Evaluation of a Regional Reactivation Project by the WSR System Methodology

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a research result of promoting and evaluating a regional revitalization project based on the WSR system methodology. The paper introduces a regional revitalization project in Japan, and it explains the promotion and evaluation of the regional revitalization project by the WSR system methodology. From this research, the authors show that the WSR system methodology is useful in promoting as well as in evaluating such a social project.

Keywords: Agricultural Expansion, Regional Revitalization Project, Retail Expansion, Small Business Expansion, WSR System Methodology

INTRODUCTION

During the high economic development period in Japan, the population movement from countries to cities took place, and as a result agriculture relatively turned down. Especially due to bad environment conditions in mountain regions, or the regions between plains and mountains, the regional societies’ decline was accelerated. Moreover, the pressure of the farm products trade liberalization, and the enhancement request of the infrastructure for the home demand expansion became big problems. To cope with the changes of such inside and outside situations a lot of attempts of regional revitalization have been performed, utilizing regional resources and characteristics.

Japanese government set up the Regional Revitalization Headquarter in the Cabinet Office on October 24, 2003. After having set up this headquarter, the recognized regional revitalization plans reached 1,158 places in the whole country. Moreover, the law concerning regional revitalization was promulgated to advance the regional revitalization business of the whole country in 2005. However, the regional revitalization business of the whole country has not been necessarily advanced well in current years.

In such circumstances, people in the Haku-san Foothills region in Ishikawa prefecture, Japan, established a regional revitalization project. This paper explains how we have been
promoting and evaluating this project based on the WSR system methodology (Gu & Zhu, 2000; Gu & Tang, 2005; Gu, 2006; Zhu, 2000, 2004). This paper first considers the regional revitalization project of Hakusan Foothills from the aspects of human, subject and matter. Then the paper presents the questionnaires to persons working for the regional revitalization project. After analyzing the questionnaires, the paper shows the usefulness of the WSR system methodology in promoting as well as evaluating such a social project.

TARGET REGION

The Hakusan Foothills region is being composed by Kawauchi village, Yoshinodani village, Torigoe village, and Okuchi village, in Hakusan City of Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan (the city was born by merging of municipalities on February 1, 2005; see Figure 1). Hakusan is one of the Japanese three major great mountains, which has been worshiped for a long time with the sacred mountain. It is a region also in Japan where scarce flora and fauna live a lot. The water resource in the Hakusan Foothills region is also abundant. The water that flows from Hakusan has enriched four big plains of Kaga, Echizen, Seo, and Tonami. Hakusan undercurrent water is used for specialty in the region, and is also the source of the hot spring of Hakusan village.

However, negative implications such as declining birthrate and a growing proportion of elderly people and depopulation, the problem of the society’s infrastructure, increase of vacant houses and empty facilities, and increase in the abandoned cultivated land are factors to decline the Hakusan Foothills region. Especially, the population decrease has become a big problem in the Hakusan Foothills region. The population was 8,000 people or more in 1995, which decreased linearly up to about 7,000 people in 2009. A decrease of 1,000 people or more in ten years exerts a very serious influence for this region because there was originally not a lot of population.

There are 61 districts in this region, among them the so-called marginal villages (the population of more than 65 years old is more than 50%) account for 16%, and the semi-marginal villages (the population of more than 55 years old is more than 50%) account for 33%. The increase in the abandoned cultivated land is also a big problem for the Hakusan Foothills region. The cultivated land under management area of Hakusan City decreased from 5,447ha in 1985 to 3,445ha in 2005. The greater part of the abandoned cultivated land has been generated in this region.

Local residents are made embarrassed with the problem of the dissatisfaction of the society’s infrastructure in this region. As just mentioned above, the population of the senior citizens occupies more than half of the whole population in this region. The transportation to hospitals and supermarkets is important for the senior citizens. However, the traffic in the Hakusan Foothills region is inconvenient, and the number of hospitals and supermarkets is small. The lack of the society’s infrastructure causes the population decline further. Therefore, it becomes difficult for persons to settle down here, and then regional revitalization becomes more difficult.

REVITALIZATION PROJECT

The Hakusan Foothills regional revitalization project was proposed by parties concerned in the autumn of 2008 in the lecture “Regional revitalization systems theory” in Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (JAIST). This is an open lecture, which means that any citizens can attend the lecture without tuition, with the support of the Cabinet Office. In this systems theory course in 2008 fiscal year, “Mountainous area promotion” was considered as one of the themes of group work, and the “Hakusan Foothills regional revitalization project” was proposed. Ten groups participated in this project, including an agriculture group, a sightseeing group, an eco-tourism group, etc. The project considered revitalization of
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