

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Ethnic Foods

journal homepage: <http://journalofethnicfoods.net>

Original article

Expectations of residents and tourists of agriculture-related certification systems: analysis of public perceptions

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 March 2017

Received in revised form

28 April 2017

Accepted 1 May 2017

Available online 5 May 2017

Keywords:

geographical indication

geopark

globally important agricultural heritage system

regional branding

regional collective trademark

ABSTRACT

Background: To reveal the level of recognition of regional and product certifications related to agriculture, an analysis of the official minutes of assemblies and the perceptions of tourists was conducted. This is one of the first attempts to combine analysis of residents and tourists at the product level (Geographical Indications, trademarks) and landscape level (registration under Food and Agricultural Organization [FAO] or United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO]-related certification systems).

Methods: The research sites were Itoigawa and Sado, two municipalities in Niigata prefecture. The former is certified as a Global Geopark, and the latter as a National Geopark and Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS). The text-mining approach was conducted to analyze the official minutes of the municipal assemblies, and the questionnaire survey was conducted to identify the recognition of tourists on the certifications.

Results: The results of the analysis of assemblies and tourists provide issues and possibilities of the certification systems. Tourists' recognition of the GIAHS and its weighting in the assemblies are relatively low. Residents and tourists have different expectations for regional certification. Residents expect education, while tourists expect tourism.

Conclusion: It is necessary to evaluate the GIAHS's contribution to tourism and industry when municipalities and international organizations manage the GIAHS sites. Considering the gaps between residents and tourists and taking measures to resolve them can contribute to managing certificated areas by collaboration of stakeholders. Regarding products aimed at branding, consumers need to be informed about the GIAHS as a regional certification in addition to product certification to share the historical and environmental characteristics of agricultural products.

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1. Introduction

The area certification system for the conservation of biodiversity intends to maintain and conserve integrated landscapes including geology and human society [1,2], and is associated with developing an environment conducive to producing local food. In some cases, the area certification system is utilized to pass on local food to the next generation [3] and for branding it alongside the landscape [4]. In addition to area certification, product certification focuses on the relation between the product and area [5]. Adding value to local

food through product certification promotes development by local people so that they can pass it on to the next generation as a local brand. Both area and product certifications are utilized in branding focused on the relation between the local area and local products, and they can be combined in the conservation of food, cultural, and historical heritage [6–8] in different regions of the world. However, the number of cross-sectional studies is limited [9,10], and an integrated analysis of area and product certifications has never been conducted. In this research, we provide the results of an analysis that can contribute toward solving the problem, by focusing specifically on municipalities conducting tourism and area management.

There are various certification systems for areas including World Heritage, Geopark, Biosphere Reserves (BR) under Man, the

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Biosphere Program (MAB) by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System (GIAHS) by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). In addition to systems aimed at conserving nature directly, GIAHS aims to preserve the traditional agricultural system historically cultivated by local people.

The traditional agricultural system can contribute to the conservation of biodiversity in an area. The GIAHS certification focuses on agriculture as a social factor that drives the socioecological landscape, which is characterized by mosaic land use and resulting rich biodiversity. At first glimpse, the relationship between biodiversity and Geopark certification seems weak, but geodiversity is actually the basis of biodiversity [1].

Geopark certification aims to produce synergistic effects on geology, the ecosystem, and human activity and to conserve geosites. The unique nature of the soil forms an ecosystem that reflects various features and provides an ideal environment for the agriculture of each area where people can produce local food.



Fig. 1. Agricultural landscape in Itoigawa City. Source: Itoigawa City. Geosites of Itoigawa City are located in whole City areas. Those geological features developed unique agricultural landscape in the City. In this environmental condition, production and branding of sake are implemented using the logo of Itoigawa Geopark.

Regarding the product certification system, some systems including the Regional Collective Trademark (RCT) and Geographical Indication (GI) are enforced in Japan. Specifically, GI was initiated in 2015, and as such, is a relatively new system in the country. For these two systems, people register the names of products that share the names of places in the area. The social and ecological features of the production district provide added value of the products. Therefore, product certification is expected to contribute toward promoting the local brand. Through the process during which the common property of the area or the local food is certified, local people have the opportunity to recognize the value of local food.

Hereafter, we explain the methods used in this study. Then, regarding area certification and product certification, we provide the results of the analysis of the minutes of local assemblies and tourists.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Analysis of minutes of assemblies

Because Itoigawa is located close to Sado and the environmental conditions including the distance from large cities are similar, they were selected for comparison. Itoigawa City (Figs. 1–3) is certified as a Global Geopark, and Sado City (Fig. 4) as a National Geopark and GIAHS. For the analysis, we used the minutes of assemblies for the years 2015 and 2016. The frequency of the names of certifications appeared in the assembly minutes was the focus of this comparative analysis.

2.2. Questionnaire survey of tourists

The respondents in our study were residents in Itoigawa City, Niigata prefecture except Itoigawa, and residents of Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka. The gender and age of respondents are shown in Fig. 5. We investigated respondents' recognition of regional and product certifications to identify the public perception of certifications at the product and landscape levels.

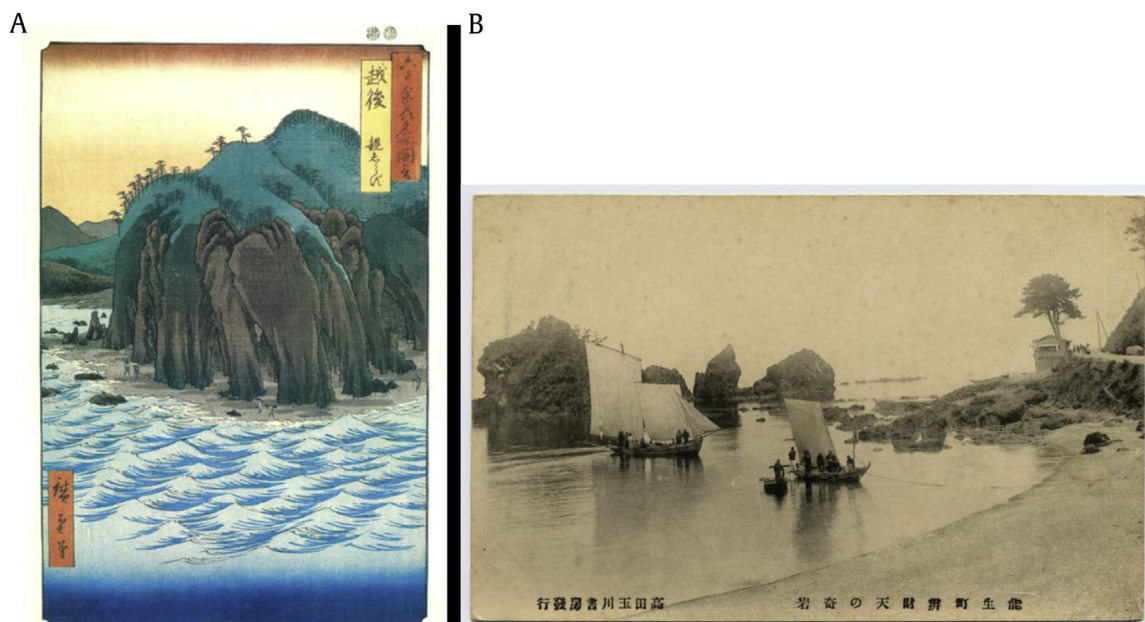


Fig. 2. Historical landscape of geosite in Itoigawa City: (A) Late Meiji period to early Taisho period; (B) The late Edo period, image by Hiroshige Utagawa [歌川広重]. Source: Itoigawa City. Before receiving the certification of Geopark, Itoigawa's geosites were famous for unique land forms.

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