

Evaluation of a Kleingarten in the Town of Suo-oshima, Yamaguchi Prefecture, in the Islands of Seto Inland Sea

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ABSTRACT

In recent years in Japan, derelict land by aging farmers has increased at the same time as the desire of city dwellers for a more natural, leisurely lifestyle. In response, an increasing number of citizens' farms(or 'allotment gardens') have opened in and around urban areas. Citizens' farms with overnight accommodation are known as 'kleingartens'. As a case study, we evaluated a kleingarten in the town of Suo-oshima by interviewing the resident caretaker and conducting a questionnaire survey of facility users. Our survey revealed a number of ways in which the facility could be improved to meet user needs. The case study also suggested that kleingartens are an effective means of revitalizing local communities in rural areas.

Key Words: Kleingarten, Case Study, Rural Land, Allotment Gardens, Local Revitalization

1. Background and Aims of the Study

Recent years in Japan, there has been a growing push for measures to deal with the increasing amount of derelict land by the progressive aging of people engaged in agriculture. At the same time, the growing desire by city dwellers for a more natural and leisurely lifestyle has led to the opening of an increasing number of citizens' farms(also known as 'allotment gardens') in and around urban areas. Most of the people who use citizens' farms live in surrounding urban areas, but a good number of such people get involved with these facilities as a first step on the path to a permanent life in the countryside.

In Japan, residential-style citizens' farms(with overnight accommodation) are generally known as 'kleingartens'. Kleingartens are set up by individual farming families, by local governments, or by private companies, not only to provide retired people with an active interest in life and an enjoyable form of leisure, but also to fulfill other important roles as a place for green land and farmland conservation, to promote exchange between urban and rural areas, and as a venue for a rich form of nature-related education. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fo-

resty and Fisheries(MAFF) also promotes kleingartens as regional development projects. In some cases it provides grants-in-aid to assist municipalities to set up kleingartens. As a current research, 'The realities of city farm village exchange in the Allotment Garden' that Makiyama *et al.*, wrote¹⁾, 'The Property of the Allotment Garden's Users and their Possibility of Contribution to Revitalization of Rural Area' that Furuya *et al.*, wrote²⁾, 'Reinvigoration of farm village by kleingarten' that Yamazaki wrote³⁾ and "The try of Forming a Community through 'Kleingarten' at the Condominium" Akamatsu wrote⁴⁾. However, in these theses, there is no research with which the case is Kleingarten in the execution of the hearing investigation to the grasp of a nationwide trend in recent years and the manager and the islands region.

As a case study, we therefore decided to conduct a survey of a kleingarten in the town of Suo-oshima in Yamaguchi prefecture(山口県周防大島町), located in the islands of the Seto Inland Sea(瀬戸内海). Through an interview with the resident caretaker of the facility and a questionnaire survey of the facility users, we evaluated the kleingarten and identified the issues and challenges they face.

II. Research Method

Firstly, we collected relevant published literature and reference materials from the Internet to help us understand the general trends in kleingarten development in Japan. Next, we conducted a field survey of the kleingarten selected for the case study, Gartenvilla Oshima(ガルテンヴィラ大島), and a questionnaire survey of its users(Jan. to Feb. 2007: 18 questionnaires distributed; 12 returned = 67% response rate), in order to assess the characteristics of the kleingarten. In addition, we interviewed the caretaker of Gartenvilla Oshima, and to help clarify the issues facing the venture.

III. Trend of Kleingarten in Japan and Outline by Gartenvilla Oshima

According to a survey by the Rural Development Bureau of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries(MAFF), there was a total of 68 kleingartens in Japan as of 2006. In the past 10 years the number of kleingartens in Japan, including those without overnight accommodation, has more than doubled. In addition to a growing demand in the population, this growth can be explained by the active implementation of a wide variety of support measures, such as the enactment in 1990 of the 'Citizen's farms development promotion law'(市民農園整備促進法: *shimin nouen seibi sokushinbo*), as well as other MAFF initiatives such as the 'Peace of Mind Exchange Space Development Project'(やすらぎの交流空間整備事業: *yasuragino kouryu kuukan seibi jigyo*) and the 'New Special Mountainous Village Promotion Project for Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries'(新山村振興等農林漁業特別対策事業: *shin sanson sinkoutou nourin gyogyo tokubetsu taisaku jigyo*). After sorting out our data collected from around Japan, we found that existing kleingarten facilities vary widely in scale, ranging from small-scale facilities consisting of less than 10 plots(land parcels) to large-scale facilities of more than 100 plots. The size of these facilities ranges from less than 2,000 m² to more than 50,000m².

As for the location characteristics of kleingarten, many kleingartens locate the inland area in Japan.

Nagano prefecture has 12 facilities ,it is most number in Japan. Next to Hyogo prefecture, has 9 facilities.

Kleingarten in Japan have a lot of varieties. To the average, Kleingarten in Japan have about 66 allotments, the total area

of about 18051m² per a facility, and the farm area of about 7564m² per a facility.

Almost annual user charges of kleingarten in Japan ranges from less than 300,000 yen to more than 400,000 yen, to the average, the charge of about 374,000 yen. Kleingarten in Japan has a high popularity and there is not almost vacant allotment.

The facility that serves as the subject of this case study, Gartenvilla Oshima, was developed in 1999 for the purpose of promoting utilization of degraded land and the exchange between rural and urban Japan. This small-scale facility consists of 12 plots, with a total area of 5,286m². A unique feature of Gartenvilla Oshima is that it is located on an island, thereby enabling residents to enjoy the rich nature and country lifestyle of Suo-oshima, including activities such as strolling along the shores of the dam, hiking, and pursuits that can only be enjoyed in the islands, such as fishing. Since April 1999, when 12 buildings were constructed at Gartenvilla Oshima, 22 households have used the facility. Of these, three households have used the facility for more than five years continuously and are now in their ninth year of participation. As a rule, contracts are renewed every year, but all of the 22 households wished to use the village for at least five years when they began. In fact, all except one have extended their contracts to five years. This shows that the village is extremely popular. In spring 2007, when the availability of two plots was announced, five applications were received in response. As of April 2006, all the users were aged in their 50s and 60s. Of these, 33% were from Yamaguchi prefecture, 42% were from Hiroshima prefecture, and the rest came from other prefectures(Osaka, Shiga, Hyogo). Many of the kleingarten users(approx. 75%) live within driving distance of the facility.

The caretaker appointed to look after Gartenvilla Oshima also serves as an advisor. The caretaker provides instructions on cultivation of crops and general consultations on rural life, in order to help the facility users adapt smoothly to a fulfilling life in the countryside.

IV. Questionnaire Survey to User in Gartenvilla Oshima

According to the questionnaire survey the most common motivations for using Gartenvilla Oshima were, "I wanted a place for growing vegetables, fishing, etc".(33%), "I wanted a new life after retirement"(25%), and "I wanted a natural

Table 1. Outline of Gartenvilla Oshima⁵⁾

Name of facility	Oshima Residential-style Citizens? Farm, Gartenvilla Oshima		
Address	1446-1 Yuchimen, Higashi Yashiro, Suo-oshima-cho, Oshima-gun, Yamaguchi		
No. of plots	12 plots (residential facility with attached farmland)		
Residential	Wood single-level bldg. (incl. bathroom, toilet, kitchen, loft) of 36.40 m ²		
Total area	5,286 m ²	Farmland area	51~104 m ²
User charges	Annual fee: 373,800 yen + 120 yen/m ² of farmland		
Contract period	1 year (extendable to 5 years)		
Targeted users	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People who can use and cultivate the allotment garden by themselves (incl. families, groups) [persons who can come at least once a week (management)] 2. People who can participate in joint work on common facilities 3. People who can maintain the landscape of the allotment garden they have rented. 4. People who desire to participate in the annual activities program. 5. People who can observe the rules and regulations relating to the management of the kleingarten. 		



Figure 1. Gartenvilla Oshima residential-style facility.

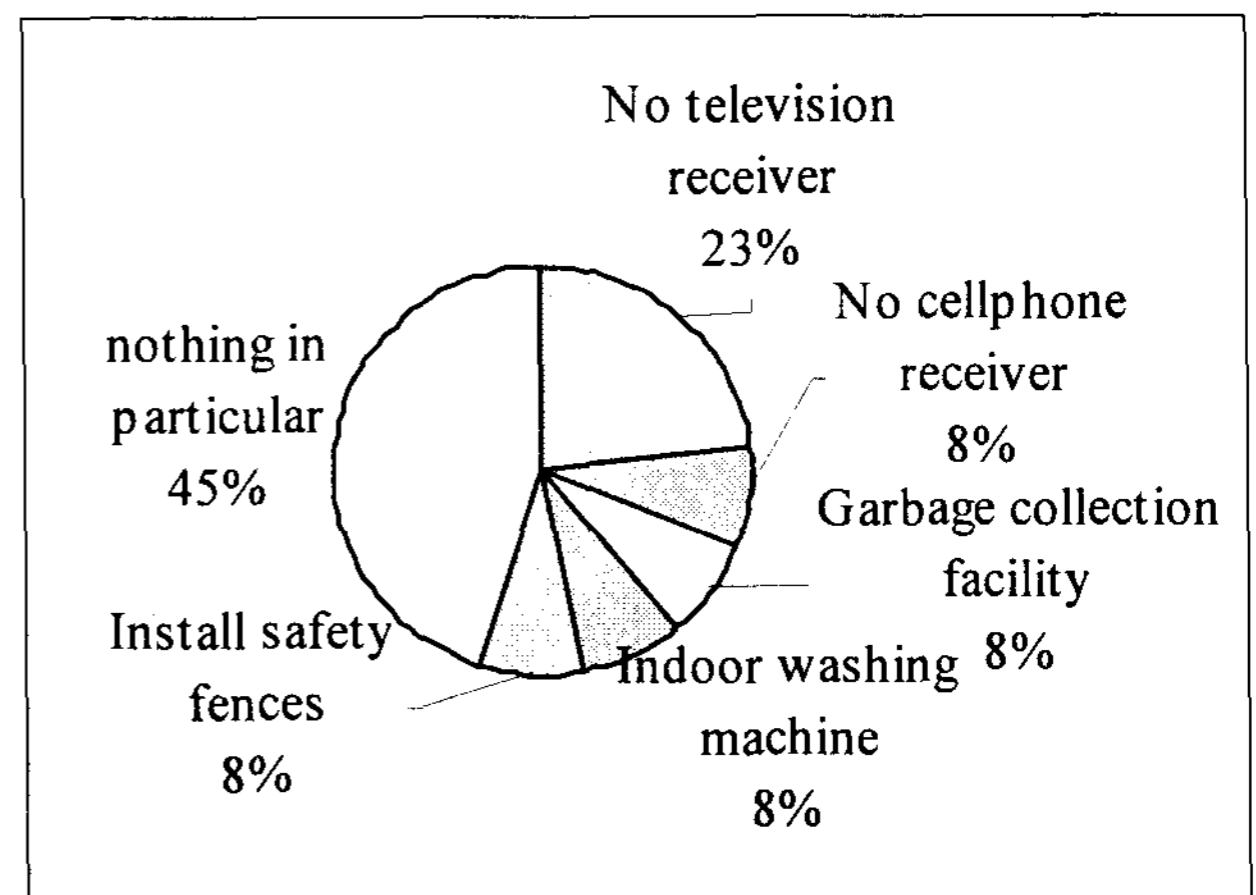


Figure 3. Desired facilities and services.

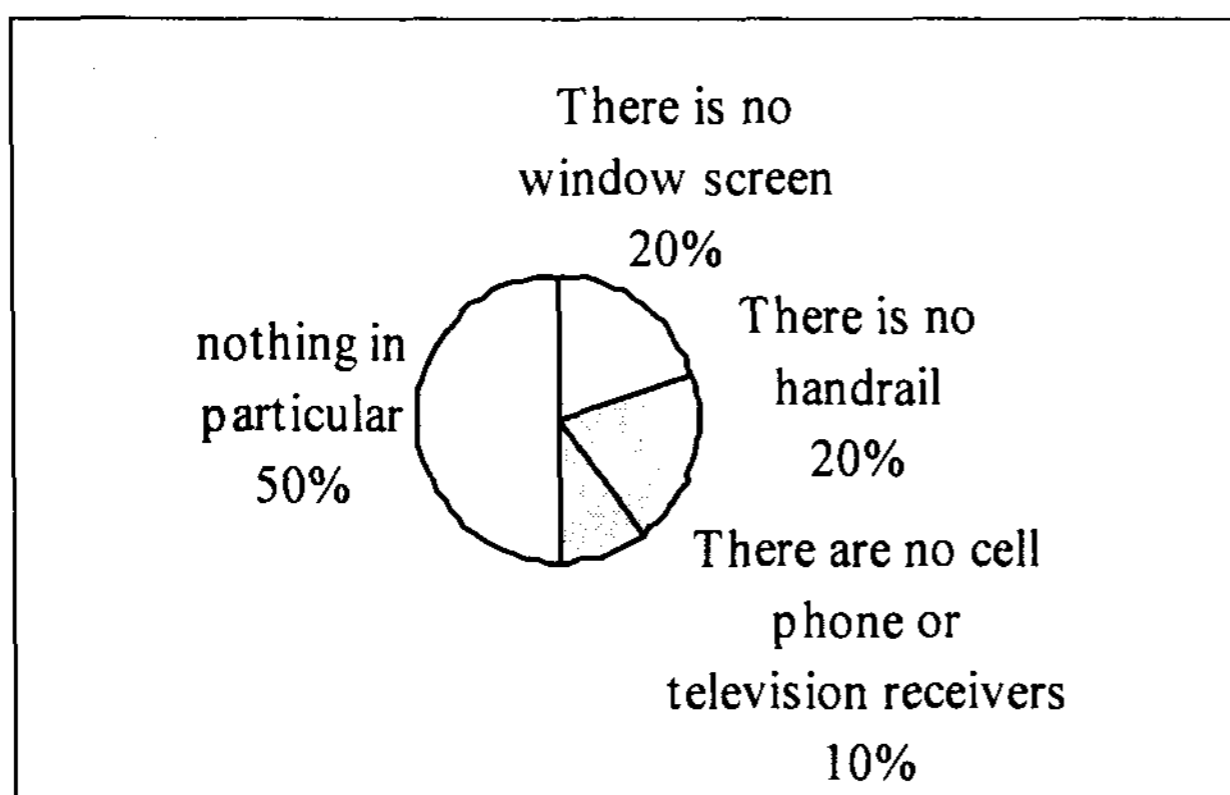


Figure 2. Problems with the Gartenvilla Oshima facility.

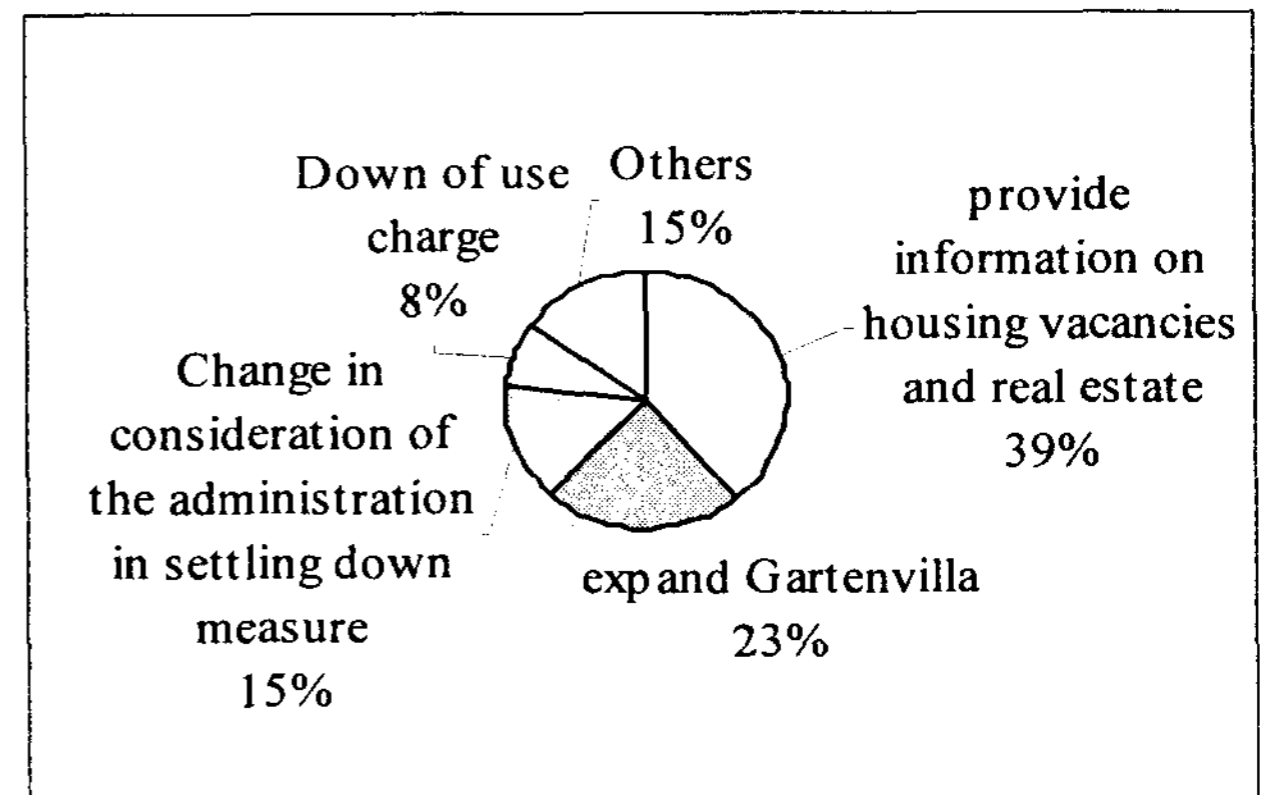


Figure 4. Measures required for permanent residence.

environment of sea, mountains, etc.”(25%). For many people the major motivation was to live a ‘new life’ after retirement, away from the city, to enjoy a rich experience of nature

in the countryside.

We see that a positive aspect of staying at the kleingarten for 41% of users was ‘contact with nature’. This shows that

people use the facility based on a desire to live in the countryside and get in touch with nature, and also that this desire is satisfied. The next most common answers to this question, each expressed by 17% of respondents, were 'the joy of growing vegetables' and 'interaction with local people and other users'.

Figure 2 shows that 50% of users answered 'nothing in particular' to the question on problems with the kleingarten facility, suggesting that no major problems exist. However, there is a recognized need to improve the safety, such as installing handrails alongside steps.

Figure 3 shows that 45% of users answered 'nothing in particular' to the question of what further facilities and services are desired, revealing that the existing level of service is adequate. The expressed desire for 'antennas for TV and mobile phones' was also pointed out in the question on problems, so it is necessary to consider setting up such antennas. It is also necessary to set up safety fences to prevent people from falling down the sloping parts of the site, which are a significant hazard.

Figure 4 shows that in relation to permanent residence in the future, users consider it necessary for the kleingarten to 'provide information on housing vacancies and real estate', and to 'expand Gartenvilla'. There were also strong opinions suggesting that the local administration should be more actively committed to promoting migration and permanent settlement in the area.

We asked survey subjects to evaluate specified aspects of Gartenvilla Oshima and the town of Suo-oshima, in which the facility is located, on a scale of -5 to +5. (A negative score denotes disagreement with the statement.) Table 2 shows the average scores for each evaluation item. We can see here that the aspect that received the highest positive score was 'A place where nature can be fully enjoyed'. The next highest scores in order were for 'I was glad I stayed at Gartenvilla', 'The landscape of Suo-oshima is wonderful', and 'Life at Gartenvilla is healing'. From this, we can tell that users were satisfied with Gartenvilla Oshima. On the other hand, the score for 'I would like to see better availability of general merchandise and clothes' was -1.2, which clearly shows that the kleingarten users do not feel a need for such items in their life at Suo-oshima.

From the free comments made in the survey, we learned that the majority of users are generally satisfied with the environmental management of the facility, but a number of

people called for improvements to household waste handling, in view of the fact that there is no rubbish collection site nearby. It is desirable to improve the living environment not only for the benefit of farmland, but also for long-term residence.

V. Achievements and Issues Faced by the Facility, Based on an Interview Survey

From the interview survey we conducted with the caretaker of Gartenvilla Oshima, we learned that many users enjoy leisure activities outside the facility, such as fishing, golf, and walking. This shows that one of the factors for enhancing the appeal to users—aside from farming activities within the facility—is the surrounding environment. We also found that the caretaker, out of goodwill, waters and weeds farm plots when users are away. This level of care seems to be responsible for the high degree of satisfaction and trust in the facility on the part of users, as evidenced by the free comments offered in the questionnaire to users.

Some of the issues facing the facility include the need for painting of external walls and building maintenance due to visible damage to the walls over the approximately 10 years of operation since the kleingarten was opened.

It is generally expected that kleingarten users interact with the existing local community. For about five years after the opening of Gartenvilla Oshima, members of the local community joined users in planting work at the facility's common farm plot. Since then, however, no joint events or joint work have been conducted at the common farm plot.

However, more effort is expected to be made in the coming years to promote local exchange activities, so that the facility can contribute more to vitalizing the local community.

Generally, kleingartens aim to serve as a foothold for people planning to settle permanently in the local community. Among Gartenvilla Oshima's users, there are two-family users who came to settle down after the use period ends in these several years.

Therefore, it can be said that Kleingarten is a measure contributing to the local revitalization.

In addition, a good deal of effort was invested in measures to promote permanent residence and farm management through collaboration between the kleingarten and local municipality. The results of these efforts are already being seen.

Table 2. Average evaluation* of Gartenvilla Oshima

Evaluation item	Evaluation mean value
A place where nature can be fully enjoyed	3.6
I was glad I stayed at Gartenvilla	2.8
The landscape of Suo-oshima is wonderful	2.8
Life at Gartenvilla is healing	2.6
I would like to come again if I have the chance	2.2
I enjoyed the cultivation of farm produce	1.8
I felt secure at Suo-oshima	1.4
I was satisfied with the facilities at Gartenvilla	1.2
The price charged was reasonable	1
I appreciated the opportunity to fish	1
Gartenvilla is far from home	0.8
The life style at Gartenvilla is healthy	0.8
The services at Gartenvilla were satisfactory	0.8
I was able to get to know the local citizens	0.6
I would like to settle down in Suo-oshima	0.6
I was able to get to know the other residents	0.6
Ability to participate in local festivals and events	0.4
I want to learn more about crop cultivation	0.4
I want to buy crop seeds and seedlings	0.2
I want medical facilities and facilities for the elderly and the disabled	0
The food in Suo-oshima is delicious	-0.4
There should be more stores	-0.4
Public transport in Suo-oshima is good	-0.6
I want a general store and a tailor	-1.2
I want to buy farm produce	-2

* Evaluation mean value = $\{(+2) \times (\text{Number of answers}) + (+1) \times (\text{Number of answers}) \dots\} / 5$

However, from the above-mentioned questionnaire survey result, The user was pointing out the measure of the insufficient administration with an insufficient introduction of the vacant house and the real estate though he or she was interested in settling down in Suo Oshima a little. Therefore, an administrative measure was clarified to the user enough of no well-known it. In the free comments of their questionnaires, the facility users feel that further measures need to be taken to promote permanent residence, so this is an upcoming issue.

VI. Conclusion

In this study, we described trends relating to kleingartens in Japan and evaluated Gartenvilla Oshima, a kleingarten located in Suo-oshima in Yamaguchi prefecture.

It is clear that kleingartens are being established across Japan in a wide range of sizes, but there are no distinct trends in relation to the number of plots or total area of kleingartens in particular areas.

Our evaluation of Gartenvilla Oshima revealed that users of the facility highly valued the farming activities and the opportunities for leisure in the surrounding area. On the other hand, we identified some issues affecting the prospects for permanent residence, such as the need to install handrails for steps and insect screens for doors and windows, and the need for better disposal of household waste. Our survey also revealed a desire on the part of users to stay in touch with the people and lifestyles of the city, through TV and a mobile phone service. It is therefore necessary to consider improving communications facilities, for example by making available antennas for TV and mobile phones. One of the main factors in the high degree of user satisfaction at Gartenvilla Oshima was the presence and devoted support provided by the resident caretaker. Moreover, people who settled down descended after using Kleingarten, and the current state in which it contributed to the local revitalization was clarified. In the coming years, Gartenvilla Oshima is expected to make further efforts to promote permanent settlement in the area and greater exchange with the local community. Our study has shown that kleingartens in Japan are an effective means for revitalizing local communities in rural areas.

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