

COMMUNITY-BASED RURAL TOURISM IN SUPER-AGEING JAPAN: CHALLENGES AND EVOLUTION

Yahsuo Ohe*

Abstract

Japan became a super-ageing society in 2005, with rural Japan becoming extremely super-aged. This paper investigated how a rural community conducts tourism activity and how it copes with challenges through studying a community-based rural tourism activity in Chiba. By defining community-based rural tourism as using a bonding type of social capital in the local community, this paper explored the advantages and limitations of this type of social capital when the social capital becomes older. Specifically, it was revealed that community-based rural tourism has done well from aspects of job and income generation, increases in self-confidence and local pride, and to a certain extent coping with the impact of unexpected natural disasters. On the other hand, transferring these activities to the younger generation while maintaining the community-based decision-making system will be challenging. Thus, there comes a time when the use of the traditional bonding social capital within the local community must be expanded toward a more open, wider, and new network beyond the local community.

Keywords: Community-based rural tourism. Super-ageing society. Bonding social capital. Earthquake. Harmful rumour.

TURISMO RURAL DE BASE COMUNITÁRIA NO CONTEXTO DE SUPERENVELHECIMENTO DO JAPÃO: DESAFIOS E EVOLUÇÃO

Resumo

O Japão tornou-se uma sociedade super-envelhecimento em 2005, com a parte rural do país tornando-se extremamente super-envelhecida. Este trabalho investigou como uma comunidade rural conduz a atividade turística e como ele traz desafios através de estudar uma atividade de turismo rural baseado na comunidade em Chiba. Ao definir o turismo rural baseado na comunidade como a utilização de um tipo de ligação de capital social na comunidade local, este trabalho explorou as vantagens e limitações desse tipo de capital social quando a capital social torna-se mais velho. Especificamente, foi revelado que o turismo rural baseado na comunidade tem feito bem desde aspectos da geração de emprego e renda, o aumento da auto-confiança e orgulho local, e até certo ponto lidar com o impacto dos desastres naturais inesperados. Por outro lado, a transferência dessas atividades para a geração mais jovem, mantendo o sistema de tomada de decisões com base na comunidade será um desafio. Assim, chega um momento em que a utilização do capital social, de ligação tradicional dentro da comunidade local deve ser expandido para uma rede mais aberta, mais ampla e nova para além da comunidade local.

Palavras-chave: Turismo comunitário rural. Sociedade super-envelhecida. Capital social. Terremoto. Boato prejudicial.

TURISMO RURAL COMUNITARIO EN EL CONTEXTO DEL SUPER ENVEJECIMIENTO EN JAPÓN: RETOS Y EVOLUCIÓN

Resumen

Japón se convirtió en una sociedad super-envejecimiento en el año 2005, con el Japón rural llegando a ser extremadamente súper edad. En este trabajo se investiga cómo una comunidad rural lleva a cabo la actividad turística y se enfrenta desafíos mediante el estudio de una actividad de turismo rural de base comunitaria en Chiba. También se estudió el impacto de la radioactividad debido al desastre de Fukushima tras el enorme terremoto. El turismo rural comunitario ha hecho bien allí aunque la recuperación en el número anterior de visitantes llevó tres años debido a los rumores de la radiactividad. Basada en el turismo rural comunitario se ha generado empleos e ingresos y aumentado la confianza en sí mismo y el orgullo local. La transferencia de estas actividades para la generación más joven, manteniendo el sistema de toma de decisiones basado en la comunidad será un reto.

Palabras clave: Turismo comunitario rural. Super envejecimiento. Capital social. Terremoto. Rumor dañino.



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1 INTRODUCTION

Since the issue of an ageing society will arise sooner or later in every society, it is a common issue in every part of the world. Among countries, Japan is the most aged society. A society in which the proportion of residents who are 65 years of age or older i.e., population ageing ratio, is greater than 20% is termed a super ageing society. Japan became the first such society in the world in 2005 (MURAMATSU; AKIYAMA, 2011) and was followed by Italy and Germany in 2010.

Especially, in rural Japan the population has aged far faster than the national average due to depopulation of younger generations and the subsequent ageing of the remaining local residents. Thus, it is safe to say that what rural Japan is experiencing is a little ahead of the experiences in many societies with an ageing population.

Thus, this paper sheds light on how rural tourism can evolve in a super ageing rural community by focussing on a community-based rural tourism activity in Chiba, Japan. The rural community has been a basic social structure that plays a role in providing mutual help in daily life in Japan (FUKUTAKE, 1980).

It has been often said that the group-oriented mentality among Japanese people comes from this collective community work. This paper examines a community-based rural tourism activity, which is not very common even in rural Japan with its communal tradition. Individual activity is common in terms of accommodation services in rural areas.

Although policy makers like to promote community-based tourism activity, actually it is not easy to organize and operate such activities sustainably in local communities. The study case presented here is one that has overcome challenges one after another, including recovery from the unprecedented set of disasters associated with the Great East Japan Earthquake that hit in March, 2011, to operate a community-based tourism activity. Thus, this case is suitable to investigate this paper's aims.

Although studies on the relationship between farm activity and the ageing of farmers have been conducted, there has been little investigation of rural tourism from the perspective of an ageing population except for that by Ohe (2008), which clarified the significance of the role of retiree farmers in rural tourism.

Nevertheless, as far as the author knows, community-based rural tourism has not been addressed from the perspective of ageing. It is a universal agenda in all rural tourism areas as to how rural tourism based on the traditional communal function can cope with the inevitable difficult challenges and in which direction it will evolve.

Therefore, this paper aims to clarify how community-based rural tourism has been performed and how local operators cope with the difficulties they face under super-ageing circumstances. These points will provide useful perspectives for community-based rural tourism in other parts of world as well because every community-based activity will face the same problem sooner or later.

To approach these aims, firstly, based on a literature review the author defined community-based rural tourism as a tourism activity based on traditional bonding social capital formed in the local community. Secondly, trends of leisure preferences among people in Japan are reviewed briefly and, thirdly, distinctive features of and constraints on rural tourism in Japan are summarized. Fourthly, the author investigates a case study of a facility, designated as the Nature Lodge Kusunoki in Japanese, which conducts community-based rural tourism in Minaniboso, Chiba.

This paper investigates characteristics of how the people concerned conduct the tourism activity in the ageing rural community and the advantages and limitations of bonding social capital when facing challenges caused by both expected and unexpected social and natural phenomena. Finally, policy recommendations are suggested.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In tourism research issues of ageing were mainly discussed with regard to retirees as a segmented market for tourism (POUDYAL et al., 2008). The supply side perspective was limited to Ohe (2008), whose work focussed on the significance of rural tourism activity conducted by retirees. From both the demand and supply sides, issues related to ageing are to be explored more in the future.

Rural tourism is an activity that mobilizes tangible and intangible rural resources. Garrod et al. (2006) re-conceptualizes fundamental rural resources for rural tourism as "countryside capital" and urges a holistic approach to rural resource management. As a holistic manager of countryside capital, the rural community is one of the most appropriate bodies.

With respect to community-based tourism development, social capital is the most commonly taken perspective. Although social capital is variously defined by multiple disciplines and there exist critical views on social capital (FIN, 2001), the perspective of social capital is useful to characterize community-based rural tourism. Social capital is defined here as a network based on mutual trust among the people concerned.

Social capital includes both bonding and bridging types (GITTELL; VIDAL, 1998; WOOLCOCK; NARAYAN, 2000; INABA, 2007; NEWTON, 2008). Further, Szreter and Woolcock (2004) added another type of social capital, that is, “linking social capital”, which is characterized by a vertical network such as relationships between the government and local community. Among these types, a traditional rural community that is based on

a closed human network within that community is considered to be a bonding type that aims to strengthen and utilize this network, which is a Coleman’s closed type of network while an open network is considered to be a bridging type (INABA, 2007; BURT, 2008).

Studies on various topics related to community-based tourism and on rural tourism in Japan are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Literature on Tourism Related to Community-based Activity and Japanese Cases.

Category	Topic	Literature
Community-based tourism activity	The initial study	Murphy, 1985
	Social capital and enterprenership	Zao et al.,2011; Mascardo, 2014
	Canada, planning	Grybovych and Hafermann, 2010
	Korea, social capial	Park et al., 2012; 2015
	Cambodia, resident perceptions	Ellis and Sheridan, 2014
	Lao, gender	Phommavong and Sörensson, 2014
	Thailand, success factors, home stays	Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014; 2015
	South Asian countries, ecotourism	Walter, 2013
	China, disempowerment of residents	Han et al., 2014
	Tibet, asset-based community development	Wu and Pearce, 2014
	Timor-Leste, remote island	Tolkach and King, 2015
	Dominica, resident perceptions	Holladay and Powell, 2013
	Hawaii, tourist/resident preceptions	Vaughan and Ardoin, 2014
	Romania, networking	Lorio and Corsale, 2014
	Cape Verde, quality of service	López-Guzmán et al, 2013
Japanese rural tourism	Retiree farmer’s activity	Ohe, 2008
	Variability of rural tourism	Knight, 1996
	Antenna shop	Thompson, 2003
	Characteristics of rural tourism	Ohe, 2014
	Educational tourism	Ohe, 2011a; 2012
	Productivity measurement	Ohe, 2011b
	Connection between tourism and brand farm products	Ohe and Kurihara, 2013
	Dependent on tourism resources	Ohe, 2010
	Stepwise process of tourism development	Ohe et al., 2011
	Public fiscal support	Ishikawa and Fukushige, 2009

Source: Reviewed by author.

Studies on community-based tourism activity in the Korean rural community were conducted by Park et al. (2012, 2015). Interestingly, social capital does not always foster a pro-tourism attitude in the community (PARK et al., 2015). Leadership and entrepreneurship are often focussed upon in connection with social capital (ZHAO et al., 2011; MASCARDO, 2014). Grybovych and Hafermann (2010) investigated a participatory dialogical approach to community tourism development on a rural island in Canada.

Studies on community-based tourism development have a relatively long history beginning with the initial research (MURPHY, 1985) to recent studies on developing countries due to the growing attention to community-based tourism development as an effective means of promoting tourism in developing countries and regions. These studies are by Ellis and Sheridan (2014) for Cambodia, Phommavong and Sörensson (2014) for Laos, Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2014, 2015) for Thailand, Walter (2013) for three Southeast Asian cases, Han et al. (2014) for China,

Wu and Pearce (2014) for Tibet, Tolkach and King (2015) for Timor-Leste, Holladay and Powell (2013) for the Dominican Republic, Lorio and Corsale (2014) for Romania, and López-Guzmán et al. (2013) for Cape Verde.

Literature on rural tourism in Japan is not scarce but is mostly in Japanese. This means that these studies were not targeted at international readers; therefore, little is shared internationally. This paper tries to narrow this longstanding information gap.

Here literature published in English is reviewed because this journal is internationally oriented. Although Murphy and Williams (1999) discussed the potential of inbound Japanese tourists to rural Canada from a planning perspective, that paper did not focus on rural tourism conducted in Japan. Knight (1996) conducted some of the initial research on rural tourism in Japan, which discusses the variability of rural tourism in Japan. Thompson (2003) focussed on the "antenna shop", a shop for tourism promotion and the selling of local products, run by a remote rural community in the center of the Metropolitan Tokyo area.

Ohe (2014) pointed out that there are tighter constraints on the development of rural tourism in Japan than on their counterparts in Western Europe where the long vacation system is fully implemented, which creates demand for lodging for longer periods in rural tourism. Beside these institutional factors, Ohe (2010) empirically verified that too much dependence on external tourism resources creates a conservative attitude among operators toward new developments in rural tourism. Ohe (2011b) measured productivity of rural tourism in Japan and evaluated marginal productivity.

Ohe and Kurihara (2013) verified quantitatively the positive connection between local brand farm products and tourism in rural areas by a simultaneous equation model. Ohe et al. (2011) presented a stepwise development process for rural tourism among local people concerned using a two-stage equation model and found that the first step is to raise satisfaction among those who are involved.

Ohe (2011a, 2012) focussed on educational tourism in agriculture from the perspective of how to nurture operator's attitudes toward this new activity. From an empirical analysis conducted in rural Japan, Ishikawa and Fukushima (2009) noted that rural areas need public fiscal support in addition to tourism development.

To summarize, no study was conducted from the perspective of ageing and community-based tourism activity despite its importance. We approach this issue from the perspective of bonding social capital. It is assumed that social capital becomes old

as the ageing of people in the local community progresses. Under this condition we investigate how the people involved in community-based rural tourism behave and cope with their various challenges.

3 TRENDS OF LEISURE PREFERENCES IN JAPAN

First, let us take a look at the background of rural tourism in Japan. Table 2 shows results of a government opinion poll on how the preferences among people have changed from tangible physical aspects to intangible mental aspects of life. Those who seek richness of the mind have increased steadily to reach more than 60% of respondents of a survey by the Cabinet Office for the year 2011 while the preference for richness in tangible goods has decreased to 31%. Table 1 shows the percentages of individuals who wished to engage in various leisure activities and those who selected enjoyment of food during their time away from work.

Table 2. What People Seek in Life.

Year	Richness in mind	Richness in tangible goods	Desired activity	
			Leisure	Enjoyment of food
1973	35,3	40,3	20,2	14,4
1975	38,8	40,9	16,0	21,9
1980	42,2	39,8	19,9	17,3
1985	49,6	32,9	27,6	14,5
1990	53,0	30,8	37,2	12,6
1995	56,8	28,1	35,3	15,4
2002	60,7	27,4	36,2	22,9
2005	57,8	28,4	33,2	25,2
2010	60,0	31,1	33,3	25,4
2011	61,4	31,0	35,8	26,5

Source: Opinion Poll on People's Life, Cabinet Office.
Note: Until 1999, the survey question allowed only a single answer. while since 2001 it allowed multiple answers.

The proportion of those who seek leisure activities has increased to 35.8% in 2011 from 20.3% in 1973, and is followed by enjoyment of eating at 25.5% in 2011. Increasing concerns over health and food safety and interest in various aspects of food such as culinary heritage and exotic new foods are considered as the background of this trend. Among leisure activities, domestic tourism was the most popular (Table 3).

Although domestic tourism is not limited to rural tourism, it is important to recognize this choice as the background for the potential demand for rural tourism.

Table 3. Desired Leisure Activities.

Rank	Activity	Year		
		2012	2011	2010
1	Domestic Travel	75,2	75,8	79,5
2	Car driving	49,4	51,9	59,2
3	Travel abroad	47,9	48,5	53,1
4	Visit zoo, botanical garden, aquarium,	44,8	45,2	53
5	Eating out	42,8	45,6	47,3
6	Movie going	40,0	40,6	46,9
7	Listening to music	34,7	35,7	38,4
8	Picnicking, hiking, outdoor walking	34	35,1	41,4
9	Going to music concert	33,8	36,6	39,6
10	Buying lottery ticket	31,9	34,9	38,8

Source: White Paper on Leisure (2013), Japan Productivity Center.

Note: Since 2009 data were surveyed through the Internet.

The history of rural tourism in Japan is not long. Rural tourism is termed as green tourism, which has been promoted since the early 1990s by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF). The legal framework for promotion of green tourism was inaugurated in 1994 and was placed in the rural policy arena under the Food, Agriculture and Rural Basic Law that stipulates pillars of policy measures by the Ministry in 1999.

What characterizes rural tourism in Japan is the smaller market size and slower pace of development than, for example, agritourism, the Italian counterpart, which was also a latecomer to agritourism in Western European countries. The number of stays in green tourism in Japan from 2005 to 2009 increased 1.09 times (7.77 million to 8.48 million) while that in agritourism in Italy increased 1.37 times (6.56 million to 8.96 million), surpassing the number of stays in Japan.

We need to be careful when we look at data on the number of stays in Japan because people often stay in public accommodations in rural areas. Therefore, not all people stay in farmhouse accommodations, which is not the case with agritourism data. In Italy, demand for agritourism has increased in accordance with the increase in the number of agritourism farms, which means that the demand has moved in parallel with the supply (OHE; CIANI, 2011, 2012). In contrast, in the case of Japan the number of green tourism farms remains small, which is one tenth of that of the Italian case: 2006 farms in Japan and 19,019 farms in Italy in 2009.

The reasons for this slow pace of the rural tourism market in Japan are two fold: demand and supply, respectively. As to the supply side, Japanese farmers already have off-farm jobs due to the small size of their farms, which means that farmers have little incentive to find a source of extra income. On the demand side is an institutional constraint on

taking longer holidays because Japan has not implemented the long vacation system that exists in Western European countries.

The Japanese government was recommended by the UN International Labour Organization (ILO) to implement this system. Nevertheless, unlike Western Europe it has not been implemented, yet. This means that the institutional condition that stimulates accommodation demand for long stays has not been established.

Therefore, rural tourism in Japan must rely more on short stays and day-trip markets, which mean less spending per capita than with longer stays. The recent increase in the number of farm restaurants can be partly explained by this factor in addition to the surging preference for local food and interest in heritage among urban residents because restaurant visitors are mostly day trippers.

To summarize, rural tourism in Japan has distinctive characteristics in the sense that it must be developed under severe institutional constraints on its market. However, other Asian countries experience similar constraints on rural tourism. It is, thus, possible to establish a model for Asian rural tourism if rural tourism in Japan can grow sustainably.

Under these circumstances, what is the size of the rural tourism market in this country? Although there are no public statistics specifically on rural tourism, there are ad hoc survey results on related activities that are not far from rural tourism.

Table 4. Annual Sales from Agricultural-related Activities in 2012.

Type of activity	Annual Sales (million yen, %)	
Conducted by farms	476.719	27,3
Food processing	293.622	(16,8)
Farm Shop	117.572	(6,7)
Tourism farm	37.932	(2,2)
Farm Restaurant	27.593	(1,6)
Conducted by agricultural cooperativ	1.268.406	72,7
Farm shop	727.247	(41,7)
Food processing	530.107	(30,4)
Farm restaurant	11.052	(0,6)
Total	1.745.125	100,0

Source: Survey on the 6th industrialization of farm and rural activity (MAFF, 2012).

Note: () indicates percentage share of total annual sales in each category.

Table 4 shows amounts of sales of agricultural-related activities such as from food processing, direct selling of farm products, and tourism not only conducted by individual farmers but also by agricultural cooperatives. Rural tourism is included in this category, which means that the data are overestimated as being from rural tourism.

Keeping this point in mind, 1.7 trillion yen was the total amount of annual sales from agricultural-related activity (=14,727 million US dollars when 1 US dollar=118.5 yen) in 2012 while the value of agricultural production was 8.5 trillion yen (=7,1942 million US dollars) (MAFF, 2012).

Even considering if processed farm products were counted in both cases, it is important to recognize that growth potential is higher for agricultural-related activities than conventional farm production activity.

Now turning to ageing issues. Table 5 shows the ratios of the ageing population in Japan and in other countries for three years: 2000, 2005, and 2010. Japan entered the super-ageing society in 2005 and remained such a society in 2010. During this period, the ratio increased from 20.1% to 23.0%, which means that nearly one out of four people are over 65 years of age in Japan.

Table 5. Ratio of Ageing Population Worldwide.

Country	Year		
	2000	2005	2010
Japan	17,2	20,1	23,0
Italy	18,3	19,6	20,3
Sweden	17,3	17,3	18,2
Spain	16,9	16,8	17,1
Germany	16,3	18,9	20,8
France	16,0	16,4	16,8
UK	15,8	16,0	16,6
USA	12,4	12,3	13,1
Korea	7,3	9,3	11,1
China	6,9	7,7	8,4
Thailand	6,6	7,7	8,9
India	4,4	4,7	5,1
More developed regions	14,3	15,3	16,1
Less developed regions	5,1	5,5	5,8

Source: United Nations World Population Prospects: The 2012 revision with the exception of data for Japan, which is based on the National Census in Japan.

Note: Developed regions are North America, Japan, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand while developing regions are Africa, Asia excluding Japan, Central and South America, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

The ratio is increasing year by year and was projected to reach 40% in 2050 (CABINET OFFICE, 2013). Although that ratio in Chiba prefecture, the eastern neighbor of Tokyo, is slightly lower than the national average during the same period when it increased from 16.7% to 20.5% due to the progress of urbanization of the eastern part of Chiba, the

large increase in the ratio narrowed the gap between the national average.

The study area is located in the municipality of Minamiboso in the rural south of the Boso peninsula, Chiba, and the ratio of aged people in the population in this municipality is the third highest in Chiba, which was 35.9% in 2010.

Furthermore, when only looking at farm households in the study area, the Hamlet Card, which is the Agriculture and Forestry Census specially focussed on the situation of rural communities, showed that in 2010 the ratio of aged people in Kamiku was 41.8% and was extremely high at 86.8% among those who farm as a job (Table 6).

Table 6. Ratio of Ageing Population in Kami hamlet, Minamiboso.

Year	No. total households	No. farm households	Population ageing rate (%)	
			Farm population	Agricultural workforce
1990	110	72	24,9	33,3
1995	—	64	29,6	45,2
2000	105	51	37,7	70,3
2005	—	35	41,5	77,4
2010	108	28	41,8	86,8

Source: Agricultural Hamlet Card, MAFF.

Note: Only those who sell farm products are counted as farm households.

The main farm products there are rice, milk, and vegetables. Thus, it is safe to say that close to nine out of ten farmers are over 65 years old, so that this area is super advanced in terms of ageing. Fifteen out of 28 farm households include part-time farmers to sustain household expenses because of the small farm size. Among those farm households, only three farmers less than 65 years of age are involved in full-time farm activity. In this super ageing rural community, now let us examine how people there operate rural tourism on a community basis.

4 STUDY CASE: LODGE KUSUNOKI OPERATED BY THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

4.1 History

The first distinctive feature of the Lodge Kusunoki is that the facility was renovated from a once abolished municipal elementary school due to progressive depopulation.

The second is that its operation is conducted by residents of the local community, Kamiku, a traditional rural hamlet. The name "Kusunoki"

comes from an enormous old wild camphor tree that is over 750 years old and stands in a small shrine at the corner of the school. This tree is designated as a natural treasure by the Chiba prefectural government.

The tourism activity was begun when local residents started discussing how to utilize the school facility that was to be abolished. The school was established in 1873, in the early Meiji era when Japan embarked on modernization that included a compulsory education system, after the samurai feudalism era.

Because of the long history of the school and the existence of the divine tree, people in this community have a strong attachment to the school as a symbol of community. Therefore, it was quite natural for local residents to form a committee to explore how to utilize the school facility after abolition based on consensus among residents in the community. Consequently, it was decided to use that facility as a local community center that could also be used for rural tourism activity. It was renovated for that purpose by a subsidy from the Ministry of Education that promotes renovation of these abolished school facilities for educational purposes in the local community.

Now the Kusunoki has been selected as one of the 50 model examples of renovated school facilities by the Ministry. Operation of the facility was conducted by a community-based organization newly set up for this purpose since the inauguration in 1997.

The president of this organization is automatically identical with the head of the autonomous community association who is annually rotated among the residents. The tradition of strong ties among local residents created this style of community-based activity, which shows evidence of bonding social capital.

4.2 Structure

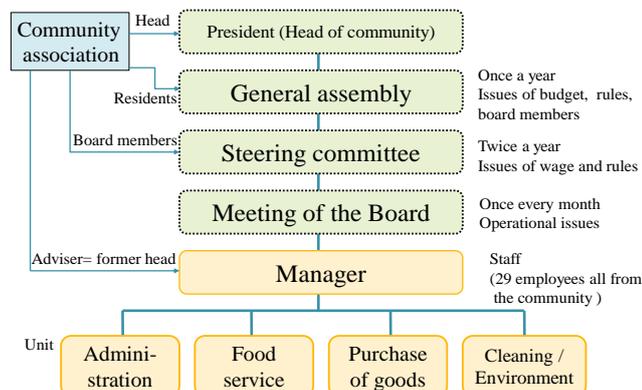
Among the hundred households in this hamlet, 29 residents are employed, including seven married couples, by this organization on a part-time basis, which means that one fourth of the residents are involved in this community-based activity (as of 2015 February). The youngest employee is a 39-year-old female who provides food services and the oldest is a 79-year-old female who cleans the facility. The organization does not have any legal status.

After the residents discussed which type of organization would be the most suitable, they decided not to be a non-profit organization (NPO) because they thought that the principle of a community consensus-based activity would not be compatible with NPO status. Also, the flexible use of part-time jobs is possible with the current system due to seasonality of tourism activity.

The facility has a kitchen, laboratory for food processing, dining and exhibition room, meeting room, Japanese bathrooms with large bath tubs, and six Japanese style rooms with tatami covered floors and futon sleeping mats for lodging. A maximum of 48 people can stay in the six rooms. The former gymnasium is used as a multi-purpose hall. The school facility was renovated by the owner, that is, the local municipality, and the renovated facility is operated by the community organization.

The municipality and the Kusunoki organization sign a contract for the operation of this facility and the municipality provides a lump sum for operational expenses. Every five years the contract is renewed after reviewing the performance during the past five years. In this respect, the Kusunoki is a traditional rural hamlet-based rural tourism business body, which attracts nationwide attention. The organizational structure of the Kusunoki is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Structure of the Kusunoki



Source: proper elaboration based on empirical research data.

Daily activities of the 29 residents (i.e., 11 males and 27 females) hired on a part-time basis are divided among four units administration, food service, purchase of goods, and cleaning/environment. Among the 29 part-time employees is a manager who oversees all four units.

A retired municipality officer who is a native of this community has taken the post of manager since the inauguration of the Kusunoki. A meeting of the Board of Directors is held once every other month to decide operational issues. The Board is composed of 19 of the 29 Kusunoki employees.

The Steering Committee deals with alterations in wages and rules of that organization. Role of the Steering Committee is to connect with an autonomous community association in this area because members of this committee consist of the president of the Kusunoki, who is also head of the association, and board members of the community association and the Kusunoki.

The Steering Committee meeting is held twice a year. A General Assembly chaired by the President of the Kusunoki is held once a year together with that of the community association to approve the budget, board members, and setting or changing rules.

Thus, a decision-making system comprised of various entities is adopted to harmonize activity of the Kusunoki with consensus in the hamlet. This system enables community residents to learn about the hamlet tourism activity and also to reflect their opinion regarding that activity although it takes a longer time to make decisions than in a private company.

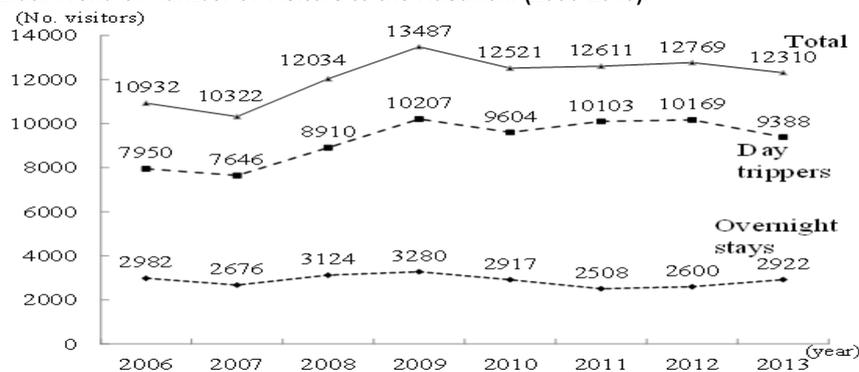
4.3 Activities

The services that the Kusunoki provides are accommodation, meals, and farm experience services.

Accommodation fee is 5500 yen per night including breakfast, dinner, and taxes regardless of the season. Experience services are provided when more than 10 people come with reservations. Fifteen experience services are offered in total, which include agricultural experiences, local food heritage experiences, craft making, outdoor experiences, and star watching. The farm experience program is provided with cooperation of neighbouring farmers to provide farmland because the Kusunoki does not have farmland. Each service has a different price, ranging from 200 to 7000 yen, except for star watching, which is free of charge. These activities are performed throughout the year except for certain agricultural and food experiences that are constrained by seasonal availability. To counter the seasonality of tourism activity and secure stable job-holding, a food delivery service was started beginning in 2002. This delivery service is offered every other day, that is, three weekdays, to neighbouring residents and the municipality office. Actually, profitability of the youth-group oriented accommodation service is better than the meal delivery service because of the existence of delivery costs.

Total sales revenue in 2013 was 28 million yen (=236.3 thousand US dollars, 118.5 yen/dollar) in which 45% was from accommodations and 55% from food service and experience programs. The contracted subsidy from the municipality was 4.7 million yen (=39.7 thousand US dollars). Regarding the cost structure, labour costs accounted for the largest share at 13.6 million yen with 7.8 million for foodstuffs, 3.3 million for utilities, 7 million for administration costs, 0.5 million for purchased goods, and 0.3 million for materials used in the experience program, all of which totalled 32.5 million yen (=274.3 thousand US dollars) From these figures, it can be understood that the subsidy plays an important role in providing equilibrium between revenue and costs.

Figure 2: Annual Trend of Number of Visitors to the Kusunoki (2006-2013).



Source: Data were provided by the Kusunoki.

Figure 2 shows the number of visitors for the past eight years. In looking at the figures, we need to be careful because the fiscal years as shown in the figure begin in April and end in March of the following year.

The peak season is July and August when group visitors, mainly youth clubs such as baseball clubs and Boy Scouts, are the most numerous. In other seasons, family visitors and groups of visitors come on weekends, the year-end, and New Year holidays.

Visitors are almost all domestic tourists, and tourists from abroad are rare. Repeat visitors account for around 60%. The breakdown where visitors came from is as follows: 54% from Chiba prefecture, 24% from the neighbouring Kanto area, and 22% from other areas, including 600 children from Fukushima in 2013.

As mentioned later in detail, the total number of visitors is over 10 thousand, including those who stay overnight and day trippers, that is, those who engage in experience services, take baths, and have meetings. Figure 2 indicates that the number of incoming visitors stagnated after the earthquake hit at the end of the fiscal 2010 year.

In Japan, the fiscal year starts in April and ends in March the following year. The Kusunoki does not engage in public relations (PR) activity except for their own website and having a linkage with the website of the local municipality; therefore, word of mouth by visitors is the most frequent means of PR.

Consequently, through these activities, those people who are involved in operating the Kusunoki gain not only jobs and income, but also self-confidence and local pride. Thus far they are satisfied with what they are doing, which results in strengthening the bonding social capital in the community while maintaining the linking social capital with the municipality.

Challenge 1: earthquake and tsunami in 2011

Attendance by children from Fukushima is a part of a government program to cheer up children in the radioactivity-disaster area, a program that continues to be supported until the present.

The disaster occurred in March 2011, which was named the Great East Japan Earthquake and had a magnitude of 9.0. The earthquake and the subsequent tsunami hit and devastated the Pacific coastline with a 500 km range mainly in three northern prefectures, Iwate, Miyagi, and

Fukushima. Total casualties reached 15,889 lives taken by the tsunami with nearly 2,600 people still missing (National Police Agency, January 2015).

Tsunami also hit the northern tip of Chiba prefecture and took 21 lives with two people missing (the same source). Comparatively speaking, the damage was relatively light in Chiba. Nevertheless, despite no physical damage in many tourist sites in Chiba, radioactivity emitted from the crippled nuclear power plant in Fukushima spread to the Kanto area where Tokyo and Chiba are located. Many people living in the area surrounding the power plant in Fukushima were displaced due to high contamination by radioactivity even if no physical damage was done to their property.

Radioactivity spread over their hometown and destroyed the local community in the heavily contaminated areas. Although the level of radioactivity was not serious in the Kanto area where Tokyo and Chiba are located, tourists on their own avoided tourism after the death of so many people and also worried about radioactivity. Although this self-restraint ended a few months later, the fear of radioactivity spread throughout this country, which was actually a harmful rumour with no scientific evidence to support it. In this respect, harmful rumours generated the most negative impact on tourism in rural Chiba.

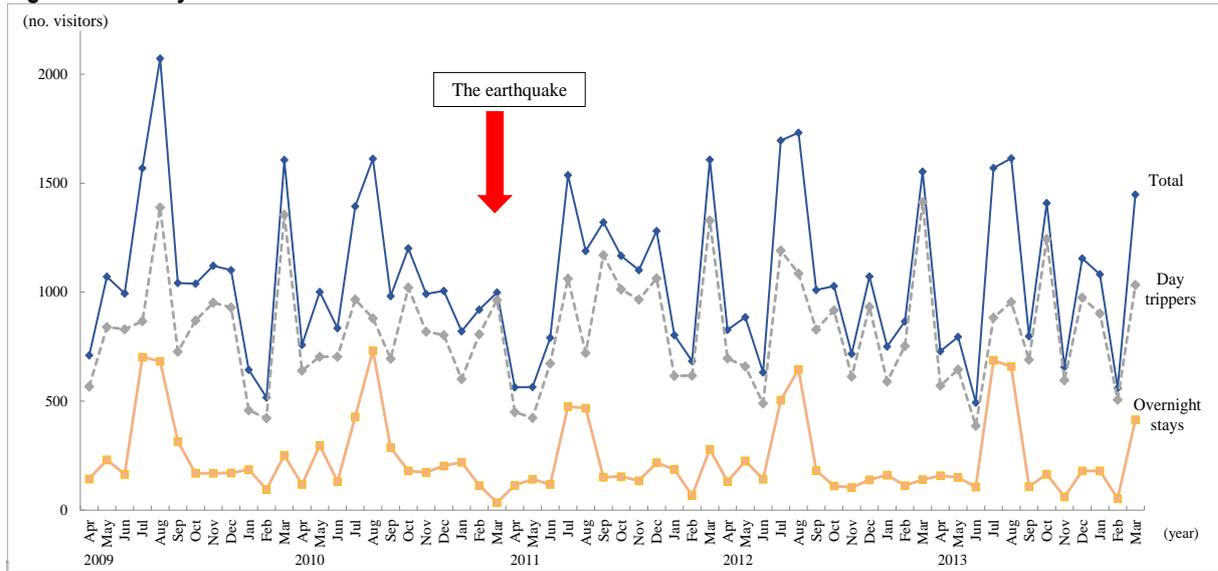
Bearing in mind this aspect, now let us take a look at how the disaster influenced the rural tourism activity of the Kusunoki despite no physical damage there. Apparently, the number of visitors had plummeted that March. Many reservations were canceled. This is because people were worried groundlessly about radioactivity.

The number of visitors in total plummeted in March 2011 when the earthquake occurred as depicted in Figure 3.

The figure illustrates monthly fluctuations in the number of visitors in three categories from April 2009 to March 2013. Figure 3 indicates that clear seasonality exists; the highest peak season is August, the second peak comes in April, and the third in December.

The earthquake caused the large irregular drop that is recorded in Figure 3 due to a series of cancellations just after the earthquake in March 2011. Although the seasonal pattern of demand came back in 2013, the level of demand has not returned to the 2009 level, which marked the highest record (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Monthly Trend of Number of Visitors to the Kusunoki.

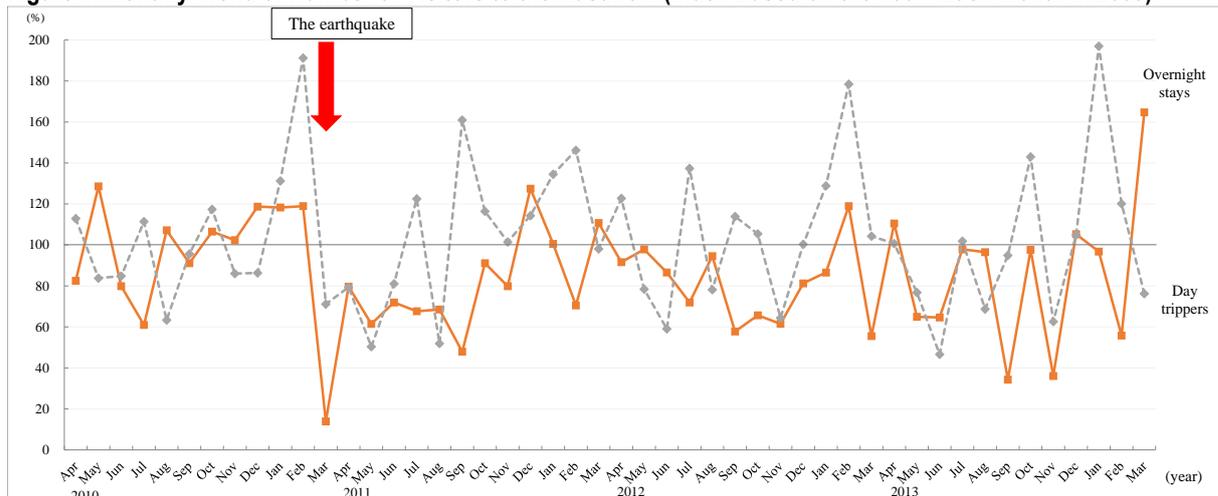


Source: Data were provided by the Kusunoki.

To examine the trend for recovery in demand the author compared data from 2011 to 2013 with the 2009 level. Figure 4 illustrates indices of the three categories, which are ratios of the number of visitors a month based on data for the same month in 2009. Among three indices, the overnight index dropped far more sharply than that of day trippers in March 2011. Since then, the recovery process of the overnight index has been slower than that of day trippers as shown in Figure 4.

In March 2013, total demand came back to 90% of the 2009 level. The manager of the Kusunoki said that although data for 2014 are not yet fully aggregated, indexes were better than in the previous year. Roughly speaking, it took three years to fully get back to the previous level. Consequently, we can say that people involved in the Kusunoki overcame the challenge by bonding social capital. This strong tie among the people concerned is the advantage of traditional bonding social capital in a rural community.

Figure 4. Monthly Trend of Number of Visitors to the Kusunoki (Index Based on the 100 = Each Month in 2009).



Source: Data were provided by the Kusunoki.

Challenge 2: succession, cohesive decision-making, and PR through social media

As we have seen above, the Kusunoki generates jobs and revenue in an ageing rural community by also playing a role as a community center that symbolizes

communal bonding. Nevertheless, the Kusunoki has several issues for future evolution, although those employees who work there are satisfied with what they do. The first challenge is to secure successors. The same staff has been involved since the inauguration of the Kusunoki, so they are getting old.

It is necessary to have a smooth transition to the younger generation. Those who are in their 30s living in the hamlet, however, have stable jobs already and work outside of the hamlet. Even if they return to work for the Kusunoki, the present price level for accommodations is not high enough to earn revenue sufficient to pay for fulltime employment of a young staff.

If the accommodation price goes up, the number of visitors will decrease unless attractive new services are offered. There could be an option to form an NPO or a community-based private company. People in the Kusunoki, however, are not sufficiently self-confident about their own entrepreneurship to start a new business evolution.

Another reason for this reserved attitude toward a business evolution is that they respect the principle of community consensus making. They are still skeptical about the decision-making ways of NPOs or private companies because these decision-making ways will not be compatible with the consensus-oriented community principle. If an NPO or private company is set up, then quick decisions are necessary, which is different from what they are now doing in the community.

Another point is that these entities are not always compatible with the community-based subsidy principle urged by the municipality as well. This is a dilemma that the Kusunoki people face between the community-based principle and further development of tourism activity. Although two families with children immigrated into this community before the earthquake, one family left because of the fear of radioactivity immediately after the earthquake and was followed by the other.

After that, by March 2015, two families and one couple had newly settled into the community. How to promote the entry of newcomers into the community is an emerging common topic for every rural community.

The second challenge is the renovation of the facility; for example, to renovate a much-aged wooden floor of the hall although that floor promotes warm nostalgic feelings. The issue of renovation is inevitable for users of the aged school facility.

Challenge 3: issue of PR activity and its implications

The third challenge is the issue of PR activity, which does not need immediate action, but would become crucial in the long run. The Kusunoki does not practice PR activity except for their own website and linkage with the website of the local municipality, so that word of mouth by visitors is the most frequent means of PR. A PR activity that is oriented toward a

social networking system (SNS) will be necessary in the future; therefore, the younger generation, which is good at dealing with SNSs, should be recruited for any form of involvement.

Consequently, it should be noted that community-based tourism activity of the Kusunoki will reach a turning point with the progression of ageing among the people concerned. In any case, capability building, especially targeting the younger generation in the area of SNS marketing and language skills in English, to cope with potential inbound demand is necessary. Raising rural entrepreneurship compatible with the community-based mind is the challenge ahead for this community. This challenge is common to all rural areas. It should be noted that ageing of bonding social capital places limitations on its capability to cope with these aspects of entrepreneurship and networking with external human resources.

To summarize, these facts mean that the ageing bonding social capital is not sufficiently effective in coping with newly evolving circumstances under conditions of an ageing population but is effective in overcoming the effects of a natural disaster through a community consensus.

Thus, since bonding social capital becomes old along with the ageing of the community, it is time for those people involved in the Kusunoki who have developed social capital solely based on a network within the local community to expand the network to outside of the community, i.e. bridging social capital.

This would enable them to mobilize external resources while keeping the advantages of bonding social capital. It is also true, however, that it is often difficult for local people to expand the network beyond the local community. In this respect support measures are necessary to create opportunities to build a new network.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Ageing is an unavoidable common issue not only for individuals but also for society in general. This paper shed light on community-based tourism activity as an entity of bonding social capital in super ageing rural Japan, which has faced ageing issues earlier and more seriously than any other counterpart in the world.

This paper investigated the evolution of a study case in rural Chiba and how people there coped with challenges by focusing on an unexpected challenge, i.e., the negative impact of the huge earthquake and subsequent radioactivity disaster that occurred in March, 2011, and an expected challenge, i.e.,

transition to the younger generation. Main findings are as follows:

1) Rural tourism in Japan has distinctive characteristics, different from their Western counterparts, which are more institutionally constrained on the demand side and with a low incentive for farmers to launch tourism activity due to the large portion of their income from off-farm jobs. Because of these constraints, rural tourism operators have to depend on day trippers.

2) The study case, the Lodge Kusunoki, investigated in this paper was based on a tight communal bandage and conducted rural tourism activity by utilizing a closed school that was renovated. Youth groups are a main target and meal services are also provided to local residents. Rural tourism activity generates not only an income source and jobs, but also self-confidence among residents in the ageing rural community, which strengthens community ties.

3) With this bonding social capital, despite facing a drop in the number of visitors and the slow recovery after the Great East Japan Earthquake, this unexpected challenge was overcome by community unity, which is the advantage of bonding social capital.

4) On the other hand, the rural community cannot cope well with issues of transition between generations and transformation of business forms, which is the limitation of bonding social capital.

5) Consequently, it should be noted that when a population becomes older, bonding social capital becomes older as well. While keeping the community-based spirit, the need to explore how to build a new extensive network of information and human resources based on the traditional form of local community is inevitable. Therefore, it is necessary to provide support measures to facilitate the development of an open network especially focusing on capacity building in terms of rural entrepreneurship targeting younger generations in collaboration with external technical experts.

6) In this respect, how to effectively expand the network from bonding social capital to including those outside of the community and how to make a smooth transition from the present participants to the younger generation should be scrutinized in the next study.

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