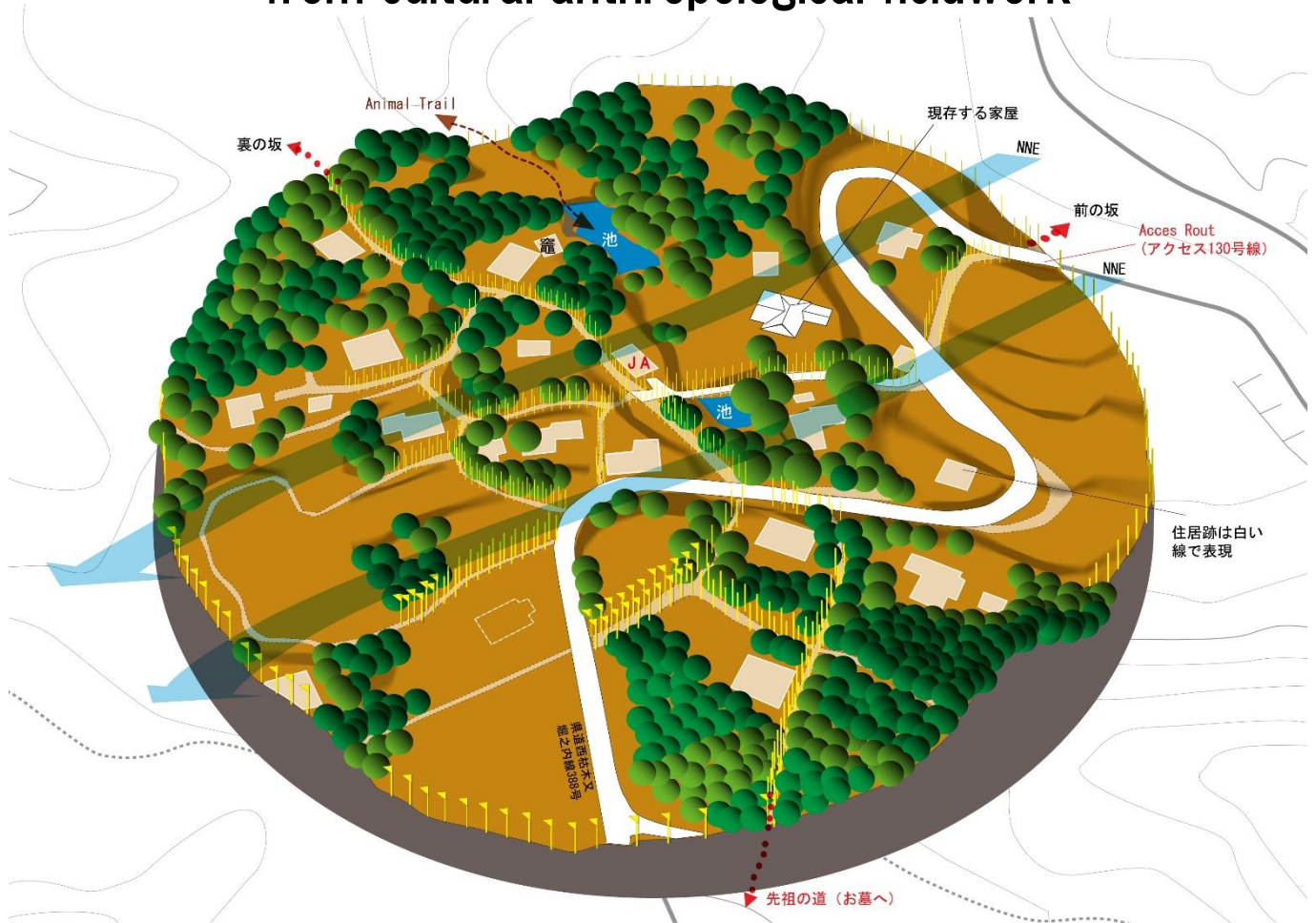


It was all fun in the past

from cultural anthropological fieldwork



There was once a village called Kotsunagi in Tokamachi-city. I will consider the background leading to the closure of the “two Kotsunagi villages”, one in Matsudai and the other in Nakajo・Tobitari in Tokamachi. The place-name “Kotsunagi” stands for a key point of traffic routes connecting main roads with pathways or one village with another and also a point where we descend from the mountain pass. The settlement is thought to have been located at a quiet point in the traffic.

The two villages were closed in 1992 and 2007 respectively and the evidence of their existence of 400 and 800 years are preserved as “inscriptions” on the Stele. Both villages developed their histories and cultures by finding original ways of doing agriculture and leading life while adapting to the natural environment of the region. Such distinctive agriculture and lifestyle of each community resulted in diversity that supported the ecology of the region while at the same time improving adaptability to natural disasters and changes in the social environment.

The stele reads that people after people left the village as they were influenced by “the Income Doubling Plan” advocated by the national government in the Showa era. Also, one could read in the inscriptions of the closure of the village about how the consolidation of communal facilities in each district due to the grand mergers of municipals in the Showa and Heisei eras led to the collapse of local communities and the decline of productivity in agriculture, making it impossible for communities to survive. This could also be seen in the trace of how the land had been used.

Under such circumstances, the Seeds and Seedlings Law has recently been amended to protect the intellectual property rights of seeds and seedlings. However, there are concerns about this movement as the law will make it difficult to maintain agricultural diversity, for example, by restricting the unique “home propagation” that farmers in each region have traditionally maintained. As the globalization of industry and economy progress and the climate change issues become more apparent, it is important to reconsider the role of regional agriculture with diversity which had contributed to sustainable development.

Kotsunagi village in Nakajo·Tobitari was under the direct influence of the social changes. The Chuetsu Earthquake in October 2004 accelerated the depopulation of the village which eventually led to the closure of the village in 2007. Various communal facilities were set up in the village over the long history including something very interesting such as Agricultural Cooperative (Kotsunagi JA, 1958), shared workshops, clinics, fishponds, primary schools, communal hearths, shrines, farm roads, cemeteries, simple post offices, temples, water weirs for power generation, masonry bridges, plants (trees and tree species), natural disasters (floods, earthquakes) and “epidemics” in the Meiji era with its relation to the shrines.

This project attempts to reveal how the villages were in the past; what facilities existed for the community, and the history of peaceful life in the village then through cultural anthropological research method.

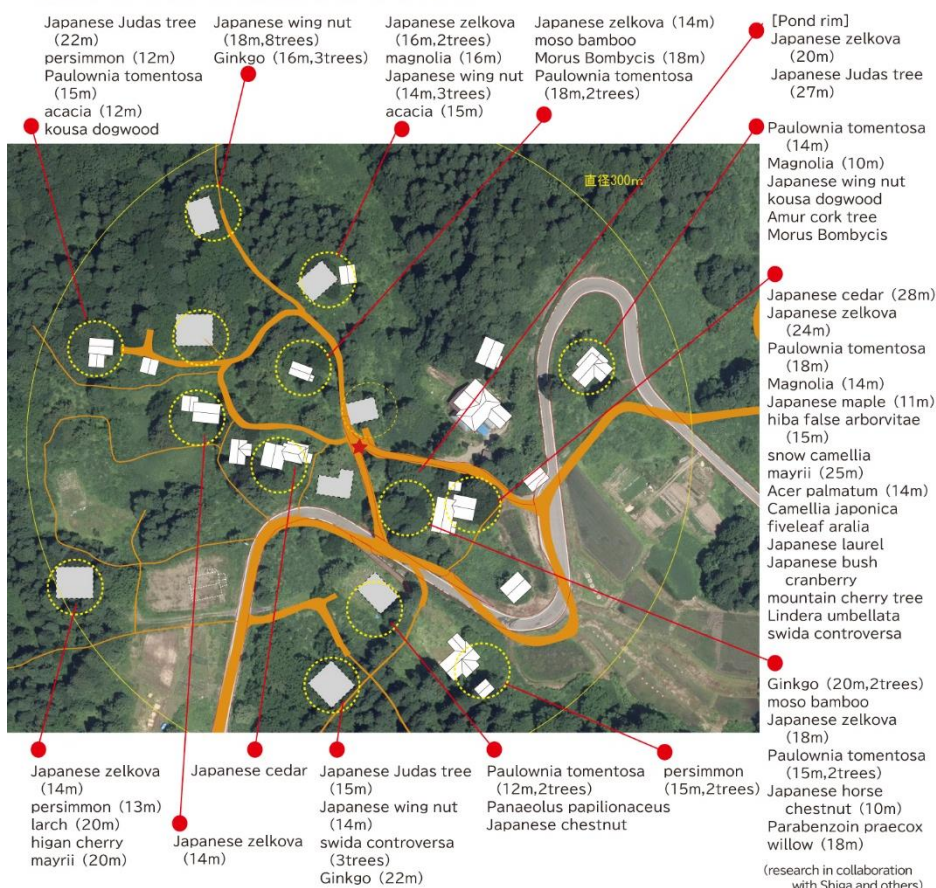
First of all, within a diameter of 300 metres of the site where the building of the Agricultural Cooperative, the centre of the community and key facility of the economic and social life, stood, we would expose the settlement’s bygone topsoil surface. The purpose of this research is to find a trace of the old settlement and their lives from the exposed site, and consider why the village was formed and then closed here so that we could use our findings in the future. Close to the site where the Agricultural Cooperative stood is a trace of cracks in the ground caused by the Chuetsu earthquake that determined people leaving the village.

While we know most about the topography of the time, slopes, plants, paving stones, fishponds, cooking stoves, open spaces, temples and shrines, cemeteries, halls, remains of village roads, and the remains of cracks in the ground from the Niigata Chuetsu earthquake in 2004, we are planning to conduct a research on many things that have disappeared through interviewing local people. In order to explore how the community existed, I used yellow poles tracing small pathways that were walked on by villagers every day. I couldn’t get clarity from the elderly member of the current village in regard to the time of burial and cremation, a funeral custom, which provides an indication of anthropological period classification. However, I managed to confirm there was a bone-eating ritual in order to inherit the wisdom of the ancestors as a funeral custom. There is a wide range of topics to be clarified by future research.

Explanation for the botanical distribution

It indicates the selected plants (trees) easily found around the former residential sites and its neighbors.

() after the name of the plants means the tree height (if more than 10m) and the number of trees in around area is written.



I put a card onto each tree with the name of plant, of genre and the characteristic for use of each plant. For some trees, which are too dangerous to approach near, I installed the “botanical cards” along the poles installed in the paths around the area.

【botanical and other ecological system in the village Kotsunagi】

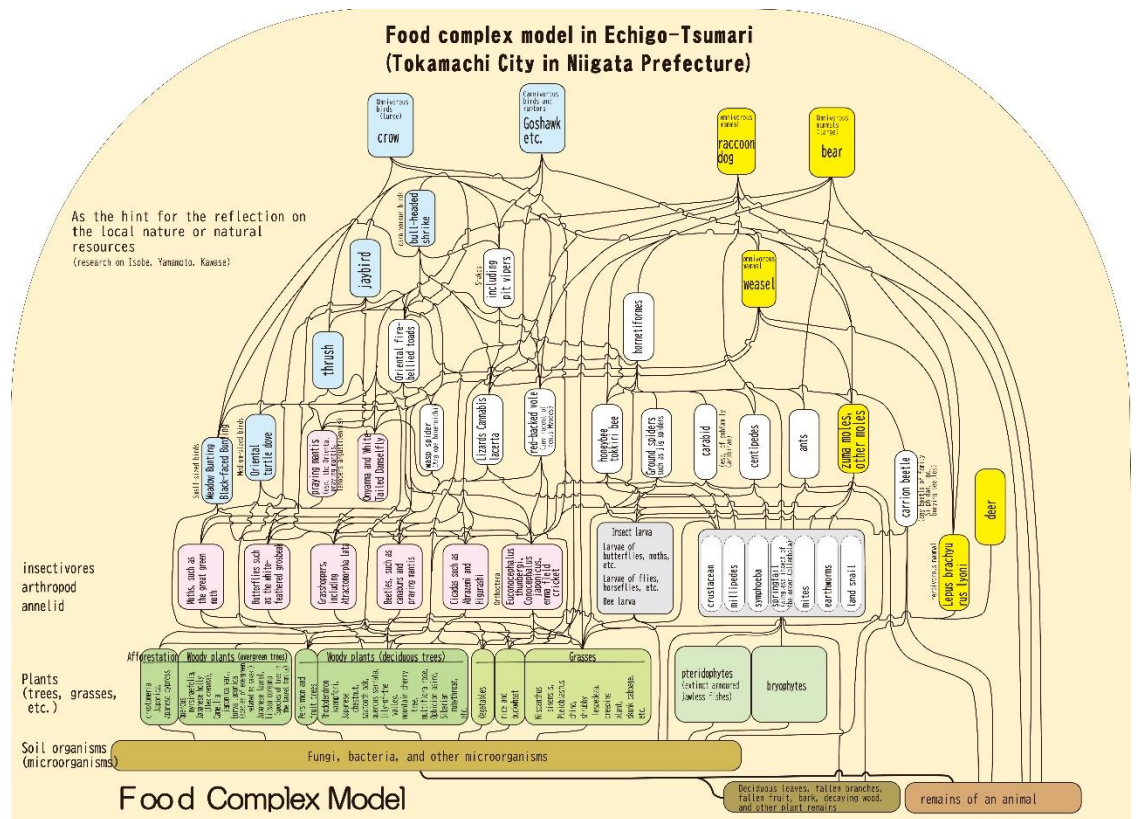
Animals and plants in living in this area have contributed to the local people in various manners, while these creatures have constantly changed according to the changing activities to the locals.

In the present Kotsunagi village, a number of plants can be found including those for the fuel wood or other woods, or the plants for food or for decoration, and also the increasing plants in abandoned fields and houses, or even planting.

These botanical situation reveals the environment, history or culture of the area. Here introduced is the botanical distribution in the research of Mr. Takashi Shiga, owner of Shiga Teikaen, gardening company of Tsunan-machi.

If we know such botanical situation, then, we understand more deeply the environment, history or culture of the locals.

The chart indicates the model of possible food chain in Tokamachi area. These models are also changing since the environment or its relationship with the people themselves have changed.



Welcome to Kotsunagi ~introduction by Sanssei Niwano (former resident of the village Kotsunagi)~

Thank you very much for your visit to Kotsunagi and its art installation entitled “It was all fun in the past” by Yukihiisa Isobe.

Kotsunagi closed itself in 2007, mainly because of the Niigata Chuetsu Earthquake in 2004, with the locals (3 houses) left there after staying and protecting the village to the last minute. It is to be noted that this was not so-called “abandoned village”, since the former residents still frequents their Kotsunagi for wild-vegetable-collecting or growing vegetables or rice in their fields. Also, there is village Karekimata across the site of Kotsunagi, so the traffic with cars is still alive on the road.

To explain the village Kotsunagi, it was composed of two parts of Kamimura (upper village) and Shimomura (lower village). If the origin of the village remaining unknown, there were already 2 houses and 20 residents in Shimomura, according to the document, in 1692. Their family names were Harukawa and Niwano. Family Niwano had then increasing branch families in Kamimura.

In 1947, they counted 20 houses, 185 residents (135 adults and 50 children) in Kotsunagi, which was the peak in this village. 50 children in 20 families! While declining birthrate is one of the serious issues in present society, this number of the children is a surprising impact on our area of baby bust.

It is important to remember in the history of Kotsunagi that the first JA cooperative was installed in ex-Nakajo village. Also, the branch school in winter season was built here in the latter period of Meiji Era (1868-1907), since some residents could foresee the progressing society.

from such point of view.

It was all fun in the past
from cultural anthropological fieldwork



**Village Kotsunagi (Kamimura)
Guide map**

Welcome to Kotsunagi ~introduction by Sanssei Niwano (former resident of the village Kotsunagi)~(suite)

If you walk through Kamimura, you will know that the streets are located in circle, with the compact layout with houses. It is better for stepping on the snow, an effective layout shared by the people to footing the streets with Kanjiki or against-snow-sandals. Thus, the locals managed to overcome the severe season of winter in cooperation with each other. We can reconsider the “spirit of balance or consensus”

For this project, we carried out the mowing grass or cutting scrubs and trees, recreating the local streets, and the credited yellow large poles were installed alongside. This pole was the good sign for strolling about in the village, so please try to stroll around. At each point, the caption (short text) can be found and suggests the meaning of the phrase “It was all fun in the past”.

In addition, the house name was installed in the site of former houses. The houses vary from the stable house in installation, destroyed houses by heavy snow, those covered by the grass. The local people had a communal life helping with each other until 1960’ although their daily life was humble.

Next to the shrine in Shimomura in Kotsunagi, there stands a tall cedar tree (of 800 years old). In the Triennale in 2015, an art was installed to make feel the 800 years of history in the village. Although it is not nominated as property, there also are in Kamimura zelkova and Japanese judas tree, the latter is especially precious in this area. There are 45 in all the large tree of judas registered in Japan, and this judas tree in Kotsunagi is rivaled to them. If the small village as Kotsunagi has 3 large trees, that is already the proof that the village had a history to be noted,

Please focus on the pole with the color of its flags to indicate the routes. Both yellow and blue colors are associated with the flag of Ukraine. The Triennale is the very festival of the peace. Let’s pray for the peace and the finish of the war at the soonest, while seeing the poles and flags.