

Original article

Capturing the relationships between local foods and residents: A case in the Noto region, Japan



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ABSTRACT

Background: Under the influence of global trends, most regions are at risk of losing their local-food knowledge. In this context, analyzing the transmission of the knowledge, understanding the context of transmission, and implementing precise activities and policies are required. Noto is known for its unique ethnic fermented food products.

Methods: Through our questionnaire survey and analysis of the Noto peninsula, we explore the relationships between the attributes of local food producers and the variety of foods they produce, attempting to identify the key attributes related to making diverse local foods and the transmission of local food knowledge.

Results: Our analysis showed a correlation between the diversity of local foods made by residents and the number of years they had lived in the municipality.

Conclusion: The results implied that adequate management of social networks by local residents, who depend on the local environment, is required in transmitting the knowledge of local foods.

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1. Introduction

Knowledge systems transmitted from generation to generation in a local environment can contribute to sustainable regional management [1]. Knowledge related to food is included in local knowledge systems, as the residents use local-food knowledge in their daily food choices and cooking activities; they also share this knowledge with their family and neighbors. However, under the influence of global trends—including urbanization, population aging, and climate change—most regions are at risk of losing their local-food knowledge. Therefore, analyzing the transmission of the knowledge, understanding the context of transmission, and implementing precise activities and policies are required.

Analyzing such knowledge systems is an urgent task as they are disappearing rapidly. Rural areas in Japan are parts of the at-risk regions. The Noto region, with its unique Japanese rural landscape called *satoyama* [2] and its culture, is the research site. In this paper, the transmission of local-food knowledge in the region is

explored through a questionnaire survey and statistical analysis, and the individual attributes related to the local environment of the residents are provided as key factors of the sharing of local foods among generations.

The study area, the Noto region, was designated as a Globally Important Agriculture Heritage System site in 2011 as a symbolic *satoyama* landscape [3]. The *satoyama* system of the region has been evaluated as a sustainable socio-ecological system, and the local residents acknowledge the abundance of ecosystem services in the *satoyama* environment. In order to transmit the rich ecosystem services to future generations, local residents have cultivated their traditional knowledge to make processed foods, and they have made their local processed foods including fermented seasonings as ethnic foods. For example, *ishiru*, which is made from salted sardines, is produced as a regional ethnic fermented seasoning, and it is included in the main three fish sauces (made from fermented salted marine products) in Japan. The Noto region that provides unique traditional foods and seasonings such as *ishiru*, is an important region for the conservation of ethnic foods in Japan. The region is located in the central parts of Japan (Fig. 1). It takes about 2 hours from the region to the Tokyo or Osaka metropolitan area by rapid train. The region belongs to the Ishikawa prefecture. The Kanazawa City is the largest city in the

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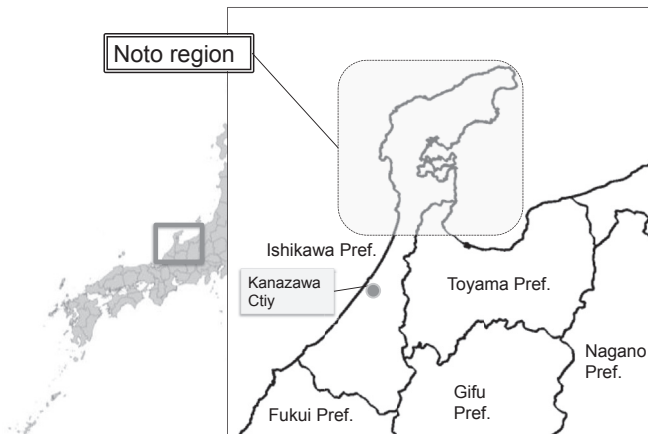


Fig.1. Location of the Noto region. Pref., prefecture.

prefecture and well known as a historical city with a culture of warrior families.

Noto's main local foods as ethnic foods are registered as Noto's traditional vegetables including eggplants and white radishes, processed marine products, and Japanese *sake* [3]. Local people with professional knowledge to make *sake* have been called *Noto touji*, and Noto's *sake* has been well known as regional *sake* in Japan. As the unique ethnic foods produced with local food knowledge in the *satoyama* landscapes, parts of Noto's agricultural and marine processed products including *ishiru* and dried persimmons have been registered as the composition elements of the Noto Globally Important Agriculture Heritage System site (Figs. 2–4).

Most of the Noto's ethnic foods are eaten with steamed rice in daily life. A representative seasoning, *ishiru*, is used as a seasoning to make fish and vegetable soup. Dried persimmons are eaten as confectionery with Japanese green tea.



Fig. 2. Bottled *ishiru*.



Fig. 3. Process of making dried persimmons.



Fig. 4. Dried persimmons in a rural landscape.

Local ethnic foods made in each household are shared among neighbors through the sharing activities called *osusowake* in the Noto region. *Osusowake* can be seen in other parts of Japan; however, the activities have become inactive in most urban and rural areas. Nonmarket exchanging activities contribute to strengthen the community networks that support the cultural activities including local festivals and seasonal events.

Semicultivation has been implemented by way of agriculture in the Noto's *satoyama* environment, and Chen and Qiu [4] have discussed the methodology of environmental management involving the consumer. The process of traditional-knowledge transmission in the production of mushrooms as nontimber forest products has also been clarified in the Noto region [5]. In that process, tacit knowledge is made explicit by the local agricultural organization as the mediator.

Research has also analyzed the relationships between traditional events and local foods [6]. Nonetheless, research is limited on local foods throughout the entire Noto region. Specifically, the relationship between local foods and residents, which is important in the context of sharing local food among generations, has been overlooked and has not been fully investigated.

In the next section, we review precedent research related to "localness" and socioeconomic characteristics of food in the globalization era. We then provide the method of analysis and the

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