

Aya-Final Report

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What We Learned in Aya

Aya town is located in Miyazaki. There is a laurel forest city, and 80% of the area is forest. It is a small town with a population of about 7,000. Aya Town focuses on organic farming and crafts and is developing as a UNESCO Eco Park town. Aya town built the “Tezukuri Honmono center”, which sells agricultural and livestock products produced from organic farming. It is intended to lead to the protection of rich natural produce and promote the health of people. The laurel forest in Aya Town was protected by the strong insistence of Mayor Goda. People were divided over whether to prioritize economics or environmental protection. After the tree trimming plan was canceled, the laurel forest became a national park. Aya town became known as a tourist city because the spring water was selected as one of the top "100 Exquisite Well Waters" and the "Teruha Suspension Bridge" was built. Aya town is called “Handmade craft village” because there are many craftsmen living there practicing, e.g., woodworking, dyeing, weaving, ceramics, and glasswork. Since Aya Town is designated as an "industrial model area", they actively invited craftsmen to live and work there. Now there are nearly 40 workshops located in the small town of Aya. Furthermore, in Aya Town, they held various events such as marathons, Hinamatsuri, and horse racing to attract tourists. However, the finances of Aya town are dwindling, and it is the lowest in Miyazaki. In addition, the population decline due to the declining birthrate and a growing proportion of elderly people is a serious problem. The decrease in the number of tourists due to the influence of the coronavirus has further damaged the economy of Aya town.

Summary of Fieldwork Experience

We visited Aya for 2 days and 1 night. We stayed at the Aya UNESCO Eco Park Center, which opened in April of 2018, as a base facility for providing information in the natural environment and interacting with nature focused on the Aya Biosphere Reserve. The first day, we attended a lecture by government officials. We were able to learn a lot about Aya’s rich history as

well as some specific problems of the current situation. Of particular importance were hearing the thoughts directly from the people, which can only be known by going to Aya and engaging with the people there. Three things impressed us in the lecture. First, great efforts are made based on the basic idea of town development, which is “Aya is a town where the people coexist with nature.” Second, keeping the soil healthy and growing healthy organic vegetables is very important to them. By making the soil healthy they believe they are working on the policy of local production for local consumption, making healthy vegetables, and building a healthy body, medical expenses can be reduced, and they are conducting recycling-type global economic activities. Third, they are setting goals for buying and producing agriculture and aiming for a self-sufficient life. We were able to think about nature more deeply than before. This particularly made us think about some of the things we had forgotten in our extremely convenient world. That night, we made curry and rice using vegetables from Aya Town. On the second day, we heard a lecture by Mr. Genta at Aya Castle Genta Dyeing and Weaving Studio. Mr. Genta stated that work is something that we create ourselves, and we thought it was a wonderful concept to be able to create something fun and do it as a job. After making spoons, we went on a tour of Aya town. We learned a lot about Aya through the two days there, which changed our view of Aya. It was a great experience to learn not only about Aya Town but also about how to live alongside nature in the global environment.

Main Points of the Presentation

We made two suggestions for Aya. Firstly, we suggested making an international school in Aya. During the fieldwork in Aya, they stressed they would be facing a major problem of a shortage of craftsmen and farmers in the future. By making school this problem could be addressed because it is a good way to draw craftsmen to sustain traditional crafts in Aya and develop young farmers through agricultural courses. In addition, we think it is more effective to collaborate with MIC because MIC offers some advantages such as recruitment of international students. MIC supports students from all over the world and it is good to make a school where we can learn traditional crafts and agriculture in Aya. Secondly, we suggested establishing a satellite office of MIC in Aya. Recently, remote work has become more common in our society. Moreover, people want to work in rural areas to refresh and work more productivity. In addition, the Japanese government has also publicly recommended setting up satellite offices in rural

areas. We think we can resolve the population problem by setting up satellite offices because some people want to live in the countryside instead of urban cities like Osaka and Tokyo. Furthermore, an artist-in-residence system is a good way for Aya to facilitate this. Artist-in-residence is a system in which artists of all kinds stay in a certain place for a certain period of time to create artistic work. This activity is already being promoted in some prefectures. We believe by attracting artists, a new community can be created and opportunities for many more people to know about Aya Town will be generated as a result. However, changes will need to be made to the network environment (or Internet infrastructure), particularly Wi-Fi access, to attract artists and companies to Aya. Buildings will need to be provided for office spaces. Making use of unoccupied houses for offices was a suggestion made to accommodate this initiative. The two suggestions described above are big tasks. It is understandable that it may be difficult for the government officials of Aya town to commit completely. However, we hope our ideas will contribute to the success of Aya's future.

A Thought on how this Course can be Improved

This course included a lot of activities. More than usual, so we could join the discussion positively. Also, we could actually go to Aya to find assignments and to communicate with Aya's people. It was a very valuable experience for us. We really recommend this course for other students next Fall semester. Because we can develop the skills of problem solving, discussion, and presentation. We feel this course is most effective to obtain those skills. We want this program to continue because only two presentations are not enough to change Aya. We think it would be even better if we could increase the number of classes and make it a long-term program.