



Supplementing Activities of Resilience

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Rural areas in Japan are currently facing long-term effects of ongoing demographic decline as well as short-term or mid-term challenges such as earthquakes that together constitute a complex situation. At the same time, social relationships that are often conceived of as pillars of resilience are changing. Long-existing local organisations or practices have strengthened social relationships within the community by offering communicative places or social places for exchange. They are currently transforming into newer forms or movements. To grasp these transformations, this project investigates how local stakeholders become active in three different regions in Japan and how they supplement previously existing practices of resilience.

Data and Methods

This project primarily employs semi-structured interviews with the following people:

- Volunteers engaging in social participation and/or providing communicative places
- People working at or together with social welfare organisations
- Leading persons of regional revitalization movements
- Participants in local activities

Research Themes

This study combines perspectives of civil society (local engagement) with regional sociology (local resilience) and demographics. It aims to understand how local (rural) society changes and adapts to ongoing challenges. It implements an Arendtian perspective (1958) on collective action that focuses on the places where people act jointly to create something new. Further, it adds Japanese perspectives (e.g. Okada 2021) on revitalisation and engagement to enable a more nuanced understanding of local action in Japan's regions.

The project therefore covers the following topics:

- Local political engagement / local civic engagement (*chiiki zukuri*)
- Regional welfare (*chiiki fukushi*)
- Well-being (*ikigai, kōfuku*)



A former school in Kumamoto Prefecture that has been re-used as a space for local engagement

Fieldsites

This project observes three rural places in different municipalities in Japan. While all of them share high ageing rates, they vary in terms of local movements, access to bigger metropolitan areas and exposure to disasters.



Rural town in Southern Tottori Prefecture that has seen a lot of revitalisation activities in social welfare, local decision making and sustainable economy.



Region in Eastern Kumamoto that has suffered from the Kumamoto Earthquake in 2016. Parts of the region are famous for citizen-led recovery and resilience.



Rural town in Western Tokyo that is part of a touristic area, but shows high rates of ageing

Some Findings

1. Constant social exchange within communities enhances local resilience. However, due to societal changes happening in regional Japan, these resilient practices increasingly get supplemented through (top-down and bottom-up) activities that explicitly try to enhance social cohesion.
2. These activities redefine existing places or create new places for social exchange and joint activities that are closely linked to the participants' well-being.
3. Long-term challenges get amplified by short-term stressors such as earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially the latter poses significant difficulties to local activities since anti-COVID measures aim at reducing direct social exchange – a crucial factor supporting social resilience.

References

- Arendt, Hannah (1958): *The human condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press [1998].
- Okada, Norio (2021): "Build back better, even before disaster – adaptive design of communicative process, place and practice", Madhumita Chatterji and Partha Gangopadhyay (eds.): *New frontiers in conflict management, peace economics and peace science account*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing, 27-38.

