

Issues on Footpaths Linking Attractive Public Open Spaces in Hokkaido: from the Perspective of Recreational Use of the Countryside

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Introduction

In Japan, projects to create footpaths started in various places on the model of British footpaths, which have been expected to be new resources for local vitalisation (Hirano et al. 2012). The movement has become active in Hokkaido since the early 2000s, where more than 200 courses extend through 40 or more municipalities today and footpaths by making most of natural environments and scenic views constitute part of regional resources for tourism.

Preceding studies on Japanese footpaths have been associated mostly with research on their effectiveness as a tool for regional development and local vitalisation (Hirano et al. 2012). Meanwhile, related studies have clarified historical backgrounds and legal systems of footpaths in Britain (Hiramatsu 1995; Ota 2009; Ota et al. 2011).

The right-of-way on the public footpath is legally guaranteed in Great Britain, whereas no such protection is provided by law in Japan. For this reason, it is difficult to maintain the continuity of a route which needs to be extended across private land, and to design effective courses by linking attractive public open spaces. However, no studies have approached issues about actual utilisation of public open spaces such as urban parks.

In this light, to clarify actual situations of footpaths running through public open spaces in Hokkaido and problems concerning creation, management and maintenance of footpaths, this study examined reference materials of footpaths in Hokkaido and carried out their field research, hearing survey to their operators, and questionnaire survey to footpath users.

Methods

To understand current situations of footpaths in Hokkaido, this study selected Hokkaido's 19 major footpaths running through public open spaces. To examine one of major issues in creating a footpath, that is coordination with a landowner, selected three footpaths among them were investigated as for their land use, land ownership, and status of permission for passing of the land. Furthermore, to comprehend issues of footpaths from the viewpoint of recreational users, a questionnaire survey was carried out to users of footpaths in Hokkaido. A total of 830 question forms were made available at the starting point, and respondents were required to send back a reply card. The total number of respondents who replied to the questionnaire was 112.

Results and discussion

Field research and hearing survey

Footpaths in Hokkaido have been developed and operated in various locational conditions by public and private organisations under a variety of utilisation systems (Figure-1). Among them, most are pastoral and natural types of footpaths by taking advantage of Hokkaido's rural landscapes and natural environments.

Hokkaido's three typical footpaths were examined regarding the state of their land use. In the case that an organisation of courses management was an NPO, or an administrative body together with locals, public spaces such as urban parks, rivers and roads, which basically require no agreement, occupied a high proportion in area. In the meantime, footpaths developed by footpath organisation members extended over a wide area of private agricultural land owned by the members, but nearly the half was still public land such as road sites.

In our research, the number of landowners was not so many but oral and written agreements with them were not necessarily reached so smoothly. Rather, the difficulty in reaching agreements seemed to be reflected in the use of more public land for the course setting.

In this study, some public spaces such as rivers, seacoasts and urban parks are regional resources themselves. Because sites owned by operators and local resources are linked and strolled around, public spaces available to anyone including roads were made most of. A primary reason for this is an attempt to build a course by minimising the use of private land which presented difficulty in coordinating with landowners.

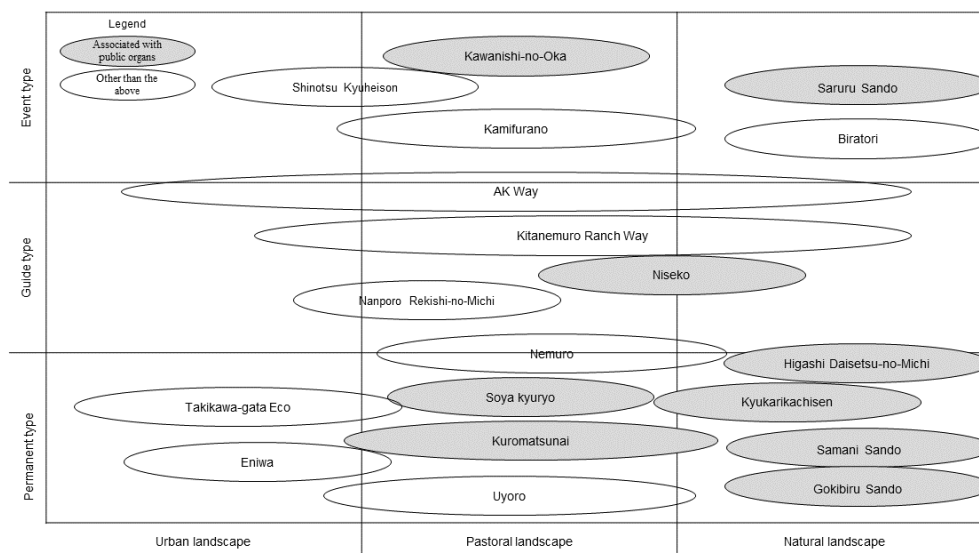


Figure-1 Classification of major footpaths in Hokkaido

Questionnaire survey

A questionnaire survey was carried out to footpath users in Hokkaido, asking them about problems they thought in the use of footpaths. Our survey result was compared with the result of similar questionnaire survey conducted in Britain as a model country of footpath development. The British survey referred to was the Scottish Recreation Survey which was carried out in Scotland, the region similar to Hokkaido in terms of area, population and climate

As many as half the number of users of Hokkaido footpaths were aware of some problem or other, more than the number in Scotland. Most of problems in Hokkaido were obscure signposts and course layout, and difficulties in walking on overgrown paths and boggy

ground. Users in Scotland regarded restrictive signs and locked gates as problems, which were pointed out by few in Hokkaido.

Most users replied that they had not changed their route. The users in Hokkaido footpaths changed their route because they found it difficult to walk through (6%) or the course layout was obscure (6%), but few answers of this kind were given by Scotland users.

A high proportion of respondents in Scotland had knowledge about the regulations accounting for 73% of the total whereas less than half or 42% of the Hokkaido footpath users knew of the code of a footpath they used.

Conclusions

To develop an attractive footpath by linking regional resources, the effective use of public open spaces is a major issue to be coped with.

Definite procedures and rules for placement/management of a footpath as well as the permission for passing of public open spaces, have yet to be formulated. Although there are procedures for installation and maintenance of signposts in building a footpath in public spaces, the clarification and systemisation of criteria of permission is still an issue to be dealt with. In order to newly create or continuously operate a footpath, a system to effectively use public open spaces and to share important agreements is urged to be formulated as well as a clear definition of a footpath.

Problems pointed out by users included maintenance of footpath courses and improvement of signposts. It is essential to install plain signposts, to suggest and publicise common regulations and moral standards, and to share course-particular notices.

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