

**Social Meanings of Outdoor Education**  
In the context of mountain communities in Japan

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# Meanings of Behaviors In Nature Indigenous To Japan

Modern mountaineering was introduced to Japan at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

People who worshiped Mt. Fuji had already climbed there since the 12<sup>th</sup> century

World **Cultural** Heritage “Mt. Fuji”

- The components
  - The Fuji mountain area as “sacred places”
  - The Shrines and the lodging houses derived from the faith in Mt. Fuji

Outdoor education may have unique meanings in Japan



# Outdoor Education In Japan

NOW

Organized Camping 

Outward Bound 

Adventure 

Packaged 

Place-based 

Place-responsive 

 Traditional/Indigenous 

# Mountain Communities



Mountain Communities : 47% of total area of Japan

A lot of people had lived there over hundreds years

The main industry : forestry and agriculture

The population : 3% of total of Japan, decreased by decline of forestry and agriculture.

34% of the population is over 65 years old.

(Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 『山村をめぐる状況と今後の方向』, 2016.

[https://www.maff.go.jp/j/nousin/tiiki/sanson/s\\_about/pdf/zyoukyou.pdf](https://www.maff.go.jp/j/nousin/tiiki/sanson/s_about/pdf/zyoukyou.pdf))

# Mountain Communities and Outdoor Education

Mountain communities have provided facilities and opportunities for outdoor activities and outdoor education to create job places and employments to stop depopulation.

- Skiing areas, Camping Sites, Large resorts, Small-scale outdoor tourism etc.

But those “outdoor” has always been for urban inhabitants.



# Opportunities of Natural Experiences for Local People

Plays in nature that local children create

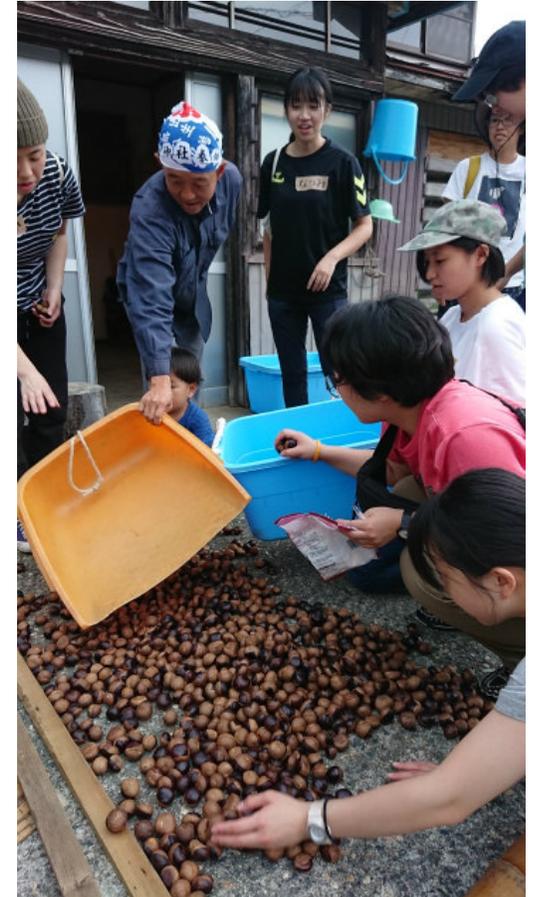
Universal outdoor activities

Minor subsistence : traditional, indigenous and not so economical

- Fishing (trout, char, etc.), Gathering (wild vegetables, nuts, fruits and mushrooms), Hunting (bear, deer, wild boar, hare, birds, etc.)

Local rituals and festivals by community organization

- Fertility cult, harvest festival, fire festival for driving bugs away, etc.)



Horse chestnut for rice cake

## A case of 針生 Haryuu



Population: 414

Households: 179

Half of the population is over 65 years old.

Only 4-5 forestry workers

Haryuu elementary school pupils was 176 in 1959. The school was closed in 2013

Eighteen children take a school bus to elementary school in the neighboring community.

# The Challenges Haryuu Faces

The number of people who manage nature has decreased.

- Abandoned cultivated land has increased.
- Unmaintained forests are vulnerable to disasters.

Less job places

- A lot of work to be done for everyday life. But young people have to go out because they cannot earn a stable income.

Social relations educating local children have collapsed.

The relationship between local adults and children has decreased due to most of local events (rituals, festivals and so on) have become impossible to hold.

# Disappearance of The Informal Children's Groups

The informal children's groups have disappeared due to the declining birthrate.

They don't play together after school as they live apart.

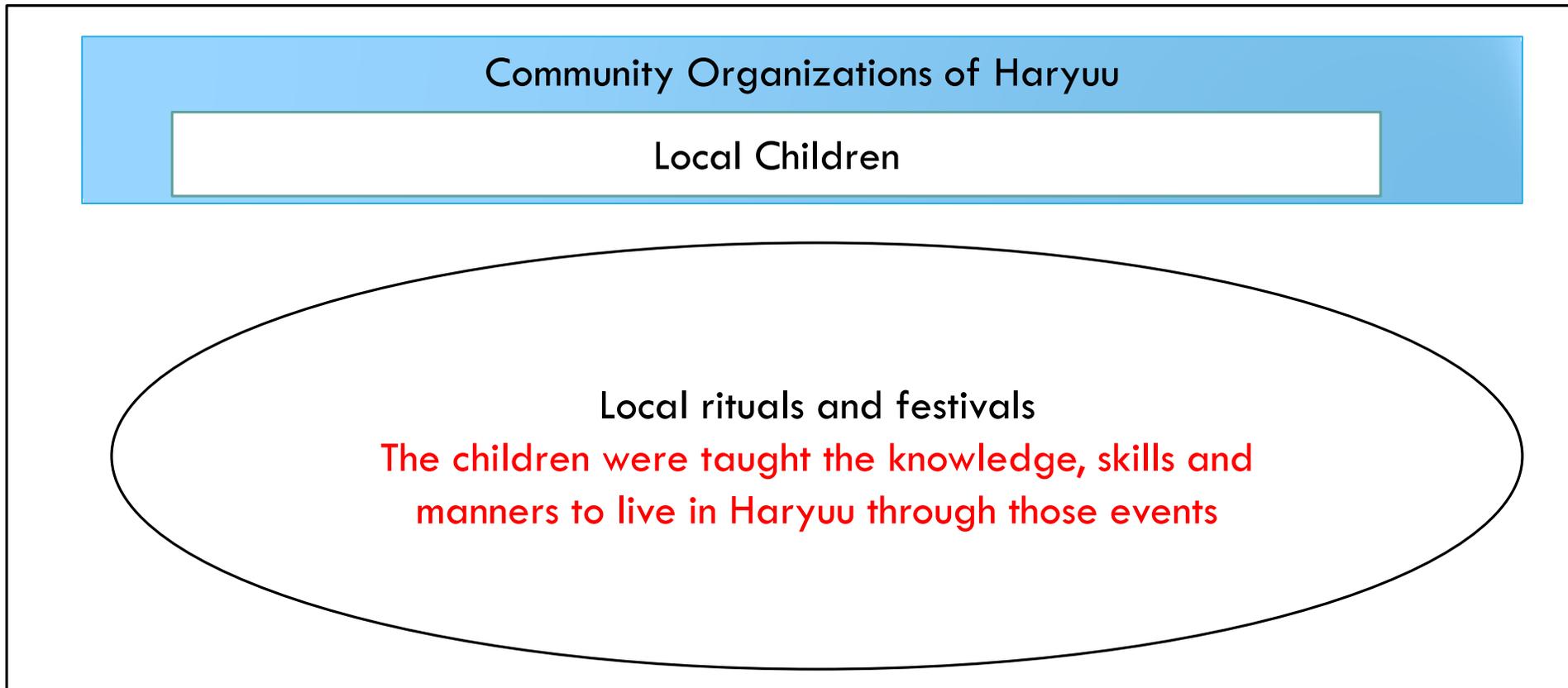
They don't know what to do even if they can play together because they have never played in fields, forests or creeks in Haryuu.

There is no longer a social relationship where older children teach younger children to play in nature.

As a result, it's best to play video games.

Negative Cycle!

# Social Relations To Educate Local Children



# Lost Of The Social Relations to Educate Local Children

Community organizations of Haryuu

Local children

the aging population and the outflow of  
young people.



Most of local events are no longer held



The children lost the opportunity to learn  
about Haryuu.

Local children who has no experience of Haryuu must easily leave there

# Challenge of Local Adults

Kenji, a leader of a local sports club who came from Haryuu

- The last generation raised by “the social relations to educate children”.
- He has had a lot of experience to play in nature of Haryuu.
- He wants local children to have rich experience of place of Haryuu and to love the home.

## His strategy

- Local adults deliberately provide opportunities of “plays in nature”
- Recreate a contemporary version of “the social relations to educate children”.
- The knowledge and skills (about minor-subsistence) of the elderly are required for the children to understand how they should live there.

# ～こんな活動してます～

By a student of mine  
photo by Hinoki Sports Club

川離れした子どもを  
もう一度川へ



Return to the creek

昔の暮らしの跡を  
見てみる



Looking for traces of  
old living

針生全域鬼ごっこ  
じじばばも走り回る  
子どもたちに元気もらう



Playing tag  
throughout Haryuu

地域で生まれたもの  
歴史を知る



Listen to the stories of  
Haryuu

荒れたキャンプ場を  
楽しいあそび場に



Play in an abandoned  
camping site

虫キングは誰だ

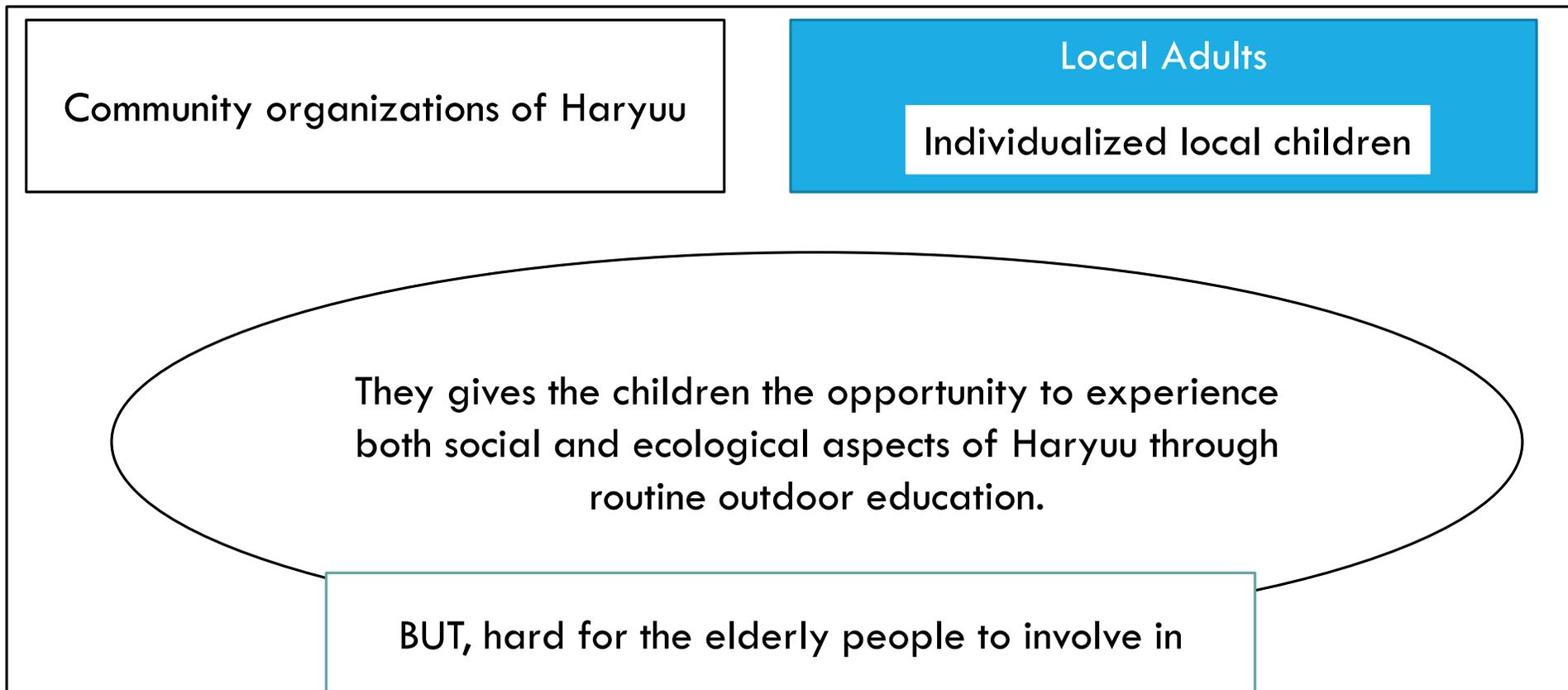


Who is Dr. Insects?

子どもと自然  
そして  
地域の大人も巻き込み  
地域活性化

シノブ 慶

# The Local Adults Deliberately Provide Outdoor Activities For Local Children.



# Possibilities

Entrust to the younger generation in Haryuu

- Kodai who came from Haryuu, 24 years old, a fireman.
  - Taking the local children to nature to play.
  - Revived local festivals to create opportunities for the children and adults to connect.
  - Started to help Kenji as an instructor of outdoor education

Collaborate with outdoor education professionals

- Two outdoor educators are working in Haryuu. Former my students
  - Shun is also working for forestry and often help the community events.
  - Kenyu is a fishing guide working with Kenji and Kodai for the local children.

# To connect with elderly people

The elderly people are hard to involved in the efforts. (Aging and ...)

There might be a invisible wall between local cultures (rituals, festivals and minor subsistence) and universal outdoor activities.

Outdoor education in Japan seems to have mainly used “plays in nature” and “universal outdoor activities” as teaching materials.

We need to go beyond the universal concept of outdoor activities.

How can we add the local cultures to that concept?

To make mountain communities and their natural environment sustainable.