

ADVENTURES IN SMALL TOURISM: STUDIES AND STORIES

Edited and with an Introduction by Kathleen Scherf

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The Power of Small: Creative In-Migrant Micro-Entrepreneurs in Peripheral Japanese Islands during COVID-19

Meng Qu and Simona Zollet

Introduction

Population decline, out-migration, and ageing in peripheral rural areas are issues of concern in many countries. Japanese rural communities disproportionately suffer from these issues, given Japan's status as the first "hyper-ageing" society (Manzenreiter, Lützel, and Polak-Rottmann 2020). As a response to the depopulation issue, in recent years the Japanese government has been attempting to promote domestic urban-to-rural migration and new economic activities in rural areas. Many rural in-migrants are engaged in tourism, creative professions, and local revitalization projects that creatively engage with and enhance local communities' cultural, social, and environmental resources (Cunha, Kastenholz, and Carneiro 2020; Qu, Coulton, and Funck 2020). There is, however, a persisting tendency to focus mainly on the economic outcomes of in-migration, tourism, and rural entrepreneurship (Kalantaridis 2010; Stockdale 2006), both in policy and research. This contrasts with the growing literature on the contribution of small businesses to rural communities' quality of life (Olmedo, Twuijver, and O'Shaughnessy 2021). Furthermore, it has been suggested that in smaller communities tourism can be developed more sustainably, including through creative approaches (Baixinho et al. 2020; Richards 2021). Research on rural resilience

and revitalization processes driven by creative in-migrant entrepreneurs is therefore becoming more valuable.

In addition to the common problems with socio-economic decline faced by many rural regions, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought further negative impacts to peripheral areas that depend on tourism. COVID-19, however, offers an unprecedented opportunity to examine how small-scale, creative tourism initiatives are responding to the disruptions caused by the pandemic. The double challenge micro-businesses are facing is how to maintain vital tourism flows in peripheral and resource-constrained communities while at the same time ensuring the safety of their elderly residents.

This chapter aims to qualitatively explore the creative strategies employed by in-migrant tourism micro-entrepreneurs to increase the resilience of small tourism destinations, focusing on their dual role as both tourism businesses and community-engaged enterprises. Fieldwork was conducted at a Japanese heritage site, the town of Mitarai, located in one of the peripheral islands of Japan's Seto Inland Sea. We employed participant observation and interviews with small-scale tourism businesses both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic to describe the creative activities performed through newcomer-resident-tourist co-creation, and we highlight some representative cases to demonstrate the role of in-migrant micro-entrepreneurs in enhancing community resilience. The fieldwork carried out after the COVID pandemic began is especially useful in illustrating how "the power of small" entails a diversified and organic approach to co-creating new cultural assets while preserving community resources and social resilience. The results suggest that small-scale tourism plays a key role in community resilience in peripheral rural contexts, as well as in ensuring that revitalization goals can be pursued even in the face of unpredictable events such as COVID-19. The chapter concludes by highlighting that the power of small hinges upon creating flexible, low-cost, multi-functional tourism businesses, and upon advancing strategies for balancing both community and tourism needs. These considerations can also provide valuable lessons for the revitalization of other small rural communities around the world. Small and peripheral destinations also emerge as potential attractive destinations for entrepreneurial in-migrants in the post-pandemic world.

Why Do Creative In-Migrant Micro-Entrepreneurs Matter on Small Islands?

Approaches that focus on creative enhancement (Mitchell 2013) are more likely to occur in tourism destinations with insufficient visitation and limited resources, often in “small or isolated settings” (Mitchell 2013) characterized by small-scale events and businesses (Qu and Cheer 2021). In small-scale peripheral rural communities, especially in the Global North, research has been increasingly engaging with the role of small or micro-businesses and creative entrepreneurs (Korsgaard, Ferguson, and Gaddefors 2015; Stone and Stubbs 2007; Yachin and Ioannides 2020), with growing attention paid to their embeddedness through social innovation and network-building abilities. In the tourism sector, creative artistic entrepreneurs help to revalue the local landscape and cultural capital through tourism (Crawshaw and Gkartzios 2016; Prince 2018).

Entrepreneurs, particularly those who are in-migrants to a community, further enhance their socially embedded roles through the creation of local to extra-local networks (Bosworth and Atterton 2012). In-migrant entrepreneurs and their networks can help to establish effective linkages between visitors and new migrants, and they facilitate business integration into the local destination and regional cultural context (Stone and Stubbs 2007). In-migrant entrepreneurs’ capacity to be a bridge between the local community and the outside has been described as “mixed embeddedness” (Kloosterman and Rath 2001) and “placial embeddedness” (Korsgaard, Ferguson, and Gaddefors 2015) because of their role in integrating local and extra-local resources as well as structuring social networks and capital flows. Entrepreneurs establish a relational resource exchange mode through processes of “market-exchange, redistribution and reciprocity” (Olmedo, Twuijver, and O’Shaughnessy 2021). While research has mostly focused on international in-migrant entrepreneurs, domestic urban-to-rural in-migrants also play the relational function of connecting intra-community networks with extra-local networks (Bosworth and Atterton 2012). The presence of networks of in-migrant entrepreneurs within rural communities helps to create an environment that facilitates new opportunities for sustaining rural communities (Dinis 2021).

In some cases, creative tourism entrepreneurs also play a socially and community-engaged role (Duxbury and Campbell 2011; Qu, McCormick, and Funck 2022), reflecting the broader literature on the social role of small

businesses in fulfilling community needs (Barraket et al. 2019; Michaelis et al. 2020; Olmedo, Twuijver, and O'Shaughnessy 2021), thus also contributing to sustainable community development. Tourism micro-businesses founded by lifestyle in-migrants, in particular, are often both business-oriented and community-engaged, due to the fact that they focus more on lifestyle rather than economic outcomes (Cederholm 2018). As such, they play multi-faceted roles in structuring diversified innovation networks for resilience building (Michaelis et al. 2020; Qu and Cheer 2020), sustainable development (Qu, McCormick, and Funck 2022; Yachin and Ioannides 2020), and regional revitalization (Qu, Coulton, and Funck 2020; Qu and Cheer 2020).

Rural creative entrepreneurs, however, also suffer from obstacles such as geographical isolation, inefficient policy and network supports, inadequate markets, and conservative neighbourhood relationships (Woods 2012). And yet entrepreneurs in resource-constrained communities faced with an uncertain future are also more likely to display a higher resilience and to succeed in weathering sudden shocks (Michaelis et al. 2020). In resource-constrained contexts, small businesses tend to adopt a multi-faceted nature and functions to sustain themselves (Michaelis et al. 2020). Literature engaging with small or micro-businesses describes their behaviour variously as entrepreneurial bricolage, resourcefulness (Barraket et al. 2019; Michaelis et al. 2020; Yachin and Ioannides 2020), and frugality within a resource-constrained environment (Michaelis et al. 2020).

Small islands can be seen as resource-constrained environments (Arias and Cruz 2019; Burnett and Danson 2017), often characterized by a fragile ecological, economic, and social structure (Karampela 2017). As a result, they also face more challenges when it comes to the potential for tourism development, especially in relation to issues of long-term sustainability and resilience (Karampela 2017; Qu and Cheer 2020). Tourism on a small island can be developed by way of a creative or artisanal entrepreneurial bricolage, and especially through the use of locally embodied narratives and cultural resources (Arias and Cruz 2019). Although the role of creative entrepreneurs for the economic revitalization of declining peripheral areas is often emphasized, especially in tourism, the direct economic benefits of creative industries are hard to evaluate (Woods 2012). On the other hand, their social role is often overlooked. In this research, we seek to explore how the individual attributes and network characteristics of creative in-migrant micro-entrepreneurs contribute to make them more resilient in the face of unexpected

external impacts such as COVID-19. Furthermore, we investigate the role of in-migrant networks in providing a bridge between individual and community-level resilience. We argue that places like small peripheral islands provide an especially suitable context in which to explore the power of small.

Small Tourism, Creative Entrepreneurs, and Community Resilience in Mitarai

Mitarai village, located on Osakishimojima island, in the Seto Inland Sea (see figure 9.1), is a typical small island destination with a population of about two hundred people. Mitarai is a Japanese heritage site due to its preserved Edo-period townscape, with high historical and cultural appeal. Despite its potential for tourism development, there is a lack of young and innovative people engaging in tourism-related activities. More than two-thirds of the island population consists of elderly people over sixty-five; of these, almost half are over eighty (Qu, Coulton, and Funck 2020). In the past decade, however, Mitarai has attracted ten in-migrant micro-entrepreneurs; these people have subsequently established restaurants, accommodation facilities, as well as an art festival, and their efforts have started to provide a model for rural revitalization (Qu, Coulton, and Funck 2020).

The Japanese government has been trying to attract young domestic in-migrants and their families to rural areas in the expectation that such migrants would play an important role in decreasing the speed of depopulation (Schrade 2019). Previous research conducted in Mitarai, however, found that among the micro-entrepreneurs who move to the community, there are both long-term settlers as well as transmigrants who live in the community only for certain periods, such as on weekends (Qu, Coulton, and Funck 2020; Qu and Cheer 2020). Some of the businesses in the town are run by commuters. Compared to settled entrepreneurs, commuters are less welcome by the community, which perpetuates their social distance from locals. However, these “unsettled” transmigrants can also play an important role in bringing social innovation to local tourism-development efforts (Qu, Coulton, and Funck 2020), enhancing creative community-engagement (Qu, Coulton, and Funck 2020; Qu, McCormick, and Funck 2022), and building social resilience (Qu and Cheer 2021). Mitarai can be considered representative of small peripheral island communities struggling with decline and who treat tourism development and in-migrant entrepreneurs as their last ray of hope. This case study

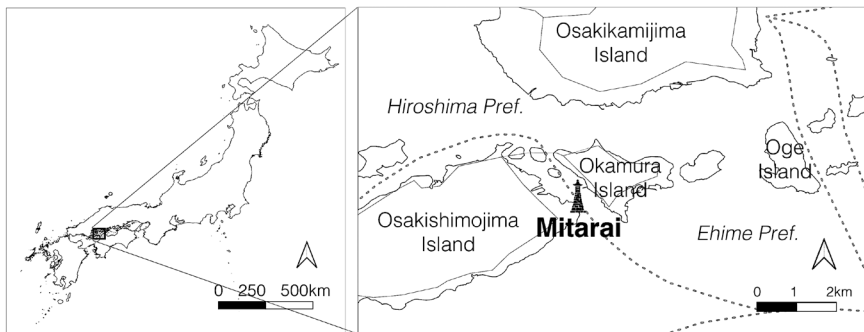


Figure 9.1: Location of Mitarai (authors' illustration).

Source: Geospatial Information Authority of Japan, https://www.gsi.go.jp/kankyochiri/gm_japan_e.html (accessed 10 April 2023).

can therefore contribute useful insights applicable to the transformation of other small islands or rural communities facing similar conditions both nationally and globally.

Methods

Much of the work on the role of small-scale in-migrant entrepreneurs in rural contexts is located at the intersection of the rural entrepreneurship, lifestyle migration, and creative tourism literatures, where social innovation (Olmedo, Twuijver, and O'Shaughnessy 2021), tourism innovation (Richards 2020), rural creativity (Borch et al. 2008; Woods 2012), resourcefulness (Barraket et al. 2019; Qu, McCormick, and Funck 2022), as well as frugality within a resource-constrained environment (Michaelis et al. 2020), allow a cross-regional exchange of social capital, restructuring, and reciprocity in small rural communities (Lysgård 2016). According to the literature on networks, social innovation can play a relational role that facilitates local to extra-local social capital exchange, as well as aiding in the transformation of resources tailored to local conditions after the establishment of a networked community by in-migrants. This creative and relational-based framework suggests that rural in-migrant entrepreneurs' ability for creative transformation and networking should play a central role in producing innovative strategies for the resilience of their businesses as well as their communities under the double strain of depopulation and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The fieldwork was conducted over four years, both before the pandemic (October 2017 to December 2019) and during (March 2020 to August 2021). The exploratory research used qualitative methods (Creswell 2017), including formal and informal interviews and naturalistic and participatory observation. Interviews were conducted with micro-entrepreneurs, elderly residents, and government officials before and during the pandemic. The events and activities documented include tourism and research visits, community event volunteering, local board meetings, university on-site projects, international education workshops, as well as online promotion events organized by tourism entrepreneurs. Additionally, archival documents and online information, including internal reports and documents from the local government and small-scale tourism enterprises, were collected during the entire fieldwork. The type and quantity of data is extensively documented in table 9.1.

Adopting a longitudinal research method allows us to observe how in-migrant entrepreneurs' activities and attitudes change over time, and to compare their efforts before and during the COVID pandemic both at the individual and community level. Qualitative research is also very suitable for small numbers of participants, such as the ten entrepreneurs in the village. Interview questions before the pandemic included interviewees' understanding of depopulation and decline issues in their community, the current tourism-development issues, and the connection between their business visions and community-revitalization goals. Follow-up interviews during COVID-19, most of which were conducted online, focused on understanding the impact of the pandemic, the change in business patterns, and entrepreneurs' creative strategies and adaptation. Participant observation during the pandemic also provided on-site confirmation of interviewees' statements. All interviews lasted an average of thirty minutes and were recorded and transcribed in Japanese before being translated into English. The content was analyzed through a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 2011), following open, axial, and selective coding methods (Creswell 2017). The results and discussion are presented together and organized by themes.

Table 9.1: Research methods and data

SCALE	DATA	SOURCES	QUANTITY	
Mitarai village	Observation	Naturalistic	Field observations from before (2017-2019) and after the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021), documentary videos, field notes and photographs	Approx. 50 days of observation (30 days before and 20 days after COVID impact) with 120 pages of fields notes, 50 minutes documentary videos, 300 photos
		Participatory	Participation in 4 community events (2019-2021) as volunteer or co-organizer; informal interviews	Approx. 10 days of observation with 20 pages of fields notes
	Interview	Local entrepreneurs	Semi-structured interviews before the COVID-19 and online follow up interviews during the COVID-19	10 semi-structured interviews with 30 pages of transcript 5 online follow-up interviews with 10 pages of transcript
		Elderly residents	Un-structured interview during COVID-19	8 un-structured interviews with 5 pages of transcript
		Government	Semi-structured interviews and public lecture before COVID-19 Online promotion event during COVID-19	3 unstructured interviews with local tourism association and government officials, 5 government-organized public lectures, and 1 online promotion event with 15 pages of transcript
Regional	Archival documents, online information	Official tourism information, SNS, online articles, municipal reports	20 sources	
	Secondary data analysis	Number of visitors (2019-2020), regional COVID-19 cases (2020)	2 years of data provided by the Mitarai Tourism Association. 2020 COVID infection number by (Chugoku News Digital, 2021)	

Source: Authors

Results and Discussion: Small Community, Stronger Engagement

A Taxonomy of In-Migrant Entrepreneurs

In the decades before the COVID pandemic, Mitarai was one of the many shrinking island communities unable to revive its economy, with its original industrial structure declining while new tourism development lagged behind. Besides the scarcity of tourists, underlying causes such as the lack of residents and in-migrants and insufficient promotion efforts to attract tourists (Qu, Coulton, and Funck 2020) suggested that this small declining community did not have the necessary internal energy to thrive. In the last decade, however, the growing importance of micro-entrepreneurship for community revitalization and resilience building has become more and more apparent.

It is possible to identify three broad categories of in-migrant micro-entrepreneurs based on their migration pathways: (1) Regional Revitalization Corps program (*Chiiki Okoshi Kyōryokutai* in Japanese) members, who moved to a rural community through a government-funded community development scheme (Zollet and Qu 2019, 2023); (2) young and/or middle-aged in-migrants moving to rural destinations independently and with no previous connections to the community; (3) in-migrants with previous family ties to the community (e.g., their family was originally from the island, but they were not born there), including return migrants. Within these three categories, the motivations for moving to the community and opening businesses vary, with some being more lifestyle-oriented and others more economy-oriented. In-migrants can be further categorized by two types: the first includes those who settle down as new residents, despite remaining connected to the urban areas where they lived and worked before; the second contains cases of “non-settled” in-migrants, such as commuters who only run their business in Mitarai, or transmigrants who move between two locations (e.g., Mitarai on the weekends and a larger urban area during weekdays). Although previous research shows that the latter group receives less of a welcome from the local population, non-settled in-migrants also contribute to community-level revitalization efforts, sometimes significantly (Qu, Coulton, and Funck 2020). One such example is the founder of Mitarai’s Shiosai art festival, who resides in Mitarai mainly on weekends.

This case also shows the increasingly important role of creative tourism in the revitalization of Mitarai. Creative tourism here includes the transformation of vacant semi-abandoned historical buildings into new tourism facilities and cultural attractions, as well as the establishment of new artistic events that bring additional visitors to Mitarai, such as the Shiosai art festival (Qu and Cheer 2021). In a broader sense, however, creativity also contributes to the building of new social assets that locals can also benefit from (Qu, McCormick, and Funck 2022; Schrade 2019). Since most micro-businesses open mainly during the holidays and weekends, this frees up time for in-migrant entrepreneurs to play other roles, including those of artists, writers, non-profit organization leaders, designers, and community supporters. Several in-migrants, for example, were involved in the organization of social events or in community groups such as the local volunteer firefighter group. From a tourism perspective, however, despite the developments brought by in-migrant entrepreneurs, pre-COVID tourist flows remained lower than entrepreneurs' expectations due to Mitarai's peripherality.

Small Equals Safer: Tourism Recovery during COVID

During the three COVID waves of 2020 (see figure 9.2), tourism all over Japan came to a near halt, particularly at the beginning of the virus's emergence. Similarly, in Mitarai there were almost no visitors in April and May 2020. Due to the continued interruption of international tourist flows, government efforts turned to domestic tourism, with the implementation of the "Go to Travel" campaign in July 2020. The campaign, however, was suspended only a few months later due to the beginning of the third wave of the pandemic.

Over the course of 2020, 26.9 per cent of tourism businesses nationwide reportedly went bankrupt as a result of the pandemic (Kankokeizai News 2021). Mitarai, however, was not as severely impacted, and none of the town's tourism businesses closed because of COVID, even though Mitarai received no visitors for nearly two months. In the following months, with domestic tourists starting to privilege smaller, more rural, and safer travel destinations, the number of tourists started climbing back up, and was subsequently unaffected by the second and third outbreak waves. By November 2020, the number of tourists had nearly bounced back to that of the pre-pandemic period. As noted by one of Mitarai's in-migrant entrepreneurs,

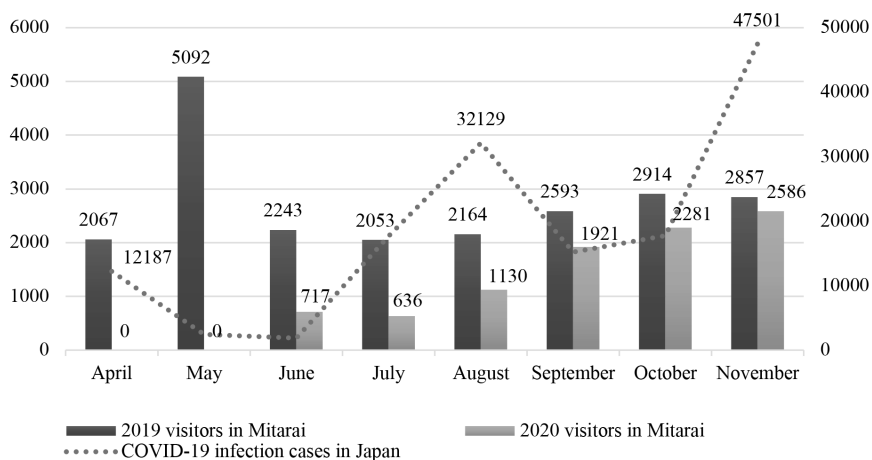


Figure 9.2: Number of tourists in Mitarai compared to 2019–20, and nationwide COVID infection cases in 2020.

Source: Authors

During the partial-lockdown time, in the beginning, tourism has been increasing... more people are ‘escaping’ to the islands because they probably feel it’s safer here, or they want to escape the cities and the stress of COVID. (In-migrant entrepreneur A)

From tourists’ perspective, Mitarai is a history-rich travel destination that, despite being small and relatively remote, is still close enough for a day trip for Hiroshima Prefecture’s residents, and its relative isolation makes it feel safer compared to larger mainland destinations. As more and more tourists chose to make day trips from the nearby cities, Mitarai’s micro-tourism businesses faced both opportunities and challenges. The key challenge was how to continue tourism services while at the same time ensuring the safety of local—mostly elderly and thus vulnerable—residents. This caused concern among locals, as evidenced by the following statements:

Local people themselves believe that [Mitarai] is a place where it's unlikely to get COVID, unlike cities, so they rarely wear masks while walking on the street. (Resident A)

If a local resident gets infected with COVID, it takes more than an hour to reach the closest hospital. During periods with bad weather [such as the rainy or typhoon seasons], transportation to the outside can even be interrupted. (Resident B).

The magnitude of the concern was such that a Mitarai Tourism Association representative stated, "We don't want tourists to come here because we have so many elderly people, so we cancelled the local tour-guide services." (Mitarai tourism association interviewee; see table 9.1).

Implementing safety measures in a small community where the majority of residents are very vulnerable to the impact of the epidemic posed a new challenge for tourism businesses. The problem of how to take up the opportunities brought by the increasing tourist flow while at the same time considering elderly residents' safety thus became an important driving force behind the innovations introduced by tourism micro-businesses and their networks, which will be introduced in the following sections.

Creative Entrepreneurs, Diversified Networks

Small Means Diversification, Low Costs, and Flexibility

When asking micro-entrepreneurs about the merits of being small businesses located in a small town, the responses could be selectively coded by way of three themes or attributes: "multi-functionality," "flexibility," and "frugality." Multi-functionality refers to the fact that many, if not most, respondents are engaged in two or more occupations, including both tourism- and non-tourism-oriented ones. Mitarai's micro-entrepreneurs therefore either do not entirely depend on tourism income for their livelihood, or they have expanded into more diversified types of tourism businesses that can meet the needs of different types of tourists and locals. This is connected to their display of flexibility in their business operations.

Comparing the situations before and during COVID, it was evident that most micro-businesses were experimenting with new approaches that would allow them to survive and possibly even thrive. Examples include using the

time without tourists to carry out self-maintenance of their businesses and to increase their online promotion. This flexibility is in turn connected to entrepreneurs' "make do at low cost" attitude, which results from their frugal approach. One way of reducing costs is to take advantage of the fact that the local government provides historical buildings to in-migrant entrepreneurs at very low rents, much cheaper than in nearby urban areas. Often renovations are undertaken by in-migrants themselves, thus further reducing costs. The cheap rent and relatively low cost of living in small peripheral communities helps micro-entrepreneurs survive even when their businesses are not flourishing, in a way that would be nearly impossible in cities. As the following respondent noted,

I think the power of small overhead is the new big! It's difficult to survive in this environment if you have a lot of overhead and expenses. . . . Compared with urban tourism businesses that were used to receiving lots of visitors and that employ a lot of staff, we are in a better situation. (In-migrant entrepreneur C)

The three individual attributes of multi-functionality, flexibility, and frugality tend to be present, in different degrees, among all micro-business proprietors interviewed, and thanks to these attributes these micro-businesses displayed a striking capacity for resilience. Several businesses attributed this to their resource-constrained environment. One entrepreneur, for example, noted that

the problems that were affecting the island before COVID [low visitor rates, lack of manpower] probably made Mitarai more resilient to the effects of COVID. (In-migrant entrepreneur B)

Through a combination of multi-functionality, bricolage, resourcefulness, and frugality (Michaelis et al. 2020; Qu, McCormick, and Funck 2022; Yachin and Ioannides 2020), during the three partial lockdown periods in 2020 micro-entrepreneurs and their networks initiated a variety of activities, from renovation of their closed businesses, to socio-technical innovation, to online networking and promotion. Moreover, their response to the COVID situation in a few cases also benefited the community more broadly. In line with Mitchell's creative enhancement, businesses that do not rely only on tourism in small-scale rural settings often maintain multiple functions (2013, 385).

This also shows that creative enhancement is more likely to happen through micro-businesses in resource-constrained areas with limited tourist flows (Mitchell 2013; Qu and Cheer 2020).

Small Island, Extended Networks: Co-creation between Competition and Collaboration

Business survivability and resilience do not only depend on the individual attributes mentioned above; the involvement of Mitarai's tourism micro-entrepreneurs in a variety of social networks also determines the types of community- and extra-community-level resource exchanges and integrations that will be present. We identified four major forms of micro-entrepreneur networks and classified them according to their position on a continuum extending from local to extra-local linkages and their roles as both businesses and gathering places for socially engaged community members (see figure 9.3). The four types are (1) private local or extra-local business networks; (2) community-level local business networks; (3) regional and cross-regional creative co-operation networks; and (4) community-level revitalization networks.

Entrepreneurs' personal local or extra-local business networks (top-left quadrant in the above image) are often connected with urban places where they used to work or live, displaying "mixed embeddedness" (Kloosterman and Rath 2001) characteristics. This type of network is characterized by urban/rural and local to extra-local knowledge and resource flows and exchanges, which helps each entrepreneur in Mitarai maintain a business that is creatively distinct. Entrepreneurs localize the extra-local capital and creativity in the regional context: for example, each business targets a different customer group, which results in the creative transformation of extra-local resources in the locally embodied context, while also maintaining a sense of creative uniqueness. Most entrepreneurs treat this kind of network as their private business resource and tend not to share it with other local entrepreneurs in Mitarai.

Due to the limited internal social resources of the community, however, the interaction among local tourism businesses is based not only on competition, but also on instances of collaboration informed by the desire to promote tourism within the community and to overcome common challenges, such as the impacts of COVID-19. These networks and interactions are shown

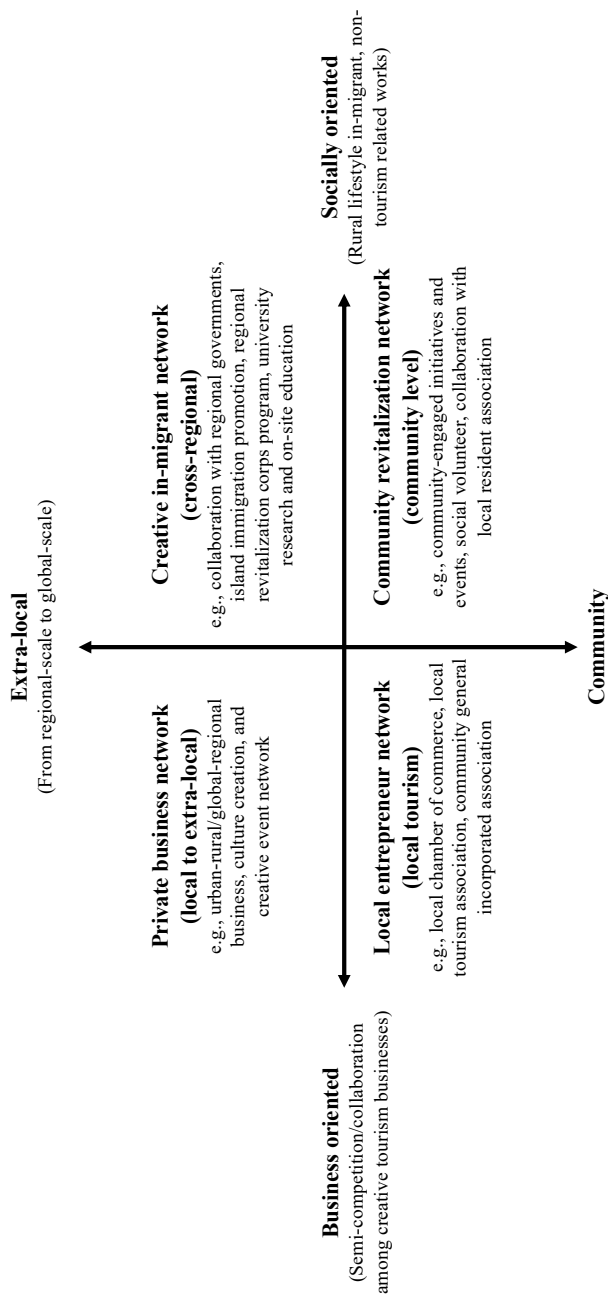


Figure 9.3: Type of creative in-migrant rural micro-entrepreneur networks.

Source: Authors.

in the bottom-left quadrant of figure 9.3. One example of such a network is Mitarailabo, a general incorporated association created in 2017 by a group of young entrepreneurs (both in-migrants and locals), not only to promote Mitarai's tourism development but also to engage with the community's social and cultural affairs. In 2020, Mitarailabo promoted the creation of a new audio tour guide device through crowdfunding (Mitarailabo 2020). The crowdfunding initiative opened in November 2020, and raised 315,500 yen (around USD\$3,000) in one month with the support of thirty-seven people (Mitarailabo 2020). This initiative was launched because of the suspension of the community tour guide service that was managed by local elderly volunteers, yet again due to COVID-19. The content of the audio tour guide highlights the historical and cultural background of the town as well as its everyday life in the past, and the information was obtained with the participation of elderly residents who shared their collective memories. This small technical innovation therefore not only supports "socially distanced" tourism and indirectly benefits local tourism businesses, but also helps to preserve Mitarai's culture.

The introduction of this innovation is also connected to the resource constraints faced by the community even before the start of the pandemic. As one entrepreneur noted, "this idea came from a lack of guides rather than from COVID" (in-migrant entrepreneur B). At the same time, however, COVID-19 provided the stimulus for entrepreneurs to collaborate on the project, as it became more urgent to find a way to introduce the town to visitors while minimizing close contact with elderly residents. In terms of reciprocity (Olmedo, Twuijver, and O'Shaughnessy 2021), the role of the entrepreneur's "placially embedded" network is also reflected in their capacity to find mutually beneficial creative solutions through relational co-creation processes between entrepreneurs and residents.

Community-Engaged Social Innovation Networks

The socially oriented side (right quadrants of figure 9.3) shows how tourism businesses play a more than purely economic role by linking different stakeholders and supporting the community. Regarding extra-local networks (top-right quadrant), one example is a series of online promotional events co-designed by a Mitarai in-migrant entrepreneur and the prefectural government office that oversees the promotion of in-migration. The events were held in both English and Japanese between 26 November 2020 and 6 March

2021. The topics were designed to attract new creative in-migrants to the area, and the events had titles such as “My Setouchi Lifestyle” and “Your Next Challenge Can Be Done in Rural Japan” (HIROBIRO 2020). These events attracted a diverse range of participants, from aspiring in-migrants living in Japan’s urban areas, to researchers, to members of the regional destination-promotion organization, to island residents. Creative entrepreneurs in small rural and island communities increasingly strive to connect with entrepreneurs and creative place makers from other rural areas—and even from outside Japan—to share their experiences. Through these promotional events, in-migrant entrepreneurs were able to put to good use their creative and communication skills to promote the community, connect it to the outside world, and sow the seeds of new collaborations.

At the community level, an important indicator of in-migrant entrepreneurs’ social role is whether they participate in co-creating new activities that benefit the community, in collaboration with other entrepreneurs and community members (Qu, McCormick, and Funck 2022). In Mitarai, the best example is Shiosai, a regional-scale art festival created by one in-migrant artist and entrepreneur. In 2019 Shiosai attracted around 1,850 visitors in one week at the beginning of May (two and a half times more than the 2018 edition), a significant number in the context of Mitarai (Qu and Cheer 2021). Shiosai emphasizes the importance of using vacant historical buildings to host art events, and the need for the exhibited artworks to have a connection with the local community and history. It includes events in which community members (such as local children) engage in art creation together with artists.

Despite the growing success of Shiosai, however, organizers decided after the onset of the pandemic to put community safety first and cancel the 2020 edition, even though at that time the number of COVID-19 infections in Japan was still low. Subsequently, the Shiosai executive committee decided to hold two smaller-scale art and creative events in November 2020 and May 2021, while limiting participation only to artists living in or close to the community and involving community members even more in the festival creation process. For example, the November 2020 edition included events managed by local practitioners of traditional arts, such as tea ceremonies and traditional music. Although the festival was still open to tourists, the choice to reduce its scale and re-localize participation and content criteria increased the community’s sense of ownership over the festival-creation process and

encouraged the initiation of more locally embedded partnerships between in-migrants and residents.

To further protect the community from the threat of COVID-19, some tourism businesses managed by in-migrants also chose to implement stricter protective measures, despite the economic damage these would likely cause to their businesses. In the words of one entrepreneur,

The problem [of being small-scale] is how to continue to cater for tourists while protecting the local population that is elderly. We've tried by separating locals and tourists. Tourists have the option to take away or sit outside; only locals can sit inside. (In-migrant entrepreneur C)

Small Businesses, Greater Capacity for Resilience

This research explored and categorized three types of migrant entrepreneurs encountered through our fieldwork. The findings discussed the role of in-migrant creative tourism micro-entrepreneurs and their networks under the double pressure of long-standing socio-economic and demographic rural decline and the COVID-19 pandemic. The research shows how small-scale, diversified businesses can be more sustainable to local contexts than large ones (Baixinho et al. 2020; Richards 2021), especially when faced with sudden and unpredictable shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of the epidemic, and later, during the recovery of the tourism sector, the flexibility of small businesses in keeping the balance between their tourism and non-tourism sides was particularly evident. The research also highlighted three attributes of individual entrepreneurs: multi-functionality, flexibility, and frugality. Furthermore, the findings show how COVID-19, despite its initial negative impact on tourism, also served as the catalyst for creative adaptation and innovation processes both at the individual and network levels. In line with research on the importance of diversified innovation networks for the building of resilience (Michaelis et al. 2020; Qu and Cheer 2020), the study found that four different types of networks contributed to greater community-level resilience and to sustainable tourism development. We observed how competitive and reciprocal behaviours (Olmedo, Twuijver, and O'Shaughnessy 2021) coexist, and how they largely depend on the type of

network each individual entrepreneur is operating in and its business- versus community-oriented characteristics.

Finally, the findings add to the literature on the role of creative micro-businesses in small declining communities as a major driving force in supporting tourism development in ways that are respectful of the local community, enhance its social resilience, and promote sustainable tourism development and regional revitalization (Fleming 2010; Jóhannesson and Lund 2018; Qu, McCormick, and Funck 2022; Yachin and Ioannides 2020). The examples presented in this chapter show the social innovation encouraged by diversified micro-entrepreneurs and their networks, and their involvement in community-engaged initiatives. Small-scale businesses in small-scale destinations are more likely to develop through creative enhancement (Mitchell 2013); in our examples, the crucial role played by these enterprises' creative and relational attributes was demonstrated during the pandemic. The social role of micro-businesses can be described as the capacity to use innovative ideas to enhance community resilience.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges still posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Mitarai's tourism micro-businesses have managed to survive, all while translating individual resilience into community-level resilience. From the perspective of long-term community resilience and revitalization in declining rural communities, small businesses established by in-migrants play a multi-faceted role. First, they create economic value for the in-migrants themselves, thus enabling them to keep living in the community. Second, they increase Mitarai's attractiveness as a tourism destination, thanks to the presence of new businesses and their creative activities. Third, they contribute to the improvement of local residents' quality of life, including by providing new services and community spaces. And lastly, the presence of in-migrants helps to attract other urban-rural in-migrants. This process, if sustained, has the potential to help stabilize the population and restore a sense of socio-economic vitality in the community.

Although this research was based on a single community case study, the findings broadly correspond to those reported in the recent literature on in-migrant-led revitalization in rural Japan (Ganseforth and Jentzsch 2021; Manzenreiter, Lützel, and Polak-Rottmann 2020; Schrade 2019), which also confirm the importance of focusing on in-migrant entrepreneurs. This is

further validated by research conducted in contexts beyond Japan (Bosworth and Atterton 2012), showing how similar processes are at play across the Global North. In addition, processes of social innovation connected to small- and micro-scale entrepreneurship are emerging as increasingly central to the social and economic resilience of small communities located in peripheral rural areas. In these contexts, being small is often an advantage, and combined with the common attributes of small-scale entrepreneurs, such as multi-functionality, flexibility, and frugality, as well as with the social innovation capacity and relational networks of these enterprises, smallness can contribute not only to the resilience of individual businesses, but to that of the whole community.

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