

Essential Factors in Promoting Endogenous Development During the Depopulation Era in Less-Favored Areas in Japan: A Case of Sugiyama Village, Maizuru City

Ryohei Yamashita

Faculty of Science and Technology
Tokyo University of Science, Japan
ryama@rs.noda.tus.ac.jp

Yasuaki Kuki

Graduate School of Agriculture
Kyoto University, Japan
yakuki69@kais.kyoto-u.ac.jp

Satoshi Hoshino

Graduate School of Agriculture
Kyoto University, Japan
shoshino@kais.kyoto-u.ac.jp

Abstract

A revitalization of less-favored areas that are on the verge of dissolution due to remarkable depopulation is an important subject. In such areas, it is very important not to depend on one-sided and transient support from the outside, but to aim at endogenous development in regional planning in addition to the conservation of sustainable regional vitality.

In this research paper, we aim to clarify the factors of promoting endogenous development by focusing on the role of the administration in the revitalization of less-favored areas in Japan. We selected the Sugiyama village in Maizuru City as an area for research, and analyzed the process of revitalization, by focusing on the actions of the administration. This was done through an interview with the prominent residents of Sugiyama village and officers of Maizuru and Kyoto prefecture.

The survey revealed that the administration was responsible for the accomplishment of endogenous development in Sugiyama village, specifically, for the synergistic effect between the administration and the village. This supports its exact 'quantity' and 'timing' and raises village residents' volition and motivation. The fact that the residents requested for more supportive policies was clearly demonstrated.

Although 'the new public', which consists of various citizen groups responsible for an area is expected to grow in the future, we defined the role of the administration in enhancing potential regional motivation for revitalization.

Keywords: endogenous development, less-favored areas, administration support, depopulation

Introduction

In Japan, some ministry agencies have investigated the sustainability of rural areas, as well as ‘measures against less-favored areas’, which has become one of the most important problems of national land policy in recent years. Based on a macro-level viewpoint, looking at the actual conditions of less-favored areas and the financial restrictions of basic municipalities requires us to consider the ‘selection and concentration’ of public investment in rural management. It is also very important to manage rural areas continuously due to the scarcity of peculiar cultural and ecological value, in addition to the preservation of food production and multiple functions of the farmlands.

Under present conditions, while it is expected that successors in places near less-favored areas will grant permission for entry and offer support, their human resources and organizations are scarce. Since finding a successor can be difficult, we should consider a regional plan that involves endogenous local development.

Endogenous development theorists include Tsurumi (1996), who regarded social change as a process; Mamadou (1997), who regarded it as an effect of raising the level of education and Miyamoto (2007) and Okada (2005), who regard endogenous development as reinvestment of power in an area.

Although there are various views about endogenous development, it is generally regarded as the theory of subject formation in the process of community development in a broad sense. However, in many cases, it means a qualitative ex-post evaluation of local development. However, since its meaning is generally unclear, it cannot be denied that the procedure involved in the strategy of participatory rural planning is not apparent.

While discussing it in the context of rural planning, such as Christopher Ray (2000), endogenous development should not only be considered as local knowledge and technology that is merely antithetical to external dependence and the like, but also of allowing participation in local management of public and private sectors besides a local resident¹. That is, endogenous development that can effectively absorb external support, which High Chris et al. (2007) refers to as hybrid development, should be established².

In this research paper, we pay attention to the village that succeeded in invigorating the critical situation of fate and accomplished endogenous development through urban-rural exchange and community gardens. By determining the present conditions of the area of study and the circumstances of the measures undertaken against depopulation by municipalities³, we considered invigorating the less-favored areas with declining population.

Study Area

The Sugiyama village in Maizuru of the Kyoto prefecture is our area of study (see Fig. 1). According to the 2005 census of agriculture and forestry, Sugiyama Village is a small-scale mountainous village whose population is 64, with 14 households. Its conditions for access from urban areas are comparatively bad and it takes a little less than 3 hours to get there by car from Kyoto City, a travel distance that is not convenient for the young people. It is a typically disadvantaged area whose permanent residents are aging that exceeds 50% of the total population.

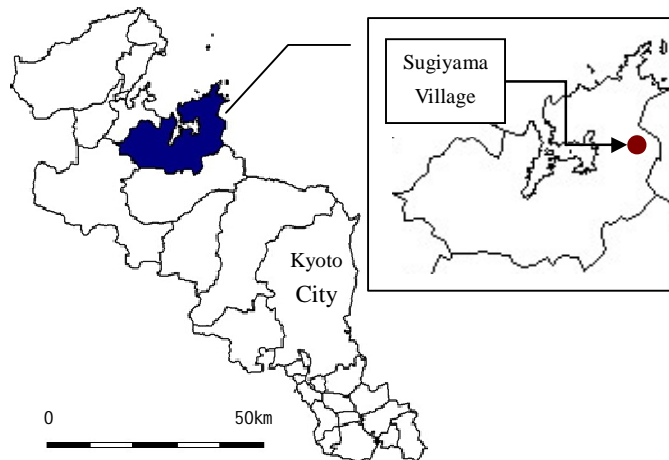


Fig.1 The location of Sugiyama village

For the purpose of grasping the situation of farmland management and the village's local resources as well as collecting other related references, we interviewed three leaders of the regional autonomous organization in the survey conducted in November 2009. Moreover, we interviewed eight personnel of a prefecture in Maizuru in May 2009 and scrutinized the circumstances of the measures of municipality, local change and so forth related to Sugiyama village. Below, we explain the deployment of a local activity for land use, based on information acquired by the investigation.

The Circumstances of Endogenous Development

Depopulation in Sugiyama Village (~1999)

As a result of the rapid progression of the desolation of farmlands in the Sugiyama village, the 2005 census of agriculture and forestry highlighted that the abandonment rate of cultivation rose to 27.8%, making this village the area with the highest rate of abandonment of cultivation in the city. Furthermore, the abandonment of cultivation increased the damage to farmlands by wildlife. The residents could hardly maintain their farmlands. They have also lost the motivation to engage in farming activities.

Tapping the “direct income payment” for endogenous development of intermediate and mountainous areas (4) (2000 ~ 2001)

Direct income payment for intermediate and mountainous areas is a policy that provides subsidy to the villagers on the condition that the farmlands would be managed and maintained for five years. This policy took effect in Japan in 2000. The villagers in Sugiyama village formed a local association composed of 14 households. Meanwhile, the Maizuru agricultural administration helped facilitate the establishment of community gardens as a strategy to maintain the farmlands within the village

Realization of endogenous development (2002~)

Simultaneous with the establishment of the community garden is educating the potential candidates (who are members of the local association) through hands-on and actual demonstration. A handbook about community gardens was also produced highlighting the multifunctionality of agriculture in the village. The handbook also encourages the city residents to gain farming experiences by renting the community gardens in Sugiyama village.

A 1000-m² community garden has a corresponding rental fee of 1000 yen /year. Most of those who have entered into agreement are residents of Maizuru. The rental fee covers the use of the area and the payment for the villagers who are maintaining the gardens. Because of constant interaction and information exchange between the villagers and the plantation users (leases), the community gardening has spread out and expanded, and has become a rural-urban exchange activity.

The community gardening paved the way for the establishment of the NPO ‘Meisui no sato Sugiyama’ in October 2005, comprised of all the village residents, 32 garden users and participants of the rural-urban exchange program. This organization has become the fountainhead of the local vitality because it has also been organizing local events such as music festival and joint harvesting. Table 1 presents the different activities that have been organized by the NPO.

⁴ ‘Direct income payment in intermediate and mountainous areas’ is a policy that delivers a subsidy according to contract area on the condition of continuous management of bad-use conditions of the farmland for five years. It was enforced in Japan in 2000.

Table 1. Principal interaction between actors in the process of endogenous development.

Year	Regional matters	External to village	Internal to village	Maizuru City
1999	Decrease in population aggravated and participation of DIP considered.	Only individual exchange.	Although cultivation abandonment was aggravated, village residents did not have any power.	Advised villagers to apply for DIP as it is considered a trump card for local revitalisation.
2000	DIP was started and the level of abandonment of farmland in the village was improved.		Although farmland maintenance was completed in the wake of application to DIP, there was no successor.	Villagers were asked to start a community garden as a solution to the shortage of successors.
2001	In place of a labour shortage in the village, recruitment for community gardens and maintenance was undertaken.	The residents of the urban areas of Maizuru city mainly participated	In the beginning, efficacy of developing an community garden was skeptical for village residents.	Took charge of the advertisement that proposed developing farmlands in community gardens in villages
2002	Prefaced by endogenous development, community gardens were instituted completely.	Extension of a human network and activity.	At first, although village residents were supervising city residents' activity, an exchange gradually began.	NPO establishment enabled the organisation of various activities.
2005	During the inauguration of the NPO, villages inside and outside this region banded together and formed an organisation.			
2006	The region re-solidified in the wake of the prefectural revitalisation project that was additionally devised.		The event aiming at a successor's cultivation was plotted strategically.	Positioned a village that features continuous endogenous development

Factors that motivated the villagers to engage in endogenous development

Depopulation and aging are two factors that contribute to the declining vitality of many villages in Japan. The model and approach that was employed by Kyoto and Maizuru in revitalizing Sugiyama village is very much impressive.

The Maizuru administration played a key role in transforming the mindset of the villagers to restore the abandoned farmlands. Through their active interaction with the villagers, the latter was able to develop their consciousness of maintaining the farmlands. The DIP also served as a factor in motivating the villagers to restore and improve their farmlands.

The Maizuru administration has also devised a strategy that would not only promote the restoration of the abandoned farmlands, but would also revitalize the local culture, through the establishment of the community garden.

Synergy Effect

The revitalization of the Sugiyama village began by solving the problems expressed by the villagers, which motivated the latter and paved the way for endogenous development. It was also fortunate that the enforcement of the DIP policy coincided with the escalating concern about the preservation of the farmlands. The establishment of the community gardens covered the shortage of labor force that would maintain the farmlands.

For example, Mr M said the following during an interview, “*Some users of the community garden are studying agriculture eagerly, so that farmlands in a village are guided conversely*”. “*As a user of the community garden who enjoys agriculture immensely, we think that we are favored compared to other areas*”. *Village residents have enjoyed working hard and cultivating the land.*” From this information, we argue that a direct face-to-face exchange started between residents of the city and the village and this led to the success of the community garden.

In addition, users of the community garden consulted the Prefectural Investment Project, which is a superior government agency. Taking advantage of the human network that was established in the community garden, the workshop by ‘Furusato Hozen Katsudou’ of Kyoto prefecture involved in NPO was held at the time that a new activity plan was being crafted. During the project implementation, the place and time of cooperation of labor that was a sore point during the planning stage, the bilateral work towards planning practice, and sharing results and so on, were resolved. Thus, building the social capital of the village was addressed. That is, the mechanism connected to generate the social capital of the area was included.

Technical and administrative support

Provision of technical support, timing, and continuous encouragement among the villagers are among the essential factors for endogenous development in Sugiyama village. An interview with a Maizuru personnel indicated that as much as possible, they would not like to force their intentions and recommendations for the villagers. Instead, they would like the villagers to just seek for their help and assistance, when needed. However, in times of crises, the Maizuru administration comes in. In addition, the Maizuru administration may withdraw or disregard its suggestions or recommendations should the villagers think that these are no longer appropriate.

Such sensitivity and approaches adopted by the administrative personnel of Maizuru are considered as important factors that led to the endogenous development in Sugiyama Village.

Conclusion

This study concludes that an endogenous development could be induced by an outside organization. Appropriate strategies, proper timing, and harnessing the potentials of the village are among the mechanisms that could help the villagers realize the need to restore and revitalize their village.

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