

## **Community-based Tourism as a New Livelihood: Sustaining social and human capital and local impact management on the local community**

**Metabel Miriam Akinyi**

Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Japan

### **Abstract**

Community based tourism development and sustain ability in destination communities have become core issues for tourism development at the local level. However, low community capacity, a lack of tourism knowledge, and a lack of skills are considered to be the basic constraints that limit the ability of local people to actively participate in tourism planning and development. This paper reports on enhancing empowerment, human capacity building, and active participation in the tourism planning process at the local level. The research reported in this paper adopted the sustainable livelihood and learning experience approaches to sustainable destination development, and explored the links between strategies for tourism development and impacts on livelihood capitals that are available in the destination communities. The methodology was based on a workshop and field trip conducted in Kunisaki City, Oita Prefecture, Kyushu Island, Japan. This involved communicating with the Kunisaki Mayor and other community members. Among the issues discussed were the importance of community development; their on-going community development projects; the community's willingness to accept tourism-based development; community participation levels, and the current situation and future sustainability of community based tourism. The results highlight the importance of resident involvement and engagement in tourism planning activities. This shows that the capacity of local social and human capitals must be considered crucial for the success of planning for local development: including community empowerment, capacity building and the need to find different models for local and regional tourism organizations.

**Keywords:** Community development, social capital, human capital, capacity building, community wellness.

### **Introduction**

The Kunisaki Peninsula is found in the Usa area of northeast Kyushu Island. Politically, it is under the jurisdiction of four cities and one village, with the 731m high Mt Futagoat their center (Figure 1). The geographical terrain features mountain ridges and 28 deep valleys extending out radially from the central mountain (Figure 2). Plain lands are narrow and there are many short and steep rivers. The Japan National Tourism Organization describes Kunisaki as projecting between the Suo-nada Sea in the Seto Inland Sea and the Iyo-nada Sea. Approximately 1000 years ago Buddhism came to stay here, and a culture unique to this peninsula developed. Many temples and Buddhist remains are scattered all over the Peninsula.



**Figure 1: The Kunisaki Peninsula**

Source: Based on NASA Open Source Image



**Figure 2: Mt Futago**

Source: Photo courtesy of the Author

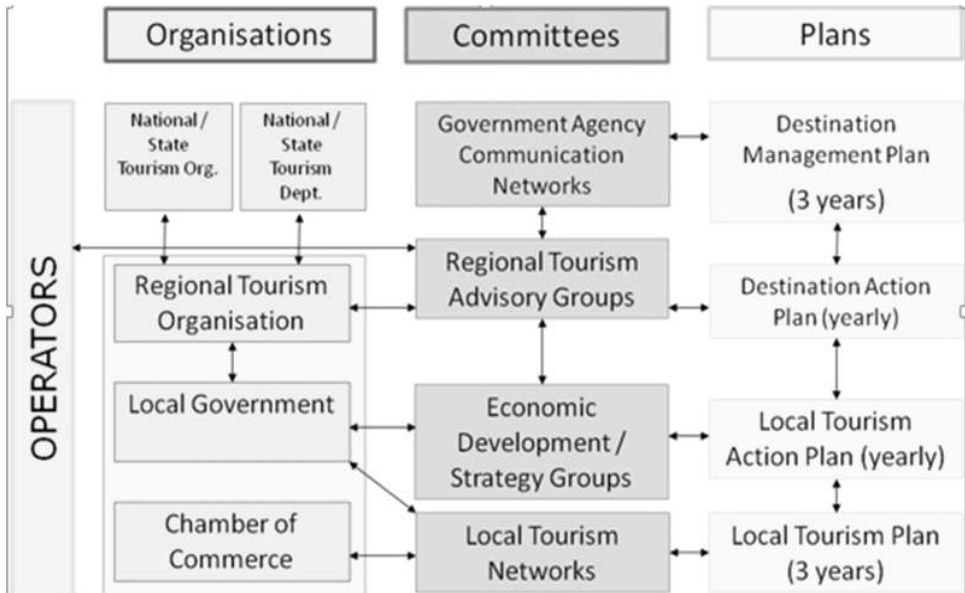
Kunisaki is very rich in Agri-tourism and food culture. This is one of those areas that are considered valuable when we refer to community based tourism. Though they are currently small in size, the involvement of the local communities is felt in the peninsula, and the guidance of local government is also experienced. Each of these stakeholders is vitally interested in one of the major challenges that this study identified: that of the traditional local agricultural activities requiring very high levels of skilled labor. For example, the community member weaving tatamiomote grass into tatami mats by machine has 15 years of experience, but she is the only one involved in the activity at the commercial level because these skills have otherwise left the community. For someone to learn and understand the procedure involved takes about two years work in *each* of the agricultural activities related to

it. This requires lots of patience, and a high level of self-determination and motivation. Due to this requirement, a trained labor force is lacking since these skills are not considered to be interesting, especially by the younger generation, so there is lack of motivation to acquire them. Thus, even though skills may have previously been passed down within the community over a considerable period of time, with the steady decline in the population of Japan and the increased migration to urban areas for better jobs and higher education, rural revitalization projects initiated by rural communities will face challenges in the near future from this lack of skills situation, and thus their sustainability is questionable.

This paper discusses the strategies required to enhance community participation in tourism activities through realization of its importance to community development, and is based on fieldwork undertaken in the Kunisaki area. Before going into detail though, perhaps the most important point is that social and human capital must be integrated, to bring a broader sense of community involvement in the redevelopment of rural areas.

### Literature Review

Communities are made up of many different stakeholders and groups that are involved in planning for development at different levels, as seen in Figure 3 taken from the South Australian Government's City Plan 2030 study (Figure 3). These groups can have different values, opinions, attitudes, and even power levels, that can override the weaker voices in the community (Beeton, 2006). However, many studies have tended to treat local communities as one body with a common attitude towards tourism development issues. This has resulted in misunderstandings that are ultimately reflected in unsuccessful developments, or in dissatisfied groups who resent and reject change, particularly in relation to tourism development and tourists. In the extreme, some of these communities may break down completely. Beeton points out though that such situations can be halted by increasing the understanding of internal, complicated and in-depth community relationships regarding tourism in these communities.



**Figure 3: Planning for Development**

Source: Modified by author from [http://www.npsa.sa.gov.au/about\\_council/strategic\\_planning/cityplan\\_2030](http://www.npsa.sa.gov.au/about_council/strategic_planning/cityplan_2030).

One of the many terms used in the community development field is community well being, which simply refers to the quality of life and level of sustain ability as viewed by the members of that community. This is guided by social, economic, environmental, psychological and cultural factors that shape the way that people think and act, as well as their relationships with others in their community. It is thus not easy to measure or interpret. For example, what works for one community may not be applicable in another community because it may be interpreted as being negative. Despite its complexity, community well being is important for community development, and it is also a tourism asset that if well managed that can be used to enhance community outcomes and wellbeing (Figure 4). Healthy communities with a higher sense of their own wellbeing are greatly along the path of self determination, and empowerment, through developing strategies that can help them achieve greater results from their plans.



**Figure 4: The Determinants of Community Well-being**

Source: Modified by author from

[http://www.nps.gov.au/about\\_council/strategic\\_planning/cityplan\\_2030](http://www.nps.gov.au/about_council/strategic_planning/cityplan_2030).

Community based tourism (CBT) is a form of tourism where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community. Human resource development is an essential component that if neglected at the early stage of community development often proves to be challenging to the community. The main areas of challenges are the required skills and awareness to enable them to meaningfully participate in tourism development.

Plummer (2004) agrees that the education and training of persons are major human capital strategies. Education illuminates both the understanding of the requirement of the

environment and the society at large, and training equips people to meet the labor needs of existing local employers as a means of promoting local growth. On the other hand, learning is the process by which skills, knowledge and attributes are acquired and translated into habitual forms of behavior and performance, whether by design or through the natural passage of time. Rodgers (1994) distinguished two types of learning: cognitive (meaningless) and experiential (significant). The key to this distinction is that experiential learning deals with the needs and wants of the learner. Rogers lists the qualities of experiential learning: personal involvement, self-initiated, evaluated by learner, and pervasive effects on learning. This approach emphasizes the learner's real experience as a main component in the learning process.

Kolb & Fry (1975) developed a model of learning based on experience known as *Kolb's Learning Cycle*. This means that someone who learns something new based on his or her own experiences will form a new concept which will be used in the real situation. Beeton (2006) suggests that in community-inclusive strategies, in terms of tourism, the focus is actually on capacity building and training to assist all stakeholders (including governments, indigenous and local communities) to analyze and interpret baseline information, undertake impact assessments and evaluations and be adaptive managers. She further explained that while capacity development is an element of empowerment and self-determination, support from higher level policy areas and the public is needed to understand the level of social capital in the community.

Jones (2005) defined social capital as a community's social assets, such as the extent and quality of members' involvement with others in their community; where engagement and trust between community members are essential ingredients of social capital. The connectedness of social networks, particularly where the members of these networks share social norms, trust and reciprocity, is valuable in fostering cooperation to achieve common goals. In the same context, it is explained that there are two elements of social capital: the structural and cognitive aspects. The structural aspect includes networks, roles, rules and precedents, while the cognitive aspect incorporates the norms, values, attitudes and beliefs of those in a community.

## **Methodology**

The Kunisaki Peninsula was selected as the study area for this research based on the criteria of: a declining rural area showing the impact of tourism development on the local people; an area experiencing participatory tourism development implemented by local government and local communities, and showing the intensity of implementation of tourism activities promoted by local government and community based groups. The Kunisaki Peninsula has a total area of 317.84km<sup>2</sup>, while Kunisaki City has a total population of 29,811 (as at October 2015) in 13,194 households ([www.city.kunisaki.oita.jp/uploaded/attachment/6958.pdf](http://www.city.kunisaki.oita.jp/uploaded/attachment/6958.pdf)). The age structure of the population is even older than that of the country as a whole, due to the constant migration of people to city areas that has left only old people in the local communities.

A detailed presentation was made by two government officials presenting local community on-going activities in a two-day workshop that the researcher attended. Thereafter, I visited the field areas where the physical activities were going on, engaging with the community participants by becoming involved in the activities and learning through observation about the tools and materials that are assembled before dividing the long grass, and how the tatami machine is fixed before the weaving is begun. In addition, I watched videos on the history of tatami elaborating its existence, growth, uses in the community, maintenance and resilience to this date. The videos showed very detailed information about the grass, emphasized its uniqueness, noted the labor intensive harvesting method, its various uses, and the care and community appreciation directed towards it. During this time, working group participants engaged in direct question and answer sessions, managed by the



community member in charge of the presentation. Through this interaction, we were able to understand more closely the area's tatami, shiitake mushroom, and water system uniqueness, and the reasons for its success in earlier years. Using the notes taken during the presentations and elaborations in the field work, I analyzed the comments through discussions amongst with working group members, while citing other issues and sharing ideas.

## **Results**

### ***Agri-Tourism***

Kunisaki has established three main agricultural areas, namely: growing of rice, growing of shiitake on Oakwood (mushroom), and planting of Shichitoui (the tatami grass). All these activities are done communally, headed by the community elders who are experts in specified fields, and supported by local government to ensure smooth implementation and effective daily operations. These community elders gained their technical know-how in the specified fields from previous generations. Knowledge within the community used to be given to the new generation to retain unique skills, expand on the area of specialized fields, and to maintain human resource development in the community. Local government remains actively involved in these activities in order to achieve capacity building by encouraging community members to participate in various projects, supporting them financially and providing markets for the products.

### **How is rice grown in this area?**

Due to low precipitation and volcanic soils that quickly absorb any rainfall, the Kunisaki region has struggled with the difficulties of securing water since ancient times. To achieve stable rice paddy agriculture, the history of the irrigation ponds began centuries ago when the fields were opened up and crop cultivation began. Additional terraces were established in line with the increasing population of the 19th Century. Given that the construction of large scale irrigation ponds was not possible due to the area's geographical conditions, earlier generations established techniques to secure the necessary amount of water by using multiple interlinked small scale irrigation ponds. Through this, in turn, beneficial water supplies were equalized and the precious water was efficiently distributed. In addition, by having open waterways between the irrigation ponds, the total water catchment area was increased so that more rainfall entered the irrigation ponds and a stable water supply could be attained. As a result, more rice paddies were cultivated than first thought possible, increasing the rice cultivation in the area (Figure 5).



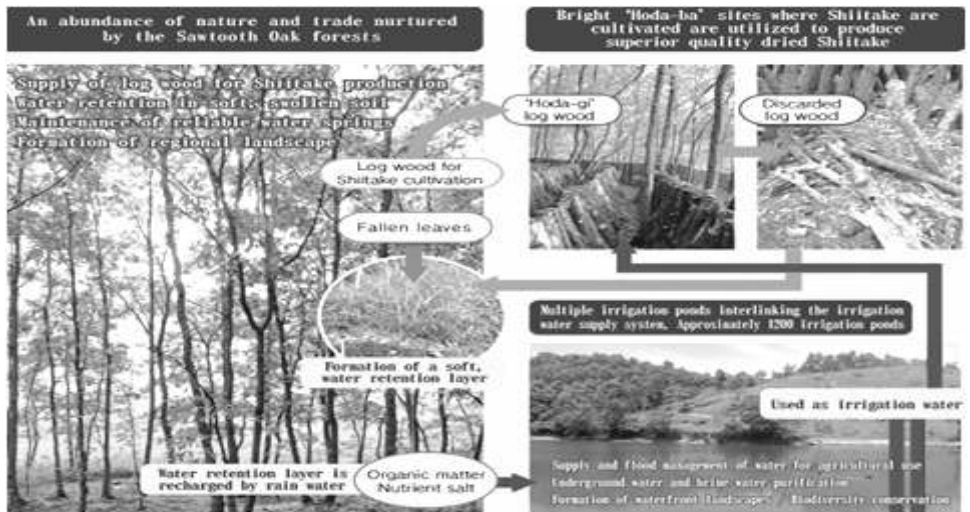
**Figure5:Rice Paddy**

Source: Photo courtesy of the author

## Use of trees to produce food

Local communities traditionally used log wood to cultivate mushrooms. This is a unique way of producing food in this area. As a result of its geography, the Kunisaki area has a lot of land between the rice paddies that would otherwise be idle. Therefore, the communities had greater access to lands or forests where they could cut down the trees in a way that they are able to re-grow. When these trees are cut, the leaves dry on the soil and whenever it rains, their nutrients soak back into the soil, making it more fertile for cultivation. In addition, the trees re-grow and regenerate in bunches, and in the end more trees are produced from one tree cut, resulting in forest renewal (Figure 6).

When the trees are cut, Sawtooth Oaks provide the necessary nutritional source for the growth of Shiitake mushrooms, and are used to produce a log wood cultivated Shiitake food source. The Sawtooth Oak forest resource system that produces this food source is highly regarded by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) because it contributes greatly to the aspects of nutrition and livelihood security in this region of limited arable land. Together with maintaining public functions of the forests such as recharging water resources, it is also linked to the preservation of the excellent rural area environment and scenery. In the areas around the base of the mountains, Sawtooth Oak forests are properly managed so that the recharged water resources also nurture the rice paddy agriculture and diverse ecosystems. In total, they form the beautiful scenery of the rural areas and farming communities.



**Figure 6: Forest Renewal Cycle**

Source: [http://www.kunisaki-usa-giahs.com/en/about\\_giahs/system.html](http://www.kunisaki-usa-giahs.com/en/about_giahs/system.html)

## Shichitoui Cultivation

The 2020 Olympics in Japan is creating a boom in the local sports tourism and construction industry. Japan is expecting to hit a target of 20 million inbound tourists during this time, and therefore from the national government to local environments, hosting preparations are underway, and every benefit that the Olympics may bring to economic growth is tapped even as far away from Tokyo as Kunisaki. Even though the Olympic Games will be held in the capital, some 1200km away, this peninsula has already gained economically. Their tatamiomote mats, which are the most durable and in high demand, have been ordered to be used in the Olympic Games events such as judo. This mat is also found in renowned areas such as the airports, temples and expensive apartments in the big cities of Japan and abroad.

The local cultivation of the grass used (shichitoui) does not overlap with water

usage for rice paddy. Due to its high rating for the tatamiomote mat sheets, the Kunisaki community has diligently grown it over the years, and kept its cuttings for 350 years since it does not have seeds. During harvesting, a portion is kept for the next plantation, and this has been passed through the generations. Kunisaki is the sole production area for this type of grass in Japan, therefore it is a treasure to the whole community. Compared with Igusa (soft rush), Shichitoui is hard and has outstanding durability, being well known in Judo halls, and as a traditional cultural asset.

The grass is planted in early May, and then as it grows, it is trimmed when it has reached a length of about 150cm, and is reinforced by chain of strings to prevent it from falling over. Approximately 90 days after it is planted, it is harvested by hand using a sickle. The Shichitoui is split lengthways into two strips and then dried out over a period of 10 hours. During planting, harvesting and drying, festivals are held to encourage the community to participate and learn how this prestigious grass is processed, since it is a very labor intensive crop. Figures 7 and 8 show Shichitoui fields and the end product, which is the tatami mat.



**Figure 7: Shichitoui Field**

Source: Photo courtesy of the author



**Figure 8: Tatami being woven by one of the community members**

Source: Photo courtesy of the author



## **Turning medicinal plants into edible foods**

Rain in this region soaks into the soil piled up with fallen Sawtooth Oak leaves and turns into spring water comprised of organic matter and nutrient salts. As a source of nutrients for phytoplankton and seaweed, this spring water supports rice paddy agriculture and coastal fishing in addition to nurturing the diverse ecosystem. A number of medicinal foods come from this area. The community has gone a step further to learn the nutritional values of those herbs that can be turned into food. Those community members who have gone through training of about two years have invested in restaurant businesses that offer only traditional foods with nutritional or medicinal values. This process is educational in the sense that the restaurant owner takes the tourist into the areas where they get such plants, lets the tourist have the feeling of owning whatever they are going to feed on by getting involved in the process of harvesting, and then finally teaches them how to prepare the dish before enjoying the meal. This is an interesting approach which can attract many tourists who are adventurers and would love to try new things. It is also additional knowledge shared for free with the tourists.

## **Discussion**

The planning process for the rejuvenation of agriculture is participatory in nature and includes decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It should be noted that local government is actively involved in these processes, while the local community is passively involved even though participation is induced and within a flexible planning process whereby local people can participate voluntarily. This could be due to the ageing group that contributes a lot of the total population in the Kunisaki area. Also, the community that passes skills down to the younger generation who eventually do not stay in the community but migrate to find other jobs that suits them, cannot flourish. Therefore, many of the older generation are left in the community but with no energy to actively involve themselves in community activities. On the other hand, the cognitive aspect of social capital, which is more about perceptions and reciprocity and trust in terms of what the community feels, incorporates the norms, values, attitudes and values of those older people. In the Kunisaki community this was highly rated by the participants in this research. This is because most of the on-going activities have been practiced for a long time through many generations, and have been kept within the community up to now. As much as this is a challenge that has to be realized in the human capital of an area, it is also generating pride that the community can use to live with, from the uniqueness of the skills they own and the high end products they produce.

The degree of benefit gained in this form of capacity building is associated with people's willingness to participate in the planning process, and the benefits related to the developments achieved through that activity. There is willingness to participate in community development by the community members, but this is narrowed to closer generations and is not open to the outer community. This leads to lack of adequate human power to participate in community activities, since the majority do not have the skills required, and the few who have these are too old to participate. Further, passing the knowledge to their children when they have left the community for other more interesting jobs is nearly impossible. The field trip to the tatami production area for example, identified old relevant community member as an old woman in her 60's, and one of the few with the rare skills to weave quality tatami. It takes a new learner about two years to grasp the basics, hence very minimal production is achieved when the skills cannot be passed on.

Self-motivation, encouragement by local leaders, empowerment, knowledge and skills, gender and age, benefits received from participation, the communication processes, and an interest in contributing to society, are components of social capital that support active community participation. Leadership style is another vital issue that was observed during the field trip, and at the workshop. The community leaders led by the Mayor of Kunisaki and his

assistant, showed great respect amongst themselves and to local government, thus the power influencing participation and contribution in these activities occurred through respect and trust for the leaders from the community members. This shows that social capital is implanted within structures of power and can be used to facilitate a mutual action for the common good (Mansuri, 2004). In addition, the relationship between the local government leaders and the community members created effective local community networks leading to strong community ties that fitted into the concept of social organization, networking, classification of social capital and social relationship (Putman, 1993).

A strong bond within the community supplemented by great respect for their leaders provides the potential to mobilize the community towards participation in local tourism development. For instance, the workshop I attended was at short notice, and yet the number of participants from the community was reasonable, and the willingness to share their projects with workshop attendees was much in evidence; including taking us through the processes and the tours to experience real time production of some of these products. This closeness was also evident in coordination and level of involvement by the community members with the workshop participants, and the level of network creation in rural areas.

## **Conclusions**

This study has shown that social capital is a vital factor for a community when participating in community activities, and in the development planning process. It builds relationships, trust and respect between leaders and the community members. It also encourages self-motivation and empowerment, which are key issues in capacity building. This study also showed that simply having the structural elements (networks, roles, rules, and precedents) does not create social capital; the value that the cognitive aspects (norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs) provide must also be present. Even though social capital is hard to measure, it is the key to many healthy communities like the Kunisaki Peninsula community. These two goals of social capital would improve tourism development in any community.

Human resource development is an equally vital aspect of tourism development in a community, and cannot be overlooked. Learning through experience is the practical approach for a rural community that has limited academic ability. Despite the activities in Kunisaki being self-learned through passing down knowledge to the present generation from the previous generation; that shared knowledge given to the right people is essential for the continuation of the prosperity of this community. Kunisaki products such as the tatami mats, shiitake mushrooms, and medicinal foods are very high end products which have gained massive popularity in Japan. For example, the tatamis from Kunisaki are displayed at the Narita airport, an international terminal which many visitors to Japan pass through, and are also associated with the judo skills respected by the Japanese community. However, the underproduction of these items demotivates the outside market from accessing them due to the waiting period. This to some extent affects the economic capital of the community, and also the sustainability of these products unless a solution is reached immediately. One of the solutions would be to mobilize the younger generation who are willing to take part in the training offered by the experts, and then continue to offer their services in order to increase production. Potential trainees could be persuaded to stay in the area by local government and community elders emphasizing the importance of the activities to the community, and the value they add to the community. Ongoing ownership then would be created within the community, and would protect and help develop their projects and their sustainability.

## **References**

- Beeton, S. (2006). *Community development through tourism*. Melbourne: Landlinks Press.
- Jones, S. (2005). Community-based ecotourism: The significance of social capital. *Annals of Tourism Research* 32(2): 303-324.
- Kolb, D.A. & Fry, R. (1975). *Toward an applied theory of experiential learning*; in C.

*Community-based tourism as a new livelihood: Sustaining social and human capital and local impact management on the local community...Metabel Miriam Akinyi Cooper (ed.) Theories of Group Process*, London: John Wiley.

Kunisaki City Official Website. (2015). *Estimated City Population*.  
ww.city.kunisaki.oita.jp/uploaded/attachment/6958.pdf

Mansuri, G. (2004). Community-Based and Driven Development: A Critical Review. *The World Bank Research Observer* 19(1): 1-39.

Plummer, P. (2004). Entrepreneurship and human capital distilling models of local economic. *Journal of Small Business Enterprise Development* 11(4): 427-439.

Putman, R. (1993). The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life. *The American Prospect* 13: 9-11.

Rodgers, C. (1994). *Freedom to learn*. Colombus: Merrill.

Saarinen, J. (2006). Traditions of Sustainability in Tourism Studies. *Annals of Tourism Research* 33: 1121-1140.

## About the Author

**Metarbel Miriam Akinyi** is a teaching assistant at Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University. From December 2011 to February 2015 she worked for Sheraton Hotels in Belgium, Egypt, Nigeria, and Uganda. Her main tasks were planning pre-opening of hotels within the African Region, managing the hotels in the pipeline in terms of regional staff training, the roll-out of new innovations in the hotel brands, and managing corporate social responsibility activities. From 2006 until 2011 she worked for the Metro Petroleum Company in Kenya as a sales coordinator, and for Premium Petroleum Limited as a client relations manager. Her current academic research is on the Socioeconomic impacts of community based tourism in the Masai community in Kenya. Email- metaak15@apu.ac.jp