Yoshimi, a lettuce farmer living a few kilometers from The Windsor Hotel, was threatened by the G8 Summit. A temporary heliport had been set up by the Japanese Self Defense Forces (SDF) adjacent to his fields as part of the security and logistical preparations for the summit. The helicopters were blowing soil over his crop and lettuce heads were being damaged by the strong gusts. On learning that the heliport would be built, Iwahara had planted some of his crop in another field further from the heliport, but with inadequate soil preparation and fertilization the crop was blighted. While hoping that the Hokkaido Toyako Summit would be a success for his hometown, Iwahara faced an uncertain future. [1]



The G8 Summit: Global Media Event vs. Local Lived Experience

The G8 summit was a global media story. Leaders of the world's richest nations joined by a growing group of invited leaders from all

continents discussed the issues affecting the planet and their deliberations were relayed to millions of homes via the news media. However, Hugo Dobson has argued in his paper in this series:

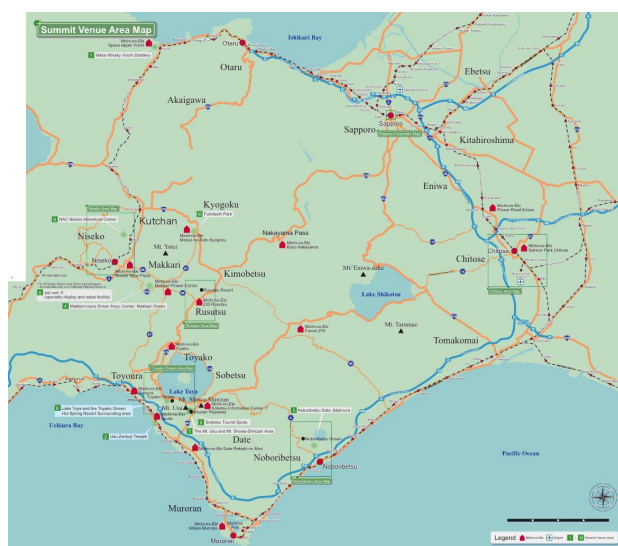
Most media depictions of the G8 are sadly predictable to the degree that the reports for next year's summits could probably be copied and pasted now. They tend to fall into one of two camps: it is either an evil behemoth of global capitalism irresistibly crushing all under foot ... or it is regarded as an impotent, anachronistic and irrelevant talking shop at which what the leaders ate at dinner gets more press attention than their discussions and declarations. [2]

Part of the reason for these characteristics of media coverage is genuinely held concern over the consequences of globalization and neo-liberalism, of which the member states of the G8 have been the primary proponents. But they are also related to the news-gathering practices of the major news agencies. The constant need to be ahead of the competition on tomorrow's news makes media coverage anticipatory rather than reflective regarding events fixed in the global calendar: events from the G8 summit to the Beijing Olympics are extensively hyped in advance but quickly forgotten. The anticipation often sets unrealistic expectations, and media coverage can be merciless if the event fails to meet expectations.



The International Media Center for the Hokkaido Toyako Summit (Credit: Hugo Dobson)

During G8 summits, journalists typically have a brief to cover primarily the leaders' discussions. For reasons of security and convenience, they are herded into a media centre. The media centre for the Hokkaido Toyako Summit was located in Rusutsu, about 27 kilometers away from the Windsor Hotel. The journalists who "attended" the summit, therefore, had to rely for their information on the media centre monitors and print outs of official communiqués supplied by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Map, Hokkaido Summit Preparation Council

Some journalists ventured out of the media centre to get alternative angles, but given their distance from the summit venue and briefs to cover the political discussions, much reportage was limited to rewordings of official communiqués, in some instances with a critical angle to reassure the public that the media are watchdogs, not lapdogs, of the summiteers. In the absence of major political breakthroughs, always unlikely in the slow and painstaking process of multilateral diplomacy, headline-writers demanding more "newsworthy" angles can resort to spiced-up critiques of the summit, for example regarding the dinner – on which more later.

These practices of the international news media illustrate why coverage of the Hokkaido Toyako Summit (like other G8 Summits) tended toward the critical: summit coverage thrives on summit failings. This paper, however, examines an important exception: local media coverage in Hokkaido, where the majority wished to see the summit as a *success*, on a national but also particularly on a local level.

Japan has developed an identifiable approach to global governance and the G8. Endo Seiji describes three components: a) a tendency toward economism or technology, and an aversion to "politics" (military and security matters); b) a sense of being Asia's representative at an otherwise Euro-American forum; and c) using the multilateral forum of the G8 to address bilateral issues (such as Japanese concerns over the abductions issue – discussed below). [3] Furthermore, Hugo Dobson argues that Japan has tended to embrace the G8 Summit.

Although Japan had been admitted to the UN in December 1956, it was still excluded from a permanent position on the UNSC [Security Council] despite its growing economic status and contributions to the maintenance of this body.

Thus, the G8 represents for the Japanese government and its people validation of its status in the world and to this end it has worked actively to ensure that the summit is successful (especially when hosted in Japan). [4]

This was exemplified by the official line in Hokkaido, given in a statement by Hokkaido Governor Takahashi Harumi on the website of the [Hokkaido Toyako Summit Preparation Council](#):

“As the host prefecture, we are resolved to provide the greatest possible cooperation and support to help bring the Summit to a great success. We would like to ensure that all the residents of Hokkaido unite in welcoming the Summit participants with warmth and hospitality.” - Hokkaido Governor Takahashi Harumi



Opinion polls indicated that Governor Takahashi spoke for many Hokkaidoites. People were generally in favor of the summit being hosted in Hokkaido and had higher expectations for its success than the Japanese people as a whole. A nationwide opinion poll carried out on 7 and 8 June, a month before the summit, found that 56 per cent had “great” or “some” expectations for the summit. This was about the same as before the Okinawa Summit in 2000 (54 per cent).[5] In Hokkaido, the number of people with “great” or “some” expectations was significantly higher at 71 per cent, with the highest number of people with “great expectations” (not surprisingly) living in the Iburi-Hidaka region around Lake Toya. An even higher number (78 per cent) thought the summit would bring positive effects to Hokkaido: greater name recognition for Hokkaido (26 per cent), raised environmental consciousness among Hokkaidoites (22 per

cent), a boost to tourism (16 per cent), and a chance for new business opportunities (14 per cent). Furthermore, 71 per cent thought that the positive effects of the summit would continue, or continue to some extent. [6]

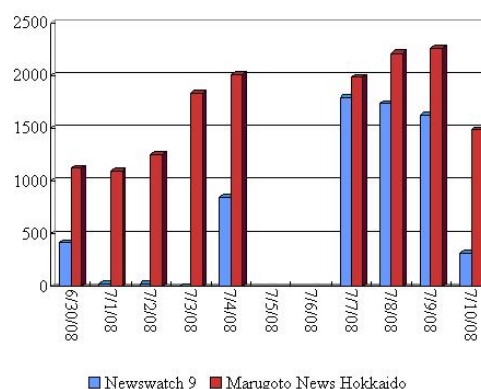
These generally positive sentiments were reflected in local media coverage of the summit, which rallied behind the official call “Let’s make the summit a success”. Even on issues with most potential for critical local coverage, such as security (discussed below), the local media was remarkably compliant. There were voices critical of the G8 to be heard – mainly in interviews with anti-globalization protestors, representatives of NGOs, or in alternative media. But once Prime Minister Abe Shinzo had made the decision in April 2007 to host the summit in Hokkaido, whatever prior reservations there might have been (particularly regarding costs) were overridden by the need to make the summit a success.

Furthermore, in the local media the main story was not so much the deliberations of the G8 leaders, but rather the effects of the summit on the host region as thousands of government officials, security personnel, staff from NGOs and journalists descended on their little corner of the world and made it the centre of global attention for a few days. The story of the lettuce farmer whose crop was being damaged by flights from a temporary heliport and whose story headed this paper epitomized this angle. Iwahara’s dilemma – wanting the summit to be a success while enduring inconveniences – was framed in terms of local costs vs. local benefits, or individual sacrifice for the collective good. A successful summit relied on the pluses outweighing the minuses, and the media played their part in emphasizing the positives; and through repeated comments wishing for the success of the summit, the media could even be categorized as playing a “mobilizer” role to bring civil society in line with official aims.

The Summit in National and Local NHK

News

The analysis of Hokkaido perspectives is based mainly on a survey of local television news in Hokkaido on NHK, Japan’s public broadcaster. [7] I recorded the flagship local evening news programs on NHK-General – *Marugoto News Hokkaido* (NHK Hokkaido only, 18:10 – 19:00 Monday to Friday) – on nine days for the week before the summit (30 June to 4 July), during the summit (7 July to 9 July) and on the day after the summit (10 July). To facilitate comparisons between local and national news I also recorded *Newswatch 9* (broadcast nationally, 21:00 – 22:00 Monday to Friday) for the same period. This allowed for comparison between two news bulletins on the same channel (NHK General), of similar length (50 and 60 minutes respectively), and broadcast at roughly similar times (6:10 pm and 9:00 pm respectively).



Time (in seconds) of summit coverage on the NHK news bulletins Marugoto News Hokkaido and Newswatch 9. The program does not air on weekends (July 5 and 6).

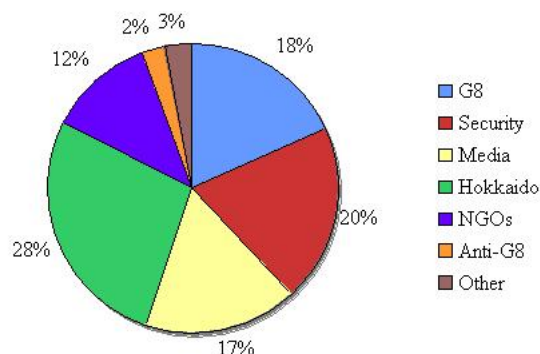
In terms of the simple amount of summit coverage, *Marugoto News Hokkaido’s* coverage was over double the length of *Newswatch 9*, (4 hours 16 minutes compared to 1 hour 54 minutes), despite the program being 10 minutes shorter overall. Summit coverage accounted for 57 per cent of time on air in the

nine programs on *Marugoto News Hokkaido*, but only 21 per cent on *Newswatch 9*. *Marugoto News Hokkaido* consistently dedicated 20 minutes (1200 seconds) or more to the summit over the period, while national news coverage fluctuated greatly and was concentrated on the three days of the summit when coverage approached but did not equal that at *Marugoto*.

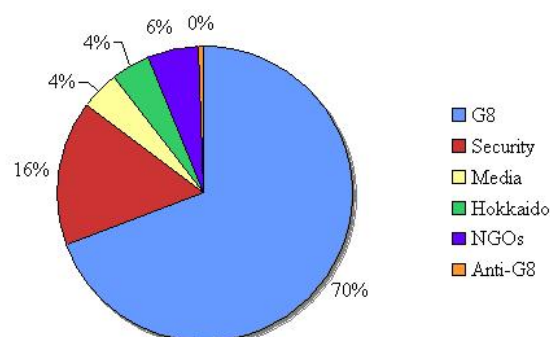
The programs were analyzed for content. The subject of coverage was categorized into seven broad themes as illustrated in the following table.

G8 summit	The G8 political leaders and their spouses; other politicians involved with the Summit; the timetable of the Summit; the key themes (the environment, poverty etc.) and discussion of all the above by pundits.
Security/Preparations	Summit security; other preparations by the authorities, such as traffic restrictions in downtown Sapporo.
Media/PR	The International Media Centre; foreign journalists in Hokkaido to cover the Summit; PR events to increase international awareness of Hokkaido.
Hokkaido	Local reaction to the Summit; how the Summit affected local people's lives; business beneficiaries (souvenir vendors etc.); the Summit dinner as a showcase of Hokkaido produce.
NGOs/Alternative Summits	Alternative summits; the activities of NGOs; reactions of NGO representatives to the deliberations at the main summit.
Anti-G8	Anti-globalization or anti-G8 protests.
Other	Montages that covered many aspects simultaneously.

The time given to these topics as a percentage of the total length of summit coverage in the program over the period is given in the following two charts. This first chart shows *Marugoto News Hokkaido* and indicates a fairly even spread of coverage between five categories - the main summit, security/preparations, media/PR, effects on Hokkaido, and NGOs - over the program's 4 hours 16 minutes of coverage.



The second chart is for *Newswatch 9* and shows that this program focused heavily on the main summit and security, which accounted for 86 per cent of the total of 1 hour 54 minutes of coverage.



When local aspects (particularly in the "Hokkaido" and "NGO" categories) were covered on *Newswatch 9*, they tended to be heavily edited versions of the reports produced by NHK Hokkaido and previously aired on *Marugoto News Hokkaido*. The main point of similarity between the two programs was in the amount of coverage (as a proportion of total coverage) of security issues. However, while *Newswatch 9* tended to focus on national level security (traffic restrictions in Tokyo, national

security), *Marugoto News Hokkaido* focused on local versions (traffic restrictions in Sapporo, summit venue security).

In sum, this data indicates how NHK Hokkaido tended to report the summit as a local event while *Newswatch 9* tended more toward the “summit as national/global media event”. While this conclusion is hardly surprising, these differing foci are key to understanding the contrast between the generally critical stance in the international media and the generally supportive stance in the local media regarding the summit. In the middle stood *Newswatch 9*, which did not assume as critical a stance as the international media (“Japan” was still the host) but also did not participate in the “cheerleader journalism” that was evident in much of NHK Hokkaido’s coverage.

The rest of the article focuses on these local perspectives with particular reference to NHK’s *Marugoto News Hokkaido* program, indicated by the following: (MNH + date). Other information is drawn from 23 minutes of summit retrospective on Sapporo Television, one of the five commercial channels in Hokkaido. This special on the “wideshow” news program *Dosanko Wide 180* (DW 10 July) suggests that the content on commercial channels was reasonably similar to NHK’s coverage, albeit presented in a less formal way. The other main source is *Hokkaido Shinbun*, the prefectural broadsheet, which is a key opinion leader in Hokkaido with remarkable sales figures of 1.2 million in Hokkaido’s overall population of 5.6 million.

Leaders and their Spouses



There is no need here to give a detailed summary of the summit proceedings, which were discussed in Hugo Dobson’s paper in this series. Instead, this section focuses briefly on a sub-theme in local coverage on NHK: the portrayal of leaders and their spouses as “visitors to Hokkaido” congruent with consciousness within Hokkaido of being the host region and the aim of using the summit to promote Hokkaido to the world.

NHK Hokkaido’s presentation of the leaders as visitors to Hokkaido started with their arrivals (and ended with their subsequent departures) at Chitose Airport. These were chronicled in some depth because the story offered a particular local angle. The arrival of so many world leaders’ jets was a once in a lifetime opportunity for local plane spotters. News

featured photographers and their children enthusing over their shots of the planes, particularly Air Force One (MNH 7 & 9 July).

But the “leaders as visitors” theme was particularly evident in coverage of the leaders’ spouses. Five spouses from overseas (neither Angela Merkel nor Nicolas Sarkozy’s spouses attended) were extended full Japanese hospitality by Prime Minister Fukuda’s spouse, Kiyoko. The six ladies were referred to as the “leaders’ wives” (*shuno fujin*) on NHK and their program of PR activities “reverted to the highly feminized photo opportunities of previous summits”.^[8] They experienced Japanese traditional culture (kimono-wearing and tea ceremony, MNH 7 July), visited a market for local produce in Makkari village and the International Media Centre, where they donned Ainu clothing (see photo, MNH 8 July), and they planted trees and attended the J8 (Junior Eight) Summit (MNH 9 July). These activities were the subject of 2- or 3-minute reports on each of the days of the summit (and were then shown in abridged versions on *Newswatch 9*).



Also covered was the visit of Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and his spouse Laureen to Date city, which is twinned with the Canadian town of Lake Cowichan. Children in Date had been working on ideas for saving the environment and they presented their findings to Harper (MNH 7 July). Despite twenty invitations to leaders from municipalities –

many of which were clearly bids for some summit-related publicity for local tourist attractions (such as an invitation to Prime Minister Harper from Ashibetsu to visit the forlorn and bankrupt Canadian World theme park) – Harper’s trip to Date was the only one that took place. Security considerations were the official explanation; world leaders having more important things to do with their time was the more likely reason (DW 10 July).

These various reports about the leaders and their spouses as “visitors” and their impact on/interaction with local people reflect the dominant theme within local television news coverage: wherever possible the summit was related back to a local issue or local people.

Security

The terrorist threat and the potential for disruptive, perhaps violent demonstrations by anti-globalization protestors mean that major summits require extensive security operations and choice of locale tends to be far from major metropolitan areas. As described above, both national and local NHK news gave comparable (in percentage terms) amounts of coverage.

The cost and nature of security had become a thorny issue by the beginning of the summit. The summit budget was ¥60 billion, of which half was for security. At a [press conference](#) on 1 July 2008 Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Taniguchi Tomohiko had to fend off questions from reporters about the budget, specifically why the cost of hosting the summit (excluding security) was nearly nine times the cost of the Gleneagles Summit in Scotland in 2005, while the security operation was twice the cost. These were charges of overspend and overkill, despite the budget being less than the ¥80 billion spent on the 2000 G8 Summit in Okinawa and Kyushu. Taniguchi responded that the lesson following the Gleneagles Summit was: “To provide as much security as possible in order for Japan not to repeat such tragic events that hit London [the 7 July 2005

bombings that coincided with the summit].” Effectively, any security budget could be justified if nothing happened.



Policeman at the IMC (Credit: Hugo Dobson)

For some citizens of Hokkaido, the security operation constituted a considerable business opportunity. About 21,000 police officers were deployed around the summit venue, of which 16,000 were drafted in from outside Hokkaido (MNH 30 June) and many spent days or weeks in Hokkaido prior to the summit. They needed food and lodging, and during their time off they spent money in local businesses. The business generated by the security operation, however, was offset by the loss in ordinary tourists in the Toyako area and across Hokkaido as the area locked down for the summit.

For many others the summit meant inconvenience. Coin lockers (for left luggage) in stations were sealed (MNH 3 July). Toyako resident and farmer Masada Kiyohara needed to apply for a pass so that he could drive from his house to his nearby fields, while 79-year-old Ohiro Satoshi had to rearrange his regular hospital appointments to avoid traveling during the summit period (MNH 7 July). Traffic restrictions were in place in central Sapporo as President Hu Jintao of China and other leaders

were whisked by motorcade to their hotel in central Sapporo. Street interviews contained a number of grumbles about the restrictions. “It was faster to walk”, said one woman, who had given up sitting on a bus stuck in traffic (MNH 8 July). People trying to fly out of Chitose on 9 July found their flights delayed as the leaders returned home.

In general, local news showed people stoically complying or putting up with the restrictions. If there were serious complaints about the summit security, they were not making NHK’s regional news. Quite the contrary, the regular reports about the security operation almost felt like a stern warning to the people of Hokkaido to comply with the security operation, or else.

Amid the generally supportive mood on NHK for the security operation, there were some more worrying aspects that raised a perennial problem in this age of a so-called “war on terror”: the extent to which security can be allowed to trump civil liberties. This was already an issue following the introduction of fingerprinting of all foreign visitors to Japan in 2007 (following America’s lead). In the run up to the summit, NHK reported that five members of a Korean delegation planning to attend an anti-summit event were detained after one member of the group was violent to an immigration official. This followed the detention of 19 people the previous day (MNH 4 July). The issue of detention had also been raised at the MOFA press conference on 1 July about people detained at Narita Airport. This “welcome” to foreign visitors during the summit stood in ironic contrast to the aim of using the summit to promote Hokkaido and Japan as a nice place to visit.

Incidentally, the security aspect was what deepened my own personal interest in the summit. In June I was stopped at Chitose Airport and asked (for the first time in my over eleven years in Japan) to produce ID in the form of my Alien Registration Card. Unwilling

to inconvenience my visitor, who had just arrived from half way around the world, I complied. However, when a policeman made the “mistake” of stopping Debito Arudou, a naturalized Japanese citizen and crusader for foreigner rights in Japan, Arudou thrust a microphone under the nose of his interrogator, insisted he was Japanese and demanded that other Japanese be questioned before he produced ID.[9] Knowing that many departmental colleagues at Hokkaido University had also been stopped (one had even been “gaijin carded” four times), the next time I was asked to produce ID I politely pointed out that it was beginning to feel like harassment of the foreigner community in Hokkaido. The policeman was very friendly and apologetic for inconveniencing me, but said it was police policy to stop and ask all foreigners passing through Chitose Airport for ID (which corroborates Arudou’s version of events, despite the denials of the Hokkaido Police that there was no such policy). However, this was illegal (the law states there must be reasonable suspicion of involvement in a crime for the police to ask for ID) and effectively relied on crude racial profiling to select people for questioning. Civil rights (in other words, Japanese law) were trumped by “security” in the run-up to the summit.

How ironic it was, therefore, that the biggest security scare of the summit was not caused by an Islamic terrorist, or even any of the “suspicious” foreigners stopped or detained at airports. Instead, it was caused by a Japanese man, Deto Takanari (69), who claimed that he was carrying a bomb as he boarded an Air Do flight to Tokyo. He was quickly arrested and the plane was delayed for three hours as airport security checked the hold. It turned out to be a hoax, although the man said it had nothing to do with the summit (MNH 8 July).



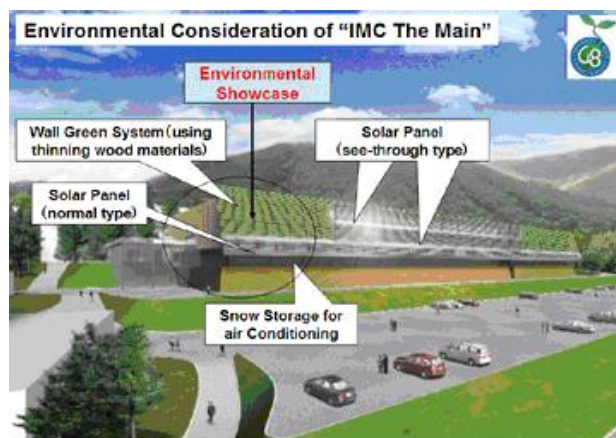
On 10 July, the day after the summit, NHK Hokkaido joined in the collective sigh of relief that the summit had passed off without major incident. The 21,000 police officers from across Japan were packing up and on their way home, and Sapporo’s traffic returned to normal. Meanwhile, *Newswatch 9* revealed that the Self Defense Forces had conducted a massive exercise based on the scenario that hijacked planes were flying towards Toyako with plans to crash 9/11-style into the Windsor Hotel. Sensible precaution or massive overkill? Questions will always exist regarding the necessity and cost of the security operation. Two things that can be said are: a) the summit passed without any major security scare, and b) this happy situation did cost an awful lot of money and inconvenience.

Covering the Summit, Promoting Hokkaido

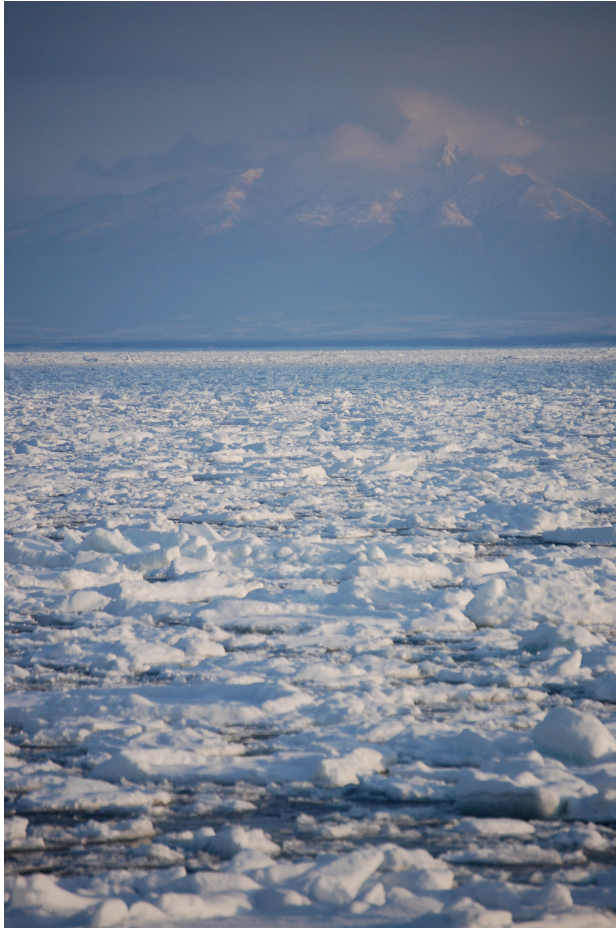
The G8 summit was reported to the world via the International Media Centre (IMC) set up in the car park of a ski resort in Rusutsu. IMC gained a lot of attention in its own right because of its environmental technologies and expense. The IMC budget was ¥5 billion, while communications infrastructure between Rusutsu and the summit venue in Toyako (which are 27 kilometers apart) cost ¥9 billion. By the benchmark of the Gleneagles Summit in 2005, this made IMC on its own much more costly than the entire ¥2.6 billion yen price tag (excluding security) for the 2005 summit. Given a number of pressing social issues in Japan in 2008 that could benefit from injections of

public money (particularly the rise in healthcare charges for pensioners), such expenditures drew much flak. [10] Also at issue was the construction of an expensive “disposable” media centre that would be pulled down after the summit. I caught a couple of presenters on CNN engaging in derogatory banter along the lines of – “Do you know what they’ll do with the media centre?”, “They’ll pull it down.”, “Amazing” – and such thoughts were doubtless echoed privately elsewhere.

NHK Hokkaido’s coverage of IMC, however, gave a different view. The coverage was mainly about the environmental technologies and the views of the foreign journalists covering the summit. In particular, rather than IMC being “disposable” it was “recycled” and “recyclable”. Rather than being “pulled down” it would be “dismantled” and 90 per cent of the materials could be used again (MNH 4 July). One angle that gained repeated coverage was the cooling system. It used snow to cool air, which was then conveyed around the media centre in a network of vents made from used cardboard boxes. The snow was visible beneath a glass floor to showcase this emission-free way of cooling a building, apart from the energy necessary to transfer 7,000 tons of snow into the basement of a building, that is. And while a snow cooling system (and the water’s subsequent use in air conditioners and toilets) may be innovative, it is hardly practical for most buildings.



In addition to such environmental technologies, an exhibit space completed the media centre’s secondary role as an “Environmental Showcase”, a function that was loud and clear within NHK’s coverage. There were lumps of sea ice on display to raise awareness of the reduction in sea ice due to global warming. By mid-February, sea ice formed in the Sea of Okhotsk drifts down to Hokkaido’s northern coast, the most southerly coastline in the northern hemisphere reached by sea ice. But the area of sea ice has dropped by the equivalent of 10 per cent of the area of the Sea of Okhotsk over the past 30 years, both a sign of and a contributing factor to global warming. [11]



Sea Ice off the coast of Abashiri: Visible in the background is the Shiretoko Peninsula

Whether the environmental message was picked up enough by foreign journalists and people outside Japan to justify the expense is another matter entirely. And there was a sting in the tail to the PR effort. In the attempt to get the media centre dismantled as quickly as possible after the summit (work started the day after the summit ended), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs turned down requests from local schools to take their children on educational visits to the media centre. Local media had featured a number of examples of extracurricular activities for schoolchildren generated by the summit, but this unwillingness on the part of the authorities to respond to public enthusiasm for the summit led the *Hokkaido Shinbun* to report that, “Some local residents have said they were

disappointed that the Summit seemed to be such a distant event.”[12]

Other reportage from NHK Hokkaido’s coverage hinted that the extensive PR efforts to market Japan and Hokkaido to the thousands of international visitors during the summit period might have fallen flat. The tourist centre in Toyako had prepared an exhibition and space for experiencing traditional Japanese culture, but a tea ceremony instructor lamented that fewer foreign visitors than expected had come to partake in this quintessential Japanese experience (MNH 8 July). NHK local news also featured foreign journalists almost being chased by Japanese students volunteering to help them with the language barrier in local shops. The journalists made kind comments in interviews on NHK about the student volunteers’ helpfulness, but one could sense some bewilderment about why volunteer translators were necessary to buy a drink in a convenience store (MNH 8 July).

These enthusiastic attempts to promote Japan and Hokkaido to foreign visitors were based on well-meaning but unrealistic and even naive assumptions that visiting journalists would be interested in learning about Japan. The reality was that most were there to do a job: cover the summit. Those journalists who seemed most interested in learning more about Japan were those who already had some prior interest, such as the Chinese economic journalist Song Jinming who spoke fluent Japanese and used his trip to Sapporo to investigate how the Toyohira River flowing through Sapporo had been cleaned up. His reportage was meant to be a lesson for those trying to clean up China’s many polluted rivers (MNH 9 July). In sum, despite all the well-meaning attempts to promote Hokkaido, the distinct impression left by NHK’s coverage was that much had fallen on deaf international ears.

Hokkaido and the environment



The summit logo demonstrates clearly the importance of environmental issues for the summit. As illustrated in discussion of the International Media Centre, Japan tries hard to promote an environmentally-friendly image based on its development of clean technologies, for example in hybrid cars. Despite noticeable advances in recent years in popular environmental consciousness, such as the campaigns to use “eco-bags” and “*mai hashi*” (using one’s own chopsticks instead of disposable ones in restaurants), as Andrew DeWit argues in [The G8 Mirage: The Summit and Japan’s Environmental Policies](#), Japan’s environmental record is more complex. Its international reputation also remains tarnished by the whaling issue.



Lake Toya (Credit: Makoto Watanabe)

The choice of Lake Toya (Toyako) for a G8 summit with the environment as a key theme explicitly tapped into popular images of Hokkaido. Official tourism and summit publicity, such as the Hokkaido Tourist Association booklet *Hokkaido: A Land of Natural Treasures* ([available here](#)), promotes Hokkaido as a beautiful, largely unspoiled part of Japan and location of the Shiretoko Peninsula (designated a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site in 2005). But as with the nation as a whole, idealized images conceal a less environmentally-friendly reality. In contrast to much of Japan, where commuting and travel revolves around the efficient rail network, Hokkaido is a car society. Furthermore, public buildings and private homes tend to be heated to perhaps excessive levels during winter. [13] Hokkaido produces 1.3 times the level of greenhouse gases per capita compared to the national average. [14]

The issue of the environment is one that resonates very clearly in Hokkaido. Many reports on *Marugoto News Hokkaido* had the environment as a key theme and lauded local efforts: restaurants in the Toyako area that organized a collection for recycling of disposable wooden chopsticks (MNH 1 July); a supermarket that opened an environmentally-friendly store with solar panels on the roof that

had cut its CO2 emissions by 20 per cent (MNH 3 July). During the summit itself, the plastic boxes of the 30,000 *bento* lunchboxes distributed daily to police officers and volunteers were recycled, the chopsticks were made of fast-growing bamboo, and the cooking oil was converted to biodiesel (MNH 8 July). The reality, however, was somewhat more complex than this idealized image. The green credentials of the summit itself were brought into question by the vast amount of paper left in IMC. Despite all the communiqués being available online, they had also been printed out and left for journalists. *Dosanko Wide's* retrospective showed reams and reams of print outs untouched in the deserted IMC on 10 July.

The other, perhaps surprising, story that had the environment as a main theme was the summit dinner. In the international media, the summit dinner was the subject of much withering and sarcastic commentary. The following is from the article “Just two of the 19 dishes on the dinner menu at the G8 food shortages summit” in *The Guardian* (UK):

“As the food crisis began to bite, the rumblings of discontent grew louder. Finally, after a day of discussing food shortages and soaring prices, the famished stomachs of the G8 leaders could bear it no longer. The most powerful bellies in the world were last night compelled to stave off the great Hokkaido Hunger by fortifying themselves with an eight course, 19-dish dinner prepared by 25 chefs. This multi-pronged attack was launched after earlier emergency lunch measures - four courses washed down with Chateau-Grillet 2005 - had failed to quell appetites enlarged by agonizing over feeding the world's poor.”[15]



The Summit Dinner

The summit dinner was an easy target for attack by the international media given the discussions of rising food prices at the summit. In the article from *The Guardian* above, the dinner was framed in terms of the summit theme of global rises in food prices and poverty. The dinner was slammed as insensitive given hunger around the world. But on *Newswatch 9* the dinner was uncontroversial: worth a brief mention but no more. In Hokkaido, by contrast, the dinner was framed in terms of the environment and the richness of local cuisine. In a six-minute report on 7 July, head chef Nakamura Katsuhiko, explained how all the ingredients had been chosen because they were local (reducing carbon emissions from transportation). The dinner was a chance to showcase some of Hokkaido's premier agricultural and marine products, particularly those produced in an ecologically-friendly way. The style of the report was consistent with the myriad cooking and travel shows on Japanese television: the focus is on the food as local specialty, the aesthetics of the meal, and the artistry of the chef, in this case supplemented by attention to its environmentally friendly character. The lingering close-ups of the main platters also revealed the hyperbole in the “leaders stuffing themselves as the world starves” rhetoric. One “dish” in the *Guardian* article above could mean as little as “a sprig of

asparagus”.



Dosanko Wide mirrored NHK’s coverage in its enthusiastic promotion of local specialties: presenters tucked into and enthused over a slice of cherry blossom cheese that George W. Bush had apparently taken a liking to at the summit dinner. But the retrospective also picked up on international criticism of the dinner in an interview with a South African journalist, who serenely berated the leaders for feasting while many in Africa starved (DW 10 July).

In the international media, summit dinner critiques have become a cliché of summit coverage and partly reflect an inability to find other more substantive issues to report. Overall, the coverage of the summit dinner was the clearest example during the summit of local and international media basing their reporting on completely different assumptions.

Alternative Summits, Alternative Agendas

Japan [has long been the world’s] second largest economic power. By contrast, the power and the influence of the NGO sector or the civil sector in Japan have been very limited in spite of its relatively long history among Asian countries. Japan’s NPO law was enforced only from December 1998 mainly

triggered by the Kobe earthquake. [16]

Despite lagging well behind Europe and North America in the extent and vitality of its NGO sector, Japan has a particular place in G8 summit history with regard to the participation of NGOs. “[A]t the Okinawa Summit, the Japanese government was the first government to provide the necessary facilities and establish a physical base for a number of NGOs to conduct their activities.” But the separation from the media centre, security procedures smacking of surveillance, and charging NGOs \$91 each to register during a summit costing \$750 million all drew criticism.[17] NGOs were given space in the media centre in Hokkaido, and away from IMC there were many events organized to coincide with the G8 summit. They receive only a brief mention here because many of the issues surrounding these events have been discussed in the articles in this series by lewallen (Indigenous People’s Summit) and Zablonki and Seaton (Peace, Reconciliation and Civil Society Symposium).

NHK’s national bulletins gave relatively little coverage to these alternative events compared to regional news. For example, the Indigenous People’s Summit received only 40 seconds of coverage on *Newswatch 9* (1 July) compared to nearly nine minutes (spread over 1, 3 & 4 July) on *Marugoto News Hokkaido*. Despite the importance of this event and the implications of the Japanese government’s declaration of Ainu indigeneity just before the summit, this news would have been missed by all except the most observant viewers outside of Hokkaido. Furthermore, Japanese TV coverage demonstrated precious little consciousness of the Ainu as a people whose land was and remains colonized, particularly in comparison to international media and the participants of the “Peace, Reconciliation and Civil Society” Symposium.[18]

The pattern was the same for the other

simultaneous events. The **J8 (Junior Eight) Summit** held in Chitose and Shikotsuko was a gathering of 39 teenagers from the G8 nations and seven developing nations. The event was co-hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNICEF. The **University Summit** was hosted by Hokkaido University and gathered senior academics from around the globe to discuss what could be done by the academy to prevent global warming. The **Alternative Summit** was a chance for representatives of NPOs to discuss the environment, poverty and other issues. The **Religious Summit** debated faith issues.

All of these Alternative Summits and more came together because the G8 Summit was taking place. All were major international gatherings requiring months if not years of planning, and many will have long-term effects on the participants and their broader networks. All received far less coverage on national television than they did on local television news, which indicated media treatment of the alternative summits as local events more than global events, despite the global make-up of the participants. The coverage of the alternative summits also played an important function in the midst of NHK's generally supportive coverage of the summit: it allowed NHK to air views critical of the summit and thereby fulfill its duty as a public broadcaster to remain "politically impartial". Representatives from various NGOs, such as Greenpeace and the WWF (World Wildlife Fund/World Wide Fund for Nature), were given a chance to air their demands to the G8 leaders, including fixing targets for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions (MNH 7 July). And they gave their generally critical evaluations of the leaders' discussions on the last day of the summit (MNH 9 July).

Apart from these major international events, many Japanese groups and local groups in Hokkaido organized events to mark the summit or to further a local or domestic issue. The main campaign in Hokkaido was on the

Northern Territories issues. The Northern Territories are the islands of Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan and Habomai, which were occupied by the Russians at the end of World War II, although they are claimed by Japan. Northern Territories Day is 7 February every year, which marks the anniversary of the Treaty of Commerce, Navigation and Delimitation in 1855 that established the national border between Japan and Russia as the straits between Etorofu and Uruppu (the border desired by the Japanese government today). Every year the campaign to have the islands returned marks 7 February with meetings, essay competitions and local media coverage. However, to coincide with the summit there was an extra drive in the "Return the Four Islands" campaign that is announced by billboards on public buildings across Hokkaido, especially in the eastern city of Nemuro (3 July). The summit had brought a Russian president to Hokkaido for the very first time since the end of the war. Dmitry Medvedev's visit was seen as an opportunity to break the deadlock on this key issue for Hokkaido, although little actual progress was made beyond the arrangement of a trip by Prime Minister Putin later in the year (9 July) [Following the Georgian conflict and financial crisis, the visit is now scheduled for 2009].



Cape Nosappu, the most eastern point of Japan: Just visible 3.7 km across the water is the Habomai Island group, part of the disputed Northern Territories. A Japanese coast guard vessel is making sure that

Japanese fishing boats do not stray into “Russian waters”, where they risk being impounded.

Whereas this issue occupied over nine minutes in two extended reports on *Marugoto News Hokkaido* on 3 and 9 July, it did not make NHK’s national news. The Northern Territories issue remains important for Japan’s political leaders and diplomats because it is the main obstacle to a peace treaty to finally “end” World War II, but it has far less resonance nationwide than it does in Hokkaido. Instead, *Newswatch 9* featured a different pressure group with much more national attention: the [Association of the Families of Victims Kidnapped by North Korea](#). On 7 July, President Bush had given Prime Minister Fukuda an emotive assurance that “The United States will not abandon you on this issue” and a call for the resolution of the abductions issue (*rachi mondai*) was included in the summit declaration, but AFVKN held a press conference to express their disappointment at the lack of serious debate (NW9 9 July). They like almost every other interest group active during the summit period were trying to get the attention of global leaders on a myriad of issues when the leaders were struggling to find consensus on the wording of setting a target for reductions in emissions. With the summit leaders having too much on their plates, and not only at the summit dinner, it was always unrealistic that citizens’ groups could ever capture the leaders’ attentions for longer than it took to stage a good photo opportunity.

Poverty: Pro- and Anti-Summit

A cornerstone of the security operation was the prevention of the sort of disorderly anti-G8 protests that had disrupted some previous summits. Since the violent protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999, the G8 summit has also become a focal point for protests against the poverty and inequalities of the global economic system. The main march against the summit was held on the Saturday (5 July), which meant it did not

feature much in the news programs featured in the television survey. News programs over the weekend documented the demonstrations in central Sapporo, although by previous standards, particularly the violent protests in Genoa (2001) in which protestor Carlo Giuliani was killed by police, the four arrests seemed very tame.

Demonstrators had been kept a safe distance from the summit venue in campsites in the villages of Sobetsu and Toyoura. The demonstrators were not helped by inclement weather that left them bedraggled in their tents. Their soggy marches (where protesters were almost outnumbered by police) were covered on local television news, but on the first day of the summit a group of foreign demonstrators found their way out of the campsite blocked by police in riot gear (MNH 7 July). NHK followed the story of one student protestor, Sueoka Tomoyuki, who had traveled to Hokkaido from Kyoto to register his concerns about globalization (MNH 9 July). But while the small contingent of around 1,000 protesters had their moment in the local (and for an even shorter time national) spotlight, they were outnumbered and out muscled by the police. With no major disturbances around the summit venue, there was relatively little coverage of the anti-G8 and anti-globalization protests.



Part of the reason for the lack of anti-summit demonstrations is that so many in Hokkaido looked to the summit as a chance to alleviate

some of the significant local economic problems. One of the key summit themes was poverty. Poverty in Japan may not come close to matching the desperate living conditions of the one in five people on the planet who live on less than one dollar a day. Nevertheless, the image of Japan as a rich, egalitarian nation is certainly in need of revision given an OECD report in 2006 that placed Japan just behind the USA in second place among advanced industrial nations for people living in relative poverty, defined as earning less than half the median income.[20] Hokkaido is poor by Japanese standards. In 2006, Hokkaido had the highest percentage of households eligible for Public Assistance for the Poor (*seikatsu hogo*) of any prefecture at 20.5 per cent, well above the national average of 11.1 per cent. [21] The bankruptcy of the former coalmining town of Yubari in 2006 has come to epitomize Hokkaido's financial woes and was the focal point of much discussion about poverty in the lead up to the summit.



A deserted, dilapidated house in Yubari: symbol of economic woes in Hokkaido.

Economic sluggishness and poverty in Hokkaido was being compounded by one of the key issues discussed at the summit: the price of oil. During the winter of 2007-8, there were

dozens of articles in *Hokkaido Shinbun* about thieves siphoning off heating oil from storage tanks outside homes, schools and offices, an issue that became emblematic of how high oil prices affected Hokkaido.[22] High oil and food prices also hit Hokkaido's agricultural sector (which accounts for 10 per cent of national agricultural output), particularly in the price of fertilizers (which rose 60 per cent in a year), cattle feed and heating oil for vegetable greenhouses.[23] Meanwhile, just after the summit fishermen staged a national strike on 15 July 2008 to protest a tripling of fuel prices in five years and an inability to recoup their additional costs via the wholesale and distribution system.[24]

Given this economic context, the choice of the Windsor Hotel as the summit venue was ironic. It was a relic of the bubble era resort development frenzy. Opened in 1993, the Windsor Hotel closed in 1997 before being bought for one eleventh of its development costs and reopened in 2002. For local people it had become a symbol of the bursting of Japan's economic bubble. [25]



Hosting the summit, it was hoped, would inject new life into the hotel, Toyako and Hokkaido. The Hokkaido Economic Federation estimated that the spin offs from the summit would provide a ¥37.9 billion economic effect in the five years following the summit.[26] Hokkaido's share of the total summit budget of ¥60 billion was ¥2.2 billion (MNH 3 July), so the prefecture was potentially going to get a good return on its money. As the G8 leaders were criticized in the international media for their splendid surroundings while they discussed poverty in

Africa, therefore, as befits Japan's "economistic" approach to summits (Endo Seiji) outlined above, the summit was an opportunity to alleviate some of Hokkaido's own economic problems. NHK's coverage featured many businesses attempting to cash in: a gift shop selling summit manju (sweet bean cakes), a craftsman producing engraved souvenir swords, and even "summit takoyaki" (octopus in batter balls, but with eight different fillings representing each of the G8 countries) (MNH 4 July). When interviewed again at the end of the summit, the takoyaki vendor looked happy: he had been "busy" (MNH 10 July). Such boosts to local business would be no miracle cure to Hokkaido's economic woes, but they could certainly be a shot in the arm.

Given all the potential benefits – a boost to the local economy, publicity for Hokkaido, a chance to promote local issues and agendas – the summit was never going to bring crowds of Hokkaidoites onto the streets in protest. On the contrary, some went out of their way to give the G8 leaders a welcome, such as farmer Miyauchi Hachiyo who planted an entire field of sunflowers, which she hoped the leaders would be able to see as they passed by (MNH 7 July). As a local event the summit had value and the potential for success completely independently of the leaders' discussions. There were of course people who questioned the wisdom of the budget and opposed the summit itself. But for a majority, the summit was not a reason to pick up a placard and march in protest. It was a chance to make a point, or make a yen or two.

Reflections on the Hokkaido Toyako Summit

The story of the Hokkaido Toyako Summit as seen from Hokkaido raises multiple common themes with the previous G8 summit hosted in Japan: Okinawa and Kyushu in 2000. Julia Yonetani writes:

Through 1999 and the beginning of

2000, summit fever swept across Okinawa. ... The multimillion dollar Convention Center built at Busena and the massive International Press Center constructed within Nago center (the latter destined from the outset to be demolished after the summit due to untenable maintenance costs) were financed with centrally controlled funds that were earmarked exclusively for projects related to the three-day summit. The months leading up to the summit saw numerous summit-related events fostering international exchange. ... The holding of the summit in Okinawa was intended to show case a new high-tech-smart, globalized Japan ... behind the central government's carefully constructed multicultural stage stood some 22,000 police officers, flown in from across Japan and backed up by twenty aircraft and one hundred naval vessels. Of the 81 billion yen Japan spent on hosting the summit – ten times more than any country had ever spent before – about half went for security. [27]

The obvious common themes suggest a "standard operating procedure" for summits hosted in Japan's regions, characterized mainly by extravagant expenditure on PR and security. The summits were also characterized for being inextricably linked to local issues. In Hokkaido it was the environment. In Okinawa it was the US bases. [28] This distinction helps explain the difference between Julia Yonetani's depiction of the media mood in Okinawa and the considerably more supportive tone depicted in this paper. Yonetani writes:

Within Okinawa, the local media and a large section of the population had never viewed the summit as being anything more

than a multinational carnival. The wave of pre-summit hype generated by a coalition of central government agencies, big business, and [LDP-backed Okinawa Governor] Inamine [Keiichi]'s support base within Okinawa no doubt helped create the generally convivial mood that ironically was greeted with such contempt around the world.[29]

In both cases, however, local media coverage in the host venue clearly contains perspectives distinct to national and international news. Understanding these perspectives of people in the summit host region is integral to any broader understanding of the meanings of the G8 summit.

Of course, not all people in Hokkaido watch local television news and for many their primary source of summit information was the national media. There were also many occasions on which local media took a line largely indistinguishable from national or international media, including *Marugoto News Hokkaido's* coverage on the main summit. Also, an editorial in the *Hokkaido Shinbun*, for example, echoed the familiar disappointment in the international news media at the lack of concrete targets on reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. [30]



The Lectern used by Prime Minister Fukuda: Empty lectern, empty statements?

But the local impact of the summit helps explain differing attitudes toward the summit among people from Hokkaido, Japanese people as a whole, and beyond Japan's shores. In its post-summit editorial (10 July 2008), the *Hokkaido Shinbun* Newspaper listed the by now familiar benefits – the chance to promote Hokkaido, think about the environment and stimulate civic activism – and commented that the end of the summit was only the beginning of the revitalization of Hokkaido. This editorial was reproduced in *Hokkaido Shinbun's* souvenir brochure (see photo), which went on sale soon after the summit and is full of glossy pictures of the event. The very existence of this kind of publication speaks volumes about what the summit meant to Hokkaido as an event to be remembered in years to come. [31]



It is still too early to assess the long term effects of the summit on Hokkaido. While there are clearly many, such as the significant links forged between groups active on peace and reconciliation issues described in Zablonski and

Seaton's paper in this series, they should not be overstated. On 20-22 September, there was a meeting of representatives of many of the citizens groups that had organized events to coincide with the summit. Only a few dozen people attended, creating the impression that Hokkaido, like the rest of the world, moved on fairly quickly after the party was over.[32] Then on 3-4 October, an exhibition was held at the Former Hokkaido Government Building (Aka Renga, "Red Brick"). There were far more people queuing to taste one of the dishes on the summit dinner menu and buy organic vegetables from the stalls visited by the leaders' spouses on the second full day of the summit than there were people visiting the photo exhibition of the main summit.



The G8 summit is part of a diplomatic process that moves discussion about global issues

forward, if only a little. The local impact of the summit can be categorized as part of the "moving forward" process within Hokkaido on issues of environmental consciousness, economic revitalization, and widened participation in civic activism. But as this article series comes out a few months after the summit, the world has already changed. Memories of the Toyako Summit have faded fast. Summit chair Prime Minister Fukuda resigned in September and was replaced as prime minister by Aso Taro. The Beijing Olympics were a showcase for China that quickly overshadowed the G8 summit's showcasing of Hokkaido. Then came the global financial crisis and a hastily arranged summit (dubbed the G20) in Washington (14-15 November). With a drop in tourists to Japan of 7 per cent in September 2008 compared to September 2007 due to fears of global recession and the strong yen, many of the prospective short-term benefits of hosting the summit have tumbled along with global share prices. [33] In the long-run, however, Hokkaido should reap some benefits as a result of the greater name recognition generated by the summit.

The Hokkaido Toyako Summit is already yesterday's news. It will feature in the retrospectives of the year on Japanese television and in the press in December, but Hokkaido counts down in anticipation to its next major events. The Japan–Pacific Islands Forum will be held in Tomamu in May 2009. And outside Sapporo Station, the counter used to indicate the number of days to the G8 summit is still there. It has been (appropriately enough) recycled and reused to give the countdown to a national sports festival for the over-sixties: Nenrin pikku Hokkaido. 284 days to go ...



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Article Series Index	
Alternative Summits, Alternative Perspectives: Beyond the 2008 G8 Summit	Philip Seaton
The 2008 Hokkaido-Toyoko G8 Summit: neither summit nor plummet	Hugo Dobson
Indigenous at last! Ainu Grassroots Organizing and the Indigenous People's Summit in Ainu Mosir	ann-elise lewallen
The Hokkaido Toyoko Summit as a Springboard for Grassroots Reconciliation Initiatives: The "Peace, Reconciliation and Civil Society" Symposium	Lukasz Zablonksi and Philip Seaton
The G8 Summit as "Local Event" in the Hokkaido Media	Philip Seaton

Other Resources	
G8 Information Center, University of Toronto	
Official Japanese Government Webpage	
Hokkaido Toyoko Summit Preparation Council 2008 Webpage	
Andrew DeWit, The G8 Mirage: The Summit and Japan's Environmental Policies	

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- [4] Hugo Dobson (2007) *The Group of 7/8*, London: Routledge, p. 51.
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