

# Introduction Process of Tourism-Based Community Development

## The *Onpaku* Model Introduction Process in Japan as an Object of Study

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### **Abstract:**

Recently, many regional areas in Japan have acknowledged the need to tackle tourism-based community development for regional revitalization. Tourism-based community development is defined as “activities of the local community to promote exchange and to create a community filled with energy by fully harnessing nature, culture, history, industry, talented people and other local resources.”<sup>6)</sup> How can this method of tourism-based community development be introduced into regional areas? This study examines the introduction of this method using the introduction process of *Onpaku* (abbreviated name for *Onsenhakurankai*) as an example. We mainly analyze this process from the viewpoint of leaders who promoted the introduction of *Onpaku* in their regions.

*Onpaku* is an activity of regional revitalization involving a wide range of stakeholders. It aims to discover and export regional charm, develop regional human resources, and create various tourist services that utilize regional resources. A case-study method was adopted for this study. The study sample comprised the following four regional areas wherein the *Onpaku* model has been introduced: Atami City, Noto Peninsula, Nagara River Basin, and Suwa area. We also interviewed the leaders who implemented this model in their regions.

We can recognize the following conclusions from the results:

- A background to the introduction of *Onpaku* was necessary to revive local, declining communities.
- The introduction of *Onpaku* was promoted by the leaders’ or residents’ goal “to revitalize their own community,” the existence of community resources to attract people, and an activity network.
- The process by which these factors effectively function is the residents’ and especially the leader’s decision to “revitalize their own community.” They discover attractive community resources and involve various people and form a network for activity through implementing community development activities that utilize attractive community resources.
- However, Suwa area was slightly different from the other cases in the introduction process of *Onpaku*. In the first three cases, there was strong determination “to revitalize own community.” on the part of the leaders or inhabitants. In Suwa area, however, local governments and the chamber of commerce set out the direction of regional revitalization, and it was them that introduced *Onpaku*. Then, individuals came to have strong feelings about revitalizing their community.

### **Keywords:**

tourism-based community development, introduction process, *Onpaku*, Japan

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## 1. Introduction

Alternative tourism reflecting the hobbies and tastes of individuals began to manifest in the second half of the 1980s. In Japan, tourists are interested in local nature, local culture such as local life, and interchange with the inhabitants of the area<sup>1)–5)</sup>. As a result of this situation, in the tourist areas of Japan, the “development of tourist areas,” seeking to improve the attraction of tourists, and “community development,” seeking to improve the lives of residents, have become closely related. Currently, many regional areas in Japan have acknowledged the need to tackle tourism-based community development for regional revitalization. Tourism-based community development is defined as “activities of the local community to promote exchange and to create a community filled with energy by fully harnessing nature, culture, history, industry, talented people and other local resources.”<sup>6)</sup> According to Nishimura<sup>7)</sup>, with the introduction of tourism-based community development, regional areas can strengthen the local economy within the framework of community development. However, in the field of tourism, regional areas can strengthen the consideration of community life through the introduction of tourism-based community development. Thus, many areas are considering whether to introduce this method. Consequently, the following questions arise: How is this method of tourism-based community development introduced into regional areas? What do regional areas need to do to implement tourism-based community development?

The literature on tourism-based community development has steadily grown from the late 2000s<sup>8)</sup>. For example, we have the above-mentioned study by Nishimura<sup>7)</sup>: this introduces with practical examples the theory of tourism-based community development. Others include a study by Yasumura<sup>3)</sup> explaining the birth of and principles for the establishment of tourism-based community development, or the study by Soshiroda<sup>1)</sup> giving the perspective of marketing in tourism-based community development. A great deal of effort has been made to clarify the entire structure and practical examples of tourism-based community development. Such development has unique characteristics that change from area to area. Therefore, in order to obtain the desirable form of the tourism-based community development, furthermore it is necessary to grasp practical examples. In particular, examining the process of introduction of tourism-based community development will create basic materials in other areas for use in the consideration of tourism-based community development.

This study clarifies the process of introduction of tourism-based community development, using the introduction of the *Onpaku* model as an example. We analyze this process from the viewpoint of leaders who are promoting the introduction of *Onpaku* in their regions.

## 2. Methods

This study adopted a case-study method. This study’s sample comprised four regional areas that have introduced the *Onpaku* model.

*Onpaku* is an abbreviated name for *Onsenhakurankai*; it is an activity of regional revitalization involving a wide range of stakeholders. Onsen means “a hot spring,” and Hakurankai means “an exhibition.” *Onpaku*, as a model, aims to discover and export regional charm, develop regional human resources, and create various tourist services that take advantage of regional resources<sup>9)</sup>. Therefore, *Onpaku* is a representative method used within tourism-based community development.

We analyzed the following four cases to clarify the process of introduction of *Onpaku*: Atami City, Noto Peninsula, Nagara River Basin, and Suwa area. We interviewed leaders who

promoted the introduction of the *Onpaku* model in their regions.

### 3. Summary of *Onpaku*

#### 3.1 The birth of *Onpaku*

*Onpaku* was born in Beppu City, Oita Prefecture. Beppu City is a tourist area constructed around eight hot springs. The number of tourist visits to Beppu City increased greatly in the period of rapid economic growth in Japan. The number of tourist visits to Beppu City was about 13.12 million (overnight visits: about 6.13 million; day-trips: about 6.99 million) in 1976<sup>10)</sup>. Then, however, the number of tourist visits began to decrease, and in the 1990s, this number fell to 11 million (overnight visits: about 4 million; day-trips: about 7 million)<sup>11)</sup>. Beppu City was faced with a need for regional revitalization. From around 1996, various community development activities called Beppu Hattou Undo had been performed. For example, residents would walk around their town, thereby discovering new regional charms and coming to appreciate the town more. Various activities contributed to the excavation and export of regional charms. Those activities showed low sustainability, because they relied on volunteers. Therefore, *Onpaku* was planned in order to carry out a sustained regional revitalization<sup>12)</sup>.

#### 3.2 The business model of *Onpaku*

We provide a diagram [see Figure 1] showing the structure of *Onpaku*. *Onpaku* gathers many small experience-based activities, called “programs”: walking around town with a guide, appreciating the richness of the region while interacting with local people in the lush woodlands, enjoying events featuring local artists in historic locations, increasing one’s own beauty and health through use of the hot springs, enjoying unique local foods, and so on<sup>9)</sup>. These programs are carried out in various locations in a certain period of time<sup>12)</sup>.

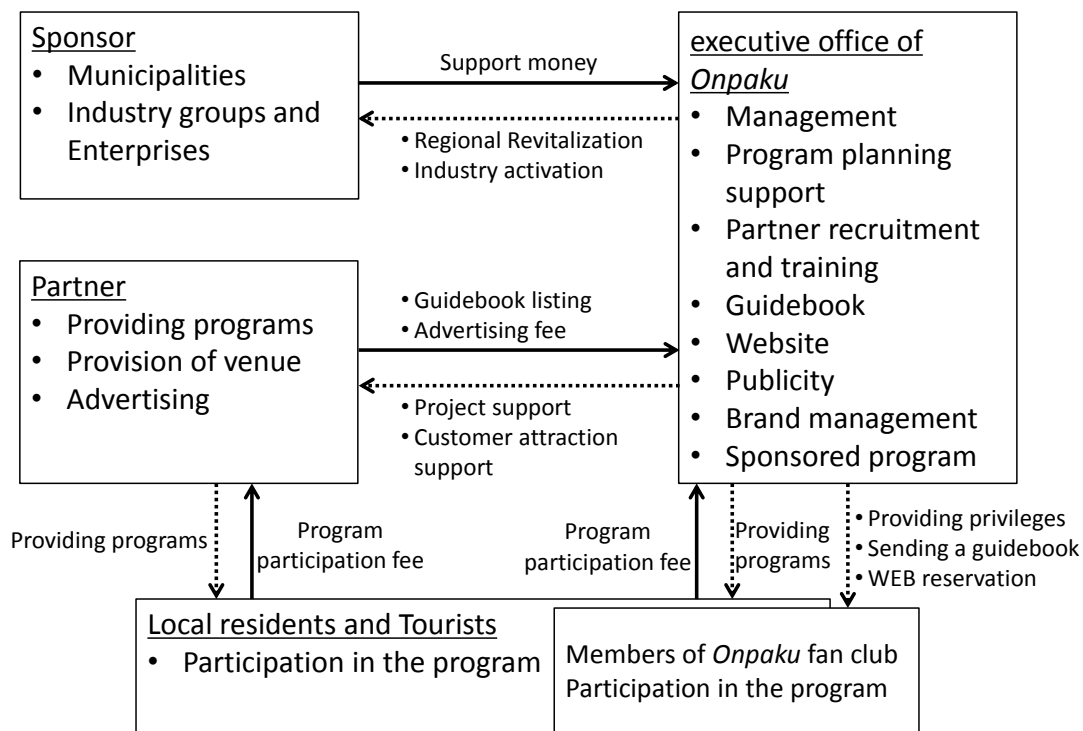


Figure-1: *Onpaku* seen from the flow of funds and services  
Source: Tsuruta and Nogami (2008)<sup>11)</sup>

Regional small businesses, called “partners,” carry out programs to provide access to regional charms. These are not only tourism-related businesses; they include also community development organizations, individuals, mall officials, or students. More than 70% of the participants in *Onpaku* are local residents. *Onpaku* involves the efficient utilization of local resources and the development of human resources. As a result, various services lead to new businesses. *Onpaku* is not a mere event intended to attract customers; *Onpaku* is an effort to develop a community by supporting people who want to try new challenges<sup>9)</sup>.

*Onpaku* received support from the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry from 2007 through 2009, and the actions taken in Beppu City were modeled as the “*Onpaku* technique.” In 2011, the general corporate judicial person *Japan Onpaku* was established. The “*Onpaku* technique” has since been introduced in many areas in need of regional activation.

### 3.3 Case selection

We requested the cooperation of *Japan Onpaku*, who cited typical regions for the introduction of *Onpaku* on the basis of the following policy. In *Onpaku* activities, there is a need for a leader to lead the activities. Therefore, we asked about the regions where *Onpaku* had been introduced and where leaders were present. Furthermore, we selected regions where *Onpaku* had been introduced within a year prior to the time of the interview, because the leaders would remember their process of introduction clearly.

Four areas where *Onpaku* was introduced were selected. We visited each area, and interviewed leaders about the process of *Onpaku* introduction.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Atami City

Atami City is located in the easternmost part of Shizuoka Prefecture. It is a tourist city that has developed around the hot springs. *Onpaku* was introduced in Atami City in 2009. The number of tourist visits to Atami City<sup>13)</sup> was about 9.23 million people in 1996, at its peak. However, this had decreased to about 5.76 million in 2009.

From the 1990s to the 2000s, Mr. A had observed Atami City’s gradual decline. He worked at a business-consulting company in Tokyo. However, he wanted “to revitalize Atami,” which was his hometown, and so he returned there. Firstly, Mr. A began by setting up an internet site to discover and export Atami’s charm. Then he carried out various community development activities (e.g., creating agricultural experiences) taking advantage of Atami’s resources.

In 2009, Mr. A and the chairman of the Atami City tourist association played a key role in the introduction of *Onpaku*. At this time, Mr. A brought in various residents who were interested in the revitalization of Atami City. These included city officials, members of the staff of the chamber of commerce, members of the staff of the city’s tourist association, young residents, and so on. Mr. A served as the vice chairman of the *Onpaku* Executive Committee. The experience program, for example, included a tour of various coffee shops in Atami City, the experience of tea-plantation maintenance and original techniques of tealeaf fermentation, and a tour of vacant resort condominium properties<sup>14)</sup>.

In Atami City, in the 2010 *Onpaku* fiscal year, called “Onsentamatebako,” the number of programs was 61, there were 52 people working as partners carrying out programs, and the number of those who had experienced the program was 1,123<sup>15)</sup>. Since 2009, the number of tourist visits in Atami City has fluctuated, reaching about 6.4 million in 2014<sup>13)</sup>. To promote the

resolution of regional problems, Mr. A established a specified nonprofit corporation in 2010. Nowadays, he is continuing *Onpaku* in Atami City as “efforts continue to expand.”

#### **4.2 Noto Peninsula**

Noto Peninsula is a large peninsula that protrudes into the Sea of Japan from the vicinity of the center of the Hokuriku region. On March 25, 2007, the Noto Peninsula was severely damaged by an earthquake. The number of tourist visits to the peninsula in 2006 was about 7.36 million. After the earthquake, the number of the tourist visits in 2007 was about 6.2 million<sup>16)</sup>. This represented a significant decrease of 15.7%.

At this time, Ms. B was a representative of a town development company located in Nanao City. She and other practitioners of community development on Noto Peninsula thought, “We must do something for revitalization from the earthquake.” Ms. B and other practitioners were already carrying out community development activities before the earthquake. These involved various inhabitants: city officials, members of the staff of the chamber of commerce, and members of the staff of the Onsen Ryokan Association. These individuals combined past activities and new events, carrying out *Onpaku* on Noto Peninsula approximately six months after the earthquake. For the experience program, for example, cooking classes using local vegetables and walks around the town were implemented. *Onpaku* in Noto Peninsula was carried out every year. Since 2007, the number of tourists visiting Noto Peninsula has gone up and down, reaching about 6.93 million visits in 2014<sup>16)</sup>. Currently, *Onpaku* programs are carried out as part of a course at Misogigawa University to train new leaders in regions.

#### **4.3 Nagara River Basin**

Nagara River flows through Nobi plain from Dainichidake in Gifu Prefecture, Gujo County, and empties into Ise Bay. The area of the basin is 1,985 square kilometers. *Onpaku* began in Nagara River Basin in 2011, around Gifu City. According to the statistical data on Gifu Prefecture<sup>17)-18)</sup>, the number of visits to the tourist area of Gifu City, the center of *Onpaku* in Nagara River Basin, was about 9.27 million in 2000<sup>(1)</sup>, but this decreased to about 8.16 million in 2010. In the 10-year period from 2000 to 2010, the number of visits to the tourist area of Gifu City had decreased by about 1.11 million.

Mr. C, who is the *Onpaku* leader in this area, was disappointed with the inhabitants’ lack of a sense of pride in Nagara River Basin. His goal was “to revitalize Nagara River Basin;” therefore, he carried out community development activities (e.g., walking around the town to study Gifu City) using the advantages of the resources of Nagara River Basin.

In 2010, Mr. C participated in the *Onpaku* workshop in Atami City. Mr. C met the founder of *Onpaku* at a workshop, and told him about the efforts he had carried out so far. The founder of *Onpaku* praised Mr. C and encouraged the introduction of *Onpaku* to Nagara River Basin. Mr. C was self-confident, thanks to the high evaluation given by the founder of *Onpaku*, and he implemented *Onpaku* in Nagara River Basin, involving a variety of residents. These residents were city officials, members of the staff of the chamber of commerce, members of the staff of the local tourist association, members of the staff of the Onsen Ryokan Association, young residents, and so on. In 2011, *Onpaku* in Nagara River Basin featured 100 experience programs, attracting 3,400 people in a month. The degree of recognition of Nagara River Hot Springs was improved. In order to promote the solution of regional problems, Mr. C established a specified nonprofit corporation in 2011. In 2015, *Onpaku* in the Nagara River Basin comprised 180

experience programs, and attracted 14,800 people in a month and a half<sup>19)</sup>.

#### 4.4 Suwa area

Suwa area is located around Lake Suwa, in central Nagano Prefecture. There are several cities, towns, and villages around Lake Suwa. The local economy of Suwa area long depended on manufacturing, such as the precision machinery industry. Accommodation businesses in Suwa area were able to manage without doing promotional activities, because local companies often made use of these businesses. But the collapse of the bubble economy affected companies in Suwa area, and the accommodation and food service industries suffered accordingly<sup>20)</sup>. According to statistical data from the Suwa Region Office<sup>21)-22)</sup>, Nagano Prefecture, the number of tourists visiting Suwa area was about 16.99 million people in 1993, but that decreased to about 14.17 million people in 2008. In the 15-year period from 1993 to 2008, the number of tourists visiting the Suwa area had decreased by about 2.82 million people. Thus, Suwa area needed someone to do something for revitalization.

At first, Suwa City and the Suwa Chamber of Commerce and Industry wanted to provide a variety of hands-on tourist experiences in Suwa area. They considered it better to provide this variety in a wider area than in Suwa City only. Accordingly, they invited neighboring cities, towns, and villages to undertake *Onpaku*. In 2008, *Onpaku* in Suwa area began in Suwa City, Okaya City, and Shimosuwa Town. Gradually, many other cities, towns, and villages participated, until finally *Onpaku* was carried out in eight cities, towns, and villages. The experience program, for example, included B-grade gourmet tours around the local coffee shop or local bar with a guide, a program to harvest local vegetables, and programs to sample locally brewed liquor and local cheese. Since 2008, the number of tourists visiting Suwa area has also risen and fallen, reaching about 12.92 million people in 2014<sup>23)</sup>. This represented a decrease of 8.8%.

Mr. D has been a town official of Shimosuwa. He was involved in the executive committee from the start of the introduction of *Onpaku*: moreover, he devoted himself to the adjustment of the municipal cooperation through *Onpaku*. Through his activities in *Onpaku*, his aim “to revitalize this area” became stronger, which also motivated him to work harder.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study analyzed four cases to clarify the *Onpaku* introduction process. Table 1 summarizes the results of the four cases. We can recognize the following conclusions from the results:

- A background to the introduction of *Onpaku* was necessary to revive local, declining communities.
- The introduction of *Onpaku* was promoted by the leaders’ or residents’ goal “to revitalize their own community,” the existence of community resources to attract people, and an activity network.
- The process by which these factors effectively function is the residents’ and especially the leader’s decision to “revitalize their own community.” They discover attractive community resources and involve various people and form a network for activity through implementing community development activities that utilize attractive community resources.
- However, Suwa area was slightly different from the other cases in the introduction process

of *Onpaku*. In the first three cases, there was strong determination “to revitalize own community.” on the part of the leaders or inhabitants. In Suwa area, however, local governments and the chamber of commerce set out the direction of regional revitalization, and it was them that introduced *Onpaku*. Then, individuals came to have strong feelings about revitalizing their community.

*Table-1: Comparison table of the four cases*

Case	The situation before introducing <i>Onpaku</i>	<i>Onpaku</i> introduction process	Implementation system at the time of <i>Onpaku</i> introduction
Atami City	The number of tourists was a decreasing trend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. A had discovered and exported the Atami’s charm. He learned the <i>Onpaku</i> model.</li> <li>• He then encouraged city hall and tourist associations, they worked on the introduction of <i>Onpaku</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An executive committee was organized by staffs of local government, staffs of Chamber of Commerce, staffs of tourism association, and local youths. They promoted <i>Onpaku</i>.</li> <li>• Mr. A was the Vice Chairperson.</li> </ul>
Noto Peninsula	Noto Peninsula was damaged by Noto Hanto Earthquake in 2007, and the number of tourists was decreasing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms. B and other practitioners of community development in Noto Peninsula thought that “we must do something for revitalization from the earthquake.”</li> <li>• Triggered by a briefing session of the <i>Onpaku</i> model held for the same period, Miss B and other practitioners worked on the introduction of <i>Onpaku</i> in cooperation with local governments.</li> </ul>	Local governments of Noto Peninsula were in charge of the secretariat. Ms. B and other practitioners were actually operating the events and programs.
Nagara River Basin	The number of tourists of Gifu City (the center of Nagara River Basin) was a decreasing trend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. C had discovered Nagara River Basin’s charms, and he had created a free paper to provide information about it. In addition, he had also performed experience programs that utilize the resources.</li> <li>• Mr. C then participated in the <i>Onpaku</i> workshop; he worked on the introduction of <i>Onpaku</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An executive committee was organized by staffs of local government, staffs of Chamber of Commerce, staffs of tourism association, staffs of Onsen Ryokan Association, and local youths. They promoted <i>Onpaku</i>.</li> <li>• Mr. C was the Chief of secretariat.</li> </ul>
Suwa area	The number of tourists was a decreasing trend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At first, Suwa City and the Suwa Chamber of Commerce &amp; Industry wanted to provide a variety of hands-on tourist experiences in Suwa area. They considered it better to provide this variety in a wider area than in Suwa City only.</li> <li>• They then invited the neighborhood cities, towns, and villages and worked on the introduction of <i>Onpaku</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An executive committee was organized by staffs of local government, staffs of Chamber of Commerce, and staffs of Ryokan Association. They promoted <i>Onpaku</i>.</li> <li>• Mr. D has been a town official of Shimosuwa.</li> </ul>

Future research should not only accumulate cases of the introduction process of *Onpaku* but also of tourism-based community development. In particular, it will be necessary to continue to grasp the actual situation of DMO (Destination Management/Marketing Organization), because DMO is gathering attention in the regional revitalization policy of the Japanese government<sup>24)</sup>.

#### Notes

- (1) From the survey of 2011, Gifu Prefecture has changed the survey method to one that Japan Tourism Agency had established. It cannot be compared with the survey results of the previous year. Therefore, we compared the data of 2010 and 2000. Data of 2000 is the oldest thing as data that are published on the web site of Gifu Prefecture.

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