Case Analyses in Start-up and Expansion of Homestay Tourism in Fishing Villages

journal or publication title	Proceedings of the International Conference on Fisheries Engineering 2019
year	2019-09-22
	Posted with approval of the Japanese Society of Fisheries Engineering
URL	http://id.nii.ac.jp/1342/00001908/

Case Analyses in Start-up and Expansion of Homestay Tourism in Fishing Villages

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1. Introduction

The falling population of Japan due to the low birth rate and the rapid aging of society are expected to create critical problems for Japan's economy and society. Therefore, various measures aimed at revitalizing fishing villages have been taken. One of these measures is a continuing "real experience" tourism program, inaugurated in 2017, which brings tourists to villages in agricultural regions, the mountains, and harbors where they can meet in exchanges with natives of those regions who are living traditional lifestyles. This paper describes the current activities in the fishing village tour campaign and the conclusions of a study on how to start, sustain, and expand such a campaign.

2. Measures for Revitalization of Fishing Villages

Figure 1 shows measures currently planned to revive fishing villages. These efforts can be divided into business-centered initiatives, which are anticipated to yield economic benefits, and community-based initiatives, which emphasize social benefits. However, both sorts of benefits can be expected from all of the measures. The goal of continuing this campaign is to rejuvenate declining fishing villages into sustainable communities that will again attract people from surrounding regions to move in and stay.

Urban-Rural Exchange Project

This "People, Things, Information" project was inaugurated in fiscal year 2001 (FY2001) with the objective of popularizing a new lifestyle of interactions leading to mutual understanding between the residents of urban regions and the residents of rural areas regarding the attractions of each other's home regions, and to encourage those populations to engage in more such travel.

Children's Rural Village Exchange Project

This project, which was inaugurated in FY2008, promotes student excursions aimed at nurturing virtues such as strength, will to study, independence, consideration for others, and respect for social norms. The students spend several days and nights in rural villages so that they can directly experience life in the agricultural and fishing industries, as well as participate in extended exchanges with local residents.

Promotion Project for Homestay Tourism in Fishing Villages

Exchanges have focused on social benefits such as getting to know a new region, but recent reports have pointed to difficulties in continuing the conventional style of exchanges, due to the economic burden on the hosts and their increasing ages. They are based on the idea that attracting domestic and foreign sightseers and other visitors to rural villages would result in economic opportunities, support sustainable development of local businesses, and generally revitalize the region. This project provides support for the expenses of conferences held to discuss how to create new systems, for writing and establishing the homepages needed to widely publicize these regions, for the refurbishment of accommodations, and for the construction of "hands-on experience".
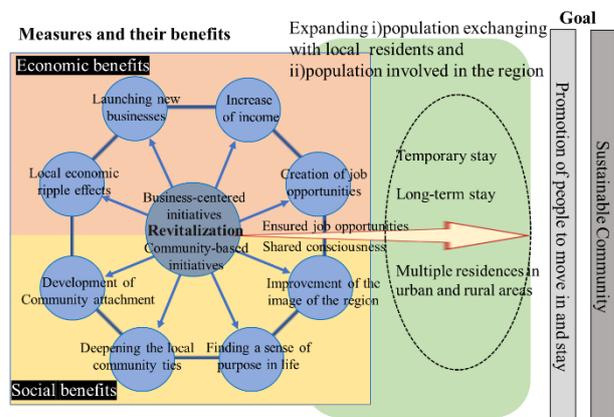

Figure 1　Benefits and goal of revitalization of fishing villages.

3. Regions Designated for Fishing Village Homestay Tour Campaign

Some of the regions have accepted subsidies for this, whereas others have not. The regions can be divided into three classes based on their records. Each class contains about 30 regions:

A regions: Newcomers (receiving subsidies)

B regions: Experienced regions (receiving subsidies)

C regions: Experienced regions (not receiving subsidies)

Visitors Targeted for Fishing Village Homestay Tour Campaign

Figure 2 shows graphs of the fractions of each class of regions hosting the various types of visitors. Experienced regions mainly host visitors who have come for educational purposes, but the reader can see that newcomers are also handling ordinary domestic and foreign visitors.

Promotion Factors of Campaign

With respect to various promotion factors, **Figure 3** compares regions that have newly signed on to the project and are handling such stays with the experienced regions that are using the subsidies. The reader can see that there was little difference between the two groups.
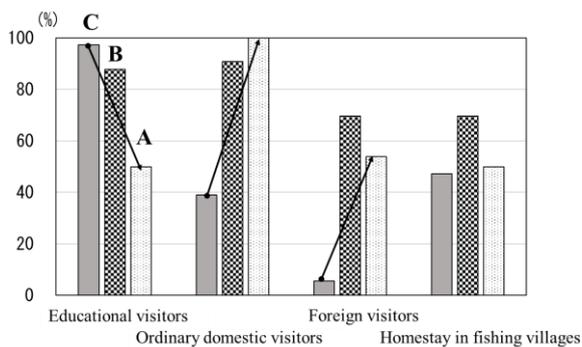

Figure 2　Fractions of each class of regions hosting various types of visitors

Figure 3　Promotion factors of the Fishing Village Homestay Tour Campaign.

4. From Conception to Start-up

The process from the original conception of a campaign to its inauguration is diagrammed in **Figure 4**. Here, the reader can see a shared consciousness of a problem at conception; the regions' issues must then be identified and a positive consciousness toward acting must be fostered. The people who conceive a solution to a problem might not necessarily live in any of the regions in question. Many of these are people who move to a location distant from where they were born and grew up after they finish high school (so-called "I-turn people") or people who finish school and then return to the region where they were born and grew up (so-called "U-turn people"). It is essential to rely upon such local resources when dealing with regional problems or concerns. Such resources may be so well known to the locals as to be taken for granted; on the other hand, the locals may be totally unaware of them. Resources must be noticed, their potential must be pointed out, and they must be polished to usable forms.

An activist organization that draws up its vision for the region, sets the goals for its activities, and acts to realize solutions to problems on the basis of its philosophy must be formed and consolidated in order to bring the concept to fruition in the real world.
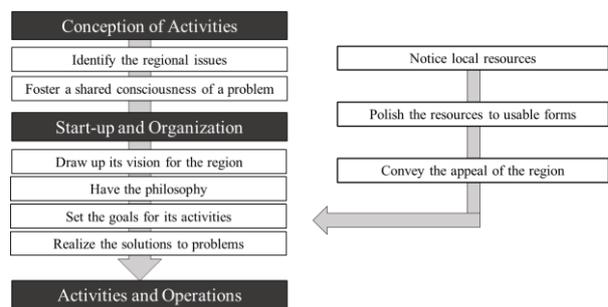

Figure 4　Process from conception to start-up and Organization.

Now, let us turn to some actual examples of conceptions and solutions to problems.

○ Ojika Island Tourism (nonprofit organization (NPO))

The people of Ojika Island felt they were in a crisis during the 1990s. So many people had already left the island that they worried it would become completely uninhabited. To counteract this, they proposed opening an exchange campaign with I-turn people, offering educational opportunities and the chance to spend time in an unspoiled environment. Until that time, they had been dependent on the primary sector, but they accepted that they had no choice but to shift to a reliance on tourism, and set about selling their friendliness and warmth.

○ Island Tours Promotion Council

Toba City used to be a prosperous host to many sightseers and one of the most popular tourist destinations in Japan, but it suffered a drastic downturn in visitors. The city's proposal to establish the Island Tours travel agency in order to make better use of their exchanges to increase tourism was approved, and in FY2001 they began to conduct surveys of local resources and create a menu of "real experience" activities for visitors. The citizens learned much about the resources of their own islands through these activities, which in turn spurred the founding of an association for mothers on the islands.

Organizational Structure

It is essential to have the right support organizations and people in order to be successful in forming and consolidating an activist organization that has the understanding, shared values, and consensuses among the residents of the region. The organizations vary from region to region; such as unincorporated volunteer groups, ordinary incorporated associations, private companies, or regional councils (**Table 1**); this makeup may change as the activities are developed. The following are the requirements that an organizational structure must meet:

(i)Be inclusive of the people of the region

(ii)Have clear lines of responsibility and leadership

(iii)Be connected with local authorities and organizations related to the goal of the activism

(iv)Involving fishermen and fishermen groups who want to preserve and pass down the lifestyle, environment, and main industry of the village

Table 1　Types of organizational structures.

Activist Organization	Secretariat or Core Organization	Other Major Organizations	Organizations Concerned
Council	Council(membership)		
	Council(membership)		Cooperation with organizations concerned
	Council(membership)	Cooperation with other organizations concerned	
Incorporated Association Nonprofit Organization(NPO)	Incorporated associations or NPO(membership)		
	Incorporated associations or NPO(membership)		Cooperation with organizations concerned
Fishermen's Cooperative Association	Fishermen's cooperative associations	Cooperation with organizations concerned	

The following are examples of organizational structures, problems, and their resolutions:

○ Habomai Fishermen's Cooperative Association

Fisheries are the mainstay industry of Habomai. The Fishermen's Cooperative Association has long accepted visitors to stay overnight and experience fishing, with a focus on serving educational groups. The Cooperative Association is publicizing Habomai among foreign tourists and is seeking to expand its hosting activities by using information and communication technology as it upgrades and expands its facilities, and is teaming up with travel agencies, hotels, and other operators.

○ Sugari Homestay Promotion Council

Suffering from depopulation and the aging of its remaining residents, Sugari is a typical fishing village, over 80% of which are threatened by aging populations as the fishing industry wanes. Private companies in different industries and fields have entered the primary sector and this has spurred the formation of a defense council that is mustering the knowledge and experience of its individual members, member companies, and groups in a network to establish a sustainable, regional organization.

5. Expansion of Activities with Growth and Development

Figure 5 shows an overview of the process of expanding activities in a region, in the wake of startup, growth, and development of the activist organization. An organization grows and develops in the course of successively facing and solving problems, but ultimately, it aims to act in an independent and sustainable way. Nevertheless, an organization will always face difficulties in continuing its activities as time goes on. Over the years as it continues, it will run into problems challenging its survival as an independent organization, problems related to attracting visitors, problems in offering "real experience" activities, and problems in its home-stay accommodations for visitors, even as it wrestles with the aging of the members who are active, accept guests, and/or perform other tasks. Currently, organizations in half the experienced regions receive subsidies from the national government in order to break such impasses.
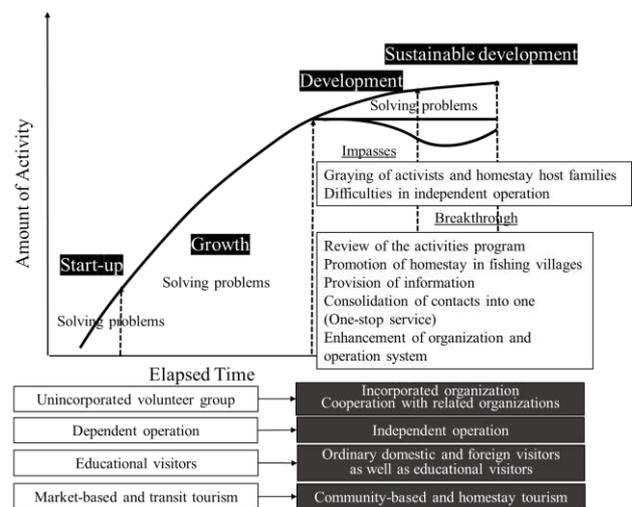

Figure 5　Process of expanding activities with growth and development.

The examples of impasses and their resolutions are as follows:

○ Ojika Island Tourism (NPO)

Since the original organization, Ojika Tourism Association, was established in 1996, this group has reorganized its management and established a brand in island tours. They also established the (Nature Learning Village in 2001 and Ojika Island Tourism Association in 2005. The present Ojika Island Tourism was formed in 2007 to ensure the most sustainable organizational structure. Since the start of those efforts, more than 300 U-turn and I-turn people have taken jobs in agriculture, fishing, business, and civil offices, as well as in tourism

(**Figure 6**), and are contributing significantly to renewal and development efforts.
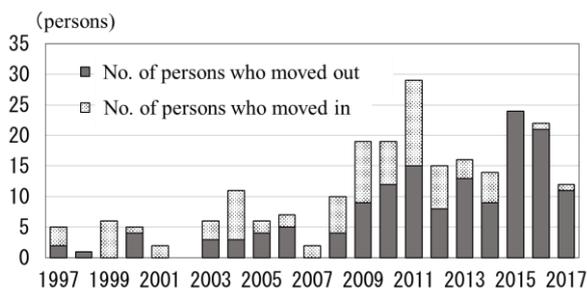

Figure 6   Trend of the number of persons who moved out/in.

○ Tsushima Green Blue Tourism Association

Six homes were registered in Tsushima for hosting tourists interested in "real experience" agriculture, forestry, and fisheries at the behest of a wildlife researcher who had come to the island in 2002. Under a program imitated by Nagasaki Prefecture from 2013 to 2016 after a series of meetings and surveys of interested islanders, these homes dedicated for hosting tourists were increased by 13. Since the secretariat was privatized in 2016, tours to experience life in fishing villages have been promoted to add 6 more registered homes (**Figure 7**).
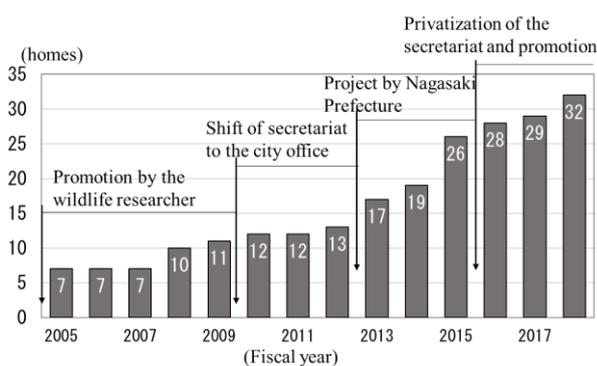

Figure 7   Trend of registered homes for hosting tourists.

6. Solutions to Problems

During the long processes of startup, growth, and development, when difficulties are encountered, it is essential to identify and then seek solutions to problems. The following solutions to various problems are provided as unique examples (angles of attack).

Systems for Inquiries & Booking and Hosting
○ Oshika Peninsula Homestay Promotion Council

This village has been in danger of extinction since the Great East Japan Earthquake. The U-turn and I-turn residents have taken the lead in consulting with locals and have worked to balance the concerns of industry, everyday life, and learning while developing concepts for refurbishing its coastal areas in a sustainable way.

Finding and Using Capable People
○Toba Homestay Promotion Council

One issue here is to tie together the tourist resources and the agricultural, forestry, and fishery resources in an organic fashion. A system encompassing the entire region is being assembled using designs of a homestay program suggested by interns while also developing a tour program, surveying laborers, and enhancing the cuisine of the region.

Collection and Analysis of Information
○ Ousats Women Diver Culture Preservation Council

This region had showcased local programs, answer inquiries, and take reservations on its websaite. However, it was never clear how effective the site was. An application was incorporated to record attributes of website users and the PCs they were employing. These data were analyzed to track referring webpages and the website was revamped on the basis of the findings.

Development of "Real Experience" program
○ Ogats Homestay Promotion Council

This village also has been in danger of extinction since the Great East Japan Earthquake. A project-type promotion is underway to solicit businesses and individuals from the Tokyo Metropolitan Area as volunteers to refurbish old residences and to revitalize their village.

Establishment of Facilities
○ Ousats Women Diver Culture Preservation Council

Facilities and programs of "real experience" activities have been created to encourage travelers to extend their stays in Ousatsu. A traditional-style residence has been remodeled into a restaurant dedicated to the memory of women divers.

Provision of Information
○ Kamae Blue Tourism Study Group (NPO)

Kamae had been offering "real experience" activities and accommodations for overnight visitors but had been unable to attract a sufficient number of guests. In an effort to attract more, they have set up a website and, with the help of students, are now offering live views from cameras and bird's-eye view videos taken from drones.

7. Summary

A number of regions have encouraged outsiders to move in and stay permanently, but these efforts have not slowed the declining of the populations and the aging of the residents. In order to initiate, maintain, and expand campaigns aimed at encouraging visits to fishing villages and stays overnight, it will be essential to use the provided national subsidies effectively. It is also desirable for different regions to share information and support each other in solving their problems.