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Possibility of regional development owing to the commodification of rural spaces: the case of the Kurobe alluvial fan

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In many developed countries including Japan a rural area used to be considered an agricultural space in essence, but it has become more often regarded as a space with other functions such as leisure and relaxation, social, cultural and educational values, and environmental conservation, in addition to a place to grow food. While the role of production has decreased in the present rural space, the role of consumption has increased. This situation is defined as the "commodification of rural spaces". The purpose of this presentation is to analyze the possibility of regional development through the commodification of rural spaces in Japan by focusing on the expansion of the tourism industry. A case study will be made on the Kurobe alluvial fan in Toyama prefecture.

Tourism resources can be defined when the commodification of rural spaces is considered in terms of educational experience-based tourism on the Kurobe alluvial fan. As natural tourism resources, daily natural environments such as present and old alluvial fans, terraced escarpments, shore erosion, coastal dune, deltas, cedar swamps, dispersed rural settlement, and characteristics of the Kurobe River which local residents usually neglect, may be extremely precious tourism resources to outsiders. Structures built on these natural bases can also be culture tourism resources. Open levees of the Kurobe River, various types of spur dikes, Water Shrine, Aimoto Dam, the East and West Gokuchi canals, and the main, branch and fringe irrigation canals are exemplified. Landscapes of farm product cultivation, Koshikari brand rice, Kurobe watermelons, tulip bulbs and Japanese sake can also be tourism resources. Furthermore, landscapes of old post stations on Hokuriku Road, historic sites that have not been considered tourism resources and new facilities such as a wind power plant of Nyuzen Town.

By relating new tourism resources discovered through the commodification of the above mentioned rural spaces to the existing tourism resources there will be possibility to realize more fulfilling tourism. However, there are limitations to implement regional development program through tourism in this region. Residents need to be interested in their local area and research local nature, landscapes, lifestyles, and culture, to recognize the value of their existence and to be proud of them; this must be related to regional construction. Thus, lifelong learning and education should be promoted. As a result firmly adopted local people's activities, it can be strongly anticipated that the number of tourists from other regions will increase. The Water Museum Project has been promoted on the Kurobe alluvial fan. Various materials related to water in the Kurobe River basin are considered as Water Museum displays and local visits and experience are available, which promotes the protection and maintenance of water, water environment and the sustainable development of the entire regional society. A similar approach to this is eco-museum activity, which can be seen in various regions.

Keywords: commodification, rural space, regional development, tourism, Kurobe Alluvial Fan