

The Renaissance of Creative Rural Communities

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1. Aims

This paper aims to show the creativity of rural communities that have become more open to outside various actors: organizations with technical and academic experts such as local governments, corporations, NPOs, and universities, as well as urbanites visiting there for recreation activities in nature, leading to the accumulation of bridging social capital (Putnam 2000) and the active interaction for the revitalization of rural communities.

2. Methods

For this purpose, the results of my field researches in rural areas in Kanagawa will be shown. Though they experienced the depopulation, the depletion of young workforce, and the expansion of abandoned farmlands and exhausted landscapes, like other parts of Japan, they are trying to solve the structural problems in cooperation with various actors now.

3. Results

Recently more rural communities and the local people including new settlers, both in Kanagawa and many parts of Japan, are trying to overcome rural problems with the help of various actors. Rural communities are also motivated to improve their hometowns and become more proud of them by interacting with urban visitors with high cultural sense.

Despite their contradicting interests, these diverse actors cooperate to recover the exhausted rural towns, to rediscover the valuable landscapes of satoyama, and reconstruct more creative communities that can be social and cultural magnets to increase bridging social capital and stimulate more active interactions. Now many rural areas are not homogeneous but more tolerant of differences, which is one of important factors for a creative place (Florida 2003).

4. Conclusion

Previous studies point out that rural communities in general are conservative and often socially isolate themselves from outside. This might be true. However, can we conclude that rural communities are inherently stagnant and even degenerative?

Rather they are more creative than we might imagine. Agriculture is one of the most creative human wisdoms to intervene into nature for the production of foods and to build aesthetic landscapes. In addition, rural communities are supported by many creative actors, contributing to further revitalization of rural areas now.

Though the creativity of many rural communities was damaged in the process of economic development and urbanization, they are not fatalistic victims: The renaissance of creative rural communities is taking place in many areas.

References

- Putnam, Robert D., 2000, *Bowling Alone*, New York City: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks.
Florida, Richard, 2003, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, New York City: Basic Books.