

Farm visiting reports <Part 7>

Future of Local Communities ~Reflections from Manazuru~

After visiting Tanokura Farm, which we introduced in the previous issue (AAI News No. 125), we continued our tour in Manazuru, guided by our colleague.

Small Town Attracting Newcomers

Manazuru is the second smallest town in Kanagawa Prefecture by area, located on a peninsula. Under Japan's Depopulation Countermeasures Act, it is the only area in the prefecture designated as "depopulated." Despite its small size, the town has recently experienced an increase of residents—particularly younger generations—who are drawn to Manazuru and choose to settle there. What is it about this town that attracts people?

People Creating New Momentum

At Manazuru Olive Garden, which we visited, the owners have been converting abandoned mandarin orchards—left unmanaged due to the aging of the growers—into olive groves since 2019. With the concept of creating a "third place of comfort," Mr. and Mrs. Yamahira have been developing spaces for community interaction within the garden. The olive leaves they cultivate are also processed into products such as tea and confectionery. They are working hard to establish olives as a new crop and integrate them into the local agricultural landscape.

Our second stop was Mr. Yamashita, who renovated vacant houses and launched Rockin' Village in 2019, a facility where visitors can experience local community life. Over the years, he has been involved in projects across Japan addressing population decline, including attracting corporate satellite offices and promoting the relocation of urban residents to rural areas. Currently in Manazuru, he is actively working to address local challenges by creating spaces for interaction between "outsiders" and local residents through his accommodation, coworking, and dining facilities.

Our last stop, Kusayanagi Liquor Store, has been a family-run business deeply rooted in the local community for generations. The fourth-generation owner, Mr. Kusayanagi, who is full of love for Manazuru, has organized a variety of events, including "kaku-uchi" (standing bar) hours in the store, street food tours along the main shopping street, and local music festivals. His unique personality, deep knowledge of the town, and warm

hospitality toward visitors has earned him many fans of Manazuru.

"Standards of Beauty"

Visiting Manazuru, we felt greeted by the beautiful landscapes of cultivated orchards and the nostalgic scenery of a traditional port town, which conveyed the warmth of the community. After the visit, we learned that Manazuru has a scenic ordinance called the "Standards of Beauty," which helped prevent uncontrolled resort condominium developments during Japan's economic bubble in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The Standards of Beauty was established in 1993 as part of the town planning regulations. It set out eight criteria and a design code for town planning and architecture development. Instead of using numerical standards and limitations, the ordinance presents 69 keywords; such as "mixed households," "shops as schools," and "small gatherings of people" to describe the local culture and character that should be preserved.

The Future of Local Communities

For many regions, aging populations and declining numbers of residents are major challenges, and local governments are stepping up their efforts to attract newcomers.

In Manazuru, the town has faced challenges such as resort development and the resulting depletion of water resources. These experiences prompted residents to reassess local assets and define standards of living that reflect their community identity. Thirty years after the establishment of the Standards of Beauty, the preserved natural environment, everyday landscapes, and local communities have become key attractions, drawing people who value these qualities and wish to engage with the town.

The new perspectives and involvement of "outsiders" can blend effectively with the unique character of the local community, creating fresh momentum for change. For this to succeed, however, mutual communication and the presence of intermediary actors are essential. During our visit, we could sense that such initiatives are already taking root in Manazuru, gradually forming a growing wave of community revitalization.