

Achieving Food Sovereignty in Fukushima through Anthropological and Artistic Approaches Japan

International Christian University

Yurika Tatsuoka (Japan, International Christian University)

Instagram for the project: https://www.instagram.com/hashikko_icu/

Summary

This project consisted of educational activities about food heritage and production in Odaka-ku, Fukushima Prefecture, where all residents had to evacuate in 2011 because of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Fukushima Nuclear Accident¹. In cooperation with local farmers and a vegetable shop there, this project organized workshops to provide local children with information about food through experiencing actual farm work, lunch while communicating with farmers, and artwork to create name cards of vegetables that will be used in a local shop of vegetables.

Project Description

The first issue to be addressed in this project is that today's children have little knowledge of how the vegetables they eat are grown. This is because processed foods are being consumed daily, and children have fewer opportunities to come into contact with agriculture. In addition, Fukushima, where this project was based, has suffered a decline in income from agricultural products due to harmful rumors about the region's food safety and quality after the nuclear accident. Therefore, I decided to tackle these issues from two approaches: the anthropological fieldwork approach of conducting research from the local perspective by interviewing people, and the artistic approach of allowing people to learn about food while having fun.

I chose the location of Odaka in Fukushima because this town is where 100% of the residents had to evacuate in 2011, and the problems are more serious. In addition, in Odaka, there is an entrepreneur support group that helps people who want to create new businesses there, and by staying in the group's lodgings in a co-working space where such people gather, we were able to interact with them and establish new relationships.

The first step of this project was to hold an explanation seminar to gather members of the town who could work together on the project. As a result, four members interested in food were gathered. We also named the team "Hashikko," a name that has two meanings in Japanese: Hashi (箸, chopsticks), traditional Japanese cutlery, and Hashi (橋, a bridge), which links producers to consumers. We also decided to make original T-shirts to identify members at the workshop.

Other fundraising that contributed to this project included financial support from the Odaka government for lodging expenses. This was to support lodging expenses for those doing fieldwork in Odaka.

Together, Team "Hashikko" conducted anthropological fieldwork during the first two weeks of our three-week stay in Fukushima. First, we visited people engaged in food-related activities to deepen our understanding of local food. For example, we saw and interviewed local people who run a blueberry farm while working on solar power production. Also, we visited an Odaka production studio, which grows chili peppers unaffected by radiation. This studio could connect with the local community by producing and selling the products. In addition, we participated in cooking events and visited the houses of people we met there to learn about local food culture. In Odaka, where local cuisine is disappearing because of the long evacuation from the disaster, we could hear local people's valuable experiences. Furthermore, we visited a local elementary school to have lunch and communicate with elementary students.

Additionally, regarding artistic approaches, I collaborated with a local design office and considered what we do for artwork in the workshop. We decided to create name cards of vegetables that

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will be used in a farmer's shop because it makes it possible for children to engage in a farmer's job. We prepared stamps made of actual vegetables, for example, an eggplant stamp made of the hull of an eggplant. Participants enjoyed creating name cards while drawing and stamping.

Regarding changes we made to the workshop, although we had initially planned only to hold a cooking workshop, we added an event focused on farm work experience. The reason was that it would be easier to imagine how the vegetables are grown if we went to the farms and experienced the farm work. We also provided an opportunity to cook simple dishes such as onigiri (rice balls) for lunch in the workshop.

The schedule of the workshop (July 22, 2023)

10:00~	Farm work (Picking cucumbers and eggplants, Planting seeds)
12:00~	Lunch (Cooking some dishes, Eating while communicating with local farmers)
13:30~	Artwork (Creating name cards of vegetables that are going to be used in a local vegetable shop)

Reflection

Peace is created through community connections. After the evacuation order due to the nuclear power plant accident was partially lifted, one person told me that a restaurant was opened in Odaka. The restaurant not only served meals but also played a role in regenerating the community connections that had been lost due to the evacuation. Furthermore, the people who met at the restaurant took notice of chili peppers, which had not been affected by radiation, and grew them in their home gardens to create an original brand for the area. This brand is now consumed throughout Japan, supported by people from all over the country. In this way, I feel that the connections among people in the community have the power to cooperate with each other and face difficulties when there are any challenges. In this sense, my project could connect local farmers and children and strengthen local connections. Especially today, no matter how rich the food is in supermarkets, there are few opportunities to know how farmers grow their vegetables; therefore, this workshop provided an opportunity to talk with farmers and get to know local agriculture.

Personal Statement

Yurika Tatsuoka: Since this was my first time to plan and run a workshop, there were many difficulties. For example, it was difficult to gather participants for the workshops, and we had to go to places where children gathered and hand out posters to increase the number of participants. Also, flexibility was sometimes required, such as changing the content of the workshops while considering the true goals of the project. Nevertheless, the difficulties of this project provided me with the invaluable experience of organizing the workshop and involving people based on my own awareness of the issues I have with society about food. Specifically, I successfully gathered team members who had the same interests in modern food circumstances in which many consumers do not have connections with farmers. Furthermore, after the workshop, I was very happy that the children who participated told me that they enjoyed learning about vegetables, which they had never known before.

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Future Plan

We plan to do two activities to continue the work of this project. First, we will create booklets and postcards that document the workshop. Originally, we planned to produce only postcards, but we have decided to produce a booklet as well, in order to provide more detailed information about the experiences gained through the project. These will be produced in collaboration with a design office in Odaka. These will be distributed to the people of Fukushima and our university. Second, we will hold an event for students at my university in Tokyo, International Christian University. After considering how to distribute the booklets effectively, we decided to organize our own event. We plan to cook with vegetables from Fukushima, report on our activities in Odaka, and distribute the postcards and booklets.

Finally, this was the first year that my university engaged in Project for Peace. Hence, I would like to expand this program within my own university through these activities and increase the number of participants for next year.