

Footpaths : A Regional Resource in Japan

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Abstract

This dissertation clarifies the characteristics and development phases of footpath projects developed since the 1990s, in Japan, through case study analyses of eight projects (three in Hokkaido, two in Honshu, and three in Kyushu). The recent footpath projects in the context of growing health awareness, of an increased walking population especially in urban areas, and the need for rural empowerment have developed as a way to attract visitors from outside the region to experience “rurality,” natural beauty, and lifestyle in rural villages. In this dissertation, we assess the paths and footpath projects, assuming that footpaths as the embodiment of rurality should have “walkability,” create “public space,” and form “rural landscape.” The result shows that footpaths in Hokkaido, having social recognition and great flexibility in course setting, are highly evaluated according to the aforementioned three functions. In Honshu and Kyushu, footpaths managed and operated voluntarily by civil organizations are more highly evaluated than those operated under the leadership of local governments.

JEL 区分 : K32, H49, Q59

keywords : footpath, countryside, rurality, local governments, local residents

I. Introduction

Probably around the year 2000, the number of people enjoying running and walking began increasing sharply, partially due to growing health awareness and inexpensiveness as well as ease of access of these two activities, among other things. The growth in the walking population is especially remarkable, increasing from 11.68 million in 2002 to 18.48 million in 2010 (Sasakawa Sports Founda-

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tion, 2002 ; 2010). The reason for this increase is the conversion to a quality-oriented lifestyle, represented by phrases like “slow life,” and “slow food.” Amid this trend, a related mechanism is appearing in many places in Japan : making use of nature and other regional resources to develop routes called “footpaths” to attract walkers.

Within this context, the term *footpath* originated in England, and meant paths on which the public has “the rights of way” for recreation or other purposes—regardless of landownership. In Japan, the trend to develop footpaths occurred much later than in England—the late 1990s to the 2000s. Since Japan recognizes no rights of way, footpath projects have been conducted without the legal infrastructure that exists in England. Japanese footpath projects have redeveloped “*rido*,” non-designated roads or small paths to which road law does not apply. *Rido*, long used in people’s daily lives within village communities or as strip roads and recreation trails are being redeveloped into footpaths for recreational walking. Many are expected, directly or indirectly, to invite visitors from outside the region, but, at the same time, they are located close to local residents’ lives and encompass them.

Given these purposes for Japanese footpath projects, in this dissertation, we clarify in concrete terms the current development phase of these footpath projects by conducting case study analyses.

II. Previous study and analysis perspective

1. Outline of English and Japanese footpaths

In England, during the 19th century, when the population of urban workers surged, countryside rambling was considered a sort of national recreation. But since the 18th century, aristocrats and other landowners had been enclosing their lands by unilaterally closing their roads and pastures. This triggered frequent protest movements by workers strongly demanding recreational opportunities, specifically, freely rambling in suburban common lands or privately owned properties. Civil protests against the aristocrats and other large-scale landowners insisted on civil access rights in the face of strong property rights ; these protests became a key factor in the birth of English footpaths. As the workers’ insistence became gradually accepted by intellectuals and other members of the English society, the Rights of Way Law was enacted in 1932, allowing people to ramble freely on paths that became designated as public, regardless of private or public ownership. Based on this law, local authorities work as coordinators should any question occur as to which paths are approved footpaths, or should any problems occur, such as landowners neglecting the footpaths’ maintenance (Riddall and Trevelyan, 2007). To summarize, English footpaths emerged from a compromise between landownership (the right to privacy) and enjoyment of civil recreation (access rights) (Hiramatsu, 2002).

In Japan, however, no such legal infrastructure or compromise was necessary. When footpath projects originated in the late 1990s, interests in the environment and health were rising, as was the trend toward a quality-oriented lifestyle. Against this background, life in regions other than large cities and rural lifestyle were highly revalued, with some urban residents migrating to rural areas. Opportunities increased for interactions between urban residents and residents of agricultural, moun-

tain, and fishing villages.

In addition, as the recession continued and the fiscal deficit expanded, local authorities faced the necessity of finding different, autonomous methods of regional development; they could no longer depend on public work projects based on infrastructure development. Aided by the social background, footpaths drew their attention as a way to attract visitors from outside the region, while highlighting “rurality,” which includes the individual characteristics of agricultural, mountain, or fishing villages and regional features, including natural beauty and the residents’ lifestyles.

According to Halfacree (1995), rurality is formed by the interrelation between ecological infrastructure (natural environment: land, water area, as well as flora and fauna), economic infrastructure (agriculture, forestry, and fisheries), and social infrastructure (communities) of rural areas. Therefore, many local authorities and nationwide private organizations began promoting footpath projects. Nevertheless, as I develop the argument later in detail, compared to England, the involvement of Japanese local authorities in footpath projects varies greatly; they rarely play the role of active coordinators, especially in Hokkaido.

Setting aside the comparison, in England or Japan, walking a footpath means feeling rurality and having access to the scenic and scattered tourist spots. Therefore, footpaths are themselves a resource for tourism, and, simultaneously, connect other fixed resources to transform the long-ignored *rido* into an attraction, a form of resource. “Excavating resources,” so to speak, can be accomplished through interaction between visitors and local residents. Outsiders’ rambling often highlights the wisdom and skills, perhaps from generations ago, and the natural beauty so close that local people neglect it, thereby offering the possibility of excavating unexpected “treasures” (Kaizu, 2001). Meanwhile, through interaction with footpath ramblers, local residents can expect to rediscover the appeal of their own lives and region, thereby fostering pride and energy to help revitalize the region.

In other words, given this background and expectations, recent Japanese footpath projects relate to ongoing regional revitalization and are based on local residents’ taken-for-granted world, while advocating the enjoyment of rurality and encompassing the lives of local residents. Footpath projects aim at a style of tourism different from mass tourism, in which tourists visit only large-scale attractions and high points. Instead, footpaths provide visitors walking facilities and local residents opportunities to interact with visitors. The predicted results are positive exchange of values and augmented opportunities for community development from both outside and inside the region. In this sense, footpath projects can help motivate residents toward rural development.

2. Various possibilities of “paths”

Zimmermann, a pioneer in resource study, did not regard “resources” as mere substance or material object, but as equivalent to a function of substance or material to fulfill human desires (value, interest) (Hunker, 1964). “Paths” that include footpaths have at least three functions regarded as resources from the human viewpoint (Kubota, 2005). First, a path functions as a means of transfer and access, reflecting their most general human interest (transportation function). Second, paths serve as public space, a communicative space for anyone: neighbors stand talking and children run

playing. Another public space function is maintaining and improving the surrounding residential environment by offering lighting and ventilation (public space function). Third, paths can form “original landscape,” as they become part of nature or living space. While walking, visitors see and feel the region’s authenticity, discover beautiful natural scenery and phenomena, and thereby gain a sense of identity and comfort (landscape forming function). In these three ways, paths are “transformed into resources,” not only for their transportation function (connecting with other scenery, resources, and facilities) but also for the access of public space and the formation of landscape.

We can see that recently developed footpath projects also offer (re) development of all the traditional or historical functions of paths. However, since the history of their development is not yet very long, no research has yet outlined or analyzed Japanese footpath projects in a functional, systematic framework. Only Ogawa (2011) has compiled the expected effects of regional footpath projects by citing examples of efforts in Hokkaido. In contrast, many studies have treated footpaths in pioneering England, covering details in the associated rights of way and the footpaths’ economic impact. The walkers’ demands for broadening the rights of way have provoked backlash from farmers and other landowners resulting in much research focusing on possible solutions (Kay and Moxham, 1996 ; Mulder, Shibli, and Hale, 2006 ; Anderson, 2007). As for economic impact, one estimate asserts that countryside walkers are spending 6.14 billion pounds annually and supporting 245,000 full-time jobs (Christie and Matthews, 2003).

However, the framework of previous research on England’s footpaths cannot fit Japan’s current situation, where footpath projects have just emerged and the rights of way has not yet been established. Therefore, in this dissertation, we focus first on how the functions of Japanese footpath projects are transforming them into resources, and, after understanding the regional circumstances and social background of recent projects, how strong these functions are. More specifically, we relate the transportation function to course setting, maintenance difficulties, and walkability. Furthermore, we evaluate the extent to which the transportation function is used, judging from any constraint related to landownership, whether maps, signposts, and regular cleaning are provided, and other factors. Second, as for the public space function, that is, as a place for communication between walkers and local people, the extent of use should be judged from the size of spaces for communication, including relaxation space and eating establishments. Third, the landscape forming function, should be judged as related to rurality or to the characteristics of the region, such as agricultural, mountain, and fishing villages. In other words, whether the footpaths blend with nature and human life spaces should be the third function’s criteria. Clearly demonstrating how footpaths are being transformed into resources can clarify current situations and future issues for Japanese footpath projects as resources having various potentials.

From this perspective, the dissertation first outlines an overall view of Japanese footpath projects and their trends. Then, we examine to what extent each selected footpath project enables regional revitalization as represented by the three footpath functions. Finally, we clarify the factors that have promoted the projects’ development, issues that have arisen, and the meanings of footpaths as regional resources, including their challenges.

III. Development and characteristics of Japanese footpaths of recent years

1. Overview of Japanese footpaths

As far as we were able to discern by the end of March 2013, Japanese footpaths, which are differently developed from those in England, are distributed nationwide as shown in Figure 1. At least 70 exist, with a total length of 2,961 km. Many have more than one course, the total number of courses being 261. Although the total length is far shorter than the 188,700 km in England (Riddall and Trevelyan, 2007), Japanese footpaths have been rapidly extended within the last twelve or so years. Among them are nine long-distance footpaths (long trails), each course more than 30 km, a distance requiring an overnight stay. Compared by region, Hokkaido has 47 footpaths, more than 65% of the national total, with at least 135 courses stretching to 1,681 km.

As the number of footpaths increases nationwide, many organizations have been established to support footpath course setting and offer related information. The Japan Footpath Association, a national organization, was established in 2009, while Hokkaido has Eco Network, established in 1992, and Footpath Network Hokkaido, established in 2012. Kyushu has Footpath Network Kyushu, 2014, and all of these organizations offer supportive activities.

Recent Japanese footpath projects have the common aim of regional revitalization based on local people's lives. However, a closer look reveals some differences in footpath introduction and positioning, which are key to project development. Furthermore, the macro trend differs according to social background in Honshu and Kyushu, as compared to Hokkaido.

2. Characteristics of footpaths in Honshu and Kyushu

Significantly, in Honshu and Kyushu, many *rido* or non-designated village roads exist. Different from those administered by road law, *rido* belong under "public property not stipulated by law." On the map affiliated with the old *cadastre* (public map), they are marked in red. Most were developed for transportation and daily village living by residents, as the need arose. On the *rido*, not only access and transportation but also daily communication took place. Their landscapes were shared and well preserved, fulfilling the three previously mentioned functions of paths. These paths were categorized as *rido* at the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912) and, nominally, as state property, along with national and prefectural roads under the modern system of ownership and administration. Later, during economic development and continuing urbanization in the second half of the 20th century, the three functions of *rido* were lost due to community deterioration and increased use of cars.

However, in the early 1990s, when people began seeking a new lifestyle and new methods of regional development, the *rido* of Honshu and Kyushu attracted attention as a means of reviving and reactivating local communities. Offering momentum for this new trend was the enactment of comprehensive laws on decentralization in 2000. According to these laws, some still-functioning *rido* were ceded to municipalities that were supposed to act autonomously. Thereafter, municipalities began seriously seeking new methods of using *rido*, which had become their administrative assets, for development.

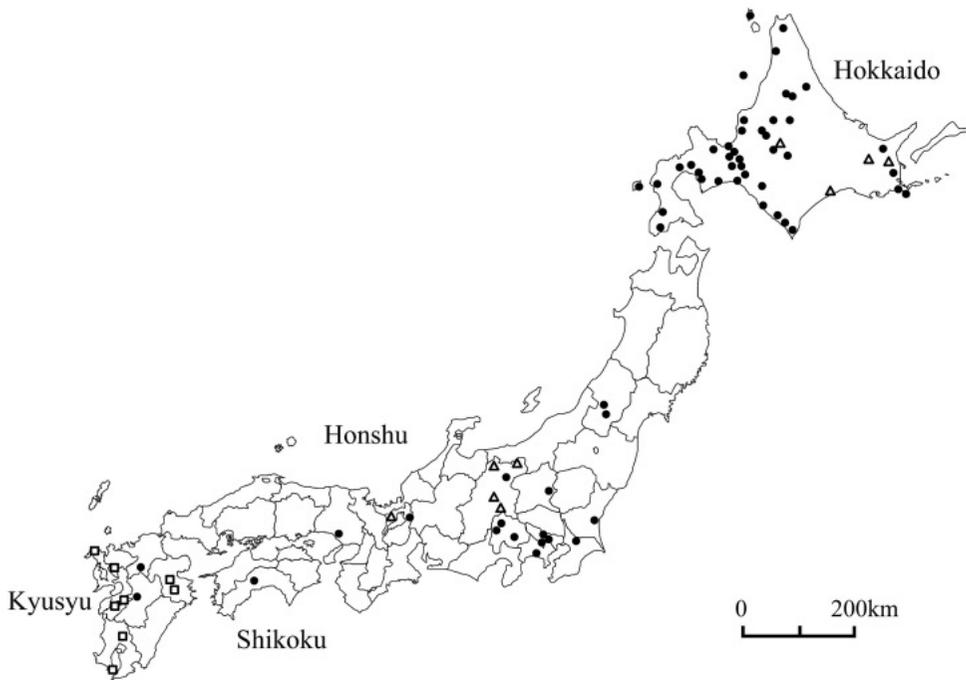


Figure 1. Locations of major footpaths. The nine triangles, \triangle , in Hokkaido and Honshu are trails of 30 km or longer, crossing boundaries of municipalities, with the triangles placed on the supervising organization's location. The eight squares, \square , in Kyushu represent the Kyushu Olle footpath's courses.
 Source : Izumi (2013), with some postscripts.

Amid the trend of decentralization and reevaluation of *rido*, the concept of footpaths became generally accepted in Honshu and Kyushu. Therefore, in footpath projects, especially in Honshu, there are prominent cases of incorporating former *rido* into footpaths based on municipal governments' proactive involvement. *Rido*, formerly means of access and transportation, still exist as a network inside communities, with many people living around them. In addition, since the footpath projects' purpose is helping visitors to experience directly a regional lifestyle, routes are naturally set to pass near residents' homes or fields, and through their lands or adjoining lands. Therefore, since footpath projects in Honshu and Kyushu unexceptionally involve many surrounding residents (landowners) and other local stakeholders, acquiring their consent and understanding were important for the success of the projects.

3. Characteristics of footpaths in Hokkaido

Conversely, in Hokkaido, many areas of mountain forests, wild lands, rivers, and coastlands were incorporated into state property at the beginning of the Meiji period, and then sold or rented to settlers. Previously, the land had been populated by the Ainu people, so the history of the surrounding paths and landscapes can be traced only to the time of Japanese settlement. Another characteristic

of Hokkaido is extremely low population density, 69 per 1 km², which is less than one-fifth of the national average and less than one-90th of the Tokyo metropolitan area. In addition, paths for daily activities in Hokkaido differed significantly from *rido* in Honshu, where paths thread through fractionally divided privately owned land and are used by many residents. As we discuss in detail later, footpaths in Hokkaido have an extremely small number of residents (landowners) around their courses, many of which are set through large publicly and privately owned lands, adding to the use of existing roads. Moreover, in Hokkaido, no footpath project uses the catchphrase “reactivating *rido* functions.”

Against this historical and social background, footpaths are widely developed in Hokkaido. The major footpaths number 47 as of the end of March 2013, stretching to approximately 1,681 km, equal to more than half the national total. Offering momentum to footpath projects in Hokkaido was a forum held by the Hokkaido Shimbun Press in Sapporo, in 2002. Following England’s originating example, the forum was held with the expectation of connecting recreational opportunities with the demands of urban residents and other visitors for walking—as a means of regional revitalization. More than 300 people attended the forum, demonstrating the demand for footpaths in Hokkaido. Since then, promotional activities have been rapid, led by Eco Network, a citizens’ ecological group that took the initiative during the forum.

In other words, since the history and communality of paths were limited in Hokkaido, no conventional axis, such as *rido*, existed at the footpaths’ introduction, and therefore the autonomous organizations did not reevaluate *rido*. Thus, when the footpath concept was introduced and promoted, civil actors were prominent, as seen in individual initiatives and support from ecological NGOs, citizen groups, and the newspaper company. Indeed, local groups initiated many projects. Significantly, the number of residents and landowners around the courses is extremely small, so consensus for footpath establishment was relatively easy to achieve. In fact, compared to the features of Honshu and Kyushu projects, this feature of Hokkaido footpath projects prompted flexibility and rapid development.

IV. Formation and development of individual footpath projects

Based on this overall outline of Japanese footpath projects, we now outline individual footpath projects and then examine in detail each footpath’s functions as a regional resource. When choosing examples of footpath projects, we selected two from Honshu, three from Kyushu, and four from Hokkaido, to reflect different footpath positioning, and then conducted a field survey centered on hearings from each project’s stakeholders between October 2009 and December 2012.

1. Nagai Footpath

Nagai City, Yamagata Prefecture, in Honshu, is a commercial and industrial city, which prospered from water transportation on the Mogami River. Because of this, Nagai positioned its footpath as a revitalization project to connect the city center, the Mogami River, and other nearby attractions. The Yamagata Construction Office of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism pro-

vided momentum in 2002, in a proposal to Nagai City to develop a footpath for enjoying scenery along the river. In 2003, the “Nagai Footpath policy promotion working group” was established as a citizens’ group to route the course, select a name, design signposts, and map the course, in cooperation with the city government. As a result, Nagai Footpath was established in 2005, with 10 courses, extending 51.9 km.

Nevertheless, acquiring the understanding and cooperation of landowners near the courses was difficult. For this reason, especially in the city center, the footpath’s greater part runs alongside an automobile road, thus sometimes failing to fulfill the purpose of visitors’ directly experiencing the region’s charms and lifestyle. Nonetheless, local residents are using the footpath for purposes of integrated study at schools and advancement of health. The number of trekkers from outside the city is also increasing. Furthermore, due to increased numbers of visitors, residents’ awareness is also changing, with some spontaneously cleaning up around the footpaths and the adjoining water conduits.

2. Katsunuma Footpath

The second example is the Katsunuma Footpath in Koshu City, Yamanashi Prefecture. Koshu City was established in 2005, with the merger of former Enzan City, Yamato Village, and Katsunuma Town, where the footpath project is located. Katsunuma is famous for its Koshu grapes, and since the Meiji era’s policy of encouraging new industry, many vineyards and wineries thrive there. Since Katsunuma also has many historical sites, ranging from the age of warring states (late 15th to early 17th centuries) to the Meiji period, the footpath purposefully connects these spots by crossing vineyards.

Initially, the footpath was developed as a project of the municipality subsidized by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, but later in 2007, a citizens’ volunteer organization “*Katsunuma Footpath no kai*” was established and since then, has been operating the footpath project. Among the four courses of Katsunuma Footpath, three start from Japan Railway Katsunuma Budokyo (Grape Town) station; two run through the Oohikage tunnel promenade of the former railway Chuo Line, the main footpath attraction. While the transportation function connecting individual tourist facilities, historical sites, wineries, and other spots, is viewed as important, interaction and experience of the regional lifestyle and landscape were also considered. For example, the Fukazawa course, passing through rural communities, has a café set up voluntarily by local people, where visitors can enjoy the taste and atmosphere of local households. The Katsunuma Footpath is routed on public, private, and agricultural roads, but not on privately owned land. Mostly, the footpath follows agricultural roads surrounded by vineyards and existing paved roads in the urban area and villages.

3. Kyushu Olle

Footpaths in Kyushu are strongly influenced by Jeju Olle, a footpath on South Korea’s Jeju Island. Jeju Olle was established in 2007, with a plan to go nearly all the way around the island. In Japan, Kyushu Olle was developed mainly by the Kyushu Tourism Promotion Organization, established

jointly by the prefectures of Kyushu and private organizations, under the direct mentorship of Jeju Olle for knowledge in selecting courses, designing signposts, and so on. In Kyushu, many courses have routes that connect natural settings, historical buildings, delicious food, hot springs, and other appealing spots, aiming at walking tourists. A joint investigation team of the Kyushu Tourism Promotion Organization and Jeju Olle is selecting courses by actually walking the courses proposed by the prefectures.

The Kyushu Olle project officially began in 2012, and three courses were approved for the first stage. This includes the Takeo Course, for example, which covers 14.5 km, starting from Japan Railway Takeo Onsen (hot spring) station in Takeo City, Saga Prefecture. Takeo is a historical hot springs town surrounded by mountains, with a traditional atmosphere, having more than 90 pottery kilns dating back 400 years or more. Connecting these tourist spots, the Takeo Course was developed by the tourism section of Takeo City government. As the second stage, another four courses were selected in 2013, with a total extension of 106.4 km, although these later courses are not connected.

4. Misato Footpath

Another Japanese footpath influenced by Jeju Olle is Misato Footpath. Misato Town, Kumamoto Prefecture, is an area amid mountains, rich in both nature and history, with nearly 40 old stone bridges, many built during the Edo period, and rice terraces dating to the Muromachi period (14th to 16th centuries). The Misato Footpath was developed within the framework of town development, taking advantage of Misato Town's landscape. Conventional tourism there consisted of driving immediately from one stone bridge, along the national route, to the next. The footpath developers hoped to induce walking tourists to stay longer, for a meal or overnight.

Supported by Misato Town Commerce and Industry Association, and Kumamoto Prefecture, an incorporated nonprofit organization called Misato NPO Holdings developed three courses during the first stage, in 2012, but that number has now increased to ten. Kozaki Rice Terrace Course, for example, runs around the rice terraces bordered by stone walls dating to the Muromachi period. Visitors can walk, not only on ridgeways between rice terraces, but also between local houses. In other words, this footpath was developed with the cooperation of local residents. In 2013, through cooperation among Misato Town Commerce and Industry Association, Misato NPO Holdings, and other players (including landowners, local residents), the Misato Footpath Association was established to manage and operate the footpath. The association is not only making maps and improving the conditions of the courses but also holding footpath events during each district festivals and seasonal events because it highly values cooperative relations with the residents. Also, during such events, temporary cafés may be opened by renting space in local houses to offer tea and snacks to walkers.

5. Kumamoto Uki Footpath

The last example from Kyushu is Kumamoto Uki Footpath, routed by Misato NPO Holdings (which also developed the Misato Footpath) and commissioned by Uki Regional Development Bureau of

Kumamoto Prefecture. Its developers selected courses for walkers to enjoy mountains, fields, the seaside, rivers, and the historical streets of the Uki area in the center of Kumamoto Prefecture. As of 2011, it had unconnected nine courses with a total extension of 47.5 km. They differ greatly in degrees of maturity and cooperation with local residents. The courses that overlap Misato Footpath are well developed, but some others are difficult to find due to a lack of signposts or markings. For example, Kaitou Course is set in the Moushigi community in a mountainous area of Ogawa Town, Uki City. Here the stone walls of farmhouses continue from the community's entrance to the shrine at its peak, which formed the original landscape. Fields of ginger, a specialty of this region, and rice terraces stretch behind the houses. Although the course runs among wonderful agricultural village landscapes, no signposts or benches for resting are provided. In fact, some parts of the course are not well preserved, so one feels isolated from local residents.

6. Nemuro Footpath

Nemuro Footpath in Nemuro City, Hokkaido, has features different from the previously explained footpaths in Honshu and Kyushu. In Honshu and Kyushu, local municipalities were deeply involved in the development and generation of footpaths. On the other hand, the Nemuro Footpath was created by five dairy farmers from a group called AB-MOBIT, by developing and connecting roads on their own farms. They started this project in 2003, aiming to share farming lifestyle and the beauty of rural landscape with urban residents, deepen interactions with them by allowing them to experience farm life, and as a result, reactivate their region.

Three courses stretch over vast privately owned pastureland and wilderness, with a total extension of 42.5 km, each course starting from a Japan Railway station and connecting the five farms. Both in terms of landscape and scale, the Nemuro Footpath resembles footpaths in England ; such a path would be difficult to realize in the population density and segmented landownership of urban Honshu. Along the Nemuro Footpath, there are teashops that also offer meals and agricultural processing facilities where walkers can have hands-on experiences.

The Nemuro and Kushiro region, with spacious wilderness and many beautiful lakes, have already established a reputation as a famous tourist destination, but so far, most tourists have traveled from one spot to another only by car. In contrast, the footpath founders believe that tourists walking along the Nemuro Footpath can learn the pioneering history of the Meiji period, the history of pilot farms during the Showa period, the characteristics of human life in those times, and also rediscover the beauty of Hokkaido.

7. Ebeotsu Hilly Area Footpath

The Ebeotsu Hilly Area Footpath, too, was developed through a private group's leadership. As its name indicates, this footpath is set on the hilly area of the agricultural Ebeotsu Town of Takikawa City, where visitors can observe beautiful rural scenery : mustard and apple flowers in spring, buckwheat flowers in summer, cosmos flowers and ripe red apples in autumn. To make such a charming hilly area known to people inside and outside the region, Ebeotsu Hilly Area Fan Club was set up in 2006, led by local residents, and this led to eventual footpath development.

Officially, the footpath has three courses with an extension of 25 km, most routed through lands owned by the township, starting from “*michi no eki*” (roadside station) or highway bus stops. But in reality, for footpath events held almost every month, a different route is set according to the latest landscape situation, running through privately owned lands and letting participants walk to different places. Thirty-nine farm families along the course cooperated to let people walk on their ridgeways and fields, and to improve the paths’ condition by cutting grass, renting toilets, and offering other services.

In 2011, the Ebeotsu Hilly Area Footpath received high evaluation both in and out of the region, winning an award for excellent urban and regional planning from the Japan Society of Urban and Regional Planners. This footpath was also chosen among “the 100 paths of Hokkaido” selected by the newspaper company Hokkaido Shimbun. Because of these awards, the footpath strengthened relations with Takikawa City, which offered cooperation in selecting courses and other matters, thus deepening cooperation with the local government.

8. Uyoro Footpath

Uyoro Footpath, along the Uyoro River in Shiraoi Town, was founded, again, through private sector leadership. The operating body, NPO Uyoro Countryside Trust was established in 2001, first acquiring ownership of a long abandoned larch forest stretching 2.2 ha along the mid-valley of the Uyoro River. With financial contributions from members, activities such as tree thinning, pruning, and grass cutting began, along with promises to redevelop forests and restore the environment of the village forest hills. The footpath concept emerged when the scope of activities expanded along the Uyoro River. Then, expectations heightened for securing routes into the forests for experience activities and for observing the surrounding landscape and the ecosystem’s functioning, especially the salmon swim up the river for laying and hatching eggs. After acquiring approval for use of various roads—town owned, developed for river management, and through natural parks and privately owned land—and after work such as grass cutting, two 14 km courses were finally opened in 2003.

Owing to publicity and events held jointly by Japan Railway Hokkaido and Eco Network, the number of visitors to the footpath has recently increased greatly, especially from Sapporo City, and walking tours sponsored by different organizations also use this footpath. However, as the number of visitors increased, some problems occurred, for instance, cars driven on livestock farms and some walkers forgetting to close pasture gates.

9. Kuromatsunai Footpath

The last example from Hokkaido is Kuromatsunai Footpath, a rare example of a footpath in which the municipal government took leadership. Since Kuromatsunai Town, with the catchphrase of “Northern Limit Village of Beech,” is promoting regional reactivation, the footpath course is making good use of beech forests. In 2004, the mayor sought consultation on the feasibility of a footpath from the Kuromatsunai Town’s regional development promotion committee. In response, the committee established a framework for developing and operating a footpath, with cooperation from Eco Network, which is promoting footpath projects in Hokkaido, and together they completed the first

course. Since then, four courses have been developed with a total extension of 22 km, and many walking events have been held. At present, Kuromatsunai Town's regional development promotion committee is operating the footpath project, with the town office conducting secretarial functions and about ten citizens working as volunteers.

In the case of Kuromatsunai Footpath, although some courses go through the town and pastureland starting from the town office, most courses are set to connect existing forest parks, which are publicly owned, and tourist facilities. Thus, visitors enjoy forest landscapes and the walking experience. Nevertheless, these courses were set partly because of the difficulty in acquiring residents and farm owners' approval, many of whom prefer a quiet lifestyle.

V. Evaluation of footpath projects from functional viewpoints and challenges

The outlines of each footpath project roughly reflect differences in the social background surrounding paths at the time of introduction in Honshu, Kyushu, and Hokkaido. When examining them in detail, one can find characteristics of each region supplementing the macro outline.

Table 1 evaluates the footpaths for the extent to which they fulfill the previously explained functions from a regional resources perspective. Generally, footpath projects are expected to offer visitors from outside the region a direct experience of nature and regional lifestyle, to improve access to other tourist facilities, to let them participate in local events, and to help local residents rediscover the charms of their own region through interaction with visitors. For these benefits to materialize, the footpaths must have sufficient functions, so now we examine the functional capacities of footpaths. First, for the transportation function, the important evaluation criteria should be whether 1) the course includes places with high population (residents and landowners), 2) whether course maps have been prepared for distribution, 3) whether signposts have been set up, and 4) whether "course development" in reality becomes an obstacle for walking. Among these points, the most important is "number of residents (landowners)." While developing footpaths not only landowners on the footpath route but also residents and landowners in surrounding areas are requested consensus on the project. Therefore, the larger this number, the more difficult it is for the project developers and operators to coordinate. For most projects, residents' feeling uncomfortable or invaded, or being stared at, actually leads to problems or complaining. Currently, project developers have no option but to continue patiently negotiating with residents and landowners to seek their understanding and to address the possible disadvantages. Especially, when the project operator is not a municipality or other public body; this requires tremendous effort because clarifying the project's public nature and the whereabouts of responsibility becomes more difficult. As far as this issue is concerned, footpaths in Hokkaido enjoy favorable conditions across the board, in strong contrast to those in Honshu and Kyushu, where large numbers of residents (landowners) become an issue in setting courses.

Next, for public space function, the important evaluation criteria are 1) whether benches or other resting spaces are prepared, partially prepared, or not prepared at all on all the courses. Also worth noting is 2) whether the course is provided with drinking and eating spaces by the operating

body itself or by commissioning to a third party, 3) whether these locations are marked on a map, or 4) whether no such facilities exist. If informing visitors about residents' lives and activities as well as the region's charms is a goal, the footpath must provide resting spaces, drinking and eating spaces, as well as map them clearly, so visitors stay for as long as possible. Furthermore, not only the managing body but also local residents and other volunteers, who know local situations thoroughly, should participate in the maintenance and management of such facilities. Eating establishments, where meals are prepared from local ingredients, can be highly attractive for walkers. The Nemuro, Katsunuma, and Misato Footpaths are operating cafés independently. Yet another evaluative point is 5) whether more than half the course is "walkers only" or only a part of it, the rest is used as a road for cars. If the course is set on walkers-only paths, where cars are forbidden, visitors can experience and understand the region's lifestyle rather deeply, but if the course uses roads for cars, visitors find it difficult to interact with local residents or stop to enjoy the scenery.

Last, the evaluation criteria for landscape function include 1) whether the course is set sufficiently to incorporate rurality, the nature of the region, and living space, 2) whether "must-see points" are mapped clearly, and 3) whether more than half the course is paved or unpaved with wood or gravel or with asphalt or concrete. It is necessary to incorporate the course with nature and residents' living space, but actually to achieve this, not only outsiders but also local residents must be engaged in course setting. In each region, there are charming places known only to the local residents, but on the other hand, there are also highlights noticed only by the outsiders, because residents take these places for granted. Excavating special features and treasuring their charm is the basis for course setting. Hokkaido footpath projects were able to set courses by involving people from both inside and outside of the area, with support from Eco Network, but some footpaths in Honshu and Kyushu failed to engage local residents, or ended by setting courses without highlights due to certain limitations, such as alleys between houses or privately owned lands. For the same reasons, not many footpaths in Honshu and Kyushu incorporate the landscape through wood or gravel pavements or no pavements at all.

Generally, Hokkaido footpaths, which enjoyed great flexibility in course setting, have functions with high evaluations. In Hokkaido, supported with macro promulgation activities by Eco Network and other organizations, footpaths have acquired social recognition, and therefore they easily attract volunteers and other supporters. Conversely, in Honshu and Kyushu, footpaths managed and operated voluntarily by civil organizations are more highly evaluated than those operated under the leadership of local municipalities. Visitors are attracted by unique landscapes and the ambience of a place where they can have real, local experiences. They cannot enjoy such experiences in urban areas, and therefore rural villages are themselves an important regional resource constituting rurality. The footpaths' operating bodies must manifest this experience factor.

Due to their advantages, attractive footpaths with sufficient functions might experience deterioration due to an increased number of visitors. Rapid increases could cause contradictions, not only in interaction with project operators and landowners but also in actions not suited to the concept of the project operator or lack of privacy for landowners. Footpaths naturally have low exclusivity: they are based on approval of open access for every walker, but sometimes, due to regional charac-

Table 1. Evaluation of footpaths according to the three functions

name	transportation function			public space function			landscape forming function			
	adequate population around passes	course map	signposts	course management	rest spaces	drinking and eating spaces	“walkers-only” path	rurality on course setting	must-see points	natural road surface
Nemuro Footpath	good	good	good	good	found	good	good	good	good	good
Ebeotsu Hilly Area Footpath	good	good	good	good	found	found	found	good	good	good
Uyoro Footpath	good	good	good	good	found	poor	found	good	good	good
Kuromatsunai Footpath	good	good	good	good	good	found	found	good	good	good
Nagai Footpath	poor	good	good	good	found	found	poor	found	good	poor
Katsunuma Footpath	poor	good	good	good	good	good	found	good	good	poor
Kyushu Olle, Takeo Course	poor	good	good	good	found	found	poor	found	good	poor
Misato Footpath	poor	good	good	good	found	good	found	good	good	found
Kumamoto Uki Footpath, Kaitou Course	poor	good	poor	poor	poor	poor	poor	found	good	poor

Source : Author's interview

teristics, paths could have a strong eliminative (or competitive) nature. For example, in Nagai, Honshu, residents have strongly resisted being seen by visitors, while in Shiraoi, Hokkaido, too, the increased number of visitors is widening the gap between the project operator and the landowners. Generally, such differences in positions, interests, and motives among stakeholders become a factor that endanger maintenance functions of footpath projects and become an issue for future development.

In regard to this point, the non-establishment of the English style “the rights of way” in Japan could be responsible for such instability both in management by project operators and enjoyment by visitors. Nevertheless, in cases of potential conflict among project operators, visitors, and landowners, when municipalities support footpath projects, the administration can coordinate between the two sides, approaching the English style of the actors’ composition and compromise.

VI. Conclusion

In Japan, footpaths are not developed just by physically connecting paths exclusively for walkers. Old paths in village communities and paths passing through pastures or other forms of vast privately or publicly owned lands are incorporated into footpaths so that visitors can experience the nature and lifestyle in the region ; their access to other tourist or regional facilities can be improved ; and local people can rediscover the appeal of their own region, thus reactivating their enthusiasm. These footpaths, taking advantage of social differences in each region, fulfill functions as a regional resource. The projects reflect positions, interests, and motives of local municipalities, civil organizations including NGOs and volunteers, landowners and other local residents, as well as visitors from outside the region, thus leading to the formation of a new regional linkage through footpaths. These footpaths take advantage of other tourist resources and are positioned as a “convenient” tourist resource themselves. They lead to reactivation of each region, while integrating local stakeholders. In Japan, ecotourism can be seen as making use of the allure of nature and culture, including human history. The entire region rediscovers this allure and, by attracting tourists, encourages regional development (Kaizu, 2001). In this context, footpaths can play a new, dynamic part in ecotourism.

More footpaths will be developed nationwide, aided by the continuing boom of healthful walking. However, they should not be one-sided investments by the administration, similar to public work projects. Ideally, they should be developed by local residents, municipalities, and NGOs, as well as urban residents. These stakeholders should come to a consensus and cooperate in developing, maintaining, and improving the footpaths’ functions and surrounding environment, all along supported by the Japan Footpath Association, Eco Network, and other actors in macro promulgation activities. Moreover, after streamlining the existing legal framework related to ownership and occupancy surrounding footpaths, the Japanese should seek the possibility of cooperative management by project operators, residents, and visitors all joining hands, all aiming at a new stage of regional reactivation.

Acknowledgements. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 15K00663 and 15

K21615.

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