

学術とふるさとづくりとの連携：
金沢大学による「祭り支援プロジェクト」が能登半
島の農村社会に与える影響

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Connecting Academia and *Furusato-zukuri* in Rural Japan: The “Festival Support Project” of Kanazawa University and its Impact on a Village Community in the Noto Peninsula.

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Abstract

This article reviews the activities of *furusato-zukuri* (native place-making) in Japan during the last 40 years and discusses its potential today. While the Japanese economy declined during this period from an economic boom to an uncertain situation, the countryside's problems of depopulation, over-aging, and low business opportunities became serious. In the bubble period, *furusato-zukuri* policies burnt great amounts of money for doubtful local recovery projects and created a critical myth of self-reliant revitalization. In the 1990s and 2000s, financial support from authorities decreased due to town amalgamations and made the situation for Japan's rural areas more difficult. Many local communities shrank and were forced to give up their village festivals (*matsuri*) which were essential for their identity. In 2010, Kanazawa University began a project to support village festivals in the Noto Peninsula by sending students to help and interact with the locals. It creates an important chance for contact between urban youth and rural elders. In a mutual exchange, the young students can learn about the countryside's problems, and the villagers receive support for the continuation of their festivals. Although there are some difficulties and critical voices, this concept of creating strong collaborations between remote village communities and universities as institutions of research and education takes a big step towards sustainable revitalizing activities for Japan's over-aged and depopulated countryside.

Keywords

furusato-zukuri, village community, local festival

学術とふるさとづくりとの連携

— 金沢大学による「祭り支援プロジェクト」が能登半島の農村社会に与える影響 —

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要旨

本論では、日本における40年前から現在までのふるさと作りについて、能登半島にある村を例として最近のプロジェクトを評価する。日本の経済は1970年代の好景気から不景気へ変化してきたことに伴い、農村地域の離村や高齢化の問題が深刻になってきた。バブル経済のころには、政

府がふるさと作りのプロジェクトを手厚く支援し、農村地域の自立活性化という理想的なモデルが広がっていった。しかし、それは本当に地方活性化に持続的なメリットを与えるものなのかという疑問もある。1990年代になると、日本の農村地域の状況はかなり厳しくなっていった。市町村合併の影響で地方自治体への政府からの支援が減少した一方、過疎化に伴い、農村の人間関係とアイデンティティ維持に重要な、風土に根ざす祭りが消滅した事例がみられるようになった。これを背景に、金沢大学は2010年に能登半島にある消えそうな祭りを支援する大学生を派遣するプロジェクト（能登祭り支援プロジェクト）を開始した。このプロジェクトによって、都市に住んでいる大学生が農村地域と深い交流をすることが可能となった。批判的な声と問題がないわけではないけれども、本論に述べたような地方大学との連携が過疎化や高齢化に悩む限界集落を持続的に活性化させる可能性があるだろう。

キーワード

ふるさとづくり, 農村社会, 祭り

Introduction¹

After participating in the “Festival Support Project” (*Matsuri Shien Purojekuto*) in autumn 2011, I returned to the village of Natauchi in February 2012 together with two researchers from Kanazawa University for interviews with the local settlement leaders. One of them did not come to our appointment but sent us a fax with the following excerpt:

[...] The preservation of my settlement has become difficult. The town hall and the members of different organizations don't help us. The number of participants at our festivals decreases every year and the continuation becomes impossible. This is the situation of decline in my settlement. The number of inhabitants decreases every year. The old people are getting older while the young people are going away, leaving a sad silence behind them. If you see this situation every day, you have to give up. With the remaining few people, it doesn't matter what you do, you can't change anything. [...] ²

There are not many people in the rural areas of Japan who speak in such a direct

manner about their problems and desperation. The reasons for the decline of rural Japan are numerous; over-aging, migration to urban areas, and low economic opportunities are just the most obvious explanations. Paradoxically, the public discourse of rural Japan is still dominated by nostalgic romanticism and the critical belief in self-reliant revitalization. *Furusato-zukuri* (native place-making³) is still considered an effective tool against the decline of rural communities; example cases of troubled villages, which were transformed to flourish touristic destination, are omnipresent in media. However, the disappointing reality of rural Japan and the numerous cases of failed projects are often concealed or ignored in the discourse. Critical approaches are still rare, especially from Japanese scholars. In this article, I show a new approach of *furusato-zukuri* as a collaboration between university students and villagers, which can offer more positive effects for both parties than many earlier projects.

In the first part of this article, I present the discourse of native place-making in Japan from the 1970s until today. I explain the role of grassroots and politics for the romanticism

of the rural life. The second part discusses, by the example of the village Natauchi, how *furusato-zukuri* is organized and implemented. I consider the village's revitalization projects for agriculture, tourism, and welfare, and reflect on the potential for sustainable development. The last and largest part focuses on the "Festival Support Project" of Natauchi's *furusato-zukuri* group and Kanazawa University, which offers students the chance to help at local festivals during a short-term home stay and to interact with the locals. In three subsections, I analyze the influence of over-aging and depopulation on the festival, the interaction process during the festival, and evaluate its opportunities for revitalization. As research methods, I conducted two participant observations at the "Festival Support Project," interviewed the local settlement leaders, and made a questionnaire for male adult villagers.^{4,5,6}

1 The Discourse on *Furusato-zukuri* in Japan

This first part gives just a short, and by far not sufficient, critical introduction to the origins of the Japanese discourse on *furusato-zukuri* and its development from the 1970s until present by tracing the beginnings of grassroots, political agencies, and current tendencies. I mainly focus on some essential literature written in English by socio-cultural anthropologists and mention some new approaches to *furusato-zukuri* from Japanese scholars in the last section.

The word *furusato* can be translated as "native place" or "hometown/village."⁷ The term is not limited to one's individual origin but also describes the idea of a national native place. The typical landscape of *furusato* includes key-features like low mountains, woods, rice paddy fields, a river, and a small village with old

houses, where the local community members live a simple and rustic life (Robertson 1991: 13). Many scholars recognize a similarity or even equivalence of *furusato* and *satoyama* (village and forested mountains) (e.g. Knight 2010: 422; Yuki 2013: 54), a concept of so-called traditional landscape management and community life that recently gained a lot of attention. The antithesis to *furusato* is the urban city, where the people live in a society, not a community. This image roots in Western sociology like David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) (Toriyama 2008: 2) and in Japanese "nativist folklore studies" (*minzokugaku*), most prominently contributed by Yanagita Kunio (Yoneyama 1996: 3). *Furusato* is an imagery for all that is believed lost in the urban society: compassion, tradition, motherly love (*amae*), and a family network (Robertson 1988: 503). Some scholars recognize *furusato* as another expression of *nihonjinron*⁸ and the attempt to create a unified Japanese identity (e.g. Ivy 1995: 26; Ertl 2008: 95-96).

The newer history of *furusato-zukuri* started during the period of economic growth in the 1970s⁹. Mass migration from rural to urban areas led to a collective sense of homelessness and a strong romanticism of rural Japan, a "retro boom" or respectively "*furusato* boom" (Creighton 1997: 241-244). The mourning for the lost rural life became a regular topic in popular culture, especially in movies and *enka* songs (Robertson 1988: 497-507), and travel marketing campaigns like "Discover Japan" (1970s) or "Exotic Japan" (1980s) appealed to the imagined homelessness of urban people (Narita 2000: 25; Ivy 1995: 35). The demand of national tourism in that time enforced many local grassroots to engage in so-called *furusato-zukuri* projects; until present, many villages that suffer under depopulation and over-aging

recognize tourism as a chance for new economic prosperity. These villages offer visitors, besides a *furusato* or *satoyama* landscape, activities like harvesting rice or participation in the local festivals. These sometimes also called *furusato-mura* (native place villages) are in many cases not dependant on agriculture and are just used to attract tourists (Robertson 1988: 508-510).

Since the 1980s, *furusato-zukuri* has also received a lot of attention by the government. During the bubble era, politicians like Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru (06.11.1987-03.06.1989) made *furusato sōsei* (an official political term for *furusato-zukuri*)¹⁰ a national agency (Yasui 2000: 101). He wrote the book *Nihon. Subarashii kuni. Watakushi no "Furusato sōsei ron"* (Japan: Great Country. My Thesis of "Native Place-Making"; 1987), in which he explains his vision of *furusato-zukuri* as a project to revitalize rural areas and to foster the Japanese society: "*Furusato sōsei* does not only mean development for rural areas or regional support. In my understanding, *furusato* is a solid base for a good life, on which Japanese people can live as Japanese people and of which they can be proud." (Takeshita 1987: 25-26). Takeshita's vision of *furusato sōsei* as the solution for several contemporary national problems like the dependency of imports was realized in 1989 through the program *Furusato Sōsei Ichi Oku En Jigyō* (Native Place-Making 100 Million Yen Program). This program supported local activities of *furusato-zukuri* in city, towns, or villages throughout Japan by contributing 100 million Yen; every municipality which presented a project received this huge financial assistance. The program was stopped after only one year due to the bubble crisis; however, 3,286 municipalities had submitted project outlines and most were realized (Yasui 2000: 95;

Toyama 1993: 2). Although some municipalities might have used the 100 Million Yen fund for more or less sustainable development activities, the vast majority burnt the 100 Million Yen for unstable projects. I show two cases from the Noto Peninsula, in the neighborhood of Natauchi. Kahoku City put up the *Shichifukujin Sentā* (Center of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune), three buildings in the forms of a dragon, a sphinx, and a pyramid. These buildings were used as a gemstone museum, a restaurant, and as a so-called "spiritual center," to name just a few purposes. The owners had changed many times and debts had piled up, until the complex was finally shut down in 2010 (Chūnichi Shimibun 2010). Hakui City used the program's support for hosting an international symposium on extraterrestrial life with 40,000 participants in February 1990. However, because of the controversy of the topic, information on the symposium was not allowed to be published in the media (Toyama 1993: 58-60). Until today, Hakui celebrates its questionable image as Japan's alien city (Hakui City 2015). Although many such stories of the excessive *furusato-zukuri* from the bubble era are forgotten today, I think that they are worth being remembered as a warning about financial risks and in consequence analyzing new projects critically.

The academic discourse on *furusato-zukuri* became generally more reflective since the 1990s and emphasized problematic aspects as the low economic merits or the lack of sustainability. The hard life conditions in "communities on the edge" (*genkai shūraku*), which suffer under massive depopulation and over-aging, and even the disappearance of such communities became a serious topic (Matanle 2014: 3-4). Western scholars, in particular, discuss furthermore the lack of authenticity in

Japanese rural tourism; e.g. handcraft courses marketed as a "*furusato* experience" (Creighton 1995), or the local "invention of traditions" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) to attract tourists (Martinez 1990). According to some scholars, the persistent and critical romanticism of rural Japan could be called "the most striking irony of the Japanese countryside at the opening of the twenty-first century" (Kelly 2006: 69). The idealistic images of rural Japan are a double-edged sword, which on the one hand attracts urban people who can help to revitalize local communities, but on the other hand may lead to over-optimistic projects as in the bubble era and raise false hopes in independently organized grassroots' projects. Recently, Japanese scholars also suppose a rather critical approach to rural revitalization activities; one should first ask for the reasons that created the actual difficulties and then analyze possible measures. The four basic and major problems of declining rural areas in Japan are in most cases 1) insufficient economic opportunities, 2) the lack of young and leading individuals, 3) the late agencies in social capital, education, and research, and 4) the decline of social reproductive support systems (Shimohirao 2006: 112-121). Particularly the second point is often seen as a key factor for innovative projects; charismatic leaders on the top of grassroots or NPOs are important for the creation of common activities in rural areas (Sawamura 2005: 149-150). U-turners or I-turners¹¹, who have studied or worked in urban areas, can bring with their outside experience new perspectives to rural communities (Knight 1994: 642-644; Yamamoto 2013). The following case study of this article, however, discusses an example for the third point; an innovative agency of education, research, and social capital between a village and a university.

2 Furusato-zukuri in Natauchi¹²

Based on the short resume on the discourse on *furusato-zukuri* in Japan, I focus on the *furusato-zukuri* activities of the village Natauchi (Natauchi-chiku). First, I describe the village's location and situation, second, the organization of *furusato-zukuri* projects by local grassroots, and third, past or present action plans for local agriculture, tourism, and welfare. Although this village might be just one particular case, I think that this example shows some tendencies that can be generalized for *furusato-zukuri* projects everywhere in Japan.

Natauchi is located in the East of the Noto Peninsula, near to Nanao Bay, and about 80 kilometers distanced from the prefecture's capital and economic center Kanazawa (see Figure 1). The village consists of ten settlements (*shūraku*): Bessho, Fujinose, Furue, Kawachi, Kitamenden, Machiya, Nishiyachi, Ōdaira, Torigoe, and Uwabatake (see Figure 2); nine of them have been part of the village since the Meiji period, and one (Bessho) was added in 1970. The oldest data of Natauchi's population (see Figure 3) dates back to 1889; when at that time there lived 2,515 inhabitants in the village. Up to World War II, the population shrank slightly, but it recovered due to the post-war migration from the urban areas back to the countryside. However, when the economic growth began, the population shrank again dramatically. The over-aging rate (*kōreikaritsu*, inhabitants older than 65 years) was 37.2 percent in 2011 (see Figure 4). At that time, the over-aging rate in the nearest city Nanao was 28.7 percent and Japan's average rate was 23.1 percent (Japanese Government 2011: 2). 2012 counted 963 inhabitants in Natauchi and 47 houses unoccupied (see Table 1). As in

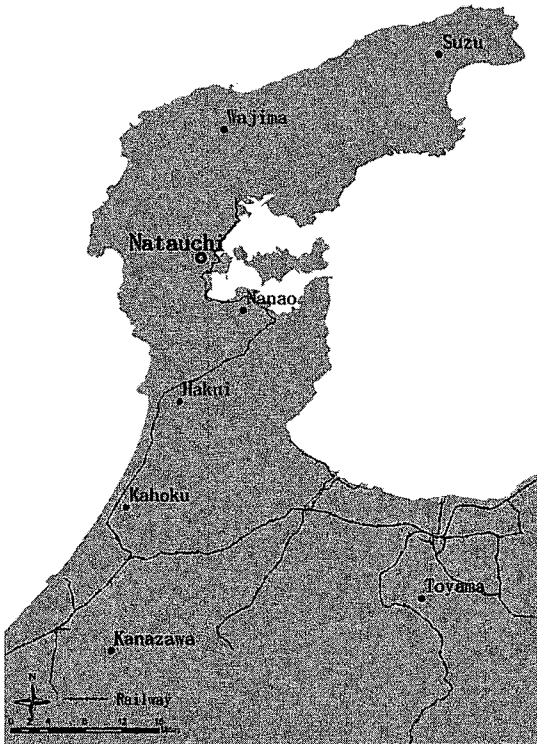


Figure 1: The location of Natauchi.
Source: created by the author.

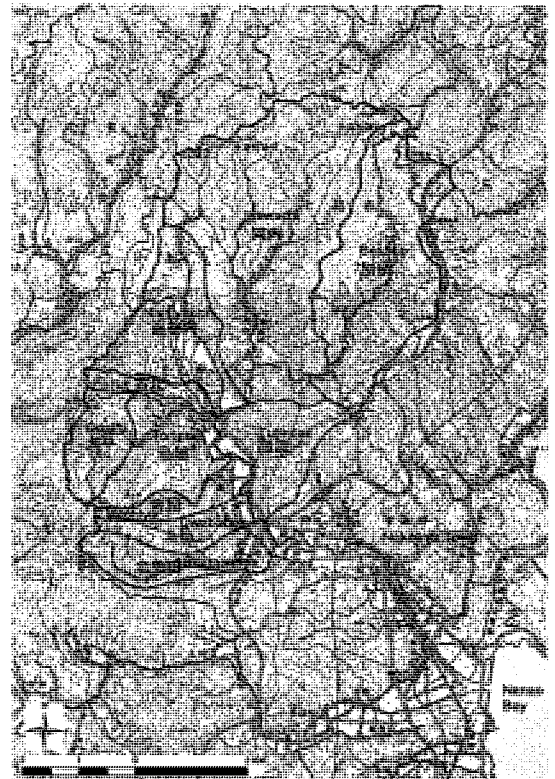


Figure 2: The village of Natauchi and its settlements.
Source: created by Horiuchi Mio, English place names added by the author; permission for reuse by the author.

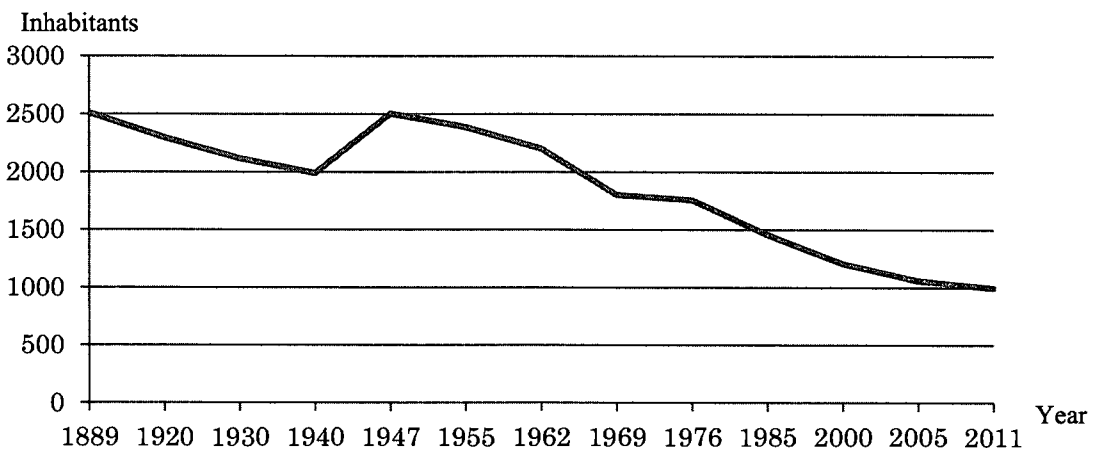


Figure 3: The population of Natauchi.

Data sources: collected from the following local publications or materials; created by the author.

Nakajima Town. 1986. *Nakajima-chō chōki sōgō seibi keikaku*: 25.

Nakajima Town. 1996. *Chōsei 40 shūnenkinen. Nakajima-chō no rekishi to bunka*: 138.

Furusato-zukuri Council of Natauchi. 2009. *Shūroku kinō saisokushin jigyō itaku jigyō*: 3.

Furusato-zukuri Council of Natauchi. 2012. *Nanao-shi Nakajima-chō Natauchi chiku nenreibetsu jinkō shūkeihyō*.

Table 1: Inhabitants, adult men group members, and housing data of Natauchi.

Settlement	Inhabitants	Adult men group members	Households	Unoccupied houses	Houses reoccupied at the festival
Bessho	43	3	15	6	3
Kawachi	141	2	47	5	2
Ōdaira	13	No data	No data	No data	No data
Furue	64	5	17	1	0
Torigoe	79	2	31	3	0
Nishiyachi	165	9	56	20	5
Fujinose	208	14	63	4	4
Machiya	73	4	22	1	1
Uwabatake	68	2	21	4	3
Kitamenden	109	11	32	3	1
Natauchi	963	52	304	47	19

Data source: interview sessions with the settlement leaders of Natauchi by Kamiya Hiroo, Horiuchi Mio, and Timo Thelen in February 2012; created by the author.

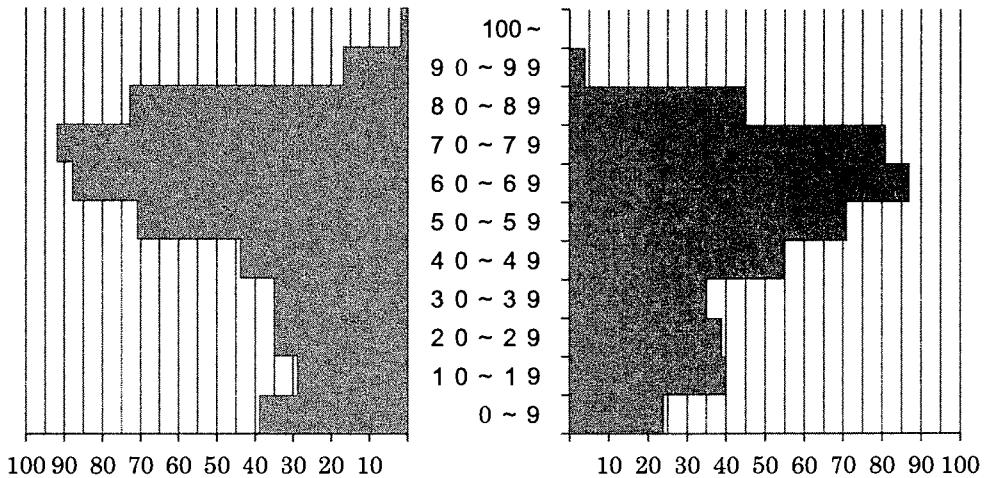


Figure 4: Population pyramid for Natauchi (2012) (left women, right men).
 Data source: Furusato-zukuri Council of Natauchi. 2012. *Nanao-shi Nakajima-chō Natauchi chiku nenreibetsu jinkō shūkeihyō*; created by the author.

countless remote villages anywhere in Japan, the depopulation causes many problems for the local community. In addition, the infrastructure of public transport by bus or train is quite limited; thus a car is indispensable for the daily life, and it is difficult for outsiders to come to the village.

Furusato-zukuri activities in Natauchi started in the early 1980s during the previously men-

tioned boom of grassroots engaged in rural tourism. The Natauchi Furusato-zukuri Kyōgikai (Natauchi Native Place-Making Council; in the following called "Furusato-zukuri Council") was founded in 1981 with the aim to stop the increasing depopulation. Its primary goal was to make young women come to the village and get married, but the priorities changed because of the critical degree of over-aging in the 1990s.

Furthermore, the municipal amalgamation in 2005 made the name “Natauchi” disappear from local institutions and reduced the financial support from the government. The Furusato-zukuri Council consists of several groups which represent different members and interests of the community such as the local groups for men, women, elders, inhabitants who are active in agriculture, and a welfare NPO which was founded in 2010. A special group is the 1958 founded Zaikyō Natauchi Sato Tomokai (Friends of the Village Natauchi Living in Tokyo) which consists of 265 relatives of inhabitants located in Tokyo who give financial support to the village. Another interesting group of the Furusato-zukuri Council is the Reisui Kanri Kumiai (Spiritual Water Management Group) which takes care of a local spring and a little shop nearby for agricultural products. This second group was founded in 1993 and consists of 85 members. The Furusato-zukuri Council of Natauchi defines its most important aim as to unify the settlements’ activities and to create a stronger sense of community as a village. The ten settlements are still perceived as crucial boundaries by many villagers, but to fight against problems as over-aging, it is necessary to overcome these boundaries and to collaborate. The recent leaders of the Furusato-zukuri Council are mostly U-turners.

The local agriculture is one of the Furusato-zukuri Council’s main targets. The Council made a working plan until 2016 to create and promote its own rice brand “Natauchi Tanadamai.” Different variations of package size, trading ways, and forms of production were tested. However, the popularity of this brand seems quite low¹³ and the chance of successful development is rather small, because of the huge competition from other villages in this region. A similar working plan was

created for vegetables. *Nakajima-na*, a local vegetable comparable to spinach is, besides rice, the most important agricultural product of the village. According to the working plan, it should primarily be sold pickled; as *tsukemono*. The Tokyo based group of relatives (Zaikyō Natauchi Sato Tomokai) and collaborations with Kanazawa University were expected to push the sale of *nakajima-na*. By 2015, a turnover of 4.5 million Yen was intended, while the turnover of 2011 was just 2.5 million Yen. However, a closer look on the local agriculture leaves doubt about the possible success. The village’s agricultural fields measure 200 hectares, from which 75.9 hectares had been abandoned until 2009. In 2012, agriculture was the main source of income for only one inhabitant of Natauchi, an organic farmer of 60 years. Three women, all over 80 years old, helped on his farm with the vegetable processing and sale. In addition, there are two groups of retired men (five and thirteen members respectively) who cultivate rice and vegetables; their wives support them in processing and sale. The primary customers are relatives living in other places. Thus, agriculture in Natauchi plays no economical role – what is rather typical for village communities that engage in *furusato-zukuri* as mentioned in the first part of this article – and the continuation is uncertain due to the over-aging of the active people. Therefore, the Furusato-zukuri Council may not put too much effort in the promotion and sale of local products, but just try to keep up a certain degree of agricultural activities for the wellbeing of the older villagers.

Tourism is another objective for the local revitalization planning. The Furusato-zukuri Council wants to offer several types of active or green tourism like participation in agricultural work or traditional food processing.

Seasonal short-time trips in collaboration with Kanazawa University or the relatives' group in Tokyo were planned. More than tourism as business, these trips should create a mutually corresponding relationship with people from urban areas and promote the local products because the village has no infrastructure and capacities for hosting big groups of visitors. As in the case of agricultural products, the competition in the field of tourism is overwhelming and probably possesses better access connections and hosting facilities for visitors.

An interesting object of the *furusato-zukuri* in Natauchi is the "spiritual water" (*reisui*) spring. In 1979, a villager was believed to be healed from a neurological disease by drinking the spring's water. Although this mysterious story went through media, the location of the spring was hard to access and therefore it gained no greater popularity. At beginning of the 1990s, in the aftermath of the 100 Million Yen Program and its rush for marketing local particularities, the spring was rediscovered and the construction of a "Spiritual Water Park" (Reisui Kōen) began. A parking lot for 16 cars and a building nearby were constructed for 200 million Yen, mostly taken from governmental support funds. In 1999, a second building was constructed for selling local agricultural products by the costs of 50 million Yen, and the paddy fields around were restored for cosmetic reasons. The water of the spring is freely available, only parking costs a small fee. The yearly number of visitors is constantly at about 40,000 or 50,000 persons (Gao 2000: 101-103; Chiiku Kasseika Sentā 2011: 00:04:07). However, nearly the entire turnover is needed to cover the costs of maintenance and staff. In an interview study from 2000, some villagers

doubted, if the construction of the park has brought any changes for the village at all (Gao 2000: 105). The Furusato-zukuri Council did not mention the spring in its working plans of 2011; the overestimation of its potential to attract visitors seems to be understood. Recently, the number of parking spaces was also reduced by half.

The last major project of the Furusato-zukuri Council of Natauchi is the local welfare NPO which offer support to the many over-aged inhabitants (see Figure 4). Concrete activities of the welfare NPO are a transport service for elders with limited mobility to hospital visits or shopping, and a safety service of regular home visits or phone calls. During a test period of four months in 2011, the transport service was used 120 times and the safety service 320 times; and the future expected a higher usage of these two services. In addition to the transport service, a companion for hospital visits and shopping trips has been planed, furthermore the purchase of a small transport van. A closed nursery school was planned to be reconstructed and reopened as an elderly home, and this project was completed recently. Although the welfare NPO was only just founded in 2010, its activities to the state of 2012 can be considered as very positive. Instead of speculating on future development, the recent and most critical problems of the over-aged village are the major target of the welfare NPO. However, one could question why this NPO was not founded earlier than in 2010, because the over-aging of Natauchi is not just a recent problem. During the 1990s where 250 million Yen was used to build a rather unsuccessful "Spiritual Water Park"; what if the welfare projects mentioned above had already started that time? As mentioned in the previous part, the autonomy of

furusato-zukuri grassroots was longtime believed as an advantage to revitalize local communities, but the risk of overestimating its own potential can also lead to unrealistic projects with unsustainable perspectives. In the next part, I present a new and probably more helpful approach for Natauchi's revitalization.

3 The "Festival Support Project"

This part analyzes the "Festival Support Project"; which due to its length is divided into three subsections. I start in the first section with some general remarks on the local festivals of Natauchi and the difficulty of continuation due to over-aging and depopulation. The results of a questionnaire for locals and interviews with the settlement leaders investigate the meaning

of the festivals for the villagers' identity. In the second section, the "Festival Support Project" itself is outlined and described based on my participation. Finally, in the third section, the settlement leaders' voices and responses from students who participated lead to a critical evaluation of the project.

3.1 The Local Festivals of Natauchi in Times of Over-Aging and Depopulation

Before focusing on the project, a short introduction to the local festivals (*matsuri*) in the Noto Peninsula is necessary to understand the background of the project. In the Noto Peninsula, there exists many local customs which are regarded as unique in Japan like *aenokoto*, a kind of Shinto thanks-giving ceremony, which was designated as a UNESCO

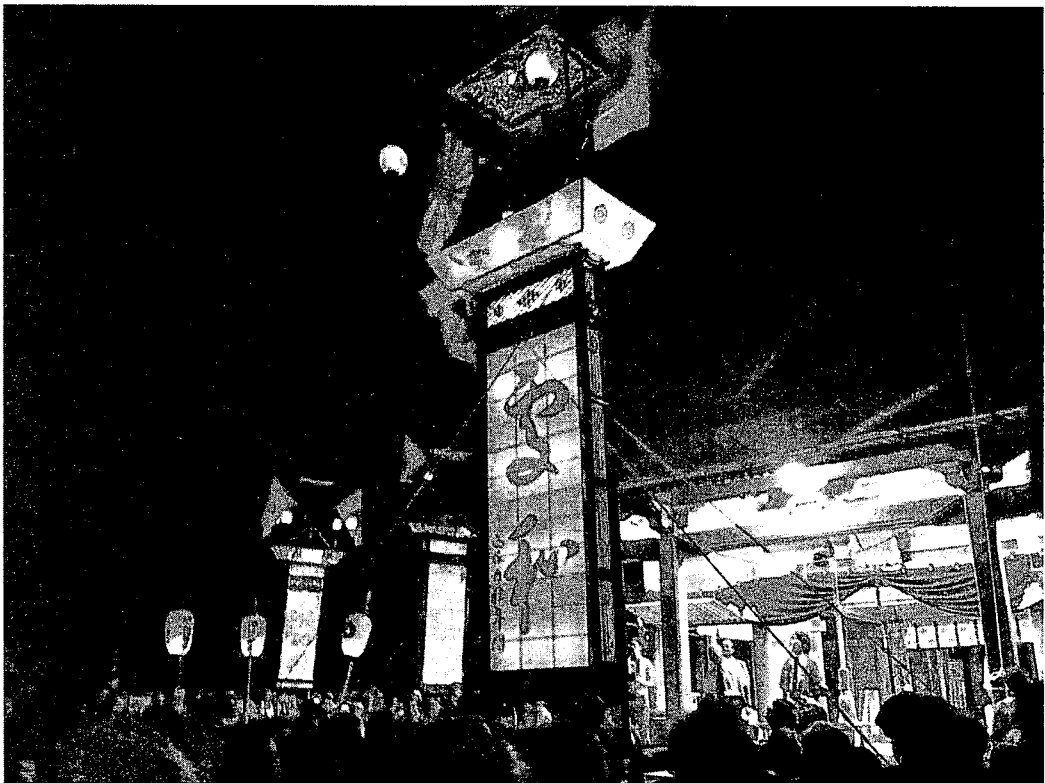


Figure 5: The kiriko festival of Natauchi in 2011 (private photo by the author).

Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009. But also the *kiriko* and *wakubata* festivals (see Figure 5 & 6) which are well-known and important relics of the local culture (Kamiya 2011: 14). *Kiriko* (from *kirikotōrō*; paper lanterns in temples) are portable wooden constructions with a colorful paper outside and candles burning inside. *Wakubata* (frame flag) are similar constructions that resemble sailing ships. An information pamphlet from the Kiriko Museum in Wajima City (Wajima Kiriko Kaikan) showed that there had been nineteen *kiriko* festivals and four *wakubata* festivals in the Noto Peninsula by 2011 and that they were still regularly held. The four *wakubata* festivals in the area of Nakajima Town, the higher municipality of Natauchi, were designated as an Important National Intangible Folklore Heritage (*Kokushitei Jūyō Mukei*

Minzoku Bunkasai) in 1981. Both festival types are held in Natauchi. Nine of the ten settlements participate in the *kiriko* festival; the same nine also take part in the *wakubata* festival, together with seven settlements from neighbor villages.¹⁴

The adult men groups (*sōnen-dan*, literally translated as “middle-aged men groups”) of the settlements organize the festivals. The age guidelines of the groups vary in the settlements, but in most cases the members’ age ranges from 20 to 45 years. In 2012, 52 individuals were active in these adult men groups (see Table 1). For carrying a *kiriko* with the average height of nine meters, at least 20 individuals are needed, and for a *wakubata* at least 30. In addition, about 20 individuals per settlement are required for minor tasks like carrying the portable shrine (*mikoshi*) or playing drums (*wadaiko*). In four

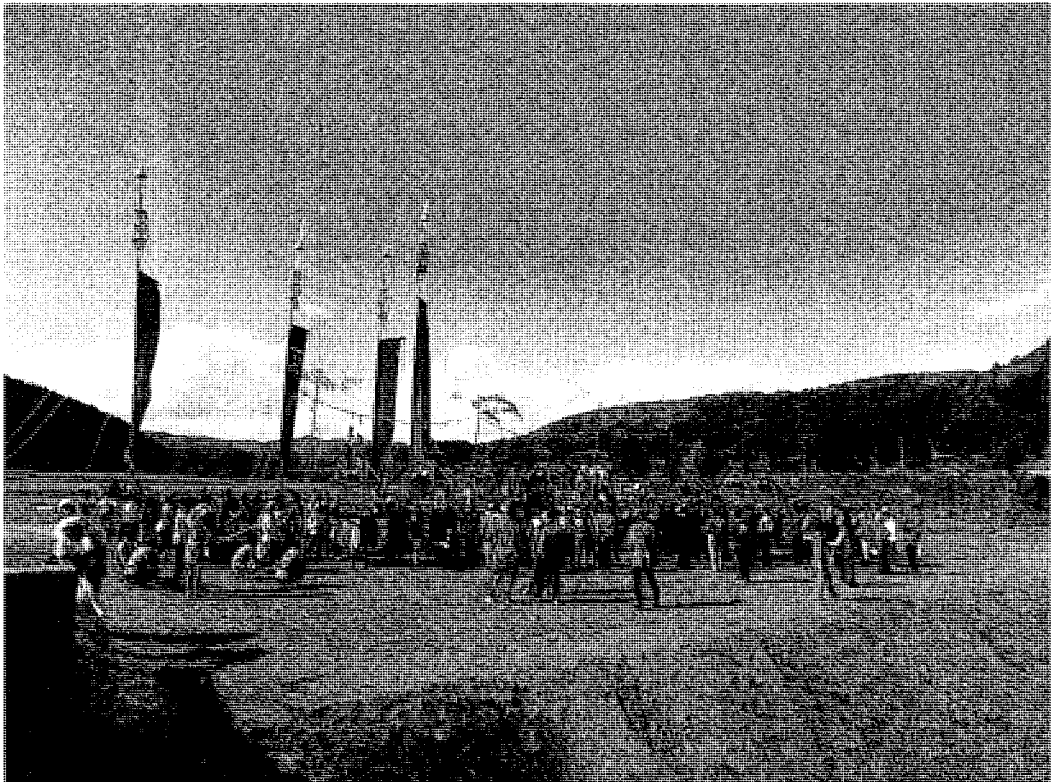


Figure 6: The *wakubata* festival of Natauchi in 2011 (private photo by the author).

settlements women are allowed to perform these minor tasks.¹⁵ To recruit this large amount of helping hands in times of over-aging and depopulation several measures are taken. There is, for example, the custom *ē* (エー), which means that an adult men group invites men of a neighbor village for support. For an easier transportation of the *kiriko* and *wakubata* wheels are assembled to roll on asphalted ways. In 2003, the date of the *kiriko* festival was changed to the *obon* holidays allowing locals to participate without sacrificing work time (Kamiya 2012: 105-107). Besides the work force, another serious problem is the festival's budget for the feast and the yearly maintenance of the *kiriko* and *wakubata*, because the individual contributions must increase for the remaining persons and outside supporters like the relatives group in Tokyo. Recently, all these measures seem to not be enough to guarantee the continuation of the two festivals which have steadily reduced. In the 1970s were about 20 *kiriko* and 15 *wakubata* used, but in 2011 there were just nine *kiriko* and four *wakubata* at the two festivals. For children, smaller versions of *kiriko* also exist; but they have not been used for more than ten years

(Kamiya 2012: 102-107).

But is there still the necessity to continue these flamboyant festivals? For investigating the villagers' opinion on the festivals a questionnaire was prepared in March 2012, which 30 of the 52 members of the adult men groups answered.¹⁶ As a first indicator, the members were asked if they feel a burden when the festival comes. Ten individuals answered that they perceive the festivals as a heavy burden (*kanari futan*); 13 individuals feel a slight burden (*sukoshi futan*), and only six individuals feel no burden (*zenzen futan de wa nai*) (see Figure 7). The next question asked how many times they had left work early for the festival. Half of the questioned individuals (15) answered that they had left their work place earlier in order to help prepare for the festivals between one or three times; eight individuals did so at least four times, and one individual even left work early 14 times for the festivals (see Figure 8). These results show that the festivals are still an important event for most men in the village. Furthermore, the members of the adult men groups were asked who they ask for help for the festival. 19 individuals invite friends to help at the festival;

Do you feel a burden when the festival comes?

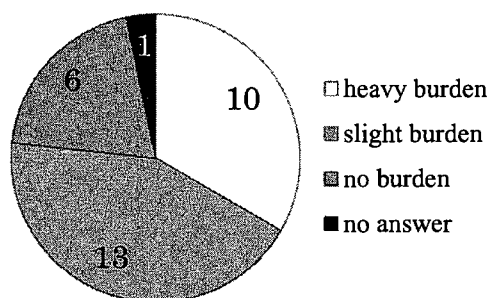


Figure 7: The burden of the festival.

Data source: questionnaire for the adult men group members of Natauchi (30 participants) March 2012, conducted by Kamiya Hiroo, Horiuchi Mio, and Timo Thelen; created by the author.

How many times did you leave work early for the festival?

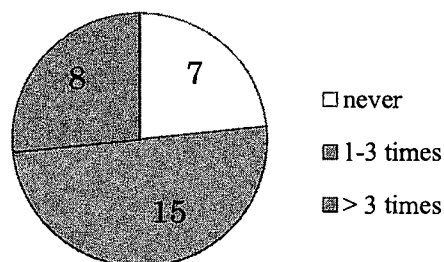


Figure 8: Leaving work early for the festival.

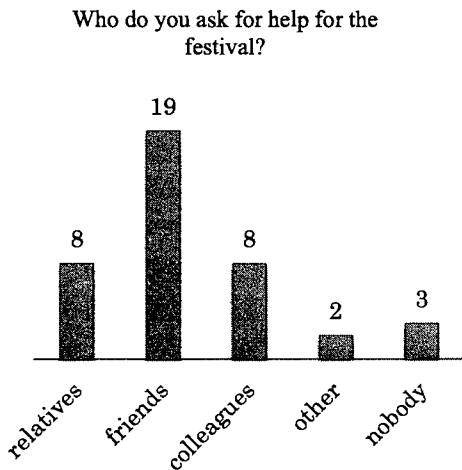


Figure 9: Asking help for the festival.

Data source: questionnaire for the adult men group members of Natauchi (30 participants) March 2012, conducted by Kamiya Hiroo, Horiuchi Mio, and Timo Thelen; created by the author.



Figure 10: Visitors at the festival.

eight individuals ask relatives or colleagues, and only three individuals do not search for help from outside the village (see Figure 9). This result can be interpreted as evidence for the villagers' strong will to continue the festivals. The next question asked about visitors at the festival. 26 of the 30 questioned individuals expect guests at the time of the festivals; mostly either relatives (22) or friends (15) (see Figure 10). This fact illustrates the meaning of the festivals as an event for the family and community to come together. In addition, from the 47 empty houses in Natauchi, 19 are occupied during the festival days (see Table 1).

Probably the most interesting question of the questionnaire asked what might happen if the festivals were abolished; twelve choices were given and multiple answer allowed. The majority of 18 individuals answered that the human relationships in the settlement would become worse. These results emphasize the thesis that local festivals in Japan bring out an important sense of community and identity (e.g. Robertson 1991; Morris-Suzuki 1995:

768 referring to Yanagita Kunio). Also the next most frequent answers point out human relationships inside the village. Nine individuals think that the elderly people would feel lonely without the festivals. Eight individuals answered that the abolishment of the festivals would be pitiful for the children. Seven individuals believe that less people would come back to the village on *obon* without the festivals. Only one individual answered that the abolishment of the festival would cause no changes. It can be resumed, that the two local festivals fulfill a strong role for the self-understanding of most villagers as a community. Therefore, their continuation is important for their vitality.

The settlement leaders of Natauchi also admitted at the interviews that the festival is a tradition which should be continued every year, because otherwise it would be lost forever. However, most settlement leaders expect that the festivals' continuation may end in the next five to ten years, or that at least a massive reduction might become necessary. Remembering the statistics of over-aging and

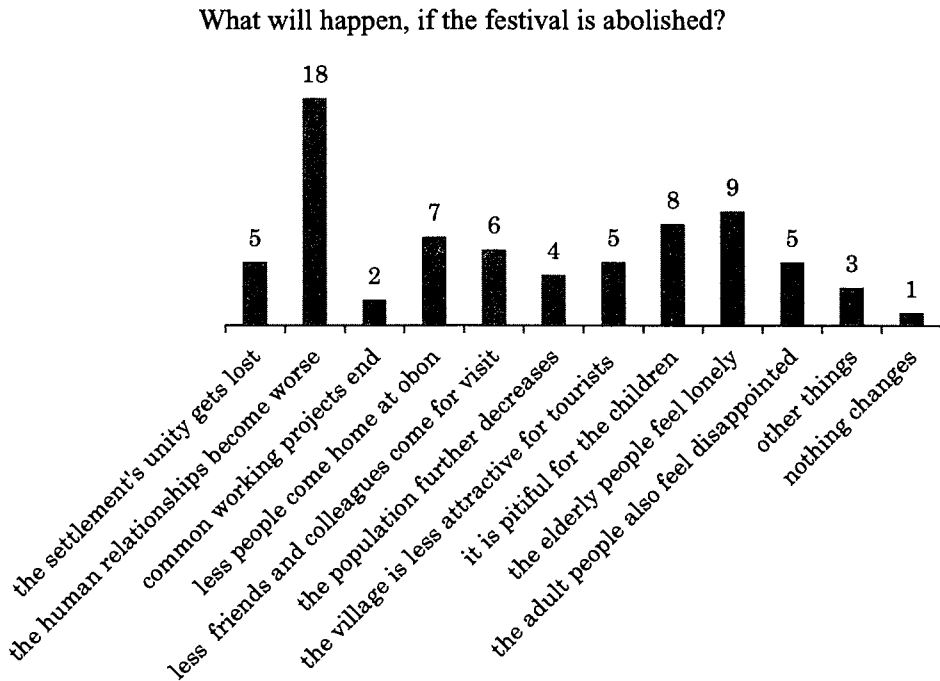


Figure 11: About the abolishment of the festival.

Data source: questionnaire for the adult men group members of Natauchi (30 participants) March 2012, conducted by Kamiya Hiroo, Horiuchi Mio, and Timo Thelen; created by the author.

depopulation (Figure 2 & 4) in Natauchi, this prognosis seems realistic. Though, in the past the adult men groups also took several measures to save the festivals and its important function for the community.

3.2 The Experience of the “Festival Support Project” in 2011

As mentioned in the first part of this article, active rural tourism like participation in local festivals has become popular since the late 1970s; this kind of tourism, in most cases, does not offer the chance of a dialog with the locals and becomes just a commercial event. The “Festival Support Project” (*Matsuri Shien Purojekuto*) between the Furusato-zukuri Council of Natauchi and Kanazawa University aims to overcome these boundaries between locals and outsiders and to initiate a process of

communication. Kamiya Hiroo, the first project leader, defines the project as “an attempt to utilize the personal and intellectual capacities of Kanazawa University positively for the local cultural heritage” (Kamiya 2011: 15). He mentions the festivals not just as an opportunity for an encounter between students and locals, but also as an introduction for researchers and experts to the relatively isolated village communities. These interactions can create networks, which are beneficial for all individuals involved and may lead to further exchange activities between young urban people and the rural communities in the Noto Peninsula (Kamiya 2011: 14). The project was officially initiated in 2010 by Kanazawa University Center for Regional Collaboration (*Kanazawa Daigaku Chiiku Renkei Suishin Sentā*). In the year 2011, which was chosen for this study, 12

individuals participated in Natauchi's *kiriko* and 14 in the *wakubata* festival (Table 2). Besides Natauchi are four other villages or towns in the Noto Peninsula included in this project, which was originally based on informal collaborations between university professors and local activists.

For a better understanding of the project's interaction between students and villagers, I describe the project's schedule (see Table 3) and my personal experience from a two-time participation in 2011. In the *kiriko* festival of Natauchi in 2011, nine Japanese students (one female) and three foreign exchange students (including myself) participated (see Table 2). After arriving in the village after

a nearly two-hour bus drive from Kanazawa University, an introduction speech was held at the common house of Natauchi. Three representatives of the Furusato-zukuri Council talked about the village's situation, activities in agriculture, the local festivals, and also a few sentences about the problems of over-aging and depopulation. The participants received packages of several merchandise goods of the village, like mobile phone straps and stickers with the Chinese characters "Natauchi" or "spiritual water," a CD with the village's festival song and some pamphlets about the Furusato-zukuri Council. After eating lunch packages (*obentō*) the participants went on a village tour guided by the Furusato-zukuri

Table 2: Participant data of the "Festival Support Project."

Year	Festival	Participants*	Male	Female	Foreign Students	Origin Countries
2011	Nafune Kiriko	11	10	1	2	China
	Natauchi Kiriko	12	11	1	3	Germany, China
	Kuroshima Tenryōsai	12	5	7	10	no data
	Fukami Kiriko	9	8	1	0	
	Iwaguruma Kiriko	8	3	5	0	
	Natauchi Wakubata	10	4	6	4	Germany, China
2012	Nafune Kiriko	9	7	2	1	Vietnam
	Issaki Kiriko	8	6	2	0	
	Natauchi Kiriko	13	8	5	1	China
	Iwaguruma Kiriko	10	3	7	1	China
	Natauchi Wakubata	17	10	7	3	China, Vietnam, Indonesia
2013	Natauchi Kiriko	10	3	7	9	China, Brazil
	Natauchi Wakubata	12	6	6	4	China, Vietnam
	Iwaguruma Kiriko	6	3	3	0	
	Okuyoshita Ropposai	15	8	7	3	China, Vietnam
2014	Natauchi Kiriko	12	9	3	1	no data
	Natauchi Wakubata	11	9	2	0	
	Okuyoshita Ropposai	16	13	3	6	no data
Total		201	126	75	48	

*Participants include foreign students

Source: original in Japanese created by Horiuchi Mio; permission for reuse by the author who added bold type letters to emphasize the sections about Natauchi

Council's chairman to the village's main shrine, paddy fields, and an old-style house with a thatched roof (*gasshō-zukuri*). The students helped with the assembling of a *kiriko* before splitting up in groups of three or four people to go to their host families for dinner. At sunset, the students gathered at the local shrine of the settlement, where they were supposed to help. They were introduced to the adult men group members and received festival clothes (*happi*) with the insignia of the settlement. The procession with drums, a portable shrine, and *kiriko* started to move to the village's main shrine, where the nine groups of the different settlements gathered. Every group performed the ceremony of running towards the shrine's building, stopping at the last moment, and waving the *kiriko* in the air under joyful screaming three times. This ceremony of the lit *kiriko* shaking wildly in the dark night sky was very impressive for the spectators. After the performance of every settlement group

was finished, there was a recreation pause, before the dance-like running ritual to the main shrine's building was performed one more time. Afterwards, the settlement groups lined up on the road in front of the shrine and moved to a large plain area, where the *kiriko* were waved in the air once again and finally put down for the end of the procession. The participants stayed at the location for about one hour, and the whole festival took around four hours, full of drinking and chatting. The students then went back to their host families to sleep. The visitors from university left the village the next morning after a last meeting with the Furusato-zukuri Council's leaders.

The *wakubata* festival, which was held six weeks later, had as participants ten Japanese students (six female) and four foreign students (including myself; two female) (see Table 2). The schedule (see Table 3) was similar to the *kiriko* festivals, starting with a speech of the Furusato-zukuri Council, the handover

Table 3: Schedule of the "Festival Support Project" in 2011.

Time	<i>Kiriko</i> festival	Time	<i>Wakubata</i> festival
14.09.2011 11:00	Arrival; speech by the leaders of the Furusato-zukuri Council	22.09.2011 11:00	Arrival; speech by the leaders of the Furusato-zukuri Council
12:00	Lunch	12:00	Lunch
13:00	Village tour guided by the chairman of the Furusato-zukuri Council	13:00	Visit of the Wakubata Museum of Nakajima Town, the Spiritual Water Park, and the Bessho-dake viewpoint
15:00	Helping to assemble a <i>kiriko</i>	15:00	Helping to assemble a <i>wakubata</i>
17:00	Dinner with the host families	17:00	Dinner with local people
19:00	Start of the festival	23.09.2011 06:00	Start of the festival
21:00	Gathering at the main shrine	08:00	Gathering at the main shrine
22:00	Moving to the village's festival ground	10:00	Moving to the village's festival ground
24:00	End of the festival	11:00	End of the festival
15.08.2011 09:00	Closing speech by the leaders of the Furusato-zukuri Council	12:00	Festival lunch with the locals
11:00	Return home	14:00	Return home

Source: fieldnotes by the author; created by the author.

of merchandise goods, and lunch. Due to bad weather conditions, a rice harvesting practice (*inekari taiken*) and the visit of a hot spring (*onsen*) were both cancelled; the alternative program included a visit of the Wakubata Museum in Nakajima Town, a drive to a viewing spot, and a visit of the “Spiritual Water Park.” In the late afternoon, the male students helped to assemble a *wakubata*, while the female students helped to prepare food together with local women for dinner. In opposition to the stay at the *kiriko* festival, most students slept this time at the village’s common hall. The festival’s final preparations started the following morning at 6 a.m. The procession and ceremony was exactly the same as at the *kiriko* festival; but the number of spectators was about half. The male students helped to carry a *wakubata* while the female carried a straw bag shrine (*tawara-mikoshi*).¹⁷ The festival ended with a festival lunch at the village’s common hall, where the students and the local adult men group members participated.

The interaction between locals and students during the whole two stays was very friendly. There were a lot of chances to talk with the villagers; in addition, the unconstrained festival atmosphere with much drinking made it easy to start conversations. The villagers liked to hear personal stories of the students and told in return a lot about their local festivals and other customs. The village’s problems like over-aging and depopulation were sometimes mentioned as well. The Furusato-zukuri Council used the “Festival Support Project” to present their village as a traditional Japanese village, which fondly welcomes outsiders. Remembering the *furusato-zukuri* activities of Natauchi, described in the second part of this article, the project belongs to the category of

tourism, which primarily aims to promote the local agricultural products. During the student’s stay, local vegetables like *nakajima-na*, rice, and the “spirit water” were consumed by the visitors. However, whether the participants could be bound as regular customers of the village’s goods is rather uncertain and was probably not intended by the staff in charge. A rice-harvesting experience was cancelled due to weather conditions, so I cannot suggest if this event might have created more interest in the agricultural work of the villagers by the students. The activities of the welfare NPO were not touched by the project, although some villagers were thinking of creating a program of voluntary social work for students in order to get credit points usable for their studies. In short, the project seems rather unconnected to the other local *furusato-zukuri* activities, but I do not estimate that fact as a problem.

3.3 Evaluating the “Festival Support Project”

In order to understand the project’s impact on the village interviews with nine of ten settlement leaders were conducted in February 2012. The leaders of the four settlements, in which the students had helped, gave mostly positive feedback. They hope that the students enjoy the festival, but they also want them to understand it. The students should not come just for the festivals, but participate in the daily life of the village. Two settlement leaders emphasized that the students must follow the local rules and learn about the festival’s ceremony and the *kiriko*. One settlement leader fears that the festivals might lose their original meaning and value by the participation of outsiders and just become tourist events. The five leaders of the settlements, in which the students did not help, were by far more

critical about the project. Although they mostly accepted the help of outsiders, these outsiders must strictly follow the local rules, be careful with the *kiriko* and *wakubata*, and understand the meaning of the festivals. They fear that the festival rules and traditions from their ancestors might become forgotten by allowing outsiders to participate. Furthermore, the fear of accidents or the damage of the festival items was often mentioned. The students should learn the rhythm of the festival and take care of the local rules. One settlement leader also mentioned that in earlier times, it was generally forbidden for outsiders to participate because they do not follow the local customs. To summarize, the villagers seem to have an ambiguous opinion of the project. Although they generally welcome outsiders and their motivation for help, some settlement leaders critique the short and superficial interaction and wish a longer stay of the students. On the other hand, others do not welcome the help of outsiders and want to avoid it.

The aim of the "Festival Support Project" is to create an interaction between rural and urban people, not just a tourist-aimed event. However, the dialog between villagers and students seems to be limited to the time of the festival. Only two students (including myself) participated in both festivals in Natauchi. The argument that outsiders do not know the festival's rules and should therefore not participate was also used by the natives of Kodaira City in Robertson's study on a civic festival in Tokyo (1991). However, what exactly these local rules are seems rather unclear. Just a basic point like the role of women at the festival differs in the settlements and reflects the fact that these rules seem to be a conservative spurious argument against outsiders. The project's staff from

Kanazawa University is aware of the problem that for most involved persons the interaction is limited to the festival. Thus, there are plans of additional short trips and other activities between the village and the university. But, also besides the project, the continuation of the festivals is a serious problem. Most of the adult men group members are in their late thirties and there are just a few succeeding young men. As the settlement leaders have mentioned, the festivals might be dramatically reduced in the next years or even disappear. The students' help is limited to carrying one or two *kiriko*, but the adult men group members must organize the festivals, pay the expenses, repair and maintain the *kiriko* and *wakubata*, to mention just their major tasks.

However, the positive impact of the projects should not be narrowed. Many villagers enjoyed the time together with the students as a rare chance to interact with outsiders. The students described their reactions in feedback papers, which were partly published on the project's webpage (CRC 2012). For some of them (including Japanese students) the project was not only their first chance to participate in a village festival and to experience rural life, but also to understand the problems of over-aging and depopulation in the countryside. They enjoyed interacting with and learning from the rural people. Foreign students also commended the project as a precious and authentic experience of Japanese traditional culture. Some participants came back to the village for research, especially students of geography and social science. To present, six of the students involved have written their graduation thesis about the village's serious situation. Furthermore, the involved university staff are still connected to the inhabitants of Natauchi

by several other research or collaborative projects. To summarize, the project can be seen as an effective way to create networks of research, education, and social capital, which can overcome one of the four major and basic problems of declining rural areas in Japan, as explained in the first part of this article. This is of course a long-term process that just started, but looking at the project's positive impact until present demonstrates its chances for the future.

Unfortunately, due to the aging or death of local activists in other municipalities, the number of villages or towns which participate in the project reduced from five to two (including Natauchi with its two festival) until 2014 (see Table 2). Furthermore the continuation of the project is uncertain, because the university staff in charge of it has changed. Despite this, the number of student participants is constant and shows the student's interest in the project and in supporting rural people.

Conclusions

This article showed the problematic nature of *furusato-zukuri*. Media and politics have for decades presented *furusato-zukuri* as a successful way for self-reliant rural vitalization. However, in fact many projects were rather unsuccessful and could not lead to a sustainable development. In the late 1980s and 1990s, there was an enormous amount of support funding put into questionably effective prestige projects instead of creating welfare institutions which were by far more necessary. The critical over-aging and depopulation of rural Japan led to a decline of local communities and to the abolishment of village festivals. Natauchi is just one example of numerous villages all over Japan that are facing serious problems in maintaining their customs

and rural lifestyle. The reality of the villagers' daily life is far away from any romanticism of *furusato*.

The *furusato-zukuri* activities in Natauchi focused on agriculture and the sale of local products. However, the working plans for rice and vegetables of 2011 were rather optimistic as agriculture was for most involved people just a retirement hobby with no economic importance. Another problem is the big competition of more famous places with better basic conditions for agricultural production. Tourism is also rather difficult due to the bad access and limited capacities for hosting visitors. The expensive project of the "Spiritual Water Park" could only cover the costs of its own maintenance. However, the welfare projects, like the transport and safety service and the reconstruction of the abolished nursery school to an elderly home, are sustainable measures for the over-aged population of Natauchi. However, one might question why the welfare NPO was not founded earlier than 2010, as the over-aging of the village is not a recently occurred problem.

The "Festival Support Project" aims to create a new form of *furusato-zukuri* as an interaction between villagers and students. The encounter at the local festivals can offer many merits for the village community as well as for the students and lead to later visits or also research projects. It functions further as an educational activity for the participants to experience not just a rural festival, but also other aspects of rural life. However, as the interview study has shown, not all villagers welcome the help by outsiders. This conflict might be resolved in the future, when the project continues and the rather conservative villagers get used to the outsiders' participation and understand that they do not harm the local traditions. Therefore,

projects like this can offer a good chance for connecting academia with rural areas in Japan and can consequently lead to more sophisticated and sustainable activities of *furusato-zukuri* and future revitalization.

Notes

- ¹ I want to thank Kamiya Hiroo and Aleya Thompson for their help and advice on this manuscript.
- ² All translations in this article are made by the author.
- ³ The term *furusato-zukuri* is most commonly translated as “native place-making” (e.g. Robertson 1988, 1991). Due to the length of this article, I do not provide a differentiation to similar concepts of rural revitalization like *mura-okoshi* (village renewal), *machi-zukuri* (town building), *chiiki-zukuri* (region making) etc. in this study and summarized them under this probably most common term.
- ⁴ This article is a resume of my master thesis, submitted December 2012 at Duesseldorf University; Institute for Modern Japan Studies.
- ⁵ The interviews and the questionnaire survey were part of a research project of Kanazawa University led by Professor Kamiya Hiroo. All data is used by permission as the author was member of this project.
- ⁶ The research stay was supported by a one-year scholarship for graduate students by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).
- ⁷ I prefer, in this article, the term “native place” for its more general and larger meaning than “hometown/village.”
- ⁸ “Discourse of the Japanese”; a controversially discussed semi-scientific literature genre about the particularity of Japanese people, society, and culture. A good introduction is offered by Befu (2001).
- ⁹ Although some scholars (e.g. Uchida 2000) suppose early forms or prototypes of *furusato-zukuri* in the Meiji era, most literature defines the beginning of *furusato-zukuri* with its still actual meaning in the late 1960s or early 1970s.
- ¹⁰ *Sōsei* (創生) consists of the Chinese character *tsukuru*, which is also part of the word *furusato-zukuri* and means “creation.” The other character *sei* means “life.” The word *sōsei* is often used as a political keyword in several contexts. *Furusato sōsei* could be translated as “native place creation.”
- ¹¹ U-turners are locals who have lived for a certain time outside of their community, in most cases studying or working in a larger city, and eventually coming back to their native place. I-turners are people who move to a rural community without having any blood or deeper social connection to it before.
- ¹² Most of the information and data in this part and the following are based on informal local publications with no official release or on interviews with the village’s inhabitants. Therefore, no references are mentioned.
- ¹³ An internet search showed only one result for Natauchi’s rice brand. It was served at a local symposium in 2010, organized by Kanazawa University (Noto Ikimono Maisutā Jigyō 2010).
- ¹⁴ These other seven settlements are not the object of this study, because their contribution to the *wakabata* festival is relatively small.
- ¹⁵ In five of the nine settlements women are not allowed to take actively part in the festivals. This study cannot answer the question of why this essential rule for the festivals differs in the settlements. In one settlement women were just a few years ago allowed to participate in the minor tasks like drumming due to the lack of men. Probably in the cases of the other settlements, which also allow women to participate, this development is rather new and due to the depopulation. As a reference to the controversy of female participation at festivals, I recommend Brumann who discussed the case of the *gion-matsuri* in Kyōto (Brumann 2012: 194-208).
- ¹⁶ Questions were multiple-choice, sometimes multiple answers were allowed. The term

"festival" meant the *kiriko* festival.

- ¹⁷ The difference between a straw bag shrine (*tawara-mikoshi*) and a normal portable shrine (*mikoshi*) lies in their spiritual value. While the portable shrine at a festival is mostly believed to be a vessel for a god, the straw bag shrine carries just local rice as a sacrifice for that god. This might be a compromise for the uncertain gender roles at the festival varying in every settlement. For a more profound look on the presence or absence of gods in portable festival shrines, I recommend Robertson's study on a citizen's festival in Tokyo (1991).

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